

An Intervention Programme to improve Spiritual Intelligence among Iranian Adolescents in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine whether an intervention program on Spiritual Intelligence will help to improve spiritual intelligence among Iranian female adolescents studying in an Iranian School in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The sample comprised of 32 female students, 16 assigned to the experimental group and another 16 in the control group. The study utilized the quasi experimental design with a pre-test and a post-test. The experimental group was given 5 sessions of training in spiritual intelligence (SIG Training) over a period of 5 weeks. The control group was given life skills training for the duration of the experiment. Spiritual intelligence was measured by Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) by Amran and Dryer (2007). Results showed that the SIG training improved spiritual intelligence in the experimental group as well as the subscales in spiritual intelligence. The subscale 'Gratitude' showed a significant increase when a comparison was made between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group. The control group showed a significant increase in one subscale namely 'purpose' but there was no significant change for the other subscales. Hence, the training given to the experimental group was effective in enhancing spiritual intelligence.

Keywords: Spiritual intelligence, SIG Training, Iranian Adolescents

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 29 February 2012

Accepted: 27 April 2012

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INTRODUCTION

During the last three decades, the crime age in Iran has decreased from 40 to 15 years old (The National security commission of Iran Parliament, 2009). Meanwhile, the theft statistics among Iranian adolescents increased about 300 percent from 10 to 17 years old in the period from 1996 to 2006.

At the same time, the rate of addiction increased about 300 percent among the same age group (Iranian adolescents who are 10 to 17 years old) from 56 people in 1996 to 179 people in 2006 (Geravand A. Mehr News Agency, 2006). With the present conditions, it seems that the study of the methods in order to effectively improve people can help them to fight with these problems. For instance, some newer forms of psychotherapy focus upon the development of positive emotions and adaptive coping strategies rather than focusing upon negative emotions, internal conflicts, and anxieties formed in childhood. These forms of psychotherapy can be quite successful in helping people emerge from debilitating psychological problems (Seligman 1999).

Recent research has suggested that spiritual beliefs, commitments, and practices appear to be related to such positive outcomes such as physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, positive interpersonal functioning, marital satisfaction and stability, and enhanced quality of life (Emmons, 2000). A contributing factor to these positive outcomes may be having a spiritual orientation towards life protects human beings against undesirable and maladaptive behaviours such as acting in personally or socially destructive ways (Emmons, 2000).

Obviously, spiritual intelligence has a significant influence on the quality of life and it goes without saying that adolescence is a sensitive period which requires specific training to make a brighter future and be exposed to the difficulties. However, there

is no systematic program to educate the adolescents for spiritual intelligence, and consequently the present research made an attempt to address this question, i.e. whether we could design a training plan to increase spiritual intelligence among adolescents.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

A high degree of conscious awareness about and adaptiveness to the events and experiences in one's life and cultivation of self-awareness may be considered as crucial for the ongoing development of spiritual intelligence (Sisk & Torrance, 2001; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). In fact, a number of strategies, techniques, and practices have been recognized to be useful for the development and improvement in spiritual intelligence. For instance, Vaughan (2002) has proposed that spiritual intelligence improves with increased openness and the ability to empathise with broad points of view. It will also improve with greater sensitivity to and experience of delicate realities such as transcendent states and spirit scopes. Spiritual intelligence will also improve with deeper comprehension of mythical, symbolic, and archetypal manifestations of the unfolding of consciousness. Hence, from this point of view, an open and contemplative mindset that tolerates uncertainty, paradox, and mystery, is beneficial to the growth of spiritual intelligence, whereas a rigid, closed, and definitive acceptance of a particular belief system may hinder its development (Noble, 2000; Sisk & Torrance, 2001).

