



The Effect of Gratitude on the Happiness Levels of Students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication: A Study at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

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Abstract. Happiness serves as a fundamental pillar of university students' psychological well-being; yet, empirical investigations targeting cohorts within Islamic communication disciplines remain underrepresented in the literature. Addressing this knowledge gap, the present study quantified the impact of gratitude on happiness levels among undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Utilizing a quantitative predictive correlational design, data were gathered through Likert-scale questionnaires administered to a purposively sampled cohort of 100 active students spanning their 2nd, 4th, and 6th academic semesters. Simple linear regression executed via IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25.0) revealed a statistically significant positive effect of gratitude on student happiness ($p < .05$, $p = .000$). The regression equation, $Y = 18.419 + 0.492X$, indicates that each unit increase in gratitude corresponds to a 0.492-unit enhancement in happiness. Furthermore, an Adjusted R^2 value of .314 demonstrates that gratitude accounts for 31.4% of the variance in happiness levels, leaving the remaining 68.6% attributable to unexamined external variables. These empirical insights underscore gratitude as a viable psychological determinant of student happiness, offering actionable implications for higher education institutions to design targeted character-building initiatives and well-being interventions.

Keywords: Gratitude, student happiness, Islamic psychology, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

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Introduction

A university is a higher education institution whose students are referred to as undergraduates (Sedyati, 2022). As members of the academic community, students are expected to think critically and be quick to make appropriate and responsive decisions (Rahmawati & Gumiandari, 2021). These various demands often lead to stress—such as academic pressure, the need to adjust to new environments, and social responsibilities—which can affect students’ psychological well-being. One important psychological aspect to consider is happiness, as it is closely linked to pleasant actions and feelings. A person’s state of happiness can be influenced by various factors, including their levels of stress and fatigue. In positive psychology, happiness is not merely understood as a pleasant emotional state, but rather as the foundation for a meaningful, productive, and impactful life (Wirani & Ramli, 2025). Therefore, happiness serves as a key indicator for assessing an individual’s psychological well-being, particularly among students facing various academic and non-academic demands.

According to the theory proposed by Hills & Argyle (2002), happiness is composed of seven main components, including a positive mindset, a sense of self-confidence, a friendly attitude, life satisfaction, positive self-esteem, empathy, and well-being. These seven components indicate that happiness is not only related to the emergence of positive emotions but also encompasses how individuals view themselves, build relationships with others, and evaluate the overall quality of their lives. The concept of happiness is also frequently mentioned in the Qur’an as part of Islamic thought. Happiness is viewed as a state that is not only oriented toward worldly pleasures but is also related to closeness to Allah, gratitude, and peace of mind (Dewi & Hidayat, 2024). Thus, happiness in Islam is not only oriented toward the fulfillment of worldly aspects but also encompasses spiritual happiness and an orientation toward the afterlife. One of the verses that explains this concept is found in Surah Hud, verse 105:

يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلِّمُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۚ فَمِنْهُمْ شَقِيٌّ وَسَعِيدٌ

Meaning: “When that Day comes, no one will speak except with His permission; so among them will be those who are doomed and those who are blessed.”

This verse states that among humankind there are those who are doomed and those who are blessed, and that no one can speak except with Allah’s permission (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). According to Wahbah Az-Zuhaili’s Tafsir, the blessed are those who attain the pleasures of Paradise due to their faith and steadfastness in carrying out the commands of Allah, the Exalted, while the wretched are those who receive punishment as a result of their disbelief and disobedience. Wahbah Az-Zuhaili also explains that every human being is given the opportunity to choose their path in life through the deeds they perform. Those who consistently do good will be among the blessed, while those who choose evil will be among the wretched. Thus, happiness from an Islamic perspective is not merely understood as worldly happiness, but also as true happiness attained through faith, righteous deeds, and steadfastness in following the teachings of Allah SWT (Puspita, 2023).

One manifestation of this closeness is reflected in an attitude of gratitude—a state of mind that acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates every blessing bestowed by Allah SWT.

Through gratitude, a person becomes better able to see the positive side of every life event, including when facing various difficulties. This attitude can help individuals reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, while fostering optimism and life satisfaction. By being grateful for the blessings Allah SWT has bestowed, individuals will feel more content with what they have and will not easily focus on their shortcomings, thereby increasing their happiness in life (Wantini et al., 2023). Therefore, from an Islamic perspective, gratitude is viewed as one of the spiritual values that contribute to the attainment of happiness.

