

Understanding psychological well-being of alpha generation



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Abstract The psychological well-being of Alpha Generation, the first cohort to grow up entirely in the digital era, is an emerging area of study in developmental and psychological sciences. Although quantitative studies on adolescent well-being are increasing, there remains limited qualitative research that delves into the everyday school experiences of Alpha Generation. Understanding the problems for the Alpha Generation can be done by identifying the problems using the Problem Checklist (DCM) carried out by Guidance and Counseling teachers at school. This study aims to describe the dimensions that exist in the psychological well-being of Alpha Generation, in this case junior high school students, so that they can determine the conditions of psychological well-being experienced. This study uses a qualitative research method with purposive sampling and involved total of 15 subjects in one of private junior high school in Surabaya, Indonesia. Data were collected through semistructured in-depth interviews. The results of the study show that the personal growth dimension is the most prominent, while the purpose in life dimension remains not yet developed. The conclusion of this study is that the dimension of psychological well-being must always be a concern so that Alpha Generation has a healthy mentality. Findings contribute original qualitative insights into Alpha students' mental health in Surabaya, Indonesia and recommend that schools and parents implement digital literacy programs, peer-support initiatives, and purposeful activity planning to bolster well-being. The results of this study are expected to provide additional knowledge or references regarding the importance of psychological well-being in the Alpha Generation and can be used as evaluation material for schools and parents to always support various things that can improve their psychological well-being. As the first qualitative investigation of Alpha Generation's psychological well-being in the local context, this study offers foundational evidence for policymakers and educators to design targeted interventions. There are few studies that explore the study of psychological well-being for the Alpha Generation. While studies on psychological well-being are mostly conducted quantitatively, examining it with qualitative methods can provide unique insights.

Keywords: problem checklist, psychological well-being, alpha generation, private junior school

1. Introduction

The development of technology has changed the way people interact, communicate, and exchange information. New communication methods allow people to interact with others at high speed and establish connections with many people simultaneously. Individuals of all ages, from the Silent Generation to the Alpha Generation, have been involved in technological advancements (Cirilli et al., 2019). Alpha Generation is the generation that lives in the current era. The Alpha Generation comprises the adolescent who are most connected to the world, where this generation was born between 2010 and 2024 (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020). Increasingly, massive amounts of technology have become entertainment for this generation. The Alpha Generation is likely to link their formative years with contemporary trends, given that their parents are engaged users of technology and social media. Their upbringing alongside smartphones fosters a significant reliance on technology, positioning them as the most transformative generation (Manuel & Sutanto, 2021). Because it occurred in the midst of high-tech evolution, the development of the Alpha Generation is considered different from that of previous generations. This evolution requires changes in teaching, learning, and the use of technology (Reis, 2018; Tootell et al., 2014).

There are several characteristics of Alpha Generation, including being able to apply online reading skills, having the ability to interpret information, and learning through technology (Taylor & Hattingh, 2019). Moreover, according to (Apaydin & Kaya, 2020), Alpha Generation is characterized by a heightened perception due to early exposure to technology and a balanced mix of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. However, growing up in an environment with high dependence on technology can cause problems for Alpha Generation, one of which is lower communication skills (Drugas, 2022). In addition, Alpha Generation is predicted to be adolescent who are less social, less creative, and tend to be individualistic; they prefer instant things and have less respect for the process. They become socially alienated because of their love of software (Fadlurrohman et al., 2019). According to Selvi et al. (2022), adolescent in the Alpha Generation tend to lose attributes such as



loyalty, attention, affection, open-mindedness, and responsibility. These things affect many aspects of their lives, one of which is psychological well-being.

Junior high school students who are in their teenage years have entered a new phase in their lives. Piaget's theory explains that starting at the age of 11, an individual begins to be able to think and reason logically. They are able to think about various hypotheses and solve problems through logical and systematic deduction (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022). Alpha Generation adolescents tend to spend more time playing with gadgets. Researchers have reported that time spent playing with gadgets is associated with various adolescent health problems, including a lack of exercise and inactive behavior (Pearson et al., 2017). A literature review revealed that sedentary behavior (lack of physical activity due to lifestyle) can affect psychological well-being, which is related to depression, cognitive function, and health-related quality of life (Zhu & Owen, 2017). This shows that psychological well-being is an important point to consider. Psychological well-being is important for Alpha Generation children in adolescence to be able to face increasingly diverse challenges and pressures (Deviana & Umari, 2023).

