

Spirituality, Gratitude, and Hope: Testing Multiple Mediation Models in Adventist Senior High Schools

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Abstract- Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by identity exploration and increased sensitivity to life meaning and purpose. In educational settings—especially those informed by faith traditions—spiritual constructs may play a role in shaping psychological strengths. This study investigated the mediating relationships among spirituality, gratitude, and hope in a sample of 355 senior high school students enrolled in Adventist schools in Luzon, Philippines. Utilizing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, participants completed standardized measures including the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), the Index of Spiritual Well-Being (ISWB), and Snyder's Hope Scale. Descriptive, correlation, and mediation analyses were conducted using Jamovi. Results showed that the best-fitting model was: **Spirituality** → **Hope** → **Gratitude**, with the direct path from spirituality to gratitude remaining significant ($\beta = 0.6652$, $p < .001$), and the indirect path through hope while statistically non-significant ($\beta = -0.0889$, $p = .102$), yielded a total effect of $\beta = 0.5763$. The mediation model is represented as: **Gratitude** = $c' \cdot \text{Spirituality} + b \cdot \text{Hope} + e$, where $c' = 0.6652$ and $ab = -0.0889$. Although the mediating role of hope was not statistically supported, spirituality consistently emerged as the strongest predictor. These findings provide empirical support for spiritually integrated educational practices. Faith-based initiatives may strengthen adolescents' psychological orientation toward gratitude and purpose.

Keywords: spirituality, gratitude, hope, mediation analysis, adolescence, school chaplaincy

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by substantial physical, emotional, and cognitive transformations. As adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood, they are expected to manage increasing academic demands, navigate evolving social relationships, and confront questions of identity and purpose. These challenges are often accompanied by heightened emotional sensitivity and vulnerability to mental health concerns, including anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness (Panchal et al., 2021). The global pandemic has further exacerbated these vulnerabilities, leaving many students feeling isolated and uncertain about their futures (Imran et al., 2022). In this context, educational institutions are called to reimagine how they support adolescent learners—not only intellectually, but emotionally and spiritually.

Recent calls from education and mental health professionals underscore the need for a more holistic approach to high school education. Holistic education recognizes that the academic, emotional, social, and spiritual domains of a student's life are interconnected and must be nurtured simultaneously. According to López-Pérez et al. (2023), promoting socio-emotional learning and well-being within the school curriculum significantly improves students' engagement, emotional balance, and future outlook.

Schools serve as a primary context for identity formation, meaning-making, and character development, making them critical sites for well-being interventions that integrate life purpose, emotional expression, and resilience-building skills. Developing such competencies enables students to thrive in the face of adversity and transition more successfully into adult roles (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021).

This study aims to contribute to this growing movement by empirically modeling how spirituality, gratitude, and hope interact among senior high school students. By testing five different mediation models, the study seeks to clarify which pathway most effectively promotes adolescent well-being. The findings offer important implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers seeking to build more compassionate, resilient, and flourishing school communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research studies underscore the significance of integrating well-being principles into formal education, particularly during older adolescence, a developmental period characterized by identity formation, emotional vulnerability, and increased cognitive complexity (Steinberg, 2021). Positive psychology, as a foundational framework, has guided the promotion of character strengths such as gratitude, hope, and spirituality as essential components of flourishing and resilience (Waters et al., 2021). These traits are increasingly recognized not only as moral virtues but also as empirical predictors of psychological well-being, academic engagement, and life satisfaction among adolescents (Lomas et al., 2022). This literature review examines the conceptual foundations and interrelationships of spirituality, hope, and gratitude in the context of older adolescence and explores how these constructs synergistically contribute to adolescent well-being.

Gratitude

Gratitude, broadly defined as the recognition and appreciation of benefits received, functions as a social emotion that fosters reciprocity, trust, and positive affect (Emmons & Mishra, 2019). Within adolescent populations, gratitude has shown a consistent association with enhanced psychological well-being, reduced depressive symptoms, and greater academic motivation (Bono et al., 2020). Froh et al. (2019), in a longitudinal study, found that adolescents with higher gratitude levels reported increased life satisfaction, prosocial behavior, and reduced emotional distress over time. These findings suggest that gratitude not only enhances individual emotional regulation but also nurtures supportive peer relationships, a key developmental task during adolescence.

