

## Motivation in Learning and Happiness: A Study among Generation Z University Students in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The focus on success has overshadowed the happiness of students, leading to increased stress levels and eventual disengagement and dropout. This study prioritized the importance of student motivation in their happiness. It aimed to determine whether there is a link between motivation in learning and the happiness of Gen Z students in a Malaysian institution. 120 business faculty members enrolled in bachelor's degree programs in Malaysia participated in an online survey. The survey consisted of close-ended questions and utilized a Likert-type scale to gauge levels of agreement or disagreement regarding happiness using The Happiness Measures (HM). The analysis of the data was performed with SPSS Statistics Version 29. The study findings indicated a strong and meaningful correlation between happiness and three predictor variables: self-efficacy, active learning strategy, and achievement goals. Moreover, the research emphasized the capacity of extracurricular pursuits to improve the welfare of Generation Z students.

**Keywords:** *Happiness, self-efficacy, active learning strategy, attainment goal*

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### 1. Introduction and Background

Learning is the process by which an individual builds and reconstructs meanings in their mind by connecting the input to past experiences. Motivation is unquestionably a component that plays a big influence in developing this pretty sophisticated mental activity (Keramati, 2024). Emotions also have significant functions in our day-to-day existence. In educational settings, feelings "may offer hints about additional characteristics of behavior episodes." Although it has been postulated since the time of Socrates and Aristotle, happiness is one of the aspects that humans need. It has only lately gained attention, however, as the positive psychology movement has grown in importance.

Between 2020 and 2024, the field of psychology produced around 375,000 articles focusing on negative topics such as mental illness, depression, anxiety, fear, and anger, while only 124,000 articles addressed positive concepts and human capabilities. The 2023 National Health and Morbidity Survey of Malaysia found that 29% of young adults experienced mental illness and depression, consistent with happiness research. Analysis of happiness research in Malaysia suggests a decline in the national happiness index, projecting a drop to 59th place in the world ranking for 2024, down four positions from the previous year. These insights are based on the annual World Happiness Report by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The 2024 Global Annual Review predicts that students will make up half of the global workforce by that year. As Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, will soon hold influential positions in government, it is crucial to prioritize their well-being.

Even though developed nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and various Asian countries have begun implementing a positive approach to education (Abedini, 2019; Argyle & Hills, 2020), education in Malaysia has received minimal attention in higher education, specifically in public universities. There has been limited focus on researching student happiness due to the perception that researchers conducting positive studies are not legitimate scientists. Undoubtedly, the country's education system is fundamental to its future, as it aims to move towards being a more powerful and advanced nation. Therefore, it is fitting for the government to have strategies to modernize public universities into active, competitive educational institutions. With these considerations in mind, this initial study aimed to establish whether there are any links between Malaysian students' motivation to learn and their level of happiness, as demonstrated in prior studies in the Western world. The following are the study's objectives. Thus, the following are the study's objectives:

- 1) To examine the relationship between self-efficacy and happiness among Gen Z students at university in

Malaysia; 2) To examine the relationship between active learning strategy and happiness among Gen Z students university in Malaysia; 3) To examine the relationship between attainment goal and happiness among Gen Z students university in Malaysia.

## 2. Literature Review

Happiness conveys the idea that life is worthwhile and enjoyable and arises from enjoyment, satisfaction, and a positive sense of well-being. Happiness can be characterized as a person's overall sense of well-being, their actual perception of their life, and their pleasant feelings. Emotions have always been important to human life, and happiness is one of the fundamental emotions that everyone experiences. Diener (2020) defines happiness as an individual's assessments of their life, both emotive and cognitive. It is the emotional condition that a person experiences in every part of their life. Studies involving students from 40 different nations revealed, according to Diener (2020), that students' happiness plays a crucial role in their overall life satisfaction. Siti, Wan, Azyanee, and Nooradzlina (2021) have shown through their research that the most important life goal is to attain happiness. This conclusion aligns with their findings. Happiness content can be differentiated by components such as life satisfaction and, on a smaller level, job satisfaction, satisfaction with educational institutions, or satisfaction with a product. Carr (2018) investigated the significance of happiness for 7,204 university students worldwide. According to the data, 64% of college students believe that happiness is the most significant aspect of life. Lee (2023) offered a similar perspective, claiming that pleasant acts and pleasurable feelings at school like engaging in participatory class activities are what lead to happiness. Pleasant emotions may be a technique for fostering interpersonal connections (Michalos, 2018). Shahrroz & Farraz (2018) inferred those emotions [happiness] is "an empowering source of information about how to influence motivational patterns". Similarly, this study focuses on how emotional components, associated with public university students' Generation Z happiness are influenced by their motivation to learn.

