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Meaning in Life and Happiness: Integrating Positive Psychology and Islamic Counseling

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ABSTRACT
Happiness is an important aspect of students' psychological development; however, the experience of happiness is not always associated with the fulfillment of desires or the presence of positive emotions. In the pesantren context, happiness is also related to the ability to find meaning in life experiences, establish life goals, build positive relationships, and internalize Islamic values. This study aims to analyze the meaning of life and happiness among santri through the integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling perspectives. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data are collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving santri and supporting informants in the pesantren environment. The data are analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation of the findings. The results show that santri construct meaning in life through educational goals, hopes for the future, aspirations to become better individuals, and interpretations of their life experiences. Santri's happiness is experienced through positive social relationships, personal achievements, gratitude, inner peace, and religious experiences. Islamic values, including prayer, gratitude, patience, reliance upon Allah, and closeness to Allah, serve as a framework for interpreting both positive experiences and difficulties. The findings further indicate that meaning in life connects life experiences, psychological strengths, and happiness. The integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling provides a contextual framework for developing santri's happiness through strengthening meaning in life, personal strengths, positive relationships, and spiritual orientation.
Keywords: *Happiness; Islamic Counseling; Meaning in life; Positive Psychology; Santri.*

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is an important goal in human life and an integral component of positive psychological functioning. In contemporary psychology, happiness is understood not merely as an emotional state characterized by pleasant feelings, but also as a multidimensional construct encompassing meaning in life, life satisfaction, positive relationships, and the capacity to flourish and achieve optimal functioning. Positive psychology emphasizes human strengths, virtues, and the conditions that enable individuals to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. Within the educational context, this perspective is particularly relevant because education is not solely concerned with the development of academic competencies but also with individuals' personal, social, emotional, and spiritual development. Accordingly, the

study of happiness is closely aligned with guidance and counseling practices that seek to facilitate individuals' holistic development.

One construct that is closely associated with happiness is meaning in life, which refers to an individual's perception of purpose, direction, and values that make life feel significant and worthwhile. A meta-analysis conducted by (Li J.-B. D., 2021), involving 147 studies and 92,169 participants, demonstrated a positive association between the presence of meaning in life and subjective well-being. This finding suggests that individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful tend to experience greater well-being. Nevertheless, meaning in life represents a distinct construct from the mere experience of positive emotions. Happiness may therefore develop not only through pleasant emotional experiences but also through the perception that one's life is purposeful and guided by personally significant values.

The relationship between meaning in life and happiness is particularly relevant during adolescence and emerging adulthood, developmental periods characterized by identity formation, future orientation, and adaptation to various environmental demands. (Karaman, 2020) found that meaning in life, hope, and resilience were associated with students' life satisfaction. Similarly, (Li P. F.-L., 2019) reported that happiness and meaning in life make distinct yet complementary contributions to mental health. Meaning in life is more closely related to orientations toward goals and values that transcend immediate self-interest, whereas happiness is more strongly associated with positive experiences and self-fulfillment. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating meaningfulness into the understanding of happiness as an integral aspect of individual development.

This perspective becomes particularly relevant within the educational context of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Pesantren do not merely provide formal instruction but also shape students' everyday lives through religious practices, social interactions, discipline, caregiving, and the internalization of Islamic values. The lives of *santri* (students residing in pesantren) take place within a relatively structured environment in which learning experiences, social relationships, interactions with caregivers and teachers, and religious practices are interconnected with their psychological development. A systematic review conducted by (Muliadi, 2022) indicates that the happiness of *santri* is associated with social relationships, perceptions of self, and closeness to Allah. These findings suggest that the happiness of *santri* should be understood by considering psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously.

