

Profiling Student's Subjective Well-Being in the Elementary School Context

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Abstract

Students' happiness and life satisfaction can be measured through subjective well-being. Many elementary schools do not have counselors or guidance and counseling teachers, resulting in the development of students' subjective well-being not being conducted professionally or optimally. This study aimed to determine the level of subjective well-being among elementary school students. This study employed a non-experimental design using a survey method. The research participants consisted of 386 elementary school students aged 10–12 years. Data were collected using the context-free multi-item psychometric scale CW-SWBS. Instrument validity was examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .972. The results showed that the subjective well-being of students was predominantly in the high category, with 297 students (76.9%), and differences were observed based on gender and age according to descriptive statistical analysis. Eleven-year-old male students demonstrated higher levels of subjective well-being. These findings indicate that the subjective well-being of elementary school students is generally ideal, although variations exist according to demographic factors. This study contributes to strengthening the understanding of the importance of subjective well-being as a foundation for guidance and counseling services in elementary schools, particularly as a promotive and preventive effort to support students' emotional and social development.

1. Introduction

Happiness in life is a dream of every individual. In general, happiness can be indicated by an individual's level of life well-being (Oishi *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, individuals continually strive to achieve well-being in their lives. In psychological studies, happiness is often associated with subjective well-being, a psychological term used to describe individuals' evaluations of their happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Llamas Díaz *et al.*, 2022). Subjective well-being refers to individuals' evaluations of their lives and their level of satisfaction with life experiences (Diener & Chan, 2011). Sirgy (2012) stated that subjective well-being consists of three main components: overall life satisfaction, emotional well-being encompassing affective and hedonic aspects, and eudaimonia, which associated with self-actualization and a sense of meaning in life. Each individual has different levels of subjective well-being and personality characteristics, which emerge early in life and tend to remain relatively stable throughout development (E. & Diener, 2009). This is supported by Pluess (2015), who suggested that approximately 30–40% of the variance in subjective well-being is attributable to genetic factors.

Diener and Chan (2011) explained that individuals with high levels of subjective well-being tend to experience greater life satisfaction, fewer negative emotions, demonstrate optimism, and more frequently experience positive emotions. These conditions have a positive impact on both physical and mental health and even contribute to longer life expectancy. In contrast, low levels of subjective well-being can negatively affect various aspects of an individual's life.

Research on subjective well-being among students in rural areas remains relatively limited. However, patterns of subjective well-being in childhood are closely related to adaptive abilities and are influenced by various factors, including surrounding environment, school, and peers (Kammerman *et al.*, 2010). Satisfaction with peer relationships, a sense of acceptance within the school environment, enjoyment of the learning process, and perceptions of one's own ability to complete tasks are key factors shaping students' overall satisfaction with school. When students feel competent, enjoy learning activities, and maintain positive social relationships, their subjective well-being tends to be higher, while negative experiences in both social and academic domains may

diminish subjective well-being at school, underscoring the importance of a supportive school environment in promoting the psychological well-being of all students (Goldan, Nusser, & Gebel, 2022; Steinmayr, Paschke, & Wirthwein, 2022).

Children's subjective well-being is the result of their cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives, including life experiences and the conditions of their living environments. (Savahl *et al.*, 2019). The environment surrounding individuals plays a crucial role in influencing subjective well-being, as most life experiences occur within this environmental context (Marans & Stimson, 2011; Wong *et al.*, 2024). Casas and Rees (2015) stated that children's subjective well-being is reflected in their level of subjective satisfaction and feelings of happiness with the lives they lead. Consequently, paying attention to children's subjective well-being, especially among students, is critically important. By strengthening students' self-perceptions, confidence, and sense of competence, counseling services can help enhance emotional well-being, improve social relationships, and support positive academic engagement (Katsantonis, Mclellan, & Marquez, 2023).

Subjective well-being is a phenomenon that encompasses individuals' cognitive and emotional evaluations of their lives, including feelings of pleasure, contentment, and life satisfaction. (Diener *et al.*, 2003). Research conducted by Borualogo and Casas (2021) identified various aspects of subjective well-being in general and children's subjective well-being in particular, including overall life satisfaction, domain-based subjective well-being, material well-being, and positive and negative affect. The study examined key themes in children's lives, including care, support, a sense of safety, appreciation, and participation across various life contexts such as home, school, and the surrounding environment.

