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Flourishing in Academic Life: A Phenomenological Study of Students' Empowerment and Meaningful Living

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Abstract: The phenomenon of flourishing has gained significant attention in the context of higher education, given the increasing challenges faced by students, such as academic pressure, the need for self-development, and maintaining a balance in social life. Within the campus environment, flourishing not only reflects academic success but also encompasses emotional and social well-being, enabling students to thrive optimally. However, understanding how students perceive and achieve flourishing remains limited, particularly in the context of higher education in Indonesia. This study aims to understand the phenomenon of flourishing in students' academic lives, focusing on their experiences in achieving empowerment and meaningful living. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological design was employed to explore students' subjective experiences in depth. Ten students from the University of Bengkulu, Indonesia, were selected as participants through purposive sampling, based on their engagement in academic and non-academic activities as well as their self-perception of life success. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic phenomenological analysis. The findings reveal that flourishing in students' academic lives is influenced by key factors such as social support, stress management, academic achievement, and involvement in meaningful activities. Participants described flourishing as a dynamic experience involving a balance between challenges and resources, self-confidence, and a sense of meaningful living. The study highlights that flourishing is not solely determined by academic success but also by personal growth through social interactions and activities that foster individual development. These findings emphasize the importance of creating a campus environment that supports students' well-being through programs focusing on emotional and social aspects. In conclusion, flourishing among students is a multidimensional process requiring both internal and external support. This study recommends more inclusive educational policies to support students' psychological well-being.

Keywords: Flourishing, PERMA, Phenomenology, Student empowerment

Introduction

Individual welfare is an important aspect of human life, especially in the context of education. In this modern era, the pressure faced by students is increasing, both from an academic, social and personal perspective (Willen et al., 2022). Individual happiness and well-being are fundamental aspects that not only impact personal life, but also have broad implications in the educational context, especially for students (Barnes & Scoffham, 2011; Michalos & Michalos, 2017; Seligman, 2011). In the midst of increasingly complex challenges and pressures in

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this modern era, it is important for students to achieve a state of optimal happiness or what is often referred to as flourishing. Flourishing refers to a condition in which an individual is not only free from stress or difficulties, but is also able to develop optimally, both psychologically, emotionally and socially (Agenor et al., 2017; Compton & Hoffman, 2019; Fredrickson & Kurtz, 2011).

The welfare of students, especially in Bengkulu, is often faced with various pressures, whether originating from academic demands, social pressure, or the dynamics of personal life. This condition demands high adaptability and effective coping strategies so that students can achieve flourishing amidst the challenges they face (Hamadeh Kerbage et al., 2021; Hefferon et al., 2017). Flourishing is not just achieving temporary happiness, but includes the ability to continue to grow, feel connected to others, and find meaning in every aspect of life, including in education (Seligman, 2011). In the midst of this pressure, achieving flourishing becomes increasingly important because optimal well-being has a direct impact on students' ability to achieve, maintain motivation, and establish healthy social relationships (Ryan et al., 2013). In an educational context, students who are in a thriving condition tend to show better learning outcomes, have more positive interpersonal relationships, and are able to deal with academic pressure more effectively (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Ryff & Singer, 2014). Therefore, understanding the factors that support student flourishing is a crucial step in creating an educational environment that supports overall prosperity.

Research on flourishing has been carried out in various contexts and populations. In general, the majority of research on flourishing uses a quantitative approach (Hefferon et al., 2017; Willen et al., 2022). These studies often focus on measuring levels of prosperity through surveys and questionnaires that assess various indicators of well-being such as happiness, life satisfaction, and social engagement. Although the quantitative approach provides a general picture of flourishing conditions in a particular population, this approach has limitations in exploring the deep meaning and subjective experiences of individuals regarding how they achieved flourishing conditions. The use of numbers and statistics can indeed provide an understanding of how much individuals are thriving, but they are less able to explain the processes, dynamics and complexity of experiences experienced by individuals in achieving optimal happiness.

In contrast, qualitative research on flourishing is still relatively limited, especially those using a phenomenological approach. Qualitative approaches, especially phenomenology, offer deeper and richer insight into individual experiences in achieving flourishing (Volstad et al., 2020). This approach allows researchers to explore how individuals make sense of their own well-being, how they respond to life's challenges, and how they develop strategies to achieve optimal happiness. Thus, there is a significant research gap in the literature on flourishing, especially in understanding subjective experiences and individual narratives related to the process of achieving flourishing in the context of everyday life. Considering the limitations of a quantitative approach in exploring the deep meaning of flourishing, this research uses a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of students in Bengkulu in achieving optimal well-being amidst the life pressures they face. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research method, emphasizes the subjective understanding of individual experiences, with the aim of uncovering the essence of the phenomenon under study (Donalek, 2004). In this research, the phenomenon studied is how students in Bengkulu experience and manage pressure in their lives, as well as how they achieve flourishing even though they are faced with various challenges.

