Spirituality among University Students: From the Learning Perspective

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled

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is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except
where due reference is made

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In 2012, I decided to enroll myself in the Master of Science (Learning Sciences) programme. Though I know this journey might be tough and long, I was prepared to make sacrifices along the way. Yet, not only me who have to make sacrifices, as my household also had to make sacrifices, and for that, I am deeply, and truly grateful to my family, siblings and my close friends for their enduring patience.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand and investigate how university students perceive the meaning of spirituality. Besides that, this research also tries to disclose university students’ perception on the influence and role of spirituality in their learning. This study examined and analyzed how university students defined spirituality, how university students perceived the role of spirituality in their learning, and also personal development, and uncover their opinion on the differences or similarity between spirituality and religion. With the growing educational trend that emphasize the producing of the ‘whole learners’, it is important to acknowledge the important of implementing spirituality in and out of the university students classroom. This is because, many scholars believe that spirituality eventually contribute to the process of meaning making, through external and internal self of students. There are seven respondents involved in the process of data collecting. The data was being collected through semi-structures interviews and the artifacts were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study reveal that university students perceive spirituality as the medium to search and making meaning externally and internally. This involves the process of interaction with others around them and also environment. Besides, university students also believe that spirituality to be a broad things, and religion is one of its components. Apart from that, this study also indicates that, spirituality have its role in learning process, and it contributed a positive effects towards academic achievements of the university students as well as their personal developments. This is analyzed by considering the responds and also spiritual experience that have been enclosed by the students in answering the interview questions. Basically, this study concluded that, spirituality is the process of meaning making and it have a positive relationship and contribution towards students learning process, academic achievements and personal developments. They describe spirituality as enhancing the leaning process of the content, facilitating transformational learning, trigger holistic learning, giving confident and spirit to continue study, and revealing meaning and purpose for their lives.

INDEX WORDS: Spirituality, Transformational Learning, Holistic Learning, Meaning and Purpose for life, Whole Learner
ABSTRAK


PERKATAAN INDEX: Kerohanian, Transformasi Pembelajaran, Pembelajaran Holistik, Maksud dan Tujuan untuk hidup, Pelajar Seluruh
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The chapter presents an overview of the current view of the term spirituality, how it is interpreted, how it is classified, and as well as their components and how it can be interpreted in the teaching and learning process, and also what contribution it would be able to serve. Besides that, this chapter will highlight the spirituality among higher institution students, research views on the forms of spirituality, types of spirituality seekers, and recommendation for the educators.

Apart from that, this chapter also covers statement of problem, research objectives, significance of study, and definitions of key terms on how spirituality could effect and give impact to the students that eventually reflects their performance in higher education, specifically universities. By the end of this chapter, reader will understand the view that researcher hold on spirituality, and how to view those taboo terms.
1.1 Background of the Study

The purpose of this research is to determine how learners or students in university perceive the influence of spirituality in their learning. In order to address this objective, this research examined how university students perceive spirituality, how they perceived the role of spirituality in their learning process and factors that influenced spirituality in their learning.

Since spirituality is considered to be an elusive concept (Tisdell, 2000) and there has been no general agreement about its meaning in the literature (Emmons, 2003), studying this topic was at times difficult (Laura, 2008). Yet, by integrating some precise and suitable methodology adapted from other scholars, the researcher believes that this research could generate relevant and correct data that will eventually address the objectives and research questions of this research.

There have been a lot of proofs to highlight that there is a huge increase in the number of higher institution students engaging in the spiritual search or spirituality activities. This is because, nowadays, people are more aware that, in order to perform well in their academic pursuit, solely learning formally is not enough. Spirituality is one of the important elements that has been taken into account seriously in education in recent years. For example, when these spiritual perceptions, beliefs, and connections are complemented by reverent instructors, hospitable spaces, dependence on a transcendent and when the adult learners use their spiritual lens to interpret the content, they perceive that spirituality has contributed to their learning (Laura, 2008).

