

## **Educational Process: International Journal**

ISSN: 2147-0901 | e-ISSN: 2564-8020 | [www.edupij.com](http://www.edupij.com)

### **Educational Process International Journal • Volume 7 • Issue 1 • 2018**

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**To cite this article:** Nabavi, R. T., Bijandi, M. S. (2018). An Investigation of Predictors of Life Satisfaction among Overseas Iranian Undergraduate Students. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 7(1), 74-93.

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2018.71.6>

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## An Investigation of Predictors of Life Satisfaction among Overseas Iranian Undergraduate Students

RAZIEH TADAYON NABAVI and MOHAMMAD SADEGH BIJANDI

### Abstract

In recent years, many young people have gone overseas to study and live at least temporarily in new countries that maybe quite different to their homeland. The aim of this study was to determine the predictors of life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduate students studying at Malaysian private universities. A total of 361 undergraduate students were identified as respondents of this study by using Multi-Stage random sampling technique. The results of the study showed that the Iranian undergraduate students were moderately satisfied with their overseas student life. Findings also showed that the results of multiple regression analyses indicated social support emerged as the strongest unique predictor of life satisfaction, followed by academic achievement, and adjustment. Findings revealed that 44.8% of the variability in life satisfaction could be predicted by social support, academic achievement, and adjustment. The results also indicated that social support significantly mediated the effect of loneliness on life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** life satisfaction, studying abroad, social support, adjustment, academic achievement, loneliness.



DOI: 10.22521/edupij.2018.71.6

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EDUPIJ • ISSN 2147-0901 • e-ISSN 2564-8020

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## Introduction

Throughout time, education has often been considered as the fruits of a good life and happiness; a life that is well lived (Arani & Abbasi, 2008). Previous studies have shown that “ideal life-plans” is an ideal whereby everyone has a set of goals and even if some of these goals change at different stages of life, they tend to be stable for increasing the satisfaction during the different stages of life (Sutherland, 2006). In this regard, most students in higher education institutions (HEIs) have always had their goals and even those who did not would invariably wish that they had.

Life satisfaction is the overall assessment of an individual’s past and current life (Huber, Sillick, & Skarakis-Doyle, 2010). It is known that international students will usually experience stress on arrival in a new culture (Berry, 2009; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) and require greater support than home students (Andrade, 2006; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Over the past few decades, a number of researchers such as Rockenbauch, Meister, Schmutzer, and Alfermann (2006) have directed considerable attention to the construct of life satisfaction. They stated that the construct of “life satisfaction” is part of the perceived quality of life and an important component of well-being. However, other scholars like Daig, Herschbach, Lehmann, Knoll, and Decker (2009) have looked at it conceptually, and maintain that life satisfaction is characteristically subjective, cognitively appraising one’s own situation in respect of different domains in life. In recent years, many young people from different countries travel to developed countries or countries that have easier processes for continuation of their education. Through this movement young people may probably face dissatisfaction in their lives. In this regard, the relationships of different indicators with life satisfaction have been studied by some researchers. Reviewing the literature has shown that few studies explore satisfaction with life and well-being from the late adolescent/young adult perspective.

However, there is a wealth of studies and research on the relationship between education, happiness, whilst little attention has been given to life satisfaction in the context of education, socialization and happiness/life satisfaction within a single framework among foreign students.

In today’s borderless and globalized world, more and more students are pursuing their higher education in foreign lands and university student populations are becoming more and more internationalized with some universities having sizeable foreign student populations (Yusoff, 2012). International students will usually experience stress on arrival in a new culture (Berry, 2009; Berry et al., 2006) and require greater support than home students (Andrade, 2006; Sawir et al., 2008).

Past research has documented that although there have been efforts made to study various aspects of international students such as social support (e.g., Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008), this variable of the international undergraduate student has not been paid adequate attention (Yusoff, 2012). Moreover, Cohen, Sherrod, and Clark (1986), and Harlow and Cantor (1995) asserted that it is common for students in universities to develop friendships at various levels with those who provide social and moral support in their young adult days. Such support comes in several forms: as an avenue for appraisal through someone they can talk to; developing self-esteem through positive comparisons; and acquiring a sense of belonging that comes from having friends to share their life, people to

interact with, and who will provide a critical buffer against negative thoughts, and behavior and help to alleviate loneliness.

Other studies have shown the relationship of adjustment and life satisfaction among young adults during university life. For example, Shibazaki (2011) stated that many university students have difficulties facing the challenges of adjusting to the university environment. A study by Yusoff (2012) asserted that there is a need for more research to be done specifically on the adaptability of foreign university students.

