

## Designing a Model for the Spiritual Elevation of Students with an Emphasis on Outcomes

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**Objective:** The application of spirituality in today's fast-paced and concern-filled life; attention to the transcendent aspect, inner truth, meaning-making, and deep thinking that, by shaping in the minds of students, leads to the development of security, peace, the spread of joy and contagious happiness among the community, and its spiritual elevation. The present study aimed to design a model for the spiritual elevation of students with an emphasis on outcomes.

**Methods and Materials:** The method of the current study was qualitative and utilized an interpretative content analysis approach. For this purpose, findings from the review of literature and theoretical foundations were aligned with the results from the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted purposively and optimally with members of the educational science group at universities and higher education centers in Lorestan province in 2023. The research tool was semi-structured interviews, for which validity was assessed using a formal method, and reliability was measured using an inter-coder agreement coefficient, which resulted in 87%. Data analysis was also conducted using a coding method.

**Findings:** After analyzing the data, eventually, eight indicators based on the outcomes formed the model of students' spiritual elevation, which included insight, faith, social responsibility, spiritual self-awareness, spiritual aesthetics, purposefulness, meaning-centeredness, and ethics-orientedness.

**Conclusion:** The use of the findings of this article can practically play a role in fostering the spirit of spirituality among students in a real and non-abstract manner, and its extension to society can be beneficial.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual elevation, interpretive content analysis, bioethics, meaning-seeking.*

### 1. Introduction

In the present era, which is moving towards integration, harmony, and globalization, beyond ideological, cultural, and social differences, spirituality can serve as a common and intercultural foundation for current needs. Spiritual education of students enables reflection on their

beliefs, interests, emotions, the values of different individuals, learning about oneself, others, the surrounding world, and using their imagination and creativity in learning (Moulin-Stožek, 2020) and encompasses a set of individual, social, conscious, and unconscious influences on an individual in a specific society, ethnicity, or nation (Maysless & Kizel, 2022; Zowar & Enayati, 2017). It plays

a fundamental role in human development throughout life, stopping only at death, without any geographical limitations, whether at home, school, church, mosque, village, or city, and school is just one of the pathways for education (Bakhshi et al., 2023; Heidari Kobriti et al., 2023; Sheivandi Cholicheh et al., 2023; Soleimani et al., 2022). Ray (2020) also mentioned the remarkable effect of direct parental involvement (Ray, 2020).

In Britain, there has been a legal requirement for the spiritual development of children in schools since 1944 and it is considered a criterion for the effectiveness of schools in inspections (Moulin-Stožek, 2020). To prepare young people for participation in a harmonious civil society and to create effective and benevolent collective governance patterns, education must rely on a new conceptual and philosophical basis that considers spirituality as a fundamental human quality from early childhood and focuses on the common bond between all humans and the natural world, promoting respect instead of fear and humiliation (Mayselless & Kizel, 2022).

Research shows that individuals who engage in spirituality experience lower levels of depression and anxiety and enjoy better health. The psychological effects of prayer in dealing with stress and anxiety and improving performance by strengthening inner strength to cope with ups and downs are undeniable. Hope, security, inner strength, and comfort during hard times and adversities are obtained through religious beliefs (Noh & Shahdan, 2020). Complete holistic growth (Moulin-Stožek, 2020), health, increased level of mental well-being, enhanced mental health, and self-esteem (Soleimani et al., 2022), moving towards perfection (Hajian et al., 2013), deepening understanding and holistic growth from childhood and adolescence (Mayselless & Kizel, 2022) are results of promoting spirituality in society. According to Peter Drucker, one of the functions of school leadership is to provide mental health and spiritual well-being for community members.

