Examining University Students' Self-Determination through the Lens of Spiritual Learning

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between spiritual learning and self-determination ability is the research objective in this study, and this study develops a conceptional model of spirituality and self-determination ability through a systemic literature review. From the previous studies, self-determination ability is launched when human needs are supported by the social context, focusing on the satisfaction of the three basic needs of human beings, seeking happiness that needs are satisfied. A short peak experience is a spiritual pursuit, and each peak experience is heart-shaking and has a lasting effect on life. It is accompanied by epiphanies and is a successful learning experience. Thus, spirituality learns how to effectively provide the peak experience of humans "making warrior-like decisions" rather than impulsive heroic sacrifices. The results show that spiritual learning is associated with effective self-determination ability, and that epiphany is an important moment to reach the level of self-determination ability is the act of learning. The conclusion is that epiphany manifesting in three states: concentration, sharing, and aesthetic experience as a conceptional model of self-determination ability and spiritual learning is the vital moment whenever one wants to be self-determined.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Students who encounter learning difficulties prefer using technological tools to tackle issues. They have better experiences using these technological tools and use them well, rather than relying on teachers and parents. This is because teachers spend a lot of effort on improving students' intrinsic motivation in curriculum design and teaching methods, where teachers could ask students to tackle problems by themselves in the first place. At the same time, parents tend to encourage students to work harder. However, the normal feedback is that "I did work hard, but I failed anyhow." Based on the above, the more teachers and parents try to assist, the more they can exacerbate the problem. Therefore, identifying the question of failure is the key to success. Past research has focused on the relationship between effort and success, including a discussion of learning strategies, teaching styles, and other aspects [1-4]. This approach tries to understand the entire picture between effort and success while exploring the factors that affect individual conditions and learning effectiveness. These factors include learning motivation and the possible factors influencing learning effectiveness [5-7]. However, little attention has been paid to possible spiritual factors. Spirituality could be an essential factor in reducing the risk of failure. Take wiping a dirty desk as an example. When one wipes a messy desk with a dirty rag instead of a clean cloth, it is not expected to make the desk clean, no matter how hard one tries. Cleansing the dirty rag before using it as a tool is the way to address this critical step to the initial goal of the intention. Life is like the rag born as a white and flawless clean cloth. It absorbs knowledge while polluting the mind at the same time. Spirituality is being polluted, called spiritual materialization, a process that may isolate effort from success. Life carries many great experiences that help acquire knowledge more effectively and efficiently. However, it can destroy learners' passions and motivations over time. Eastern students' autonomy is still insufficient because of the lack support provided by the cultural and social context. There is less autonomous and insufficient to manifest students' spirituality. Under diplomaism, the variety of subject learning leads students to adopt forced memory learning, where there is almost no learning dominance. How spiritual learning enables students to make fearless and resolute choices for better academic results to achieve enlightened knowledge, explain the inner self, break through the barriers of a lack of autonomy, and move toward a self-determination mindset should be further explored.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Spirituality is a mindset that exists deep within oneself and is often associated with words such as "growing," "transformative," "profound," "self," and "wonderful." In human societies, the subject of learning is human beings. Past studies on learning have focused on the nature, the process and the meaning of learning, etc. [8,9]. There is a lack of discussion regarding the relationship between human development and learning behavior from the intersection of human essence and learning. This section explores the relationship between learning and spirituality while further discussing the relationship between spiritual learning and self-determination ability.

2.1 The Relationship between Learning and Spirituality

The intricate relationship between learning and spirituality emerges as a focal point in contemporary educational and psychological discourse. Kumar et al. [10] underscore the interconnectedness of creativity, spirituality, and wholeness, emphasizing their collective significance in the realms of teaching, learning, and living. This symposium highlights the holistic perspectives necessary to understand these relationships. It suggests that spirituality is not an isolated concept but deeply intertwined with creative and educational processes.

Similarly, Mamat et al.'s study [11] during the COVID-19 pandemic illuminates the relationship between emotional intelligence, spirituality, and stress in online learning environments. Their findings indicate a significant correlation between spirituality and the ability to manage stress, highlighting the role of spiritual understanding in coping with the challenges of remote learning.

