

Gratitude, Optimism, and Subjective Well-Being: Empowering Honorary Teacher to Thrive Amid Challenges

¹Masyhuri Masyhuri*, ²Subhan Ajrin Sudirman, ³Muhammad Fadhli, ⁴Sabza Gol Qaderi

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim, Indonesia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol, Indonesia

³Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia

⁴Herat University, Afghanistan

*Corresponding email: masyhuri@uin-suska.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Honorary teachers in special schools often face complex challenges, both professionally and emotionally, impacting their subjective well-being. This study aims to examine the influence of gratitude and optimism on subjective well-being honorary teachers teaching in special schools. This quantitative study uses an ex post facto approach with multiple linear regression tests. The samples size in the study was 152 honorary teachers teaching in special schools, selected using cluster random sampling techniques. The measuring instruments used were a modification of the Gratitude Scale ($\alpha = .789$), a modification of the Optimism Scale ($\alpha = .889$), and a combination of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the HOT Scale to measure Subjective Well-Being ($\alpha = .802$). Data analysis was carried out using SPSS) version 25. Hypothesis testing using multiple linear regression showed that gratitude and optimism simultaneously had a significant effect on subjective well-being ($F = 793.986$; $\text{sig.} = .000$; $R = .702$; $R^2 = .492$). Gratitude ($t = 12.935$; $\text{sig.} = .000$) and optimism ($t = 63.816$; $\text{sig.} = .000$) also had significant individual effects. The effective contribution of gratitude was 23.8%, and optimism was 25.4%. Thus, the results of this study indicate that gratitude and optimism together have a very significant effect on subjective well-being. Therefore, policymakers and educational institutions must strengthen these psychological aspects to improve honorary teachers' subjective well-being in special schools.

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INTRODUCTION

High-quality education is essential to support the development of children with special needs in Indonesia. Based on Law No. 8 of 2016, Article 10, children with special needs have the right to receive quality education, both inclusive and special (Waldes et al., 2019). The focus of this education is not only on achieving knowledge but also on developing attitudes and skills (Waisath et al., 2024). Positive interaction with the social, natural, and cultural environment is essential to improve the abilities of children with special needs in the world of work and to continue their education. To achieve these goals, qualified and professional educators must be present (Molina et al., 2021).

Problems in the education of children with special needs in Indonesia are closely related to the important role of teachers, especially in special schools (Utami & Pratama, 2024). As educators, teachers must be able to organize materials, interact with students, and carry out learning effectively (Ong & Quek, 2023). However, special school teachers' responsibilities are not limited to teaching knowledge and skills. Teachers are also expected to function as guides, social workers, advisors, managers, and therapists for students with special needs (Jeon et al., 2022). With this heavy workload, special school teachers face many challenges, such as pressure to optimally meet students' needs and issues of economic welfare (Maisaroh & Harsiwi, 2024).

Honorary teachers in Indonesia, especially those who teach children with special needs, face severe challenges that have the potential to affect their subjective welfare. Based on data from Kemendikbudristek (2023), the number of honorary teachers in Indonesia reaches more than 1.3 million, with around 60% being uncertified and not receiving professional allowances. The honorarium honorary teachers receive varies, but the average is in the range of IDR 250,000 to IDR 900,000 per month, far below the Regional Minimum Wage, which is above Rp 2,000,000 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023).

Meanwhile, ASN teachers with certification can earn a total income between IDR 1,980,000 to IDR 3,870,000 monthly, including performance and functional allowances (Anjani et al., 2022). This inequality is even more pronounced for honorary teachers of children with disabilities who not only work 30-40 hours per week but also face emotional burdens, limited facilities, and demands for the adaptation of learning methods (Uluwiyya et al., 2024). This imbalance between the demands of the profession and the rewards received raises concerns about a decrease in subjective well-being (SWB), especially in aspects of life satisfaction, positive affect, and motivation in carrying out the educator role for children with special needs (Tang, 2018).

