

## Spiritual Well-being, Resilience, and Life Satisfaction in General and Religious Education Institutes

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### Abstract

*This study aims to explore if General Education Institutes (GEIs) and (proclaimed) Islamic Education Institutes (IEIs) have different effects on spiritual well-being, resilience, and satisfaction with the life of students. Participants included 76 male students ( $M_{age} = 18.56$ ,  $SD = 3.56$ ) and 82 female students ( $M_{age} = 21.34$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ) from GEIs, and 70 male students ( $M_{age} = 18.21$ ,  $SD = 2.97$ ) and 84 female students ( $M_{age} = 21.23$ ,  $SD = 2.89$ ) from IEIs. Data was collected using approved Urdu language versions of the Spiritual Well-being Scale, Child and Youth Resilience Measure, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. Student's *t*-test indicated that there was no significant difference between students of GEIs and IEIs in terms of spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction. However, regression analysis indicated that spiritual well-being and resilience were significant predictors of life satisfaction in students. This study will aid educational policymakers and course-content advisors to polish the curriculum of religious schools to stimulate better psychological development of students.*

**Keywords:** Education, life satisfaction, religious schools, resilience, spiritual well-being.

### Spiritual Well-being, Resilience, and Life Satisfaction in General and Religious Educational Institutes

In her most influential book 'The Nurture Assumption' Harris (2009) indicated that social interactions outside the family have a comparatively

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greater influence on the personality development of a child. Children majorly develop and learn from institutions outside family throughout their adolescence (Harris, 2009) such as peer interactions. Like any demographical entity, the culture of one setting can be very different from the other affecting one's personality development differently. Many early researches have proposed that children growing up in different cultures develop significantly different personality dispositions (Rohner, 2021). Vygotsky (1978) proposed many ideas on the influence of education, teaching, and upbringing on the personality development of children suggesting that a child's development does not occur independently of social and cultural activities. His theories such as Cultural Historic Activity Theory (CHAT), and Sociocultural Cognitive Theory emphasize the interdependence of psychological development and upbringing and suggest that the fully developed personality of a child is the result of the influence of inter-psychological as well as intra-psychological factors (Vygotsky, 1978; see also Aleksandrova-Howell et al., 2012; Woolfolk, 2012). The historical-evolutionary approach to human development in evolutionary psychology also suggests that it is one's culture (in which an individual socializes) and education that shapes an individual's personality (Stryzhakov, 2022). Thus, like family culture, the differing school cultures also affect pupils' learning processes differently.

This notion has been supported by voluminous literature that school settings play an important role in the personality development of students (Dahmann & Anger, 2014). Some studies have even suggested that school experiences can *change* the personality traits of an individual (Dahmann & Anger, 2014). In Pakistan, the educational system requires an individual to complete at least ten years of education (known as secondary school education) before entering college. The personality of the individual mainly develops during this school period (Dahmann & Anger, 2014). According to National Education Policy (2009), there are three school systems in Pakistan i.e., private schools, public schools, and madrasas. The private and public schools in Pakistan can be divided into two major types i.e., general education institutes (GEIs) and Islamic education institutes (IEIs) based on their differing focus, goals, and strategies of teaching, which can be quite contradictory. This necessitates the comparison of the two school systems.

The current research compared spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction among students of GEIs and IEIs to investigate how students

from both educational cultures differ in terms of the above-mentioned personality traits as educational experiences may alter or shape personality (Heckman et al., 2010). Spiritual well-being is one's perceived level of well-being acquired from spirituality (Paloutzian et al., 2012). The concept of spiritual well-being consists of two connotations i.e., religious and existential well-being (Monod et al., 2011). Thus, spiritual well-being is not limited to religious practice rather faith development is the main focus. Spiritual conceptions exist in children before they even start interacting with religious agencies and these conceptions are later shaped by social systems such as culture, school, family, and other institutions (Boyatzis, 2012; Fowler, 1981). According to Fowler's Stage Theory of Faith Development, faith is a universal phenomenon that people inculcate in their personalities throughout life in six stages (Fowler, 1981). Children develop a vague concept of God in the initial six years, growing into complex apprehensions throughout the first three stages of faith development but these apprehensions are still dependent on one's cultural influences (Fowler, 1981); and adolescence is a crucial period of spiritual development (Donelson, 1999) when children are school going.

