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☎ +62 85312898866; ✉ [jurnal@aapbk.org](mailto:jurnal@aapbk.org)



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### Navigating Identity: The Role of Self-Regulation and Meaning of Life in Adolescents

Khoirunnisa<sup>1</sup>, Nani Al Muin<sup>1</sup>, Caroline Lisa Setia Wati<sup>2</sup>, Lira Erwinda<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Guidance and Counseling, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Guidance and Counseling, Universitas Bina Bangsa, Indonesia

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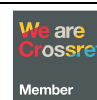
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#### Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to:

Khoirunnisa, E-mail : [nkhoirun233@gmail.com](mailto:nkhoirun233@gmail.com), Jakarta, Indonesia

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Original Article

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Khoirunnisa<sup>1</sup>, Nani Al Muin<sup>1</sup>, Caroline Lisa Setia Wati<sup>2</sup>, Lira Erwindi<sup>3</sup>

Department of Guidance and Counseling, Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Guidance and Counseling, Universitas Bina Bangsa, Indonesia authors

**Abstract.** This study examines the correlation between self-regulation and meaning of life among high school students. Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase characterized by identity exploration and emotional challenges, where self-regulation and life purpose play essential roles. Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward long-term goals, while meaning of life involves both the presence and search for purpose. This quantitative correlational research was conducted at SMA Trisoko Jakarta, involving 122 students from a population of 176, determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error. Data were collected using the Self-Regulated Learning Scale adapted from Zimmerman (1989) and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Steger (2006). The self-regulation variable was measured through indicators of metacognition, motivation, and behavior, while the meaning of life variable was assessed through the dimensions of presence of meaning and search for meaning. Both instruments were tested for validity and reliability, yielding item-total correlations above 0.30 and Cronbach's alpha values of 0.924 (self-regulation) and 0.941 (meaning of life), indicating high reliability. Data analysis followed several steps: instrument testing, prerequisite testing including normality and linearity, and hypothesis testing. Statistical analysis used Pearson's product-moment correlation. Results showed a significant positive relationship between self-regulation and meaning of life ( $r = 0.741$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a strong correlation. These findings suggest that students with higher self-regulation are more likely to experience a stronger sense of life meaning. The study underscores the importance of school-based counseling in enhancing students' self-regulation to support identity development and existential well-being.

**Keywords:** Self-Regulation; Meaning of Life; Guidance and Counseling

Corresponding author: Khoirunnisa, Email: [nkhoirun233@gmail.com](mailto:nkhoirun233@gmail.com), Jakarta, Indonesia



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## Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage of human development, marked by rapid changes in cognitive, emotional, and social functioning. During this phase, individuals begin to explore identity, values, and life purpose. These developmental tasks are closely related to mental health, academic engagement, and overall well-being (Fajri et al., 2023; Karisma et al., 2025). Global reports indicate that adolescents are increasingly vulnerable to psychological difficulties. The UNICEF (2021) survey revealed that nearly 20% of adolescents reported low motivation and unclear life goals, particularly in developing countries. More recent findings strengthen this concern. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) noted that depression and anxiety have

increased by 25% among youth after the COVID-19 pandemic, with lack of self-regulation and purpose among the contributing factors.

In Indonesia, similar trends are evident. The Ministry of Health (2022) reported that 15.5% of adolescents experience emotional and behavioral problems, while 9.8% show symptoms of depression. Furthermore, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2023) highlighted that excessive digital use and academic stress contribute significantly to identity confusion and decreased motivation among students. These findings demonstrate a pressing need to understand not only academic achievement, but also how adolescents regulate themselves and construct life meaning.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes character building, autonomy, and socio-emotional learning (Kemdikbud, 2022). Despite this shift, many schools still prioritize academic outcomes over psychological development. Students often struggle to manage competing demands academic pressure, family expectations, and digital challenges while lacking sufficient self-regulation strategies. A strong sense of life meaning could serve as a compass to help them navigate these pressures and foster resilience.