In this case, there is a striking difference between the employment status of honorary teachers and civil servants. Honorary teachers often do not have clarity regarding their legal status, which can cause uncertainty in their careers and financial problems (Syasti et al., 2024). Previous research conducted in Riau showed that honorary teachers often face emotional stress and lower levels of

well-being than civil servant teachers, even though the workload is almost the same, resulting in honorary teachers having low subjective well-being (Sari & Mariyam, 2019). This research is in line with research conducted by Utami and Pratama (2024). The results showed that honorary teachers who teach at special schools have a low subjective well-being category with a value of 62%. Furthermore, D'Ambrosio et al. (2020) stated that increased income will increase teacher happiness and well-being. Therefore, income is one of the determinants of subjective well-being that positively impacts honorary teachers who teach at special schools.

Subjective well-being is an individual's assessment of the quality of life based on personal experiences, emotions, and perceptions of one's own life, which includes how the individual feels and evaluates life as a whole, both in terms of perceived happiness and satisfaction with various aspects of life (Das et al., 2020). Subjective well-being is a broad concept encompassing pleasant emotional experiences, low negative moods, and high life satisfaction (Joshnloo, 2023). According to Diener (2009), subjective well-being is a person's subjective evaluation of life, including life satisfaction, pleasant emotions, satisfaction with areas such as marriage and work, and low levels of unpleasant emotions. According to Magyar and Keyes (2019), subjective well-being is a person's evaluation of their life, which includes a cognitive assessment of their life satisfaction and an affective evaluation that includes their feelings about the positive and negative emotions they have experienced.

Several factors can influence subjective well-being, including gratitude and optimism (Duy & Yildiz, 2019; Yang et al., 2021). Gratitude is a feeling of appreciation and respect for something received through material support, experience, or small positive things (Locklear et al., 2023). It is an emotion that arises when someone realizes that there is help or benefit coming from others. Gratitude is a form of emotional response that makes someone feel connected and bound to the person who provided the help (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). It reflects an appreciation for life, where individuals focus on positive aspects and feel satisfied with their life experiences (Tang et al., 2022). Gratitude can also be considered an attitude that can be cultivated and developed, which has been shown to have various psychological benefits, such as increasing happiness, reducing stress, and strengthening social relationships (Diniz et al., 2023).

Gratitude influences subjective well-being. Poima and Ayriza (2024) found that gratitude significantly and positively influenced subjective well-being in kindergarten teachers. Tang (2018) showed that gratitude is a strong predictor of subjective well-being in teachers. Teachers who routinely feel and express gratitude tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being than those who do not (Mahipalan & Sheena, 2019). Musri et al. (2024) demonstrated that gratitude significantly influences subjective well-being because it can strengthen positive emotions, reduce stress, and increase life satisfaction.

Apart from gratitude, another factor that influences subjective well-being is optimism. Optimistic individuals often create positive expectations for what will happen and anticipate positive outcomes (Oriol et al., 2020). Optimism is identified as an element that is often associated with expectations of positive outcomes when assessing future circumstances (Buckingham & Richardson, 2021; Dursun, 2021). In an optimistic mindset, individuals can see the positive aspects of every situation (Hecht, 2013; Millstein et al., 2019). Optimistic individuals believe they can overcome difficulties and achieve goals (Uribe et al., 2022). Optimism is understood from a positive and interesting point of view, believing in possibilities and always having good expectations for the future. Optimistic people are more likely to believe that they will achieve good results in life and are interested in actively managing their health (Bharti & Rangnekar, 2019).

Optimism influences subjective well-being. Situmorang et al. (2019) found that teachers with high optimism positively impact their subjective well-being. Rand et al. (2020) showed that individuals with high levels of optimism tend to have higher levels of happiness and well-being and are better able to cope with work pressure. Song (2022) found that optimism contributed 45% to subjective well-being. Optimistic teachers have higher life satisfaction, especially in social relationships within the work environment. Dong and Xu (2022) also showed that optimistic teachers are likely to be happier and more prosperous both internally and externally.

Previous researchers have conducted various studies on the phenomenon of subjective well-being. However, the author has not found any research on the influence of gratitude and optimism on honorary teachers' subjective well-being. The low level of economic welfare due to inadequate salaries can cause dissatisfaction with life and financial pressure on honorary teachers who teach in special schools. This prompted the author to examine the influence of gratitude and optimism on subjective well-being in honorary teachers in special schools.

METHODS

Research Design

This research is quantitative research of an ex-post facto type. Ex-post facto research is a method used to identify or trace the factors or reasons behind events occurring to the research subject (Goodman-Scott et al., 2022). The variables in this study consist of independent variables (gratitude and optimism) and dependent variables (subjective well-being).

