Motivations And Barriers to Dormitory Worship Attendance Among International Students at A Faith-Based Higher Education Institution: A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Worship is a central component of the Christian mission and the Adventist education system's holistic development goals, which emphasize Christ-centered worship. However, there has been a decline in interest in religious services, and Adventist educational institutions face challenges posed by mandatory worship attendance policies. This study aimed to identify the factors influencing international students' decision to attend or not attend dormitory worship, and suggest ways to cultivate an inclusive and spiritually supportive environment within dormitories. Using a qualitative case study approach, researchers investigated the factors influencing international students' attendance at dormitory worship services at a faith-based higher education institution. Thirteen participants, including students with varying attendance rates, a dormitory dean, and roommates, were purposefully selected. Data was collected through interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis to understand the motivations, barriers, and potential improvements related to dormitory worship attendance among international students. The study drew on social learning, self-determination, and religious socialization theories to explore how social, personal, and religious factors shape students' attitudes and behaviors towards dormitory worship. Findings revealed motivations such as attendance policies, meaningful worship experiences, active participation, community and belongingness, and personal development. Barriers included compulsory attendance policies, perceived lack of genuine spirituality, monotonous routines, cultural and linguistic differences, time constraints, and personal preferences. Recommendations include reconsidering mandatory attendance policies with flexible alternatives, encouraging authenticity and relevance in speakers' messages, and promoting diverse worship experiences, including services conducted in English.

Keywords: dormitory worship, worship attendance, international students, motivations, barriers

INTRODUCTION

International students face numerous challenges, including continuing their religious and spiritual practices, when studying abroad (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Calikoglu, 2018; Chandala, 2018; Schundler, 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Attending worship services is often an important part of their identity, but various issues can hinder dormitory students from doing so (Chandala, 2018).

This qualitative case study aimed to explore the motivations and barriers international students experience when attending worship services in dormitories at a faith-based institution, which seeks to foster the holistic development of students, including their spiritual growth, through its Adventist education system (White, 1958).

Faith-based higher education institutions have faced challenges with declining student interest in religious services, as evidenced by student opposition to mandatory worship attendance policies (Davignon, 2014; Glanzer et al., 2022; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020). International students, who often face social isolation, language barriers, and cultural differences, may view religious worship as important, but also encounter impediments when attending religious events in a foreign country (Glanzer et al., 2022; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020).

The institution in this study is deeply committed to fostering the spiritual growth of its international students through dormitory worship, yet it faces the challenge of low attendance in these services. Understanding the motivations and barriers for international students' participation in communal dormitory worship is crucial to creating an inclusive and supportive spiritual environment. Prior research has explored international students' experiences, but lacks insight into their motivations and barriers for attending dormitory worship (Davignon, 2014; Glanzer et al., 2022).

This qualitative case study aims to explore the motivations and barriers international students face in attending dormitory worship at a faith-based college. Preliminary investigations found that a significant proportion, 50%, of students residing in the dormitories had attendance rates below 50% for dormitory worship (Gibbs, 2012). The study seeks to address this gap by examining the factors that contribute to international students' participation or non-participation in dormitory worship. It is guided by two research questions: 1) What motivates international students to attend dormitory worship? 2) What barriers hinder international students from attending dormitory worship?

The findings uncovered a range of motivating factors that drive international students to attend dormitory worship, including institutional attendance policies, meaningful and engaging worship experiences, opportunities for active involvement, a sense of community and belonging, and personal growth. Conversely, significant barriers were identified, such as mandatory attendance requirements, perceptions of a lack of genuine spirituality, repetitive and monotonous worship routines, cultural and language barriers, time constraints, and individual preferences.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RELATED STUDIES

The chapter reviewed existing research on religious participation, motivations, and barriers among college students, particularly in faith-based institutions. It examined relevant theories and concepts from prior studies. The review provided a foundation for the current research on international students' experiences with dormitory worship.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research was based on three key theories that provide insights into international students' motivations and barriers towards attending dormitory worship at a faith-based institution. Social learning theory (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012) suggests the campus culture and behaviors of peers, faculty, and staff can influence student attitudes. Self-determination

theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in shaping motivation. Religious socialization theory (Taggart et al., 2018) indicates that students' previous religious upbringing and experiences may impact their views on dormitory worship attendance.

