

## The Role of Spirituality in Shaping Academic Motivation and Coping Strategies among Students

Devesh Chandel<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Anu Teotia<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate relationship between spirituality, coping strategies, and academic motivation among students. Spirituality, encompassing beliefs, practices, and experiences beyond the material realm, serves as a significant yet understudied factor in the academic landscape. The study aimed to explore the impact of spirituality on academic motivation and coping strategies in college students. The sample of 188 included graduate and postgraduate students of Amity university (53% female) with the mean age of 21.7(SD=2.645). Correlation and regression analysis was used to analyze the data, using SPSS 21. Results indicate that Spirituality is significant predictor of higher levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and adaptive coping strategies. Further research is needed to understand the phenomenon of spirituality due to its vast nature and implications of spirituality in academic curriculum to develop better environment for students to pursue their aspirations.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Academic motivation, Coping strategies

Defining spirituality is a difficult and complex task (Jastrzębski, 2022). The term is used in a multitude of different ways and can be related to religion, existential concerns, personal growth or mental health (Lepherd,2015). Throughout the history of psychological research, a number of attempts have been made to quantify spirituality and religion into a single composite construct. Measures which have been developed include Allport's 'Genuine Religious Faith' (Allport et al, 1960), and Ellison and Paloutzian's 'Spiritual Well-Being Scale' (1982). Although the term spirituality is often used in conjunction with religion, it is possible that the two concepts are independent (Weathers, E., McCarthy, G., & Coffey, A. 2016). Recent research into the psychometric properties of spiritual well-being scales has revealed that the concept may be best represented as a two-factor model with separate 'religious well-being' and 'existential well-being' factors (Unterrainer et al, 2010). In the current study, spirituality is regarded as a broad construct with the potential to impact upon various aspects of the coping process and motivation. Measures of spirituality have been included in the survey and will be used to examine the relationship between spirituality, academic motivation and coping.

<sup>1</sup>Master's in Arts, Clinical Psychology, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (II), Amity Institute of Applied Science, Noida, India

\*Corresponding Author

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During the past decade, spirituality have been recognized as important variable in the process of understanding human behavior. This recognition has fostered research which has examined the relationships between spirituality and a number of constructs regarded as central to understanding human functioning. One such area which we will explore is that of motivation and coping strategies. It has been suggested that spirituality can impact upon motivation through self-awareness and self-engagement. It has been advocated that spirituality can impact upon the coping process through the effects on the appraisal process, by shaping the individuals' interpretation of an event, and by influencing the coping resources available to an individual. The findings by vizoso et al., (2018) revealed a positive link between adaptive coping and academic achievement. The present study will focus upon the relationships between spirituality and academic motivation and coping (coping strategies), in the context of the university student population.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

Definition of spirituality differs from time to time and person to person (lepherd, 2015). It is considered a burning issue for research and everyone has its own belief and definition. Past studies have linked spiritual development with increasing awareness of a sense of self and connection to a higher power, and cause and purpose in life (Watson 1989). It is believed that spiritual people can be identified by their actions and show more concern for the welfare of others and the environment.

Spirituality cannot be seen as exclusively religious and while the two conceptions are related, they are not the same (Fowler 2017). An all-encompassing definition is provided by Ingersoll who describes spirituality as an enduring belief in a transcendent or higher power that shapes a person's character and provides a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and connection to something bigger than oneself (Cantz 2013).

However, for the purposes of this research, spirituality is viewed as a subjective and inner experience whereas religion encompasses outward observance and behavior (Eisenmann, et al., 2016). This would include beliefs in a higher power, connection to God or higher being, feelings of awe and simply asking the meaning and purpose of life (Cheng et al., 2023). The aim of this research is to determine whether spiritual beliefs which people personally hold have an effect on numerous aspects of their lives. Religion has its own potential effect on coping and motivation but it is a broad concept with vast cultural and behavioral differences and so for this reason, it has been excluded (Ysseldyk, et al., 2011)

### **ACADEMIC MOTIVATION**

This paper examines the relation of academic motivation and coping of students to their spirituality. Both academic motivation and coping have been extensively researched and each has been shown to be related to effect academic wellbeing and performance (visozo, et al., 2018). Academic motivation is defined by Ryan and Deci (2000) as the process by which the student initiates, sustains and directs behaviour towards the attainment of academic goals. This concept originated from the study of motivation in the workplace where the distinctions are made between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Heyns, M. M., & Kerr, M. D. 2018). Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is carried out for one's own interest and self-satisfaction (Cho, H., & Chiu, W. 2021) whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards and punishments (Bear et al,2017). When applied to student behaviour intrinsic motivation results in high quality learning and a deep approach to study (Jovanovic, D., & Matejevic, M. 2014), whereas extrinsically motivated behaviour often results in

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surface level learning in order to avoid failure and secure the desired outcome (Cook, D. A., & Artino Jr, A. R. 2016).

