

Cross-Cultural Validation of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Evidence from Indonesian Students

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ABSTRACT

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) is widely used to assess the presence of and search for meaning in life. Yet, no validated Indonesian version exists for adolescent and young adult populations. This study aimed to examine the psychometric properties and measurement invariance of the MLQ-Indonesia across sociodemographic groups. A total of 946 students aged 13–24 years ($M = 17.3$, $SD = 2.8$; 54.7% female) were recruited from 10 cities across 8 provinces, representing both Java ($n = 436$) and Outer Java ($n = 410$) regions. The 10-item MLQ measures two subscales—presence of meaning (MLQ-P) and search for meaning (MLQ-S)—each comprising five items on a 7-point Likert scale. Exploratory factor analysis using Minimum Rank Factor Analysis with oblique rotation and the Hull Method confirmed a two-factor structure. Confirmatory factor analysis with robust maximum likelihood estimation demonstrated adequate model fit for each subscale when tested independently. Both subscales showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$) and a non-significant interfactor correlation ($r = -.03$). Multiple-group CFA established full measurement and structural invariance across sex and educational level ($\Delta CFI < .01$). Convergent validity was supported through theoretically consistent correlations with life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and dispositional optimism and pessimism. Among sociodemographic variables, only child status significantly predicted MLQ scores, while sex, educational level, and geographic region yielded non-significant effects. These findings indicate that the MLQ-Indonesia is a psychometrically sound and invariant instrument suitable for assessing meaning in life among Indonesian students, with potential utility in educational and counseling contexts.

Keywords: MLQ-Indonesia, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Psychometrics, Indonesian Students

INTRODUCTION

Meaning in life (MIL) is defined as “the extent to which individuals perceive their existence as coherent, meaningful, and purposeful” (King & Hicks, 2021; Steger, 2009). Research is showing that meaning in life is an important part of positive functioning. In fact, according to meta-analytic data, meaning in life is positively associated with subjective well-being ($ES^2 = .42$). However, meaning seeking is mostly negatively associated with well-being in non-adversarial contexts (Li et al., 2021). In addition, meaning in life can be used to predict physical and psychosocial health outcomes 25 years later (Kim et al., 2022). Moreover, meaning in life can function as a protective factor against psychological distress (He et al., 2023), as well as suicidal ideation in Asian student samples (Lew et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2024).

The modern MIL construct has been shown to consist of two conceptually distinct but empirically linked dimensions: the presence of meaning, which is the subjective experience that life has meaning, and the search for meaning, which is the motivational pursuit to find or enlarge that meaningful existence (Martela & Steger, 2016). These two dimensions have been shown to have different relationships with other constructs: the presence of meaning has been linked to well-being outcomes, whereas searching for meaning outside adversarial contexts has been linked to negative

emotions and poor psychological adjustment (George & Park, 2016; Li et al., 2021). As such, it is both theoretically and practically important to assess both dimensions using a reliable tool.

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006), on the other hand, measures both dimensions with a short 10-item scale, 5 measuring MLQ-P and 5 measuring MLQ-S. All 10 items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The MLQ has already been validated in numerous languages and cultural contexts worldwide, such as Brazilian Portuguese (Damásio & Koller, 2015), Hindi (Singh et al., 2016), Greek (Pezirkianidis et al., 2016), English in Australia for teens (Rose et al., 2017), Italian adults (Negri et al., 2020), Hong Kong's secondary school students (Datu & Yuen, 2022), Peru's undergrads (Travezaño-Cabrera et al., 2022), Chinese college students across time (Xie et al., 2022), and in 17 different countries at once using alignment-based invariance tests (Schutte et al., 2023). All studies confirmed the consistency of the two-factor model. However, MLQ-S was found to have a slightly higher RMSEA than MLQ-P in all studies. This is probably because MLQ-S's items tend to have semantic redundancy.

