

***Predicting Student Flourishing:  
Uncovering Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education***

Anna Ayu Herawati, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Universitas Bengkulu, Indonesia  
Syamsu Yusuf LN, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia  
Ilfiandra, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia  
Ahmad Syaf Ya Habibi, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

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**Abstract**

Research on student flourishing in higher education is crucial given the complexity of challenges faced by modern students. The competitive academic environment, high academic demands, and social pressures can significantly impact the mental well-being of students. The primary objective of this research is to identify and understand the challenges and opportunities students face in their efforts to thrive in the higher education environment. The study employed a survey approach, utilizing the Student Flourishing Index to measure various dimensions of student well-being. A diverse sample of 360 students from various disciplines participated in the survey. The results of the survey data analysis revealed specific challenges faced by students, including academic stress, social pressures, and emotional well-being. On a positive note, opportunities for improvement, such as enhanced support systems, targeted interventions, and the promotion of a positive learning environment, were identified. The study concludes that fostering student flourishing is a complex endeavor requiring a holistic approach. It emphasizes the need for educational institutions to systematically address the identified challenges and capitalize on opportunities to create a supportive atmosphere for student well-being. Recommendations for policymakers and education stakeholders are suggested to consider the survey findings when formulating strategies and policies.

Keywords: Flourishing, PERMA, Challenges, Opportunities, Higher Education

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## Introduction

Higher education is an important stage in individual development, where individuals not only seek academic knowledge, but also hone life skills, form self-identity and improve their psychological well-being. In positive psychology, well-being can be described in flourishing, which is the most optimal form of well-being based on hedonic well-being (HWB) and eudaimanic well-being (EWB). Aristotle introduced eudaimanic to reflect individual flourishing as a reflection of virtue and the development of an individual's full potential, in contrast to the pleasure-centered hedonic (Heintzelman, 2018). An individual who is flourishing in life tends to feel positive things and successfully achieve their goals and expectations (Tay, 2018). In contrast, individuals who experience difficulties in life usually do not feel positive emotions and fail to fulfill the goals or expectations they have. Flourishing is a concept that describes an individual's highest level of well-being in various aspects of life, such as emotional, social and mental well-being (Keyes, 2022). In addition, flourishing is defined as a state of life characterized by well-being, which includes competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive relationships and self-esteem (Huppert & So, 2013). Regardless of the word used to describe it, flourishing demands individual excellence, optimization of certain strengths, character and thoughts.

Flourishing is not only important for individual success, but also has broad implications for higher education institutions and society as a whole. In the realm of higher education flourishing is a crucial benchmark for evaluating student success. Flourishing students usually show high levels of academic engagement, have strong social relationships, and are able to cope with academic pressures and life challenges with good resilience (Howell, 2009). In addition, students are also better prepared to face the challenges of the world of work and contribute positively to their communities after graduation. Seligman (2011) presents a flourishing model known as PERMA, which is 1) positive emotion, 2) engagement, 3) relationship, 4) meaning, and 5) achievement. According to Seligman, these five elements of well-being are pursued for their own sake and not necessarily to improve other elements of well-being.

The study of flourishing, especially in the context of higher education, has received increasing attention. This is in line with the increasing understanding of the importance of mental and psychological well-being. However, this is not an easy task, due to the complex and diverse factors and challenges that affect students' well-being. One of the main challenges is the high academic load, which can cause mental and emotional distress (Baik et al., 2019). In addition, social factors such as social isolation and lack of psychological support also contribute to low levels of flourishing among university students (Sesarika & Kennya, 2015). Other studies have shown that students who lack adequate social support are more prone to stress, anxiety and reduced academic performance (Kuh et al., 2005). Understanding the factors that influence flourishing is becoming increasingly crucial as attention to the mental health and well-being of university students around the world increases. Schreiner (2012) emphasized the importance of identifying predictors of flourishing to design effective interventions and create supportive campus environments. In addition, Fredrickson (2001) revealed that flourishing individuals not only have better well-being, but also show superior academic performance and stronger social engagement.