In fact, as mentioned earlier, open mindedness has been identified as both a contributing factor to and result of the development of spiritual intelligence (Noble, 2001; Zohar & Drake, 2000). In this case, it may be said that the development of spiritual intelligence follow the path of Fowler's (1995) stages of faith development, which show the progress from spiritual immaturity to maturity and from another aspect, commitment to any selected spiritual practice has also been said to very much ease the growth of spiritual intelligence. Such practices may include prayer, contemplation, self-reflection, yoga, meditation, psychotherapy, charitable service to others, and entering periods of silence or solitude (Vaughan, 2002). Spiritual or mystical experiences are also able to play a significant role in the development of spiritual intelligence, especially if they happen in a supportive and grounding setting which eases their combination into everyday life. If the physical, psychological, and interpersonal effect of these experiences is contemplated and acknowledged, they can have a positive transformative effect on the individual's psychological functioning and well-being (Noble, 2001; Vaughan, 2002).

SQ is a set of abilities like awareness, synthesis, purpose, service and acceptance. Hence, using these abilities in our life can help us to outgrow our immediate ego selves and to reach beyond those deeper layers of potentiality that lie hidden within us. It helps us to live life at a deeper level of meaning. Finally, we can use our SQ to wrestle with problems of good and evil, problems of life

and death, the deepest origins of human suffering, and often despair. Too often, we try to rationalize such problems away, or else we become emotionally swamped or devastated by them (Zohar, 2000).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that some of the abilities and qualities of spiritual intelligence such as wisdom, self-awareness, creative reasoning, integrity, compassion, and asking 'why' questions (Sisk & Torrance, 2001; Zohar & Drake, 2000), can be argued to be relevant to a much broader range of problems and issues apart from existential or spiritual matters (Emmons, 2000). They may, for example, be applied to the conceptualisation and resolution of relationship problems, and may also be used in work contexts for planning and formulating company policies and mission statements (Bowell, 2005).

ADOLESCENCE STAGE

The adolescence period is the best time to develop positive emotions and training skills because adolescents are seeking to find their identity and their future personality at this period (Bar-on, 2000). Adolescence as a formative stage plays a significant role in the study of psychopathology because after this maturational interval, it is difficult to change some behavioural and emotional patterns. Youth mostly are spiritually disconnected. This is the complaint of many concerned adults who sense that problems among young people are growing greater, and even those young people growing up in 'religious' homes are among the victims of a number of social ills. The disconnect causes young

people learning religion but not practicing it, not realizing it, and not having it influenced their lives in a meaningful way. In fact, the disconnect occurs between the knowledge that they are receiving and that knowledge translating into meaningful actions, and positive, healthy human and spiritual development. Youth researchers across the globe acknowledge the war of values taking place inside the hearts and minds of young people. Youth are in desperate need of the skills, knowledge and competencies to moderate the worldliness of our age with the understanding that can only come from the wisdom and applies spirituality, also known as spiritual intelligence (Abdul Lateef, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of training on spiritual intelligence among adolescents. Hence, this is a quasi-experimental study based upon the non-equivalent Groups Design, as suggested by Campbell and Stanley (1963). Table 1 shows the Quasi experimental design utilized in the study.

The quasi-experimental designs are commonly employed in the evaluation of educational programs when random assignment is not possible or practical. For quasi-experiments, the groups are equivalent on a set of pre-test measures and demographic measures. For this research, a sample group was chosen according to pre-test result. The scale used in this study was an adaptation of the Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) by Amram and Dryer in 2007. This survey was conducted among Iranian adolescent girls who are living in Malaysia and studying in an Iranian school (about 120 subjects). In this study, the pilot test was, first, administered to 30 students, and the results of the pilot test were then analyzed and the reliability of the scale was measured. Based on the findings of the pilot test, the lowest scored subscale in ISIS scale was included in the training programme. Then, the pre-test was carried out among the population of 90 students (those 30 students taking part in the pilot study were excluded). This was following by selecting 34 students scoring the lowest in SQ test as the sample of the

TABLE 1
Research design

Groups	pre-test	treatment	post-test	Follow-up test
Experimental group	O1	X	O2	O3
Control group	O4	-	O5	O6

- O1 : The pre-test for measuring SQ in experimental group conducted before the treatment.
- X : SI-G (spiritual intelligence-gratitude) training in 5 sessions for the experimental group.
- O2 : The post-test conducted after 5 sessions for the experimental group.
- O3 : The follow-up test conducted after 3 weeks to evaluate the sustainability of the results in the experimental group
- O4 : The pre-test conducted for measuring SQ in the control group
- : The control group did not experience any treatment programme
- O5 : The post-test conducted among the control group after 5 sessions.
- O6 : The follow-up test conducted for the control group after 3 weeks for evaluating the sustainability of the results

study who were later randomly divided into two groups comprising of 17 students in the experimental group and 17 students in the control group.