### Motivation for Learning

The process by which goal-directed activity is explored and maintained is a straightforward definition of motivation (Pintrich, 2018). General definitions of motivation distinguish between two types: extrinsic motivation, which refers to external factors, and intrinsic motivation, which describes internal factors. Boekaerts (2001) and Schiefele and Rheinberg (2017), have extensive links between learning, motivation, and accomplishments. In his study, Erb (1996) found that students' low self-esteem, lack of responsibility, and dysfunctional families were the main causes of their lack of enthusiasm to learn in university. Numerous studies conducted in this area have concluded that students who are highly driven are more likely to comprehend their material better and perform well in their classes. Researchers are particularly interested in examining the components of intrinsic motivation in this study because it is thought that these components lead to highly cognitive thinking, which is necessary for developing notions related to abstract scientific ideas.

Brophy (1998) identified four measures that can impact an individual's motivation for learning. These measures pertain to the learning environment, personal goals, task importance, and self-efficacy. Tuan et al. (2005) highlighted the presence of various motivational measures in their recent study, aiming to develop a tool for assessing students' motivation for learning. They emphasized the need to specifically measure the following scales in learners: learning environment, performance goals, achievement orientation, science learning value, self-efficacy, and active learning strategies. This discussion focuses on three motivational scales: self-efficacy, active learning strategies, and achievement goals, as space constraints limit the scope of the study.

Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish tasks, whether they are initially perceived as difficult or easy. The inclusion of the scale of students' active engagement in this study is aligned with the constructivist viewpoint it adopts, based on the idea that knowledge is actively constructed and varies among individuals. Active learning is crucial as it puts students in control of their education and integrates values into the curriculum. Tasks such as researching theories and concepts, solving problems, and applying learned ideas to real-world situations are central, with motivation closely linked to these tasks and their level of determination in completing them. On the other hand, an attainment goal emphasizes the need to improve one's skills in achieving the goal and the desire to do so through internal motivation

### **Self-Efficacy and Happiness**

The belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks, known as self-efficacy, can apply to tasks perceived as easy or difficult, as per Bandura (1997). Farshid & Ali (2022) discovered that self-efficacy is positively and significantly related to both male and female students, while happiness serves as a predictor of academic achievement specifically for male students. Fatemah and Mohammadreza (2023) found that students with higher academic self-efficacy and happiness display a positive attitude and possess greater problem-solving abilities and adaptability in school, leading to improved academic well-being. Ahmed (2019) conducted a study on the relationship between happiness and self-efficacy among university students in Egypt and Lebanon. The research findings indicated that Egyptian and Lebanese men achieved higher average scores in happiness and self-efficacy compared to women. Lebanese participants scored significantly higher in happiness and self-efficacy than their Egyptian counterparts of both genders, with a large impact on happiness. The study demonstrated statistically significant links between the two measures in both countries. A study conducted by Hassan, Haidar, Fahime; Ghadriye, Rojia, Masomeh, and Fariba (2022) emphasized the predictive role of 'academic self-efficacy' in the happiness of university students, involving 290 students from an Iranian medical science university. Healthcare providers at the university consider these aspects when designing mental health promotion initiatives aimed at fostering student happiness. Vania & Linda (2020) demonstrated the positive impact of happiness on self-efficacy and the negative influence of stress on happiness among graduate students from Southern Brazil. In a study by Izzet (2023), a linear model was developed to explore the impact of general self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and life satisfaction on happiness. The model demonstrated strong fit indices, indicating its adequacy and suitability. The study sample comprised 315 selected students. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H1:** Self-efficacy has a positive significant relationship with happiness among Generation Z university students in Malaysia.

### **Active Learning and Happiness**

Students are required to engage in active learning, taking responsibility for their educational journey and incorporating values into their learning process. According to a study conducted by Ahmed & Jehad (2022), active learning is positively and significantly linked to satisfaction and happiness in the classroom environment for business students. Similarly, Torsak (2023) research examined the connection between happiness, learning levels, and academic achievement among students at Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand, using the Learning with Happiness survey. The study involved 587 participants, consisting of 428 female and 159 male students, and revealed a high overall evaluation of learning with happiness among the students. Fung & Tsz's (2019) study emphasized the positive and significant relationship between learning and happiness among first and second-grade students in Hong Kong. Additionally, a survey by Lam & Pratchayapon (2023) found a statistical correlation between happiness and self-determination across all academic levels, indicating that higher levels of happiness could lead to increased positive learning motivation for students at their respective schools. An analysis of the research results suggested that kindergarten and elementary students demonstrated the highest levels of happiness and intrinsic motivation for learning, while high school students, who exhibited the lowest level of happiness, may benefit from additional support through alternative methods. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H2:** Active learning strategy has a positive significant relationship with happiness among Generation Z university students in Malaysia.