The Indonesia-National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) Report (2023) indicated that 4.3% of parents reported that their children required support for emotional and behavioral problems within the past year, while simultaneously, 34.9% of adolescents experienced mental health problems. Other findings from I-NAMHS revealed that only 38.2% of teachers and other educational worker provided counseling services for emotional and behavioral issues. This low level of awareness and involvement may represent a potential source of problems that could hinder the achievement of optimal mental health among students.

The role of guidance and counseling teachers as well as school counselors is essential in promoting mental health in schools. Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture Number 111 of 2014 concerning Guidance and Counseling in Primary and Secondary Education, specifically Article 10 paragraph (1), states that the provision of guidance and counseling services at the elementary school level (SD/MI) or equivalent is carried out by counselors or guidance and counseling teachers. Recent study by Zheng (2022) highlights that teachers play a crucial role in supporting students' subjective well-being through the quality of their interactions with learners. However, based on observations in several elementary schools, guidance and counseling teachers are not yet available. Under these circumstances, homeroom teachers take on the role of providing guidance and counseling services to students, which are integrated into classroom learning activities. Students who experience problems are generally assisted by homeroom teachers, and in some cases, schools also involve public health center psychologists and parents in the resolution process. This situation indicates that the implementation of guidance and counseling services in elementary schools has not yet been carried out optimally and remains far from ideal conditions.

Based on information provided by several elementary school teachers, a common issue encountered is students' reluctance to continue attending school. This condition has the potential to disrupt students' social and emotional development. Schools have made various efforts to restore these students' motivation so that they are willing to attend school; however, such efforts have not been successful. The factors contributing to students' reluctance to attend school include feeling uncomfortable at school, a lack of motivation to study, excessive academic workload, and low enthusiasm for schooling. These phenomena indicate low levels of subjective well-being among students, as reflected in the predominance of negative emotions in their school experiences.

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative research method. The purpose of the study was to examine empirical data regarding the profile of subjective well-being among elementary school students. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, in which participants were chosen based on specific considerations. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This study was conducted from October 2024 to December 2024.

Data were collected using a questionnaire. The study utilized the Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale (CW-SWBS), which has been adapted to the Indonesian cultural context. The instrument was adapted and modified to ensure its applicability to children in Indonesia and demonstrated excellent model fit indices, which is chi-square = 94.58; df = 5; p = .000; CFI = .998; RMSEA = .049, 90% CI (.041-.058) (Borualogo & Casas, 2019). The instrument consists of five items and is therefore referred to as the CW-SWBS5 (Borualogo & Casas, 2019). Subjective well-being was measured using the following statements: (1) I enjoy my life as it is now, (2) My life

is going well at present, (3) I have a good life, (4) Everything in my life has been going very well, and (5) I am happy with my current life. The CW-SWBS5 employs an 11-point response scale, ranging from 0 which means “strongly disagree” to 10 which means “strongly agree.”

3. Results and Discussion

The respondents in this study were elementary school students who were identified as having low levels of subjective well-being, as indicated by symptoms such as feeling uncomfortable at school, a lack of motivation to study, and low enthusiasm for attending school. The overall categorization of elementary school students’ levels of subjective well-being is presented in the Table 1. The Table 1 illustrates the distribution of subjective well-being among elementary school students. The categories were determined using IBM SPSS version 26, which showed that 19 students were classified in the low category (4.9%), 70 students in the moderate category (18.1%), and 297 students in the high category (76.9%).

Table 1. The Overall Categorization of Subjective Well-being

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low | 19 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 4.9 |
| | Moderate | 70 | 18.1 | 18.1 | 23.1 |
| | High | 297 | 76.9 | 76.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 386 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The Table 2 presents the percentages of students’ subjective well-being within the age group of 10-year-old respondents. It shows that among students aged 10 years, 3 students (0.8%) were classified in the low category, 16 students (4.1%) in the moderate category, and 98 students (25.4%) in the high category.

