The Interplay of Spiritual Insight, Self-Actualization, and Educational Excellence

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Abstract

Spiritual intelligence refers to the capacity to access and embody spiritual sources, values, and qualities, alongside self-actualization, ongoing personal growth, and a continuous striving for inner harmony and wholeness. This study employed a descriptive-analytical and correlational research design. The statistical population included all undergraduate students enrolled in 2015 at Ilam University's Faculty of Literature and Humanities, with a sample of 200 students selected through multi-stage cluster random sampling. Data collection involved the use of the Ahwaz Self-Actualization Questionnaire, King's Spiritual Understanding Scale, and a researcher-developed instrument measuring the quality of education. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software, including Pearson's correlation and regression analysis.

Findings revealed a positive correlation between spiritual understanding and both self-actualization and perceived educational quality. Regression analysis further demonstrated that these two factors significantly predict levels of spiritual understanding among students. The study concludes that self-efficacy and educational quality play a crucial role in shaping students' spiritual understanding.

Keywords: Spiritual understanding, Quality of education, Self-actualization, Students

Introduction

Higher education (HE) serves as a fundamental pillar for every economy, acting as a driving force behind the emergence of new professionals, innovative business ideas, and policy developers. Mark Brey (2007) highlights that universities, through inquiry and instruction, contribute significantly to the advancement of science and innovation in research. In recent years, higher education has experienced rapid expansion and transformation [1]. Toward the end of the last decade, a growing emphasis on integrating inner personal development with external life has been observed, with the educational system emerging as a key domain for this integration. Concepts such as morality, truth, faith in a higher power, honesty, conscientiousness, altruism, and self-actualization point to the rise of a new paradigm centered on spirituality. Spiritual intelligence, in particular, has gained prominence as psychologists increasingly explore the intersections of religion and spirituality [2]. According to Amram (2007), spiritual intelligence refers to the ability to utilize spiritual resources, values, and qualities to enhance everyday functioning and overall well-being, both psychological and physical [3]. Self-actualization is described as a fundamental drive toward realizing one's full potential and achieving internal unity and integration [2, 4]. Moreover, societal advancement is closely linked to the quality and growth of the education system, especially higher education [5]. Barzanouni (2000) emphasizes spirituality as an inherent human necessity vital to community survival, capable of filling existential voids. Maslow (1969), in his hierarchy of needs, introduced self-transcendence—or spiritual being—as a crucial stage preceding self-actualization [6]. Research by Emami *et al.* (2014) revealed significant impacts of spiritual intelligence, moral intelligence, self-actualization, and life satisfaction [7]. Similarly, Mousavimoghadam *et al.* (2015) found

that higher education, social solidarity, and spiritual health positively influence students, with male students rating education quality more favorably [8]. Their regression analysis further justified predicting educational quality based on students' spiritual health.

This study aims to explore the relationship between spiritual understanding, self-actualization, and the perceived quality of education among students at the University of Ilam.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design and involved a population of 2,500 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Literature at the University of Ilam. A sample of 200 students, representing approximately 8% of the population, was selected using Morgan's table and multi-stage random cluster sampling. Initially, students were grouped into 12 clusters based on their field of study, which were further divided into smaller clusters according to their year of university entry, resulting in 48 sub-clusters. From these, 7 clusters were randomly chosen for sampling.

Inclusion criteria for participation were: (a) voluntary consent to participate, (b) membership in the selected clusters, and (c) permission from instructors to administer questionnaires during class time. After explaining the study's objectives and ensuring confidentiality, questionnaires were distributed and completed in a group setting.

The research instruments included:

1. **King's Spiritual Understanding Scale (2007):** This 24-item scale measures spiritual understanding across four subscales—critical thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental consciousness, and expanded awareness— using a 5-point Likert scale with total scores ranging from 0 to 90. Higher scores indicate greater spiritual understanding. Validity was established through correlations with related scales (transpersonal interpretation, mysticism, religiosity, and internal-external locus of control) ranging from 0.58 to 0.67. Reliability assessed by test-retest yielded an overall alpha coefficient of 0.95, with subscale alphas between 0.87 and 0.94 [9].

2. **Ahvaz Self-Actualization Questionnaire:** Developed by Esmaeilkhani *et al*. (2001), this 25-item instrument uses a 4-point scale (0 = never to 3 = often), with total scores ranging from 0 to 75 [10]. The questionnaire demonstrated high reliability with test-retest (0.90) and Cronbach's alpha of 0.92. Validity was supported through correlations with self-concept, Beck Depression Inventory, and anxiety scales, showing coefficients of 0.66, -0.70, and -0.77, respectively [8].

3. **Quality of Education Questionnaire:** A 17-item, 5-point Likert scale developed by the authors, which was refined by removing two questions after expert review to confirm content validity. Reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated, and Pearson correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships between variables.

Results and Discussion

The study's findings are summarized in **Tables 1 and 2**. **Table 1** shows that the average scores (mean ± standard deviation) for spiritual understanding, self-actualization, and perceived quality of education were 45.8 ± 17.81, 51.81 ± 11.53, and 33.62 ± 6.97, respectively.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation spiritual understanding, self-actualization and quality of education and the correlation coefficient between them

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
Spiritual understanding	45.8	17.81	1		
Self-actualization	51/81	11/53	0.29	1	
quality of education	33.62	6.97	0.24	0.40	1

The participants' average age was 25.28 years, with a standard deviation of 3.57. Among the 200 students, 120 were female, while 80 (40%) were male. Stepwise regression analysis revealed that self-actualization was the primary predictor of spiritual understanding, followed by the quality of education, which also showed a significant contribution. Together, these two variables accounted for 10% of the variance in spiritual understanding **(Table 2)**.

Table 2. summarizes the results of to stepwise multiple regression

Steps	Predictor variables	R	R^2	B	Beta	T	P
First steps	Self-actualization	0.29	0.08	0.36	0.23	3.18	0.002
second step	quality of education	0.32	0.10	0.37	0.15	1.99	0.05

This research explored how spiritual understanding relates to self-actualization and educational quality among students at the University of Ilam. The results revealed that spiritual understanding has a strong positive connection with both self-actualization and the perceived quality of education. These findings support earlier studies by Emami *et al*. (2014) and Mousavimoghadam *et al*. (2015) [7, 8]. According to humanistic psychology, individuals who are self-aware often experience moments of spiritual elevation, where they momentarily detach from themselves and material concerns [10]. This spiritual dimension extends beyond biological and psychological levels, contributing to a fuller sense of human excellence [10]. Education functions as a social process whose aims and methods adapt according to the community's nature, making it responsive to changing times and environments [11]. To foster spiritual understanding within educational settings and society at large, a deliberate and structured approach is necessary, including the development of supportive frameworks and motivating factors. These efforts typically involve collaboration between universities, professional bodies, and research institutions. Therefore, a heightened spiritual understanding is crucial for advancing both personal development and the overall quality of education.

Conclusion

Promoting self-actualization and enhancing educational quality require nurturing a strong spiritual understanding among students. By employing well-designed teaching strategies and evaluation methods that emphasize more than mere memorization, educators can support students' holistic growth—encompassing academic, moral, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. This comprehensive educational approach contributes significantly to improved learning outcomes and the full realization of students' potential.

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