



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship Between Gratitude and Happiness Among Students of HKBP Nommensen University

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between gratitude and happiness among students at HKBP Nommensen University. The method used in this study was a quantitative approach. The subjects of this research were 212 students of HKBP Nommensen University selected using a random sampling technique. The measurement instruments applied in this study were the Gratitude Scale and the Happiness Scale, which employed a Likert scale with a score range of 1–5. The data analysis technique used was Pearson's product-moment correlation with a significance level of 5%. Based on the data analysis, the correlation coefficient obtained was $r = 0.393$ with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.005$). These findings suggest a significant relationship between gratitude and happiness, indicating that higher levels of gratitude are associated with greater happiness, and conversely, lower levels of gratitude correspond to lower levels of happiness.

Keyword: gratitude and happiness, students.

Introduction

Happiness can be understood as a general term used to describe how frequently an individual experiences positive emotions. According to Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005), happy individuals are those who experience positive emotions—such as joy, curiosity, and pride—more frequently, and negative emotions—such as sadness, anxiety, and anger—less frequently. According to Carr (2004), happiness is defined as a combination of positive psychological characteristics and a high level of life satisfaction, characterized by the frequent presence of positive affect and the infrequent presence of negative affect.

In fact, happiness comes from within individuals themselves. True happiness does not depend on wealth, status, worldly pleasures, or physical perfection (Arrasyid, 2020). Happiness emerges when individuals are able to appreciate the life they are living, learn from every experience, and feel grateful for what they have rather than focusing on things they may not necessarily obtain. Happiness is not merely associated with feelings of pleasure (Hidayat, 2015). According to Froh, Bono, and Emmons (2010), happiness is not only about good or extraordinary experiences, but also encompasses overall positive conditions, including social, physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Happiness is also important for students as they pursue their education in higher education. According to Santrock (2012), students are in a developmental stage transitioning from secondary education to university. The primary goal of students in higher education is to learn and develop their way of thinking. Therefore, students need to engage in the entire educational process in order to achieve their learning goals, obtain satisfactory academic performance, and graduate on time (Hardianti, Iskandar, et al, 2013).

Research conducted by Mujidin (2021) found that student happiness plays an important role in daily activities and can have a positive impact on the meaning of life. Jiang (2022), in his study, revealed that happiness is more than just a temporary feeling in life; it is also crucial for students' development and future careers, and

enduring happiness, in particular, can foster a more productive, cohesive, caring, and sustainable society.

In Indonesia, students are often associated with various psychological problems, such as academic stress, difficulty in controlling anger, traumatic experiences, and issues within family and social relationships (Allyna, n.d.). Individual sadness can be exacerbated by problems in social or family relationships (Allyna, n.d.). In his study, Sholeh (2017) found that failed romantic relationships, family conflicts, disputes with friends, and even minor problems that trigger feelings of threat or suicidal thoughts often lead to distress among respondents (Naseem & Khalid, 2010).

Happiness is important because, in the educational context, it plays a role in improving students' academic performance (Lumontod, 2018). Students often use various methods to seek happiness. According to Seligman (2005), people genuinely desire to feel happy, but they often pursue it through false shortcuts such as using illicit drugs, eating chocolate, engaging in loveless sex, shopping, masturbation, and watching television.

Happiness is important for every individual, as it can improve mental health and reduce stress (Goldman, 2016). Difficulties can become obstacles for individuals in experiencing happiness; however, those with emotional intelligence are generally able to view challenges as valuable opportunities (Serene Tan, Liu Mei et al., 2021). Being grateful for one's current circumstances is one way to cope with such challenges. According to Lee (2020), an individual's level of appreciation has a significant impact on their happiness. In simple terms, gratitude enriches our emotional experience and can improve the overall quality of human life (Emmons, 2007).

Gratitude, according to Peterson and Seligman (2004), is a feeling of comfort and appreciation for what has been received, as well as the positive impact of others or events that provide a sense of mental peace. According to research by Hemarajarajeswari and Gupta (2021), individuals who are highly grateful tend to exhibit higher levels of happiness, highlighting the distinctive role of gratitude. According to McCullough (2001), gratitude is defined as the emergence of emotions triggered by moral actions. Based on this definition, gratitude is considered a moral emotion similar to empathy, sympathy, shame, and guilt.