### **Attainment Goal and Happiness**

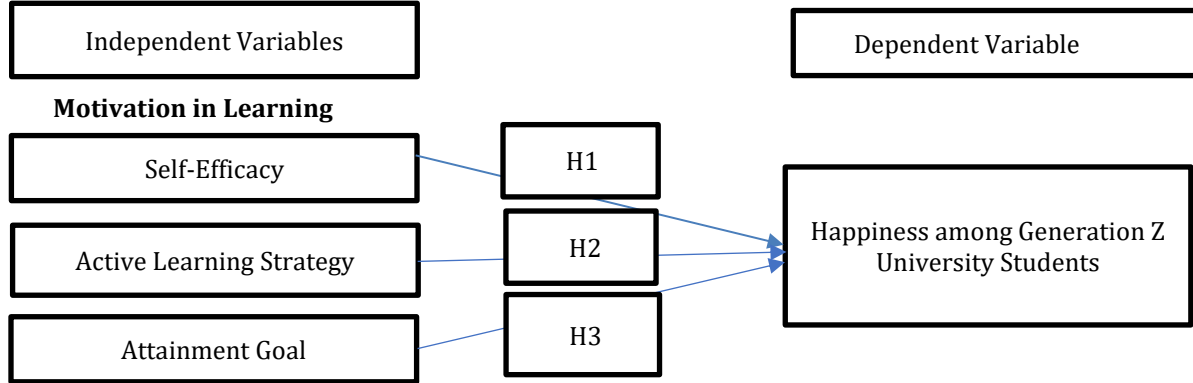
Jamileh, Farokh, Abbas, Maryam, and Toni (2022) conducted a study examining the connection between attainment goals, achievement motivation, and happiness in undergraduate nursing students. The study found a direct and significant correlation between these factors among 255 undergraduate nursing students in an urban area of Iran. Similarly, a study by Hassanzadeh and Galin (2023) demonstrated a significant relationship between happiness and achievement goals with a 95% reliability level among male and female students. Conversely, research by Robinson and Iji (2019) at Central Luzon State University in The Philippines, involving 300 college students, indicated no significant relationship between achievement goals and happiness. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H3:** Attainment goal strategy has a positive significant relationship with happiness among Generation Z university students in Malaysia.

**Research Framework**

Figure 1 displays the suggested framework for this investigation. Self-Efficacy, Active Learning Strategy and Attainment Goal make up three independent variables of the study. Happiness is the study's dependent variable. The framework also shows the proposed correlation for hypotheses in the investigation.

**Figure 1: The proposed research framework**



**3. Research Methodology**

The research used a quantitative approach to explore the potential link between motivation and happiness. It employed a quantitative research design and collected validated and structured data. The participants were business students from 15 different bachelor's degree programs at a public university. Subjects from the specific group, comprising students born between 1997 and 2012, were conveniently selected using quota sampling. To gather information for the study, the researcher utilized both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was collected through questionnaire surveys distributed to the respondents, while the secondary data was sourced from various online platforms, websites, journals, and articles. All primary data underwent processing and analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science Version 29.

**Measurement of Student's Happiness**

The assessment to gauge the happiness of students was created by Fordyce in 1988 and 2005. This happiness evaluation, called the Happiness Measures (HM), comprises two components. The initial part measures the perceived overall happiness quality, while the second part evaluates the individual's assessment of time spent feeling happy, unhappy, and neutral. The original 10-point scales in the first part were modified to 5-point scales to standardize the outcomes, ranging from 1 (very sad) to 5 (extremely happy). The frequency percentages of happiness time in the second part were not altered. This specific tool was chosen because it is a thoroughly studied indicator of well-being and is frequently referred to as the 'granddaddy' of happiness measures (Fordyce, 1988). These assertions are backed by Diener (1984), who discovered that among the 20 happiness and well-being measures examined, Fordyce's Happiness Measures exhibited the most robust correlations with daily affect and life satisfaction.

**Measurement of Motivation in Learning**

The Self-determination Theory (SDT) assesses three aspects of motivation in education: self-efficacy, active learning strategy, and achievement goals. Ryan and Deci (2000) explain that learners can be motivated internally or externally. Bandura and Ryan & Deci (2000) established four main dimensions that affect students' motivation, with at least one dimension needing satisfaction for motivation to occur. The survey used comprises 16 items to gauge motivation levels, employing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This study's reliability tests produced Cronbach alpha values of .829 for self-efficacy, .836 for active learning strategy, and .881 for achievement goals. SPSS version 29 was used to analyze the students' responses about their happiness and motivation in education. The initial data analysis aimed to determine the average levels of student happiness and motivation in education. Following this, the data underwent further examination for reliability, descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression to explore the connections between motivation in education and happiness.