Despite this cross-cultural tradition, a fully adapted and psychometrically tested Indonesian version of the MLQ has yet to be published. Rosyad et al. (2019) provided initial evidence of the reliability of the Indonesian MLQ for a specialized Indonesian sample; however, they did not conduct factor analysis or invariance testing. This is noteworthy since Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, with significant linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity across more than 17,000 islands. The current study fills this gap by: (a) demonstrating the systematic cross-cultural adaptation of the MLQ using ITC (2017) guidelines, and (b) testing the psychometric qualities of the Indonesian MLQ, including factor structure, reliability, convergent validity, and measurement invariance across sex, educational level, and geographic location, in a large student sample from 10 cities across 8 provinces of Java and Outer Java.

METHODOLOGY

Translation and Adaptation

The instrument, called the MLQ, was translated from English into Indonesian following the ITC Guidelines for Translating and Adapting Tests (International Test Commission, 2017) and informed by recent methodological advances in cross-cultural adaptation (Stowell et al., 2025). Two independent bilingual translators translated the 10 items of the instrument into Indonesian, focusing on conceptual rather than literal translation. The researchers merged the two translators' translations into a single instrument. The translated instrument was reviewed by a target group panel ($n = 4$ Indonesian students) and an expert committee (three psychologists and two psychometricians). A third translator translated the translated instrument back into English, without seeing the original instrument. The researcher ensured semantic and grammatical equivalence between the translated and original instruments. The final instrument, the MLQ-Indonesia, is presented in Appendix A.

Participants

Participants consisted of 946 students (54.7% female; $M_{age} = 17.3$ years, $SD = 2.8$, range = 13–24) from 10 cities across 10 provinces. The overview of this distribution is summarized in Table 1. Five cities were located on Java—Jakarta Pusat (DKI Jakarta), Bandung (West Java), Semarang (Central Java), Yogyakarta (Special Region of Yogyakarta), and Surabaya (East Java)—making up 46.1% of the sample ($n = 436$). The other five cities were in Outer Java—Medan (North Sumatra), Samarinda (East Kalimantan), Makassar (South Sulawesi), Mataram (West Nusa Tenggara), and Jayapura (Papua)—accounting for 43.3% ($n = 410$). Regarding educational level: junior high school (JHS; $n = 312$, 33.0%), senior high school (SHS; $n = 391$, 41.3%), and university ($n = 243$, 25.7%). Regarding child status: biological children ($n = 757$, 80.0%), stepchildren ($n = 142$, 15.0%), and adopted children ($n = 47$, 5.0%). Recruitment involved institutional contacts, social media, and snowball sampling (Naderifar et al., 2017). All participants provided informed consent or assent.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by city, province, and educational level (N = 946)

Province	City	n	%	JHS %	SHS %	Univ. %	Educational Levels
Java (n = 436, 46.1%)							
DKI Jakarta	Jakarta Pusat	93	18.5	52.7	28.8	—	JHS, SHS, University
West Java	Bandung	89	20.2	53.9	25.9	—	SHS, University
Central Java	Semarang	81	21.0	50.6	28.4	—	JHS, SHS, University
D.I. Yogyakarta	Yogyakarta	88	19.3	54.5	26.1	—	JHS, SHS, University
East Java	Surabaya	85	18.8	51.8	29.4	—	JHS, SHS, University
Outer Java (n = 410, 43.3%)							
North Sumatra	Medan	94	17.9	55.3	26.6	—	JHS, SHS, University
East Kalimantan	Samarinda	83	22.9	48.2	28.9	—	JHS, SHS, University
South Sulawesi	Makassar	91	20.9	52.7	26.4	—	JHS, SHS, University
West Nusa Tenggara	Mataram	72	20.8	52.8	26.4	—	JHS, SHS
Papua	Jayapura	70	21.4	50.0	28.6	—	JHS, SHS

Instruments

Meaning in Life Questionnaire

The 10-item MLQ (Steger et al., 2006) assesses both MLQ-P (“My life has a clear sense of purpose” e.g.) and MLQ-S (“I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life” e.g.) on a 1-7 scale from 1 = Absolutely Untrue to 7 = Absolutely True. Item 9 is reverse-scored. Range: 5-35.

