

Lived Experiences of Selected High School Students in Integrating Spirituality as Core of the Curriculum in Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) Schools

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Abstract

The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) have a long-standing legacy of offering Catholic education grounded in values such as love and reverence for God, truth and charity, ecological stewardship, and compassionate service towards the poor. This research was designed to investigate how such integration shapes the lived experiences of high school students in FMM schools. Specifically, it examined how students incorporate spirituality into their academics and activities and how such integration impacts their growth and relationships. Using a qualitative narrative approach, the study engaged 50 selected high school students and was led by Benson and Fisher's spiritual frameworks and Waldrop's body-mind-spirit connection theory. The findings revealed that the students were deeply aware of their spiritual growth. Their participation in academic and religious activities nurtured their character, shaped their purpose, and strengthened their relationships with themselves, others, the environment, and God. Despite their varied backgrounds, students regarded spirituality as the foundation and essential of their lives. Based on these insights, the study recommends enhancements to the academic programs, activities, and initiatives at FMM schools to deepen and sustain the spiritual formation of the youth, emphasizing that integrating spirituality into education is vital for holistic development and well-being.

Keywords: academic, adolescence, formation, relationships, well-being, values

Introduction

Every person is primarily a spiritual being, and one's overall well-being is deeply anchored in spirituality. Globally, educational paradigms are shifting toward more holistic models, recognizing that cognitive development alone is insufficient to prepare students for life's complexities. Drew (2023) gave the importance of holistic education-which includes spiritual formation which nurtures the inner lives of learners, enabling them to make sense of their experience, connect with others, and act with purpose.

This global shift is reflected in several studies emphasizing the integration of spirituality into educational settings. For instance, Hooker and Fodor (2008) assert that incorporating spiritual practices like mindfulness, prayer, and reflection promotes psychological resilience and strengthens community bonds among students and teachers. Similarly, international research on school-based mindfulness programs reveals that these practices can enhance well-being and reduce stress, particularly when integrated into the curriculum (The Guardian, 2024).

The possibilities of spiritual maturity are inherent in the dynamics of the young person. Vokey (2003) said that spirituality in the curriculum provides students with opportunities and resources to probe the meaning of life and the higher purposes of what they are learning. There is a need to respond immediately to the crisis of mental health among the young population. As professionals directly involved in the lives of young people, teachers are called to enable the learners to understand how they can cope with the pressures that burden them, especially problems arising from the family and community.

Despite this international recognition, the incorporation of spirituality into formal education remains underdeveloped in many contexts. In the Philippines, while public and private schools often reference values formation, few empirical studies explore how spirituality is systematically embedded in the curriculum and its effect on adolescent well-being. This concerns in light of the country's growing mental health crisis among the youth. According to the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) and the World Health Organization (WHO), students

face increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness, often rooted in family, social, and academic pressures.

Recent local studies offer valuable insights. Del Castillo et al. (2023) found that Filipino Christian youth derive psychological comfort, moral guidance, and emotional stability from prayer and spiritual engagement. Similarly, Calaguas (2025) emphasized that self-awareness in Filipino college students played a protective role against depression and anxiety, especially during post-pandemic transition to face-to-face education. These findings highlight the vital role of spirituality in supporting mental health. Although existing literature (Entegro and Del Rosario, 2021; Bual and Madrigal, 2019) supports the value of holistic and spiritually grounded education, specific evidence is lacking on how such approaches are concretely implemented in Philippine high schools, particularly within the context of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) schools. Furthermore, there is little known about the lived experiences of students who engage in spiritual lessons and practices as part of their formal education. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the actual impact of school-based spiritual formation on the personal, social, and emotional growth of selected high school students.

The researchers examine the integration of spirituality as a fundamental component of the curriculum for high school students, utilizing the spiritual development framework proposed by Benson and Roehlkepartain (2008), the spiritual well-being model established by Fisher (2011) and Waldrop's (2018) body-mind-spirit connection. Benson and Roehlkepartain contend that spiritual development is an essential component of human development, involving both internal and external journeys. Fisher develops a spiritual well-being framework that underscores the significance of spirituality in enhancing psychological health. Furthermore, Waldrop's study indicates that spirituality is significant in establishing connections among the mind, body, and spirit in education, thereby advancing social justice and equity. She stresses the importance for educators to incorporate personal experience and convictions into pedagogical approaches to enhance overall well-being and foster learners' growth. The researchers employ the demographic profiles of the students alongside the theories of Benson, Fisher, and

Waldrop to examine their lived experiences across various subjects, activities, and programs. This also establishes how the students were facilitated or hindered in the learning-teaching process. Thus, this research offers significant insights on the practical and sustainable implementation and support of spirituality integration in Philippine education.

