

## The Effect of Self-Compassion and Gratitude on University Students Life Satisfaction: Social Support as the Mediator

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### Abstract

University students often face various academic and non-academic demands, expectations in society and many other life demands. These can surely raise various problems, anxiety, stress, decrease in concentration, achievement, motivation and even depression which will affect their life satisfaction and happiness. Even though life satisfaction is a significant part of psychological well-being, it can influence mental health conditions. Regarding this background, the aim of this study was to examine the effect of self-compassion, gratitude, and social support on life satisfaction, and to examine the role of social support as the mediator variable in the effect of self-compassion and gratitude on life satisfaction. It used a quantitative non-experiment ex post facto design. Based on the Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis of the structural model of self-compassion on life satisfaction through social support and the structural model of gratitude on life satisfaction through social support, the findings of this study have proved that the test of the direct influence of self-compassion, gratitude and social support on life satisfaction resulted positive and significant result, while social support was able to mediate the effect of gratitude on life satisfaction positively and significantly, but unable to mediate the effect of self-compassion on life satisfaction significantly.

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## INTRODUCTION

Achieving life satisfaction is a wish and goal everyone desires to attain, so all people will do any important things considered to realize their dreams, including university students (Putri., & Suryani., 2020). Life satisfaction among university students can be influenced by various things covering personal, academic and non-academic life (Fellisia., & Wijaya., 2022). In adulthood, university students will face numerous demands and pressures in their lives due to many major changes occurred in this period (Nabila & Wahyuni, 2022).

Various demands often shackle university students, including personal life, academics, non-academics, achievements, community expectations, social life on campus and the surrounding environment. All these demands may trigger problems, anxiety, decrease in concentration, academic achievement, learning motivation, mood, even stress and depression which will affect students' life satisfaction and happiness (Suwartika., et al. 2014). Life satisfaction is valuable for anyone because a person whose life satisfaction is high will feel happy in his life, be involved in various activities, and feel a meaningful life (Pavot & Diener, 2008). On the other hand, the one with low life satisfaction shows a tendency to have a higher risk of experiencing psychological problems, for example depression indicated by uncertain emotional states of sadness and depression (Novianti., & Alfiasari, 2017).

Regarding the findings of the preliminary study on 340 students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya, 4.26% of the participants (20 students) had very high life satisfaction, 27.72% (130 students) had high life satisfaction, 42.43% (199 students) had medium life satisfaction, 17.70% (83 students) had low life satisfaction and 7.89% (37 students) had very low life satisfaction. These results illustrate the domination of the medium level of life satisfaction in students, meaning that the majority of students felt quite satisfied and happy with their lives, but at the same time they still had some important domains in their lives that have not been achieved

well, have not been fulfilled or have even been neglected, so there needed to be re-evaluation.

In addition to the above findings regarding the domination of medium life satisfaction achieved by the university students, there still left undiscussed about the low and very low life satisfaction in students or the dissatisfaction that led to the feeling of meaningless, less able to realize maximize their functioning, and confused with unclear life goals. These needed to be addressed since life satisfaction and feelings of happiness in students refer to a good quality of life indicated by feeling psychologically satisfied and prosperous in academic life and life as a whole (Sirgy, 2021).

Life satisfaction is an one's cognitive ability to assess the happiness of his life, including an assessment of feelings, the attainment of desires and experiences in life. Besides, life satisfaction is also a comparison between events and expectations, where individuals compare their current situation with situations they consider to be the ideal standard. The smaller the expectation perceived, the greater the level of life satisfaction (Diener et.al., 2008).

Commonly, there are five aspects that influence one's life satisfaction, namely (1) motivation to renew life, (2) present life satisfaction, (3) past life satisfaction, (4) future life satisfaction, and (5) others' perspectives (Diener, et.al., 2008). Life satisfaction refers to a person's subjective evaluation of his or her current quality of life, which is an important indicator of psychological well-being (Diener et al., 1985). Hence, it is very important to know the factors that a person needs to have to achieve maximum life satisfaction (Nabila & Wahyuni, 2022).

One of the psychological factors that functions as a facilitator of mental health and provides welfare for individuals to increase life satisfaction is self-compassion (Neff & Germer, 2013). Self-compassion is a concept that can explain conditions when an individual is faced with various difficulties, trials, tribulations, and evaluates himself lowly, so that he tends to think negatively and is dominated by emotions. With self-compassion, an individual will be able to survive various difficulties, pressure, stress and

focus on finding ways to overcome problems so that they are able to face various bad situations (Allen & Leary, 2010).