The Malaysian government is also not excluded from the effort of implementing the elements and components of spirituality in education. Many spirituality elements are integrated in the education of Malaysia. Among them are, the inclusion of Islamic and Moral subjects in the education system (Salasiah Hanin et al., 2012).

Rohana et al. (2010) conducted a research that describe on the philosophy in the self development from the spirituality domain and development of conceptual model of the spirituality development of a particular students through their academic process. It is very important to note that in order to implement the spirituality in teaching and learning process, the potential of the spirituality in education should first be identified.

There are many factors that influence the level of academic performance of a particular student, such as socio-economic background, parents’ education level, family income, self-motivation, teachers’ teaching styles and the learning styles of the students themselves (Considine & Zappala, 2002; Frase & Killen, 2003; Harb & El-Shaarawi, 2006).

This clearly highlighted that in order to measure the performance of the students, or enhance the performance of the students, formal learning in the class is insufficient. This is because, others factors also should be considered. As for the example, factor of socio economy and family
education level are the most famous factors to be discussed in order to determine the factor that influence the performance of the students (Considine & Zappala, 2002).

Besides that, a research done by Ishak (2004), find out that the most pertinent factor that plays an important role is the spirituality and also self-conception of the students towards achievement in education. Hence, there are clear evidences that stated, the spirituality among students are also the influential factor of the performance in education of the students in higher institution.

Many research have been done to clarify the potential of spirituality factor in determining the performance of students in their education. As an example, a research found out that the level of involvement in religious activity and spirituality could contribute to the academic performance of the students (French et al., 2008; Hodge & Cuddeback, 2010; Steward & Jo, 1998).

Spirituality as the determinant of students achievement and performance in education is being accepted quite prominently among researchers. This can be seen when spirituality is being supported as being the determinant of students achievements in their academic performance. According to French et al., (2008), a research on the Muslim students in Indonesia, showed that the involvement in religious and spirituality activity could be related to several variables, which include the academic achievement of the students, attitude of the students and also self-esteem of the students.

In term of learning effectively, there are actually a clear view that relate the learning styles of a particular students with the spirituality involvement. It is being said that, students will gain their inner peace and could enhance their inner self that eventually could lead the students to be able to learn effectively. This is being supported by Mohammad Shatar (2005, p. 15), who stated that the enhancement in term of spirituality and aspects of the spirituality could contribute to learning effectively.

Besides that, in the work for her Doctorate thesis, Laura (2008), found out that somehow “spirituality is linked with learning process”. This proves the existence of a connection between spirituality and the learning process. Laura further explained in her study that the “nature of the instructor, the nature of the classroom environment and the spiritual world view of the learner can influence spirituality in adult learning” (Laura, 2008).

Spirituality in education is not a foreign thing or term among researchers. There are many researchers who conducted their research purposely to investigate this factor, and how it can contribute to the academic achievement of students. It is pivotal to note that many researchers in the West approve the importance of conducting research on the spirituality. This result in
abundance of research that had been done focusing on the elements of spirituality in education (Buchanan, 2009; Campbell, 2010; Daniliuk et al., 2010; Revel, 2008).


Palmer (1998) provides examples such as understanding the meaning and purpose of life, exploring the personal gifts that contribute to the world, maintaining hope, and dealing with suffering. Palmer (1998) believes that spiritual questions are embedded in every discipline and whether we acknowledge it or not, the spiritual aspect is always present in teaching and learning. This highlighted the existence of spirituality in learning process.

Besides that, in term of spirituality in learning, there are many authors who have academically and professionally addressed the spirituality in learning process. As being stated, “authors have included spirituality in their discussions of the wholeness of learning” (Miller, 2005; Palmer, 1999), transformative learning (Dei, 2001; O’Sullivan, 1999; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001) and workplace learning (English, Fenwick, and Parsons, 2003; Groen, 2002; Howard, 2002).

Surprisingly, in term of implementing the spirituality activities, it not only benefits the students, it also contributes to the educators and also teachers in one way or another. As being stated by Buchanan (2009), the implementation of elements of spirituality in curriculum could help teachers to handle the anxiety, and stress that could lead to managing their career more effectively.