Participant

The population of this study was honorary teachers of Special Schools in Pekanbaru Regency. The sampling technique for this study used probability sampling. This technique gave each school an equal opportunity to be selected as a research sample. This study used cluster random sampling, which is done by randomizing based on the population area. The number of samples was 152

respondents randomly selected from the population as a research sample. Data were collected from November 11, 2024, to November 25, 2024, using Google Forms. The following sample data for each school can be seen in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Sample data for each school

No.	School Name	Number of Sample
1	SLB Negeri Pembina Pekanbaru	18 students
2	SLB Sri Mujinab Pekanbaru	17 students
3	SLB Pelita Nusa	15 students
4	SLB Al-Faqih	15 students
5	SLB Pendowo Limo	14 students
6	SLB Panam Mulia	14 students
7	SLB Pelita Hati	15 students
8	SLB Anak Mandiri	13 students
9	SLB Baikuntha	15 students
10	SLB Cendana	16 students
Total		152 students

Measurement

This study used three measuring instruments: the gratitude scale, the optimism scale, and the subjective well-being scale. The statements on these scales are both favorable and unfavorable. The Likert scale used in the questionnaire for these three variables has five answer choices. The answer choices range from strongly agree (SS), agree (S), undecided (N), disagree (TS), to strongly disagree (STS). The favorable item category is assessed as "very appropriate" with a value of 5, "appropriate" with a value of 4, "undecided" with a value of 3, "less appropriate" with a value of 2, and "not appropriate" with a value of 1. Conversely, the unfavorable item category is assessed as "very appropriate" with a value of 1, "appropriate" with a value of 2, "undecided" with a value of 3, "less appropriate" with a value of 4, and "not appropriate" with a value of 5.

Gratitude Scale: The gratitude instrument refers to the concept by [Watkins et al. \(2003\)](#), which was adapted into the Indonesian version by [Listiyandini et al. \(2020\)](#). It consists of three aspects: a sense of appreciation for others or God and life, positive feelings about the life one has, and the tendency to act as an expression of the positive feelings and appreciation one possesses. The three aspects consist of favorable and unfavorable items. The gratitude scale consists of 30 items. The Cronbach's alpha value is .789.

Optimism Scale: The optimism instrument in this study is a modification of the scale developed by [Sudirman et al. \(2020\)](#), which refers to the theory of [Seligman \(2006\)](#), and consists of three aspects: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. The three aspects consist of favorable and unfavorable items. The optimism scale consists of 24 items. The Cronbach's alpha value is .889.

Subjective Well-being Scale: The subjective well-being instrument in the study was the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) from [Diener \(2009\)](#) and the HOT scale of [Watson et al. \(1988\)](#). Both scales are used to measure the subjective well-being of

individuals. This scale describes the two dimensions of subjective well-being: the affective dimension, divided into positive affect and negative affect, and the cognitive dimension. Both dimensions will be described with favorable and unfavorable statements. This scale consists of 25 items. The Cronbach's alpha value is .802.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method in this study used descriptive and inferential statistics. Inferential statistics process data to test the proposed hypothesis and obtain the correct conclusion. In this process, inferential statistics include prerequisite tests and hypothesis tests. The prerequisite test stages consist of normality tests, linearity tests, multicollinearity tests, and heteroscedasticity tests. In contrast, hypothesis tests are carried out using multiple linear regression with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The normality test results with the unstandardized residual value show a significance value of 0.200 ($P > .05$) with a Z value of 1.246. The linearity test of gratitude on subjective well-being shows a linearity value of 0.000 ($< .05$), and optimism on subjective well-being shows a linearity value of 0.000 ($< .05$). The multicollinearity, test results show that the tolerance value of the gratitude variable on subjective well-being is 0.881 and the optimism variable on subjective well-being is also 0.881. Based on the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) value, both variables are free from multicollinearity with a VIF value of the gratitude variable of 1.135 and the optimism variable of 1.135, both below 10. Finally, the prerequisite test, namely the heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test, shows that the significance value of the gratitude variable is 0.602 ($> .05$) and the optimism variable is 0.477 ($> .05$). Furthermore, the results of descriptive data analysis can be seen in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Descriptive data

