

Spiritual Impact on Student's Anatomy Learning and Experience

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: spirituality is often defined as the quality of awareness of the human spirit or soul. Human anatomy is mostly concerned with knowing the human body architecture by dissection. Hence spirituality and Anatomy represent different forms of a person. It is strongly believed that an inclination towards spirituality tends to increase focus towards work. It is also advocated that spirituality helps to overcome anxiety, and stress and hence to have better emotional intelligence. In this viewpoint, we have expressed our perceptions regarding the impact of spirituality and its impact on students' anatomy learning.

Keywords: Basic science; Dissection; Mental wellbeing; Religion; Visualization.

Introduction

The spiritual impact on students' anatomy learning and experience can vary greatly depending upon one's individual beliefs, religious background, and perspective. Sanctity of mind can lead to a deeper understanding of the sophisticated designs of the human body, or it may hurt religious sentiments and create ethical dilemmas¹.

According to Joseph *et al.*², spirituality should be understood as "a more general, unstructured, personalized, and naturally occurring phenomenon, where a person seeks closeness and connectedness between him/herself and a higher power or purpose." Other authors define spirituality in terms of a search for universal truth and as an activity enabling people to discover meaning and significance in the surrounding world³. Some students may find that studying the human body and its intricate designs strengthens their beliefs and instills a sense of appreciation for the wonder and complexity of life.

Spirituality and Anatomy learning

Learners with spiritual inclination tend to develop care for the physical body as a temple of spirit. When studying anatomy, these students develop a greater appreciation for the vulnerability and fragility of the human body, making them more compassionate and empathetic towards patients which will lead to a more ambitious healthcare system in the future. These students view them as remarkable creations and can connect their religious beliefs with the pursuit of knowledge about the intricacies of life. Their spiritual values can contribute to thoughtful discussions and decisions regarding topics such as consent and human

subject research. Spirituality is known to emphasize the connection between mind, body, and spirit⁴.

Students with strong spiritual beliefs tend to have a holistic approach to learning anatomy.

They view the human body as not only a physical entity but consider it as an integrated system. Practices like mindfulness, meditation, or visualization results in enhanced focus, concentration, and mental clarity. Studies demonstrated the positive impact of spirituality on physical and mental health as well as on other health outcomes such as subjective well-being, health-related quality of life, coping skills, recovering from mental illness, or less addictive or suicidal behaviors^{5,6,7}. Learning Anatomy could be demanding and emotionally challenging, particularly when dissecting cadavers or witnessing the effects of disease or injury so spirituality may draw on their faith or spiritual practices to find solace and cope with the emotional aspects of the subject matter and maintain their overall well-being. This results in deep engagement with the subject and creates a more immersive learning experience.

Even some students may struggle with the study of anatomy, feeling uncomfortable or even repulsed by the graphic nature of the subject matter. This discomfort may stem from spiritual beliefs, as they may view the body as sacred and not meant to be dissected or studied in such detail⁴. Additionally, Strong believers of spirituality may raise ethical questions regarding the use of cadavers or the role of medicine and technologies that alter the natural processes of the body. The data suggests that having a religious/spiritual component to one's life and a belief in the soul may make dissecting more stressful and potentially have negative effects

on anatomy learning. Alternatively, the converse may be true, and a lack of religious/spiritual belief may reduce stress levels. Consideration of spirituality is increasingly being recognized as important in the provision of health care⁸.

Students with strong spiritual or religious beliefs that conflict with scientific principles, or the material being taught in anatomy may be more inclined to reject or selectively interpret certain information. This bias can hinder their ability to fully understand and accept scientific concepts and may lead to misconceptions or a limited understanding of anatomy. In an earlier qualitative study, medical students expressed some rather idiosyncratic beliefs related to the dissection of the heart and brain and the origin of the seat of the soul⁹. These students place an exaggerated importance on the dissection of these organs. Further, topics such as the study of human remains or reproductive systems can clash with religious or cultural beliefs. Students who feel conflicted or uncomfortable due to their spiritual background may struggle to fully engage with the material or may actively avoid certain topics, limiting their overall learning experience. Students often described the soul as the 'life force' or the 'spiritual essence of a person'⁹. This sometimes encourages a reliance on faith or dogma rather than critical thinking and scientific inquiry. In anatomy, critical thinking skills are essential for understanding complex structures and processes. Students who prioritize their spiritual beliefs over critical analysis may struggle to fully grasp and apply anatomical

concepts. These beliefs often rely on personal experiences, intuition, or faith-based beliefs, which may not align with the empirical evidence-based approach required for studying anatomy. An overemphasis on subjective experiences without considering objective evidence can hinder a comprehensive understanding of anatomical structures and their functions.

Conclusion

So, the impacts of spirituality can vary greatly among groups of students. It's affected by one's cultural contexts and the way spirituality is practiced and integrated into students' lives.

In one place spirituality can offer a sense of purpose and meaning which can enhance students' emotional well-being which may help them cope with stress, anxiety, and depression, promoting overall mental health. It offers resilience in students. It provides a source of inner strength and support during difficult times. Students who engage with spirituality may develop a strong moral compass, guiding their actions and decisions. On the other hand, If students rely solely on spiritual practices to cope with difficulties, they may neglect practical solutions or action which may lead to intolerance or judgment towards those who hold different viewpoints. This can negatively impact diversity and inclusion within the student community. So, to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual impact on students, conducting interviews with the individuals who have experienced such influences firsthand would provide valuable insights.

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