#### 4. Results and Findings

Table 1 data reveals that among 105 respondents, 61.9 percent are female while 38.1 percent are male. The 21-25 age group comprises the highest proportion of respondents at 45.7 percent. In terms of ethnicity, Malay constitutes the largest group at 38.1 percent, followed by Chinese at 29.5 percent, Indian at 21 percent, and others at 11.4 percent.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile**

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE%
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	40	38.1
Female	65	61.9
<b>AGE</b>		
16-20	24	22.9
21-25	48	45.7
26-30	33	31.4
<b>RACE</b>		
Malay	40	38.1
Chinese	31	29.5
Indian	22	21
Others	12	11.4

In Table 2, it is evident from the reliability test results that all six constructs have values above 0.6, indicating satisfactory reliability. The study conducted an internal consistency reliability test to assess the reliability of each variable. The table presents the interpretation of reliability based on Cronbach's alpha with data from 105 respondents. The Cronbach's alpha for happiness yielded a value of .893, indicating suitability for eight questions. Similarly, the self-efficacy variable demonstrated promising reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of .829 for seven questions. Additionally, the active learning strategy showed a good result with a Cronbach's alpha of .836 for seven questions. The attainment goal showed a good result with a Cronbach alpha of .881 for eight questions.

**Table 2: Interpretation of reliability based on Cronbach's alpha for 105 respondents**

VARIABLE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	NO. OF ITEM	RESULT
Happiness	.893	8	Good
Self-efficacy	.829	7	Good
Active Learning Strategy	.836	7	Good
Attainment Goal	.881	8	Good

Table 3 presents the total mean score and standard deviation for each variable. The highest total mean score (M = 3.6583, SD = .74159) is for the attainment goal, followed by the active learning strategy (M = 3.5492, SD = .74569). In addition, the mean score for the happiness variable (M = 3.2037, SD = .86013) ranks third, and the self-efficacy variable (M = 2.9587, SD = .76961) has the lowest mean score among the variables.

**Table 3: Total of Mean Scores and Standard Deviation**

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Happiness	3.2037	.86013
Self-Efficacy	2.9587	.76961
Active Learning Strategy	3.5492	.74569
Attainment Goal	3.6583	.74159

Source: Primary data from IBM SPSS statistics V29

The results are outlined in Table 4, demonstrating a notable correlation at the 0.01 significance level (1-tailed) between the independent variables (self-efficacy, active learning strategy, and attainment goal) and the dependent variable (happiness). All the independent variables exhibit a positive connection with the dependent variable. Self-efficacy demonstrates a strong positive association with happiness ( $r=0.800$ ), and the association is statistically significant ( $p= 0.000, p< 0.05$ ), supporting the validation of H1, indicating a statistically significant positive association between self-efficacy and happiness in Malaysia. Similarly, the results indicate a moderate positive link between active learning strategy and happiness ( $r=0.659$ ), with a statistically significant association ( $p= 0.000, p< 0.05$ ), supporting the validation of H2, proposing a significant positive association between active learning strategy and happiness in Malaysia. Additionally, the attainment goal displays a strong positive correlation with happiness ( $r= 0.741$ ) and a statistically significant association ( $p= 0.000, p< 0.05$ ), confirming the validation of H3, a statistically significant positive association between the attainment goal and happiness in Malaysia.

**Table 4: Correlation Analysis**

		HAPPINESS	SELF-EFFICACY	ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGY	ATTAINMENT GOAL
Happiness	Pearson	1	.800**	.659**	.741**
	Correlation Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N		105	105	105

The R2 value of the model, as indicated in Table 5, is 0.74, suggesting that 74 percent of the variability in happiness can be attributed to the variations in self-efficacy, active learning strategy, and attainment goal. The remaining 26 percent can be explained by other factors. The model's F value stands at 80.189, with a significance level of ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a robust fit. It's worth noting that self-efficacy exhibits a significantly positive correlation with happiness ( $\beta=0.509, p<0.01$ ), thus providing support for H1. Similarly, an active learning strategy is positively linked to happiness ( $\beta=0.274, p<0.01$ ), supporting H2. Furthermore, the attainment goal shows a positive significant relationship with happiness ( $\beta=0.157, p<0.01$ ), hence supporting H3. These results affirm that the attainment of a goal is positively associated with happiness. To summarize, self-efficacy emerges as the most influential variable in determining happiness, with a significant relationship, whereas the attainment goal appears to have the least impact on happiness, but still maintains a crucial relationship with happiness.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis**

