

Mediating Role of Social Self-efficacy in linking Positive Thinking to Satisfaction with Life among First Year University Students

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Abstract

Objectives. Present study was an attempt to examine how positive thinking among university freshers helps them to deal with challenges related to new setup and have an impact on their life satisfaction through social self-efficacy. Furthermore, it explores how changing one's thoughts about different perspective into positive ones overcoming challenges of life becomes easier, consequently, people feel socially strong and satisfied with life.

Method. In the present study, total 480 (Boys=218 Girls=262) newly admitted students in undergraduate programs from Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan with age range of 17-22 years ($M=18.57$ & $SD=.835$) participated. Participants responded on Life Oriented Test- Revised [LOT-R (Scheier et al., 1994)], Social Self-Efficacy Scale [SSES (Muris, 2001)] and Satisfaction with Life Scale [SWLS (Diener et al., 1985)] respectively. Data analyses consisted of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and linear regression by utilizing SPSS (25.0) whereas Process Macro 3.5.0 was used to verify mediation model.

Results. Findings indicated that positive thinking does not predict satisfaction with life directly whereas it significantly predicts social self-efficacy ($B= 0.45, p < 0.001$) and social self-efficacy predicts satisfaction with life ($B= 0.23, p < 0.001$). Thus, results showed that social self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship of positive thinking with satisfaction in life among students.

Conclusion. Social self-efficacy has been found as an imperative facet of students' life so it should be considered while designing curricula and other activities related to students.

Keywords. *Positive thinking, satisfaction with life, social self-efficacy, university freshers.*



Introduction

Thoughts are autonomous in nature; either negative or positive, they influence each individual differently. Positive thinking leads to attainment, happiness and life satisfaction (Wilson, 2017). Chang (et al., 2019) identified that thinking with positivity or even its influence can enhance an individual's life satisfaction. Positivity boosts an individual's ability to perceive a situation through different perspectives, thus enabling a person to deal with stressors (Naseem & Khalid, 2010). Moreover, it also lessens academic burnout and stress (Barkhordi et al. 2010). Positive thinking effectively fades negative actions in academic settings among newly enrolled students; it also decreases academic burnout and further negative hitches (Fandokht et al., 2014).

General self-efficacy is found having an impact on life satisfaction of the students (Azizli et al., 2015). Students having high self-efficacy are competent to plan advanced objectives in life which allow to attain goals and heightened satisfaction with life (Aydm & Cos, 2011). Life satisfaction promotes a person's health emotionally and behaviourally (Proctor et al., 2008). Researchers found association between problem solving styles and life satisfaction in University students (Khan et al., 2016). It was concluded through another finding that higher levels of life satisfaction helped in heightened emotional intelligence while lower life satisfaction led to low emotional intelligence (Cazan & Năstasă, 2015). Ayoobiyan and Soleimani (2015) observed that students' decree about beliefs related to their own self influenced their academic behavior and performance.

Positive thinking is a mental and emotional process which helps to motivate a person for fronting new challenges in life with a positive attitude (Wilson, 2017). Barnett and Martinez's (2015) revealed that past thoughts associated with optimism and pessimism influence future. According to Cheikh (2017), positive thinking intensifies students' motivation and boosts their wisdom and capability. Thinking in positive configuration is advantageous because it precedes to future positive outlooks (Scheier & Carver, 1993) and also strengthens positive bonding, upturns self-esteem or self-efficacy and improves students' academic enactment (Pourrazavi & Hafezian, 2017).

Social self-efficacy is demarcated as a person's self-reliance on ones' own competencies to engage in social actions and enhanced interactions (Smith & Betz, 2000). Self-efficacy is a vital component which when considered beneath educational situations would stimulate the academic achievement and associates with academic motivation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). It is also found positively associated with novice performances (Hannon, 2014). It is observed that high level of academic self-efficacy in students would enrich academic achievements, augment concentration and higher grades (Maddux, 2016).

