Indonesian Journal of Educational Research and Technology

Exploring Happiness: Integrating Philosophical Theories and Psychological Models Among University Students

K.M.N.T.K. Bandara*, K.G.W.K. Katukurunda

National Institute of Education, Maharagama, Sri Lanka
*Correspondence: E-mail: nirangabanadara08@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

This study explores the concept of happiness by integrating philosophical theories and psychological models among university students in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines quantitative data from 301 students selected via stratified sampling and qualitative insights gathered through purposive interviews. Philosophical frameworks such as hedonism and eudaimonia are examined alongside psychological constructs like the PERMA model and subjective well-being. Instruments used include the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). A concurrent triangulation design enables comprehensive data integration. Results show that while many students equate happiness with pleasure and pain avoidance, others emphasize moral values and self-effort. Gender differences emerged: females valued social connections, while males focused on financial and academic success. The study concludes that combining philosophical and psychological perspectives offers a holistic understanding of happiness and suggests ethical living and personal growth are key to student well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Happiness, an enduring subject of human inquiry, has been explored extensively in both philosophy and psychology. Philosophers have debated the essence and pursuit of happiness for centuries, proposing theories such as Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, which emphasizes living a virtuous and fulfilling life, and Epicurus's hedonism, which identifies pleasure as the primary component of happiness. In contrast, psychology, particularly through the lens of positive psychology, has sought to understand happiness through empirical research, examining factors like subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and the role of positive emotions and relationships. Understanding happiness from both a philosophical and psychological perspective provides a richer, more nuanced comprehension of what it means to lead a happy life. Philosophical literature on happiness delves into various schools of thought, each offering unique insights. Aristotle's virtue ethics, for instance, posits that happiness (eudaimonia) is achieved through the cultivation of virtues and living by reason. Conversely, utilitarianism, as championed by Bentham and Mill, suggests that happiness is the greatest good, defined by the maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. Contemporary philosophers continue to explore these ideas, debating subjective versus objective well-being and the ethical implications of pursuing happiness.

Psychological research has made significant strides in understanding happiness, particulrly through the development of positive psychology. Key theories include Martin Seligman's PERMA model, which identifies five essential elements of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (Wagner *et al.*,2020). Other influential frameworks include Lyubomirsky's set-point theory, which suggests that individuals have a baseline level of happiness influenced by genetics, circumstances, and intentional activities. Despite these advances, there remains a gap in fully integrating these philosophical insights with empirical psychological findings, particularly in understanding how these perspectives converge or diverge in real-world contexts.

This research aims to bridge the gap between philosophical theories and psychological findings on happiness by addressing the following questions:
1. How do philosophical theories of happiness align or contrast with psychological findings among university students?
2. What are the common themes and divergences in the understanding and experience of happiness from both philosophical and psychological perspectives?
3. How can the integration of philosophical and psychological perspectives enhance our understanding of happiness and well-being in university students?

Integrating philosophical and psychological perspectives on happiness is essential for developing a holistic understanding of this complex construct. Philosophical theories provide deep, normative insights into what happiness ought to be, while psychological research offers practical, empirical evidence of how happiness is experienced and achieved. This interdisciplinary approach can enrich our understanding of happiness, leading to more effective strategies for enhancing well-being, particularly in the university student population, who face unique stressors and challenges.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for understanding happiness integrates both philosophical theories and psychological models, each providing unique but complementary insights into well-being.
.

2.1. Psychological Models

Psychological research on happiness has yielded several influential models that operationalize and measure well-being in empirical terms. Martin Seligman's PERMA model identifies five essential elements of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (Wagner *et al.*, 2020). This framework suggests that happiness is multifaceted, encompassing not only positive emotions but also meaningful engagement, supportive relationships, a sense of purpose, and personal achievement. Contrasting this, set-point theory posits that individuals have a baseline level of happiness determined largely by genetics and stable personality traits. While life events can temporarily impact happiness, individuals tend to return to their set-point over time. This theory underscores the role of inherent predispositions in shaping long-term well-being. Moreover, subjective well-being, as measured by self-report assessments like the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, provides insights into individuals' subjective evaluations of their happiness, encompassing life satisfaction and emotional experiences (Kjell *et al.*,2016).

2.2 Integration

Integrating philosophical theories with psychological models offers a comprehensive approach to understanding happiness. Both perspectives provide complementary and contrasting insights that enrich our grasp of this complex phenomenon. Philosophical theories offer normative guidance on the ethical and moral dimensions of happiness, emphasizing virtues, personal growth, and the pursuit of a meaningful life (Fowers, 2012). In contrast, psychological models contribute empirical evidence on how happiness is experienced, measured, and influenced by factors such as relationships, accomplishments, and personal attitudes. A proposed framework for integration involves leveraging philosophical insights to inform the development of psychological interventions aimed at enhancing well-being. By integrating these perspectives, we can bridge theoretical depth with practical applications, advancing our understanding of happiness in ways that benefit individuals, communities, and societal well-being.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the nature of happiness among university students in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The mixed methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of happiness from both philosophical and psychological perspectives.

