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Mental Health, Spiritual Intelligence, and Academic Performance among Final-Year Agricultural Education Students in Malaysian Universities

Muhammad Kamal Aiman Baharin¹, Asilah Abdul Mutalib^{1,*}, Zalina Ismail¹, Shaibatul ' Islamiah Che Man², Fatin Nur Aqmar Ishak¹

¹ Department of Agricultural Science, Faculty of Technical and Vocational, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Perak, 35900, Malaysia

² Centre of Studies for Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Puncak Alam, 42300 Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Mental health and spiritual intelligence have emerged as important determinants of students' academic success in higher education. However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding their combined influence on agricultural education undergraduates in Malaysia. This study examined the relationships between mental health factors, spiritual intelligence, and academic performance among final-year Agricultural Science Education students from two Malaysian public universities. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving 80 final-year students selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that anxiety recorded the highest mean score among the mental health dimensions, whereas stress showed the lowest mean score. Within the spiritual intelligence construct, the relationship with God demonstrated the highest mean score, followed by relationships with others, religious practices, and life purpose and principles. Correlation analysis indicated that academic focus disruption, depression, and anxiety were significantly associated with academic performance, while stress showed no significant relationship. Furthermore, all dimensions of spiritual intelligence life purpose and principles, religious practices, relationships with others, and relationship with God were positively and significantly associated with academic performance. Among these factors, relationships with others and life purpose and principles exhibited the strongest associations with academic achievement. The study highlights the importance of fostering both psychological well-being and spiritual development to enhance students' academic outcomes. The findings provide empirical support for the integration of mental health interventions and holistic educational strategies aimed at strengthening students' resilience, well-being, and academic success in higher education institutions.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: asilah@ftv.upsi.edu.my

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1. Introduction

Mental health is not a foreign topic in society around the world. This issue is becoming increasingly acute occasionally, and it can affect every age group. Mental health is a person's ability to think, feel and act in the individual's daily life. According to Said [11], mental health also includes how an individual thinks, feels, and acts; it also refers to how an individual faces problem and overcomes the issues faced. As a potential teacher in the future, producing the best teacher needs to be formed from various physical and mental forms. Teachers who are not very skilled or knowledgeable in recognising mental health will also have an impact on those around them, namely the students at school.

Spiritual intelligence can be considered an individual's ability to find a deeper meaning and purpose in life and understand spiritual values such as wisdom, gratitude, and repentance. It involves self-awareness, a relationship with the environment, and a perception of a broader reality beyond the physical dimension. Individuals with high spiritual intelligence tend to seek growth and development in spiritual aspects, not just the fulfilment of physical or emotional needs.

Academic performance is a matter that is highly emphasised by every society in achieving the required mastery grade. According to Samsudin and Tan [15], academic performance is one of the signals of a student's productivity and individuals with high productivity are essential to the country's development. In relation to that, this aspect of mental health and spiritual intelligence needs to be given more in giving birth to an excellent generation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mental Health

According to Basri [12], mental health is closely related to a person's mind. A healthy mind will show a good mental health response. Even so, physical condition is not related to mental health because a healthy body does not guarantee mental health or a good mind. He also stated that the best way to see a person's state of mental health is to observe the attitude and behaviour exhibited. Usually, those who have self-confidence, independence, perseverance and patience when facing a problem are individuals with healthy mental health.

2.1.1 Depression factor

According to Don [16], this disaster occurs when a human-to-human relationship or with the environment triggers feelings. Human life in this world is covered with two forms of feelings, which are feelings of happiness and feelings of sadness. When understood, this feeling alternates in human life just as day and night alternate in determining the day and time where this feeling is also called an "emotion" that can be felt by every human being regardless of age, gender, race and rank. His argument is that this aspect of depression has three categories of depression, namely personal depression, friend depression and community depression.

2.1.2 Anxiety factor

This anxiety disorder involves more than temporary anxiety or fear. Individuals with this disorder can get worse over time. According to Pekrun and Perry [14], high anxiety can increase academic pressure and reduce students' self-efficacy, thus hurting their academic performance. Individuals

who experience this anxiety will be accompanied by several negative feelings, such as nervousness, nervousness, fear, horror, worry, and apprehension as well as other negative feelings.

