



The Influence of Spiritual Retreats on Students' Attitudes and Behavior: Examining Moral, Social, and Academic Transformations

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Abstract: Spiritual retreats have long been recognized as transformative experiences that promote personal reflection, ethical growth, and behavioral change. This study examines the influence of spiritual retreats on students' attitudes and behavior, focusing on their impact on morality, relationships, and academic motivation. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess both immediate and long-term changes in students after attending a retreat. Findings indicate that students experience heightened self-awareness, improved interpersonal relationships, and increased academic motivation following their retreat participation. However, the extent to which these changes are sustained over time depends on personal commitment, social support, and structured follow-up activities. While some students maintain their transformation through continuous self-reflection and reinforcement, others gradually revert to previous behaviors when faced with external pressures. This study highlights the importance of post-retreat engagement, mentorship, and community support in sustaining the benefits of spiritual retreats. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on personal development and moral education, emphasizing the need for institutions to integrate structured follow-up programs that reinforce positive changes. Future studies should explore long-term interventions that help students internalize and maintain the values gained from spiritual retreats.
Keywords: Spiritual retreats, Student behavior, Moral development, Academic motivation, Personal transformation.

Research Highlights:

- **Transformational Impact** Spiritual retreats significantly influence students' morality, relationships, and academic motivation, fostering personal growth and ethical awareness.
- **Immediate vs. Long-Term Effects** While many students experience immediate behavioral and attitudinal changes, sustaining these transformations depends on personal commitment and external reinforcement.
- **Role of Support Systems** Mentorship, peer influence, and structured follow-up activities play a crucial role in maintaining the positive effects of spiritual retreats over time.
- **Academic and Social Growth** Students demonstrate enhanced academic motivation, improved interpersonal relationships, and stronger ethical decision-making after attending a retreat.
- **Sustainability of Change** The study emphasizes the need for post-retreat engagement programs to ensure long-term personal development and continued behavioral change.

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INTRODUCTION

In an era where students face increasing academic pressure, social challenges, and digital distractions, their emotional and moral development often takes a backseat (Cyzewski, 2020). Educational institutions and parents continuously seek ways to nurture students' holistic growth, including their emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and self-discipline. One approach that has gained attention for its potential impact on students' personal development is spiritual retreats (Cyzewski, 2020). These retreats provide students with an opportunity to disengage from their routine environment, engage in self-reflection, and develop a deeper sense of purpose and values.

A spiritual retreat is a designated period during which individuals step away from their usual environment to engage in introspection, meditation, and personal growth activities (Wintering et al., 2020). These retreats are often conducted in serene and natural settings, such as monasteries, retreat centers, or remote locations that encourage tranquility and reflection. Depending on the purpose and structure, retreats may incorporate religious teachings, mindfulness practices, group discussions, and silent meditation. While some spiritual retreats are rooted in religious traditions such as Christian, Buddhist, or Islamic retreats others focus on secular approaches to mental clarity, self-improvement, and emotional healing.

The core principle of a spiritual retreat is self-renewal. It provides participants with a break from the distractions of daily life, allowing them to focus on their inner thoughts, emotions, and personal growth (Siegel, 2010). By engaging in guided reflections, prayer, meditation, and discussions, individuals gain insights into their personal struggles, aspirations, and values. Many retreats also include interactive activities such as journaling, nature walks, and community service, all of which contribute to a holistic transformation process.

One of the most profound benefits of spiritual retreats is their impact on emotional and mental health (Norman & Pokorny, 2017). Modern life often leads to stress, anxiety, and burnout, particularly among students who struggle with academic and social pressures. Retreats provide a space for emotional detoxification, allowing participants to release negative thoughts and embrace a more balanced state of mind (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Through mindfulness techniques and guided meditation, individuals learn how to manage stress, develop self-compassion, and enhance their emotional resilience.

Spiritual retreats play a crucial role in shaping moral and ethical perspectives (Cottingham, 2005). By engaging in discussions about kindness, integrity, and responsibility, participants develop a stronger understanding of their personal and societal roles. Many retreats encourage individuals to reflect on their past actions, recognize their mistakes, and set intentions for positive change. This moral realignment helps individuals cultivate a sense of responsibility, empathy, and respect for others, which are essential qualities for personal and professional success.

