Spirituality and Academic Performance: Exploring the Interplay for Students

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Abstracts: This study aimed to explore the association between students' spirituality level at Caraga State University and their academic performance. Spiritual health and life orientation were assessed using the Spiritual Health and Life Orientation Measure (SHALOM) developed by John Fisher, while academic performance was measured in terms of Grade-Point Average (GPA). A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, involving 366 randomly selected participants through stratified random sampling with colleges as strata. Descriptive statistics, including averages and percentages, were utilized to assess the participants' spirituality level and academic performance. Additionally, Pearson's R Correlation test was applied to investigate the relationship between spirituality and academic performance. The results indicated that the participants at Caraga State University generally exhibited good spirituality, with an average score of 4.23. Most students demonstrated very good academic performance. The study found a positive, yet weak correlation between students' spirituality and academic performance, which was not statistically significant, with a coefficient of 0.049 and a p-value of 0.347. This weak and insignificant relationship can be attributed to the majority of students having a consistently high level of spirituality. The findings suggest that promoting spirituality within the school environment remains beneficial, as it does not adversely impact education. Furthermore, spirituality appears to be non-discriminatory, as both academically-inclined and non-academically-inclined students place equal value and importance on spirituality. Therefore, fostering spirituality in the university setting may contribute positively to students' holistic development.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Education, God, Relationship, Spirituality.

1. INTRODUCTION

"In the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, ancient wisdom suggests that spirituality plays a vital role (Proverbs 2:6). This research delves into the intricate relationship between spirituality and academic performance, exploring whether a connection exists between these two facets of a student's life. The notion that spirituality is intertwined with academic achievements is supported by the belief that our God, the Almighty, is at the core of spirituality (Morgan & Peterson, 2020; Williams & Drexler-Dreis, 2019), while academic performance is associated with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Zimmer & Haumann, 2013). If the Lord, symbolizing spirituality, is indeed the source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, representing academic performance, there may be a meaningful interplay between the two.

In the realm of spirituality, adherents of God-believing religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam assert that God is the ultimate source and creator of all things (Landau, 2015; Rahim Acar et al., 2012; Valkenberg, 2006), including wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. The scriptures further enumerate these as part of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Isaiah 11:2-3 (Long, 2013; Meinert, 2017). These tenets suggest that a belief in God could complement the pursuit and development of knowledge.

Robert Barron, a Catholic bishop, expounds on the compatibility of God and knowledge, proposing that if God is Truth, then all truths are inherently linked to God (R. Barron, 2014, 2018). According to Barron, belief in God is not only harmonious with knowledge but also a fundamental condition for the possibility of knowledge. The sciences themselves emerged within a framework that presupposed an intelligent designer—God—as the creator of the universe. The discernible patterns and intelligibility found in the universe align with inquiring intelligence, a core assumption that underpins the development of sciences. Consequently, the intelligible universe becomes a corollary of the theological doctrine of creation, wherein God is recognized as the intelligent designer (Barron, 2000, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2014, 2018, 2020).

The significance of spirituality in education has been recognized, with scholars advocating for a spiritual dimension or religious foundation in the educational process (Slattery, 2007). Spirituality, indeed, holds a central place in many individuals' lives, becoming a core concern for most, if not all.

Previous research has explored the connection between spirituality and academic performance, yielding notable findings. Flannery (2012) conducted a quantitative study in America, revealing a statistically significant positive relationship between spirituality, as measured by Beazley's Spirituality Assessment Scale, and academic performance (GPA) among college students. Wood & Hilton (2012) conducted qualitative research focusing on African American male community college students, discovering that spirituality positively influenced academic success by serving as a confidant, a source of inspiration, and providing life purpose and the ability to overcome barriers.

Additionally, Jeynes (2020) conducted a meta-analysis investigating the relationship between prayer and student outcomes in urban schools. The study found a positive association between prayer and higher student outcomes, particularly in high-quality studies. Byfield (2008) explored the impact of religion on the educational achievement of Black boys in the United Kingdom and the United States, demonstrating that religious faith and community support significantly contributed to academic success among these students. Similarly, Lee et al. (2007) used longitudinal data to investigate the link between religiosity in high school students and bachelor's degree attainment.

In the context of Caraga State University, this research aims to delve into the relationship between students' spirituality and academic performance. Through a comprehensive examination, we seek to shed light on the interplay between these two critical aspects of students' lives.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is primarily anchored on two main theories: the theory of spirituality and its impact on academic performance, and the social identity theory. The theory of spirituality posits that individuals' spiritual beliefs and practices can influence various aspects of their lives, including academic performance. Spirituality may provide students with a sense of purpose, meaning, and emotional well-being, which in turn can positively impact their motivation, focus, and resilience in academic pursuits.

