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THE INFLUENCE OF INCOME, UNEMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY ON HAPPINESS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract
This study aims to find out the extent to which economic, social and political factors affect the level of happiness of people in Indonesia. In this study, economic factors are represented by GDP and unemployment rates, social factors are represented by average school age and political factors are represented by democracy levels. Using panel data from 34 provinces in 2014, 2017, and 2021, using a Fixed Effect Model (FEM) approach. The results of the analysis showed that the variables of GDP and unemployment rate had a significant negative relationship with the happiness index. On the other hand, the average length of school shows a negative positive impact. Meanwhile, the level of democracy does not show a statistically significant influence. This model has an R-squared value of 0.740 which indicates that almost 74% of the variation in the happiness index can be explained by the variables in the model. These findings emphasize the importance of inclusive economic growth, reducing the unemployment rate, and equitable access to education in an effort to improve the subjective welfare of people in Indonesia.

Keywords: Happiness, GDP, Unemployment, School Time, Democracy

1. Introduction

Currently, happiness is a concept that is widely considered in economic and political studies. Happiness has become one of the important measures in evaluating the quality of a country's development. Along with the development of the human development paradigm, traditional indicators such as economic growth are no longer considered sufficient to present welfare as a whole. In response, many countries have begun to use subjective measures of well-being, one of which is the happiness index, into the framework of public policy. Economics no longer only focuses on monetary aspects but also involves the interaction of various sciences such as psychology, sociology, and even mathematics and computer science. Welfare measurement in development is no longer limited to economic indicators only. In recent decades, the focus of global development has shifted towards a more comprehensive approach that encompasses psychological, social and political dimensions.

Macroeconomically, the goal of development is to improve the welfare of the community as a whole. Welfare includes improving the quality of life, as well as the equitable distribution of income and opportunities. In Indonesia, this approach is reflected in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), where improving the quality of life of the community is the main target of national development. The government emphasized that economic growth must be balanced with improving the quality of education, creating jobs, and strengthening governance. This is also in line with the pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the 3rd goal (welfare and health), the 4th goal (Quality education) and the 8th (decent work and economic growth) which are part of the national sustainable development strategy. In addition,

efforts to achieve community welfare are also an integral part of the state's goals, as mandated in the fourth paragraph of the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, which is to protect the entire Indonesian nation and all Indonesian bloodshed, promote general welfare, and educate the nation's life.

The Word Happiness Report 2025 puts Indonesia in 83rd place out of 143 countries with a happiness score of 5.57. Although this figure is slightly higher than the global average of 5.56, Indonesia still lags behind neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore ranked 34th, Vietnam 54th, Philippines 53rd, Thailand 58th and Malaysia 59th. This lag raises important questions about the determinant factors that affect the level of happiness in Indonesia, as well as how strong the contribution of economic, social, and political indicators to the perception of happiness is. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding the determinants of happiness empirically so that the policies formulated are not only oriented towards economic growth but also on improving the quality of life of the community. This research aims to make an academic and practical contribution to the formulation of national development strategies, especially in the context of improving people's welfare. In addition, this study is expected to be able to add to the literature that discusses the direct relationship between macro indicators and happiness levels at the regional level.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Foundation of Subjective Well-Being and Basic Needs

The main foundation of this research comes from Subjective Well-Being (Ed Diener, 1984) which views happiness as the result of an individual's subjective assessment of their lives, both emotionally and rationally. In the context of economics, the Basic Needs Theory developed by Abraham Maslow (1943) emphasizes that the fulfillment of basic needs is the main foundation for achieving life satisfaction. In this case, GDP per capita reflects the ability of the community to meet these needs.

