

HAPPINESS AND ITS ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA: A SCOPING REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Happiness is important because it influences many facets of university students' lives. This scoping review aims to describe the happiness and the factors associated with it among university students in Malaysia. This review uses a framework suggested by Arksey and O'Malley. EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, and Scopus databases were used to search for published articles from 2000 to 2026. A total of 766 titles were extracted from electronic databases. Only 10 papers were selected for review after applying the inclusion criteria. Following analysis, happiness was found to be associated with psychological and psychosocial factors (social skills, psychological well-being attributes, mattering to others, problem-solving, parental home involvement, life satisfaction, perceived social support, social relationships, religiosity, and religious commitment). In addition, sociodemographic variables such as gender, religion, field of study, and socioeconomic status were associated with university students' happiness. Institutional and academic factors (conducive environment of students' hostel, perceived safety, competency and friendliness of lecturers, infrastructure, support, and online teaching and learning) are the predictors of university students' happiness. This review serves as a foundation for studies on the happiness of Malaysian university students. It benefits the university authorities and student development affairs in planning effective programs for students' psychological well-being.

Keywords

happiness, university students, psychological and psychosocial, sociodemographic, institutional and academic

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is an emotional state that plays an important role in human life and can have a huge impact. Happiness comprises three major components: global life satisfaction, positive affect, and the absence of negative affect (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). A person will be considered to have positive emotions when they are happy. Positive emotions indicate that life is going well, that the person's goals are being met, and that resources are adequate (Clare et al., 2001). Over time, positive emotions lead to psychological growth and optimal functioning. According to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, people who experience positive emotions are more likely to move upward when their attention and thinking broaden (Fredrickson, 2004). Happiness is a combination of frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and high life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). It arises from pleasant moods and emotions, well-being, and a positive attitude (Jain, 2012).

Based on many contemporary theories of emotion, happiness is one of the six fundamental emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust (Shaver et al., 1996). The quest for happiness is an essential goal for many people, and the World Health Organisation is placing increasing emphasis on it as a component of health (Miret et al., 2014). Happiness is a personality characteristic that can protect health and play a major role in future success (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). When people who engage in rewarding behaviours or positive interactions experience happiness and joy, they are likely to continue engaging in those behaviours or interactions (Carver, 2003). Happiness signals to people that particular goals have been achieved (Fredrickson, 2001). In terms of concept, Vaingankar et al. (2012) state that happiness is a multidimensional concept, which different individuals may perceive it differently. The concept of happiness has been found to be associated with other concepts such as well-being, jubilation, pleasure, and satisfaction (Seligman, 2002).

Previous research found that happiness has some positive impact on a person; for example, it can facilitate individuals' positive behaviour (Choi, 2016). People who are happy have greater positive energy and tend to be more energetic, passionate, and vibrant than less happy individuals (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2014; Park et al., 2009). One of mankind's psychological needs is happiness, which always occupies people's minds due to its major impact on their lives. Additionally, happiness is a basic and essential human need that can be considered a key factor in the health of families and societies (Ziapour et al., 2018). Given the importance of happiness, it is the most sought-after goal in individuals' lives, the final result of achieving their various wants and needs (Safaria, 2014).

University students' happiness was explored by past researchers. Researchers have identified numerous factors associated with happiness. Choi (2016) revealed that sustainable behaviour affects happiness. Meanwhile, Ali and Bozorgi (2016) discovered that there were significant relationships between happiness with altruistic behaviour, empathetic sense, and social responsibility among university students. The study further found that happiness is one of the most fundamental positive feelings, crucial for fostering altruism and empathy at both the individual and societal levels. Francis et al. (2017) showed that there is an association between religiosity and happiness. Self-efficacy appears to enhance both life satisfaction and overall happiness (Van Zyl & Dhurup, 2018). Singh and Jha (2008) propose that happiness and life satisfaction are positively and significantly correlated. One reason many researchers are discovering the factors related to happiness among university students is that these findings can help university authorities further undertake suitable measures to raise students' happiness.

