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Submission date: 01-Jul-2025 11:18AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2708712499

File name: An-nafs_revisi_judul-4236-Articles-17128-4-10-20250510.pdf (335.17K)

Word count: 5815

Character count: 35004



The Combined Role of Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction in Enhancing Student Engagement

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Abstract

Article Information:

Received August 31, 2023

Revised December 01, 2023

Accepted December 03, 2023

Keywords:

Life satisfaction

Self-esteem

Student engagement

Student engagement is essential for academic success and holistic development, yet many studies have examined only isolated predictors of engagement. While self-esteem and life satisfaction have each been linked to engagement, few studies have investigated their combined effect, particularly within non-Western contexts such as Indonesia. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the joint and individual contributions of self-esteem and life satisfaction to student engagement among 397 active university students in Bandung City. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected through the University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Multiple regression analysis revealed that self-esteem and life satisfaction significantly predicted student engagement, both independently and simultaneously ($R^2 = 0.31$, $p < .001$). Self-esteem emerged as the stronger predictor, accounting for 21.3% of the variance, compared to 9.7% from life satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of fostering both self-esteem and life satisfaction in educational settings to enhance student engagement. The study contributes a novel perspective by demonstrating the synergistic influence of these two psychological factors in a culturally specific context. Practical implications include the need for integrated student development programs that promote self-worth and subjective well-being. The study calls for future research to examine how each predictor influences different dimensions of engagement—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive—over time.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in supporting human life. The importance of education is emphasized in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that education must be carefully planned to create a conducive environment and learning process that enables students to actively develop their potential. Through education, students are expected to participate actively in both academic and non-academic learning activities designed by educators.

At the higher education level, lectures are the primary form of learning activity, designed to develop student competencies in accordance with their chosen academic

programs. To succeed in lectures and cope with their academic demands, university students must actively participate in all related activities. This aligns with Arnett's (2015) theory on emerging adulthood, which characterizes this developmental stage by experimentation and exploration. At this stage, individuals are still exploring their desired career paths and personal identities. Active involvement in academic and student activities serves as a medium for such exploration and experimentation, helping students shape their career goals and identity as adults.

Student engagement has been examined by several researchers in Indonesia. For instance, Sholeh (2019) found that student engagement remains low, while Sulastra and Handayani (2020) reported high levels of engagement in lectures. Meanwhile, research by Qonita, Dahlan, and Damaianti (2021) showed that 54.2% of students exhibited low engagement levels, indicating variability across different institutions. Internationally, research on student engagement has also been conducted in countries such as Cambodia (Heng, 2014), Sri Lanka (Glapaththi et al., 2019), and Latin America (Salas-Pilco, Yang, & Zhang, 2022).

Student engagement is closely related to school engagement. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), school engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. In the university context, Fredericks prefers the term "student involvement," referring to academic and non-academic participation, including social and extracurricular activities. Behavioral engagement includes positive actions such as following classroom rules, participating in discussions, contributing to assignments, and being active in student organizations.

Emotional engagement refers to positive feelings toward lecturers, peers, assignments, and the campus environment. Cognitive engagement involves students' commitment to mastering material through strategic learning. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), student engagement helps eliminate apathy and enhances learning quality. Numerous studies have shown that student engagement is crucial for academic achievement (Heng, 2014; Glapaththi et al., 2019), performance (Delfino, 2019), and the development of competencies (Ulum, Yanto, & Widiyanto, 2017). Hu and Kuh (2002) emphasized that engagement in learning is the most significant contributor to students' academic and personal development, highlighting the need for ongoing research into ways of increasing engagement.

Several studies have identified self-esteem as a key predictor of student engagement. Pellas (2014) found that self-esteem influences all three engagement dimensions, while Artika, Sunawan, and Awalya (2021) confirmed its significant impact. Rosenberg et al. (1995) define self-esteem as an individual's positive or negative self-attitude and overall evaluation of personal worth and value. Students with high self-esteem respect themselves and recognize their potential for academic success. This self-awareness supports their engagement with academic tasks (Virtanen et al., 2016),

contributes to achievement (Adiputra, 2015; Hidayat, 2019), and boosts motivation (Zulkarnain, Sari & Purwadi, 2019).