2.2. The Complex Role of Income and the Easterlin Paradox

Individuals with higher incomes are more likely to feel happy compared to those with lower incomes (Indrayani & Mulyani, 2022). The results of the research from Adila et. al (2024) also shows that the variable per capita income has a positive and significant effect on the happiness index. Emerson Luis Lemos Marinho (2015) in his research said that income has a positive effect on happiness but is not the only factor. Meanwhile, according to Suparta & Malia (2020), per capita income has a significant and negative effect on the Happiness Index. And after crossing a certain threshold, the increase in income no longer significantly increases happiness (Siregar et al., 2018). The results of research from Randiko (2024) also show that GDP per capita has no effect on the Happiness Index. The Easterlin Paradox (Richard Easterlin, 1974) shows that after a certain point, an increase in income does not necessarily increase happiness. This means that non-economic factors also have a big role in influencing the subjective welfare of the community.

2.3. Unemployment and Social Uncertainty Theory

According to the Social Uncertainty Theory put forward by Dolan and Layard, unemployment can trigger psychological stress, feelings of insecurity, and a decrease in purchasing power, which ultimately has an impact on declining happiness levels. Several studies using ASEAN-5 panel data show that an increase in the unemployment rate tends to reduce the level of happiness in society (Saputri, 2023). The Open Unemployment Rate

(TPT) is known to have a negative impact on the level of happiness in Indonesia. However, in the study of Rositawati & Budiantara (2019), the effect of unemployment on happiness showed a positive relationship, but statistically not significant. Furthermore, the results of Randiko's research (2024) also indicate that the Open Unemployment Rate does not have a significant influence on the happiness index.

2.4. Education as Human Capital Investment

Meanwhile, Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) emphasizes that education is a long-term investment that can improve individual adaptability, get a job, and live a quality life. In this study, the average length of school was used as an indicator to represent the level of education of the community. Some studies show that education has a significant influence on happiness levels; the higher a person's level of education, the higher the level of happiness tends to be (Michalos, 2007; Katsoulas, 2012; Baumeister, 2017; Noddings, 2008). Educated individuals tend to be more optimistic, able to manage their lives well, and have better access to jobs than those with low education.

2.5. Political Legitimacy and The Democracy Index

The political aspect is also an important part of the happiness level analysis. Political Legitimacy Theory (David Easton, 1953) states that the legitimacy of government reflected in democracy, public participation, and accountability affects public trust and satisfaction with institutions. The Democracy Index (IDI) in this context is an indicator of the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Political factors such as the level of democracy also play a significant role in determining people's happiness (Suparta & Malia (2020). Previous studies have also shown that countries with higher levels of democracy tend to have happier citizens, as democracy is often associated with personal freedom, security, and political stability (Helliwell et al., 2019).

2.6. The Role of Government in Welfare Creation

Furthermore, the role of the state in creating community welfare is explained through two main approaches. First, Government Intervention Theory (John Maynard Keynes, 1936) emphasizes that the government has an active responsibility in managing the economy through fiscal policies and government spending. Second, the Theory of Public Finance (Richard Musgrave, 1959) divides the role of government into three functions, allocation, distribution and stabilization. Finally, the approach of Amartya Sen (1999) in Development as Freedom emphasizes the importance of the role of the government in expanding individual freedom and capabilities as the core of human development. Freedom to live a healthy life, get an education, and participate in social life are important pillars to build a Happy Society.

2.7 Operational Definition

Table 1. Literature Review

No.	Name and Year	Variables studied	Research Methods	Research results
1	Hanaa Abdelaty & Nedra Nouredeen (2018)	Happiness, GDP per capita, social factors (health, education, unemployment),	A five-point Likert survey; Descriptive Analysis and Cronbach's Alpha	Social factors are the main determinants of happiness that affect economic