2.1.3 Stress factor

A study conducted by Abdullah *et al.*, [1] shows that stress is directly related to student academic performance. High stress often reduces students' learning ability and academic performance in higher education institutions. According to Acosta-Gonzaga [2] the pressure felt can hurt mental well-being, and the ability of students to overcome this pressure depends on the personal resources and social support available. The performance of individuals who suffer from this stress problem is found to be low, less effective and become increasingly ineffective.

2.2 Spiritual Intelligence

According to Aripin *et al.*, [4], spiritual intelligence makes people who are really strong intellectually, emotionally and spiritually and can bridge themselves and others. The matter explains that by understanding this spiritual intelligence, people or individuals will know themselves better-how something is to them. In the end it will educate and form a person who has good moral values such as good character and manifest it in everyday life.

2.2.1 Purpose and principles of life factor

Finding purpose and principles in life involves understanding what you value and what makes life meaningful for you. Guiding principles concisely summarise these values and the importance of aligning daily actions with what matters most. According to Routledge and FioRito [5] explains that meaning does not exist but must be created through responsibility and taking a role where others depend on you. Reflecting on significant life experiences can help identify your values and sources of meaning.

2.2.2 Religious practice factor

Religious practices include various activities and behaviours informed by religious beliefs, norms and values. These practices can include attending religious services, praying, wearing religious clothing or symbols, displaying religious objects, observing certain dietary rules, abstaining from certain activities, preaching and more. According to Knott [9] religious practices play an important role in the daily life of individuals, contributing to the formation of personal identity, congregational and community bonds, and improving personal performance.

2.2.3 Relationship with other people/surroundings factor

Relationships can take many forms, including family, friendship, romantic and professional relationships. A positive relationship is characterized by open communication, mutual interests, and balance in giving and receiving. According to the study Umberson and Montez [6], the quality of social relationships significantly affects physical health. Individuals with more positive social relationships showed better health outcomes, including lower blood pressure and improved immune system function.

2.2.4 Relationship with God factor

Relationship with God is a spiritual and religious concept that refers to interaction, communication, and closeness between individuals and God. This is an important aspect of many religions and belief systems worldwide. This relationship can be manifested in various forms, depending on religious traditions, personal beliefs, and spiritual practices. According to a study conducted by Van Cappellen *et al.*, [13], individuals who have a deep relationship with God also show higher life satisfaction. Factors such as gratitude and high self-acceptance play an important role in this relationship. The individual will indirectly give birth to a spiritual relationship that can help increase self-efficacy towards better achievement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research design is a process of planning a research or study that is used to answer research questions and achieve specific research objectives. This is also one of the first steps in scientific or scientific research. The design of this study is also one of the techniques or methods that will be used by the researcher to collect information - information that is needed in line with the title of the study. The information is used to identify whether the study's objectives have been achieved.

The research method chosen by the researcher is quantitative (Quantitative); the researcher has used the questionnaire method to obtain the necessary data among final year students majoring in Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI) and Bachelor of Science Education Agriculture at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). This quantitative survey method uses a questionnaire method that will be given to two experts from various fields, namely Education and Agricultural Science, to go through the process of validity and reliability. The results of this research present data in the form of descriptive research. The design of this study is descriptive because it is in line with the aim of this study which is to study the relationship between factors of mental health and spiritual intelligence on the academic performance of students in the final year of the Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and Bachelor Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Inferential statistics also evaluate the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

3.2 Population and sample

The population that is the main focus of this study consists of students in the two public universities, namely Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), which consists of final-year students (semesters 7 & 8). The two universities' involvement has involved 104 final-year students who will do teaching training in the coming semester. Constitutively, a population that shows certain measurements has a continuous variable with an infinite range. Inferential statistics will not be an issue if the researcher is able to use all individuals in the population to be studied. Using the entire population as a study subject allows for more accurate results because there is no sampling error. The sampling method that will be used in conducting this study is a simple random sampling method. According to Berawi [7] simple random sampling (simple random) is the most basic sampling and is the basis for other designs. The use of this sampling technique can ensure that each individual has the opportunity to be selected to represent the population. The meaning of having the chance explains that all the individuals that make up the population are selected without considering or ignoring other factors.