However, this is often difficult to realize due to the many challenges that students face. The main challenges students face include academic pressure, financial problems and social difficulties. In addition, heavy study loads and high expectations often trigger stress and

anxiety (Beiter et al., 2015). Not only that, financial problems such as high tuition fees and poor financial management can exacerbate psychological distress (Archulete et al., 2013). In addition, the imbalance between academic and personal life is often a significant challenge. Students must try to manage their time between studies, part-time jobs and social life (Martines et al., 2013). Despite the many challenges that students may face, higher education provides various opportunities for students to achieve flourishing. Higher education offers students opportunities for personal development, exploration of new interests, skill development and building valuable social and professional networks that can support their future success (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Thomas, 2002). The important role of universities in creating an environment that supports students' psychological and social healing can be through counseling services, mentoring programs, life skills improvement programs, academic resources, career exploration through internships, research, campus organizations that can strengthen a sense of belonging and encourage self-development (Schreiner et al., 2012; Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Datu, 2018).

Understanding the challenges and opportunities is crucial for higher education institutions, as this will enable them to design effective programs and policies to support student flourishing, maximize potential and prepare for later life. Therefore, this study aims to predict student flourishing in higher education by identifying the challenges and opportunities that exist, the findings from this study are expected to provide practical guidance for higher education managers in formulating effective strategies to optimize student well-being, so that they can achieve maximum potential in both academic and personal life aspects.

## Method

This research uses a survey method with a quantitative approach. The sample of this research was 360 students of Bengkulu University. The instrument used in this study used a scale compiled based on the PERMA concept to measure the flourishing level of students. Data collection procedures using Google Form. Data analysis in this study by creating a frequency distribution table and descriptive statistics using SPSS.

## Finding and Discussions

Table 1: Frequency College Students

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	65	18.1
Female	295	81.9
Total	360	100

Based on the results of research conducted on 360 Bengkulu University students, it shows that most of the respondents are women with a percentage of 81.9%, or 295 students, while men are only 18.1% or 65 students. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the majority of students involved in this study are women.

Table 2: Frequency of Student Flourishing Based on Gender

Gender	Low	Medium	Total
Male	6	59	65
Female	13	282	295
Total	19	341	360

Based on the table above, it shows that the distribution of students' flourishing level based on gender is grouped into 3 categories, namely; low, medium and high. A total of 65 male students, there are 6 students (9.2%) in the low category, and 59 students (90.8%) are in the medium category. While female students with a total of 295 students, there are 13 students (4.4%) in the low category, and 282 students (95.6%) are in the moderate category. These results show that the majority of students, both male and female, have a flourishing level in the moderate category. Although there is a striking difference, that the flourishing level of male students has a higher percentage than women. So it can be concluded that female students have a higher level of flourishing than men.

Table 3: Frequency of Student Flourishing Based on Study Program

<b>Prodi</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Total</b>
Teknik Elektro	1	9	10
Manajemen	0	2	2
D3 Akuntansi	0	1	1
Hukum	0	1	1
Agribisnis	0	2	2
Ilmu Hukum	0	3	3
Kedokteran	2	6	8
Kesejahteraan Sosial	0	4	4
Akuntansi	0	3	3
Bimbingan dan Konseling	5	99	104
Pendidikan IPA	3	40	43
PGSD	1	22	23
Bahasa Indonesia	1	8	9
Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris	3	27	30
Biologi	0	3	3
Pendidikan Nonformal	2	43	45
Fisika	0	17	17
Matematika	0	27	27
Pendidikan Jasmani	0	1	1
Peternakan	1	18	19
Kimia	0	3	3
Ilmu Tanah	0	1	1
Statistika	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>360</b>

Based on the results of the table above which displays the distribution of students from various study programs grouped by low, medium and high categories. Of the total 360 students from 23 study programs, the majority of student flourishing is in the medium category, namely 34 students, and 19 students have flourishing in the low category. The study program with the largest number of students at 104 students in the guidance and counseling study program has flourishing in the medium category of 99 students, and the low category is 5 students. Furthermore, the non-formal education study program has the second largest number of students with a total of 45 students, and 43 students have flourishing in the moderate category and 2 students in the low category. From the results of the table above, it can be concluded that most students from various study programs tend to have flourishing in the moderate category.