Additionally, the social identity theory plays a vital role in understanding how spirituality operates in a university setting. According to this theory, individuals derive part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong. In the context of this study, students at Caraga State University may form a collective identity around spirituality, where they share common beliefs and values related to spiritual well-being. This shared identity could influence their behaviors, attitudes, and academic endeavors.

By combining these two theories, this study seeks to explore how students’ level of spirituality, as measured by the Spiritual Health and Life Orientation Measure (SHALOM), may be linked to their academic performance, represented by Grade-Point Average (GPA). The hypothesis is that students who exhibit higher levels of spirituality may experience enhanced emotional and psychological resources, which could positively impact their overall academic performance. Moreover, understanding the relationship between spirituality and academic performance within the context of a social identity perspective can shed light on the potential role of a shared spiritual identity in shaping students' educational experiences.
This study integrates the theories of spirituality and social identity to investigate the connection between students’ spiritual level and their academic performance at Caraga State University. It aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how spirituality and a shared spiritual identity may influence students’ holistic development and educational outcomes.

3. METHODS

The research design for this quantitative study employed a descriptive-correlational approach to investigate the relationship between students’ spirituality levels and their academic performance, specifically focusing on GPA. The study utilized descriptive statistics to measure the spirituality and academic performance levels of students at Caraga State University. Inferential statistics, using Pearson/Spearman correlation, were employed to determine the relationship between the students’ spiritual levels and their academic performance. Additionally, regression analysis was used to assess the impact of spirituality on students’ academic performance. The data was collected through a survey questionnaire and quantitative methods.

The study was conducted at Caraga State University-Main Campus in Butuan City, Philippines. The university’s history dates to 1918 when it was founded as the Agusan Agriculture High School (AAHS). It later became Caraga State University in a reserved forest area in Butuan in 1946. Over time, the university has attained significant recognition, rising to SUC Level 4 status, becoming the only Level 4 SUC in the Caraga Region and one of the 20 Level 4 SUCs in the Philippines.

The participants of the study were undergraduate students from the main campus of Caraga State University, enrolled in the Academic Year 2021-2022. The sample size of 366 students was determined using Cochran’s Formula for sample size determination. Participants were chosen through a probability-based stratified sampling design, considering the various colleges within the university, ensuring adequate representation for inferential statistics to be applicable to the entire main campus.

To gather data, the study employed the Spiritual Health and Life Orientation Measure (SHALOM) questionnaire developed by John Fisher. This instrument consists of four domains: personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental. The data on students’ academic performance in terms of GPA were obtained from the University registrar while strictly adhering to the Data Privacy Act to maintain students’ privacy and confidentiality.

The study utilized a scoring system for both spirituality and academic performance. For spirituality, the SHALOM instrument assigned scores from 1 to 5, corresponding to different levels of spirituality. For academic performance, Caraga State University uses a grading system with numerical values ranging from 1.0 (highest) to 5.0 (lowest), where 3.0 is the lowest passing grade.

Data gathering was carried out through an online survey questionnaire using Google Forms. Participants were selected randomly with the help of a statistician, and they were provided with a YouTube video explaining the survey orientation. Consent was obtained from participants by agreeing to a consent statement and uploading their ID and signature. Students responded to the SHALOM instrument and provided their GPA, which was later verified by the University Registrar.

The validity and reliability of the research were ensured through various steps, including a research proposal defense, obtaining approvals, permissions, and consent letters. Expert consultations were sought in the field of Mathematics and Statistical Computing and Research Center (MSCRC). The reliability of the SHALOM instrument was tested using Cronbach’s alpha, resulting in a high value of 0.912.

For statistical treatment, the study used descriptive statistics to analyze the levels of spirituality and academic performance, employing mean, frequency, and percentage distributions. Inferential statistics included Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis to identify the relationship between spirituality and academic performance, determining whether a significant correlation existed and the nature of that relationship (direct or indirect).
4. RESULTS

This part presents the results and discussions of data collected through the research instrument used in this study. This section shows the results of data quantification, analyses, and interpretation.

4.1 Students’ Level of Spirituality

The CSU students' spirituality level was determined through the instrument developed by John Fisher, the Spiritual Health and Life Orientation Measure (SHALOM). SHALOM offers a quantifiable measurement of an individual's spiritual well-being level to measure the relationship's quality in four areas: Personal, Communal, Environmental, and Transcendental. Each category has five questions, with a total of 20 questions. Indicators for the SHALOM were assessed by giving rates from 1 (lowest score: very few/low) to 5 (highest score: Very high). The following tables display the level of spirituality in terms of the four domains and the overall average.

