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BEYOND THE SCREEN: RE-THEORIZING ACADEMIC BUOYANCY THROUGH A BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL– SPIRITUAL FRAMEWORK IN ONLINE HIGHER EDUCATION – A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract:

The normalization of online and distance learning (ODL) has intensified psychological strain among university students while exposing important theoretical limitations in existing student support models. Current frameworks primarily emphasise technological readiness, instructional design, and cognitive engagement, yet often overlook the existential and spiritual dimensions that shape students' functioning and adaptation in digital learning environments. This conceptual paper proposes a Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) framework that positions spiritual well-being as a meta-regulatory construct influencing academic buoyancy and mental health. Drawing on the integration of the Biopsychosocial–Spiritual model and Social Cognitive Theory, the framework conceptualises spiritual well-being as a foundational personal resource that enhances mindfulness, academic hope, and self-efficacy within online learning contexts. A conceptual structural model is subsequently proposed to explain the mediated relationships linking spiritual well-being with depression, anxiety, stress, and academic buoyancy. By repositioning spirituality from a peripheral consideration to a structural determinant of student functioning, the proposed framework extends existing theoretical perspectives on resilience in online higher education. It further provides a holistic foundation for future empirical research while offering practical implications for

digital pedagogy, institutional student support, and mental health strategies designed to enhance student well-being and academic success in Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE).

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Keyword:

Academic Buoyancy, Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model, Higher Education Mental, Mindfulness, Online Learning, Health Spiritual Well-Being



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Introduction

The rapid expansion of online and distance learning (ODL) has transformed higher education by improving accessibility and learning flexibility. However, this shift has also introduced substantial psychological challenges for students, including social isolation, technological barriers, and reduced opportunities for meaningful interpersonal interaction (Al-Oraibi et al., 2022). Within the Malaysian Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE) landscape, particularly in institutions such as Open University Malaysia (OUM), many learners must simultaneously manage academic responsibilities alongside professional commitments and family obligations. These competing demands often intensify the experience of transactional distance, creating additional psychological and emotional pressures that may hinder students' engagement and persistence (Johnson, 2015). Evidence suggests that approximately 51% of distance learners experience psychological distress, highlighting the need for more comprehensive approaches to student support (Gamage & Herath, 2021). While existing interventions have primarily focused on technological, pedagogical, and cognitive dimensions of online learning, they provide comparatively limited attention to the deeper existential resources that enable students to remain resilient when facing persistent academic challenges. Against this backdrop, the present paper argues that spiritual well-being should be understood as a structural determinant that provides the existential grounding necessary to sustain motivation, adaptive functioning, and academic persistence within increasingly complex digital learning environments.

Problem Statement

Despite significant advances in AI-driven personalisation and digital pedagogy, an important theoretical gap remains within contemporary student support frameworks. Although existing

approaches have become increasingly sophisticated in addressing technological, instructional, and psychological needs, spirituality continues to be largely overlooked as a functional psychological resource. Consequently, prevailing models remain predominantly reactive and secularised, placing greater emphasis on alleviating symptoms such as stress and anxiety than on fostering the sustainable adaptive capacity required for long-term academic success (Chen et al., 2022).

This limitation becomes more apparent when viewed alongside empirical evidence indicating that approximately 51% of distance learners experience psychological distress (Gamage & Herath, 2021). Such findings raise important questions regarding the adequacy of existing "universal" support approaches, particularly within the Malaysian sociocultural context where faith, meaning, and existential orientation are deeply embedded in students' identities and lived experiences (Tanti et al., 2025; Al-Thani, 2025). A one-size-fits-all framework that neglects these contextual dimensions may therefore be insufficient for supporting students enrolled in Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE).

The limited integration of spirituality has contributed to what may be conceptualised as a "spiritual void" within existing online education frameworks. As a result, current models often fail to account for the deeper motivational, meaning-making, and self-regulatory processes that enable students to remain engaged and resilient when confronted with ongoing academic challenges. This conceptual paper therefore argues that spiritual well-being should be recognised as a meta-regulatory construct that underpins adaptive functioning in digital learning environments. Without incorporating this dimension into contemporary student support frameworks, efforts to promote student well-being are likely to remain both theoretically incomplete and practically insufficient.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the theoretical role of spiritual well-being in influencing mental health and academic buoyancy in online learning environments.
2. To propose a Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) conceptual framework for understanding student resilience in digital higher education.
3. To develop a conceptual model guiding future empirical research examining the mediating roles of mindfulness and academic hope.