Materials and Methods

The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) administered two Catholic educational institutions in the Philippines where the researchers conducted this qualitative narrative research. These schools integrate spirituality into their curriculum, making them suitable locales for exploring students' lived experiences of spirituality. Using purposive sampling, 50 high school students from Grades 9 to 12, aged 14-18, were selected based on good moral conduct, academic performance (with a general average of at least 85%), and active participation in various activities within and outside the school. The sample included both Catholic and non-Catholic students, with five coming from Born-Again and Iglesia ni Kristo backgrounds. Data collection utilized three researcher-made instruments: an interview guide with seven open-ended questions, a two-part survey (demographic profile and four open-ended items), and a ten-item guide for focus group discussions (FGDs). These instruments underwent pilot testing, and revisions were made based on feedback to improve clarity and age-appropriateness. To enhance understanding and inclusivity, the instruments were also translated into Filipino. The researchers ensured the ethical compliance and voluntary participation through the use of informed consent and parental permission forms.

Descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, were used to present the students' demographic and academic profiles. For qualitative data, the study employed thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. This process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying, and reviewing themes, and constructing narratives that reflected the core meanings of the students'

experiences. Themes were organized in alignment with the research objectives and were supported by participant quotes. Although the research offers helpful observations about the integration of spirituality in Catholic education, its scope is limited to two FMM schools and may not represent all educational contexts. Self-reported data and purposive sampling also pose limitations; however, validation by experts, pilot testing, and the iterative refinement of the tools enhanced the credibility and depth of the research findings. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge about adolescent spirituality and well-being in faith-based education.

Results and Discussion

To maintain the confidentiality, the FMM schools were labeled as School A and School B. For the respondents, the code would be the letter of the school, A or B; the capital letter S stands for a student, and a number (examples AS1, BS20, AS16, BS6).

Table 1 shows all relevant demographic variables: grade level, age, gender, religion, family type, educational background of parents, economic status, and geographical location.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants (N = 50).

Variable	Category	School A (n = 24)	%	School B (n = 26)	%	Total (N = 50)	%
Grade Level	Grade 12	6	25.00	6	23.08	12	24.00
	Grade 11	6	25.00	6	23.08	12	24.00
	Grade 10	6	25.00	8	30.77	14	28.00
	Grade 9	6	25.00	6	23.08	12	24.00
Age	18	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	2.00
	17	7	29.17	6	23.08	13	26.00
	16	5	20.83	6	23.08	11	22.00
	15	7	29.17	7	26.92	14	28.00
	14	5	20.83	6	23.08	11	22.00
Gender	Male	12	50.00	13	50.00	25	50.00
	Female	12	50.00	13	50.00	25	50.00

Variable	Category	School A (n = 24)	%	School B (n = 26)	%	Total (N = 50)	%
Religion	Catholic	23	95.83	22	84.62	45	90.00
	Non-Catholic	1	4.17	4	15.38	5	10.00
Family Type	Nuclear	13	54.17	13	50.00	26	52.00
	Single Parent	2	8.33	0	0.00	2	4.00
	Extended Family	8	33.33	10	38.46	18	36.00
	Stepfamily	0	0.00	2	7.69	2	4.00
	Grandparent Family	1	4.17	0	0.00	1	2.00
	Lone Habitant	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	2.00
Parents' Educational Attainment	High School	5	20.83	2	7.69	7	14.00
	College	14	58.33	18	69.23	32	64.00
	Graduate Studies	2	8.33	6	23.08	8	16.00
	No Answer	3	12.50	0	0.00	3	6.00
Economic Status	Poor	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	2.00
	Lower Middle Class	6	25.00	2	7.69	8	16.00
	Middle Class	16	66.67	21	80.77	37	74.00
	Upper Middle Class	1	4.17	2	7.69	3	6.00
	No Answer	1	4.17	0	0.00	1	2.00
Geographical Location	Rural	24	100.00	0	0.00	24	48.00
	Urban	0	0.00	26	100.00	26	52.00

This study had 50 adolescent participants—24 from School A and 26 from School B. The data show that 28% of the respondents in School B were in grade 10, while 24% were in grades 9, 11, and 12. The highest number in the age groups was 15, and the lowest was 18. Bertran (2014) said that during adolescence, individuals often search for their identity and seek to understand the meaning of life and their place in the world. The data had an even distribution of male and female as shown in gender

profile. In a related study conducted by Young-in (2013), revealed that adolescent spirituality and self-directed learning exhibited positive correlations among both male and female individuals.