In Islamic teachings, happiness is understood as the opposite of poverty. Islam explicitly encourages its followers to continually strive for happiness in the hereafter, as stated in Allah SWT's admonition in Surah Al-Qasas, verse 77, which reminds people not to neglect life in this world (Dewi & Hidayat, 2024; Putri, 2018; Yunita, 2019). One value that plays a crucial role in achieving this happiness is gratitude. Gratitude encourages individuals to appreciate every blessing they receive, to view life's various events more positively, and to maintain inner peace when facing difficulties. Thus, individuals with a high level of gratitude tend to be better able to sustain happiness compared to those who are less grateful (Hemarajareswari & Gupta, 2021).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between happiness and gratitude, with similar findings. The results of Anabella's (2022) study revealed that gratitude accounts for 24.4% of the happiness of psychology students at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Bandung, with a regression coefficient of .646. Another study by Mujidin et al. (2021) showed that gratitude contributed 47.6% to students' happiness. Unlike the two previous studies, the study by Fatmala & Sari (2022) found that gratitude has a significant and beneficial effect on students' psychological well-being. Although both concepts are related to positive psychological functions, psychological well-being has a broader scope because it encompasses aspects of self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, life purpose, personal growth, environmental mastery, and independence. Therefore, these findings do not directly explain the relationship between gratitude and happiness. A study (Hemarajareswari & Gupta, 2021) found that college students with high levels of gratitude have higher levels of pleasure and psychological well-being.

Although these various studies indicate that gratitude is linked to students' happiness and psychological well-being, most of the research has been conducted on students in general or within specific contexts, such as psychology students at UIN Bandung, students during the COVID-19 pandemic, or student populations without specific academic characteristics. To date, research specifically examining the relationship between gratitude and happiness among students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Sumatera Utara remains very limited. Students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication have distinct characteristics compared to students in other faculties because, in addition to facing academic demands, they are also expected to possess skills in da'wah, interpersonal communication, public speaking, community outreach, and to embody Islamic values in their daily lives. These various demands have the potential to create academic and social pressures that can affect students' psychological well-being and levels of happiness.

Thus, there remains an empirical gap that requires further study regarding how gratitude contributes to happiness among students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at

UIN Sumatera Utara. Based on the above discussion, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between gratitude and happiness among students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Sumatera Utara. This study is expected to provide an empirical contribution to enriching the field of positive psychology, particularly regarding the relationship between gratitude and happiness among students in an Islamic-based university setting.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach, which is a research method that emphasizes the use of numerical data and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and measure relationships between variables. The research design used is a predictive correlational design, aimed at analyzing the relationship between variables and the ability of the gratitude variable to predict the level of happiness among students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Sumatera Utara. Data collection was conducted through a survey using a questionnaire, with the independent and dependent variables measured simultaneously at a single point in time (cross-sectional).

Participants

The population for this study consisted of students at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UIN Sumatera Utara, numbering approximately 800 students. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error, resulting in a minimum sample size of 89 respondents. However, in practice, this study collected data from 100 respondents who met the criteria; therefore, all of this data was used in the analysis. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) active students at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UIN Sumatera Utara; (2) enrolled in the 2nd, 4th, or 6th semester; (3) aged 19–22 years; and (4) willing to participate as research respondents. Students in their second, fourth, and sixth semesters were selected because they already had sufficient academic and social experience in a university setting.

Participant Recruitment Procedure

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, which involves selecting a sample based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives—in this case, currently enrolled students in their 2nd, 4th, and 6th semesters at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UIN Sumatera Utara, who were willing to complete the research questionnaire.

Before completing the questionnaire, prospective respondents were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and benefits, the questionnaire completion procedure, assurances regarding the confidentiality of respondent data, and the respondents' right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without any consequences. Willingness to participate was confirmed through the respondents' informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. All data collected were used solely for academic research purposes.

Research Instrument

Data collection in this study utilized a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure the variables of gratitude

and happiness. The research instrument is based on theories developed by experts and adapted to the research objectives.

