Spirituality and effective factors in education: A qualitative study

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND AND AIM: Spirituality in education, as a necessity in improving the quality of teaching and learning, is affected by various personal, social, religious, and cultural factors. Since the identification of these factors can empower the faculties and facilitate the transfer of spiritual concepts through teaching, the aim of this study is explanation of the factors affecting the spirituality transfer in education process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This qualitative content analysis approach study included 22 faculty members of medical universities, 25 faculty members of seminary, and 19 medical students interested in participating in the study. They were studied according to purposive sampling method. Data collection was done by interviewing a semi-structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using conventional content analysis method.

RESULTS: The factors influencing the spiritual transfer in teaching process were classified into two main forms of teacher-related factors and peripheral-related factors. Teacher-related factors include the teacher's insight and worldview, adherence to religious principles, belief in ethical virtues, the positive and constructive interaction of the teacher with the student, and the mastery of teaching skills. The peripheral-related factors include the highly skilled classrooms and the talented learners.

CONCLUSION: The intensification of the insight, religious worldview and the basic of beliefs, consolidating ethics and empowering faculty members in teaching skills along with building a positive and constructive relationship with the students, as well as institutionalizing spirituality as the inseparable teaching element can facilitate the transfer of spirituality concepts. More studies are needed in this regard.

Keywords:

Medical students, qualitative research, spiritual content, spirituality in teaching, teachers, teaching

Introduction

Nowadays, increasing attention is given to spirituality in medical care.[1] Studies from Europe and the United States showed that spiritual and religious coping is important for patients during hospitalization.[2-4] Definition of spirituality in health care has considerable, especially associated with the need to find meaning in life.[5]

Education in medicine becomes a great collection of principles, methods, educational templates, and vocabulary and practical skills. There is an importance in addition to the proficient skill in education, which is paying attention to the spiritual dimension of faculties and learners, such as the importance of moral and educational self-efficacy in the educational environment. Spirituality is one of the faculty's abilities in teaching that involves the use of managerial and skillful technical and communication skills, knowledge, argument, emotions, and values. This capability requires a set of cognitions, tendencies, and skills that a teacher can promote the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development of students.[6] University

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professors, if they have a good spiritual development, can give a more comprehensive understanding of man and his aftermath when teaching. On the other hand, the best time for the growth of spirituality in individuals is through teaching. Spirituality in education not only causes to understand educational content, but also it reinforces the argumentation and analytical methods of thinking among learners.[7]

Wilber believes that to simultaneously promote the rational, ethical, and physical development, the spiritual levels and awareness should be further addressed. He believes the inclusion of spirituality in the curriculum as the basis of the educational system can provide appropriate opportunities for raising and enhancing the existence philosophy of individuals. This is accomplished by combining science and spirituality in the form of planning for "spiritual insight." He, in the book of "Spiritual Growth," regardless of its content, about the indigo path of the goals writes: This path of growth, like the others, through the full development of awareness and movement from preconventional growth (self-based) to conventional (community-based), then the postconventional (world-based) and beyond the conventional (spiritual awakening) goes forward.[8] Using spirituality in education, in addition to ease the process of teaching and learning, contributes to preparing the learners' mentality in learning, more efficacy along with psychological safety.[9,10] Furthermore, education along with spiritual training can give meaning to lessons and goals; it creates a deep sense of unity and relation to the world.[11]

The important point is that the purpose of teaching along with spirituality is to educate people who, in addition to logic and reason, have a deep and productive feel. Spiritual teaching is a kind of teaching that seeks to attain higher levels of awareness and meaningfulness of life, which, regardless of the content of education, is the same path of development of ultimate goals that lead spiritual awakening.[3] Acquiring knowledge about this part of the professors' abilities reveals the status and allows planning for promotion. Spirituality in education must first be in harmony with Islamic culture because the Islamic society is based on belief in Allah Almighty. It is believed that all things are planned for him.[12] Second, it is in line with the ultimate goals of education, in which the role of professors to convey spiritual concepts is very important.[13] Considering the importance of the issue and the spiritual teaching deficiencies, based on the researches, no study was found to address the factors affecting spiritual teaching. Therefore, this study is designed to explain the factors affecting the transfer of spiritual concepts during teaching process.