### COPING

Coping is defined as continually changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). High use of coping strategies has been related to better adjustment to higher education (Amirkhan, 1990) and better wellbeing and life satisfaction (Saddler, 2010). High levels of maladaptive coping have been shown to be significantly related to mental health problems (Chang, 1998). Active and engaged coping mechanisms have been considered as adaptive coping, whereas avoidant disengaged coping methods were considered maladaptive (Sagone and De Caroli, 2014). Coping can take on many different forms in different people and situations and coping inventories have shown that in the minds of students, coping greatly encompasses a broad spectrum of behavioural and cognitive processes aimed at the regulation of the emotions and stress response raised by a given situation (Pulvers and Hood, 1988). Coping has been shown to influence the effects of life stress on psychological distress (Higgins and Endler, 1995).

### *Purpose of the study*

The purpose of the existing study was defined as the investigation of Spirituality's impact on Academic motivation and Coping strategies of college students. The model of academic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) served as a theoretical framework for the study to delineate how different motivational regulations are influenced by our spiritual beliefs and use of different types of coping strategies. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) was used to guide the investigation of how spirituality relates to the students' coping strategies to deal with the demands of college.

### *Hypotheses*

- Higher levels of spiritual engagement (e.g., religious practice, mindfulness) will be associated with more adaptive coping strategies (e.g., problem-solving, seeking social support) when facing academic challenges.
- Students with strong spiritual beliefs will exhibit higher levels of motivation for learning, leading to better academic performance.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

The study included 188 students (53% female) of Amity University. The mean age of participants was 21.7 (SD=2.645). Convenience sampling method was used for data collection. Data for the study was collected through printed questionnaire and it was completed in the presence of the experimenter. All those collecting data were fully briefed on the aims and reasons for the study and were given guidelines about standardization of the procedure.

### *Instruments*

Three measures were used in this study,

1. **Spirituality Measurement Scale:** SMS is a 5-point Likert-type scale designed by Makkar and Singh (2021), comprising 38 items. Responses range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). It consists of two main sections: Transcendence and Self-engagement, which together form the Core Dimension. Additionally, combining the dimensions of Self-efficacy, Self-awareness, and Service toward others yields the

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Correlated Dimensions. A higher total score on the SMS indicates greater spirituality, with Core Dimension scores ranging from 23 to 115, Correlated Dimensions from 15 to 75, and total Spirituality Measurement Scores from 38 to 190.

2. **Academic Motivation Scale:** AMS is a trustworthy tool for accurately evaluating motivation as needed. To fulfill this requirement, the instrument utilized was Vallerand's (1992) Achievement Motivation Scale (AMS), which has undergone rigorous testing and is widely recognized as a reliable measure of student motivation. Developed through extensive research within the framework of self-determination theory, this instrument categorizes motivation into three types positioned along the Self-Determination Continuum. This continuum ranges from a lack of motivation (amotivation) to various forms of heightened motivation (extrinsic types), ultimately leading to self-determined motivation (intrinsic).
3. **Brief-COPE Inventory:** The original brief-COPE, developed by Carver, originally comprised two items in each of its 14 subscales, covering a wide range of coping strategies such as self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, emotional and instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame. Participants rate each item on a Likert Scale from 1 (I have not been doing this at all) to 4 (I have been doing this a lot). The subscales encompass problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping.

### Procedure

All the questionnaire were interpreted and scores were entered on Microsoft Excel which was later imported to SPSS. All the data collected was analyzed using correlation and regression analysis on SPSS 21. Subscales of tools used were also analyzed.

