

**PREDICTING LIFE SATISFACTION OF
MALAYSIAN CHINESE ADOLESCENTS; THE
ROLE OF SIMILARITY IN ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE, ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY
AND FRIENDSHIP SATISFACTION**

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**PREDICTING LIFE SATISFACTION OF
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AND FRIENDSHIP SATISFACTION**

by

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**MERAMAL KEPUASAN HIDUP GOLONGAN REMAJA CINA
MALAYSIA: PERANAN PERSAMAAN DARI SEGI PRESTASI
AKADEMIK, EFIKASI DIRI AKADEMIK DAN KEPUASAN
PERSAHABATAN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti bagaimana persamaan dari segi prestasi akademik, persamaan dari segi efikasi diri akademik dan kepuasan persahabatan meramalkan kepuasan hidup dalam kalangan remaja Cina Malaysia. Seramai 238 remaja (min umur = 15.22) dari SMJK (Cina) di Pulau Pinang mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Ini adalah kajian kuantitatif, peserta dikehendaki menjawab beberapa soalan dari soal selidik. Mereka diminta untuk mengenal pasti rakan baik sesama jantina di sekolah dan kemudian menilai persamaan dari segi prestasi akademik, efikasi diri akademik dan kepuasan persahabatan dengan rakan ini. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa remaja dalam kajian ini lebih suka untuk memilih kawan baik yang serupa dengan mereka. Analisis korelasi mendedahkan bahawa kepuasan persahabatan dan persamaan dalam efikasi sendiri akademik secara signifikan dikaitkan dengan kepuasan hidup remaja. Selain itu, analisis korelasi juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perkaitan yang signifikan antara persamaan dalam efikasi diri akademik dan kepuasan persahabatan. Kepuasan persahabatan tidak berfungsi sebagai pengantara antara persamaan dari segi akademik dan persamaan dari segi efikasi diri akademik dan kepuasan hidup. Hanya persamaan efikasi diri akademik yang dikaitkan dengan kepuasan hidup/persahabatan yang lebih tinggi. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan kepentingan persahabatan dalam menyumbang kepada kepuasan hidup dalam kalangan remaja Cina Malaysia. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa persamaan dalam

efikasi diri akademik boleh menyumbang kepada mencapai kepuasan. Kepuasan persahabatan bukanlah pengantara yang sesuai untuk persamaan dan kepuasan hidup dalam kalangan remaja.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the similarities in academic performance, academic self-efficacy and friendship satisfaction of same-sex friends at school predict life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents. A total of 238 adolescents (mean age = 15.22) from a SMJK (Cina) located in Penang have participated in this study. This was a quantitative study; participants were required to answer a series of questionnaires. They were asked to identify one same-sex best friend at school and then rate their similarities in academic performance, similarities in academic self-efficacy and friendship satisfaction with that friend. The results revealed that adolescents in this study tend to have best friends who are similar to them. Correlation analysis revealed that friendship satisfaction and similarity in academic self-efficacy was significantly associated with adolescent's life satisfaction. In addition, correlation analysis also showed that there was a significant association between the similarity in academic self-efficacy and friendship satisfaction. Friendship satisfaction does not serve as the mediator between the similarity in academic performance, academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction. Only similarity in academic self-efficacy was associated with higher life and friendship satisfaction. Findings indicated the importance of friendships in contributing to life satisfaction among Chinese adolescents in Malaysia. This study showed that similarity in academic self-efficacy could contribute to attaining satisfaction. Friendship

satisfaction is not a suitable mediator in mediating similarities and life satisfaction among adolescents.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Educators and mental health professionals are dedicated to promoting the well-being of young people (Huebner et al., 2006). It is indeed the mission of positive psychology to improve the lives of children. Although a variety of constructs have been proposed, understanding and fostering life satisfaction is widely acknowledged as crucial to the achievement of this goal. According to Diener et al. (1985) has mentioned that life satisfaction is about how positively an individual views his or her overall quality of life as a whole. Through research conducted in the U.S.A, Israel, South Korea, and China, it was found that global life satisfaction decreases with the onset and progression of adolescence (Park, 2005; Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Ullman & Tatar, 2001). Life satisfaction levels declined in all 43 countries studied in a large cross-sectional study of over a quarter million adolescents between 10 and 16 years of age (Daly, 2022). As adolescents, they need to deal with multiple stresses ranging from cognitive, emotional, and social changes in which adolescence is one of the most difficult stages among human beings' development. (Arnett, 1999). This was seen as the reason why the developmental phenomenon is not static, but volatile among adolescents (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Therefore, there is a strong rationale for exploring the life satisfaction among adolescents.