In Malaysia, a strong positive relationship between happiness and life satisfaction was found, with health status, employment, and household financial situation all positively and significantly affecting happiness (Boo et al., 2016). Other factors such as ethnicity, marital status, and education are also found to be statistically significant in determining individuals' happiness (Cheah & Tang, 2013). Aziz et al. (2014) revealed that happiness is influenced by various types of personality traits (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness). Besides, it was found that neuroticism negatively affects happiness. Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2019) study proposed that social and family environments, as well as education, predict happiness among young adults. Surprisingly, it also revealed a significant negative relationship between economic opportunities and young adults' happiness. Having information about Malaysian happiness would help future researchers gain a clearer understanding of happiness in Malaysia.

Researchers also investigated about happiness during the Movement Control Order (MCO) of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic among university students in

Malaysia. Wan Mohd Yunus et al. (2021) discovered that there was a substantial portion of university students who reported having moderate to extremely severe symptoms, with 37.3% having depression, 34.3% having anxiety, and another 22% having stress. Besides, 11.6% of the students reported being unhappy or somewhat unhappy, while 38.4% indicated that they were neither happy nor unhappy. The study suggested that MCO negatively affected university students' well-being and highlighted the need for university authorities to implement appropriate interventions to address this issue. Wan Mohd Yunus et al. (2021) also found that higher happiness levels significantly decreased the likelihood of experiencing severe stress, anxiety, and depression. These findings indicate that happiness serves as an important protective factor against negative emotional symptoms among university students. Given the protective role of happiness, university administrators and academic councils should pay greater attention to promoting and enhancing students' well-being and happiness.

In brief, happiness is essential to the quality of life and subjective well-being (Safaria, 2014) and impacts people in specific areas of their lives. Although various factors are associated with happiness among university students, there is a lack of studies on university students' happiness in Malaysia. To date, no scoping reviews have been conducted based on the happiness of Malaysian undergraduate and postgraduate university students. Therefore, this scoping review aims to identify the (i) factors associated with happiness among university students and (ii) sociodemographic variables associated with university students' happiness. Because it is exploratory, a scoping review was judged to be the most suitable approach for obtaining the results, as it incorporates a variety of research designs and emphasises breadth rather than depth. To ensure the study's scope, this review considered all research methodologies, including mixed, qualitative, and quantitative approaches. The study summarises research on happiness among Malaysian university students and identifies gaps that will guide future studies in the field.

METHOD

A scoping review is a form of knowledge synthesis that addresses an explanatory research question to map key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in research within a defined field (Colquhoun et al., 2014). It also summarises previous research findings without providing a concrete answer to a specific research question (Sucharew & Macaluso, 2019). The review was carried out following the five-stage framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005).

Stage 1: Identifying the research questions

Identifying research questions was necessary to guide the review and determine how relevant studies would be identified and selected (Reinders et al., 2019). Therefore, the research questions of this review are: i) what factors are associated with happiness among university students? ii) what sociodemographic variables are associated with university students' happiness?

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies

In the current study, the adopted strategy for searching and identifying potentially relevant documents was by using electronic databases (Scopus, ScienceDirect, and EBSCOhost). These databases would cover all relevant journals in the area of interest. The keywords used to search for articles were as follows: "Happiness AND University Students AND Malaysia". Research

articles published online were chosen as the source for this scoping review. Online articles were chosen because they were faster to obtain than hardcopy articles.

To determine whether each article met the inclusion criteria, two reviewers (the first and second authors) independently evaluated the titles and abstracts. The inclusion criteria were as follows: articles had been published between 2000 and 2026; articles written in English or Malay (articles written in other languages were excluded because the authors could not understand those articles); articles that were about happiness and university students in Malaysia; and articles that have proper methodology (which includes research questions and data collection) in order to properly identify the participants and gather information from the instruments (such as questionnaires) used to measure happiness. If there was a disagreement, a third reviewer (an academic who was not engaged in the study or author list) joined the conversation and offered feedback. Since the review's objective was to determine the breadth of happiness among Malaysian university students, the quality of the study of the articles was not assessed. Ethical approval is not required for this study, as the review does not involve or report on the use of any human data.

