

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE IN OPENNESS TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE – A MIXED METHODS DESIGN

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Abstract

This study examined the role of spiritual intelligence in enhancing openness to interreligious dialogue. The study utilized multiple paradigm approach where both social constructivist and positivist paradigms were used. Qualitative → quantitative mixed methods design was used for the inquiry. The qualitative study explored the meaning of the word ‘openness to interreligious dialogue,’ and helped in the construction of a quantitative questionnaire to measure the same. The quantitative study identified the role of spiritual intelligence in openness to interreligious dialogue. The qualitative data was gathered from Christian and Muslim respondents who were involved in interreligious dialogue and the quantitative data was gathered from 26 Christian and 26 Muslim respondents living in the Philippines. The qualitative findings suggest that the conceptualisation of openness to interreligious dialogue varied among the Christians and the Muslims. The five common themes that emerged were-acceptance and respect, good will and spirituality, living and befriending, religious supremacy, and prejudice and bias. Two themes-transcendence and dialogue of deeds were unique to the Christian participants. The quantitative findings suggest that 21% of the variance in interreligious dialogue is predicted by spiritual intelligence and there is moderate positive correlation between spiritual intelligence and openness to interreligious dialogue. An individual can become open to interreligious dialogue if one’s spiritual intelligence is increased.

Keywords: *Spiritual Intelligence, Interreligious Dialogue, Openness*

Introduction

Spirituality is considered to be one of the important aspects of psychology of religion. Studies on spirituality are on the increase and in the recent years there have been many journals that have published issues based on spirituality (Pargament, 1999). In the recent decade scholars are attempting to understand spirituality as intelligence (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshal, 2000; Vaughan, 2002; Nasel, 2004; Amram, 2007; King & DeCicco, 2008). There have been researches that suggest that spiritual intelligence has an impact on the life and activity of the individual (Doostar, Chegini & Pourabbasi, 2012). There is an intrinsic relationship between spirituality and religion (Pargament, 1999). This research paper attempts to understand what one means by openness to interreligious dialogue and the role of Spiritual intelligence in improving the individual's openness to interreligious dialogue.

Spirituality is the experience of interconnectedness with all beings (Vaughan, 2002) and a quest for the ultimate truth (Emmons, 2000), transcendence (King & DeCicco, 2008; Pargament, 1999) and meaning (Emmons, 2000; Amram & Dryer, 2008). Intelligence is the individual's mental ability to solve problem (Gardner, 1993), ability to adapt (Sternberg, 1984), and the ability for abstract reasoning (Mayer, 2000). Spiritual Intelligence is seen as a mental ability that facilitates in the experience of interconnectedness, meaning and transcendence, and ability to contemplate over existential problems and utilise spiritual resources to solve day to day issues.

Spiritual Intelligence

In recent years scholars attempted to explain the concept of Spiritual Intelligence (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshal, 2000; Vaughan, 2002; Nasel, 2004; Amram, 2007; King & DeCicco, 2008). There are common themes that run through all these investigations. They are: (1) the ability to contemplate over existential issues and solve day to day problems, (2) the ability to seek and evolve meaning and purpose, clarity and direction in one's life, (3) The ability for transcendental awareness and to expand the state of consciousness (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshal, 2000; Vaughan, 2002; Nasel, 2004; Amram, 2007; King & DeCicco, 2008).

The ability for existential thinking is seen as the individual's ability to critically think, contemplate and reason out issues like life, death, universe and suffering (Zohar &

Marshal, 2000; Vaughan, 2002; King & DeCicco, 2008). At the same time the individual utilises spiritual resources to analyse and identify alternative solution for existential, spiritual and practical issues and implement it (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshal, 2000; Nasel, 2004; Amram& Dryer, 2008). The ability to seek and evolve meaning and purpose in one's life gives the individual the reason for living (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshal, 2000; Nasel, 2004; Amram & Dryer, 2008; King & DeCicco, 2008) and the individual is able to comprehend one's day to day experiences in the same light (Amram & Dryer, 2008; King & DeCicco, 2008). The individual experiences clarity and senses direction that one is able to perceive an issue from different perspectives and distinguish truth from illusion (Vaughan, 2002), and experiences inner direction and freedom to do it (Aamram & Dryer, 2008). Transcendental awareness is the ability to understand the nonmaterial dimension of oneself (King & DeCicco, 2008) and experience interconnectedness with all beings (Emmons, 2000;Vaughan, 2002; Nasel, 2004; Amram& Dryer, 2008; King & DeCicco, 2008).The expansion of the state of consciousness is the ability to enter into spiritual states of consciousness where the individual experiences pure consciousness or oneness with the ultimate (Zohar & Marshal, 2000; Emmons, 2000;Vaughan, 2002; Nasel, 2004; Amram & Dryer, 2008; King & DeCicco, 2008).