Individuals who have self-compassion tend to be more satisfied with their lives than those who lack. When self-compassion is attached to wounds, feelings of brokenness, failure and disappointment, an individual can integrate sadness into a deep, rich and satisfying acceptance of what it means to live a human life (Neff, 2011).

The above concept in line with a study conducted by Li, et al (2021) which concludes self-compassion as a positive character that can provide psychological resources for individuals who are in trouble to increase life satisfaction. It shows that self-compassion is significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction. In other words, someone who has a high level of compassion can achieve higher life satisfaction, tends to be happier, optimistic, does not give up easily, has a feeling of being sufficient and has the potential to achieve success (Satwika et al., 2021).

Self-compassion can be attained through social support from other people, including the closest ones (Azra & Gustriani, 2022). A study by Azra & Gustriani (2022) concludes that there is a relationship between social support and self-compassion in students during the Covid-19 pandemic. It proves that the higher a student's social support, the higher their self-compassion and vice versa, the lower a student's social support, the lower their self-compassion. It is similar to the one found by Wilson et. al (2020) that social support can help increase attention, self-compassion, and maintain a person's psychological well-being.

Other than self-compassion, gratitude also has an effect on reducing negative emotions, such as stress and depression, increasing life satisfaction, happiness, social relationships, and creating a positive environment (Putri et al., 2021). Gratitude is positively related to critical and important things, namely life satisfaction, health, happiness, self-esteem, optimism, hope, empathy, and the desire to provide support to others. This feeling can change individuals for the better and have a positive mindset so they can build relationships with other people and create

harmony with the surrounding environment (Davis et al., 2016).

You. et.al (2018) in their study shows that a higher level of gratitude leads to fewer emotional difficulties, which in turn is positively related to a higher level of life satisfaction. When someone lacks satisfaction in their life, gratitude is one way to determine the attitude of an individual who has a positive mindset regarding the occurrences he experiences so that he can increase satisfaction in his daily life (Safaria, 2014).

Life satisfaction is also related to prosocial behavior and attitudes, such as self-esteem and social support, and is negatively related to emotions, depression and suicidal ideation (Zhang et al., 2013). This satisfaction will arise if there is interaction between individuals and their environment. It functions to open up opportunities for the individuals to develop their personal and social domains (Coria et al., 2018). Based on the previously mentioned reasons, the present study aimed at analyzing the direct effect of the variables self-compassion, gratitude and social support on life satisfaction, and the role of social support as the mediator variable for the indirect effect of self-compassion and gratitude on life satisfaction among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya.

## METHODS

This ex post facto research was done to 340 students at Universitas Muhamamdiyah Tasikmalaya. Those students were sampled using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique to so that the data were stratified and proportional based on faculty and semester level. In details, the sample distribution is presented in table 1.

**Table 1.** The Sample

Faculty	Population	Sample
FKIP	984	158
FIKES	861	135
FT	386	47
Total	2.231	340

Note: FKIP = Faculty of Teacher Training and Education; FIKES= Faculty of Health Sciences; FT= Faculty of Engineering.

In this study, the university students' life satisfaction was measured using a life satisfaction scale developed by the researchers based on an adaptation of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) compiled by Diener et al., (1985). It has 5 aspects, namely: (1) motivation to renew life, (2) present life satisfaction, (3) past life satisfaction, (4) future life satisfaction, and (5) others' perspectives. These aspects were covered in 15 statement items and assessed based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree). In terms of validity, this scale obtained an AVE value of 0.510, while its reliability resulted a CR value of 0.774, meaning that the scale has met the validity and reliability criteria.

Self-compassion in this study was measured using a scale adapted from Self-Compassion compiled and developed by Neff (2003). It has 6 aspects, namely (1) self-kindness, (2) self-judgment, (3) common humanity, (4) isolation, (5) mindfulness and (6) over-identification. These aspects are elaborated in 26 statement items with alternative answers on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost never, to 5 = almost always). Based on the validity test, the self-compassion scale gained an AVE value of 0.520, while its reliability resulted in a CR value of 0.867, meaning that the instrument has met the validity and reliability criteria.