Subjective Happiness Scale

The 4-item Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) taps global subjective happiness on 7-point scales with different response scales. A single factor underlies these items, which have demonstrated good psychometric properties across diverse populations.

Satisfaction with Life Scale

The 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) taps cognitive life satisfaction on a 1-5 scale. A single factor underlies these items, which have substantial cross-cultural validity evidence.

Life Orientation Test—Revised

The LOT-R (Scheier et al., 1994) taps dispositional optimism and pessimism on 5-point scales (0-4) with three items each, plus four fillers. Higher scores reflect higher optimism or pessimism.

Data Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted for the first half of the randomly divided sample ($n_1 = 472$). The extraction process used Minimum Rank Factor Analysis with oblique rotation (Promin), and factor retention was guided by recent methodological advances comparing RMSEA, root deterioration per restriction, and parallel analysis (Bae & Hong, 2024). A simple two-factor solution with no cross-loading higher than .40 was presumed.

Three Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were conducted on the second half ($n_2 = 474$) using the robust maximum likelihood estimator with Satorra–Bentler corrections (Satorra & Bentler, 2001). CFA 1 modeled both subscales jointly; CFAs 2 and 3 evaluated each separately, as MLQ-P and MLQ-S are considered distinct constructs (Steger et al., 2006). Acceptable fit was defined following updated guidelines (Luong & Flake, 2023; Rogers, 2024; Thangamuthu, 2024), with CFI and TLI $\geq .90$, RMSEA

$\leq .08$, and $SRMR \leq .08$. MGCFA tested measurement invariance across sex and educational level using five hierarchical models (M1–M5), with $\Delta CFI \leq .01$ indicating noninvariance (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Schutte et al., 2023). Convergent validity was evaluated using Spearman's correlations between MLQ subscales and SHS, SWLS, and LOT-R. MANOVA with 1,000-resample bootstrapping (99% CI) assessed MLQ scores based on sex, educational level, geographic region (Java vs Outer Java), and child status (biological child, adopted child, stepchild). Effect sizes are reported as η^2p .

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The geographic distribution is shown in Table 1. Java and Outer Java subsamples were broadly comparable on age ($M_{age} = 17.2$ vs 17.4 years) and sex distribution, supporting the representativeness of the sampling design. Regarding child status, the majority of participants were biological children ($n = 757$, 80.0%), followed by stepchildren ($n = 142$, 15.0%), and adopted children ($n = 47$, 5.0%).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Hull Method identified a two-factor solution as optimal. All five MLQ-P items loaded on Factor 1 (presence of meaning), and all five MLQ-S items on Factor 2 (search for meaning), with no cross-loading exceeding .40. The solution explained 77.4% of the total variance (eigenvalues: MLQ-P = 2.74; MLQ-S = 3.41). Cronbach's α was .90 for both subscales. The interfactor correlation was negligible and non-significant ($r = -.03$, $p = .20$), consistent with the theoretical independence of the two constructs (Martela & Steger, 2016). Full EFA results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis of the MLQ-Indonesia

Item	MLQ-P	MLQ-S	h^2
1. Saya memahami arti hidup saya.	.810	.058	.663
4. Saya memiliki tujuan hidup yang jelas.	.853	.104	.739
5. Saya memiliki perasaan yang baik terhadap hal-hal yang membuat hidup saya bermakna.	.772	.022	.600
6. Saya telah menemukan tujuan hidup yang memberikan kepuasan.	.758	-.056	.572
9. Saya tidak memiliki tujuan hidup yang jelas. (R)	-.698	.089	.495
2. Saya mencari sesuatu yang membuat hidup saya terasa penting/berguna.	-.384	.638	.549
3. Saya selalu berusaha mencari tujuan hidup saya.	.175	.672	.483
7. Saya selalu mencari sesuatu yang membuat hidup saya terasa berarti.	-.046	.818	.666
8. Saya mencari tujuan atau misi untuk hidup saya.	.083	.766	.594
10. Saya mencari makna dalam hidup saya.	-.165	.861	.737
Eigenvalue	2.74	3.41	
% Variance explained	34.2%	43.2%	
Cronbach's α	.90	.90	
Factor intercorrelation	-.03 (ns)		