Theoretically, gratitude is anchored in Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which posits that positive emotions such as gratitude expand an individual's cognitive and behavioral repertoire and help build enduring psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Toivonen et al. (2021) support this framework, demonstrating that gratitude interventions in high school contexts can enhance empathy, reduce aggression, and increase optimism. The cultivation of gratitude in older adolescents promotes a shift from entitlement to appreciation, reinforcing a growth mindset and the capacity to reframe adversity positively.

Hope

Hope, as conceptualized by Snyder's Hope Theory, includes two components: agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals) (Snyder et al., 2002). Among adolescents, hope acts as a cognitive-emotional asset that helps them maintain focus on future aspirations while navigating the uncertainties of academic, social, and personal domains. Schnyder et al. (2021) emphasize that adolescents high in hope are more resilient in the face of setbacks, as hope enables them to remain action-oriented and emotionally buoyant.

Hope has also been linked with lower levels of anxiety and higher self-efficacy. In a recent study, Martins et al. (2022) found that hope significantly predicted positive coping mechanisms and life satisfaction among adolescents in both secular and faith-based schools. The strength of hope lies in its dynamic nature—it is malleable and teachable. School-based hope interventions, particularly those that combine reflective journaling, vision-setting, and peer support, have shown promising outcomes in enhancing students' motivation and overall well-being (Kern et al., 2022).

Moreover, hope's theological dimension, especially in Christian contexts, connects it to spiritual assurance and divine promises (Galatians 5:22). When rooted in faith, hope transcends optimism, becoming a spiritual anchor during periods of suffering and uncertainty. This deeper spiritual hope reinforces adolescents' sense of purpose, moral orientation, and trust in a meaningful future (Kim & Esquivel, 2020).

Spirituality

Spirituality, while variably defined across disciplines, is often described as the search for or connection with transcendent meaning, purpose, and values (Pargament, 2013). Among older adolescents, spirituality becomes increasingly salient as they question existential themes and seek coherence in their beliefs, values, and identity. Krok (2020) asserts that spirituality during adolescence plays a critical role in existential well-being, especially when aligned with a perceived life purpose.

In faith-based educational settings, spirituality is frequently expressed as a relationship with God, moral integrity, and service to others. Spiritual development supports identity coherence, emotional balance, and resilience in adolescents by offering a moral framework through which they interpret experiences (Mahoney et al., 2021). This aligns with Erikson's psychosocial theory, particularly the identity vs. role confusion stage, where spirituality can act as a stabilizing force in the midst of self-exploration (Erikson, 1968).

Recent studies have identified spirituality as a strong predictor of mental health, particularly among adolescents exposed to adverse life events. For instance, a study by Kim et al. (2023) involving high school students found that higher levels of spiritual well-being were associated with reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Similarly, Bragin et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of spiritual connectedness in mitigating the negative psychological impact of trauma and loss among adolescents.

Interrelations Among Spirituality, Hope, and Gratitude

Though distinct in definition, spirituality, hope, and gratitude frequently co-occur and reinforce one another in shaping adolescent well-being. Multiple empirical studies suggest that these constructs are dynamically interrelated. Kim and Esquivel (2020), for example, demonstrated that gratitude partially mediated the relationship between spiritual well-being and life satisfaction among adolescents. In their model, spirituality fostered a grateful disposition, which in turn elevated psychological well-being.

Implications for Educational Practice

Despite compelling evidence, character strengths such as spirituality, gratitude, and hope remain underrepresented in most formal curricula. This is particularly concerning in the context of rising mental health concerns among youth due to global uncertainties like climate anxiety, social isolation, and academic pressures (OECD, 2023). As Kern et al. (2022) argue, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift from knowledge acquisition to whole-person development in education.

Schools, particularly those rooted in holistic and faith-based values, are uniquely positioned to integrate these strengths into their pedagogy through classroom practices, mentoring, service-learning, and reflective spiritual activities. Waters et al. (2021) suggest that character education initiatives grounded in positive psychology not only enhance emotional literacy but also foster purpose-driven leadership among students.

Moreover, the integration of these strengths can cultivate a school culture that values gratitude rituals, spiritual reflection, and future-oriented goal-setting. Such a culture provides adolescents with emotional grounding and a deeper sense of belonging, both of which are critical to mental health and social connectedness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section outlines the research design, participants or data sources, tools and instruments, procedures, and data analysis techniques used in the study. It provides enough detail to allow for replication, including how samples were selected, what tools or measures were used, and how data were collected and processed.