Bengkulu, with all the unique socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by its people, provides a rich background for understanding how students can achieve flourishing (Afriyati & Herawati, n.d.) Although economic pressure and lack of access to adequate educational resources are often obstacles, there is also great potential that can be optimized, such as community support, the values of mutual cooperation, and strong social solidarity. These values can become the basis for students to develop effective strategies in achieving optimal happiness (Hogan, 2020; Marujo & Casais, 2021).

This research not only aims to understand how students in Bengkulu achieve flourishing, but also to provide a basis for developing a narrative counseling approach that can support student flourishing. Narrative counseling emphasizes the importance of individuals' life stories in understanding and interpreting their experiences (Buckman et al., 2008; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2001; Wang et al., 2015). By understanding the narratives students construct about their struggles in achieving flourishing, counselors can help them reconstruct these stories in a more positive and empowering way. Optimal happiness or flourishing is very important in the educational context because students who are able to achieve this condition tend to have advantages in various aspects of life. Students are not only more resilient in facing challenges, but also more able to develop healthy social relationships, find meaning in daily activities, and contribute positively to the community. Therefore, this research also aims to identify key factors that can support student flourishing and how appropriate interventions can be developed to

help students achieve optimal happiness. In the theoretical framework used, flourishing is seen as a multidimensional concept which includes the PERMA profiler, namely positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning of life and achievement. This research seeks to reveal how these five dimensions contribute to flourishing achievements among students.

Based on this description, through an in-depth understanding of how students can achieve flourishing amidst the pressures of life, this research is expected to not only enrich the literature regarding student welfare in Bengkulu, but also provide practical contributions in designing effective and evidence-based interventions to support optimal happiness among young generation students. Thus, the results of this research can become a strong foundation for the development of more holistic and sustainable education and counseling strategies.

Method

Study Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. The phenomenological approach was chosen because the aim of this research was to understand students' subjective experiences in achieving flourishing or optimal happiness amidst the pressure they faced while studying at Bengkulu University. This approach allows researchers to explore in depth how students interpret their own well-being and how they deal with challenges that arise in their academic and personal lives. Qualitative research is useful in social research, because it explores a person's words, thoughts, experiences and goals (Lichtman, 2013; Mohajan, 2018). Phenomenological design data analysis was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Fieldsend & Smith, 2021). The stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis carried out are as follows: (1) reading and re-reading; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections across emergent themes; (5) moving the next case; and (6) looking for patterns across cases. All these processes are carried out in detail to produce reliable products.

Participant Selection and Sampling

This research recruited ten participants from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education from the guidance and counseling study program, the Indonesian language and literature study program, and the Natural Education Sciences study program. Participants were selected purposively to ensure that they had experience relevant to the research topic. The selection of participants was based on the desire to obtain diverse views regarding how students from various disciplines experience and interpret flourishing in different educational contexts.

Data Collection Procedures

The data in this research was collected through in-depth interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on literature related to flourishing with aspects of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning of life and achievement. The interview guide includes questions about students' experiences in interpreting happiness, the dominant feelings students face, activities involving students, how students relate to those around them, the strategies they use to resolve conflicts, and how they interpret well-being and happiness in everyday life day. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded with the participant's consent to ensure data accuracy. The data collection process was carried out over a two month period, namely May to June 2024. The data collected was then transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Data Management and Analysis

The transcribed data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which aims to identify the main themes that emerged from the participants' experiences (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Terry et al., 2017). Analysis was carried out by following steps (Braun & Clarke, 2019) that included re-reading the transcripts repeatedly, creating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, and verifying these themes with existing data.

Transcripts were read several times to familiarize oneself with the data. Next, transcripts were imported into QSR NVivo-12 for effective data management and coding. In the transcripts, key phrases, statements, and expressions relevant to the caregiving experience were identified, and initial codes were assigned (Hermanns & Mastel-Smith, 2012). These initial codes were then used to create condensed units of meaning, capturing the core essence of participants' descriptions and emotions. The codes provided were further reviewed and organized into themes reflecting general aspects of the caregiving experience. Thereafter, the authors engaged in discussions to elaborate and refine the themes, with the goal of creating clear and comprehensive descriptions that effectively conveyed the depth and breadth of the participants' experiences. This validation process continued until consensus was reached regarding the final themes. Research findings are presented by including selected quotes from transcripts to illustrate and support identified themes. The results of this analysis are then presented in the form of a rich and in-depth narrative, describing how students achieve flourishing amidst the pressure they face.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this research implemented several strategies, including data triangulation by conducting member checking, namely confirming the results of interviews with participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations matched their experiences. Apart from that, the involvement of researchers in the in-depth analysis process is also used to increase the credibility of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

This research has received ethical approval from the Bengkulu University Research Ethics Committee. All participants were provided with complete information about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Written informed consent from each participant was obtained before the interview began. Participants are also guaranteed anonymity, with all personal data anonymous and interview recordings kept in secure conditions. This research was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards and other relevant research ethics guidelines. During the interviews, special care was taken to ensure that participants felt comfortable and did not feel pressured to provide information they considered sensitive.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