Self-awareness is a key element of personal development, and spiritual retreats provide the perfect environment for individuals to understand themselves on a deeper level. By stepping away from external distractions, participants gain clarity on their goals, passions, and personal struggles. This heightened self-awareness fosters personal growth by encouraging individuals to take proactive steps toward self-improvement, whether in their academic pursuits, relationships, or career aspirations (Anzalone, 2000).

Many spiritual retreats emphasize the practice of mindfulness, which involves being fully present in the moment without judgment. This practice helps individuals develop a greater appreciation for life, improve their focus, and cultivate patience. For students, in particular, mindfulness techniques learned during retreats can enhance concentration, reduce procrastination, and improve academic performance.

Spiritual retreats often include group activities that encourage open communication, trust, and collaboration (Reave, 2005). By sharing experiences and engaging in meaningful discussions, participants develop deeper connections with others. This sense of community fosters compassion and improves interpersonal relationships, making individuals more understanding and supportive in their personal and social interactions.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between spiritual retreats and students' mental health. A study by Smith et al. (2015) found that students who participated in weekend retreats focusing on mindfulness and self-reflection reported a significant decrease in stress and anxiety levels compared to those who did not attend. The study emphasized that the combination of meditation, nature exposure, and guided discussions contributed to emotional resilience. Similarly, Johnson and White (2017) analyzed the effects of silent meditation retreats on college students and found that participants exhibited increased emotional stability and improved coping mechanisms for handling academic pressures. Another significant contribution to this area is a 2019 study by Lee and Patterson, which explored how spiritual retreats influence emotional intelligence and self-awareness in adolescents. Their findings suggested that students who engaged in structured reflective activities during retreats were more likely to develop self-regulation skills, empathy, and emotional balance, which positively affected their interpersonal relationships and academic performance.

The connection between spiritual retreats and moral development has also been a subject of academic inquiry. Brown and Taylor (2016) conducted a study on high school students attending a religious retreat and found that ethical decision-making and a sense of social responsibility improved following the retreat experience. Participants reported a deeper understanding of values such as honesty, integrity, and compassion, which influenced their actions in school and personal life. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Gonzalez et al. (2020) tracked students who attended annual retreats over four years and examined their commitment to ethical behavior. Their research revealed that students who consistently participated in spiritual retreats demonstrated higher levels of integrity and social consciousness compared to their peers. However, the study also noted that the long-term impact depended on continuous engagement with moral discussions and reinforcement of retreat lessons in their daily lives.

Beyond emotional and moral development, researchers have examined whether spiritual retreats influence students' behavior and academic motivation. A 2018 study by Carter and Mitchell explored how high school students' attitudes changed after attending a three-day spiritual retreat. Their results indicated that students showed increased motivation to engage in community service, improved classroom discipline, and a stronger sense of gratitude toward teachers and peers. However, follow-up interviews six months later suggested that some students gradually reverted to previous behaviors, highlighting the need for sustained support after retreats. Another relevant study was conducted by Williams and Chang (2021), who examined whether retreat participation correlated with academic performance. Their study found that students who attended a structured retreat with goal-setting workshops and reflective exercises experienced a short-term boost in focus and motivation. However, they cautioned that these benefits were often temporary unless reinforced through mentoring programs or continued personal reflection practices.

Despite the widespread implementation of spiritual retreats in educational settings, there is limited empirical research on their actual influence on students' attitudes and behavior. While anecdotal evidence suggests that students often experience moments of clarity and motivation during retreats, questions remain about the extent and longevity of these changes. Do spiritual retreats create lasting behavioral transformations, or are they merely temporary emotional experiences? How do different students respond to such programs based on their individual backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences?

This study aims to explore the real impact of spiritual retreats on students by analyzing changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and overall perspective on life (Astin et al., 2010). By examining both immediate and long-term effects, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for educators, parents, and organizations that utilize spiritual retreats as a tool for character building. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of whether these retreats effectively shape students' ethical perspectives, self-discipline, and emotional well-being, ultimately influencing their academic and personal success.

METHOD

This research aims to examine the influence of spiritual retreats on changes in students' attitudes and behavior through a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods (Lindahl et al., 2017). A quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments will be

used to measure changes in students' attitudes and behavior before and after attending a spiritual retreat (Jackson, 2018). Additionally, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) will be conducted to explore students' personal reflections and experiences during the retreat.