Stage 3: Study selection

At first, 766 articles were identified in the current study. The articles were further checked for duplicates. A total of 19 duplicated articles were removed from the study. Thus, leaving 747 articles to be assessed for eligibility. In selecting eligible articles, the author screened titles and abstracts. Articles were excluded if the title or abstract did not contain the keywords "happiness", "university student", and "Malaysia". Next, all articles were reviewed in full (full-text) to eliminate those that did not address the current research questions or meet the inclusion criteria. Finally, only 10 articles were chosen for this study. The flow chart of this scoping review is shown in Figure 1.

Stage 4: Charting the data

Microsoft Excel was used at this stage to organise the selected articles' data. The collected information was categorised into author(s) and year of publication, types of study, purpose, participants' characteristics and locations, tools/instruments, and findings (sociodemographic and main findings) (see Table 1). In addition, aggregate data were presented in the results section.

Stage 5: Collating, summarising, and reporting the results

All the pertinent information from the articles was properly organised, summarised, and tabulated in Table 1. Finally, the table of results was shown and reported in the results session.

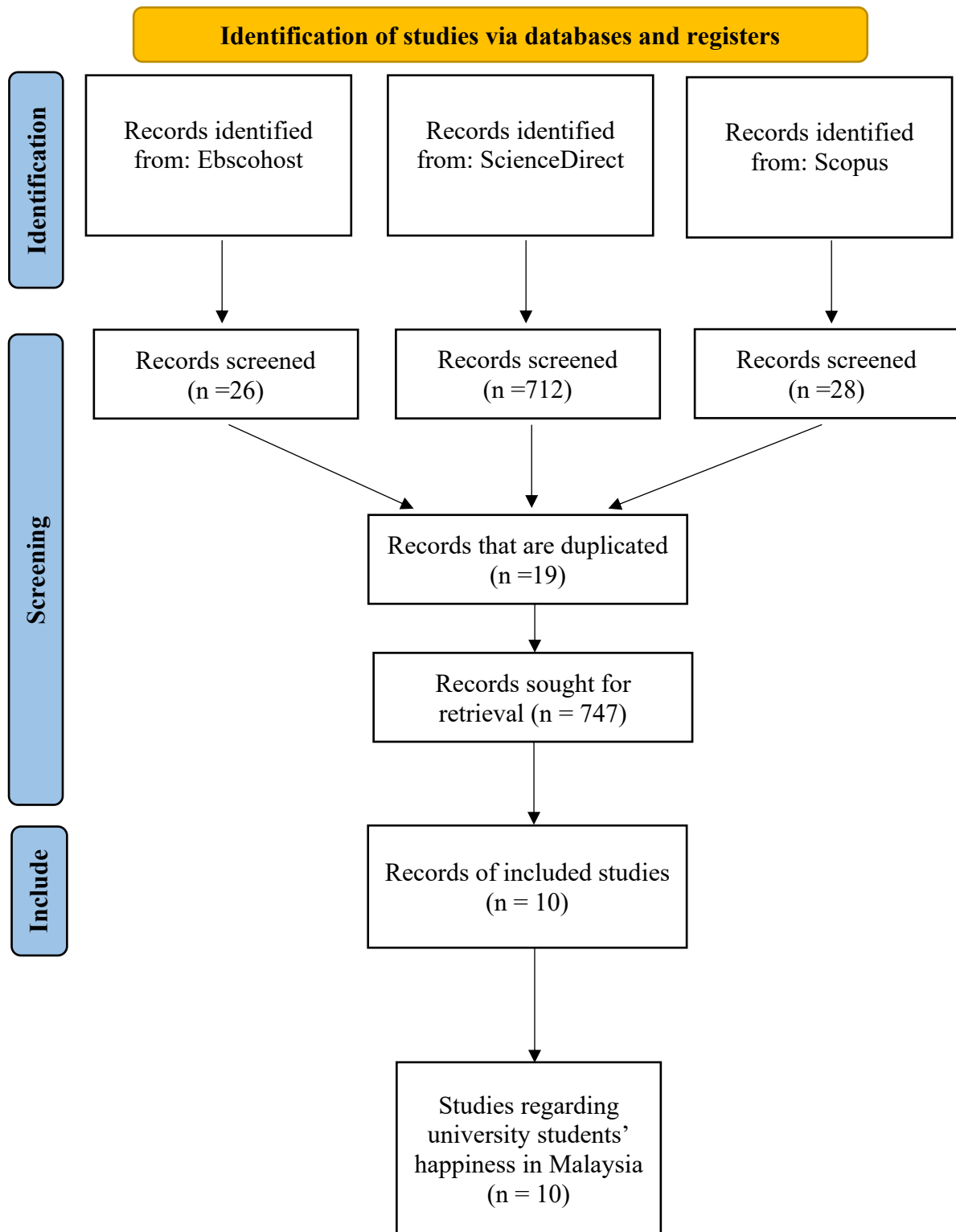


Figure 1: Flow chart of scoping review (based on the framework by Arksey and O'Malley 2005)

RESULTS

Data extraction and synthesis

As portrayed in Table 1, the current scoping review yielded 10 articles published between 2000 and 2026. All articles were research articles. In line with the study objectives, the articles' findings were divided into two groups: main findings and sociodemographic findings (as presented in Table 1). Of all the data collected, only five articles addressed sociodemographic variables and happiness among university students, and only two identified associations between sociodemographic variables and happiness. The facts in the articles will be examined under the heading of happiness among university students in Malaysia. The research designs of the studies include cross-sectional, longitudinal, and retrospective observational. All the study results focused on happiness among university students. Eight studies were conducted in public universities, and one was conducted in both public and private universities. Only one study did not state where it was performed. In this scoping review, studies involving undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as international and local students studying in Malaysian universities were included.

