

Spiritual and Social Support as Correlates to the Online Learner Satisfaction Among Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic rushed the restructuring of educational systems to be primarily based through an online medium. Research on the kind of assistance that students require, if any, to maximize learning satisfaction is sparse. This study sought to ascertain the links between social and spiritual support and undergraduates' satisfaction with their online learning experiences. Using descriptive-correlational study and purposive sampling techniques, 132 nursing students took part in a face-to-face survey. The social and spiritual support and online course satisfaction scales were used in the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation coefficient. This study determined the respondents had a strong impression of spiritual support, a high perception of social support, and were satisfied with their online course. There is a weak positive correlation between social support and online learner satisfaction and a moderate positive correlation between spiritual support and online learner satisfaction. This study widens the knowledge of the effects spirituality and social connection can have on a student's online satisfaction. Students who are satisfied with their online learning in the classroom could be more prepared to perform well in the workspace, which is especially important in healthcare clinical settings. Future studies should strive to include a larger sample size of students from a variety of institutions, degree programs, and geographical distributions.

Keywords: *Spiritual Support, Social Support, Online Learner Satisfaction, Spirituality*

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 innovated the traditional educational infrastructure globally. During this transition to a post-pandemic society, new health regulations were enforced such as physical distancing, use of facemasks, vaccination cards, temperature checks, frequent sanitization, and finally distance education which has impacted students in ways that have not yet been studied (Qian & Jiang, 2022). The shift from traditional to remote learning caused students to reduce their social connections with classmates, professors, and the college community as well as their healthy eating and exercise routines, which led to students becoming fatigued and feeling cynical towards their studies (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). With the emergence of online learning came negative side effects to the students' mental health and wellbeing. As the world shifts from traditional face-to-face classes to an online or blended learning course design, it is necessary to track its progress. In 2020, the percentage of students in distance education classes in postsecondary institutions was 72.8%; a stark increase compared to just 36.3% in 2019 (U.S. Department of Education). With this increase in online teaching, it is important to ensure educational institutions make the appropriate adjustments to smoothly facilitate online classes not only for their teaching effectiveness but also for their students' wellbeing.

The variables that have the most impact on student engagement in online learning are student characteristics, instructor characteristics, course design, course content, and the learner's environment (Deka, 2021). By refining course design and course content, educational institutions can expect to positively affect student engagement in online learning and therefore increase knowledge retention (Skinner et al., 2008), furthermore increasing online learner satisfaction. If these aspects are overlooked, there can be complications. Some of the drawbacks of switching to online learning were technological, infrastructural, and teacher support and knowledge. However, the more difficult limitations related to the learning process and what actively supports it, the students' capacity for self-regulation and motivation, the detrimental effects of isolation, the loss of socialization and interaction with colleagues and academic staff, and the essentially total absence of hands-on experiences (Zgheib et al., 2021).

While technical support and tutor support are predictable, challenges to resolve the challenge for students to self-regulate and self-motivate is still under research. There is limited study about spiritual and social support in online learning. Hence, the purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between spiritual and social support to student's online learner satisfaction among nursing students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spiritual Support

Spiritual support is defined as assistance that is provided with the explicit purpose of increasing the religious beliefs and behaviors of the recipient (Krause et al., 2020). There is evidence of a strong link between everyday spiritual experiences of students and their mental health in the context of a pandemic. Pandemic breakouts have an impact on people's mental health, but most especially when they are isolated from their social network. Therefore, major consideration at the policy level is needed for counseling services and other interventions to fulfill the needs of students to combat that feeling of isolation (Joseph, 2021). Although, spiritual support can tackle more than just the feeling of isolation. Turkish college students who scored highly on conscientiousness tended to use more optimistic, self-confident, and religious coping mechanisms when stressed, whereas people who scored highly on extraversion tended to use more self-confident and social support mechanisms when stressed (Eksi, 2010). Those who have different personality types will prefer to use one type of coping mechanism over the other to deal with stress.

Spiritual support can also improve mental wellness in a group setting. After multiple meetings, participants said the club gave individuals an opportunity to practice their faith outside of more official religious institutions and relieve their anxieties and confusions about spirituality (Forrester-Jones et al., 2018). A study in Indonesia of 222 highly anxious students displaying physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms found two key causes of student anxiety: social limitations and academic pressure. Most respondents opted for a religious strategy rather than a cultural strategy to lessen their anxiety (Santosa et al., 2021). In another study, there were 1739 university students in China where the findings revealed a considerably positive relationship between religious coping and post-pandemic wellbeing (Hu & Cheng, 2022).

