

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GRIT: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT – With the comprehensive promotion of social transformation and educational reform, Chinese primary and secondary school teachers shoulder multiple tasks, and their work pressure is increasing, and their mental health is not optimistic. If teachers are in a state of low well-being for a long time, it will certainly bring great hidden dangers to the development of China's education. Therefore, we must attach great importance to the problem of primary and secondary school teachers' psychological well-being. This study aims to propose a conceptual framework involving spiritual leadership, psychological well-being, and grit of primary and secondary school teachers on the basis of previous studies by scholars. By exploring their relationship, we can provide insights for improving primary and secondary school teachers' psychological well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

The Plan for Strengthening Teachers for Basic Education in the New Era was released in April 2022 by the Ministry of Education and other departments with the goal of enhancing the general quality of teachers in elementary and secondary schools and fostering the development of high-quality, professional, and innovative teachers in elementary and secondary schools in the new era (MOE, 2022). The development of the times and the law of the operation of education itself will inevitably put forward new requirements for teachers, and teachers' quality is also in a continuous development trend. The role of teachers is becoming increasingly complex. At the same time, due to the increasingly complex role of teachers, in the face of complicated teaching work, social expectations, parents' requirements, and even many uncontrollable factors, the pressure on teachers is unprecedentedly increased. (Cui Yun, 2016). In such a social background, paying attention to teachers' psychological well-being has become an inevitable topic. Current research has found that although the psychological well-being of Chinese teachers has generally been at the middle level in the past decade, teachers are considered a profession of high intensity and high stress, and their psychological well-being is challenged, and many teachers still feel unhappy (Tian et al., 2021). Teachers are important for the growth of students and have a profound impact on the physical and mental health and development of students (Sun et al., 2022; Ye & Wang, 2021). If teachers' psychological well-being is low, their teaching quality, work enthusiasm, self-efficacy and emotional commitment will be seriously affected, which will further affect students' learning quality and physical and mental health development (Deng et al., 2022; Li & Gai 2022). As a result, we must pay attention to and improve teachers' psychological well-being in elementary and secondary schools. The study found that the influencing factors of teachers' psychological well-being mainly include external factors and internal factors (Yao Ru, 2019; Xia Bin, 2020). External factors are classified as occupational factors, organisational factors, and social factors, whereas internal factors are classified as attitude factors, ability factors, and physiological factors (Xia Bin, 2020).

Spiritual leadership may be an important external organisational factor that influences and improves teachers' psychological well-being. Spiritual leadership is a new hot spot in the field of leadership research. Fry, an American scholar, defines spiritual leadership as a model of leadership behaviour that integrates vision, hope/belief, and altruistic love, internally inspires themselves and others and gives employees spiritual satisfaction (Fry, 2003). Spiritual leadership will influence the organisational identity of their subordinates, enhance their organisational commitment (Karadag, 2009),

and significantly increase their work engagement level (Deng, 2016). At the same time, some studies have revealed that spiritual leadership has a positive effect on employees' well-being and nurses' psychological well-being (Hunsaker, 2019; Caldeira & Hall, 2012; Zou et al., 2020).

However, with Chinese teachers from elementary and secondary school as the research object, there are few studies on the psychological well-being of elementary and secondary school teachers. Therefore, this study takes spiritual leadership as an external environmental factor, explores the influence mechanism of principal spiritual leadership on the psychological well-being of elementary and secondary school teachers in the Chinese context, and examines the intermediary role of grit in it in order to provide new insights and enlightenment to improve the psychological well-being of teachers in elementary and secondary school.

Based on this, the Research Questions (RQ) in this study are:

RQ1: Does spiritual leadership influence teachers' psychological well-being?

RQ2: Does spiritual leadership influence grit?

RQ3: Does grit influence teachers' psychological well-being?

RQ4: Does grit play an intermediary role between spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Spiritual Leadership and Teachers' Psychological Well-being

Spiritual leadership theory has evolved since 2003, which is a leadership theory based on stimulating individuals in motivation (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005). Spiritual leadership includes three dimensions, namely vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love (Fry et al., 2005). In the school environment, spiritual leadership can create a clear and easily understood vision passed on to the teachers so that the teachers can have a strong sense of presence and mission so that they can feel the meaning and value of the work and enhance the psychological well-being; Spiritual leadership help teachers to build up confidence in the development of the school and their prospects (Hunsaker, 2019). By constantly stimulating teachers' work enthusiasm and vitality, they can deal with work tasks with full spirit, face setbacks bravely, improve their sense of work competence, and obtain psychological well-being. Spiritual leadership truly care and loves for teachers so that teachers feel that they are appreciated and understood, learn to care for themselves and care for others, feel love and be loved, and enhance psychological well-being. Hence, the following Hypothesis (H) is proposed:

H1: Spiritual leadership's vision dimension has a significant effect on psychological well-being.