Among the participants of this study, 90% were Catholics, while 10% were non-Catholics, specifically, Born Again and Iglesia ni Kristo (Church of Christ). Donlevy (2007) cited those Catholic institutions welcome non-Catholic students, fostering ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, and mutual understanding. Fifty-two percent of the respondents belonged to a nuclear family, while 2% were living with their grandparents or living alone. It is noted that either parent or guardian had the highest educational attainment, with 64% completing college and 14% finishing secondary school.

It showed that 74% of the students were from the middle class, while 2% belonged to the financially challenged. Since most of the respondents come from middle-class families, it is their children who participate in most religion-related activities and are members of various organizations. It also indicates that those respondents are interested in spirituality or drawn to it. School A has a considerable number of participants—48%, who reside in rural areas approximately 117.6 kilometers south of Manila. In contrast, School B has a higher percentage of participants (52%) hailing from a highly urbanized city. It is noteworthy that Pham and Del Castillo's (2020) study found that individuals from both rural and urban areas share a spiritual inclination, irrespective of where they live.

Table 2 presents the academic profile of the participants, summarizing the average grades, involvement in organizations or clubs, extracurricular activities, and religious activities.

Table 2. Academic Profile of the Participants (N = 50).

Variable	Category	School A (n = 24)	%	School B (n = 26)	%	Total (N = 50)	%
Average Grade	85%–88%	1	4.17	0	0.00	1	2.00
	89%–92%	5	20.83	4	15.38	9	18.00
	93%–96%	15	62.50	21	80.77	36	72.00
	97%–100%	3	12.50	1	3.85	4	8.00
Organizations/Clubs	Sports	5	20.83	8	30.77	13	26.00
	Music	6	25.00	3	11.54	9	18.00
	Religious	3	12.50	5	19.23	8	16.00
	Others (e.g., Council, Arts)	10	41.67	10	38.46	20	40.00
Extracurricular Activities	Outreach/Community Service	16	66.67	9	34.62	25	50.00
	Inter-School Programs	5	20.83	1	3.85	6	12.00
	Advocacy-Related	3	12.50	16	61.54	19	38.00
Religious Activities	Retreat	4	16.67	7	26.92	11	22.00
	Recollection	18	75.00	17	65.38	35	70.00
	Parish Youth	1	4.17	0	0.00	1	2.00
	Others	1	4.17	2	7.70	3	6.00

Seventy-two percent of the students received an average grade between 93% and 96%, while two percent got a grade between 85% and 88%. This indicates that these students not only excelled in academics but also did not have any significant behavioral problems. According to a study by Entegro and Del Castillo (2021), Filipino adolescents who did not have any behavioral issues showed a higher level of spiritual well-being compared to their counterparts. Schools A and B ranked fourth (16 %) in religious services (mostly as sacristans and Mass servers), third (18 %) in Music, second (26 %) in Sports, and first (40 %) in other unspecified areas in the Table. These areas include science, scouting, and the Student’s Council in School A; and the Student’s Council, Art Club, Peer Facilitator, School Journal, and Photography in School B. Organizations

are essential in promoting the comprehension and integration of social norms and beliefs, nurturing spiritual growth, and encouraging moral behavior (Baring et al., 2022).

FMM schools are highly involved in outreach and community service (50%). This is followed by advocacy related involvements (38%) and completed in inter-school programs (12%) by students to participate in activities in other schools. The study of Matsuba, Donnelly, Hart, and Atkins (2006) show that civic engagement, such as participating in community service, can result in the development of spirituality in an individual due to the increased awareness and connection to others.

Recollection received the highest score of 70%, and other religious activities got only 2%. A number of studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between religious beliefs and practices, which serve as tools for spirituality, and mental health (Compton, 2005; Russel and Yarhouse, 2006).

Spiritual Development

Following the spiritual development framework of Benson and Roehlkepartain, the spiritual dimensions of Fisher, and the body-mind-spirit connection of Waldrop, the following data presents the lived experiences of students in a dynamic process of interconnection of self, others, nature, and God. The awakening, or spiritual awareness, refers to the conscious understanding of their existence, life, essence, others, and the cosmos (Benson et al., 2019). This includes one's perception of God, leading them to a sense of spirituality, identity, value, and direction. Grounded in their faith in God, the respondents value solitude and self-reflection from their faith in God. They seek and feel the God's presence in the daily routine. The respondents were mindful that their thoughts and actions shape their spiritual depth and interior disposition. Thus, recognizing the spiritual dimension in their thoughts, words, and actions enriches their capacity to deal with life. To wit:

I feel the presence of God, especially when I need help or guidance. He gives me strength and hope. (AS9)

I am spiritual every time I reflect or talk to myself. (BS1)

They tend to empathize with their classmates and peers during challenging times. Empathy is recognized as a contributing factor in enhancing relationships and facilitating superior product development (Brown and Lee, 2018). The respondents aspire to make others happy with their kind words and deeds. On the other hand, they recognize that significant people are essential for their lives and growth. They teach and guide them, and they always wish only good things for their families, friends, and fellow humans.