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality is considered different from religion. According to Pargament (1999) religion is understood as a systematized structure of rituals, rites, beliefs and practices. It is also an organizational phenomenon that has the possibility of both good and bad deeds. In short religion is institutional, ritualistic and dogmatic, whereas spirituality is personal and experiential (Paragament, 1999). At the same time religion and spirituality are closely connected with each other. The common characteristic shared by both religion and spirituality is the search for the sacred. Religion is seen as a social tool that facilitates spirituality (Hill & Pargament, 2008; Pargament, 1999).

Down the ages different religions came into existence and there emerged issues pertaining to their coexistence. One of the prime issues was interreligious conflict. Religion caused conflict when it attempted to ascertain its exclusive identity in the form of fighting for a legal state or by suppressing people who belonged to other religious

traditions. Religion promoted conflict when it encouraged ideologies like holy wars and justified it with scriptural underpinnings (Neufeldt, 2011). Inter-religious dialogue was introduced as a means to resolve the conflicts and promote harmony.

Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is a positive and constructive exchange between people and communities of different faiths (Engebretson, 2009). It involves recognition of and respect to contradictions and exclusiveness found in each other's belief and practice. It begins as an interpersonal communication to attain a common objective and develops into a profound interpersonal communion that involves mutual respect, acknowledgment and friendship (Brajovic, 2006).

Inter-religious dialogue is not about changing the belief of the other rather it is about clarification of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of other's beliefs and practices. With sincere fraternal love one is called to share with and listen to each other's religious experiences, understanding of life and death, and quest for the absolute (Anastasios, 2000). It involves readiness to share one's God understanding and faith with the other and at the same time listen to the same God who could speak to them through other religious traditions (Mercado, 2004).

For an individual to enter into a dialogue one has to possess certain attitudes that makes one open for a constructive interaction. They are balanced attitude, receptive mind and openness to truth. Balanced attitude is about not being critical but being open to other religions (Dialogue and Proclamation, 1991). One must see the dialogue as an opportunity for a personal transformation and a way to rediscover the forgotten truths of one's religion (Mercado, 2004). The second requirement is a receptive mindset to accept that the manifestation and revelation of God has occurred in different religious traditions. The third requirement is openness to truth. The individual must be ready to inculcate values from different religious traditions (Dialogue and Proclamation, 1991).

The behavioural traits required for a healthy inter-religious dialogue are showing recognition and respect to the difference found in other religions, making conscious option to get into a dialogue, neither withdrawing nor fighting but being empathetic to other's beliefs, practices and experiences and deliberately creating occasions where one can meet the other (Sheetz-Willard, Faaland, Mays & Ilic, 2012).

There are basically four forms of inter-religious dialogue. The first form of dialogue is regarding life issues. It involves sharing of the problems, issues and moments one encounters in one's of life. The second form of dialogue is in the realm of action where they discuss the possibility of working together to uplift humanity. The third form of dialogue is about theological issues. It comprises the sharing of dogmas, traditions and practices. The fourth form of dialogue is through the exchange of religious experiences (Brajovic, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

The experts of interreligious dialogue followed one of the above forms to propose a model for inter-religious dialogue. Alternatively Song (2012) proposed internal change as a prerequisite for inter-religious dialogue. While attempting to understand inter-religious dialogue from the perspective of Buddhist non-duality he suggested that individual transformation must be the first step towards inter-religious dialogue. He affirmed that when one experienced unity and interconnectedness with all beings, one would be able to get involved in a healthy interreligious dialogue. Spiritual intelligence can help one to experience transcendence and interconnectedness (Doostar, Chegini & Pourabbasi, 2012).

