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Research Article

Role of Religion and Spirituality in Shaping Diasporic Student Identity

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of religion and spirituality on the construction of diasporic student identity in education. Diasporic students are caught in intricate negotiations of self-identity influenced by culture, religion and spirituality in a world that is becoming more globalised. The present study sought to explore the association and predictive utility of religion and spirituality in diasporic identity among the target group. The quantitative research approach was followed and the data were gathered by administering standardised scales on religion, spirituality and diasporic identity from 200 students of the University of Burdwan. Descriptive statistics, t-test, correlation, regression and ANOVA were used to analyse data. The results indicated a strong positive correlation among religion, spirituality and identity formation ($r = 0.62, p < 0.01$) and that religion and spirituality significantly predicted diasporic identity ($\beta = 0.62, p < 0.001$). There were no significant gender differences, but the duration of stay was significant. The study recommends that religion and spirituality are critical dimensions of identity that offer meaning and a sense of belonging. The results suggest a new consideration of culturally responsive educational practices in support of the identity development of diasporic students.

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KEYWORDS: Cultural identity, Diasporic identity, Diasporic students, Duration of stay, Education, Identity formation, Religion, Spirituality

1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalisation and transnational mobility, the diaspora has become a prominent social formation and is now subject to novel processes of identity formation, which can be observed for example, in students in educational contexts. Diasporic identity is the shifting experience of self that individuals undergo as they mediate between their heritage cultural norms and those of the host society and is often driven by hybridity, fluidity and multiplicity (Hall, 1990). In this regard, religion and spirituality are deemed significant, as they allow people to find meaning, a sense of belonging and a link to the past in new cultural surroundings. Grounding of the study is in acculturation theory, identity development theory and meaning-making models. Acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) deals with the process of adaptation to new culture in which there are a number of strategies for adapting to a new culture lifestyle, in this case the preferred youth as a solution to stability of identity. Identity formation theory (Phinney, 1992) highlights that the development of one's identity is a long process characterized by exploration and commitment and is particularly relevant in the context of emerging adults in multicultural environments. Furthermore, meaning-making theory (Park, 2005) discusses the importance of religion and spirituality in assisting people in making sense of life experiences and in maintaining psychological coherence. Previous research indicates that religion and spirituality are key resources for members of the diaspora to promote a sense of belonging and cultural survival (Levitt, 2007). Research on migration has demonstrated a positive relationship between participation in religion and coherence of identity, psychological health and social integration (Connor, 2011; Saroglou, 2011). Further, it has been found that diasporic identity is not fixed, but is constructed and reconstructed through ongoing engagement with social, cultural and learning contexts (Vertovec, 2001). Educational institutions contribute largely to identity formation as they are places of cultural exchange, contemplation and bargaining (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Yet even with the burgeoning research, the quantitative relationship and predictive role of religion and spirituality in the formation of diasporic identity is underexplored, especially in higher education. Much of the research is qualitative or conceptual, with little empirical data employing statistical models (e.g., correlation and regression). Furthermore, the research addresses the need to focus on Indian diasporic or quasi-diasporic students (internal migration and cultural diversity within India, along with globalization are producing analogues to active diasporic experiences), where barely any studies exist. Given that the Indian society embodies religious pluralism and cultural diversity coupled with increasing student mobility, the significance of religion and spirituality in identity formation today is multi-fold. Universities are also considered sites of identity experimentation and negotiation as they are places where students from all over the world come to their own cultural versions of themselves. Hence, it is pertinent and also imperative to study the importance of religion and spirituality

in the formation of a diasporic identity among students of the University of Burdwan. This research will address this void by examining the relationships, predictive capabilities and group differences between religion, spirituality and the development of a diasporic identity in a quantitative manner, thus advancing the cross-disciplinary studies of education, sociology and psychology.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is important in that it adds to the understanding of how religion and spirituality inform diasporic identity in education, a space that has not been fully theorized through quantitative measures, especially in the context of India. It contributes to theoretical accounts of acculturation and identity development by showing how engagement with spiritual and religious traditions shapes identity development. The findings provide valuable information to teachers, policy makers and counsellors on how to develop culturally sensitive and whole school approaches which promote positive student identity and well-being.

1.2 Operational Definitions of the Study

In this study, all the key variables are operationalized in terms of measurable indicators and standard instruments are used to collect data, thereby bringing in reliability and validity of the data and also making the quantitative analysis consistent.

1.2.1 Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality relate to the extent to which students participate in religious beliefs and practices and have personal experiences of spirituality. This parameter was evaluated with the aid of the Religion and Spirituality Scale standardized instrument, that evaluates various dimensions such as faith orientation, involvement in religious practices (such as prayer, rituals), extent of spiritual beliefs and in the form of making meaning. The scale contains Likert type items (e.g. 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The summary score is the sum of responses across all items; higher total scores represent more religiosity and spirituality. Cronbach's alpha was used for assessing the scale reliability and was $\alpha = 0.87$ indicating good internal consistency.

1.2.2 Diasporic Identity Formation

Diasporic identity formation involves the students' construction and negotiation of identity as they relate to their heritage culture and the host or multicultural culture of environment. This factor was assessed by a standardized Diasporic Identity Formation Scale which considered aspects such as cultural belonging, identity negotiation, bicultural integration and self-concept in different contexts. The instrument is a Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Composite scores were calculated with higher scores reflecting more positive and consolidated identity formation. The scale's internal consistency was considered satisfactory with $\alpha = 0.84$.

1.2.3 Gender

Gender is the demographic information of the respondents who are male or female as reported in the personal information section of the questionnaire. It was treated as a categorical variable and tested for group differences through inferential statistics (t-test).

