

DOI Link: <https://doi.org/10.61586/3aWe1>
Vol.409, Issue.7, Part.1, July 2025, PP.111-118

Factors affecting college life satisfaction and loneliness of early childhood education major college students in South Korea

Soo-Koung Jun

Associate professor, College of General Education, Namseoul University
skjun74@nsu.ac.kr

Funding for this paper was provided by Namseoul University.

Received May 2025 Accepted June 2025 Published July 2025

Abstract:

This study aimed to identify psychological factors that influence university life satisfaction and loneliness among university students majoring in early childhood education. A total of 96 undergraduate students from a four-year university in South Korea participated in the study. The variables examined included self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience (with subcomponents: endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, and autonomy), life satisfaction, and loneliness. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted using SPSS 23.0. The results showed that life satisfaction and positive supportive relationships significantly predicted university life satisfaction, while self-esteem, life satisfaction, positive supportive relationships, and autonomy were significant negative predictors of loneliness. Interestingly, sense of control was positively associated with loneliness. These findings suggest that students' overall psychological well-being and the presence of supportive interpersonal relationships are critical for enhancing their satisfaction with university life and reducing feelings of loneliness. Based on the results, this study highlights the importance of implementing university-based programs that promote life satisfaction, social support, self-esteem, and autonomy among students. Practical implications and recommendations for psychological support and intervention programs in higher education settings are discussed.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, College Students, College Life Satisfaction, Loneliness, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem, Resilience

Introduction

Globally, there is a growing emphasis on improving the quality of higher education to support the healthy development of university students and to help them become competent individuals who can fulfill their roles in society after graduation (Yoon et al., 2024). As university students are in a transitional stage from adolescence to adulthood, their adjustment to university life and overall well-being are considered critical factors in preparing for adulthood (Jeon & Shin, 2021).

University life satisfaction is a significant psychological variable that facilitates academic engagement and successful adjustment to campus life. Students with high satisfaction with their university experience tend to achieve better academic performance, participate more actively in various school activities, report higher academic self-efficacy, and experience lower levels of academic stress (Antaramian, 2017).

Higher levels of social support and positive peer relationships are associated with increased satisfaction with university life (Arslan & Akkas, 2013). Park and Cho (2011) found that social support has a significant impact on university students' satisfaction with their school life. Furthermore, peer relationships and interpersonal trust with friends were found to be positively associated with university life satisfaction. Therefore, fostering students' social skills and providing programs that promote peer interaction are essential for enhancing students' well-being and satisfaction during university (Jeon, 2019).

Since the 1980s, Korean youth have increasingly embraced individualistic tendencies, such as dining or drinking alone ("honbap," "honsul"), which do not necessarily reflect mature independence. These individuals may possess covert narcissistic tendencies characterized by inward self-absorption and limited emotional expression, potentially leading to heightened feelings of loneliness and isolation (Lee, 2018).

Recent university students, often referred to as the MZ generation, place high value on personal interests and tend to be individualistic. As such, they are more comfortable with solitary activities than with group belonging and are reportedly more likely to experience loneliness and isolation (Jang & Lee, 2025). Loneliness is negatively associated with social support (Kang & Kim, 2007), and strengthening interpersonal relationships and social support systems could reduce students' loneliness while increasing satisfaction with university life.

Loneliness is also closely linked to depressive symptoms. It represents a lack of security in social relationships (Cramer & Barry, 1999) and arises when an individual's need for intimacy is unmet due to quantitative or qualitative deficiencies in their social connections. Loneliness is often perceived as a form of social failure (Duck et al., 1994) and acts as a stressor that threatens the self, potentially contributing to depression (Semmer et al., 2007).

In this context, the present study aims to identify the psychological factors that influence university students' satisfaction with university life and their experiences of loneliness at a four-year comprehensive university. The study further seeks to provide insights into strategies for enhancing university life satisfaction and reducing loneliness.

The specific research questions are as below. First, what are the psychological variables (self-efficacy, self-esteem, endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, autonomy, loneliness, and overall life satisfaction) that influence university students' satisfaction with university life? Second, what are the psychological variables (self-efficacy, self-esteem, endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, autonomy, and overall life satisfaction) that influence university students' experiences of loneliness?