In the last 50 years, researchers have been interested in studying the relationship and consequences of loneliness (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). From these studies, it has been proven that there are divergent opinions on the notion of loneliness. On this subject, Lyyra, Lyyra, Lumme-Sandt, Tiikkainen, and Heikkinen (2010), Rambod and Rafii (2010), and Schnittker (2007) studied loneliness as a factor that affects life satisfaction. These scholars reported that students might come to feel isolated at home and perceive that they are missing out on relationships with others. In this regard, Pinquart (2003) and Rokach, Matalon, Rokach, and Safarov (2007) believe that a reduction in social support and lack of social integration are probable catalysts for loneliness.

Based on the previous studies, another factor which can affect life satisfaction is career maturity. Beauchamp and Kiewra (2004) found that the university years are a very different phase of young adult life. There is exposure to a new environment, physically, socially, culturally and academically. It is a time when new relationships are established with fellow students, lecturers and others within the campus community. These young adults in such new circumstances establish a new self-awareness and in time become involved in career exploration and need to weigh up their options and to make decisions on their future direction in life. It is a time for them to build upon the knowledge and ideas acquired in high school, or even to change them for something newer and better. A study by Bono (2011) revealed that students, who found life satisfaction in the early period of their university life, were positive even after a period of a couple of years and rated their campus life highly. Furthermore, Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) reported that the well-being component of their findings is supportive of correlational data that has illustrated a relationship between career maturity and general life satisfaction. In addition, Mansor (2009) discovered a positive relationship between gender and career maturity.

#### *Problem statement*

The popularity of examining life satisfaction has increased with the positive psychological approach and has become the subject of numerous studies. Duffy, Raque-Bogdan, and Steger (2008) stated that predictors of life satisfaction have been studied across a wide range of populations, from children right through to the elderly. Yet, little is known about the evolution of life satisfaction predictors during periods of life transition, as individuals move from one developmental stage to the next. Based on these statements, nowadays the problems faced by international students can negatively influence their life experience and thereby their academic achievement. If they cannot overcome the problems and adjust successfully, they may be unable to reach their fixed goals and experience life dissatisfaction with as a result (Bijandi & Hassan, 2009). Currently, many Iranian students are studying overseas; they are young adults in transition, facing strange and unfamiliar situations and new cultures in pursuit of their academic dreams. In the current study, the

researchers aim to determine the predictors of life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduate students studying at Malaysian private universities.

Predictors of life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduate students, especially those studying overseas, has not yet been established (Ganbari Hashemabadi & Kadkhodazadeh, 2008; Mohammadi & Joukar, 2010). Based on Moslemi's report (2012) –the deputy of the Ministry of Scientific, Research and Technology (MSRT)– the number of Iranian students studying overseas at that time was 86,000, with most in the United States, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. He also stated that more than 50% of them were undergraduate students, and that dissatisfaction with life of undergraduates studying overseas was a growing problem that concerned many families as well as the Iranian government. Therefore, he encouraged researchers to consider the importance of understanding and studying these students' experiences, with more research on different aspects of life satisfaction, especially of undergraduates, urgently needed in order to seek the root cause of the problems.

Researchers of the current study have therefore tried to determine the predictors of life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduate students studying at Malaysian private universities. In this main objective, six specific objectives; to describe sociodemographic characteristics, psychological factors (social support, adjustment, loneliness, and career maturity), life satisfaction and the relationship among them were formulated, and a set of 12 research hypotheses were framed.

#### *Literature review*

This section aims to define the research variables and discuss their research evidences. At the end of the section, hypotheses of the study are developed based on the literature reviewed.

The term "social support" often appears in discussions of relationships. Warren, Jackson, and Sifers (2009) defined social support as a multidimensional construct that consists of relationships, perceptions, and transactions which can help individuals master emotional distress, share tasks, receive advice, learn skills, and obtain material assistance. Social support can be viewed as care, value and guidance, which is provided from family, peer and community members (Dollete, Steese, Philips, & Matthews, 2006). There is also evidence that social support improves life quality and acts against negative events in life (Das, Vonkeman, & Hartmann, 2012).

Arkoff (1968) defined university adjustment as university achievement, or what the student achieves in terms of academic grades and self-development. Adjustment, to Arkoff, means a student's ability to obtain adequate academic grades and eventually graduate and in the process also achieve a level of personal growth. To Baker, Siryk, and Services (1999), university adjustment involves a range of demands of various degrees on the student who will need to respond and adjust accordingly.

Earlier work has defined loneliness as the feeling of solitude, disconnection, and absence of closeness, and usually conceptualized as a one-dimensional construct (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), a view that has been generally accepted (Durak & Senol-Durak, 2010; Smith, 2012). Steed, Boldy, Grenade, and Iredell, (2007) described loneliness as "experience of negative feelings about missing relationships" (p. 81). Moreover, loneliness has been defined as an individual's perceived lack of intimate relationships with others, a

sense of increased dependency, as well as a sense of extreme loss (Drageset, Espehaug, & Kirkevold, 2012).

The concept of career maturity or career readiness is defined as “the degree of development or the place reached on the continuum of vocational development from exploration to decline” (Super, 1955, p. 153). Later, Super (1990) further explained that one’s readiness toward career is a manifestation of their career maturity. As such, career maturity can take place in a series of stages and tasks.