Empirical studies suggest that self-regulation plays a significant role in academic success, emotional control, and risk prevention (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2020; Panadero, 2017). Similarly, research shows that meaning in life contributes to higher well-being and lower levels of depression and anxiety among adolescents (Martínez et al., 2023; Park & Baumeister, 2019). Nevertheless, most studies focus on each construct separately, such as the impact of self-regulation on learning outcomes or the role of life meaning in mental health. There remains a lack of research examining their interrelation in shaping adolescent identity, especially within the Indonesian school context.

The Indonesian school environment, with its strong emphasis on performance and conformity, presents unique challenges for adolescent development. Poor self-regulation, particularly in the context of digital media, has been linked to relational aggression and declining academic achievement (Syahputra et al., 2024). Meanwhile, adolescents who lack a clear sense of meaning often report heightened anxiety and identity confusion. This gap highlights the importance of examining the correlation between self-regulation and meaning of life to provide practical insights for school counselors. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between self-regulation and meaning of life among high school students at SMA Trisoko Jakarta. The findings are expected to contribute to theoretical understanding of adolescent development and to strengthen guidance and counseling (BK) practices in fostering resilience, self-awareness, and purpose in students

## Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between self-regulation and meaning of life among high school students. This design was chosen to investigate the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without manipulating them. The study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory, which conceptualizes self-regulation as a multidimensional process involving metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral components (Zimmerman, 1989). Steger's Meaning in Life Theory, which comprises two core dimensions presence of meaning and search for meaning (Steger et al., 2006). These theoretical perspectives provided the foundation for the development of the research instruments, the formulation of the hypothesis, and the interpretation of the data. The Rasch model ensures instrument validity and reliability, especially in measuring latent psychological traits like learning skills and self-regulation (Syahputra et al., 2022). After ensuring the reliability and validity of the instruments, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution) to examine the tendencies of students' demographic characteristics (age, gender, and class level) as well as their scores on self-regulation and meaning of life. In addition, prerequisite tests,

including normality and linearity, were conducted to ensure the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. Finally, hypothesis testing was carried out using Pearson's product-moment correlation.

### Participants

This study was conducted at SMA Trisoko Jakarta during the 2024/2025 academic year, involving students from grades 10 and 11. The target population consisted of 176 students, from which a sample of 122 participants was selected using simple random sampling, ensuring each student had an equal probability of being included in the study. The sample size was determined to ensure sufficient statistical power for the correlational analysis.

The participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years old. The gender distribution was approximately balanced. All participants were of Indonesian ethnicity and native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia. Most came from middle socioeconomic backgrounds, as reported by school demographic data, and all were actively enrolled in formal secondary education at the time of data collection.

Students with any significant cognitive or emotional impairment that might affect the accuracy of self-report responses were excluded based on school counselor assessments. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. The study also received ethical clearance from relevant institutional authorities, and data collection followed strict protocols to protect participant confidentiality and well-being.

### Instrument

This study used two questionnaires to collect research data: the Self regulation Scale developed from Zimmerman (1989) theory, with indicators of metacognition, motivation, and behavior. The Meaning of Life developed from Steger (2006) theory, with the dimensions of presence of meaning and search for meaning.

Both questionnaires used a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4). Higher scores indicated higher levels of self-regulation and meaning in life.

The validity of the instruments was tested using item total correlation analysis, with all items exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.30. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha showed very high internal consistency: 0.924 for self-regulation and 0.941 for meaning of life. An example of a valid item with high reliability is: "I have a strong drive to complete tasks according to the learning goals I have set" ( $r = 0.790$ ) in the self-regulation scale, and "I determine steps to make my life more meaningful" ( $r = 0.741$ ) in the meaning of life scale.

### Procedures

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained formal permission from school authorities at SMA Trisoko Jakarta to conduct the study. Once approval was secured, a schedule was arranged in coordination with school staff to minimize disruption to academic activities. The research involved two measured variables: self-regulation (independent variable) and meaning of life (dependent variable). No experimental manipulation or group comparisons were conducted, as this study employed a non-experimental correlational design. All participants were selected through simple random sampling, and no grouping or treatment conditions were applied.

Data were collected in a classroom setting during regular school hours. The researcher distributed printed questionnaires directly to the selected students. Before completing the instruments, participants were given brief oral and written instructions explaining the purpose of the study and the nature of the questionnaires. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. During the data collection process, the researcher remained present in the classroom to monitor the session and provide clarification if participants had any questions regarding the items. Participants completed the questionnaires individually

and were given approximately 25–30 minutes to do so. Once finished, all completed forms were collected immediately.

