

Measuring Sense of Purpose among University Students

By

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Abstract

Sense of purpose is a stable and generalizable intention to accomplish something meaningful to oneself while at the same time leading to a fruitful engagement with some aspects of the world beyond oneself, i.e. an individual's determination to do something that he or she seeks to achieve to benefit himself or herself and others. The current research was aimed at measuring the sense of purpose among university students and identifying differences in the sense of purpose according to sex variables (male-female) and specialization (scientific-human). In the theoretical context, Damon's theory (Damon,2003) was addressed, which is the theory against which a tool was prepared to measure the sense of purpose. The apparent validity and discriminatory power have been extracted, besides, finding the relationship of the items' score with the total sum and using the method of the relationship of the field to the field and the field to the total score, and the construction validity was extracted through exploratory factor analysis, and the reliability coefficient was reached by the re-test method (0.75), and by the Cronbach's alpha method (0.73). The results showed that the research sample has a sense of purpose, there are no statistically significant differences according to the sex variable (male-female), and there are statistically significant differences according to the specialization variable (scientific-human) in favor of human, there is no significant interaction between the variables (gender and specialization). Thus, according to the results of the current research, the researcher came up with several recommendations and suggestions.

Chapter one

First: The research problem

The purpose is the focus behind the individual self that involves making a meaningful difference in the world that results in many personal and social benefits, and people find this purpose through the care of their families and the services provided to them by society (Bronk & Damon, 2021.p.114). The sense of purpose in life is a basic human motivation that does not stop during difficult periods of life. Thus, the failure of a person to achieve his purpose will lead to the emergence of a wide range of health and mental problems and psychological crises, which lead to maladaptation, lack of purpose, and widening value gaps in life (Gabrielsen, et al., 2012, p.1054). Based on the foregoing, the problem of research is reflected in the answer to the question (Do university students have a sense of purpose?)

Second: the research importance

The purpose of each person's life is the essence of human existence and is expressed through practices such as selecting him for a short-term mission or identifying a long-term

purpose, which is a difficult task and must be treated as the fundamental purpose in his life to achieve what he wants to reach his goal (Ventegodt, et al., 2003, p.1278).

On the subject of identity, the Brunk study (Bronk,2011) found that the creation of a strong and meaningful purpose in life contributes to the formation of a healthy identity (Bronk, 2011, p.36). Turning towards demographic variables, the study of Molasso (2006) on university students showed that males have a lower sense of purpose in life compared to females (Molasso, 2006, p.4). In the area of public health, Alimujiang, et al., 2019 study found that a high sense of purpose was associated with a lower mortality rate, because meaningful life has health benefits through a person's understanding of biological mechanisms that, if ignored, can affect their healthy lives (Alimujiang, et al., 2019, p.1). In the field of personality, the study by (Dewitz, et al., 2009) found a significant correlation between the beliefs of self-efficacy and the sense of purpose in life among university students (Dewitz, et al., 2009, p.19). In the field of mental health, the Shek 1993 study of university students concluded that individuals who have a sense of purpose are more mentally and psychologically healthy than their peers who do not have a sense of purpose (Shek.1993.p.35).

One of the main pillars that contribute to the development of society and that lies with society's leadership in the future is the effective and productive energy repository. Therefore, attention must be paid to them and to develop constructive and positive plans and studies for a better future, which requires helping them and empowering them to have a sense of purpose in their lives to face and overcome future problems and obstacles, achieve happiness and well-being, and form a healthy identity that has a positive impact in society.

Third: Research Objectives

The current research aims at the following

1. Measuring the sense of purpose among university students.
2. Differences in the sense of purpose are defined according to sex variables (male-female) and specialization (scientific-human).

Fourth: the research limit

The current research is limited to the students of the University of Baghdad from the morning preliminary studies and for the two specializations (scientific and human) for both sexes (males, and females) for the academic year 202-2022.