No.	Name and Year	Variables studied	Research Methods	Research results
		economic factors, political factors		development in Jazan
2	Immawa Azhar Ben Atasoge (2021)	Dependent Variables: Happiness Index (IK)Independent Variables: GDP per capita (GDP), Average School Length (RLS), Life Expectancy (AHH), Poverty (PRV), Gini Index (GNI), Zakat, Infaq, Shodaqoh (ZIS), Indonesian Democracy Index (IDI)	Descriptive quantitative data panel (34 provinces, 2014 & 2017) Regression Data Panel (Fixed Effect Model)	Significant Positive: Education, (RLS), Health (AHH), ZISignify Negative: Gini Index (GNI)Insignificant: GDP, Poverty, Democracy Index
3	Scarlett Robinson (2022)	Happiness Index, Gini Ratio, unemployment rate, HDI, economic growth	Regression data panel (fixed effect model), descriptive analysis	Gini ratios, the number of poor people, and unemployment have a negative influence, while HDI, per capita expenditure, and economic growth have a positive effect on the happiness index
4	Adila Dhiya Hanifa, Shavera Sofiana Malia, Amin Pujiati (2024)	Dependent Variables: Happiness Index (IK)Independent Variables: Per capita income (logGDP), Unemployment (UNMP), Social Support (SOS), Government Expenditure (GOV)	Quantitative Regression Data Panel Fixed Effect Model (FEM)	Per capita income: positive significant Unemployment: negative insignificant Social Support: positive significant Government Expenditure: positive significant.
5	Nailatun Kurniawati & Adi Cilik Pierewan (2020)	Dependent: Women's happiness Independent: Income, Education Age, Religiosity	IFLS V data (2014–2015) Multiple linear regression	Income, education, religiosity: significant positive Age: significant negative

No.	Name and Year	Variables studied	Research Methods	Research results
6	Ruut Veenhoven (2014)	GDP, Happiness	Time-series Analysis	Positive correlation between GDP growth and happiness in various countries.
7	Emerson Luis Lemos Marinho (2015)	Happiness, Income	Econometric Analysis	Income has a positive effect on happiness but is not the only factor.

3. Methods

This study applies a descriptive quantitative approach using panel data regression analysis as an analysis method. The scope of the research covers 34 provinces in Indonesia. The sample selection was carried out purposively by considering the availability of complete data in 2014, 2017, and 2021. The total number of panel observation units analyzed was 102, which came from observations in the three time periods. This research data is secondary data obtained from the official publication of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS). Data processing and analysis is carried out using EViews software version 12

3.1 Operational Definition

Table 2. Operational Definition

No.	Variable	Definition and Size	Symbol	Unit	Source
1	Happiness Index	The Happiness Index as a measure of development that is subjective is offered to see people's perceptions, about what they feel in living their daily lives	IK	Index	Central Statistics Agency (BPS)
2	GDP Per Capita	GDP per capita (Gross Regional Domestic Product per capita) is the value of the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GDP) of an area divided by the total population of that region	GDP	Rupiah	Central Statistics Agency (BPS)
3	Open Unemployment Rate	The Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) is the percentage of the number of unemployed to the number of labor force in a region or country.	IP	Percent	Central Statistics Agency (BPS)

No.	Variable	Definition and Size	Symbol	Unit	Source
4	Average School Length	Average length of school is a number that describes the number of years of study completed by a population aged 15 and over in formal education	RLS	Year	Central Statistics Agency (BPS)
5	Democracy Index	Indonesian Democracy (IDI) is a measuring tool used to measure the level of development of democracy in Indonesia. IDI is calculated based on several aspects such as freedom, equality, and capacity of democratic institutions.	IDI	Index	Central Statistics Agency (BPS)

4. Results And Discussion

4.1 Model Selection Test

Table 3. Results of Chow and Hausman Tests

Test Type	Statistic Details	D.F.	Prob.	Decision
Chow Test	Cross-section F = 3.082580 Cross-section Chi-square = 97.047657	(33,64) 33	0.0001 0.0000	FEM preferred over CEM ($p < 0.05$)
Hausman Test	Chi-Square Statistic = 43.333347	4	0.0000	FEM preferred over REM ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Data Processing Results EViews 12, 2025

As shown in Table 3, the Chow Test produces probability values of 0.0001 (Cross-section F) and 0.0000 (Cross-section Chi-square), both of which are below the 0.05 significance level. This result indicates that the Fixed Effect Model (FEM) is more appropriate than the Common Effect Model (CEM). Furthermore, the Hausman Test yields a Chi-Square statistic of 43.333347 with a p-value of 0.0000, confirming that FEM is also preferred over the Random Effect Model (REM). These results imply that individual heterogeneity across cross-sectional units significantly affects the dependent variable, validating the use of the FEM approach for panel data estimation in this study. By accounting for these unobserved individual effects, the FEM provides unbiased and consistent estimators, thereby improving the reliability of the analysis.