Method

Participants

In this study, a total of 100 undergraduate students majoring in Early Childhood Education at P University, located in Daejeon, Chungcheongnam-do, were initially recruited as research participants. Among them, 96 students were included in the final analysis after excluding four respondents who either did not consent to the survey or provided incomplete or insincere responses. Of the final sample, 27 students (28.1%) were first-year, 29 (30.2%) were second-year, 22 (22.9%) were third-year, and 18 (18.8%) were fourth-year students. In terms of gender distribution, 11 participants (11.5%) were male and 85 (88.5%) were female.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (N=96)

Variables	Classification	Frequency	Per Cent
Gender	Male	11	11.5
	Female	85	88.5
School year	1 st	27	28.1
	2 nd	29	30.2
	3 rd	22	22.9
	4 th	18	18.8

Instruments

a. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy encompasses both evaluative and emotional aspects of the self. It refers to an individual's subjective sense of competence, self-assessment, and perceived value regarding their own traits and abilities. From a developmental perspective, self-efficacy must be understood in the context of human growth, in which individuals develop perceptions and evaluations of their capabilities through interactions with the environment—particularly with significant others such as parents, siblings, and peers (Harter, 1982). In this study, the self-efficacy scale developed and used by Kim Min-Young (2013) was adopted. The scale consists of six items, each rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all true") to 4 ("Very true"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy. The reliability of the scale in this study, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .826.

b. Self-esteem

Self-esteem generally refers to an individual's sense of importance, competence, and belief in their own worth. It reflects the overall evaluation of one's self-worth, indicating the degree to which individuals believe themselves to be capable, valuable, and significant (Coopersmith, 1981). In this study, self-esteem was measured using an adapted version of Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale. The scale consists of 10 items, each rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all true") to 4 ("Very true"). Higher total scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. The reliability of the self-esteem scale in this study, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .740.

c. Resilience

Resilience refers to the ability to successfully adapt with competence and positive functioning in the face of high-risk and stressful situations (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). In this study, ego-resilience was measured using 22 items from the scale originally developed by Joo and Lee (2007) and later revised by Kim (2013). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all true") to 5 ("Very true"). The scale consists of four subcomponents: endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, and autonomy. The overall reliability of the resilience scale in this study, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .831.

d. Loneliness, College Life Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction

University life satisfaction and overall life satisfaction were each measured with a single item. Both items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Very satisfied") to 5 ("Not at all satisfied"). Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with university life and overall life, respectively. Loneliness was assessed using a 15-item scale originally employed by Kwon (1997). All items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all true") to 4 ("Very true"). Higher total scores indicate a higher level of perceived loneliness. In the present study, the reliability of the loneliness scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .776.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 23.0. First, descriptive statistics—including frequency, minimum and maximum scores, mean, and standard deviation—were calculated for the main variables: self-efficacy, self-esteem,

resilience, life satisfaction, university life satisfaction, and loneliness. Second, Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis was conducted to examine the interrelationships among the key variables. Finally, to identify the effects of the major variables on university life satisfaction and loneliness, stepwise multiple regression analysis using the enter method was performed.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables

University life satisfaction was found to be relatively high, with a mean score of 3.50 out of 5. Among the variables related to positive emotion, self-efficacy had a mean of 3.22, and self-esteem averaged 3.18. The overall mean for resilience was notably high at 4.02. Specifically, the subcomponents of resilience also showed high average scores: endurance of negative emotions (3.88), positive supportive relationships (4.19), sense of control (4.14), and autonomy (3.87), all exceeding 3.8. The mean score for life satisfaction was 3.67, while loneliness showed a relatively low average of 1.40, indicating that participants experienced a low level of loneliness. These findings suggest that the participating university students possessed a high level of emotional resources related to positive affect and resilience, and reported generally high levels of satisfaction with their university life (see Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of major variables

Variables		N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Self-efficacy		96	2.17	4.00	3.22	.49
Self-esteem		96	2.50	3.90	3.18	.37
Resilience	Total	96	3.07	5.00	4.02	.55
	Endurance of negative emotions	96	2.71	5.00	3.88	.68
	Positive supportive relationships	96	2.75	5.00	4.19	.57
	Self-control	96	3.14	5.00	4.14	.52
	Autonomy	96	2.25	5.00	3.87	.72
Life satisfaction		96	0	5.00	3.67	1.03
College life satisfaction		96	0	5.00	3.50	1.00
Loneliness		96	1.00	2.20	1.40	.31

Correlation of Main Variables

University life satisfaction showed statistically significant correlations with self-efficacy, self-esteem, endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, autonomy, life satisfaction, and loneliness. It was positively correlated with all variables except loneliness, which exhibited a negative correlation. All correlations were significant at the $p < .01$ level. Among these, the strongest correlation was observed between university life satisfaction and life satisfaction ($r=.872$). Loneliness was negatively correlated with all other variables, with the highest negative correlation found with self-esteem ($r=-.633$), followed by autonomy ($r=-.577$) and positive supportive relationships ($r=-.480$).