Biblical Foundations of Worship

Worship is an essential part of the Christian faith, involving reverent admiration, submission, and response to God (Piper, 2010, p. 11). It is a divine command and a proper reaction to God's greatness, power, and redemptive work (Revelation 14:6-12). True worship engages the whole person, not just the intellect, and is best experienced in community (John 4:24). While worship can take different forms, it must be grounded in biblical principles to be genuine. Proper understanding of worship is crucial for individuals and faith communities to know what God desires in worship today.

College Students and Worship

Worship is a crucial part of faith-based institutions, fostering community and spiritual fulfillment for college students (Eberhardt, 2005; Montgomery-Goodnough & Gallagher, 2007). Genuine worship can spark spiritual awakening, while its absence leaves the human spirit like a wanderer without access to water (Fankhauser, 2012). Studies emphasize the importance of a supportive campus community in addressing students' emotional needs and promoting spiritual revival (Hoelscher, 2021, Morrison, 2014). However, international students in Adventist higher education in the Philippines faced decreased spiritual commitment due to lack of commitment from instructors and burdensome course requirements (Chandala, 2018).

A case study found that college students were more motivated to attend optional worship services rather than mandatory ones (Morrison, 2014). They appreciated the voluntary nature of worship attendance and even cited it as a reason for choosing the school, in contrast to viewing compulsory chapel attendance negatively. Though college students may become less actively involved in religious activities, they tend to maintain personal beliefs in God and show increased interest in spirituality during their university years.

Motivations to Worship Among International Students

The research indicates that non-mandatory attendance and factors like willingness for spiritual growth, opinions of worship quality, need for community, autonomy, and personal interests are key motivators for international students to participate in worship (Griffin, 2022, Fankhauser, 2012; Morrison, 2014). The presence of a supportive church community and well-designed spiritual programs can positively influence their commitment. Peer interactions and the desire to take ownership of one's faith are also identified as important motivators.

Building cross-cultural relationships can motivate international students to attend worship. Important factors in forming these connections include sharing food, cultural identity, gender roles, and friendship. Open-minded students who value adaptability tend to have fewer sociocultural adjustment issues and an easier time settling into the new environment. Additionally, the length of time students spend in the host country positively impacts their personal growth, ability to identify opportunities, and engagement in activities that promote further adjustment. These factors

indirectly motivate international students to participate in worship (Chang, 2016; Roccas et al., 2010).

Barriers to Worship Among International Students

International students face numerous challenges when adjusting to a new academic environment, including cultural adaptation, navigating daily life, and feelings of doubt, confusion, and isolation (Asia- Pacific International University, 2018). These difficulties can negatively impact their worship experience as they struggle to understand cultural differences and unfamiliar surroundings (Paus & Robinson, 2008). International students often feel alienated, lack personal support, and grapple with new and unfamiliar situations, creating barriers to their participation in worship activities. They may also encounter social prejudice, loneliness, and a sense of being an outsider or foreigner (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). Language barriers can significantly hinder their academic achievement, social networks, and overall adjustment, leading to acculturative stress and less time for attending worship services, including those in college dormitories (Calikoglu, 2018).

Discrimination and acculturative stress are significant barriers for international students, causing them to feel uncomfortable, unsafe, and isolated in the new environment. International students also face challenges with social engagement, cultural remoteness, and lack of university support. Additionally, spiritual struggles such as doubting religious views, dealing with difficult topics, and conflicts with the dominant campus culture can hinder international students' participation in dormitory worship (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007; Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009; Ward & Searle, 1991). These challenges present barriers for international students in attending and engaging with dormitory worship services.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design, research locale, population and sampling, data collection instruments, data gathering procedure, ethical considerations, analysis of the data, and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

This qualitative case study investigated the motivations and barriers to dormitory worship attendance among international students at a faith-based university (Debout, 2016). The in-depth examination within the unique context, using interviews, discussions, and observations, provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing international students' participation in dormitory worship.

Research Locale

This study took place at a faith-based university with dormitories for international students. The diverse international student population and regular dormitory worship services made it an ideal setting to examine the motivations and barriers to worship attendance among international students. The accessible location and research-supportive environment enabled the researchers to conduct field observations, attend worship services, and collect data while adhering to ethical considerations.