4.2 Classic Assumption Test

Table 4. Results of Classical Assumption Tests

Test Type	Criterion / Threshold	Result	Conclusion
Multicollinearity	Correlation between IVs < 0.8	All correlations < 0.8	No multicollinearity detected
Heteroscedasticity	p-value > 0.05	All independent variables p-value > 0.05	No heteroscedasticity detected
Autocorrelation	Durbin-Watson ≈ 2	DW = 2.659	No autocorrelation detected

Source: Data Processing Results EViews 12, 2025

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Classical assumption testing is performed to ensure that the regression model meets the feasibility requirements of the analysis. These tests include testing for multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation. The results of the multicollinearity test showed that the correlation between independent variables was below the 0.8 threshold, so it can be concluded that the model did not experience multicollinearity problems. Furthermore, the results of the heteroscedasticity test showed that the entire probability value of the independent variable exceeded 0.05, so that no indication of heteroscedasticity was found in the model. Meanwhile, the Durbin-Watson value obtained was 2.659, close to 2, so it can be concluded that this regression model is free of autocorrelation.

4.3 Regression Results

Table 5. Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-101.7307	30.92922	-3.289146	0.0016
LN_PDRB	8.648197	1.904357	4.541269	0.0000
IP	-0.439027	0.170236	-2.578927	0.0122
RLS	2.125717	0.418828	5.075394	0.0000
IDI	0.087283	0.046014	1.896870	0.0624
Effects Specification				
Cross-section fixed (dummy variables)				
Root MSE	1.219636	R-squared		0.740567
Mean dependent var	70.85147	Adjusted R-squared		0.590583
S.D. dependent var	2.406342	S.E. of regression		1.539715
Akaike info criterion	3.980080	Sum squared resid		151.7263
Schwarz criterion	4.958011	Log likelihood		-164.9841
Hannan-Quinn crister.	4.376078	F-statistic		4.937625
Durbin-Watson stat	2.658486	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Source: Data Processing Results EViews 12, 2025

Based on the results of data processing in table 5, the following equation model is obtained:

$$IKit = -107.7307 + 8.648197\ LNGPDRB - 0.439027\ IP\ it + 2.125717\ RLS\ it + 0.087283\ IDI\ it + \mu it$$

4.4 T test

Table 6.T test

Independent Variables	Bound Variables			
	T-Statistics	T-Table	Probability	Conclusion
LN_PDRB	4.541269	1.983971519	0.0000	Influential
IP	-2.578927	1.983971519	0.0122	Influential
RLS	5.075394	1.983971519	0.0000	Influential
IDI	1.896870	1.983971519	0.0624	Has no effect

Source: Data Processing Results EViews 13, 2025

Based on the results of the t-test in table 4.4, it can be seen that of the four independent variables used in this study, there are 3 variables that significantly affect the happiness index in Indonesia, namely GDP, IP, and RLS. And one variable did not show a significant influence, namely the IDI variable.

4.5 Test F

Table 7. Test F

df1	df2	a	F-Table	F-stat	Probability	Conclusion
4	102	0.05	2.69742322	4.937625	0.000000	Influential

Source: Data Processing Results EViews 13, 2025

The F test is performed to find out whether all independent variables simultaneously have a significant effect on the dependent variables. Based on the results of the F test shown in Table 4.5, a probability value of 0.05 was obtained. Thus, it can be concluded that all independent variables consisting of GDP, IP, RLS, and IDI together have a significant influence on the happiness index of people in Indonesia.

4.6 Coefficient of Determination

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
R^2	0.7426	74.26% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the model.
Unexplained	0.2594	25.94% of the variation is explained by factors outside the model.