Friends are an important predictor of life satisfaction as they are essential during the period of adolescence. This refers to the period when peer relationship increases in relative importance among adolescents (Robinson, 1995). Friendship is closely related to the experience of a positive emotion such as happiness and satisfaction (Brannan et al., 2013; Camfield et al., 2009; Lu, 1999; Lu, 1995). Studies also discovered that

early adolescents tend to experience less trust in relationships with their parents while becoming less communicative (Nickerson, 2002). Goldbeck et al. (2007) found that among their sample of adolescents, their satisfaction with friends achieved high level, while satisfaction with family relations decreased with the increase in age from 11 to 16 years old. Demir et al. (2007) found that friendship quality was the only significant predictor of happiness and life satisfaction. Having a high-quality friendship was associated with greater happiness and satisfaction in life. According to Gillespie et al. (2015), there is a significant association between friendship satisfaction and satisfaction from life. Thus, to study life satisfaction among adolescents, friendship satisfaction may serve as an important predictor.

Research conducted by Morry (2007) also showed that perceptions of similarity can predict friendship satisfaction. In reports, it is common to find out that the investigated group of friends exhibit similar traits with one another (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Among friends and classmates, adolescents tend to select individuals similar to themselves to bond with. According to Shrum et al. (1988), samples from middle schools showed that the students highly emphasize mixing with others who are similar to themselves. Over the years, there have been many studies conducted in regard to the similarity-attraction relationship. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berger, 1973; Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Clore & Byrne, 1974; Morry, 2005; Morry, 2007). Both actual and perceived similarities are effective predictors of attraction (Montoya et al., 2008; Reis & Shaver, 1988). A study found by Montoya et al. (2008) showed that no significant effect was found for actual similarity in values or personality traits in existing relationships; only perceived similarity predicted attraction in no-interactions, short-interactions, and established relationships. Besides the similarity-attraction, there are also studies regarding similarity and its influence among

friendship maintenance. For instance, studies have found that the behavior of a good or close friend may significantly influence similar behavior in target adolescents (Berndt et al., 1999; Fordham & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999; Pilgrim et al., 1999). Adolescents also tend to develop friendship with those who are similar to themselves, and the similarity is maintained among friends over time (Kandel, 1978a). The research found that it is common to find observed friends being similar to each other (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Similarity serves as an important factor in friendship, so this study would like to look into how perceived similarity has an effect on friends.

Adolescents prefer to have friends that are similar to them in terms of age, race, sex, and social class (Epstein, 1983a; Hartup, 1983). Some may have friends with different types of similarities such as similarities in academic, behavior, physical, psychological, and social domains of development (Berndt, & Perry, 1990; Berndt, 1982; Epstein, 1983b; Kandel, 1978a). Friends also tend to have similar academic aspirations, academic achievements and orientations toward school (Epstein, 1983b; Kandel, 1978b). Many studies have been conducted about friends who perform similarly in academics. For instance, Burgess, Sanderson, & Umaña-Aponte (2011) concluded that the closer the friendship is, the more similar the adolescents are in their academic achievements (especially in KS2 and KS3 scores). Also, they tend to share the similar total Intelligence Quotient (IQ); the likelihood of going to university; the popularity among peers and the similar bad teen behavior (arriving late to and skipping classes). Besides, another study also showed early adolescents are prone to select friends that are somehow similar to themselves in academic self-efficacy and achievement (Shin & Ryan, 2014). Researchers also found that in terms of the academic domain, friends share similar attributes due to both choices (similarity selection) and influences (peer effects); and both of these play an essential role in

increasing with frequent interaction (Kandel, 1978a). As for this study, the focus is on school context and Malaysian Chinese adolescents are very concerned about academic, therefore similarity in term of academic is chosen. Individuals react differently to certain similarities, depending on their environment. For instance, in a study conducted by Hashim et al. (2012), people tend to look for individuals that are similar in terms of working style and intellectual ability with them in which both elements that are important in a workplace. Hence, since this research is on a school context study about the effect of similarity of academic performance and academic self-efficacy might be more suitable as compared to other similarities.

According to Clark et al. (2014), compared to non-Chinese students, Chinese students rate lower satisfaction with life as a whole. Kok et al. (2011) reported that, in Malaysia, if compared to Malays and Indians community, students from the Chinese community more likely to consider schoolwork as the source of highest-level stress. Some of them even considered it as the main cause of suicide. This study focuses on Malaysian Chinese adolescents and the aim is to explore how friendship is related to life satisfaction. More specifically, this study examines the contribution of similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy on friendship satisfaction and consequently life satisfaction among the best same-sex friends of Malaysian Chinese adolescents.