Life satisfaction or satisfaction with life (SWL) has been defined as the global evaluation of a person’s quality of life based on the person’s own chosen criteria (Neto & Neto, 2011). Furthermore, Veenhoven (2010) have reported, when we deal with human beings we have to contend with the subjective appreciation of life, often referred to as “subjective well-being,” “life-satisfaction” and also “happiness” (Veenhoven, 2009), which is also subscribed to in the current study.

#### *Hypotheses of the Study*

- H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant relationship between age and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>02</sub> There is no significant relationship between father’s years of education and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>03</sub> There is no significant relationship between mother’s years of education and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>04</sub> There is no significant relationship between parents’ income and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>05</sub> There is no significant relationship between academic achievement and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>06</sub> There is no significant relationship between social support and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>07</sub> There is no significant relationship between adjustment and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>08</sub> There is no significant relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>09</sub> There is no significant relationship between career readiness and life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>010</sub> There is no significant difference in life satisfaction between male and female Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>011</sub> The regression coefficient for sociodemographic characteristics (age, parents’ years of education, parents’ income, academic achievement) and psychological factors (social support, adjustment, loneliness, and career readiness) equals zero when regressed against life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.
- H<sub>012</sub> Social support does not significantly mediate the effect of psychological factors (adjustment, loneliness, and career readiness) on life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates in Malaysian private universities.

## Methodology

Data for this study was gathered from 361 undergraduate students from three Malaysian private universities which have the highest percentage of Iranian undergraduate students in Malaysia. The selected universities are all located in Kuala Lumpur. The respondents were split as 28.57% from Multimedia University (MMU), 34.73% from Asia Pacific University (APU), and 36.70% from University College Sedaya International (UCSI). The sample ranged in age from 17-30 years (mean: 22.53 years; SD: 2.43 years), and all voluntarily participated.

A self-administered questionnaire was used which consisted of inventories that assessed social support, adjustment, loneliness, career maturity values and perception of life satisfaction in general. Permission had been obtained from the administration of the selected universities for the distribution of the questionnaire at two main centers, namely the Student Service Center and the Immigration Office. Once permission was granted, a date was scheduled to collect the data. During the process of data collection, respondents were asked to complete the self-administrated questionnaire. The respondents were permitted to ask questions if they experienced any problems in understanding the questionnaire. Then the researcher spoke with each of the students to discuss any of their concerns or to answer questions.

The questionnaires were distributed by systematic random sampling among Iranian undergraduate students during working hours at the Student Service Center and Immigration Office of each selected university. Questionnaires took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Student selection was performed by selecting every third student who attended the aforementioned centers of the respective universities. Also, a screening question was asked to confirm that were indeed undergraduate students. The researchers only proceeded to administer the questionnaire to those who were undergraduates and questionnaires were collected on the same day by the researchers. The researchers informed all of the participants about the terms of anonymity and confidentiality. In total, 392 questionnaires were distributed and 361 were returned, equating to a response rate of 92%.

The questionnaire was divided into six sections: Section A was the questionnaire, aimed at gathering the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. Then, the measures of social support, adjustment, loneliness, career maturity and life satisfaction among respondents were presented in Sections B, C, D, E and F respectively.

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This scale is intended to examine respondent's judgment towards life in general. A seven-point, Likert-type scale was applied (i.e. from 1="strongly disagree" to 7="strongly agree") for the five items (e.g. "In most ways my life is close to ideal"). A high score indicates greater sense of satisfaction with life in general. As for social support, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) was used to measure the level of respondents' social support in terms of support from their family, friends and significant other. Explicitly, the MSPSS consists of 12 items that assess social support on a seven-point, Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from 1="very strongly disagree" to 7="very strongly agree."

The Student Adaption to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker et al., 1999) was used to measure respondents' adjustment to university. The SACQ is a 67-item, self-reporting questionnaire and is divided into four principal subscales that focus on particular areas of university life. As for loneliness, the revised Loneliness Scale University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA; Russell et al., 1980) was used to measure the feelings of respondents about the people around them in their host country. There were 10 negative and 10 positive items each in the UCLA and reverse scoring was recorded, with a four-point, Likert-type scale ranged from 1="never" to 4="often." The Career Factor Inventory (Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill, & Boggs, 1990) was utilized to find out the readiness of the respondents to make decisions on the needs of their career development. There were 21 items used to measure career readiness on a five-point, Likert-type scale.

Collected respondents' data were coded, computed and analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (Version 20.0). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) as well as inferential statistics (Pearson's Correlation, Independent *t*-test, Multiple Regression Analyses using the Hierarchical and Mediator Analysis) were employed for descriptive and hypothetical testing respectively. Likewise, in order to make sure that data were normally distributed, the normality test was reformed for all measures.