Review of the literature has demonstrated that patients prefer their doctors to ask them about their spirituality, but the practice is most uncommon. It can be due to the lake of the spirituality content in education in university.[14] Therefore, spirituality is not considered in the medical consultation because doctors think it is unimportant. To diminish this mismatch between needs and actions, it is necessary to include spirituality in education. This study is basically setup according to this idea to explore principal affected factors of spirituality in education.

Materials and Methods

This qualitative study with a content analysis approach is based on expressing the factors affecting the transfer of spiritual concepts during teaching process, based on interviews with the seminary and university faculties and students. The research community and samples included university and seminary faculties and students. Inclusion criteria included at least 1 year of teaching or studying at the university, the citizenship of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Persian language fluency and interest to participate in the study Refuse the continue present in the study was the criterion for withdrawal.

To determine the sample size in qualitative studies, there is no exact criterion, and the number of participants is influenced by the subject and method of research. In qualitative studies, interviews will continue to saturate data.[15] Sixty-six people were interviewed totally. Sampling was done according to convenience method. The sampling environment included all university centers affiliated with the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Seminary of Qom city, Iran.

In the qualitative section, data collection was done by interviewing a semi-structured questionnaire.[16] Data collection tool in this part of the study was demographic characteristic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questionnaire. The following questions were used. According to the responses of contributors, more research questions were raised such as: what do the spiritual teachers have? What are the methods and criteria of spirituality in teaching? What are the factors affecting the transfer of spiritual concepts during teaching process?

Trustworthiness and rigors
To evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of qualitative data, the following criteria are used.

Validity or credibility
It means whether the results of the research actually reflect the experiences of the participants and whether the findings are in accordance with them.[17] The following methods were used to increase the acceptability of data.

Observer's review (criticism)

Re-thinking, explicit judgment, and critical analysis of all details of the study lead to the validation of qualitative research.[17] In this direction, two methods were used.

a. Substantive and critical comments were provided by presenting the results and analyzing them to other people. For this, the researcher's coding should be sufficiently clear so that colleagues can better articulate their views or new perspectives on participants' experiences and findings

b. In the first part of the study, after completing the interview, a handwritten text was given to the interviewees to examine whether this text reflects their experiences or not. At this stage, interviewees usually complete their opinions. [18]

Researcher's credibility (integrity)

The subjective outcomes of the results of the qualitative studies analysis emphasize the importance of the researcher as one whose mentality can influence the outcome of the research.[17] Therefore, the amount of deep involvement and previous experience of him with the subject and the participants can increase the credibility of data.[18] Having a history of teaching at the university is helpful in this regard.

Transferability and proportionality

To help increase the generalizability of this research, the method of selecting the appropriate samples, i.e. selecting the most knowledgeable and the best professors (faculties) was used. The method of accurate description of participants, sampling method, and time and place of data collection were also used. The possibility of documenting the findings was made possible by providing an audio file for interviews, interviews' text, data analysis, and observers' review.[18]

Conformability

If reports, manuscripts, and notes are given to two researchers, and both will extract the same findings, then confirmation will be obtained. To improve the quality of the evaluation of the qualitative data of this study, two skilled professors in the field of teaching are asked to review the reports and manuscripts and express their findings to determine the similarity of the results.[18]

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire of spirituality measurement in university faculties' teaching is evaluated in this study.

The interviews were conducted on the basis of questions about the concept and dimensions of spirituality in teaching at first. The guidance was provided by reviewing the texts and consulting with the experts. After a few pilot interviews, the final corrections were made to the final guidance. After presenting the letter of introduction and obtaining the consent of the participants, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded, and each interview lasted approximately 30–45 min. If necessary, the second and third interviews were conducted to validate the data and resolve possible problems. Interviews were handwritten and coded on the same day or at the earliest opportunity. They were then delivered to interviewed individuals to ensure that they were transmitted and understandable to apply corrective comments.

MAXQDA software (introduced by VERBI Software, Berlin, Germany) was used in the qualitative section to manage the data. Data were analyzed by conventional content analysis method. After data collection, each interview was reviewed by the researcher several times; finally, the full text of the interviews was written exactly. After full implementation of the interviews, all interviews were identified as line-to-line coding and basic codes. After encoding, the tags that specify each section of the text are determined and received a label or title. Subsequently, common titles are grouped into the main cluster to analyze data and extracted themes. Then, a summary table of organized themes was prepared. Quotes that indicate each theme, as well as quotes from the interview text, are extracted and inserted into the table. To merge the data, a summary table was created for the first participant and used to analyze the next one. In this process, new themes were added to the original table. As a result, the themes have merged and progressed over time, which ended with the analysis of the latest handwriting.

