

# Creative Self-Concept and Life Satisfaction Among Indian High School Students

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## Abstract

Creativity, often considered a key human resource, has been linked to various aspects of psychological well-being. This research aimed to examine how creativity is associated with life satisfaction among Indian high school students. Given the intense academic demands and socio-cultural pressures faced by this group, understanding this link may offer important insights for promoting psychological well-being in their context. A total of 445 Indian students (318 males, 127 females) aged 15–19 participated in this correlational study. Participants completed the Short Scale of Creative Self (Karwowski et al., 2018), which measures creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity, along with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine relationships between variables, with separate analyses performed for the total sample and by gender. In the total sample, creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity, and overall creativity were significantly correlated with life satisfaction. Gender analyses also showed similar patterns. Findings suggest a positive relationship between creative self-concept and life satisfaction among Indian students.

*Keywords:* creativity, creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity, Indian adolescents, well-being

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## Introduction

Creativity, broadly understood as the capacity to generate novel and useful ideas, has been proposed as a fundamental psychological resource, one that may not only enhance academic and professional performance but also contribute meaningfully to individuals' sense of fulfillment and happiness (Richards, 2007). Central to this line of inquiry is Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) theory of flow, which holds that creative engagement is among the most intrinsically rewarding forms of human activity precisely because it activates what he describes as an evolutionarily rooted drive toward novelty and discovery. On this account, the enjoyment that accompanies creative work is not incidental but constitutive: it arises from a state of optimal experience characterized by clear goals, immediate feedback, and a calibrated balance between challenge and skill. Crucially, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) distinguishes this form of well-being from passive pleasure, arguing that only complex, growth-oriented activities reliably translate flow experiences into lasting life satisfaction.

Within the Indian educational context, high school students face uniquely demanding circumstances. Academic stress has increased drastically due to parental expectations and competitive environments (Nagle & Sharma, 2018). Socio-cultural expectations regarding academic performance, family honor, and occupational prestige further compound these pressures (Deb et al., 2015). Understanding the factors that support adolescent well-being in this context is therefore of considerable practical importance.

Life satisfaction is a cognitive, evaluative component of subjective well-being that refers to a global judgment individuals make about the quality of their life as a whole, based on standards they set for themselves rather than externally imposed criteria (Diener et al., 1985). Unlike affective components of well-being such as positive and negative affect, life satisfaction reflects a deliberate appraisal of one's circumstances against a personally chosen standard (Diener et al., 1985). Among adolescents, life satisfaction is associated with better mental health outcomes, academic engagement, and social functioning (Proctor et al., 2009). Importantly, research suggests that life satisfaction acts not merely as an outcome but also as a buffer. Adolescents with higher life satisfaction are less likely to develop externalizing and internalizing problems in response to stressful life events (Proctor et al., 2009).

Recent theoretical developments have moved beyond viewing creativity merely as a cognitive ability and have increasingly emphasized the motivational and identity-related aspects of creative functioning. Karwowski et al. (2013) introduced the concept of creative self-concept, which encompasses two interrelated but distinguishable constructs: creative self-efficacy, defined as one's belief in one's capacity to think and act creatively, and creative personal identity, which captures the degree to which creativity is incorporated into one's sense of self. These constructs have been shown to predict creative behavior over and above traditional measures of creative ability (Karwowski, 2014), and there is growing evidence that they are also associated with positive psychological outcomes.

The present study examines the associations between creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity, and life satisfaction in a sample of Indian high school students. Additionally, the study explores whether these associations are present within each gender subgroup.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***Creativity and Well-being***

From a positive psychology perspective, creativity has been identified as a key character strength whose expression promotes flourishing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) suggests a complementary mechanism: positive emotions generated through creative engagement broaden individuals' attentional and cognitive resources, which in turn build lasting personal resources, including psychological resilience and social connectedness. Conner et al. (2018) indicate that creative activities are associated with higher levels of positive affect, meaning in life, and overall life satisfaction. In a 13-day study of 658 young adults, engaging in creative activity on one day predicted significantly higher positive affect and flourishing the following day, even after controlling for prior levels of well-being. Importantly, the reverse was not supported. Well-being did not predict next-day creative activity suggesting that creativity drives improvements in well-being rather than the other way around. Supporting this, Kumar et al. (2024) identified three psychological mechanisms through which creative pursuits promote positive mental health: the expression of the authentic self, a positive attentional focus, and the experience of flow, each of which contributes to a sense of purpose, reduced psychological distress, and enhanced well-being. Importantly, these benefits are not limited to artistically gifted individuals; creative engagement at any level, from everyday novelty to structured artistic practice, carries meaningful psychological value (Kumar et al., 2024).