The lived experience of pesantren life further suggests that happiness cannot be adequately understood solely by measuring its intensity or level. Academic, social, and religious experiences may involve considerable complexity, while social support, spiritual well-being, gratitude, and the realization of personal and religious values may contribute to the formation of positive experiences among *santri*. Research involving Muslim university students in pesantren environments and Qur'an memorization students indicates that meaning-making may develop through religious experiences, life purposes, and processes of responding to various educational demands. Accordingly, the experiences of *santri* should be viewed as an ongoing process of meaning-making involving dynamic interactions among the self, educational environment, social relationships, and religious beliefs.

From an Islamic perspective, happiness encompasses more than pleasure or worldly satisfaction. It is associated with a purposeful orientation toward life, one's relationship with

Allah, and the internalization of values that provide guidance for living. (Hamdan, 2018) explains that positive psychology and Islamic psychology share an interest in the good life, yet differ in their conceptual foundations concerning the nature of happiness, its indicators, and the means through which it can be attained. Within an Islamic framework, happiness is not limited to an individual's present psychological condition but is also connected to the meaningfulness of life and orientation toward the hereafter. Consequently, the experience of happiness among *santri* needs to be understood through the interplay between psychological well-being and spiritual orientation.

The integration of positive psychology and Islamic perspectives provides a relevant framework for understanding happiness within Islamic counseling. Positive psychology emphasizes character strengths, positive emotions, relationships, accomplishment, and meaning, whereas Islamic values provide a spiritual framework for directing and cultivating these strengths. A systematic review by (Anli, 2025) suggests that the application of positive psychology within Muslim communities needs to take cultural and religious contexts into account, including prayer, social support, *tawakkul* (reliance upon Allah), and gratitude. Research on Islamic-based gratitude strategies has likewise indicated that gratitude practices that connect positive experiences with Allah may contribute to greater happiness among Muslim participants. These findings suggest that Islamic values can function as an integral component of the meaning-making process surrounding positive experiences rather than merely serving as an additional element within a psychological intervention.

This framework is consistent with the developmental function of guidance and counseling, which extends beyond addressing psychological difficulties to helping individuals recognize their potential, construct meaningful lives, and achieve optimal functioning. Research on Islamic guidance suggests that support grounded in Islamic values can facilitate the reconstruction of happiness through emotional regulation, meaning-making, and the development of purposeful life orientations. Studies examining the integration of happiness-related values into Islamic counseling have likewise positioned life purpose and happiness as important components of the counseling process. This body of research reinforces the relevance of Islamic counseling as a context for understanding and cultivating happiness rooted in meaning in life and religious values.

Although research on happiness, meaning in life, positive psychology, and the experiences of *santri* has continued to expand, several gaps remain. Previous studies have frequently focused on quantitatively examining associations among variables, such as the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being or between gratitude and happiness. Other studies have examined *santri* happiness through literature-based approaches or investigated positive psychology interventions grounded in Islamic values. While these approaches have provided important foundations, they do not fully capture how *santri* themselves understand and experience happiness or how meaning in life is constructed within the everyday context of pesantren life. Moreover, empirical research that explicitly brings together the concept of meaning in life within positive psychology and the concept of happiness within Islamic counseling through the lived experiences of *santri* remains limited. Therefore, further research is needed that moves beyond measuring happiness to explore how happiness is understood, experienced, and interpreted by *santri* within their religious and educational environment.

The present study extends previous research by focusing on the lived experiences of *santri* within the pesantren environment and interpreting these experiences through the complementary perspectives of positive psychology and Islamic counseling. Previous research has established associations between meaning in life and well-being, highlighted the roles of social relationships and spiritual closeness in the happiness of *santri*, and demonstrated the potential for adapting positive psychology to Muslim communities. The present study expands this body of scholarship by bringing educational experiences, individual development, meaningfulness, and religious values together within a single interpretive framework. This approach is consistent with (Muzaini, 2026), who emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning experiences in Islamic education, and (Salsabila, 2025), who demonstrates that the dynamics of emerging adulthood, including changes in patterns of digital media use, are associated with individuals' psychological experiences. Accordingly, this study seeks to develop a contextual understanding of happiness and meaning in life among *santri* as a foundation for a more holistic perspective on Islamic counseling.