When I help others during their challenging times, I make them happy. (AS7)

I'm always mindful that I should respect everyone and live up to that. (BS7)

Francis (2015) wrote in his encyclical that people have a sense of spiritual awareness and tend to admire the beauty and splendor that surround them. These young people recognize that nature sustains and balances life by offering them food, shelter, and beauty. They spend time with other creatures to foster a sense of interconnectedness. As a response, they appreciate the beauty of nature and care for it that bring inner peace and happiness. The respondents' awareness of ecological situations motivates them to participate in coastal clean-ups and avoid human-animal conflict. They were inspired to help clean the school campus.

Amid their life's pressures, they seek God's wisdom and strength. These students have a deep connection with Him and implore Him for divine guidance. Further, they prayed in the school chapel or at home in the evening, which makes them aware of God's abiding presence and love (Ocampo et al., 2013). Being in solitude deepens their relationship with God (Durà-Vilà and Leavey, 2017). They feel His presence when helping and understanding others. It is a sacred experience and part of a moral obligation.

God is the one who guides me through the struggles of my journey. (AS15)

When I am praying, trusting, and believing in God, I feel His presence. (AS23)

There is a spiritual connection of belonging, seeking, accepting, or experiencing significance in relationships with others, the world, or a sense of transcendence (Frankl, 1963). At the outset, they realize that God is omnipotent, unlike humans. That makes them rely on God and family. As a process of personal growth, they learn how to amend their mistakes and hope to flourish (Scales et al., 2014). Furthermore, balancing personal decisions with the guidance of others leads to righteousness, as self-awareness and spiritual connection lead them to growth. In addition to passion and perseverance, another essential quality is having a growth mindset, which entails that skills and abilities can be enhanced through demanding work and acquiring knowledge (Dweck, 2006). Recognizing their connectivity to the very source of their being.

I am a part of God's work. (BS18)

Bonding, learning, and uniting with others enriched the lives of these respondents. According to Thurston (2017), cooperation and shared missions foster unity among them. Their relationships allowed them to feel God's love and care. Developing the ability to understand and recognize others' emotions and perspectives is critical for fostering healthy interpersonal connections and facilitating effective collaboration. This creates positivity among themselves and towards others. Additionally, they believe that spiritual growth comes from interacting with people. The respondents acknowledge that others offer unique meanings or lessons and strive not to judge them. They always try to show kindness when interacting with those around them. Thus, they can emphasize when one faces silent battles.

To do to others what they are doing to me, spread love, care, and joy. (BS26)

What I learned from my spiritual encounter with my friend is her kindness and empathy and the profound impact our actions can have on our spiritual growth and well-being. (AS4)

The students found strength in trusting in God's plan and guidance, which enabled them to fulfill their responsibilities. It entails having faith in a higher power or divine being. Existence is not merely a decision, but rather a bestowed privilege. Despite challenging circumstances, they were able to demonstrate appreciation for God's existence. For them, this is a significant occasion to enhance their belief and reliance on God throughout their entire lives. His unwavering presence during hardships brings comfort. They feel at peace when communicating with Him. They acknowledge that everything, whether big or small, is a gift from God that fosters gratitude (Lucado, 2015).

I believe and trust in God because He has a good plan. (AS22)

We should have a grateful heart for everything we achieve, whether it's a small thing or an important thing because God is the Creator of it, not us. (AS5)

Spiritual integration consists of cultivating a way of becoming as Benson (2019) explains it. The respondents learn the significance of sharing inspiring quotes and experiences with their peers as they acknowledge the role of God in their life. They trust and believe in Him who forgives and never leaves them alone. Furthermore, such efforts influence their identity, creativity, values, and interests, utilizing activities, relationships, and practices that forge connections to live out in their lives (Fisher, 2011). Their positive actions lead them to inspire their classmates and friends, particularly those who are disheartened. This highlights the importance of fostering strong connections with friends, family, and loved ones. These relationships provide a sense of belonging, different perspectives, and encouragement during tough times.

Life is too short. Always give. I will give my best in every situation that I face. No matter what happens during my difficulties, I must be grateful for what I experience, whether good or bad. I trust that on our everyday journey, God listens to my experience. I always put my love and trust in God. By doing so, I will never feel lonely on my journey towards life. (AS3)

Knowing that those past experiences were significant for me, I would share them to others and teach them that trusting God and loving Him is the best way to live life with purpose and meaning. (BS16)

These respondents are fully aware of their spirituality like these male students who aim to inspire others by using their experiences as examples. They embrace successes and mistakes which help them flourish (Scales et al., 2014) which manifest in their good character, conduct, and excellent academic performance.