Table 4: Frequency of Student Flourishing Based on Indicators

Indicator	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Positive Emotion	11.658	19.97
Engagement	11.568	19.82
Relation	10.888	18.65
Meaning	12.858	22.03
Achievement/Accomplishment	11.3397	19.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>58.369</b>	<b>100</b>

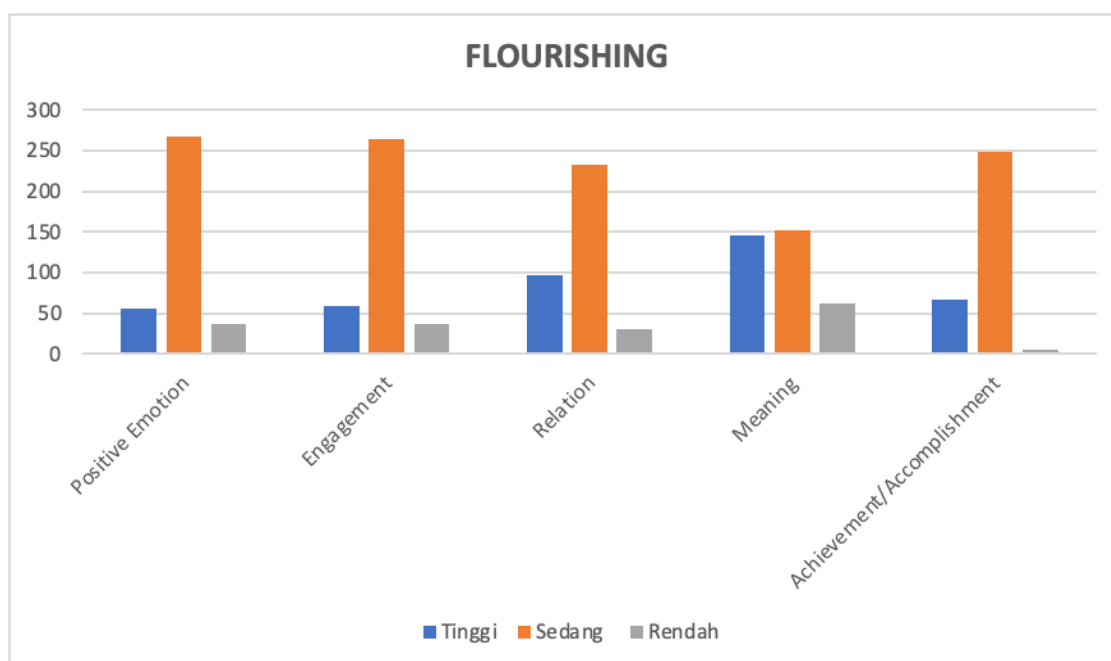


Figure 1: Flourishing

These findings provide an overview of student flourishing. In the context of flourishing, the five main indicators taken in the PERMA model developed by saligma include: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement. Based on the research results, the meaning indicator has the highest percentage of 22.03%. This shows that students manage to find goals in their academic and personal lives. According to Frankl (1984) the search for meaning is a basic human drive and this finding reflects that students who have a sense of purpose in life tend to experience better flourishing. Steger et al (2008); Matthews & Lerner (2016) in their research showed that sense of purpose and meaning in life are closely related to psychological well-being and tend to experience personal growth during the study period. Students who feel that their education is relevant to their life goals, both in personal development and professional preparation, tend to be motivated and have higher levels of satisfaction and have a foundation for building a career. In the context of education, students who understand their educational and life goals have stronger motivation to achieve better outcomes, both academically and professionally.

