

## Academic Gratitude and the Purpose among Muslim Students: An Empirical Study

**Nurul Wardhani**

Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia

Email: nurul.wardhani@unpad.ac.id

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### ABSTRACT

Academic gratitude plays an important role in shaping students' psychological well-being and motivation; however, research on its association with purpose in life remains limited, particularly among Muslim students in Indonesia. On the other hand, many Muslim students experience confusion in determining their life direction and the meaning of academic activities, which leads to stress, anxiety, and even depressive symptoms. Cultural pressures, discrimination, and lack of social support further exacerbate this condition, making the absence of a clear life purpose a significant issue affecting their well-being. This study aims to examine the relationship between academic gratitude and purpose in life among Muslim students. The participants consisted of 308 Muslim students in West Java recruited through convenience sampling. The instruments used were self-report questionnaires, namely the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) to measure academic gratitude and the Claremont Purpose Scale (CPS) to measure purpose in life. Spearman correlation analysis revealed a moderately strong and significant positive relationship between academic gratitude and purpose in life ( $r = 0.434$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that the higher students' academic gratitude, the clearer their sense of life purpose. Further research is needed to explore the influence of academic gratitude on purpose in life in different cultural and religious contexts to broaden the generalizability of the findings.

**Keywords:** *Muslim students; West Java; academic gratitude; the purpose*

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### INTRODUCTION

The lecture period is a time of development filled with academic, social, and spiritual challenges. In academia, stress from assignments, exams, and achievement demands often serves as a primary source of strain, potentially endangering students' mental health (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Shabana Akhtar & Naeem Akhtar, 2024). Additional constraints exacerbate these conditions, including ineffective time management, lack of motivation, and poor study skills (Nguyen & Le, 2024). Socially, students frequently struggle to secure support (Nair et al., 2024; Roming & Howard, 2019) and need to enhance communication skills and emotion regulation—essential for healthy relationships (Nguyen & Le, 2024). Spiritually, studies reveal students' struggles amid academic pressures or life transitions (Ekwonye et al., 2020; Machfud, 2025; Plant, 2020; Pohan et al., 2025). Thus, students must cope with academic pressures, foster social relationships, and derive meaning from their activities.

The life orientation of Muslim students, grounded in religious values and purpose discovery, profoundly influences their success in navigating study challenges (Harun et al., 2021). Clear life goals offer motivation, direction, and psychological resilience, proving vital for identity formation and well-being (Hill et al., 2016; Sumner et al., 2015; M. Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al., 2023). Yet, studies indicate many Muslim students grapple with life's direction and the meaning of academic pursuits, leading to elevated stress, hesitation in major or goal selection, and future uncertainty (Khan & Parveen, 2020; M. Suud & Na'imah, 2023). This confusion often triggers psychological symptoms like depression, anxiety, and stress, worsened by cultural pressures, discrimination, and insufficient support (Al-Krenawi, 2025; Nadeem et al., 2017; Tabassum et al., 2024; Tineo et al., 2021). Such ambiguity diminishes spiritual and psychological motivation (Achour et al., 2021; Dzikra et al., 2025).

The phenomenon of unclear life purpose among Indonesian Muslim students poses a significant health concern. For instance, research on nursing students links vague life direction to heightened stress and diminished quality of life (Komariah et al., 2025). Many struggle to integrate academic and spiritual meaning, partly due to Indonesia's dichotomous and partial Islamic education system, which hinders spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth (Al-Razi et al., 2024; Hamami & Nuryana, 2022). Spirituality-based education remains underutilized in universities, despite emerging at schools, leaving students without guidance for meaningful goals (Chanifah et al., 2021; Zuhdi & Syarief, 2023). Modernization and globalization further erode identity and lifestyle clarity, overshadowing Islamic boarding schools' and institutions' efforts to foster moderation and future orientation (Mujahid, 2021). This is alarming, as Muslim students' purpose encompasses not just worldly success but devotion to God. According to Damon and colleagues (Damon et al., 2003, 2019), "Life purpose is a stable and overarching intention to achieve something that is not only meaningful to oneself but also has an impact on the world outside oneself."

Gratitude, a key psychological component, influences life purpose. It involves acknowledging, appreciating, and valuing opportunities, experiences, and support during academic processes (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2002). This reflects a grateful worldview—a lifestyle viewing one's possessions, including life itself, as altruistic gifts received from others' goodness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In academia, gratitude transcends emotion, serving as cognitive regulation that fosters positive interpretations of learning (Mason, 2020; Wilson, 2016). Grateful individuals discern value in tasks, boosting cognitive and emotional engagement (King et al., 2023; King & Datu, 2018; Nawa & Yamagishi, 2021).

Gratitude holds strong religious and cultural significance as a positive emotion for Indonesian Muslim students. It shapes their lives as both spiritual expression and cultural force, bolstering character amid academic and social challenges. Islamic education emphasizing gratitude, integrated with local culture, strengthens identity and wisdom by deepening its daily meaning (Mujahid, 2021; Muliadi et al., 2024).

