

**EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS’  
SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the spiritual intelligence level of teachers employed in government secondary schools in Malaysia, based on selected demographic variables. The sample of the study comprised 203 teachers. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant difference between teachers’ gender and their spiritual intelligence, but differences were also evident between teachers’ age groups and their spiritual intelligence. Furthermore, a significant relationship was noted between teachers’ spiritual intelligence and the six strategies of classroom discipline, including discussion, recognition, involvement, hinting, punishment, and aggression.

**Keywords:** Teachers’ Spiritual Intelligence, Classroom Discipline Strategies, age, gender.

***ABSTRACTO***

*El propósito de este estudio fue analizar el nivel de inteligencia espiritual de maestros empleados en escuelas secundarias en Malasia, basado en variables geográficas seleccionadas. La muestra para este estudio consistió de 203 maestros. Los hallazgos de este estudio demuestran que hay una diferencia significativa entre el género de los maestros y la inteligencia espiritual, pero también hubo diferencias entre el grupo de edades de los maestros y su inteligencia espiritual. Además, se notó una relación significativa entre la inteligencia espiritual de los maestros y las seis estrategias de la disciplina en el salón de clases, incluyendo la discusión, el reconocimiento, el involucramiento, el atisbo, el castigo y la agresión.*

***Palabras clave:*** *Inteligencia espiritual de los maestros, Estrategias de disciplina en el salón de clases, edad, género.*

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## **Introduction**

Behavior management is a set of interactions employed to assist teachers to influence the students’ behavior and teach them to act positively. These interactions are developed not only to reduce teacher’s stress but to help these professionals and the students to establish social climates of cooperation, a setting in which children and adults can learn together, play together, and build quality relationships (Danforth & Boyle, 2007). Successful behavior management does not rely merely on knowledge for behavioral change. It also calls for realizing the environmental setting of behavior. In the past decade, discipline was considered the main problem in classrooms for teachers (Chiodo & Chang, 2000). Teachers accepted the fact that disciplinary problems are becoming an epidemic

phenomenon in public schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996; Rose & Gallup, 2004).

Many teachers have been reported to have quit schools because of frequent problems of classroom disruption (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Disciplinary problems have long been recognized as a major issue in schools (Edwards, 2008). Classroom discipline management refers to control of time and behavior of students as well as of teachers in a classroom setting (Fredrick, Deitz, Bryceland, & Hummel, 2000). Classroom discipline management involves teachers encouraging positive social interactions as well as active management in learning and self-motivation. They shape a positive learning society in which the students are actively engaged in individual learning process and classroom management. They establish the physical climate, control students' behavior, establish an environment full of respect, ease instruction, create safety and wellness, and communication with others when required. All of these issues are related to classroom discipline management, the major goal of which is to establish a positive learning environment and take steps to maintain this positive climate by directing and correcting students' behavior (Burden & Byrd, 2002). This study is focused on the narrow view of classroom behavior management, which includes managing students' behavior in the classroom, as well as promoting and maintaining appropriate student behavior. The tactics teachers use to manage student behavior are referred to as classroom discipline or behavior management (Charles, 2008). It encompasses activities by teachers, ranging from instructional strategies to manipulation of environmental variables (e.g., arrangement of desks in the classroom) to procedures required to respond towards disruptive behaviors.

The methods used by teachers to control students' behavior are referred to as discipline or behavior management (Charles, 2008). In other words, classroom discipline is commonly referred to as actions taken by teachers in response to students' misbehavior (Lewis, 1997). It involves organizing suitable lessons, showing new content as well as assigning proper practical activities (Hunter, 1982). Teachers are expected to be able to create a non-disruptive classroom environment (Doyle, 1986).

There are three major points of view about classroom discipline, each supporting special tactics (Burden, 2003; Lewis, 1997; Wolfgang, 1995). Firstly, some psychologists argue that to encourage responsibility among children, the teachers should set up obvious expectations for their students' behavior and then fairly use a range of rewards and support for good behavior as well as punishments for misbehavior (Canter & Canter, 2002; Swinson & Melling, 1995). According to this point of view, children are viewed as being molded by the impacts received from the environment. Other researchers are of the view that this objective could only be achieved by placing less stress on students' obedience and teacher's force, and more on students' self-regulation. The teacher has the responsibility to structure the classroom environment to make the students at ease and have control over their own behavior (Burden, 2003).