3.2. Participants

The study targets a sample of 301 university students across various universities in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.

3.3. Sampling Methods

The sampling method utilized includes stratified sampling for quantitative data and purposive sampling for qualitative data. Stratified sampling ensures representation across different faculties and years of study, while purposive sampling selects participants who can provide in-depth insights into the research topic.

3.4. Data Collection

This research utilized a concurrent triangulation design, collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. This design ensures that the two types of data complement each other, providing a holistic understanding of the research questions.

3.4.1. Instruments

The primary instruments for data collection are a structured questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire comprises validated scales and items to assess different dimensions of happiness. These include measures derived from psychological models such as the PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) and subjective well-being scales like the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). Additional items address philosophical perspectives on happiness, exploring concepts such as eudaimonia, hedonism, and virtue ethics.

3.4.2. Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to university students through a combination of online platforms and in-person administration. Researchers collaborated with university administrators and faculty to facilitate the distribution process, ensuring maximum participation and adherence to ethical guidelines.

3.5 Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Data: Analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlations, and factor analysis to explore relationships between variables.
2. Qualitative Data: Analyzed thematically to uncover nuanced insights into students' perceptions and experiences of happiness.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committees. Informed consent was sought from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality. Permission was also obtained from participants' parents or legal guardians due to the potential sensitivity of the topics discussed. Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the study to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires were presented in the quantitative results section. Conversely, data from open-ended questions and interviews were analyzed and reported in the qualitative results section.

4.1 Quantitative Results

The sample selected for this study included both female and male students. According to the bar chart (**Figure 1**), there were significantly more female students compared to male students, with approximately 216 female students and 85 male students. This distribution indicates that 72% of the students were female, while 28% were male. Given the visual representation in the bar chart (**Figure 1**), the sample predominantly comprised female students.
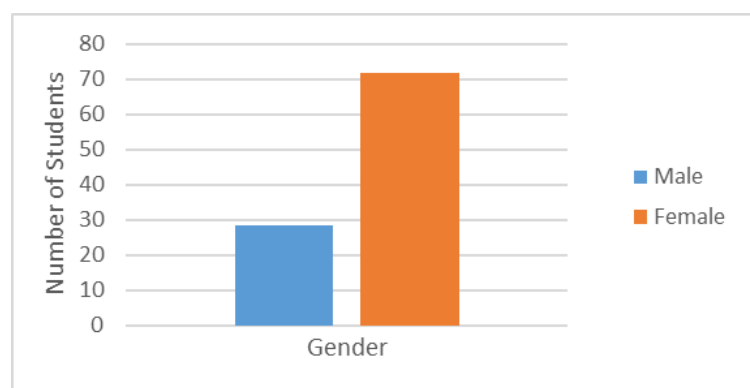
Figure 1. Gender distribution.

The sample selected for this study included students from different academic streams, representing different subject areas. According to the data, 58% of the students are engineering students, as shown by **Figure 2**.
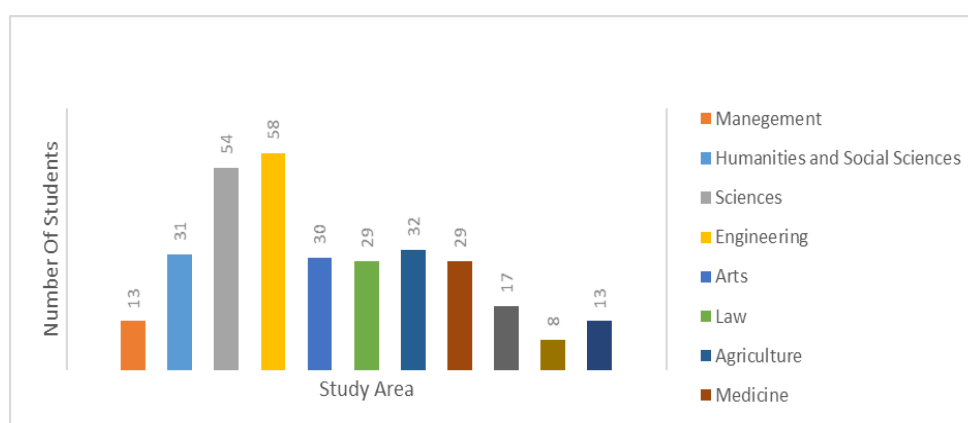

Figure 2. Academic streams.

4.1.1. Philosophical perspectives on happiness

A recent survey on students' perceptions of happiness revealed diverse viewpoints through a quantitative analysis of their responses to four philosophical questions. The questions aimed to understand their definitions of happiness, the philosophical concepts that align with their views, their agreement with the statement "Happiness is primarily about living a morally good life," and whether they believe happiness is an inherent right or something that must be earned.