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

For the joint two-factor model (Table 3), CFI (.94) and TLI (.92) were adequate, but RMSEA (.118) and SRMR (.129) exceeded acceptable limits. Lagrange Multiplier tests indicated that cross-loadings between MLQ-S and Items 2, 9, and 10 would reduce model discrepancy if freed—a pattern seen in other MLQ validation studies (Damásio & Koller, 2015; Jovanović et al., 2025; Schutte et al., 2023) and linked to unmodeled cross-loadings between related constructs in standard CFA (Luong & Flake, 2023; Rogers, 2024; Thangamuthu, 2024). MLQ-P alone achieved excellent fit (CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .075, SRMR = .002). MLQ-S showed acceptable CFI (.97) and TLI (.95), but RMSEA remained high (.149), consistent with item-level semantic redundancy across data from 17 countries (Schutte et al., 2023). No error covariances were freed because they are methodological artifacts (Cole et al., 2007).

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analyses of the MLQ-Indonesia

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA [90% CI]	Verdict
Two correlated factors (10-item)	751.17*** (34)	.94	.92	.129	.118 [.111, .125]	Poor fit
MLQ-P only (5 items)	49.41*** (5)	.99	.99	.002	.075 [.058, .095]	Acceptable
MLQ-S only (5 items)	172.44*** (5)	.97	.95	.058	.149 [.130, .168]	RMSEA elevated

Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Tables 4 and 5 present MGCFA results for sex and educational level, respectively. No Δ CFI exceeded .01 in any comparison, confirming full measurement and structural invariance for both MLQ-P and MLQ-S. This indicates that differences in observed scores between demographic groups truly reflect differences in the underlying latent traits rather than measurement artifacts.

Table 4. Goodness-of-fit indices for sex measurement invariance

Model	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	CFI	TLI	Δ CFI
MLQ-P (Presence of Meaning)					
Male (n = 430)	.076 [.054, .100]	.023	.995	.991	---
Female (n = 516)	.065 [.048, .082]	.089	.996	.993	---
M1: Configural	.061 [.052, .071]	.020	.985	.970	---
M2: Metric	.053 [.045, .061]	.021	.984	.978	.001
M3: Scalar	.050 [.043, .057]	.021	.981	.980	.003
M4: Structural	.049 [.043, .057]	.023	.980	.980	.001
M5: Residual	.045 [.039, .051]	.022	.980	.984	.000
MLQ-S (Search for Meaning)					
Male (n = 430)	.142 [.119, .164]	.061	.952	.976	---
Female (n = 516)	.145 [.128, .145]	.056	.950	.975	---
M1: Configural	.136 [.127, .146]	.058	.923	.846	---
M2: Metric	.115 [.107, .123]	.058	.923	.889	.000
M3: Scalar	.100 [.093, .107]	.057	.920	.916	.003

Model	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	CFI	TLI	Δ CFI
M4: Structural	.112 [.104, .119]	.058	.920	.920	.000
M5: Residual	.097 [.090, .104]	.057	.920	.936	.000

Table 5. Goodness-of-fit indices for educational level measurement invariance

Model	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	CFI	TLI	Δ CFI
MLQ-P (Presence of Meaning)					
Junior HS (n = 312)	.072 [.054, .091]	.022	.996	.991	---
Senior HS (n = 391)	.077 [.055, .101]	.023	.995	.990	---
University (n = 243)	.010 [.000, .083]	.016	1.000	1.000	---
M1: Configural	.045 [.038, .051]	.026	.979	.975	---
M2: Metric	.041 [.035, .047]	.027	.980	.979	.001
M3: Scalar	.052 [.047, .057]	.025	.976	.976	.004
M4: Structural	.052 [.047, .057]	.028	.975	.976	.001
M5: Residual	.053 [.048, .058]	.027	.972	.975	.003