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Among Major Variables

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)
Self-efficacy(a)	1								
Self-esteem(b)	.719**	1							
Endurance of negative emotions(c)	.603**	.753**	1						
Positive supportive relationships(d)	.454**	.622**	.702**	1					
Self-control(e)	.571**	.679**	.841**	.706**	1				
Autonomy(f)	.5340**	.638**	.696**	.661**	.648**	1			
Life satisfaction(g)	.290**	.235**	.288**	.101**	.153**	.337**	1		
Loneliness(h)	-.477**	-.633**	-.466**	-.480**	-.326**	-.577**	-.453**	1	
College life satisfaction(i)	.267**	.181**	.260**	.215**	.188**	.332**	.872**	-.411**	1

**p<.01

Factors Influencing University Life Satisfaction

To examine the factors influencing university life satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis using the enter method was conducted (see Table 4). The independent variables included self-efficacy, self-esteem, subcomponents of resilience (endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, autonomy), loneliness, and life satisfaction.

The results indicated that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F=43.723$, $p<.001$) and accounted for 78.3% of the variance in university life satisfaction ($R^2=.801$). An examination of the standardized regression coefficients (β) revealed that life satisfaction had the strongest positive influence ($\beta=.899$, $p=.000$), followed by positive supportive relationships ($\beta=.255$, $p=.002$), both of which were statistically significant predictors.

In contrast, endurance of negative emotions, sense of control, autonomy, and loneliness were not significant predictors ($p>.05$). These findings suggest that overall life satisfaction and the presence of supportive interpersonal relationships are key contributors to university life satisfaction.

To assess multicollinearity, tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined. The tolerance values were all below 1.0 and VIF values were below 10, while the Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.221, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern in this model.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis on Factors Influencing University Life Satisfaction

	B	SEB	β	t	p	ΔR^2	R ²	F	p
(Constant variable)	-.100	.920		-.108	.914	.783	.801	43.723	.000
Self-efficacy	.125	.144	.061	.863	.391				
Self-esteem	-.483	.257	-.180	-1.877	.064				
Resilience	Endurance of negative emotions	-.215	.156	-.147	-1.385	.170			
	Positive supportive relationships	.448	.138	.255	3.241	.002			
	Self-control	.174	.190	.091	.916	.362			
	Autonomy	-.036	.107	-.026	-.334	.739			
Loneliness	-.065	.241	-.020	-.271	.787				
Life satisfaction	.875	.066	.899	15.401	.000				

Factors Influencing Loneliness

To examine the factors influencing university students' loneliness, a multiple regression analysis using the enter method was conducted (see Table 5). The independent variables included self-efficacy, self-esteem, subcomponents of resilience (endurance of negative emotions, positive supportive relationships, sense of control, autonomy), and life satisfaction. The regression model was statistically significant ($F=18.522$, $p<.001$) and accounted for 59.6% of the variance in

loneliness ($R^2=.596$). An analysis of the standardized regression coefficients (β) revealed that self-esteem had the strongest negative effect on loneliness ($\beta = -.555$, $p=.000$), followed by life satisfaction ($\beta = -.291$, $p=.000$), positive supportive relationships ($\beta = -.261$, $p = .018$), and autonomy ($\beta = -.249$, $p=.022$). On the other hand, sense of control showed a significant positive effect on loneliness ($\beta=.382$, $p=.006$), indicating that higher perceived control was associated with higher levels of loneliness. Other variables, such as self-efficacy and endurance of negative emotions, were not statistically significant predictors ($p>.05$). These findings suggest that higher levels of self-esteem, autonomy, and positive supportive relationships, as well as greater life satisfaction, are associated with lower levels of loneliness. Conversely, an elevated sense of control may be linked to increased loneliness. Thus, enhancing self-esteem, fostering autonomy, and developing supportive interpersonal relationships may be essential strategies for reducing loneliness among university students.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis on Factors Influencing Loneliness Among University Students

	B	SE B	β	t	p	ΔR^2	R^2	F	p
(Constant variable)	3155	229		13772	.000	.564	.596	18.522	.000
Self-efficacy	-.003	.064	-.005	-.054	.957				
Self-esteem	-.464	.102	-.555	-.4527	.000				
Resilience	Endurance of negative emotions	.034	.069	.074	.465	.622			
	Positive supportive relationships	-.143	.069	-.261	-.2419	.018			
	Self-control	.228	.080	.382	.2835	.006			
	Autonomy	-.108	.046	-.249	-.2334	.022			
	Life satisfaction	-.088	.023	-.291	-.3820	.000			

Conclusions and Suggestions

The present study examined the psychological factors that influence university life satisfaction and loneliness among university students majoring in early childhood education. The findings revealed that life satisfaction and positive supportive relationships were significant predictors of university life satisfaction, while self-esteem, life satisfaction, positive supportive relationships, and autonomy significantly contributed to lower levels of loneliness. Conversely, a higher sense of control was unexpectedly associated with increased loneliness.