Five training sessions were planned for the experimental group. The duration of each session was about 130 minutes per week. Therefore, it took about two months to complete the training program. After 5 sessions, a post-test was conducted among the two groups and the achieved data were analysed to evaluate the effect of the training. After 3 weeks, the same Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) was administered as a follow up test to the control and experimental groups in order to study the results of the training stability after that duration.

Scoring Procedure

The scoring procedure in this instrument was based on a six-point Likert scale with 1 (never, or almost never) to 6 (always, or almost always). If the overall mean of the participant's ISIS score is above 4.30, it indicates a greater spiritual intelligence; conversely, if the overall raw score of the participant falls below 4.30, it indicates a lower degree of spiritual intelligence.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Dr. Yosi Amram and Dr. Hristopher Dryer developed and conducted the preliminary validation of a measure of spiritual intelligence (SI), the Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS). SI is explained as the ability to use, show and embody spiritual resources, values, and qualities to

develop routine operating and well-being. ISIS is an 83-item long form, and a 45-item short form, self-report instrument. ISIS has shown satisfactory factor structure, internal consistency, test-retest reliability and construct validity. It includes 22 subscales evaluating separate SI potentialities related to Beauty, Discernment, Egolessness, Freedom, Gratitude, Higher-self, Holism, Immanence, Inner-wholeness, Intuition, Joy, Mindfulness, Openness, Practice, Presence, Purpose, Relatedness, Sacredness, Service, Synthesis, and Trust.

In order to assess the internal consistency of the scale and subscales, Amram and Dryer (2007) calculated Cronbach's Alpha. The internal consistency of the Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale was high, with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.97.

Training Programme

For this research, the researcher designed 5 sessions of training for spiritual intelligence: 4 sessions for training spiritual intelligence according to Howell's programme (2005) and 1 session for training gratitude because according to the results analysis of the pilot test, it has shown the lowest score among the subscales. As experiencing and expressing gratitude does not come naturally (Miller, 2006), it needs training and fortunately, many individuals have described specific exercises for promoting gratitude (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005; Miller & Nickerson, in press) which were used by the researcher for designing the training programme. The researcher chose SI-G (spiritual intelligence – gratitude) as a

name for this programme and it includes 5 sessions. The total duration of the programme was five weeks and it had each session in one week. Each session includes two hours and ten minutes break between them. In this study, the training programme was conducted during the school hours.

In the first session, the activities were as follows:

1. Students get to know each other through an ice breaking session
2. Students discuss about factors that help people to become successful and satisfied in their life.
3. Students are able to increase their awareness about each situation.

The trainer presented an introduction to get them ready for discussion on related topics. The trainer started a group discussion with examples and students participate. After that, the trainer asked for students' ideas regarding the subject during the group discussion. This takes about 30 minutes. After that, the trainer summarizes the discussion and draws a chart on the board, writes the important points and then explains about the exercises which the students should accomplish prior to and for the next session.

In the second session, the following objectives were set:

1. Students are able to find the meaning of each situation in their life.
2. Students are able to evaluate situations with open minds and listen to another person without judgment.

3. Students are able to use proper expressions for evaluation.

For the third session, the trainer set the following objectives:

1. Students will be able to manage time for every situation according to the importance of each situation in their life.
2. Students will be able to understand the reason that they are doing certain activities.
3. Students will be able to consider all the aspects of each situation.

Objectives for the fourth session were:

1. Students will be able to write short-term and long-term aims in their life.
2. Students will be able to discipline themselves by following simple rules daily.
3. Students will be able to explain their mission in the world.

