Religious Commitment and its Relation to Happiness among Muslim Students: The Educational Level as Moderator

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Abstract This study examines the relationship between religiosity and level of happiness in an Islamic context among Muslim students studying at Malaysian universities. The determinants of happiness included in this research are positive attitudes, self-esteem, and other-esteem. Religiosity has long been considered as the main determinant in increasing happiness, and educational level strengthens its relationship. For this purpose, the researchers sampled 230 Muslim students aged 17–40 years studying at Malaysian universities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The study found a positive and significant correlation between religious commitment and level of happiness. Religious commitment also shows positive and significant correlations with positive attitudes, self-esteem, and other-esteem. The study also concludes that educational attainment moderates the relationship between religious commitment and happiness. Thus, religious commitment plays a very important role in increasing levels of happiness.

Keywords Happiness · Well-being · Life satisfaction · Religious commitment · Muslim students
Introduction

Happiness is a positive emotion with a significant impact on the physical, cognitive, and psychological mechanisms that improve human performance (Ziapour et al. 2014). Throughout human history, philosophers and intellectuals prized happiness. Spinoza commented, “Everyone wants continuous and genuine happiness” (Spinoza 1677/1985). Many societies highly value happiness. For example, a sample of 9000 college students from 47 nations was given a list of twenty values including wealth, love, and health (Kim-Prieto et al. 2005). The students identified happiness as the most important value with only 3% reporting they did not value it at all. In recent years, concerns about well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness have become a central issue to scholars and researchers, as more people recognise that economic prosperity is not synonymous with well-being (Mendes et al. 2007).

Well-being is a behavioural science in which people’s evaluations of their lives are studied (Diener et al. 2003: 188). Happiness is a topic of growing interest for philosophers, policy makers, poets, economists (Osvald and Powdthavee 2006), and positive psychologists (Diener 2000). Religion and happiness have been studied by a number of researchers and scholars, and religion features in many elements are addressing the components of happiness, as identified by positive psychology. Its association with happiness is facilitated in part by the social connections of organised religion (Routledge 2012). In recent surveys conducted in the USA with a nationally representative sample, over 93% of Americans reported a belief in a higher power, 59% of all Americans stated that they believe religion can solve all or most of today’s problems, and over 50% indicated that religion was very important to them (Rosmarin et al. 2010; Gallup Poll, May 8–11 2008).

Religious behaviours and beliefs give life meaning. Some behaviour such as trust in God, worship, pilgrimage, etc. can cause inner peace by creating hope and encouraging positive attitudes (Alimardani et al. 2014). Other theorists believe psychological happiness is achieved by paying attention to spiritual values and goals, fundamental needs, the meaning of life, and religious and divine love and interests (Heidari and Enayati 2010). Many researchers examined the relationship between religious commitment and happiness. For example, Heidari and Enayati (2010) concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between components of happiness and religious attitude and a significant relationship between components of happiness. Kazemianmoghadam and Mehrabizadeh (2009) concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between religious attitude and happiness among female and male students.

Some researchers claim that religious students are better in their studies or academic life (Glass and Jacobs 2005). Religiosity provides students with better options than other actions (Lehrer 2004). Certain religious factors positively affect the education level, while others weaken educational attainment (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Sherkat and Darnell 1999). Since there are limited empirical studies that address the association of religiosity with happiness among Muslim students, the current study examines the relationship between religiosity and happiness in an Islamic context. It also examines the moderating effect of educational level on the relationship between religious commitment and personal happiness.
Religious Commitment

Religious commitment, religious involvement, religiousness, religious orientation, and religiosity are terms often used to refer to the same concept (Khenfer and Roux 2012). Religious activity or religiosity has been defined as the degree of participation and adherence to the teaching and the organised activity of a particular religion (Emblem 1992). Religious commitment has been defined as, “the degree to which person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices, and uses them in daily living” (Worthington et al. 2003, p. 85). Schaffer (1996) defined religiosity as the “degree of participation in or faithfulness to the beliefs and practices of religion.” Mookherjee (1993) defined religiosity in terms of a public or participatory role in society based on church membership and the frequency of church attendance, as well as private or devotional religious behaviour based not only on the frequency of prayer, but also on readings of the Bible, complemented by a cumulative score of devotional intensity. Religiosity has been defined as, “…the way in which people expresses their religious beliefs and practices and the importance ascribed to them” (Musgrave and McFarlane 2004, p. 1180). Religiosity is seen as the attitudes and practices to discover the meaning, purpose, or connection with things external to and larger than the self (Kiesling et al. 2008). Religious belief, on the other hand, is the fundamental belief system that could influence our ideas, values in life, and ways of living. Many patients recognise the importance of religion in their lives and want physicians to take religious factors into account in their healthcare management (Maugans and Wadland 1991).