Independent variables ( $\beta$ )	Dependent Variable Usage
Self-Efficacy	.509*
Active Learning Strategy	.274*
Attainment Goal	.157*
F value R2	80.189**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.704
	0.696

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Discussion**

The results indicated a correlation between motivation in learning and happiness. As a result, this study has effectively achieved its goal of examining the strong and positive relationship between self-efficacy, active learning strategy, and achievement goals concerning happiness among individuals in Malaysia. This investigation illustrates that self-efficacy, active learning approach, and achievement goals play a significant role in influencing the happiness of university students from Generation Z. This suggests that higher levels of self-efficacy, active learning approach, and achievement goals are linked to greater perceived happiness. The research results are consistent with previous studies, indicating a significant and positive correlation between self-efficacy and happiness. Among Malaysian Generation Z students, self-efficacy has the most influence on



their happiness, as shown by regression analysis. This finding is in line with the conclusions of other researchers such as Hassan et.al (2022), Vania & Linda (2020), and Hubli et al (2024). Students who have a strong belief in their abilities are more likely to take on challenging tasks and demonstrate intrinsic motivation. They tend to exert a high level of effort to meet their responsibilities and attribute setbacks to factors within their control rather than external circumstances. Additionally, self-efficacious Generation Z students tend to recover quickly from failures and are more likely to achieve their goals.

The study found that active learning strategy has a significant and positive relationship with happiness, which is consistent with earlier research. This outcome is consistent with research by Torsak (2023), Fung & Tsz (2019), and Lam & Pratchayapun (2023). Any university activity that involves active learning is essential because it allows students of Generation Z to engage with the material rather than just passively absorbing it. Students perform better and achieve higher academic levels when given the chance to actively participate in the material they are studying. Grades or grade point averages (GPA) are frequently used to describe academic success. The Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) must be steady and maintained every semester to reach the maximum CGPA following the study semester. The courses taken at higher education institutions provide a wealth of instances of motivation in learning. Similar to subject reading, mastering math demands perseverance and active learning techniques. Intrinsically driven students are more likely than their counterparts to apply practical arithmetic strategies including visualizing, checking, and estimating. They also have a higher propensity to select deeper learning and performance strategies. If given the choice between an easier and a more challenging math problem, intrinsically driven students would choose the more complex problem because they enjoy challenges and want to push their subject-matter knowledge.

Consistent with previous studies, the study revealed that the attainment goal has a significant and positive relationship with happiness. This result is in line with other studies conducted by Jamilleh & Haedba (2022), and Hassanzadeh Galin (2023). Intrinsically driven students are more likely than their counterparts to apply practical arithmetic strategies including visualizing, checking, and estimating. They also have a higher propensity to select deeper learning and performance strategies. If given the choice between an easier and a more challenging math problem, for example, intrinsically driven students would choose the harder problem because they enjoy challenges and want to push their subject-matter knowledge. Those who invest a great deal of time and energy into their education will, in turn, experience great passion and satisfaction as they work toward their academic objectives each academic year. To be happy as a student would mean to be satisfied with one's obligations and responsibilities

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study also clarifies how providing extracurricular activities might enhance students' sense of self-worth, active learning approach, and satisfaction with goal attainment in higher education among Gen Z. Participating in extracurricular activities at higher education institutions allows students to broaden their social networks, discover new interests, and grow as leaders. Students can combine their academic knowledge with practical know-how and gain real-world experience through internships, student clubs and organizations, sports teams, and green environment programs. This can increase their level of self-efficacy, active learning strategy, and goal achievement. Furthermore, extracurricular activities and international programming promote student unity and collaboration. The present study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Motivation in learning associated with students' happiness is still unexplored, especially in Malaysian universities. To begin with, data was collected from students at a single university. Even though the sample was somewhat representative of the university's population, more study with a wider range of participants is required to ascertain whether the results apply to other student populations at other universities. Future research should include more faculties for the findings to apply to all of Malaysia's higher education institutions. Second, when students use the questionnaire answer strategy, it has less of an impact on the respondents' personal opinions. It is recommended that future studies include focus group interviews and a longitudinal study design to precisely identify the variables that influence happiness. Using these methods of improvement, the researchers can gain more insight into the self-efficacy, active learning strategy and attainment goal of each individual. This study, in particular, lacks mediators and mediating, which could result in diversity and positive outcomes. Lastly, to lend even more significance to the study, moderating and mediating variables should be incorporated into the framework.

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