1. **Research Design:** This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design. Mediation analysis was used to explore the direction and significance of the relationships among spirituality, gratitude, and hope. A quantitative approach was deemed appropriate given the study's objective to test theoretical mediation models using statistical measures. The non-experimental nature of the study and its focus on naturally occurring psychological traits among high school students positioned it within a descriptive-correlational framework.
2. **Participants/Data Sources:** The participants were 355 senior high school students enrolled in Adventist sectarian schools in Luzon. To ensure representativeness, cluster random sampling was used. In cluster random sampling, naturally occurring groups (or clusters) such as schools or regions are randomly selected, and all individuals within the selected clusters are surveyed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, schools were first categorized by geographic clusters—North Luzon, Central Luzon, and South Luzon; another cluster was randomly selected such as the sections in each school where the sample was selected. This technique provided logistical efficiency and reduced sampling error across diverse subgroups of students. Ethical protocols were observed, including informed consent and the confidentiality of responses. Data collection was conducted using online Google Forms, ensuring accessibility and standardization.
3. **Tools and Instruments:** Three standardized instruments were used to measure the variables:
 - **Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6):** Developed by McCullough et al. (2002), this 6-item scale measures trait gratitude using a 7-point Likert format. It has shown high internal consistency across various adolescent populations.
 - **Index of Spiritual Well-Being (ISWB):** Developed by Ellison and Paloutzian (1982), this instrument comprises two subscales: Religious Well-Being and Existential Well-Being. It assesses a person's perception of their relationship with God and their sense of purpose and meaning in life.
 - **Snyder's Hope Scale:** Created by Snyder et al. (1991), this 12-item scale measures two components of hope—agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals). It uses an 8-point Likert scale and has been widely used in studies on adolescent hope and psychological resilience.

All instruments used in this study reported Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.80, indicating strong internal reliability.

4. **Procedures:** After obtaining necessary ethical approvals and coordinating with school chaplains, the study was launched online. Invitations and consent forms were distributed to students. Students received the link to the online survey. The administration was conducted over two weeks to allow adequate time for participation and reduce potential response bias due to academic schedules. Chaplains in each school cluster assisted in monitoring participation. Data from Google Forms were exported into spreadsheets and then uploaded to the Jamovi software for analysis.
5. **Analysis Techniques:** Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi, a user-friendly statistical software platform for social science research. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the mean and standard deviation of the three key variables. Mediation analysis was carried out to determine relationship and mediation of the three variables. Four models were tested, using the standard $a \times b$ pathway to estimate indirect effects. Bootstrapped confidence intervals (based on 1,000 resamples) and p-values were used to assess the significance of these indirect paths. Model comparisons were based on effect sizes, p-values, and theoretical coherence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is critical for demonstrating the value and originality of the research. It should provide a clear, concise, and objective presentation of the findings, followed by a thoughtful interpretation of their meaning and significance. Results must be supported by appropriate data, and the discussion should highlight how these findings relate to the research questions, existing literature, and potential implications.

Descriptive Analysis of Hope, Gratitude, and Spirituality

Table 1. Levels of Hope, Gratitude, and Spirituality

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Hope	3.95	0.521	Moderately High
Gratitude	4.86	0.727	High
Spirituality	5.09	0.749	High

The participants reported a **moderately high** level of hope ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.52$), indicating that they generally exhibit goal-directed thinking and a belief in their capacity to find ways to achieve their objectives. Gratitude had a **high** mean score ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 0.73$), suggesting that respondents frequently acknowledge and appreciate the positive aspects and benefits in their lives. Spirituality received the **highest** average score ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 0.75$), indicating a strong sense of personal meaning, faith, or connection to the transcendent among participants.