Social Support

Social support is a multifaceted notion (Lourel et al., 2013), denoting the social and psychological assistance an individual receives or views as accessible from family, friends, and

the community (Awang et al., 2014; Zimet et al., 1988). Particularly, having friends and loved ones at your side helps lessen feelings of loneliness (Hussin et al., 2021). Social support, originating from familial, peer, and academic networks, can significantly influence student experiences in education, yielding beneficial effects on both wellbeing and academic achievement (Brailovskaia et al., 2018; Maymon et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020).

Studies also show that social support has a statistically significant positive link with resilience (Jeongjina, 2020). College students' resilience and life happiness are correlated with social encouragement. Support from family, friends, and teachers will increase individual's capacity for psychosocial interaction and higher levels of mental health are frequently correlated with strong social support (Hu et al., 2022). Psychological resiliency was found to be positively correlated with perceived social support from friends, family, and current meaning of life (Eker et al., 2020). Social support and resilience and college life adaptation and resilience were found to have statistically significant correlations (Kim Hye-ok et al., 2021).

The spectrum of social support that students obtain from their families, peers, and the academic community can significantly affect their capacity to navigate the challenges of university life (Cage et al., 2021; Mishra, 2020) and correlates with enhanced educational experiences (Maymon et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020). Social support is essential for students' well-being and academic achievement. Studies demonstrate that increased social support correlates with reduced stress levels in students (McLean et al., 2023). Studies indicate that social support as a coping strategy can significantly assist students in alleviating academic stress and enhancing their academic performance (Baqtayan, 2011). These findings emphasize the necessity of creating measures to augment social support for students, thereby alleviating stress and enhancing overall student experiences.

Online Learner Satisfaction

Student satisfaction in online learning is a vital component of success in higher education. Research has revealed numerous critical aspects affecting satisfaction, including instructional design, quality of educational materials, evaluation methods, and workload (Li et al., 2016; Martin & Bolliger, 2022). Tang et al. (2020) stated that engineering students are generally not satisfied with online learning. Another study revealed that the satisfaction of students in Medicine and Health Sciences is lower than other disciplines. Students studying in the applied sciences department have lower satisfaction with online learning (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Regarding the medical faculties, it is stated that there are problems especially in practical education courses, students have high cognitive load, and they have difficulties in providing self-discipline (Simsek et al., 2021).

Quality of the instructor, course design, prompt feedback, and the expectations of the students all have a beneficial influence on how satisfied pupils are, that in return has a favorable effect on their academic achievement. These four factors are essential for educational administration in order to achieve high levels of performance and satisfaction for online courses (Gopal et al., 2021). Attributes of learners, including self-assurance in digital communication and comprehension of course expectations, significantly influence outcomes (Palmer & Holt, 2009). Moreover, learner-content interaction, self-regulated learning design, and Internet self-efficacy have been identified as strong determinants of satisfaction (Ng & Baharom, 2018). Comprehending these aspects enables institutions to create efficient online learning environments and deliver focused support to improve student satisfaction and learning results (Martin & Bolliger, 2022; Palmer & Holt, 2009).

METHODS

Research Design

Descriptive-correlational methodology was used in this investigation. Descriptive or exploratory inquiries are used when little is known about a certain event. Correlational designs meticulously investigate the nature of interactions or associations between and among variables rather than concentrating on direct causal relationships and correlations. These techniques are used to establish the correlation between changes in any number of variables and changes in the remaining ones (Sousa et al. 2007). Under the descriptive method, to determine the online learner's degree of satisfaction, perceived support, and perceived spiritual support. Correlation was used to determine the relationship between spiritual support and social support and online learner satisfaction.

Population and Sampling Techniques

Through purposive sampling, 132 nursing students from a sectarian institution in Cavite were selected to participate in the study. The participants consisted of 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year enrolled nursing during the 2022-2023 second semester who have experienced a period of online learning. Those that can read and understand English and chose to completely answer the surveys when presented in person determined the sample size. Excluded from the sample size were students enrolled students in their first year of nursing who have never participated in online learning in nursing and students who are not enrolled in any major nursing courses.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires used in the study were fully adapted from different authors. The first part of the instrument is the consent for their voluntary participation. Then it is separated into four parts. Questions establishing the participant's demography are included in the initial part including sex, family income, and year level.