Research Questions

1. **RQ1:** To what extent does spiritual well-being predict mental health outcomes and academic buoyancy among students in the Malaysian ODL environment?
2. **RQ2:** How can the BPSS model be theoretically integrated with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to explain the triadic interaction between personal spirituality and digital interventions?
3. **RQ3:** What are the proposed sequential mediation pathways through which mindfulness and academic hope translate internal spiritual well-being into measurable academic buoyancy?

Literature Review

The Ecosystem of Online Learning and Belonging

Student development in online learning environments is best understood through a bioecological perspective that recognises the dynamic interplay between individuals and their learning contexts across time (Harris & Hammond, 2026). From this perspective, learning extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge to encompass the quality of students' interactions with their digital environment, peers, and institutions. Central to this process is the development of a sense of belonging, which is fostered through meaningful digital communities, responsive feedback, and supportive interpersonal connections that encourage sustained engagement (Damiani & Basko, 2026). Alongside these relational factors, psychological readiness and instructional clarity remain fundamental determinants of technology acceptance, influencing students' confidence, participation, and overall learning experience within online environments (Robinson, 2025). Collectively, these elements illustrate that successful online learning depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the quality of the psychological and social ecosystem that supports students throughout their educational journey.

Importantly, academic buoyancy does not refer to responses to major adversity or trauma, but rather to students' capacity to manage routine setbacks inherent in ODL environments, such as unstable internet connections, delayed feedback, social isolation, and competing life responsibilities (Knežević & Polak, 2024). This distinction is critical, as buoyancy operates at a micro-adaptive level, directly influencing student engagement, persistence, and day-to-day academic functioning.

Empirical studies demonstrate that academic buoyancy is positively associated with engagement and enjoyment, while simultaneously reducing anxiety and academic stress (Wang & Hui, 2024). By focusing on everyday disruptions, academic buoyancy provides a more precise and contextually relevant construct for understanding student success in digital higher education.

Re-Defining Academic Buoyancy

Academic buoyancy refers to students' capacity to navigate the routine setbacks and everyday challenges that characterise online and distance learning (ODL), rather than their responses to major adversity or traumatic events. These challenges—including unstable internet connections, delayed instructor feedback, social isolation, and competing work or family responsibilities—require continuous adaptation to sustain learning engagement and academic progress (Knežević & Polak, 2024). This distinction is particularly important because academic buoyancy captures the micro-adaptive processes that enable students to remain engaged, persistent, and effective in managing the day-to-day demands of digital learning environments. Emerging empirical evidence underscores the significance of academic buoyancy as a protective psychological resource in higher education. Students who demonstrate higher levels of academic buoyancy are more likely to report stronger academic engagement and greater enjoyment of learning, while simultaneously experiencing lower levels of anxiety and academic stress (Wang & Hui, 2024). By focusing on students' capacity to respond adaptively to routine academic disruptions, academic buoyancy offers a more precise and contextually

relevant framework for understanding sustained engagement and academic success in contemporary online higher education.

Digital Interventions: Mindfulness and AI

Recent advances in digital learning technologies have expanded opportunities to support students' psychological well-being beyond conventional instructional approaches. Among these innovations, online mindfulness interventions have consistently demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing anxiety and promoting emotional regulation among university students, highlighting their value as accessible psychological support within digital learning environments (Coster et al., 2020). The growing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) has further broadened these possibilities through the development of technologies such as Spiritual Robotics and chatbot-based modules designed to facilitate spiritual reflection, meaning-making, and personal growth. Emerging evidence suggests that these AI-enabled interventions can strengthen students' resilience while fostering a deeper sense of purpose and existential awareness (Sharma & Aggarwal, 2025; Yeshenkulova et al., 2025). Collectively, these developments indicate that digital technologies have the potential to support not only students' cognitive and emotional needs but also the spiritual dimensions of learning, reinforcing the relevance of a more holistic approach to student well-being in online higher education.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

The proposed conceptual framework is grounded in the integration of the **Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) model** with **Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**. This theoretical synthesis moves beyond conventional secular approaches to student support by positioning spiritual well-being as both a **meta-regulatory construct** and a foundational personal resource that underpins higher-order processes of self-regulation, motivation, and meaning-making within online learning environments. Rather than viewing spirituality as a peripheral dimension of student development, the framework conceptualises it as a central mechanism that shapes students' capacity to adapt and flourish in digitally mediated educational settings.