1.2.4 Duration of Stay: Duration of stay is the amount of time that students have been living in a diasporic or multicultural context away from home. The duration was grouped into <2 years, 2-5 years and >5 years. This factor was applied to investigate diasporic identity formation differences via ANOVA.

1.2.5 Students (Diasporic Students):

Diasporic students in this study are those who took their place at Burdwan University and so found themselves and their cultural antiphony challenged and put to the test by the very fact of migration, dislocation, or engagement in multiracial-educational environments. These students come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and thus serve well to focus our analysis on diasporic identity formation.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the degree of religiosity and spirituality among students in the diaspora.
2. To measure the extent of diasporic identity consolidation within students.
3. To investigate the correlation between religion, spirituality and diasporic identity formation.
4. To predict the salience of religion and spirituality in identity development.
5. To investigate the effect of gender and duration of stay.

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

On the basis of the research objectives, the following hypotheses were developed:

H₀₁: There is no significant correlation between religion and spirituality with diasporic identity formation of students.

H₁₁: There is a significant relationship between religion and spirituality, with diasporic identity formation among students.

H₀₂: Religion and spirituality are not significant predictors of diasporic identity formation of students.

H₁₂: Religion and spirituality are significant predictors of diasporic identity among students.

H₀₃: No significant gender difference is found in religion, spirituality and diasporic identity formation.

H₁₃: There are significant gender differences in religion, spirituality and diasporic identity formation.

H₀₄: There are no significant differences in the formation of a diasporic identity according to length of residence.

H₁₄: There is a significant difference in diasporic identity formation across length of stay.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Research Design This research method is a suitable to study the relationship among variables and to predict the effect of the independent variable on dependent variables.

2.2 Sample

The sample was comprised of 200 students of the University of Burdwan, who were selected by applying random sampling technique. The participants had a range of cultural and social backgrounds and were diasporic.

2.3 Tools Used

1. Predefined standardized tools were used in data collection:
2. Religion and Spirituality Scale
3. Diasporic Identity Formation Scale

The adoption of standardized tools allows for the validity, reliability and objectivity of the measurement of the constructs, thus enhancing the generalizability and scientific rigor of the findings.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

We collected data by providing the students with structured questionnaires following the consent procedure. All appropriate ethical considerations were observed.

2.4 Methods of statistical analysis

- Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation [SD], percentage), t-test
- Pearson Correlation
- Regression Analysis
- ANOVA

Such methods were suited to investigating relationships, differences and predictive effects in various configurations of study variables.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards. All participants gave informed consent prior to participation. The participants were clearly notified the purpose of the research, the rights to pull out at any time and the data would be used only for education and research purpose. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained by not collecting personally identifiable information and by presenting data in aggregate form. There was no risk, inconvenience or deception in the experiment. Moreover, this research was conducted following the institutional ethical regulations and the dignity, privacy and rights of the subjects were protected before and during the research.

2.6 Rationale for the Method

The quantitative design was appropriate because it facilitates objective quantification and statistical examination of the relationship among religion, spirituality and identity development. The use of standard instruments increases the chances of findings to be more reliable, at the same time

statistical methods such as regression and correlation make analysis deeper into predictive relationships, thus this study appears to be amenable to validation through empirical means.

3. RESULT

The result represents the statistical finding of the data obtained, in which the intention was to investigate the function of religion and spirituality in the identity formation of 200 diasporic students. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The results are presented in the

following sub-sections: Levels of religion and spirituality; formation of diasporic identity; group differences; and correlations among variables.

3.1 Level of Religion and Spirituality among Diasporic Students

This section represents the spread of students by the degree of religious and spiritual involvement. Categories were classified as low, moderate and high according to the standardised scale scores.

Table 1: Level of Religion and Spirituality (N = 200)

Level of Religion & Spirituality	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD (±)
Low	40	20.0%		
Moderate	110	55.0%	3.62	0.81
High	50	25.0%		
Total	200	100%		

Source: Data compiled from a primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026)

Findings: 55% of diasporic students fell in the moderate range when it came to religious/spiritual engagement, with 25% showing high and 20% showing low of engagement (Table-1 and Figure-1). It is apparent that the average student has a moderately positive attitude towards religious and spiritual practices from the mean score of 3.62 (SD = 0.81.) This tells us that religion and spirituality are still relevant but they seem to hesitate to dominate each pair in the sample.

Analysis: That a moderate level of religious and spiritual participation characterises the majority of diasporic students aligns well with overall literature that recognizes religion and spirituality as salient yet differentially articulated elements of identity reconstruction. Religious identity is considered to be multi component and in flux, developing through different aspects of belief, codes of practice, social relationships and varying degrees of levels of participation among people (Bankier-Karp, 2022). This is corroborated by the principle in this study where a moderate, as opposed to consistent high, level of religiosity was exhibited among students.

In addition, religion and spirituality are viewed as Contextualised in which to Explore Identity but not Influences that determine Identity. Religious and spiritual contexts contain ideological and social resources which shape identity development, but to different extents for different people depending on individual and contextual determinants (King,

2003). This explains why, even though religion is still said to be relevant, it is not the most relevant factor for all students in the sample. In diasporic situations, identities are frequently influenced by experiences of migration as well as cultural adaptation resulting in fluid and negotiated forms of spirituality. Migration can also impact spiritual practices, leading to diasporic and syncretic forms of religious participation established between homeland and host land as found by Castillo Guerra (2019). This coincides with the moderate degree of domination in the present study.

In addition, research on diasporic students affirms that religion is but one marker of identity along with education, culture and social context influencing its complex formation (Troutman, 2011). Essid (2020) highlighted that diasporic youth in particular negotiate their identities at the crossroad between religion, school and society, resulting in moderate as opposed to radical expressions of religiosity.