1.2 Problem Statement

Studies have showed that stress, anxiety, depression, suicide, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide were linked with decreased in life satisfaction. Suicide is a concern among adolescents (Mistler et al., 2012). National Center for Health Statistics has provided that suicide among people with ages ranging between 15 to 34 years old

were high in 2019 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2021). Aside from suicide, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide are also reported to occur among adolescents (Chen et al., 2005). In Malaysia, it is reported that people aged between 16 to 25 years old has the highest suicide risk among other age group (Kok & Goh, 2011). Based on the results of the National Health Mobility Survey (2019), about 424,000 Malaysian children suffer from mental disorders. It is estimated that 1 in 8 adolescents aged 10–19 and 1 in 20 children aged 5–9 have a mental disorder, including developmental disorders. According to Valois et. al (2004) revealed that poor mental health (past 30 days), poor mental/physical health (past 30 days) serious suicide consideration (past 12 months), planning for suicide (past 12 months), attempted suicide (past 12 months) and suicide attempt requiring medical care (past 12 months) were significantly related to reduced life satisfaction. Aside from suicide, high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression also will decrease life satisfaction (Bukhari & Saba, 2017; Clinciu, 2011). In one study, near to half of the students (41.6%) mentioned that their greatest worries were the high level of anxiety (Mistler et al., 2012). Depression and generalized anxiety disorder are the two most common disorders in children and adolescents (Stansfeld et al., 2016). The development of adolescents is adversely affected by depression and anxiety, including lower educational attainment, school dropout, impaired social relationships, and increased risk of substance abuse, mental health problems, and suicide (Copeland et al., 2014; Gore et al., 2011). In the prevention and treatment of depression, improvements in satisfaction with life and pleasure would be beneficial (Seo et al., 2018). Happiness and life satisfaction were linked to a lower incidence of depression (Seo et al., 2018). According to research, increased life satisfaction protects against the negative impact of stress and the emergence of mental disorders. For instance, adolescents with a higher life satisfaction level have a lower

risk of developing subsequent externalizing behaviours as a result of stressful life events than those with a negative life satisfaction which is according to a longitudinal study (Suldo & Huebner, 2004a). In general, life satisfaction has been shown to be strongly correlated with health outcomes when combined with measures of mental and physical health (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Veenhoven, 1996).

During the pandemic period, studies found an increase in a variety of stress responses and mental health issues among children and adolescents (Duan et al., 2020). A study was conducted in China during the first quarter of 2020 to investigate the life satisfaction of children and found that 21.4% of respondents were more satisfied with life during the period (Tang et al., 2021). In contrast, a study conducted in Australia has discovered a great decrease in adolescents' life satisfaction and the study was conducted in May 2020 (Magson et al., 2021). The decrease in adolescents' life satisfaction might be because of the socially isolated from their peers as the pandemic has hindered them to meet their friends at school. The Covid-19-related concerns as well as the decreased time spent on schooling are strongly linked to depression in cross-sectional studies (Ellis et al., 2020). According to Magson et al. (2021) the most troubling problem for teenagers during this period was unable to actually see their friends, followed closely in the situation where a family member or a friend was contracted COVID-19 and became very ill or even died. From the studies showed that the pandemic might have an effect on life satisfaction of adolescent, so an investigation on how friends affect life satisfaction during the pandemic among Malaysian Chinese adolescents is crucial.

Research has discovered that academic-related issue is the major stressor for most of the adolescents in Malaysia (Hashim, 2007). Barone (2004) pointed out that the education system in Malaysia focuses heavily on examination readiness which

creates a lot of stress for students. The reason Malaysian Chinese adolescents are facing academic stress is due to the excessive information, the pressure of heavy workload and the examinations. Besides, parents exert too much pressure on children as parents tend to spend money on extra tuition and books (Hassan & Rasiah, 2011). All of these may affect their health and performances (Poon et al., 2012). Especially the Chinese community, there is a strong emphasis on academic achievement which is well known worldwide. The old-fashioned Chinese belief is that “to be a scholar is to be at the top of society”. Hence, Chinese students were expected to work hard in order to gain excellent results and academic success due to such belief (Shek & Chan, 1999). In terms of engagement towards school activities and achievement in academic subjects, Chinese children in China were more engaged as compared to children in the U.S.A (Pomerantz et al., 2008; Stevenson et al., 1990). Compared to American parents, Chinese parents tend to be more concerned about the academic performance of their children. This can be reflected from more significant amount of time invested by Chinese parents in monitoring their children’s schoolwork or exam results (Ng et al., 2014). In addition, Chinese parents were discovered to be more of a dictator and are more common to impose pressure on their children, which eventually affects their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours about academic success (Ng et al., 2014). As such, academic stress has been seen as a source of depression and a cause of suicidal behaviour (Ang & Huan, 2006; Bjorkman, 2007). There are studies about anxiety and depression among Malaysian Chinese adolescents. A study conducted in Malaysia by Kaur et al. (2014) showed that Indian adolescents (30.0%) and Chinese adolescents (20.2%) descent reported higher prevalence of depressive symptoms than their peers compared to other ethnicities. Other findings of a study in Malaysia, indicated that ethnicity had an influence on depression in adolescents, which suggested that Chinese