Given the educational institutions' mission to train skilled and experienced generations, attention to spirituality in school is essential (Hajian et al., 2013). Unacceptable failures in our country's education system and the shift from "perception of knowledge" to "acquisition of certificates" have led to neglect and deviation from the overall goal (Sarafraz et al., 2011; Taheri Kal Kheshvandi & Allahbedashti 2015). Excessive emphasis on academic progress and competition has endangered the mental health of students, while in most developed countries, spiritual

growth is considered important alongside mental, physical, and cultural development (Hosenikhah, 2018). The commission of crimes by youths under 15 years old is 110 times higher according to Neil Postman (Ahmadi et al., 2017). Miller believes that all elements within the education sector should benefit from spirit and energy, attention to purpose and meaning, and focus on spirituality (Soleimani et al., 2022).

Value statement number 26 of the Fundamental Transformation Document of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Education identifies the formal general education system as a factor in generating spiritual force for growth and elevation. In macro strategy 11, it emphasizes enhancing religious, revolutionary, and political knowledge and insight for spiritual growth and elevation, in strategy 4-5 it mentions support for students in deprived areas, in strategy 8 it highlights increasing participation of the formal education system as an institution generating spiritual capital, and in strategy 1-9 it calls for creating legal facilities for spirituality, and in strategy 3-11 it emphasizes strengthening spiritual motivations. Regarding the research topic, studies have been conducted. However, according to the literature review and available sources on the topic of spirituality, in most cases, the focus has been on documents and curriculum research, leading to a research gap in this area due to the lack of methods based on review, library, and mixed approaches. Given the importance of the topic, there is a felt need for comprehensive research and the design of a comprehensive model that is practical and not abstract. Considering the aforementioned issues regarding the importance of this matter, the research questions of the current study are: What is the model for the spiritual elevation of students?

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The method of the current research was qualitative with a sequential exploratory approach and was also applied in terms of its objective. The population consisted of experts and professionals associated with education in Lorestan province (in 2023), including faculty members of the educational sciences departments at universities and higher education centers, from which 13 individuals were selected through purposive and judgmental sampling. Interviews were conducted until the data reached saturation and redundancy.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

The data collection tool was in-depth structured interviews. The duration of the interviews varied from forty-five minutes to one hour, depending on the interviewee's tolerance and willingness, to enrich the research outcomes. The questions were pre-designed, and the response method was open-ended. Ethical considerations, including the confidentiality of participants' names and the use of codes instead of names in the audio files, and adherence to the principle of trustworthiness in the transcription phase of the interviews, were observed. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research, and they were assured that there would be no physical or psychological harm in participating in the study.

2.3. Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed carefully, and content analysis was conducted through a coding process. To ensure the validity of the findings, interview transcripts and extracted concepts were sent to participants, and their agreements and disagreements were considered after comparison with the findings. To ensure reliability, an inter-subject agreement method or reliability between two coders using independent coders and four interviews was employed, resulting in an 87% agreement. Data analysis was also performed using a coding method.

3. Findings and Results

After conducting the semi-structured in-depth interviews, sentences and key phrases related to the research's stance and objectives were identified and labeled with conceptual tags, considering theoretical foundations and in combination with new concepts (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Example of Coding and Extracting Concepts from Interview Text*

Interview Text	Concepts Derived from Coding
"All evidence indicates that we have not been able to internalize Islamic, human, and ethical standards to the maximum extent in individuals. For example, our student, after twelve to thirteen years of schooling under the explicit and implicit programs on Islamic ethical decrees, generally displays different behaviors in society. Worse, it has been repeatedly reported that some compatriots, as soon as they leave the country, exhibit behaviors that neither conform to Islamic norms nor to any of our ethical principles."	Avoiding duplicity, Internalizing teachings, Spiritual ethical orientation

Thus, through coding based on the interpretive content analysis method, 189 concepts were identified. In the next stage, by eliminating similar contexts, the initial concepts were combined, and similar codes were placed side by side

in abstract categories, resulting in 44 sub-themes. In the final stage of coding, by classifying similar codes into larger categories, 8 main themes were extracted (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Results from Coding Phases and Aligning Data with Theoretical Foundations*

