A Correlational Study on Subjective Well-Being (SWB) and Relationships amongst University Students

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Abstract—**Over the past decades, fundamental change in underlying beliefs and theories in the context of teaching and learning has prompted invigorating consensus amongst researchers that happiness or subjective well-being (SWB) amongst the students could stimulate and incite students' motivation and engagement in the classroom context. However, in the same disposition, it is also claimed that positive relational maintenance with both lecturers and peers is deemed as one of the key sources of happiness in which instrumental support, social and emotional development exist. With the aim to probe on the correlation between subjective well-being and student-lecturer relationship as well as student-peer relationship, this study employed a survey questionnaire to determine the imminent issues linking the concept of well-being and positive relational maintenance in the context of teaching and learning. The correlation analysis showed that there is a significant positive association, not only between student-lecturer relationship and SWB, but also between student-peer relationship and SWB.**

Index Terms—**subjective Well-Being, relationships, teaching and learning**

I. INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of literature has been published on subjective well-being (SWB) which has highlighted tremendous development in regards to individuals' affective and cognitive evaluations of their lives [1]. The yields from numerous investigations involving SWB suggest that interpersonal relationships are significantly linked to SWB [2], [3]. In retrospect, the prominence repercussions of social relationship and SWB can support cogent comprehension of students' motivation and engagement in the classroom context which in turns affect their overall performance. Gauging the concept of SWB or happiness is rather challenging since it is immensely subjective and unique to individuals' circumstances and experiences. In this instance, a student's level of happiness has always played a crucial role in the outcome of a student's academic performance and social life. Previous studies have looked into the underlying factors that influence a student's level of happiness such as social relationships, financial

security, academic achievement, health and religiosity, and how it affects their general well-being and overall academic performance. In this context, academic success is a well-known contributor of stress for students in university and it was found that SWB is positively correlated to reading, scientific, and mathematical literacy in a study of school-age children. This was subsequently proven in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Nipissing and they found that happiness comes, at least in part, from an individual's scholastic abilities as well as academic success [4]. In the same vein, the eminence influence of students' relational maintenance with their fellow peers and academic faculty and the level of happiness can also shape and inluence them academically [5]-[7]. Thus, to probe on the correlation between subjective well-being (SWB) and student-lecturer relationship as well as student-peer relationship, these research questions were postulated:

1. How does student-lecturer relationship correlate with students' SWB?
2. How does student-peer relationship correlate with students' SWB?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Student-Lecturer Relationship

A lecturer is an educator, whose role is assisting students in the application of knowledge by means of classroom instruction as well as presentations. Lecturers play a significant part in the route of a student's formal schooling experience; from kindergarten all the way to university. Majority of students' day (about 5-7 hours) is spent in the company of their educators. To that end, it is important to cultivate positive relationships between students and teachers in order to make the students feel shielded and invulnerable in their learning environment; thus bestowing upon them strong foundations for salient social and academic abilities. In this context, positive student-lecturer relationships are categorized as having an aura of amiability, closeness as well as productivity. According to McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace [8], positive relationships with teachers could potentially turn into motivational factors when students are exposed to challenging experiences in pursuing their academic goals. With this relationship firmly established, students can use

it as a jumping board to navigate other academic challenges as well as social-emotional construct. The role of a lecturer here is very important through the provision of academic, emotional, autonomous support; however, we cannot negate the importance of a well-rounded teaching approach.

Undoubtedly, academic achievement is important because it acts as a deciding factor of the student's future endeavors after graduating. How well a student performs is based on the effort they put into their work throughout the duration of their study, however; the academic support that they receive from their teachers is as important. A lecturer's disposition can influence students and the teaching/learning process in many ways, one of which is academic success [9]. A research was conducted on adolescent students to see whether the likeability of a teacher contributed to the academic success of students and the study found that well liked teachers had a positive impact on the fondness of students and their overall academic achievement [10]. In addition to that, they noted that these teachers had more definite positive personality traits than the disliked or neutral teachers. Furthermore, the study called for the deliberation of action plans that would increase the engagement of students in the classroom thus improving their performance [11]. Another important example of the benefits of student-lecturer relationship with reference to academic support is the manner in which the demonstration and validation through praise and encouragement especially in instances of a student's marked improvement. The unequivocal support students received from their teachers especially in the presence of their peers acted as a strong motivator to perform better in the future. Students held in high regard teachers that tirelessly listened and encouraged them, as well as furnished them with fun and supportive, yet challenging environments where everyone in class could learn [12]. In addition, praising development and improvement, the process of developing skills is more important than getting the best grades [13]. Due to this, the students felt that their teachers were instrumental in shaping their learning and behaviour in the school setting [11]. Henceforth, contribute to the students' overall performance.

