

Unveiling the Psychological Pathway From Gratitude to Job Satisfaction in Working Students

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Article Information

Submitted date 13-02-2026
Revised date 05-03-2026
Accepted date 10-03-2026

Keywords:

gratitude;
job satisfaction;
part-time working students;
spiritual intelligence.

Kata kunci:

kebersyukuran;
kepuasan kerja;
mahasiswa pekerja paruh waktu;
kecerdasan spiritual.

Abstract

The phenomenon of students studying while working is increasingly common, influenced by economic factors, the desire to gain experience, and the use of free time. This study aims to examine the relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction, with spiritual intelligence as a mediating variable among part-time working students. A quantitative correlational approach with a cross-sectional design was employed, involving 368 part-time working students selected through cluster sampling across five faculties. Statistical mediation analysis was performed using PROCESS Macro Model 4, with a bootstrapping procedure of 5.000 resamples. The results of the bootstrap-based mediation analysis indicated that gratitude had a significant total effect on job satisfaction ($c = 0.622$, $SE = 0.030$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.562, 0.683]). After including spiritual intelligence as a mediator, gratitude remained a significant predictor of job satisfaction ($c' = 0.407$, $SE = 0.053$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.302, 0.511]), indicating partial mediation. Furthermore, gratitude showed a significant indirect effect on job satisfaction through spiritual intelligence ($ab = 0.215$, $BootSE = 0.061$, 95% CI [0.088, 0.325]). The proportion mediated analysis indicated that spiritual intelligence accounted for 34.5% of the total effect, suggesting that it partially mediates the relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, these findings cannot be interpreted as a causal relationship but rather reflect statistical associations among the variables within the context of the study.

Abstrak

Fenomena mahasiswa berkuliah sambil bekerja semakin umum terjadi, dipengaruhi oleh faktor ekonomi, keinginan memperoleh pengalaman, dan pemanfaatan waktu luang. Penelitian bertujuan untuk menguji hubungan antara kebersyukuran dan kepuasan kerja dengan kecerdasan spiritual sebagai mediator pada mahasiswa pekerja paruh waktu. Pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional dengan desain *cross-sectional* digunakan, melibatkan 368 mahasiswa pekerja paruh waktu melalui *cluster sampling* dari lima fakultas. Analisis mediasi statistik dilakukan menggunakan PROCESS Macro Model 4 oleh Andrew F. Hayes dengan prosedur *bootstrapping* 5.000 sampel. Hasil analisis mediasi berbasis *bootstrap* menunjukkan bahwa kebersyukuran memiliki pengaruh total yang signifikan terhadap kepuasan kerja ($c = 0,622$; $SE = 0,030$; $p < 0,001$; 95% CI [0,562; 0,683]). Setelah memasukkan kecerdasan spiritual sebagai mediator, kebersyukuran tetap menjadi prediktor yang signifikan terhadap kepuasan kerja ($c' = 0,407$; $SE = 0,053$; $p < 0,001$; 95% CI [0,302; 0,511]), yang menunjukkan adanya mediasi parsial. Selain itu, kebersyukuran juga menunjukkan pengaruh tidak langsung yang signifikan terhadap kepuasan kerja melalui kecerdasan spiritual ($ab = 0,215$; $BootSE = 0,061$; 95% CI [0,088; 0,325]). Analisis proporsi mediasi menunjukkan bahwa kecerdasan spiritual menyumbang sebesar 34,5% dari total pengaruh, yang mengindikasikan bahwa kecerdasan spiritual memediasi secara parsial hubungan antara kebersyukuran dan kepuasan kerja. Namun, karena data bersifat *cross-sectional*, temuan ini tidak dapat ditafsirkan sebagai hubungan kausal, melainkan menunjukkan pola asosiasi statistik antarvariabel dalam konteks penelitian ini.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of students studying while working is increasingly common, influenced by economic factors, the desire to gain experience, and the use of free time (Hidayat & Muliadi, 2023). This condition places students in a dual-role complexity, in which academic and work demands occur simultaneously (Rofiqoh & Priyngasari, 2025). This form of role conflict is known as work-study conflict, which leads to physical fatigue, difficulty managing time, and decreased academic performance (Andya & Sulastri, 2024).