In Islam, Mohsen (2007) defined religiosity as a concept that is embedded in taqwa. Al-Goaib (2003) defined religiosity as the commitment to the fundamentals of Islam through the fulfilment of God’s rights, the protection of the rights of others, following God’s orders, avoiding bad acts, and performing worship. Worship such as prayers, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage to Makkah should improve a person’s relationship with God and others. Otherwise, they are observing empty rituals (Gazzali 2004). Individuals characterised as religious are those who not only hold particular religious beliefs but also practise them in day-to-day life (Morgan and Lawton 1996).

Researchers differed in their measure of religiosity due to different definitions. Glock (1962) included ideological, intellectual, ritualistic, and experiential dimensions to measure religiosity. Caird (1987) suggested three measures of religiosity, namely cognitive, which focuses on religious attitudes or beliefs, behavioural, which evaluates church attendance or private prayer, and experiential, which queries mystical experiences. Glock and Stark (1965) identified five dimensions of religiosity: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and consequential. In this study, religiosity has been measured by 20 items. The sample items include “I feel that my God makes me very happy” (Item-8), “I perform my daily tasks, because it is a form of worship” (Item-12), and “I pray the five compulsory prayers every day at the Mosque” (Item-20).

Concept of Happiness

Philosophers and historians have extensively analysed the concept of happiness. Most philosophers and historians agree that the concept of happiness in antiquity centred around good luck and fortune, whereas contemporary Americans view happiness as something over which they have control and something that they can actively pursue (Kesebir and
Diener 2008; McMahon 2006; Oishi 2012). The concept of happiness has been used differently by different researchers, often referring to an undifferentiated state of positive affect and life satisfaction (e.g., Argyle 1987). However, happiness has been defined as the effective balance between positive and negative affects with happiness resulting when positive effects outweigh the negative effects (Bradburn 1969). It has also been defined as a set of emotions and the cognitive evaluation of one’s life. It is considered a degree of the quality of people’s lives which is evaluated positively (Rojas 2007). Veenhoven (1984) described happiness as the level to which an individual positively assesses the overall quality of his life as a whole. Aristotle described it as the capability to achieve one’s potential (Waterman 1990).

In Islam, happiness is a feeling that resides in the heart. It is characterised by the peace of mind, tranquillity, a sense of well-being, and a relaxed disposition. It results from proper behaviour, both inward and outward, and is inspired by strong faith. This is attested to by the Qur’an and Sunnah. Allah says, “Whoever works righteousness as a believer, whether male or female, we will give a good life.—Then, whoever follows My guidance shall neither go astray nor be distressed. But whoever turns away from My reminder will have a life of hardship” (Quran 16:97). Al-Ghazali argued in his Alchemy of Happiness that happiness is only known by turning away from the world and turning to God. To understand life and achieve happiness, one should know oneself, know God, know the world as it is, and know the afterlife as it is. Al-Ghazali argued that the world is deceitful, and those who fall into the traps that the world has set for us are wrong (Al-Ghazzali 2004). Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said, “Do not think little of any good deed, even if it is just greeting your brother with a cheerful smile” (Sahih Muslim: 16/177), and “To smile in the face of your brother is charity given on your behalf” (Tirmidhi: 27/62). One of Prophet Muhammad’s companions said, “Since the day I accepted Islam, the Messenger of God would never meet me without a smiling face” (Tirmidhi: 49/4192).