Self-esteem enables students to assess themselves positively, which fosters motivation to persist in academic and extracurricular activities. Martin et al. (2021) emphasized that positive self-evaluation enhances student responsibility and motivation, enabling them to maintain persistence despite challenges. Therefore, high self-esteem promotes greater engagement in learning activities.

Another key predictor of student engagement is life satisfaction (Antaramian & Lee, 2017; Rastogi et al., 2018; Akanni, 2022; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2017). Diener et al. (2017) define life satisfaction as an individual's cognitive judgment of their overall well-being. Life satisfaction, a component of subjective well-being or happiness, is especially critical during emerging adulthood, when individuals make pivotal decisions related to education, careers, and relationships. High life satisfaction supports positive psychological functioning and reduces the risk of harmful behavior during decision-making processes (Hollifield & Conger, 2014).

Studies have also demonstrated that life satisfaction improves student engagement. Antaramian and Lee (2017) found that satisfied students show greater engagement, and Akanni (2014) confirmed its predictive power among Nigerian university students. Similarly, Upadyaya and Salmela-Aro (2017) discovered that in Finland, life satisfaction predicted engagement during the transition to college.

Life satisfaction may influence student engagement because satisfied students can better focus on campus activities. Conversely, dissatisfied students are preoccupied with fulfilling unmet needs, limiting their participation in academic and extracurricular activities. Waksalak et al. (in Ye et al., 2020) support this, noting that negative emotions like sadness and fear tend to redirect attention inward. Satisfied students, by contrast, are more capable of self-development through active campus involvement.

Life satisfaction and self-esteem are also strongly correlated. Research by Szcześniak et al. (2020) found a significant positive relationship between the two: individuals with high life satisfaction tend to have higher self-esteem, while low satisfaction is associated with reduced self-worth. Uram and Skalski (2022) reported similar findings, affirming the influence of life satisfaction on self-esteem.

Despite the established importance of self-esteem and life satisfaction as individual predictors of student engagement, the current body of research reveals a critical gap: these constructs have rarely been examined in tandem, particularly within the context of university student populations in Indonesia. Existing studies tend to treat self-esteem and life satisfaction as independent variables, thereby overlooking the potentially synergistic effects they may exert when considered simultaneously. Moreover, much of the prior research has been conducted in Western or non-Indonesian contexts (e.g., Antaramian & Lee, 2017; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2017; Akanni, 2022), limiting the cultural applicability of their findings. Few studies have specifically explored how the

joint influence of these two psychological factors contributes to student engagement during the critical period of emerging adulthood, when identity formation and life direction are most salient (Arnett, 2015). This oversight leaves a gap in the literature regarding whether fostering both self-esteem and life satisfaction simultaneously could yield greater educational benefits than promoting either one in isolation. Addressing this gap is particularly timely and relevant, given the increased demands on student well-being and engagement in higher education today. Therefore, this study aims to examine the combined predictive power of self-esteem and life satisfaction on student engagement among university students in Indonesia, offering a novel contribution to the field of positive psychology in educational contexts.

University students with high life satisfaction and self-esteem positively evaluate themselves, accept their strengths and weaknesses, and appreciate their worth (Rosenberg, 1995; Diener, 2017). These characteristics motivate them to participate actively in academic and student life—hallmarks of engaged learners. In contrast, students with low life satisfaction and self-esteem view themselves negatively, lack self-acceptance, and are preoccupied with unmet needs and negative emotions (Wakslak et al., in Ye et al., 2020), which hinders their campus involvement.

This research hypothesizes that "there is a simultaneous role of life satisfaction and self-esteem on university students' engagement." The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of positive psychology in educational settings.

METHOD

Research design

This research involved three variables: life satisfaction, self-esteem, and student engagement. The method used in this study was a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. As stated by Graziano and Raulin (2014), a strong correlation between variables indicates that the value of one variable can predict the value of another, where the strength of prediction is expressed by a regression coefficient.

Participants

The study population consisted of university students registered as active students from the 2019–2022 academic years and aged between 18 and 25 years in Bandung City. A convenience sampling technique was employed (Sugiyono, 2017). Sampling was conducted on an unknown population, using a 5% margin of error. Based on Isaac and Michael's table (Sugiyono, 2019), the minimum required sample size was 386.

Research procedure

The questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms. Before filling out the questionnaire, participants were provided with an informed consent form to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. Students who agreed to participate could proceed to complete the questionnaire, while those who declined were not given access to it.