Krumrei-Mancuso (et al., 2013) examined academic self-efficacy and concluded that it was positively correlated with the GPA of earliest semester however 1st semester GPA acted as a mediator between psychosocial dynamics and GPA of last semester, whereas, satisfaction with life was predicted by psychosocial dynamics. It was also observed that social connectedness; self-esteem and career success were associated with psychological well-being (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Findings indicated that positive affect and well-being boost life success and satisfaction (Leung et al. 2011). Bordwine and Huebner (2010), explored through Fredrickson's theory the role of coping in mediating the association between positive affect and adolescents' school satisfaction and the results demonstrated that positivity in students supplemented life satisfaction and work as coping strategies. Another study revealed that female students have more problem-solving styles adaptation which leads to satisfaction in life as compared to male students (Khan et al., 2016)

Present study explored the impact of positive thinking with social self-efficacy that affects the academic quality, students' knowledge and capabilities. Social self-efficacy worked as a mediator between the relationship in positive thinking and satisfaction with life. It also emphasised on the significance of positive thinking in newly enrolled students' life as it aimed at examining the relationship between positive thinking and satisfaction with life among newly inducted University students. Moreover, it focused on investigating mediating role of social self-efficacy in linking positive thinking with life satisfaction.

On the basis of literature review, the following model was devised to explain hypotheses of the study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

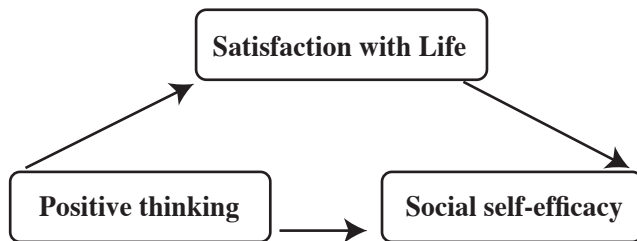


Figure 1. Illustrates the mediating role of social self-efficacy between the relationship of positive thinking and satisfaction with life. There is a significant relationship among social self-efficacy, positive thinking and satisfaction in life. Social self-efficacy mediates in linking positive thinking on satisfaction in life among first year University students.

Method

Sample

Study sample consisted of four hundred and eighty ($N=480$) freshly admitted students in Arts & Social Sciences Departments of Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan. Sample size was calculated through online A-priori statistics calculator for structure equation modelling (Soper, 2019) in which effect size was 0.2 with 0.8 desired statistical power level at 0.05 probability. Further number of latent variable is 1 and number of observed variables is 2. The minimum sample size calculated to detect effect was four hundred ($N=400$), which with 20% attrition rate 480. Participants were 218 male and 262 female students. Participants' age ranged between 17 to 22 years ($M=18.57$ & $SD=.835$).

Sample was approached through multistage random sampling. Participants were enrolled in 4 Year BS program in eight departments of faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan. Total students enrolled in 8 departments were 625 while calculated sample size was 480. Afterword's proportionate sample for each department was calculated through $n/N*100$.

Study design and measurement of variables. Present study aimed at investigating how social self-efficacy of undergraduate students play a role in linking positive thinking to satisfaction with life. For this, on standardized questionnaires, data was collected that is quantitative in nature. While participants belong to different age ages and demographic characteristics, therefore present study employs cross sectional research design and sample was approached through Survey method for data collection.

Life Orientation Test –Revised. The instrument was applied in the present study to examine the positive thinking patters (optimism) in first year university students. It contains ten items examining the optimism and pessimism (LOT-R- Scheier et al., 1994). In this scale, three items phrased positively (1,4, & 10) measure optimism; three reverse coded items (3, 7 & 9) measure pessimism while remaining four (2, 5, 6, & 8) act as fillers of the fillers which were not scored. The response rate of items lies in zero to four point Likert scale where zero stands for strongly disagree while four means strongly agree. Internal consistency for optimism for the present study was 0.79.

Social Self-Efficacy Scale. The instrument was applied to examine students' social self-efficacy (SSES- Muris, 2001). It consists of eight items which examine self-assessment of young people through which their abilities to negotiate in social situations, their involvement and other interactions in society are revealed. The respondent responses scored from one to five where 1 as not very well to 5 as very well. All items scores have to be summed together to get the final score of each respondent. Not any item in this scale needs a reverse scoring. Internal consistency of 0.82 was computed for the current study.

Satisfaction with Life Scale. The instrument examines level of satisfaction in respondent's life (SWLS- Diener et al., 1985). It contains five items which are self-report in nature. The scoring range of this tool lies from one to seven where 1 is strongly disagree response to 7 that is strongly agree response. Total points the instrument ranges are from 5-35. Computed alpha is 0.87 for the present study.

Procedure

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences consisted on 16 departments. Researcher decided to approach 50% departments for data collection to approach the representative sample. On first stage, a list of departments was prepared and through online random number generator (www.randomization.com) 8 departments were selected. On second stage, selected departmental admin offices were contacted to take lists of students enrolled in 1st semester of 4-year BS program. Among 8 departments, 5 departments have Morning and Evening both programs while 3 departments have only morning programs.