Based on this background, the present study offers a distinctive contribution in terms of its focus and approach to understanding happiness among *santri*. Previous studies concerning meaning in life and happiness have generally treated these concepts as measurable constructs and examined their associations with well-being, life satisfaction, mental health, or other psychological factors. Research on *santri* happiness has primarily identified factors associated with happiness, including social relationships, perceptions of self, and spiritual closeness, whereas studies of Islamic counseling have tended to focus on counseling processes or the application of Islamic values to assist individuals in addressing psychological difficulties. In contrast, the present study does not seek merely to examine relationships among variables or identify factors associated with happiness. Rather, it explores how *santri* themselves experience, understand, and make meaning of happiness through their everyday experiences within the pesantren environment.

The distinctive contribution of this study lies in integrating experiences of meaning in life, experiences of happiness, and Islamic values within a single interpretive framework informed by positive psychology and Islamic counseling. Happiness is conceptualized in this study as a multidimensional experience that may emerge through processes of meaning-making, social relationships, the development of personal strengths, educational experiences, and spiritual closeness to Allah. Thus, the study does not position the Islamic perspective merely as an additional dimension to the positive psychology conception of happiness. Instead, Islamic values are considered part of the contextual framework through which the experiences of happiness among *santri* are formed, interpreted, and given meaning.

Employing a qualitative approach and a case study design, this study aims to explore how *santri* make sense of life and happiness, identify the experiences and values that shape their perceptions and experiences of happiness, and examine the implications of these findings for the development of Islamic counseling. The study is expected to contribute not only to the conceptual understanding of the interplay between meaning in life and happiness but also to a contextual understanding of happiness among *santri*. Such an understanding may provide a foundation for developing guidance and counseling services that integrate psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions in a holistic manner.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to develop an in-depth understanding of *santri*'s experiences, meaning-making processes, and perspectives regarding meaning in life and happiness within the context of pesantren life. A case study design was considered appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation cannot be separated from the religious, social, educational, and cultural contexts that simultaneously shape everyday life within the pesantren environment. This design enabled the researchers to explore the experiences of *santri* in depth and to examine how Islamic values contribute to the construction of meaning in life and experiences of happiness.

The selection of a case study design is also consistent with previous qualitative research in the context of Islamic education that employed observation, interviews, and documentation to examine phenomena within their contextual settings (Muzaini, 2026). In the present study, the case under investigation was the experience of *santri* in making sense of life and happiness while participating in educational processes and religious life within the pesantren. The study focused on three main aspects: (1) how *santri* make sense of their lives; (2) experiences and conditions perceived as sources of happiness; and (3) the role of Islamic values in shaping *santri*'s meaning in life and experiences of happiness.

The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah Cijantung IV, Ciamis, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively because the pesantren provides an educational context that integrates formal learning, character development, social life, and religious practices into the everyday experiences of *santri*. Therefore, the pesantren provides a relevant setting for examining the integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling perspectives in understanding meaning in life and happiness.

This study did not employ an experimental intervention; therefore, no treatment or experimental manipulation was administered to the participants. Prior to data collection, the researchers obtained permission from the pesantren authorities and provided participants with information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study, data confidentiality, and their right to participate voluntarily. Participants' identities and any information that could potentially reveal their identities were anonymized in the reporting of the findings to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Data and Data Sources

The data consisted of qualitative information concerning *santri*'s experiences of meaning in life, happiness, positive experiences, social relationships, religious values, and their everyday experiences of living within the pesantren environment. The primary data were derived from participants lived experiences and narratives, while supporting data were obtained through observations and relevant documentation related to the focus of the study.

The primary data sources were *santri* who resided at and participated in educational activities at Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah Cijantung IV, Ciamis. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in pesantren life and their ability to provide information relevant to the research focus. The participant inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) actively participating in educational activities and daily pesantren life; (2) having resided in the pesantren for at least six months; (3) being willing to participate in interviews and observations; and (4) being able to communicate their experiences and perspectives

regarding life, meaning, and happiness. Where necessary to enrich the perspectives represented in the data, additional information was obtained from teachers, counselors, or pesantren caregivers as supporting informants.

