

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE SATISFACTION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG TRAINEE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Life satisfaction is a way a person evaluates his or her life and how he or she feels about where it is going in the future. This study was conducted to investigate the level of high achievers' life satisfaction, the domains of their life satisfaction and its relationship to their academic achievement. Based on the literature review, academic achievement is predicted to contribute significantly to high level of life satisfaction compared to other domains in life. Forty-five (45) high-achieving (those who obtained a CGPA of 3.50 to 3.99) students have participated in this study. This study is adapted from a research of Diener et al. (1985) on Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS). Four domain factors, namely social, self, physical and family were studied. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in this study. The results showed that the high-achieving students showed a high level of life satisfaction in terms of family supports domains but moderate level of satisfaction on their appearance. Nevertheless, for various reasons, academic satisfaction is not a strong determinant of their life satisfaction.

Keywords: *Life satisfaction, academic satisfaction, family support, social supports, physical appearances and self-awareness*

INTRODUCTION

A good quality of living contributes to various positive outcomes of life. In modern years, individuals place values on healthy relationship, affordable houses, and good security system (Civitci & Civitci, 2015; Gamble & Garling, 2012; Veenhoven, 1996). Across time, the importance of subjective wellbeing is examined. Initiated in the early 1940, Maslow has proposed self-actualization theory which refers to basic individual needs that describes human needs as being relatively fluid – with many needs being present in a person simultaneously (Santrock, 2012). The physiological as well as the psychological needs, expectations and motivation in life were researched for the past 30 years. The fundamental trend of human needs changes to betterment of living. In fresh atmosphere, Inglehart (1990) proposed that when basic material needs are met, the individual will move to post-materialistic phase which is concerned with self-fulfilment. The transformation and the change of human ways of living contribute to the more advanced definition of self- fulfilment. Recent research found that high life satisfaction is associated with positive outcome such as good psychological well-being, socialization relationship and academic achievement (Park, 2004).

Education is one of the intriguing aspects in life satisfaction that is worth studying. As revealed in the variance in satisfaction between nation resources, generally, more highly educated countries experience higher levels of satisfaction, but with this education comes opportunity for aversive consequences: loss of previous opportunities that comes along with achieving such education, job competition, or even lack of jobs. That being said, those more highly educated ones tend to experience more favourable events compared to adverse events (Irvin, 2015). Life satisfaction was measured with two types of measurement, one-dimensional (global) and multidimensional (domain specific). According to Huebner, Laughlin, Ash and Gilman (1998), multidimensional life satisfaction measures provide a better viewpoint of adolescents' life satisfaction. As suggested by Huebner (2002) which meets the purpose of this study, he proposed 5 specific domains of life satisfaction which are family, school, self, friends and living environment. Alfonso et al., (1996) have re-examined the SWLS domains by Diener et al., (1985) and concluded with Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS). The main domains examined were social life satisfaction, self-satisfaction, physical appearance satisfaction and family satisfaction.

The concept of subjective well-being is close to Bentham's classic definition of happiness, which he defined as "the sum of pleasure and pain" (Veenhoven, 2008). From a classic interpretation then, the concept of well-being was studied. According to the early theories, happiness resulted most directly from objective circumstances of their lives. In regards to life satisfaction, Veenhoven (1984) claimed that:

"high satisfaction level suggests that the quality of life, in the population concerned, is good. Though conditions may not be ideal, it is apparently acceptable for most of the population and vice versa low satisfaction marks serious shortcomings of some kind. An example is the assessment of life-satisfaction among single people. In all modern nations, single persons express less pleasure with life than married persons, and the divorced and widowed frequently express the lowest levels of satisfaction with life".

Diener (2000) and Veenhoven (1996) suggested life satisfaction as subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is defined as one's evaluation of his or her life; an evaluation that is both affective and cognitive. Subjective well-being is also defined as a global judgment of one's life. It is deemed that human beings, in general, experience an abundance of subjective well-being. We experience both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. For instance, when we are engaged in exciting activities; pleasure experiences; painful experiences and challenges which all of these later, contribute to a certain degree of life satisfaction.