Fifth: Terminology identification

The sense of purpose has been defined by several researchers, including:

1. (Frankl, 1982): The individual's ability to sense his values and purpose by making his life worthy of living, and it occurs by satisfying his primary motive represented by the desire for meaning (Frank, 1985, p.131).
2. (Damon, et al., 2003): It is a stable and generalizable intention to accomplish something meaningful to the self and at the same time leads to a fruitful engagement with some aspect of the world outside the self (Damon, et al., 2003, p.121).

The researcher adopted Damon's definition (Damon, 2003) as it is consistent with the objectives of the current research, and the owner of the adopted theory.

Operational definition: It is the total score that the respondent obtains after answering the items on the Sense of Purpose Scale prepared for this purpose.

Chapter Two - Theoretical Framework

First – Introduction

The purpose was mentioned in many of the world's great religions and philosophies. The concept of purpose arises through the search for purpose in life and the pursuit that connects people of all historical epochs, social and cultural backgrounds, economic conditions, and geographic conditions. The purpose is a timeless and universal feature of the human experience (Bronk, 2014, p.6). The purpose was first noted in the psychology literature when Viktor Frankl (1959) adopted Kierkegaard's idea of the will to meaning for psychotherapy arguing that meaning or purpose in life is the intrinsic human motivation. The purpose is to achieve the highest level at which one works in search of meaning, also, organizes, plans, and directs behavior, and gives forward impetus to development, driven by the desire to contribute to something greater than or beyond the self. This drive is rooted in the same emotional, cognitive, and identity-forming processes (Malin, et al., 2015, p.109).

Second: Terminological distinction of purpose from other terms

1. Purpose and goal: The purpose and the goal are not synonymous, the goal is what the individual seeks to achieve, the goals are the basis of human life, they are the end at which the continuous behavior stands, which satisfies the motivation of the individual and to him, the behavior is directed, and it is usually an external thing (Younis, 2007, p. 22). As for the purpose, it is a broad motivational component, and the purpose does not require the achievement of a specific result, but rather motivates the person to be goal-oriented, and therefore goals are central and produced by purpose (Mcknight and Kashdan, 2009, p.243).
2. Purpose and meaning in life: Purpose is a person's pursuit and passion for a goal worthwhile and compatible with his inner contexts (Bronk & Damon, 2021.p.114), which is the true self that refers to each person's potential that can be achieved and reached to achievement (Waterman, 1990, p.40). The meaning in life, according to Frankl, is the individual's ability to feel the value of his life by making it worth living after overcoming difficulties and challenges (Steger, et al., 2006, p.80).

Third - William Damon Theory, 2003

In Damon's view, the purpose is a universal concept, but its expression varies from one culture to another in terms of authenticity and literature. Some cultures emphasize the independent choices of individuals in choosing their purpose, while others depend on the ultimate imperative they determine for individuals for their purpose (Damon, 2003, p.48).

It is Damon's definition of a sense of purpose as (a stable, generalized intention to accomplish something simultaneously that is meaningful to the self and the world beyond self). The following points can be extracted:

1. The purpose is an individual's future-oriented intent and ambition, that is, what the individual hopes to achieve.
2. The purpose is the present activity directed towards (the fulfillment of the intention).
3. The purpose represents the individual's motive for his choice of goal-oriented behavior (Damon, et al., 2003, p.121).

Damon believes that a sense of purpose is an essential thing in an individual's life because it contributes to the development of his personality to be able to overcome obstacles

and difficulties that stand in his way (Kosine, et al., 2008, p.134). He also stressed that a sense of purpose is key to achieving the goals that the positive psychology movement envisions, such as true happiness, flow, and creativity (Damon, et al., 2003, p.120).

Damon based on what Frankel (1946-1991) brought that the search for meaning in life is the main driving force in human beings. Gaining investigations of purpose in life leads to an understanding of how people achieve meaningful goals (Arantes & Pinheiro, 2021, p.2).