The research has utilized multiple paradigm approach where both social constructivism and positivism were used. The using of different lenses helps one to develop multiple view points and thus offering a comprehensive understanding of the issue (Kirkwood & Campbell-Hunt, 2007). Social constructivism supports the existence of knowledge rather than knowledge. It suggests that a phenomenon or an event can be illustrated in different ways. In contrast positivists suggest that there is a direct relationship between the perceived and the perceiver, and hence there is a possibility of objective knowledge (Willig, 2001). Social constructivist paradigm is used for the first phase of the research to understand the term openness to interreligious dialogue and positivist paradigm is used for the second phase of the research to identify the role of spiritual intelligence in facilitating openness to interreligious dialogue.

Methodology

Qualitative → Quantitative sequential mixed methods design was chosen. Mixed design was chosen because the research had two phases. In the first phase where the concept of openness to interreligious dialogue was explored qualitative research design was utilised and in the second phase where the role of spiritual intelligence in openness to interreligious dialogue was identified quantitative research design was used. Using the output of the first phase a quantitative instrument to measure openness to interreligious dialogue was created. This instrument along with the spiritual intelligence questionnaire helped quantitatively assess the role of spiritual intelligence in openness to interreligious dialogue.

Purposive and quota sampling techniques were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data respectively. As part of purposive sampling, data was gathered from two Christians and two Muslims living in Manila who are actively involved in interreligious dialogue. As part of quota sampling data was gathered from 26 Christians and 26 Muslims. Their age ranged from 16 to 74. There were 22 males, 29 females and there was one missing response. Among them, 6 had often participated in interreligious dialogue, 30 had sometimes participated, 13 had never participated and there were three missing responses.

The data for the qualitative part of the research was collected through interviews and the data for the quantitative part was gathered through questionnaires. Two questionnaires were used to collect the quantitative data. The questionnaire 'The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)' of King and DeCicco (2008) was used. It is a 24 item five-point Likert scale and it was modified into 6-point Likert scale. It had a reliability of .83. The second questionnaire to measure the openness to interreligious dialogue was created using the qualitative output. It was a 25-item 6-point Likert scale with a reliability of .83. Exploratory thematic data analytical technique and regression analysis were used to analyse the qualitative and quantitative data respectively.

Qualitative Results

Psychological Dimensions of Openness to Interreligious dialogue

Thematic analysis was conducted on the four interview transcripts and themes pertaining to openness to interreligious dialogue were extracted. Seven major themes that were extracted.

Theme 1: Acceptance and respect

This theme focuses on acceptance, appreciation and respect one has for the others' religion, religious tradition, practice and culture.

"...openness that you are accepting the culture of other people, you appreciate, and at the same time...you respect the culture... whether you are a Muslim or a Christian."

Acceptance leads one to respect the other. Respect includes the acknowledgement of the presence of divine in other religions. It invites one to realize the active presence of God in other religions, religious texts and worship. It is also a call to celebrate diversity where one acknowledges and appreciates plurality.

Theme 2: Goodwill and spirituality

The theme goodwill and spirituality emphasises the good intentions of the individual, the love one has for one's neighbour and its spiritual underpinnings. Unified intention of peace and harmony serves as a driving force to bring people from diverse religious background together.

"... it came to my mind that we are here on the Earth to do good for the others."

"Although there is a diversity of religion but there is the unified intention of peace..."

Moreover the individual who enters into interreligious dialogue must be able to see the other as one's sibling. This experience of filial relationship would make an individual to cross barriers.

Theme 3: Befriending and living together

The theme befriending and living together insists on creating situations where one can meet the other. Personal contact with the people of other religion will remove hostility.

“...there are problem in human relations because we see the other as a person as an enemy. Once you know a person as a human being, it would be really hard to hate.”

“One of the best things is to be in situations where you meet and interact with the other. It even could be inter-faith prayer. I join you for celebration of the Eid-al-Fitr and you join me for Christmas.”

There is a need to create situations where people of different religions come together and know each other. Befriending can be extended to the realm of religious worship where the individuals can express their openness by partaking in the worship of other religion.