One of the researchers that have studied on this significant relationship is Durayyapah (2010). It is said that, significant research on life satisfaction around the world played a vital role in Durayyapah's studies in which he proposed a 3P model on life satisfaction. In this study, he focused on subjective well-being. Since the way people perceive their happiness is relatively differently, happiness should be assessed based on the human development process. Thus, individuals would experience a significant shift in temporal attention of satisfaction throughout their life. The 3P Model holds on to the notion that subjective well-being is a temporal component, for individuals do not desire to only pursue happiness (Prospect), but also to experience it (Present), as well as protect acquired happiness (Past).

On the other hand, Diener et al., (2013) envisioned life satisfaction to complement existing indicators by reflecting the influences of diverse facets of quality of life and allowing respondents to freely weight different aspects based on people's values and preferences into account as well as the outcomes of their choices. Some recent studies focus on age differences in forecasts of life satisfaction, the accuracy of anticipated future life satisfaction across adulthood and age differential effects of educational and health resources (Lang et al., 2012; Gamble & Garling, 2012; FitzRoy, Nolan & Steinhardt, 2011; Civitci & Civitci, 2015).

Nowadays Malaysia is experiencing significant adjustments and demands in the way of living. Indirectly, all demands and social changes are characterized by certain life expectations. Empirical studies conducted in the context of Malaysia and outside Malaysia postulated that individuals with higher level of life satisfaction are highly involved in substance abuse, delinquent misbehaviour and suicidal tendencies (Salleh & Zuria, 2009; Huebner et al., 2004). One of the important studies conducted by Gilman et al., (2006) disclosed that Malaysian students either attending public or private universities have higher *alexithymia* (difficulty in understanding, processing and expressing emotions and *alexithymia* can be a catalyst to various psychiatric disorders) compared to university students outside Malaysia. Nonetheless, research conducted in recent years indicates that factors that lead to lower scores on the subjective well-being in Malaysia are similar to abroad countries. Malaysians from highly urbanized cities are exposed to more educational and job opportunities which could probably contribute to higher life satisfaction. This finding is aligned with Veenhoven's studies (1984 & 2008). Malaysian students are generally close to their family members and friends and therefore, in certain circumstances, family and friends contribute significantly to students' success (Durrayapah, 2010; Salleh & Zuria, 2009; Park, 2004).

As claimed by Gilman et al., (ibid), Malaysian students experienced relatively high level of *alexithymia*. This could be attributed to the fact that college years is one of the life cycles which could likely lead to stressful experiences; it is a life cycle where young adults are responsible for their own health, school life, financial condition and they have to manage their own life. In this life cycle that appears to be stressful for college students, their life satisfaction is an important aspect worth examining. As discussed,

research findings of Diener et al. (1999 & 1985) showed that goals are significantly related to life satisfaction. According to Arias (2004), students' goals are usually divided into 2 categories, namely, academic goals and social goals. Asian countries, including Malaysia, appreciate institution of family, friends and individual perceptions on oneself. Thus, this appreciation could be made into a simple hypothesis- "Do family, social interaction, perception of oneself and physical appearance contribute to students' life satisfaction?" Students defined life satisfaction as a "perception that one is progressing towards important life goals" (Arias, 2004 p.6). Thus, would students, while being young and lack of exposure to the society outside, find it satisfying if their goals are assigned to them instead of them setting their own goals? Are the students satisfied with their lives when they are pursuing goals assigned to them? It is known that high achievers are considered better self-regulators in terms of learning (Santrock, 2012). Salmela and Tuominen (2009) found that students with higher academic performance experienced a higher level of life satisfaction. Irvine (2015) also suggested that students with higher self-efficacy reported higher levels of life satisfaction. However, earlier studies done by Rode, Arthaud, Mooney, Near, Baldwin, Bommer and Rubin (2005) reported that "less likely that a student whose identity and energy is wholly consumed in academic performance will maximize life satisfaction".