Furthermore, Islam, Khan, and Asad (2019) explored the dynamics within organizational contexts, specifically in Pakistan's banking sector. Their findings indicate a positive correlation between organizational learning culture and workplace spirituality. This finding is

significant because it suggests that an environment conducive to learning and growth fosters a sense of spirituality among employees, thereby enhancing overall organizational well-being.

Cochrane [12] examined the connection between learning, spirituality, and management, drawing upon Bateson's theory of learning categories and Chakraborty's model of spiritual development. This comparison suggests that spiritual growth is linked to subjective forms of learning and existence, representing a paradigm shift in how spirituality is integrated into educational and managerial contexts. The relationship between learning and spirituality is multifaceted, encompassing creativity, organizational culture, emotional intelligence, and management. These studies collectively highlight the importance of considering spirituality as an integral component of learning, whether in educational settings, workplaces, or during challenging times such as a global pandemic.

2.2 The Meaning of Spiritual Learning

Spiritual learning is a concept rich in depth and diversity. It encompasses developing inner values, understanding, and connection to a broader existential purpose. Juzwik et al. [13] comprehensively viewed spiritual and religious meaning-making in language and literacy studies. They emphasize the role of spirituality in shaping individual and collective identities, particularly in the context of teaching, learning, curriculum, and policy. This perspective highlights spiritual learning as a process of integrating personal beliefs and values into one's understanding and interpretation of the world.

Eren and Dökme [14] examined the effectiveness of blended learning environments in enhancing cognitive learning and spiritual meaning. Their research highlights the importance of integrating spiritual dimensions into educational settings. This implies that spiritual learning is about acquiring knowledge and nurturing a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.

Sharma et al. [15] proposed that cultivating counseling students' well-being and the professional knowledge and skills is important, and developing and fostering their purpose within educational settings is comprehensive to career success.

Zheng et al. [16] explored the concept of spiritual learning in the context of dark tourism. They examined how mixed emotional experiences at sites of historical tragedies can lead to spiritual meaning-making. Their study illustrates that spiritual learning can occur in various contexts, including the processing of complex emotions and reflections on past events.

Abu Bakar et al [17] discussed the spirituality and pedagogy in tourism higher education and their study found that spiritual-based pedagogy was grounded on the way of humanizing the educational experience, engaging the learning and authenticity, but the pedagogy is also transformative in a variety of formats such as stories, reflection, and dialogic discourse.

Shim [18] discussed the significance of spiritual education through Augustine's "Confessions." Their study highlights spiritual learning as a journey in overcoming human vulnerability and limitations, leading to the joy of sharing and teaching profound insight on life. It portrays spiritual learning as a transformative process that involves introspection, self-discovery, and sharing personal spiritual journeys [19]. Spiritual learning is a multifaceted process that comprises the cultivation of inner wisdom, emotional processing, and integrating personal beliefs into one's understanding of the world. It is a transformative journey that enriches cognitive learning with deeper existential meaning and connection.

Spiritual learning is closely related to the development of self-perfection, where everyone has a moment that is considered a sudden flash of inspiration [20]. When this moment comes, some do things particularly smoothly, even better than expected. Others may attribute this phenomenon to luck, while some attribute it to hard work. Therefore, self-perfection occurs at the level of the mind. Thus, self-perfection is the accumulation of peak experiences and a peak experience is the brief moment called epiphany. Epiphany refers to a sudden awakening, like waking up, and is a momentary phenomenon. Unlike other moments, at the moment of an epiphany, there will typically be a clear feeling where the subject-object world disappears; true and false are no longer confused, and the existing world one feels is the truth (Lian, 2013: Zhang, 2016). Moreover, Lian (2013) found that aesthetic experiences can be related to an epiphany. It represents a personal experience, an open mind, an awakened experience, and a

sense of enjoyment and satisfaction from the heart.

Based on the above, spiritual learning is generated through self-perfection, and self-perfection is the accumulation of peak experiences, i.e., epiphanies, where aesthetic experience is a form of epiphany.