Damon suggested that parents could help their children find their purpose in life by asking survey questions about a particular path, forcing the child to consider determining the importance of choosing a particular path, for example, to be a doctor to help others (Hill, et al., 2018.p.146). Damon viewed youth as a precarious period, with young people having several problems that must be resolved before they can do serious harm to themselves or others. This has led to the introduction of a new approach to youth development, and this approach envisions young people as resources and not as problems of society (Damon,2004,15-17). Damon emphasized that a person who searches for his purpose in life must search strong for good because practicing the wrong purpose can be destructive (Damon, 2003, p.53). He also believes that purpose plays a positive role in self-development, which is a characteristic that every young person has and can be explored (Damon, et al., 2003, p.124).

Chapter three

First - the research community

The current research community consists of college students at Baghdad University for the initial morning study in scientific and humanitarian disciplines in (2020-2021), and their number reached (61,481).

Second - The research sample

The researcher chose his research sample on the stratified random method according to the variable of gender and specialization, and Table (1) illustrates this.

Table (1) *The research sample is distributed according to specialization, gender, and educational levels*

school grade		First		Second		Third		Fourth		total
Gender	Major	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	
College	engineering	13	12	12	13	13	12	12	13	100
	Science	12	13	13	12	12	13	13	12	100
	Languages	13	12	12	13	13	12	12	13	100
	Media	12	13	13	12	12	13	13	12	100
	Total	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	400

Third - the search tool

To achieve the objectives of the current research, the researcher built a tool to measure the sense of purpose according to the theory adopted by the psychologist Damon (Damon, 2003), and at the same time suits the Iraqi environment, by relying on some studies and literature related to the subject. The researcher has followed the following steps in building the scale

1. Determining the sense of purpose variable: in explaining the sense of purpose, the researcher relied on the adopted definition of Damon's theory (Damon, 2003).

2. Determining the domains of the Sense of Purpose Scale: The literature and previous studies and their findings have been examined by relying on Damon's theory of a sense of purpose, as (33) items were prepared to cover three areas:
 - a. Awareness of purpose includes (11) items
 - b. Awakening for a purpose includes (11) items
 - c. The altruistic purpose includes (11) items
3. Items drafting: In collecting and formulating the items of the Sense of Purpose scale, the researcher relied on reviewing some relevant scales and benefiting from some of their items, as well as the contents of the adopted theory.
4. Response alternatives and scale correction: The researcher relied on the Likert method in constructing the sense of purpose scale, and five alternatives were developed to estimate the response, which is (strongly agree, agree, hesitant, disagree, and strongly disagree), which are given when correcting scores (1,2,3,4, 5) for the positive items, as for the negative items, it is given (5,4,3,2,1) upon correction.
5. Prepare Scale Instructions: The researcher sought to make the scale's instructions simplified and accurate, as he asked the respondent to place the cursor on one of the five alternatives to the scale's items and answer them honestly and objectively.
6. Items Validity: The researcher verified the validity of the (33) items of the Sense of Purpose scale, by presenting them to a group of arbitrators with expertise in the field of psychology to express their observations and opinions about the validity of the scale and response alternatives, taking into account the linguistic modifications that they suggested. The researcher adopted the percentage of agreement (80%) or higher as a criterion for accepting the item. The arbitrators' approval obtained the validity of (30) items, and three items were excluded from the scale.
7. Items Analysis
 - a. The method of the two extreme groups: Psychological scales require calculating the Discrimination Power of its items. The purpose of this process is to exclude items that do not distinguish between individuals and to keep those that distinguish between individuals (Ghiselli, et al., 1981, 500). Discriminatory power is the ability of the item to distinguish between individuals who obtained the highest scores on the test and those who obtained the lowest scores on the same test (Al-Zoba'i and others, 1981, p. 89). To calculate the discriminatory power for each item of the Sense of Purpose scale, the researcher followed the following steps:
 1. Applying the scale to the sample, and determining the total score for the items of the Sense of Purpose scale in each form of the examinees.
 2. Arranging the questionnaires in descending order from the highest score to the lowest score, according to the total score of the scale.
 3. 27% of the forms with the highest scores, and 27% of the forms with the lowest scores, were selected to represent the two extreme groups, as the number of forms in each group reached (108) forms. Therefore, the number of forms that were subjected to analysis for both groups amounted to (216) out of (400) forms.
 4. After extracting the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for each of the two groups of high and low scores, the researcher applied the T-test for two independent samples to test the significance of the differences between the means of the two groups, because the calculated T-value represents the discriminatory power of the item between the two groups, and the calculated T-value was considered an indicator to distinguish each item

by comparing it with the tabular value of (1.96) at the level of significance (0.05) and the degree of freedom (214). In light of this procedure, all items were distinguished at the level of significance (0.05) because the calculated T value is higher than the tabular value, and Table (3) illustrates this.