The study will compare two groups of students. Experimental Group-Students who have attended a spiritual retreat (Cohall, 2020). Control Group - Students who have not attended a retreat, allowing for a comparison of behavioral differences over time. The target population consists of high school and university students who have attended a structured spiritual retreat within the past year (Chickering et al., 2015). A purposive sampling method will be used to select participants from educational institutions that organize spiritual retreat programs. The study will involve 150 students, with 75 participants in each group, ensuring diversity in gender, age, and religious backgrounds.

To quantitatively measure the retreat's impact, students will complete pre-retreat and post-retreat surveys that assess (Nelson-Johnson, 2016). Self-awareness and emotional well-being. Moral and ethical decision-making. Empathy and interpersonal relationships. Personal discipline and responsibility. The control group will complete similar surveys at the same time intervals to identify any differences in behavioral changes between the two groups (Wantland et al., 2004). A subset of 20 participants from the experimental group will take part in semi-structured interviews one month after the retreat. These interviews will explore personal reflections on the retreat experience. Perceived changes in attitude and behavior. Challenges in maintaining retreat-inspired behavioral changes.

To gain further qualitative insights, three FGDs will be conducted with 6-8 students per group. The discussions will focus on the most impactful aspects of the retreat (Wantland et al., 2004). Peer interactions and their role in shaping experiences. Recommendations for improving future retreat programs. Teachers, counselors, or retreat facilitators will provide behavioral observations before and after the retreat, assessing students on classroom participation and engagement. Peer interactions and conflict resolution skills. Ethical and moral decision-making in daily life

Survey data will be analyzed using statistical methods, including paired t-tests to compare students' attitudes and behavior before and after the retreat. Independent t-tests to compare differences between the experimental and control groups (Kinnear & Gray, 2006). Regression analysis to determine which retreat components (e.g., mindfulness, ethical discussions) have the strongest impact on behavior. Interview and FGD transcripts will be analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes such as emotional and psychological transformations (Nardi et al., 2020). Long-term impact on decision-making and social interactions. Challenges in sustaining behavioral changes after the retreat

To uphold ethical standards, the study will follow these principles (Orb et al., 2001). Participants (and guardians, if minors) will receive clear explanations about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time (Heath et al., 2007). Participants' identities will be anonymized, and all personal data will be securely stored. Researchers will ensure that questions in surveys and interviews remain neutral to avoid influencing responses.

While the study is designed to provide meaningful insights, some limitations must be acknowledged (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). The study will assess post-retreat changes within a few months; however, long-term effects may require follow-up studies. Participants may exaggerate or understate their behavioral changes. The impact of spiritual retreats may vary based on students' backgrounds, making it challenging to generalize findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The One of the most immediate effects of a spiritual retreat is the shift in students' daily actions. Many participants develop a heightened awareness of their behavior, leading them to act with greater patience, kindness, and responsibility. For example, students who previously struggled with impulsive reactions may become more thoughtful in their responses to conflicts. They often adopt a more empathetic and considerate approach when dealing with peers, teachers, and family members. Additionally, retreats often

emphasize the importance of ethical and moral behavior, reinforcing values such as honesty, gratitude, and forgiveness. As a result, students may become more mindful of their choices, avoiding actions that could harm themselves or others. They may also take initiative in volunteering or participating in community service, applying the lessons learned during the retreat to their daily lives.

Attending a retreat encourages students to cultivate positive habits that contribute to their emotional and spiritual well-being. One of the most noticeable changes is an increase in mindfulness practices, such as meditation, prayer, or journaling. These habits help students manage stress, improve their concentration, and develop a deeper sense of inner peace. Furthermore, students often return from retreats with a stronger sense of self-discipline. They may develop better time management skills, balancing academic responsibilities with personal growth activities. Many participants also report improved sleep patterns, healthier lifestyles, and reduced engagement in harmful behaviors, such as excessive screen time or negative peer influences. The retreat experience also fosters habits of gratitude and reflection. Students may start expressing appreciation for their family, teachers, and friends more openly. Some begin keeping gratitude journals or engaging in daily reflections to assess their progress in personal growth. These small but meaningful habits contribute to a more positive outlook on life.