McCullough (2002) found that individuals who are grateful tend to have greater life expectancy, higher levels of satisfaction, and more frequent positive emotions compared to those who are not grateful. Prosocial scores are also often higher among individuals with greater gratitude than those with lower levels of gratitude. Highly appreciative individuals tend to be sympathetic, forgiving, helpful, and supportive, and are generally less materialistic.

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According to Llenares (2020), gratitude has a positive impact on resilience and is associated with happiness. Research by Prabowo (2020) also indicates that gratitude can evoke positive emotions. Considering that students are individuals who are vulnerable to problems and dissatisfaction, gratitude can help them cope with various life situations. Furthermore, grateful students tend to be happier and have a more positive outlook on life.

These arguments lead to the conclusion that an individual's level of gratitude is correlated with their level of happiness. Happiness is considered an important component that can influence students' academic achievement in the educational context. Therefore, "The Relationship Between Gratitude and Happiness Among Students of HKBP Nommensen University" becomes an interesting subject of study for researchers.

Method

This study utilized a quantitative approach with a correlational design. Quantitative research refers to a method used to investigate specific populations or samples by collecting data through research instruments and analyzing it using statistical or quantitative techniques to test predefined hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2012).

Based on this research design, data were collected using psychological instruments, and the results were tested using statistical analysis to determine whether there is a relationship between gratitude and happiness among students of HKBP Nommensen University.

The population in this study consisted of 212 students of HKBP Nommensen University aged 19–23 years. The determination of the minimum sample size was conducted using an a priori statistical approach with the assistance of G*Power software version 3.1.9.7. The sample size calculation focused on a two-tailed correlation test (Exact test: Correlation: Bivariate normal model). The participants in this study were students of HKBP Nommensen University. The research sample was set at 212 participants, with an additional 50 participants used for the try-out.

Data were collected through questionnaires utilizing psychological scales, and the analysis was performed using Pearson's product-moment correlation technique.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study seeks to examine the relationship between gratitude and happiness among students of HKBP Nommensen University. The data derived from the study conducted on 212 students of HKBP Nommensen University were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 25.0 for Windows, producing the following descriptive statistics:

Table 1. Description of Research Results

Descriptive Statistics								
Variable	Hypothetical Data				Empirical Data			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Gratitude	27	135	81	18	84	129	103.8	8.42
Happiness	34	170	102	22.67	96	154	127.4	15.3

The participants in this study consisted of 212 students of HKBP Nommensen University aged 19–23 years. Based on the table, the comparison between the hypothetical mean and the empirical mean shows that for the gratitude scale, the empirical mean (103.83) is higher than the hypothetical mean (81). This indicates that the students of HKBP Nommensen University who took part in this study demonstrated a high level of gratitude.

Similarly, for the happiness scale, the empirical mean (127.35) is higher than the hypothetical mean (102), indicating that the research participants have a high level of happiness.

The results of the hypothesis testing for the gratitude and happiness variables are as follows:

Table 2. Results of Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation

Correlations			
		Gratitude	Happiness
Gratitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.393**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	212	212
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	.393**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	212	212

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the outcomes of the hypothesis testing, it was found that $r = 0.393$ with a significance level of 0.000. Since the obtained significance value (p) is 0.000 or $p < 0.05$, the hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is a significant relationship between the variables of gratitude and happiness. The value of $r = 0.393$ indicates a positive relationship between gratitude and happiness. Therefore, the level of happiness rises as the level of gratitude increases among students of HKBP Nommensen University.

Discussion

This research seeks to investigate the association between gratitude and happiness among students of HKBP Nommensen University, Medan. The participants in this study consisted of 212 participants. Based on the statistical analysis, the significance value was 0.000 ($p < 0.005$), indicating that the hypothesis was supported, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.393$. This result demonstrates a significant positive relationship, meaning that higher levels of gratitude are associated with higher levels of happiness among students of HKBP Nommensen University, and vice versa.