The number of participants was determined based on information adequacy and the principle of data saturation, which was reached when further data collection no longer generated substantively new information relevant to the research focus. The study involved seven *santri* as primary informants and three supporting informants, resulting in a total of ten participants. Participant characteristics, including age, gender, educational level, and length of residence in the pesantren, were recorded and presented anonymously to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities.

Supporting data were obtained from pesantren documents related to educational and religious development activities, including activity schedules, development and mentoring programs, institutional regulations, and relevant activity documentation. The use of multiple data sources was intended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and to facilitate data triangulation.

Data collection technique

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection technique for exploring *santri*'s subjective experiences of meaning in life and happiness. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and informed by relevant concepts from positive psychology and Islamic counseling.

The interview questions addressed several key themes: (1) *santri*'s understanding of a meaningful life; (2) their life goals and aspirations; (3) experiences that made their lives feel valuable and worthwhile; (4) experiences that contributed to their sense of happiness; (5) relationships with peers, *ustaz* (teachers), pesantren caregivers, and family members; (6) experiences of dealing with difficulties and challenges in pesantren life; (7) the role of worship and religious activities in coping with problems; and (8) experiences of gratitude, patience, *tawakkul* (reliance upon Allah), and closeness to Allah in everyday life.

The interviews were conducted individually in settings that enabled participants to share their experiences comfortably and without significant distractions. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The researchers also maintained field notes to document the interview context, relevant nonverbal expressions, and situational factors that could support the interpretation of the data.

Observations were conducted of *santri*'s activities within the pesantren environment, particularly activities related to learning, worship, social interactions, communal activities, and developmental or mentoring programs. The observations were intended to provide contextual information about *santri*'s everyday lives and to identify behaviors or situations relevant to experiences of happiness, meaning in life, social relationships, and religious practices.

Documentation was used as a supporting data source and included pesantren program documents, activity schedules, mentoring materials, and relevant records of activities. The use of interviews, observations, and documentation enabled the researchers to conduct methodological triangulation, allowing interpretations of *santri*'s experiences to be informed by multiple data collection techniques rather than relying on a single source of evidence. This data collection strategy is also consistent with qualitative case study research in Islamic

education, which employs interviews, observations, and documentation to develop a contextual understanding of participants' experiences (Muzaini, 2026).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the data collection process and continued through the interpretation and conclusion-drawing stages. The first stage involved data familiarization, in which interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents were read repeatedly to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

The second stage involved coding data segments relevant to the research focus. Participants' statements describing meaning in life, life purposes, experiences of happiness, positive relationships, experiences of dealing with difficulties, and Islamic values were assigned relevant codes. The third stage involved grouping codes with similar meanings into broader categories. These categories were subsequently developed into themes representing broader patterns within the experiences of the *santri*.

The fourth stage involved reviewing and refining the themes by comparing the emerging themes against the dataset as a whole. The researchers ensured that each theme was adequately supported by the data and provided a meaningful representation of the phenomenon under investigation. The fifth stage involved defining and naming each theme to systematically explain the connections among meaning in life, happiness, positive psychology, and Islamic values. The final stage involved developing interpretations and drawing conclusions based on the relationships and patterns identified across themes.

The analysis was not limited to identifying the forms or sources of happiness experienced by the *santri* but also sought to understand the underlying meaning-making processes. Accordingly, the data were interpreted by examining how religious experiences, social relationships, life purposes, personal strengths, and processes of coping with difficulties contributed to the development of happiness. The positive psychology perspective was used to examine strengths, positive experiences, relationships, and meaning, whereas the Islamic counseling perspective was employed to understand dimensions of faith, worship, gratitude, patience, *tawakkul* (reliance upon Allah), and orientation toward the hereafter.