Relationship of Hope, Gratitude, and Spirituality

Table 2. Correlations Among Hope, Gratitude, and Spirituality

Variable	Hope	Gratitude	Spirituality
Hope	—	.202*	.542***
Gratitude	.202*	—	.594***
Spirituality	.542***	.594***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The correlation matrix revealed significant positive relationships among the variables. Hope was moderately and significantly correlated with spirituality ($r = .542, p < .001$), indicating that students with stronger spiritual well-being tend to report greater hopefulness. Gratitude also showed a strong positive correlation with spirituality ($r = .594, p < .001$), reflecting prior findings that gratitude often arises from a deeper sense of connectedness and meaning (Toivonen et al., 2021). While the correlation between hope and gratitude was statistically significant ($r = .202, p = .055$), it was comparatively weaker. These findings align with prior studies asserting that spirituality serves as a foundational mechanism through which gratitude and hope are cultivated (Kim & Esquivel, 2020; Martins et al., 2022). Lomas et al. (2022) further emphasize that character strengths such as gratitude and hope may show distinct pathways of influence depending on developmental and cultural contexts.

Path Analysis of Hope, Gratitude, and Spirituality

This section presents the results of the mediation analyses conducted to investigate the interplay between spirituality, hope, and gratitude using different pathway configurations. The mediation models tested various directional relationships among the three constructs based on existing theoretical assumptions and recent empirical findings (Peterson & Seligman, 2019; Yaden et al., 2020; Hyland et al., 2021; Krause & Pargament, 2022; Smith et al., 2023). Each model includes direct, indirect, and total effects, as well as the percentage of mediation. Five configurations were examined: (1) Spirituality → Hope → Gratitude, (2) Spirituality → Gratitude → Hope, (3) Hope → Gratitude → Spirituality, (4) Gratitude → Hope → Spirituality, and (5) Gratitude → Spirituality → Hope. A summary table is also presented to highlight the best mediating path.

Table 3. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of the Five Models

Model 1	Estimate	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	-0.0889	0.0543	-0.2020	0.0163	-1.64	0.102	11.8
Direct	0.6652	0.0952	0.4560	0.8297	6.99	<.001	88.2
Total	0.5763	0.0825	0.4030	0.7228	6.99	<.001	100.0
Model 2	Estimate	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	-0.0761	0.0470	-0.1740	0.0089	-1.62	0.106	14.4
Direct	0.4526	0.0764	0.3260	0.6239	5.92	<.001	85.6
Total	0.3765	0.0765	0.2470	0.5513	4.92	<.001	100.0
Model 3	Estimate	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	0.1470	0.0919	-0.0065	0.3530	1.60	0.11	18.8
Direct	0.6320	0.1348	0.3913	0.9140	4.69	<.001	81.2
Total	0.7790	0.1787	0.4521	1.1560	4.36	<.001	100.0
Model 4	Estimate	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	0.0916	0.0570	-0.0027	0.2210	1.61	0.108	15.0
Direct	0.5201	0.1130	0.2800	0.7130	4.60	<.001	85.0
Total	0.6116	0.1209	0.3592	0.8270	5.06	<.001	100.0

Model 5	Estimate	SE	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	0.0006	0.0485	0.0118	0.0993	0.99	0.0993	0.1
Direct	0.5760	0.0986	0.0000	0.0000	5.84	<.001	99.9
Total	0.5760	0.0815	0.0000	0.0000	7.07	<.001	100.0

Model 1: Spirituality → Hope → Gratitude

The direct effect of spirituality on gratitude remained strong and significant. Hope did not significantly mediate this relationship ($p = .102$), accounting for only 11.8% of the total effect. This suggests a dominant direct influence of spirituality on gratitude.

Model 2: Spirituality → Gratitude → Hope

This model indicated a small and statistically insignificant indirect effect ($p = .106$), with gratitude mediating only 14.4% of the effect. The direct path remained strong, suggesting gratitude does not function as a significant mediator.

Model 3: Hope → Gratitude → Spirituality

An indirect effect of 18.8% was observed, though it was statistically non-significant ($p = .110$). The model highlights a relatively robust direct relationship between hope and spirituality, again limiting the mediating role of gratitude.

Model 4: Gratitude → Hope → Spirituality

This configuration showed an indirect effect of 15.0%, with hope again not reaching significance as a mediator ($p = .108$). The direct path from gratitude to spirituality remained strong and significant.

Model 5: Gratitude → Spirituality → Hope

In this model, spirituality fully mediated the relationship between gratitude and hope, with nearly all of the effect passing through spirituality ($p = .991$). The direct effect was nearly equal to the total, indicating full mediation.

