

The Bright Side of Youth: Profiling Positive Attitudes and Behaviors in University Students

Swera Zulfiqar ^a Saima Riaz ^b

Abstract: *The current study aimed to profile and examine the predictive role of positive attitudes, namely hope, kindness, meaning in life, and sense of humor, and positive behaviors, including self-reflection, self-monitoring, self-leadership, and self-motivation, in relation to personal growth among university students in Pakistan. The Objective of the Study was to assess the level of positive attitudes and positive behaviors among university students. : A Multistage random sampling technique, a probability sampling technique, was used. A total of 900 participants completed self-report questionnaires comprising demographic information and nine standardized psychological scales. Data were analyzed using cluster analysis to explore the contributions of individual factors and student subgroups. The analysis identified three student profiles. Cluster 1 (High positive profile) showed high levels of positive traits and personal growth. Cluster 2 (Moderate profile) had mixed trait levels with lower personal growth. Cluster 3 (Low traits/high growth) had lower positive traits but the highest personal growth, suggesting growth despite fewer internal strengths. These findings underscore the bright side of youth by highlighting how positive attitudes and behaviors shape growth and define meaningful psychological profiles.*

Keywords: Hope, Kindness, Sense of Humor, Meaning in Life, Self-Reflection, Self-Monitoring, Self-Motivation, Self-Leadership

Introduction

Students must balance their academic obligations and personal growth throughout the transformative time of university life. A person's personal growth, which is generally understood to be the constructive development of their abilities, attitudes, and emotional maturity, is aided by the obstacles that this period presents, which call for cognitive, emotional, and social adaptability (Snyder, 1974). Positive attitudes, actions, and personal development are becoming more widely acknowledged as critical elements of university students' development. As they move from high school to college, students face several obstacles that impact their growth, attitude, and mental health. We can better understand how institutions could support student achievement if we know what encourages a positive attitude and conduct (Davis & Lee, 2023). Understanding the role of various factors in this development, particularly positive attitudes, hope, kindness, meaning in life, and sense of humor, and positive behaviors, self-reflection, self-monitoring, self-leadership, and self-motivation, has become increasingly significant in contemporary educational research (Lopez & Snyder, 2011).

A cheerful outlook on development can be one of the central factors that lead to personal growth. Those positive attitudes would be optimism, resilience, and a growth mindset. Of course, these attitudes create a healthier academic climate, but they also help to develop students' ability to stick with challenges and setbacks. Positively motivated students are more likely to take proactive steps like asking for help when they need it, maintaining high academic standards, and creating helpful social networks (Brown et al., 2023). University students also need behaviors associated with personal growth and positive attitudes to shape their experience. The relation between higher academic achievement and personal well-being has been reported with initiative-taking behaviors, including goal-setting, time management, etc. (Nguyen et al., 2022). These behaviors are equally important in facilitating productive interpersonal relationships necessary for social integration and emotional support (Roberts & Tucker, 2023). Additionally, students who practice self-reflection and mindfulness tend to associate better behavioral patterns, be more

^a Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

^b Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

empathic, and be more emotionally intelligent with their peers (Kwon et al., 2022). Individual factors play into this as well, but so does the larger university environment. Personal growth is affected by social support, mentorship, and campus resources. Environments in universities that proudly focus on promoting inclusivity, diversity, and emotional well-being encourage students in such environments to feel valued and supported in their development (Stewart et al., 2023). The range of personal, academic, and social factors that influence university students' attitudes and behaviors was observed. Students who have greater self-esteem are likely to exhibit positive emotions and actions, which coincidentally improve their general growth (Huang & Chen, 2024). Personal growth can be bidirectional with regards to a cheerful outlook and behaviors. First, cultivating a positive attitude and behavior facilitates personal growth, and second, personal growth promotes positive attitude and behavior. Academic, social, and emotional dimensions of student development are interrelated and important, which makes this reciprocal relationship especially important among university students (Davis & Lee, 2023).