Table (3) *The discriminatory power of the Sense of Purpose Scale using the two extreme samples*

Item No.	High score group		Low score group		Calculated T- value	Significance
	Arithmetic mean	standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	standard deviation		
1.	4.36	0.63	3.69	0.86	6.57	Sig.
2.	4.79	0.47	4.06	0.82	7.90	Sig.
3.	4.17	0.88	3.45	1.01	5.54	Sig.
4.	3.83	1.02	2.81	1.18	6.80	Sig.
5.	4.44	0.74	3.55	1.04	7.29	Sig.
6.	4.74	0.52	4.01	0.92	7.19	Sig.
7.	4.65	0.6	3.97	0.86	6.70	Sig.
8.	4.40	0.85	3.94	1	3.67	Sig.
9.	4.47	0.66	3.54	1.16	7.30	Sig.
10.	4.62	0.59	3.58	1.07	8.82	Sig.
11.	4.72	0.59	3.80	0.99	8.32	Sig.
12.	3.69	1.14	2.94	1.07	4.99	Sig.
13.	4.16	0.88	3.69	1.13	3.36	Sig.
14.	4.25	0.93	3.78	1.16	3.30	Sig.
15.	4.86	0.37	4.29	0.85	6.40	Sig.
16.	3.53	1.20	3.02	1.31	2.98	Sig.
17.	4.65	0.50	3.80	0.81	9.34	Sig.
18.	4.16	0.87	3.01	1.07	8.66	Sig.
19.	4.55	0.63	3.58	1	8.48	Sig.
20.	3.96	0.85	3.13	1.14	6.10	Sig.
21.	3.98	0.82	3.10	0.98	7.17	Sig.
22.	4.06	0.94	2.92	1.21	7.74	Sig.
23.	4.67	0.58	3.52	1.05	9.98	Sig.
24.	3.31	1.23	2.96	1.33	2.02	Sig.
25.	4.77	0.50	3.99	0.88	7.97	Sig.
26.	4.44	0.82	3.63	0.93	6.73	Sig.
27.	4.56	0.65	3.47	1.02	9.42	Sig.
28.	4.38	0.75	3.19	1.05	9.59	Sig.
29.	3.81	1.18	3.20	1.10	3.88	Sig.
30.	4.72	0.54	3.47	1.11	10.54	Sig.

b. the method of internal consistency (The relationship of the item's scores to the total number):

The researcher used the same data that he adopted in the two extreme samples method, as the Person Correlation Coefficient was calculated to extract the correlation between the score of each item on the scale with its total score. The results showed that all correlation values are statistically significant, being higher than the tabular value of (0.098) at the significance level (0.05) and the degree of freedom (398), and table (4) illustrates this.

Table (4) *The correlation coefficient of the item with the total score of the sense of purpose scale*

Item no.	Correlation value	Sig.	Item	Correlation value	Sig.	Item	Correlation value	Sig.
1.	0.33	Sig.	11	0.48	Sig.	21	0.40	Sig.
2.	0.41	Sig.	12	0.24	Sig.	22	0.37	Sig.
3.	0.36	Sig.	13	0.17	Sig.	23	0.51	Sig.
4.	0.34	Sig.	14	0.18	Sig.	24	0.12	Sig.
5.	0.39	Sig.	15	0.35	Sig.	25	0.50	Sig.
6.	0.41	Sig.	16	0.17	Sig.	26	0.41	Sig.
7.	0.38	Sig.	17	0.46	Sig.	27	0.46	Sig.
8.	0.24	Sig.	18	0.46	Sig.	28	0.46	Sig.
9.	0.42	Sig.	19	0.49	Sig.	29	0.23	Sig.
10.	0.47	Sig.	20	0.32	Sig.	30	0.51	Sig.