Understanding psychological health is not only the responsibility of parents but also that of teachers at school, especially guidance and counseling teachers. Understanding what the problems are for Alpha Generation can be accomplished by implementing the Problem Checklist (DCM) as a guideline. The Problem Checklist was developed by Mooney (1942) and consists of 11 general problem areas, namely, health and diet problems, problems with circumstances, life and economic independence, problems with recreation, hobbies and use of free time, problems with social relations and social justice, personal problems and mental health, problems with religion and morals, family problems, problems with aspirations and future decisions, problems with adjustment to school, and problems with adjustment to the curriculum (Mooney, 1942). The Problem Checklist then became one of the instruments used by guidance and counseling teachers to explore student problems. This study focuses on psychological well-being, which is included in one of the descriptors of the Problem Checklist in the field of personal and mental health problems.

There are six dimensions of psychological well-being according to Ryff & Keyes (1995), namely, autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth. A preliminary study was conducted at the research site in the form of interviews with guidance and counseling teachers. Through short interviews, it can be seen that outside of class hours, students tend to interact with classmates and friends from other classes. They are quite capable of developing certain activities into a game for their own scope. However, if school activities have ended and students are allowed to take the smartphones that were initially collected by the homeroom teacher, they return to focus on their respective smartphones. The students admitted that they felt that they had to immediately open social media so as not to miss the latest things during school activities.

Previous studies on psychological well-being have been conducted by several researchers, including Yusof et al. (2022), where social support has a significant relationship with psychological well-being, whereas psychological well-being does not significantly differ by gender. In addition, stress can affect student performance and ultimately affect their psychological well-being (Mookerjee et al., 2022). The results of other studies revealed that fatigue is negatively correlated with students' psychological well-being (Raza et al., 2023). This means that if fatigue increases, students' psychological well-being decreases.

This study focuses on how psychological well-being is in the Alpha Generation, which is in their teens. The difference between this study and previous studies is that, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, research on psychological well-being in adolescence has been carried out mostly via a quantitative approach. Meanwhile, the researcher will attempt to take a qualitative approach to understanding the picture of psychological well-being in the Alpha Generation, namely, in adolescents. On the basis of the background above, the objective of this study is to describe the psychological well-being of Alpha Generation adolescents on the basis of Ryff's six-dimensional model. By examining how each dimension—autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth—is manifested in their daily experiences, this study seeks to identify which dimensions are most common and not yet developed. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for parents, educators, and policymakers in supporting mental well-being among adolescents in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological well-being

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the theory of psychological well-being of (Ryff, 1989). Psychological well-being occurs when someone has a positive attitude toward themselves and others, is able to make their own decisions and regulate their behavior, and is able to create and manage an environment that suits their needs. Moreover, according to Hernandez et al. (2018), psychological well-being is defined as the subjective outcome of affective or cognitive appraisals that are judged to be positive. Lower activation effects, such as calmness and contentment, and greater activation effects, such as joy, fall into this category. Psychological well-being does not mean that a person always feels good or experiences positive emotions; rather, it means that a person is able to cope with negative emotions (Widyawati et al., 2022).

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The factors that can affect psychological well-being according to Oskrochi et al. (2018) are gender, age, education, number of children, and marital status. Ryff & Keyes (1995) explained that several factors that can affect psychological well-being are age, gender, socioeconomic status, and social and cultural support.

2.2. Alpha Generation

Alpha Generation is the generation that lives in the current era. The Alpha Generation, which encompasses individuals born from 2010-2024, represents the most interconnected and technologically proficient cohort to date. Characterized by their use of smartphones, tablets, video games, and autonomous technologies, they embrace new innovations at an unprecedented pace. With screens serving as both sources of entertainment and educational resources throughout their formative years, they are regarded as the most intelligent generation thus far (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020).

The participation of the Alpha Generation is characterized by adaptability, a strong emphasis on learning, roles as influencers in marketing, a collaborative approach to work, leadership that prioritizes empowerment, habits related to digital payments, the use of voice recognition technology, trends in personalized consumer experiences, and a tendency to seek social validation when making decisions (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020).