Hope, a cognitive process involving goal-directed thinking in which people set specific objectives, create plans to reach them, and stay motivated in the face of setbacks, is one crucial activity associated with personal growth. According to Snyder's theory, people define their goals, make plans to reach them (pathways), and decide what they want to accomplish (agency) to achieve them (Lopez et al., 2009). Similarly, hopeful learners have greater accomplishment goals and more optimistic future outlooks (Snyder et al., 2006). According to Gilman et al. (2006), there is an inverse relationship among hope and depression as well as with hope and behavioral issues, distress markers, and disengagement from school. Additionally, hope prepares students for long-term personal and professional success by instilling a sense of agency and adaptability. Universities should recognize the importance of fostering hope and positive attitudes through supportive programs, as these psychological resources are integral to students' overall growth and development. Depending on their experiences, people have different levels of hope. Hope also serves as a shield against positive and negative emotions. According to research conducted by Webb, (2013), he found that students who have high hope and have a hopeful mindset achieve their goals more effectively and show satisfaction in their academic experience. Positive behaviors and hope also to contribute to social development in university students. Expanding on the role of hope in academic and emotional contexts, Griggs and Crawford (2019) conducted a study on the disparities in hope, core self-evaluations, emotional well-being, and wellness risk behaviors among first-year university students. Many young adults experience psychological difficulties during their first year of college, and one in five undergraduates report currently having a mental disorder. Academic performance, emotional wellness, and risky health behaviors can all be adversely affected by stress. The purpose of a cross-sectional study was to examine variations in hope, core self-evaluations (CSE), psychological wellness, behaviors associated with health risks, and academic achievement by gender, race, and social desirability. a sample of first-year college students.

Kindness is not merely an action but also a mindset that encourages emotional resilience, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal connection, all of which are crucial to personal development. In the university setting, students encounter diverse situations that challenge their personal beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. Intentional actions aimed at benefiting others are defined as kindness, reducing stress, and contributing to overall emotional health, which could be fostered by a supportive environment (Otake et al., 2006). Encouraging positive behaviors among undergraduates performing acts of kindness is one of the effective strategies. Higher life satisfaction, lower depression, and improved well-being are particular psychological and physical effects of acts of kindness (Shillington et al., 2021). Positive perspectives, such as optimism and self-compassion, will help students manage stress and prevent the emergence of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety (Jones et al., 2023). The "KISS of Kindness Study" investigated the benefits of offering a stress management resource booklet to undergraduate students at Canadian universities as well as the gradual impacts of acts of kindness on their affect, social interaction anxiety, and mood (Shillington et al., 2021). Similarly, a study by Paviglianiti and Irwin (2017) looked at how students felt about a voluntary random act of kindness (RAK) health promotion initiative that was put into place in a sizable undergraduate health promotion classroom. *Meaning in life* is somewhat correlated with beneficial behavior and emotional health. Meaning in life could improve student involvement and emotional weariness. This link was recently discovered in studies of working populations (Garrosa-

Hernández et al. 2013) and could be explained by a variety of mechanisms. The mental, inspirational, goal-directed, and affective elements that comprise meaning in life, that is, knowing oneself, finding and seeking a purpose, and feeling that life makes sense should, first and foremost, enhance college students' capacities and dispositions toward making an investment in their academic endeavors and participating more completely. Romero Parra (2020) investigated the relationship between depression and the meaning of life in university students in times of pandemic examined the pandemic has caused immense social and economic changes worldwide, with sponsored measures impacting citizens' mental health. The study's objective was to evaluate the degree of sadness and life purpose among students impacted by the pandemic. This type of study used a cross-sectional design and was descriptive correlational.