In a different study, some researchers were compelled to look into the antithesis of the role of student-teacher relationships; they found that such relationship did not play a role in the overall academic success or self-esteem of a student [14]. This could have been attributed to lecturers focusing solely on teaching their students without bothering to establish any sort of social relationship with the students either during or outside of the classroom context and some cultures do not encourage close relationship between students and teachers. Other than that the study also suggested that praise did not have a direct correlation with academic success or lack of it therein, but that certain type of criticism (positive or negative) had an effect on student's sentiment about the student teacher relationship [15]. The results cautioned teachers on the type of feedback they gave to students especially on the heels of failure [16]. Thus, students can be intrinsically motivated and in turn accomplish better academically.

A student's cognitive ability affects the way in which they will perform at an academic institution. At this juncture, sense of autonomy which can be loosely described as freedom from external influence shifting the focus of study from the teacher to the student. Motivation exists when a student is intrinsically driven to learn. A study conducted on motivation and teacher autonomy support in the classroom showed that high autonomy supportive style was related to high intrinsic motivation behavior [17]. The study showed that students were more likely to participate in class when the teacher used phrases such as *"you can", "if you choose",* it showed that it encouraged students' input in matters relating to their learning. Another study encouraged teachers to be expedition-teachers as opposed to tour guide-teachers; the former encourages both the teacher and student to take on the learning experience as a new journey to both them, while the latter involves teacher control of the dissemination of information [18]. Therefore, it is postulated that when a student's autonomy was regulated in an educational environment, it might in turn cause the student to believe that they had no value addition in the classroom or that their views are simply not respected [19].

Student-lecturer relationship helps in providing students with strong emotional support. This helps in improving students' behaviour and interaction in university as they begin to form strong bonds with their lecturer. However, poor student-lecturer relationship can lead to conflict, which then results in students being unable to rely on their lecturers for any support [20]. Emotions support encourages the students to develop help-seeking behaviour and develop higher self-esteem. This is because the warm and friendly environment created bonds which enable students to feel less threated by their lecturer and to be more open to the idea of improving their self-performance [21]. Besides that, teaching approach in another important aspect of student-lecturer relationship. This is because it affects the learning environment for students as the teachers play a role in cultivating strong academic culture. For example, lecturer can encourage more class participation by consistent routines and constructing a sense of community [22]. This consequently create a conducive learning environment for students to inculcate positive learning culture.

B. *Student-Student Relationship*

Happiness; by definition is the psychological or emotion satisfaction attained by positive emotions. The question is, how can an individual excel academically if they are emotionally and socially distraught? The answer is surprisingly simple: They cannot, unless of course they are naturally repulsed by human interaction. But what are the chances of that? Likely slim to none in a classroom setting. One of the researches reported that students are less likely to be focused academically when they are

situated in emotionally unresponsive learning environment [23]. In such juxtaposition, a student would not be able to fully utilize his or her time because they are simply unhappy. Being unhappy can be toxic to the soul, and in the event that unhappiness may loom over a person for extended periods of time, they may fall into a spiraling depression; the lowest kind of low a person may be able to emotionally comprehend. Essentially, the happiness of a student amongst their peers is not entirely, neither is it strictly bound by the social boundaries that regulate relationships by which different levels of interaction amongst students yield different levels of happiness.

To begin with, communication is an integral part of maintaining a relationship. Depth of the communication directly affects the happiness of a student and their experiences in the classroom. According to Li-Jun [24], many adolescents in school agree that effective communication greatly reduces conflicts between students and thus almost guarantees relationship satisfaction between students. Thus, SWB amongst students is greatly impacted by relationships, efficiency and effectiveness of communication and acceptance of one another. To corroborate the statement, Suldo [25] discovered that the absence of negative relationships provided evidence of improved mental health and general happiness of students in school. Furthermore, a positive sense of social acceptance is associated to academic excellence because being accepted by one's peers have been known to positively influence one's self-perception [26]. Cheng [27] reiterated that friendships are imperative as the benefits such as support, feedback and mutual interests are a dime a dozen. Support from peers are especially important because benevolent individuals create the highest levels of happiness [28]. One documented situation is that the response obtained from others when they revealed their success can be taken as emotional support [29]. In general, positive reinforcement and appropriate support aid in learning and happiness. Students who received more support in class generally did better, and reported better levels of satisfaction and happiness [30]. Moreover, bringing good will towards others fostered positive relationships [25]. Be it complimenting someone over a good grade or how they managed to resolve a conflict in class, a little bit goes a long way.