For working students, job satisfaction is an important psychological indicator to consider. Job satisfaction not only reflects an individual's perception of their work but also relates to their performance, commitment, and job satisfaction itself (Ali & Anwar, 2021). For working students, job satisfaction plays a role in maintaining amidst academic and work demands. Conversely, low job satisfaction can exacerbate role tension.

Demographically, the data from the Statistics Surakarta Municipality (*Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Surakarta, 2025*) indicates a high level of student participation in part-time work. However, this data does not directly confirm the existence of psychological problems such as low job satisfaction. The urgency of this research lies in the psychological stress resulting from dual roles, not simply the number of working students. Theoretically, the conflict between academic and work demands influences the evaluation of the job itself. Furthermore, job satisfaction among part-time working students has rarely been studied using psychological models that incorporate emotional and meaning-making aspects.

Part-time working students were selected as the sample criteria because this group is relevant to the research focus. The 20–25 age group was chosen because it represents emerging adulthood, as proposed by Arnett (as cited in Permana & Sulastri, 2025). This is the transition to early adulthood. In Erikson's developmental stage theory, this phase is known as *intimacy vs. isolation*, where individuals strive for independence and closeness with others. Experiences in study, work, and social interactions during this period contribute to identity formation. Furthermore, students at this age have already completed their fifth semester of education.

The criteria for a minimum part-time work period of six months are based on previous research on hardiness and student engagement (Maeshade et al., 2023; Wulandari & Pratama, 2023). Firdasanti et al. (2021) also reported that many students are working for a short time to gain new experience. Jobs are classified into three categories based on their characteristics: personal businesses, direct service jobs, and digital-based jobs. Personal businesses are independent entrepreneurial activities involving the sale of various products, such as hijabs, clothing, and skincare and makeup. Direct service work includes activities that involve face-to-face interaction, such as tutoring, company administration, and sales (Kamilah & Rahman Zh, 2022). Digital-based work includes jobs that rely on online platforms, such as online content writers, online graphic designers, and online sellers (Zaini et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have shown that low job satisfaction can have negative impacts. Low job satisfaction, according to Maeshade et al. (2023), was associated with decreased academic perfor-

mance and job commitment, as well as increased burnout and turnover intention. Syahida et al. (2025) also highlighted that low compensation can decrease job satisfaction. The results of this study indicate that job satisfaction has direct benefits on the sustainability of students' roles as workers and as students.

On the other hand, global studies indicate that student workers' job satisfaction is influenced by situational factors such as the work environment, dual-role balance, and compensation (Acabo et al., 2025). However, most of this research has focused on external determinants and has not examined the internal psychological mechanisms that explain how personal characteristics, such as gratitude, can contribute to job satisfaction. In particular, the role of spiritual intelligence as a mediator in this relationship has rarely been empirically tested.

Several studies also show that gratitude is positively associated with job satisfaction. Chen et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction among kindergarten teachers in China. Similar results were also found by Laksono et al. (2023) and Dewi & Sumiati (2025), which reveal that higher levels of gratitude can increase individual job satisfaction. Therefore, this research is conceptual, meaning it explains the psychological mechanisms that underlie the formation of job satisfaction in complex situations.

Within the framework of positive psychology, gratitude is interpreted by Peterson & Seligman as an individual's tendency to recognize, feel, and appreciate the good in life, whether it comes from oneself, others, or from broader sources, such as fate, God, or life's circumstances in general. Within the framework of character strengths, gratitude is seen as a moral virtue that emphasizes feelings of joy, gratitude, and appreciation for the benefits received, thus encouraging someone to respond positively to valuable experiences in their life. In the work context, gratitude can be associated with a broader perspective on work experiences, namely not only focusing on pressure, stress, or shortcomings, but also on the value of self-development, social relationships, and contributions that provide personal meaning.