Observing ethical considerations

During the process of the study, necessary permissions and recommendations were obtained and presented to the participants. The goals and method of the study were explained to the participants, and they were assured that the texts of the interviews were kept anonymous and their information would remain confidential. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from the participants for enrollment in the study and recording the interviews. The participants were assured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any desired time.

Results

The findings of this study were categorized into 2 themes, 7 main categories, and 46 subcategories which are described in Table 1.

Findings showed the factors affecting the transfer of spiritual concepts during teaching process which can be categorized into two themes of the teacher-related factors and peripheral-related factors that can be further elucidated.

Table 1: Effective factors on spiritual content transfer during teaching process

Main categories	Subcategories	Codes
Teacher-related factors	Teacher's insight and worldview	Positive look at society and religious government
		Paying attention to the spiritual growth of the student
		Sanctity of teaching acceptance
	Teacher's adherence to religious principles	Faith, piety, and servitude of God
		Trust and strong relationship with God
		Behavior based on religious teachings
		Salvation belief
	Having moral virtues	Anger control
		Avoid envy
		Vow to the promise
		Appearance, speech, and good behavior
		Love to teach
		Vigilance and awareness
		Sincerity
		Criticism
		Self-improvement and refinement
		Observing ethics and professionalism
		Justice
		Modesty
		Responsibility
		Honesty
		Sacrifice
		Amiability and affability
		Patience and tolerance
	Positive and constructive interaction with the student	Respect for the student and his rights
		Avoid repeated blaming
		Attention to student conditions and support
		Honor and compassion
		Deep and lasting relationship with student
		Relevant and discreet feedback
		Creating calm in the student
		Inducing hope in the student flexibility
	Mastery of teaching skills	Expressions are short, exciting and attractive
		Provide quality and practical training
		Skills in the design of spiritual topics
		Having enough and up-to-date information on the lesson
		Utilizing effective teaching methods
		The ability to manage classes
		Paying attention to individual differences of students
Peripheral-related factors	Advocate environment	Partners
		Community religion
		The existence of appropriate patterns
	Talented learners	Having spiritual insights
		Attention and concentration in class
		Humility against the master

Teacher-related factors

The teacher's insight and worldview, adherence to religious principles, belief in ethical virtues, positive and constructive interaction with the student, and mastery of teaching skills are among those that can transfer spirituality concepts through teaching.

Teacher's insight and the worldview

Having a positive attitude toward society and religious government, paying attention to the spiritual development of the student and the recognition of teaching as a sacred thing through the recognition of God as the source of their knowledge and also self-recognition are among internal attitudes and beliefs that can affect the performance of the teacher to convey spiritual concepts through teaching.

"Man always introduces herself as a mediator of grace, among doing activities, if he knows the origin and principle of the work is God; then, he connects himself

to holy divine, he will see the divine truths. If he does not see himself independent to science makes himself the delicacy of the spirit and his notes affect audiences and students. God will change their insights and give them a key to understand many concepts."

"I think we should first look at teaching as a valuable, moral, humanistic, and religious work, not technical aspects."

Teacher's adherence to religious principles
Having faith in monotheism (God Almighty) and believing in religious values such as faith, piety, and servitude of God, trusting and communicating with God, acting on the basis of religious doctrines, and believe in resurrection are also indications of teacher's commitment to religious teachings which can provide the basis for establishing a link between the teacher and the spiritual teaching. In other words, a teacher can talk about spirituality if he believed to the spirituality and committed it.

"Spirituality is belief to religious doctrine. For example, Hijab should be in accordance with religious teachings. If you wear a short sleeveless dress, whereas according to the community many parts of my body should be hidden; if I enter to the class that women are there too, so, I will not have a place in this framework. If a teacher's beard and mustache are in contradiction to something that exists in Islam, so he should not talk about spirituality in the classroom, because it will be a vain work."

"In most cases, teachers who were more religious, I felt there was more spiritual both in teaching and ethics."

"In general, spirituality means the connection with the infinite and powerful divine superior. If a teacher ties himself to this source during his teaching, he emanates the positive energy that promotes his education."