4.1.1.2. Definitions of happiness

The survey results showed varied definitions of happiness among the students. A small portion, 5% of the students (**Figure 3**), identified happiness simply as a state of joy or contentment, focusing on the emotional experience of being happy. Another 12% of the students expanded this concept, defining a happy and meaningful life as one that is virtuous and meaningful, suggesting that living in alignment with moral values and finding purpose contributes to their sense of happiness. A larger group, comprising 34% of the students, associated happiness with achieving personal goals and success, indicating that accomplishments and progress in personal ambitions play a significant role in their perception of happiness. The largest segment, 49% of the students, defined happiness as freedom from pain and suffering, highlighting the importance of well-being and the absence of distress as crucial factors in their understanding of what it means to be happy.

Figure 3. Definitions of happiness among the students.

These varied definitions illustrate the multifaceted nature of happiness and how it can be influenced by different priorities and life experiences. Correspondingly, Oishi and Gilbert (2016) stated that happiness is typically described as a state of well-being marked by lasting positive emotions, which can range from simple contentment to profound and intense joy in life, along with a natural inclination to sustain this state.

4.1.1.3. Philosophical concepts of happiness

According to the philosophical concept of happiness, students' perspectives varied significantly. As shown in **Figure 4**, 23% of students identified happiness as Eudaimonia, which refers to flourishing through virtuous living. These students believe that true happiness comes from living a life of moral integrity and fulfilling one's potential. The majority, 61%, associated happiness with Hedonism, which emphasizes maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. This group sees happiness primarily as the pursuit of pleasurable experiences and the avoidance of suffering. Additionally, 13% of students viewed happiness through the lens of Utilitarianism, which advocates for the greatest happiness for the greatest number. These students believe that actions should be judged by their ability to promote overall well-being and happiness for the largest number of people. A smaller group, 3%, understood happiness from an Existentialist perspective, seeing it as creating meaning in life through individual choices. These students emphasize personal freedom and responsibility in shaping a meaningful and fulfilling life. This diverse range of views highlights the complexity and multifaceted nature of happiness as understood by different philosophical traditions.
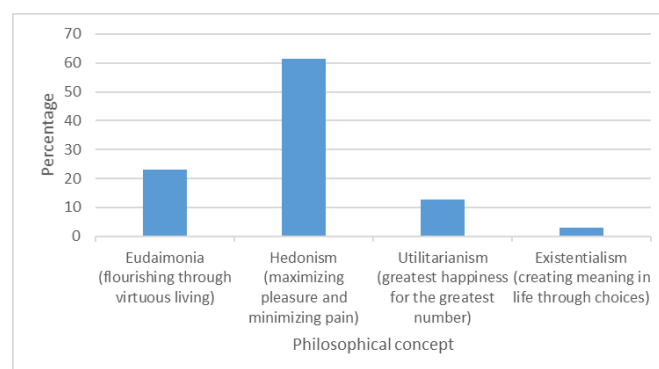

Figure 4. Students' perspectives on the philosophical concept of happiness.

4.1.1.4. Moral life and happiness

In a recent survey conducted among a group of 301 students, the notion that "Happiness is primarily about living a morally good life" was explored. The results revealed that a notable portion of the students resonate with this idea. Specifically, 12% of the students strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief in the importance of morality for achieving happiness. Furthermore, a significant majority, comprising 82% of the students, expressed their agreement with the statement, suggesting that they too see a strong link between moral living and happiness. These findings highlight a consensus among students that ethical behavior and moral principles play a crucial role in attaining a happy and fulfilling life.

4.1.1.5. Moral life and happiness

In a recent survey conducted among a group of 301 students, the notion that "Happiness is primarily about living a morally good life" was explored. The results revealed that a notable portion of the students resonate with this idea. Specifically, 12% of the students strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a firm belief in the importance of morality for achieving happiness. Furthermore, a significant majority, comprising 82% of the students, expressed their agreement with the statement, suggesting that they too see a strong link between moral living and happiness. These findings highlight a consensus among students that ethical behavior and moral principles play a crucial role in attaining a happy and fulfilling life.

Overall, the survey's quantitative analysis of students' responses reveals a rich tapestry of perspectives on happiness, influenced by emotional states, philosophical doctrines, moral principles, and the belief in earning happiness through one's efforts.

4.1.1.6. Happiness as an earned state

On the other hand, a substantial majority of the students, amounting to 92%, mentioned that happiness is something that must be earned. This perspective suggests that these students believe happiness is not simply given or naturally occurring, but rather a result of one's efforts, achievements, and possibly the overcoming of challenges. It indicates a viewpoint that happiness requires active pursuit and dedication, whether through personal growth, fulfilling goals, or maintaining positive relationships and moral integrity. This belief underscores the idea that happiness is an outcome of intentional actions and decisions, rather than a passive state of being.

Overall, the survey's quantitative analysis of students' responses reveals a rich tapestry of perspectives on happiness, influenced by emotional states, philosophical doctrines, moral principles, and the belief in earning happiness through one's efforts.

4.1.2 Psychological findings on happiness

A recent survey on the psychological perspectives of happiness among 301 students revealed diverse insights based on their responses to four key questions: How often do you experience happiness in your daily life? What factors contribute most to your happiness? How do you typically measure your happiness? To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Happiness can be scientifically measured and quantified"? The information obtained from the students was analyzed quantitatively, and the results are presented below.