Prior studies link gratitude to well-being, happiness, academic success, engagement, and life's meaning. Spiritually, it aids purpose-building, helping define life's aims; spirituality often mediates this (Bono & Sender, 2018; David et al., 2022; Fuertes, 2024; Kerry et al., 2023; Lasota & Shekhar, 2024; Liao & Weng, 2018; Ping Bilong et al., 2021; Wardhani et al., 2025; M. A. Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2024; Zainoodin et al., 2021). However, few explicitly target life purpose, especially among Indonesian Muslim students.

This study addresses a gap: limited research on academic gratitude's relation to life purpose in Indonesian Muslim students. Rooted in religious and cultural values, academic gratitude aids navigation of pressures and globalization. Clear purpose proves essential for mental health and readiness. Thus, this study empirically examines their relationship. Findings offer theoretical contributions to positive psychology, Islamic psychology, and student development by illuminating gratitude-purpose links in religious-collectivist contexts. Practically, they guide policymakers and practitioners in Islamic higher education to design interventions—like counseling, curricula, or activities—fostering gratitude, clearer purpose, psychological well-being, engagement, and success.

## METHOD

The participants in this study were 308 Muslim students from 56 public and private universities (Academies, Polytechnics, Colleges, Institutes, Universities) in seven cities in the West Java Province of Indonesia (Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, Cirebon, Bandung, Cimahi, Sukabumi, Bogor). Willing to answer the gratitude scale, and the scale of life goals through the dissemination of google forms. They consisted of: 218 men and 90 women, 68 people at the D3 level (Bachelor) and 240 people at the S1 (Bachelor) level, with an age range between 17 and 24 years ( $M = 20.5$ ). The selection of participants was carried out by convenience sampling method.

This study uses a correlational quantitative design with the aim of looking at the relationship between academic gratitude and life goals in Muslim students in Indonesia.

The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 Scale (GQ-6) is a measuring tool to capture responses about gratitude. Compiled by McCullough et al. (2002). It consists of six items, with a Likert scale of seven points, where point 1= 'strongly disagree' to point 7= 'strongly agree'. Then for use in this study, the researcher modified it in the context of academic gratitude, the reliability value ( $\alpha = 0.775$ , reliable), the results of the CFA Ftest were classified as fit: ( $p$ -value 0.25; RMSEA 0.029; SRMR 0.022; CFI 1.00; GFI 0.99). Higher scores indicate higher levels of academic gratitude, while lower scores indicate lower levels of academic gratitude. Operationally, academic gratitude is described as the tendency of students to consciously acknowledge and respond with gratitude to the various experiences, supports, and opportunities they encounter in the context of lectures. It includes indicators: recognition of the role of others in giving kindness, awareness of the many events that should be grateful, and the intensity of feelings of gratitude experienced.

The Claremont Purpose Scale (CPS) is the second measurement tool in this study. Compiled by Bronk et al. (2018) to measure life goals. This instrument is adapted into Indonesian. It consists of 12 items on a five-point Likert scale, where one point indicates very low and five points indicates very high. All CPS items are reliable or consistent ( $\alpha = 0.889$ ). Operationally, life purpose is defined as a consistent desire or intention to achieve something meaningful to oneself and beneficial to others. This includes things like clarity of direction in life, belief in goals, efforts to realize long-term goals, and the expectation that they will make a positive contribution to others. The higher the score, the clearer the student's life goals.

Research procedure. This study lasted for six months. Data collection via Google Forms. Before use, the research instrument has been adapted in language, tested by experts, and gone through several trials (pilot studies) to ensure the validity of the content, and is equipped with reliability and construct validity tests. The instrument used is a self-report questionnaire, so it is prone to subjectivity bias. However, to minimize this, the presentation of items is randomized, respondents' participation is kept anonymous, and instructions are given uniformly to all participants before filling out the online questionnaire with voluntary consent.

Data analysis. The data obtained have characteristics that do not fully meet the assumptions of normal distribution. Therefore, the Spearman correlation analysis technique was used to see the relationship between academic gratitude and the life goals of Muslim students, with the help of SPSS statistical software version 26.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1. Mean, median, and standard deviation**

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Median (Me)	Standard deviation (SD)
Life purpose	308	4,232	4,33	0,612
Academic Gratitude	308	5,968	6,00	0,679

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024

**Table 2. Correlation between academic gratitude and life purpose**

	Academic gratitude	Life purpose
Academic Gratitude	<i>Spearman's Correlation</i>	1
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0,434**
	<i>N</i>	308
Life purpose	<i>Spearman's Correlation</i>	0,434**
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0,000
	<i>N</i>	308

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed)*

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024

**Discussion**

Muslim students have an average academic gratitude score (M) = 5,968; SD = 0.679; and median (Me) = 6.00 (Table 1). The highest scores ranged between 5.29 and 6.65. The level of academic gratitude of students is quite high, according to an average score that is close to the median. This high number of gratitude scores, according to McCullough (2002), indicates that Muslim students tend to be grateful often and have a deep sense of gratitude for various academic experiences. This is demonstrated by their awareness of recognizing and responding to supports, opportunities, and learning experiences. In addition, students realize that there are outsiders who do good things or gifts. They also consider many academic events to be something to be grateful for.