adolescents had a higher risk of depression compared to other races (Kaur et al., 2014). For anxiety, Malay and Chinese adolescents scored significantly higher on the anxiety scale than other adolescents (Mousavi et al., 2016). Stress, anxiety and depression are closely linked to decrease in life satisfaction (Bukhari & Saba, 2017; Clinciu, 2011). For this reason, it is crucial to have better understanding on the life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents.

In Malaysia context, researchers may have overlooked the importance of friendship to adolescents. For an example, one study showed that satisfaction gained with family members is higher than satisfaction with gained friends (Chiong et al., 2016). In Asian culture, society is highly family-centric and encourages its members to be interdependent, which causes parents to remain crucial attachment figures, surpassing peers (Ishak, 2000). In the local context, however, respecting parents, teachers and individuals of older ages or higher social status is emphasized in Malaysia (Hofstede, 1983; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Yet, study conducted in Malaysia found that support from friends can be a better predictor of adolescents' satisfaction of life than social support from family (Yaacob et al., 2017). Malaysian Chinese adolescents spend a great amount of time in school and often spend time with peers. Students in Malaysia stay together within the same classroom for the entire academic year, making school their primary social group in creating opportunities for peer influence and peer friendships. The study by Altermatt & Pomerantz (2003) demonstrated that similarities are more likely to be reinforced by friends within the same classroom. According to Barone (2004), Malaysian Chinese adolescents tend to seek advice from their friends rather than adults. Therefore, this research considers the importance of studying the friendship among adolescents in Malaysia.

The study of similarity-attraction has been going on for more than 50 years and much work has been done on this topic. However, there is not much research done regarding the similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy between adolescents and its effect on both friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction. Most of the studies relate the similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy with a selection of friends and peers influence (Altermatt, 2001; Dieterich, 2015; Flashman, 2012; Shin & Ryan, 2014). This proposes that individuals tend to mix around with people who are similar to them in terms of academic performance and academic self-efficacy. The individual is eventually being influenced by their friends where they become more similar to each other in terms of their academic performance and academic self-efficacy. There is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with similarity and life satisfaction with the mediation of relationship satisfaction. There were only two studies discovered (Chi et al., 2020; Sortheix & Lönnqvist, 2015). By exploring similarity in other domains such as similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy, one might discover a new domain in the prediction of friendship and life satisfaction among adolescents. Therefore, this study aims to discover the association between similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy, friendship satisfaction, and life satisfaction among adolescents.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What is the relationship between friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction?
2. What is the relationship between similarity in academic performance with friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents?

3. What is the relationship between similarity in academic self-efficacy with friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents?
4. Does friendship satisfaction mediate the relationship between of similarity in academic performance and similarity in academic self-efficacy with life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives are:

1. To investigate the relationship between friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents.
2. To examine the relationship between similarity in academic performance with friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese adolescents.
3. To examine the relationship between similarity in academic self-efficacy with friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction among Malaysia Chinese adolescents.
4. To examine friendship satisfaction mediates the relationship between similarity in academic performance and similarity in academic self-efficacy with life satisfaction among Malaysia Chinese adolescents.

1.5 Significance of Study

The objective of this study is to resolve the factors that affect life satisfaction among adolescents. As debated in the problem statement, studies showed that nowadays adolescents are increasingly facing mental illnesses such as stress, depression, and anxiety (Mistler et al., 2012; Twenge, 2006). Additionally, they are also exposed to a high risk of suicide (Chen et al., 2005; Kok & Goh, 2011). With a better understanding of life satisfaction, the occurrence of anxiety and depression can be minimized. This may help to promote a healthier community.

In particular, the objective of this study is to resolve the causes that affect life satisfaction among adolescents during the pandemic. As discussed in the problem statement, the pandemic has hugely affected the life satisfaction and mental health of adolescents. While friends serve as an important factor in affecting adolescents, a further understanding of how friends affect life satisfaction during the pandemic may help to promote a healthier community.