Population and Sampling

This study involved international students at a faith-based university who attend religious services in the dormitories. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants, selecting those with more than 50% attendance to study motivations and those with less than 50% attendance to study barriers. The sample size was 13 participants, including 6 from each attendance group, as well as 1 dormitory dean and 4 roommates (Patton, 2014). The researchers worked with the international student association to recruit participants who met the criteria and respected their autonomy and voluntary involvement.

Instrumentation

The researchers employed a range of methods to gather data, including semi-structured interviews with dormitory deans and roommates, focus group discussions on motivations and barriers, field observations during worship services, and analysis of attendance records. This approach provided data to understand international students' participation in dormitory worship.

Data Gathering Procedure

We followed ethical protocols to ensure the study adhered to appropriate standards (World Health Organization, n.d.). Participants were selected based on their high or low attendance at dormitory worship services, and their informed consent was obtained. The data collection involved focus group discussions, field observations, and document analysis, including two focus group discussions, worship service observations, and attendance record analysis. Triangulation was used to ensure validity and reliability by comparing data from multiple sources. The researchers then coded and analyzed the data, identifying patterns and developing themes based on the findings.

Ethical Considerations

We ensured the study was voluntary, with participants having the right to decline or withdraw without consequences. We obtained informed consent, maintained confidentiality and anonymity, minimized potential harm, and communicated results to participants. We secured ethical approval, were transparent about our biases, and adhered to institutional policies and guidelines with oversight.

Analysis of the Data

The researchers used a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They first transcribed the interviews and focus group discussions, and reviewed observation notes to become familiar with the data. Next, they used an inductive coding process to identify significant statements, ideas, and phrases related to the research questions. The identified codes were then organized into potential themes based on their relevance and connection to the research questions. The researchers reviewed and refined the themes to ensure they captured meaningful aspects of the motivations and barriers to dormitory worship attendance among international students.

They defined and described each theme based on the content and patterns found in the data, assigning clear and concise labels that reflected the core meaning and relevance to the research questions. The researchers also created a visual representation to illustrate the relationships between the themes, subthemes, and supporting data. Finally, they evaluated and analyzed the themes by investigating the underlying meanings, explanations, and implications, taking into

account the context, participant viewpoints, and relevant literature to provide a comprehensive assessment of the motives and barriers to dormitory worship participation. The findings were synthesized and reported in a research report and presentation.

Rigor

The study ensured research dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility. The researchers used a clear and systematic research design, multiple data sources, and addressed potential biases. The purposeful sampling and detailed context description promoted transferability. Reflexivity and external input enhanced confirmability. The rigorous qualitative case study design, diverse data collection methods, and comprehensive methodology overview strengthened the overall trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS

This chapter presents and examines key themes relating to international students' motivations and barriers to attending dormitory worship services. It also explores suggested strategies to improve attendance and acknowledges challenges faced in the research process.

Barriers to Dormitory Worship Attendance

**Theme 1: Obligation Versus Spirituality;
Dealing With Attendance Policies in
Dormitory Worship**

Several participants indicated that their attendance at dormitory worship was primarily motivated by attendance requirements rather than genuine spiritual interest. While some, like P1, initially attended out of a desire to connect with God, they later realized the services were more focused on tracking attendance than fostering spiritual development. Participant 13 admitted that their consistent attendance during the first semester was mainly for practical reasons, not because they felt a spiritual draw to participate. For example, P1 said: "At first I thought going to chapel was a good way to connect with God and develop my faith. But after a few weeks, I realized the focus was more on taking attendance than helping us grow spiritually.

Theme 2: Developing Spirituality Through Novel Worship Experiences

The second theme highlights the importance of incorporating diverse and innovative elements in dormitory worship services to engage international students spiritually. Participants found guest speakers from outside the community particularly uplifting, as they could share new experiences. Additionally, group discussions and improvised worship during challenging times were seen as inspiring. The participants also suggested that having new speakers, especially external ones, or theology students sharing personal experiences, added depth and meaning to the worship services. This theme emphasizes the need for diverse perspectives and formats to foster spiritual engagement among international students. For example, P4 explained: "When we have some other speakers, like from outside, like they can share new experiences. That is the time we feel also."

