

ACADEMIC MAJOR SATISFACTION AS A PREDICTOR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the relationship between the students' academic satisfaction and the psychological well-being and psychological stress. This research was categorized as a correlational research, as well as a type of subject research. Data were collected from 429 Indonesian university students (age 17-24 years) using academic major satisfaction, a brief symptom inventory, and the Ryff psychological well-being scale which had been adapted to Indonesian. Data were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U Test formula. Our results show that students with higher academic major satisfaction have higher psychological well-being and lower psychological distress. We also discussed the importance of high school counselor's individual student planning services in helping students find the most suitable major.

Keywords: academic major satisfaction, psychological well-being, psychological distress, college students.

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of students entering the unsuitable academic major is a long-discussed issue. Some of the reasons for unsuitable academic majors include the significant influence from the others; a low passing grade as a requirement for admission to a university; lack of intensive college preparation; an awareness of the world demands (i.e., students choose majors based on market needs rather than personal interests); and the fear of being unable to do anything after graduation (Ali, 2018).

Academic major choice can also be impacted by a student's attitudes, goals, learning, and perspectives (Maknunah & Sudiasmo, 2020). Students who can select study programs based on their interests report higher satisfaction with their educational choices. Satisfaction with one's academic major has been shown to improve academic achievement, job stability, and general life satisfaction (Madison, Hopp, Santana, & Stansberry, 2018).

Choosing an unsuitable academic major can affect students' psychological well-being. Students are extremely vulnerable to stress

due to their inability to adjust to the learning process (Ali, 2018). Meanwhile, the academic major chosen by students affects their total academic achievement and long-term job success (Milsom & Coughlin, 2017). For that reason, students' psychological well-being is essentially correlated with academic major satisfaction major because it also affects students' GPA (Juriana, 2017). Other factors, such as acceptance by faculty and social support, also affect the students' views of self-determination, competency, relevance, and interest in academic fields (Schenkenfelder, Frickey, & Larson, 2020).

Major satisfaction potentially predicts their job satisfaction because job environment is similar with academic environment of their field of study (Nauta, 2007). Students will have high major satisfaction when their work or academic environments represent a good fit with their interests.

Career guidance and counseling services offered in high school and university settings can help students narrow down their academic interests. More specifically, in the guidance and counseling comprehensive program, there is a service called individual students planning, which focuses on helping students plan their studies and career (Gysbers, 2008). Through the service, students will be helped to achieve greater life happiness by selecting the best fit academic major.

Academic majors and academic happiness are highly correlated (Milsom & Coughlin, 2017). The academic pleasure with the major of students' is a result of a direct engagement between lecturers and good classmates. This connection is linked to student career motivation indirectly and substantially (You, 2020) because academic happiness is positively associated with self-realization and personal progress in students (Figuera Gazo, Llanes Ordóñez, Torrado Fonseca, Valls Figuera, & Buxarrais Estrada, 2020).

Major satisfaction also affects students' stress (Y. Jung, 2020). In Korea, some studies reported that major satisfaction may result in students' various stress, including

employment stress (Byun & Park, 2014), stress in clinical practice for nursing students (Park & Oh, 2014), academic stress (M.-R. Jung & Jeong, 2018), life stress (J.-R. Lee & Kim², 2018), and job-seeking stress (J.-H. Lee & Jang, 2018). Individuals may suffer from psychological stress when environmental demands exceed their adaptive capacity (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007). When stress is faced daily, people start to feel distressed, which means they start to show symptoms. People with distress might face harm, even temporary or permanent (Ridner, 2004). Symptoms that show for people who face psychological distress include physical problems, such as dizziness, upset stomach, trouble breathing or tingling; emotion problem, such as feeling lonely, blue, worthless, etc.; or anxiety (Franke et al., 2017).

In summary, we attempted to investigate the association between academic major satisfaction with psychological well-being and college students' psychological distress. We were interested in discussing that the best-fit major for students will contribute to students' psychological condition.