Another objective of this study is to discover a way to tackle the stress faced by adolescents in terms of their academic performance. Research has pointed out that adolescents face immense stress resulting from their academic performance especially among Asians (Hashim, 2007; Ng et al., 2014; Poon et al., 2012). As pointed in the problem statement, in Malaysian context, if compared to Malays and Indians, the Chinese students tend to mention that schoolwork as the source of highest level of stress and they tend to consider that as the main cause of suicide. Besides, the education system in Malaysia focuses heavily on examination readiness which creates a lot of stress for students. The results from this study may help to improve life satisfaction among Chinese adolescents. A significant contribution to raising life satisfaction can be made by addressing the issues that cause stress among adolescents.

This study is important as it provides us a better understanding of the nature of adolescent friendship in Malaysia. In the problem statement has stated that so far, not many studies have been conducted, focusing on both friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction in Malaysia, especially among Chinese adolescents. Locally, most of the existing studies investigated peer influence on substance abuse (Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan Malaysia Kementerian Dalam Negeri, 2010; Hong et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2006; Soh, 2011) and parent attachment (Chiong et al., 2016; Ishak, 2000). While friends play an essential role during adolescence in helping individuals to explore and

build their personal identity, it is beneficial for researchers in Malaysia to better understand the nature of friendship.

This study will be beneficial to sociologists, psychologists, and researchers as many of them are interested in the effect of similarity on friendship. The objective of this study is to allow sociologists, psychologists, and researchers to better understand the effect of similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy on friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction among adolescents. It may be vital for researchers to understand other factors that could be contributing to adolescent satisfaction rather than what has been researched so far. Sociologists have long explored the topic of similarity among friends and manners in which friendship is maintained. A satisfactory friendship could assist in a better prediction of maintaining a friendship and further enhance their life satisfaction. The similarity in academic performance and academic self-efficacy might serve as an important factor in predicting satisfaction, as academic ranking is highly important to Chinese adolescents and it might have a significant impact on their life.

1.6 Scope of Study

This study emphasizes how the similarities found between friendships affect life satisfaction. It aims to understand the association similarities found between friendship and life satisfaction. The overall results from the study will provide brief information about the correlation between similarity of academic performance and similarity in academic self-efficacy among friends with life satisfaction. Research regarding similarities among friends and life satisfaction is rarely conducted in Penang. Besides, Penang, Malaysia's second-largest city, was found to have significant levels of internet addiction, suicide rates, and unhappiness (Helliwell et al., 2017). This

study only focuses on Chinese adolescents because it involves academic in which the Chinese community strongly emphasis on academic achievement added a lot of pressure to Chinese adolescents (Ng et al., 2014) that impact their mental health (Ang & Huan, 2006; Bjorkman, 2007). Only one school being selected, the reasons only one school being selected are there are only a few SMJK schools in Penang and only one school agreed while other schools rejected as the data was collected during the pandemic.

This study was conducted through quantitative research. Participants were required to complete a series of questionnaires that consisted of demographic information, academic performance, academic self-efficacy, friendship satisfaction, and life satisfaction. The size of the sample was 238 adolescents.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

The organization of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 briefly explains the flow of the whole study and the importance of this study. Chapter 2 introduces each variable in detail and how each variable affects the others. There are a total of four variables in this study which are life satisfaction, friendship satisfaction, similarity in academic performance, and similarity in academic self-efficacy. Chapter 3 details the methods of conducting the study. It explains the statistical tool used in SPSS to validate the research questions or research objectives. Chapter 4 displays the result of the thesis with explanations on the data processing and analysis using SPSS. Correlation, multiple regression and Hayes model is used to test the moderator effect. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth discussion of all the findings and the limitation of this study. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the whole study.

1.8 Conceptual Definition of the Key Concepts

There are a total of four variables in this study. Below are the four conceptual definitions applied in this study.

1. **Life satisfaction** is how positively an individual appraises his or her overall quality of life as a whole (Diener et al., 1985).

2. **Similarity in academic performance** is perception of similarity in terms of academic performance people think they have with their designated friend. It assessed how similar participants perceived themselves and their best friend in academic performance. For instance, high-achieving students maintain their friendship by socializing with high-achieving friend groups and underachievers socialize with low-achieving students. Academic performance is the outcome of education— the extent to which an institution, teacher, or student has achieved their academic goals (Ward et al., 1996). In this study, the similarity in academic performance is determined by categorising students' school rankings using percentile rank. Students are put in categories such as high achievers, moderate achievers, moderate underachievers and extreme underachievers. In this study, the similarity in academic performance is measured by the absolute mean difference which refers to if a smaller the difference score indicates greater perceived similarity.

3. **Similarity in academic self-efficacy** is perception of similarity in terms of academic self-efficacy people think they have with their designated friend. It assessed how similar participants perceived themselves and their best friend in academic self-efficacy. Academic self-efficacy means that the individuals possess strong belief that they can accomplish the given academic tasks at a certain designated level successfully (Schunk, 1991). In this study, the similarity in academic self-efficacy

measures by absolute mean difference which refers to if the smaller the difference score indicates greater perceived similarity.