The overall level of spirituality is the average of all the 20 items in the SHALOM instruments. It is the average of the four domains of spirituality – personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Domain</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Good Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Domain</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>Good Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Domain</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>Good Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental Domain</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>Good Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Level of Spirituality</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>Good Spirituality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the overall level of spirituality of the students at Caraga State University

Table 1 exhibits the result of the overall level of spirituality. The average of all the 20 items in the four domains of spirituality is 4.23, which is good spirituality. It can be gleaned from the data that CSU students have a good spirituality for the overall average from the personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental domains. The CSU students give importance and relevance to their spiritual life as they manifest a high level of spirituality, which is good.

Spirituality is vital and relevant in CSU students' life as they have high regard for their spiritual life and find it very important. Angeles (2012), del Castillo et al. (2021), and Domingo (2008) would affirm the result of the study as they said that the belief in God is vital to most people in the Philippines. Slattery (2007) would be glad for this result as he acclaimed that education must be religious or have a theological or spiritual foundation.

This is consistent with the ideas of Barron (2000, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2014, 2018, 2020) that education and spirituality are not contradictory. Being educated to the advanced knowledge and learnings in the university will never be contrary to the students’ spiritual life, especially to their belief in God.

4.2 Students’ Academic Performance (GPA)

The academic performance of the student participants in this study will be measured in terms of their Grade Point Average (GPA) from the 2nd semester of the academic year 2021-2022. This GPA represents the most recent academic performance for a semester that concluded between February and June of 2022. The 1st semester of the academic year 2021-2022, spanning from September 2021 to January 2022, is considered distant academic performance. Moreover, the 1st semester of the academic year 2022-2023 had not concluded until January 2023. Therefore, to align with the research timeline, it is appropriate to use the GPA from the 2nd semester of the academic year 2021-2022 as the academic performance indicator for this study. It is important to note that this study adopts a cross-sectional design, not a longitudinal design, which is why only the GPA from this specific
semester is utilized, rather than considering the entire GPA or grade weighted average of the students' entire university tenure.

The grading system employed by Caraga State University uses number grades in increments of 0.25, ranging from 1.0 (highest) to 5.0 (lowest passing grade). Notably, the GPA range is downward in scope, meaning that the range between 1.0 and 1.25 falls under the level of 1.0, and similarly for the other intervals. Specific honors are awarded based on the GPA achieved. Those with a GPA from 1.0 up to 1.25 are awarded the distinction of "President Lister." Similarly, a GPA from 1.25 above up to 1.50 is recognized as "VPAA Lister," and a GPA from 1.50 above up to 1.75 is designated as "Dean's Lister." Only students falling within these three GPA ranges are eligible for the respective honors. All other GPA ranges follow the verbal descriptions specified in the Caraga State University grading system.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the Grade Point Average of the CSU students in the 2nd semester of the academic 2021-2022.

Table 2. Distribution of the Academic Performance (GPA) of the CSU students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Point Average</th>
<th>Frequency of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
<th>Verbal Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.01%</td>
<td>Excellent/President Lister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
<td>Very Good/VPAA Lister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>25.14%</td>
<td>Very Good/Dean's Lister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>24.32%</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13.39%</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.92%</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.73%</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
<td>Passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
<td>Conditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.91%</td>
<td>Failed/INC/Drop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents the distribution of the academic performance of students at CSU, measured by their Grade Point Average (GPA). The table showcases the frequency and percentage of participants in each GPA category, along with verbal descriptions for easy interpretation. Notably, a significant proportion of students achieved excellent to very good GPAs (1.0, 1.25, and 1.50), indicating a group of high-achievers at the university. The majority of students fall into the "Very Good" and "Above Average" GPA categories, signifying a considerable portion of the student population performing well academically. However, there are still students with low GPAs (e.g., above 3.0), raising concerns about academic challenges and potential interventions needed to support struggling students. The data can also prompt evaluation of specific academic programs, identify at-risk students, and help set criteria for scholarships and recognition programs. Nevertheless, a comprehensive assessment requires additional context, such as total student numbers and GPA trends over time, to draw more precise implications about the university's academic performance and standards.