**Religious Commitment and Happiness**

Happiness is an important mental need that affects personality and mental health. All human beings seek happiness for themselves and those they love (Alimardani et al. 2014). Aristotle believed that there are at least three types of happiness. At its lowest level, he regarded happiness as enjoyment, happiness as success and fulfilment, and happiness as gladness resulting from spirituality. He believed that real happiness is not achieved by fulfilling desires but by ethically performing worthy actions as a manifestation of virtue (Alimohammadi and Azarbayejani 2009).

Religiosity or religious activities are positively and firmly associated with happiness (among others, Chamberlain and Zika 1988; Ellison et al. 1989; Ellison 1991). Early studies consider religiosity as a source of individual happiness (Migheli 2009). Lelkes (2006) found that religious people are happier than non-religious. Iannaccone et al. (1997) and Barro and McCleary (2001) demonstrated a direct and positive link between happiness and freedom of choosing religions and churches. It is natural to expect that religiosity has a greater effect on the happiness of people in need (Snoep 2008).

Robbins and Francis (1996) reported a positive relationship between religiosity and happiness. In the Islamic context, Sahraeian et al. (2013) found that individuals with a more religious attitude experience more happiness. Abdel-Khalek (2006), using a sample
of 2210 Kuwaiti Muslim college students, found significant positive correlations between the self-rating scales of happiness, physical health, mental health, and religiosity. The factor analysis of the correlational matrix of the last-mentioned four self-rating scales yielded one high loaded factor. Multiple regressions revealed that religiosity accounted for approximately 15% of the variance in predicting happiness. Abdel-Khalek and Naceur (2007) recruited a college student sample ($N = 244$) from Algeria, in which all were Muslims. They found that religiosity was significantly and positively correlated with self-ratings of physical health, mental health, happiness, and satisfaction with life.

Measuring Happiness

Happiness is a state of mind and is difficult to measure. It is not a stable state, and even the happiest people report negative emotions from time to time. This issue causes problems for researchers trying to measure happiness scientifically. Many researchers believe that an effective approach to measure happiness is by using questionnaires, asking people about their life as a whole, as well as making judgements on more specific aspects of their life such as life satisfaction and positive or negative emotions. In the attempts to measure happiness, specific dimensions of happiness included satisfaction with life, personal efficacy, sociability/empathy, a positive outlook, physical well-being, cheerfulness, self-esteem (Argyle et al. 1995; Hills and Argyle 2002); mastery and self-fulfilment, satisfaction with life, vigour, social interest, social cheerfulness (Meleddu et al. 2012); life satisfaction, vigour, and positive affect (Karademas and Kalantzi-Azizi 2005). The Oxford Happiness Inventory measures the following six factors categories as cited in three different studies: life satisfaction, joy, self-esteem, calm, control, and efficacy (Argyle and Crossland 1987; Francis et al. 1998; Liaghtadar et al. 2008). As shown in Table 2, in this study happiness comprises positive attitudes which contain six items, self-esteem which contains four items, and other-esteem which contains three items.

The Link of Religiosity with Positive Attitude, Self-esteem, and Other-esteem

Religion has been discussed by pioneer psychologists and researchers such as James (1929), Freud (1961), Jung (1875–1961) and others. For example, Freud refers to religion as an illusion which is “perhaps the most important item in the psychical inventory of a civilisation.” Jung (1933: 76) refers to “invisible and unknowable things”, and James (1929) asserts that “the word ‘religion’ cannot stand for any single principle or essence…”, but arbitrarily describes it thus: “…the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine” (James 1929: 31–32). On the other hand, religion refers to a particular way of living in the world both providing prudence of material life and agreeing with afterworld perfection and eternal real life near the sublime God. It accounts for all aspects of human’s need (Tabatabaii 1985: 130). Galloway (1956) has defined religion as the faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability of life, and which he expresses in the act of worship and service. There is a belief that there is an extraordinary power in belief in God which gives a kind of spiritual power to the religious and helps them tolerate life hardships and releases him from anxiety.
Religious behaviours and beliefs have a positive effect on the meaningfulness of life. Some behaviours such as trust in God, worship, and pilgrimage can cause inner peace in a person by creating hope and encouraging him/her to have positive attitudes (Alimardani et al. 2014).