H2: Spiritual leadership's hope/faith dimension has a significant effect on psychological well-being.

H3: Spiritual leadership's altruistic love dimension has a significant effect on psychological well-being.

Spiritual Leadership and Grit

Grit as a positive psychological factor was proposed by psychologists represented by Duckworth, which was characterised as trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Some studies have shown that both authentic leadership and servant leadership have an effect on grit (Jang & Lee, 2018; Chan, 2016). They belong to the leadership style, just like the spiritual leadership. Thus, spiritual leadership may have a positive impact on grit. In the school environment, spiritual leadership establish a clear vision of the school and supports teachers to pursue their own development so that teachers are more clear about their own development direction and their level of perseverance will be higher. Spiritual leadership can give teachers faith and strength. Even when faced with problems or difficulties, teachers can maintain a positive working state, actively and continuously in work and life. Spiritual leadership show the satisfaction of the spiritual needs of teachers and the

selfless care for them, stimulating their enthusiasm for work so that they can unswervingly move forward towards the goal. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Spiritual leadership's vision dimension has a significant effect on teachers' grit.

H5: Spiritual leadership's hope/faith dimension has a significant effect on teachers' grit.

H6: Spiritual leadership's altruistic love dimension has a significant effect on teachers' grit.

Grit and Teachers' Psychological Well-being

Studies have shown that grit can affect the subjective well-being of adolescents (Liu Yumin et al., 2021) and significantly predict personal stress levels and mental health levels, thus affecting the life and happiness index (Singh & Jha, 2008). Grit predicts physician health, perhaps because grit better promotes self-control, resists burnout, and allows adherence to repetitive, boring, or frustrating behaviours (Seguin, 2019). The higher the level of grit, the stronger the psychological resilience in the dilemma, and they can actively adjust themselves and maintain a positive and optimistic attitude. Empirical studies show that grit can significantly affect teachers' psychological well-being (Nazari & Alizadeh Oghyanous, 2021). The following hypothesis is offered based on the preceding argument:

H7: Grit has a significant effect on teachers' psychological well-being.

The Mediating Effect of Grit

Spiritual leadership, as an active leadership style, will have a positive impact on individuals, teams, and organisations. From the above analysis, it can be seen that spiritual leadership improves the grit level of teachers (Jang & Lee, 2018), and grit positively affects teachers' psychological well-being (Nazari & Alizadeh Oghyanous, 2021). Therefore, it is speculated that grit plays an intermediary role between spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being. Spiritual leadership provide teachers with a good environment through vision, gives teachers confidence, hope and selfless love, helps teachers firm faith, enhances their level of grit, makes them work actively to face difficulties, and improves the ability of stress, thus work keep dynamic state, improve work emotional experience, improve teachers' psychological well-being. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: The relationship between the vision dimension of spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being is mediated by grit.

H9: The relationship between the hope/faith dimension of spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being is mediated by grit.

H10: The relationship between the altruistic love dimension of spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being is mediated by grit.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Through a closer study of the relationship between spiritual leaders, teachers' psychological well-being and grit, this study divides spiritual leadership into three dimensions: vision, hope/belief, and altruistic love, and regards grit as a single dimension. After reading a large number of literatures, the research model of this study is obtained through logical reasoning to explore the influence of different dimensions of spiritual leadership on teachers' psychological well-being. The above literature grows a network of connections between spiritual leadership, grit and teachers' psychological well-being and is shown in Figure 1.