Prior to participation, students were informed about the study and gave their informed consent, which was documented in line with ethical research protocols. The entire procedure was conducted with respect to ethical principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and non-coercion. All responses were reviewed for completeness before being inputted into SPSS for statistical analysis.

## Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between self-regulation and meaning of life. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20. Descriptive statistics were first conducted to calculate the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum for each variable. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests were performed to ensure the appropriateness of parametric analysis. These included tests for normality and linearity. To test the research hypothesis, the Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between self-regulation and meaning of life. This analysis method was selected due to its suitability for assessing the linear relationship between two continuous variables in a non-experimental research design.

## Results and Discussions

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine students levels of self-regulation and meaning of life. The results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics Self Regulation and Meaning of life

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Self regulation	113,24	18,49	341,82
Meaning of life	114,72	17,46	304,96

As shown in table 1, the mean score for self-regulation was 113.24 (SD = 18.49), while the mean score for meaning of life was 114.72 (SD = 17.46). These results indicate that, on average, students demonstrated moderate to high levels in both constructs. To test the prerequisite assumptions, a normality test was conducted using the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The result showed a significance value of  $p = 0.666$ , which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed table 2. Linearity was tested using ANOVA. The results are presented in table 3.

**Table 2.** Normality test results of Self regulation and Meaning of Life

	Unstandardized Residual
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	,727
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,666

As shown in table 3, the linearity test revealed a significant linear relationship ( $p = 0.000$ ), while the deviation from linearity was non-significant ( $p = 0.286$ ). This confirms that the relationship between the variables was linear. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson's product-moment correlation. The results are displayed in table 4.

**Table 3.** Linearity test results of Self regulation and Meaning of Life

			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Meaning of life * Self regulation	Between Groups	(Combined)	27206,6	47	578,863	4,419	,000
		Linearity	20245,5	1	20245,47	154,55	,000
		Deviation from Linearity	6961,1	46	151,33	1,155	,286
	Within Groups		9693,96	74	131,00		
	Total		36900,52	121			

**Table 4.** Product Moment Correlation Test Results of Self-Regulation and Meaning of Life

		Self Regulation	Meaning of life
Self regulation	Pearson Correlation	1	,741**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	122	122
Meaning of life	Pearson Correlation	,741**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	122	122

Table 4 demonstrates that the correlation coefficient was  $r = 0.741$  ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a strong and significant positive correlation between self-regulation and meaning of life. This suggests that students with higher self-regulation tend to report a stronger sense of purpose in life. To further enrich the results, visualizations were generated. Figure 1 and 2 presents a Raincloud plot of self-regulation scores by gender.

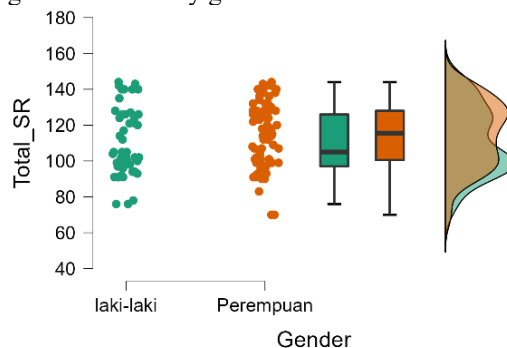
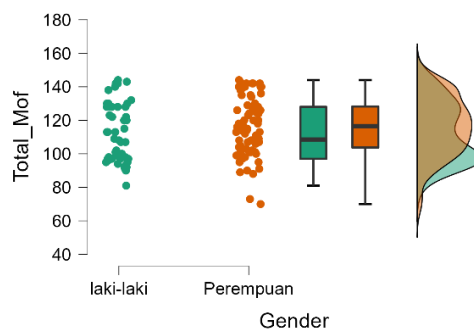
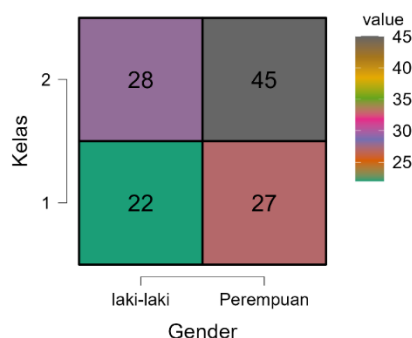
**Figure 1.** Raincloud of Self regulation by Gender**Figure 2.** Raincloud of Meaning of life by Gender