Regarding the life goals of Muslim students, the average score (M) is 4,232; standard deviation (SD) is 0.612; and median (Me) was 4.33 (Table 1), with the highest score range between 3.62 and 4.85. In short, these values show that Muslim students have a clear purpose in life. Referring to Damon et al. (Damon et al., 2003, 2019), this shows that they have clarity about their life path, strong belief in their goals, make real efforts to achieve their goals, and hope to make a positive impact on others.

The main finding of this study is that there is a strong and significant positive relationship between academic gratitude and Muslim students' life goals, as shown in Table 2. That is, the greater their gratitude for academic life, the clearer their life purpose will be, and vice versa. In line with the view of McCullough et al. (2002) and Emmons et al. (2003), students who are grateful for their education reflect that they develop a grateful personal schema or grateful worldview. This means that they see academic experience—from college, doing assignments, to exams—as an altruistic gift. This kind of worldview fosters feelings of gratitude, gratitude, and appreciation to those who are considered to have given this opportunity.

In contrast, college students who have a clear life purpose show a consistent and overarching intention to achieve something meaningful for themselves and others (Damon et al., 2003, 2019). With this intention, they can spot opportunities and take appropriate action.

They can also focus their efforts on achieving long-term goals (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007). As a result, they are encouraged to engage in daily activities in a more meaningful way, using them as a means of realizing personal goals, while fostering aspirations so that these activities have a positive impact on others and contribute to the betterment of society (Bronk et al., 2018).

The relationship between the gratitude variable and life goals can be explained psychologically through certain mechanisms. A grateful outlook helps students make more rational decisions, clear their minds, and become more open to new experiences. It becomes an important basis for creativity and decision-making (Fredrickson, 2001; Mccraty & Childre, 2004; Pillay et al., 2020; Tong et al., 2022; Walsh et al., 2022). Gratitude also serves to encourage moral behavior and encourage social engagement related to the achievement of individual and collective long-term goals (Algoe et al., 2020; Keefer et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2024). Therefore, gratitude is not only a positive emotion, but also a cognitive-affective foundation that helps students find a clear way of life and purpose.

The relationship between gratitude and life purpose in Muslim students in Indonesia cannot be separated from the religious and collectivist cultural context. Gratitude is one of the most important forms of worship of the heart, according to the Islamic religion which is embraced by the majority of students in Indonesia. The positive feelings and inner attitudes that result from gratitude encourage a person to change their life towards a better goal, both for themselves and others (Chanifah et al., 2021; Pohan et al., 2025; Zuhdi & Syarief, 2023). Therefore, gratitude for the academic achievements of Muslim students can be understood as a spiritual expression that is closely related to their life's goals and quests, rather than just an emotional response to academic achievement.

In addition, because Indonesia's collectivist culture emphasizes togetherness and strong social connections, students in Indonesia are often grateful to their parents, teachers, friends, parents, and academic community, who are considered important to their academic journey (Mujahid, 2021; Pohan et al., 2025; Wardhani et al., 2020). Awareness of the role of others encourages students to set social life goals, namely goals that benefit society, families, and people (Armenta et al., 2022; Walsh et al., 2022). In other words, academic gratitude in a collectivistic system encourages students to have prosocial life goals, which tend to outweigh personal interests.

Because of this combination of religious and collectivistic values, the relationship between academic gratitude and life purpose in Indonesian Muslim students has become increasingly strong and unique. Collectivistic culture directs life purpose to broader social contributions, while gratitude instills an emotional and spiritual foundation (Fuertes, 2024; Vilaplana-Pérez et al., 2021; Yaden et al., 2022). This shows that research on academic gratitude and life goals of Indonesian Muslim students is psychologically and culturally important because it can illustrate the unique dynamics between religiosity, togetherness, and the search for meaning in life in an academic environment.

The results of this study also illustrate how important it is to build higher education programs that increase gratitude for education through the incorporation of religious values and create a supportive academic environment. This is expected to help students set clearer life goals.

Further research should be focused on looking at the influence of academic gratitude on life goals, in order to gain a better understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms.

In addition, follow-up studies are also important to be carried out in the context of other religions or in societies with individualistic cultures, so that they can be compared with findings on Muslim students in Indonesia who live in religious and collectivist cultures

## CONCLUSION

This study among Muslim students in West Java proved that there was a significant positive relationship between academic gratitude and their life goals ( $r_s = 0.434$ ;  $p < 0.01$ , Table 2). These findings suggest that, especially in a religious and collectivist Indonesian society, fostering gratitude in an academic context can be one of the important psychological foundations for building meaningful life goals. Moving forward, it is recommended that higher education institutions, especially those with a strong Islamic foundation, integrate gratitude-focused interventions such as reflective journaling, integrated spiritual-academic mentoring, and values-based curriculum modules to support students in nurturing a sense of purpose. Additionally, further research should explore longitudinal and experimental designs to examine causality, as well as comparative studies across different religious and cultural settings to broaden the applicability of these findings.

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