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Research Design and Participants

This qualitative research investigates the psychological well-being of the Alpha Generation through interviews and observations. Qualitative methodologies offer profound insights into real-world issues Moser & Korstjens (2017) and adeptly elucidate intricate patterns of human behavior (Foley & Timonen, 2015). The research sample comprised 15 junior high school students from Surabaya, Indonesia, with five participants selected from each of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

3.2. Instruments

The instrument used in this study was an interview guide compiled on the basis of the theory of Ryff & Keyes (1995), which consists of 6 dimensions, namely, autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth.

3.3. Procedure

This study lasted for two weeks. Data collection from the research informants required an interview duration of 60 minutes and several interviews to obtain consistent answers. After interviews were conducted with the research informants, interviews were conducted with the teachers involved to obtain additional data and data validity with the same interview duration as the research informants.

3.4. Data Validity

Data validity in this research is guaranteed through the use of triangulation, which integrates various data types alongside theoretical frameworks (Flick, 2014). This methodology offers a range of perspectives on the research issue. The study utilizes a technical triangulation source by collecting information from both teachers and peers.

3.5. Data Analysis

This study consists of three stages of data analysis: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusion. The purpose of data reduction is to make the amount of data collected easier to understand and handle. The final stage involves drawing conclusions from the findings and comments that have been given.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Before the data were collected via interviews with the students, informed consent was provided and explained, including the purpose of the research, research procedures, informant identity, and agreement to voluntarily become a research informant. The informants in this research did not receive compensation after the research was completed.

4. Results

Research has indicated that the psychological well-being of the Alpha Generation is in the good category. The following will present the results of interviews with research subjects, which are divided into six dimensions of psychological well-being according to Ryff & Keyes (1995):

4.1. Autonomy

This dimension means that individuals are able to control themselves without interference from others or the external environment. This dimension of autonomy is demonstrated by subjects with behaviors such as starting to learn to be responsible for schoolwork that must be done at home. Several subjects said that the difference they felt when doing homework while still in elementary school and junior high school today was that when they were in elementary school, they tended to be guided by their parents to do their homework, whereas since they were in junior high school, they began to practice doing their homework independently and would only ask their parents if they had difficulties.

4.2. *Self-Acceptance*

This dimension is related to the level with which each individual behaves and is responsible for themselves. This dimension is related to how adolescents understand themselves. They also have a desire to be able to adjust to their shortcomings. The advantages possessed by the subjects are recognized as a source of pride in their relationship with the surrounding environment.

4.3. *Positive Relations with Others*

This dimension is related to trusting relationships with others. Through brief observations conducted by the researcher, the subjects of this study were able to show empathy and good affection to the people around them. Several subjects admitted that they did not mind having to socialize with seniors or students who had just transferred from another school.

4.4. *Purpose in Life*

This dimension is related to a person's view of the meaning and purpose of his or her life. The results of this study indicate that the dimension of purpose in life is the lowest dimension compared with the other dimensions. The subjects of the study admitted that they did not have a direction in their lives. They do not yet have any definite ideals or career directions after completing their studies or continuing to high school or vocational school.

4.5. *Environmental Mastery*

This dimension relates to the extent to which people are able to utilize the possibilities in their immediate environment. Through interviews, it can be seen that subjects are generally quite responsible for the situation in their surroundings. Although they sometimes feel quite stressed due to environmental influences, they can adapt slowly.

4.6. *Personal Growth*

This dimension is related to a person's capacity to realize their own potential. The results of this study indicate that the personal growth dimension is the most prominent dimension compared with the other dimensions. The research subjects realized that they had become adolescents and needed broader social skills than when they were in elementary school. This is indicated by the decision of several research subjects who finally joined OSIS (student council) activities and became administrators in them. In personal growth, students adapt more quickly to new technologies or new software that support their learning process and creativity.

Interviews with class teachers and guidance and counseling teachers revealed that personal growth is the most prominent dimension of psychological well-being among junior high school students and is part of the Alpha Generation. At school, these students demonstrate high curiosity, quick adaptation to technological advances, and a strong drive to explore new experiences for self-development. Compared with previous generations, they show greater independence in seeking information and greater self-awareness of their growth. They frequently use online platforms to deepen their understanding beyond classroom material and quickly master new applications that enhance their learning and creativity. Teachers also noted that students often take online courses and learn from others' experiences, reflecting their strong personal growth.

