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### Intrinsic Motivation, Life Satisfaction And Happiness: Students at higher learning institution in Malaysia

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#### Abstract

Happiness is currently one of the primary indicators of social progress in modern society, particularly among students at higher learning institutions. The study examines the relationship between intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction, and happiness. 285 business faculty students at a higher learning institution in Malaysia enrolled in a bachelor's degree programme received online surveys. The results demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between happiness and the two independent variables of intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction. This study sheds light on how offering extracurricular activities can boost students' pleasure in higher learning and improve students' intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Happiness; intrinsic motivation; life satisfaction

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#### 1.0 Introduction

Happiness is the ultimate objective of life, and everyone strives to achieve it (Guazzelli & Zilli, 2016). According to Courtney (2020), happiness is the sensation or display of pleasure or contentment. Happiness is made up of three interrelated basic elements: positive benefits, the absence of negative consequences, and general enjoyment of life (Pishva, Ghalehban, Moradi, & Hoseini, 2011). Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, and Conway (2009) mentioned that happiness predicts our ability to construct our personal qualities to promote life satisfaction. These personal qualities can act as a coping mechanism, consequently increasing the ability to adjust and adapt to challenging environments. The meaning of happiness was identical to life satisfaction and subjective well-being, as they were used interchangeably in various past studies (Chan & Lee, 2006; Easterlin, 2001; Layard, 2005). Intrinsic motivation towards one's thing can create individual positive emotion or happiness. According to Ceci and Kumar (2015), intrinsically motivated individuals may carry more positive affect and experience. Intrinsic motivation is the internal satisfaction of the individual that makes a person happy. Life satisfaction is also a major driver of happiness (Shahrooz & Farnaz, 2018). Life satisfaction is often associated with feelings of general well-being as a result of harmony (Beiser, 1974). Life satisfaction is calculated over a relatively long period, and it is filled with the feelings of being cheerful and enjoying.

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In the 2023 World Happiest Report, Malaysia was listed as the 55th-happiest country. According to the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's annual World Happiness Report, Malaysia has moved up 15 spots to claim 55th rank. Since 2018, when it was classified as the 35th happiest country, the nation has seen a decline in its happiness level, falling to the 80th position in 2019, the 82nd slot in 2020, the 81st spot in 2021, and the 70th position in 2022. Malaysia's status in 2023 will still fall short of where it was in 2018. Research on higher learning students' unhappiness also reveals a severe problem. According to a poll conducted in 2022, people between the ages of 18 and 25 had the highest percentage of depression (13.1%), followed by those between the ages of 26 and 49 (7.7%), and those above the age of 50 (4.7%). Additionally, young people between the ages of 18 and 25 had twice as many suicidal thoughts and 4.5 times as many suicide attempts as people in other age groups (Micolas, 2020). Students begin to become autonomous throughout their time at university. Still, if they are not mature enough to adjust to these changes in their lives and academics, this could make them more susceptible to stress (Casey, Laura, Cara, & Kelsey, 2020). According to a study by Jiang, Sian, Karit, & Joko (2021), around half of higher education students have moderate stress-related mental health issues. In light of these issues, studies into the markers and variables relating to happiness levels among higher education institutions are necessary.

The relationship between intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction, and happiness is one of the important questions that has to be addressed in the education sector. Thus, the following are the study's objectives: 1) To determine the relationship between intrinsic motivation and happiness among students at higher learning institutions in Malaysia, 2) To determine the relationship between life satisfaction and happiness among students at higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Happiness

A pleasing sensation of well-being, enjoyment, and satisfaction are the sources of happiness, which communicate the idea that life has value and is worthwhile. Happiness is the general sense of satisfaction with one's life, the fundamental understanding of one's life, and the positive mood of a person. Happiness is a state of contentment that brings about positive feelings and thoughts in a person's life (Myers & Diener, 1995). Guazzelli & Zilli (2016) emphasize that happiness is the result of a person's life's positive emotions and realization of their desires. Everybody experiences happiness on a basic level, and emotions have always been important to human existence (Kvajo, 2016). According to Amir, Mohammad, & Arezou (2018), it has many advantages, including raising a person's IQ, analytical abilities, creativity, and memory. Additionally, it shields against despair, makes it simpler to assist others, strengthens interpersonal ties, and promotes both physical and mental health. According to Carr (2018), happiness has a positive impact on all aspects of life and leads to a better life, especially for university students. This is because happier people have more chances to have better relationships, be more productive, live longer, be in better health, be more creative, be better at solving problems, and make better judgments about their future.