Furthermore, according to Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions, such as gratitude, broaden thinking and encourage a more constructive reinterpretation of experiences. This process builds psychological resources relevant to David King's four aspects of spiritual intelligence. First, gratitude supports critical existential thinking because individuals are more reflective in deeply interpreting life experiences. Second, gratitude facilitates the production of personal meaning, namely, the ability to generate personal meaning from daily work experiences.

Third, by increasing sensitivity to values and connectedness, gratitude strengthens transcendental consciousness, that is, awareness of dimensions beyond the self. Fourth, a stable positive emotional state contributes to the expansion of conscious states, that is, to openness to more reflective inner experiences. Gratitude not only correlates generally with spiritual intelligence but also operates through cognitive-affective mechanisms that specifically align with its four dimensions. Thus, gratitude not only produces positive emotions but also triggers cognitive expansion, forming the foundation for the existential and meaning-making capacities at the heart of spiritual intelligence.

Empirical studies show that gratitude is associated with psychological well-being (Hidayati et al., 2024; Triono et al., 2023) and that spiritual intelligence is also positively associated with job satisfaction (Bai et al., 2024; Roswandi et al., 2020). However, most studies treat these two variables as separate direct predictors, without examining whether meaning-making capacity serves as a bridging mechanism linking affective experiences to stable job evaluations, particularly in student-working populations. Thus, the research gap lies not in geographic context but in the lack of integration of psychological mechanisms between positive emotions and job evaluations.

Alternative models are also possible, such as job satisfaction being related to a stronger experience of work meaning, or all three variables being influenced by general psychological well-being. Considering these possibilities, this study does not assume a single, definitive direction of relationship but rather tests several possible relationship patterns within a single relational model.

Based on the background presented, this research examined the relationship between gratitude, spiritual intelligence, and job satisfaction using a statistical mediation model among part-time working students. This model allows for testing several possibilities: (1) full mediation, (2) partial mediation, or (3) dominance of the direct path. Given the correlational and cross-sectional nature of the study design, causal interpretations were not drawn; instead, the focus was on the pattern of associations among variables.

Based on this theoretical framework, the expected relationship is positive, but alternative models are still considered in statistical testing. The hypothesis proposed is: (1) gratitude is positively related to spiritual intelligence, (2) gratitude is positively related to job satisfaction, (3) spiritual intelligence is positively related to job satisfaction, and (4) spiritual intelligence mediates the relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction in part-time working students.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational design to test relationships among variables. Gratitude (X) is the independent variable, job satisfaction (Y) is the dependent variable, and spiritual intelligence (M) is the mediating variable. The study population was all students of Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia, class of 2019–2023 ($N = 8,661$). The university was chosen as the research location because it has a significant proportion of part-time working students distributed across various faculties, thus allowing for systematic identification of the target population. In addition, the availability of academic data and administrative access supports a proportional, controlled sampling process.

A sample of 368 respondents was obtained through proportionate stratified cluster sampling. This technique was chosen because the population of part-time working students is spread across various faculties. Faculties were used as clusters to ensure representation across academic units, while proportional stratification was used to ensure the number of respondents reflected the actual population distribution (Ramadani et al., 2025).

The criteria having been determined in this research are, among others: (1) men or women, (2) part-time working students, (3) aged 20–25 years, (4) having completed lectures at least up to semester 5, (5) undergoing part-time work with a minimum duration of six months, and (6) with personal business or direct service work or digital-based work being the type of work they are undergoing.

Instrument selection was based on the theoretical suitability of the instruments to the constructs under study. Modifications were made to limited editorial and contextual aspects to ensure relevance to part-time student workers, without changing the operational definitions or the original dimensional structure. The initial stage involved an editorial review to adjust the situational context of the items, ensuring their relevance to the dual-role experiences of working students. Next, the instrument was reviewed by four psychology experts in three stages to ensure clarity of language, contextual relevance, suitability of indicators to the construct, and representativeness of the content. Revisions were conducted iteratively until consistency of assessments was achieved across experts. Following the expert review stage, the instrument was piloted on respondents outside the primary sample to evaluate readability and internal consistency. This procedure aligns with the stages of instrument development and refinement recommended in modern psychometric literature, ensuring that the modified scale maintains adequate validity and reliability.