METHODOLOGY

This correlational study aimed to determine the relationship between the main academic satisfaction and the psychological well-being and psychological distress. Data were collected from 429 university students (age 17-24 years) in Indonesia using academic major satisfaction, a brief symptom inventory, and the Ryff psychological well-being scale which had been adapted to Indonesian. Data were analyzed using Mann-Whitney U Test formula, showing that people with higher academic major satisfaction have higher psychological well-being and lower psychological distress. We discussed the importance of high school counselor' individual student planning services to help students find the best fit for their major.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

We conducted a parametric assumption analysis and found that academic major satisfaction and psychological distress data were not normally distributed, while psychological well-being data were normally distributed. It was also noted that, regarding homogeneity test between male and female students, it was assumed that academic major satisfaction and psychological well-being variables are homogeneous, while psychological distress variable was not. Following the assumption analysis, data were tested using non-parametric analysis.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation in terms of Gender

Variables	Male	Female
Academic major satisfaction		
Mean	3,59	5,52
Sd	0,48	0,54
Psychological well-being		
Mean	58.18	72.31
Sd	36.31	39.90
Psychological distress		
Mean	162.61	158.97
SD	22.33	19.33

The first analysis was done to describe gender difference in all variables. The Difference between men (M= 3,59; SD= 0,48) and women (M= 5,52; SD= 0,54) was not significant in academic major satisfaction. For psychological well-being variable, there was also no significant difference between male (M= 162.61; SD= 22.33) and female (M= 158.97; SD= 19.33). While for psychological distress, there was a significant difference between male (M= 58.18; SD= 36.31) and female (M=72.31; SD= 39.90) students. This result showed that females have higher psychological distress than males. Although female students reported higher distress than male students, it did not correlate with bad behavior such as alcohol use, while the male does the different (Markman Geisner, Larimer, & Neighbors, 2004). Another research described that a healthy lifestyle, including daily alcohol consumption and smoking, causes less distress for both genders (Cockerham, Hinote, & Abbott, 2006).

Table 2
Mann-Whitney U Test

Variables	Sig
Academic Major Satisfaction	0,300
Psychological well-being	0,285
Psychological Distress	0,004

The second analysis shows a correlation between variables. The nonparametric statistics analysis found that academic major satisfaction was negatively correlated with psychological distress. It showed that students with high academic major satisfaction have a low psychological symptom. On the other hand, there was a positive correlation between academic major satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Academic major satisfaction	3,53	0,53	1		
Psychological distress	69,54	39,59	-0,183 (0,00)	1	
Psychological well-being	159,68	19,98	1,55 (0,00)	-0,379 (0,00)	1

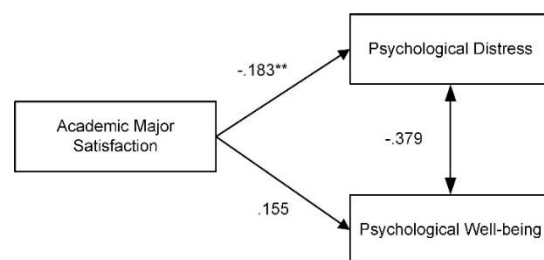


Figure 1
Correlation between Academic Major Satisfaction with Psychological Well-being and Psychological Distress

Data showed that one's psychological distress was negatively correlated with psychological well-being. Although people with low psychological distress are expected to have high psychological well-being, no findings support measuring these variables separately (Winefield, Gill, Taylor, & Pilkington, 2012). Mindfulness has been reported to improve psychological well-being

and decrease psychological distress, among other factors (Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015; Parto & Besharat, 2011).

The analysis result shows that academic major satisfaction affects psychological distress and psychological well-being. Therefore, school counselors need to focus on providing services to assist students' career planning. The findings support the importance of person-environment fit to enhance students' satisfaction with their major (Morstain, 1977).

To help students find their suitable major, school counselors need to provide individual student planning to all students but specific to every individual. In order to do so, school counselors may develop an accessible platform, such as a web-based service (Cahyawulan, Komalasari, & Badrujaman, 2021). Individual student's planning service allows counselors to help students find the most suitable major for them. School counselors could also develop media, such as video, to help students gain knowledge about career and enhance the service attractiveness (Cahyawulan & Nurjani, 2019; Cahyawulan & Ratih, 2019)

Helping students find a major that matches their attributes will help them be satisfied with their college life which contributes to their mental health. Considering one's factors such as career calling, including mediated with career decision self-efficacy, work hope (Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011), and work volition (Jadian & Duffy, 2012), are also correlated with academic major satisfaction. Research on engineering students showed that social cognitive factors help students reach academic major satisfaction (Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2007). Factors such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations that directly predict one's goal will drive people to do actions that result in the outcome that will be satisfied.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, students' academic major satisfaction is related to their psychological function. Students perceiving satisfaction with their major tend to have

higher psychological well-being and lower psychological symptoms. This study also shows that the school counselors' individual planning service is extremely important for students.

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