Thus, these studies found contradicting points from 2 different studies. Alfonso, Allison, Rader & Gormon (1996) argued that life satisfaction can be measured in various domains, and academic satisfaction can be one of the domains. Dienar & Chan (2011) also showed certain degree of agreement to Alfonso's studies. They stated that, the level of importance of different domains could affect life satisfaction as a whole and rest under individual's judgment. To reiterate, four important domains which characterized students' goals are social, self, physical appearances and family. Thus, this study is aimed to explore students' level of life satisfaction and the four domains that contribute to students' life satisfaction.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to investigate level of life satisfaction among students of Faculty of Education and to identify the domain(s) that contributes the

most to students' life satisfaction. Faculty of Education was conveniently chosen due to the high percentage of excellent students (high achiever – who achieve a CGPA of 3.50 and above) in a local university in Malaysia. These students are enrolled as undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education in four-year programme to become school teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Respondents

The respondents involved in this study were comprised of 45 high achieving trainee teachers with the CGPA of 3.50 to 4.00 from the Faculty of Education. Faculty of Education offers several fields of specializations: Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Biology, Mathematics, Physics, Art Education and Physical Health Education. A total of 950 undergraduate students were registered in this faculty. This faculty was chosen due to students' academic excellence. In 2013 and 2014, Faculty of Education had the highest number of Dean's List recipients in this university (Laporan Peperiksaan Fakulti Pendidikan, 2013/2014). Majority of the excellent students were from the programme of TESL, Mathematics and Biology. These were the courses with highest number of recipient of Dean's List. These trainee teachers are enrolled in four-year programme and in this study, majority of the students are third year trainee teachers. As a means of obtaining data, a set of questionnaire was developed and subsequently sent to the respondents via electronic mail (e-mail). A total of 60 questionnaires were sent to all recipients of Dean's List. A total of 45 questionnaires were answered and returned to the researcher.

Research Instrument

The Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS) constructed by Alfonso et al., (1996) is adapted for this study. In making judgment related to life satisfaction, ESWLS emphasizes on the person's own standard of evaluation. This instrument was chosen as it has been widely used in research (Civitci & Civitci, 2015; Rhijin & Lero, 2014; Gamble & Garling, 2012; Sirgy & Wu, 2009; Gregg & Salisbury, 2001) which infers that it possesses a high reliability level (0.546). Besides, ESWLS is also shown to have favourable psychometric properties (Gregg & Salisbury, 2001).

These domains were among the important domains relevant to college life (Yui-hui, 2006; Hodge & Mellin, 2010). Among the included variables in this questionnaire were socio-demographic background and 20 items of ESWLS that measured the respondents' satisfaction within four (4) domains, namely, Social Satisfaction, Self – Satisfaction, Physical Satisfaction and Family Satisfaction. Each domain consists of 5 items with 5- point Likert scale; one (1) with low satisfaction and five (5) with high satisfaction.

Statistical Analysis

The data was tabulated according to the research objectives of this study. For the first objective, descriptive statistical analyses were utilized. For the second objective, inferential statistical analyses were employed.

FINDINGS

A) Analysis of Overall Life Satisfaction Level

Table 1: Overall Life Satisfaction

| Overall Life Satisfaction | <i>f</i> | % |
|---------------------------|----------|-------|
| Moderately low | 4 | 8.9 |
| Moderately high | 30 | 66.7 |
| High | 11 | 24.4 |
| Total | 45 | 100.0 |

As shown in Table 1, 30 high-achieving students (66.7%) were reported to have moderately high level of life satisfaction. The responses were calculated from Section B of the questionnaire. The total of frequency was calculated from 5 items in Section B and the scale of these items ranged from scale 1 (strongly disagree) to scale 5 (strongly agree). Analysis of the data yielded a result indicated of majority of high achievers are satisfied with life. Eleven students were reported to achieve high level of life satisfaction. Four respondents reported a moderate lower life satisfaction (8.9%).