I can share my stories and experiences with others to try and let them witness being seen, heard, and loved, while also inspiring them to show care and love to others and the environment. This can lead us all to become the best versions of ourselves by sharing stories and inspiring one another as a community. We can develop a path towards the common good. (BS15)

Myers (2000) cited that connecting with people through shared experiences fosters empathy. Encouraging others to embrace experiences and not fear them can guide them towards wholeness. Like these female participants who incorporate spirituality into their lives by gaining insights from their experiences and practicing empathic listening.

Be a role model to others as a daughter, sibling, and learner. Helping others with schoolwork. Encouraging my co-students to join school projects. Sharing our experiences and learning from others nourish and enhance our learning. (BS3)

Exchanging experiences and knowledge with others enhances their personal development and broadens their outlook. Likewise, the promotion and facilitation of open communication provide them with space for better ideas and opinions which broaden their perspectives. They exert a profound impact on individuals' spiritual beliefs and practices by exchanging stories. They do this by taking a cue of various recollections and group sharing in their classes.

Students' Definition of Spirituality

Spirituality is a way of looking for direction and significance in the life of a person. Besides, there is a quest for wholeness and for finding a way to connect with God (Mansukhani & Resurreccion, 2009). The researchers present the responses of the participants to what they understand about spirituality. These are the following themes that are culled from their responses: know oneself and attain inner peace, connection with God and believing in Him, live out morals and values, and discover purpose and meaning in life.

Know oneself and attain inner peace

The students believe that God created them, that they have spirits, and their body is the temple of God. This human spirit enables them to connect with the Creator. They acknowledge that an individual's soul or spirit represents the essence of one's existence—one's true self. It is their religious beliefs that often connect them to their innermost being. Additionally, self-discovery and self-awareness (Buqué, 2024) allow them to understand their unique paths. They believe that self-discovery allows them to understand their distinct personalities, and their beliefs and understanding shape their perception of the world. They experience a sense of peace which they consider a spiritual experience. Self-knowledge helps individuals experience harmony and inner peace.

Spirituality is knowing who you truly are. (AS13)

It reminds me of the soul and my connection with God and my brothers and sisters. I realize that I am a temple and must be taken care of, but so are others. Thus, I must help take care of them as well. (BS26)

I think of peace. Spirituality is a way to find ourselves and our purpose. Through the connection with ourselves it brings out the inner peace that makes stronger bonds with us and with others. (BS19)

Connection to God and believing in Him

A religious life involves nurturing and deepening one's faith, recognizing the omnipresence of God, and striving to understand one's beliefs and religion on a deeper level. This includes having faith, attending worship services, availing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and committing to one's faith. By focusing on their relationship with God (Yabut, 2018), participating in religious activities, and connecting them with Him nurture their faith and religiosity.

It is something that we all have within us. Moreover, for me, this term is also connected to God and the Holy Spirit. Aside from it, spirituality also relates to our Christian faith. (AS6)

It is the presence of God within us during prayer or moment of silence. (BS3)

According to them, they lead a meaningful religious life, when they help others and follow the teachings of their faith with commitment. They feel God's presence in their lives. Their relationship with Him shapes their spirituality, and faith sustains them on their journeys (Tuason et al., 2017).

Spirituality is a sacred word that can be related to us and to God. We need to affirm it. This also corresponds to us as Catholics on the way to the afterlife. (AS3)

Live out of morals and values

Yabut (2018) cited that morality plays a significant role in shaping one's behaviors and choices. The respondents strive to treat others well and make ethical choices. Living a life based on positive traits and values, acting with integrity, and upholding moral principles involve doing what is right and beneficial to self and for others. The respondents uphold values and do what is right, all of which transform their lives. In sum, it is a call to live a life of integrity and positive values.

Spirituality is the concept of praising God. However, not just through prayer but also through multiple acts of selfless actions such as helping the needy. (BS9)

Morality is doing the right thing, and it is in accordance with one's way of life. It is also our relationship with God-how close we are to Him and how we value Him.(AS7)

Discover purpose and meaning in life

Fisher (2011) study on adolescence spirituality stress that possessing a sense of purpose, which serves as a driving force and source of motivation, is essential for experiencing happiness, exploring personal interests, and identifying opportunities to make meaningful contributions to a cause or purpose larger than one's individuality

Spirituality helps me find my purpose in life. It is through deepening and developing beliefs around the meaning of life and connection with other creations. (AS14)

Spirituality comes as one's perception of the world and what one's purpose is in the greater scheme of life. (AS11)

The students learn to accept the guiding force of God who helps them navigate life's journey and acknowledge their place in the world. Ultimately, it is about discovering the purpose and meaning of spirituality through the interconnectedness of all creation in every circumstance.