Mak and Deneen (2012) define *humor* as utterances that use para-linguistic and discourse hints to amuse and are seen as entertaining by some participants. Using humor to cope with stressful situations and communicate effectively can increase cohesiveness, generate consensus, and convey messages across power and authority. This situation is less scary and encourages change, a link between it and university students' emotional well-being and social adjustment. Humor has a good impact on social cohesiveness and acceptability in higher education (Cruthirds, 2006). A study titled "The Influence of Humor Styles on the sense of belonging among university students" explored how human nature is deeply ingrained in the desire for belonging (Sukor et al., 2020). When members of a group or community look out for and support one another, a sense of belonging is developed. The purpose of this study is to determine how humor-style conduct affects a feeling of community. *Self-reflection* does more than help students succeed academically; it also helps them succeed in life in general. Self-reflection, in the personal growth of university students, is important. Students use self-reflection as a useful tool to critically evaluate their experiences, find the aspects for improvement, as well as make specific changes to their behaviors and attitudes (Yang et al., 2023). The connection between self-reflection, academic results, and growth objectives is explored in a qualitative study (Travers et al., 2015) that reflects on goal-setting theory remains a popular and important theory of motivation and performance, although its scholarly applications are limited compared to other disciplines like organizational psychology. In this study, academic improvement through reflective goal formation is examined using a qualitative method and a review of quantitative studies. The study included 92 final-year students from the UK who enrolled in an elective course on personal development and advanced interpersonal skills.

Individuals with high *self-monitoring* tendencies closely observe and react to the actions of others. These individuals are self-conscious and prioritize appearance, making them adaptable to many social circumstances. Low self-monitors tend to be unaware of how others perceive them, leading them to act independently (Egbe et al., 2013). A comparison of self-monitoring performance and self-monitoring attentiveness by Rafferty and Raimond (2009) It was found that although youngsters with emotional instability are known to exhibit poor social conduct, they also typically struggle academically. Comparing the impact of self-monitoring performance and self-monitoring attention on the academic and social behaviors of three minority students who were diagnosed with emotional disturbance while doing mathematical calculations on their own was the aim of this study. According to the results, children who self-monitor their academic achievement during math practice may exhibit improved social and intellectual performance.

Self-leadership plays an important role in personal growth as it is the habit of guiding towards goals with the help of self-motivation and abilities of leadership abilities. According to the research conducted by Students who can exhibit self-leadership perform better in academic activities, and their success rate also increases and also, and they have a habit of setting goals for themselves and solving the hurdles independently (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Self-leadership involves several tactics. To manage their actions, influence themselves, and guide themselves, people employ a variety of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional techniques (Unsworth & Mason, 2012). Mauykrantz & Houghton (2020) explore the relationship between leadership and stress among college students, also highlighting the moderating role of coping skills in personal challenges. For today's college students, stress is still a major health risk. From an organizational and personal standpoint, research on student stress is required. The moderating role of coping skills in the relationship between stress and self-leadership in college students is examined in this

study. The online survey was completed by 712 respondents in February 2017. The findings indicate that self-leadership practices lower stress levels in students, which are controlled by their coping mechanisms. This study demonstrates how well self-leadership practices work to lower stress levels in college students.

Self-motivation is the internal desire or wish to achieve goals and also become successful without any hope of rewards; the only motive is to perform better in academic activities, and it also leads to self-satisfaction. Self-motivated students perform better in studies and also get good grades (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Afzal et al. (2010), an investigation into the motivation of college students and their connection to their academic accomplishment demonstrated how God-given skills, top-notch instructors, and high-quality education all contribute to academic success. But the key to success is student motivation. This study looks at how students' motivation affects their academic performance. 342 university students from different programs in Islamabad and Lahore, Pakistan, were included in the sample. Students were questioned about what motivates them to study and why they are attending university. Both male and female pupils were given the questionnaire. Students' academic performance is positively impacted by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, according to the study. A significant overall model ($p < 0.05$) indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation improve academic performance by 23–34%. The significance of student motivation for their success is emphasized in the study.

Material and Method

Participants and Procedure

Correlational cross-sectional research was used to investigate the effects of positive attitudes and behaviors on the personal growth of university students. Correlational research design measures the nature as well as the strength of the relationships between two or more variables that occur naturally (Shaughnessy et al., 2015). Multistage random sampling was used to ensure that the sample accurately represents the diverse student population at both universities. A representative sample of a total of 900 students (514 female and 386 male) from all the faculties and departments of the University of Gujrat, Hafiz Hayat Campus, and the University of Chenab participated in the present study. Students ranged in age from 18 to 25 years, and 809 students were day scholars while the remaining 91 students were boarders.