Variable Data	N	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Mean
Subjective well-being	152	34	116	21.005	88.519
Gratitude	152	42	138	23.931	105.177
Optimism	152	33	112	20.382	85.315

In [Table 2](#), the variables can be seen as subjective well-being with a minimum value of 34, a maximum value of 116, an average of 88.519, and a standard deviation of 21.005. The gratitude variable has a minimum value of 42, a maximum value of 138, an average value of 105.177, and a standard deviation of 23,931. Finally, the optimism variable has a minimum value of 33, a maximum value of 112, an average of 85.315, and a standard deviation of 20.382. Furthermore, the hypothesis test was carried out using multiple linear regression, as seen in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Test Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R2
1	Regression	66549.361	2	33274.680	793.986	.000	.702	.492
	Residual	78.580	149	.527				
	Total	66627.941	151					

In [Table 3](#), hypothesis testing is carried out by looking at the significance value of the analysis results. The hypothesis is accepted if the significance value is less than 0.05 (sig. < .05). Based on [Table 3](#), the value of $F = 793.986$ with a significance of 0.000 (< .05) so the hypothesis is accepted. Based on these results, gratitude and optimism simultaneously affect subjective well-being. The coefficient of determination, or R squared is .492. The R squared value of .492 is obtained from squaring the correlation coefficient, or R, namely $.702 \times .702 = .492$. This coefficient of determination value shows that the gratitude and optimism variables together affect the subjective well-being variable by 49.2%. The remaining 50.8% (100% - 49.2%) is influenced by other variables outside this regression equation or not examined in this study. Then, the results of the T-test used to determine whether the independent variables (X) individually affect the dependent variable (Y) can be seen in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression T-Test Results

Variables	T	Sig.
Gratitude	12,935	.000
Optimism	63,816	.000

In [Table 4](#), the T-test is conducted by examining the significance value of the analysis results. If the significance value is less than .05 (sig. < .05), then the variable (X) influences the variable (Y). Based on [Table 4](#), the gratitude variable has a T value of 12,935 with a significance of .000 (sig. < .05), indicating that the gratitude variable positively influences subjective well-being. Furthermore, the optimism variable has a T value of 63,816 with a significance of .000 (sig. < .05), so the optimism variable also positively influences subjective well-being. The contribution of each variable can be found in [Table 5](#).

Table 5. Effective Contribution of Independent Variables

Variable	Regression Coefficient (Beta)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Effective Contribution (%)
Constant	1.035		
Gratitude	.341	.699	23.8
Optimism	.532	.478	25.4

[Table 5](#) shows the effective contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable, obtained from the multiplication of the regression coefficient and the correlation coefficient, which is then expressed in percentage form. The gratitude variable has an effective contribution of 0.238 or 23.8%, and the optimism variable has an effective contribution of 0.254 or 25.4%. The total

effective contribution of the two variables is the same as the total value of the determination coefficient, or R-square, which is .492 or 49.2%. The multiple linear regression line equation follows:

$$Y = 1.035 + 0.341X_1 + 0.532X_2$$

Discussion

Gratitude is a form of positive emotion that reduces the impact of negative emotions, allowing individuals to better face various life challenges and maintain a more positive outlook (Kalamatianos et al., 2023). Komase et al. (2021) stated that gratitude can increase happiness and enrich an individual's positive experience of various events. Teachers who apply the strength of character in the form of gratitude tend to be more resilient, manage stress well, and remain enthusiastic in carrying out their duties without easily feeling tired (Martínez-Martí et al., 2020). The greater the feeling of gratitude, the more significant the positive effects, while the negative effects decrease. Rama et al. (2021) revealed that gratitude affects subjective well-being; the greater the teacher's gratitude, the higher their subjective well-being. Conversely, lower gratitude corresponds to lower physical and subjective well-being.

In this study, gratitude affects subjective well-being in honorary teachers who teach at special schools. Poima and Ayriza (2024) showed that gratitude significantly and positively influences subjective well-being in kindergarten teachers. Tang (2018) found that gratitude is a strong predictor of subjective well-being in teachers. Teachers who routinely feel and express gratitude tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being than those who do not (Mahipalan & Sheena, 2019). Musri et al. (2024) found that gratitude significantly influences the increase in subjective well-being because it can strengthen positive emotions, reduce stress, and increase life satisfaction.