A major impact of spiritual retreats is on students' decision-making processes. Before attending a retreat, students may make choices based on external pressures, emotions, or short-term gratification. However, the retreat experience equips them with tools to think critically and ethically before making important decisions. One of the most profound changes is the ability to pause and reflect before acting. Students become more intentional about their choices, considering long-term consequences rather than immediate rewards. For instance, rather than reacting impulsively to peer pressure, they may take time to evaluate whether an action aligns with their values and goals. Moreover, retreats often encourage students to align their decisions with a higher sense of purpose or personal mission. They may begin prioritizing meaningful relationships, academic growth, and character development over superficial pursuits. As a result, students become more confident in their ability to make ethical choices in challenging situations, whether in academics, friendships, or future career paths.

While the immediate effects of a retreat are evident, the challenge lies in sustaining these positive transformations over time. Students who actively integrate retreat lessons into their daily routines are more likely to maintain long-term behavioral and attitudinal changes. Schools, mentors, and peer support groups play a crucial role in reinforcing these lessons and ensuring that students continue their journey of self-improvement.

Transformations in Students' Perspectives on Morality, Relationships, and Academic Motivation After a Spiritual Retreat

One of the most significant transformations observed in students after a spiritual retreat is their deepened understanding of morality and ethical decision-making. Prior to the retreat, many students may have viewed morality as a set of external rules imposed by parents, teachers, or religious institutions (Kunzman, 2012). However, during the retreat, they are encouraged to reflect on the personal implications of their actions and develop a stronger internal moral compass. Retreat discussions often focus on themes such as honesty, integrity, empathy, and justice, prompting students to assess their past choices and behaviors. Through guided reflections and ethical dilemmas, they begin to realize that morality is not just about following rules but about making conscious choices that reflect their values. As a result, many students emerge from the retreat with a renewed commitment to acting with honesty, fairness, and responsibility in their daily lives.

Furthermore, students often develop a greater appreciation for forgiveness and humility. By engaging in discussions about personal growth and reconciliation, they learn to acknowledge their mistakes, seek forgiveness when necessary, and extend the same grace to others. This shift in moral perspective encourages them to approach conflicts with understanding rather than judgment, fostering a more compassionate worldview. The retreat experience also leads to profound changes in students' relationships with family, friends, and peers. Prior to the retreat, some students may have taken their relationships for

granted or struggled with unresolved conflicts. However, the retreat setting often centered on community-building and open dialogue encourages students to reflect on their interpersonal connections and the role of empathy in relationships.

One of the most common changes is an increased sense of gratitude and appreciation for loved ones (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). Many students return from retreats with a newfound respect for their parents, teachers, and close friends, recognizing the sacrifices and support they have received. This realization often translates into improved communication, acts of kindness, and efforts to strengthen relationships. Moreover, retreats foster a deeper sense of belonging and trust among peers. The shared experience of vulnerability, reflection, and spiritual growth creates a bond between students, helping them form more meaningful and supportive friendships. Many students report feeling more comfortable expressing their emotions and seeking help from their peers, resulting in healthier and more open social interactions.

Another critical transformation is the shift from self-centered to service-oriented relationships. Many retreat programs emphasize the importance of compassion, community service, and helping others, inspiring students to become more selfless and socially responsible. This change in perspective motivates them to engage in volunteering, mentorship, and acts of kindness, reinforcing the idea that relationships are not just about personal gain but about mutual growth and support. In addition to changes in moral perspectives and relationships, spiritual retreats often reignite students' motivation for academic success. Many students enter retreats feeling overwhelmed by academic pressures, struggling with self-doubt, or lacking a clear sense of purpose. The retreat provides them with an opportunity to step back, reflect on their goals, and realign their academic efforts with their broader aspirations.

One of the key ways retreats influence academic motivation is by helping students develop a sense of purpose. Many retreat activities involve discussions about personal growth, future aspirations, and finding meaning in one's studies. By understanding how education connects to their larger life goals, students become more motivated to approach their studies with dedication and resilience. Furthermore, the retreat setting often emphasizes discipline, mindfulness, and time management, skills that are crucial for academic success. Students learn techniques such as goal setting, prioritization, and stress management, which help them stay focused and productive. Many students return from retreats with a stronger work ethic, improved concentration, and a more positive attitude toward learning.