### 2.2 Intrinsic Motivation

A commitment that is naturally satisfying or enjoyable is referred to as having intrinsic motivation. Since intrinsic motivation is not utilitarian by nature, it is no longer imaginable to behave only out of a desire to minimise negative effects on oneself (David, 1974). Happiness and intrinsic motivation are significantly positively correlated. The study's findings demonstrate that intrinsic characteristics strongly affect happiness (Ying, Mohamad, Wen, & Ann, 2019). The research of Sofiah, Jain, and Fauziah (2013), which outlined the existence of a link between intrinsic motivation and happiness, supports this. According to earlier research (Guillen-Royo & Kasser, 2015), happy persons had higher levels of intrinsic motivation. In the line of others findings, Tan, Yee, Rohaiza and Sum (2019) confirmed the intrinsic motivation is a stronger predictor of happiness among adolescents in Malaysian context. A study by Amir and Shabnam & Krishnan (2021) the result showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between internal motivation and happiness as well as academic achievement.

Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Intrinsic motivation has a positive significant relationship with happiness among students at higher learning institution in Malaysia

### 2.3 Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a judgmental and cognitive process (Diene, Emmons, & Larsan, 1985) in which individuals assess the merits of their lives in light of a number of factors. Life satisfaction is the subjective assessment of one's overall quality of life or of particular areas of it, such as family and educational experiences; it is the result of striking a balance between one's goals and their current circumstances. A study by Shahrroz and Farnaz (2019) revealed a significant and positive connection between life satisfaction and happiness with mediation of resiliency among university students in Tehran. In the line with other findings, Seligman & Adler, (2019) confirmed that life satisfaction and happiness are significantly correlated with the three subscales: pleasure, meaning and engagement of orientation to happiness among 320 university students. Consistent with previous empirical studies by Metin, Mehpare and Mehmet (2018) the findings of this study suggest that leisure satisfaction and life satisfaction are the moderators of dimension of happiness, and significantly mediates the effect of national well-being on happiness.

Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Life satisfaction has a positive significant relationship with happiness among students at higher learning institution in Malaysia

### 3.0 Research Methodology

This study aims to determine the relationship between intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction, on happiness among students at higher learning institutions in Malaysia. A quantitative research approach, which is based on current measurements using structured and verified data, was employed in this study. The respondents for the study were recruited from business students enrolled in 15 bachelor's degree programs at an institution of higher learning. The final-year students are chosen as the respondents in Business and Management Studies. They range age from 19 to 38 years old. The estimated population of the study was 4000 students. The targeted sample size was 285 respondents, which complied with Roscoe's Rule of Thumb, which stipulates that samples bigger than 30 and smaller than 500 are adequate for most research. Data was collected through questionnaires. In a self-administered survey, the questionnaire was individually delivered to the participants.

Purposive sampling was used as the study's sample strategy. The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) developed by (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) was used to assess participants' happiness. The SHS is a reliable and well-established measure that includes four statements reflecting positive happiness in life. Respondents rate their agreement with each other on a five-point ordinal scale. Alpha coefficients for the SHS have ranged from .79 to .85 in previous research (Chan & Rance, 2016; Guillen & Kasser, 2015), and in the present sample, alpha was .846. Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), which the study adopted 28 items from (Pintrich, Garcia, Smith & McKeachie, 1993), intrinsic motivation was assessed. The scale assesses students' intrinsic motivation in several dimensions. Respondents rate their agreement with each other on a five-point ordinal scale. Alpha coefficients for the AMS have ranged from .71 to .92 in previous research (Sofiah & Jain, & Fauziah, 2013), and in the present sample, alpha was .914. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) developed by (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to assess participants' life satisfaction. Respondents rate their agreement with each other on a five-point ordinal scale. Alpha coefficients for the SWLS have ranged from .79 to .92 in previous research (Shahrroz & Farnaz, 2018; Silvia, & Veronika, 2022), and in the present sample, alpha was .920. The 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") was used to ask respondents to rate how much of each statement pertains to them for all factors. For the statistical analysis, IBM Statistical Package for Social Science Version 29 was employed.