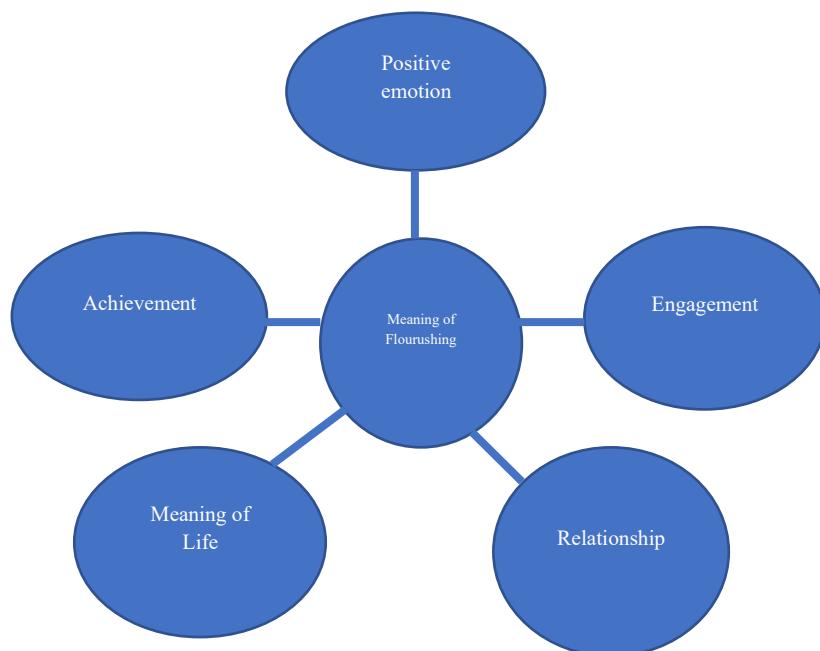


Figure 1. Emerging themes

This research involved ten participants who were students at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Bengkulu University. Participants consisted of five men and five women with ages ranging from 22 to 24 years. They come from three different study programs, namely Guidance and Counselling, Indonesian Language, and Natural Sciences Education. From the Guidance and Counseling study program, there were four participants consisting of one man and three women, with an age range of 23 to 24 years. Meanwhile, from the Indonesian language study program, there were three participants consisting of two men and one woman, all aged 23 to 24 years. As for the Science Education study program, there were three participants, all women, with an age range of 22 to 23 years.

This diversity in gender, age and study program provides diverse insights into the experience and meaning of flourishing among students with different academic and personal backgrounds. Based on the results of research, there are six themes emerging from the textual data. These themes are entitled: (1) The meaning of happiness (2) Positive emotion; (3) engagement; (4) relationships; (5) Meaning of life; and (6) achievement (see Figure 1).

The Meaning of Happiness

Happiness is a universal yet complex concept, and is often interpreted differently by individuals depending on cultural, social, and personal context (Diener & Lucas, 2000; Trommsdorff, 2018). In the student context, especially in Bengkulu, happiness is not only understood as a momentary positive feeling, but as a condition that reflects deeper and more sustainable well-being. This study found that happiness for students in Bengkulu is closely related to personal achievement, social relationships, and an attitude of gratitude. Below is an overview of the interview results that have been processed using NVivo.