Experiences with Themselves, Others, Nature, and God in Subject Areas and School-Related Activities as They Relate to Spirituality

The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) and Phoenix Publishing House Educational Foundation Inc. published the Philippine Catholic Schools Standards for Basic Education (PSCS), which Aguas (2022) used to describe the defining characteristics of Catholic schools in the country. Environmental literacy is crucial for learners to make informed decisions on related issues (Garcia and Cobar-Garcia, 2022). The learners must develop scientific, technological, and ecological literacy skills, to enable them to address real-world problems. They should understand science concepts and apply inquiry skills to address global issues. The students were amazed by the distinctiveness of every species in the ecosystem and biodiversity. Respondents also recognized that every life form, including humans, is unique and plays a role in maintaining harmony with the environment. As a result, they have become mindful of how their actions can impact on the other living beings that coexist with them.

In terms of biodiversity, we are dependent on nature. Biodiversity helps us see the uniqueness of each species, as well as how we are interrelated and interdependent. Climate change affects us all. (AS20)

I am amazed by the genetic combination of my parents. There are recessive and dominant genes. I am amazed that we have distinct characteristics. We are all unique. (AS24)

In the DepEd curriculum guide, the mathematics content standard focuses on developing skills that focus on quantities, shapes and figures, functions, logic, and reasoning. Mathematics is a scientific tool. and a language equipped with symbols, notations, and rules. Like Science, Mathematics is a challenging subject for many. However, there is value that Mathematics offers to many when connected to spirituality.

In math, we learn from our mistakes and look for ways to make things right. It is like what we are doing to our planet that contributes to destruction and causes massive global warming. We must continue addressing what wrong we have done. (BS11)

Learning about arithmetic sequences can extend beyond mathematical concepts. It teaches practical skills like budgeting our allowance properly, which aligns with responsible financial management. (BS14)

The Araling Panlipunan (AP) curriculum aims to instill in the youth with a specific identity and role as Filipinos in society, country, and world. In addition to cultivating identity and civic competence, this curriculum emphasizes understanding the past and the present. According to Aguas (2019) it also explores the relationships within society, between society, nature, and the world, and how these relationships have shaped and continue to shape individual and collective futures. Bual and Madrigal (2019) emphasize that spirituality in social science helps the learners distinguish their role in the community and their responsibility as Filipino citizens and Christians while acquiring skills.

Doing research is one of the performance tasks. It is to help an organization and promote its advocacies, such as Angat-Bayan, an NGO. As students, we helped an organization promote its advocacy in terms of donations and awareness. What we did was to involve our parents in this activity. It helps us live out our vision and mission for school. (BS14)

The purpose of teaching Filipino is to foster the development of students' ability to communicate effectively, capacity for reflective and critical thinking, and appreciation for literature. Through reading materials and technology, with the goal of nurturing a sense of national identity, cultural literacy, and a commitment to lifelong learning to adapt to fast-paced global changes. The students like poetry in Filipino because it expresses their inner feelings. They could articulate their deepest emotions in the language they are familiar with. The words they speak,

read, and compose in Filipino touch their spirits, and fill them with nostalgia. Exploring Philippine literary heritage allows them to appreciate their collective story as a people—their struggles, hopes, triumphs, and cultural richness.

Filipino stories nurture our appreciation of our culture, history, and tradition. (BS9)

Like Filipino, Language as a subject is a tool for acquiring knowledge and the fundamental basis for communication and cognitive processes. It is a subject that affects people's mental, interpersonal, and affective development. Language is crucial for establishing and maintaining relationships with others, comprehending the world, and nurturing individual development. The participants shared that their teacher emphasized respect for diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. Thus, their experiences not only fosters learning from one another but also promotes a harmonious and inclusive environment.

In English, faith integration helps build confidence. (BS4)

We used what we learned in the subject in our student government campaign to advocate these effective communication skills. (AS12)

We go beyond the subject. In our student campaign, we were encouraged to create change regarding the current issues because many people and other creatures were affected. (BS16)

Spirituality and School-related Activities

Moulin-Stožek (2020) research has shown that incorporating spirituality into activities can significantly contribute to students' personal development. The responses provided by the participants in this study reflect their individual experiences and engagements. It presents that Recollection has the highest level of student involvement and is well appreciated in this study. This allows them to have a conducive space for introspection, spiritual exploration, and sharing. These young adolescents

discover and affirm their values, beliefs, and unique qualities, contributing to an intense sense of identity.