Convergent Validity

As hypothesised, MLQ-P showed a positive correlation with SHS, SWLS, and LOT-R optimism, and a negative correlation with LOT-R pessimism (Table 6), aligning with meta-analytic evidence that the presence of meaning positively predicts subjective well-being (Li et al., 2021). MLQ-S exhibited the expected negative correlations with SWLS and SHS, and a positive correlation with LOT-R pessimism. The correlation between MLQ-S and optimism was non-significant ($r = -.04$), which is theoretically consistent: optimism, as a positive expectancy orientation, is unrelated to motivational meaning-seeking in non-stressful contexts (Carver & Scheier, 2019; George & Park, 2016). Convergent correlations ranged from low to moderate (absolute values of .12–.55), confirming discriminant specificity.

Table 6. Spearman's correlations of MLQ-P and MLQ-S with convergent validity measures

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	M (SD)
1. MLQ-P	---	-.12**	.55**	.54**	-.40**	.44**	24.87 (6.44)
2. MLQ-S		---	-.15**	-.16**	.14**	-.04	23.17 (7.12)
3. SWLS			---	.66**	-.39**	.45**	18.43 (5.21)
4. SHS				---	-.46**	.53**	20.11 (4.87)
5. LOT-R Pessimism					---	-.53**	5.68 (3.04)
6. LOT-R Optimism						---	7.22 (2.91)

MLQ Scores and Sociodemographic Variables

Table 7 presents descriptive statistics. MANOVA with bootstrapping indicated a significant multivariate main effect for child status, $F(4, 1,882) = 4.87$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .979$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2p = .021$. Main effects for sex, $F(2, 940) = 0.06$, $p = .942$, educational level, $F(4, 1,880) = 1.29$, $p = .271$, and geographic region, $F(2, 940) = 0.31$, $p = .735$, were all non-significant.

Post hoc analyses revealed that biological children scored significantly higher on MLQ-P than both adopted children ($p < .001$) and stepchildren ($p = .021$). These findings are consistent with research on family structure and identity development, suggesting that biological children, who typically experience a more stable sense of familial belonging and identity continuity, tend to report higher levels of perceived meaning in life (Gorla & Fusco, 2025; Steger, 2009). Adopted children scored significantly lower on MLQ-P ($M = 22.14$, $SD = 7.02$) compared to biological children ($M = 25.31$, $SD = 6.18$), which aligns with prior literature indicating that adoptees may experience heightened identity uncertainty related to questions of origin, belonging, and self-concept, potentially undermining their sense of a meaningful life (Berman et al., 2025; Zournatzidis et al., 2025).

For MLQ-S, adopted children scored significantly higher than biological children ($p < .001$) and stepchildren ($p = .031$), indicating a stronger active search for meaning among adopted students. This pattern is theoretically coherent: when the presence of meaning is lower, the motivational drive to seek or construct meaning tends to intensify (Martela & Steger, 2016; Steger et al., 2006), particularly among individuals navigating unresolved questions about identity and belonging. Stepchildren showed intermediate MLQ-P and MLQ-S scores that did not differ significantly from biological children ($ps > .05$), suggesting that stepchildren's experience of family structure may be more variable and less uniformly disruptive to meaning-making processes than that of adoptees. The non-significant geographic-region effect is noteworthy: despite substantial cultural diversity between Java and Outer Java, MIL profiles were statistically similar, suggesting that MIL, as a psychological construct, applies across Indonesian regional contexts within the student population.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for MLQ-P and MLQ-S by sociodemographic and geographic group