4.1.2.1. Frequency of experiencing happiness

In the survey, 79% of the students mentioned that they experience happiness frequently in their daily lives. This indicates that a large majority of students regularly feel a sense of joy and contentment. Meanwhile, 16% of the students reported experiencing happiness only sometimes in their daily lives. This suggests that while happiness is a common experience for many, there is

a notable portion of students who find it less consistent. These results reflect a general trend of positive emotional well-being among the students, but also highlight that a significant minority may face challenges in maintaining consistent happiness.

4.1.2.2. Factors contributing to happiness

When analyzing the correlation coefficient between gender and the factors that contribute to happiness, the coefficient was found to be 1. This indicates a perfect positive correlation, suggesting a strong relationship between gender and the factors influencing happiness (**Figure 5**).
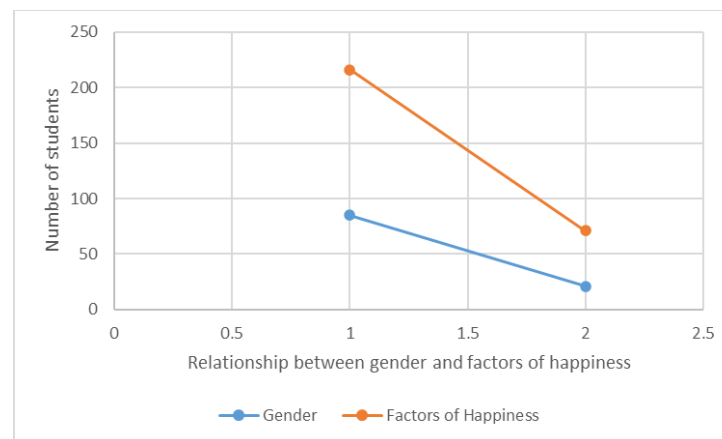

Figure 5. Relationship between gender and the factors influencing happiness

According to the survey, 98% of female students reported that relationships with family and friends are the primary factors affecting their happiness. This highlights the importance of social connections and emotional support for female students in achieving happiness. In contrast, 95% of male students indicated that financial stability and academic or career success are the main factors influencing their happiness. This suggests that male students place a higher value on financial security and professional achievements as key contributors to their overall sense of well-being. These findings illustrate distinct differences in how male and female students perceive the sources of their happiness. For female students, interpersonal relationships play a critical role, whereas male students tend to prioritize economic and career-related aspects. Understanding these gender-based differences can provide valuable insights into the diverse needs and motivations that drive happiness among students.

4.1.2.3. Measuring happiness

When measuring happiness in their lives, 70% of the surveyed students mentioned (**Figure 6**) that it can be gauged through personal reflection and self-assessment. This indicates that the majority of students believe introspection and evaluating their emotional state are key to understanding their level of happiness. Personal reflection allows individuals to consider their experiences, emotions, and overall satisfaction, providing a subjective yet meaningful measure of happiness.
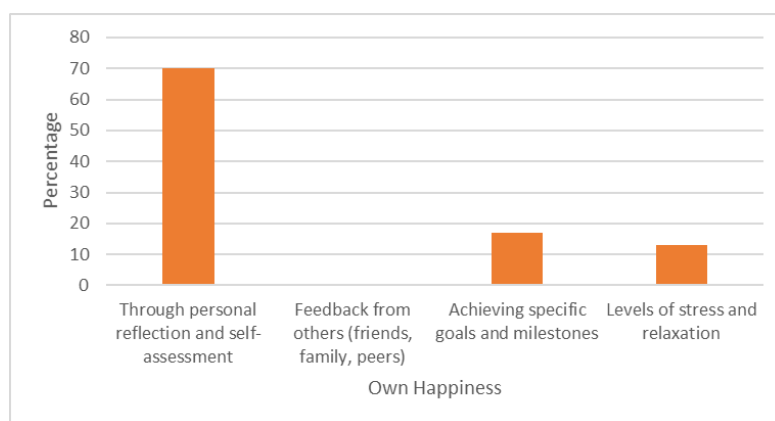
Figure 6. Students' measurements of their happiness.

Additionally, 17% of the students mentioned that happiness can be measured by achieving specific goals and milestones. This perspective suggests that for these students, happiness is closely linked to tangible accomplishments and progress in their personal, academic, or professional lives. Achieving specific goals provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment, contributing to their overall sense of happiness.

These findings highlight two different approaches to measuring happiness among students. The first approach emphasizes internal self-assessment, focusing on individual feelings and reflections. The second approach is more objective, tying happiness to external achievements and milestones. Both methods underscore the multifaceted nature of happiness, combining both subjective and objective elements in its assessment. Understanding these different perspectives on measuring happiness can help in developing more comprehensive approaches to enhancing student well-being, recognizing that both personal introspection and goal achievement play important roles in the pursuit of happiness.