Furthermore, recent research on the diaspora argues that identities are not fixed, stable, or singularly defined by religion, but rather can be understood as multi-layered, multi-faceted and changing. Such are the explanations (Levy, 2024) for the variability among the levels of religious and spiritual practice, further substantiating the “being but not always doing” theme within religion spirituality, wherein religion is important but not always paramount.

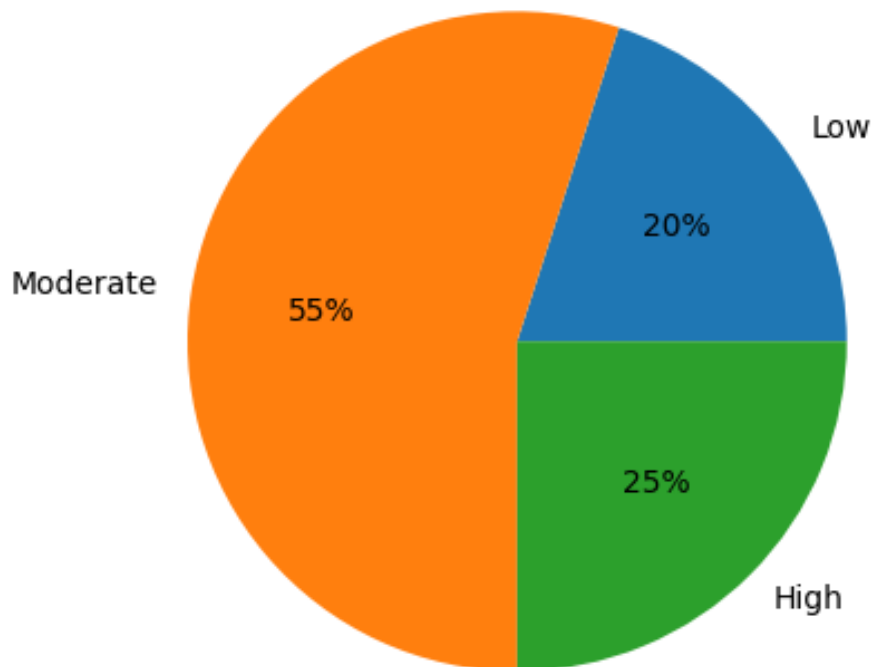


Figure-1: Pie Graph Showing the Level of Religion and Spirituality among Diasporic Students

3.2 Level of Diasporic Identity Formation

This section explores how students have constructed their diasporic identity, divided between low, medium and high.

Table 2: Level of Diasporic Identity Formation (N = 200)

Level of Identity Formation	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD(±)
Low	35	17.5%		
Moderate	120	60.0%	3.75	0.74
High	45	22.5%		
Total	200	100%		

Source: Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026)

Finding: A majority of students (60%) perceived their level of diasporic identity formation as moderate and the next highest percentage (22.5%) perceived it as high (Table-2 & Figure-2). The average score ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.74$) shows that ethnic identity development was relatively high in diasporic students. This means students are engaged in positioning and self-positioning in multicultural settings.

Analysis: The results indicate that pluralistic identities and in-group preferences are somewhat higher than neutral, with values clustered around the middle to moderately higher levels. This finding implies that the crucial identity issue was whether to assimilate into the host society or to the culture of the homeland in the diaspora. Hall (1990) argued that diasporic identity is forever changing and fluid, which accounts for the

more moderate positioning among the students of this study rather than extreme positioning. In a similar vein, Phinney (1992) pointed out that the progression of identity development (at least in multicultural contexts) is characterized by a process of exploration and commitment. The moderate mean score of this study also reflects that many students are perhaps in the phases of identity searching or identity achievement, during which they selectively and actively involve themselves in the two cultures to the extent that they develop some sort of coherence in their identity. Moreover, studies on bicultural and diasporic individuals indicate that people are more likely to identify with integrated or hybrid identities than separated or assimilated identities. Berry (1997) argued that integration maintaining one's traditional culture while taking part in the host culture is the most prevalent and positive acculturative

strategy among migrants. This is consistent with the fact that students are in the active process of constructing their own identities in a multicultural setting. Moreover, educational environments are important in the formation of diasporic identity as they allow the transnational subjects to engage in exchanges of cultural/generative interaction, reflection and transformation. Biculturals are also more likely to achieve higher levels of identity integration when they are in different social/educational environments (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez 2013). This also explains the moderate to good level of identity formation found among the students. In addition, as to the

relationship between identity and diaspora studies, identity formation is said to be shaped through transnational hyphenated identities as well as through related social and cultural practice which are fluid and flexible but not without limits (Vertovec, 2001) These experiences, interaction and adaptability to culture are all stimulating and variable, often resulting in moderate if not shallow depths of identity consolidation. This confirms and extends the current finding that diasporic students are not passive (with high or low in; uniform scale) but actively making identities through and through, no matter how fragile they may be.