In the fifth session, the objectives were:

- Students will be able to list the things that they should be grateful for them (from God and people)
- Students will be able to use proper expressions for gratitude.

All the sessions followed a similar structure as follows:

1. Introduction or Review
2. Presentation/Discussion/Activity
3. Practice
4. Homework

The students in the control group as usual had one session each week on life skills training. It includes skills for saying No, skills for enhancing the relationship among friends, skills for having a purpose in life (short aims and long aims), skills for creating better relationship with parents, and skills for improving self-control.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as mean scores and standard deviation, was used to describe the demographic profiles of the respondents and also to describe the information of SQ and its subscales in the pre-test and post-test for the experimental and control groups. In order to determine the effect of training on increasing SQ and its subscales, the t-test was used to compare the experimental group from the control group.

FINDINGS

According to the results presented in Table 2, the total student's spiritual intelligence (SQ) demonstrated that the students in the control group had low SQ in the pre-test (SQ= 3.95) and post-test (SQ=4.08) based on the scoring of the ISIS by Amram and Dryer. If the total mean for the SQ is below 4.30, it is considered as low SQ.

The findings of the study showed that the other subscales also have low means, with the lowest score is for gratitude in the pre-test (M=2.65) and post-test (M=3.03). The highest score is the practice factor in the pre-test (M=4.44) and post-test (M=4.41), and this is a good point that could be of help in the course of the training programme.

Table 3 presents the descriptive information of the students' SQ and its subscales in the experimental group before the training programme and after the training. As for the experimental group, gratitude had the lowest score (M=2.75) in the pre-test, while practice had the highest mean score of 4.50. The mean SQ was 3.96, and all the means of the subscales in the group were lower than 4.30. Overall, the results of the pre-test in this group are similar to the results of the pre-test in the control group, which means, all the subscales are weak.

After the training, the analysis on the distribution of mean scores demonstrated that the mean SQ was 4.80. Table 3 indicates that self-acceptance, as a subscale, had the highest mean score of 5.07, while most of the subscales had a mean score higher than 4.30. In comparison with the pre-test scores, the study discovered the difference between the mean scores in the subscales. Most of the mean scores for the subscales were increased. Gratitude, with the lowest mean in the pre-test, was improved after the training session (M=4.79).

Table 4 reveals the results of the t-test for the control group. Though the control group did not receive any training in the field of spiritual intelligence, at the same time, they received regular training on life skills and religious lessons from the school. The findings revealed that the purpose subscale with ($t = 2.40, p < .05$) has changed considering its mean (M=0.47), which is an improvement. Thus, regular training in schools maybe effective on the

TABLE 2

Descriptive information of SQ and its subscales according to the results of the pre-test and post-test for the control group

Variables	N	Mean pre test	ST.DV Pre test	Mean post test	ST.DV Post test
SQ	16	3.95	0.21	4.08	.25
Awareness	16	4.34	0.77	4.36	.68
Synthesis	16	4.15	0.77	3.95	.49
Beauty	16	3.82	0.94	4.13	.95
Gratitude	16	2.65	0.83	3.03	1.06
Joy	16	4.11	0.99	4.50	.74
Discernment	16	4.23	0.76	4.15	.67
Freedom	16	3.70	0.53	3.96	.65
Purpose	16	3.65	0.70	4.12	.41
Service	16	4.04	1.03	4.00	.94
Embodiment	16	3.97	0.49	3.81	.60
Intuition	16	4.07	0.68	3.99	.73
Acceptance	16	3.14	0.69	3.65	.81
Mindfulness	16	3.37	0.79	3.23	.90
Optimism	16	3.61	0.61	3.58	.63
Peacefulness	16	3.53	0.76	3.76	.80
Self acceptance	16	3.76	0.70	3.69	.74
Holism	16	4.12	0.97	4.00	.72
Relatedness	16	3.95	0.91	4.30	.99
Sacredness	16	3.74	0.67	4.06	.72
High self	16	4.09	0.57	3.98	.48
Practice	16	4.44	0.45	4.41	.47
Egoless	16	3.98	0.61	4.27	.85

purpose subscale but not on SQ (as a whole) or its other subscales. Overall, most of the subscales had $p > .05$, so generally there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test in the control group.