The second part is the perceived spiritual support scale by Ai et al. (2021). It determines the level of spiritual support of the respondents. It has 12 items with a four Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale scored a Cronbach-alpha of 0.97 across three different studies. The third part is the perceived social support scale by Zimet et al. (1988). It is a 12-item questionnaire with a 7 Likert scale ranging from Very Strongly Disagree to Very Strongly Agree. The significant other, family, and friends subdivisions have Cronbach's alpha scores of .91, .87, and .85, accordingly. The entire scale's reliability was .88. The fourth part is the online course satisfaction scale by Bayrak et al. (2020), with 8 items. This was scored with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with Cronbach's alpha of .855. The questionnaires were sourced from an open-access journal, but the author sought permission to utilize their questionnaires as part of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

After the proposal was approved, the researcher applied for approval from the ethics review board. Once approved, the researcher gathered data and distributed the questionnaire face-to-face. First, the researcher asked permission from each year level department chair. Second, the researcher collaborated with professors to schedule days appropriate for data gathering. After outlining the study's objectives and providing the instruments that were required, the ethical consideration was assured for participants' privacy and confidentiality. the

researcher gathered the survey responses. All questionnaires gathered were sealed in an envelope. Data was then checked, tallied, and analyzed. After the results are finalized, all data will be discarded.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the human research ethics. The research was subjected to ethics review by the Ethics Review Board (ERB). The approval protocol for this study was 2023-ERB-AUP-0018. The ethical principles were carefully reviewed to maintain the dignity of the respondents. Key informants were briefed on the objective of the study and an informed consent was also given before administering any of the research protocols.

Analysis of Data

The collected data was encoded and analyzed using the Jamovi version 2.3 and was used in multiple statistical tests, using both descriptive statistics and correlational statistics. Descriptive statistics summarize the collected data based on the characteristics of the respondents (Trochim, 2020). Descriptive Statistics of Mean and Standard Deviation and Descriptive Statistics of Frequency and Percentage were used to assess the extent of the respondents’ perceived spiritual support, perceived social support and online learner satisfaction. In addition, to determine if there were significant relationships between all independent and dependent variables among participants, Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient was utilized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Spiritual Support

Table 1 shows that nursing students have *strong* perceived spiritual support $M = 3.40$ ($SD = 0.516$).

Table 1
Level of Spiritual Support

	Mean	SD	Qualitative Interpretation
Spiritual Support	3.40	0.516	Strong

Legend: 3.50-4.00 strongly agree (very strong), 2.50-3.49 agree (strong), 1.50-2.49 disagree (weak), 1.00-1.49 strongly disagree (very weak)

Studies demonstrate that spiritual health significantly influences the well-being and professional growth of nursing students. Research indicates that elevated spiritual health correlates with diminished clinical practice stress, reduced depressed tendencies, and enhanced health-promoting activities in nursing students (Hsiao et al., 2010). In a study undertaken in China, it was determined that pupils in nursing who took part in a spiritual educational program for fifty minutes per week for a total of eight weeks had considerably have fewer short-term consequences on their spiritual health and substantially smaller clinical practice stress ratings than the control group. Additionally, they performed superiorly on their last clinical practice examination (Ya-Chu et al., 2012). Spiritual support can also improve mental wellness in a group setting (Forrester-Jones et al., 2018). Studies also suggest that spiritual and religious support has a substantial impact on the state of students’ well-being and their academic achievements (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018). A spiritual education course

should be considered as a regular course in nursing as it has been shown to markedly enhance nursing students' spiritual skills, encompassing spiritual health, spiritual care attitudes, and caring conduct (Chiang et al., 2020).

The result of the study reveals that students have a strong spiritual support, which may help their mental wellness, overall well-being, enhance their performance in school, and ultimately contribute to their academic success. Integration of spiritual education into nursing curricula may also improve students’ personal spiritual development and their capacity to deliver spiritual care to patients. It is also important that the university should continue incorporating spiritual and religious support, as it can significantly enhance students’ overall well-being and enrich their academic experience.

Level of Social Support

Table 2 reveals that nursing students have a *high* level of perceived social support, with an overall mean score of 5.72 ($SD = .889$). The *significant others* category has the highest mean with 5.78 ($SD = 1.198$), followed by support from friends ($M=5.72, SD=1.045$), and lastly support from family ($M=5.68, SD=1.198$).