Instruments

Regarding the research instruments, some psychological scales used in the study were freely available for academic use, while others required formal permission. These permissions were obtained via email communication with the original authors before data collection. Adult Hope Scale was developed by Rick Snyder, (1991). It is used to measure the levels of hope. AHS is a 12-item scale. The Adult Hope Scale (AHS) consists of 12 items. Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale is a brief version of Sprecher and Fehr's Compassion Love Scale developed (2005). It consists of 5 items and is designed to measure individual's kindness towards others. SCBCS is a 7-point Likert Scale. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire was developed by Steger, M.F. (2006). It can be used by people to understand their points of view about their lives. It is a 10-item scale with responses on a 7-point Likert scale. Multidimensional Sense of Humor is developed by James A. Thorsan and F.C. Powell (1993). It's a self-report scale. It is designed to measure different aspects of humor in person's life. The MSHS is a 24 items scale with 5-point Likert Scale. Eighteenth statements are positive while 6 statements are negatively phrased. SRIS is developed by Grant (2002), as a measuring tool of self-reflection and insight in Australia Psychologists. SRIS is a self-report measure of 20 items consisting of two sub-scales: Self-Reflection and Self-Insight. But in my research only one dimension was used which is Self-Reflection and it consists of 12 items. SRIS is a 6-point Likert Scale. Revised Self-Monitoring Scale was designed by Lennox and Wolfe (1984). It is a revision of Synder's (1974) original Self-Monitoring Scale. It consists of 13-items with 6-point Likert scale. The Multidimensional Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale (LSE) was developed by Bobbio and Manganelli (2009). It is used to assess self-perception about leadership. The LSE scale is made up of 21 items and consists of a 7-point Likert Scale. LSE is designed for adults. Self-Motivation Quiz developed by Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell (ENMU- Rosewell). It is a 15-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale. The Personal Growth Initiative Scale II (PGIS-II) was developed by Christine Robitschek (2012). ItThe PGIS-II is made of 16 items and consists of a 6-point Likert Scale.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All ethical considerations were followed by the American Psychological Association (APA) that are applicable in research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and procedures. The aim of the present study, along with confidentiality of participants' personal information and its usage only for research purposes, was spelled out to them both orally and in written consent. Students were briefed that their participation is free and voluntary without any negative consequences for their refusal, and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point. All the participants and authorities were thanked personally for their cooperation.

Results and Discussion

The major part of students falls between the ages of 18 and 25, with 21 years being the most common age (26%). The gender distribution shows the majority of female students (516) compared to male students (386), 55.6% of students belong to the University of Gujrat, while 44.4% are from the University of Chenab.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Demographics of University Students (N=900)

Variables		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age			
	18–21	557	61.9
	22–25	343	38.1
Gender			
	Boy	386	42.9
	Girl	514	57.1
University			
	University of Gujrat	500	55.6
	University of Chenab	400	44.4

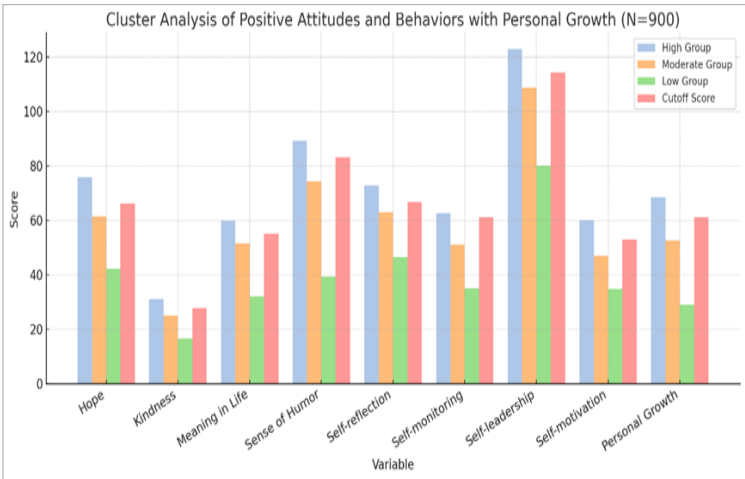
A cluster analysis was conducted to classify university students based on their positive attitudes, behaviors, and personal growth, using standardized scores from variables: hope, kindness, meaning in life, sense of humor, self-reflection, self-monitoring, self-leadership, self-motivation, and personal growth.