Table 4 summarizes the mediation analysis results for all five tested models. Based on the statistical significance of the indirect paths and the percentage of mediation, the Gratitude → Spirituality → Hope model showed the highest mediation ratio (99.9%) despite an insignificant indirect effect. However, none of the models yielded statistically significant indirect effects. The model with the strongest and most significant direct effect remains Spirituality → Gratitude. This suggests that future studies may need to examine moderating variables or alternative mediators beyond hope and gratitude.

Table 4. Summary of the Mediation Models

Model	Indirect p-value	% Mediation
Model 1: Spirituality → Hope → Gratitude	0.102	11.8%
Model 2: Spirituality → Gratitude → Hope	0.106	14.4%
Model 3: Hope → Gratitude → Spirituality	0.11	18.8%
Model 4: Gratitude → Hope → Spirituality	0.108	15.0%
Model 5: Gratitude → Spirituality → Hope	0.0993	0.1%

Across all tested configurations, spirituality emerged as the strongest and most consistent predictor among the three variables. In both Model 1 (Spirituality → Hope → Gratitude) and Model 2 (Spirituality → Gratitude → Hope), the direct effect of spirituality remained statistically significant with medium to large effect sizes ($\beta = 0.665$ and $\beta = 0.453$, respectively; $p < .001$), regardless of the mediating pathway. Although Model 5 (Gratitude → Spirituality → Hope) mathematically presented a full mediation model (99.9% mediation), the indirect effect was statistically non-significant ($p = .991$), indicating that the apparent mediation lacks empirical support. Therefore, models where spirituality serves as the independent variable (especially Model 1 and Model 2) are the most theoretically and statistically sound configurations.

These findings are consistent with prior literature underscoring the central role of spirituality in psychological well-being, particularly in adolescence. Studies by Peterson and Seligman (2019), Yaden et al. (2020), and Hyland et al. (2021) affirm that spirituality fosters positive emotions, life purpose, and coping strategies in youth. Krause and Pargament (2022) further emphasized that spirituality contributes to hope, gratitude, and psychological resilience.

In the context of senior high school students, the results imply that interventions designed to promote spirituality—such as reflective journaling, faith-integrated guidance programs, and service learning rooted in spiritual values—may directly enhance both hope and gratitude, thereby supporting adolescent mental health. Educational institutions, particularly those with faith-based missions, can leverage these findings to develop spiritually grounded wellness initiatives that foster gratitude and hope as protective psychological resources. Integrating spirituality into the academic and extracurricular landscape has the potential to significantly improve students' emotional resilience, life satisfaction, and sense of meaning during critical developmental years (Smith et al., 2023)

CONCLUSION

This study affirms the vital role of spirituality in cultivating hope and gratitude among senior high school students. Among the five mediation models tested, spirituality consistently demonstrated a strong and statistically significant direct effect on both gratitude and hope, regardless of the mediating variable. Although the mediation paths were not statistically significant, the magnitude and consistency of spirituality's influence underscore its foundational importance in adolescent well-being. These findings align with prior research emphasizing spirituality as a key protective factor in adolescent development, positively influencing emotional regulation, resilience, and purpose in life (Peterson & Seligman, 2019; Yaden et al., 2020; Krause & Pargament, 2022; Hyland et al., 2021).

The implications of these findings extend to the design of school-based spiritual formation programs. Senior high schools—especially those with faith-based orientations—can intentionally enhance student well-being by incorporating spiritual initiatives such as reflective journaling, mission trips, devotional groups, and peer mentoring rooted in biblical principles. Mission trips, in particular, offer adolescents meaningful opportunities for service, self-discovery, and deepened spiritual identity, all of which can foster gratitude and a hopeful outlook. These immersive experiences not only enrich students' spiritual lives but also translate into increased empathy, community engagement, and a stronger sense of calling.

For school chaplains, the findings suggest a shift toward proactive, holistic spiritual care. Chaplaincy programs should integrate both individual and community-based practices—combining personal reflection (e.g., journaling and guided devotionals) with corporate experiences (e.g., mission outreach, spiritual retreats, prayer groups). Collaborating across academic and pastoral departments can ensure that spiritual development is not peripheral but central to the student formation process. By embedding these strategies within the educational framework, schools can foster emotionally resilient, spiritually grounded adolescents who are better equipped to navigate life's challenges with faith, hope, and gratitude.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The presenting author, Joshua Castillo was responsible for sample selection, data collection, and the write-up on the introduction and conclusion. The co-author's responsibility was on the conceptualization, literature review, and data analysis and interpretation.

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