Research literature has shown a link between school settings and resilience (Jessiman et al., 2022). Resilience is a culture-sensitive phenomenon rather than a universal construct (Ungar & Lienbenberg, 2011). The school environment plays an important role in mediating coping strategies when students are faced with adversity (Nettles et al., 2000). A healthy school culture fosters mental health and resilience in children (Jessiman et al., 2022). Studies have shown that spiritual well-being and resilience share a significant correlation and are ecologically bound (Smith et al., 2013) specifically in students (Hatami & Shekarchizadeh, 2022). Active involvement in spiritual activities and resilience improve interpersonal relations (leading to better socialization) and satisfaction with life (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2022; Stoll et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2022). Life satisfaction is linked with positive outcomes and experiences in many domains of life (Proctor et al., 2009). Longitudinal studies show that children who are more satisfied with life tend to adopt more adaptive behaviors in adulthood (Lyons et al., 2013). Individuals who practice religion are comparatively happier and more satisfied with life, and recover from life's hardships more quickly (Myers, 2008). Schools in Pakistan are either increasingly adopting and inculcating western ideologies in students or putting over-emphasis on extremist religious practices (Ashraf, 2019; Qazi, 2021). Despite the

availability of extensive evidence regarding the importance of inter and intra-psychological factors (contextually spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction) for personality development; and persisting problems in the Pakistani education system research exploring the impact of differing school cultures remains scarce. Thus, the present research was carried out to investigate if GEIs and IEIs have any different effects on the spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction of students. It was hypothesized that the students of both education systems will significantly differ in terms of spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction.

## Method

### Participants:

Participants included 312 students, 76 male students ( $M_{age} = 18.56$ ,  $SD = 3.56$ ) and 82 female students ( $M_{age} = 21.34$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ) from GEIs, and 70 male students ( $M_{age} = 18.21$ ,  $SD = 2.97$ ) and 84 female students ( $M_{age} = 21.23$ ,  $SD = 2.89$ ) from IEIs; aged 17 to 24. The Islamic schools taken for this study refer to schools that focus on religious studies along with regular curricula of scientific studies, instead of *madradas* that keep their complete focus on religious education. Included participants did not have any learning disabilities.

Moreover, students currently enrolled in colleges and universities (undergraduate students under the age of 24 equivalent to the maximum average age of college students) participated in the study only including individuals who have attended the same school for at least 5 years. The sample of young adults belonging to college and universities (in early undergraduate years), rather than schools, was purposively targeted to ensure that all participants have already attained the fourth stage of faith development when individuals become independent in their religious and spiritual beliefs (Fowler, 1981) thus the influence of schooling experience on their personality development could be better explored. This is also the period when an individual goes through important transitional changes in life (Bonnie et al., 2015). The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive of Research Participants (N=312; GEIs=158; IEIs=154)**

Variables	General School Students <i>n</i> (%)	Islamic School Students <i>n</i> (%)	Full Sample <i>n</i> (%)
<b>Gender of the Participants</b>			
Men	76(48.1)	70(45.5)	146(46.8)
Women	82 (51.9)	84 (54.5)	166 (53.2)
<b>Education Level</b>			
College	99(62.66)	88(57.14)	187(59.93)
University	59(37.34)	66(42.85)	125(40.07)
<b>Family System</b>			
Nuclear	94(59.5)	73(47.4)	167(53.53)
Joint	64(40.5)	81(52.6)	145(46.27)
<i>Note.</i> GEIs = General Educational Institutes, IEIS = Islamic Educational Institutes.			

Demographics had no significant effect on study variables thus the results have not been reported.

## Measures

### **Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS):**

Spiritual well-being was assessed using the 20-item Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS; Urdu translation) developed by Ellison and Paloutzian (1983). The scale indicates two dimensions of spirituality through two 10-itemed subscales i.e. Religious Well-being Scale (RWBS) comprised of all odd-numbered items in the scale aiming to measure the religious dimension of spiritual well-being, and Existential Well-being Scale (EWBS) comprised of even-numbered items aiming to measure the existential connotation of spiritual well-being. The tool is responded on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *moderately disagree*; 3 = *disagree*; 4 = *agree*; 5 = *moderately agree*; 6 = *strongly agree*). Nine of the twenty items are reverse scored (items 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 18). Scores range

from 20 to 120 with a midpoint of 70. Scores lying between the range of 20 to 40 indicate low spiritual well-being, scores lying between a range of 41 to 99 indicate moderate spiritual well-being while scores lying between 100 to 120 indicate a sense of high spiritual well-being. Research studies show good reliability for SWBS and its subscales. For RWB  $\alpha$  ranges from .82 to .94, for EWB  $\alpha$  ranges from .78 to .86, and for SWB  $\alpha$  ranges from .89 to .94 (Bufford, 1991). The  $\alpha$  for SWBS in the present research was .87.