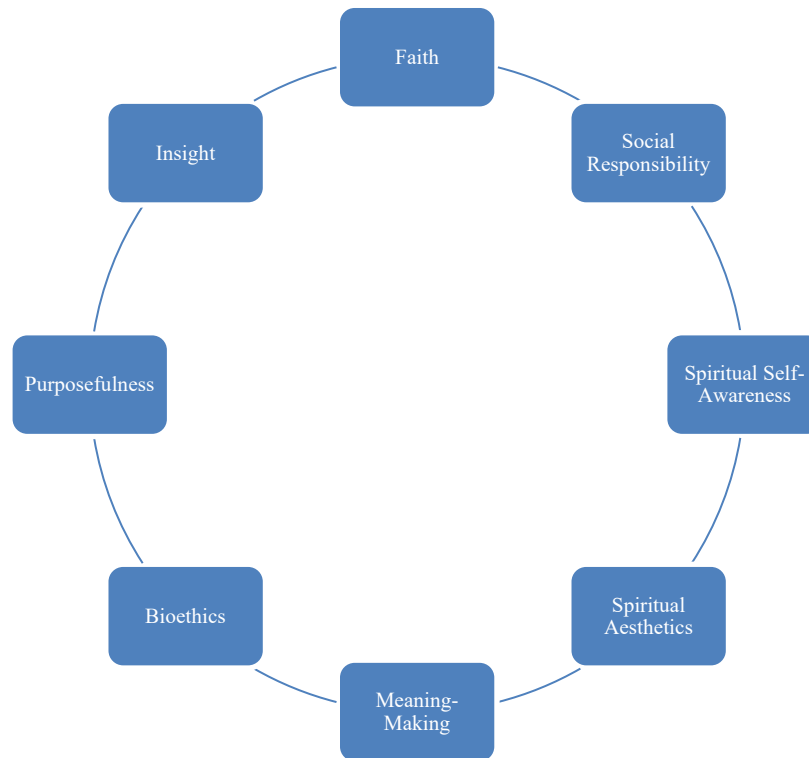
Main Themes	Sub-themes
Faith	God-consciousness, Persistence in gratitude, God-centeredness, Sincerity of intention, Prayer, Peace
Social Responsibility	Philanthropy, Patriotism, Law-abiding, Increasing social participation, Enhancing cultural intelligence, Establishing healthy communications
Spiritual Awareness	Self-control, Self-regulation, Emotion management, Thinking and contemplation, Self-esteem, Mental and physical health
Spiritual Aesthetics	Discovery of artistic flair, Art and aesthetic literacy, Naturalism, Gratitude
Meaning-Making	Curriculum enriched with meaning, Perseverance, Spiritual intelligence, Perfectionism, Intuitive thinking, Joyfulness, Physical and mental health
Bioethics	Avoiding duplicity, Forgiveness, Moderation, Good temper, Tolerance
Purposefulness	Pragmatism, Hopefulness, Avoiding laziness and indulgence, Time management, Continuous progress
Insight	Ability to distinguish good from bad, Predictive power, Studiousness, Alertness, Critical thinking

Based on the results of Table 2, 8 main themes were identified (insight, faith, social responsibility, spiritual self-awareness, spiritual aesthetics, meaning-making, bioethics, purposefulness, and insight). Subsequently, a conceptual

model of the research based on the qualitative section's outcomes, which was the result of the identified components from coding the interviews through interpretive content analysis, was designed (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Final Identified Components*



**4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The current research aimed to design a model for the spiritual elevation of students with an emphasis on outcomes. The spiritual elevation of students requires planning for the spiritual education of a mentally and psychologically healthy generation that has acquired the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for real life, in addition to being something that interacts with all environmental elements. According to the results of twenty years of research by De Souza (2016), spirituality-based education for students enhances communicative aspects, emotional and physical well-being, fostering social life (de Souza, 2016).