According to research by Hemarajarajeswari and Gupta (2021) involving students from various arts and science colleges in the districts of Coimbatore and Tirupur, individuals with higher levels of gratitude demonstrate higher levels of happiness, highlighting the uniqueness of gratitude. The findings of this study are consistent with several previous studies that also found a positive relationship between gratitude and happiness. For example, a study by Prabowo and Laksmivati (2020) on students of Surabaya State University reported a correlation value of 0.859 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating a very strong relationship between gratitude and happiness. Additionally, research by Dinanti and Mangundjaya (2023) at University X found a correlation of 0.653 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating a strong relationship between the two variables among young adult students.

Individuals who are grateful for their lives are able to acknowledge and accept various aspects of themselves, including both strengths and weaknesses, and tend to have a positive view of their past experiences. According to Watkins (2003), gratitude is one of the most important strengths for achieving a better life, as having purpose and meaning in life is closely related to being grateful for the life one is living.

The study conducted by Alsukah (2021) involving 447 female students aged 19–25 found that gratitude and mindfulness made significant contributions to predicting students' happiness, accounting for 31% and 41.5%, respectively. Furthermore, the combined influence of overall mindfulness and gratitude accounted for 51.5% of the variance in happiness. Furthermore, the interaction among mindfulness, a sense of abundance, and simple appreciation explained 54.4% of the variance in students' happiness.

The results indicated a positive association among mindfulness, gratitude (encompassing a sense of abundance, simple appreciation, and appreciation toward others), and happiness. Furthermore, students at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University were generally found to have moderate levels of mindfulness, as well as moderate to high levels of gratitude and happiness. In more detail, the sense of abundance was classified as moderate, simple appreciation as high, and appreciation of others as moderate. These

factors—mindfulness, gratitude, a sense of abundance, and various forms of appreciation—were observed to be higher among students who reported greater levels of happiness.

From a psychological perspective, these findings support the theory of positive psychology, which states that individuals who are able to experience and express gratitude tend to have increased emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Seligman, 2005). Gratitude encourages students to appreciate positive experiences, focus on what they have, and reduce negative emotions, thereby contributing to higher levels of happiness (Hemarajarajeswari & Gupta, 2021).

According to Froh, Miller, and Snyder (2007), gratitude makes individuals feel happier, more optimistic, and more satisfied with life. This indicates that gratitude is one of the important factors in achieving happiness. In addition, Emmons (2002) states that happy individuals tend to be more creative, enthusiastic, helpful, confident, possess better self-control, and demonstrate stronger self-regulation and coping abilities.

Students, in undergoing their academic processes at university, often face various challenges such as academic pressure, social adaptation, and future planning. In this context, psychological factors such as gratitude and happiness play an important role in enhancing their emotional well-being. Seligman (2012) emphasizes that the development of positive emotions is closely related to the concept of happiness. Furthermore, Khairullah (2021) highlights that an individual's level of pleasure is strongly influenced by their level of gratitude.

In line with this, Safaria (2014) found a positive correlation between happiness and gratitude. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of gratitude are likely to experience greater happiness compared to those with lower levels of gratitude. Moreover, the study indicates that gratitude functions as a buffer, reducing the negative effects of low happiness, particularly among students.

According to Watkins et al. (2003), gratitude is essential for increasing an individual's level of happiness. Through various mechanisms—including enhancing positive experiences, helping individuals cope with difficulties, aiding in recalling and appreciating meaningful experiences, strengthening social bonds, and reducing symptoms of depression—gratitude can have beneficial effects. The ability to express gratitude is particularly important for students, especially those living away from home, as it fosters a sense of purpose and enthusiasm for life. This enables students to lead happier lives both in the present and in the future, and to become more engaged in their daily interactions.

In line with research conducted by Mujidin (2021), which found that student happiness plays an important role in daily life and positively influences how individuals find meaning in life, gratitude and charitable behavior together contribute significantly to increasing happiness, which in turn affects students' lives.

Similarly, Lin (2019) highlighted the beneficial role of appreciation in enhancing emotions. In general, individuals who are grateful tend to feel a greater sense of abundance and well-being. For students, especially those living independently and facing various challenges, this is highly relevant. Students who lack gratitude often feel burdened and tend to compare themselves with others. On the other hand, individuals can more easily achieve pleasure and reduce stress in campus life by practicing gratitude and cultivating a sense of contentment with what they have.