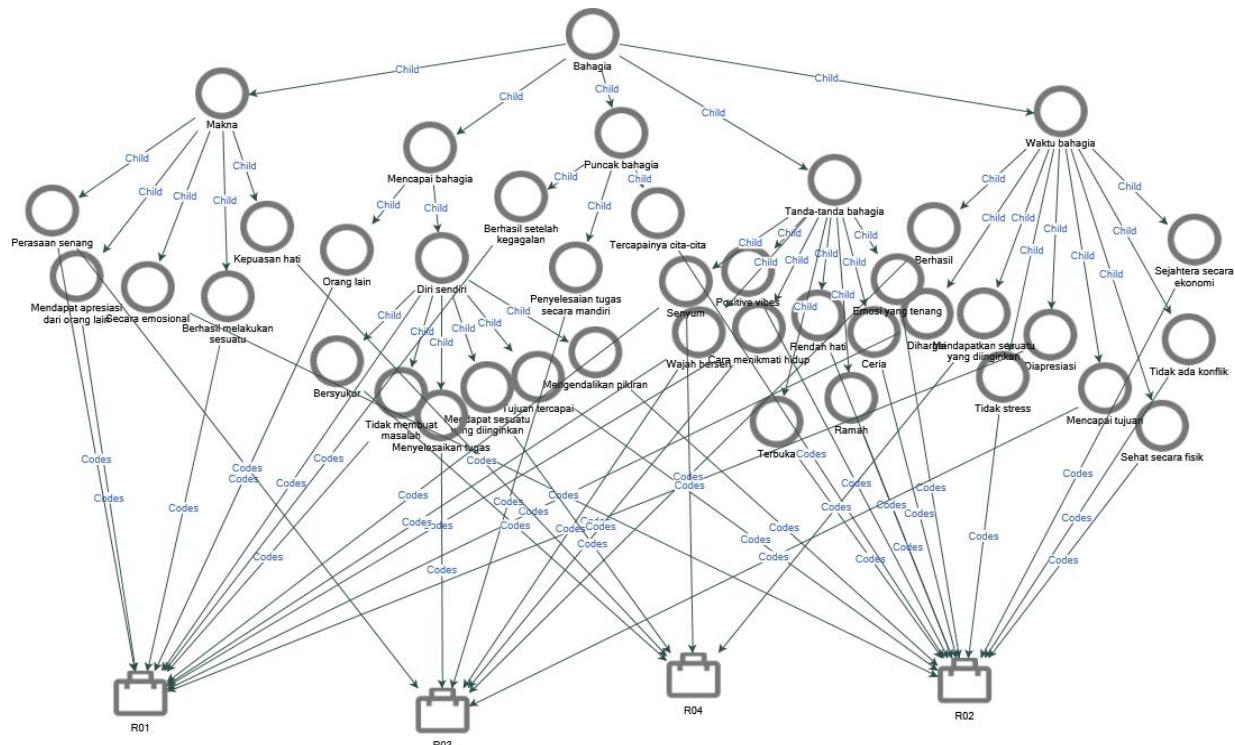


Figure 2. Dimensions of finding the meaning of happiness

In this study, the main theme explored was "Happiness." Through a qualitative data analysis process using NVivo, various sub-themes related to happiness were identified, each indicating a different aspect of how happiness is understood and experienced by individuals.

Definition and Difference between Happiness and Pleasure

Several informants in this study described happiness as more sustainable compared to pleasure, which is more temporary and superficial. The following is a participant's explanation which explains that:

"I think that happiness is in the long term, whereas happiness is in the short term (P04, 2024)".

Furthermore, further investigation was also conveyed by participant 06 and participant 09.

"If happiness is satisfaction in the long term, it is like our satisfaction when we get what we want. If happiness is satisfaction in the short term (P09, 2024)"

"Happiness is when we escape from difficulties... if we are happy, I might go straight to the example, for example, I like writing... but if I am happy when I have succeeded in writing, I have escaped the difficulties (P06, 2024)" .

This explanation reflects the view that happiness is profound and related to meaningful accomplishments, while pleasure is more often related to immediate and temporary experiences. This view is in line with the theory of happiness, distinguishing between pleasure and *meaningful life* (Goldman, 2018; Kashdan et al., 2008). According to (Seligman, 2011) pleasure, it is a positive emotion that arises from a pleasant experience and is temporary. On the contrary, according to him, deep and long-term happiness emerges when a person finds meaning in his life and succeeds in achieving important goals (Compton & Hoffman, 2019). Furthermore, Hedonic and Eudaimonic theories also support this distinction. Hedonism refers to happiness based on the experience of pleasure and avoidance of pain, whereas Eudaimonia refers more to self-actualization and achieving one's full potential as a deeper form of happiness (Aurelius, 2022).

Achievement and Happiness

Happiness for students in Bengkulu was also found to be closely related to personal achievement. Many students feel happiness when they succeed in achieving something they want or when they fulfill their personal and family expectations. This was explained by the participant who stated that he felt happy.

"when I get something I want or I achieve my satisfaction (P03, 2024).

achievement is often the main source of happiness for students, as stated below:

"I feel happy when I successfully complete an assignment or achieve the grade I expected (P03, 2024)".

In an academic context, this achievement is not only seen as an end result (such as a high grade or passing a course), but also a deep process involving struggle, hard work, and perseverance. This view is supported by literature showing that academic achievement is often a key indicator of subjective well-being among college students (Pavot & Diener, 2008). These accomplishments not only provide a sense of satisfaction and pride, but also strengthen a sense of self-worth and purpose in life, which in turn promotes deeper feelings of happiness.

Social Relations and Happiness

Another important aspect in understanding student happiness in Bengkulu is the role of social relationships. Social support from family and friends was mentioned as the main source of happiness by many informants. Participant 3 stated that:

"support such as encouraging words from friends or family really influences my happiness (P03, 2024)".

These social relationships not only serve as a source of emotional support but also as a coping mechanism that helps students deal with academic pressures and daily life challenges. In the PERMA perspective, positive and meaningful relationships are an important component of well-being, which explains why students who have strong social relationships tend to feel happier.

Previous studies have shown that social support contributes significantly to psychological well-being. Cohen & Wills (1985) for example, finding that social support can serve as a buffer against stress, ultimately improving individual well-being (Malkoç & Yalçın, 2015). In the context of college students, strong social relationships can help reduce the negative impact of academic stress and strengthen feelings of happiness.

