

Flourishing of Nias Students: A Phenomenology Study

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Abstract

Every person has the power to flourish by maximizing all his or her abilities in order to obtain a quality and prosperous life—including away-from-home students. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that influence the flourishing of Nias students in the city of Yogyakarta. This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological perspective. The sampling technique used was purposive. Six male away-from-home students were involved, and the inclusion criteria were: 1) participants are from the Nias area; 2) can communicate well; 3) have lived in a boarding house in Yogyakarta for at least one year; 4) have entered at least third semester; 5) aged 18–25 years; 6) willing to be a research participant, as evidenced by a research informed-consent sheet. Data were collected by observation and in-depth interviews with the research sample. Furthermore, this data will be analyzed using content analysis. Nias students who face new environments develop characteristics of positive emotions, engagement, and positive relations in adapting to new environments. Nias students flourish in unfamiliar contexts with family and community support, enabling them to thrive there.

Keywords: flourishing; overseas, student

Received 25 September 2022/Accepted 30 November 2022 ©Author all rights reserved

Introduction

Positive psychology is a psychological approach that, for the past three decades, has emphasized encouragement, the promotion of experiences, and positive conditions in life (Pawelski, 2016). According to Compton (2005), positive psychology investigates the maximization of human functioning with the aim of identifying and promoting the factors that help individuals, communities, and societies grow and develop. Positive psychology can be a paradigm for quality teaching and the

development of academic research in its emphasis on overcoming and preventing pathologies and maladaptive experiences (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990; Seligman, 1999; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). According to Gable and Haidt (2005), the study of positive psychology considers different internal and external conditions that can contribute to the optimal functioning of persons and/or organizations. Its orientation is to recognize, nurture, develop, and assist individuals in terms of their potential, talents, and strengths to live productive and meaningful lives. Thus, its review of human beings is comprehensive.

Psychological science has three main objectives: 1) healing related to mental health; 2) identifying and nurturing talents and potential, and developing strengths; 3) helping humans to live more productively and meaningfully (Seligman, 2002). After World War II, the focus of psychology has been on only on the first function. In 1998, Martin Seligman proposed the concept of positive psychology to restore psychology's three main objectives. Positive psychology aims to achieve well-being by building positive emotions and focusing on individual strengths (Seligman, 2002). Huppert and So (2013) observed that the focus of mental health research and practice has been on pathological treatment, such as depression and anxiety, and few psychologists have focused on prevention. The assumption has been that wellbeing will only thrive when pathologies are absent. Longitudinal research and experimental studies of wellbeing show associated positive outcomes, including effective learning, productivity, creativity, good relationships, pro-social behavior, and good health and life expectancy (Diener et al., 2010). According to Fowers and Owenz (2010), the concept of flourishing in positive psychology is a picture of a complete life, displayed in the achievement of good that is rewarding through meaningful activities and high-quality friendships. People who experience flourishing feel that every experience of their life is valuable or meaningful, leading to achievement of life goals, having positive relationships with others, and contributing to community activities. This suggests that flourishing is the highest level of wellbeing (Huppert & So, 2009).

Although research on flourishing has been productive, it has also been challenging. Due to the nature of construction, it is often more complicated than research in most other areas in psychology. Most psychologists would state that flourishing includes wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction. However, components of flourishing include meaning, purpose, autonomy, self-acceptance, optimism, positive

relationships, mastery, self-determination, resilience, personal growth, vitality, engagement, and self-esteem (VanderWeele, 2017). In addition to wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction, it has also been proposed that virtues and health be considered components of flourishing. In addition, financial stability and religious or spiritual health can also play a role (VanderWeele, 2017). Early research on flourishing confirms that positive emotions play an essential role (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Although it was later determined that the mathematical modeling used in Fredrickson and Losada's research had a significant drawback, a common finding still applies: those who flourish reported more positive emotions than those who did not. Although there is still much debate about the dimensions or aspects of flourishing, there is one thing that most researchers agree on: flourishing is not merely the opposite or absence of depression or mental illness.

Research on the importance of flourishing by Keyes (2002) shows that a person with a low level of flourishing tends to be twice as prone to depression. Ryff and Singer (2000) found that those with a low level of flourishing will experience dissatisfaction with their condition, be easily frustrated in fostering interpersonal relationships, and easily succumb to social pressure. Individuals may also struggle to manage daily situations, interpret life, and develop good behavior and attitudes.

