LIFE SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL ANXIETY AMONG INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

International university students are generally suffered from anxiety in their social interaction due to cultural diversity in a foreign country. This problem may force individuals to avoid social interaction, give rise to the feelings discomfort in new environment, and prevent them to perform well academically. The cross-cultural study of subjective well being which explain about life satisfaction is one indicator of the quality of life in a society, but there was no direct study which focus on social anxiety among university students. Thereby, the aims of this study is to examine how the relationship of life satisfaction on social anxiety among International students of Sultan Idris Education University. Research was designed by quantitative approach using Person Correlation and simple regression analyses. The variables have been measured by Life Satisfaction Scales (LSS), and Social Interactions Anxiety Scale (SIAS) among International university students. Pearson correlation test was conducted to evaluate the relationship between these variables. The result reported there was significant correlation between life satisfaction and social anxiety with r = -.248 (p<0.05), which is means the social anxiety will be low while life satisfaction is high. This study provided the information about social anxiety problem among international students and extended the explanation about the relationship life satisfaction on social anxiety.

Field of Research: life satisfaction, social anxiety, international university students

1. Introduction

A growing number of universities in Malaysia are competing to accommodate international students. Department of Immigration (MoHe, 2009) has shown it is 70,259 total of international students whether students who enroll at Private Higher Education Institutions or Public Higher Education Institutions in 2009. The top five countries of them were from China (10.355), followed by Indonesia (10.020), Iran (6.245), Nigeria (6.054), and Bangladesh (3.586). The latest statistics showed there are more than 90,000 international students currently studying in the several institutions of higher education in Malaysia (Yusoff and Chelliah, 2010). As more and more students choice to study abroad (Wang, 2009), the requirement to understand and concentrate on their psychological and social interaction anxiety during in foreign country becomes more important. In this study, the researcher concentrated on Sultan Idris Education University as one of the large public sector education University in Malaysia, which has been developing international standards of education level.

Previous studies had been shown that many individual experience anxiety when they faced with various situations in life. Anxiety in this term is a general feeling of discomfort, be felt as a concept in
personality when feeling anxious (state anxiety) during social interaction (Hidayat, Singgih and Indiati, 1996). Several studies on the human tendency to feel anxiety when interacting with the social environment are the anxiety of public speaking which clearly visible from a random survey of 500 residents Winnipeg, Manitoba. The results of this study indicated that 1 of 3 people experiencing excessive anxiety when speaking in public, and influential a significant adverse effect on their lives (Nevid et al, 2005). Based on that data, feeling of anxious might be felt by everyone and cause by various thing in social interaction. This study will be measured the common problem which be felt by everyone in more specific and complicated environment, international university students who will face many problem and vulnerability to feeling worry in foreign country which different norm and culture.

Subjective well-being is often defined in terms of frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and high life satisfaction (e.g. Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, 1999). Life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect in part have been researched more frequently across culture (Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, 1999). Furthermore, these components of subjective well being are major focal points that allow for a certain degree of precision in measuring the fuzzier, folk concept of happiness. The cross-cultural study of subjective well being is one indicator of the quality of life in a society (Diener, 2009). Diener and Diener (2009) have studied subjective well being in 31 nations, and found that the correlates of well being vary across societies. Predictor of subjective well being varies substantially across cultures. Subjective well being is different between individualistic and collectivistic society. Another research has reported a close relationship between subjective well-being and maintenance of physical and psychological health in life and degree of social interaction (Iwasa et al., 2006).

Previous studies have established the explanation about subjective well being generally have a connection to social life. No direct study yet which explore in direct and detail about the relation of subjective well being cognitive aspect, which is life satisfaction, to social anxiety. Hence, the aim of this study was to investigate directly the relationship between life satisfaction and social anxiety and extended the explanation in this construct.

2. Literature Review of Social Anxiety

La Greca (1999) defined social anxiety as one affective response that could result from negative, aversive, or exclusionary experiences with peers. Feeling of social anxiety may in turn inhibit social interactions that are necessary for satisfactory social or emotional development. In this manner, social anxiety could play a role in the development of socially withdrawn and avoidant behavior, leading to missed opportunities for normal socialization experiences, as well as further problems with peer relation (La Greca, 1999).