Present study was approved by the Board of Studies, Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. For approaching students, prior permission was collected through Departmental Heads. Afterwards, a booklet containing Life orientation test, social self-efficacy scale and satisfaction with life scale along with demographic sheet was provided to participants.

Results

Keeping in view the main objectives of the study, results are presented in this section. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the data.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of sample (N=480)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	% age	M (SD)
Age				18.57 (0.83)
Gender	Male	218	45.4	
	Female	262	54.6	
Subject	Economics	84	17.5	
	Education	75	15.6	
	Communication Studies	80	16.7	
	Anthropology	65	13.5	
	Applied Psychology	62	12.9	
	Gender studies	43	9.0	
	International Relation	34	7.1	
	Sociology	37	7.7	
Program	Morning	294	61.3	
	Evening	186	38.7	
Attending University	Day Scholars	182	58.7	
	Hostelites	198	41.3	

Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the study participants. It depicts that composition of sample was 45.4% male and 54.6% female first year university students enrolled in undergraduate degree program in various departments of the faculty of social science. Among them, 61.3% were enrolled in morning program while 38.7% got admission in evening program. Moreover, 58.7% first year students were day scholars while 41.3% students were residing in hostels.

Table 2

Inter correlation among study variables (N = 480)

Variables	1	2	3
Optimism	1	.21**	.038
Social Self Efficacy		1	.19*
Satisfaction with life			1

P<0.05*

Table-2 shows that there is a significant relationship between optimism (positive thinking), and social self-efficacy ($r=0.219$; $p<0.05$); whereas optimism (positive thinking) is not correlated to satisfaction with life ($r=0.038$; $p>0.05$). Moreover, it indicates a significant positive correlation between social self-efficacy and satisfaction with life ($r=0.195$; $p<0.05$).

Table 3

Mediation and Indirect effects (N = 480)

	SSE		Opt-SSE-SWL				Indirect effect of M				
	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		Indirect effect	SE	95% CI		
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE			LL	UL	
Age	0.267	0.25	0.57	0.31	0.64	0.32	SSE	.106*	0.03	0.04	0.19
Gender	-0.02	0.43	0.26	0.53	0.26	0.54					
Opt	0.45***	0.09	-0.02	0.11	0.077	0.11					
SSE					0.23***	0.05					
F	8.39***		1.52		5.54***						
R ²	0.05		0.009		0.044						

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. (Opt: Optimism; SSE: Social Self-efficacy; SWL: Satisfaction with Life; CI, confidence interval; LLCI, lower level confidence interval; SE, standard error; ULCI, upper level confidence interval).

Figure 2. Mediation Model

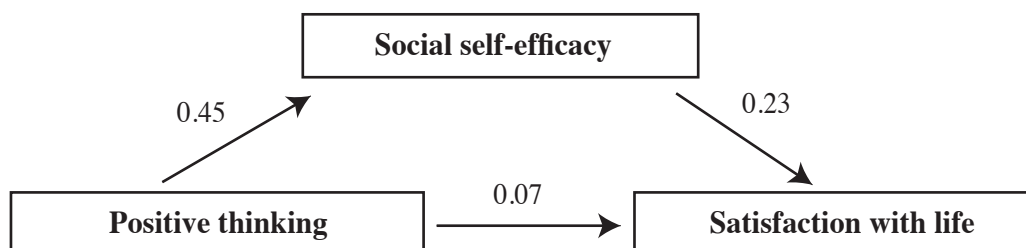


Table 3 shows the testament of mediation model which indicates indirect effect of optimism on satisfaction with life among first year university student through social self-efficacy. The model was tested in three stages. In first step, after controlling the age and gender, there was statistically significant effect of optimism (positive thinking) on social self-efficacy ($B=0.45, p < 0.001$). In step, 2, the effect of optimism (positive thinking) on the satisfaction with life was statistically insignificant ($B= -0.02, p > 0.05$). While, in last step, both optimism (positive thinking) and social self-efficacy were used as inputs, results indicate that social self-efficacy had a statistically significant effect on the satisfaction with life ($B= 0.23, p < 0.001$) thus, full mediation model is evident through results in which optimism (positive thinking) increases the satisfaction with life through social self-efficacy among first year undergraduate university students.