## Results

The results were summarized according to the research objectives. This method helped the researcher to answer several questions and meet the objectives regarding student satisfaction, as well as to determine the relationship between various psychological factors and the students' level of life satisfaction. Initially, Exploratory Data Analysis was applied to provide evidence as to whether or not the inferential statistical methods selected fulfilled the basic assumptions in terms of normal distribution of population, linearity between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Thus, before applying a specific statistical method, exploratory data analysis was first performed. According to Table 1, both statistics fall within -2 and +2 and therefore, the studied variables are considered to be normally distributed.

**Table 1.** Descriptive analysis of variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Life Satisfaction	-.202	-1.186
Social Support	-.215	-.861
Adjustment	.309	1.387
Loneliness	.068	-.483
Career Maturity	-.245	.622

Next, both descriptive and inferential statistics were performed. The results were analyzed using, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and percentage), Pearson Correlation Coefficient, Independent *t*-test, Multiple Regression and Mediated regression method. With regard to descriptive statistics, Table 2 profiled each study variable in terms of mean and standard deviation.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for study variables ( $n=361$ )

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall life satisfaction score	20.26	6.546
Overall Social Support score	55.50	14.06
Overall Adjustment score	345.11	51.71
Overall Loneliness score	47.01	8.92
Overall Career Maturity score	67.09	10.61

M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

Using mean $\pm$ 1 SD, the result of frequency distribution for life satisfaction showed that the majority of the respondents (61.8%) experienced moderate satisfaction, whilst 23% exhibited low satisfaction, and the remaining 15.2% indicated high satisfaction in life (mean=20.26, SD=6.546). In fact, around 50% of the respondents had overall score on life satisfaction at the midpoint of the scale. On the other hand, findings for the level of students' overall social support revealed that 144 (39.9%) of the respondents received moderate overall social support from family, peers and significant others, whereas 88 (24.4%) received high overall social support and 129 (35.7%) received low overall social support (mean=55.50, SD=14.06). In summary, most of the respondents experienced a moderate level of overall social support from family, peers and significant others.

Moreover, findings indicated that the majority of the respondents (72%) reported experiencing low followed by moderate overall adjustment (26.9%). Only a very small proportion of the respondents (1.1%) reported experiencing high overall adjustment (mean=345.11, SD=51.71). The results showed that the majority of the respondents experienced difficulty in adjusting to university life. Furthermore, the mean score for loneliness (47.01) with SD=8.92 was mid table of the scale score (25 to 70). Based on the total scores, 311 (86.1%) of the respondents reported having a low level of overall loneliness, while 50 (13.9%) reported having a high level. Additionally, the result showed that respondents were not suffering loneliness while overseas; possibly because of support from family, peers and significant others. Finally, 56.8% of the respondents reported having a high level of career readiness, while 43.2% reported having a low level. In other words, most of the respondents have high levels of overall vocational goals; which shows that the respondents appeared to be more confident about successfully completing career readiness and making decisions about their career.

Responses to each item of The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLWS, see Table 3) were sorted in ascending order based on mean scores. The highest ranking response was "I am satisfied with my life" (mean=4.61, SD=1.752). This indicated that the majority of respondents have experienced slight satisfaction with life. It implies that improvements to enhance their life satisfaction still need to be negotiated. On the other hand, the item, "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing" was the lowest ranking response (mean=3.54, SD=1.625). This indicates that most of the respondents will change their current life conditions if given the chance.

**Table 3.** Means and standard deviations for SWLS items

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>SWLS items</i>		
If I would live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	3.54	1.625
In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.	4.00	1.674
The conditions of my life are excellent.	4.04	1.633
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	4.06	1.693
I am satisfied with my life.	4.61	1.752

M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

As for inferential statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, Independent *t*-test, and multiple regressions analyses using the hierarchical and mediation method were undertaken. Pearson Correlation was used to identify relationships between sociodemographic characteristics and psychological factors on life satisfaction. The independent *t*-test was performed to determine the significant differences of life satisfaction between genders. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to provide information on the influences of the independent variables on the dependent variable and also to determine the most influential predictor variable of life satisfaction of respondents. Moreover, mediation analysis was used to determine the mediating role of social support on the relationships between adjustment, loneliness, career readiness and life satisfaction among respondents.

As can be seen in Table 4, there were correlations between parental income, academic achievement and life satisfaction. More specifically, the results were as follows: Pearson Correlation analysis revealed a small but significant correlation between students' parents' income and life satisfaction ( $r=.119, p<.05$ ), and academic achievement significantly correlated ( $r=.260, p<.01$ ) with life satisfaction.