B) Analysis of the Contributing Domains towards Overall Life Satisfaction

Table 2: Domains of Life Satisfaction

| Domains of Life Satisfaction | Mean | SD |
|----------------------------------|------|------|
| Family Satisfaction | 4.01 | 0.64 |
| Social Life Satisfaction | 3.76 | 0.41 |
| Self - Satisfaction | 3.47 | 0.45 |
| Physical Appearance Satisfaction | 3.12 | 0.76 |

*highly satisfied ($m=4.00 - 5.00$), moderately satisfied ($m=3.00 - 3.59$), satisfied ($m=2.00 - 2.99$) and least satisfied ($m=1.00 - 1.99$)

Table 2 shows the distribution means of the domains of life satisfaction. The finding reveals that family satisfaction scored as the highest mean value ($M=4.01$, $SD=0.64$). Social life satisfaction domain recorded the second highest mean value ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.41$). Another domain that was considered to attain a high score was self – satisfaction ($M= 3.47$, $SD=0. 45$). The least satisfied domain reported by the high achievers was physical appearance ($M=3.12$, $SD=0.76$). Thus, it is deemed that parents and family play a significant role and have an impact on the high achievers. Nevertheless, most of the high achievers were moderately satisfied with their physical appearance.

C) Analysis of the Contributing Domains towards Overall Life Satisfaction

i) Social Life Satisfaction level

Table 3: Social Satisfaction Level

| Item (Social Satisfaction) | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| 1. In most ways my social life is close to my ideal. | 3.80 | 0.63 |
| 2. The conditions of my social life are excellent. | 3.53 | 0.69 |
| 3. I am satisfied with my social life | 3.96 | 0.47 |
| 4. So far I have got the important things I want from my social life | 3.67 | 0.67 |
| 5. I am generally pleased with my social life I lead. | 3.84 | 0.63 |

*highly satisfied ($m=4.00 - 5.00$), moderately satisfied ($m=3.00 - 3.59$), satisfied ($m=2.00 - 2.99$) and least satisfied ($m=1.00 - 1.99$)

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of mean scores for the first domain of life satisfaction, social satisfaction. As portrayed in Table 2, social satisfaction was in the category of 'moderately satisfied' among other domains ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.41$). As for Table 3, it shows the highest mean score of item 3 (*I am satisfied with my social life*) $M=3.96$, $SD=0.47$. This score was followed by item 5 (*I am generally pleased with my social life I lead*) $M=3.84$, $SD=0.63$. Item 2 (*The conditions of my social life are excellent*) was the item with the lowest mean score among high achievers $M=3.53$, $SD=0.69$. The mean scores indicate that, the respondents were contented with their social life.

ii) Self – Satisfaction Level

Table 4: Self - Satisfaction level

| Item (Self-Satisfaction) | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| 6. In most ways my actual self is close to my ideals. | 3.75 | 0.65 |
| 7. As an individual I consider myself excellent. | 3.24 | 0.68 |
| 8. I am satisfied with my person or self as an individual. | 3.67 | 0.56 |
| 9. So far I have got the important things I want from myself. | 3.17 | 0.80 |
| 10. I am generally pleased with myself as an individual. | 3.51 | 0.66 |

*highly satisfied ($m=4.00 - 5.00$), moderately satisfied ($m=3.00 - 3.59$), satisfied ($m=2.00 - 2.99$) and least satisfied ($m=1.00 - 1.99$)

Table 4 displays the distribution of mean score for self-satisfaction domain. From the mean score of Item 6, (*In most ways my actual self is closed to my ideals*); $M=3.75$, $SD=0.65$, it could be said that, the respondents were moderately satisfied with themselves. Item 8 also reflects respondents' moderate level of satisfaction (*I am satisfied with my person or self as an individual*) $M=3.67$, $SD=0.56$. This is followed by item 10 (I am generally pleased with myself as an individual) $M=3.51$, $SD=0.66$ while Item 9 records the least moderately satisfied level of respondents (*So far I have got the important things I want from myself*) $M=3.17$, $SD=0.80$. The results from this table suggested that, the students were moderately satisfied with themselves.