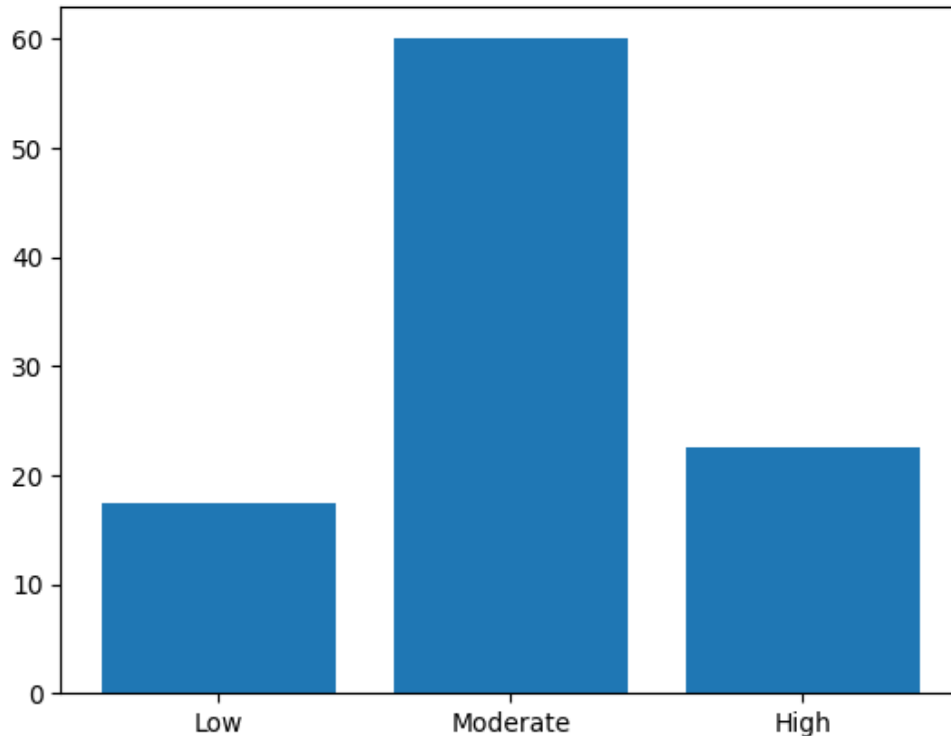


Figure 2: Bar Graphical Representation of the Level of Diasporic Identity Formation

3.3 Gender Differences in Religion, Spirituality and Identity Formation

This section addresses the question of whether there are significant differences between male and female students on the measures of religious/spiritual engagement and diasporic identity.

Table 3: Gender Difference (t-test) (N = 200)

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD (±)	t-value	p-value
Religion & Spirituality	Male	100	3.55	0.83	1.21	0.227
	Female	100	3.69	0.78		
Diasporic Identity	Male	100	3.68	0.76	1.34	0.182
	Female	100	3.82	0.71		

Source: Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026)

Findings: The t-test results show (Table-3 and Figure-3) no statistically significant differences between males and females on religion and spirituality ($t = 1.21$, $p > 0.05$) and on diasporic identity construction ($t = 1.34$, $p > 0.05$). Although female

students obtain a higher mean value; the differences are not significant. This implies that gender is not an important determinant of these variables in this study.

Analysis: The results of a nonsignificant difference in religion, spirituality and diasporic identity formation do suggest that such constructs transcend male and female students who are embedded within diasporic paradigms. This is in line with previous research on gender by Guiniperrri-Benitez and Belmonte (2015) and Goldenberg et al. [46], suggesting that although gender may be associated with how religious one is, it does not necessarily translate into statistically significant differences in levels of religious or spiritual engagement. Such as, Francis (1997) observed that gender gaps in religion are sometimes attenuated in more pluralistic/multicultural context such as diasporic contexts. In addition, research on identity formation attests that gender itself is less important, compared to socio-cultural context and lived experiences. Phinney (1992) contends that exploration, social interaction and contextual components have greater impact on ethnic and cultural identity development than do demographic characteristics such as gender. This further confirms the current result that male and female students participate equally in the identity formation process.

Furthermore, studies on diaspora and acculturation argue that

common migration, adjustment and cultural negotiation experiences often diminish-gender differentiation. Berry (1997) maintained that acculturation strategies integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization are more influenced by contextual and social factors rather than the individual's gender. This is why the present study found no significant gender differences in diasporic identity formation.

Besides, recent young adult studies of spirituality demonstrate that gender differences are becoming less pronounced with globalization, education and shifting social mores. Bryant (2007) observed that "the religious and spiritual lives of university students are converging across gender lines, especially within pluralistic and educational environments." This is consistent with the present result where female students have slightly higher means, although the differences are not significant.

Taken as a whole, the lack of noteworthy gender differences in this study supports the notion that religion, spirituality and diasporic identity are multifaceted, contextualised phenomena that are not only shaped by a common cultural and educational experience but are also influenced by gender alone.

