

The role of optimism in improving subjective well-being in Islamic Boarding School Students

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ABSTRACT

Subjective well-being is a critical metric for assessing quality of life, particularly among students residing in Islamic boarding schools. It encompasses both life satisfaction and emotional experiences, serving as a vital indicator of positive mental health. This study aimed to examine the impact of optimism on students' subjective well-being. A quantitative research methodology was employed, involving 93 students aged 13 to 17 years from Islamic boarding schools. Data were collected using scales measuring optimism and subjective well-being. The analysis was conducted using simple linear regression, supplemented by assumption tests, including normality and linearity assessments. The results indicated a significant effect of optimism on subjective well-being, with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that optimism exerts a highly significant influence on the subjective well-being of students in Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: Islamic boarding school students; optimism; subjective well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The family environment is very important for adolescents in their developmental process, which includes the need for a sense of security, appreciation, affection, acceptance, and freedom to express themselves (Ali & Asrori, 2010). In the family context, children first receive education and guidance, considering that most of the children's time is spent in the family environment, so the education most children receive comes from the family (Sari & Deliana, 2017). Education is obtained not only from the family but also from formal education. Formal education is education in schools that is obtained regularly, systematically, in stages, and following clear requirements (Hidayati, 2016). One formal form of education in Indonesia is Islamic boarding schools, although there are several non-formal Islamic boarding schools (Sari & Deliana, 2017). According to Zarkasyi, Islamic boarding schools are defined as Islamic educational institutions with a dormitory system, where the kiai is the central figure, the mosque is the center of activities that inspire it, and students follow Islamic religious teachings under the guidance of the kiai as routine activities (Muhakamurrohman, 2014). In the education system implemented, Islamic boarding schools are not only oriented towards teaching Islam but also adapt to the needs of society, which continues to develop (Ikromi, 2025).

Education in Islamic boarding schools is inseparable from problems experienced by students. Research conducted by Wafa and Soedarmadi (2021) revealed that there were many cases among students in Islamic boarding schools who violated the rules, including being absent from class, smoking, bringing smartphones, dating, meeting the opposite sex secretly, and falling asleep during class due to fatigue from activities at Islamic boarding schools that lasted until late at night. Behavior that violates the rules occurs because students are bored with the conditions at Islamic boarding schools. This boredom has a negative impact on students' academic motivation, resulting in a lack of focus on memorization, difficulty in understanding the lesson material at school, and a decrease in academic achievement (Fitriah, 2020). This can be understood as a result of the pressure they face due to the demands that must be met by students, which in turn causes feelings of pressure (Ghofniyah & Setiowati, 2017).

Students living in Islamic boarding schools are expected to adapt to this environment. However, in practice, mismatches often occur. As Hasanah (2012) noted, some students feel uncomfortable, tend to isolate themselves, experience illness, and do not participate in activities. They feel that their lives are restricted by the rules of the Islamic boarding school, preventing them from pursuing their interests freely. Therefore, it is not uncommon for some students to feel uncomfortable and unable to survive in Islamic boarding schools, and some even choose to flee the place (Revelia, 2019).

These conditions are indicators of low subjective well-being among students. Dursun (2021) stated that individuals with low subjective well-being are dissatisfied with their lives, feel little happiness, and generally experience negative emotions, such as anxiety or aggression. Subjective well-being refers to a comprehensive assessment of one's life, which includes not only the length of positive experiences and the absence of negative experiences but also involves cognitive satisfaction (Diener et al., 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Subjective well-being is defined as a comprehensive evaluation of the quality of life (Keyes et al., 2002) and can be measured through life satisfaction (Oliver et al., 2017) and positive affect (Luhmann, 2017). Subjective well-being is also a multidimensional construct consisting of three separate components: the presence of positive affect, the relative absence of negative affect, and an individual's cognitive evaluation of their life circumstances (Jibeen, 2014). According to Ryff and Singer (2008), psychological well-being is a condition in which individuals have a positive attitude toward themselves and others, are able to make their own decisions, and regulate their own behavior. They can also perceive and shape environments that suit their needs, have a purpose in life, make life more meaningful, and strive to explore and develop optimally. Lucas and Diener (2009) explained that the dimensions of subjective well-being are divided into two categories: cognitive and affective assessments. Cognitive assessment refers to an individual's evaluation of life satisfaction, whereas affective assessment relates to an individual's evaluation of the moods and emotions frequently experienced in life.