2.3 The Connotation of Concentration

Concentration is a critical aspect of cognitive and psychological functioning. It is often associated with focused attention and sustaining mental effort on specific tasks or thoughts. The difference between attention and concentration is whether one can pay attention to the things one pays attention to. The connotation of concentration encompasses various dimensions, including its role in learning, decision-making, and emotional regulation.

Mahamat [11] discussed the phenomenon of urban concentration while highlighting the growing population aggregation and activities in urban areas. While this study primarily focused on urbanization, it indirectly provided insight regarding concentration as a gathering or focus of elements, whether people in cities or thoughts in the mind.

Feng [21] explored the implication of "study" in Mencius while emphasizing the importance of concentration in learning. This study highlights that concentration is not just about focusing attention but also involves persistence, rethinking, and questioning, which are essential for deep learning and personal development. The connotation of concentration extends beyond the realm of individual cognitive processes to include broader applications in urban planning, organizational structure, ideological development, and educational practices. These diverse perspectives underscore the multifaceted nature of concentration and its significance in various domains.

Fan, Chen, and Han [22] expanded the connotation of concentration in the context of ownership concentration and its impact on accounting information consistency. Their study provides a unique perspective on concentration, not just as a mental process but also as a structural characteristic in organizations that impact information processing and decision-making.

2.4 The Concept of Altruism

Altruism is a fundamental aspect of human behavior characterized by selfless concern for the well-being of others. Mokhtar et al. (2020) explored this concept in the workplace context, particularly at the Islamic University College of Melaka. Their findings indicate a high level of altruism among lecturers, emphasizing its importance in achieving psychological well-being and organizational success. This finding underscores altruism as a personal virtue and a critical component in fostering a positive and productive work environment.

Joseph, Tobias, Obiora, and Ebuka examined the philosophical aspects of altruism, evaluating the concept of effective altruism proposed by Peter Singer [23]. Singer's perspective on altruism challenges traditional notions, suggesting a more pragmatic approach to doing good, where effectiveness in improving the lives of others is key. This philosophical viewpoint broadens the understanding of altruism, integrating ethical reasoning with practical outcomes.

Alavi et al. [24] introduced altruism as a vital aspect of caring self-efficacy in pediatric nurses. Their study highlights how altruism manifests in the form of humanistic care and caring attitudes driven by values such as religious beliefs and love for children. The findings provide insight into how altruism is a moral attribute and a professional competency, particularly in healthcare settings.

Kumar's study on the impact of mothers' education on the self-concept and altruism of secondary school students reveals intriguing findings [25]. Contrary to expectations, the study suggests that children of mothers who were less educated tended to exhibit higher levels of altruism. The finding challenges conventional wisdom and indicates that altruism may be impacted by various social and educational factors. Altruism is a multifaceted concept that plays a significant role in multiple domains, from workplace dynamics and philosophical discourse to healthcare and educational settings. These studies collectively highlight the diverse implications and expressions of altruistic behavior in human interactions.

Based on the above, altruism is about sharing rather than scarifying. It leads an individual to play the helper role, which also benefits oneself

afterward. The practice of altruism is typically driven by specific values.

2.5 Theoretical Basis of Self-Determination Ability

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a robust framework for understanding the psychological underpinnings of self-determination ability. Grounded in the work of psychologists Deci and Ryan, this theory emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs-autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering self-determination. These three basic needs are supported by social agencies, i.e., the teacher, parents, and peers.

Soenens and Vansteenkiste [26] augmented the theoretical concept of parental psychological control by integrating it with SDT. They suggest that understanding the dynamics of psychologically controlling parenting through the lens of SDT offers clearer insight into its effects on child and adolescent development. This perspective is crucial in understanding how external factors influence the development of self-determination abilities.

Dr. Harly Ramsey applied SDT to the context of online teaching, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic [27]. Her research adopted SDT to contextualize student feedback and teaching effectiveness, highlighting the theory's relevance in understanding student motivation and needs in online learning environments.

2.6 The Relationship between Spiritual Learning and Self-Determination Ability

The relationship between spiritual learning and self-determination is a complex interplay that involves the development of personal autonomy, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation. Farida and Badrus [28] explored this relationship by examining the impact of spiritual and social intelligence on self-efficacy among high school students. Their findings indicate the significant effect of spiritual intelligence on self-efficacy. This suggests that spiritual learning can enhance an individual's belief in their ability to control their actions and outcomes.