In terms of doing their works, responsibility of students, it is also reported that by involving in spirituality activities, students might be responsible towards their learning and could easily receive the responsibility well. This is in line with what being find out by Salleh and Zuria (2009). In the research, they find out that a particular individual that has high level of spirituality value are more ease or easily accepted physical exercise, responsibility and having good social support and also good development of spiritual value.

There are many reasons to be included in order to implement the spirituality elements in education. In the research done by Dalton et al. (2006), there are six assumptions of why they think that it is important to enhance students’ spirituality values, in terms of inner development. These include the following:
1. Learning in college is intrinsically connected to students’ inner lives of emotions, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. Higher education that ignores the connections between the cognitive and emotional domains of students’ lives will necessarily be less effective.

2. The liberal arts tradition in American higher education has always emphasized the holistic development of college students. Students develop holistically, and concern for educating the whole student continues to be an important aspect of undergraduate education in most colleges and universities.

3. The majority of undergraduates in most U.S. colleges and universities are in the traditional age group of 17 – 23 years. Parents and the general public expect that higher education will help to prepare these young adults in their transition to adult life and responsibilities in a democratic society.

4. The seriousness of student conduct on campus including alcohol abuse, academic dishonesty, abuses in athletics, racism, sexism, and materialistic values demand that colleges and universities take more accountability for guiding the ethical development of college students.

5. College students who report higher levels of spirituality and religiousness also report higher levels of physical and psychological well being.

6. The moral challenges and pressures of leadership in today’s increasingly complex and competitive world require college graduates who have developed ethical integrity as well as intellectual competence.

There are some consequences that might be facing by education if this spirituality is not being taken into account seriously. Astin and Astin (1999) argue that students in higher education are discouraged from engaging in issues of meaning, purpose, authenticity, wholeness, and fragmentation among themselves or with their professors, if they are not being given an approach on the spirituality in learning process.

### 1.1.1 Spirituality among Students in Higher Education Institution

Spirituality is not always being the activities that involve in religion. This is because, by saying practicing spirituality, we refer to variety of behaviors and activities that students engage in as part of their spiritual searches (Dalton et al., 2006).

In order to implement spirituality among students, we first must know the term’s forms and also pattern, so that we could implement it in education correctly and precisely. According to Bracken (2006), there are still not enough, or per harp not yet the literature review of such compilation of students spirituality practice ans the forms and patterns they take, in their way of
practicing spirituality. So, it is important for us to acknowledge this term correctly before furthering in researching on a topic under spirituality.

There are several definitions of the spirituality that are based on the scholars' view respectively. In this research, spirituality are being viewed as two main categories, that includes forms of religious practice as well as non-religious or secular beliefs and practices in which inwards search for meaning and purpose, authenticity, and wholeness is the guiding purpose (Dalton et al., 2006).

This definition of spirituality is in line with what being suggested and defined by Hufford (2005), that argue spirituality is more general term and includes religion. This types of definition, that is looking spirituality as two, religion and non-religion (secular based) is important so that this research could cover most of the peoples view.

In term of secular spirituality, there are some categories and criteria that are taken account in this research. There are being adapted from a research by Dalton et al, (2006). The criteria are listed below:

- Spiritual practices include those student behaviors that are done solely for the purpose of relaxation, stress management, recreation, or other forms of exercise and health enhancement
- Physical activity is employed as an intentional means to enhance the inward search for meaning, purpose, authenticity, and fulfilment, it can be a powerful aid to spirituality.
- If they do not incorporate spiritual search as an intentional aspect of the activity, it is not regard as spirituality activities for the purpose of our research.

Spiritual awareness and growth can also be the unintentional result of some powerful college student experiences. This is because, in higher institution, students tend to actively participate or involve in the “after school” activity. This will indirectly produce and promote the feeling of empathy, passion, reflection, and they lead some students become more spiritually aware and concerned (Dalton et al., 2006).