Gratitude as a Source of Happiness

An attitude of gratitude emerged as another important theme in these interviews, with many students mentioning that their happiness was influenced by how grateful they were for what they had. As expressed by participant 04 below:

"Everything we do, we are grateful... we will get the maximum of something (P04, 2024)".

This attitude of gratitude not only helps students appreciate their achievements, but also see the positive side of various situations, including the challenges they face. Gratitude is one of the practices that can increase happiness and well-being. Emmons & McCullough (2003) found that individuals who regularly engaged in grateful reflection reported higher levels of happiness and fewer depressive symptoms. In the context of college students, an attitude of gratitude can help them maintain a positive perspective even when facing academic pressure and other life challenges (Sarwar & Khurram, 2023; Zhao et al., 2023a). Thus, in the context of students' understanding in Bengkulu, happiness is not only seen as an individual experience but also as part of connectedness with other people. This emphasizes that student happiness is not only measured through personal success but also through the quality of their social relationships and their contribution to the well-being of those around them.

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are a concept that includes various feelings and emotional states that build a person's well-being and happiness. Positive emotions such as happiness, love, gratitude and satisfaction play an important role in forming an optimistic attitude and helping individuals face life's challenges in a more constructive way. These emotions are not only pleasant feelings, but they also play an important role in mental, physical, and social health.

One important aspect of positive emotions is that these emotions not only arise spontaneously, but can also be created and maintained (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004; Zhao et al., 2023b). Through practices such as gratitude, meditation, or even by surrounding themselves with supportive people, individuals can increase the frequency and intensity of positive emotions in their lives. In the academic world, especially for students, positive emotions are important because they can influence academic performance, learning motivation, and personal life balance (Low et al., 2016; Trigueros et al., 2019). In the student context, positive emotions help in dealing with academic pressure, maintaining enthusiasm in the learning process, and building healthy social relationships with fellow students and lecturers. When students feel positive emotions consistently, they are more likely to better achieve their academic and personal goals. Conversely, a lack of positive emotions can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, which can hinder their academic development and general well-being. Fredrickson (2001) also emphasizes that positive emotions do not always have to be strong or deep to be beneficial. Even a mild feeling of pleasure or simple satisfaction after completing a small task can make a significant contribution to a person's well-being if experienced consistently. In the long run, the collection of these small moments can contribute to a more meaningful and fulfilling life.

Sources of Positive Emotions

Positive emotions do not appear out of thin air, they are usually triggered by certain sources that serve as a foundation for emotional well-being. One source of positive emotions for students is interpersonal relationships, namely healthy and supportive interactions with friends, family, and romantic partners that are often the main source of positive emotions (Lazarus, 2006; Philippe et al., 2010; Reis, 2001). Warmth, love, and support from others reinforce feelings of happiness and calm. This is in accordance with what was conveyed by participant 06 and participant 04:

"I always feel happy because I am surrounded by people who care about me, the way for me to maintain my feeling of happiness is to be with people who I love and care about (P06, 2024)".

"I feel like the family is really looked after, ma'am, so we are happy because we are surrounded by people who love us (P04, 2024)."

Happiness that comes from interpersonal relationships not only provides a sense of comfort, but also builds emotional resilience. For example, in an interview with participant 08, it was stated that:

"Thank God, lately I feel happy because I am surrounded by friends who often make small happiness happen. I also often go to beautiful places and that makes me happy (P08, 2024)".

In the context of students, a supportive surrounding environment is one of the key factors in maintaining their emotional balance amidst the demands of academics and daily life. These statements from participants illustrate how the presence and support of those closest to them, such as family and friends, can be a significant source of strength in maintaining positive emotions. A loving environment provides a sense of security and comfort that allows individuals to respond to life's challenges with more calm and optimism (Schweitzer et al., 2004; Southwick & Charney, 2018). When someone feels supported and appreciated by the people around them, they tend to be more resilient and able to overcome difficulties better. Furthermore, a positive environment not only increases happiness, but also motivates individuals to be more enthusiastic in pursuing goals and overcoming obstacles. Thus, it is clear that a person's positive emotions are greatly influenced by the environment around them. Healthy relationships, warm interactions, and consistent support from family, friends, and community play an important role in establishing and maintaining a person's happiness and emotional well-being (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2007). A supportive environment is not just an external factor but also a vital foundation that allows individuals to develop and achieve their best potential in life (Bundick et al., 2010; Collins & Feeney, 2015a).

Engagement

Engagement is a state where someone is fully involved and immersed in their activities or work (Ben-Eliyahu et al., 2018; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). Engagement in this research includes participants' intense involvement in certain activities that they enjoy, thereby making them lose track of time.