Teacher's belief in moral virtues
Participants of this study also suggested that if a teacher wants to convey spiritual concepts during teaching, he should also have moral virtues such as controlling anger, avoiding envy, devotion, good appearance, good speech and behavior, love to teach, consciousness and awareness, sincerity, criticism, self-efficacy and refinement, observance of ethics and professionalism, justice, humility, responsibility, honesty, sacrifice, amiability and affability, and patience and tolerance, so his teaching is effective.

"Teacher must be able, first, in terms of speech, observance of the appearance, literacy, to be a kind of transmitter. He should have them himself. At least, the student sees his behavior, that is honest in speech, adherence to science and ethics, the student will move toward that."

"The ethical approach to education, such as forgiveness, compassion, tolerance, responsibility, and love, leads to the ultimate universal teaching for each subject; the teacher's and student's energy will be doubled."

Teacher's positive and constructive interaction with the student
Respecting the student and his rights, refusing to repeated blame, paying attention to the student's conditions and supporting him, compassion and sympathy, deep and lasting relationship with him, providing a good and accurate feedback, making the student calm, and inducing hope in him and being flexible are among factors that enhance the student's intimacy and trust to teacher and increase the influence of his speech.

"Everyone has his own problems. When a teacher understands the anxiety and problems of him/her, he tries to overcome it, which means spirituality."

"Self-kindness, in fact, kindness in its maximum, perhaps is spirituality." "Teacher should be in a way that brings peace to students."

Mastery of teaching skills
Teacher's acquaintance with teaching skills such as short, exciting and appealing expressions, providing quality and practical training, skills in the design of spiritual topics, having sufficient and up-to-date information about lessons, taking advantage of effective teaching methods, ability to manage the class, and paying attention to the individual differences of students and the application of these methods can increase the transfer of spiritual concepts through teaching.

"Paying attention to collaborative learning: Group activities." "Using easy and expressive words: Avoiding too much interpretations and expressions about the concept." "Knowing the techniques and methods of successful teaching and avoiding mistakes which means the spirit of teaching."

Peripheral-related factors
Advocate environment and talented learners are among the factors that affect spiritual teaching, the inclusion of spiritual concepts in teaching, and its impact on students.

Advocate environment
Colleagues and relations governing the organization, religious conditions governing the society, and the existence of appropriate patterns can facilitate or inhibit the inclusion of spiritual concepts during teaching and also teacher's performance.

"One is a faculty and teaches the aspects of spirituality in education, the other is a learner and learns the aspects related to it, and one is the recipient of the service. If we

want to refer to the context or the hidden section of the curriculum, we can point out to colleagues and system administrators."

"If the acceptance of the majority of the community is religion, this issue tends to go toward religion, but our society is very worldling, so I think this is a serious structural obstacle."

Talented learners

Having spiritual insights, attention and concentration in the class, and modesty toward the master are among the most commonly related features that can facilitate or prevent the expression of spiritual concepts and transmissions by teacher.

"Obstacles of spiritual acquisition among students: If all human are far from the level of insight and spiritual beliefs; this matter leads to lower spiritual knowledge."

"For example, a student has a marital concern that is also associated with a sexual problem at young period. If you simultaneously want to instill spirituality in it, this obstacle must be removed. A mental relaxation should be dominated on his/her mind; such things would not be his/her main concern."

Discussion

These study findings showed that effective factors on spiritual transfer during teaching process are categorized in two themes of teacher-related factors and peripheral-related factors. Teacher-related factors include the teacher's insight and worldview, teacher's commitment to religious principles, teacher's belief in ethical virtues, teacher's positive and constructive interaction with the student, and mastery of teaching skills. Peripheral-related factors include the advocate environment and talented learners.

The qualitative analysis of the contributions of the participants in the present study suggests that the teacher's insight and worldview (having a positive look at society and the religious government, paying attention to the spiritual development of the student, and recognizing teaching as a sacred thing by recognizing God as the source of knowledge as well recognition of the master as the mediator of divine grace), the teacher's adherence to the religious principles (having a monotheistic belief [God Almighty] and belief in religious values such as piety and servitude of God, trusting and communicating with God, acting on the basis of religious doctrines, and resurrection belief), the teacher's belief in moral virtues (control of anger, avoidance of envy, devotion to the oath, good appearance, good speech and behavior, love of teaching,