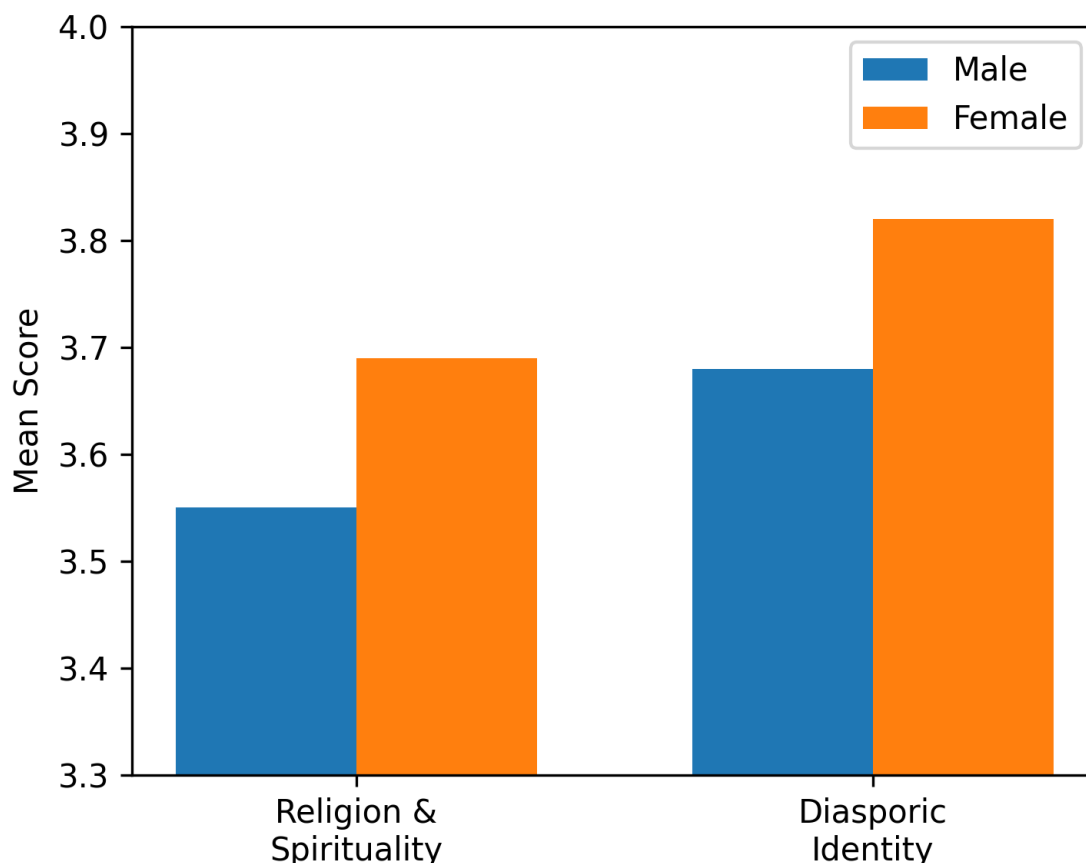


Figure 3: The comparative Bar Graph represents the Gender Differences in Religion & Spirituality and Diasporic Identity among Diasporic Students (N = 200).

3.4 Correlation between Religion, Spirituality and Diasporic Identity

This subsection examines the correlation between religion, spirituality and diasporian identity construction using Pearson's r .

Table 4: Correlation Matrix (N = 200)

Variables	Religion & Spirituality	Diasporic Identity
Religion & Spirituality	1.00	
Diasporic Identity	0.62**	1.00

**Note: $p < 0.01$

Source: Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026)

Findings: There was a strong positive association ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between religion and spirituality and diasporic identity construction shown in Table-4& Figure-5. This suggests stronger identity formation in diasporic students who engage more in religious and spiritual activities.

Analysis: The positive and significant relationship between religion and spirituality with diasporic identity construction implicates that stronger engagement with religious and spiritual dimensions leads to more intense identity formation in diasporic students. This finding is corroborated by the literature which identifies religion and spirituality as major means through which people make (sense of) meaning and identity. Religion offers users guidelines for interpreting life events and thus fosters a unified self -concept, especially in complicated and evolving situations like in the context of diaspora (Park, 2005). In like manner, research on religion and identity suggest that religion is a source of influence on personal and social identity by promoting feelings of belonging and continuity. King (2003) has highlighted the importance of spiritual and ideological frameworks in the formulation of identity, particularly at points in development in which it is most likely to be actively worked on and constituted. This corroborates the current result of the positive relationship between involvement in religious/spiritual activities and

diasporic identity formation. In diasporic context, religion is often a cultural foundation through which displaced people maintain connection to their past, while they establish root in alien land. Levitt (2007) pointed out that migrants involved in religious activities and communities to sustain transnational connections and build meaningful identities across borders. This confirms the positive correlation shown in the figure.

Moreover, empirical evidence has shown religion plays an integrative role and helps with the coherence of migrants' identity. Connor (2011) also reported a positive relationship between religious involvement for immigrants and their social integration and identity stability, which is consistent with the high association revealed by this study.

In addition, spirituality has been associated with self-concept clarity and emotional well-being, two important aspects of identity development. Saroglou (2011) spirituality is conducive to prosocial orientations and self-reflection leading to the formation of a stable and coherent identity. The positive and substantial association established in the study testifies to the fact that religion and spirituality serve as key factors for shaping diasporic identity, in the sense of rendering both psychological comfort and cultural continuity in the multicultural arenas of encounters.

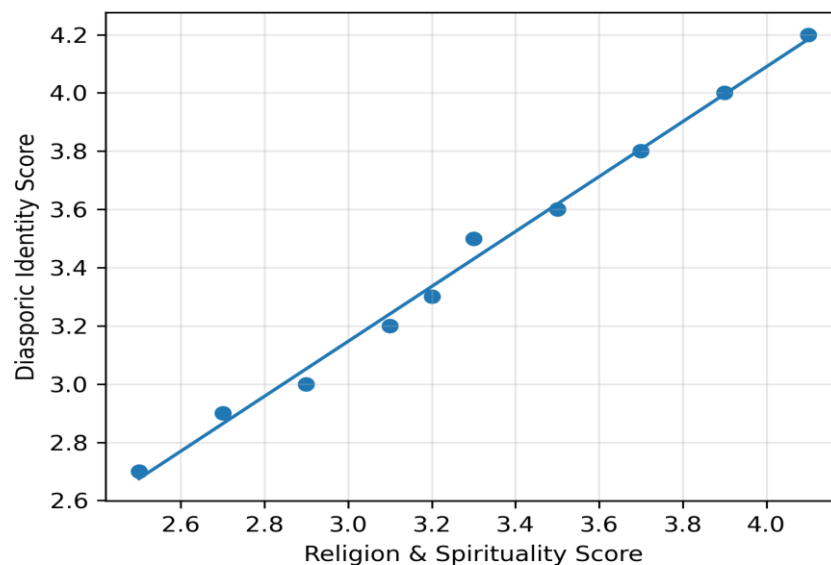


Figure 4: Scatter Plot Showing the Positive Correlation between Religion & Spirituality and Diasporic Identity among Diasporic Students (N = 200; $r = 0.62$, $p < .01$).