1.2 Research View on the Forms of Spirituality

Adapted from a research done by Dalton et al, (2006), this research implement the view that being used in that research. This is because the view that being used is clear enough to explain spirituality and most appropriate to cover both, religious based spirituality and also secular based spirituality.
There are two types of view that spirituality being viewed in this research. There are being listed as follows:

A. One form of spiritual search is oriented inside the context of religion, either a specific religious faith tradition or a multi-faith context
   - Form of spirituality that accepts religion as a primary and necessary framework for engaging in spiritual search.

B. The other form of spiritual search occurred outside a direct connection to any particular religion or religions and utilized a non-religious or secular approach in the search for spiritual meaning and purpose
   - Form of spiritual search orients itself outside the context of religion and engages in spiritual search activities through a secular context

There are not a huge different in both of the views that being proposed in this research, the only different is that the ways spirituality is being place and seen, religious or non religious (Secular). After all, both of the view had the same intention, that is to discovering and relating to what individuals judge to be sacred and transcendent, but their intellectual and psychological contexts are quite different (Dalton et al., 2006).

Despite of all the different views, these two definition of spirituality should be seen in the perspectives of what they have in common.

1.2.1 Types of Spiritual Seekers in Higher Education

In this research, there will be a clear explanation about the types of spirituality seekers. As being adapted from a research from Dalton et al, (2006), there are four types of spirituality seekers, based from the two categorical view of spirituality describe above.

Each type has some distinguishing features that we think are useful in identifying since they can assist us in understanding how and why college students engage in spiritual activities. The types of spirituality seeker as being adapted from Dalton et al, (2006) are being explain as follows:

- Religious Seekers
  There are two types of seekers who pursue spirituality inside a religious context:
  1. *Faith centered seekers*: those who engage in spirituality solely within the context of their own particular religious tradition
  2. *Multi-religious seekers*: those who seek to deepen their religious spirituality through *interfaith* and *multi-religious* exploration, dialogue, and practice.
- **Secular Seekers**

  Those who are engaged in spiritual search *outside* the context of religion are called “secular seekers.” There are generally two primary types of secular seekers:

  1. **Mindfulness seekers**: those who focused in their inner search on ways to heighten self-awareness and understanding
  2. **Wellness Seekers**: those who engaged in spirituality activities in order to achieve a more holistic, healthy and integrated ways of life.

  This four types of spirituality seekers is for the purpose of explanatory and also making clear of what this research looking at in terms of spirituality seekers. This is more or less describing the higher education institutions students’ are doing nowadays. For better and simple views, these four types of spirituality seekers are being display in the table 1.1.

1.2.2 **Recommendations for Educators**

  Students in higher institution are tend to pursuit their spirituality needs and spiritual search. This result in educators should be aware of these needs and respond to it effectively. This is to ensure that the smooth development of students’ holistic development. In order to do so, educators should give a proper attention to the students need so that they could be engaged in a search for meaning, purpose, and authenticity and look to higher education institutions to support them in these efforts and to create educational environment that promote faith and spirituality.

  It is a mutual important if an institution want to promote or to enhance the academic of the students, they need to equally balance the effort of promoting and responding to the religion and spirituality needs of the students. This is being supported by Kuh (2005) who stated that there is a growing evidence that religion and spirituality are positively correlated with some educationally beneficial qualities and behaviors such as equanimity, students involvement, and positive mental health. This clearly highlighted that religious and spirituality have direct impact on retention, students satisfaction and academic achievement.

  There are many ways and steps for the educators to respond to students’ need of spirituality and religious search. Yet, for a proper and structured ways and steps, Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2005), proposed several ways for educators and administrator in responding to spirituality movement on campus. The strategies are described as follows:

  - **Awareness and Advocacy**
    - Take a stronger role in advocating for the place of spirituality in the mission and culture of
higher education and as an essential aspect of holistic student learning. n.

- Publicize, especially to new students, the spiritual resources and activities of the campus including religious organizations, student groups, and speakers and events with a spiritual focus or content.