Theme 3: Promoting Spiritual Development
Through Active Worship Involvement

The third theme came as a result of the statements of the participants about their roles and engagement in dormitory worship services. P16 said "song leader," while P12 and P13 indicated their roles as speakers and presiders, with P12 specifying involvement in opening prayer. P14 also mentioned serving as a presider. When asked about their level of active involvement in dormitory worships, P11 expressed a desire to be active in serving but mentioned a lack of opportunity to do so. P11 said, "For me. I can say I kind of active during like worship service. Yeah. And actually, when I arrived here and MVC, I really want to serve, but I don't have opportunity to serve."

Theme 4: Building Relationships and Spiritual
Well-Being Through Community
and Belongingness

The fourth theme suggests that a sense of community and shared experiences among international students motivates their attendance at dormitory worship services. Participants expressed that worshiping together, rather than just attending for the sake of attendance, helped foster a sense of belonging. The idea of separating international students' worship from the larger dormitory groups was proposed, as international students share similar challenges and experiences being away from home. The involvement of fellow international students in worship also seemed to increase motivation and active participation. For example, P2 emphasized, their attendance was motivated by a sense of worshipping together with others, not solely for attendance purposes: "God makes me to attend worship. Like ... says, I join worship not because of attendance, because it is one way that we worship together."

Theme 5: Nurturing Ones' Faith and Spirituality

Theme 5 emerged from a participants' responses when asked about their motivation to attend dormitory worship services. P4 mentioned that their primary motivation was to strengthen their faith, and they sometimes did not even think about the attendance sheet or bother to sign in. This response suggests that personal spiritual growth and development were driving factors in their attendance. She said, "Actually, for me it's because we want to strengthen our faith, because for me, I sometimes don't think even about my attendance sheet. Even sometime I don't write my name in the attendance book, because I don't really care about that."

Barriers to Dormitory Worship Attendance

Theme 6: Choosing Between Obligations
and Personal Faith

The participants expressed concerns about the obligatory nature of dormitory worship attendance, which they found burdensome and detracted from the spiritual experience. They described issues with multiple attendance requirements during campus events and feeling pressured to attend rather than having a genuine desire to participate. The emphasis on tracking attendance, rather than fostering spiritual development, created an uncomfortable atmosphere

according to the participants. For example, Participants P2 and P4 also agreed that "forcing attendance created an uncomfortable atmosphere."

Theme 7: Struggling to Find Spiritual Fulfillment in Worship

Theme 7 indicates that participants expressed feelings of disconnection from the spiritual aspect of dormitory worship services. They described worship as feeling more like a chore than a meaningful spiritual experience, and some said the services induced guilt and stress instead of providing spiritual relief and connection with God. Participants also found certain aspects of the worship, such as the song service, unhelpful. The dormitory dean acknowledged that international students may sometimes skip worship because they have their own personal devotions. Participant 13 said, "And there are also times there are factors that our international students have no interest in attending the worship because they have their own also used personal devotions."

Theme 8: Seeking Variation and Engagement in Worship

The participants expressed frustration with the monotonous and repetitive nature of the dormitory worship services. They described the services as feeling like a "drag" and a "repetitive chore" due to issues such as speakers not getting to the point, repeatedly saying the same things, and going overtime. The participants emphasized the importance of diversity in worship, noting that people worship differently in different countries. They expressed a desire for more varied song selections, as singing the same few songs repeatedly caused the meaning to lose its value. P13 emphasized the importance of diversity in worship, saying, "I mean, but for the songs. Yeah. I mean, it's just like this personal preference, you know. Of course, like everyone has a sort of worships differently in each country, right?"

Theme 9: Addressing Cultural and Linguistic Differences

Theme 9 indicates that the use of the local language during dormitory worship services and the different cultural norms around waking times posed challenges for international students. Participants expressed difficulty focusing on the spiritual aspects of the service when the language used was unfamiliar to them. Additionally, the earlier waking times required in the host country contrasted with the habits of the international students, making it difficult for them to consistently attend the services. To address these issues, the participants suggested the need for changes in the language used during worship. P14 and P13 agreed, highlighting the challenges of adjusting to a different cultural waking time. When asked about changes they would make to the worship services, P11 stated a desire for a change in language.