Research Instrument

To measure student engagement, the University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI) developed by Maroco et al. (2016) was used. This instrument measures three dimensions of student engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The inventory consists of 15 items—five items for each dimension. Response options range from 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. An example of a behavioral engagement item is, “I pay attention to lessons while studying in class.” An emotional engagement item is, “I am happy to be on campus,” and an example of cognitive engagement is, “I try to integrate material from various scientific disciplines into my general knowledge.” The instrument demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = 0.878$. Validity was tested using Pearson correlation, with coefficients ranging from 0.341 to 0.710, indicating that the USEI is a valid instrument for measuring student engagement (Sugiyono, 2019).

To assess self-esteem, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) by Rosenberg (1965) was utilized. This scale contains 10 items, with response choices ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. An example item is, “Sometimes I think I am not good at all.” The reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) was $\alpha = 0.852$. Validity testing using Pearson correlation showed coefficients ranging from 0.390 to 0.756.

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (2013), which consists of five items. The response scale ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. An example item is, “I am satisfied with my life.” The Cronbach’s alpha value was $\alpha = 0.811$. Validity was tested using Pearson correlation, with coefficients ranging from 0.663 to 0.852.

All three instruments were originally in English. Therefore, a translation process was conducted. Two translators translated the instruments into Indonesian. Following this, a back-translation process was performed by two additional translators. The results of both translations were reviewed by experts to ensure equivalence and clarity. Based on expert evaluations, necessary revisions were made to finalize the translated items. Finally, the instruments were tested for reliability and validity.

Data Analysis Technique

All three instruments were originally in English. Therefore, a translation process was conducted. Two translators translated the instruments into Indonesian. Following this, a back-translation process was performed by two additional translators. The results of both translations were reviewed by experts to ensure equivalence and clarity. Based on expert evaluations, necessary revisions were made to finalize the translated items. Finally, the instruments were tested for reliability and validity.

RESULTS

Based on the research findings, the demographic distribution of the 397 respondents is presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were female students in their eighth semester.

Table 1

Gender and Semester

Demography	N	%
Gender		
Male	154	38.8%
Female	243	61.2%
Total	397	100%
Semester		
2	117	29.55%
4	35	8.8%
6	91	22.9%
8	154	38.8%
Total	397	100%

Before conducting the regression analysis, classical assumption tests were performed. The results indicated that the data met all necessary conditions for regression analysis. The data were normally distributed, with a significance value of 0.200, which is greater than 0.05.

Multicollinearity testing showed no signs of multicollinearity, as evidenced by a tolerance value of 0.538 (greater than 0.10) and a VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) value of 1.860 (less than 10.00). An autocorrelation test was also conducted, revealing no signs of autocorrelation. Furthermore, the heteroscedasticity test results showed no clear patterns (wavy, widening, or narrowing), and the data points were scattered above and below the zero value on the Y-axis, indicating no heteroscedasticity in this dataset.

Next, the intercorrelation matrix among dimensions and variables is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Intercorrelation Matrix

	BE	EE	CE	SA	SR	LS	S.Eng	S.Est	LS
BE	1	0.538**	0.584**	0.364**	0.366**	0.317**			
EE		1	0.485**	0.549**	0.539**	0.583**			
CE			1	0.324**	0.354**	0.275**			
SA				1	0.756**	0.668**			
SR					1	0.598**			
S.Eng							1	0.536**	0.475**
S.Est								1	0.680**
LS									1

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

As shown in Table 2, all variables are significantly correlated at the 0.01 level. Self-esteem (S.Est) has a correlation coefficient of 0.680 with student engagement

(S.Eng), while life satisfaction (LS) correlates at 0.475 with student engagement. This confirms that both predictors are positively and significantly related to student engagement. The results of the simultaneous regression analysis of life satisfaction and self-esteem on student engagement are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Simultaneous Regression Results

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.556 ^a	0.310	0.306	6.932

a. Predictors: (constant) *Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem*

As seen in Table 3, the simultaneous contribution of life satisfaction and self-esteem to student engagement is 31%, while the remaining 69% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study. The p-value obtained was 0.000, indicating that the joint contribution of life satisfaction and self-esteem is statistically significant.