- **Supportive Environments**
  - Provide a campus environment that encourages opportunities for student reflection, prayer, contemplation, and introspection including the availability of sacred spaces and places on campus.
  - Create more structured opportunities in classroom and out of class settings for students to explore topics related to their spiritual search for meaning, purpose, and authenticity.
  - Strengthen collaboration with campus ministers and local clergy to support student opportunities for religious life activities.

- **Educational Programs**
  - Provide courses, especially during the first year, in which students can explore the relationship of spirituality to learning and development in college.
  - Integrate spirituality as a component of student leadership programs and experiences.
  - Include spirituality as a major theme or topic for campus activities programming.

- **Staff/Faculty Development**
  - Work with faculty colleagues to develop faculty-student mentorship programs.
  - Include spirituality as a component in student affairs staff development and training. Since student affairs staff are often responsible for responding to students’ spirituality interests staff need to be able to describe their own spiritual lives and beliefs in their interactions with students and colleagues.

1.3 **Statement of Problem**

This research aims to investigate the perception of university students, specifically, students of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) on spirituality and what how it effect learning process.
Currently, they are indeed many research had been done to cover the perspective of spirituality. Yet, there are a yet no research that focus on spirituality, and how it effect learning, whether enhance it or stunted it.

When going through the literature review, it is known or acknowledged that the problem is that many past research has just simply touch in the surface about spirituality benefit learner in their learning process. This is in line with the opinion of Fenwich and English (2004), who stated that they do not focus on investigating this and do not provide extensive empirical evidence to support the claims.

As a result of these problems, it leads the researcher to conduct a research that focuses on investigating the effect of spirituality among students in university towards their learning process. This research try to bridging the gaps that being left by past research, by trying to find the relationship between spirituality and learning process towards students in higher institution.

Besides that, according to Salasiah et al. (2012), researchers in the West are indeed admitting the importance of doing research on spirituality. For example, there are alot of research that specified on the elements of spirituality with learning (Buchanan, 2009; Campbel, 2010; Danliuk et al., 2010; Revel, 2008).

Surprisingly, spirituality is very important in facing the negative influence that exists as the effect of globalization and modernization. This is being supported by Revell (2008), findings in one of his research stated that, there is a need to enclosed spirituality in learning at school as one of the ways to cope the negative influence cause by the process of modernization.

Therefore, as spirituality is very important in the learning process, this research tries to investigate perspective of spirituality towards learning on university students, particularly, students in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

1.4 Research Question
This study specifically seeks the answer for the following questions:
a) What are the perception of students in university on spirituality?
b) What are the opinion of university students on the role of spirituality in enhancing their academic achievements?
c) How do spiritual practices affect students’ academic and personal development? (Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), 2003)
d) What are the differences or similarity between spirituality and religion? (Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), 2003)
1.5 **Objectives of the study**

The aim of this study is to find out students’ understanding on the concept and term of spirituality and religious and how it affect the academic performance of the students, the objective of the students are being stated in details as follows:

a) To determine students in universities perceptions’ on spirituality

b) To determine university students’ opinion on spirituality role in enhancing their academic achievement.

c) Find out how spirituality could affect students academic and personal development.

d) Determine whether students could differentiate between the terms and concepts of spirituality and religious.

1.6 **Significance of study**

This study is expected to disclose the importance of spirituality activities and spiritual search among university students. Besides that, this research is also expected to determine whether students truly understand the concept and definition of the terms spirituality and how they perceive it in their life. Finally, this research are expected to reveal the importance of spirituality activities and its potential to enhance the academic performance and personal development of the students.

Apart from that, this study would be very much informative in further understanding the learning process. This is because by understanding the concept and the importance of spirituality in learning process, educators will be able to integrate spirituality in the learning process. This will eventually enhance the process of learning.

1.7 **Operational Definitions of Terms**

1.7.1 **Spirituality**

i. “Spirituality includes believing in the sacredness of life, seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually, and believing that we are all spiritual beings” (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2003)

ii. Dollard (1983) stated that spirituality is “concerned with our ability, through our attitudes and actions, to relate to others, to ourselves, and to God, as we understand Him”.

1.7.2 **Religious**

"a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them.”( Durkheim, 2002)