Schlenker and Leary (1982) states, social anxiety is experienced when people are motivated to make a desired impression on others but are not certain they will do so. This concern about making a particular impression on others motivates people to put their best foot forward in social situations. In fact, individuals who focused his attention on it, directing it to experience social anxiety and emotional processes involved in avoiding social rejection (Leary and Kowalski, 1995). Further, Leary and Kowalski (1995) defined social anxiety is a pervasive part of everyday life, whether experienced during public speaking (Nevid et al., 2005), in casual conversation, interaction with a boss, a potential romantic partner, a complete stranger, feeling of anxiety, uncertainty, and awkwardness are often the consequence of quite ordinary encounters.
Holt, Heimberg, Hope, and Liebowitz (1992) suggest that the situation that precipitate social anxiety can classified into four primary categories. The most anxiety-producing situation involving formal speaking and interaction: giving a talk in front of an audience, performing on stage, giving a report to a group, speaking at a meeting and the like. A second category of that induces social anxiety involves informal speaking and interaction. This category includes situations such as going to a party, meeting strangers, and trying to pick up someone. Third, interactions requiring assertive behavior (expressing disagreement, returning goods to a store, or resisting a high pressure salesperson) also precipitate social anxiety. Fourth, people sometimes feel socially anxious when they are simply observed by others while working, writing, or eating, for example. What all of these situations have in common that they tend to evoke concerns with other people’s evaluations of oneself (Leary and Kowalsky, 1995).

Social anxiety is an effect on psychological well-being of the individual concerned. The higher the social anxiety that one feels, the higher the tendency to feel difficulty in asking for help to others, feel safe engaging in relationships with others, and not able to establish warm relationships with others (DePaulo et al; Hidayat, Singgih, and Indiati, 1996). Ledley and Heimberg (2006) state socially anxious people are exquisitely sensitive to the feedback that they receive from others and facial expressions are an important way in which feedback is communicated. Individuals who experience social anxiety tend to feel frustrated at his inability to establish a warm relationship with others. They always feel tense and depressed, or have always felt short. Social anxiety makes people confused and disappointed to his own feelings to herself (Phillips, in Hidayat and Indiati 1996). Based on the conceptual theory, then social anxiety is not only normative but also as a process of adaptation (Ledley and Heimberg, 2006).

Social anxiety in this study is the feeling which common be felt by everyone especially university students as an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness in social environment, worries about social situations like new daily norm, educational interaction like public speaking or talking to authority figures, or experience more general feelings of shyness or a lack of confidence in social environment.

3. Literature Review of Life Satisfaction

Part of cognitive component in subjective well being is referred to life satisfaction. In subjective well being, life satisfaction be evaluated by self adjustment, which provides an adjunct to measures oriented toward the assessment of negative states. It assesses the positive side of the individual’s experience rather than focusing on unpleasant emotions. In making a life satisfaction judgment, life satisfaction emphasizes the person’s own standards of evaluation (Pavot and Diener, 2009). There is evidence that satisfaction often forms a factor separate from affective indexes of well-being. In other hands, life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment of one’s life in which the criteria for judgment are up to the person. Life satisfaction seems to have moderate temporal stability, although it also changes in reaction to life events. In addition, life satisfaction shows some degree of autonomy from related subjective well-being constructs such as depression (Pavot and Diener, 2009).

Subjective well-being has another component in addition to the hedonic component, it includes a cognitive judgment about one’s life, as a whole, as satisfying. Some researchers refer to this as life satisfaction, and most see it as an essential feature in the overall structure of subjective well-being. It is possible for judgments of life satisfaction to be at variance with the hedonic component (e.g., a starving artist who has a lot of negative affect and little positive affect in his or her life, but judges his or her life to be satisfying and worthwhile). However, in most populations the life satisfaction
component and the hedonic component of subjective well-being are at least moderately and sometimes highly correlated (Diener, Napa-Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto, and Suh, 2000).

Early research focused on the causes of well-being, but recently researchers have begun to focus on its consequences, and particularly on whether high levels of subjective well-being are beneficial to effective functioning, or alternately, whether they almost success. A growing body of evidence suggests that high well-being and life satisfaction significantly improve life within the four areas of health and longevity, work and income, social relations, and societal benefits (see Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008; Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener, 2005 for a full review).

4. Conceptual Framework

This study has been conducted to explore the relation and influence independent variable, life satisfaction to dependent variable, social anxiety among international university students.

The conceptual framework based on background theory, objective of study and hypothesis of this research could be described by following schema:

\[ H_0: \text{Life satisfaction has no significant correlation with social anxiety among international students at university.} \]

5. Research Design
5.1 Population and Sample

Based on academic database 2012, there were 105 International students at Sultan Idris Education University, include exchange students program. International students of Sultan Idris Education University were comprises, 59 students in degree program, include exchange students, 34 students in master’s program, and 12 students in PhD program. They came from Indonesia, China, Korea, Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, USA, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. Most of them were came from Indonesia, especially Acehnese students which almost 50% of the population. The consideration of choosing this population because there were rarely research about International students in these aspects, they were new population in university since Sultan Idris Education University was developing International students this early years, and its also as evaluation to International office about general description regarding to social anxiety.