Next, the results of the partial significance test for each independent variable are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Test of Significance for Partial Regression

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	Constant	30.116	1.800		16.729	0.000
	SE	0.608	0.088	0.396	6.936	0.000
	LS	0.294	0.082	0.205	3.598	0.000

Based on Table 4, both self-esteem and life satisfaction significantly contribute to student engagement ($p < 0.05$). The standardized regression coefficient for self-esteem is 0.396, while for life satisfaction, it is 0.205. This means that a 1% increase in self-esteem is associated with a 0.608 increase in student engagement, whereas a 1% increase in life satisfaction results in a 0.294 increase in engagement.

The effective contribution of each predictor to student engagement is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Effective Contribution of Each Predictor

Predictor	Effective Contribution	R square
Self-esteem	21.3%	31%
Life satisfaction	9.7%	

From Table 5, it can be concluded that self-esteem contributes more to student engagement (21.3%) than life satisfaction (9.7%). Therefore, self-esteem plays a more dominant role in predicting student engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide direct empirical support for the research gap identified in the introduction—namely, the lack of studies examining the combined role of self-esteem and life satisfaction on student engagement, particularly in the Indonesian university context. By demonstrating that these two psychological factors jointly contribute to student engagement, with a significant shared variance of 31%, this study addresses a critical limitation in the existing literature, where these constructs have largely been examined in isolation. The results affirm that students with high levels of both self-esteem and life satisfaction are more likely to be actively engaged in academic and non-academic university life. This underscores the value of adopting an integrative approach in research and practice, particularly within emerging adulthood and culturally specific contexts like Indonesia, where student well-being and engagement remain vital developmental concerns.

Students who are satisfied with their lives and possess high self-esteem are more likely to build strong engagement in academic and non-academic settings. Conversely, students who are dissatisfied with their lives and lack self-worth tend to exhibit lower engagement levels. This is supported by Table 2, which shows a strong and significant correlation between life satisfaction and self-esteem ($r = 0.680, p < .01$). Thus, the higher students' life satisfaction, the higher their self-esteem tends to be.

This finding aligns with prior research. Szcześniak et al. (2020) found a strong and positive relationship between life satisfaction and self-esteem, while Uram and Skalski (2022) also revealed that life satisfaction significantly influences self-esteem. University students with high life satisfaction tend to recognize their strengths and develop high self-esteem. In contrast, students with low life satisfaction often undervalue their capabilities, leading to lower self-esteem. The strong relationship between these two variables may explain why both make a simultaneous contribution to student engagement.

Students with high self-esteem and life satisfaction tend to be more content with their current lives and hold a positive self-assessment. They are able to accept both their strengths and weaknesses (self-acceptance) and appreciate their own existence (self-respect). This psychological state motivates them to concentrate on learning activities and participate in student organizations—both indicators of student engagement. Conversely, students with low life satisfaction and self-esteem often evaluate themselves negatively, struggle with self-acceptance, and feel dissatisfied with their lives. These conditions lead them to focus more on unmet needs and negative emotions (Wakslak et al., in Ye et al., 2020), which in turn reduces their capacity for campus involvement.

In addition to the simultaneous contribution, the study also found that self-esteem on its own significantly contributes to student engagement. This suggests that students with higher self-esteem are more likely to be engaged on campus. As shown in Table 5, self-esteem had an effective contribution of 21.3% to student engagement. Students who evaluate themselves positively are more likely to develop high self-esteem, which in turn

promotes involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities. This finding is in line with Artika et al. (2021), who found that self-esteem can predict student engagement. Similarly, Zhao, Zheng, Pan, and Zhou (2021) discovered that self-esteem influences student engagement through academic self-efficacy, accounting for 73.91% of the variance. This suggests that a positive self-view increases students' confidence in their academic abilities, which enhances motivation to engage in learning.

Student engagement tends to be stronger when students possess good self-esteem throughout the learning process. According to Pellas (2014), self-esteem significantly predicts all three dimensions of engagement: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. However, an interesting finding from that study was that higher self-esteem was associated with lower behavioral engagement. Virtanen (2016) also found that self-esteem is positively related to emotional and cognitive engagement, reinforcing the importance of self-esteem in students' academic lives.

Life satisfaction was also found to contribute significantly to student engagement, although to a lesser extent than self-esteem. The effective contribution of life satisfaction was 9.7%. This confirms that students who are satisfied with their lives are more likely to participate actively in campus activities. Antaramian (2017) similarly found that students with higher life satisfaction demonstrated greater engagement compared to those who were dissatisfied.