Another variable, namely gratitude was measured using a questionnaire adapted from the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ) compiled and developed by Emmons et al., (2002). This scale has 4 aspects, namely (1) intensity, (2) frequency, (3) span, and (4) density. These all are covered in 11 items with alternative answers on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, to 5= strongly agree). In terms of validity test, the gratitude questionnaire got an AVE value of 0.502, while its reliability obtained a CR value of 0.727, meaning that the questionnaire has met the validity and reliability criteria.

The last variable, social support was estimated using a scale developed by the researchers based on an adaptation of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social

Support (MSPSS) compiled by Zimet (1988). This scale has 3 aspects, namely (1) family, (2) friends and (3) important and influential people compiled in 15 items with alternative answers on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree). In terms of validity test, the social support scale had an AVE value of 0.525, while its reliability got a CR value of 0.749, meaning that the instrument has met the validity and reliability criteria.

In accordance with table 2, the Construct Reliability (CR) value of each variable has met a value of >0.7 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each variable has achieved a value of >0.5. Therefore, it was concluded that all variables were reliable.

**Table 2.** Reliability Test Results

Variable	CR	AVE	Result
Self Compassion	0.867	0.520	Reliable
Gratitude	0.727	0.502	Reliable
Social Support	0.749	0.525	Reliable
Life Satisfaction	0.774	0.510	Reliable

Following the data collection, the subjects data were analysed using SEM (Structuring Equation Modeling) analysis, a statistical model that provides calculated values for the strength of the relationship and influence between variables in a theory, both directly and indirectly (through mediator variables). Here, the SEM analysis was carried out in AMOS data processing software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of descriptive analysis presented in table 3, the level of life satisfaction was (M= 56.74; SD= 6.43), self-compassion was (M= 83.14; SD= 10.6), gratitude was (M= 46, 49; SD= 4.7), and social support was (M= 52.97; SD= 6.9), indicating that all variables were in the medium category.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistical Analysis

	Mean	SD
Self Compassion	83.14	10.6
Gratitude	46.49	4.7
Social Support	52.97	6.9
Life Satisfaction	56.74	6.43
N= 340		

The measurement model in this study covered four latent variables (life satisfaction, self-compassion, gratitude, and social support), and 18 manifest variables. In this case, the model suitability testing showed good results to the measurement model; N= 340;  $\chi^2= 99.368$ ;  $df= 110$ ;  $CMIN/DF= 0.903$ ;  $CFI= 1$ ;  $RMSEA= 0.000$ ;  $RMR; 0.013$ ; therefore the model was considered proper.

**Table 5.** The Direct Effect Testing

Variabel	Coef	S.E	t	P
SC→LS	0.510	136.69	2.198	<0.05
G→LS	0.517	0.084	5.958	<0.01
SS→LS	0.124	0.170	1.979	<0.01
SC→SS	0.361	26.697	135.020	<0.05
G→SS	0.447	0.125	4.825	<0.05

NOTE: SC= Self Compassion; G= Gratitude; LS= Life Satisfaction; SS= Social Support

The direct effect testing as presented in table 5 indicated an increase due to the influence of self-compassion on life satisfaction ( $\beta= 0.510$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $t > 1.96$ ), so it was concluded that there was a significant direct influence between self-compassion on life satisfaction. Furthermore, there was an increase in the influence of gratitude on life satisfaction ( $\beta= 0.517$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $t > 1.96$ ), so there was a significant direct influence between gratitude and life satisfaction. Also, there was an increase in the influence of social support on life satisfaction ( $\beta= 0.124$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $t > 1.96$ , meaning there was a significant direct influence between social support on life satisfaction. In addition, there was an increase in the influence of self-compassion on social support ( $\beta= 0.361$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;

$t > 1.96$ ), indicating a significant direct influence between self-compassion on social support. Lastly, there found an increase in the influence of gratitude on social support ( $\beta= 0.447$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $t > 1.96$ ), proofing a significant direct influence between gratitude and social support.

**Table 6.** The Results of Indirect Effect Testing

	Z	P
SC→SS→LS	0.197	0.843
G→SS→LS	3.105	0.001

NOTE: SC= Self Compassion; G= Gratitude; LS= Life Satisfaction; SS= Social Support

With regard to the indirect effect testing, it was found that the influence of self-compassion on life satisfaction through social support was ( $Z= 0.197$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), meaning that there was no indirect influence between self-compassion on life satisfaction through social support as the mediator variable. Particularly, self-compassion had no effect on life satisfaction through social support so that social support did not function as the mediator variable that mediated the influence of gratitude on life satisfaction. Another result was the relationship between gratitude on life satisfaction through social support was ( $Z= 3.105$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), so there was a significant indirect influence between gratitude and life satisfaction through social support as the mediator variable, or gratitude influenced life satisfaction through social support.