### 4.0 Findings

There were 285 replies overall. According to Table 1 data, 76.1 percent of respondents are female and 28.4 percent are male. The bulk of participants 66 percent of respondents were single. Age wise, 46.3 percent of respondents, or the majority, were between the ages of 19 and 23. According to the department, the majority of responses, or 14.7%, are from the Department of Health and Administration.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	81	28.4
Female	204	71.6
<b>Age</b>		
19-23	132	46.3
24-28	119	41.8
29-33	26	9.1
34-38	8	2.8
<b>Departments</b>		
Economic	23	8.1
Finance	31	10
Islamic Banking	11	3.9
Insurance	12	4.2
Customer Service	14	4.9
Entrepreneurship	12	4.2
Marketing	20	7.0
Retailing	26	9.1
Human Resources	35	12.3
Management	3	1.8
Health Administration	42	14.7
International Business	9	3.2
Office Management System	8	2.8
Operation management	14	4.9
Transport	20	7.0

According to Table 2, which displays the reliability test results, all three constructions are above adequate because their values are over 0.6. This study has conducted reliability tests, like internal consistency. This test will show whether each variable is reliable. Table 2 provides the interpretation of dependability for 285 respondents using Cronbach's alpha. Based on the happiness result from Cronbach's alpha, the value is 0.846, which is suitable with 4 questions. The value for intrinsic motivation is then 0.914, which indicates positive

outcomes from 28 questions satisfaction with one's life. With a positive outcome and 7 questions, Cronbach's alpha is 0.920.

Table 2. Interpretation of Reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha for 285 respondents

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	No of Items	Results
Happiness	0.846	4	Good
Intrinsic Motivation	0.914	28	Good
Life Satisfaction	0.920	7	Good

(Source:) Primary data from IBM SPSS V29

The correlation of the different variables is shown in Table 3. First, there is a moderately positive and significant association ( $r = 0.668$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) between happiness and intrinsic motivation, indicating that when intrinsic motivation rises, happiness rises as well. The following finding is that there is a moderately significant and positive association between life satisfaction and happiness ( $r = 0.548$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ), which suggests that as life satisfaction rises, so does happiness.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis

		Intrinsic Motivation	Life Satisfaction
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	0.668**	0.548**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	285	285

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Display the value of  $R=0.839$  and the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.696 in Table 4. This suggests that 69.6% of happiness is influenced by independent variables (intrinsic drive and life satisfaction), whereas the other 30% ( $100\% - 69.6\% = 30.4\%$ ) are not. As a result, this study is unable to account for 30.4% of the variance of the dependent variable. This suggests that there may be additional independent variables that were not included in this study.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.839 <sup>a</sup>	.704	.696	.47461

a. Predictors: (Constant), Intrinsic Motivation, Life Satisfaction

b. Dependent Variable: Happiness

According to ANOVA Table 5, the F value of 113.928 is significant because it is greater than 1, whereas the p-value ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) is significant because of the outcome. To explain the variation in happiness, the overall regression model of the four predictor variations, including intrinsic motivation, has been successful.

Table 5. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11400.684	2	5700.342	113.928	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	14109.723	282	50.034		
	Total	17766.956	284			

a. Dependent Variable: Happiness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Intrinsic Motivation, Life Satisfaction

According to Table 6, it demonstrates that ( $b = 0.640$ ), or 64%, is the characteristic that has the greatest influence on happiness. Because ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), it is s. Life satisfaction comes next, where ( $b = 0.435$ ), or 43.5%, comes next. In conclusion, relationships are important, but internal motivation is the one that most influences happiness.

Table 6. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	29.173	3.043		9.587	.000
	IM	.970	.112	.640	8.648	.000
	LS	.785	.132	.435	5.947	.050

a. Dependent Variable: Happiness

Table 7 shows the summary of hypotheses for this study resulting from the multiple regression analysis that had been done by the researcher. H1 indicates intrinsic motivation has a significant positive relationship with happiness among students at higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Hence, H1 is supported. H2 indicates that life satisfaction has a significant positive relationship with happiness among students at higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Hence, H2 is supported.