Table 2
Level of Social Support

	Mean	SD	Qualitative Interpretation
Significant Others	5.78	1.198	High
Family	5.68	1.198	High
Friends	5.71	1.045	High
Overall Perceived Social Support	5.72	0.889	High

Legend: 6.50-7.00 very strongly agree (very high), 5.50-6.49 strongly agree (high), 4.50-5.00 mildly agree (somewhat high), 3.50-4.49 neutral (moderate), 2.50-3.49 mildly disagree (somewhat low), 1.50-2.49 strongly disagree (low), 1.00-1.49 very strongly disagree (very low)

High levels of social support are typically associated with good mental health (Hu et al., 2022). In a particular study of minority students, the students with the lowest levels of social support had the fewest students who graduated on time. Furthermore, they were less inclined to pursue career objectives than students who experienced a late support boost (Wittrup & Hurd, 2022).

The vital impact of social support in the well-being and academic achievement in students cannot be overstated. According to Park and Jang (2013), there is a positive correlation between higher levels of social support and both increased life satisfaction and decreased depression among college students. Significantly, the fewer depression symptoms and higher quality of life in psychological and social areas are predicted by social support from family and friends (Alsubaie et al., 2019). Significantly, the provision of emotional support by friends modifies the association between stress and depression (Park & Jang, 2013).

Studies also show that social support from family, friends, and teachers have a positive link with resilience (Jeongjina, 2020) and psychological resiliency (Eker et al., 2020). College students' resilience and life satisfaction are correlated with social encouragement (Hu et al., 2022). The spectrum of social support that students obtain from their families, peers, and the academic community can significantly affect their capacity to navigate the challenges of university life (Cage et al., 2021; Mishra, 2020) and correlates with enhanced educational experiences (Maymon et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020).

The study revealed that nursing students have high levels of social support. Studies prove that students can benefit from social support. Maintaining this support is crucial, as it plays a significant role in various aspects of students’ lives, including mental well-being, life satisfaction, resilience, and academic success. Therefore, universities and educators should consider implementing strategies to strengthen social support networks for students, ultimately promoting their overall well-being and enhancing their academic performance.

Level of Online Learner Satisfaction

Table 3 displays that students learning nursing are *satisfied* with their online learning, with an overall *mean* score of 3.59 (*SD* = .599). The highest item is item 4 “*I am satisfied top receive feedback from my teachers*”.

Table 3
Level of Online Learner Satisfaction

	Mean	SD	Qualitative Interpretation
1. I am satisfied to communicate effectively with my teachers throughout the semester.	3.70	0.730	Satisfied
2. I am satisfied with the support of my teachers in accessing various educational materials related to the course.	3.95	0.719	Satisfied
3. I am satisfied that my teachers are enthusiastic about online learning	3.90	0.740	Satisfied
4. I am satisfied to receive feedback from my teachers online	4.05	0.790	Satisfied
5. I am satisfied that the presentation of the units is consistent.	3.80	0.808	Satisfied
6. I am satisfied that the language used in the presentation of the content is clear and understandable	4.04	0.805	Satisfied
7. I am satisfied that the online system is easy to use.	3.88	0.874	Satisfied
8. I am satisfied that my needs are met in the online learning environment.	3.59	0.980	Satisfied
Overall Online Learner Satisfaction	3.86	0.599	Satisfied

Legend: 4.50-5.00 strongly agree (*very satisfied*), 3.50-4.49 agree (*satisfied*), 2.50-3.49 neutral (*neutral*), 1.50-2.49 disagree (*unsatisfied*), 1.00-1.49 strongly disagree (*very unsatisfied*)

Student satisfaction in online learning is a vital component of success in higher education. Research has revealed numerous critical aspects affecting satisfaction, including instructional design, quality of educational materials, evaluation methods, and workload (Li et al., 2016; Martin & Bolliger, 2022). According to one study on mobile learning, accessibility to communities of practice, contextually distinct content, instructor-guided delivery, adaptable and naturally intuitive ease of use, and flexible and intuitive mobile structure all lead to practical learning outcomes and high levels of learner satisfaction. (Kellam, 2021).