I realized that we are not perfect; I was wrong sometimes. I gained a connection with God and my fellowmen. (AS14)

There is personal interaction among students, and we share our struggles. Then I realized that we have to care for each other. (BS25)

Since majority of the respondents are Catholics, they recognize the Eucharist as the source and summit of the life and mission of the church. Their active participation in Eucharistic celebrations reflects their understanding that it is the highest form of worship, glorifying and honoring God. According to the students, participating in the Eucharistic celebrations nourishes their souls and deepens their relationship with God. It provides spiritual sustenance, guiding them in their daily lives. The Holy Eucharist affects their personal development and well-being as they become adults. The sermon during the Eucharistic celebration aids students in enhancing their spiritual well-being and effectively dealing with difficulties in life.

Homily helps us improve our spirituality because the priest explains the Word of God, and it gives us guidance on how to live it out. I get insights, and it is there that I can improve my spirituality. (BS25)

The priest's sermon offers precepts for practical guidance and encourages us to live our faith fervently. The Eucharist inspires selflessness and compassion, motivating us to serve our communities and beyond. (AS6)

The FMM schools have other activities that enhance the spiritual growth of the learners. The respondents mentioned the following: (1) Mission Sunday, (2) Retreat, (3) Transitus, (4) Holy Week, (5) religious rituals, (6) Outreach Program, and (7) Morning Routine. The researchers culled answer from the non-Catholics regarding their involvement in religious activities.

Factors that Facilitate and Hinder the Integration of Spirituality

The respondents name the components that facilitate and hinder the integration of spirituality in the curriculum: teacher-related factors and student-related factors. There are three themes used to categorize the facilitation of the integration of spirituality into the curriculum: nurturing positive relationships with the learners, a conducive teaching-learning environment, and ingenious teaching strategies.

Building a teacher-student relationship has to be established as seen in the insights of the respondents based on their experiences. According to the respondents, teachers who are patient create a supportive environment where students are valued and understood. These teachers know how to listen attentively and pay attention to their students' needs.

Teachers are to encourage students to pay attention and complete the assigned tasks. They also urge students to work hard on academic assignments. (AS14)

The teacher is adept at establishing a connection with the students and imparting the necessary knowledge. Students should pay attention to the instructions provided. (AS17)

The teacher is to be considerate and patient. He needs to understand the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students. (AS19)

It has been a school culture to recognize the students where they excel according to their capacities and talents. The school is the venue where they can hone their giftedness. They are ready to share, and they will be happy with themselves. The respondents described what it means to sustain a positive environment like those educators who practice innovative, creative, and meaningful teaching strategies encourage cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork. Madelo (2015) affirmed these values are the spiritual foundation these young people need from their teachers.

There must be cooperation between teachers and students for an effective teaching-learning process. (AS22)

We should focus on finding solutions to problems rather than blaming others. God gives us challenges in life for a reason. So, let's have a positive mindset. (AS24)

The teachers always motivate us. They are creative and innovative in their teaching strategies. They guide us through inspiring quotes to live by. (AS1)

The teacher explained well what he was going to teach. If all subject teachers were like this, we could easily understand what they were sharing with us. (BS3)

On the other hand, the students recognized their crucial role in facilitating the integration of spirituality. The following are from their responses:

I am attentive, patient, and understanding toward my teachers. (AS23)

To understand how to teach something, students should be ready to listen. The mind must be open, so that it can adapt to ideas. (AS17)

Spirituality as Core of the Curriculum (SCC) helps us relate our lessons to our lives and Christian faith, which in turn allows us to inculcate the lessons that we learn in our everyday lives as Christians. (BS15)

Students show respect and diligence towards teachers and their teaching with patience, attention, interest, cooperation, and understanding. Striving for purpose and meaning in life paves the way to grow with God's grace and guidance of mentors when spirituality becomes a core of teaching and learning experiences. Some respondents recognized the role of parents and other school personnel aside from their teachers in their spiritual growth.

Parents and teachers can negotiate academic pressure by working together to find a balance between academic requirements and spiritual growth. (BS12)

The students shared what hinder them in learning. This study presents three themes emerged from the responses: educators' lack of skills and knowledge to incorporate spirituality into academics and activities, their communication deficiency, and their problematic behaviors. Every school needs competent and knowledgeable teachers who are the beacons of education for students (Hudson, 2008). Besides being subject experts, they also need multiple other skills that are essential for teaching and inspiring students, especially in digital era.