The third approach supports group participation and decision making, in which the group is responsible for the behavior of its members (Edwards & Mullis, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Hence control of the students' behavior is a shared responsibility between both the students and the teacher. Teachers who believe in moderate control advocate the student-oriented psychology, which is manifested in the

low control philosophy, but they also recognize that learning occurs in a group environment (Burden, 2003).

It is important to study how teachers promote classroom discipline and limit or reduce disruptive behavior of students. Scholars believe that high intelligent quotient (IQ) does not necessarily guarantee success in a person's life (Goleman, 1997). It is not responsible for the differences beyond personality factors and characteristics (Mehrabian, 2000). Hence, other forms of 'intelligence' were investigated (Goleman, 1997). Spiritual intelligence is yet an effective element in classroom discipline management. Zohar and Marshall (2000) were of the view that when the level of spiritual intelligence is high, we are in contact with our wholeness. Our personality traits reflect our inner self and we tend to be intellectual and develop proper behavior. When the level of our spiritual intelligence is low, we become caricatures of ourselves. Our feelings and emotional models are not stable and we experience difficult behavior patterns. This intelligence also increases with age and is not linked to any religion. Amram and Dryer's spiritual intelligence theory (2007) is the most widely known and related. It has guided extensive research on behavior management. There are a substantial number of studies that have looked at how spirituality may have an impact on mental health and behavior (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). According to (Amram & Dryer, 2007), this theory of spiritual intelligence has a positive effect on teachers' well-being.

Donahue and Benson (1995) mentioned that there are supporting findings to indicate that increased participation in spiritual activity is strongly related to a higher well-being, lower level of delinquency, misbehavior and other social problems (Compton, 2005). This study attempts to assess the relationship between teachers'

perceived spiritual intelligence and their classroom discipline strategies. It is assumed that teachers who have low perceived classroom discipline strategies might also be less spiritually intelligent and vice versa. Therefore, they need to be assisted to identify their strengths and develop their spiritual intelligence and classroom discipline strategies.

Recent research has suggested that spiritual beliefs, commitments, and activities appear to be connected to psychological well-being, positive interpersonal functioning and stability, and better quality of life (Seybold & Hill, 2001). A factor playing a significant role in such positive consequences might be adoption of a spiritual approach towards life, which protects against unwanted and maladaptive behavior, such as acting in personally or socially destructive ways (Emmons, 2000). Teachers in schools may have different demographic profiles. Therefore, in this study, it was necessary to compare the spiritual intelligence level of teachers with respect to their gender and ages.

The main objective of the study was to analyze the teachers' spiritual intelligence and their classroom discipline strategies in secondary schools in Selangor State of Malaysia. The spiritual intelligence level of teachers is important for teachers and students communication and to improve classroom discipline strategies. To comprehend spiritual intelligence and classroom discipline strategies, there is a need to carry out a comparative study between teachers and students' perceptions and demographic variables. According to Rahimah and Norani (1997), among the disciplinary problems faced in Malaysian schools are crimes, immoral conduct, untidiness, truancy, disrespect for others and maladjustment with the school environment. Bullying, violence and maladjustment are also becoming an increasing phenomenon.

The main objective of the study is to exploring the relationship between teachers' spiritual intelligence and classroom discipline strategies in secondary schools in Selangor state in Malaysia. The specific objectives of the study involve examining the relationship between classroom discipline strategies and level of teachers' spiritual intelligence, possible differences between the level of teachers' spiritual intelligence and teachers of different genders, as well as investigating any difference between the level of teachers' spiritual intelligence and teachers of different age group.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The quantitative approach is applied in this study. This study is designed to use a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationship between classroom discipline strategies as a dependent variable, and teachers' spiritual intelligence as the independent variable.

### *Sample*

The target population for this study was secondary school teachers. However the accessible population was level two and level four teachers in secondary school. This study employed the multi-stage sampling procedures: random sampling and cluster sampling. To obtain the required number of samples, two moderate classes (one class level two and one class level four) were chosen from each school. Level two and level four teachers were included in the study, because they are in different groups and may have different and may also have used different strategies. Once the class is identified,

about 10 teachers teaching different subjects in the class were selected. This is based on cluster sampling where each teacher teaching the selected class was included as sample for the study. Based on this method, 203 teachers were chosen. Moreover, a sample size of 180, based on Cohen table (1992) is considered sufficient to answer all the research questions that required the use of mean, standard deviation, percentage, Pearson 'r', t-test and ANOVA. The sample was chosen according to government secondary school types (public) and region.