## RESULTS

*Table 1 Descriptive statistics*

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Problem focused coping (PFC)	22.1765	4.162	12	32
Emotion focused coping (EFC)	19.2299	4.72759	9	32
Avoidant coping (AC)	16.7112	4.52496	8	28
Extrinsic motivation (EM)	57.9626	12.75719	24	82
Intrinsic motivation (IM)	54.3209	12.22652	26	83
Amotivation (AM)	13.4920	6.45278	4	28
Spirituality	131.1497	21.82282	61	180

*Table 2 Correlation coefficients*

	PFC	EFC	AC	EM	IM	AM	Spirituality
PFC	-						
EFC	.041	-					
AC	-.016	.975**	-				
EM	.374**	-.078	-.096	-			
IM	.426**	-.029	-.061	.633**	-		
AM	-.145*	.476**	.459**	-.182*	-.279**	-	
Spirituality	.249*	.042	.056	.226**	.374*	-.055	-

\*\*- significant at 0.01 level

\*- significant at 0.05 level

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Firstly, there was a significant positive correlation between EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION and INTRINSIC MOTIVATION ( $r = 0.633$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher levels of extrinsic motivation were associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation.

Secondly, SPIRITUALITY showed significant positive correlations with both EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION ( $r = 0.226$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and INTRINSIC MOTIVATION ( $r = 0.374$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that higher levels of spirituality were associated with higher levels of both types of motivation.

Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between AMOTIVATION and INTRINSIC MOTIVATION ( $r = -0.279$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher levels of amotivation were associated with lower levels of intrinsic motivation.

**Table 3 Regression coefficients of Problem Focused Coping**

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t-value	p-value
(constant)	15.943	1.806		8.829	.000
Spirituality	.048	.014	.249	3.499	.001

Dependent variable - PFC

The overall model is significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the predictor, Spirituality, significantly predicts Problem-Focused Coping (PFC).

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for Spirituality is 0.249, indicating that for each one-unit increase in spirituality, there is a corresponding increase of 0.249 standard deviations in problem-focused coping.

The regression coefficient (B) for Spirituality is 0.048, suggesting that for each one-unit increase in spirituality, there is an increase of 0.048 units in problem-focused coping, holding other variables constant.

**Table 4 Regression coefficients of Emotion Focused Coping**

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t-value	p-value
(constant)	18.040	2.116		8.527	.000
Spirituality	.009	.016	.042	.570	.569

Dependent variable - EFC

The constant term ( $B = 18.040$ ,  $SE = 2.116$ ,  $t = 8.527$ ,  $p < .001$ ) represents the estimated mean value of EFC when all predictor variables are zero. In this case, the constant term is statistically significant, suggesting that there is a significant intercept when SPIRITUALITY is not considered.

The coefficient for SPIRITUALITY ( $B = 0.009$ ,  $SE = 0.016$ ,  $Beta = 0.042$ ,  $t = 0.570$ ,  $p = .569$ ) represents the change in the predicted value of EFC for a one-unit change in SPIRITUALITY, holding all other variables constant. However, the coefficient is not statistically significant ( $p = .569$ ), indicating that there is insufficient evidence to conclude a significant linear relationship between SPIRITUALITY and EFC.

**Table 5 Regression coefficients of Avoidant Coping**

<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>(constant)</b>	26.813	5.078		5.280	.000
<b>Spirituality</b>	.210	.038	.374	5.491	.000

Dependent variable – AC

The intercept, representing the expected value of Avoidant Coping when all predictor variables are zero, was 18.226 (B = 18.226, SE = 2.024, t = 9.007, p < .001).

The coefficient for SPIRITUALITY was -0.012, indicating that for each unit increase in SPIRITUALITY, there was a corresponding decrease of 0.012 units in AC, although this relationship was not statistically significant (B = -0.012, SE = 0.015, t = -0.759, p = .449).

Therefore, the regression analysis did not find a significant relationship between SPIRITUALITY and AC.

**Table 6 Regression coefficients of Extrinsic motivation**

<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>(constant)</b>	26.813	5.078		5.280	.000
<b>Spirituality</b>	.210	.038	.374	5.491	.000

Dependent variable – Extrinsic motivation

The constant term (B = 40.654, SE = 5.566, t = 7.304, p < .001) represents the estimated mean value of EXTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION when all predictor variables are zero. The constant term is statistically significant (p < .001), indicating a significant intercept when SPIRITUALITY is not considered.

The coefficient for SPIRITUALITY (B = 0.132, SE = 0.042, Beta = 0.226, t = 3.152, p = .002) indicates the change in the predicted value of EXTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION for a one-unit change in SPIRITUALITY, holding all other variables constant. This coefficient is statistically significant (p = .002), suggesting that there is a significant positive linear relationship between SPIRITUALITY and EXTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION.

Overall, based on these results, SPIRITUALITY appears to be a significant predictor of EXTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION in the regression model.