Creating a foundation of a strong and concrete relationship amongst peer results in elevated levels of happiness as a mutual understanding ca transpire. For example, peer conflicts that are effectively and appropriately settled boosts one's general happiness [24]. At the same time, negatively handled conflicts will bring increased levels of unhappiness. In essence, there are many contributing factors to a student's happiness. Be it peer acceptance, receiving compliments, find common ground, or positive self-perception; because without any of that, we would not doubt be falling into an unending turmoil of self-loathing and low-self-esteem. Happiness, however subjective it may be, is an integral part of not just a student's life, but to everyone as well. Otherwise, everyone will always be sour and angst for a million reasons. Being unhappy has plenty of negative effects, but the best thing to do is always try to find common ground should be any conflict of sorts and communicate as effectively as possible.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was administered online and in the survey, there were 2 items of Likert-type questions used in the context of determining the level of happiness, from lowest, 1 = not a very happy person, to highest, 5 = a very happy person. To measure the element of student-lecturer relationship, it contains a total of 11 items, where 2 multiple-choice questions and another 9 Likert-type questions score from lowest, 1 = strongly disagree, to highest, 5 = strongly agree. The survey also included 11 items of Likert-type questions score from lowest, 1 = strongly disagree, to the highest, 5 = strongly agree, to reflect the relationship between students and peers. To ensure internal consistency reliability, Cronbach alphas were computed for each element. After eliminating the multiple-choice questions and question number 9 in the element of student-lecturer relationship, it is validated that this element has an adequate internal consistency of Cronbach alpha of 0.870. The element of student-peer relationship also has a good internal consistency of Cronbach alpha of 0.889 after the question number 11 was taken out.

IV. RESULTS

A. Participants

TABLE I   GENDER OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	45	43.7
Female	58	56.3
Total	103	

A sample of 103 college students answered the survey. Out of these participants who completed the survey, 43.7% were male and 56.3% were female (see Table I). The range of their age is between 16 to 27 years old. The mean age of these college students was 19.7 years (SD = 2.27).

B. Data Analysis

The collected data were downloaded and analyzed using the SPSS statistical software package. To determine the number of happy and unhappy college students, the two lowest points were combined as unhappy, while the two highest points were combined as happy.

TABLE II   ITEMS DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF HAPPINESS

Item	Happy	Neutral	Unhappy
1.	72 (69.9%)	24 (23.3%)	7 (6.8%)
2.	63 (61.2%)	24 (23.3%)	16 (15.5%)

Table II indicates the number of happy and unhappy for the two items in determining the level of happiness.

About 70% of the university students found themselves happy. Only 6.8% of them considered themselves as not happy. As compared to their peers, 61.2% of the students were happy, while 15.5% were unhappy.

In order to show the number of agreement and disagreement of each item in the element of student-lecturer relationship and student-peer relationship, the number of 'Strongly Agree" and 'Agree' were combined as agreement, while the number of 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' were combined as disagreement.

TABLE III   ITEMS IN STUDENT-LECTURER RELATIONSHIP

Item	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement
3.	46 (44.7%)	37 (35.9%)	20 (19.4%)
4.	20 (19.4%)	21 (20.4%)	62 (60.2%)
5.	63 (61.2%)	27 (26.2%)	13 (12.6%)
6.	80 (77.7%)	17 (16.5%)	6 (5.8%)
7.	66 (64.1%)	26 (25.2%)	11 (10.7%)
8.	75 (72.8%)	20 (19.4%)	8 (7.8%)
10.	72 (69.9%)	26 (25.2%)	5 (4.9%)
11.	62 (60.2%)	33 (32.0%)	8 (7.8%)

Table III shows the numbers of agreement and disagreement for each item in the context of student-lecturer relationship. Surprisingly, only 20 students (19.4%) felt comfortable to share personal matters with their lecturers when the need arose. Majority of the students (77.7%) found their lecturers were willing to help them in learning.

TABLE IV   ITEMS IN STUDENT-PEER RELATIONSHIP

Item	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement
1.	69 (67.0%)	26 (25.2%)	8 (7.8%)
2.	68 (66.0%)	20 (19.4%)	15 (14.6%)
3.	70 (68.0%)	24 (23.3%)	9 (8.7%)
4.	49 (47.6%)	30 (29.1%)	24 (23.3%)
5.	48 (46.6%)	27 (26.2%)	28 (27.2%)
6.	56 (54.4%)	31 (30.1%)	16 (15.5%)
7.	74 (71.8%)	20 (19.4%)	9 (8.7%)
8.	47 (45.6%)	32 (31.1%)	24 (23.3%)
9.	48 (46.6%)	31 (30.1%)	24 (23.3%)
10.	47 (45.6%)	29 (28.2%)	27 (26.2%)

The numbers of agreement and disagreement for each item in the element of student-peer relationship were shown in Table IV. Most of the participants were substantially able to collaborate with their peers. 71.8% of them have someone whom they can always rely on. 68.0% of the college students were having someone to cheer them up when they were sad.

