

# Characteristics of Students' Religiosity and Their Implications on Content and Direction of Their Religiosity: A Case in Iran

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**Abstract** Religiosity is one of the Iranian's identity sources and as an entity plays a role in structuration and social relations in Iran's society. This principle that is approved by university researches and by critics of analytical approaches instead of prescriptive and normative approaches, has provided the necessity and importance of doing the other researches by religiosity domains. The present paper analyzes the religiousness characteristics of students and their implications to religiosity contents and direction. It has considered the theories of semantic intelligentsia, especially the perspectives of Peter Berger. The population of the study consists of Zanjan Azad University students and 345 of them were selected by random sampling. The questionnaire of Gelak and Stark was used to collect data. The collected data were analyzed by descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and inferential methods such as one-sample t-test, paired t-test, and ANOVA. The results showed that the religiosity of students has emotional and religious contents, it has also semantic orientation. In this line, gender variables and major of education were not decisive.

**Keywords:** *religiosity, religiosity characteristics, religiosity content, religiosity orientation, students*

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## 1. Introduction

Issues such as religion and religiosity are central concepts in the individual and social literature of Iranian society. These concepts that consisted one of the epistemic themes and regular discourses in the various historical periods are considered most often as assessment indicators, valuation of phenomena, and as important elements of Iranian identity. So considering one of the valuation and conformation phenomena can be useful in the planning of models and forms of phenomena. Although to limit the subject of study is among the principle of confirmed science and it is necessary to pay attention to it, what is clearly stated in this study is descriptive analysis of religiosity contents and directions of students. Religiosity has its own special content and direction in every period and every society based on the implications of entities and other material and non-material variables. Religiosity is not a proved phenomenon and independent of time and situation, but it is a dynamic dialectical phenomenon, full of conflict and withdrawal, and with no certainty. It never takes a fixed form and content and is followed by the criticism of findings of conducted researches. It is important to note that, the religiosity has its special dynamics and evolution in every society that is the religiosity is not the reflection and simple implication of

institutional spheres or other components but it is an authentic structural element that has a complex relation with other structural elements in spite of preserving its intrinsic core. It takes different formations according to numerous objective, subjective, micro, and macro implications and requirements of environment. That is it takes various form, structure, and content according to epistemic and discursal nature, institutional spheres nature, and other software and hardware variables of environment and this principle proceeds according to logic of other institutional spheres in the final analysis.

The concept of religiosity content refers to content, elements or aspects of religiosity, and quantity and quality of their relations. The religiosity direction also refers to possible directions that religiosity can focus to them. Religiosity direction has two main aspects of semantic direction and functionalist direction in the literature of religion sociology. In the semantically direction, the priority of ontology and teleology is with sense of meaning in the religiosity that is the sense of meaning determines the main content of religiosity. In the functionalist direction, religiosity is the functional determinability during regenerating of social state.

The present study was done by above mentioned perspectives and by focus on students' society; it followed the religiosity characteristics of students and showed their religion content and direction by scientific assessment of mentioned characteristics.

## 2. Review of literature

One of the valid evidences of scientific researches is that every research was done in the specific line and in a clear and justified content structure based on the considered subject and implications. The present study has considered the Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz perspectives in the semantic religiosity and the Durkheim and Radcliff Brown perspectives in the functionalist religiosity in order to provide evidences to doctrines for the methodology of theory.

Peter Berger [61] has been one of the influential pioneers who sees religion as a main source and people have tried to use it in various periods ([55], p. 265). Berger [61] argues about religion sociology in his main ideas: "society is a dialectic phenomenon because it is both the product of human being and a reality out of human beings which affects to creator humans of this product. The process by which we can create social world by physical and mental activity, in fact, we experience this social world as external and independent reality and see ourselves who develop by that; it is a process by that a meaningful discipline dominates to our experience. Berger calls this meaningful discipline as Namos "human beings have a tendency to dominate a meaningful discipline to reality by nature" ([61], p. 31). Namos is a social product and is created socially. It is a protector against issues that threat the world to meaningless and disorder. Humans consider Namos as something that is placed in "nature of things" and it is clearly a true and acceptance of reality. Although humans make the Namos, they consider it as a natural phenomenon and a part of world which stand further of will, ability, and history of human being. The religion keeps such an understanding about a pure reality and naturalness of Namos that is made by humans. Namos finds a holy quality and then changes to holy world by religion. Namos is holy because it is mysterious and very powerful. "Religion is a humanistic work and a holy world is settled by that" ([61], p.34). "Religion is a boldly effort in order to make the world meaningful for human beings ([61], p.37).