Table 2. Subjective Well-being Category Based on the Respondents Aged 10 Years

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low | 3 | .8 | 2.6 | 2.6 |
| | Moderate | 16 | 4.1 | 13.7 | 16.2 |
| | High | 98 | 25.4 | 83.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 117 | 30.3 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 269 | 69.7 | | |
| Total | | 386 | 100.0 | | |

The Table 3 presents the percentages of students’ subjective well-being within the age group of 11 years. In this category, 13 students (3.4%) were classified in the low category, 40 students (10.4%) in the moderate category, and 160 students (41.5%) in the high category.

Table 3. Subjective Well-being Category Based on the Respondents Aged 11 Years

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low | 13 | 3.4 | 6.1 | 6.1 |
| | Moderate | 40 | 10.4 | 18.8 | 24.9 |
| | High | 160 | 41.5 | 75.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 213 | 55.2 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 173 | 44.8 | | |
| Total | | 386 | 100.0 | | |

The Table 4 presents the percentages of subjective well-being among respondents aged 12 years. It indicates that 3 students (0.8%) were classified in the low category, 14 students (3.6%) in the moderate category, and 39 students (10.1%) in the high category.

Table 4. Subjective Well-being Category Based on the Respondents Aged 12 Years

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low | 3 | .8 | 5.4 | 5.4 |
| | Moderate | 14 | 3.6 | 25.0 | 30.4 |
| | High | 39 | 10.1 | 69.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 56 | 14.5 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 330 | 85.5 | | |
| Total | | 386 | 100.0 | | |

The Table 5 presents the categorization based on male gender, with a total of 207 student participants. Of these, 8 students (2.1%) were classified in the low category, 36 students (9.3%) in the moderate category, and 163 students (42.2%) in the high category.

Table 5. Subjective Well-being Categories Among Male Students

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low | 8 | 2.1 | 3.9 | 3.9 |
| | Moderate | 36 | 9.3 | 17.4 | 21.3 |
| | High | 163 | 42.2 | 78.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 207 | 53.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 179 | 46.4 | | |
| Total | | 386 | 100.0 | | |

The Table 6 shows the percentages of subjective well-being among female students across the low, moderate, and high categories. A total of 11 students (2.8%) were classified in the low category, 34 students (8.8%) in the moderate category, and 134 students (34.7%) in the high category.

Table 6. Subjective Well-being Categories Among Female Students

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low | 11 | 2.8 | 6.1 | 6.1 |
| | Moderate | 34 | 8.8 | 19.0 | 25.1 |
| | High | 134 | 34.7 | 74.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 179 | 46.4 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 207 | 53.6 | | |
| Total | | 386 | 100.0 | | |

The results of this study indicate that the percentage of subjective well-being among elementary school students was predominantly in the high category (76.9%), followed by the moderate category (18.1%) and the low category (4.9%). This suggests that the majority of elementary school students have relatively good levels of subjective well-being. In their research, Jex and Britt (2014) explained that individuals with high levels of subjective well-being tend to contribute positively to others and to organizations. This finding implies that subjective well-being is most strongly associated with cognitive and emotional hope, particularly forms of hope that are agentic and active rather than passive. Individuals who actively engage with their goals, maintain positive emotional anticipation, and believe in their capacity to influence future outcomes are more likely to experience higher subjective well-being (Pleeging, Burger, & van Exel, 2021). Such behaviors are further reinforced because engaging in prosocial actions leads individuals to experience greater happiness and satisfaction, thereby strengthening the reciprocal relationship between subjective well-being and positive contributions within social and organizational contexts.

The researchers differentiated the levels of subjective well-being in this study based on gender and age. Based on gender, the proportion of male students in the high subjective well-being category was 42.2% (163 students), which was higher than that of female students at 34.7% (134 students). In contrast, in the low category, the proportion of male students was lower at 2.1% (8 students) compared to female students at 2.8% (11 students). These findings indicate that male students demonstrated higher levels of subjective well-being than female students. Snyder and Lopez (2009) suggested that gender is one of the factors influencing subjective well-being, noting that females tend to experience emotions and feelings with greater intensity than males. These findings are consistent with the results reported by Meisenberg and Woodley (2015), who found that in some countries, subjective well-being among females is higher than among males, whereas in other countries, the opposite pattern is observed.