4.1.2.4. Scientific measurement of happiness

When asked about the opinion that happiness can be scientifically measured and quantified, 32% of the students gave a neutral response, while 68% disagreed. According to these students, happiness is perceived as a qualitative measure rather than something that can be quantified scientifically. However, previous findings indicate that the measurement of happiness can encompass both quantitative and qualitative approaches, depending on the methods and tools used (Veenhoven, 2017).

Quantitative measures involve numerical data and statistical analysis, generating objective, standardized assessments that can be compared across different groups and over time. Examples include self-report surveys like the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), which provide numerical scores quantifying levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and emotional states (Vela *et al.,* 2017). The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) collect quantitative data on happiness and emotional states at various points in time. Physiological and biological measures, such as hormone levels or brain activity, also provide quantifiable data. Composite measures like the Gallup World Poll and the OECD Better Life Index aggregate multiple quantitative indicators to offer a comprehensive measure of happiness (Chaaban *et al.,* 2016).

On the other hand, qualitative measures involve non-numerical data and focus on understanding the depth and complexity of individuals' experiences and perceptions. These include interviews, focus groups, diary methods, content analysis, and case studies, which explore individuals' experiences and perceptions of happiness in detail. Integrative approaches

combining both quantitative and qualitative methods provide a comprehensive understanding of happiness, allowing for the quantification of happiness while also exploring the personal and contextual factors influencing well-being. For example, a study might use surveys to measure overall happiness levels and follow up with interviews to explore why participants feel happy or unhappy. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative measures are essential for a full understanding of happiness, with quantitative measures enabling broad comparisons and analyses, and qualitative measures offering deeper insights into the personal and contextual factors that influence happiness (Jongbloed & Andres, 2015).

4.1.3 Integrating philosophical and psychological perspectives

When considering the idea that understanding philosophical concepts can improve mental well-being, 85% of students agreed, while 15% mentioned that it might be possible. Hence, regarding the importance of considering both philosophical and psychological perspectives when studying happiness, 62% of students said it was very important, and 36% said it was important and agreed with this view. Additionally, 77% of students believe that a combination of personal introspection and philosophical understanding, along with practical actions and psychological strategies, contributes more effectively to achieving happiness. They recognize that understanding philosophical concepts provides a deeper sense of purpose and meaning, while psychological strategies and practical actions offer tangible ways to improve well-being. This holistic approach suggests that integrating introspective and theoretical insights with actionable techniques can lead to a more comprehensive and sustained sense of happiness.

4.1.3.1. Challenge in integrating philosophical and psychological perspectives on happiness

In a survey of 301 students, 54% identified the biggest challenge in integrating philosophical and psychological perspectives on happiness as the differing definitions of happiness. This variability complicates efforts to synthesize these perspectives into a cohesive understanding. Additionally, 46% of students noted that cultural and individual differences pose significant challenges. These variations in cultural values and individual experiences influence how happiness is perceived and pursued, highlighting the complexity of achieving a unified perspective on happiness that incorporates both philosophical and psychological insights. Integrating these diverse viewpoints requires navigating nuanced interpretations and recognizing the impact of cultural context and personal beliefs on the pursuit and attainment of happiness.

Previous research has identified that one of the biggest challenges in integrating philosophical and psychological perspectives on happiness is reconciling different definitions and approaches to understanding happiness. Philosophical perspectives often emphasize broad concepts such as virtue, meaning, and fulfillment, while psychological perspectives focus on measurable aspects such as subjective well-being, positive emotions, and life satisfaction (Das *et al.,* 2020). Reconciling these perspectives requires addressing fundamental questions about the nature of happiness, the role of internal versus external factors, and the validity of the various methodologies used to study and measure happiness. In addition, cultural and individual variability further complicate integration efforts, as definitions of happiness can vary widely based on cultural norms, personal values, and life experiences (Diener & Lucas, 2000). Achieving a unified understanding that includes both philosophical depth and empirical rigor requires navigating these complexities and finding common ground that respects the richness and diversity of perspectives on happiness.

4.1.4. Student Perspectives on Sources of Happiness

When asked about what brings true happiness into their lives, students expressed varied perspectives as shown in **Figure 7.**
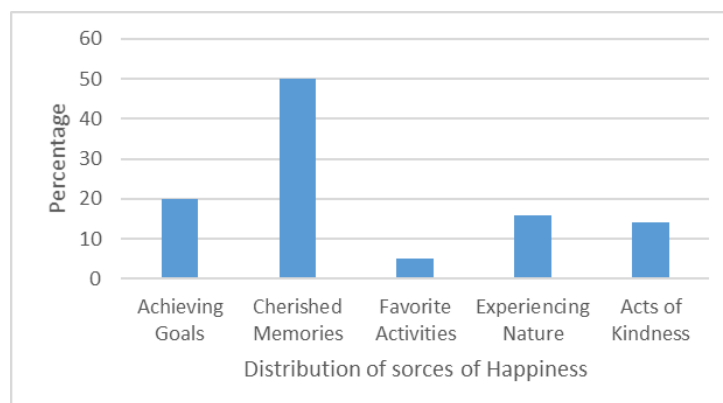

Figure 7. Students' perceptions of sources of happiness.