Engagement and the Role of the Environment in Generating Engagement

Engagement is an important element of flourishing that is often overlooked Afriyati &(Herawati, 2023; Ryff & Singer, 2014b; VanderWeele, 2017). Engagement refers to the degree to which a person feels engaged and immersed in a particular activity, often accompanied by feelings of enthusiasm and satisfaction. In the context of everyday life, deep involvement in certain activities is often influenced by the surrounding environment and the interpersonal relationships that exist within it (Miell & Croghan, 1996).

A positive environment not only supports a person's positive emotions, but also facilitates a person's involvement in meaningful activities. When individuals feel supported and appreciated by those around them, they are more likely to engage fully in the activities they undertake. This can be seen from the following statement from participant 06:

"In activities where there are people I love, for example, when I am at home, for example in the village with my mother and father, we do things that we do together, for example cooking together. So there I felt enthusiastic and happy (P06, 2024)".

This deep engagement suggests that a supportive environment can be a catalyst for increasing engagement in daily activities. Activities carried out together with people closest to them often provide additional meaning, making individuals feel more motivated and immersed in the process. For example, in the example above, participants felt a high level of engagement when cooking with family, indicating that the activity is more satisfying and meaningful when done in a positive social context. This also supports attachment theory, which emphasizes that emotional attachment to others can increase feelings of security and involvement in various activities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, 2013). Additionally, a supportive environment can also encourage a person to explore their interests and talents in more depth (Larson, 2000; Subotnik et al., 2011), which in turn strengthens their involvement in certain activities. Participant 08, for example, indicated how a positive social and academic environment increased his involvement in nature-related activities:

"I am very excited because I am directly connected with nature. There is a lot of knowledge that we don't get in lecture material but we can get it directly in an open environment (P08, 2024)."

The statement suggests that engagement depends not only on an individual's interests, but also on an environmental context that allows them to explore and learn in a meaningful way. A positive environment also plays an important role in keeping individuals engaged in the long term. When someone is surrounded by people

who support and encourage their involvement, they are more likely to continue engaging in activities that are important to them, even when faced with challenges. Participants 06 and 08 indicated how support from those around them helped maintain their involvement in activities they enjoyed. This is in line with Self-Determination theory which states that social support is one of the main keys in facilitating deep and sustainable involvement in various activities.

In an academic context, this involvement is also related to how students feel connected to their environment, both socially and academically (Patrick & Ryan, 2001; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013). When the learning environment and interpersonal relationships support engagement, students are more likely to demonstrate better achievement and feel more satisfied with their learning experience.

In conclusion, a person's engagement or involvement in certain activities is greatly influenced by the quality of the social environment and the support they receive from the people around them. A positive environment not only facilitates deeper engagement but also provides a meaningful context that makes activities more satisfying and sustainable. Therefore, creating a supportive environment is key to helping individuals achieve optimal engagement in their daily lives and the activities they undertake.

Relationships

Relationships or interpersonal relationships are one of the main themes that emerged in interviews with participants. These themes cover various aspects of how individuals build, maintain, and experience their relationships with others, including their family, friends, and social environment. Healthy and mutually supportive relationships play an important role in shaping a person's flourishing. Strong relationships not only provide emotional support but are also a source of happiness and security, which in turn influences how a person navigates challenges in their life (Collins & Feeney, 2010, 2015). Support from friends is also an important element in building strong interpersonal relationships. Participant 08 explained how support from his friends provided positive encouragement in his life, he stated:

"I like socializing. I take part in various activities, so I socialize with people who have positive values, people who provide something positive too. I relate well to my fellow colleagues, then in socializing, thank God, they can understand each other (P08, 2024)".

Positive peer relationships provide a platform for participants to experience happiness and develop strong social connectedness. These friends not only serve as colleagues in daily activities, but also as an important source of support when facing difficulties. The relationship theme that emerged from this interview shows how important interpersonal relationships are in the participants' lives. Positive relationships with family and friends provide essential emotional support, which in turn supports their happiness. Participants highlighted that healthy and supportive relationships not only provide a sense of security and acceptance, but are also their main source of happiness. This narrative is supported by direct quotes from participants, who describe how significant interpersonal relationships are in supporting their daily happiness.

Meaning of Life

Meaning of life is an important theme in understanding a person's psychological well-being. This theme refers to how individuals find and give meaning to their lives, including what they consider most valuable, how they find purpose in daily activities, and how this meaning influences students' sense of satisfaction and motivation. Meaning in life is often a primary source of motivation that helps a person get through life's challenges, provides direction, and helps individuals to stay focused on what is truly important to them (De Klerk, 2005; Martela & Steger, 2012, 2016).

In everyday life, the meaning of life can be found in various aspects, such as relationships with other people, personal achievements, social contributions, or spiritual pursuits. For many people, the meaning of life provides a sense of purpose and significance that makes them feel like they are living in a fuller and more meaningful way. One way participants found meaning in life was by identifying what was most valuable in their lives. Participant 06 revealed that for him, family is the most valuable thing and is the main source of meaning in his life, this is stated in the statement:

"The most valuable things in my life are my mother and father, my family, and the people I love (P06, 2024)".