Theme 4: Religious supremacy

Religious supremacy is caused by fundamentalist attitudes. Religious fundamentalism is a major hurdle for interreligious dialogue. Fundamentalism is the strong attachment one has in one's faith that one looks down and condemns the faith of the other. It is the thought that one is in possession of the ultimate truth, and as a result one disrespects the other's religion.

“...fundamentalism is in putting one' faith above everything else and thinking what your faith says is the best and therefore you don't have to respect others...”

Theme 5: Prejudice and bias

Prejudice and bias is about the misconceptions the individuals have about other religions, religious teachings and the attitude of the followers. People develop misapprehensions that certain religions promote violence and that people who belong to certain religions are associated with terrorism.

“The biases I heard from the Christians is that Muslims are terrorists...”

“...they think that Islam teaches people to kill people and do bad things...”

Theme 6: Transcendence

Transcendence is about going beyond negative experience, understanding the other and being willing to forgive and asking pardon. If one intends to involve in interreligious dialogue one must be ready to give up the natural feelings of hatred, transcend oneself and move towards healthy relationship.

“There have been past misunderstandings, there have even been wars...the stories of history which is passed on create negative views about other people. Openness is to offer condolences to someone who has been hurt...(and) be willing to go beyond what your natural feelings might be and be ready to reconcile.”

Theme 7- Dialogue of deeds

Dialogue of deeds is about the community service which involves people of different religions.

“...there is a problem due to lack of water in our community...Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, we come together and try to solve this problem. We work together...”

It entails cooperation and collaboration from the part of the participants. Openness to interreligious dialogue necessitates the willingness to participate in such community building endeavours.

The common and unique themes pertaining to openness to interreligious dialogue are enumerated in Table 1. The five themes that were shared by both Christian and Muslim participants were chosen for the quantitative phase. The two themes that were unique to the Christian participants were omitted.

Table 1 Common and unique themes extracted from the interview

Major Themes	Muslim Participant 1	Muslim Participant 2	Christian Participant 1	Christian Participant 2
Acceptance and Respect	×	×	×	×
Good will and spirituality	×	×	×	×
Living and befriending	×	×	×	×
Religious Supremacy	×	×	×	
Prejudice and bias	×	×	×	×
Transcendence			×	×

Dialogue of deeds			×	×
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Using the five themes that were common to all the participants a 25-item six-point Likert scale was constructed to quantitatively measure the individual’s openness to interreligious dialogue.

Quantitative Results

Role of Spiritual Intelligence in Interreligious Dialogue

The data was subjected to the evaluation of assumptions. The missing data were estimated and replaced by mean substitution method. One outlier was identified and was removed. The data was normally distributed and the shape of the residual in the scatter plot is not curved proving linearity. The band enclosing the residuals in the scatter plot is approximately equal in width at all values of predicted openness to interreligious dialogue, confirming the presence of homoscedasticity.

The predictor variable spiritual intelligence ($M= 84.36, SD =11.79$) and the outcome variable openness to interreligious dialogue ($M= 89.01, SD =14.21$) were subjected to correlation analysis and simple regression analysis. There was moderate positive correlation ($r= .46, p< .01$) between spiritual intelligence and openness to interreligious dialogue. The results of the regression analysis indicates that 21.16% of openness to interreligious dialogue is predicted by spiritual intelligence ($R^2 =.21, F(1, 49)= 22.95, p< .05$).

Table 2 Reporting the Correlation between spiritual intelligence and openness to interreligious dialogue among respondents and the variance explained by spiritual intelligence.

Variables	Over all	Christians	Muslims
<i>r</i>	.46**	.41*	.53**
<i>R</i> ²	.21**	.17*	.29**

* $p< .05, ** p< .01$

Spiritual intelligence among the Christians ($M = 86.66, SD = 11.84$) is greater than that of the Muslims ($M = 81.96, SD = 11.48$). Openness to interreligious dialogue among the Christians ($M = 89.15, SD = 15.04$) is greater than that of the Muslims ($M = 88.87, SD = 13.60$). One way Anova was used to test whether there is significant difference in the spiritual intelligence and openness to interreligious dialogue between the Christian and Muslim respondents. **There was no significant difference in spiritual intelligence $F(1, 49) = 2.07, p > .05$ and openness to interreligious dialogue $F(1, 49) = .01, p > .05$ between the Christian and Muslim respondents.**

Table 3 Reporting the Mean and SD among Christians, Muslims and overall respondents.