Synthesis of results

During the scoping review, the earliest article was from 2012, and the latest was from 2026. In the review, various findings were identified regarding happiness among university students in Malaysia (as shown in Table 1). Numerous psychological and psychosocial factors were found to be associated with university students' happiness. The factors were religious commitment (Achour et al., 2017; Ading et al., 2012), social skills (Demir et al., 2012), mattering to others (Foo & Prihadi, 2021), psychological well-being attributes (Khairuddin & Mahmud, 2020), problem-solving, parental home involvement (Khan et al., 2014), and religiosity (Tekke et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2014). Ading et al. (2012) discovered that happiness significantly affects life satisfaction. As in Ee et al. (2026), a significant correlation was found between perceived social support with self-esteem and subjective happiness. Besides, self-esteem was found to mediate the relationship between perceived social support and subjective happiness. According to Ee et al. (2025), the social relationship factor was uncovered to be a predictor of students' happiness.

In identifying the sociodemographic variables associated with university students' happiness, gender and socioeconomic status are found to significantly influence the subjective well-being of Malaysian university students (Khan et al., 2014). Happiness was also found to be associated with gender, religion, and field of study (Pang et al., 2025). Other results on sociodemographic variables related to happiness were obtained in this review as well. Ading et al. (2012) found that male students were happier than female students, a finding supported by Khan et al. (2014). Khan et al. (2014) also discovered that students from religious groups and from wealthier families tend to be happier. Few institutional and academic factors were identified as predictors of happiness. Pang et al. (2025) revealed that the conducive environment of students' hostel, perceived safety, and the competency and friendliness of lecturers were all factors in predicting students' happiness. As found in Ee et al. (2025), infrastructure factors, support factors, and online teaching and learning factors were predictors of students' happiness.