Kim [29] investigated the structural relationship between self-determination, learning flow, and innovative behavior in office worker graduate students. They focused on the mediating effect of positive psychological capital. The findings indicate that self-determination significantly impacts positive psychological capital and learning flow but not innovative behavior directly. This implies that spiritual learning, which often fosters self-determination, can indirectly influence innovative behavior through enhanced psychological well-being.

Chiu and Sun [30] examined the relationship between technology learning support and digital literacy from the perspective of SDT. Their findings suggest that autonomy and competence, critical components of self-determination, are crucial in developing digital literacy. Their study highlights the role of self-determination, potentially fostered by spiritual learning, in navigating the digital world.

Luarn, Chen, and Chiu (2023) examined the enhancement of intrinsic learning motivation through gamification using SDT as a framework. Their findings indicate that gamification features can impact students' intrinsic motivation and are closely linked to self-determination. Their study suggests that by promoting intrinsic motivation, spiritual learning can play a significant role in educational contexts where engagement and motivation are crucial. The relationship between spiritual learning and self-determination is evident in various educational and psychological contexts. Spiritual learning enhances self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, critical components of self-determination. These influence an individual's ability to engage in innovative behavior and adapt to technological advancements.

3. METHODS

Initial findings were developed using a comprehensive literature review and the review process is discussed and drew on theoretical studies of spiritual learning and self-determination ability in relation to the relevant studies to reviewing and synthesizing qualitative research. This study focuses on the theory of self-determination initially and is interested in the three innate needs which are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Through the literature review, the looming connection between the spiritual learning and self-determination ability is gradually visible. For a deeper understanding of the relationship to the research objective, the core concepts of epiphany were found and three main influenced

factors from the spiritual learning were developed to illustrate the above relationship.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the process of gaining new knowledge, working hard or making an effort harder is all the way to understand it, and having an epiphany is the path of understanding. In this section, concentration, altruism and sharing, and aesthetic experience are fully discussed to explore the essence of epiphany.

In most cases, learners who are aware of the attractive things, could further focus on the things they notice, focus on and continue to engage in the learning activities, and are showing the concentration of their minds, that is, concentration. SDT underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs of learners with concentration. SDT not only attaches importance to the autonomy of the individual, but also emphasizes the inseparable relationship between the autonomy of the individual and the social context, and instead of independent of the self from the social context or the dedication to sacrificing the ego to complete the ego. It is an altruistic instinct that transcends sensory perception in pursuit of self-perfection.

Altruism and sharing beyond the senses are manifested above the spiritual level. Spiritual learning is a purifying process of realizing the benefits of sharing and actively pursuing a higher and deeper wisdom aimed at solving the problems of others and achieving the happiness of others. Xu [31] discusses the art of nursing from an aesthetic point of view, arguing that the interaction between medical staff and patients is art, and the personality traits, literacy and interpersonal interaction of nursing staff themselves can play a therapeutic role, such as teasing patients in a southern tone or quietly listening to patients' pain. In other words, when trying to experience others, bear others, and value others, you will not feel that it is a painful thing, it is the moment to realize the beauty of human nature, and it is the pursuit of happiness, and happiness is not only to eliminate pain, but also to invest in it. The study further emphasizes that in the era of modern science and the pursuit of instrumental rationality, nursing is classified as a combination of technology and knowledge, and the spirituality of nursing labor cannot be ignored because of the aesthetic consciousness or aesthetic experience of the caregiver. It is an

important factor in nourishing the lives of caregivers and patients. Shi (2013) examines Dickie's denial of the correlation between aesthetic attitudes and aesthetic experience, and also echoes that aesthetic experience exists above the spiritual level, arguing that aesthetic attitudes are not unique attitudes, but only attention (emphasizing that attention is selective) is distracted, "focused" on aesthetic properties that do not involve interests, so aesthetic attitudes do not exist before aesthetic experience. This study further illustrates the relationship between concentration and aesthetic experience, arguing that the empirical subject must first be able to see the object as aesthetic (focusing on the nature that does not involve interest), otherwise it is difficult to generally regard the object as beautiful, and the aesthetic nature must be above the mental state of the experience subject.