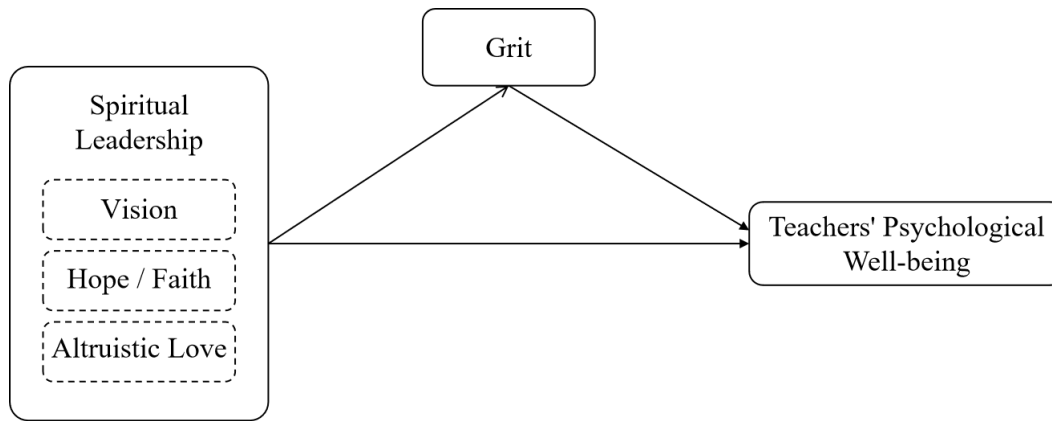


Figure 1. The Research Model

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The positivist research paradigm and the quantitative research method will be used in this study due to the relationship between the variables investigated. This study will focus on the questionnaire survey method, comprehensively using the literature method and individual interviews. This study will use a cross-sectional web survey study as it provides study data in a short period of time. This study will outline a questionnaire to measure the relationship between spiritual leadership, grit and teachers' psychological well-being. The questionnaire will be distributed via the Questionnaire Star Platform, which is a professional online questionnaire, assessment, and casting voting platform that focuses on providing users with influential and sympathetic online questionnaire design, data gathering, reports and dashboards, survey discussion of results, and a variety of other services.

Population and Sampling

The target population of this study was elementary and secondary school teachers in Shandong Province, China. With the large population of teachers from elementary and secondary schools in Shandong Province, due to time and funding constraints, it is impossible for researchers to code all teachers, so this study will mainly use the non-probability purposive sampling technique. In order to determine the sample size needed for research, several factors must be considered, including statistical power, effect sizes, alpha level, and predictors (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). Prior determination of the sample size is crucial, and G*Power software (Faul et al., 2007; Faul et al., 2009) can assist in this process. For this study, a priori power analysis embedded in G*Power software was used to estimate the optimal sample size of 85 respondents based on a medium effect size (f^2), α of 0.05, and 80% power for the mediation model. Kline (2004) suggested that a sample size of over 200 is typically large and appropriate for most study models, and as such, this study will use data from over 200 respondents.

Measures Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership measurement was developed by Fry (2003) and translated by Tang et al. (2014). The spiritual leadership scale consists of 14 items and has been modified to reflect the educational context, such as "The vision of my school can stimulate my best work performance", "I always do my best at work because I have confidence in my school and leadership", "School leaders will communicate with teachers from time to time to understand their ideas" and so on. The scale was graded on a 5-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from "absolutely disagree (1)" to "absolutely agree (5)". This scale has Cronbach's alpha values of 0.922, 0.925, and 0.747 for vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, respectively.

Grit

Grit measurement was developed by Duckworth & Quinn (2009), the grit scale consists of 8 items, such as "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one", "Setbacks don't discourage me", and so on. The scale was graded on a 7-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from "Not at all like me (1)" to "Very much like me (7)". The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.82.

Teachers' Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being was constructed by Zheng et al. (2015), which is a subscale of the employee well-being scale and consists of six items, such as "I handle daily affairs well", "I generally feel good about myself, and I'm confident", and so on. The scale was graded on a 7-point Likert scale, with "strongly disagree (1)" being the lowest and "strongly agree (7)" being the highest. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.88.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Teachers in elementary and secondary schools are the driving force behind basic education. Their mental health directly affects their working state, directly or indirectly affects the physical and mental state of students and colleagues, and even affects the development of schools. Paying attention to the psychological well-being of elementary and secondary school teachers has significant practical and theoretical implications for increasing basic education quality and teacher rankings. Therefore, this study presents a conceptual framework for investigating the positive influence of spiritual leadership on the psychological well-being of teachers in elementary and secondary schools mediated by grit.

The findings of this study can help to establish the existing literature on spiritual leadership, teachers' psychological well-being, and grit, clarify the relationship between spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being and illustrate the intermediary role of grit in it. In previous studies, less attention has been paid to grit as a mediator of spiritual leadership and teachers' psychological well-being. This fills the gap in previous studies and has a unique significance. Although the proposed model is quite beneficial, it can still be improved. The main limitation of this study is the absence of empirical research, and the framework's rationality and validity must be validated using real data. This is also the focus direction of future research.

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