Approximately 20% emphasized that achieving goals, such as passing tests, completing projects, or reaching personal milestones, contributes significantly to their happiness. Interestingly, a majority of male students (90%) shared this sentiment (**Figure 8**), finding joy in the sense of accomplishment these milestones bring. About 50% of the students stated that they derive happiness from cherished memories spent with loved ones, including family and friends. Remarkably, among those who find happiness in these relationships, 95% are girls, underscoring the importance of interpersonal connections in their lives.

Engaging in favorite activities, such as playing games, creating art, or pursuing hobbies, brings happiness to approximately 5% of the students. Meanwhile, about 16% derive satisfaction from experiencing nature through activities like hiking, spending a day at the beach, or watching sunsets. Furthermore, 14% of students find happiness in acts of kindness and making a positive impact on others' lives through helping. Notably, the majority (95%) of students who derive happiness from these altruistic acts are girls, highlighting their inclination towards empathy and community engagement.
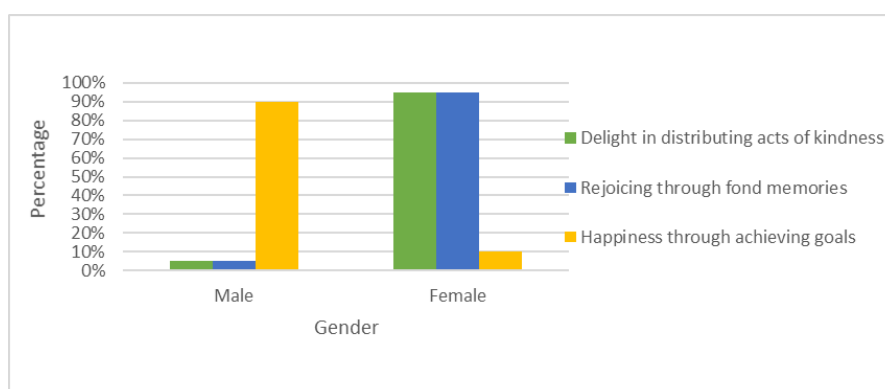

Figure 8. Students' perceptions of happiness by gender.

4.2. Qualitative Data

Through an iterative analysis of the collected qualitative data, two main themes emerged, revealing various concepts and patterns related to happiness. These themes provided students with a deeper understanding of the ideas and activities that contribute to their sense of well-being. By examining these themes, students were able to explore different dimensions of

happiness, including emotional, social, and cognitive factors, ultimately fostering a richer comprehension of what happiness means in their lives. This process not only highlighted the diversity of perspectives on happiness but also encouraged students to reflect on their own experiences and engage in meaningful discussions about achieving well-being.

4.2.1. Theme 01: Students' views on psychological strategies such as mindfulness and gratitude exercises that have been found to increase happiness

There are various exercises to increase happiness, among which the students commented on the strategies used, some of which are given below. Of these, it was found that students mainly use mindfulness meditation, gratitude exercises, mindful breathing exercises, physical activity and mindfulness, acts of kindness, mindful eating, visualization techniques, digital detox, and hygiene practices.

(i) Mindfulness meditation

It has been stated that most of the students do this mindfulness meditation to maintain their happiness and reduce stress. The comments about it are given below. Several students said, "Practicing mindfulness helps me to be present and reduce my anxiety. I feel more grounded and able to appreciate the moment." Another group of students said, "By incorporating mindfulness into my daily routine, I am more aware of my thoughts and feelings. I'm more aware, which helps me manage stress better."

(ii) Gratitude Exercises

It could be seen from the following comments that students are satisfied by thanking others and maintaining peace of mind. Several students said, "Keeping a gratitude journal where I write down three things, I'm thankful for each day has made me more positive and appreciative of the little things in life." Another student said, "Expressing gratitude to others through a thank-you note or a simple verbal acknowledgment. Doing so strengthens my relationships and lifts my spirits."

(iii) Positive Effirmations

Happiness can also be developed through positive affirmations, and the students expressed their views on how to find happiness through that method. Several students said, "Starting my day with positive affirmations boosts my self-esteem and sets a positive tone for the rest of the day." Several other students said, "Repeated affirmations like 'I'm good' and 'I'm worth it' help me fight negative self-talk and stay motivated."

(iv) Mindful Breathing Exercises

Many Buddhist students reported practicing this method, and many students said that "deep, mindful breathing in stressful situations calms me down and helps me think more clearly." Another group of students said, as in, "Practicing breathing exercises before exams or presentations reduces my anxiety and improves my focus."

(v) Acts of Kindness

It was found that female students were more interested in these acts of kindness. Among them, several students said, "Doing small acts of kindness, such as helping a classmate or volunteering, gives me a sense of purpose and makes me happy." Another group of students said, "Seeing the positive impact of my actions on others strengthens my belief in the goodness of people and increases my happiness."