### ***Creative Self-Concept***

The creative self-concept framework developed by Karwowski (2011, 2014). Creative self-efficacy refers to the belief that one possesses the ability to function creatively (Karwowski, 2011). Research has shown that CSE predicts creative achievements (Tierney & Farmer, 2002) and is associated with optimism, curiosity, and teacher behavior (Karwowski, 2014). Creative personal identity, in contrast, captures whether being a creative person is a central aspect of one's self-concept, whether creativity is “who I am” rather than merely something “I can do” (Karwowski, 2014).

Both dimensions of creative self-concept may contribute to well-being. Creative self-efficacy may foster well-being through competence-related pathways: believing that one is capable of creative thought and action satisfies fundamental psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which in turn promotes life satisfaction. Creative personal identity may operate through identity coherence and meaning-making mechanisms: individuals whose sense of self incorporates creativity may experience greater psychological integration, a stronger sense of purpose, and a more stable foundation for navigating life's challenges.

### ***Creativity and Well-being in Indian Adolescents***

Many Indian schools place considerable emphasis on rote learning, examination performance, and narrowly defined academic success (Bhattacharya, 2022; Deb et al., 2015; Nagle & Sharma, 2018), potentially creating environments in which creative self-expression is undervalued or constrained. Within such contexts, adolescents who sustain a positive creative self-concept, believing in their creative capacities and incorporating creativity into their sense of self, may draw on these self-perceptions as a psychological resource that supports agency, purpose, and overall well-being. This possibility is consistent with the view that creativity is best understood

as a developmental construct shaped by social context rather than a fixed trait (Plucker & Beghetto, 2004).

### ***Gender Differences***

Research on gender differences in creative self-concept has produced mixed findings. Karwowski et al. (2013) found that men scored slightly higher on creative self-efficacy while women scored slightly higher on creative personal identity, though both effects were very weak. Regarding life satisfaction, gender differences are similarly inconsistent and depend on the type of measure used: boys tend to report higher overall life satisfaction, whereas girls score higher on agreement-based well-being measures, with no difference found on domain-specific satisfaction scales (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2015). Whether the association between creative self-concept and life satisfaction is observed consistently within both gender subgroups remains an open question that warrants empirical investigation in the Indian context.

The present study investigated the associations between creative self-concept (creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity) and life satisfaction in a final analytical sample of 445 Indian high school students aged 15–19.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 475 Indian high school students were initially recruited for the study. Of these, 30 participants were excluded due to incomplete questionnaire responses (i.e., missing data on one or more scale items), yielding a final analytical sample of 445 students (318 males, 127 females), with ages ranging from 15 to 19 years. Participants were recruited from public and private high schools located in semi-urban areas in West Bengal. The gender imbalance (71% male) reflects the demographic composition of the schools sampled, in which male enrollment predominated. This imbalance is acknowledged as a limitation and future studies should aim for more balanced recruitment.

### **Measures**

#### ***Creative Self-Concept***

The Short Scale of Creative Self (SSCS; Karwowski et al., 2018) was used to assess participants' creative self-concept. The SSCS is an 11-item scale assessing two dimensions of creative self-concept. The Creative Self-Efficacy subscale (6 items; e.g., “I trust my creative abilities”; “I am good at proposing original solutions to problems”) measures beliefs about one's capacity for creative thought and action. The Creative Personal Identity subscale (5 items; e.g., “I think I am a creative person”; “Creativity is an important part of myself”) measures the extent to which creativity is incorporated into one's self-concept. Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely yes). Higher scores indicate greater creative self-efficacy and stronger creative personal identity, respectively.

#### ***Life Satisfaction***

Life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985), a widely used and psychometrically robust measure of global life satisfaction. The

SWLS consists of 5 items (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”; “I am satisfied with my life”), rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Total scores range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction.