Table 1. Research Instrument

Variables	Basic theory	Indicators/Aspects Measured	Amount Item
Gratitude	<i>Gratitude Questionnaire</i>	<i>Sense of Abundance, Appreciation of Others,</i>	12
	McCullough, Emmons & Tsang (2002)	<i>Simple Appreciation, Gratitude in Daily Experiences</i>	
Happiness	Diener (Diener et al., 2002; Rulangi et al., 2021)	<i>Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, Negative Affect</i>	12

The gratitude instrument was adapted from the Gratitude Questionnaire developed by McCullough et al. (2002), while the happiness instrument was adapted based on the concept of happiness proposed by Diener et al. (2002); Diener & Tay (2015). Both instruments were adapted to the research context and used to measure the variables of gratitude and happiness among students at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UIN Sumatera Utara. Before being used in the study, the instruments were tested for validity and reliability. The results of the validity and reliability tests are presented in the research results section.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0. The analysis began with validity and reliability tests to evaluate the instruments. After the instruments were deemed valid and reliable, classical assumption tests—including normality and linearity tests—were performed as prerequisites for regression analysis. Next, the data were analyzed using simple linear regression to determine the effect of gratitude on happiness. Hypothesis testing was conducted based on the significance values of the regression analysis results, while the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to determine the extent of the contribution of the gratitude variable to the happiness variable.

Results

This study was conducted to examine the extent to which gratitude affects the happiness of students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Sumatera Utara, involving 100 participants from the Islamic Guidance and Counseling, Da'wah Management, Islamic Broadcasting Communication, and Islamic Community Development programs who met the research criteria. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0, yielding the descriptive statistics presented below.

Table 2. Description of Research Results

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gratitude	100	14	96	50.44	8.752
Happiness	100	14	60	43.23	7.62
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Based on Table 2, the gratitude variable had a minimum score of 14, a maximum score of 96, a mean of 50.44, and a standard deviation of 8.752. Meanwhile, the happiness variable had a minimum score of 14, a maximum score of 60, a mean of 43.23, and a standard deviation of 7.62. Next, validity and reliability tests were conducted on the research instrument before data analysis was performed.

Instrument Validity

The validity test aims to assess the ability of each statement item in the research instrument to accurately represent the measured variables. The level of validity in this study was verified using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation method processed through the SPSS application.

Table 3. Validity Test Results

Variables	Item	r count	Information
Gratitude	1	.543	Valid
	2	.620	Valid
	3	.657	Valid
	4	.594	Valid
	5	.674	Valid
	6	.626	Valid
	7	.647	Valid
	8	.588	Valid
	9	.702	Valid
	10	.657	Valid
	11	.661	Valid
	12	.630	Valid
Happiness	1	.544	Valid
	2	.497	Valid
	3	.571	Valid
	4	.415	Valid
	5	.559	Valid
	6	.550	Valid
	7	.415	Valid
	8	.535	Valid
	9	.501	Valid
	10	.509	Valid
	11	.552	Valid
	12	.566	Valid

Based on the results of the validity test using Pearson's product-moment correlation, all items in the gratitude and happiness variables had calculated *r* values greater than the critical *r* value (0.196), so all items were deemed valid. Therefore, the instrument used was deemed appropriate and suitable for measuring the gratitude variable in this study.

Instrument Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the level of consistency of the research instrument. An instrument is considered reliable if it has a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.70. The results of the instrument reliability test are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Results of the Reliability Test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Gratitude	0.920	Reliable
Happiness	0.879	Reliable

Based on Table 4, the gratitude instrument obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.920, while the happiness instrument obtained a value of 0.879. Both values are above the minimum threshold of 0.70; therefore, the instruments are deemed to have good reliability and are suitable for use in this study.

Classical Assumption Tests

Normality Test

As a step to evaluate the distribution of residuals in the regression model, a normality test was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which serves to confirm whether the residual data are normally distributed.

Table 5. Results of the Normality Test

	Kolmogrov Smirnov			Shapiro- Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total X	.172	100	.000	.859	100	.000
Total Y	.091	100	.041	.952	100	.001
Unstandardized Residual	.076	100	.173	.971	100	.024

Based on the table above, the significance value for the unstandardized residual is 0.173, which exceeds the threshold of 0.05. This finding confirms that the residuals are normally distributed. Although the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a significance value of $0.024 < 0.05$, the interpretation of normality in this study refers to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov results because the sample size reached 100 respondents. Therefore, the assumption of normality of the residuals in the regression model is deemed to have been met, allowing the simple linear regression analysis to proceed.