Due to the limited implementation of a separate pilot test, the instrument quality was evaluated on the main sample. Given that the instrument was an adaptation of a previously validated scale and was not intended to develop a new construct, this study focused on confirming its internal consistency and contextual suitability within a population of part-time working students. Content validity was assessed through expert judgment, while internal reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha to indicate internal consistency in correlational studies (Azwar, 2022).

Content validity was analysed using Aiken's V coefficient, and all items demonstrated values $\geq .88$. Items that did not meet empirical criteria were eliminated before hypothesis testing. All subsequent analyses used the final item structure that met psychometric criteria. Gratitude was measured using an instrument adapted from The Gratitude Questionnaire – Six Item Form (GQ-6) by McCullough et al. (2002), with the indicators prepared to align with the aspects developed by Fitzgerald (1998), namely a sense of appreciation, positive feelings, and expression of gratitude. The items–total correlations for twenty–seven items ranged from .602 to .964, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .989.

Spiritual intelligence is measured using the results of modifying the measuring instrument, the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) by King (2008), and is arranged according to the aspects developed by King and DeCicco (2009), namely critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental consciousness, and consciousness state expansion. The items–total correlations for twenty–seven items ranged from .368 to .955, with the Cronbach's alpha of .980. Job satisfaction was measured using an instrument adapted from the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) by Luthans and Spector (as cited in Robbins, 2008), prepared according to the aspects developed by Luthans (2011). The item–total correlations for twenty–six items ranged from .645 to .909, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .979.

Mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS Macro Model 4, developed by Hayes, with a bootstrap procedure of 5.000 resamples to estimate the confidence interval of the indirect effect (Shen et al., 2022). The data analysis process is carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 23.0 for Windows.

RESULTS

Table 1.
Characteristics of Respondents

	Classifications	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Men	141	38.3%
	Women	227	61.7%
Age (years)	20	59	16%
	21	149	40.5%
	22	125	34%
	23	30	8.2%
	24	3	.8%
	25	2	.5%
Semester	5	80	21.7%
	7	195	53%
	9	76	20.7%
	11	16	4.3%
	13	1	.3%

	Classifications	N	%
Faculty	Ushuluddin and Dakwah	80	21.7%
	Sharia	67	18.2%
	Islamic Economics and Business	95	25.8%
	Manners and Language	52	14.1%
	Islamic Education	74	20.1%
Work Tenure	6–12 months	190	51.6%
	1–2 years	125	34%
	> 2 years	53	14.4%
Type of Work	Personal business	42	11.4%
	Direct service work	271	73.6%
	Digital-based work	55	14.9%

Table 1 indicates that female students constituted the largest proportion of respondents (61.7%). The dominant age group was 21 years old (40.5%), and most were in their 7th semester (53%). The Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business contributed the highest number of respondents (25.8%), with part-time work experience of 6–12 months (51.6%), and were predominantly engaged in direct service work (73.6%).

Table 2.
Descriptive Analysis

Variable	N	M	SD
Gratitude (<i>X</i>)	368	110.62	12.027
Spiritual Intelligence (<i>M</i>)	368	106.83	13.332
Job Satisfaction (<i>Y</i>)	368	97.57	10.304

Based on Table 2, the descriptive analysis shows that gratitude has a mean of 110.62 ($SD = 12.027$), spiritual intelligence has a mean of 106.83 ($SD = 13.332$), and job satisfaction has a mean of 97.57 ($SD = 10.304$). The standard deviation indicates relatively moderate variation and does not suggest extreme deviations.