### **Measures**

Three instruments were used to collect data from the respondents. They are:

#### *Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) Amram and Dryer*

In 2007, Amram and Dryer developed a spiritual intelligence questionnaire. The spiritual intelligence scale comprises 45 items. A six-point Likert scale was developed to address the seven dimensions of spiritual intelligence; rarely or almost never; very infrequently; somewhat infrequently, somewhat often; very frequently; and always or almost always. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the items about spiritual intelligence. The scale has a Cronbach alpha of .83.

#### *Classroom Discipline Strategies based on Students' Perception*

To measure classroom discipline strategies, the researcher made use of Lewis's 24 item questionnaire (Lewis et al., 2005). These 24 items were accepted by researchers in different countries to assess the six discipline strategies reported in this study (for any one item, there were four questions). The strategies measured were punishment, reward or recognition, involvement in decision-making, hinting, discussion and aggression.



Examination of a number of discipline texts (Charles, 2008; Lewis, 1997; Tauber, 2007; Wolfgang, 1995) indicated that one or more of these strategies were seen as underlying most of the available approaches to classroom discipline. It would have been possible to utilize exploratory factor analysis on data sets from the point of view of nationality, to obtain assessments of discipline most appropriate to other countries (Australia and China). It would even have been possible to utilize confirmatory factor analyses and compare goodness of fit measures to examine the extent to which one particular measure applied equally to two national settings. The scale has a Cronbach alpha of .86.

#### *Classroom Discipline Strategies*

In 2009, Shlomo Romi developed this questionnaire. The questionnaire for classroom discipline strategies for teachers' perception comprises 25 items and six strategies. The strategies measured include punishment, reward or recognition, involvement in decision-making, hinting, discussion and aggression, all of which are based on teachers' perceptions. This questionnaire focused on teachers' perceptions on classroom discipline strategies. Examination of a number of discipline texts (Charles, 2008; Lewis, 1997; Tauber, 2007; Wolfgang, 1995) indicated that one or more of these strategies were the basis for most of the available approaches to classroom discipline. The scale has a Cronbach alpha of .076.

#### *Data Analyses*

SPSS version 17 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the relationship with respondents. Pearson correlation was used to examine the association between teachers' spiritual intelligence and classroom discipline strategies.

Independent sample t-test was used to examine gender differences, and ANOVA test was used to examine the different age groups.

## **Results**

### *Level of Teachers' Spiritual Intelligence*

The results in Table 1, displays the teachers' level of spiritual intelligence. The findings indicated that the majority of the respondents' spiritual intelligence scores were moderate (n = 129, 63.5%). The data also showed that 75 respondents (36.5%) had high spiritual intelligence scores, while none scored in the low level of spiritual intelligence. Based on the six-point Likert scale used in the survey instrument, the minimum score result was 3.22 and the maximum was 5.70, with a standard deviation of 0.36. The mean score for spiritual intelligence was 4.16 implying that the level of spiritual intelligence score was moderate.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents' Spiritual Intelligence Scores

Levels	Mean	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1.0 – 2.66	0	0
Moderate	2.67 – 4.30	129	63.5
High	4.31 – 6.00	75	36.5
Total		203	100.0
Mean = 4.16	Std. deviation = .36	Minimum = 3.22	Maximum = 5.57

### *Teachers' Gender*

An independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to compare the scores of spiritual intelligences between male and female teachers, and to identify whether there was significant differences between the two groups of teacher respondents. Table 2,

displays that 14.8% of the teachers in the study were males and 85.2% was females. The findings show that the mean score for males is 4.16 (Std .45), and for women is 4.16 (Std .34).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Spiritual Intelligence

Variable	Teacher Gender	N	Mean	S.D
Spiritual Intelligence	Male	30	4.16	.45
	Female	173	4.16	.34

The following table shows the Levene's test values for the assumption of equality of variances for spiritual intelligence ( $F = 4.75, p = .030$ ).

Table 3: Levene's Test Results for Spiritual Intelligence

Variables	Status of equality	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Spiritual Intelligence	Equal variances assumed	4.75	.030	.020	35.038	.984

The findings show that there were no significant differences between female and male teachers' perceptions of total spiritual intelligence [ $t(35.04) = .020, p = 0.98$ ].

### *Teachers' Age*

Table 4 shows that the age of participants' ranges from 24 to above 54. About 32 % are between the ages of 24 and 34, 42.4% between the ages of 35 and 44 and 25.6% e between the ages of 45 and 54.