Variables	Mean	SD
Spiritual Intelligence (Over all)	84.36	11.79
Openness to IRD (Over all)	89.01	14.21
Spiritual Intelligence (Christians)	86.66	11.84
Openness to IRD (Christians)	89.15	15.04
Spiritual Intelligence (Muslims)	81.96	11.48
Openness to IRD (Muslims)	88.87	13.60

The correlation between spiritual intelligence and the openness to interreligious dialogue among the Muslims ($r = .53, p < .01$) was higher than that of the Christians ($r = .41, p < .05$). Among the Muslims, spiritual intelligence predicted 28.6% of the variance in openness to interreligious dialogue. Among the Christians, spiritual intelligence predicted 16.7% of the variance in openness to interreligious dialogue.

Discussion

There has been no study that attempted to understand the concept of openness to interreligious dialogue both qualitatively and quantitatively. This study has contributed to the body of knowledge by identifying the variables pertaining to interreligious dialogue, and by evolving a quantitative questionnaire to measure them. Added to that this study attempts to understand the predictive role of spiritual intelligence in enhancing interreligious dialogue.

The concept of openness to interreligious dialogue varied among the two groups that were involved in the research. Transcendence and dialogue of deeds were not found among Muslim participants.

Transcendence and dialogue of deeds were not part of the Muslims' understanding of openness to interreligious dialogue. Transcendence is about the willingness to go beyond negative feelings and forgiving the other. It is not part of the Muslims' understanding of openness to interreligious dialogue may be because of the long history of oppression in the Philippines. Before the arrival of the Spaniards the Moro Sultanates had their own way of governance and they had a culture based on Islamic tradition. They lost their land, governance and culture to the Spaniards and then to the Americans. The Americans invalidated their ownership of land and resettled Christian farmers in Muslim territories (Tuminez, 2008). These experiences of marginalisation would have created negative feeling among the Muslims.

Dialogue of deeds is about the collaborative humanitarian endeavours between the Muslims and Christians. The Muslims did not include it as part of their understanding of openness to interreligious dialogue. This finding may mislead one to understand that the Muslims are not in favour of collaborative social endeavours or that the Muslims are not involved in such activities. This may be due to the region from where participants were chosen. The data was gathered from the Muslim participants who were living in Manila. Manila unlike Mindanao has very few Islamic organizations who venture into social endeavours. There are Muslim organizations in Mindanao that encourage interreligious collaborative activities. The Muslim respondents from Manila would have had less exposure to such collaborative humanitarian activities and hence they would have failed to mention dialogue of deeds in their sharing.

There were also quantitative difference and similarities between Muslims and the Christians respondents. Though both the Muslims and Christians did not have significant difference in their scores on spiritual intelligence and openness to interreligious dialogue, Christians had a higher score in both the measures. However there was a greater correlation between the spiritual intelligence and the openness to interreligious dialogue among the Muslim respondents than the Christian respondents. Interreligious dialogue

and spirituality are inseparable-twin topics in Islamic theology, and it is reflected in the Muslim's response.

Limitation and Future research

The themes and questionnaire on 'Openness to interreligious dialogue' was framed based on the responses of Christian and Muslim participants. Future researchers may include participants from other religions so that an objective understanding could be established.

The Spiritual Intelligence questionnaire SISRI-24 was chosen because it conceptualised and measured spiritual intelligence as a cognitive ability. Some of the participants experienced difficulty to comprehend the concept of consciousness in the spiritual intelligence questionnaire. The lack of clarity pertaining to the western understanding of states of consciousness could have confounded the respondents. As part of future research other measures of spiritual intelligence could be utilised.

The paper has offered a new approach to interreligious dialogue. Spiritual intelligence is treated as a predictor of interreligious dialogue. Thus we can conclude that one can create openness in an individual with regard to interreligious dialogue by enhancing spiritual intelligence. Moreover spiritual intelligence as other intelligences can be learnt, taught and practiced. Hence it could be even taught in schools and other institutions which are situated in the conflict prone areas.

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