Previous researchers have found that subjective well-being focuses on whether a person feels happy without considering marital status, wealth, spiritual well-being, and other demographic factors.

However, more recent research has focused on how and when individuals experience happiness and the processes that influence subjective well-being (Diener, 2000). Achieving subjective well-being is even more important when students face significant life crises. This may serve a unique role in helping students cope with these crises, build resilience, and improve their functioning so that these stressful negative experiences do not interfere with their adjustment (Dahl, 2001; Fredrickson et al., 2003).

Individuals with high subjective well-being tend to feel greater life satisfaction and experience more positive emotions than negative ones (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). They also experience joy and rarely experience unpleasant emotions such as sadness and anger (Utami, 2009). Conversely, individuals with lower subjective well-being feel dissatisfied with their lives, have less compassion and joy, and more frequently experience negative emotions such as anger or anxiety. The cognitive and affective components of subjective well-being are closely related (Diener et al., 1997). Such adolescents may be able to recover from negative experiences and adapt easily to changing conditions. Research by Ye et al. (2012) on adolescent subjective well-being showed that junior high school students in the lowest grades had higher subjective well-being than high school students in the highest grades.

Subjective well-being encompasses life satisfaction and emotional experiences and is an important indicator of positive mental health. Research suggests that subjective well-being is negatively correlated with depressive disorders, and higher levels of subjective well-being can reduce perceptions of depression (Donald & Jackson, 2023; Li et al., 2024). Interest in the concept of subjective well-being or happiness has gained increasing attention in psychology literature (Dursun, 2021). This growing interest has led researchers to explore subjective well-being in relation to a variety of psychological, social, and cultural variables (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), including optimism.

Optimism is a positive emotion that is associated with hope, confidence, and trust in the future. Optimistic adolescents tend to expect good things to occur in the future (Snyder & Lopez, 2001). Optimism has a positive effect on individuals. Those with high levels of optimism generally demonstrate good morale, high motivation, satisfactory achievements, good health, and the ability to overcome various problems (Chang & McBride-Chang, 1996). Optimism also positively contributes to the quality of life (Primardi & Hadjam, 2010), psychological well-being, and happiness. Furthermore, optimism influences perseverance, academic achievement, athletic performance, morality, career success, popularity, better health, and effective problem-solving skills, and can prolong life and reduce stress and trauma. Optimistic individuals tend to have better mental health by adopting a healthy lifestyle and behavior, having a positive outlook on the future, emphasizing the positive aspects of every event, not being easily frustrated when experiencing defeat, believing in their abilities and talents, and using solution-oriented coping strategies (Rezaei et al., 2015). Optimism has been linked to increased positive affect (Ferguson & Goodwin, 2010), enhanced life satisfaction, and reduced negative affect (Daukantaitė & Zukauskienė, 2012). The advantages of optimism arise from individuals' responses to challenges. Those who maintain an optimistic outlook towards achieving their goals or desired states are more likely to persevere despite obstacles, whereas those with a pessimistic view tend to withdraw their efforts (Carver et al., 2010). This optimistic bias seems to serve as a foundation for assessing life (Daukantaitė & Zukauskienė, 2012).