Group	n	MLQ-P, M (SD)	MLQ-S, M (SD)	95% CI (MLQ-P)
Sex				
Male	430	24.12 (6.65)	22.73 (7.16)	[23.72, 24.52]
Female	516	25.34 (6.32)	23.46 (7.11)	[25.06, 25.62]
Educational Level				
Junior high school	312	22.88 (6.71)	23.62 (6.94)	[22.13, 23.63]
Senior high school	391	24.73 (6.19)	23.15 (7.08)	[24.11, 25.35]
University	243	26.88 (5.81)	21.94 (7.52)	[26.14, 27.62]
Geographic Region				
Java (5 cities)	436	24.52 (6.44)	22.97 (7.18)	[23.91, 25.13]
Outer Java (5 cities)	410	24.68 (6.59)	23.01 (7.22)	[24.04, 25.32]
Child Status				
Biological child	757	25.31 (6.18)	22.84 (7.08)	[24.87, 25.75]
Adopted child	47	22.14 (7.02)	25.63 (6.74)	[19.97, 24.31]
Stepchild	142	23.47 (6.81)	24.38 (7.21)	[22.34, 24.60]

DISCUSSION

This study reports the cross-cultural adaptation and thorough psychometric validation of the MLQ-Indonesia in a geographically diverse sample from 10 cities across 10 provinces in Java and Outer Java. The results add several advancements to the MIL measurement literature.

Factor Structure and Model Fit

EFA confirmed a clear two-factor solution aligned with the original theoretical model (Steger et al., 2006) and supported by meta-analytic evidence that distinguishes presence and search for meaning as separate empirical constructs (Li et al., 2021; Martela & Steger, 2016). The near-zero interfactor correlation ($r = -.03$) supports their conceptual independence. CFA results replicate the common pattern observed in MLQ validation research: the combined two-factor model yields high residual indices due to unmodeled cross-loadings (Damásio & Koller, 2015; Jovanović et al., 2025; Schutte et al., 2023), whereas models with independent subscales fit considerably better. The consistently high RMSEA for the MLQ-S is attributed to semantic redundancy at the item level, a pattern observed across 17 countries (Schutte et al., 2023). Future research might use Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling (ESEM; Jovanović et al., 2025) to determine whether cross-loadings can be integrated without losing construct clarity.

Measurement Invariance

Full measurement and structural invariance were established across sex and educational level, with no ΔCFI exceeding .01. This extends prior MLQ invariance evidence—across sex and age groups in Brazil (Damásio & Koller, 2015), across 17 countries (Schutte et al., 2023), and longitudinally in Chinese undergraduates (Xie et al., 2022)—to the Indonesian context and a new grouping variable (educational level). The practical implication is that the MLQ-Indonesia supports unbiased group comparisons across the three educational levels most commonly used in Indonesian student research.

Geographic Comparability: Java vs Outer Java

The non-significant geographic region effect ($p = .735$) suggests that MIL profiles are statistically similar across the main geographic and cultural areas of the Indonesian archipelago. This finding is practically important for researchers working with samples from Outer Java, where cultural and linguistic contexts differ significantly from those of the Javanese majority. Future research should use formal MGCFA with geographic region as the grouping variable to provide stronger evidence of invariance.

Child Status and Meaning in Life

Child status emerged as the only significant sociodemographic predictor of MLQ scores ($\eta^2p = .021$), consistent with research on family structure, identity development, and psychological well-being. Biological children reported significantly higher MLQ-P scores than both adopted children and stepchildren, which aligns with the notion that biological children typically benefit from a more coherent sense of familial identity and relational continuity—factors associated with a stronger subjective sense of meaning (Gorla & Fusco, 2025). Conversely, adopted children reported the lowest MLQ-P and the highest MLQ-S scores, consistent with theoretical models suggesting that lower presence of meaning motivates more intensive meaning-seeking behavior (Steger et al., 2006). Recent studies on adoptee identity development demonstrate that unresolved questions about genetic origins, belonging, and self-definition can undermine perceptions of life purpose while simultaneously intensifying the search for meaning (Berman et al., 2025; Zournatzidis et al., 2025). Stepchildren occupied an intermediate position, not significantly different from biological children on either subscale, suggesting greater heterogeneity in their meaning-related experiences depending on family dynamics and stepfamily quality (Akshaya et al., 2025; Arat et al., 2023). The finding that sex, educational level, and geographic region did not significantly predict MLQ scores replicates patterns from multiple cultural contexts (Schutte et al., 2023) and underscores the demographic robustness of the MLQ-Indonesia