**Table 4.** Pearson correlation test between demographic variables and life satisfaction

		<i>Age</i>	<i>Fathers' Years of Education</i>	<i>Mothers' Years of Education</i>	<i>Parental Income</i>	<i>Academic Achievement</i>
<i>Life Satisfaction</i>	Pearson Correlation	.094	.078	.047	.119*	.260**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.073	.139	.373	.024	.000

\*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

As can be seen in Table 5, findings from Pearson Correlation showed that students' social support ( $r=.636, p<.01$ ) and adjustment ( $r=.279, p<.01$ ) were positively significantly associated with life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates, and a low negative relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction ( $r=-.268, p<.01$ ). Interestingly, the results showed no significant relationship between career maturity and life satisfaction ( $r=.043, p>.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Pearson correlation test between independent variables and life satisfaction

		<i>Social Support</i>	<i>Adjustment</i>	<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Career Maturity</i>
<i>Life Satisfaction</i>	Pearson	.636**	.279**	-.268**	.043
	Correlation	.000	.000	.000	.414
	Sig. (2-tailed)				

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

As illustrated in Table 6, findings from the Independent *t*-test revealed no significant difference of life satisfaction among male and female Iranian undergraduates studying overseas ( $t=.414, p>.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

**Table 6.** Independent *t*-test analysis of Iranian undergraduates' life satisfaction ( $n=361$ )

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
<i>Life Satisfaction</i>						
<i>Male</i>	210 (58.2)	4.07	1.27	2.56 <sup>ns</sup>	.414 <sup>ns</sup>	.676 <sup>ns</sup>
<i>Female</i>	151 (41.8)	4.02	1.36			

Remark \*  $p<.05$ , \*\*  $p<.01$ , ns: non-significant

Multiple regression analyses using Hierarchical analysis method were conducted in order to examine to what extent the proposed multiple linear regression models are supported by the research data. The regression examined how well the individuals' scores on life satisfaction could be predicted from determined criterion variables. Variables included in the regression model were limited to those significant at the bivariate levels: social support, adjustment, loneliness, academic achievement, and parental income (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** Correlates of life satisfaction

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Life Satisfaction</i>	
	Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Parental income	.119*	.024
Academic achievement	.260**	.000
Social support	.636**	.000
Adjustment	.279**	.000
Loneliness	-.268**	.000

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$

Hierarchical Multiple Regression was used to determine the significant predictors of the respondents' life satisfaction. Based on the strength of bivariate correlations between all variables, social support was the first independent variable to enter the regression model, followed by adjustment, loneliness, academic achievement, and parental income. Results of the analyses of Models 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Summary of hierarchical regression analyses predicting life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates studying overseas

Model	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	R <sup>2</sup> Change
<i>Model 1</i> Social Support	.636***	.636	.405	244.176***	.405
<i>Model 2</i> Social Support Adjustment	.604*** .132**	.649	.421	10.126**	.016
<i>Model 3</i> Social Support Adjustment Loneliness	.604*** .132** -.001	.649	.421	.000	.000
<i>Model 4</i> Social Support Adjustment Loneliness Academic Achievement	.592*** .117** .018 .169***	.670	.449	17.632***	.027
<i>Model 5</i> Social Support Adjustment Loneliness Academic Achievement Parental Income	.587*** .114** .012 .166*** .045	.671	.450	1.287	.002

Note. Predictors: Social Support, Adjustment, Loneliness, Academic achievement, and parental income. Dependent variable: Life Satisfaction, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

When all the independent variables were hierarchically entered into the regression equation, social support, adjustment, and academic achievement, appeared as significant contributors of life satisfaction among undergraduates. Adjustment had a high significant incremental effect on life satisfaction after the effect of social support was accounted for. After accounting for the effects of social support and adjustment, loneliness did not have incremental effect in influencing life satisfaction. Likewise, after accounting for the effects of social support, adjustment, and loneliness, academic achievement had a high significant incremental effect in influencing life satisfaction. In addition, after accounting for the effects of social support, adjustment, loneliness, and academic achievement, parental income did not have incremental effect in influencing life satisfaction. In summary, the presented findings denote that social support, academic achievement, and adjustment are critical factors in the development of life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates studying overseas.

Based on the results of the hierarchical analyses, two variables, namely loneliness and parental income were not predictors and did not contribute to variations of life satisfaction. Thus, only three variables, namely social support, academic achievement, and adjustment were entered into the equation of the regression model as follows:

Findings are shown in Table 9. They indicate that three of the predictor variables significantly explain life satisfaction. These predictor variables are social support ( $t=14.400$ ;

p=.000), academic achievement (t=4.185; p=.000), and adjustment (t=2.759; p=.006). The findings also show that the three-predictor multiple linear regression model are supported by the data. As demonstrated in Table 9, estimates of model coefficient were -1.535 for  $b_0$ , .656 for  $b_1$ , .512 for  $b_2$ , and .190 for  $b_3$ . Therefore, the prediction model assumes the formula:

$$Y (\text{Life Satisfaction}) = -1.535 + .656 (X_1) + .512 (X_2) + .190 (X_3) + \epsilon$$

Where

Y = Life Satisfaction ;  $X_1$  = Social support;  $X_2$  = Academic Achievement ;  $X_3$  = Adjustment;  $\epsilon$  = Model error of estimate

An R-square value of .448 means that the three-predictor model explains 44.8% of the variance in life satisfaction. Table 9 demonstrates that on the basis of the reported value of the F-statistic (f=96.678, p<.01), the model fits the data and thus the slope of the estimated linear regression model line is not equal to zero, and confirms that there is a linear relationship between life satisfaction and the three predictor variables.