Indicator of Faith: Faith pertains to strengthening an individual's psychological well-being for spiritual health. Jahani and Azimi (2022) define faith from the root of "security" against fear, referring to a psychological state of humans where one does not feel endangered, leading to tranquility and heart peace (Jahani & Azimi, 2022). A person

who acknowledges the truth and whose faith keeps them from doubt. A participant's comment in the interview was quoted: "We should plant the seed of God's love in children's hearts away from coercion and clamor so that they can feel God with all their being and enjoy the eagerness of this beauty. We are obliged to imagine God for the child in the most beautiful way, suitable to a child's condition without causing fear or terror." Another participant's comment on this matter was: "When I, as an educational agent and parent, center my intentions and actions around God, children will gradually internalize it, and this matter doesn't need any advice or warning. Children see and emulate." The subcategories necessary to realize this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include: God-consciousness, persistence in gratitude, God-centeredness, sincerity of intention, prayer, and peace.

Indicator of Social Responsibility: Includes responsibility towards all dimensions of social life and various commitments towards the individual and society (Sepahvand et al., 2022). A participant quoted in the

interview said, "Moving towards spirituality naturally creates a sense of compassion and responsibility towards all creatures created by the Almighty God. A spiritual person cannot remain indifferent to people and other beings; such a person feels responsible towards the environment and even obeys the laws established for people's comfort." The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include: philanthropy, patriotism, law-abiding, increasing social participation, enhancing cultural intelligence, and establishing healthy communications. This research aligns with the results of previous studies (Zowar & Enayati, 2017).

**Indicator of Spiritual Self-Awareness:** Some define self-awareness as the recognition of beliefs and values, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, strengths and weaknesses, needs, and goals and recommend reflection and contemplation on existential dimensions to achieve self-awareness in the Holy Quran (Sarafraz et al., 2011). Lisa Miller (2015) considers cognitive literacy, emotional literacy (self-awareness and self-regulation), learning from mindfulness, and social awareness based on self-knowledge as aspects of students' spiritual education (Sarafraz et al., 2011). A participant in the interview stated: "Believing that a soul from God has been breathed into humans and that humans are the noblest of creatures creates a sense of self-esteem and confidence that elevates standards and does not belittle oneself. With this self-recognition, one does not stoop to any lowliness. I wish we could instill this feeling and recognition in our students. This understanding alone guarantees all human dignity and creates self-management. If it were so, perhaps there wouldn't be so many social criminals in society." The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include self-control, emotion management, thinking and thought, self-esteem, mental and physical health. This indicator aligns with the research results of previous findings (Nooralizdah Mianji, 2012; Sarafraz et al., 2011).

**Indicator of Aesthetic Appreciation:** Moulana also considers proportion and harmony, the absence of deviation, balanced and compatible beings, and beauty as markers of perfection. Lisa Miller (2015) considers learning through art, music, and experience, developing creative imagination, and enjoying beauty as aspects of students' spiritual education. Bieger (2003) has also introduced music, science, and art for spiritual growth. A participant stated: "When a person's perspective towards the world is the discovery of beauty and aesthetics, not only does this bring mental and emotional peace, but it also encourages deeper contemplation of the

existence of the Creator of beauty, and this is one of the ways to teach spirituality to students. Reaching God in this way may be deeper and more inseparable than traditional methods. We have no choice but to adapt our teachings to the changing times, or else our efforts are in vain." The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include the discovery of artistic flair, art and aesthetic literacy, naturalism, and gratitude. This indicator aligns with the previous results (Bigger, 2003; Hosein Zadeh, 2018; Javidi Kalate Jafar abadi & Abdoli 2018).

**Indicator of Meaning-Making:** Heidegger considers humans as the only beings whose existence is a problem for themselves, and the lack of finding life's meaning can lead to misguidance and loss for some. By placing ontological presuppositions based on revelatory knowledge side by side, one finds life meaningful, purposeful, and consequently, free and responsible (Taheri Kal Kheshvandi & Allahbedashti 2015). A participant stated, "When the foundation and structure of life's goals have a spiritual direction, and spirituality is the principle with other issues being secondary, perspectives change. One of my students, who was financially and socially from an upper class, committed suicide in a reactionary move without any significant cause due to the lack of spirituality, and lost his life. A spiritual person becomes less hopeless and sees life as purposeful." The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include a curriculum enriched with meaning, perseverance, spiritual intelligence, perfectionism, intuitive thinking, joyfulness, and physical and mental health. This indicator aligns with the previous results (Taheri Kal Kheshvandi & Allahbedashti 2015).