Aesthetic experience exists above the consciousness of the empirical subject at the level of mind that does not involve interest, and sees the aesthetic side of the object, so that the empirical subject can understand the beauty of the object. On the other hand, Dewey (2005) believes that aesthetic consciousness is a special concentration or comprehension that is usually ignored in the consistent experience, while Mou [32] believes that aesthetics is a judgment that must first understand the object itself through a priori form of reason, but the result of understanding is not necessarily logical, so aesthetic consciousness occurs after rationally noticing that the object has aesthetic qualities, and at the level of the mind, the subject of experience produces an illogical judgment of the object with a characteristic concentration or comprehension. The helper's sense of the beauty of human nature is particularly inspired because the helper himself is a poet, and the blood and sweat of labor at work is itself a work of art. Wang [33-35] believes that every nursing work of helpers (such as medical staff and social workers) close to suffering and death is a perspective of the human mind to see its own experience, reflect on oneself, and create a self-conscious aesthetic experience [36-38].

In summary, lack of spirituality leads to less altruistic instincts, and loss of peak experience accumulation tends to reduce epiphanies and aesthetic experiences, and then the ability to self-determination is spontaneously disappearing. [39-41] Therefore, it can be seen that spiritual learning is the key to breaking through the lack of self-determination [42-44].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Spiritual learning is to constantly share, experience good experiences and concentration, find wisdom, meet the moment of enlightenment, let the long-term impact of enlightenment on learners play a role, unmask materialized spirituality, reveal more human essence, let abundant spirituality enhance the individual's self-confidence, so that they can freely take out spirituality in exchange for the beauty of human nature. The beauty of human nature is like a brilliance, illuminating the path of learning, guiding individuals to forget the boundary between the ego and the big self, satisfying the sense of belonging from the social context, maintaining mindfulness for learning (without denying self-ability), seeing opportunities for success, and comfortably facing happiness. Therefore, self-determination is influenced by sharing, aesthetic experiences, and concentration in spiritual learning to find the enlightened wisdom to enter spiritual learning. The relationship between sharing, aesthetic experience, concentration and self-determination is shown in Fig. 1, and its connotations are as follows:
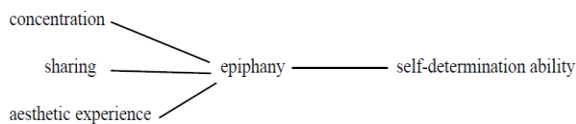

Fig. 1. Relationship between spiritual learning and self-determination ability

5.1 Concentration

Concentration refers to the moment when you notice something and focus on that thing, develop potential from the process of focusing on that thing, increase wisdom, and expect an epiphany. In doing so, intrinsic motivation is built up and one is supposed to succeed.

5.2 Sharing

Sharing means offering what you have, even your rights, to make others happy, regardless of gains and losses, or to bear the pain of others, without prioritizing one's own personal happiness. The essence of human beings is to be altruistic and achieve others, and the way to achieve others is usually achieved by sharing and also benefit themselves. The more times one shares, the higher possibility one can have an epiphany. As long as individuals have epiphanies, they are spontaneously motivated to do what they intend to do.

5.3 Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience refers to focusing on something without stake, looking at the thing in front of you with a judgment, so as to nourish one's own mind or the hearts of others to be not afraid of pain, and sometimes into pain. People persuade this kind of experience are more likely to follow their heard.

5.4 Self-Determination Ability

SDT include intrinsic motivation and amotivation. The former is about how eager human intend to act, and the latter is about the last choice one wants to make. They are completely different from each other. However, it is possible to internalize or regulate the status from less motivated to higher motivated situations according to SDT. When a learner is aware of the bonus behind a certain learning activity, such as getting rewards, one is motivated. Therefore, how to make a learner turn to value a certain learning activity as a treasure, whether getting rewards or avoiding punishments, is about epiphanies. Through enhancing concentration, sharing, and aesthetic experiences, epiphanies are unveiled shortly but affect self-determination ability permanently.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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