Optimism is associated with decreased levels of depression (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Studies have shown that individuals with low levels of optimism are more susceptible to depression and anxiety. For example, Valentsia and Wijono (2020) revealed that 61.9% of students showed low levels of optimism, while 29.1% of them had very low levels of optimism; thus, 70% of students had difficulty dealing with problems that caused stress. Uribe et al. (2022) also found a negative relationship among optimism, depressive symptoms, and suicidal tendencies. Previous studies on subjective well-being in Islamic boarding school students have been widely conducted, such as research conducted by Wafa and Soedarmadi (2021), which aimed to determine subjective well-being in Generation Z students of the Yanbu'ul Qur'an Youth Islamic Boarding School (PTYQR). The method used is a qualitative approach to describe the phenomenon of subjective well-being in generation Z students of the Yanbu'ul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School. Then, the research conducted by (Mariyati et al., 2023) this study was to determine the effect of emotional regulation as variable "X" on subjective well-being as variable "Y" in Islamic boarding school students in Sidoarjo. The study was conducted on students aged 13-15 years, totaling 123 students.

The research that the researcher will conduct is novel in that it explores the role of optimism on subjective well-being in students using quantitative methods with simple linear regression analysis. Research that examines subjective well-being in students in terms of optimism is still rare; therefore, researchers are interested in conducting this research. Therefore, the formulation of the problem in this study is "Is there a role of optimism in the subjective well-being of students?". And for the hypothesis in this study, namely, "there is a role of optimism in the subjective well-being of students."

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative methodology characterized by an ex-post facto research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study was conducted at an Islamic boarding school located in Central Java, Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used, resulting in a sample of 93 students aged between 13 and 17 years who resided at the boarding school. The subjective well-being measurement tool comprised 20 statement items based on the work of Larsen et al. (1985), which included both cognitive and affective components. The optimism measurement tool consists of 21 statement items drawn from Seligman (2006), which encompass the dimensions of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. Data analysis for this study was performed using simple linear regression, supplemented by assumption tests such as normality and linearity tests. Data analysis was performed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software for Windows, version 24.00.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive Data

The descriptive analysis in this study is intended to provide an overview of the tendency of research subject responses to research variables, namely, subjective well-being and optimism. The distribution of the variables based on the categorization formula is as follows:

a. Subjective Well-being

Table 1. Categorization of subjective well-being scores

Interval	Score categories	Frequency	Percentage
$X \geq 84,4$	High	15	16,1%
$66 \leq X < 84,4$	Medium	64	68,8%
$X < 66$	Low	14	15.1%
Total		93	100%

Based on Table 1, the results of the subjective well-being data description showed that 14 students had a subjective well-being level in the low category, 64 in the medium category, and 15 in the high category. This shows that the majority of the subjects in this study had a subjective well-being level in the medium category.

b. Optimism

Table 2. Categorization of optimism scores

Interval	Score categories	Frequency	Percentage
$X \geq 88,36$	High	17	18,3%
$71,36 \leq X < 88,36$	Medium	60	64,5%
$X < 71,36$	Low	16	17,2%
Total		93	100%

Based on Table 2 and the results of the optimism data description, it was found that 16 students had optimism in the low category, 60 students in the medium category, and 17 students in the high category. This shows that the majority of the subjects in this study had optimism in the medium category.

3.2. Normality Test

The normality test was conducted using the One Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and SPSS 24 for IBM. The rule used to determine whether the distribution is normal is that if $p\text{-value} > 0.05$, then the distribution is normal, and if $p < 0.05$, then the distribution is not normal. Table 3 presents the results of the normality tests.

Table 3. Normality test

Variable	Sig (p)	Description
Subjective well-being	0,131	Normal
Optimism		

Based on the results of the normality test, the Sig p-value was obtained, namely $0.131 > 0.05$, so it can be concluded that each residual variable in the study has a normally distributed data distribution.

3.3. Linearity Test

The linearity test aims to determine whether independent and dependent variables have a linear relationship. The linearity test criterion was if the significance value of the independent variable was greater than the significance level of 0.05. The results of the linearity test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Linearity test

Test variables	F	Sig	Result
Optimism – subjective well-being	0,843	0,696	Linear

Based on the results of the linearity test in the table above, it can be concluded that the independent variables of subjective well-being and optimism have significance values greater than 0.05. This shows that the research variables were linear.