### **Child and Youth Resilience Measure:**

The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM; Youth version, Urdu translated short form) is a self-report measure consisting of 28 items. The subscales gauge resilience differently under different cultural contexts however, the universal three subscales involve Personal or Individual (personal skills, peer support, and social skills), Relational (caregivers' physical and psychological caregiving), and Contextual factors (spiritual context, educational context, and cultural context). All items are answered on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (where; 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *quite a bit*, and 5 = *a lot*). CYRM questionnaire is keyed in the direction of resilience i.e., lower scores on the instrument indicate low resilience, and high scores indicate high resilience. These levels can be assessed by calculating the average score of the respondent where very high resilience is indicated by an average score of 5 and very low resilience is indicated by an average score of 1. The higher the score the more resilient qualities reflected in the respondent.

CYRM-28 has shown good reliability and validity with Chronbach's alpha ranging from .65 to .91. Detailed understanding of the three tricky subscales and factors is facilitated by CYRM-28's structure (Liebenberg et al., 2012) demonstrating good construct validity as well. The  $\alpha$  for SWBS in the present research was .89.

### **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS):**

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS; Urdu translation) developed by Diener et al. (1985), was used to access subjective evaluation of life satisfaction. SLS is the five-item scale with a Likert scale format ranging from 1 through 7 (where, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *slightly agree*, 6 = *agree* and 7 = *strongly agree*) with no reverse items. The range of SLS scores from 5 through 35 with a midpoint of 20 which indicates a neutral attitude towards life. Scores

above the midpoint indicate satisfaction with life while scores below the midpoint indicate dissatisfaction. Some of the cut-offs that are used as benchmarks indicating how much a person is satisfied with life are; 5 to 9 = Extremely dissatisfied, 10 to 14 = Dissatisfied, 15 to 19 = Slightly dissatisfied, 20 = Neutral, 21 to 25 = Slightly satisfied, 26 to 30 = Satisfied, and 31 to 35 = Extremely satisfied. The scale is not restricted to one specific domain or cause of life satisfaction; it allows the subject to respond to items subjectively in accord with his perception of life satisfaction (Andrews & Crandall, 1976), and holds favorable psychometric properties with average Cronbach’s alpha of .83. The  $\alpha$  for SLS in the present research was .73.

## Results

IBM SPSS Statistics (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Version 23.0) was used to analyze the data. The main focus of the research was to investigate the difference between students of GEIs and IEIs across levels of spiritual well-being (including both religious and existential well-being), resilience, and satisfaction with life thus, an independent sample *t*-test was carried out to compare both groups. The results are given in table 2.

**Table 2: Comparison of General (n=158) and Islamic (n=154) Educational Institutes’ Students regarding Spiritual Well-being, Resilience, and Life Satisfaction (N=312)**

Measures	General	Islamic	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen’s <i>d</i>
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
SWBS	96.05 (15.4)	95.04 (12.8)	.63 (302.41)	.53	-2.15	4.17	.07
CYRM	116.25 (12.99)	115.9 (14.3)	.244 (310)	.81	-2.66	3.42	.03
SLS	23.3 (5.81)	23.3 (5.99)	-.05 (310)	.96	-1.35	1.28	.01

*Note.* SWBS = Spiritual Well-being Scale; CYRM = Child and Youth Resilience Measure; SLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale.

The results indicated that there were no significant mean differences between students of GEIs and IEIs in terms of spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction. Cohen’s *d* indicated a small effect size between students of both

educational systems which means that there was large overlapping of data between groups for which the results were insignificant.

Although insignificant, the mean scores of students of GEIs were slightly higher than students of IELs on spiritual well-being and resilience whereas, the mean score on life satisfaction was almost equal. Conceptually, mean scores for IEI group should have been higher and more significant. To explore if spiritual well-being and resilience were significant predictors of life satisfaction for this sample of students, regression analysis was run the results of which are given as follows.

**Table 3: Pearson’s Correlation Analysis among Spiritual Well-being, Resilience, and Life Satisfaction (N=312)**

Source	1	2	3
1 Spiritual Well-being	-	.37*	.43*
2 Resilience		-	.56*
3 Life Satisfaction			-
Mean	95.55	116.07	23.31
SD	14.196	13.62	5.89
* $p < .01$			

Spiritual well-being had a statistically significant positive correlation with resilience and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction also shared a significant positive relationship with resilience. The results of multiple linear regression are presented in table 4.



**Table 4: Relationship between Spiritual Well-being, Resilience and Life Satisfaction in Students of General and Islamic Educational Institutes (N=312)**

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	-10.25				
Spiritual Well-being	.105	.02	.25	5.21	.000
Resilience	.203	.021	.47	9.66	.000
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.373				

The results indicated that the model was significant ( $F(1,310) = 91.76, p < .05$ ), and spiritual well-being and resilience significantly predict life satisfaction in students belonging to general and religious educational systems. The value of R square indicates 37.3% variance in life satisfaction explained by spiritual well-being and resilience. Regression coefficient indicates that one standard deviation increase in spiritual well-being is likely to predict .25 standard deviation units increase in life satisfaction. Regression coefficient also indicated that one standard deviation increase in resilience is likely to predict a .47 standard deviation unit increase in life satisfaction.