The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through methodological and source triangulation. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Source triangulation was undertaken by comparing information obtained from *santri* with that provided by supporting informants, where available. The researchers also conducted *member checking* by confirming selected information or interpretations with participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected the experiences and meanings intended by the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from interviews, observations, and documentation, this study identified four main themes concerning meaning in life and happiness among *santri*: (1) meaning in life through life purposes and lived experiences; (2) happiness through social relationships and personal accomplishments; (3) Islamic values as a framework for making meaning of happiness; and (4) the interconnectedness between meaning in life and experiences of happiness.

These four themes indicate that happiness among *santri* is not understood solely as an experience of positive emotions but is also associated with how they interpret and assign meaning to their experiences within the pesantren environment. This pattern is particularly evident in the interplay among life purposes, social relationships, personal accomplishments, religious experiences, and the ways in which *santri* make sense of both pleasant and challenging experiences.

Meaning in Life among *Santri* through Life Purposes and Lived Experiences

Interview findings indicate that *santri* make sense of their lives through goals, hopes, and aspirations for personal growth. Life in the pesantren is understood not merely as a process of acquiring religious knowledge but also as an opportunity to develop discipline, independence, responsibility, and preparedness for the future. This sense of meaning becomes evident when everyday activities are connected to goals that *santri* perceive as important. One *santri* stated:

"I am actually here because I want to learn more, not only religious knowledge but also discipline and independence. Sometimes I feel tired because there are so many activities, but I feel that there is a goal I want to achieve."

This statement indicates that demanding or exhausting experiences are not necessarily interpreted negatively. An activity may be perceived as valuable when *santri* are able to connect it with goals that they consider important. Thus, the findings suggest that meaningfulness in *santri*'s experiences is reflected more strongly in how they interpret the purpose and significance of an activity than in the nature of the activity itself.

Observational findings showed that *santri* participated regularly in various pesantren activities, including learning sessions, congregational worship, religious study sessions, group activities, and social activities. At certain times, signs of fatigue and boredom were observed; nevertheless, the *santri* continued to participate and subsequently became involved in the next scheduled activities. These observations provide contextual evidence that pesantren life involves both demands and a structured pattern of activities that enables *santri* to connect daily routines with educational goals and personal development.

These findings are consistent with (Sa'adah Nasution, 2024), who found that the development of a meaningful life among Qur'an-memorizing *santri* involved experiences of suffering, self-acceptance, the discovery and realization of meaning, and ultimately living a meaningful life. The similarity lies in the understanding that meaning in life develops through the interpretation of experiences rather than solely through favorable life conditions. However, the present study extends this understanding by demonstrating that within the pesantren context, meaning-making does not emerge only when *santri* encounter suffering or difficulties but also through educational routines, demands for independence, social relationships, and future-oriented aspirations.

These findings also further clarify the distinction between meaning in life and happiness. (Li P. F.-L., 2019) distinguishes meaning in life from happiness as forms of well-being with different characteristics, with meaning in life being more closely associated with goals and orientations that extend beyond immediate self-interest. In the present study, this distinction is evident in the way *santri* continue to perceive demanding activities as valuable because they understand these activities as part of a process toward achieving meaningful goals. Thus, meaning in life among *santri* is reflected in their capacity to assign value and significance to their life experiences, including experiences that are not always pleasant.

Happiness among *Santri* through Social Relationships and Accomplishment

The second theme concerns the sources of happiness among *santri*. Interview findings indicate that happiness was frequently experienced through relationships with peers, teachers, and pesantren caregivers, as well as through experiences of accomplishing personally meaningful goals. Happiness did not necessarily arise from major events but also from simple interactions, such as joking together, helping one another, receiving support, and completing tasks collectively. One *santri* stated:

"What makes me happy is being able to spend time with my friends. When I have a problem, my friends are usually the ones who stay with me. So even though I am far from home, I do not feel so alone."