Figure 1 indicates that female students tended to score slightly higher than male students on self-regulation. As seen in Figure 2, female students also showed slightly higher scores on meaning of life compared to their male counterparts. To illustrate the demographic distribution, a heatmap was generated. Figure 3 displays the distribution of participants by gender and class level.



**Figure 3.** Heatmap of Gender and Class Distribution

Figure 3 shows that the largest group consisted of female students from Class 2 ( $n = 45$ ), followed by male students from Class 2 ( $n = 28$ ), female students from Class 1 ( $n = 27$ ), and male students from Class 1 ( $n = 22$ ). This provides an overview of the participants' demographic distribution.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant and strong positive relationship between self-regulation and meaning of life among high school students ( $r = 0.741$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that adolescents with higher self-regulation skills tend to report a stronger sense of life purpose. These results align with Zimmerman's (1989) self-regulated learning theory, which posits that individuals who effectively manage cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes are more likely to achieve meaningful goals. Similarly, the findings support Steger's (2006) framework of meaning in life, which emphasizes the presence of meaning and the search for meaning as core dimensions of well-being.

The results also confirm that students demonstrated both presence of meaning and search for meaning, consistent with Steger et al. (2006). This duality suggests that adolescents not only perceive life as meaningful but also actively seek to deepen that meaning through reflection and goal-setting. These findings are consistent with international studies (Park, 2010; Fryer & Dinsmore, 2020), which emphasize that higher self-regulation supports adolescent well-being and motivation. However, contextual factors remain influential. Lestari et al. (2017) note that family pressure, emotional climate, and opportunities for self-expression also affect adolescents' search for meaning. In Jakarta's urban context, digital exposure and academic demands amplify these challenges. Twenge & Campbell (2018) found that excessive social media use reduces life satisfaction, underscoring the need for digital self-regulation to prevent negative identity outcomes.

From an educational perspective, these findings highlight the urgency of embedding self-regulation training within school counseling programs. Practical interventions may include goal-setting workshops, reflective journaling, and self-monitoring practices. In line with Sagita et al. (2020), digital literacy and ethical online behavior should also be incorporated to support value clarification and discipline in adolescents' daily lives. Globally, the SEL framework (Casel, 2020) recognizes self-regulation as a core competency, and the Indonesian Merdeka



Curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy and character development. This study provides empirical support for both directions.

Despite the strong correlation, limitations must be acknowledged. The sample was restricted to a single urban high school, limiting generalizability. Furthermore, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce social desirability bias. Future research could benefit from qualitative methods, such as interviews or reflective journals, and explore additional variables like resilience, spirituality, or peer influence. This study provides novelty by integrating self-regulation and meaning in life within the Indonesian adolescent context, a topic rarely addressed in prior literature. Unlike studies that examined each construct separately, this research highlights their interplay and practical implications for school-based counseling. These contributions strengthen theoretical understanding while offering culturally relevant insights for educational practice.

## Conclusions

This study demonstrates that self-regulation has a significant and positive relationship with the sense of meaning in life among Indonesian high school students. Professionally, the study highlights implications for school counseling and educational practice. Counselors and educators can design interventions that cultivate goal-setting, emotional monitoring, and reflective thinking, thereby strengthening both academic outcomes and psychological well-being. Furthermore, these findings suggest that addressing self-regulation is not only a matter of improving academic performance but also a pathway to helping students cope with identity challenges and existential questions common during adolescence. Schools are therefore encouraged to implement structured guidance programs that integrate skill-building in self-regulation with activities that foster meaning-making. Future research should expand this perspective by considering additional factors such as resilience, family dynamics, and spirituality, which may further clarify how adolescents construct meaning in diverse contexts. By situating this study in the Indonesian setting, the results provide a valuable reference for both scientific inquiry and practical interventions in counseling and education.

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