Linearity Test

Before proceeding to the regression analysis stage, a linearity test was conducted to ensure a linear relationship between gratitude as the independent variable and happiness as the dependent variable. The test results showed a significance value for linearity of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the assumption of linearity is met. Therefore, the effect of gratitude on the happiness of students at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, UIN North Sumatra, can be further analyzed using simple linear regression.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the effect of gratitude on students' happiness. The results of the analysis yielded the following regression equation: $Y = 18.419 + 0.492X$, where X represents the level of gratitude and Y represents the level of students' happiness.

Table 6. Results of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	(Constant)	18,419	3,702		4,975
	Total X	0,492	0,72	0,586	6,801

A regression model was used to test the effect of gratitude on happiness:

$$Y = a + bX$$

Information: Y = happiness; X = gratitude; a = constant; b = coefficient of influence

The regression coefficient (b) shows the direction and magnitude of the influence.

Based on the analysis results, a constant value of 18.419 was obtained, indicating that when the gratitude variable is zero, the happiness value is predicted to be 18.419. Meanwhile, the regression coefficient of 0.492 indicates that every one unit increase in gratitude is

predicted to increase happiness by 0.492 units. In addition, the standardized beta coefficient value of 0.566 indicates that gratitude has a positive relationship with a moderate to strong level of relationship strength on student happiness. The *t*-test result of 6.801 with a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05) indicates that gratitude has a positive and significant effect on student happiness.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine whether gratitude influences students' happiness. The alternative hypothesis (H_1) states that gratitude influences students' happiness, while the null hypothesis (H_0) states that gratitude does not influence students' happiness.

Table 7. Results of the Hypothesis Test

Model	B	t	Sig.
Constant	18,419	4,975	0,000
Gratitude (Total X)	0,492	6,801	0,000

As shown in the test table above, the significance value for the gratitude variable, 0.000, is below the threshold of 0.05. This indicates that gratitude has a positive and significant effect on students' levels of happiness; therefore, H_1 is accepted while H_0 is rejected. This means that an increase in students' gratitude correlates with an increase in their perceived levels of happiness.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The extent to which gratitude contributes to explaining the variation in happiness can be determined through the coefficient of determination. For example, $R^2 = .40$ means that 40% of happiness is influenced by gratitude. Table 8. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Results

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std, Error Estimate
.566	.321	.314	6.928

Based on the table above, gratitude's contribution to student happiness was recorded at 31.4%, based on the coefficient of determination (Adjusted R-Square) of .314. Meanwhile, 68.6% of the variation in happiness is influenced by other factors not examined in this study, such as social support, religiosity, optimism, life satisfaction, environmental conditions, interpersonal relationships, and other psychological factors. Thus, although gratitude has a positive and significant effect on student happiness, happiness is also influenced by various other factors outside the scope of this study's model.

Discussion

The results show that student happiness has a positive influence on the happiness of students in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN North Sumatra. This is evidenced by the regression equation $Y = 18.419 + 0.492 X$ and a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that a one-unit increase in gratitude is predicted to increase happiness by 0.492 units. These findings indicate that the higher the students' sense of gratitude, the higher their level of happiness. This suggests that gratitude is not merely an emotional

response to pleasant experiences but also a way for individuals to view and interpret various life experiences more positively.

These results align with positive psychology theory, which identifies gratitude as one of the character strengths that contribute to a meaningful and fulfilling life. According to Seligman et al. (2005), gratitude is an awareness of and appreciation for the good things that happen in life and is classified as one of the “strengths of the heart,” which are strongly linked to life satisfaction. In line with this, Zhang et al. (2026) state that gratitude is a quality and psychological resource capable of enhancing psychological well-being through the emergence of positive emotions, such as joy, satisfaction, and enthusiasm, as well as strengthening interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Watkins, Woodward, Stone, et al., as cited in Dinanti & Mangundjaya (2023), explain that gratitude can increase happiness and self-satisfaction, help individuals manage life’s stresses, recall positive experiences, and reduce feelings of distress. Thus, gratitude not only influences an individual’s emotional state but also strengthens the quality of social relationships, which ultimately contributes to increased happiness (Loi & Ng, 2021; Yoo, 2020).