Guidance and counseling teachers report that many junior high school students, who are part of the Alpha Generation, often follow their peers when they participate in extracurricular or other school activities. This generation tends to prioritize instant achievements over long-term planning, with many lacking a clear vision of their future goals. Their focus on immediate gratification and tendency to follow trends or peer influence often shape their decision-making. Additionally, excessive use of gadgets for entertainment can distract them from meaningful self-reflection. When asked about future plans, many students express confusion or admit that they have not given it serious thought, highlighting the ongoing challenge of cultivating life goal awareness in this generation.

5. Discussion

The results of the interviews and observations indicate that, overall, the six dimensions of psychological well-being are classified as good, with the dimension of purpose in life being a dimension that needs to be studied more deeply because the majority of research subjects do not yet have a clear direction and purpose in life. Moreover, the dimension of personal growth is the dimension with the most prominent category.

Machell et al. (2016) describes purpose in life as a model of the future that encourages high school students to engage in prosocial behavior and fight antisocial behavior. In addition, Chen & Cheng (2020) suggest that purpose in life is an important component of the well-being of high school students. The results of a study conducted by Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma (2022) concluded that academic identity affects the sense of purpose in life, which indirectly predicts academic performance. Therefore, this study shows that high school students who have a strong academic identity tend to have better grades. These findings support the idea that students with a strong sense of purpose in life tend to show greater commitment to their academic roles and greater engagement in action. Promoting open communication with trusted adults, providing mental health resources, and encouraging healthy coping strategies are essential for enhancing adolescent psychological well-being (Choi, 2018; Mahomed et al., 2019).

The results of this study indicate that the dimension of personal growth has the most prominent effect on the psychological well-being of junior high school students, which is currently referred to as the Alpha Generation. As stated by Fadlurrohim et al. (2019), Alpha Generation is the generation that is most connected to the world because it uses technology more often and is inseparable from gadgets. The development of Generation Alpha inevitably shapes the perspectives of parents and teachers as their companions at school. The demands of technological advancement require these companions to continually evolve and adapt alongside adolescent growth. Technology plays a key role in fostering personal growth in this generation, as they frequently use gadgets for learning, information seeking, communication, play, and entertainment. Easy access to technology enables Alpha Generation to learn and develop within a broader, global environment. Research by Fadlurrohim et al. (2019) mentioned several factors that influence the growth of the Alpha Generation, namely, technological and cultural factors. The effects of technology, technological trends, and organizing technology make Alpha Generation unique, leading to the growth of Alpha Generation.

According to Ryff (1989), individuals who have dimensions of personal growth in psychological well-being are shown by having a sense of continuous development, seeing themselves as being able to develop, being open to new experiences, seeing improvements in themselves over time, and changing by reflecting more knowledge and self-effectiveness. Individuals who lack personal growth in terms of psychological well-being often experience stagnation, a lack of improvement, boredom, disinterest in life, and difficulty developing new attitudes or behaviors. This study revealed that many research informants are enthusiastic about new experiences, as technological accessibility and creative visual displays foster excitement and interest in learning. Personal growth in Alpha Generation cultivates skills driven by rapid learning through technology, including creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, digital literacy, adaptability in career development, cross-cultural competence, and a strong sense of responsibility. These skills show changes that focus on roles and behaviors in the Alpha Generation (Fadlurrohim et al., 2019).

The differences between the Alpha Generation and the previous generation are not much different. However, the personalities, motivations, and appearances of each generation make a difference. Technology provides much access to Alpha Generation to direct thoughts and actions. The trend of technology will continue in Alpha Generation and push toward automation, which has the ability to fulfill work tasks on the basis of its field (Fadlurrohim et al., 2019). Previous research has shown that the use of technology is positively related to social, cognitive, and emotional development in the Alpha Generation. Technology can expand adolescent learning experiences, which affects their cognitive development. Individuals tend to imitate the behavior they see in technological media so that it can affect social development (Apanidi et al., 2025).