(vi) Physical Activity and Mindfulness

Another group of students said, "Combining physical exercise with mindfulness, such as yoga or tai chi, helps me stay fit while promoting mental relaxation and clarity." Several other students said, "Mindfully walking or running allows me to enjoy nature and be present in the moment, which lifts my spirits."

(vii) Mindful Eating

Several students said that "paying attention to the taste, texture, and smell of my food makes eating a more enjoyable and satisfying experience," indicating that some students find pleasure through mindfulness. Another group of students said, "Mindful eating helps me develop a healthy relationship with food and reduce overeating."

(viii) Visualization Techniques

Another group of students said, "Visualizing positive outcomes and my future goals keeps me motivated and focused on achieving my dreams." Several students said, "Using visualization techniques before stressful events like exams or competitions helps me feel more prepared and confident."

(ix) Digital Detox

Today's society is often focused on digital technology, and many students said, "Taking regular breaks from social media and digital devices allows me to be more present and lower my stress levels." Another group of students said, "Spending less time on my phone gives me more opportunities to engage in meaningful face-to-face interactions and hobbies."

(x) Sleep Hygiene Practices

Another group of students said, "Prioritizing regular sleep hygiene, maintaining a regular sleep schedule, and creating a relaxing bedtime routine have significantly improved my mood and energy levels." Several other students said, "Getting enough quality sleep helps me stay focused and more resilient to daily challenges."

4.2.2. Theme 2: Students' Opinions about Happiness

Students expressed different ideas about what happiness is and how to try to achieve it, some of which are presented below.

A student commented, "Achieving happiness for me involves maintaining a balanced life where I prioritize meaningful relationships, personal growth, and a healthy work-life balance. It's about nurturing relationships with loved ones, pursuing personal interests and career goals that align with my values, and finding fulfillment in caring for my physical and mental well-being. Engaging in joyful activities, practicing mindfulness, and contributing to my community also play a critical role in my pursuit of happiness. By focusing on these aspects, I strive to cultivate a fulfilling life where happiness is not just a feeling, but a sustainable state of well-being and contentment." Another student said, "Happiness is a state of contentment in my life where I feel a deep sense of peace and contentment with my life. It includes a balance of positive emotions, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose." Several students also said, "Happiness is not just fleeting moments of joy, but resilience in challenging times and the ability to appreciate simple, everyday experiences." Another student said, "Living authentically with my values is essential to my happiness. It means being true to myself, making choices that reflect my core beliefs, and acting with integrity in all areas of life. Embracing personal growth, living with

purpose, and practicing mindfulness further enriches my journey to happiness. By staying true to who I am and aligning my actions with my values, I create a fulfilling life where I feel true contentment and inner peace." Among them, most students said, "I try to maintain happiness, but the demands of my workload often cause stress." Another group of students said, "Our education system does not encourage us to find happiness, and we are made to suffer by the examination system."

The survey results reveal compelling insights into the diverse perspectives students hold regarding happiness, both philosophically and psychologically. The demographic analysis shows a predominance of female students in the sample, with a significant majority engaged in engineering disciplines. This distribution is crucial in understanding the context and potential influences on students' perceptions of happiness. The varied definitions of happiness underscore its multifaceted nature. While nearly half of the students associate happiness with freedom from pain and suffering, a substantial portion connects it to personal achievements and goal fulfillment. These findings align with Oishi and Gilbert (2016), who describe happiness as a spectrum from simple contentment to profound joy. The dominant philosophical concept among students is Hedonism, with 61% linking happiness to pleasure maximization and pain minimization. This suggests that the pursuit of immediate pleasures is a prevailing theme in their understanding of happiness. In contrast, a minority view happiness through Eudaimonia, emphasizing moral integrity and self-fulfillment, indicating that while immediate gratification is significant, a segment of students still values deeper, virtue-based happiness.

The strong consensus among students regarding the link between morality and happiness, with 82% agreeing that living a morally good life is crucial for happiness, underscores the significant value placed on ethical behavior. This finding is consistent with philosophical traditions and empirical research suggesting that moral values are integral to achieving lasting happiness. For instance, Aristotle's concept of Eudaimonia emphasizes flourishing through virtuous living, while recent studies in positive psychology highlight the role of moral integrity in sustaining well-being (Titus, 2017). The overwhelming majority (92%) of students who believe that happiness must be earned reflect a broader view of happiness as a result of personal effort and achievement rather than a passive state. This aligns with theories of happiness that emphasize the importance of personal growth and perseverance. For example, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory posits that intrinsic motivation and personal effort are crucial for experiencing true satisfaction and happiness.

The high frequency of happiness reported by 79% of students, combined with the recognition that a notable minority struggles with consistent happiness, highlights a generally positive outlook tempered by challenges in maintaining it. This pattern is supported by Diener's (2000) research on subjective well-being, which suggests that while many individuals experience regular joy, fluctuations in happiness are common and influenced by various personal and situational factors. Gender differences in happiness sources, with female students prioritizing social relationships and male students focusing on financial stability and academic success, reflect well-documented trends. For instance, a study by Bühler *et al.* (2019) found that women often derive happiness from social connections, whereas men tend to focus more on achievement-related goals. These findings indicate the need for gender-sensitive approaches in promoting well-being.