8. *Psychometric properties of the scale*

a. Scale Validity: A valid test is a test that fulfills the function for which it was prepared (Anastasi, 1985, p. 92). Based on the foregoing, the Sense of Purpose Scale had several indicators of validity, which are:

- 1- Face Validity: This purpose was achieved through the procedures carried out by the researcher, who presented the Sense of Purpose scale to a group of arbitrators, and all their observations were taken into account.
- 2- Construct Validity: The researcher verified this type of validity through each of the following:

First: is the discriminatory power of the items of the sense of purpose scale.

Second: Correlation of the paragraph with the total score of the scale.

Third: The validity of the Sense of Purpose Scale using the relationship of the field to the field and the field to the total score.

Fourth - Factor Analysis: When constructing the Sense of Purpose scale, the researcher relied on Damon's theoretical framework, and tried to verify this by using exploratory factor analysis through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The items that entered the factor analysis were (30) items. After the result of the exploratory factor analysis of the Sense of Purpose scale, three items were deleted so that the scale in its final form consisted of (27) items.

b. Scale Reliability: The researcher used two methods to extract stability, which are:

1. Test-Retest Method: The researcher applied the Sense of Purpose scale to a sample of (50) male and female students from (the University of Baghdad - College of Arts). They were selected by the stratified random sampling method, and after a period of (14) days from the first application on the scale, the researcher re-applied the scale again on the same sample, and after using the Pearson correlation coefficient, the value of the stability coefficient of the sense of purpose scale in this way reached (0.75).
2. Alpha-Cronbach Method: The researcher verified the stability of the Sense of Purpose Scale using the Alpha Cronbach method, based on the data of the total sample of (400) male and female university students, and the stability coefficient in this method reached (0.73).

Chapter four

Presentation, discussion, and interpretation of results

First: results

The first objective - measuring the sense of purpose among university students:

To achieve this goal, the researcher applied the scale of sense of purpose to the members of the research sample, which numbered (400) individuals. The results showed that their

average score on the scale amounted to (106.35) scores, with a standard deviation of (9.16), when balancing this average with the hypothetical mean ¹ of the scale of (81) scores, and using the t-test for one sample, it was found that the difference was statistically significant in favor of the arithmetic mean, as the calculated t-value was higher than the tabular t-value of (1.96) with a degree of freedom (399) and a level of significance (0.05). This indicates that the research sample has a sense of purpose, and Table (5) illustrates this.

Table (5) *T-test for the difference between the sample mean and the hypothetical mean of the Sense of Purpose scale*

Sample No.	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Hypothesis mean	T-value	Calculated T-value	Tabular T-value	D. of F.	Sig.
400	106.35	9.16	81	55.38	1.96	399	400	Sig.

This result is consistent with (Shek, 1993) study, which indicated that individuals who have a sense of purpose are more mentally and psychologically healthy and the Dewitz, et al., 2009 study, which showed a sense of purpose among university students and differed from the study of Molasso (2006), which showed that males have a lower sense of purpose.

The researcher explains that this result is due to the environment in which university students grew up through parents' support and urging to choose the purpose they deem appropriate, also, a sense of purpose is considered one of the important indicators of the development and integration of an individual's personality, which is of great importance in a person's life, as it is related to his sense of meaning and value for his life. This feeling results in happiness and psychological well-being, as well as the main driving force in humans that enables them to achieve meaningful goals. The researcher also believes that the student's sense of purpose in life represents a positive, essential aspect for achieving success in his academic career and the entirety of his future life because it is related to mental health and compatibility in all its forms in the academic, professional and family forms in the future and also gives him a sense of satisfaction, orientation, and achievement.