Table 1: Articles related to happiness among university students in Malaysia

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
1.	Ading et al. (2012)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate the religion and gender differences in stress, happiness, and life satisfaction among university students. To investigate the effects of spiritual involvement and happiness on life satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants: 178 undergraduate students [Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (Hills & Argyle, 2002) The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002) 	<p>Sociodemographic findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender differences are observed only in happiness, with male students reporting higher levels than female students. Christian students had higher happiness than Buddhist students. Buddhist students reported lower happiness levels than Muslim students. No significant differences exist between Christian and Muslim students in happiness. <p>Main findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual involvement and happiness were found to contribute to life satisfaction. The impact of happiness is greater than spiritual involvement on life satisfaction.
2.	Demir et al. (2012)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate the associations between social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants: - 154 Malaysian students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire 	<p>Main findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social skills are associated with happiness.

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
			skills, friendship quality, and happiness.			
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To test a mediational model positing that friendship quality would mediate the relationship between social skills and happiness among American and Malaysian college students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [University of Malaya (UM)] - 211 American students (Southwestern University) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Buhrmester et al., 1988) • McGill Friendship Questionnaire-Friend's Functions (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999) • Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship quality fully mediates the association between social skills and happiness among Americans and Malaysians. • Americans are happier than Malaysians.
3.	Khan et al. (2014)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the predictors of psychological strengths and subjective well-being for dealing with academic stress perceived by university engineering students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: 400 Malaysian engineering students (Universities in Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru cities and New Delhi city of India) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Psychological Strengths Questionnaire (PPSQ) (Luthans et al., 2007) • Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) • Student Academic Stress Scale (Gadzella, 1991) • Parental Home Involvement (Nyarko, 2007) • Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993) 	<p>Sociodemographic findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysian males' subjective well-being is higher than females. • Significantly higher levels of subjective well-being among participants of a religious group than a non-religious group in Malaysia. • Significantly higher levels of subjective well-being among participants who belong to wealthier families than low-income families in Malaysia. • Gender, religiosity, and socioeconomic status significantly influence the subjective well-being of both Indian and Malaysian students.

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
						Main findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving and parental home involvement contribute significantly to positive psychological strengths and subjective well-being.
4.	Achour et al. (2017)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine the relationship between religiosity and happiness in an Islamic context among Muslim students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: 18 undergraduate and 47 postgraduate Muslim students [University of Malaya (UM) and the International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM)] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) • 20-item measuring religious commitment (Achour et al., 2017) 	Main findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant correlation between religious commitment and subjective happiness. • Educational attainment moderates the relationship between religious commitment and happiness.
5.	Tekke et al. (2018)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To investigate whether higher levels of positive religious affect are associated with higher levels of personal happiness among university students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: 189 Sunni Muslim students (IIUM) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle et al., 1989) • Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam (Francis et al., 2016) • Eysenck Personality (Eysenck et al., 1985) 	Main findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive association between happiness with religiosity and religious effect.
6.	Khairuddin and Mahmud (2020)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine the Psychological Well-Being Happiness Index of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: 384 undergraduate students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Scale of Psychological Well-Being (Lapa, 2015) 	Main findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in psychological well-being

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
			students in Science & Technology Program.	[(Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)]		attributes (general health, vitality, self-acceptance, academic stress, self-
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To model the relationship between the Psychological Well-Being dimensions and the students' happiness. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> control, and positive relations) is associated with greater happiness among students. Academic stress and self-control are the least related to students' happiness.
7.	Foo and Prihadi (2021)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the association between mattering (feeling mattered to others) and happiness is fully mediated by perceived social support and optimism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants: 400 university students (Not Stated) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) Mattering to Others Questionnaire (MTOQ) (Marshall, 2001) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) 	<p>Main findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mattering is no longer a predictor of happiness among university students in the new normal (post-quarantine situation amidst the pandemic), when controlling for optimism and perceived social support (PSS). Optimism and PSS fully mediated the association between mattering and happiness among university students in the new normal. In general, mattering remains a predictor of happiness, and PSS and optimism only partially mediate the association.