According to the data presented in Table 5, the data obtained from the t-test for the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group indicated that the training programme had a significant effect on the relationship

between SIG training and SQ ($t = 8.49$, $p < .0001$). The results suggested that there were significant differences between most of the subscales mean score in the pre-test and post-test. This means the training had effects on most of the subscales. Gratitude, with the mean value of 2.04 ($t = 7.42$, $p < .0001$) had the largest effect by training as compared to the other subscales.

TABLE 3
Descriptive information of SQ and its subscales according to the results of the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group

Variables	N	Mean Pre test	ST.DV Pre test	Mean Post test	ST.DV post test
SQ	16	3.96	0.25	4.80	.32
Awareness	16	4.22	0.73	4.78	.57
Synthesis	16	4.21	0.67	4.79	.81
Beauty	16	4.13	0.61	4.76	.74
Gratitude	16	2.75	0.87	4.79	.58
Joy	16	4.00	0.57	4.85	.77
Discernment	16	4.12	0.71	4.55	.86
Freedom	16	3.85	0.86	4.51	.95
Purpose	16	4.07	0.72	4.71	.98
Service	16	4.20	0.97	4.55	.83
Embodiment	16	3.92	0.67	4.56	.88
Intuition	16	3.93	0.65	4.63	.85
Acceptance	16	3.50	0.67	4.71	.90
Mindfulness	16	3.28	0.85	4.64	.85
Optimism	16	3.67	0.96	4.76	1.04
Peacefulness	16	3.70	1.06	4.86	.78
Self acceptance	16	3.53	0.73	5.07	.75
Holism	16	3.96	0.89	4.83	.84
Relatedness	16	4.49	0.83	4.97	.86
Sacredness	16	4.08	0.50	4.86	.61
High self	16	4.12	0.86	4.45	1.17
Practice	16	4.50	0.53	4.91	.84
Egoless	16	4.19	0.75	4.51	.76

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings suggested several issues for consideration. SI-G training programme can enhance spiritual intelligence quotient. In fact, spiritual intelligence is not an innate quality, it is changeable. Secondly, for the design of a training programme, it is better to focus on the subscales which have the lowest scores; for example, when the subjects showed low scores in gratitude, they were given more input for gratitude

training. In addition, it can help respondents in managing time and getting the best results from the training programme. Finally, it is better to continue the training programme for more than five sessions until the students have completely learned how to practice and continue the exercise in their homes.

This study was designed to investigate the effect of training on spiritual intelligence quotient among Iranian girls adolescents. In fact, some researchers, such as Noble (2000), Vaughan (2002) and Bowell (2004),

TABLE 4
The results of the t-test between the pre-test and post test for the control group

Variables	N	Mean	t value	p
SQ	16	0.12	1.36	0.19
Awareness	16	0.02	0.09	0.92
Synthesis	16	-0.19	-0.87	0.39
Beauty	16	0.30	0.93	0.36
Gratitude	16	0.28	0.81	0.43
Joy	16	0.39	1.71	0.10
Discernment	16	-0.07	-0.36	0.72
Freedom	16	0.26	1.23	0.23
Purpose	16	0.47	2.40	0.03
Service	16	-0.04	-0.11	0.91
Embodiment	16	-0.15	-0.77	0.45
Intuition	16	-0.07	-0.29	0.77
Acceptance	16	0.51	1.80	0.09
Mindfulness	16	-0.13	-0.56	0.58
Optimism	16	-0.02	-0.16	0.87
Peacefulness	16	0.23	0.75	0.46
Self acceptance	16	0.06	-0.37	0.71
Holism	16	0.11	-0.51	0.62
Relatedness	16	0.35	1.36	0.19
Sacredness	16	0.31	1.56	0.14
High self	16	-0.10	-0.45	0.65
Practice	16	0.03	-0.17	0.86
Egoless	16	0.30	1.45	0.16

have suggested that with training, SQ can be changed. However, currently there is no experimental research to ascertain this particular assumption. According to the role of spiritual intelligence, researchers have suggested that spiritual beliefs, commitments, and practices were related to positive outcomes such as physical, emotional, psychological well-being, positive interpersonal functioning, marital satisfaction, stability and enhanced quality

of life (Hintikka, 2001; Roth, 1988; Seybold & Hill, 2001).