Table 4: Comparison of Teachers' Spiritual Intelligence Across Age Groups

Variable	Age Group	N	Percentage	Mean	S.D	F	Sig.
Spiritual Intelligence	24-34	65	35	5.13	.54	23.81	.000
	35-44	86	42.4	5.32	.56		
	45-54	52	26.6	5.81	.48		

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. Table 5 shows the results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the means of spiritual intelligence ( $F(2, 200) = 22.80, P = .000$ ) across different age group.

Table 5: Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons for Age Groups

Dependent Variables	Age Group	Age group	Mean Difference	Sig
Spiritual intelligence	24 – 34	35 - 44	-.21	.000
		45 - 54	-.40	.000
		35 – 44	24 - 34	.21
	45 – 54	45 - 54	-.19	.002
		24 - 34	.40	.000
		35 - 44	.19	.002

### *Relationship between Teachers' Spiritual Intelligence and Their Classroom Discipline Strategies*

Table 6 displays the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between teachers' spiritual intelligence and their classroom discipline strategies. The data revealed

that the relationship between spiritual intelligence and six strategies of teachers' classroom discipline is significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$ . The results also revealed that there is a positive and linear relationship between four strategies of teachers' classroom discipline (discussion, recognition, involvement, hinting) and negative relationship between two strategies (punishment and aggression), by the teachers in the current research.

Table 6: Relationship between Teachers' Spiritual Intelligence and Teachers' Perception of Their Classroom Discipline Strategies

Variables	R	p
Punishment	-.297*	.000
Discussion	.648*	.000
Recognition or Reward	.556*	.000
Aggression	-.443*	.000
Involvement	.502*	.000
Hinting	.642*	.000

\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$

The strongest of positive linear relationship has been observed for discussion ( $r = .65$ ), followed by hinting ( $r = .65$ ), and recognition or reward ( $r = .56$ ). The strategy, involvement was observed to be moderately/positively correlated with spiritual strategy ( $r = .50$ ). However, the strategy, aggression showed negative and moderate correlation with spiritual intelligence ( $r = -.44$ ), followed by punishment ( $r = -.29$ ). All of these correlations were significant at  $p < 0.01$  level of significance.

## **Conclusion**

The results showed that there were no significant differences between teachers' gender and their spiritual intelligence. The findings of the current research are in line with Zohar and Marshal, (2004) and Amram and Dryers (2007). These researchers found that there were no significant differences in spiritual intelligence between male and female teachers. In this study too, the scores of female and male teachers were not significantly different. The findings also revealed that there was a significant difference between teachers' age and their spiritual intelligence. The findings of the research are supported by Zohar and Marshals (2000; 2004). These researchers found that human beings are born with a capability to have high levels of spiritual intelligence, and spiritual intelligence increases with age.

Statistically significant relationships were found between the six strategies of classroom discipline and teachers' spiritual intelligence. Positive relationships were found between teachers' spiritual intelligence and discussion, recognition or reward, and hinting, followed by involvement. A moderate negative relationship was established for aggression and low relationship for punishment and teachers' spiritual intelligence. The SUHAKAM journal in Malaysian Education (2008) stated that majority of the teachers and administrators agree that class teachers should be given the authority to cane students with serious disciplinary problems. However, Curwin and Mendler (1997) believed that teachers should punish students in private to allow students to maintain their dignity. In addition, McLeod, Fisher and Hoover (2003) stated that the purpose of negative reinforcement or punishment is to change misbehaviors, and not to torture students.

The findings of this study are also in line with Zohar and Marshall (2000) who believed that when the level of spiritual intelligence is high and we are in contact with our wholeness, we tend to develop intellectual and proper behavior. When the level of our spiritual intelligence is low, we become caricatures of ourselves. The findings of the current research support the findings of the study by Amram and Dryer (2007) who believed that having high level of spiritual intelligence means being able to apply the spirituality to create positive context and meaning to live a richer and more meaningful life. The findings of this research were also supported by Dincer (2007), who pointed out that spiritual intelligence is related to educators' behavior. He stated that, an educators' high level of spiritual intelligence play a significant role in preparing students of all age groups. The results of this study are also in line with Noble (2001) who suggested that high spiritual intelligence can contribute to psychological health and logical behavior. It is also supported by Emmons (2000) and Zohar and Marshal (2000), who stated that spiritual intelligence is a mechanism by which people can improve their overall quality of life.

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