4. **Friendship satisfaction.** Jones (1991) has defined satisfaction from friendship is a measure used, “to gauge the perceived adequacy of the relationship in meeting individual needs” (p. 168). It assessed how satisfied adolescents are with their best friends.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the key literature concerned with friendship, similarity in academic performance, and similarity in academic self-efficacy which are closely linked with life satisfaction. This chapter will include the key concepts and theories related to life satisfaction, friendship satisfaction and similarities. Numerous scholars have conducted extensive research on how similarities affect friendship, such as the similarity-attraction hypothesis and how friends affect adolescents' life satisfaction. However, these studies are predominantly focused separately on how similarities affect friendship and friendship affect adolescent's life satisfaction which can see the lack of linkage between friend similarity and life satisfaction. This review critically evaluates all the variables in a bid to address the gap.

This chapter begins with the overall review of life satisfaction which includes the definition, followed by the life satisfaction of adolescents, the factor affecting life satisfaction of adolescents especially on friends and academic. There are many factors affecting the life satisfaction of adolescents. Still, only friendship satisfaction is included as friendship serve as an important predictor of life satisfaction among adolescents, and adolescents spend a great amount of time interacting with friends. Besides, this chapter also mentioned about how academic affect life satisfaction of adolescents. Finally, pandemic affecting life satisfaction is discussed as the study was carried out during the pandemic period.

In the next section, it generally discusses about friendships. The first part, it explains friendship of adolescents by showing the importance of friends for adolescents and how friends affect adolescents in general. Followed by friendship,

friendship quality, and friendship satisfaction. Next, in this study discusses friendship satisfaction as mediator, friendship pattern, same-sex friendship, types of friends, and lastly, the pandemic affecting friendship are included in this section.

The third section is about similarities. It includes similarities and friendship that discuss the different types of similarities that appear in the friendship context. It is common to observe an adolescent's tendency to associate with people who are similar to them. Similarities and life satisfaction are also discussed, followed by peer influence. People are generally attracted to those who are similar to them, as it brings a sense of satisfaction with their friendship and further leading to overall life satisfaction. The similarity in academic performance and similarity in academic self-efficacy are discussed as they serve as independent variables in this study. The last section for similarities discusses about similarities, friendship and life satisfaction in which reviewing how these three are related to each other. The last two sections are the conceptual framework and hypotheses.

2.2 Life Satisfaction

The term 'positive psychology' has been widely used in the psychology field in the past (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), in which life satisfaction is one of the approaches used to assessing positive psychology. With the rise of positive psychology, a perspective that promotes health and life satisfaction has become increasingly popular.

An individual's evaluation of one's life as a whole may be more significant than assessments of family, friends, and school and all of which contribute to life satisfaction (Huebner, 1991). For Campbell et al. (1976), life satisfaction is "the perceived discrepancy between aspiration and achievement, ranging from the

perception of fulfilment to that of deprivation” (p. 231). Life satisfaction (Sumner, 1996) is based on individual standards or expectations in which the condition of one’s life is positively evaluated, and a judgment is made to strike a balance. According to Diener et al. (1985) life satisfaction is how positively an individual evaluates his or her overall quality of life. To measure individual life satisfaction, one of the most used methods across the globe was the Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS) (Swami & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009). There are many definitions used to define life satisfaction. There is no right or wrong definition, but it depends largely on which perspective the matter is being viewed from. In this study, life satisfaction is about how positively an individual appraises his or her overall quality of life as a whole (Diener et al., 1985).

Life satisfaction is highly related to happiness. Even from the time of Aristotle, the topic of happiness and how to achieve a ‘good life’ has been a huge concern among philosophers and theologians (Aristotle, 1925). It is common to use the terms happiness and life satisfaction interchangeably. Happiness is defined as the degree to which an individual assesses the quality of his or her entire life as satisfactory. In addition, it can be defined as how much someone enjoys their life (Veenhoven, 2012). According to Diener (1984), happiness is a cognitive and affective evaluation of life, and therefore, the individual feeling positive emotions such as joy, pride, confidence, excitement frequently and feeling negative emotions like anger, fear, anxiety and hate less often, as well as getting high satisfaction in various areas of life (i.e., family, work, career, etc.) is evaluated as an indication that they are happy. According to Proctor et al. (2009), their literature research normally revealed the scores on the measure of LS able to indicate whether a person is happy or unhappy. For example, positive evaluations of LS are associated with happiness and living a ‘good life’, whereas negative evaluations of LS are linked with depression and unhappiness