Based on respondents' age, the proportion of students aged 11 years in the high subjective well-being category was 41.5% (160 students), which was higher than that of students aged 10 years (25.4%; 98 students) and those aged 12 years (14.5%; 39 students). In contrast, in the low subjective well-being category, students aged 10 and 12 years showed the smallest proportions (each 0.8%; 3 students), compared with students aged 11 years (3.4%; 13 students). These findings indicate that students aged 11 years generally demonstrated higher levels of subjective well-being than those aged 10 and 12 years, although a small proportion also experienced low subjective well-being.

The predominance of high subjective well-being among elementary school students suggests that, in general, students perceive their school and social environments positively, which supports their emotional and cognitive evaluations of daily experiences. The observed differences based on gender and age, particularly the higher levels of subjective well-being among eleven-year-old male students, indicate that developmental stage and social roles may influence how students interpret and respond to their surroundings. In line with the

research conducted by Vezzoli et al. (2023) which stated that subjective well-being is shaped not merely by objective life conditions but is largely determined by individuals' personal perceptions of their experiences and the emotional responses they develop toward those experiences, as these subjective interpretations influence how people evaluate their lives, regulate emotions, and derive satisfaction from daily activities.

The results of this study are not fully consistent with the findings of Diener et al. (1999), who reported no significant differences in subjective well-being across age groups. In contrast, the present study identified a notable difference in subjective well-being at age 11 compared to ages 10 and 12 years. This pattern suggests that subjective well-being in late childhood may not follow a linear developmental trajectory but may fluctuate in response to age-specific developmental changes.

This interpretation is consistent with the meta-analytic findings of Buecker et al. (2023), which indicate that life satisfaction tends to decline during early adolescence. Within this framework, age 11 may represent a transitional phase between late childhood and early adolescence, during which students experience increasing academic demands, social expectations, and self-awareness. These transitional factors may temporarily elevate or destabilize subjective evaluations of well-being before a broader decline emerges in subsequent developmental stages.

Differences in respondents' ages do indicate variations in levels of subjective well-being; however, the researchers observed that individuals whose ages differ by only one or two years cannot be meaningfully categorized into distinct age groups. Individuals with closely spaced ages, such as a one- or two-year difference, may exhibit varying levels of subjective well-being depending on their life experiences, social support, and individual mental and emotional conditions. Therefore, although age differences are present, it is important to consider other factors that may influence individuals' levels of subjective well-being. By identifying the levels and distribution of subjective well-being at the elementary school stage, this study contributes to early detection of potential risks and highlights the importance of preventive and promotive interventions in school settings to support students' psychological well-being before more pronounced declines emerge in later developmental stages. Recent research by Li et al., (2024) emphasized that subjective well-being in early adolescents is heterogeneous, influenced by various factors, and requires targeted and differentiated interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to support adolescents' positive development.

These findings underscore the importance of integrating structured guidance and counseling services into the school system, ensuring that interventions targeting student's needs are systematically implemented to promote student's overall subjective well-being and long-term psychological adjustment. Knowledge of students' subjective well-being levels provides valuable empirical evidence for guidance and counseling services to design targeted, developmentally appropriate programs. Such information enables school counselors to identify students who may require early support, prioritize preventive efforts, and implement interventions aimed at strengthening emotional regulation, social skills, and coping strategies. Consequently, understanding the profile of subjective well-being among elementary school students enhances the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in fostering a supportive school environment and promoting students' long-term psychological well-being.

4. Conclusion

Elementary school students' subjective well-being was generally found to be in the relatively high category, indicating that most students have a fairly good level of psychological well-being. Nevertheless, a few students were identified as having moderate to low levels of subjective well-being, which require special attention. When viewed from students' characteristics, the findings showed that male students and students aged 11 years tended to have higher levels of subjective well-being compared to other groups. These findings indicate the presence of differences in subjective well-being based on gender and age, which should be taken into consideration in planning guidance and counseling services in elementary schools. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of guidance and counseling services in maintaining and enhancing students' subjective well-being. Guidance and counseling services in elementary schools should be directed not only toward addressing students' problems but also toward preventive and developmental efforts, such as strengthening positive emotions, social skills, learning motivation, and adjustment to the school environment. Therefore, the presence of school counselors and the optimization of systematic and sustainable guidance and counseling services are essential in supporting the mental health and overall well-being of elementary school students.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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