4. Data Analysis

Data is obtained descriptively using the content validity formula to analyze each data obtained through the "Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)". Analyzing this data is one of the important things in the study to see the results. Data analysis is also a stage where the collected data will be processed to answer all the problem formulations studied by the researcher.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Mental health analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the level of mental health, spiritual intelligence and academic performance. Table 1 shows statistics descriptive of mental health for both universities.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis for mental health

No	Sub - construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Stress	4.06%	0.7%	High
2	Academic Focus Disruption	4.09%	0.59%	High
3	Depression	4.18%	0.66%	High
4	Anxiety	4.19%	0.57%	High

The stress sub-construct got a mean amount of 4.06% and a standard deviation of 0.7%, the academic focus disorder sub-construct got a mean amount of 4.09% and a standard deviation of 0.59%, the depression sub-construct got a mean amount of 4.18% and a standard deviation of 0.66%, and the last sub-construct was anxiety with a mean amount of 4.19% with a standard deviation of 0.57%. The sub-construct under the mental health factor, which has the highest mean value, is anxiety (mean=4.19%), while the sub-construct, which has the lowest mean value, is stress (mean=4.06%).

4.1.1.1 Mental Health Analysis for each university (UPM and UPSI)

Figure 1 shows the mean value under the mental health factor sub-construct for students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at UPSI and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at UPM. UPSI data analysis shows that the mental health factor of anxiety has the highest mean value of 4.309 compared to other sub-constructs. While the pressure sub-construct shows the lowest mean value which is 4.1. Analysis of UPM student data shows that the mental health factor of depression has the highest mean value of 4.151 compared to other sub-constructs. While the pressure sub-construct showed the lowest mean value of 4.051.

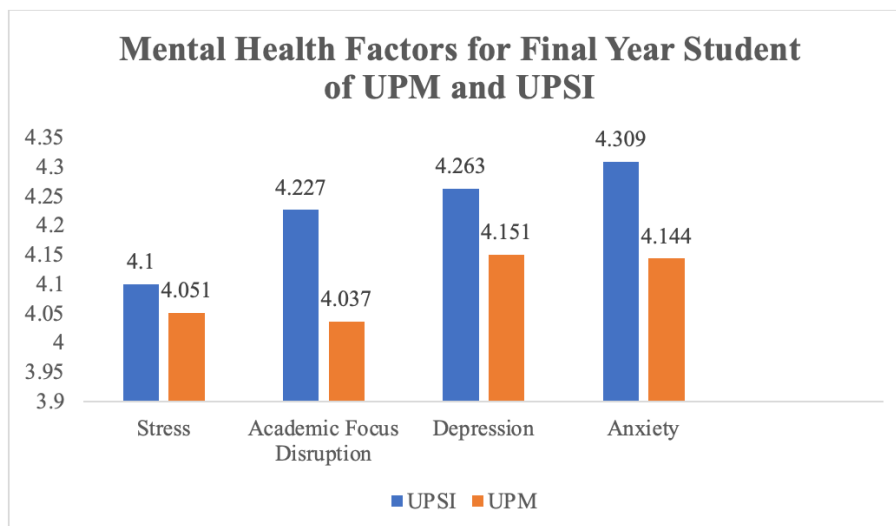


Fig. 1. Mental health factors for final year student of UPM and UPSI

4.1.2 Spiritual intelligence analysis

The purpose and principles of life sub-construct got a mean total of 4.42% and a standard deviation of 0.41%, the sub-construct of religious practices got a total of 4.46% and a standard deviation of 0.4%, the sub-construct of relationships with other people/surroundings got a mean amount of 4.49% and a standard deviation of 0.38% and the sub-construct of relationships and belief in God has a mean of 4.65% and a standard deviation of 0.31% (Table 2). The sub-construct under the spiritual intelligence factor, which has the highest mean score value, is relationship and belief in God (mean 4.65%), while the sub-construct, which has the lowest mean score value, is purpose and life principles. (mean = 4.42%).

Table 2

Descriptive analysis for spiritual intelligence

No	Sub - construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Purpose and Principles of Life	4.42%	0.41%	High
2	Religious Practice	4.47%	0.4%	High
3	Relationship with others/surrounding	4.50%	0.38%	High
4	Relationship with God	4.65%	0.31%	High

4.1.2.1 Spiritual Intelligence for each university (UPM and UPSI)

Figure 2 shows the mean value under the sub-construct of the spiritual intelligence factor for students in the final year of the Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at UPSI Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at UPM. Analysis of UPSI data shows that the spiritual intelligence factor of relationships and belief in God has the highest mean value of 4.763. While the sub-construct of religious practices shows the lowest mean value of 4.463. Analysis of UPM data shows that the spiritual intelligence factor of relationships and belief in God has the highest mean value of 4.763. While the sub-construct of religious practices shows the lowest mean value of 4.463.