Drawing on the principles of SCT, student functioning is understood through the lens of **triadic reciprocal determinism**, whereby personal, environmental, and behavioural factors continuously influence one another through dynamic interactions (Bandura, 1986). Building upon this perspective, the present framework introduces the concept of a **"nested reality,"** suggesting that students operate within multiple interconnected layers of internal psychological resources and external digital conditions that collectively shape their learning experiences (Harris & Hammond, 2026). This perspective acknowledges that students' responses to academic challenges emerge not from isolated factors, but from the continuous interplay between individual characteristics and the broader educational environment.

Within this triadic system, **spiritual well-being** represents the personal dimension, the institutional **"Culture of Care"** embodies the environmental dimension (Burkhardt et al., 2025), and **academic buoyancy** reflects the behavioural outcome (Knežević & Polak, 2024). Viewed collectively, these components provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how students interpret, respond to, and adapt to the everyday challenges of online learning. Accordingly, spirituality is reconceptualised not as a passive personal attribute but as an active regulatory resource that influences adaptive functioning by shaping meaning-making, motivational processes, and behavioural responses within digital learning ecosystems.

Triadic Interaction in a “Nested Reality”

Consistent with the principles of **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**, student development in online learning environments is conceptualised as the outcome of continuous reciprocal interactions among personal, environmental, and behavioural domains. Extending this perspective, the concept of a **"nested reality"** suggests that these interactions unfold within multiple, interconnected layers of individual experience and institutional context, where internal psychological resources and external learning conditions continuously shape one another (Harris & Hammond, 2026). Rather than functioning independently, these domains operate as an integrated system that influences students' capacity to adapt, persist, and thrive in digitally mediated learning environments.

Within this conceptualisation, the **personal domain** is represented by **spiritual well-being**, which functions as a meta-regulatory resource that provides existential grounding, purpose, and meaning making. These qualities strengthen students' ability to sustain motivation and remain engaged despite the ongoing academic and personal challenges associated with online learning.

The **environmental domain** is reflected in the institutional **"Culture of Care,"** encompassing responsive pedagogical practices, academic support, and inclusive learning environments that cultivate students' sense of belonging and connectedness (Burkhardt et al., 2025). Such institutional conditions create the external resources necessary to reinforce students' psychological well-being and facilitate positive learning experiences.

The **behavioural domain** is expressed through **academic buoyancy**, defined as students' capacity to manage routine academic setbacks, including technical disruptions, delayed feedback, social isolation, and competing work or family responsibilities (Knežević & Polak, 2024). Academic buoyancy therefore represents the observable behavioural manifestation of students' adaptive functioning within online learning contexts.

Taken together, these three domains illustrate that adaptive student behaviour cannot be attributed solely to either internal dispositions or external conditions. Instead, it emerges from the dynamic interplay between **meaning (spiritual well-being)**, **environment (Culture of Care)**, and **action (academic buoyancy)**, providing the theoretical basis for understanding how students sustain engagement and psychological well-being in online higher education.

The Meta-Regulatory Role of Spiritual Well-being

Within the proposed **Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) framework**, spiritual well-being is conceptualised as a **meta-regulatory construct** that operates at a higher level of psychological functioning. Rather than functioning as a single psychological attribute, it integrates cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes that enable individuals to regulate their responses to stress while maintaining purposeful, goal-directed behaviour (Bryan et al., 2023; Otanga et al., 2022). In this way, spiritual well-being serves as an overarching internal resource that supports adaptive functioning across multiple psychological domains.

Unlike conventional psychological resources that are often situation-specific or reactive, spiritual well-being provides a stable internal orientation grounded in meaning, purpose, and transcendence. This enduring source of psychological strength shapes how individuals interpret

adversity, sustain motivation, and remain committed to long-term goals despite ongoing challenges (Leung & Pong, 2021). Consequently, its influence extends beyond emotional coping by fostering a deeper sense of coherence and resilience that supports sustained engagement in academic pursuits.