Table 9 presents the Multiple Regression coefficients and shows the significance of the three predictors in the prediction of life satisfaction. A high beta coefficient independent variable is of great importance in the prediction of the criterion variable. On the basis of the obtained beta values, the beta coefficient for academic achievement was .167, for social support was .587, and for adjustment it was .113. Social support, academic achievement, and adjustment together predicted 44.8% of the variations in life satisfaction. Social support emerged as the strongest unique predictor ( $\beta=.587$ , p<0.001) of life satisfaction, followed by academic achievement ( $\beta=.167$ , p<0.001), and adjustment ( $\beta=.113$ , p<0.01).

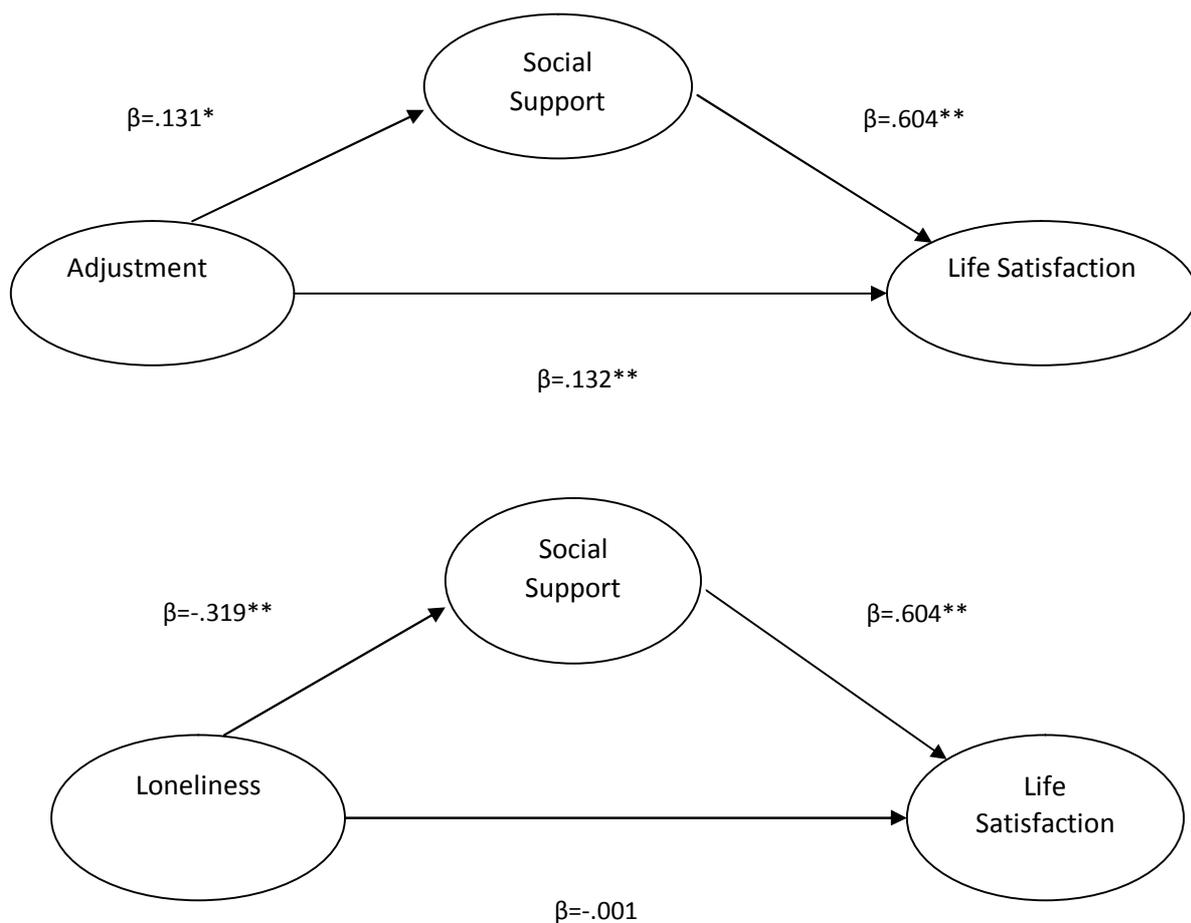
**Table 9.** Multiple regression analysis predicting life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates studying overseas