Observational findings revealed relatively frequent social interactions in everyday pesantren activities. The *santri* were observed talking and joking during breaks, helping one another with activities, discussing tasks when facing difficulties, and participating in activities collectively. These data indicate that social relationships constitute a prominent aspect of *santri*'s everyday experiences within the pesantren environment.

This finding is consistent with (Muliadi, 2022), who reported that happiness among *santri* is associated with social relationships, personal qualities, and closeness to Allah. However, the present study places greater emphasis on relational experiences as an integral part of *santri*'s everyday lives. In this study, peer support emerged not merely as a factor associated with happiness but also as a concrete experience when *santri* encountered difficulties, felt distant from their families, or needed a sense of acceptance and belonging. Thus, social relationships within the pesantren context can be understood as part of the experience of happiness as well as a social environment that provides *santri* with support in navigating various demands of everyday life.

In addition to social relationships, accomplishment also emerged as a source of positive experiences. The *santri* described feeling happy when they successfully completed assignments, achieved memorization targets, understood learning materials, or accomplished something that they had previously considered difficult.

"When I successfully memorize something or finish an assignment, I feel happy because I previously thought I could not do it. So I feel happy because I feel that I have succeeded."

This statement indicates that experiences of accomplishment are associated with *santri*'s perceptions of personal development and their ability to deal with challenges. The finding extends the understanding of happiness among *santri* by showing that happiness is rooted not only in social relationships and spiritual closeness but also in experiences of competence and personal growth. Thus, the happiness identified in this study has both relational and personal dimensions: social relationships provide experiences of acceptance and support, whereas accomplishment provides experiences of success, competence, and growth.

Islamic Values as a Framework for Meaning-Making and Happiness

The findings further indicate that religious experiences constitute an important part of how *santri* make sense of their lives. Worship, prayer, Qur'an recitation, religious study sessions, and advice from teachers were experienced not only as religious obligations but also as sources of tranquility and support in dealing with difficulties. One *santri* stated:

"When I have a problem, I usually pray first. The problem may not be solved immediately, but after praying I usually feel calmer. I feel that Allah is still there and that I can turn to Him for help."

This statement indicates that *santri* draw upon religion as a framework for interpreting difficult experiences. Notably, happiness in this context is not understood as a state in which problems are absent. The *santri* acknowledge that difficulties remain, but a sense of tranquility and religious conviction enables them to approach these experiences differently. This finding is particularly relevant to the integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling because it demonstrates that positive experiences do not necessarily require the absence of negative experiences.

This finding is consistent with Elfida (2022), who reported that experiences of happiness among Muslim individuals are associated with the ability to face life's problems and challenges in accordance with religious guidance, including acceptance, gratitude, a sense of sufficiency, and accomplishment through effort. The present study further contextualizes these findings among *santri* by demonstrating how such values are expressed through educational experiences and everyday life within the pesantren environment.

"I used to think that being happy meant having all my wishes fulfilled. Now I feel happier when I can be grateful for what I have and remain calm."

This statement reflects a shift in the way happiness is understood, from an orientation toward the fulfillment of desires to an appreciation of acceptance, contentment, tranquility, and one's relationship with Allah. Therefore, in this study, Islamic values are not present merely as religious activities practiced by *santri* but also function as an interpretive framework through which they understand and make meaning of their life experiences.

This finding highlights an important distinction from approaches to happiness that focus primarily on psychological indicators such as positive emotions or life satisfaction. In the experiences of the *santri*, prayer, gratitude, patience, and *tawakkul* (reliance upon Allah) provide both a language and a value framework for interpreting the experiences they encounter. When facing failure, for example, *santri* do not evaluate the experience solely in terms of its outcome but also consider their efforts, the learning process, and their religious convictions. Thus, within this study, the Islamic context is not merely a cultural backdrop but an integral part of how *santri* construct meaning from their experiences of happiness.