These results underscore the importance of fostering psychological well-being and interpersonal connectedness in promoting university students' academic adjustment and emotional stability. Life satisfaction emerged as the most powerful factor influencing students' satisfaction with university life, while self-esteem was the strongest negative predictor of loneliness. These findings highlight that students' overall psychological health and the quality of their social support networks are central to their well-being during the university years.

Given these findings, several implications can be drawn:

Enhancing Life Satisfaction: Programs that promote purpose, meaning, and positive experiences in students' lives should be integrated into university support services. Counseling and career development centers may implement workshops that help students reflect on their goals, values, and achievements.

Fostering Supportive Peer Relationships: Universities should provide more structured opportunities for students to develop positive interpersonal connections. Peer mentoring, cooperative learning activities, and student clubs can facilitate the development of supportive relationships that contribute to both life satisfaction and reduced loneliness.

Improving Self-Esteem and Autonomy: Educational interventions aimed at strengthening students' self-esteem and sense of autonomy—such as strengths-based counseling, self-reflection programs, and leadership training—may be effective in reducing loneliness and promoting emotional well-being.

Rethinking Control Dynamics: The unexpected positive association between perceived control and loneliness suggests a need for further research. It may be that excessive self-reliance or rigid control strategies hinder students from seeking help or building close relationships. Educational programs that emphasize adaptive coping and balanced self-regulation may mitigate these effects.

In conclusion, universities must take a proactive role in supporting students' psychological development through

comprehensive, evidence-based programs that enhance life satisfaction and social connectedness while addressing potential risk factors such as low self-esteem and loneliness. Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to explore causal relationships and include more diverse student populations to strengthen generalizability.

References

- Antaramian, S. (2017). The importance of very high life satisfaction for students' academic success. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), Article 1307622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1307622>
- Arslan, S., & Akkas, O. A. (2013). Quality of college life (QCL) of students in Turkey: Students' life satisfaction and identification. *Social Indicators Research*, 115(2), 869–884. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0233-6>
- Coopersmith, S. (1981). *SEI Self-Esteem Inventories Manual*. Redwood City, CA: Mind Garden.
- Cramer, K. M., & Barry, J. E. (1999). Conceptualizations and measures of loneliness: A comparison of subscales. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 27(3), 491–502. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(98\)00257-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00257-8)
- Duck, S., Pond, K., & Leatham, G. (1994). Loneliness and the evaluation of relational events. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 11(2), 253–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407594112006>
- Harter, S. (1982). The perceived competence scale for children. *Child Development*, 53(1), 87–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1129640>
- Jang, T. K., & Lee, S. Y. (2025). The multiple mediating effects of fear of missing out and depressive symptoms on the relationship between loneliness and SNS addiction tendency among university students. *Korean Journal of School Psychology*, 22(1), 1–20.
- Joo, S. Y., & Lee, Y. H. (2007). Development and validation of a resilience scale for children. *Journal of the Korean Home Economics Association*, 28(2), 91–113.
- Jun, S. K., & Shin, I. Y. (2021). Effects of personality traits and self-evaluation on the happiness of Korean college students: A hierarchical regression analysis. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 21, 12(6), 1969–1980.
- Kang, H. J., & Kim, K. S. (2007). The relationship between social physical activity, social support, and loneliness among the elderly. *Journal of the Korea Contents Association*, 7(11), 280–288.
- Kim, M. Y. (2013). The effects of a strengths-based group program on self-perception and resilience in children from divorced families (Master's thesis). Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea.
- Lee, J. H. (2018). Individualistic culture and pastoral care of Korean youth: A pastoral response to youth with covert narcissistic tendencies. *Theological Forum of Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary*, 50(2), 285–303.
- Masten, A. S., & Coatsworth, J. D. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments: Lessons from research on successful children. *American Psychologist*, 53(2), 205–220. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.2.205>
- Park, J. A., & Cho, M. H. (2011). The relationship between social support, sports participation, and school life satisfaction in university students. *Korean Journal of Leisure and Recreation Studies*, 35(1), 17–28.

Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Semmer, N. K., Jacobshagen, N., Meier, L. L., & Elfering, A. (2007). Occupational stress research: The “Stress-as-offense-to-self” perspective. In J. Houdmont & S. McIntyre (Eds.), *Occupational health psychology: European perspectives on research, education and practice* (Vol. 2, pp. 43–60). ISMAI.

Yoon, M. H., Sung, J. H., Kang, C. H., & Oh, H. S. (2024). An analysis of educational needs for undergraduate education based on core competencies: A case study of S University. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education Research*, 25(3), 421–449.