Thinking positively shows that there is a mutual respect between two people. A positive attitude helps us cope more easily with the daily affairs of life. It brings optimism into our life and helps avoid worries and negative thinking. However, when we have high self-esteem and respect ourselves and others, we get more respect and love from people (Parmar 2015). A positive attitude leads to success and happiness (Remez 2015). “A person with a positive attitude always sees the brighter side of every situation and thus concentrates on good aspects only. Such a person has the conviction that whatever is going to happen will work out well. Positive attitude thus brings optimism to life” (Mohanty 2013).

Religion has been a fruitful tool for self-enhancement. No psychologist has rejected the role of religion on self-improvement. Scholars agreed that religion generates benefits to the self, whether it is temporary or long lasting. Batson and Stocks (2004) continued the foundation of James (1902) and Allport (1950) for the positive relationship between religiosity and self-esteem, and stated that, “Feeling good about oneself and seeing oneself as a person of worth and value play a major role in much contemporary religion” (p. 47). Sedikides (2010) found that religiosity is partially serving the self-esteem. Schbley and Walton (2014) studied 284 Lebanese women to find a significant relationship between their religiosity levels and self-esteem.

Religiosity affects the daily lives of religious people (Diener et al. 2011). Hina and Humaira (2013) found that the individual’s self-concept in its relation to psychopathology is affected by practising a religious activity. The results of their study indicated that self-esteem and religiosity are inversely related with symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) (Hina and Humaira 2013). Reilaind and Lauterbach (2008) examined the relationships between self-esteem, religiosity, and childhood exposure to trauma. Their study revealed that those groups who reported childhood sexual abuse had low self-esteem, but those groups with stronger religious practices were affected less and had higher self-esteem. Religiosity was considered an expected protector against negative psychological reactions to trauma (Doxey et al. 1997).

Husain (2008) implemented his study on 131 Somali students in the USA and found that religiosity was correlated with self-esteem and school grades. Louis (2008) tested self-esteem in its relation to the religiosity of Muslim students in New York high schools. He found that after 9/11, most Muslim students valued religion in their daily life, 14% doubted their Muslim faith because of the stressful situation, and 16% questioned the teachings of their religion.

In contrast, James et al. (2003) found no significant correlation between religiosity and self-esteem. They assumed the difference in sample size was the reason for the different results. Similarly, Donahue and Benson (1995) found no significant relationship between religiosity and self-esteem. Despite these results, the number of studies confirmed a significant relationship between religiosity and self-esteem is greater than those that reject the relationship.
Theoretical Perception

Many theories of happiness stated that the happiness of people is associated with material factors like health, diet, and wealth; however, many other theories of happiness include social, ethical, and spiritual factors. In this study, the researchers focus on religiosity/spirituality as a source of happiness. The empirical relation between happiness and religiosity is considered from the perspective of basic utility theory (Gundlach and Opfinger 2013). Utility refers to the value that individuals gain from goods or services (Green and Baron 2001). It means that higher levels of religiosity should lead to higher levels of happiness given that all other commodities of the happiness function are held constant. Authentic happiness theory is one-dimensional; it is about feeling good, and it claims that the way we choose our life course is to maximise how we feel. It argues that happiness can be analysed by positive emotion, engagement, and meaning (Seligman 2011). Set-point theory has or had all the marks of a paradigm theory for the field of subjective well-being (Kuhn 1962). It developed over the last thirty years, originally going under the label of adaptation-level theory (Brickman and Campbell 1971), and appeared to provide an integrated account of linkages between genetic traits, including personality traits, life events, and subjective well-being (Brickman et al. 1978; Costa and McCrae 1980; Headey and Wearing 1989; Lykken and Tellegen 1996).

These theories can be used in different complex and advanced levels of analysis. For example, large national studies of subjective well-being concluded that most Americans were happy regardless of age, race, gender, income, or education level (Myers and Diener 1995). Similarly, several definitions address the relationship between religion and happiness. For example, Argyle et al. (1995) in Al-Nagga et al. (2010) states that when people are asked to define happiness, they may report they are experiencing a positive emotional state such as joy, or satisfied with life. Happiness is the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her life favourably, and it is considered to be an ultimate goal in life; virtually everybody wants to be happy.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Muslim students (183 undergraduate and 47 postgraduate) were randomly selected from the University of Malaya (UM) and the International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM). The sample represents different fields of study and ethnic groups. Their ages ranged from 17 to 50; 46 received financial support from scholarship, 83 from family, 44 self-sponsorship, and 57 from loans. They participated voluntarily in this study. All respondents completed a questionnaire containing three sections. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and utilised only for the intended research purpose. UM and IIUM are prominent universities in Malaysia with a significant number of international students (see Table 1).