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Summary of Regression</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients B</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficients Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>sig. (2-tailed)</i>
<i>(Constant)</i>		-1.535	.483			
<i>Academic Achievement</i>		.512	.122	.167	4.185	.000
<i>Social Support</i>		.656	.046	.587	14.400	.000
<i>Adjustment</i>		.190	.069	.113	2.759	.006
<i>Multiple Regression</i>	.670					
<i>R Square</i>	.448					
<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	.444					
<i>F- Statistics</i>	96.678					

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Social Support, Academic achievement, and Adjustment. Dependent variable: Life satisfaction, \*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01

Findings have provided vital insights that life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduate students studying overseas is very much dependent on social support. Collectively, these variables explained 44.8% ( $F=96.678$ ,  $R^2=.448$ ,  $p<.01$ ) of the variance for life satisfaction among Iranian undergraduates studying overseas. Lastly, the results of regression equation employing the mediation analysis indicated that social support mediated significantly the relationships of loneliness on life satisfaction.

A series of regression equation was employed to assess the mediation effect of psychological factors on life satisfaction. Mediation is one process by which psychosocial factors (Path A) and social support (Path B) might work together to influence life satisfaction (Path C). As shown in Figure 1, the hypothesis for the effect of social support in relationships between psychological factors (adjustment, loneliness, and career readiness) and life satisfaction revealed that only adjustment and loneliness were significant in the total effect (Path C) ( $\beta = .356$  and  $\beta = -.572$ , respectively). Testing (Path A), IV's to mediator, indicated that both adjustment and loneliness had significant influence on social support ( $\beta = .131$  and  $\beta = -.319$ , respectively). Testing Step 3 (Path B) revealed that life satisfaction is influenced significantly and positively by social support ( $\beta = .604$ ) (see Table 10).



**Figure 1.** Mediation role of social support in relationships between psychological factors (adjustment, loneliness, and career readiness) and life satisfaction

Then adjustment and loneliness are related indirectly to the life satisfaction, being mediated by the social support. In the direct model (Table 9), career readiness was not significant in the relationship with life satisfaction. Also in mediation model (Table 10), career readiness was not significantly related to social support. Therefore, there is no possibility to formulate a hypothesis of indirect relationship or full mediation for career readiness and life satisfaction through social support.

**Table 10.** Testing mediator effects using multiple regressions

<i>Testing steps in mediation model</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
					Lower	Upper
<i>Testing Step 1 (Path C)</i>						
<i>DV: Life satisfaction</i>						
<i>Predictor:</i>						
Adjustment	0.356	0.09	0.211**	3.954	0.179	0.534
Loneliness	-0.572	0.157	-	-3.635	-0.881	-
			0.194**			0.262
<i>Testing Step 2 (Path A)</i>						
<i>DV: Social support</i>						
<i>Predictor:</i>						
Adjustment	0.198	0.079	0.131*	2.511	0.043	0.353
Loneliness	-0.843	0.138	-	-6.123	-1.113	-
			0.319**			0.572
<i>Testing Step 3 (Paths B and C)</i>						
<i>DV: Life satisfaction</i>						
<i>Mediator:</i>						
Social support (Path B)	0.675	0.049	0.604**	13.835	0.579	0.771
<i>Predictor: (Path C)</i>						
Adjustment	0.223	0.073	0.132**	3.031	0.078	0.367
Loneliness	-0.003	0.134	-0.001	-0.02	-0.265	0.260

Note. CI = Confidence Interval.

Sobel test was employed to assess the mediation effect of social support. Since in mediation model, adjustment and loneliness have a significant relationship with social support and life satisfaction, it is practically permitted to test the hypothesis of partial mediation role for social support in research.

According to the results of the Sobel test, social support significantly mediated the effect of loneliness ( $t=-5.584$ ,  $p=.001$ ) on life satisfaction, while social support did not mediate the effect of adjustment ( $t=.251$ ,  $p=.802$ ) on life satisfaction.

The results are tailored for reporting the direct, indirect and total effects of psychological factors and social support on life satisfaction in the mediation model (see Table 11). The total indirect effect of adjustment on life satisfaction is positive and small. The direct effect is small and positive. Thus, the total effect is  $.132+.079=.211$ . As for loneliness,

the total indirect effect of loneliness on life satisfaction is negative and medium, whereas the direct effect is small and negative. Therefore, the total effect is  $-.001+(-.193)=-.194$ .

**Table 11.** Direct, indirect and total effects of psychological factors and social support on life satisfaction

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Direct Effect (DE)</i>	<i>Indirect Effect (IE)</i>	<i>Total Effect (TE)</i>
<i>Adjustment</i>	0.132	$0.131 \times 0.604$	0.211
<i>Loneliness</i>	-0.001	$-0.319 \times 0.604$	-0.194

Note: DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect

In summary, the results indicate that, social support fully mediates the effects of loneliness on life satisfaction. According to the discussion in the current study, social support was reported as a vital mediating factor that decreases loneliness in university undergraduates. Social support brings about a positive perspective to an individual's life. In the current study, students' high level of perceived social support relates to less loneliness among undergraduate students, indicating the importance of social support as a mediator in reducing loneliness. On the other hand, with the lack of social support, difficulty of adjustment may ensue. The hypothesis also suggests that levels of life satisfaction among students were enhanced when there was an increase in the level of perceived social support (from family, friends, and significant others).