(Proctor et al., 2009). The term life satisfaction is mostly used for ‘overall happiness’, but refers in some cases particularly to its cognitive component and is than synonymous with ‘contentment’. The study of happiness in the field of psychology falls under the investigations of subjective well-being (Diener, 1994; Diener, 1984; Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener et al., 1999). Subjective well-being, on the other hand is a summary of a person’s positive experiences in life, which includes a few components such as emotional responses that are both positive affects (e.g., contentment, optimism) and negative affect (e.g., fear, depression), domain satisfactions (e.g., friendship satisfaction, relationship satisfaction), and global judgments of life satisfaction (LS) (Diener et al., 1999). Life satisfaction is seen to be the critical indicator of subjective well-being as it is subjective in nature to evaluate one’s overall quality of life (Diener & Diener, 1995). According to Ryff & Keyes (1995) defined that as a part of subjective well-being (SWB; alongside positive affect and negative affect), life satisfaction is distinct from but related to psychological well-being. Individuals who report high subjective well-being often experience frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and high levels of global and/or domain-specific life satisfaction (Long et al., 2012). It is common to use the terms well-being, subjective well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction interchangeably, despite different scientific conceptualizations.

Research has shown that life satisfaction tends to be consistent over time and is relatively stable, making it the most stable part of subjective well-being. Despite that, life satisfaction could change when an individual experiences dramatic life events (Campbell, 1976; Diener, 1994; Diener & Larsen, 1984; Diener, 1984; Larsen et al., 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993; Schwarz & Strack, 1988). For instance, studies indicate that adolescents were seen to achieve as high as one month stability correlations in

terms of global life satisfaction (Huebner et al., 1998). This study focuses on life satisfaction, but the term happiness and well-being will be used as they are correlated with life satisfaction.

2.2.1 Life Satisfaction of Adolescents

The concept of life satisfaction has been studied extensively in adults, but researchers have begun exploring similar constructs in adolescents as well (Huebner et al., 2004). A large and growing body of literature has shown a significant and worldwide decrease in adolescents' life satisfaction, and adolescents are likely to be unsatisfied with their lives. Countries such as Germany and Australia reported decreased life satisfaction over time among adolescents (Goldbeck et al., 2007; Meuleners et al., 2003). For instance, a survey of 1,274 German adolescents aged 11 to 16 years was conducted and showed decreasing life satisfaction with the association of depression and suicidal ideation becoming more common. Other research conducted in the U.S.A, Israel, South Korea, and China advocates that global life satisfaction is much more likely to decrease with the onset and progression of adolescence (Park, 2005; Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Ullman & Tatar, 2001). Although Western culture is very different from Asia culture, similar findings were reported which is adolescents will have lower life satisfaction as compared to children due to emotional stress, emotional detachment, and drop in happiness level as age increases (Chang et al., 2003; Marsh, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). According to Bradford et al. (2002), in England, adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 are more likely to experience a decrease in life quality. In a large cross-sectional study of over 3 quarters of a million adolescents, life satisfaction declined between ages 10 and 16 around the world (Daly, 2022). Closer to home, according to Kok & Goh (2011), individuals aged between 16 and 25 years old in Malaysia are in contact with high

levels of stress, anxiety, and depression which results in an increased tendency to fall into the highest suicide group; proving that they are not satisfied with their life.

Adolescents experience a lot of cognitive, emotional, and social changes making it the reason adolescents are considered to experience one of the most challenging times in the development of a human being, as they undergo a period called ‘storm and stress’ (Arnett, 1999). This, in turn, affects adolescents' life satisfaction, turning them volatile during their development (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Apart from that, adolescence is also the period where they need to encounter transitional processes from childhood to adulthood, making them feel vulnerable (Steinberg, 2005). Adolescents' biological transition has an effect on their emotional well-being and may result in some stress as they face developmental tasks and cognitive maturation challenges (Giedd, 2004). Adolescence is a stage of a person's development where chances are higher for one to experience significant stress (Arnett, 1999; Collins, 1991; Danish, 1997; Weissberg et al., 1997), as it is within this stage that they frequently experience unique stressors (e.g., development of opposite gender peer relationship, increase of independency with parents, future vocational/higher education career concern) (Dryfoos, 1991). As a result, these may contribute to the decrease in life satisfaction among adolescents.