Theme 10: Balancing Academic Demands and Spiritual Commitment

Theme 10 represent the discussion among participants as they talked about the challenges they faced in attending dormitory worship services. P11 mentioned that she often stayed up late working on assignments, making it difficult to wake up early for worship. She said, "Yeah. Just sometimes we are doing our assignments and we sleep so late and like, It is really hard for us to be wake up early and joining the worship." Another participant, P14, shared how the nursing

program's demanding requirements led to working late nights until early mornings, leaving them fatigued. She said, "Because mostly because we're nursing. We have, like, so many requirements that makes us stay up until, like 1, 2, 3 in the morning, and then we have to wake up about 5 minutes of, like, maybe four." When asked about times they were absent from dormitory worship, P16 mentioned evening classes as a reason, and P11 cited exhaustion from a busy schedule as a barrier to attendance.

Theme 11: Determining Personal Interests and Spiritual Engagement

Some participants admitted to occasionally skipping worship due to feelings of laziness (P15 & P13). P15 said, "Lazy." P13 said, "Sometimes I feel too lazy to go." P1 shared that the decision to attend worship was tied to their spiritual life, and if they were occupied in worldly activities like watching movies or anime, they felt less motivated to participate. P1 said,

> For me reason why I don't join worship is depend on my spiritual life. Like in the evening if I watch movies like anime or spend my time in the worldly things then I have no desire to Join the worship. Sometimes in the evening at 6 I start watch movie, but we have to join worship on 6:45. But I already started my movie. So, I have no desire to join the worship. So, it really depend on my spiritual life.

DISCUSSION

International students have diverse reasons for attending worship services (Hoof, 2007, Greenhill, 2014). Primarily, they seek community and belonging, finding solace in the communal aspect of worship to combat social isolation in a new cultural environment. This aligns with Hoelscher's findings on the importance of supportive campus communities. Additionally, students are drawn to meaningful worship experiences that resonate with their personal values and aspirations, reflecting the principles of self-determination theory. Furthermore, many view worship as a catalyst for personal development and spiritual growth, echoing existing literature on college students' spiritual seeking (Eberhardt, 2005; Montgomery-Goodnough & Gallagher, 2007).

However, several barriers hinder their participation. Compulsory attendance policies can diminish genuine interest, as students express a preference for autonomy in their worship engagement, aligning with self-determination theory (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). This is corroborated by Morrison's findings on the positive impact of non-mandatory policies. Cultural and linguistic differences also pose challenges, as diverse religious backgrounds may lead to a disconnect with unfamiliar worship styles, highlighting the importance of inclusive practices. Finally, a perceived lack of authenticity in worship experiences, described as monotonous or disconnected from spiritual needs, can lead to disengagement, echoing concerns raised by Rockenbach et al. (2012). regarding meaningful engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the need for a significant overhaul of dormitory worship services to better meet the needs and perspectives of international students. The findings indicate that while attendance is often mandatory, many international students lack genuine spiritual engagement due

to issues such as repetitive and outdated worship experiences, as well as linguistic and cultural barriers. To address these challenges, the institution should reconsider mandatory attendance policies, prioritize authenticity and relevance in worship content, promote diverse worship experiences, and emphasize the use of English to enhance inclusivity. By implementing these changes, dormitory worship can become a more meaningful and transformative experience that fosters the spiritual growth of international students.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The key recommendations are:

1. Reconsider mandatory attendance policies for dormitory worship services to better meet the needs of international students and foster their spiritual growth.
2. Prioritize authenticity and relevance in worship messages and programs, resonating with college students' experiences.
3. Promote diverse worship styles, themes, and interactive activities, emphasizing the use of English to enhance inclusivity.
4. Engage in open discussions with students to understand their perspectives and develop customized solutions.
5. Use this study as a foundation for further research on international students' motivations and barriers to participation in dormitory worship, aiming to enhance their religious experiences and spiritual well-being.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

While this study was being done, there were several challenges, especially when the data was being gathered. One notable challenge was that one dormitory dean did not want to take part in the interview. This was a challenge because the dean's ideas could have given useful information. Also, getting people to join the focus group discussion took a lot of time and was sometimes difficult. Making sure that people were available and ready to take part in these discussions took a lot of work and planning.

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