The formation process of religion is stated as follows by Berger:

society → meaningful discipline → Namos → holy world → religion

Clifford Geertz is also one of the pioneers that has tried the semantically understandable writing from religion perspective. According to Geertz, religion is defined as: a system of signs that its duty is settlement of states and powerful motives, they are satisfactory and stable in humans, formation of concepts from general perspective of universe and their hiding is with such an areola factuality that makes these states and motives very realistic. Geertz states that religion does these works by formation of concepts about general discipline of world. For him, humans need such concepts. They need to see the world the world meaningful and well-organized. They cannot impose their ideas that the world is mainly based on chaotic and haphazard and it does not have meaning or validity for them. These types of experiences transform the world to a meaningless chaotic. Geertz imagines these experiences as a reason for perplexity and pain and mischief. The perplexity experience happens when abnormal or surprising events occur so that nothing can

explain them. Religion provides an immediate response for these events and presents acceptable reasons for the events that are not explainable in the other ways. For Geertz (1966) the second experience that makes us in doubt about the meaningful discipline of the world is the experience of pain. Religion adjusts humans by putting a pain in the meaningful context. It tries to state the pain by providing special ways of action and makes it understandable. Human's ability to understand the pain is in fact the ability to accept and bear it. The third type of meaning minatory experience is mischief experience. Religion tries to justify the human experiences about inequality and injustice. Religion tries to show that these realities are just ostensibly and if humans look broadly to them, they will understand that even this injustice has a meaningful model. There is a common method to justify these realities that claim the injustice in this world will be compensated by justice in the other world. In general, religion deals with three issues of perplexity, pain, and mischief and tries to detect them. Religion tries to deny that these issues are fundamental feature of whole world and tries to make them meaningful by connecting these issues with extended realms of reality. (Geertz quoted from [55], p.266).

From functionalism approaches, it can be referred to Durkheim and Brown works. Durkheim have had the most effect to the religion sociology. The base of his definition about religion is a distinction between holy and unholy. For him, "religion is a consistent system of beliefs and related functions with holy things that is the things that are considered separate from the other things and are in the very near relatives. These beliefs and functions associate all the people who do them in the ethical society". ([64], p.47). This definition of Durkheim which has the beliefs and functions together and has a special emphasis to having group is indicative of Smith Robertson influence to Durkheim. The one who believed that the customs have priority to beliefs because the beliefs are some rationalizations of these functions. Harry Alpert is a Durkheimian researcher; he classified four main functions of religion based on Durkheim perspective: it makes people disciplined, creates solidarity, saves life, and grants prosperity to life.

Redcliff Brown was influenced by Durkheim, but it had some differences with his perspective: the most important difference is that he does not accept that the most of religion beliefs are errors and imaginations. However, religious beliefs are emotional symbolic statements that are necessary for the constancy and survival of society. To Redcliff Brown, incorrect beliefs and erroneous functions have valuable social functions in spite of their incorrectness. Customs do not bring about consequences that the participants and performers expect, but it brings about consequences that have the value of social usefulness. We can pay attention to this theory at least as a possibility that the religion like morals and law is an important and fundamental part of social system and it is a part of the complex system that the humans can live together by it in a systematic order of social relations. Based on this perspective, we do not consider sources of religion, but we pay attention to its social functions, that is we are going to know the role of religion in the formation and protection of social discipline (Brown quoted from [55], p. 196).

The present study has raised hypothesis based on theoretic directions mentioned in religion and religiosity and their experimental certainty:

1. It seems that the religiosity of students has religious and emotional contents and semantic direction.
2. It seems that the gender and major variables have not implications to content and direction of religiosity for students.

### 3. Methodology

This is a descriptive-analytical research and it is a quantitative based on topic and its purposes., The instrument of data collection is a questionnaire and the type of study for data collection is survey. The population of the study consisted of the male and female students of Azad University of Zanjan in the 2014-2015.

#### The measurement method of religiosity in present study

Some researchers consider the religiosity level as a unidimensional construct but most of researchers of religion sociology such as Wash, De vaus, Kamal-al-Nofi, Englehart, Glak, and Stark consider the construct as a multidimensional. (Azadarmaki and Ghiasvand, 2002, 128). This study has used the model by Glak and Stark (1966) to measure the religiosity state of students for two main reasons:

- A. Since the theoretical basis of this study is based on Peter Berger approaches in the religion and Berger is among semantic theorists—that is a combination of emotional-oriented, rationalist, sociological approaches—and his definition about religion makes us to use the Glak and stark model that is more consistent with the population of the study; so to make it operational, we used Berger theory.
- B. The measurement made by Glak and Stark is the most popular measure that has affected to all the studies of religiosity measurement. "scale of religious commitment" by Glak and Stark (1966) is the most practical western measurement in the religiosity researches of internal sociologies. This measurement considers five aspects of beliefs, customs, experience, knowledge, and consequences. In general, 48 items are set in seven sections.

To measure the religiosity concept and to find its components, the measures such as God, Quran, fasting, and Resurrection are used according to the five aspects of religiosity of a Muslim students; each of measures is

defined accordance with the principles of Islam in the religiosity aspects.