Table 7. Summary of Hypotheses

	Hypotheses	Results
H1	Intrinsic motivation has a positive significant relationship with happiness among students at higher learning institution in Malaysia	Supported
H2	Life satisfaction has a positive significant relationship with happiness among students at higher learning institution in Malaysia	Supported

## 5.0 Discussions

As a result, this research has successfully achieved the research objective accordingly, which is to examine the positive and significant relationship between intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction towards happiness in Malaysia. This study reveals that intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction were found to be important in determining happiness among students at higher learning institutions. That means the higher their intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction, the more they perceive happiness.

Consistent with previous studies, the study revealed that intrinsic motivation has a significant and positive relationship with happiness. This result is in line with other studies conducted by Ying, Mohamad, Wen, & Ann (2019); Sofiah, Jain, and Fauziah (2013); and Amir and Khoshnam (2018). Academic performance, perceived learning, and personal satisfaction are all factors that contribute to students' success in the context of intrinsic motivation. Academic performance often refers to grades, or grade point average (GPA). To attain the highest CGPA after the study semester, the CGPA must be consistent and maintained each semester. There are numerous examples of intrinsic motivation in the courses studied at institutes of higher learning. Like subject reading, math requires strategies and persistence to become successful. Students who are intrinsically motivated are more likely than their peers to employ useful math techniques like estimating, visualizing, and checking. Additionally, they are more likely to choose learning and performance tactics that go deeper. For instance, if given the option between an easier and a more difficult math issue, students who are intrinsically motivated would select the harder problem because they like a challenge and want to test their knowledge of the subject.

The study found that life satisfaction has a significant and positive relationship with happiness, which is consistent with earlier research. This outcome is consistent with research by Shahrroz and Farnaz (2019); Seligman & Adler (2019); Metin, Mehpare, and Mehmet (2018); and Silvia and Veronika (2022). Life satisfaction is often associated with feelings of general well-being as a result of harmony (Beiser, 1974). The sense of joy and delight plays a significant role in life satisfaction, which is assessed over a sizable period. Those who put a lot of effort and dedication into their work and studies will, as a result, feel a lot of passion and enjoyment throughout the academic year. Being content with one's commitments and responsibilities as a student would lead to happiness. This is particularly true when individuals choose their future occupations after having a positive experience with their prior general well-being, such as earning all "As," being named to the dean's list, or scoring all "As" in their classes. To illustrate this idea, we take a written exam as an example. The feeling of joy and delight plays a significant role in life satisfaction, which is assessed over a sizable period. Those who put a lot of effort and dedication into their work and studies will, as a result, feel a lot of passion and enjoyment throughout the academic year. Being content with one's commitments and responsibilities as a student would lead to happiness.

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study also sheds light on how offering extracurricular activities can boost students' pleasure in higher learning. Students can expand their social networks, explore new interests, and develop leadership qualities by participating in extracurricular activities at higher education institutions. Through volunteering, internships, student clubs and organisations, sports teams, and green environment programmes, students can gain real-world experience and combine their academic knowledge with practical know-how. Additionally, extracurricular excursions and foreign programming foster student cohesion and cooperation. Engaging in extracurricular activities may facilitate interactions between students with similar or disparate interests. Peer groups have the most impact on a student's development, both intellectually and personally. Their behaviours as well as their emotional and cognitive development may be influenced by their peer group. Participation in extracurricular activities at a higher education institution improves students' intrinsic motivation and level of life satisfaction. The present study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the information was gathered from students at one university. Although the sample was fairly representative of the population of this university, additional research is needed with diverse participants to determine if these findings apply to other populations of university students. Furthermore, for the results to be applicable across Malaysia's higher education institutions, additional faculties should be included in future research. Secondly, the personal opinions of respondents are less affected when students employ the questionnaire answer approach. Future research is advised to conduct a longitudinal study and focus group interviews to accurately assess the factors that affect happiness. The researchers can learn more about each person's intrinsic motivation and level of pleasure from life by using these improvement techniques. In particular, mediators and mediating are lacking in this study, which could lead to diversity and favourable results. Finally, it is advised that moderating and mediating variables be included in the framework to give the study additional significance.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the fields of organisational behavior, happiness, intrinsic motivation, and life satisfaction. This study contributes to a better learning process, better health, higher academic performance, higher emotional literacy, and good behavior among higher learning institution students in Malaysia.

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