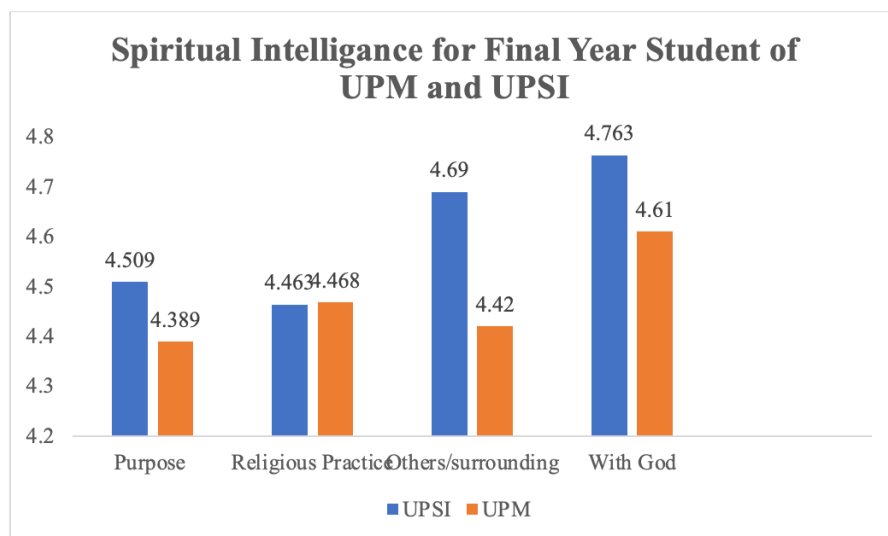


Fig.2. Spiritual intelligence for final year students of UPM and UPSI

4.1.3 Academic performance analysis

For academic performance after the analysis was done, the item with the highest mean score value was item D20 (mean 4.72%, SP= 0.45%), which is "I always monitor my performance in every test or assignment to identify my strengths and weaknesses in knowledge agriculture". The frequency value for this item is 58 respondents (72.5%) who strongly agree and 22 respondents (27.5%) who agree. The item with the lowest mean score value is D13 (mean 4.1%, SP= 0.9%): "I will meet with an academic counsellor or study guidance specialist if I experience difficulties in learning". The frequency value for this item is that 33 respondents (41.3%) strongly agree, 26 respondents (32.5%) agree, 17 respondents (21.3%) are unsure, and 4 respondents disagree.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The collected data has been analyzed quantitatively to answer all the hypotheses that have been built. The constructed hypothesis is to see the relationship between the dependent and independent variables being tested as presented in Table 3. All the hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Correlation method.

Table 3

The correlation analysis

Independent Variable (IV)	Dependent Variable (DV): Academic Performance	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Mental Health		
- Stress	0.062	0.583
- Academic Focus Disruption	0.235*	0.036
- Depression	0.290**	0.009
- Anxiety	0.309**	0.005
Spiritual Intelligence		
- Purpose and Principles of life	0.488**	<.001
- Religious Practice	0.320**	0.004
- Relationship with others/surrounding	0.515**	<.001
- Relationship with God	0.244*	0.029

Correlation analysis shows that there is no relationship between mental health factors (stress) and the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = .062$, $p = .583$. There is a relationship between mental health (academic focus disorder) and the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.235$, $p = .036$. There is a relationship between mental health (depression) and the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.290$, $p = .009$. There is a relationship between mental health (anxiety) and the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.309$, $p = .005$. Showing that there is a relationship between spiritual intelligence (purpose and principles of life) on the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.488$, $p = <.001$. There is a relationship between spiritual intelligence (religious practice) and the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Sultan Idris University of Education and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.320$, $p = 0.004$. There is a relationship between spiritual intelligence (relationship with other people/surroundings) and the academic achievement of students in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.515$, $p = <.001$. There is a relationship between spiritual intelligence (relationship with God) and students' academic achievement in the final year of Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Sultan Idris University of Education and Bachelor of Agricultural Science Education at Universiti Putra Malaysia $r = 0.244$, $p = 0.029$.