This perspective is particularly relevant within the Malaysian context, where faith, meaning, and spirituality are closely intertwined with personal identity and everyday lived experiences. By acknowledging these culturally embedded dimensions, spiritual well-being offers important contextual validity that bridges the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of students' educational experiences. Within Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE), this resource is therefore proposed to play a central role in mitigating the psychological consequences of **transactional distance**, enabling students to maintain engagement and adaptive functioning despite the physical and social separation inherent in online learning environments (Johnson, 2015).

Sequential Mediation: From Spirit to Action

To operationalise this theoretical integration, the paper proposes a Structural Equation Model (SEM) that specifies a sequential mediation pathway linking spiritual well-being to academic outcomes:

Spiritual Well-being (IV) → Mindfulness → Academic Hope → Academic Buoyancy → Mental Health Outcomes

The proposed model assumes that spiritual well-being does not exert a direct influence on academic buoyancy. Instead, its effects are conceptualised as operating through two complementary psychological mechanisms that sequentially translate internal spiritual resources into adaptive academic functioning.

The first mechanism is **mindfulness**, which functions as a process of self-regulation. Spiritual well-being is proposed to cultivate present-moment awareness and strengthen emotional regulation, enabling students to remain cognitively stable and psychologically responsive when confronted with routine academic stressors, such as technical disruptions, uncertainty, or competing responsibilities (Satici et al., 2024). By fostering greater attentional control and emotional balance, mindfulness provides the psychological foundation for adaptive responses to the everyday challenges of online learning.

Building upon this self-regulated state, the second mechanism is **academic hope**, which serves as a motivational-strategic resource. Academic hope equips students with both the **agency** (willpower) to pursue academic goals and the **pathways** (strategic planning) required to overcome obstacles encountered throughout the learning process (Reyes-Perez et al., 2025a). As a result, students are better positioned to sustain motivation, identify alternative strategies, and remain committed to their academic objectives despite ongoing setbacks.

Working sequentially, mindfulness and academic hope translate the internal resources associated with spiritual well-being into observable adaptive behaviour, ultimately enhancing academic buoyancy. This sequential mediation pathway reinforces the proposition that spiritual well-being functions as a **meta-regulatory antecedent**, indirectly shaping both behavioural

and psychological outcomes through interconnected processes of self-regulation and goal-directed motivation.

Outcomes: Academic Buoyancy and Mental Health

Within the proposed framework, **academic buoyancy** represents the primary behavioural outcome, reflecting students' capacity to respond adaptively to the routine challenges inherent in Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE). These everyday challenges—including technological disruptions, delayed feedback, social isolation, and competing personal or professional responsibilities—require continuous adjustment to sustain engagement and academic progress (Knežević & Polak, 2024). Rather than reflecting responses to major adversity, academic buoyancy captures the micro-adaptive behaviours that enable students to navigate the ongoing demands of digital learning successfully.

By strengthening this day-to-day adaptive capacity, the framework proposes that students become better equipped to manage academic pressures, thereby reducing the likelihood of adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and stress. In this way, academic buoyancy functions not only as an indicator of adaptive learning behaviour but also as a protective mechanism that contributes to broader psychological well-being.

More broadly, the proposed framework reconceptualises the ODL experience as more than a process of academic achievement or technological engagement. Instead, it presents online learning as a holistic developmental journey in which self-regulation, meaning-making, and sustained engagement interact to promote both academic success and psychological well-being. This perspective reinforces the importance of integrating spiritual well-being into contemporary student support frameworks as a means of fostering resilient, engaged, and mentally healthy learners in digital higher education.

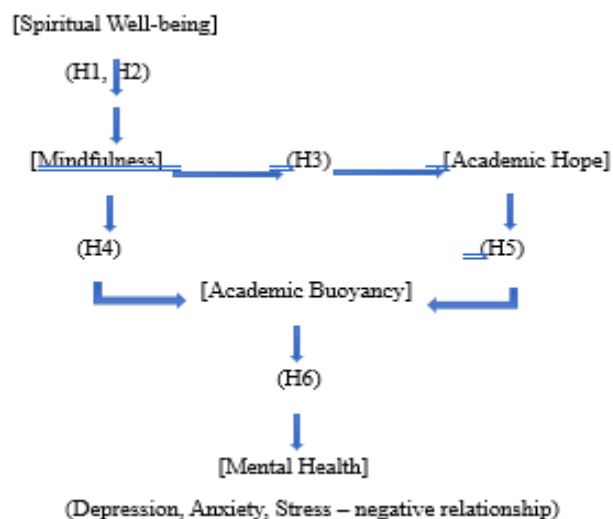


Figure 1. Proposed Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) Structural Model of Academic Buoyancy in ODL

Note: Spiritual well-being functions as a meta-regulatory personal resource influencing academic buoyancy indirectly through mindfulness (self-regulation) and academic hope (motivational–strategic mechanism). Academic buoyancy subsequently predicts mental health outcomes.