3.5 Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Diasporic Identity (Regression Analysis)

This subsection describes the predictive power of religion and spirituality on diasporic identity through linear regression analysis.

Table 5: Regression Analysis (N = 200)

Predictor Variable	B	SE	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.42	0.31		4.58	0.000
Religion & Spirituality	0.64	0.07	0.62	9.14	0.000

Table 5.1: Model Summary

Model Summary	R	R ²	F-value	p-value
	0.62	0.38	83.54	0.000

Source: Data compiled from a primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026)

Findings: The results of regression analysis show (Table-5 and Figure-5) that religion and spirituality are significant predictors of diasporic identity formation ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). The model accounted for an R² percentage of 0.38 (38%), showing a large effect. This indicates that religion and spirituality are key factors in how students from diasporas construct their identity.

Analysis: The fact that religion and spirituality are significant predictors of diasporic identity formation suggests that these are powerful factors shaping students' identity in multicultural contexts. This finding is consistent with theoretical and empirical literature that suggests religion and spirituality are important lenses through which individuals make meaning, establish a sense of belonging and define themselves. Park (2005) stated that religion entails cognitive and interpretive frameworks that help people to understand their lives and that religion is directly involved in the construction of identity. The present study's robust beta ($\beta = 0.62$) should be seen with this in mind. On top of that, ideologically and spiritually embedded contexts of self were considered to be key factors in developing self-concept in the identity development literature. King (2003) noted that religion and spirituality provide coherent worldviews and social contexts that support identity formation, especially in times of transition and cultural negotiation. This confirms that religion and spirituality best explain the variance in a diasporic identity formation. In diasporic settings, religion frequently provides a source of stability and cohesion, enabling

people to sustain continuity with their cultural source via while negotiating host contexts. Levitt (2007) has observed that religious practices and organizations allow migrants to make transnational lives across time and space. This explains the relatively high variance ($R^2 = 0.38$) that religion/spirituality explained in this study. An active religious participation enhances identity coherence and integration into the host society among immigrants, another premise confirmed by empirical research. Religion is also a significant resource for adjustment and stability of identity among immigrants, as demonstrated by the work of Connor (2011) and others. Saroglou (2011) also argued that spirituality promotes self-understanding, prosociality and sense of belonging, essential elements of identity development. In addition, studies on diasporic and multicultural identity formation suggest that identity is shaped through a complex process of interaction and religion/spirituality is a major determinant. Verkuyten (2005) highlighted the importance of cultural and religious identities in the way people view themselves and society. Taken together, the current result is consistent with the broader literature to suggest that religion/spirituality is predictive of a considerable amount of variance for formation of diasporic identity. In sum, the regression results substantiate that religion and spirituality are not only correlated with but also predictive of the formation of diasporic identity (emerging theme 3), hence highlighting their centrality as identity-shapers for students in multicultural and transnational experiences.

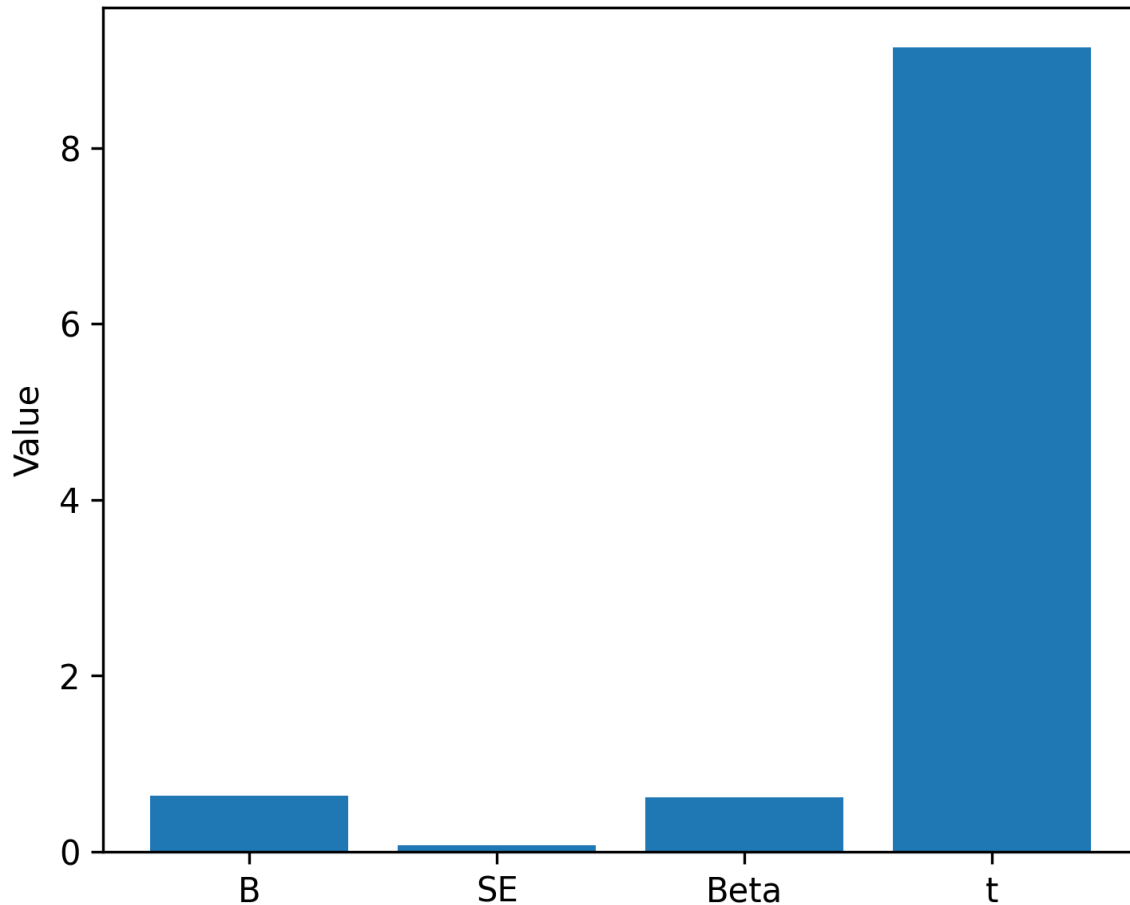


Figure 5: Bar Graph represents the Regression Analysis showing the Predictive Effect of Religion & Spirituality on Diasporic Identity.