## Procedure

Data were collected following approval from the participating schools' administrations. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, that all responses would be kept confidential, and that their responses would have no bearing on their academic standing. Completion of the questionnaire took approximately 15–20 minutes. Participants were debriefed following data collection and provided with information about available school counseling resources.

## Data Analysis

To examine the associations between creativity variables and life satisfaction, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the full sample and separately for male and female subgroups. All analyses were conducted using SPSS (Version 26.0; IBM Corp., 2019).

## Results

### Correlational Analyses

#### *Total Sample*

Table 1 presents the intercorrelations among all study variables for the total sample ( $N = 445$ ). Significant positive correlations were observed between all creativity variables and life satisfaction. Creative self-efficacy was positively and significantly correlated with life satisfaction ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ), representing a small effect. Creative personal identity showed a slightly stronger positive association with life satisfaction ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ), also representing a small effect. The overall creativity composite (comprising both subscales) demonstrated the strongest association with life satisfaction ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ), consistent with a small-to-moderate effect.

**Table 1**

*Pearson Correlations Among Creativity Variables and Life Satisfaction: Total Sample ( $N = 445$ )*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Creative Self-Efficacy	—	.58**	.88**	.18**
2. Creative Personal Identity	.58**	—	.90**	.20**
3. Overall Creativity	.88**	.90**	—	.22**
4. Life Satisfaction	.18**	.20**	.22**	—

*Note.* \*\*  $p < .01$ . 1 = Creative Self-Efficacy; 2 = Creative Personal Identity; 3 = Overall Creativity; 4 = Life Satisfaction.

Creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity were also substantially positively correlated with each other ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ), confirming that while these constructs are related, they are not redundant.

## Gender-Stratified Analyses

Analyses conducted separately for male and female participants revealed broadly consistent patterns (see Table 2). Among males ( $n = 318$ ), creative self-efficacy ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ), creative personal identity ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ), and overall creativity ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ) were all significantly positively correlated with life satisfaction. Among females ( $n = 127$ ), similar associations emerged, though significant at the  $p < .05$  level: creative self-efficacy ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), creative personal identity ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), and overall creativity ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ) were all significant.

**Table 2**  
*Pearson Correlations Among Creativity Variables and Life Satisfaction by Gender*

Variable	Male (n = 318)				Female (n = 127)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Creative Self-Efficacy	—	.60**	.89**	.19**	—	.51**	.84**	.19*
2. Creative Personal Identity	.60**	—	.90**	.21**	.51**	—	.90**	.19*
3. Overall Creativity	.89**	.90**	—	.23**	.84**	.90**	—	.22*
4. Life Satisfaction	.19**	.21**	.23**	—	.19*	.19*	.22*	—

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . 1 = Creative Self-Efficacy; 2 = Creative Personal Identity; 3 = Overall Creativity; 4 = Life Satisfaction. Male  $n = 318$ ; Female  $n = 127$ .

## Discussion

The present study set out to examine whether creative self-concept predicts life satisfaction among Indian high school students, and whether any such associations differ by gender. Significant positive correlations emerged between creativity variable and life satisfaction in the total sample and across both gender subgroups.

The positive associations between creative self-concept and life satisfaction observed in this study are consistent with broader theoretical frameworks linking creativity to psychological well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Fredrickson, 2001).

That the positive creativity–life satisfaction association was observed in a sample of Indian high school students facing significant academic and sociocultural pressures is a finding of particular relevance. India's educational system has been widely critiqued for prioritizing rote learning, conformity, and examination success (Bhattacharya, 2022; Deb et al., 2015; Nagle & Sharma, 2018) over creativity, critical thinking, and personal expression. In this context, students who nonetheless maintain a positive creative self-concept, who believe in their creative capacities and incorporate creativity into their identity, appear to show a form of psychological resilience that is associated with their overall well-being.