Furthermore, positive emotion with a percentage of 19.97%, this shows that positive feelings play an important role in motivating students, increasing creativity and broadening their perspectives. Fredricson (2001) states that positive emotions serve to strengthen the psychological and social individual, which then encourages further development. Students who have positive emotions tend to have higher life satisfaction, which in turn increases their academic motivation and achievement. The engagement indicator has 19.82%, indicating that

students are emotionally and intellectually involved in academic and social activities in higher education. Schreiner (2013) states that strong academic engagement can create a sense of satisfaction and happiness during the study period. In addition, students who are actively involved in campus activities are more flourishing because they feel intellectually challenged. Achievement, with a percentage of 19.53%, reflects the importance of academic achievement for students. Setting and achieving goals provides a sense of success that contributes to increased flourishing. When students are able to achieve their academic and personal targets, they tend to have a more positive outlook on life and are motivated to achieve success in the future.

In contrast, relationship has the lowest percentage at 18.65%. This low percentage indicates that students may face challenges in building and maintaining healthy social relationships. The low percentage indicates that students need a lot of support in the social aspect. Social support has consistently emerged as a strong predictor of student flourishing. According to Cohen & Wills (1985); Frey et al (2018); Fink (2014) social support can act as a buffer against stress and as a determining factor, where students who have strong interpersonal relationships, both fellow students and with lecturers, tend to have better emotional well-being, are able to cope with pressure, have lower stress levels and have higher levels of life satisfaction. Social support not only helps students in facing challenges, but also as a buffer against stress to achieve optimal flourishing. In line with research conducted by Mock & Smale (2023); Kuettel et al (2021) that individuals who are more actively involved in social activities, such as interacting with friends, often participating in cultural activities such as attending music performances or visiting museums and doing regular physical exercise, tend to show higher levels of flourishing and lower levels of languishing.

In addition, students who do not have adequate coping skills tend to experience decreased flourishing and overall well-being. This is further exacerbated by social pressures, both from the college environment, such as demands to perform well and fit in with peer groups, and from families who may have high expectations of academic success. These challenges collectively add to the mental burden of college students, which if not managed well can lead to emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression or mental exhaustion. Schotanus et al (2017) in their study stated that high levels of flourishing can reduce the risk of emotional distress by 28% and anxiety disorders by 53%, but it does not significantly predict the occurrence of substance use disorders. Therefore, it is important for universities to provide adequate support in the form of stress management and resilience development programs that can help students develop better coping skills. This kind of support can reduce the impact of the social and emotional stress they face, as well as provide opportunities to increase student flourishing which lies in the delivery of the intervention.

One of the main opportunities to support student flourishing is an academic environment that encourages intellectual engagement. Schreiner (2013) emphasizes that students who are engaged in the learning process, such as actively participating in discussions, collaborative projects and other academic activities, they will tend to have higher levels of well-being. This is because academic engagement allows students to fully develop their intellectual abilities, gain recognition for academic achievement and feel the satisfaction that comes from achieving academic goals. Universities can enhance these opportunities by introducing interactive and innovative teaching methods. A challenging and inspiring academic environment can motivate students to engage more deeply which positively contributes to their flourishing. In addition, resilience training programs, mentoring programs, stress management workshops or counseling services that focus on skill development can greatly

benefit students to achieve mental and physical well-being which are key elements of flourishing (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). This supports the findings of Li & Hasson (2020) who pointed out the importance of resilience in facing challenges in the college environment. Finally, the promotion of mental and physical health through various mental health and wellness programs also makes an important contribution to flourishing. Colleges have the opportunity to promote mental health by providing access to accessible health services, such as counseling services or campus psychologists (Steger et al, 2008).

There are many factors that contribute to flourishing, so it is necessary to implement strategies to help students achieve this condition. Research conducted by VanderWeele (2020) identified various activities and interventions that can facilitate this development. Hence, the need for a holistic approach in supporting student flourishing. Colleges need to consider implementing strategies that address the challenges identified and capitalize on the opportunities that exist. These include cognitive exercises centered on gratitude, enjoyment, and endangering the optimal future self. Behavioral exercises emphasize the application of character strengths, acts of kindness, and volunteerism. Next comes engagement in institutional and relational practices aimed at enhancing flourishing. These include increasing academic and financial support, creating opportunities for meaningful social engagement and integrating life skills development into the curriculum.