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
8.	Ee et al. (2025)	Longitudinal Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine the overall happiness levels of university students staying on campus during various phases of Malaysia's Movement Control Order (MCO) during the COVID-19 pandemic. To identify the specific social, infrastructure, support, and online learning factors that helped university students sustain their happiness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants: 245 Malaysian university students (UMS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) A single question using to evaluate students' happiness across six distinct time phases of MCO: Before MCO, MCO1, MCO2, MCO3, Conditional MCO (CMCO), and Recovery MCO (RMCO) Customised survey questions that assess factors (social relationship, infrastructure, support, and online learning) influencing happiness 	<p>Sociodemographic findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regarding social relationship factors that could affect happiness, friends (74.7%) and family (76.3%) were identified as the most vital contributors to achieving happiness. Regarding infrastructure factors that could affect happiness, internet/Wi-Fi (54.7%) and café (29.4%) were identified as the most vital contributors to achieving happiness. Regarding support factors that could affect happiness, monetary support (56.3%) and food supply (35.1%) were identified as the most vital contributors to achieving happiness. Regarding online teaching and learning factors that could affect happiness, the quality of the e-learning platform (30.2%) and the suitability of class timing (31.4%) were identified as

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
						the most vital contributors to achieving happiness.
						<p>Main findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness declined significantly from pre-MCO levels across the first three phases of the MCO but increased back to pre-pandemic levels during the CMCO and RMCO as restrictions relaxed. • Overall, students' happiness was moderate.
9.	Pang et al. (2025)	Retrospective Observational Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics, institutional experiences, and self-reported happiness among university students in East Malaysia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: 7,020 undergraduate students (UMS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Happiness Index (Muhamad et al., 2021) 	<p>Sociodemographic findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85.6% of students considered themselves happy. • Significant association between happiness with gender, religion, and field of study. • No significant association between family income, nationality, and level of study with students' happiness. • Conducive environment of students' hostel and perceived safety are the key

No.	Author (Year)	Type of Study	Purpose	Participants Characteristics (Location)	Tools/Instruments	Findings
						<p>predictors of students' happiness.</p>
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness predictors for the male students are the availability of recreational and extracurricular activities and the effectiveness of support staff. • The competence and friendliness of lecturers emerged as crucial factors in students' happiness.

10.	Ee et al. (2026)	Cross-sectional Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the relationship between perceived social support and self-esteem with subjective happiness among undergraduate counselling students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants: 324 undergraduate counselling students (Two public universities in Malaysia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1979) Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997) 	<p>Sociodemographic findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant differences between genders regarding overall subjective happiness. <p>Main Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived social support was significantly correlated with self-esteem and subjective happiness. Self-esteem was found to mediate the relationship between perceived social support and subjective happiness. Perceived social support, self-esteem, and gender explained 62.9% of the variance in subjective happiness among the students.
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DISCUSSION

Happiness can bring many positive aspects to an individual. It is a vital criterion for achieving a successful life and a positive psychological state. Hence, it is very important for university students to feel happy throughout their educational lives. Throughout this review, psychological and psychosocial factors were found to be associated with happiness. The review shows a strong positive correlation between religious commitment or religiosity and subjective happiness in Malaysia (Achour et al., 2017; Tekke et al., 2018; Ading et al., 2012). These findings are similar to those of a study by Francis et al. (2003), which shows a significant positive correlation between happiness and an attitude toward Christianity. One possible reason religious people are happier is that religious involvement can help a person adopt a more positive perspective when encountering problems or sadness, and think more positively when facing them.