A contributory factor to these positive outcomes may be having a spiritual orientation toward life that protects human beings from undesirable and maladaptive behaviours such as acting in personally or socially destructive ways (Emmons, 2000). On the other hand, youth researchers across the globe acknowledge the war of values taking place inside the hearts and

TABLE 5
The results of the t-test between the pre-test and post-test for the Experimental group

Variables	N	Mean	t value	p
SQ	16	0.83	8.49	<.0001
Awareness	16	0.56	2.47	0.02
Synthesis	16	0.58	1.94	0.07
Beauty	16	0.63	2.51	0.02
Gratitude	16	2.04	7.42	.00
Joy	16	0.85	3.37	0.00
Discernment	16	0.42	2.00	0.06
Freedom	16	0.66	2.20	0.04
Purpose	16	0.63	2.16	0.04
Service	16	0.24	0.83	0.41
Embodiment	16	0.63	2.58	0.02
Intuition	16	0.70	2.35	0.03
Acceptance	16	1.21	4.57	0.00
Mindfulness	16	1.36	4.48	0.00
Optimism	16	1.09	3.83	0.00
Peacefulness	16	1.16	2.80	0.01
Self acceptance	16	1.53	4.98	0.00
Holism	16	0.86	2.62	0.02
Relatedness	16	0.46	2.04	0.06
Sacredness	16	0.77	4.83	0.00
High self	16	0.36	1.16	0.26
Practice	16	0.01	0.07	0.94
Egoless	16	0.72	2.96	0.00

minds of young people. Youths are in desperate need of skills, knowledge, and competencies to moderate the worldliness of their age with the understanding that can only come from the wisdoms accrued from spiritual intelligence (Abdul Lateef, 2009). Hence, the current research can provide a programme for the development of spiritual intelligence among adolescents.

In addition, evaluating the result in pre-test aided the understanding of the sample of the study and the improvement that was needed in the training programme of the sample. One of the regular training programmes in high schools in Iran is life skills. It includes the skills for saying No, skills for enhancing the relationship among friends, skills for having a purpose

in life (short aims and long aims), skills for creating better relationship with parents, as well as skills for improving self-control.

The five sessions of life skills training for the control group had effects on purpose, but they did not have any effect on SQ and the other subscales. However, students in the experimental group who had participated in the SI-G training programme for five sessions were found to have improved in SQ and all the subscales.

Therefore, in improving SQ, students training must be tailored according to their weaknesses, so that life skills training or regular training in school like religious training cannot affect SQ or its subscales. When the researcher conducted a follow up test after three weeks from the post-test to assess the sustainability of training, the results demonstrated that the score of SQ and some of its subscales decreased as compared to the post-test. Though the decrease was not much when compared to the results of the follow-up test and the pre-test, the study revealed a significant difference between the score of SQ and its subscales. In line with the above, the study concluded that SI-G training had effects even after the training.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicated that the skills training was most effective in improving Spiritual intelligence and its subscales. Hence it is recommended that schools, family and community introduce programs such as skills training to help students. Parents can participate in school

based centres in programs which help them to be aware of the importance of skills training for their children.

The study revealed that spiritual intelligence is a necessary prerequisite in the development of a normal adolescent. Hence the present study complemented the works of earlier scholars on the concept of spiritual intelligence since it demonstrated that SQ is a trait which can be learned. In other words the result of this study reveal an actual dimension of Spiritual Intelligence Theory which highlights the capability of SQ as a training source to improve the quality of life and general well being especially for adolescents.

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