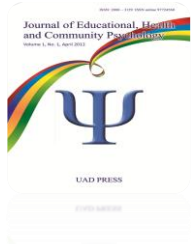
Higher education is a government strategy to promote quality cognitive, affective, and psychomotor human resources. However, the implementation of good education is still not evenly distributed, especially in border, marginal, and underdeveloped regions—"3T areas" (Syafii, 2018). One 3T area is Nias off Sumatra (kemendes.go.id). This situation has encouraged many young people in Nias to study in other cities. When students attend college, there is a change in their routine. They must adapt to campus life. Situations in campus life include pressure from friendships, the academic environment, and the activities available (Jannah et al, 2019). When entering a new area, people can experience problems which are mostly caused by contrasts in language and culture, such as customs, language, food, humor, and a new environment. This issue is a challenge for away-from-home students (Primasari, 2015). Happiness for such students lies in the successful fulfilling of their needs and development. Happy students are good at accepting everything they have and have and respond to them with positive emotions. A person who is in an optimal, dynamic, and well-functioning state of psychosocial function has high wellbeing (flourishing) (Imania, 2017).

Individual flourishing is identified through the possession of five skills: positive emotion, involvement, positive relationships, meaning in life, and achievement (“PERMA”) (Seligman, 2010). The first skill of positive emotions refers to all feelings that include pleasure, joy, warmth, comfort, and other emotions that lead to a pleasant life. Positive emotions can be expressions of happiness, joy, self-confidence, gratitude, patience, enthusiasm, love, optimism, comfort, openness, and curiosity. Someone who has positive emotions and manifests them in life tends to be able to adapt and experience effective self-change from time to time.

The second skill is engagement and is defined as that which fosters deep psychological connection, interest, focus, and involvement in something that is motivated from within. This engagement involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Involvement here means that individuals are completely connected to all aspects of their lives and have an attachment to other individuals, groups, goals, or work.

The third skill is positive relationships, a crucial dimension in life which can be defined as a set of support measures that individuals can access through their social relationships with other individuals, groups, and the larger community (Yu et al., 2020). As social beings, humans need each other. Positive relationships between humans can increase welfare and happiness. Many studies have linked social relationships with physical and psychological health, happiness, and with little chance of psychopathology. Cao et al. (2020) stated that social support in the form of attention and assistance from community, family, and higher education institutions have a negative correlation with student anxiety. The development of social support is needed by humans to carrying out their social life. Humans are creatures who cannot survive individually: they always depend on each another (Rifati et al., 2018).

The fourth skill is meaning in life which can be defined as having a purpose and direction in life and as feeling connected to something greater within. People who have meaning in life also say that they are overall quite happy and satisfied with their lives. Meaning in life is a guide that leads to something greater within, a feeling that life itself is valuable and useful and always has a purpose for whatever is done. Meaning in life can mean that people “want meaning and purpose in life” and that a meaningful



life is about belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self—such as, but not limited to, family, community, social causes, religious groups, and professional organizations (Seligman, 2013; Moog, 2021). Finding meaning is essential to flourishing and experiencing a continuum of well-being (Rehal & Nieuwerburgh, 2022).

The last skill is accomplishment. While this can be interpreted objectively, subjective definitions can also be achieved through personal ambition, drive, and differences in one's personality. In many cultures, progressing toward goals and achieving outstanding results can lead to external recognition from others as well as feelings of satisfaction and pride in personal accomplishments. When a person achieves attainment then she also achieves her goal. People pursue accomplishment, competence, success, and mastery for its own sake, in a variety of domains such as, but not limited to, the workplace, sport, games, and hobbies (Seligman, 2010; Moog, 2021). Accomplishment is also about a sense of working toward and attaining goals, mastery, and completing tasks, acquiring knowledge, and experiencing self-efficacy (Butler & Kern, 2016; Hidayat et al., 2020).