**Indicator of Ethical Centrality:** It is believed that the primary basis of education is moral education, and the ultimate goal of moral education is spiritual education. Some consider spiritual, ethical, and cultural development as aspects of spiritual growth (Moulin-Stožek, 2020). A participant said, "Those who are ethical, committed, and adhere to their choices, not out of compulsion, but because their behaviors are aligned with spirituality, do not waver with every wind, their standards do not change, and they are always honest and righteous, even in solitude. They have purer hearts and forgive more easily." The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include avoiding duplicity, honesty, forgiveness, moderation, good temper, tolerance, and

loyalty. This indicator aligns with the previous research (Niknam & Sadat Naseri 2020).

Indicator of Purposefulness: As repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Quran, God has not created humans and the universe aimlessly; there was a purpose behind their creation. Humans must have a purpose for themselves. A participant in the interview stated, "Spiritual education gives humans hope for life, making it seem not futile or in vain, ensuring that one's life does not become a vicious cycle but instead finds direction and moves forward. A spiritual person does not perceive life as futile, does not waste time aimlessly, but progresses towards the goals defined for themselves, becoming more successful than others, and does not back down, no matter the difficulties faced." The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include hopefulness, pragmatism, avoiding laziness and indulgence, time management, and continuous progress. The objectives of this indicator align with the previous research (Parcham 2012; Sheivandi Cholicheh et al., 2023).

Indicator of Insight: Insight, one of the identified indicators for the model of students' spiritual elevation in this research, means awareness, deep understanding, perception of the underlying events, distinguishing truth from falsehood, and in the Holy Quran, it refers to employing reason in the direction of enlightening human hearts with the light of intellect (Shirpour et al., 2020). A participant said, "Spiritual education should create a vigilant and knowledgeable person capable of discerning the right path. Such a person has the ability to evaluate and disregard worthless actions, can set their standards with their intellect." These results align with the previous research findings (Shirpour et al., 2020). The subcategories necessary for realizing this finding, based on the analysis of participants' comments, include the ability to distinguish good from bad, predictive power, studiousness, alertness, critical thinking.

The spiritual elevation model designed in the current research is comprehensive, covering eight spiritual dimensions, including religious, social, psychological, and ethical social aspects, and is not confined to any specific religious domain. It can be applicable in societies with diverse cultures and tastes.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study, while offering valuable insights into the model of spiritual elevation among students, is subject to

several limitations. Firstly, the qualitative nature and the purposive sampling method limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The sample was confined to experts and educators from Lorestan province, which may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives found across different regions or cultures. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews could introduce bias, as participants might provide socially desirable responses or reflect upon their experiences in a manner that aligns with the study's objectives. Lastly, the interpretive content analysis, though thorough, is inherently subjective, depending on the researchers' interpretations of the data, which could influence the identification and categorization of themes. These limitations suggest the need for further research, potentially employing a mixed-methods approach or a broader geographical scope to enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings.

Based on the findings of this research:

- Future researchers are recommended to conduct comparative studies on spiritual education with other countries.
- Educational planners, vice-principals for student affairs, directors, counselors, and all individuals involved in student education are encouraged to utilize the results of this research, especially in their charters, regulations, and educational methods.
- Those involved in education at any level are advised to act in such a way that education moves beyond clichés and emerges with a new perspective and discourse in line with contemporary changes.
- It is suggested that in-service training on spiritual education be organized for teachers, and workshops on this topic be arranged for parents.
- This comprehensive approach to spiritual elevation aims to ensure that education adapts to the evolving needs of society, fostering a well-rounded development that integrates spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions, ensuring relevance and effectiveness in contemporary educational settings.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed.

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