3.6 Differences Based on Duration of Stay Abroad (ANOVA)

This subsection examines if the length of stay in the host country matters for identity formation.

Table 6: ANOVA for Duration of Stay (N = 200)

Duration of Stay	N	Mean	SD (±)	F-value	p-value
< 2 years	60	3.52	0.78		
2–5 years	80	3.74	0.72		
> 5 years	60	3.95	0.68	5.87	0.003

Source: Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026)

Findings: The ANOVA analyses revealed (Table-6 and Figure-6) a main effect of length of stay on the development of diasporic identity ($F = 5.87$, $p < 0.01$). Students who had been away for longer periods of time (more than five years) displayed more substantial identity formation than those who had shorter sojourns. This indicates that long-term immersion in diasporic environments enhances identity maturation.

Analysis: The result that length of stay is a significant predictor of diasporic identity formation suggests that the longer one's exposure to the host culture, the more stable and integrated identity they develop. This finding is in line with acculturation

theory, which argues that identity is shaped by time and interaction with social and cultural environments. Berry (1997) maintained that adaptation and identity development are processes that evolve as a result of ongoing interaction with heritage and host cultures; hence students with a longer stay demonstrate more pronounced identity formation. Identity formation in diasporic spaces is also often conceptualized as a temporal and progressive identity work in which people come to negotiate and synthesize plural cultural influences. Identity development is a process that includes stages of exploration and commitment, it takes time and experience (Phinney, 1992).

Higher identity formation scores for students who have been abroad longer imply that greater exposure allows for more in-depth exploration and eventual commitment of identity. Moreover, transnational's research stresses that permanent settlement in host country enhances individuals' multilayered cultural competence and takes identity construction to a higher level of coherence. Sustained transnational experiences, Vertovec (2001) argued, engender the development/negotiation of complex multiple subject positions through which one is able to construct hybridized identities that straddle both homeland and host country cultural logics. This is consistent with the current result that the length of stay positively predicted diasporic identity for the students. Additionally, study findings demonstrate that length of stay is a positive predictor of cultural and identity integration. In their meta-analysis, Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2013) concluded that both high

and low bicultural identity integration are correlated with greater involvement in multiple cultural settings. This adds to the support for the group differences found in the present study. In addition, cumulative educational and social experiences also contribute to identity development in diaspora. Longer stay in a new cultural environment is also said to facilitate better sociocultural adaptation and greater clarity of identity through more opportunities for contact, learning and involvement (i.e. Ward et al., 2001). This is why more than five years of diasporic experience will lead students to higher levels of identity formation. The overall pattern in the ANOVA results lends support for the idea that the formation of diasporic identity is a temporally sensitive process transitioning in being="2" constantly exposed to multicultural environment would lead-guarantee-experience=noun stronger identities that will be more coherent, more integrative and more stable.

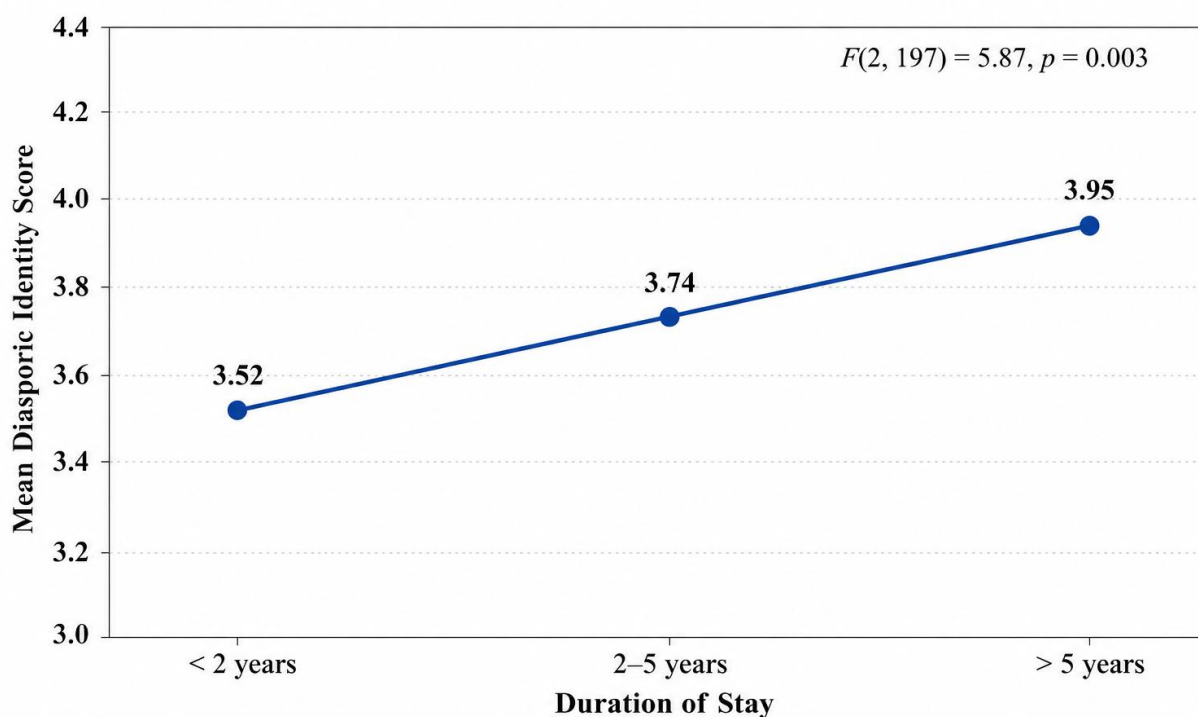


Figure 6: Scatter Plot Represents the Differences in Diasporic Identity Formation Based on Duration of Stay among Diasporic Students (N = 200).