The findings of this study are consistent with research conducted by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), which shows that individuals with high levels of gratitude tend to have lower levels of envy and depression. Gratitude enables individuals to feel calmer, more patient, and more at peace, allowing them to experience a greater sense of well-being in life. In addition, they tend to be less materialistic and demonstrate more prosocial behaviors, such as empathy and helpfulness. Individuals who feel capable of sharing with others are more likely to experience happiness, as this fosters a sense of usefulness and being needed.

Individuals who consistently practice gratitude tend to feel sufficient with the blessings they have received. These blessings may take various forms, including health, life itself, a complete family, and loving relatives and friends. Gratitude can also be reflected in how individuals respond to challenges or even the most difficult situations.

By acknowledging the blessings granted by God Almighty, individuals come to realize their limitations and dependence as

human beings. Students who consistently practice gratitude tend to feel content and are less driven by materialistic ambitions. This way of life fosters inner peace, enabling students to experience true happiness and tranquility in their lives.

Research by Prabowo (2020) on psychology students at Surabaya State University found that happiness and gratitude are positively correlated. This implies that the more grateful the psychology students are, the happier they tend to be. Conversely, lower levels of happiness are directly associated with lower levels of gratitude.

A study conducted by Amaniey (2022) involving 116 students at Yogyakarta State University also found a strong and positive correlation between mental health and students' gratitude. This suggests that better mental health is associated with higher levels of gratitude, and vice versa. The correlation coefficient between the variables was 0.564, indicating a moderately strong relationship between gratitude and mental health.

Research conducted by Mujidin (2021) on 80 students found that student happiness has a significant impact on daily life and can positively influence the meaning they assign to life. Gratitude and charitable behavior together play an important role in enhancing happiness, which in turn affects students' lives.

Research conducted by Anjani (2020) involving 70 students from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Studies at UIN Raden Intan Lampung (2017 cohort) found that among students who worked part-time, there was a substantial and positive correlation between psychological well-being and gratitude. Their psychological health improved as their level of gratitude increased. Conversely, students' psychological well-being declined as their level of gratitude decreased.

A study by Llenares (2020) involving 380 university graduates found that gratitude is associated with happiness and has a positive effect on increasing resilience. The relationship between happiness and resilience aligns with recent evidence indicating that happiness may significantly contribute to strengthening resilience among students.

Research conducted by Yoo (2020) involving 761 Korean adults from five universities in South Korea found that gratitude remains an important element of subjective well-being among Korean adults, despite the Confucian cultural context in which gratitude may imply indebtedness and obligation. The association between gratitude and subjective well-being was found to be consistent across genders. The study also explored the implications of these findings for the subjective well-being of Korean individuals.

Jiang's (2022) study, which involved 2,186 participants, found that happiness is not merely a temporary emotion but also plays a crucial role in supporting students' development and future career prospects. Sustained happiness, in particular, has the potential to foster a more productive, cohesive, caring, and sustainable society. The national survey also revealed that students' happiness is significantly associated with various factors, including personal factors such as health, family factors such as the frequency of contact and relationships with parents, and social factors such as academic achievement, sleep patterns, and romantic relationships. Furthermore, the decrease in students' happiness in recent years may be related to declining physical health, less frequent interaction with family members, and the growing use of electronic devices such as smartphones and online games. These patterns often lead to poor sleep habits and can negatively affect students' academic performance.

Research conducted by Alsukah (2021) on 447 female students aged 19–25 found that gratitude and mindfulness made significant contributions to predicting happiness among students (31% and 41.5%, respectively). The combined effect of overall mindfulness and gratitude accounted for 51.5% of the variance in students' happiness. Moreover, the interaction among mindfulness, a sense of abundance, and simple appreciation explained 54.4% of the variance in happiness. The findings also revealed a positive association between mindfulness, gratitude (encompassing a sense of abundance, simple appreciation, and appreciation of others), and happiness. Additionally, students at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University generally demonstrated moderate levels of mindfulness, along with moderate to high levels of gratitude and happiness. Specifically, the sense of abundance was categorized as moderate, simple appreciation as high, and appreciation of others as moderate. These variables—mindfulness, gratitude, sense of

abundance, and forms of appreciation—tended to be higher among students with greater levels of happiness.