Discussion

The present study was aimed to explore the impact of positive thinking on life satisfaction where social self-efficacy worked as a mediator. It has been found in results that there is a significant relationship among optimism (positive thinking), social self-efficacy and satisfaction with life i.e. there is a positive correlation between social self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. Also, social self-efficacy and optimism are positively correlated. It was assumed that satisfaction with life will be found having significant relationship with optimism in freshly admitted students' campus life but contrary to this the results in Table 2 show that optimism has insignificant relationship to satisfaction with life in students while optimism and social self-efficacy significantly related to satisfaction with life in students. In the present study, positive thinking or optimism has been found placing significant impact on various aspects of individuals' life but it has not been found significantly effecting one's satisfaction with life. Whereas, in a study of 211 college students, interpersonal and life satisfaction in relation to optimism/ positivity was analysed.

Afterwards individual hierarchical regression analyses were performed, and it was concluded that positivity/ optimism was an important predictor of both academic and interpersonal life gratification among college students (Chang, 1998).

The results in the present study showed no such relationship between optimism and satisfaction with life as the previous literature has shown that life satisfaction leads to positive emotions and positive orientation of thoughts among people (Sanchez & Vazquez, 2014). The findings do not contradict the study's hypothesis and have shown strong relationship between social self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. Therefore, impact of social self-efficacy was prominent on the life satisfaction in university students who were freshly admitted (Jhang, 2019).

A study has found that self-efficacy had a strong relationship with satisfaction in life and academic achievements among students (Doménech-Betoret et al. 2017). Present research further explored social self-efficacy as a mediator between positive thinking and satisfaction with life. As from the Table 3 of results section that presented the pathway model, has illustrated that social self-efficacy has a significant role in mediating positive thinking (optimism) and life satisfaction in students. In another study, positive affectivity encouraged positive emotions which led to higher life satisfaction in college students of China (Chang et al., 2019). Therefore, it can be stated that all three research variables were inter linked where one variable correlated with the other and social self-efficacy acted as a mediator (Beiranvand, et al., 2019; Kim, Kim, Hwang, & Lee, 2020)

Conclusion

The present study therefore found strong association among positive thinking towards social self-efficacy and showed insignificance when was correlated with positive thinking and life satisfaction. There was significant impact of social self-efficacy on satisfaction with life. Moreover, it also explored mediation of social self-efficacy. Findings clearly explain more of the positivity in thinking leads to higher stage of social self-efficacy.

Students completely concentrate on everything that occur in their surroundings, thus satisfaction with life is higher when correlated with social self-efficacy positively. Positive thinking and satisfaction with life have been found insignificant in their association among students. Therefore, social self- efficacy reveals higher levels of satisfaction with life instead of positive thinking among first year Social sciences university students of Bahauddin Zakariya University. It also signifies the impact of positive thinking, how it changes the way people look around. With positivity, students will become enough competent into social interactions that will lead their life satisfaction.

Limitations

The present study has few limitations including the sample of the current study was limited to few Departments of the university which are part of the only one faculty i.e. social sciences. Therefore, study findings cannot be generalized for all the University students due to scarce approach of sample. Moreover, psychological variables were examined only among first year university students of under graduate degree program. It also relied on the context and settings of students from a single institute of Pakistan restricted to Social Sciences Departments.

Future recommendations and Implications

After completed the analysis, findings indicated some recommendations regarding the future studies and also study implications are described as follows: The recommendation for future studies is to expand scope and focus of the study by adding some other variables like academic achievement, GPA effect, etc. It would be important to collect authentic data from participants as present study consisted of self-report measures and have some biasness or subjectivity of the participants. Future studies must consider the training or workshops of students before measuring the variables for understanding of the change in them. It would contain some positive skills training and some other motivational training that may help students to boost their efficacy in University and will have an impact on their life satisfaction.

The present study showed significant link between satisfaction with life and social self-efficacy which provides information regarding social connection and communication of students. It also provides direction for the betterment of students regarding their academic achievements. It is also recommended that future study must consider more participants as the sample n the present study was limited because of which the generalization of results was not prominently higher.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets of the current study are available from the corresponding authors on reasonable request.

Authors' contribution

RA: Conceptualization of the work; Reviewing and finalizing draft, statistical analysis; ZNH: Data collection; Write-up for Initial draft; SM: Write up for final draft; AN: Proof reading and formatting; MS: Reviewing write-up for final draft

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Present study was approved by the Board of Studies, Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Written consent was obtained from all participants.

Competing interests

The authors declare to have no competing interests.

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