“Wellbeing” or “flourishing” might be defined as the state in which all aspects of a person's life are good or as a state where he mostly experiences positive emotions and positive psychological and social functioning (VenderWeele, 2020). “Flourishing” is synonymous with positive outcomes including effective learning, productivity and creativity, good relationships, pro-social behavior, good health, and life expectancy (Effendy, 2016). Flourishing can be one of the main factors in the growth and development of the educational system (Abdi & Zandipayam, 2019). Away-from-home students who flourish are those who have positive emotions when responding to something, are actively involved in studies and the environment, relate positively to others and their environment, have good meaning in life, and can achieve (Sunbul and Malkoc, 2018). “Flourishing” can be understood as a condition that shows that, in all aspects of life, a person is functioning very well (Sekarini, Hidayah, and Hayati, 2020). Research has shown that flourishing is an individual condition that meets maximum development, increases well-being, and assists various aspects of life that function optimally. (Daulay, Purwadi, and Situmorang, 2021; Akin and Akin, 2015).

Flourishing in students manifests in attitudes and daily actions which are directed towards self-development and growth—that is, individuals who are oriented towards self-advancement. In addition, students who do not thrive in their lives are described as individuals who do not contribute enough and have little fighting power. The flourishing of away-from-home students is marked by their own success and studies in unfamiliar contexts. This research will examine the flourishing of away-from-home students and the factors influencing it in such students who experience changes in lifestyle in remote contexts. Previous research on flourishing in students shows that, in student experiences with academic development, positive affect is associated with higher academic performance (Datu 2015; Nickerson et al. 2011; Oishi et al. 2007; Villavicencio and Bernardo 2016) and engagement (Lewis et al. 2009). This research will explore the experiences of Nias students in facing new and different situations from their previous environments in remote and isolated environments by determining the factors that influence their flourishing in the city of Yogyakarta in Java.

Method

Design

This study uses a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is used to identify the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically and described in words. Qualitative research with a phenomenological approach will look more closely at the individual interpretations participants have of their experiences. The researchers will try to understand the meaning of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Kahija, 2017).

Sampling technique

The sampling technique used is a purposive sample with a homogeneous sample type. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that determines the subject according to the purpose of the researcher, who formulates special criteria for the research subject (Poerwandari, 2013). Purposive sampling has been used so that the resulting data can fulfill the purpose of this research to identify the factors that influence the flourishing of away-from-home students in Yogyakarta.

The respondents to this study were six male students who met the following criteria: 1) from the Nias area; 2) could communicate well; 3) had lived in a boarding house in Yogyakarta for at least one year; 4) had entered at least Semester 3; 5) aged 18–25 years; 6) willing to be a research participant as evidenced by informed consent form. This research was conducted in Kalasan-Yogyakarta.

Data analysis

Data collection was carried out by means of observation and in-depth interviews. In research trustworthiness (Poerwandari, 2013), researchers use triangulation, discussion, and reference materials. This study used content analysis because the researcher wanted to see, explore, and interpret more deeply the meaning behind the respondent's words about how Nias away-from-home students flourished in Yogyakarta.

Result

Based on interviews with the six respondents, three themes emerged which indicate the subjects' flourishing. The first relates to positive emotions. Based on the results of research on the six respondents, they felt positive emotions in activities on and outside campus or in their community. The six respondents felt positive emotions such as being happy, independent, grateful, and comfortable in attending lectures in Jogja, and when doing activities outside the campus as well as things that the subject liked as a student (Simanungkalit, 2014).

...what I feel is... well, I'm just happy, there's a new experience like that. (VL)

The first thing I feel is happy, there is a happy side and there is also a side like that (BG).

There are ups and downs. But whatever it was I always felt happy and didn't want to think about the thing that was holding me back. (VG)

Positive emotions were felt in the form of feelings of pleasure and gratitude for being able to undertake higher education in Yogyakarta, even though there had been ups and downs. The respondents were happy and grateful with the life they were currently living, and had family and friends who supported their work. These positive emotions contribute greatly to human happiness

because they help people deal with various situations in life.

The second theme was engagement. "Involvement" in this case means that the individual is thoroughly connected to all aspects of life and has an attachment to other individuals, groups, goals, or work (Effendy, 2016).

For involvement on campus, it can be said to be active, Sis, starting from UKM activities to academics. ... Yes, it's the same, Sis, the outside communities are still there. (VG)

If it was me, before doing my thesis, I entered the spiritual department, BEM, and FISKOM too. (WH)

E.. join the organization, e.. join the committee, inside the campus outside the campus also participate, continue to ee... participate in on-campus (VL) services. (VL)

In addition to activities in the campus environment, the subjects also participated in regional communities and youth spiritual communities. This shows the involvement of the respondents in carrying out their life on and off campus. This aspect of engagement will be related to fun and produce an optimal contribution to learning, This will have an impact on individual academic and non-academic activities. Individuals who are engaged in their work not only have the capacity to be energetic but also enthusiastically provide the energy capacity for their work (Lingga and Tuapattinaja, 2012).