Hypotheses Development

Direct and Mediated Relationships

Building upon the integration of the **Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) model** and **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**, the following hypotheses are proposed to facilitate the future empirical validation of the conceptual framework. Each hypothesis reflects the theoretical relationships underlying the proposed sequential mechanism through which spiritual well-being is expected to influence academic buoyancy and psychological well-being.

As a **meta-regulatory construct**, spiritual well-being is proposed to strengthen students' capacity for emotional regulation and present-moment awareness. Individuals with stronger spiritual grounding are generally better equipped to regulate their emotional responses and remain attentive during challenging situations, thereby demonstrating higher levels of mindfulness (Satici et al., 2024). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Spiritual well-being positively predicts mindfulness.

Beyond its influence on self-regulation, spiritual well-being is also expected to foster motivational processes by strengthening students' sense of meaning, purpose, and goal-directed thinking, which collectively form the foundation of academic hope (Reyes-Perez et al., 2025a). Consequently, the following relationship is proposed:

H2: Spiritual well-being positively predicts academic hope.

Mindfulness is subsequently expected to contribute to the development of academic hope by enhancing emotional stability, attentional control, and cognitive clarity. Through these self-regulatory processes, students are better able to maintain focus on academic goals and identify constructive pathways for overcoming challenges. Therefore:

H3: Mindfulness positively predicts academic hope.

In addition to its motivational influence, mindfulness is proposed to contribute directly to **academic buoyancy** by enabling students to respond adaptively to the routine academic challenges encountered in online learning environments. Students who remain psychologically regulated are more likely to sustain engagement and persistence despite everyday setbacks.

H4: Mindfulness positively predicts academic buoyancy.

Academic hope, characterised by both **agency** (goal-directed determination) and **pathways thinking** (strategic planning), provides the motivational and cognitive resources required to sustain academic engagement and persistence over time. Students with greater academic hope are therefore expected to demonstrate stronger academic buoyancy when navigating routine learning challenges.

H5: Academic hope positively predicts academic buoyancy.

As the primary behavioural outcome within the proposed framework, academic buoyancy is expected to function as a protective factor for students' psychological well-being. By

strengthening students' capacity to manage everyday academic stressors, higher levels of academic buoyancy are anticipated to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (Knežević & Polak, 2024).

H6: Academic buoyancy negatively predicts psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress).

Sequential Mediation Effect

Building upon the proposed direct relationships, the conceptual framework further posits a **sequential mediation mechanism** through which spiritual well-being influences academic buoyancy indirectly via mindfulness and academic hope. Within this pathway, spiritual well-being is expected to first enhance students' self-regulatory capacity through mindfulness, which subsequently strengthens academic hope as a motivational resource. Together, these sequential psychological processes are proposed to translate internal spiritual resources into adaptive academic behaviour.

H7: Mindfulness and academic hope sequentially mediate the relationship between spiritual well-being and academic buoyancy.

Multidisciplinary Significance

The proposed **Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) framework** offers meaningful contributions across multiple disciplines, particularly psychology, educational technology, and higher education management. By integrating spiritual well-being into contemporary models of student development, the framework extends existing paradigms beyond predominantly cognitive and technological perspectives towards a more holistic understanding of how students adapt, engage, and thrive within online learning environments.

Implications for Psychology

From a psychological perspective, the proposed framework extends beyond traditional secular clinical models by introducing what may be conceptualised as a "**Spiritual–Resilience Triad**," in which spiritual well-being functions as a **meta-regulatory resource** underpinning emotional regulation, motivation, and adaptive behaviour. This reconceptualisation challenges the predominance of symptom-focused approaches by emphasising preventive, strengths-based mechanisms that recognise meaning-making, purpose, and existential grounding as essential contributors to sustained psychological functioning. Consequently, the framework offers a more integrative perspective for understanding student mental health, particularly within culturally embedded contexts where spirituality constitutes an important dimension of identity formation and psychological resilience.