Furthermore, what was conveyed by participant 09 was:

"The way to find the meaning is like in a family, we gather in one family, right? Then we share stories, such as what you are doing today, mother and Nessa and your sister too, so the meaning of kinship is found in our family gathering. get the meaning of warm family, (P09, 2024)".

This quote shows that family relationships provide deep meaning in the participants' lives. Family is the center of his life goals and gives him a reason to continue fighting and growing. For this participant, family is not only an emotional refuge but also a foundation that gives meaning to every action and decision in his life.

Achievements

Achievement is an important theme that is often related to a person's sense of satisfaction and happiness. Achievement includes various forms, ranging from academic achievements, career achievements, to personal achievements that are felt as a form of progress or success in life. In the context of thriving students, achievement not only provides a sense of satisfaction but also increases self-confidence and motivation to continue to develop (Knoesen & Naudé, 2018; Knoop, 2016). Accomplished successes, whether large or small, provide an emotional boost that strengthens a person's sense of purpose and direction in life.

For students, academic achievement is often the main focus, but achievement can also include other aspects such as involvement in organizations, the ability to overcome challenges, and personal achievement in interpersonal relationships. This achievement gives them a deep sense of identity and self-confidence.

Academic Achievement and Scholarships

Many participants viewed academic achievement as one of the most significant forms of success in their lives. Participant 06 described the achievements he achieved in an academic context and how this gave him satisfaction and further motivation, this is in accordance with the statement:

"I have a dream to go to college, Thank God I got in. Then how do I get a scholarship, Thank God I got the scholarship, well those are forms of happiness for my achievement ma'am, (P06, 2024)."

This quote shows how success in achieving academic goals, such as getting into college and getting a scholarship, gives participants a deep sense of satisfaction and happiness. This success is also a source of motivation to continue trying and achieve more in his academic life.

Significant Progress in the Personal Area

In addition to academic achievements, participants also appreciated the progress they made in other personal aspects. Some participants spoke about how their achievement in understanding the lesson gave them a sense of satisfaction and encouraged them to continue moving forward. This is in accordance with what participant 08 said:

"I have achieved my goal when I understand something I want to learn (P08, 2024)".

This statement describes how participants feel achievement is not only seen from the final result, but also from the learning process and progress achieved along the way. The sense of satisfaction that results from this understanding and learning provides significant encouragement to continue pursuing other goals. Personal accomplishments also contribute to identity development. In the process of learning and achieving goals, a person begins to see themselves as competent and capable individuals. This process is very important in identity formation, especially during transitional periods such as college. When a student achieves a deep understanding of the subject matter, he or she begins to form an identity as a committed and capable learner. This identity then influences how he sees himself and how he interacts with the world around him.

Discussion

This research aims to explore how students in Bengkulu can achieve flourishing despite being under academic pressure and complex daily life. Flourishing in this context is defined as a state in which individuals not only achieve psychological well-being, but are also able to develop and reach their optimal potential emotionally, socially and academically (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2014; Seligman, 2011). The findings from this research provide in-depth insight into the factors that support student flourishing and how these factors interact in Bengkulu's unique cultural and social context.

The main findings of this research reveal that positive emotions, strong interpersonal relationships, involvement in meaningful activities, meaning in life, and personal achievement are the five main pillars that support flourishing among students. This is in line with existing literature, as stated by Seligman (2011) in the PERMA profiler model which emphasizes that the dimensions of Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement are key elements of flourishing. However, this research also found several unique nuances. The unique finding of this research is that students in Bengkulu tend to add a spiritual dimension to each of these pillars, especially through the practice of gratitude to God Almighty. This suggests that spirituality plays an important role in shaping their optimal and emotional happiness, providing them with moral guidance and support in dealing with the pressures of academics and daily life.

This can be seen in the fourth pillar of the PERMA model Meaning, which refers to the feeling that life has a greater purpose and that individuals are involved in something bigger than themselves. In the context of students in Bengkulu, the meaning of life is often found in a spiritual context, where they see their life goals as part of God's plan and they feel responsible for carrying out their roles in accordance with His will. Students described that they felt their lives were more meaningful when they could live lives in accordance with religious teachings. They feel that their every action, both in academic contexts and in everyday life, must be driven by good intentions and noble goals, namely to gain God's approval. This view gives them clear guidance about what they should do and how they should live their lives. For example, some students report that they chose their academic major not only because of personal interest, but also because they feel that the field allows them to make meaningful contributions to society and, ultimately, as a form of service to God. They feel that by becoming competent professionals in their chosen field, they can provide greater benefits to others, which in turn will bring them closer to God.