Research conducted by Rahma (2023) involving adolescents, parents, and experts in Banjarbaru found that gratitude is significantly and positively correlated with adolescents' mental health. Higher levels of gratitude among adolescents are associated with increased feelings of happiness, reduced psychological distress, and improved emotional regulation. These findings highlight the importance of integrating local wisdom values into initiatives aimed at enhancing adolescent mental health.

Research conducted by Rani (2021) involving 81 adolescents at SMA Negeri 8 Pekanbaru found a significant correlation between gratitude and mental health ($p = 0.011 < 0.05$). These results suggest that, in order to improve students' mental health, educational institutions should continuously develop activities that foster gratitude.

These findings are consistent with previous studies (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2008), which demonstrate the role of gratitude in enhancing well-being. In general, individuals who are grateful tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction, optimism, and vitality, along with lower levels of depression and envy. They also typically demonstrate greater agreeableness, extraversion, and openness, while exhibiting lower levels of neuroticism. Prosocial behavior is also more commonly found among grateful individuals compared to those who are less grateful. They are more helpful, supportive, forgiving, and empathetic toward others.

In contrast, forgiveness did not show a significant relationship with well-being in this study. This finding does not confirm some previous studies. Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, and Miller (2007) explained that forgiveness is related to well-being. Witvliet, Ludwig, and VanderLaan (2001) proposed that forgiveness has the potential to lessen negative emotions, reduce stress levels, and enhance physiological aspects of physical health. Emotional forgiveness may also transform negative feelings into positive ones and contribute to improved psychophysiological outcomes related to overall health and well-being.

In the study conducted by Witvliet (2018), gratitude is defined as appreciation for benefits received; happiness as the enjoyment of present goodness; and hope as the desire for a meaningful future. The study examined gratitude as a predictor of both hope and happiness.

It can be concluded that individuals should encourage and enhance grateful behavior. Practicing gratitude has several positive benefits when applied in daily life, as individuals cannot be separated from life's challenges. Gratitude can function as a positive coping strategy when dealing with everyday problems.

Based on the explanation above, gratitude is not the sole or dominant factor influencing happiness. In Indonesia, happiness cannot be separated from cultural and religious contexts, as the majority of the population adheres strongly to religious values, and social relationships are highly valued. Therefore, individuals continuously strive to achieve their goals in order to attain happiness. For university students, happiness is reflected in having life goals, positive social relationships, acceptance of their strengths and weaknesses, and continuous self-development to achieve optimal outcomes. However, as students are currently in a transitional phase, they are more vulnerable to difficulties in achieving these conditions and are more likely to encounter various problems.

The results of this study suggest that gratitude can evoke positive emotions. This helps students cope with various situations and conditions they may encounter in life, as students are individuals who are vulnerable to experiencing problems and unhappiness. In addition, gratitude encourages students to evaluate their lives more positively and enhances their sense of happiness.

This study has several limitations, as it only examines two variables, namely gratitude and happiness. Furthermore, the use of a quantitative method limits the ability to explain in detail the factors that influence happiness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The study findings suggest the following conclusions:

1. There is a positive relationship between gratitude and happiness among students of HKBP Nommensen

University, Medan. This means that the higher the level of gratitude among students, the higher the level of happiness they experience.

2. Students of HKBP Nommensen University, Medan generally have a moderate level of gratitude, accounting for 64.6% (137 individuals), and a moderate level of happiness, accounting for 54.72% (116 individuals).

Recommendations

As a recommendation to address the limitations of this study, future researchers are encouraged to include students from a wider range of study programs so that the findings become more representative. Future studies may also incorporate other relevant psychological variables, such as peer social support or resilience, and consider the use of mixed methods to explore the dynamics of individuals' experiences of gratitude in greater depth.

For universities and campus counseling services, it is recommended to design psychoeducational programs or character-building training that specifically focus on daily gratitude practices. These interventions are expected to serve as effective preventive measures to help students manage academic stress and achieve optimal levels of happiness during their academic journey.

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