This aligns with the concept of happiness also proposed by Seligman, namely that happiness is achieved through the process of recognizing, developing, and optimizing the strengths that individuals possess in their daily lives (Seligman et al., 2005). This means that happiness is not merely understood as the emergence of a fleeting feeling of joy, but rather as the result of an individual’s engagement in positive activities that reflect virtuous values. From an Islamic perspective, this concept aligns with the thought of Al-Attas, who explains that happiness (sa’ādah) is not only related to worldly life (dunyawiyyah) but also encompasses happiness in the hereafter (ukhrawiyyah) as the highest form of Allah’s mercy (Arroisi et al., 2023). Therefore, happiness in Islam is viewed as a state that arises from closeness to Allah SWT, gratitude for His blessings, and the practice of virtuous values in daily life.

When applied to the context of college students, gratitude also serves as a psychological mechanism that helps students cope with various academic and social demands during their college years. Students are often faced with pressures such as heavy course loads, academic goals, organizational demands, and concerns about the future. In such circumstances, students who possess a sense of gratitude tend to be better able to accept their circumstances, appreciate the process they are going through, and view every challenge as an opportunity for growth. Conversely, students who lack a sense of gratitude are more likely to focus on the various difficulties they face, making them vulnerable to stress, dissatisfaction, and a decline in well-being (Fuad, 2017; Pitaloka & Ediati, 2015).

The findings of this study also support various previous studies that indicate a positive relationship between gratitude and happiness. Hoirunnisa’s (2026) study found that gratitude has a positive and significant effect on happiness. Similar results were also reported by Prabowo & Laksmiwati (2020), who demonstrated a very strong positive relationship between gratitude and happiness among college students ($r = 0.859$; $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, research by Dinanti & Mangundjaya (2023) revealed that students with high levels of gratitude tend to experience greater happiness, are better able to manage stress during their studies, have higher self-satisfaction, and view various life experiences more positively.

However, different results were found by Melinda & Kartasasmita (2025), who stated that gratitude does not directly influence the happiness of senior-year students. This discrepancy is thought to be influenced by the characteristics of the respondents, as senior students face academic pressure, the demands of completing their final projects, and more complex psychological conditions; consequently, their happiness is more heavily influenced by other factors, such as academic success, social support, and the ability to manage stress. Thus, the findings of this study further reinforce the notion that gratitude is one of the psychological factors contributing to students' happiness, although the extent of its influence may vary depending on the respondents' characteristics, the environment, and other accompanying factors (Rulangi et al., 2021; Sari, 2022).

In line with this, the coefficient of determination, as reflected by the Adjusted R-Square value of .314, indicates that the gratitude variable accounts for 31.4% of the variation in student happiness, while the remaining 68.6% is attributed to other variables outside the scope of this study. These factors include academic success, mental health, economic factors, the environment, and social support. Therefore, in addition to focusing on fostering a sense of gratitude, efforts aimed at increasing student happiness must also address other contributing factors.

Novelty of the Research

This study is novel because it examines the relationship between gratitude and happiness among students at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN North Sumatra, a topic that has rarely been the focus of research. Unlike previous studies conducted on college students in general, this study involves students with academic characteristics oriented toward da'wah, Islamic communication, and character development based on Islamic values, thereby enriching the field of positive psychology within the context of Islamic higher education.

Implications and Contributions

In practical terms, the results of this study indicate that fostering a sense of gratitude can be one strategy for enhancing students' happiness. Therefore, universities can integrate the cultivation of gratitude into character-building programs, counseling services, self-development training, and the reinforcement of spiritual values within the learning process.

Research Limitations

Furthermore, this study has limitations, namely that it involved only students from the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN North Sumatra, examined only one independent variable, and used a questionnaire that relied on respondents' perceptions. Therefore, future research is recommended to include a broader sample, incorporate other variables that may influence happiness, and combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, gratitude was found to have a positive and significant effect on students' happiness. The regression equation obtained— $Y = 18.419 + .492X$ —indicates that a one-unit increase in gratitude will lead to a .492-unit increase in

students' happiness. This is supported by a significance value of .000, which is well below the .05 threshold. Furthermore, the Adjusted R-Square value of .314 indicates that gratitude accounts for 31.4% of the variation in student happiness, while the remaining 68.6% is influenced by other factors beyond the scope of this study's model. Thus, although there are other aspects that need to be considered, gratitude plays an important role in enhancing student happiness.

Author Contributions

The first author, PA, is a student who designed and conducted this research, including developing the research question, collecting data, analyzing data, and drafting the scientific article for publication. The second author, NR, is a faculty member who directed and guided the first author in the preparation and writing of the manuscript—covering both technical aspects and content—until the manuscript was approved for publication.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, writing, and/or publication of this article.

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