This meaning of life which is rooted in spirituality not only provides direction and purpose in students' lives, but also helps them to face challenges more steadfastly. They see every test and obstacle as part of a test given by God, which they must face with patience and trust. This gives them the mental and emotional strength to keep going, even when faced with adversity. These spiritual values are not only complementary, but also the core of how students in Bengkulu achieve optimal prosperity. By viewing their lives through a spiritual lens, they not only seek temporary happiness, but also pursue deep and lasting well-being, which is in accordance with the teachings of their religion and moral values.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this research emphasize the importance of integrating spiritual and cultural values into support structures designed to encourage flourishing among students in Bengkulu. There is a clear need to implement holistic educational initiatives, which include both academic and spiritual dimensions, and provide students with the tools necessary to face the challenges of university life while maintaining their overall well-being. Some of the recommendations from the results of this research are:

Integrating Narrative Counseling into Student Support Services

One of the main recommendations is the adoption of a narrative counseling approach in university counseling services. This approach should be adapted to help students form and understand their life narratives, by integrating their spiritual beliefs and values. Counseling sessions should not only focus on managing academic stress but also help students find meaning and purpose in their educational journey, which aligns with their religious and spiritual beliefs.

Develop Policies that Support Holistic Achievement and Well-Being

Universities should implement policies that recognize and reward not only academic success but also personal and spiritual growth. This policy should recognize students' efforts in community service, leadership in faith-based activities, and accomplishments that reflect their commitment to personal and spiritual development. Additionally, it is critical to build a support system that addresses academic challenges and aspects of student life as a whole, ensuring that students have access to resources that support their physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

By adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates spiritual and cultural values into educational and support structures, universities can significantly increase student growth. These initiatives will not only improve student academic performance but also contribute to overall student well-being, equipping students with the resilience and sense of purpose necessary to face the complexities of academic life and beyond.

Strengths and Limitations

Although this research provides valuable insight into the flourishing among students in Bengkulu, there are several limitations that need to be considered in interpreting these results. First, because this study used a qualitative approach, the findings may not be generalizable to a broader population. Although in-depth interviews provide rich insights, the results are based on the subjective experiences of a small number of participants. Secondly, this research is limited to the cultural and social context of Bengkulu, which may be different from other contexts in Indonesia or in other countries. Therefore, these findings should be seen as a reflection of this specific context and do not necessarily apply to student populations in other regions. Third, potential bias in data collection must also be considered. Although steps such as data triangulation and member checking were taken to minimize bias, it is still possible that participants provided the answers they thought the researcher wanted. This could affect the validity of the research results.

Conclusion

This research has revealed that flourishing among students in Bengkulu is not only influenced by the five main pillars identified by the PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) but is also strengthened by deep spiritual values. These findings indicate that spiritual values, such as gratitude to God Almighty, play an important role in strengthening each pillar of students' well-being, giving them deeper meaning and purpose in their daily lives. The integration of these spiritual values in students' lives strengthens their involvement in academic and social activities, enriches interpersonal relationships, and gives deep meaning to their achievements. Students not only pursue academic and personal success, but also see their every action as part of devotion to God and an effort to achieve greater well-being in their spiritual lives.

Overall, this research makes a significant contribution to the literature on thriving college students, by emphasizing the important role of spiritual values in supporting their well-being. By integrating these findings into educational policy and practice, universities can help students reach their full potential, both academically and spiritually, and prepare them to become balanced, meaningful, and compassionate individuals in their personal and professional lives.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for universities, counselors, and future researchers to strengthen students' flourishing within higher education contexts:

Integration of Holistic Well-Being Programs in Universities

Universities are encouraged to design and implement programs that promote not only academic success but also psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Initiatives such as mindfulness training, gratitude practices, peer mentoring, and emotional literacy workshops can be developed in alignment with students' cultural and spiritual values.

Strengthening Counseling Services through Narrative and Positive Psychology Approaches

University counseling units should adopt narrative and positive psychology-based approaches that assist students in interpreting and reconstructing their life experiences in more empowering ways. These approaches enable students to find meaning and purpose aligned with their spiritual values and to build resilience in coping with academic and personal challenges.

Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Academic Environment

Faculty members and program administrators are encouraged to foster a learning climate that is supportive, collaborative, and focused on student well-being. Positive relationships between lecturers and students contribute to positive emotions, engagement, and a sense of belonging key components of flourishing.

Developing Policies that Acknowledge Non-Academic Achievements

Higher education institutions should establish policies that recognize and reward diverse forms of achievement, including social participation, community service, and personal or spiritual growth. Acknowledging holistic accomplishments will encourage students to pursue balanced development across academic and personal domains.

Directions for Future Research

Future research is recommended to expand this phenomenological inquiry across broader cultural and regional contexts, both within Indonesia and internationally. Employing mixed-method designs could provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' flourishing by integrating qualitative insights with quantitative measures of psychological well-being.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

* The authors declare that all procedures followed in this study were conducted in accordance with scientific ethical principles. The data analyzed were obtained from publicly accessible databases (Scopus) and did not involve any human participants, personal data, or experimental interventions. The study adheres to academic integrity standards, including transparency in data handling, citation, and interpretation.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

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