Measures

This study examines the correlations between subjective happiness and religious commitment among university students. The participants completed a preliminary 35-item
questionnaire designed by the researchers to measure subjective happiness and religious commitment. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). They completed a 15-item Subjective Happiness Scale and 20-item for religious commitment. A self-administered questionnaire was pretested with 40 students studying at UM and IIUM. The purpose of this study was explained to the respondents to facilitate the feedback, suggestions, and answering of the questions. The respondents suggested that some words in the questions were not clear or straightforward. Except for these comments, the results of the pretest indicated that, overall, the questions were realistic, clear, and easy to follow. Following the pretest, the ambiguous words and sentences were revised (Achour et al. 2011).

Validity of Research

In this study, the researchers focus on content validity. For this purpose, feedback from three experts was used to add, delete, and modify questions for improved readability and understanding. The aspect of happiness and religious commitment was developed by the researchers from an Islamic perspective. The data were collected and pretested with 40 participants studying at UM and IIUM, and the data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Demographic variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17–25</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a year</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Sponsorship</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Internal Consistency

The Cronbach’s correlation coefficient for the subjective happiness was .869, .808 for religious commitment, .845 for positive attitudes, .826 for self-esteem, and .767 for other-esteem.

Factor Analysis

Factor loading values were obtained using varimax rotation. Table 2 presents the results of the reliability statistics and exploratory factor analysis. Most of the factor loadings for each instrument exceeded 0.55, meeting the significant level of convergent validity. Scale reliability greater than .70 is considered reliable (Hair et al. 1998). Furthermore, the research instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach’s coefficient, as reported in Table 2. The Cronbach’s a-values for all dimensions ranged from 0.76 to 0.86, exceeding the minimum of 0.6 (Hair et al. 1998). Thus, the construct measures were deemed reliable.

Table 2 gives the details of the factor analyses. Many studies have found that extracting factors on the basis of the Eigenvalues greater than 1 can lead to an overestimation of the number of retained factors (Henson and Roberts 2006). Accordingly, in this study, the Eigenvalues of the factors retained were greater than 1. This reduces the risk of overfactoring which implies that retaining factors that have little theoretical basis can lead to misinterpretation and they may not result in the replicability of results (Gorsuch 1983; Table 2

Varimax rotated factor loadings of the subjective happiness items (N = 230)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>Alpha (α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I feel happy when I create new good relations with others</td>
<td>.831</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I feel happy when I pray my obligatory prayer at the Masjid</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I feel happy when I help others</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I feel happy when someone accepts my apology</td>
<td>.682</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I am satisfied and happy when I discuss religious issues with my friends</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I feel happy when someone visits me in my room</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I am satisfied and happy with the teachers and the overall environment</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Generally, I am very happy in this community</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The staffs are wonderful people and we enjoy interacting with them</td>
<td>.702</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Generally, I am very happy</td>
<td>.692</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I feel respected when someone appreciates me</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I feel so happy when someone gives me something</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I feel so happy when someone enjoys and speaks with me</td>
<td>.571</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficient Alpha (α) .864 .826 .767
Eigen values 6.391 2.068 1.007
% of variance (total = 63.10%) 42.60% 13.78% 6.71%
Fabrigar et al. 1999; Henson and Roberts 2006). In this case, factor 1 represents the maximum variance, i.e., 42.60%, factor 2 (13.78%), and factor 3 (6.71%). However, retaining a one-factor solution can lead to underfactoring as it may cause considerable error (Wood et al. 1996). Furthermore, the percentage variance explained by factors was sufficient (63.10%). Table 3 shows that only three factors have been retained: the first factor positive attitudes (F1), the second factor self-esteem (F2), and the third factor other-esteem (F3).