4.3 Correlation analysis between Spirituality and Academic Performance

To assess the significance of the relationship between spirituality and academic performance, the Pearson Correlation test is used. According to Mukaka (2012), correlation analysis determines the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The coefficient of correlation measures the strength and direction of the correlation on a scale of -1.0 to +1.0. If the value of r is negative, it indicates an inverse relationship; otherwise, it indicates a direct relationship. The strength of the relationship is determined by the absolute value of r. The relationship between the variables is stronger when the absolute value of r is close to -1.0 or +1.0, and weaker when the value is close to 0 (zero). The p-value versus the significance level (α) will determine the significance of the relationship. This study used the Pearson Correlation test to analyze the data.

Table 3 shows the relationship between academic performance and the students’ level of spirituality.
Table 3. Relationship between academic performance (GPA) and students' spirituality level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal level of Spirituality</td>
<td>Grade Point Average (GPA)</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.310</td>
<td>Very weak and positive relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal level of Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental level of Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.612</td>
<td>Very weak and positive relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental level of Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall level of Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: * tested using Pearson correlation test

Table 3 presents the results of examining the relationship between academic performance, measured by Grade Point Average (GPA), and students' spirituality level across different variables. Each row represents a different spiritual level (Personal, Communal, Environmental, Transcendental, and Overall), and the table provides the correlation coefficient and p-value for each correlation. The correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables, while the p-value indicates the significance of the correlation.

The findings show that there is a very weak and positive relationship between GPA and each spirituality level. However, it is important to note that none of these relationships are statistically significant. The p-values are all higher than the commonly used significance level of 0.05, which means that the observed correlations could have occurred due to chance and are not strong enough to draw meaningful conclusions.

The data indicates that there might be some slight association between students' academic performance and their spirituality levels, but it is not strong enough to establish a significant link. These results may indicate that other factors play a more prominent role in determining academic performance, and spirituality, as measured by the variables in this study, may not be a significant influencing factor.

Further exploration is needed to better understand the complex relationship between spirituality and academic performance and to consider additional variables that could contribute to a more robust analysis. Additionally, using more comprehensive measures of spirituality and considering potential moderating factors could help reveal more meaningful insights into the connection between these two aspects of students’ lives.

The result of the study may not be statistically significant in terms of the relationship between spirituality and academic performance, nevertheless, it still shows a positive and not a negative relation. It is, therefore, in line with many authors’ ideas claiming the connection of spirituality and academic performance. Flannery (2012) found a statistically significant positive relationship between spirituality and academic performance. Wood & Hilton (2012) discovered a positive relationship between spirituality and academic success for some African American male community college students. Jeynes (2020) found that prayer is associated with higher levels of student outcomes, and the effects of prayer were more potent in high-quality studies. Byfield (2008) found in his study that religion, specifically church community, and faith in God, contributed significantly to Black male students’ academic achievement. Lee et al. (2007) discovered that religiosity in high school students was significantly related to bachelor's degree attainment. Pong (2017) showed a fairly positive correlation between the respondents’ spiritual health as well as their academic performance.
CONCLUSIONS

The primary focus of this study was to assess the level of spirituality among students and explore its potential relationship with their academic performance. The findings of the study led to the following conclusions:

1. High Level of Spirituality: The participants, consisting of 366 CSU students, displayed a high level of spirituality, indicating a strong connection to their spiritual beliefs. For these students, spirituality was deemed as an essential dimension of their lives.

2. Above-Average Academic Performance: Regarding academic performance, the 366 participants at CSU demonstrated an above-average level based on central tendency measures.

3. Weak and Insignificant Correlation: The correlation analysis between spirituality and academic performance revealed a very weak and positive correlation. Although it indicated that an increase in students' spirituality might correspond to a slight improvement in their academic performance, this positive correlation was not statistically significant. The high reported levels of spirituality across the board played a role in this outcome. Students with both high and low academic performance showed similar responses regarding their level of spirituality, making it challenging to establish a strong correlation.

4. Importance of Spirituality: Despite the weak and non-significant relationship, the results still hold meaningful implications in support of the significance of spirituality in education. Not being negatively correlated means that spirituality and academic performance are not in opposition. This aligns with the study's theoretical framework, indicating that one's spirituality and academic pursuits can coexist without hindering each other.

5. Non-Discriminatory Nature of Spirituality: The findings also suggest that spirituality is not limited to academically inclined students; it extends to those who may be academically challenged as well. The descriptive statistics revealed that students with both strong and struggling academic performance exhibited a high level of spirituality or recognized its importance in their lives. Consequently, spirituality is not exclusive to high-performing students but is valued by all participants.

This study highlights the prevalent high level of spirituality among CSU students and its compatibility with academic pursuits. While the correlation between spirituality and academic performance was weak and statistically insignificant, the research underscores the importance of acknowledging and appreciating students’ spirituality in educational settings, regardless of their academic standing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.15379/ijmst.v10i3.1585

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