The review discovered that social skills positively correlate with happiness (Tekke et al., 2018). The study done by Lu and Argyle (1991) has also yielded similar results. People with higher social skills tend to be happier, as they are better able to foster positive communication and reduce arguments when interacting with others. A study by Khairuddin and Mahmud (2020) found a strong positive relationship between self-acceptance and students' happiness, as reported in this review. The findings are consistent with those of Chan and Joseph (2000). When a person has higher self-acceptance, the person will be happier. This might be due to the person having accepted all their strengths and weaknesses and feeling satisfied despite deficiencies, regardless of past behaviours and choices. The review also shows that happiness significantly affects life satisfaction (Ading et al., 2012), which is in line with Singh and Jha's study. The finding might be explained by the fact that happiness is a component of life satisfaction. One needs to feel happy to be satisfied with their life.

This review depicted that mattering to others remains a robust predictor of happiness, and that perceived social support and optimism partially mediate this association (Foo & Prihadi, 2021). One possible explanation for why mattering to others can predict happiness is that when an individual feels appreciated by others, this eventually leads to happiness. Increased psychological well-being attributes (such as general health, vitality, self-acceptance, academic stress, self-control, and positive relations) are also associated with increasing students' happiness (Khairuddin & Mahmud, 2020). The reason could be that higher psychological well-being can amplify a person's positive psychological effects, eventually promoting greater happiness.

In the current review, it was found that certain factors can moderate or mediate the relationship between a factor and happiness. The statement is supported by Achour et al. (2017), whose findings show that educational attainment moderates the relationship between religious commitment and happiness. Besides, the statement is supported by the Demir et al. (2012) study, which shows that friendship quality fully mediates the association between social skills and happiness among Malaysians students. Furthermore, Foo and Prihadi (2021) also endorse this statement, with their study findings indicating optimism and perceived social support fully mediated the association between mattering to others and happiness among university students in the new normal in Malaysia. Ee et al. (2026) also concur with the statement, showing that self-esteem mediates the relationship between perceived social support and subjective happiness. Based on the above findings, future researchers should further investigate the mediating factors of happiness to provide a broader picture of university students' happiness.

Some correlations between sociodemographic variables and university students' happiness were found. Pang et al. (2025) found that the association between happiness and religion was significant. The current review further discovered differences among religions in students' happiness. Ading et al. (2012) discovered that Christian students reported higher happiness than Buddhist students, while Buddhist students reported lower happiness than Muslim students, and that there were no significant differences between Christian and Muslim students in happiness. A possible reason Christian students have higher levels of happiness than Buddhist students is that they tend to participate in spiritual practices (e.g., prayer and meditation) organised by the Christian fellowship, which help them manage stress and feel more emotionally balanced and mentally healthy (Pazer, 2024). Another reason is that the Christian students who participated in the university's Christian fellowship believe their religious beliefs give them strength and resilience in difficult times (Pazer, 2024), which will eventually increase their overall happiness. There was no difference in the happiness of Christian and Muslim students, suggesting that Muslim students also engage in religious study from time to time. For example, Muslim students go to the mosque to learn more about religious knowledge.

Regarding gender differences, a study by Ading et al. (2012) reported that male students show higher levels of happiness than female students. Khan et al. (2014) supported the results by proposing that Malaysian males' subjective well-being is higher than females. However, some findings did not align with the above studies. In Choi's (2016) study, no gender differences in happiness were found. Moreover, San Martín et al. (2010) and Francis et al. (2003) also show no differences in happiness by gender. Furthermore, Ee et al. (2026) found no significant differences between genders in overall subjective happiness. Ading et al. (2012) and Khan et al. (2014) found that their findings differed from those of other authors, which may be due to male students in their studies being more optimistic about facing new life challenges than female students. Khan et al. (2014) and Pang et al. (2025) uncovered that gender significantly influences the subjective well-being of Malaysian university students. This suggests that gender does play a role in determining the students' happiness. In Khan et al. (2014), socioeconomic status was found to influence the happiness of university students. The results, therefore, suggest that students with higher socioeconomic status will be happier than those with lower socioeconomic status. The field of study undertaken was found to be associated with students' happiness (Pang et al., 2025). This shows that the study field does play a role in determining a student's happiness while pursuing a degree at university.