The result shows that the highest among the items is the feedback from the teachers online. According to the study, instructors who are present and accessible have a significant impact on students’ learning experiences (Blackmon & Major, 2012), as they provide essential guidance (Skordis-Worrall et al., 2015). Students also expect prompt feedback from instructors during online learning (Rensburg, 2018). The absence of immediate feedback from both instructors and peers can pose a challenge in the online environment, potentially affecting learning outcomes (Ramos-Morcillo, 2020; Skordis-Worrall et al., 2015).

The study revealed that nursing students were generally satisfied with online learning during the pandemic. Several factors contribute to high levels of learner satisfaction in online education, with one key factor being the presence and engagement of instructors, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall learning experience.

Relationship between Perceived Spiritual Support and Online Learner Satisfaction Among Nursing Students

Table 4 shows that there is a *moderate* ($r = .424$) positive correlation ($p = <0.001$) between perceived spiritual support and online learner satisfaction. According to the findings, nursing students' happiness with their online learning experiences rises as perceived spiritual support does.

Table 4
Relationship Between Perceived Spiritual Support and Online Learner Satisfaction

Variable	Components	Online Learner Satisfaction
Perceived Spiritual Support	Spearman’s rho	.424**
	p-value	0.001
	N	132
	Verbal Interpretation	Significant

**Significant at the 0.05 level

Studies suggest that the provision of spiritual and religious support has a substantial impact on the state of students' well-being and their academic achievements. Life satisfaction among university students appear to be favorably associated with spiritual well-being (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018). Furthermore, studies have investigated the influence of life purpose and religious devotion on student involvement and happiness with learning. The existence of purpose in life was linked to heightened energy, commitment, and active engagement in the process of acquiring knowledge (Chagas et al., 2023). Furthermore, according to Masterson (2012), offering spiritual support to nursing students can enhance satisfaction in both conventional and online educational settings.

It is crucial to include spiritual and religious assistance in university health programs and counseling services to improve students' general well-being and academic experience, both in traditional and online educational settings.

Relationship between Social Support and Online Learner Satisfaction Among Nursing Students

Table 5 shows that there is a *weak* ($r = .253$) positive correlation ($p = <0.003$) between perceived social support and online learner satisfaction. As social support increases, nursing students' satisfaction with their online learning activities increases.

Table 5
Relationship Between Perceived Social Support and Online Learner Satisfaction

Variable	Components	Online Learner Satisfaction
Perceived Social Support	Spearman's rho	.253**
	p-value	0.003
	N	132
	Verbal Interpretation	Significant

**Significant at the 0.05 level

One key strategy family can adopt to protect their children's mental well-being is utilizing social media to maintain connections with friends and peers. Enhancing the mental health of college students necessitates social support, which is seen as a protective factor for resilience and life satisfaction (Hu et al., 2022). Moreover, research indicates that social support from family, peers, and instructors significantly influences online learning satisfaction by fostering a positive and encouraging environment (Elumalai et al., 2020). Mheidly et al. (2020) further highlight the importance of offering students' opportunities to express their emotions and mental challenges, ensuring they receive the necessary help and support. Studies indicate that social support as a coping strategy can significantly assist students in alleviating academic stress and enhancing their academic performance (Baqtayan, 2011). Therefore, receiving valuable support from their families, peers, and teachers, viewing them as crucial components of their support system in navigating the challenges of online learning.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of the investigation was to ascertain the connections between spiritual and social support and undergraduate students' overall satisfaction with their online educational experiences. Overall, the respondents had a strong perception of spiritual support, high perception of social support, and were satisfied with their online course. While there seems to be a moderate positive correlation with spiritual support and online learner satisfaction and a weak positive correlation between social support and online learner satisfaction. This study widens the knowledge of the effects spirituality and social connection can have on a student's performance, abilities, and online satisfaction. As it is efficiently supported that spiritual support and social support can increase resilience and shield against negative affect, it is now partially observed how it could be related to the academic satisfaction of students through this study. Students who are satisfied with their online learning in the classroom could be more prepared to perform well in the workspace, which is especially important in a healthcare clinical setting.

There are certain limitations to this study. It was comprised of a relatively small sample size of 132 respondents. It was conducted at a sectarian collegiate institution, which could have impacted the outcomes related to perceived spiritual support. The instruments used are based on the merit of self-reporting and may not actually represent reality. Through this study, future research can now be explored in the overall understanding of the spiritual and psychosocial network of a student learning through an online setting in relation to stress, achievement, well-being or other factors contributing to such. It is also recommended to increase the sample size to students among different courses within different institutions and distributed in different areas.

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