Coming back to Malaysia, Hashim (2007) stated that adolescents in Malaysia regularly encounter lots of life challenges and experience significant distress, which exposes them to higher chances of becoming unhappy and dissatisfied. Especially the Chinese community, Chinese students rated lower satisfaction with life as a whole compared to non-Chinese students (Clark et al., 2014). Malaysian Chinese adolescents face a significant amount of stress and tension due to the Chinese community's belief that studying well is paramount to economic success. The majority of Chinese in

Malaysia retained their cultural identity by placing a premium on academic and economical achievement. As a result, the Chinese closely monitor the relationship between their effort and the outcome they achieve. The Chinese encourage their children to excel in education by employing direct and visible methods. Therefore, Chinese parents generally emphasize directly to their children the importance of being competent, achieving high academic results in school, and achieving success in their education. They believe that educating oneself is the first step toward success. This might be the reason students from the Chinese community more likely to consider schoolwork as the source of highest-level stress when compared to Malays and Indian community (Kok et al., 2011). Growing up in such an environment brings direct tension and stress among adolescents (Lloyd-richardson et al., 2007). As one of the studies in Malaysia found that parent's expectation is one of the main stressor for students (Hassan et al., 2017). Not just parents and Chinese culture, the education system in Malaysia might also cause more pressure to students. Barone (2004) pointed out that the education system in Malaysia focuses heavily on examination readiness which creates a lot of stress for students. Research suggests schools that focus excessively on academic results will have a negative impact on youth life satisfaction (Marks et al., 2004).

Life satisfaction is a critical concept in positive psychology, emphasizing an individual's strengths as protective against developing psychopathological problems. (Proctor et al., 2009). In studies of quality of life and happiness, life satisfaction determinants have been used as surrogate measures (Veenhoven, 1996). In terms of the developmental perspective on psychopathology, there were findings relating to levels of life satisfaction and an increase in psychiatric disorders among adolescents, which is consistent with many epidemiological studies (Bray & Gunnell, 2006;

Goldbeck et al., 2007; Hawkins et al., 1992). Proctor et al. (2009) concluded that after reviewing over 140 studies on the effects of youth life satisfaction, high levels of satisfaction can lead to better interpersonal and social relationships, as well as reduced violent and antisocial behaviour. Proctor et al., (2009) also noted that those who reported higher levels of satisfaction exhibited fewer problems with externalizing behaviour following stressful events.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that life satisfaction can be considered low because adolescents go through a lot during this stage. This highlights the need to understand why this is so. This study looks further into this by studying the life satisfaction of Malaysian Chinese adolescents as they face a lot of stress, especially academically.

2.2.2 Factors Affecting Life Satisfaction of Adolescents

According to the PERMA model developed by Martin Seligman, positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment are the variables that influence life satisfaction (Seligman, 2011). Aside from PERMA model, there's also the life-domain satisfaction which it refers to a person's satisfaction with specific aspects of a person's life, such as work, marriage, and income. Out of the many domains, in a general construct that could be an approach to assessing the domain of life, studies showed that life satisfaction is positively related to satisfaction in the domain of life. There are many specific domains in a general construct that could be an approach to the domain of life literature (Cummins, 1996, 1998, 2003; Headey et al., 1984; Headey & Wearing, 1992; Meadow et al., 1992; Rampichini & Schifini d'Andrea, 1998; Salvatore & Teresa Muñoz Sastre, 2001; Saris & Ferligoj, 1996; Sirgy et al., 1995). Examples of the domain include the seven-domain partition: material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community, and emotional

well-being discussed by Cummins (1996). On the other hand, Argyle (2001) examined the domains that include money, health, work and employment, social relationships, leisure, housing, and education. Flanagan (1978), in his research, mentioned that 15 domains that include economic, physical, and health well-being, having and raising children, relations with spouse, with relatives and with friends, community and social activities, political activities, passive and active recreational activities, personal development activities, and work. Headey and Wearing (1992) also discussed about leisure, marriage, work, the standard of living, friendships, sex life, and health. Van Praag et al. (2003) stated that “satisfaction with life as a whole can be seen as an aggregate concept, which can be unfolded into its domain components” (p. 3).

Many conditions could affect an adolescent’s life satisfaction, for instance, demographics, social desirability effect, personality, physical health, productivity, relationships, environment, culture, risk-taking behavior, disabilities, psychophysiological problems, psychopathology, and character strengths (Ash & Huebner, 1998; Bradley & Corwyn, 2004; Burke & Weir, 1979; Diener & Diener, 1996; Feather & O’brien, 1986; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001; Huebner et al., 1998; Langeveld et al., 1996; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Valois et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 1997). Children and youth's global life satisfaction is moderately influenced by demographic factors (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status) (Huebner et al., 2000). For instance, the source of happiness varies between cultures. A study found that in North American culture, happiness is primarily related to personal achievement rather than interpersonal connectedness for people from East Asian cultures (Uchida & Norasakkunkit, 2004). In Malaysia, family and friends appear to be the most important sources of happiness for adolescents (Hashim & Zaharim, 2020). It is thought that friendship is an important domain of life, and satisfaction with