In summary, loneliness affects life satisfaction primarily through the amount of social support that undergraduates receive from families, friends and the amount of loneliness that they experienced.

## Conclusion

The current study successfully achieved the general and specific objectives by adding new knowledge on various predictors of life satisfaction among undergraduate students studying overseas. Findings from this study suggest that life satisfaction among these students is very much dependent on social support. This study provides valuable information on factors that predict life satisfaction of students studying overseas. The findings revealed that 44.8% ( $F=96.678$ ,  $R^2=.448$ ,  $p<.01$ ) of the variability in life satisfaction could be predicted by social support, academic achievement, and adjustment. In fact, the result shows that social support emerged as the strongest single predictor of life satisfaction, followed by academic achievement, and adjustment.

Generally, findings, which provide vital insights on any effort to enhance quality of life and to achieve a sufficient level of life satisfaction for undergraduate students who are studying overseas, would be more effective when social support is taken into consideration. The findings also shed light on the role of social support in predicting life satisfaction and enhancing quality of life, particularly for undergraduate students who are studying overseas.

In light of the above findings, there is now available information on various factors that can be relied on for the prediction of life satisfaction among Iranian university students. The gap in the literature as indicated by the statement of the problem concerning prediction of life satisfaction has been filled by the results of this current research. Additionally, these results can be generalized to the population of all Iranian overseas undergraduates in

Malaysian private institutions of higher learning. Findings from Independent *t*-test can be assumed that the life satisfactions among male and female students are the same.

Moreover, this study has shown a key finding in that variables such as social support, adjustment, loneliness, academic achievement, and parental income could be possible predictors of satisfaction with life among overseas undergraduates' students. Ultimately, however, only social support, academic achievement and adjustment are shown to be predictors of satisfaction with life among undergraduates' students.

In the current study, social support was reported to be a vital factor as mediator that decreases loneliness in university undergraduates. The results also suggests that levels of life satisfaction among students were enhanced when there was an increase in the level of perceived social support (from family, friends, and significant others). The field test findings indicate that undergraduates who received a high level of perceived social support tend to be less lonely in their university life, indicating the importance of social support as a mediator in reducing loneliness. Social support brings positive perspective to an individual's life.

In the current study, findings show that with a lack of social support, difficulty of adjustment will occur. Thus, better adjustment will lead to better life satisfaction. In summary, these results show that social support from families and peers might also have a great effect in decreasing or increasing loneliness, which, in the end, may also influence adjustment on student's life satisfaction. In summary, loneliness effect on life satisfaction is primarily through the amount of social support that the undergraduates receive from families and friends and the amount of loneliness that they experienced.

The findings of this current study are of importance to the intellectual enrichment of the body of knowledge in the Iranian context by utilizing psychological variables in predicting general life satisfaction among Iranian overseas undergraduates. The importance of demographic variables should also be considered when planning prediction of life satisfaction. For example, among selected demographic variables (age, parents' years of education, parental income, and academic achievement), only parental income and academic achievement have been shown to be the contributing factors in predicting students' life satisfaction. From the sample of 361 undergraduate students, the study found that Iranian undergraduates receive a moderate level of social support. This study showed that students with social support from family, friends, and significant others experience better satisfaction with their life. Social support brings a positive perception to an individual's life and provides a buffer against pressure among university students, especially those who are away from home. In general, though, it appears that these students are confident of achieving sufficient life satisfaction.

It is also important for parents to show positive attitudes that support their children who are of course now young adults, especial when they are studying overseas. With the realization that social support helps to negate loneliness and enhances life satisfaction, such support from family, friends and teachers is crucial to ensure life satisfaction among these young adults studying overseas. Implications of this research suggest that students would benefit from program initiatives that target social opportunities for all students, particularly those living away from home.

Finally, findings from the current study have significant implications. Theoretically, the findings may shed light on the role of social support in predicting life satisfaction and enhancing quality of life, particularly for Iranian undergraduate students who are studying overseas. From a practical perspective, the findings may imply that any effort to enhance quality of life and achieve sufficient life satisfaction for undergraduate students studying overseas would be more effective if the relevant authorities such as the Iranian Embassy or the host university took the initiative in organizing social support and academic achievement programs for them.

#### *Acknowledgement*

The researchers would like to thank the directors, staff and students of Multimedia University (MMU), Asia Pacific University (APU), and University College Sedaya International (UCSI) universities in Malaysia for enabling visits to their universities and departments in order to collect data for this study.

#### **Notes**

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