3.4. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using a t-test analysis and simple linear regression. The results of the t-test analysis are shown in table below:

Table 5. Hypothesis test

Variable	t table	t count	Sig
Optimisme – Subjective well-being	1,661	3,682	0,000

Based on Table 5, it is known that the t value = 3.682 and the p value = $0.000 < 0.05$; therefore, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted. This means that optimism plays a role in subjective well-being.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the role of optimism in the subjective well-being of students. Based on the results of the analysis, the proposed hypothesis can be proven true, namely that optimism plays a role in subjective well-being. This is evidenced by the results of the regression analysis, namely, F count = 28.872, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), and R2 value = 0.391. These results explain that there is a positive role, namely, the higher the optimism, the greater the tendency for an increase in the subjective well-being of students. Based on this explanation, the results showed a positive relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that subjective well-being increases when students are optimistic. This is because optimistic students have

a more positive outlook on the events they experience. Furthermore, by having a positive outlook on life, students can experience positive emotions while studying at Islamic boarding schools and when interacting with others, which in turn will impact their subjective well-being. Students with good subjective well-being are able to learn and perform activities optimally. Conversely, students with poor subjective well-being face difficulties and suboptimal learning and life at Islamic boarding schools (Ikromi & Hidayat, 2024).

Subjective well-being comprises of both cognitive and affective assessments. Cognitive assessment is measured through life satisfaction, while affective evaluation is determined by an individual's emotions and moods (McGillivray & Clarke, 2006). This view refers to Diener's theory, which serves as the primary foundation of this study. Diener (2000) stated that individuals with high subjective well-being tend to experience more positive affect than negative affect. Students with high subjective well-being are satisfied with their past lives, happy with their current lives, and confident in their future lives. Furthermore, students with high subjective well-being tend to have positive moods and behaviors at work. This is reinforced by a statement in research conducted by (Dewi & Nasywa, 2019) which states that individuals with high levels of subjective well-being can deal with problems and regulate emotions well, while individuals with low levels of subjective well-being tend to be filled with negative feelings and thoughts that can lead to anger, anxiety, and depression. Therefore, individuals who can control their emotions and do or think about many positive things increase their subjective well-being.

Optimism plays a role in subjective well-being. The results of this study are in line with those reported by Gustiwi (2023) and Mariyati et al. (2023), who stated that there is a significant positive relationship between optimism and subjective well-being; therefore, the higher the optimism of a person, the higher the subjective well-being. Likewise, research conducted by Rand et al. (2020) revealed that optimism directly reduces negative affect, thereby increasing subjective well-being.

Scheier et al. (2004) also explained that optimistic individuals tend to have better subjective well-being when compared to pessimistic individuals. Optimism leads to increased well-being because, with the hope that the future will go well, individuals will increase engagement and remain steadfast to their goals, so they tend to achieve their goals (Dolcos et al., 2018). In line with this, research conducted by Duy and Yıldız (2019) showed that optimism will increase an individual's self-esteem, so that individuals feel satisfied with their lives, which will then increase subjective well-being.

Harju and Bolen (1998) discovered that elevated levels of optimism are correlated with the highest quality of life. Specifically, their research indicated that individuals exhibiting high optimism reported significantly greater satisfaction with their quality of life in contrast to those with low optimism. Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive impact of optimism on health. Carver and Scheier (2024) revealed that optimists tend to anticipate favorable outcomes in their lives. This propensity allows optimists to achieve their goals more frequently than their pessimistic counterparts do.

Students who possess high levels of optimism maintain a positive outlook and believe that the challenges they face today will lead to better circumstances in the future. This mindset serves as a source of strength when confronted with life tasks. A robust sense of optimism allows individuals to handle stressors or pressures encountered while residing in Islamic boarding schools. This optimistic outlook empowers teenagers in such environments to resolve conflicts that may arise. Such conflicts can be managed through adaptability fueled by the unwavering belief that solutions exist for every problem encountered (Situmorang, 2012).