Table 3 shows that there is a strong positive and significant correlation, respectively, between subjective happiness and religious commitment ($r = .636, p = .000 < .01$), religious commitment and positive attitudes ($r = .611, p = .000 < .01$), religious commitment and self-esteem ($r = .436, p = .000 < .01$) as well as religious commitment and other-esteem ($r = .429, p = .000 < .01$). Furthermore, there is a strong and significant correlation between subjective happiness and positive attitudes ($r = .855, p = .000 < .01$), subjective happiness and self-esteem ($r = .752, p = .000 < .01$), and subjective happiness and other-esteem ($r = .759, p = .000 < .01$).

**Dependent Variable: Happiness**

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis that educational level moderates the relationship between religious commitment and happiness. All variables were entered into the regression equation as recommended by Rose et al. (2004). In step one, religious commitment was entered and was statistically significant, $F = 185.964, p < .05, R^2 = .467$. In step two, interaction of religiosity and educational level was entered, and the resulting model $R^2$ was significantly greater than zero, $F = 100.920, p < .05, R^2 = .489$. In step three, interaction of religiosity, educational level, and religiosity x educational level were entered and happiness was entered as a dependent variable, $F = 71.027, p < .05, R^2 = .504$ (see Table 4). Results revealed that educational level strengthens the relationship between religious commitment and happiness. Thus, educational level plays an important role as the moderator between religious commitment and improving happiness for Muslim students. Figure 1 shows a positive relationship between religiosity and happiness that varies as a level of education. As religiosity increases, happiness increases—the increase is more evident for those with a high level of education which will lead to a better understanding and practise of religiosity which may lead to high levels of happiness.

**Table 3** Correlations between subjective happiness, positive attitudes, self-esteem, other-esteem, and religious commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales/Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Subjective Happiness</td>
<td>56.08</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive Attitudes</td>
<td>27.20</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.855**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-Esteem</td>
<td>15.51</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.752**</td>
<td>.356**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other-esteeem</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>.759**</td>
<td>.620**</td>
<td>.347**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Religious Commitment</td>
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<td>9.63</td>
<td>.636**</td>
<td>.611**</td>
<td>.436**</td>
<td>.429**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
In recent years, interest in understanding the effects of religion on psychological well-being has grown. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between subjective happiness and religious commitment in a sample of

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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<td>Religiosity*educational level</td>
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</table>

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

Fig. 1 Interaction between religiosity and educational level in predicting happiness

**Discussion**

In recent years, interest in understanding the effects of religion on psychological well-being has grown. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between subjective happiness and religious commitment in a sample of
undergraduate and postgraduate Muslim students. For this purpose, a quantitative data technique was used. The researcher selected respondents from UM and IIUM. The results of this study have shown that there is a strong positive and significant correlation between religious commitment and subjective happiness.

Several previous studies support this result. For example, Bayani (2014) found that a significant positive association between religion and happiness in a sample of Muslim undergraduate students. The determinants of subjective happiness included under this research are positive attitudes, self-esteem, and other-esteem. Several previous studies, including the present study, conclude that religion plays a main role in human life and happiness and found that there is a relationship between self-rating of religiosity and happiness (Bayani 2014). Smith et al. (1979) found that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and religiosity. Self-esteem, while often equated as a component of happiness, is a distinct and separate entity. While correlated with happiness, self-esteem refers to feelings of self-worth, adequacy as a person, feelings of self-acceptance, and self-respect (Lyubomirsky et al. 2006; Zubrick and Kovess-Masfety 2005).

Sahraeian et al. (2011) found a significant relationship between religious orientation and happiness of students. Heidari and Enayati (2010) concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between components of happiness and religious attitude, and a significant relationship between components of happiness. Sadeghifarfaei et al. (2012) found that there was a positive and significant relationship between internal religious orientation and happiness, and a negative and significant relationship between external religious orientation and happiness. Kazemianmoghadam and Mehrabizadeh (2009) concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between religious attitude and happiness in both groups of female and male students. Alimohammadi and Azarbayejani (2009) found that there was a positive and significant correlation between religious happiness and psychological happiness.