Table 3.
Classical Assumption Test

Classical Assumption Test	Results	Conclusion
Normality	.200	Normal (Sig. $p > .05$)
Linearity Job satisfaction–gratitude Job satisfaction–spiritual intelligence	.000 .000	Linear (Linearity Sig $p < .05$)
Multicollinearity	VIF = 3.166; Tolerance = .316	No multicollinearity (VIF < 10.00 & Tolerance > .10)

Classical Assumption Test	Results	Conclusion
Heteroscedasticity		No heteroscedasticity
Job satisfaction–gratitude	.692	(Sig. $p > .05$)
Job satisfaction–spiritual intelligence	.367	

The classical assumption testing results shown in Table 3 demonstrate that the data are normally distributed, with a normality test p -value of .200 ($p > .05$). Significant linear associations were observed among variables ($p < .05$). Multicollinearity was not detected, as evidenced by a VIF value of 3.166 and the tolerance value of .316. With a p -value greater than .05, the heteroscedasticity test indicates that the regression model does not exhibit heteroscedasticity. Therefore, the data met the assumptions for regression-based mediation analysis.

A bootstrap-based mediation test was conducted to assess whether spiritual intelligence serves as a linking construct in the relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction.

Table 4.
Total Effects

Path	Effect (c)	SE	p	95% Confidence Interval	
				LLCI	ULCI
G → JS	0.622	0.030	< .001	0.562	0.683

Table 4 shows that gratitude has a significant total effect on job satisfaction ($c = 0.622$, $SE = 0.030$, $p < .001$). The 95% confidence interval ranges from 0.562 to 0.683 and does not include zero, confirming that the association is statistically meaningful. This result suggests that, overall, before including spiritual intelligence as a mediating variable, gratitude shows a significant positive correlation with job satisfaction.

Table 5.
Direct Effects

Path	Effect (c')	SE	p	95% Confidence Interval	
				LLCI	ULCI
G → JS	0.407	0.053	< .001	0.302	0.511

Table 5 indicates that after spiritual intelligence was entered as a mediator, gratitude remained a statistically significant predictor of job satisfaction ($c' = 0.407$, $SE = 0.053$, $p < .001$). The 95% confidence interval ranges from 0.302 to 0.511 and does not include zero, confirming that the association is statistically meaningful. This finding indicates that gratitude independently contributes to job satisfaction even after controlling for spiritual intelligence, suggesting partial mediation.

Table 6.
Indirect Effects

Path	Effect (ab)	BootSE	95% Confidence Interval	
			BootLLCI	BootULCI
G → SI → JS	0.215	0.061	0.088	0.325

Table 6 shows that gratitude has a significant indirect effect on job satisfaction through spiritual intelligence ($ab = 0.215$, $BootSE = 0.061$). The confidence interval generated through bootstrapping (95%) spans from 0.088 to 0.325 and does not include zero, suggesting a significant indirect association among the variables. As the direct effect remains significant after including the mediator, the results support a model of partial mediation.

Table 7.
Standardized Indirect Effect

Path	Effect (β)	Interpretation
G → SI → JS	0.251	Moderate Effect

Table 7 shows that the standardized indirect effect of gratitude on job satisfaction through spiritual intelligence is $\beta = 0.251$. This indicates that the indirect pathway accounts for a considerable portion of the observed relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction.

Table 8.
Proportion Mediated

Indirect Effect (ab)	Total Effect	Proportion Mediated (PM)
0.215	0.622	34.5%

Table 8 shows that 34.5% of the total effect is mediated by spiritual intelligence. This means that approximately one-third of the effect of gratitude on job satisfaction operates through spiritual intelligence, while the remaining effect occurs through direct pathways or other unexamined mechanisms.