Implications for Educational Technology and Instructional Design

For instructional designers and educational technologists, the framework provides practical guidance for embedding psychologically informed interventions within Learning Management Systems (LMS). In particular, it supports the incorporation of mindfulness-based micro-interventions and gratitude-oriented reflective activities that can be seamlessly integrated into online learning platforms to strengthen students' self-regulation and engagement. Beyond these

approaches, the framework also highlights opportunities for AI-enabled student support through chatbot-assisted guidance and emerging applications such as "**spiritual robotics**," which may facilitate reflection, meaning-making, and emotional support in scalable and personalised ways. Collectively, these innovations broaden the scope of digital pedagogy by addressing not only cognitive learning outcomes but also the affective and existential dimensions of students' educational experiences.

Implications for Higher Education Management and Policy

At the institutional level, the framework provides a strategic foundation for cultivating a "**Culture of Care**" within Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE). By recognising spiritual well-being as an integral component of student support, higher education institutions can move beyond fragmented intervention strategies towards a more coordinated and holistic approach that integrates academic, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions of student development. Such an approach has important implications for improving student engagement, retention, and long-term well-being, particularly within the Malaysian higher education context, where culturally responsive support systems are increasingly necessary. More broadly, the framework offers a strategic roadmap for aligning institutional policies and practices with the evolving needs of diverse, non-traditional, and digitally connected learners.

Viewed collectively, these multidisciplinary implications position the proposed **BPSS framework** as a scalable and contextually responsive model for strengthening student well-being in online higher education. By integrating psychological theory, educational technology, and institutional practice, the framework advances a more human-centred and psychologically sustainable vision of digital learning that extends beyond academic achievement to encompass students' holistic development and long-term flourishing.

Conclusion

The persistence of a "**spiritual void**" within contemporary digital education represents a significant theoretical and practical limitation in existing student support frameworks. Although prevailing models have made substantial advances in addressing the cognitive, technological, and instructional dimensions of online learning, they remain limited in explaining the deeper motivational, existential, and meaning-making processes that enable students to sustain engagement and adapt to the ongoing demands of digital learning environments.

By re-theorising academic buoyancy through the integration of the **Biopsychosocial–Spiritual (BPSS) model** and **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**, this conceptual paper positions **spiritual well-being** as a **meta-regulatory construct** that underpins self-regulation, motivation, and adaptive academic behaviour. The proposed framework extends current theoretical understanding by demonstrating how internal spiritual resources are translated into observable behavioural and psychological outcomes through the sequential mechanisms of **mindfulness** and **academic hope**. In doing so, it offers a more holistic explanation of how students cultivate the capacity to remain resilient, psychologically healthy, and academically engaged within online learning environments.

Within the Malaysian higher education context, where faith, meaning, and spirituality are closely intertwined with students' identities and lived experiences, the proposed framework offers strong contextual relevance by addressing the limitations of universal, secularised student support models. Accordingly, it provides a culturally responsive and theoretically robust foundation for promoting student well-being, engagement, and persistence in **Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE)**.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the framework also offers practical implications for higher education by informing the design of psychologically grounded digital interventions and supporting the development of institutional "**Cultures of Care**" that recognise students' holistic developmental needs. Rather than viewing student support solely through cognitive or technological lenses, the proposed framework advocates an integrated approach that acknowledges the interconnected roles of spirituality, self-regulation, motivation, and adaptive functioning in fostering student success.

Future research should focus on empirically validating the proposed structural model using **Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)** to examine the hypothesised direct and sequential mediation relationships. Such validation would not only provide empirical support for the proposed framework but also strengthen its applicability as a scalable and evidence-based model for enhancing student well-being, academic buoyancy, and psychological resilience in online higher education. Ultimately, this framework contributes a new theoretical lens for understanding student development in digital learning environments by positioning **spiritual well-being as the meta-regulatory foundation through which self-regulation, motivation, and adaptive behaviour converge to sustain both academic success and psychological well-being**.

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Author Contribution Statement:

All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. [Author 1] was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. [Author 2] handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. [Author 3 and Author 4] contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

The authors used **OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5.5)** during the preparation of this manuscript solely for language editing, grammar correction, and improving readability. All AI-generated content was carefully reviewed, verified, and revised by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript. AI was not used to generate research data, conduct analyses, or formulate the scientific conclusions.

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