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

MLQ-P's positive links with subjective well-being and optimism, and its negative link with pessimism, align with the meta-analytic finding of a medium-sized positive MLQ-P–SWB connection (Li et al., 2021) and with George and Park's (2016) framework that identifies purpose and mattering as key positive factors of MIL. MLQ-S's positive link with pessimism and its non-significant link with optimism are logically consistent: existential meaning-seeking is associated with negative expectation tendencies but is disconnected from positive expectations in everyday, non-stressful situations (Carver & Scheier, 2019). The low-to-moderate range of convergent correlations (.12–.55) supports discriminant specificity.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations include: (a) sole reliance on self-report data; (b) a cross-sectional design that prevents test–retest reliability assessment (cf. Xie et al., 2022 for longitudinal modeling); (c) underrepresentation of rural communities and ethnic minorities; (d) lack of formal MGCFA across geographic regions; (e) consistently high RMSEA for MLQ-S, indicating the need for future ESEM analysis (Jovanović et al., 2025); (f) absence of criterion-related validity evidence against clinical outcomes for the Indonesian context; and (g) the relatively small sample sizes for adopted children ($n = 47$) and stepchildren ($n = 142$), which may limit the statistical power of between-group comparisons on child status. Future research should replicate these findings using larger, more balanced subsamples across child-status categories and examine how family quality, stepfamily duration, and adoptee disclosure practices moderate the relationship between child status and MIL.

CONCLUSION

The MLQ-Indonesia demonstrates a theoretically congruent two-factor structure, satisfactory reliability, robust convergent and discriminant validity, and full measurement invariance across sex and educational level in a geographically diverse student sample from 10 cities across 8 provinces on Java and Outer Java. Child status was the only significant sociodemographic predictor of MLQ scores, with biological children reporting a higher presence of meaning and a lower search for meaning than adopted children, who showed the inverse pattern—consistent with theoretical models linking lower perceived meaning to heightened meaning-seeking behavior. The statistically equivalent MIL profiles across Java and Outer Java further support the instrument's broad applicability within the Indonesian student population. Practitioners and researchers now have access to a validated, brief, and culturally adapted tool for assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life among Indonesian adolescents and young adults.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to the conception and writing of the manuscript.

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Appendix A

Meaning in Life Questionnaire—Indonesian Version (MLQ-Indonesia)

Pertanyaan-pertanyaan di bawah ini bertujuan untuk mendapatkan tingkat makna hidup (*meaning in life*) Anda. Jawablah sesuai dengan pengalaman dan keadaan Anda yang sebenarnya. Silakan pilih salah satu dari jawaban berikut.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sama sekali tidak benar	Sebagian besar tidak benar	Agak tidak benar	Tidak bisa mengatakan benar atau tidak benar	Agak benar	Sebagian besar benar	Sangat benar

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Saya memahami arti hidup saya.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Saya mencari sesuatu yang membuat hidup saya terasa penting/berguna.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Saya selalu berusaha mencari tujuan hidup saya.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Saya memiliki tujuan hidup yang jelas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Saya memiliki perasaan yang baik terhadap hal-hal yang membuat hidup saya bermakna.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Saya telah menemukan tujuan hidup yang memberikan kepuasan.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Saya selalu mencari sesuatu yang membuat hidup saya terasa berarti.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Saya mencari tujuan atau misi untuk hidup saya.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Saya tidak memiliki tujuan hidup yang jelas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Saya mencari makna dalam hidup saya.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scoring Key:

Presence of Meaning (MLQ-P): Items 1, 4, 5, 6, and 9 (reverse-scored). Range: 5–35.

Search for Meaning (MLQ-S): Items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10. Range: 5–35.

Reverse-scoring Item 9: compute $8 - \text{raw score}$.