The Interconnectedness between Meaning in Life and Experiences of Happiness

The subsequent findings indicate an interconnectedness between how *santri* make sense of their life experiences and how they describe happiness. *Santri* continued to experience sadness, boredom, pressure, and disappointment; however, several participants tended to interpret these experiences as opportunities for learning or as part of their personal development. One *santri* explained:

"When there is a problem, I will definitely feel sad, but I try to think that maybe I can learn something from it. So I do not keep blaming the situation."

This statement illustrates that negative experiences are not necessarily positioned as the opposite of happiness. *Santri* may acknowledge negative emotions while simultaneously assigning particular interpretations to the experiences they encounter. In the context of this study, this process is more appropriately understood as a pattern of meaning-making identified in the data rather than as a causal mechanism demonstrating that meaning in life directly produces happiness. Based on the interconnectedness among the themes identified, the participants' experiences can be interpretively represented as follows:

Life experiences → meaning-making in response to experiences → orientations such as hope, acceptance, or gratitude → broader experiences of happiness.

This pattern does not represent a causal model but rather an interpretive representation of how the themes identified in the study are interconnected within the participants' narratives. (Li J.-B. D., 2021), through a three-level meta-analysis, found a positive association between *presence of meaning* and *subjective well-being*, whereas the relationship between *search for meaning* and well-being showed a more complex pattern. The findings of the present study support the relevance of meaningfulness in understanding happiness but place a different emphasis by illustrating how this interconnectedness is experienced and understood by *santri* through concrete experiences within the pesantren environment.

Within the participants' experiences, life purposes provided context for daily routines, social relationships provided a sense of acceptance and support, while religious values provided a framework for interpreting difficulties and positive experiences. These three aspects did not emerge as isolated factors but appeared simultaneously within the narratives of *santri*'s everyday lives. Therefore, the findings extend the understanding of happiness among *santri* beyond a list of factors associated with happiness toward an understanding of how *santri* assign meaning to the experiences they encounter.

The findings also clarify the distinction between situational experiences of happiness and meaning in life. *Santri* did not necessarily feel happy while engaging in every pesantren activity, yet some continued to perceive their lives as valuable when these activities were connected to educational goals, personal development, social relationships, and religious beliefs. Accordingly, happiness in this study is more appropriately understood as a multidimensional experience encompassing tranquility, positive relationships, accomplishment, gratitude, and meaningfulness, rather than as a continuously positive emotional state.

Integration of Positive Psychology and Islamic Counseling

The findings have implications for the integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling, particularly in understanding *santri*'s experiences within the pesantren environment. From a positive psychology perspective, the participants' experiences reflected strengths such as hope, positive relationships, goal orientation, gratitude, accomplishment, and the capacity to derive meaning from difficult experiences. Meanwhile, the Islamic counseling perspective provides a value-based context that connects these experiences with faith, worship, the relationship with Allah, and orientations toward both worldly life and the hereafter.

The findings extend the application of positive psychology within Muslim contexts by demonstrating that psychological strengths do not emerge independently of the *santri*'s belief systems. Hope, gratitude, perseverance, and the ability to make meaning of experiences were found alongside religious practices and beliefs in Allah. Thus, the integration identified in this study does not simply involve adding religious elements to positive psychology concepts. Rather, it indicates that religious values constitute part of the context through which *santri* understand their strengths and positive experiences.

These findings also provide a more nuanced understanding of Islamic counseling. Within the context of this study, Islamic counseling is relevant not only when *santri* experience psychological difficulties but also as a means of facilitating the development of meaning in life,

recognition of personal strengths, strengthening of positive relationships, and meaning-making from life experiences. This position is consistent with the developmental function of guidance and counseling; however, the present study further suggests that such a function needs to take into account how *santri* understand life purposes and happiness based on their religious values.

Furthermore, the integration of positive psychology within Islamic education provides opportunities to promote students' well-being through the development of happiness, optimism, meaningfulness, and spiritual values. (Warsah, 2024) demonstrated that principles of positive psychology can be applied in Islamic education through strengths-based approaches, the development of social skills, reflective activities, and the integration of spiritual values. The findings of the present study extend this perspective by showing that, within the pesantren context, psychological strengths and spiritual values do not operate independently but are embedded in *santri*'s everyday experiences of pursuing goals, developing social relationships, experiencing accomplishment, and engaging in religious life.