Life satisfaction during early adulthood is essential for promoting positive psychological functioning and avoiding risky behaviors-particularly when students are making major life decisions such as choosing a career or a life partner (Hollifield & Conger, 2014). Akanni (2014) also found that life satisfaction predicts student engagement among Nigerian university students. Likewise, Upadyaya and Salmela-Aro (2017) showed that life satisfaction predicted engagement among Finnish students transitioning from high school to college. However, Lewis et al. (2011) noted that life satisfaction was related specifically to cognitive engagement and not to emotional or behavioral engagement.

As shown in Table 5, the total contribution of self-esteem and life satisfaction when combined ($R^2 = 31\%$) is greater than their individual contributions (self-esteem = 21.3%, life satisfaction = 9.7%). This suggests that students with both high self-esteem and high life satisfaction are more likely to be highly engaged on campus than those who possess only one of the two factors. In contrast, students with low self-esteem and low life satisfaction are likely to be less engaged than students with only one low factor.

These findings underscore the importance of developing both self-esteem and life satisfaction in university students, as their combined presence offers a greater contribution to student engagement. Szczesniak et al. (2020) emphasized that high life satisfaction promotes self-esteem by increasing individuals' awareness of their strengths. Conversely, low life satisfaction reduces self-esteem due to diminished appreciation for one's abilities.

Taken together, these findings offer a meaningful theoretical contribution by confirming that self-esteem and life satisfaction, when considered jointly, exert a more substantial influence on student engagement than when examined separately. This supports the assertion that both constructs are interrelated dimensions of the self that must be understood in tandem to fully capture their effects on student outcomes. Practically, this study highlights the need for universities to implement comprehensive well-being programs that address both self-esteem and life satisfaction concurrently—rather than in isolation—to foster deeper student engagement. By contextualizing these psychological constructs within the developmental realities of Indonesian university students, the research responds to a previously underexplored intersection in the literature and provides culturally relevant insights that can inform targeted educational interventions.

This study also revealed that self-esteem has a greater impact on student engagement than life satisfaction. According to Chung et al. (2014) and Sánchez-Queija et al. (2017), self-esteem tends to increase during emerging adulthood (ages 18–25), which aligns with the role transition that university students undergo. In their first year, students often face the “top-dog phenomenon” (Santrock, 2018), transitioning from being seniors in high school to juniors in college. During this shift, self-esteem may temporarily decline but increases again in subsequent years.

According to Table 1, most respondents in this study were in their sixth or eighth semesters, suggesting they were already in the self-esteem recovery phase. This growth in self-esteem during emerging adulthood is often tied to academic achievement, competence development, and peer relationships (Chung et al., 2014; Sánchez-Queija et al., 2017). Therefore, the rise in self-esteem among these students may explain its dominant contribution to student engagement. In contrast, life satisfaction reflects global well-being (Diener, 2017) and is not limited to academic settings. While life satisfaction remains an important factor, its influence on student engagement appears less direct than that of self-esteem.

A limitation of this study is that it did not examine the individual roles of self-esteem and life satisfaction on each of the three dimensions of student engagement. Future research should investigate how these two variables affect behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement separately. A more detailed analysis would provide richer insights and help educators develop targeted strategies to enhance student engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that self-esteem and life satisfaction, both independently and jointly, play a significant role in enhancing student engagement among Indonesian university students. Notably, their combined contribution is more substantial than their individual effects, underscoring the importance of addressing both constructs simultaneously in academic contexts. While self-esteem emerged as the more dominant predictor, life satisfaction remains an essential complementary factor that supports

students' psychological readiness to engage meaningfully in campus life.

These findings advance the understanding of student engagement by filling a critical gap in the literature: the limited investigation into the combined influence of self-esteem and life satisfaction in non-Western settings and during the emerging adulthood phase. The results offer not only theoretical enrichment but also practical implications—highlighting the need for universities to develop integrated programs that cultivate both self-worth and subjective well-being. Interventions such as self-awareness training, peer support groups, and accessible counseling services may help students enhance their self-esteem and life satisfaction, thereby increasing their engagement and developmental outcomes.

Future research should explore how these psychological variables affect each dimension of student engagement—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive—through more granular analyses. Additionally, adopting longitudinal designs could clarify causal directions and developmental patterns over time. By building on this foundation, researchers and educators can better support holistic student success across diverse educational and cultural contexts.

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