Source: Data Processing Results EViews 13, 2025

The coefficient of determination represents the proportion of variation in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variable in the model. The value of the determination coefficient (R^2) obtained was 0.742617. These findings show that about 74% of the variation in the happiness index can be explained by the independent variables analyzed in the study. While the rest, which is 25.94%, is influenced by other factors outside the model that were not included in the analysis.

4.7 Discussion

4.7.1 The Effect of Gross Regional Domestic Product (GDP) Per Capita on the Happiness Index

The results of the estimation show that the LN_PDRB variable has a coefficient of 8.648197 with a very high level of significance (p-value = 0.0000). This indicates that the increase in GDP per capita significantly contributes positively to the increase in the happiness index. In other words, for every increase in one unit of GDP logarithm, the happiness index tends to increase by 8.65 points. These findings are in line with subjective welfare theory which states that income levels have an important role in shaping an individual's perception of quality of life. These results are also supported by the results of research from Adila et. al (2024) also shows that the variable per capita income has a positive and significant effect on the happiness index. Individuals with higher incomes are more likely to feel happy compared to those with lower incomes (Indrayani & Mulyani, 2022). Emerson Luis Lemos Marinho (2015) in his research also said that income has a positive effect on happiness.

4.7.2 The Effect of the Unemployment Rate (IP) on the Happiness Index

The IP variable (Unemployment Index) shows a coefficient of -0.439027 with a p value of 0.0122. These results show that the unemployment rate has a negative and significant effect on the happiness index. Thus, every increase in the unemployment rate by one unit will lower the happiness index by 0.44 points. This decline reflects that poor employment conditions lower socio-economic stability, increase income uncertainty, and

cause overall life dissatisfaction**.** These results are supported by a study that analyzed ASEAN-5 panel data, finding that unemployment has a negative and significant influence on the happiness index. This means that the increase in the unemployment rate tends to reduce people's happiness (Saputri 2023). And in line with the theory of social uncertainty which states that conditions such as unemployment can cause psychological distress, loss of security, and decreased self-esteem which all contribute to low levels of happiness.

4.7.3 Effect of Average School Age on Happiness Index

The RLS variable (Average length of schooling) shows a coefficient of 2.125717 with a very high level of significance (p-value = 0.0000). This shows that the increase in average length of education contributes positively to the increase in the happiness index. Each addition of one year of average education can increase the happiness index by 2.13 points. These findings are in line with the view that education not only improves economic capabilities, but also broadens horizons, increases social engagement, and improves the quality of life in general. Alex C. Micholas (2007) also supports this result by stating that education has a significant effect on happiness, where the higher a person's level of education, the higher the level of happiness. Similar findings were presented by Tom Katsouleas (2012), who stated that individuals with higher levels of education tend to have greater levels of happiness compared to those with lower education.

4.7.4 The Effect of the Democracy Index on the Happiness Index

The IDI variable (democracy index) has a coefficient of 0.087283 with a p-value of 0.0624. Although statistically it is slightly above the 5% significance threshold, it shows a tendency that the quality of democracy has a positive effect on the happiness index. A well-functioning democracy can create political stability, expand public participation, increase government accountability, and provide a sense of security for citizens in expressing their civil rights, which in turn contributes to increased happiness. Previous studies have also shown that countries with higher levels of democracy tend to have happier citizens, as democracy is often associated with personal freedom, security, and political stability (Helliwell et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the variables of Gross Regional Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, unemployment rate, average length of schooling, and democracy index together affect the level of happiness in Indonesia. Increasing regional income has been proven to significantly increase people's happiness. Conversely, high unemployment rates significantly lower happiness levels, underscoring the importance of creating productive jobs. Education plays an important role in improving subjective well-being through individual capacity building, social participation, and economic opportunities. In addition, good democratic quality contributes positively to happiness by creating political stability, expanding public participation, increasing government accountability, and ensuring people's civil liberties.

The study reinforces previous findings that countries with higher levels of democracy tend to have happier citizens, as democracy is closely related to personal freedom, security, and political stability. Therefore, development oriented towards improving people's welfare not only needs to focus on economic aspects, but also must pay attention to improving the quality of education, reducing unemployment, and strengthening democratic institutions.

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