5. Discussion

Anxiety factor shows the highest mean among these sub-constructs, which is item B19, "I find it difficult to calm myself even with relaxation techniques", recorded the highest mean score (4.4). Anxiety can cause students to feel restless and find it difficult to concentrate in class. Students with anxiety may worry about being judged by peers and lecturers, which can prevent them from interacting and asking questions during class. This can cause students to lag behind in learning and low academic performance. Students who experience high anxiety tend to show lower academic performance. A study by Yusoff [17] shows that anxiety and depression have a high correlation with low academic performance among university students in Malaysia.

Belief in God is the basis of spiritual intelligence for most students. A high score on item C19, "I am sure that God will help me when I am in trouble" (mean=4.77, SP=0.45), shows students' confidence in God's help in facing difficulties, which reflects a high level of trust in God. The missionary consciousness component in Amram's theory refers to the individual's awareness of their higher purpose in life and their mission in this world [3]. A high score on item C19 indicates that students have a strong missionary consciousness, where they believe God will help them in difficulties. This reflects a deep confidence in God's help and guidance, aligning with missionary awareness.

Through the factor of academic focus disorder, there is a moderately weak positive correlation between academic focus disorder and academic performance ($r = 0.235$, $p = 0.036$). Students with academic focus disorders tend to have lower academic performance. Focus disorders hinder students' ability to concentrate and complete their academic tasks effectively. This shows the importance of focus management strategies and academic support to help students improve their ability to concentrate on their studies.

The depression sub-construct shows that there is a moderately weak positive correlation between depression and academic performance ($r = 0.290$, $p = 0.009$). Depression has a significant negative impact on students' academic performance. Students with depression may experience decreased motivation, difficulty functioning in an academic environment, and lack of energy to concentrate on academic tasks. Interventions such as counselling and mental awareness programs can help reduce the impact of depression on academic performance. According to Kumar and Bhukar [10] shows that high levels of depression among university students have a negative impact on their academic achievement and suggests interventions that focus on mental health to improve academic performance.

There is a moderately weak positive correlation between anxiety and academic performance ($r = 0.309$, $p = 0.005$). Anxiety is also negatively correlated with academic performance. Students with high anxiety may have difficulty concentrating, remembering information, and coping with academically stressful situations. Anxiety management techniques such as relaxation and meditation can help students reduce anxiety and improve academic performance.

No significant relationship exists between stress and academic performance ($r = 0.062$, $p = 0.583$). There was no significant relationship between stress and academic performance in this study, indicating that stress may not significantly influence students' academic performance in this context. However, it is important to keep monitoring and managing stress because it can affect other aspects of a student's life.

For the spiritual intelligence factor, there is a moderate positive correlation between the purpose and principles of life and academic performance ($r = 0.488$, $p < 0.001$). Students with a clear life purpose and principles tend to perform better academically. Strong life purpose and principles provide clear motivation and direction, helping students focus on their academic goals. Spiritual intelligence development programs can help students develop a clear purpose in life. Amran's theory of spiritual intelligence states that self-awareness and a clear purpose in life can provide better motivation and focus in learning.

Next, there is a moderately weak positive correlation between religious practices and academic performance ($r = 0.320$, $p = 0.004$). Religious practices provide moral and emotional support that helps students overcome academic stress and challenges. Students who consistently engage in religious practices tend to have better mental well-being and higher academic performance.

A moderate positive correlation exists between relationships with others and academic performance ($r = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$). Positive relationships with others, including peers and lecturers, support students' academic development and well-being. A supportive community provides emotional and academic support that is essential to student success. According to Goleman [8], emotional intelligence, which is closely related to spiritual intelligence, helps build meaningful and deep relationships, improving well-being and academic performance.

A moderately weak positive correlation exists between a relationship with God and academic performance ($r = 0.244$, $p = 0.029$). A relationship with God gives students inner strength and spiritual support that helps them face academic challenges. Spiritual confidence provides the sense of calm and focus needed to achieve good academic performance.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that mental health and spiritual intelligence are important factors that affect students' academic performance. Educational institutions must take proactive steps to provide adequate support in both these aspects. With a comprehensive and holistic approach, students can be helped to achieve better overall well-being and excellent academic performance. The recommended further studies will help develop more effective strategies to improve students' well-being and achievement, especially in agricultural science education.

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