Some teachers are amazingly fast in discussing the topics, and some students cannot catch up. Not all students have the same level of understanding. Some students are afraid to participate in class because they fear that their answers are wrong. (AS15)

One of the key factors that students learn is the effective communication skills of the teachers. In this category, the students mentioned how the lack of communication obstructs learning. By demonstrating professional behavior, teachers efficiently convey to students the value of their education (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). It sets a positive example for students to follow, cultivating an environment characterized by respect, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

Students need encouragement rather than comparison. Teachers need to cheer students on to do better in all aspects. I experienced that the teacher was comparing the students, and the students felt downgraded. It does not contribute to the students' improvement. (BS12)

The teacher is unwilling to accept mistakes. (BS10)

If a teacher is angry, he will forget everything. Always keep peace of mind. In anger, there is no good result for anyone. (AS20)

The participants enumerated some of the factors they experienced that affected the teaching-learning activities. There are two main themes in this category: personal problems and behavioral problems. These are inevitable, however, when the student is not given help, the learning process is disrupted. When learners begin to manifest behavioral problems, they are resistant and deviant, which hampered the teachers' ability to facilitate learning and the students' receptivity to understand the concepts the teachers needed to discuss.

Annoyance and disturbance of emotions caused by classmates thwart the learning process and formation of character. Our own inhibitions and lack of interest hinder learning. We are not focused. (BS6)

Sometimes they are just disappointed in how life is going. There are some tragedies. (AS4)

We are immature, and occasionally, during discussions about topics such as abortion, there are students who do not take the topic seriously and instead laugh about it. (BS14)

Programs to Enhance the Integration of Spirituality of the FMM Schools as the Core of the Curriculum

Spirituality's overarching integration into the curriculum extends beyond mere academics. It encompasses other school activities because these projects or undertakings play an indispensable role in enhancing the spirituality and well-being of all, especially students. The following are the various categories of activities students shared in School A and School B. According to the respondents, these activities can enhance the integration of spirituality in terms of their connection with themselves, others, nature, and God.

In participating in the outreach programs, I realized that my purpose in life is to help others. It is an opportunity to express my spirituality in action (AS17)

Club organizations aid in team-building and goal achievement. (AS15)

During the interviews conducted with students from School A and School B, they were asked to identify the activities and programs that they found valuable. The respondents from both schools mentioned various activities such as performance tasks, enrichment activities, lesson reviews, study periods, break times, and subject area initiatives. The students also identified activities that fostered their spiritual growth. For instance, School A students mentioned sessions on value formation, engagement in religious activities, community outreach initiatives, and participation in social gatherings and various clubs and organizations. On the other hand, School B students emphasized the importance of the school festival and the daily morning routine.

Based on students' experiences, the researchers recommend incorporating spirituality-related tasks into different subjects for mastery. Other activities include inviting experts to discuss ecology, social issues, and history. In the class schedule, it is important to include time for review, study, and breaks, as well as a one-minute meditation before tasks. For value formation, mindfulness, mental health, time management, conflict resolution, and career orientation. Schools already have outreach programs, but options for enhancement include higher-grade students teaching catechism in public schools, civic engagements, meeting with different sectors of society, and adopt-a-school programs. This can further broaden students' perspectives and instill a sense of social responsibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Benson, Fisher, and Waldrop framework established that these young people have recognized the importance of their spiritual growth. The respondents of this study are in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 and in their adolescent stage, coming from different family types, educational backgrounds of the parents or guardians, economic status, and geographical locations. They have shared varied and rich spiritual experiences. Their academics, school activities, and programs are integrated into spirituality and holistic growth.

Processes of awareness, connection, and integration of spirituality among the adolescent respondents include realizations of the importance of the interconnected dimension of their spirituality, including their relationships with themselves, others, the environment, and God. Spiritual growth provides a foundation for individuals' lives, particularly in education and personal development, as well as their character, well-being, and life's direction. For the students, spirituality is knowing oneself and achieving inner peace; connection to God and belief in Him; living out of morals and values; and discovering purpose and meaning in life.

The curriculum allows the students to experience spirituality, which has a profound and meaningful impact on their lives. They feel the lasting presence of God, reflected on their lives, discovered their purpose, learned from others, experienced healing and peace, and developed empathy towards others. The spiritual integration is enhanced through positive teacher-student relationships, a nurturing learning environment, and creative approaches to teaching. Nevertheless, obstacles such as difficulties in communication, undesirable conduct, and personal matters can impede this process, underscoring the necessity for teachers' assistance.

There are suggested activities and programs that are enhanced to promote the integration of spirituality into the curriculum of the FMM schools for the students. There is a need to support the formation of teachers and parents because they are directly involved with these youths.

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