The dual focus on personal introspection and goal achievement for measuring happiness reveals a broader debate on the validity and utility of quantifying happiness. While 70% of students believe in self-assessment as a method for measuring happiness, 68% disagree with scientific quantification. This discrepancy reflects the ongoing discussion in the literature about the balance between subjective and objective measures of happiness. Veenhoven (2017) argues

for an integrated approach that combines quantitative measures with qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of happiness. The majority of students (85%) who acknowledge the value of integrating philosophical concepts with practical psychological strategies for enhancing mental well-being reflect a holistic approach to happiness. This perspective is supported by research suggesting that combining philosophical insights with empirical strategies offers a more complete understanding of well-being (Jongbloed & Andres, 2015). However, challenges such as differing definitions of happiness and cultural variability complicate efforts to create a unified perspective. Reconciling these diverse viewpoints requires navigating the complexities highlighted by Das *et al.* (2020), who emphasize the need to address varying definitions and cultural contexts in the study of happiness.

Generally, integrating these findings with existing literature highlights the complex interplay of moral values, personal effort, gender differences, and the debate between subjective and objective measures in understanding happiness. This comprehensive view underscores the importance of a nuanced approach to promoting well-being that respects both individual experiences and broader philosophical and psychological perspectives. Overall, the discussion reveals a complex interplay of personal, philosophical, and psychological factors in the pursuit of happiness. The findings highlight the importance of addressing both immediate pleasures and deeper, moral considerations and suggest a nuanced approach to understanding and fostering happiness among students.

5. CONCLUSION

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of happiness among university students in Sri Lanka by synthesizing philosophical and psychological frameworks. From a philosophical perspective, students' conceptions of happiness reflect diverse ethical traditions, including hedonism and eudaimonia, with a significant emphasis on both pleasure and moral virtues. Psychologically, gender-specific trends were observed: female students prioritized social relationships, while male students focused on financial security and career success. The integration of these perspectives provides a nuanced understanding of happiness, demonstrating the significance of both ethical ideals and practical factors such as personal achievements and emotional well-being. This interdisciplinary approach underscores the value of incorporating normative ethical theories alongside empirical psychological methods in developing targeted interventions aimed at promoting well-being among university students. Such an approach highlights the need to address both the philosophical and psychological dimensions of happiness to support sustainable and meaningful well-being in this demographic.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

7. REFERENCES

Bühler, J. L., Weidmann, R., Nikitin, J., and Grob, A. (2019). A closer look at life goals across adulthood: Applying a developmental perspective to content, dynamics, and outcomes of goal importance and goal attainability. *European Journal of Personality*, *33*(3), 359-384.

Chaaban, J., Irani, A., and Khoury, A. (2016). The composite global well-being index (CGWBI): A new multi-dimensional measure of human development. *Social Indicators Research*, *129*, 465-487.

Christopher, J. C. (1999). Situating psychological well-being: Exploring the cultural roots of its theory and research. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *77*(2), 141-152.

Das, K. V., Jones-Harrell, C., Fan, Y., Ramaswami, A., Orlove, B., and Botchwey, N. (2020). Understanding subjective well-being: perspectives from psychology and public health. *Public Health Reviews*, *41*, 1-32.

Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American psychologist*, *55*(1), 34-43.

Diener, E., and Lucas, R. E. (2000). Explaining differences in societal levels of happiness: Relative standards, need fulfillment, culture, and evaluation theory. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *1*, 41-78.

Fowers, B. J. (2012). An Aristotelian framework for the human good. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, *32*(1), 10-23.

Jongbloed, J., and Andres, L. (2015). Elucidating the constructs happiness and wellbeing: A mixed methods approach. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *5*(3), 1-20.

Kjell, O. N. E., Daukantaitė, D., Hefferon, K., and Sikström, S. (2016). The harmony in life scale complements the satisfaction with life scale: Expanding the conceptualization of the cognitive component of subjective well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, *126*, 893-919.

Oishi, S., and Gilbert, E. A. (2016). Current and future directions in culture and happiness research. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *8*, 54-58.

Ryan, R. M., and Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68-78.

Symons, X., and VanderWeele, T. (2024). Aristotelian flourishing and contemporary philosophical theories of wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *25*(1), 26-44.

Titus, C. S. (2017). Aquinas, Seligman, and positive psychology: A Christian approach to the use of the virtues in psychology. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *12*(5), 447-458.

Veenhoven, R. (2017). Measures of happiness: Which to choose?. *Metrics of subjective well-being: Limits and improvements*, 65-84.

Vela, J. C., Lerma, E., and Ikonomopoulos, J. (2017). Evaluation of the life satisfaction and subjective happiness scales with Mexican American high school and college students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *39*(1), 34-45.

Wagner, L., Gander, F., Proyer, R. T., and Ruch, W. (2020). Character strengths and PERMA: Investigating the relationships of character strengths with a multidimensional framework of well-being. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *15*, 307-328.