In order to study the correlation between happiness and student-lecturer relationship as well as student-peer relationship, the happiness score, student-lecturer relationship score and student-peer relationship score were calculated by summing the items in each element. The happiness score ranged from 2 to 10 with a mean score of 7.39 (SD = 1.74). The student-lecturer relationship score ranged from 8 to 40 with a mean score of 28.6 (SD = 6.14). The student-peer relationship score ranged from 10 to 50 with a mean score of 35.5 (SD = 8.15).

TABLE V   PEARSON CORRELATIONS

Score	1.	2.	3.
1. Happiness			
2. Student-Lecturer Relationship	0.258*		
3. Student-Peer Relationship	0.260*	0.374*	

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

Table V shows the Pearson correlations between the scores of happiness, student-lecturer relationship and student-peer relationship. A significant positive correlation was found between happiness score and student-lecturer relationship with $r = 0.258$ ($p < 0.01$). With $r = 0.260$ at $p < 0.01$, it implied that the happiness score was significantly correlated with the element of student-peer relationship.

V.   DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to probe on the correlation between happiness and student-lecturer relationship as well as student-peer relationship. Consequently, the findings of this study will aid lecturers in understanding the perceptions of the college students in happiness, student-lecturer relationship and student-peer relationship. On the other hand, it helps the educators to look into the importance of positive relational maintenance with college students in the context of teaching and learning. The analyzed data indicated that the mean scores of 7.39, 28.6 and 35.5 for happiness, student-lecturer relationship and student-peer relationship respectively. The ranges of these scores were respectively 2 to 10, 8 to 40 and 10 to 50. It reflected that these college students whom they maintained a strong bonding with lecturers and students were relatively happy. From the results, it showed that there is a positive correlation not only between happiness and student-lecturer relationship, but also between happiness and student-peer relationship. It was evident by previous literatures which had reported that subjective well-being correlates with the emotional closeness to others [7]. Since there were quite a number of studies had proven that good peer relationships can promote achievement in school and well-being [31] and the mutual reinforcement between well-being and academic achievement [3], therefore these findings may inspire the professionals and specialists in the educational field to develop quality activities and programs to be integrated in their teaching and syllabus that can enhance the connection between lecturers and students which could potentially improve their academic performance.

VI.   CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the aim to probe on the correlation between happiness and student-lecturer relationship as well as the correlation between happiness and student-peer relationship. The results show that the majority of the participants were happy. There is a significant positive correlation between happiness and student-lecturer relationship. It also indicates that happiness and student-peer relationship are significantly

positively associated. Thus, we can unequivocally opine that by having a profound bonding between students and lecturers and a good rapport between students and their peers, it will ensure the well-being of the students.

APPENDIX

Items determining the level of happiness
1. In general, I consider myself:
   from lowest, 1 = not a very happy person, to highest, 5 = a very happy person.
2. Compared with most of my peers, I consider myself:
   from lowest, 1 = not a very happy person, to highest, 5 = a very happy person.

Likert-type Items used in Student-Lecturer Relationship
(from lowest, 1 = strongly disagree, to highest, 5 = strongly agree)
3. My lecturers care about me as a person and not just as a student.
4. If the need arose, I would be comfortable with sharing personal matters (e.g. family problems) with my lecturers.
5. My lecturer was available if I needed to clarify my doubts about the lectures.
6. My lecturers were willing to help me learn.
7. My lecturers initiated interaction and discussions that helped me learn the subject material.
8. My lecturers were open to student discussions and opinions voiced by students.
10. My lecturers had a clear goal of what he/she wanted to achieve during the lecture.
11. My lecturers directed the attention of students to important content (e.g. exam-related material) in the lecture.

Likert-type Items used in Student-Peer Relationship
(from lowest, 1 = strongly disagree, to highest, 5 = strongly agree)
1. There are some people who truly like me.
2. Whenever I am not feeling well, other people try to make me feel better.
3. Whenever I am sad, there are people who cheer me up.
4. Whenever I need help, I ask for it.
5. When I am worried, I reach out to someone to talk to.
6. When everything becomes too much for me to handle, others are there to help me.
7. I know some people upon who I can always rely.
8. When I am down, I need someone who boosts my spirits.
9. It is important for me always to have someone who listens to me.
10. Before making any important decisions, I absolutely need a second opinion.
11. I can make my own decisions without any outside help.

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