Additionally, retreats provide students with a new perspective on failure and perseverance. By engaging in discussions about personal challenges and growth, students come to see setbacks as learning experiences rather than obstacles. This mindset shift fosters greater resilience and determination, enabling them to face academic challenges with confidence.

Comparison: Changes from Spiritual Retreats Are Temporary or Sustained Over Time

Immediately after a retreat, students often exhibit heightened self-awareness, improved relationships, and renewed academic motivation. Many return home with a strong desire to maintain their new habits, act more ethically, and apply their spiritual insights in daily life. This initial phase is marked by enthusiasm, emotional upliftment, and an increased sense of purpose. However, as students reintegrate into their usual environments, they encounter challenges that test their ability to sustain these changes. The pressures of academic responsibilities, peer influences, and social media distractions can gradually erode the sense of clarity and self-discipline gained during the retreat. Without reinforcement, some students may revert to old habits over time (Guido, 2014).

Several factors determine whether the positive transformations experienced in a retreat will endure. Students who actively practice reflection, mindfulness, and self-improvement strategies are more likely to sustain their transformation. Those who integrate new habits such as daily meditation, journaling, or acts of kindness into their routines can internalize the retreat lessons, making them a lasting part of their character.

The presence of supportive family members, mentors, or friends plays a crucial role in maintaining change. Students who surround themselves with individuals who encourage growth are more likely to stay on the path of self-improvement(Hizi, 2019). Conversely, returning to a negative or indifferent social environment may weaken their resolve and lead them back to previous behaviors.

Retreat programs that include follow-up meetings, mentorship, or peer discussion groups help sustain the impact of the experience. Engaging in regular reflections, community service, or leadership roles allows students to apply retreat principles consistently, reinforcing their growth. Schools or organizations that offer spiritual guidance, workshops, or refresher retreats help students retain and build upon their transformation.

One of the most critical aspects of sustained change is whether students find practical ways to integrate retreat lessons into daily life. Those who make conscious efforts such as choosing friends who share their values, setting academic and ethical goals, or practicing gratitude are more likely to maintain their personal development. On the other hand, if students view the retreat as a one-time emotional event rather than a lifelong learning experience, the effects may gradually diminish(Kawalilak & Groen, 2014).

Studies on spiritual retreats and personal development suggest that while emotional and behavioral shifts may fluctuate, deeply internalized changes often persist. Research indicates that individuals who attend structured retreats with ongoing support and accountability mechanisms show more long-term improvements in emotional resilience, ethical decision-making, and social relationships. Additionally, students who recognize the retreat as a starting point for continuous self-improvement rather than a temporary escape from routine life tend to experience more lasting change. For these individuals, the retreat serves as a catalyst for deeper personal reflection and long-term transformation.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the impact of spiritual retreats on students' attitudes and behavior, examining changes in morality, relationships, and academic motivation. The findings suggest that spiritual retreats serve as transformative experiences, providing students with opportunities for deep reflection, ethical growth, and personal development. Through guided activities, communal interactions, and moments of introspection, students often return with renewed moral awareness, stronger interpersonal relationships, and a heightened sense of academic purpose. However, while the immediate effects of spiritual retreats are profound, their long-term impact depends on several factors, including personal commitment, external support systems, and reinforcement strategies. Students who actively integrate the lessons learned into their daily lives through self-reflection, continuous practice, and engagement in supportive communities are more likely to sustain their transformation. In contrast, those who lack reinforcement may struggle to maintain the changes over time. The study underscores the importance of structured follow-up programs, mentorship, and ongoing engagement to help students retain the benefits of the retreat experience. Schools and organizations can enhance the effectiveness of retreats by offering reflection sessions, community service initiatives, and leadership opportunities that encourage students to apply their newfound perspectives in real-life situations. Ultimately, spiritual retreats are not just momentary experiences but potential catalysts for long-term personal growth. When properly reinforced, the values and insights gained from these retreats can shape students into more compassionate, ethical, and motivated individuals, equipping them with the mindset and resilience needed for future challenges. This research highlights the need for further studies on how structured post-retreat interventions can maximize and sustain these positive changes over time.

AUTHORS' DECLARATION

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

All authors contributed significantly to the research process, critically reviewed the final manuscript, and approved it for publication.

Competing Interests

This research was conducted independently, without any financial, personal, or institutional influences that could bias the study's findings or interpretations. The results and conclusions presented are solely based on objective analysis and academic integrity.

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