The present research has mentioned four measures of faithfulness, emotional, ritual, and the consequences considering the limitations of the study.

1. Faithfulness aspect (religion beliefs): the beliefs that are expected the followers of the religion believe to them.
2. Ritual aspect (religious practices): the certain religious practices are said to practices such as prayer, participation in special religious ceremonies, fasting that their followers do.
3. Emotional aspect (experience aspect): it is said to emotions, imaginations, and feelings related to having a relationship with God or ultimate reality or sublime authority.
4. Knowledge aspect (thinking aspect): it is said to the information and basic knowledge about the beliefs of each religion that their followers should know them.
5. Consequences aspect (religious works): it is said to the effects of beliefs, actions, experiences, and religious knowledge in everyday life of followers (Serajzadeh, 105-6, [66], p.20-21).

#### 3.1. Sampling

Stratified- random sampling method was used in this study and 345 students were selected from thirteen major including social science, law, literature, accounting, commerce management, computer engineering, mechanic engineering, industries engineering, electricity engineering, microbiology, nursing, chemistry, and physics.

#### 3.2. Instruments

Given that the main purpose of this study is testing external validity and researchers intend to generalize its results to the other people so the questionnaire was used to collect data.

#### 3.3. Descriptive Results

Gender: male 42.1, female 55.6, unclear 2.3

Major: humanity science: 45.0, engineering 34.9, basic sciences 20.2

Education year: first year: 18.2, last year: 24.2, between first and last year: 57.6

### 4. Analytical Results: Religiosity Characteristics of Students in Religiosity Aspects

Table 1. (single sample t-test)

Religiosity faithfulness and emotional aspect					
variable	frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	T	sig
faithfulness	345	1.574	.615	-42.980	0.000
Emotional	345	1.772	0.608	-37.425	0.000
Consequences(social and cultural)	345	2.079	0.638	-26.676	0.000
Consequences(individual and spiritual)	345	2.855	0.725	4.211	0.000
Ritual	345	3.212	0.789	4.977	0.000

Based on Table 1, the mean of students' responses is higher than the average in the faithfulness, emotional, and consequences aspects, and it was lower than the average in

ritual aspect. These values were gained based on t-test and significance level of more than 95%.

**Table 2. (the comparison test of male and female mean in the religiosity)**

variable	religiosity				
gender	frequency	mean	Standard deviation	T value	sig
male	146	2.266	0.672	-3.112	0.000
female	193	2.067	0.503		

Based on Table 2, the mean of religiosity is different among male and female. The observed difference between two means is significant based on t-test with value of

3.112 and significance level more than 95%. The female appropriated the more desired mean than males.

**Table 3. the comparison test of the mean of first year and last year students in religiosity**

variable	religiosity				
Education year	frequency	mean	Standard deviation	T value	sig
First year	63	2.091	0.576	-0.216	0.374
Last year	84	2.112	0.590		

Based on Table 3, there was no significant difference between the religiosity mean of first and last year students, so the observed difference between two means was not

significant based on t-test with value of 0.216 in the significance level of 0.374.

**Table 4. the comparison test of the mean of students' religiosity based on major**

Statistic indexes major	Frequency	mean	Standard deviation	F value	sig
Humanity science	155	1.508	0.498	7.835	0.000
engineering	120	1.746	0.772		
Basic science	70	1.428	0.474		

Based on Table 4, the mean of religiosity among the students of humanity science is 1.508, engineering 1.646, and basic science 1.428. There was a significant difference between means based on f test with value of 7.835 in the significance level more than 95%.

So the students of basic science have the highest mean and the students of humanity science and engineering have the next ranks. It means that the hypothesis was proved.

total religiosity. Therefore, the female showed higher level of religiosity than male and students of basic science had the highest mean and the students of humanity science and engineering were in next ranks.

So the religiosity of students had religious and emotional content and semantic direction.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper studied the religiosity characteristics of students and its implications to religious content and direction. The results showed that the semantically approach to religious and religiosity was raised as common and dominant approach among students. In other words, the mentioned approach makes clear the communal discourse of religiosity among the students of religiosity. The results gained by survey of students by religiosity standard measurement of Glak and Stark. It was in the form of four aspects of faithfulness, emotional, consequences, and ritual. It shows the direction of mental tendencies system towards the feeling of meaning and nobility by religion and religiosity. It also shows lower mean about the belief to functions, cultural and social resultants of religion and religiosity, and stable bounding for doing religious ritual among students. So the students were assessed in the higher level in terms of belief to religion principles, consequences of individual-spiritual religiosity, and religious emotions. They were assessed in the lower level than average in doing religious ritual and belief to consequences of social and cultural religiosity. In this study in addition to measure the religious perspective of students, it also examines the effect of gender, major, and education year variables to perspective and religiosity level of them. The results showed that the above mentioned variables had no effect to the religiosity content and direction of students and it was only effective to their

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