The third aspect is positive relationships. The subjects experienced positive relationships with family, college friends, and their communities.

... if I and my family are good, Sis, it's even very good. ... It used to be good, but now doesn't mean it's not good now. It's just that because of the lack of communication, especially since my friends have graduated, I've also moved places from them.... We always stay in touch, especially during the fasting month. (VL)

Praise God, it's good, even since I've been away it's been like warmth or closeness to my father, mother, younger sibling, even closer. (BG)

My relationship with family remains good, our communication is smooth. Em.. When there's an issue always take the time to talk to parents, listen to advice. (EH)

This positive relationship is manifested in good communication and proportional behavior with family, college friends, and the community. Positive relationships existed within the subject community, and subjects and community members who had known each other for a long time were like family. For the six respondents, God and family became their top priority. For them, the meaning of life is shown in the values of virtue and success in studies, because they become the great hope of the family in the village. This was their strength to remain optimistic and survive life so far from home. The achievement experienced by the respondents was having a GPA above 3. This achievement enabled them to continue receiving study assistance at the college where they studied. Success is achieving the desired state that leads to progress and goals in life (Primasari, 2015).

Discussion

Nias students in Yogyakarta experienced flourishing when moving there. The respondents experienced ups, downs, and struggles in their study journey and life in Yogyakarta. The respondents had more positive emotions and higher life satisfaction than negative emotions. They felt meaning and purpose in life, had mastery over certain fields and achievements in life, and were sufficiently motivated to complete their studies and achieve their goals.

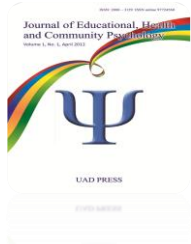
“Flourishing” is defined as a high level of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing (Huppert 2009; Huppert and So 2013; Keyes 2002). Hedonic wellbeing is the subjective or emotional experience of happiness, life satisfaction, and a balance of positive/negative influences (Diener 1984). Psychological and social wellbeing are part of eudaimonic wellbeing and include facets such as meaning, engagement, life goals, positive relationships, and personal growth (Keyes 2002; Ryan et al. 2008; Ryff 1989).

Flourishing is a condition that shows that individuals have good mental health and high wellbeing (David and Nita, 2014). Seligman (2010) distinguishes five aspects which are abbreviated as PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaningfulness, and accomplishment. A person who is in an optimal, dynamic, and well-functioning state of psychosocial function is a person who has high welfare (flourishing) (Sekarini, Hidayah, Hayati, 2020). Flourishing is the success of achieving a level of wellbeing which is marked by purpose in life, self-control, acceptance of all talents and abilities, the

realization of potential goodness in oneself, and the ability to contribute significantly to many people so that they experience satisfaction and happiness. (Effendy and Subantriyo, 2017; Handayani and Yuca, 2018).

The Nias students, when facing new and different environments and academic situations, developed characteristics of positive emotions and strengthened their engaged involvement in the process of adapting to new environments with positive relationships. The first aspect has to do with positive emotions. The six respondents felt positive emotions as away-from-home students in Yogyakarta. They felt positive emotions in the form of pleasure, gratitude, independence, and new experiences. This accords with the research of Simanungkalit (2014), which showed students having a sense of pleasure, independence, gratitude, and comfort in attending lectures in Jogja and when doing activities outside the campus. Despite experiencing positive emotions away from home, respondents were also faced with various problems that triggered negative emotions through unpleasant experiences. These experiences were in the form of financial, family, relationships, and—especially—academic problems. Such problems do impact on other aspects of life; however, they overcame their difficulties by establishing positive feelings in themselves. Positive emotions in the form of joy and gratitude enabled them to attend higher education in Yogyakarta, despite the ups and downs. The respondents were happy and grateful for their life at this time, and for having family and friends who supported them. They always tried to develop positive minds and good energy to survive and manage their lives in a foreign land, especially in difficult circumstances. This strengthened the respondents not to give up quickly and despair but always to find a way out of problems. These positive emotions significantly contribute to human happiness because they help people face various circumstances in their lives. This supports previous research that personality is related to positive emotions (Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). Other studies specific to Asia also support this research that the display of positive emotions in a customer service setting is achieved by focusing on customer traits (Tan, Foo, & Kwek, 2017). Customer traits contribute to the display of positive emotions by service providers and result in customer satisfaction.