Within the educational context, meaningful learning experiences are also associated with engagement, interpersonal relationships, and positive experiences. (Muzaini, 2026) found that a love-based learning approach in a qualitative case study could foster an empathetic and humanistic learning environment while encouraging students' motivation and participation. This finding converges with the present study in emphasizing the importance of an educational environment that supports relationships and meaningful experiences. However, the present study extends this focus by demonstrating that, for *santri*, meaningful educational experiences are also connected with life purposes, religious experiences, and the ways in which happiness is understood and interpreted.

In contrast, (Salsabila, 2025), in a study examining short-form video use among *emerging adults*, identified various psychological experiences, including sleep disturbances, reduced productivity, procrastination, social pressure, insecurity, and anxiety. These findings indicate that everyday experiences and social environments may be associated with individuals' psychological conditions. In comparison with this context, the present study highlights the distinctive environment of *santri*, whose lives are characterized by an integrated structure of education, social relationships, and religious practices. This contextual difference is important because experiences of happiness and meaning in life need to be understood in relation to the environments in which individuals live their everyday lives.

Based on the overall findings, Islamic counseling within the pesantren context can be directed toward facilitating the development of meaning in life rather than focusing solely on problem resolution. Counselors may assist *santri* in identifying life purposes, recognizing personal strengths, reflecting on difficult experiences, developing positive relationships, cultivating gratitude, and connecting life experiences with Islamic values. Within this framework, positive psychology provides concepts for understanding strengths, relationships, accomplishment, and positive experiences, while Islamic counseling provides a value-based orientation for understanding the purpose and direction of life.

Thus, the contribution of this study lies in providing a contextual understanding of how happiness among *santri* emerges at the intersection of psychological experiences, social relationships, life purposes, and religious values. The findings are not intended to establish a causal relationship between meaning in life and happiness but rather to identify patterns of

interconnectedness emerging from the participants' experiences. Accordingly, the integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling in this study can be understood as an interpretive framework for explaining how *santri* understand a good, meaningful, and fulfilling life within the context of pesantren education.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that meaning in life and happiness among *santri* are interconnected within the experience of pesantren life through life purposes, educational experiences, social relationships, accomplishment, and the internalization of Islamic values. Meaning in life becomes evident when *santri* connect their everyday experiences with goals that they perceive as valuable, whereas happiness is understood not only in terms of positive emotions but also through tranquility, gratitude, positive social relationships, accomplishment, and a sense that life has direction. Islamic values such as prayer, gratitude, patience, *tawakkul* (reliance upon Allah), and closeness to Allah constitute part of the framework through which *santri* understand both positive experiences and difficulties. These findings indicate a pattern of interconnectedness among meaningfulness, psychological strengths, social relationships, and spiritual values in *santri*'s experiences of happiness.

These findings have practical implications for the development of Islamic counseling services within pesantren. Counseling services may be directed not only toward problem resolution but also toward facilitating *santri* in finding meaning in their experiences, recognizing and developing personal strengths, building positive relationships, establishing life purposes, and internalizing Islamic values in everyday life. The integration of positive psychology and Islamic counseling perspectives may serve as a framework for developing services that address the psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of *santri* in an integrated manner.

This study has several limitations. It employed a qualitative approach using a case study design within a specific pesantren context; therefore, the findings are contextual and are not intended to be statistically generalized to all *santri* or pesantren. In addition, the meanings attributed to happiness and meaning in life were based on participants' experiences and interpretations within a particular social and religious context. Future research could involve participants from pesantren with diverse characteristics and age groups and employ longitudinal approaches to examine changes in how happiness and meaning in life are understood over time. The qualitative findings may also provide a foundation for quantitative or mixed-methods research to examine the interconnectedness among meaning in life, psychological strengths, spiritual values, and happiness more systematically.

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