Regarding the association between religiosity and self-esteem, some studies indicated that religious involvement bolsters feelings of self-esteem (e.g., Abdel-Khalek 2011). In the same vein, Evers (2009) found that religiosity buffered the risk of poor self-esteem and depression in a sample of alternative high school students at risk of dropping out of school. Husain (2008) studied 131 Somali youth in the USA and found that religiosity correlated with self-esteem and school grades.

In contrast to the research mentioned above, Donahue and Benson (1995) found no significant relationship between religiosity and self-esteem in a national study of some 30,000 American adolescents. Despite these results, the number of studies reporting a positive relationship between religiosity and self-esteem outnumbers those reporting a negative association. Roemer (2009) found strong positive correlations between life satisfaction and happiness and religious commitment.

Several studies demonstrated that religiosity has a positive relationship with the positive attitudes of the people. Perkins (1992) found that strong student religiosity was linked to a reduction in prejudice. Other studies demonstrated a positive relationship between happiness and social competence (Argyle and Lu 1990a, b), self-esteem, social skills, cooperativeness (Lu and Argyle 1991), satisfaction with relationships with people from whom support had been received (Lu and Argyle 1992), self-actualisation, self-esteem, likelihood of affiliation, community feeling and self-acceptance (Chan and Joseph 2000), life regard, self-esteem, life satisfaction and affiliative tendency (Hills and Argyle 2001), and satisfaction with life, self-esteem, sociability, and self-rated attractiveness (Neto 2001). The concept and practise of religiosity in Muslim societies are broad and diverse extending from belief in the One God to modesty and removal of harm and danger from
public space (Achour et al. 2014). Below are seven “scientifically” proven ways to increase the level of happiness (Stacey 2011):

1. Avoid comparisons, God says in the Quran, “Do not strain your eyes in longing for the things that we have given to some groups of them to enjoy, the splendour of the life of this world through which we test them. The provision of your Lord is better and more lasting” (Quran 20:131).

2. Smile, even when you do not feel like it. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said, “To smile in the face of your brother is charity given on your behalf” (Tirmidhi: 27/62).


4. Make friends and treasure family. Allah, the Exalted, says, “Worship God and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet). Verily, God does not like those who are proud and boastful” (Quran 4:36).

5. Say thank you like you mean it. God said, “Therefore, remember Me (God) and I will remember you, and be grateful to Me (for My countless Favours on you) and never be ungrateful to Me” (Quran 2:152), And (remember) when God proclaimed, “If you are grateful I will give you more (of My Blessings); but if you are ungrateful verily, My punishment is indeed severe” (Quran 14:7).

6. Give it away, give it away now. God said, Say: “Truly, my Lord blesses the provision for whom He wills of His slaves, and also restricts it for him, and whatsoever you spend of anything (in God’s Cause), He will replace it. And He is the Best of providers” (Quran 34:39).

7. Put money low on your list of priorities. God’s messenger said, “Be happy, and hope for what will please you. By God, I am not afraid that you will be poor, but I fear that worldly wealth will be bestowed upon you as it was bestowed upon those who lived before you. So you will compete amongst yourselves for it, as they competed for it and it will destroy you as it did them” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari: 64/65).

Educational Level as Moderator

This part of the study examines the moderating effect of educational level on the relationship between religious commitment and subjective happiness. This research found that educational level was positively associated with religious commitment and also with subjective happiness. Furthermore, the students with high level of education, better knowledge, and understanding of religion may have a greater understanding practice of religiosity and achieve high levels of happiness. Several studies examined the relationship between educational level and happiness and found different educational levels influence happiness. Moreover, the study examined the indirect effects of educational level as a moderator on the relationship between religious commitment and subjective happiness. In other words, the happiness of Muslim students is related to religiosity through the educational attainment. According to Hartog and Oosterbeek (citing Veenhoven 1996 as their source), “Education correlates strongly (and positively) with happiness scores in poor
nations and weakly in rich nations. Happiness is generally found to be unrelated to intelligence as measured by concurrent tests” (Hartog and Oosterbeek 1998, p. 247).