**Table 7 Regression coefficients of Intrinsic motivation**

<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>(constant)</b>	<b>26.813</b>	<b>5.078</b>		<b>5.280</b>	<b>.000</b>
<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>.210</b>	<b>.038</b>	<b>.374</b>	<b>5.491</b>	<b>.000</b>

Dependent variable – Intrinsic motivation

The constant term (B = 26.813, SE = 5.078, t = 5.280, p < .001) represents the estimated mean value of INTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION when all predictor variables are zero. The constant term is statistically significant (p < .001), indicating a significant intercept when SPIRITUALITY is not considered.

The coefficient for SPIRITUALITY (B = 0.210, SE = 0.038, Beta = 0.374, t = 5.491, p < .001) indicates the change in the predicted value of INTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION for a one-unit change in SPIRITUALITY, holding all other variables constant. This coefficient is

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statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that there is a significant positive linear relationship between SPIRITUALITY and INTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION.

Overall, based on these results, SPIRITUALITY appears to be a significant predictor of INTRINSIC\_MOTIVATION in the regression model.

**Table 8 Regression coefficients of Amotivation**

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	B	t-value	p-value
(constant)	15.641	2.886		5.420	.000
Spirituality	-.016	.022	-.055	-.755	.451

Dependent variable – Amotivation

The constant term ( $B = 15.641$ ,  $SE = 2.886$ ,  $t = 5.420$ ,  $p < .001$ ) represents the estimated mean value of AMOTIVATION when all predictor variables are zero. The constant term is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating a significant intercept when SPIRITUALITY is not considered.

The coefficient for SPIRITUALITY ( $B = -0.016$ ,  $SE = 0.022$ ,  $Beta = -0.055$ ,  $t = -0.755$ ,  $p = .451$ ) indicates the change in the predicted value of AMOTIVATION for a one-unit change in SPIRITUALITY, holding all other variables constant. This coefficient is not statistically significant ( $p = .451$ ), suggesting that there is no significant linear relationship between SPIRITUALITY and AMOTIVATION.

Overall, based on these results, SPIRITUALITY does not appear to be a significant predictor of AMOTIVATION in the regression model.

## DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics reveal the mean scores and variability of the variables under study, highlighting the range of responses observed among participants.

The correlation matrix indicates significant associations among the variables. Notably, there is a positive correlation between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, suggesting that higher levels of extrinsic motivation are associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. 2017). Moreover, spirituality shows significant positive correlations with both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, indicating that students with stronger spiritual beliefs tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation for learning (Moon, et. al 2020).

Regression analysis further explores the relationship between spirituality and coping strategies and motivation. The results reveal that spirituality significantly predicts problem-focused coping, with higher levels of spirituality associated with more adaptive coping strategies (Arbinaga, et. Al 2021; Bozorgi & Bozorgi 2016). Additionally, spirituality emerges as a significant predictor of intrinsic motivation, suggesting that students with higher levels of spirituality are more likely to be intrinsically motivated in their academic pursuits. (Fatima, S., Mehfooz, M., & Sharif, S. 2017).

However, the relationship between spirituality and emotion-focused coping, as well as amotivation, was not statistically significant, indicating that spirituality may not play a significant role in influencing these aspects of students' responses to academic challenges.

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Overall, the findings suggest that spirituality can be a significant factor influencing students' coping strategies and motivation in the face of academic challenges. These results underscore the importance of considering spirituality as a potential resource for promoting adaptive coping and motivation among students. However, further research is needed to explore the underlying mechanisms and potential implications of these findings for educational practices and interventions.

### *Limitations & Future implications*

The limitations of the current study create a wide range of research directions for the future. The most pressing issue is the complicated nature of the variable under investigation. As mentioned, more research is needed to understand the most common understanding of spirituality held in society today.

Future research should also investigate the effect of spirituality on the low and high achieving students. Although it was hypothesized often throughout this paper that spirituality would help an individual to face a crisis or an important exam, this was not empirically tested. This would entail an experiment where two different groups of students take a mock exam designed to be high in stress, and then to measure coping mechanisms through a qualitative or quantitative study. Comparisons could then be drawn from the two groups. An efficient model for measuring stress and coping could be built from this study.

In a similar fashion, the cross-cultural differences in spirituality could be researched, and the effects on coping with education and educational aspirations compared and contrasted. This would entail two separate studies, as understated ease above to warrant a full discussion here. Such research can potentially be very beneficial for minority students in majority dominant academic environments.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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