Optimism improves teachers' subjective well-being, including life satisfaction, positive emotions, and low negative emotions (Salavera & Urbon, 2024). Teachers with high optimism tend to believe that their challenges can be resolved well and that the future will bring better opportunities (Ferradás et al., 2019). This belief makes them better able to cope with work pressures, such as administrative demands, interactions with students, and expectations from schools and parents (Noviantoro & Saloom, 2020). Optimism also contributes to increased subjective well-being by helping teachers view their experiences more positively and adaptively (Yovita & Asih, 2017).

In this study, optimism affects subjective well-being in honorary teachers at special schools. Situmorang et al. (2019) showed that teachers with high optimism have an impact on the subjective well-being of teachers. Rand et al. (2020) found that individuals with high levels of optimism tend to have higher levels of happiness and well-being and are better able to cope with work pressure. Song (2022) found that optimism contributes greatly to subjective well-being. Optimistic teachers have higher levels of life satisfaction, especially in

social relationships within the work environment. The last study by [Dong and Xu \(2022\)](#) showed that optimistic teachers are happier and more prosperous, both internally and externally.

Finally, this study's results show a significant positive influence between gratitude and optimism on the subjective well-being of honorary teachers who teach at special schools. The higher the gratitude and optimism honorary teachers possess, the higher their level of subjective well-being. Gratitude makes individuals focus more on the positive aspects of life, such as appreciation for their work and social relationships, which can ultimately increase happiness and life satisfaction ([Watkins et al., 2022](#); [Mahipalan & Sheena, 2019](#)). Meanwhile, optimism helps teachers face challenges and uncertainties in the work environment with more confidence and hope for the future ([Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023](#)). Optimism not only impacts the personal well-being of teachers but also contributes to the effectiveness of work and the quality of learning in schools ([Liu et al., 2023](#)).

[Liu et al. \(2022\)](#) found that teachers with high levels of gratitude and optimism have subjective well-being that is better than that of teachers without these traits. [Musri et al. \(2024\)](#) showed that gratitude and optimism significantly influence the increase in the subjective well-being of teachers. Teachers with high subjective well-being tend to demonstrate self-confidence, appreciation, and satisfaction, thus contributing positively to the school environment. Furthermore, [Devitasari and Utami \(2022\)](#) indicated that teachers who possess high levels of gratitude and optimism are better able to recognize the positive aspects of experiences, feel more satisfied with life, and are more equipped to face challenges in the work environment.

The implications of research on the influence of gratitude and optimism on the subjective well-being of honorary teachers who teach at special schools can make important contributions to various stakeholders, including individual teachers, educational institutions, and the government. For honorary teachers, the results of this study can serve as a basis for improving their psychological well-being by fostering gratitude and optimistic attitudes when facing work challenges. Positive psychology-based training, such as gratitude and optimism strengthening programs, can be implemented to enhance the mental resilience and job satisfaction of honorary teachers in special schools. In terms of educational institutions, the results of this study can be used as a foundation for designing welfare programs and psychological support for educators, which will ultimately impact the quality of teaching and services provided to students with special needs. Meanwhile, for the government and policymakers, the findings can be considered when formulating policies that favor the welfare of honorary teachers, such as improving economic and social welfare and providing continuous self-development training. Thus, this research benefits individual teachers and improves the quality of inclusive education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Gratitude and optimism significantly influence subjective well-being in honorary teachers who teach in special schools. Gratitude helps individuals focus on the positive aspects of life, increases happiness, and enriches positive experiences in work and social relationships. In addition, optimism also plays an important role in improving subjective well-being by helping teachers face work challenges more positively and with hope for the future. Honorary teachers in special schools who are optimistic tend to believe that they can cope with work pressure and adapt well to the work environment. This study confirms that increasing gratitude and optimism in teachers contributes to better subjective well-being, which can improve the quality of teaching and create a more positive work atmosphere in schools. Future research is recommended to explore other factors contributing to the subjective well-being of honorary teachers in special schools, such as social support, resilience, and workload. In addition, a qualitative or mixed-method approach can be used to better understand teachers' subjective experiences in facing challenges in the work environment.

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