Previous research shows that the level of flourishing is significantly affected by various factors, including self-efficacy and social support (Masturah & Hudaniah, 2022), involvement in volunteer activities and coping mechanisms (Yuspendi et al, 2017), overall life satisfaction (Fadhillah & Masturah, 2023), self-compassion (Zulfa & Prastuti, 2020), as well as optimism, happiness, financial status, marital status, social relationships, and demographic variables such as age, health, education, gender, race, and religion (Diener et al., 2010; Seligman et al., 2005). Based on the findings of this study, educators, mental health professionals, institutions, and policy makers should recognize the importance of building an environment that supports students' flourishing. This goal can be achieved by creating a welcoming and safe atmosphere, and by offering students optimal opportunities for academic support (such as mentoring groups) and social engagement (including informal networking events). Academically, it is clear that students need better support in achieving mastery, particularly in the areas of time management and academic task execution. Implications for future research are to understand how these factors interact over time, as well as cross-cultural research to explore how different social and cultural contexts may affect students' flourishing. In addition, intervention research is needed to test the effectiveness of the proposed strategies in improving students' flourishing.

## **Implications and Limitations**

### **1) Implication**

The findings of this study provide several important implications for higher education stakeholders, including educators, administrators, and policymakers:

- a. **Policy Formulation for Student Well-being:** The research highlights the importance of integrating mental health and well-being strategies into higher education policies. Universities should focus on creating comprehensive programs that address not only academic challenges but also social and emotional support for students.
- b. **Customized Interventions:** The variation in flourishing levels across different gender and program groups suggests the need for targeted interventions. Programs designed

to address gender-specific challenges and study program requirements can better support diverse student populations.

- c. **Promotion of a Supportive Environment:** Universities can play a crucial role in promoting a positive academic and social environment by offering mentoring, counseling, and peer support systems. Emphasizing the PERMA indicators (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) can enhance students' overall flourishing.
- d. **Faculty and Staff Training:** Training educators and staff to recognize and address factors affecting students' flourishing can ensure early intervention and more effective support systems.
- e. **Future Research Directions:** The study underscores the necessity for longitudinal and cross-cultural studies to explore how diverse contexts affect student flourishing and to test the effectiveness of tailored intervention strategies.

## 2) Limitation

- a. **Sample Representation:** The study's sample is limited to students from a single university, which may not fully capture the diversity of student experiences across different cultural or institutional contexts. Future research should include a broader range of participants from various universities and regions.
- b. **Self-Reported Data:** As the research relies on self-reported survey data, it is subject to biases such as social desirability and inaccurate self-assessment. Including qualitative methods or observational data could provide more comprehensive insights.
- c. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study's cross-sectional nature limits the ability to infer causality between variables. Longitudinal studies would help in understanding the dynamic relationship between academic, social, and psychological factors and student flourishing over time.
- d. **Limited Scope of Challenges and Opportunities:** While the research identifies key challenges and opportunities, it does not delve deeply into external factors such as family background, financial constraints, or institutional policies that might influence student flourishing.
- e. **Generalizability:** The findings may not be generalizable to all higher education contexts, particularly in non-Indonesian settings, due to cultural and institutional differences. Comparative studies are recommended to explore these variations.

These implications and limitations underscore the need for a multifaceted approach in both research and practice to optimize student flourishing in higher education.

## Conclusion

Students flourishing is an important aspect that is influenced by the various challenges and opportunities that exist in the college environment. Students face academic, social and emotional pressures that can inhibit their flourishing. However, there are opportunities to support flourishing through a supportive academic environment, targeted interventions and strong social support. Higher education institutions need to take a holistic approach by providing academic, social and financial support to help students achieve optimal well-being. This research emphasizes the importance of programs that support intellectual engagement, stress management, and the promotion of mental and physical health in an effort to maximize students' potential in both their academic and personal lives. Longitudinal studies are proposed to further explore the interaction between these factors in different social and cultural contexts and test the effectiveness of the proposed intervention strategies.



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**Contact email:** [annaayuhherawati@upi.edu](mailto:annaayuhherawati@upi.edu)