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The results of this study highlight the crucial influence of optimism on the enhancement of subjective well-being among students in Islamic boarding schools (santri). These findings are especially pertinent to educators, counselors, and school administrators, who play a direct role in fostering the psychological and emotional growth of students within religious educational environments.

1. Incorporating Optimism Training into the Curriculum

Educational stakeholders should contemplate the integration of structured programs aimed at promoting optimistic thinking. Approaches such as cognitive-behavioral techniques, positive

affirmations, and future-oriented goal-setting can be integrated into both religious and general education courses to cultivate a hopeful perspective among students (Seligman et al., 2009). These strategies not only enhance optimism but also lead to increased life satisfaction and resilience.

2. *Psychoeducational Interventions for Teachers and Caregivers*

Educators and caregivers in pesantrens should be trained to model and reinforce optimistic behaviors. Offering workshops or counseling sessions that assist educators in recognizing and fostering optimistic traits in students can create a more emotionally supportive atmosphere (Bandura & Lopez, 2008).

3. *Enhancing Religious Coping and Positive Reappraisal*

Given that religious beliefs are a fundamental aspect of life in Islamic boarding schools, the incorporation of teachings on tawakkal (trust in God's plan) and husnuzan (positive thinking about God and others) alongside psychological principles of optimism may provide culturally relevant avenues to well-being (Abdullah, 2015). The integration of faith and positive psychology has the potential to enhance both mental health and spiritual development.

4. *Fostering Supportive Educational Environments*

A constructive school atmosphere that promotes positivity and well-being can shield students from the stressors linked to academic and social challenges. Initiatives such as peer mentoring, student counseling, and group discussions focused on hope, purpose, and gratitude should be encouraged to enhance collective resilience (Park & Peterson, 2008).

5. *Assessment and Evaluation of Mental Health Initiatives*

Educational institutions should regularly evaluate students' subjective well-being and levels of optimism using validated psychological assessments. These evaluations can guide policy and practice, enabling schools to modify their programs to support students' psychological growth more effectively (Diener et al., 2018).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings and subsequent discussion, it can be inferred that optimism plays a significant role in subjective well-being, contributing effectively at a rate of 24.4%. These findings demonstrate that, as optimism increases, there is a corresponding tendency for an enhancement in the level of subjective well-being among students in Islamic Boarding Schools. The research findings underscore the substantial impact of optimism on subjective well-being among students in Islamic Boarding Schools. The 24.4% contribution rate indicates that optimism is a key factor in shaping these students' overall sense of life satisfaction and positive emotional experiences. This relationship suggests that fostering optimism within the educational environment could be a valuable strategy for enhancing students' mental health and overall quality of life. Furthermore, the positive correlation between optimism and subjective well-being implies that interventions aimed at cultivating a more optimistic outlook could yield significant benefits for students' psychological well-being. Educational institutions, particularly Islamic Boarding Schools, may consider implementing programs or practices that promote optimistic thinking and positive future expectations. Such initiatives could potentially lead to improved academic performance, better stress management, and increased resilience among students, ultimately contributing to a more positive and fulfilling educational experience.

Ethical approval

Not Applicable.

Informed consent statement

Not Applicable.

Authors' contributions

Tri Sanatha Wahyu Akbar conceived the research idea, designed the study framework, and supervised the overall project, including methodology development, data interpretation, and manuscript preparation. Riani Winarni co-developed the research design, managed data collection and financial analysis, and assisted in writing and revising the manuscript, while also coordinating administrative and compliance requirements related to the PDP research grant. Galih Raspati contributed expertise in human resource management and MSME development, particularly in the literature review, data analysis, and contextualization of findings within the management field. Mulfi Sandi Yuda managed data handling and statistical analysis, assisted in drafting the manuscript, and provided significant input in the discussion and practical implications of the study.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes on Contributors

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