### Table 1: Population of UPSI International Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The population of the study was the accessible and available numbers of UPSI International students at the time of study. As some of International students travel to their home countries frequently and involve in other activities (collecting research data to other places, participation in events, etc) so it was not realistic to reach and access every International students. Hence, the participants of this study have been accessed by convenience sampling technique. According to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the representative the sample size for this population should be 86.

**Krejcie and Morgan’s Formula**

\[
s = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}
\]

- \(s\) = required sample size
- \(X^2\) = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)
- \(N\) = the population size
- \(P\) = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)
- \(d\) = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05)

5.2 Instrumentation and Operationalisation

Introductory letter has been written in English, with official letter from Sultan Idris Education University also be attached with questionnaire. The introductory letter comprises of introduction of the researcher, reason of research and declaration about to keep the secrecy of the respondent’s given information.
The survey questionnaire comprises on three main sections, a) LS Scale – (Life Satisfaction Scale), b) The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and c) Demographic information. LS – (Life Satisfaction Scale) which consist on five (5) items which has 5 choice, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These life satisfaction’s scale questions adopted from the study of Diener (1984), Diener and Biswas (2009) of 573 students of five universities (University of Illinois, University of New Jersey, Singapore Management University, California State University, East Carolina University).

The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick and Clarke, 1998) was administered to assess anxiety and avoidance in social situations, and was selected as it provides a brief measure of social anxiety. The scale consists of 18- items and responses were given on a 5-point scale (1 = Not at all to 5 = All the time). The development and validation of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) companion measures for assessing social phobia fears was described, the SIAS assesses fears of more general social interaction, the scales corresponding to the DSM-III-R descriptions of Social Phobia-Circumscribed and Generalized types, respectively. The scale was shown to possess high levels of internal consistency and test-retest reliability. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$) and test-retest reliability ($r = .92$). The scale correlated well with established measures of social anxiety (Mattick and Clarke, 1998). In the last, demographic section, six (6) questions will ask regarding their personal details.

5.3 Reliability Testing

All items of the present research were already used in different studies, and pilot test conducted to assess the internal reliability of both variables. The Cronbach’s alpha for all items of the study checked and should be well above the level of 0.7, which is acceptable measure for exploratory studies (Sekaran, 2003). Diener (1985) has reported that Life Satisfaction scale has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of 0.87. In the current study the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.86. Further, Mattick and Clarke (1998) also have reported that Social Interaction Anxiety scale has Cronbach alpha’s coefficient reported of .92. In the current study the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .91

5.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive studies refer as frequencies, mean, standard deviations and median. This analysis conducted for all demographic items to obtain general profile of the respondents. This analysis showed the identity and characteristic of all items.

To inspect the relationship between life satisfaction and social anxiety, Pearson correlation analysis (Dalgaard, 2008) has been used. Pearson correlation examined the nature of the relationship that exists between independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) and determines the relationships between the variables. Hair et al. (2003) illustrated the relationship or strength of the association between the dependent variable and independent variable has been used for the present study. Further, to inspect the contribution of IV to DV, simple regression enter method had applied as well.

6. Result and Discussion

6.1 Descriptive Statistics and Analysis
There were 87 International students from Sultan Idris Education University participated in this study. The majority of the participants were female (62.1%), while 37.9% were males. According to age, the majority of the participants were 20-23 years (44.8%), followed by 24-27 and 28-31 years (23.3% for each range), whereas above 31 years only 4.6%. Descriptive analysis test was applied to both variables. Mean of life satisfaction was 3.563, SD = .785, and social anxiety has mean = 2.550, SD = .594.

The t-test was applied to examine gender influence toward life satisfaction. The table 0.2 revealed that there was no statistical significant difference between male and female life satisfaction, (t= .452, p≥.652). The mean for males was higher (mean=3.61, SD=.759) than females (mean=3.533, SD=.805). This is an indication that the males control life satisfaction was higher than females’ control life satisfaction.

T-test table also showed there was no statistical significant difference between males and females social anxiety, (t=-1.100, p≥.275). The mean of social anxiety of female was higher (mean=2.605, SD=.580) than males (mean=2.460, SD=.615). This is an indication that the females control social anxiety was higher that males control social anxiety.