Overall, these results suggest that spiritual intelligence partially mediates the relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction. Gratitude remains directly associated with job satisfaction; however, a meaningful part of this relationship operates through spiritual intelligence. This outcome substantiates the hypothesized psychological link between gratitude and job satisfaction among part-time working students.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates a relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction in part-time working students, with spiritual intelligence serving as a mediating variable. The tested model provides a moderate to substantial contribution to explaining variation in job satisfaction, and the indirect effect is in the medium category. Although statistically significant, the magnitude of this effect indicates that job satisfaction is not fully explained by these two psychological variables, suggesting that other contextual factors play a role. Practically, these findings indicate that strengthening gratitude and spiritual intelligence can be supportive factors in job satisfaction, but not the sole determinant.

The results of this study are consistent with prior empirical studies on the relationship between gratitude and spiritual intelligence. Internalization of gratitude has been reported to be associated with the development of value orientation, responsibility, and the quality of social relationships (Madali, 2024). The practice of gratitude reflection in students is also associated with strengthening spiritual intelligence (Damayanti et al., 2024). Research on college students in the United States supports this finding, that the practice of gratitude is understood as a form of spirituality that deepens a sense of connectedness and encourages reflection on conflict as an opportunity for growth (Fuertes, 2024). The findings support this study's results that gratitude is related to the capacity for deeper meaning.

The relationship between these two psychological variables and job satisfaction is also consistent with previous literature. Chen et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between gratitude and job

satisfaction of kindergarten teachers in China. Harty et al. (2025) found that structured gratitude dialogues in the workplace are associated with increased employee job satisfaction. Similar results were also reported by Laksono et al. (2023) and Dewi & Sumiati (2025), who found that higher gratitude is associated with higher job satisfaction.

Likewise, spiritual intelligence is reported to be positively related to job satisfaction. Bai et al. (2024) found that increasing spiritual intelligence was a major factor in female employees' job satisfaction. Idris and Osman (2024) and Roswandi et al. (2020) also found that spiritual intelligence is positively related to teacher job satisfaction. By integrating these findings into a single model, this study extends the literature by showing that the relationship between gratitude and job satisfaction is also linked to an individual's capacity to make meaning of their work experiences.

Several possible alternative explanations need to be considered in understanding the relationships between these variables. The direction of the relationships cannot be determined because the variables were measured at a single point in time. Alternative models are possible, for example, higher job satisfaction being associated with increased experiences of work meaning related to spiritual intelligence, or individuals with higher levels of general psychological well-being tending to report higher scores on all three variables simultaneously. Furthermore, the use of a self-report instrument opens up the possibility of common method bias. Therefore, the mediation found in this study is statistical in nature and cannot be interpreted as a definitive sequence of psychological processes. Longitudinal or experimental research is needed to test the stability and direction of these relationships more conclusively.

On the other hand, discussions of spiritual intelligence also need to be placed within the context of ongoing conceptual debates. Although widely used in organizational research, its status as a distinct form of intelligence remains contested. Some scholars view it as the ability to make sense of life experiences, rather than as a cognitive ability as classically understood. This study does not aim to confirm this conceptual position, but rather to demonstrate that this construct correlates with gratitude and job satisfaction in a sample of part-time working college students.

Based on these findings, several implications can be considered, and opportunities for further research arise. Strengthening gratitude and reflection on meaning can be explored as a means of supporting the well-being of working-class students, although their effectiveness still requires further experimental testing. Future research is recommended to use a longitudinal design, incorporate multi-informant data sources, and consider contextual factors to more comprehensively understand the dynamics of relationships among variables.

CONCLUSION

The overall results of this study support the hypothesis that gratitude is positively related to spiritual intelligence and job satisfaction and suggest that spiritual intelligence partially mediates this relationship. The tested model makes a significant contribution to explaining variations in job satisfaction, although it does not fully account for the factors that influence it. These findings confirm the relevance of psychological resources in understanding job satisfaction among part-time student workers, while acknowledging the limitations of correlational designs and self-report measures. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal or experimental designs and to explore additional psychological mediators, such as work-study conflict, psychological capital, and organizational support, to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying student job satisfaction.

Acknowledgements. This study was conducted without financial support from external funding sources. The authors would like to extend their gratitude to the university for institutional support and to the respondents who participated in this study for their valuable contributions.

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