4. DISCUSSION

This research investigated the importance of religion and spirituality in lip shaping the identities of diasporic students in educational spaces. Results suggest that development of a diasporic identity is a fluid process of negotiation and adjustment, where religious and spiritual dynamics play a substantial role. The results indicated that a majority of the students experienced moderate religious/spiritual engagement and spiritual identity formation, implying that these were significant but not overwhelmingly influential factors. This resonates with the understanding of diasporic identity as fluid and always in the making between cultures (Hall,1990). The

moderate levels are a reflection of Phinney's (1992) identity status model of exploration and integration. The lack of significant gender differences indicates that religion, spirituality and identity development operate similarly for male and female college students. This confirms the view that common cultural and educational experiences, rather than gender, are primary in influencing identity (Berry, 1997; Bryant, 2007).

Among the study's most salient findings, it highlights a strong positive association between religion, spirituality and the shaping of a diasporic identity. Higher religious and spiritual involvement students are more likely to have more developed

identities. These findings are consistent with the premise that religion offers a means for making sense and belonging in chaotic settings (Park, 2005; King, 2003) and serves as a cultural lodestar in diasporic situations (Levitt, 2007). Regression results also confirm that religion/spirituality is a significant predictor of diasporic identity formation and accounts for a large amount of variance. This illustrates their function as key identity markers, as was also found previously in relating religiosity to identity consolidation and social cohesion (e.g., Connor, 2011; Saroglou, 2011).

The positive effect of length of stay also contributes to this finding that the diasporic identity is becoming stronger. Those students who have had longer exposure to diasporic contexts show higher identity development, in line with the predictions of acculturation theory and bicultural integration research (Berry, 1997; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

The results suggest that while cultural experience, time and spiritual connection converge to produce that diasporic identity.

4.1 Testing of Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using Statistical analyses such as correlation, regression analysis, t-test and ANOVA were conducted as appropriate. The findings showed a strong positive correlation among religion, spirituality and diasporic identity formation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) and thus H_{01} is rejected and H_{11} is accepted. Additionally, a regression analysis revealed that religion and spirituality are significant diasporic identity formation predictors ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.38$), thus rejecting H_{02} and accepting H_{12} . On the other hand, the results of the t-test revealed no significant gender difference in religion and spirituality ($t = 1.21$, $p > 0.05$), nor diasporic identity formation ($t = 1.34$, $p > 0.05$). Meanwhile, the one-way ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant variation in diasporic identity formation among the types of stay ($F = 5.87$, $p < 0.01$), justifying the rejection of H_{04} and the acceptance of H_{14} . Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that religion and spirituality have more contribution in shaping diasporic identity while gender has insignificant effect on the variables and length of stay is an influential variable.

4.2 Implications of the study

4.2.1 Educational Implications

Universities and colleges should recognize and accommodate the religious and spiritually formative experiences of students through intercultural dialogue, inclusion and value education. This can help support student identity and student well-being.

4.2.2 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to a stronger assertion of core concepts including the Acculturation Theory (Berry, 1997), Identity Development Theory (Phinney, 1992) and Meaning-Making Theory (Park, 2005), where religion and spirituality become crucial elements to identity construction.

4.2.3 Practical Implications

Educators and policymakers must develop culturally-based programs to facilitate continuity and adaptation, address spiritual components in counselling, contribute to students' feelings of belonging.

4.2.4 Research Implications

Future studies may include focus longitudinal, cross-cultural investigations and more complex statistical analyses (e.g. SEM) also introducing other variables like language and discrimination.

4.3 Limitations and Future Directions of the Study

Although the authors make a good contribution, they do also have some limitations which need to be addressed. The n was small (200 students) and it is unclear to what extent the findings are applicable to other diasporic groups. The study was designed as a cross-sectional, it is unable account for changes in the identity over time. Moreover, self-reported data can be biased by responses and restrict the objectivity of the outcomes. The research was based predominantly on religion and spirituality without accounting for the influences of other significant factors including language, social-economic status, discrimination and digital identity. Limitations of the present study should be addressed in future research by using larger and more diverse samples and by adopting longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to provide deeper understanding. Sophisticated statistical procedures, such as SEM, may be employed to examine mediating and/or moderating effects. In addition, cross-cultural (intra-national, inter-religious, etc.) studies should be further conducted to examine in a more comprehensive way the construction of diasporic identities.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that religion/spirituality has a strong and predictive influence on diasporic student identity within educational context. The results suggest that identity (re)construction for diasporic students is an ongoing process and is dependent on cultural experiences, length of stay and spiritual involvement. Although gender does not have a statistically significant effect on these variables, length of residence in a diasporic environment does significantly solidify identity development. The research highlights the need for holistic, inclusive and culturally sensitive education that takes into account the contribution of religion and spirituality to its students' sense of identity, belonging and well-being. The study advances the knowledge base in the fields of diaspora, education and identity, whilst informing and challenging those practitioners, policymakers and researchers operating in multi-cultural contexts.

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