## **Discussion**

The present research was carried out to explore the difference in spiritual well-being, resilience, and satisfaction with life of students from general and Islamic education institutes. It was hypothesized that both groups will significantly differ from each other, however, a direction for the difference was not specified for two reasons; i) the families are usually religion-oriented in Pakistani culture and parents start instilling religious beliefs in children through stories from a very early age which play the most important role in shaping up child's personality in earlier years (Fowler, 1981) thus the children from religious schools developing over this ecological religious foundation may have better levels of spiritual well-

being, resilience, and life satisfaction, whereas ii) the quality of religious education system is consistently deteriorating in Pakistan due to many factors including and not limited to sectarian violence, western ideologies, increasing atheism in youth, and extremist personal religious beliefs of teachers and upbringings (Ashraf, 2019; Khan, 2010; Qazi, 2021). Thus, the trend in data is hardly predictable with scarce research evidence available on the subject. The research results indicated that even though spiritual well-being and resilience were significant predictors of life satisfaction in this sample, no meaningful difference was found between the groups across any of these factors. A major explanation for this comes from the Ecological Systems Theory which suggests that an individual's personality develops as a result of the interaction between the individual and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) which leads to the inference that the culture one belongs to defines one's phenomenology. In Pakistan, the religious education of the child begins at home and from a very early age. Being a collectivist country, the joint family system is common and many secondary caregivers are influencing a child's faith development. As Fowler (1981) suggested, the concept of God is developed before the child even starts socialization with the external environment and varies (school) cultures. Thus, the school culture may not influence personality dispositions as significantly as the child's family does. And students from general and Islamic schools did not differ significantly from each other due to these ecological stimuli. Another major explanation for this might be the quality of education in religious schools. Exposure to or relatedness with religious agencies (IEIs) are expected to foster better development of spiritual well-being and resilience leading to life satisfaction in students (Smith et al., 2013).

The present research included some Islamic schools developed before partition, with the motive to protect Muslims' rights to religious education along with modern curricula. Other later-founded Islamic schools, included in this study, claim better educational outcomes than their competitors due to their emphasis on spiritual development parallel to social development. But no difference was found between GEIs and IEIs in present research possibly because Islamic schools now are over-flexible with little to no emphasis on religious education and practices, focusing more on scientific curricula (Memon, 2010) not teaching Islamic theology and philosophy as per se which is rather limited to *madrassa* system.

Apart from that, it is important to throw light on how not finding any difference between the two systems can be beneficial for the political position of the country (Ashraf, 2018) as the ideology of Pakistan promises the protection of minorities' rights and tolerance for other religious groups in the nation. Not instilling extremist religious beliefs in our children is likely to ensure better national identity and international political standing, and a collective cultural harmony.

Furthermore, regression analysis generated significant research results indicating that spiritual well-being and resilience are significant positive predictors of life satisfaction in students which fits with existing studies (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018; Smith et al., 2013). Ecology is again an important facet as theorists believe that demographic and ecological factors are specifically linked with individuals' satisfaction with life and what coping strategies they use to deal with challenges in life (Shahbaz & Shahbaz, 2015). Relatedness with a family having higher levels of spiritual well-being, sense of meaning and purpose in life (existential well-being), connectedness with God, and better quality of life such as better education and resources is more likely to have better resilience and satisfaction with life (Shahbaz & Shahbaz, 2015; Smith et al., 2013). However, regardless of the nature of ideologies followed by different school systems, a healthy school environment should be provided to students as recent research studies indicate that spiritual well-being is affected by learners' mental health (Hamka et al., 2020).

## **Conclusion**

The educational settings in Pakistan are not as distinct in nature as claimed by the titles. The research on the subject in the context of mental health is scarce. The findings of this research revealed that at present, there is no difference in culture and teachings of different educational settings whether it be general or religious (Islamic) thus there's a need to improve policies, human resources, and curriculum design of these settings so their distinct goals can be achieved without promoting religious extremism and sectarian violence. The present research also discussed theoretically how the conceptualizations of spiritual well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction are culture-sensitive rather than universal in nature.

## Research Limitations and Implications

The major limitation of the study is that the data was collected from a limited number of schools. Some of the terminology used in the items of the Spiritual Well-being Scale were also difficult to understand for adolescents (aged 14-18) compared to young adults (aged 18-22). A mixed-method approach to such topics is likely to gain more beneficial insights.

This study sets grounds for future debate and research on the subject in Pakistan the results of which would be beneficial for parents, educationists, and policymakers actively engaged in academia.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors of this study declare no conflict of interest.

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