consciousness, sincerity, criticism, self-efficacy and refinement, observance of ethics and professionalism, justice, humility, responsibility, honesty, sacrifice, amiability and affability, and patience), positive interaction with the student (respecting the student and his rights, refusing to repeated blame, paying attention to the student's conditions and supporting him, appreciation and compassion, deep and lasting relationship with the student, providing an appropriate feedback, creating peace in the student, inducing student hope, and flexibility), and mastery of teaching skills (teacher's familiarity with teaching skills such as short, exciting and challenging expressions), providing quality and applied training, an expert in the topic of spiritual discussions, having sufficient and up-to-date information about lessons, using effective teaching methods, classroom management ability, and paying attention to individual student differences) are important factors that can help translate spiritual concepts into learning through teaching. Memaryan *et al*. studied the requirements of spiritual education in medical education in Iran. According to their findings, educational needs, opportunities, and challenges should be considered at entering spiritual education into formal education.[19] on the finding of present study, prepare internal and external factors affecting the spiritual transfer in teaching process, facilitates the access to the spiritual education. Motahari, in his book "the monotheistic worldview," stated: "All religions and rituals rely to a kind of worldview, the goals that a religious school determines, all are the results of a worldview that has been offered."[20] Accordingly, the first internal factor which is expressed in this study (the teacher's insight and worldview) seems to be the basis of other internal factors. If the teacher has a correct worldview and also monotheism has been proved to him, then he will adhere to other principles of religion (resurrection and prophecy). He also achieves ethical virtues and creates a positive and constructive interaction with students. If he is poorly qualified, he will seek to acquire the necessary sciences and mastery of teaching skills as a religious duty. In the present study, it was found that the teacher's insight and worldview, his adherence to religious principles, his belief in moral virtues, positive and constructive interaction with the student, and his mastery of teaching skills are those internal factors that can translate the concept of spirituality through teaching.

In this study, the main emphasis is on directing the work toward strong relationship with God. This principle is in accordance with Bagheri and Saadabadi's study, which emphasizes this principle that spirituality in the organizations of the Islamic society means the reverence and worship of God in all matters and movements to obtain God's succession to earth.[21] In the Fry study,

spiritual teaching is defined as expression values, attitudes, and behaviors during teaching..[22]

In the study of Noralizadeh, which is based on a review study, the most important central component in Islamic society in the model of spiritual leadership is the initial connection with God as a starting point and ensuring its continuity.[23] Abedi and Rastegar study, a review one, presented a conceptual model of spirituality in work and tested it as a case study at Tehran University, Tehran, Iran.[24] What is used in this model which is the same as the result of this study, the relationship with God to pay attention to the strengthening of the spiritual dimension of man is the starting point of spirituality in any organization. It is expressed in terms of purposeful work and meaning, self-actualization, and excellence in work. Salajegheh and Farahbakhsh, as the same as the results of the present study, also stated that employee understanding of spirituality constitutes an organizational commitment in the work.[25]

From the participants' viewpoint of the study, external factors such as the advocate environment (colleagues and the conditions governing the organization, the community's religious background, and the existence of appropriate models) and talented learners (having spiritual insights, attention and concentration in the classroom, and humility toward the teacher) are among those factors that influence the teacher's attention to the inclusion of spiritual concepts in teaching and its impact on students. King and Crisp study showed that the existence of academic members with special interests, experiences, and training on spirituality is one of the most important factors in having a spiritual curriculum and educational effort,[26] while in the present study, the effective factors in spiritual transfer are divided into internal and external categories, but all components affected by a strong relationship with God. Similar with the present study, Ahanchian emphasized the spiritual management of nurses through communication with God in his study.[27]

The important point about the fundamentals of spirituality in teaching in the curriculum is that in Islam, the source of goodness and blessings is to emphasize the aspects such as ethical virtues, positive interaction between the teacher and the student, and the existence of religious values. Such a belief in the faculty brings about the flourishing of internal powers and talents so that one can take practical steps toward God. Therefore, what is clear in the effort to implement spirituality in teaching is to bring the person to the highest level of internal capacity and to influence his internal factors.

No tendencies of some faculties and students to participate in the study are one of the limitations of this study. Although the interviewees were trying to be diverse, there is certainly no possibility for the research team to interview all experts.

Conclusion

It seems that this study has revealed the broad dimensions of spiritual management in teaching among faculties. Hence, to create a spiritual system in teaching, first, the faculties must interact with God properly, using the internal factors. Then, at the organizational level, this spirituality will appear in the form of external influences so that the spiritual organization can be realized. Therefore, teachers who have established spirituality in their own way will facilitate the achievement of success in the academic system through the creation of a spiritual teaching organization.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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