Table. 2: Life Satisfaction and Social Anxiety according to Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.612</td>
<td>.75983</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.533</td>
<td>.80564</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Anxiety</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.4609</td>
<td>.61576</td>
<td>-1.100</td>
<td>.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.6053</td>
<td>.58041</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even tough mean showed difference number but t-test result didn’t support the differences in gender aspect for both variables, with p-value were not significant. However, the consistent number showed, life satisfaction was related with social anxiety, males has higher life satisfaction and lower social anxiety than females.

Further, one way ANOVA was applied to measure the participants’ life satisfaction according to age. Table 0.3 reported that there was significant differences among ages on life satisfaction (F=2.891, p≤.04). The highest mean of life satisfaction according to age were above 31 years old (4.050), followed by 28-31 years (3.781), followed by 24-27 years (3.709), and the last by 20-23 (3.307). This statistical reported mean, the older of individual indicates the higher life satisfaction they have. Statistically indicated there was no differences of social anxiety according to ages (F=1.731, p≥.167). The highest mean of social anxiety according to age were started from 24-27 years (2.622), followed by 20-23 years (2.601), followed by 28-31 years (2.5), and the lowest were above 31 years (1.934).

Table 3: Life Satisfaction and Social Anxiety according to age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>20-23</td>
<td>3.3077</td>
<td>.86432</td>
<td>2.891</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24-27</td>
<td>3.7091</td>
<td>.52636</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Pearson correlation test, statistically life satisfaction has a significant correlation ($p=0.021, p < .05$) to social anxiety and the correlation was negative ($r = -0.248$). Life satisfaction has only 6.1% contribution to predict social anxiety among International students of Sultan Idris Education University, while 93.9% remaining is influenced by other factors. The detail numbers of those statistics are described in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Life Satisfaction</th>
<th>Social Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.248&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simple regression analysis results has reported that adjusted $R^2$ square = .050, $F_{1,85} = 5.567$, $p < 0.05$. Table below showed the detail result of enter method for this model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unstandardized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Anxiety</td>
<td>61.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Pearson correlation test exposed that there was significant correlation between life satisfaction and social anxiety among International Students at Sultan Idris Education University. There was negative correlation between them, which has the meaning the higher of life satisfaction, the lower of social anxiety, or the lower of life satisfaction indicates the higher of social anxiety. Life satisfaction is the definitive goal that we as human beings are determined to achieve our whole lives, fulfillment of a need or want (Tariq, 2011). Study by Mahmoud (2011) reported that no direct correlation between life satisfaction to social anxiety, but negative thinking has. It does not mean that life satisfaction totally has no correlation to social anxiety, but the relation is partly since life satisfaction refers to general cognitive evaluation of all important aspects in like for each individual (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999). Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008) also has explained that life satisfaction is individual feeling about how good and satisfied he faced the main life aspects, which is considered as important point for him, such as interpersonal relation, health, job, spirituality, activities and leisure time. The level of life satisfaction involved the need and fulfillment of social and interpersonal interaction to seek the human basic need. In contrast, social anxiety inhibit individual to interact as comfort as they want (Ledley and Heimberg, 2006; Mattick and Clarke, 1998). Hence, both of these constructs will influence each other.
According to simple regression analysis report, life satisfaction only has 6.1% contribution to predict social anxiety among international students of Sultan Idris Education University. Even though, this contribution looks small but the correlation showed significant. Result of current study was supported by previous research, which has shown that social anxiety symptoms affect life satisfaction beyond the disability they cause (Hambrick, Turk, Heimberg, Schneier, and Leibowitz, 2003). The consistent result also been found by Eng, Coles, Heimberg, and Safrend (2005), that individuals with social anxiety were not characterized by total dissatisfaction but were particularly dissatisfied with the quality of their achievement and social functioning. This study also found that all domains of life satisfaction were significantly inversely correlated with the severity of social anxiety and depressive symptoms. Further, Headey et al (in Eid and Larsen, 2008), has mentioned social relation one of life satisfaction factor. All social interaction and condition will determine how well individual there without social anxiety which is obstacle the quality of social life as important need for human in their life to reach satisfaction.

7. Conclusion and Future Recommendation

This study provided no support for the first null hypothesis, since it has been found there is a significant correlation between life satisfaction and social anxiety among International university students. Life satisfaction has 6.1% contribution to predict social anxiety, its mean life satisfaction plays general contribution to social anxiety. There were no differences level of life satisfaction and social anxiety according to gender. According to ages, there was no difference of social anxiety among international students, but there was difference of the life satisfaction level, the older showed the higher of life satisfaction.

Future research is needed to explore more detail about the correlation between life satisfactions to social anxiety in more specific way and larger of population. Apply the correlation to each aspect of these variable will able to add deeper explanation among them.

Acknowledgement

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8. References