The second aspect is engagement, which is the feeling of being thoroughly connected to all aspects of one's life and having attachments to other individuals, groups, goals, or jobs (Effendy, 2016). In



addition to on-campus activities, the respondents also participated in off-campus activities, such as regional and spiritual communities for young people. This shows how the respondents lived their lives on and off campus in community activities. They learned as they participated in activities with their various communities. In particular, regional and spiritual communities are the forums in which respondents grew and thrived. Through regional communities, respondents felt supported away from home. The regional community was a forum that facilitated respondents in learning and adjusting to the city in which they studied. Regional and spiritual communities contributed significantly to respondents' learning, focus on education, and avoidance of wrongdoing. This engagement made their experience positive and produced optimal learning outcomes, thus impacting their individual academic and non-academic activities. The individuals had both energy and enthusiasm for their work (Lingga & Tuapattinaja, 2012). This is supported by previous research that students engage with sites as part of their acculturation. However, while offline interaction still seems to be significant, computer-mediated communication can complement and enhance place-based community engagement through commenting on posts and interacting with other members (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Gummerus et al., 2012).

The third aspect is positive relationships. The respondents experienced positive relationships, good communication, and appropriate behavior with their families, college friends, and community, helping respondents and community members bond like a family away from home. Furthermore, relationships with God and family became a top priority: spirituality is essential for students away from home. For them, meaning in life was indicated by values of virtue and success in studying because this is their family's great hope—their strength to remain optimistic and live far from their home context.

The results of this study support other research that cultural similarities (in this study, fellow away-from-home students) can decrease feelings of loneliness and exclusion for international students. Gareis's (2000) study on German students at an American university found that they were satisfied with their relationship with host students and did not experience ostracism. Lee and Rice (2007) interviewed 24 students from 15 countries at an American university; they found that different cultural factors generated higher stress levels for Latin American and Asian students than for students from Germany, Canada, and New Zealand. This research on Nias students shows the strengthening

of positive relationships in communities of which they are members. After high school, higher education students experience different expectations in a post-secondary context, including academic achievement (Antaramian, 2015; Howell, 2009), a socially supportive environment, ease of transition, a sense of belonging, civic engagement (Fink, 2014; Nicotera et al., 2015), and study engagement (Bowman et al., 2010; Low, 2011).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence the flourishing of away-from-home students in the city of Yogyakarta. This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological perspective and a purposive sampling technique. Six male overseas students met the inclusion criteria's of: 1) being from the Nias area; 2) good communicators; 3) had lived in a boarding house in Yogyakarta for at least one year; 4) had entered a minimum of Third Semester; 5) aged 18–25 years; 6) willing to be a research participant, as evidenced by a research informed consent sheet. Data was collected by observation and in-depth interviews with the research sample and analyzed using content analysis.

This study found that the six respondents showed characteristics of positive emotions, engagement, and positive relations in adapting to a new environment. The positive emotions manifested as being happy, comfortable, optimistic, and grateful. The six subjects engaged in all of their activities, academic and non-academic, both as students and as members of the community. Good time management for various activities is one of the keys to their success and involvement. The six subjects had positive relationships with family, college friends, and their communities. The relationships exhibited good communication and prosocial behavior. Meaning in life for the six subjects was being able to complete their studies well and becoming useful and virtuous human beings. God and family were the top priority for the six subjects. They were able to achieve the living conditions they wanted away from home because they perceived God's blessing and the great contributions of their families. Nias students experience flourishing in another region and have family and community support, enabling them to thrive. The six achieved academic achievement with a GPA above 3. These factors greatly influenced their success. Research shows more specific results in personality development and social

relations in overseas Nias students. Further research can be conducted on away-from-home students in other regions who come from border, marginal, and underdeveloped regions (3T areas). Such research can contribute to a more complete picture of the experiences of students from 3T areas in other parts of Indonesia. The implications of this research are that students from 3T areas need to receive government assistance to adapt to different environments.

Acknowledgment

The research has been supported by the Directorate of Research and Community Service of the Directorate General of Research and Technology Strengthening Development of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, number 0267/E5/AK.04/2022.

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