Personal growth in Alpha Generation, which uses technology in a simple way, can make them smarter and grow faster, including improving visual skills, improving eye coordination and completing tasks, and increasing scores in completing tasks (Fadlurrohim et al., 2019). However, this rapid personal growth according to Twenge (2017) found survey results showing that the development of technology, gadgets, and social media has its own shortcomings, namely, increased depression, loneliness in youth, lack of activity, lack of drinking, rarely leaving the house, and spending more time doing activities online. Twenge (2017) links adolescent happiness with the tendency to spend online activities on the internet and social media reported to be unhappy. Indirectly, Alpha Generation makes technology the standard for carrying out activities, and Alpha Generation has an online identity (Fadlurrohim et al., 2019). In line with the findings of research by Apanidi et al. (2025), there is potential for negative impacts from excessive use of technology on Alpha Generation. The impact is related mainly to the emotional aspect. Individuals who are too exposed to technology tend to show higher levels of anxiety.

The relationship between personal growth and other dimensions of psychological well-being is that individuals with high personal growth tend to have better self-acceptance and are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Personal growth can encourage individuals to be open to new experiences and improve their social skills. Individuals who experience personal growth show increased autonomy and the ability to regulate their own behavior. Personal growth can increase individuals' ability to continue developing personally, which is related to the ability to organize and control the surrounding environment and take advantage of existing opportunities to meet personal needs. Personal growth can help individuals provide direction and meaning in life and encourage the achievement of more meaningful life goals (Pedhu, 2022).

Previous studies have shown that the personal growth dimension has a high average and that the purpose in life dimension has a low average in adolescents compared with other dimensions (Savitri & Listiyandini, 2017). The results of this study support those of previous studies that reported that the personal growth dimension was more common in adolescents

than were other dimensions of psychological well-being. The study emphasizes adolescence as a stage of opportunity and positive growth, where enhancing well-being can foster positive impacts and help prevent psychological disorders. Thus, psychological well-being is not only a major part of positive development but can also function beneficially for adolescents, leading to greater opportunities to achieve positive changes in the transition to adulthood (Viejo et al., 2018).

Through a qualitative approach, this study provides in-depth insights into the psychological well-being of Alpha Generation. This allows for a better understanding of the components that influence their mental health. The results suggest that the social environment, the role of parents, and the influence of technology on the psychological well-being of adolescent in this generation are very important. However, this study has several limitations, such as its limited sample size. As a result, the results may not be widely generalizable. In addition, although the qualitative method used allows for a deeper understanding, it does not allow for the measurement of causal relationships between variables. Therefore, to observe the dynamics of the psychological well-being of Alpha Generation over time, future studies should use a mixed-method or longitudinal approach. Future studies can help create better solutions to improve the mental health of this generation by further understanding what contributes to their well-being.

6. Conclusions

This study revealed that junior high school students presented the highest level of psychological well-being in the personal growth dimension, whereas the lowest level of purpose in the life dimension. Students generally demonstrate empathy and affection toward those around them. In the dimension of positive relations with others, students are generally able to form trusting and empathetic connections with those around them. Observations revealed that many students expressed comfort in socializing with senior peers or newly transferred classmates, indicating openness and positive social adjustment. In terms of autonomy, most are beginning to take responsibility for their schoolwork at home. Regarding self-acceptance, some students feel ashamed of their shortcomings, making them less engaged in class and reluctant to communicate with peers. With respect to the dimensions of purpose in life, many students lack clear career aspirations or long-term goals. Regarding environmental mastery, students tend to show a reasonable sense of responsibility for their surroundings. In personal growth, students recognize their transition into adolescence, emphasizing the need for broader social skills, exploration of interests, and quick adaptation to new technologies to support their learning and creativity.

This research is expected to provide practical contributions in helping parents, educators, and policy makers find better ways to support adolescent mental well-being in the computer and internet eras. In addition, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for psychological interventions that are more in line with the needs of Alpha Generation in terms of education and child mental health policies. Therefore, this study not only adds to the theoretical ideas about adolescent psychological well-being but also offers new avenues for research that will further study how technology and social factors affect the mental well-being of future generations.

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Ethical considerations

This study adhered to rigorous ethical principles to safeguard the rights and dignity of all participants. Informed consent was secured from each participant following a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives and methodology. Confidentiality was upheld through the anonymization of personal data and the secure storage of all collected information.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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