The second objective: identify the differences in the sense of purpose according to the variables of sex (males - females) and specialization (scientific - human)

To achieve this goal, the researcher used the Two Way Anova analysis, to identify the significance of the differences in sense of purpose according to the variables of gender and specialization, and tables (6) and (7) explain this.

Table (6) *Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the sense of purpose scale according to the variables of gender and specialization*

Variables	No.	Arithmetic mean	standard deviations
Male – scientific	100	105.79	8.84
Male – human	100	107.52	8.71
Male- total	200	106.66	8.79
Female – scientific	100	104.37	9.54
Female – human	100	107.73	9.23
Female – total	200	106.05	9.52
scientific - total	200	105.08	9.20
Human - total	200	107.63	8.95
Total	400	106.35	9.16

¹ The hypothetical mean of the (sense of purpose) scale was extracted by summing the weights of the five scale alternatives and dividing them by the number of alternatives and then multiplying the result by the number of the scale items amounting to (27) items.

Table (7) *The results of the two-way analysis of variance revealed the significance of differences in sense of purpose according to the two variables (gender and specialization)*

s.of.v	s.of.s	D.F	M.S	F. value	Sig
Gender	36.603	1	36.603	0.443	Not sig.
Specialization	647.702	1	647.702	7.846	sig.
Gender* Specialization	66.423	1	66.423	0.805	Not sig.
Error	32692.570	396	82.557	---	---
Total	4557785	400	---	---	---

The results of Table (23) indicate the following:

1. There is no statistically significant difference in the sense of purpose according to the gender variable, as the calculated t-value reached (0.443), which is less than the tabular t-value of (3.84) at the level of significance (0.05), and the degree of freedom (1-396). This result agreed with (Shek, 1993) study and the study of Dewitz and others (Dewitz, 2009) and differed with the study of Molasso (2006), which indicated that males have a lower sense of purpose than females. The researcher explains that both sexes seek to achieve the purpose they set for their future and develop it as a basic force in their lives and an important component in the formation of their personality and motivating the person to determine the path to pursuing the purpose he seeks to achieve his ambition and goals. Students' sense of purpose is a key factor in their satisfaction and perseverance at the university because it is the main motivational basis for self-regulation of their lives.
2. There is a statistically significant difference in the sense of purpose according to the variable of specialization and in favor of the human being, as the calculated t value reached (7.846), which is higher than the tabular maximal value of (3.84) at the level of significance (0.05) and the degree of freedom (1-396). This result can be interpreted as the altruistic purpose (one of the dimensions of a sense of purpose), which represents the motive that directs the individual's intention to find opportunities, choose the behavior, and the desire to contribute to the welfare of others and make a positive change in society, as this dimension relates to social interaction and integration with others, a sense of happiness, the value of the meaning of life, and the nature of social and human studies. This is what characterizes the humanities more than the scientific disciplines that focus on the purely scientific aspects rather than the aspects related to the humanities and social life.
3. There is no significant interaction between the variables (sex and specialization), as the calculated t-value was (0.805), which is less than the tabular t-value of (3.84) at the significance level (0.05), and the degree of freedom (1-396). This result can be explained by the fact that students from both majors (scientific and humanitarian) need a purpose in their lives because it is considered part of their personality and an essential thing in their lives and they practice to achieve success in their academic career and a way to adapt to life's difficulties.

Second - Recommendations

Several recommendations were reached

1. Invite the media and the press to take care of the youth segment of the university and emphasize the positive role played by the sense of purpose of the university students.
2. Urging the guidance centers in universities to hold awareness sessions and workshops through which to explain the value of a sense of purpose and urge students to have a sense of purpose in life.

3. Teachers and teaching bodies at the university should be directed to push and guide students to have a purpose in life and feel it because it is important to create competent cadres for work.

Third - Suggestions

Several proposals were reached

1. Conducting a study similar to the current research dealing with different segments of Iraqi society (Adolescents - employees - Postgraduate students).
2. Conducting a study on the sense of purpose and its relationship to some psychological variables such as (Psychological well-being, Social exclusion, positive bias, and life satisfaction).

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