iii) Physical Appearance Satisfaction level

Table 5: Physical Appearance Satisfaction Level

| Item (Physical Appearance) | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| 11. In most ways my actual physical appearance is close to my ideal physical appearance | 3.06 | 0.96 |
| 12. I consider my physical appearance excellent | 2.95 | 0.85 |
| 13. I am satisfied with my physical appearance | 3.31 | 0.90 |
| 14. There is nothing about my physical appearance that I would like to change | 2.89 | 0.98 |
| 15. I am generally pleased with my physical appearance | 3.38 | 0.86 |

*highly satisfied ($m=4.00 - 5.00$), moderately satisfied ($m=3.00 - 3.59$), satisfied ($m=2.00 - 2.99$) and least satisfied ($m=1.00 - 1.99$)

Table 5 presents the distribution of mean scores for the physical appearances domain. Item 15 shows a moderately satisfied score of respondents towards their physical appearances (*I am generally pleased with my physical appearance*) $M=3.38$, $SD=0.86$. This is followed closely by item 13 (*I am satisfied with my physical appearance*) $M=3.31$, $SD=0.90$. Item 14 (*There is nothing about my physical appearance that I would like to change*) reflects the respondents' satisfaction level with the mean score of $M=2.89$, $SD=0.98$. Overall, the respondents were moderately satisfied with their physical appearance.

iv) Family Satisfaction Level

Table 6: Family Satisfaction Level

| Item (Family Satisfaction) | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| 16. In most ways my family is close to my ideal | 4.11 | 0.61 |
| 17. The conditions of my family life are excellent | 3.91 | 0.73 |
| 18. I am satisfied with my family life | 4.24 | 0.68 |
| 19. So far I have got the important things I want from my family | 3.93 | 0.96 |
| 20. I am generally pleased with the quality of my family life | 3.89 | 0.96 |

*highly satisfied ($m=4.00 - 5.00$), moderately satisfied ($m=3.00 - 3.59$), satisfied ($m=2.00 - 2.99$) and least satisfied ($m=1.00 - 1.99$)

Table 6 describes the overall mean scores for family satisfaction. Item 18 (*I am satisfied with my family life*) has the highest mean score ($M=4.24$, $SD=0.68$). This is followed by item 16 (*In most ways my family is close to my ideal*) which scored ($M=4.11$, $SD=0.61$) and Item 19 (*So far I got the important things I want from my family*) with at ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.96$). In item 17, high achievers showed a high level of satisfaction ($M=3.91$, $SD=0.73$). Of the 5 items examined in this study, item 20 recorded the lowest mean score (I am generally pleased with the quality of my family life) with ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.96$). From the data obtained, it could be concluded that most of the high achievers were happy with their family and their life qualities.

D) Analysis of the Relationship between Life Satisfaction and Academic Achievement

Table 7: Relationship between Life Satisfaction Domain and Academic Achievement on Life Satisfaction

| | Academic Achievement CGPA (r-value) | Significant Value <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Overall Life Satisfaction | -0.155 | 0.309 |
| Social Life | -0.038 | 0.805 |
| Self | -0.209 | 0.169 |
| Physical Appearance | -0.232 | 0.126 |
| Family | 0.134 | 0.379 |

Table 7 provides data that clarifies the relationship between the four extended life satisfaction domains and academic achievement on overall high achievers' life satisfaction. The finding showed that there is no significant relationship between overall life satisfaction and academic achievement; $r = -0.155$, $p = 0.309$. For each domain, the finding suggested that there is significant relationship between each of the domain of life satisfaction to academic achievement. The results indicated relationship between academic achievement with social life ($r = 0.038$, $p = 0.805$), self – satisfaction ($r = -0.209$, $p = 0.169$), physical appearance ($r = -0.232$, $p = 0.126$) and family satisfaction ($r = 0.134$, $p = 0.379$). The result showed that academic achievement and each domain of life satisfaction (social life, self-satisfaction, physical appearance and family satisfaction) does not have any effect on high achievers' overall life satisfaction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study demonstrate no significant relationship between life satisfaction and academic achievement among high achievers. The results obtained in this study are consistent with findings in past studies. In the first part of the research, majority of the respondents reported moderate high level of life satisfaction, parallel with other studies done on level of satisfaction among adults and college students (Civitci & Civitci, 2015; Santos et al.,