Completing a university degree is associated with positive levels of happiness in an individual’s life (Dockery 2010). Kitayama and Markus (2000) suggested that more-educated people are likely to display a higher level of agency, including higher levels of control, self-esteem, independence, and individualism. “People with lower levels of education often report high levels of happiness and life satisfaction, but they are less likely to manifest many of the other features of the independent self; they show relatively lower levels of control, self-esteem, optimism, and are less likely to have elaborated self-concepts” (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p.127).

However, there are conflicting results. For example, Veenhoven and Bakker (1977) found a negative relationship between the level of education and happiness. Hence, any negative association between higher education and happiness is limited to lower levels of well-being reported by university graduates relative to those with intermediate-level qualifications (Dockery 2010). Despite these results, several studies confirmed that a significant relationship between educational level and happiness are greater than those rejected.

Human capital theory views education as an initial investment that generates a stream of later returns in the form of increased productivity, leading to better employment prospects and higher earnings (Becker 1962). Increased education may offer benefits in a wide range of other domains, such as well-being (Hartog and Oosterbeek 1998; Haveman and Wolfe 1984). These considerations suggest that persons with high levels of education have better life outcomes and, one would assume, greater subjective well-being and happiness. It follows that people with more religiosity and more education are more satisfied with life and are happier.

A significant relationship was found between religiosity and happiness as well as between educational level and happiness. As a consequence, the tested hypothesis that assumed a positive effect from religiosity on happiness through educational attainment has been accepted. The results of the current study correspond with the results of several previous studies that have addressed the same issue earlier. Furthermore, for instance, a person with high religiosity was found to be happier than a person with lower levels of religiosity (Abdel-Khalek 2006; Balswick and Balkwell 1979; Cutler 1976; Ellison 1991). Religion promotes happiness as in a study of Routledge (2012) which justifies his result by reporting the reasons that religion provides a resource for dealing with negative life experiences and fears, increases social connectedness, and gives individuals a sense of purpose, furthermore the acquisition of knowledge leads to happiness; for this purpose Allah (SWT) has said: “Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did.” (Qur’an, 16:97). Routledge (2012) expresses that religious people are happier than non-religious people.

Allah (SWT) also said in the Qur’an: “Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is acquainted with what you do” (Qur’an, 58:11). Above all, it is evident in this verse that religiosity is a requisite for reward. This is supported by many verses in the Qur’an, but the difference in this verse is that Allah named another category of people who are going to be raised and rewarded, namely those who were given knowledge. According to the Qur’an, knowledgeable or educated people are going to be raised in degrees and rewarded with satisfaction and happiness in the life and the hereafter. Dumludağ (2013) found a positive relationship between educational level and happiness. Likewise, previous studies revealed that the
relationship between educational attainment and happiness is significant and positive (Tabbodi et al. 2015).

**Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications**

This research has highlighted the relationship between religious commitment and level of happiness among Muslim students in Malaysian universities. Religious commitment was found to have a significant and positive correlation with happiness. With the support of other research, this study concludes that religion and religiosity play a paramount role in increasing levels of happiness and life satisfaction. We found that there is a strong and positive relationship between religiosity and positive attitudes, self-esteem, and other-esteem. Furthermore, the people with high religiosity happier than people with lower levels of religiosity, also knowledgeable people or the educated people, are happier than people with low level of education and limited knowledge.

This paper contains few limitations. Firstly, it focuses on the population of university students. Future research in examining the relationship between religiosity, educational level, and happiness should require larger data since the results will potentially reflect in larger populations. Secondly, the current study only used a quantitative method to examine the relationship of religiosity to happiness through educational level. Future research should use a qualitative design to give more details about this relation. Thirdly, the scope of the study is not limited to Malaysia. The same study can be applied in other Muslim countries because this issue is not related to language or any component of culture.

The present study is important as it provides a direct relationship between religious commitment and happiness, and highlights the importance of educational level as a moderator on the relationship between religious commitment and happiness from an Islamic perspective. We suggest universities increase religious activities and continually instilling awareness regarding the importance of religiosity and getting knowledge as it will increase happiness. They should also create an environment that will enhance students’ happiness. This study recommends Muslim students increase their happiness for improved academic achievement and life satisfaction. We expect that this research could be used as a support to university management to change its policies to help students. It could contribute towards improving happiness and the quality of life of students during their study at Malaysian universities.

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**References**