Based on the review findings, a few institutional and academic factors were identified as predictors of university students' happiness. Those factors were conducive environment of students' hostel, perceived safety, competency and friendliness of lecturers, infrastructure, support, and online teaching and learning. According to the results, those factors are highly likely to be vital for improving students' happiness. Thus, it is recommended that university authorities focus on improving these factors to increase students' overall happiness, especially on campus.

CONCLUSION

In summary, there is emerging evidence of happiness among university students, although this is still very limited in Malaysia. This review mapped the existing evidence on happiness and its associated factors among undergraduate and postgraduate university students in Malaysia and suggests future research directions. Taken together, the review findings indicate that university students' happiness in Malaysia is shaped by three broad clusters of factors: psychological and psychosocial factors, sociodemographic variables, and institutional and academic factors.

Psychological and psychosocial factors (social skills, psychological well-being attributes, mattering to others, problem-solving, parental home involvement, life satisfaction, perceived social support, social relationships, religiosity, and religious commitment) were the most consistently reported correlates of university students' happiness. Among the relationships between psychological and psychosocial factors with happiness, several were not simply direct effects where educational attainment, friendship quality, optimism, perceived social support, and self-esteem were each shown to mediate, partially mediate, or moderate the relationship between a factor and happiness. This suggests that Malaysian university students' happiness arises through interconnected psychological mechanisms rather than isolated, independent factors. Sociodemographic variables (gender, religion, field of study, and socioeconomic status) were found to be associated with happiness as well. Throughout the review, several studies reported no significant differences between genders, suggesting inconsistent findings across studies. This inconsistency indicates that sociodemographic influences on happiness may be more context-dependent, possibly varying across different institutional settings, sample compositions, or measurement approaches. As for institutional and academic factors, including conducive students' hostel environment, perceived safety, lecturer competency and friendliness, infrastructure, support, and online teaching and learning, they emerged as practical, modifiable predictors of the students' happiness, particularly during periods of disruption such as the MCO during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collectively, these findings position happiness as a multidimensional outcome that university authorities can realistically influence, since the three clusters of factors were mostly actionable levers. This review, therefore, serves as a foundational reference for understanding happiness among Malaysian university students by consolidating a fragmented body of literature into a clearer, more coherent, and comprehensive picture that incorporates psychological, psychosocial, sociodemographic, institutional, and academic dimensions. The findings will benefit university authorities, student development affairs, and counselling units by helping them plan effective programs related to students' psychological well-being and identify concrete, evidence-based targets, such as strengthening campus safety, improving hostel conditions, and enhancing online learning support.

There are a few limitations in this scoping review. The first limitation is the lack of quality assessment of the included articles. However, the goal of a scoping review is simply to identify existing research, not necessarily to assess its quality. Hence, all relevant articles were included in the current study, provided they met the inclusion criteria and addressed the research questions. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) state, ". . . *the scoping study does not seek to assess the quality of evidence and consequently cannot determine whether particular studies provide robust or generalisable findings*" (p. 27). The second limitation is that there is limited research regarding the happiness of university students in Malaysia because there are few research articles (10 articles) on this topic. Thus, this scoping review can examine only a limited number of factors.

In the future, the researchers can conduct further studies on various aspects of happiness among university students in Malaysia, including emotional intelligence, social dysfunction, emotional distress, and internal locus of control, all of which could be associated with happiness. As for sociodemographic variables, future researchers can focus on identifying students' study programs, schools of study, academic achievement, and years of study in relation with their happiness. Another aspect that future researchers can examine regarding students' happiness is by comparing the differences of happiness between study programs, undergraduate and

postgraduate students, schools of study, and students' years of study. More information on happiness will give researchers more profound and conclusive findings.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there were no competing interests, financial or otherwise, related to the current work.

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