The findings of this study are in line with the one done by Li, et al (2021), namely self-compassion as a positive character can provide psychological resources for individuals who are in difficulty by increasing life satisfaction. Self-compassion has a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction. Here, someone who has a high level of self-compassion can also achieve high life satisfaction. Another similarity was found in a study by Satwika et al., (2021), that someone who has high self-compassion will not easily worry about his own shortcomings since the person is capable of treating themselves and others well, understand human imperfections, is happier, optimistic, does not give up easily, has a feeling of

being sufficient and satisfied with his life, and has the potential to achieve success.

The relationship between self-compassion and social support is also showed in Jeon et al., (2016) that self-compassion can be developed by social support. It means an attitude of loving oneself can develop along with the social support received by a person, and will then have a positive effect on psychological well-being. Another study, conducted by Harnas., et.al (2022), states that the self-compassion possessed by students can be influenced by many factors, one of which is social support. The results of the their study show that there is a positive and significant influence between social support and self-compassion in students, meaning that the higher the level of social support a person gets, the higher the self-compassion they have, and vice versa.

Another supporting study to the present findings is from by Lee (2020) which states that people who are used to being grateful will have an impact on higher life satisfaction. Then, a study by Kong & Zhao (2018) concludes that social support can mediate the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction. Furthermore, another study conducted by You., et.al (2018) revealed that a higher level of gratitude is associated with greater trust in the social support received, which is then related to a greater increase in life satisfaction.

In relation to gratitude, a study by Utami (2020) mentions that having an attitude of gratitude can encourage students to carry out positive activities and direct them to social activities with other individuals. The relationships that exist between students and lecturers at universities allow them to receive social support which can help relieve stress. It is also in line with a study done by Torihoran., et al (2021), namely gratitude has a significant influence on social support, so that the higher a person's sense of gratitude, the higher the social support a person receives and feels from his environment.

Unfortunately, there found some contradictive findings related to the present findings. Regarding the indirect effects testing, the results of this study were not in line with the one done by Jeon et al., (2016), namely self-compassion can be developed by the amount of

social support received, and in the end it will have a positive impact on psychological well-being. . Then, Bluth et al., (2018) state that self-compassion can help teenagers to prepare themselves to face various situations not in accordance with what they want, thereby reducing symptoms of depression, which in the end will have an impact on increased positive relationships and life satisfaction.

Similar results in the indirect effect tests were found in a study by Tarihoran., et al (2021) that gratitude has a significant effect on a person's life satisfaction. The higher a person's sense of gratitude, the higher the impact on a person's life satisfaction. Obviously, this will have an impact on the high level of social support felt by someone from his environment, so there is a significant influence between gratitude and life satisfaction mediated by social support.

Further findings of gratitude were found in You., et.al (2018) that a significant relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction is mediated by students' perceptions of social support, indicating that gratitude has an indirect effect on life satisfaction through social support as a mediating variable that smoothens the relationship between the two. Those who experience high levels of gratitude will experience many positive feelings of life satisfaction. Then social support was found to mediate and facilitate the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

Following the discussion of the findings, several conclusions were drawn. First, there is a direct effect of self-compassion on life satisfaction, meaning that self-compassion has been proven to positively and significantly increase life satisfaction. Second, there is a direct effect of gratitude on life satisfaction, meaning that gratitude has been proven to positively and significantly increase life satisfaction. Third, there is a direct influence of social support on life satisfaction, meaning that social support has been proven to positively and significantly increase life satisfaction. Fourth, there is a direct effect between

self-compassion and gratitude on social support, meaning that the self-compassion and gratitude variables have been proven to positively and significantly increase social support. Fifth, there is an indirect influence between gratitude on life satisfaction through social support, meaning that social support functions as a mediator variable that mediates and smoothens the influence between gratitude on life satisfaction. Sixth, there is no indirect effect between self-compassion on life satisfaction through social support, meaning that social support does not function as a mediator variable that mediates the influence of self-compassion on life satisfaction. In other words, the indirect effect through social support is not significant.

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