2014; Gilman & Hueber, 2006). Of four domains discussed thoroughly in this paper (family, self, social and physical appearance), family satisfaction domain was recorded to be a domain where high achievers are highly satisfied with. Family and parental support is a significant factor among the respondents in this study, a finding similar to past studies (Bushra & Rehana, 2010). The withdrawal of family supports could result in low level of family satisfaction (Lewis et al., 2011). Therefore, it could be said that most of the high achievers in this study do not experience rough conflicts or unresolvable problems with their family members as they reported a high level of life satisfaction. Social satisfaction, although not being the highest mean score, offers a valuable viewpoint in this study. In general, the high achievers are ecstatic with their interpersonal relationship and current social life. Social life satisfaction tends to be higher because the relationships that are built in the daily social life are mostly chosen rather than imposed (Diener & Diener, 2009). Therefore, the reason these respondents feel satisfied with this domain could be attributed to the fact that their social life is a decision made by them. Other than that, these respondents, coming from a collectivist community might feel that by socializing within the community, they are fulfilling their responsibilities as a part of the community (Diener & Diener, 2009; Krishnan, 2004).

Another domain that has been discussed in this study is self-satisfaction. Self – satisfaction generally means, the high achievers are contented with their actual selves and individuals. According to Diener and Diener (2009), the very fact that collectivists put more importance in the rest of the community members than themselves might be the cause of their lack of satisfaction in the self-satisfaction domain. However, the high achievers of this study are moderately satisfied considering that their university life allows them to get involved in activities that give them the chance to use their skills to contribute to the society and this exposure will provide them with a positive self-identity (Sirgy & Wu, 2009; Rode et al., 2005; Arias, 2004). High achievers, however, were found to be moderately pleased with their physical appearance. Chow (2005) and Rhijin and Lero (2014) suggested that individuals who accept themselves as who they are and consider that others think of them the same way, are most probably more satisfied with their life. Looking at the results, it would mean that most of the participants who reported a quite low level of satisfaction in physical appearance might be the result of their low confidence level in their appearance.

The last part of this study examined relationship between academic achievement and life satisfaction. The findings indicated that high level of satisfaction predicted high achievement but there is no significant relationship between academic achievement and life satisfaction. Different from findings in this study, a review of literature reveals that some studies claimed that, generally, students with higher academic achievement have a higher level of life satisfaction (Lewis et al., 2011). In addition to that, Quinn & Duckworth (2007) also stated that earning better grades would predict a higher level of life satisfaction as, according to them, students perform well because they are happy and performing well makes them feel even happier.

Excellent academic achievement and life satisfaction should come hand in hand in producing better students who are balanced in both their academic and also their inner being (Lewis et al., 2011). All efforts in producing great outcomes from education need to take into consideration not only the aspect of students' academic, but also their satisfaction in their life. This is because, as reported by Lewis et al. (2011), high level of life satisfaction will lead to various positive outcomes in a number of domains in life which include interpersonal, career and their physical functioning. On the contrary, students who have a low level of life satisfaction will exhibit more problematic behaviours (Busra & Rehana, 2010; Gilman & Huebner, 2006).

Those who have a balanced life (life satisfaction in multiple domains) are likely to have higher subjective well-being. Young adults, especially, are likely to experience imbalance in multiple domains; rarely experience satisfaction within single domain. Although research evidence cited support many of the theoretical notions of life satisfaction, more empirical investigations are needed. High level of life satisfaction cannot be attained through basic needs or growth needs. Instead, both needs should be met to induce subjective well-being.

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