This interpretation resonates with research on positive emotions and psychological resilience by Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), which proposes that positive psychological states expand an individual's thought-action repertoire and, in doing so, build enduring personal resources that are associated with well-being. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) demonstrated empirically that individuals who experience positive emotions, even in the context of stress, are more capable of finding positive meaning in adverse circumstances, and that this capacity is driven

by internal psychological resources rather than by the elimination of external pressures. For Indian adolescents navigating intense academic demands and high-stakes examination culture, creative self-beliefs may function as precisely such an internal resource: viewing oneself as creative may provide a sense of efficacy, purpose, and personal agency that transcends the narrow domain of examination performance and enriches one's broader evaluation of life.

From a collectivist cultural perspective, it is also worth noting that creativity need not be understood solely as individual self-expression. In the Indian context, creativity may be experienced as a contribution to the family or community, or as a means of fulfilling culturally valued social roles, in ways that are congruent with collectivist values. Students who integrate creativity into their self-concept may do so in culturally diverse ways that nonetheless support life satisfaction.

### **Gender Findings**

A notable finding of the present study was the broadly consistent pattern of creativity–life satisfaction associations within gender groups. Among male students, creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity and overall creativity were all statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . Among female students, associations were of comparable magnitude—creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity, and overall creativity—with significance at  $p < .05$ . The attenuated significance level in the female subsample is more plausibly attributable to reduced statistical power arising from the smaller sample size than to any substantive difference in the strength of the associations.

The consistency of these correlation magnitudes across gender groups is particularly noteworthy given the Indian educational context. Gender inequitable norms related to dress, mobility, and gender roles have been documented among early adolescents in urban poor communities in India, with girls directed onto more constrained developmental pathways than boys, including restrictions on movement and preparation for domestic roles rather than careers (Basu et al., 2017). Against this backdrop of unequal contextual conditions, the finding that creative self-beliefs relate to life satisfaction with comparable strength in both male and female students is theoretically significant. It suggests that the psychological relationship between creative self-concept and well-being operates as a relatively context-independent mechanism—one that functions similarly regardless of the differential opportunities' individuals may have had to develop or express creativity. This has meaningful practical implications: interventions designed to strengthen creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity may yield broadly comparable well-being benefits across the student population, without necessitating gender-differentiated approaches.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study carry important implications for educational practice and policy. If positive creative self-perceptions are associated with greater life satisfaction among high school students, then educational environments that support the development of creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity may contribute not only to academic outcomes but to students' overall psychological well-being. This argument aligns with emerging policy frameworks that advocate for more holistic approaches to education in India, including the National Education Policy 2020 (Government of India, 2020), which explicitly identifies creativity and critical thinking as core educational goals.

In practical terms, teachers, school counselors, and educational administrators might consider embedding creativity-fostering practices into the curriculum and broader school environment. Opportunities for creative problem-solving, artistic expression, and open-ended inquiry that allow students to experience and attribute success to their own creative capacities may help build creative self-efficacy over time. Classroom practices that treat students as creative agents — praising creative effort, tolerating productive failure, and valuing diverse forms of self-expression — may foster creative personal identity.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional correlational design precludes causal inference. While we have interpreted the findings as suggesting that creative self-concept supports life satisfaction, the reverse is equally plausible: students who are more satisfied with their lives may be more likely to view themselves as creative. Longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to clarify the direction of effects.

Second, the gender imbalance in the sample (318 males, 127 females) means that the female subsample was considerably smaller, potentially limiting the statistical power of gender-stratified analyses and explaining why female correlations reached significance only at the  $p < .05$  level rather than  $p < .01$ . Studies specifically designed to achieve balanced gender samples are needed to provide more definitive evidence regarding gender moderation.

### **Conclusion**

The present study provides evidence that creative self-concept, encompassing both creative self-efficacy and creative personal identity, is positively associated with life satisfaction among Indian high school students. Creative self-efficacy ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ), creative personal identity ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ), and overall creativity ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ) each showed significant positive associations with life satisfaction in the total sample, with broadly consistent patterns observed across male ( $n = 318$ ) and female ( $n = 127$ ) subgroups. In a context characterized by intense academic pressure and constrained opportunities for creative self-expression, supporting the development of creative self-concept in adolescents may represent an important pathway to enhanced psychological well-being.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

This manuscript was refined with the assistance of AI-based language generation and editing tools, including ChatGPT. The AI was used to enhance clarity, coherence, and structure in support of the discussion. All intellectual content, critical analysis, and final editorial decisions were made by the author.

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