Table 2

Cluster Analysis of Positive Attitudes and Behaviors with Personal Growth Among University Students (N=900)

	(High)		(Moderate)		(Low)		Cutoff score	F	p
	M	n	M	n	M	n			
Hope	75.92	420	61.27	387	42.25	93	66.15	2077.69	.000
Kindness	30.96	523	24.84	305	16.58	72	27.73	1690.16	.000
Meaning in life	59.84	502	51.36	343	32.00	55	54.91	2038.93	.000
Sense of humor	89.26	589	74.16	286	39.20	25	83.05	2010.99	.000
Self-reflection	72.80	482	62.89	334	46.54	84	66.67	1775.39	.000
Self-monitoring	62.63	797	50.96	93	35.10	10	61.10	1514.96	.000
Self-leadership	122.80	506	108.78	319	80.19	75	114.28	1753.00	.000
Self-motivation	60.14	480	46.94	341	34.87	79	52.92	1509.50	.000
Personal Growth	68.40	530	52.64	336	28.91	34	61.03	1611.97	.010

Figure 1
Visual representation of Cluster of Positive Attitudes and Positive Behaviors with Personal Growth among University Students (N=900)



Cluster analysis was conducted to classify university students based on their levels of positive attitudes, behaviors, and personal growth, yielding three statistically distinct profiles. One group of students demonstrated high scores in hope ($M = 75.92$), sense of humor ($M = 89.26$), and self-leadership ($M = 80.19$), and also showed moderately high personal growth ($M = 52.64$). Another group reflected moderate levels of meaning in life ($M = 51.36$) and self-leadership ($M = 108.78$), but recorded the lowest personal growth ($M = 28.91$). In contrast, students in the third profile, despite showing lower levels of hope ($M = 42.25$) and self-motivation ($M = 46.94$), reported the highest personal growth ($M = 68.40$). These distinct groupings demonstrate how university students differ in their psychological strengths and growth experiences, supporting the utility of cluster analysis in profiling based on multidimensional traits (Hair et al., 2019; Everitt et al., 2011). Cutoff scores, such as 66.15 for hope and 61.03 for personal growth, were calculated using a weighted mean formula to determine group boundaries objectively. The formula applied followed standard practices in cluster profiling (Hair et al., 2019):

$$\text{Cutoff Score} = \frac{(M1 \times n1) + (M2 \times n2) + (M3 \times n3)}{n1 + n2 + n3}$$

ANOVA results confirmed significant differences among the three clusters for all variables for example, hope ($F = 2077.69$, $p < .001$) and personal growth ($F = 1611.97$, $p < .001$), validating the reliability of the profiles. This approach aligns with previous educational studies that used cluster analysis to uncover natural groupings among students, offering insights into differing developmental needs and guiding more tailored psychological or academic interventions (Woods et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The study revealed three distinct student profiles based on positive attitudes, behaviors, and personal growth. Notably, even students with lower positive traits demonstrated high personal growth, highlighting individual resilience. These findings emphasize the role of hope, kindness, humor, and self-regulatory behaviors in shaping students' developmental outcomes. Universities should foster these traits to support holistic student growth.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study recommends integrating positive traits such as hope, kindness, humor, and self-leadership into student development programs through reflective practices, mentorship, and supportive campus environments. Regular monitoring of personal growth is also encouraged to track progress. However, the study faced limitations due to its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report measures, and limited geographic scope, which affect the generalizability of the findings. Cultural specificity to Pakistani students and the lack of longitudinal data further restrict broader application. Future research should adopt longitudinal and cross-cultural approaches and explore the role of peer relationships in shaping positive psychological development.

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