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## Crafting life purpose statements using *ikigai* framework among first-semester students in Malaysia

Dr Lok Boon Thian<sup>a</sup>, Naveen Raman<sup>a</sup>, Jolene Chong<sup>a</sup>, and Chee Meng Chin<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Taylor's University, Malaysia

### Abstract

Universities are urged to empower students to discover their life purpose during tertiary education, given the positive impact this can have for guiding a more meaningful life and emotional well-being. However, studies in the Asian context are limited. This article examined the extent to which first-semester students at a private university in Malaysia can craft their life purpose statements, guided by the *ikigai* framework and supported by Self-determination Theory. Purpose statements from 4,576 first-semester students across two intakes and 22 disciplines were analysed. The analysis revealed that 79% of students could craft their purpose satisfactorily with varying levels (76-97%) of ability across broad disciplines. Moreover, 69% of students' purposes and academic disciplines were aligned, with a range between 64-81% across disciplines. This article suggested that the *ikigai* framework, supported by Self-determination Theory, could guide the purpose-crafting intervention. Hence, universities could support students to explore their life purpose within the undergraduate curriculum.

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## Introduction

The development of life purpose has been actively studied in the United States and is also emerging in other countries globally (Kuusisto et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2022; Shirley, 2020; Hedayati et al., 2017; Damon, 2008). This study adopted Damon's definition of 'purpose', which is an enduring commitment to accomplish aims that are meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self (Bronk & Damon, 2022; Damon, 2008). While one's life purpose may evolve over one's lifespan (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011), studies have shown the positive impact of having a life purpose among youth, especially in supporting the youth to overcome life challenges, enhancing their mental health and well-being, and be fully engaged with life to flourish (Napier et al., 2024b; Damon, 2008; Kotera et al., 2021; Pfund et al., 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019; Sumner et al., 2018; van Zyl et al., 2023; Wilkes et al., 2023).

Being clear about one's life purpose or personal goal has also been associated with a 22% improvement in academic performance (Schippers et al., 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). The positive impact on academic performance is significant, especially when higher education institutions face high dropout rates, as seen in Malaysia (Free Malaysia Today, 2022). In addition, major global crises have heightened the need for purposeful leaders and individuals to achieve something meaningful to themselves and consequential for the world beyond their self-interests (Damon, 2008; Kuusisto et al., 2023).

The Self-determination Theory (SDT), a macro theory of human motivation, provides a valuable framework for understanding the pursuit of meaningful life purpose (Napier et al., 2024b). SDT suggests that a meaningful life is achieved by addressing four (4) areas (Napier et al., 2024b). The first area is the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These are part of the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), one of the six mini-theories of SDT. Autonomy refers to the need to endorse one's actions and choices based on one's interests and values. Competence refers to the need to feel efficacy and mastery in one's interactions with the environment. Relatedness refers to the need to feel a sense of connection to others. The other three areas of SDT are a) to have more autonomous forms of behaviour regulation, b) the pursuit of intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, life goals (life purpose), and c) to have an awareness of and interest in one's experience. SDT posits that a meaningful life, or eudaimonic well-being, is achieved when certain psychological needs are met, and behaviours are autonomously regulated (Ryan et al., 2008). Hence, SDT is well-positioned to guide a life purpose-crafting intervention that facilitates a more meaningful life.

While SDT posits that the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness is universal, the way these needs are met and expressed can be heavily influenced by one's cultural and academic environment. Studies conducted in the United States, Finland, and the Netherlands have reported that most higher education students have found a purpose in life (Kuusisto et al., 2023). While findings are inconsistent, students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as business disciplines, tend to be more self-oriented in their purpose than students in social and caring professions, such as teaching and nursing, who tend to express more prosocial purposes (Kuusisto et al., 2023). Although empirical evidence from Western contexts shows a high prevalence of life purpose among students, there remains a critical gap in understanding these dynamics within the Asian context to address potential sociocultural differences in how students

articulate their purpose (Hall et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2023; Moran, 2018; King et al., 2016). Hence, this study aims to explore the application and efficacy of purpose statement crafting interventions using the *ikigai* framework within a non-Western higher education environment.

## Literature

### Life purpose crafting using the *ikigai* framework

One's life purpose may evolve over the lifespan, but studies have shown that it begins to emerge around age eleven years (Kuusisto & Schutte, 2022). Typically, many students pursue university studies between the ages of 18-19 years, when they are considered emerging adults, actively exploring their identity and life purpose (Napier et al., 2024b; Maranges et al., 2024; Pfund et al., 2020). Hence, universities could be well-positioned to support students in exploring their life purpose. However, there has been limited research on the most effective ways to guide students in developing their life purpose (Pfund et al., 2020), and a recent discussion has centred on life crafting (van Zyl et al., 2023).

Life crafting is 'a process in which people actively reflect on their present and future life, set goals for important areas of life (social, career, and leisure time) and, if required, make concrete plans and undertake actions to change these areas in a way that is more congruent with their values and wishes' (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019, p. 3). The literature argues that there are two approaches to life crafting: intervention and construct approaches (van Zyl et al., 2023). Literature also argued that life crafting through an intervention framework, involving establishing personal goals and attainment plans, helps people gain a sense of direction or purpose in life, which is especially useful for emerging adults eagerly figuring out their identity and life purpose (Napier et al., 2024b; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Hence, recent research suggests that interventions to support students in nurturing their life purposes could be effective if implemented during adolescence or emerging adulthood and integrated into the curriculum (Pfund et al., 2020; Shirley, 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019).

Life crafting through intervention typically involves reflecting on one's values, passions, goals, the best possible self, goal attainment plans, and other positive psychology intervention techniques (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Integrating Self-determination Theory, literature suggested that the life-crafting intervention consists of the following five components: a) the exploration of personal values, b) developing intrinsic interests, c) fostering supportive relationships and social contribution, d) creating a coherent life narrative, and e) setting self-concordant goals and goal plans (Napier et al., 2024b). While this study does not measure grade-based outcomes, the literature suggests that life purpose crafting interventions are often associated with better academic performance (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). This is theoretically attributed to students discovering personal value in their learning, which fosters the intrinsic motivation central to Self-determination Theory (Napier et al., 2024a).

Another widely discussed concept that supports life-crafting interventions is the concept of *ikigai*. Originating from Japanese culture, *ikigai* is commonly known as 'what makes life worth living' or 'reason for being' (Okuzono et al., 2022; Kumano, 2018; Garcia & Miralles, 2017). A simple Venn diagram is commonly associated with the concept of *ikigai* or purpose (Figure 1). The diagram

consists of four overlapping circles representing 'what you love', 'what you are good at', 'what the world needs,' and 'what you can be paid for' (Sartore et al., 2023; Garcia & Miralles, 2017). The diagram suggests that a person's *ikigai* or purpose should ideally align with all four aspects. The simplicity and accessibility of this visual representation are key strengths, as it prompts individuals to question the meaningfulness of life by articulating personal factors (such as love and skill), external rewards (such as being paid), and altruistic purposes (what the world needs). This framework served as a metacognitive tool to scaffold students' personal growth, guiding them toward self-reflection, defining purpose or meaning, and setting goals aligned with global needs (such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals). While the *ikigai* concept originates from Japan, the core process of identifying meaningful activities, reflecting on values, and setting goals is valuable across cultures.

**Figure 1**

*The ikigai Venn diagram. Source: Garcia & Miralles, 2017 (based on a diagram by Mark Winn)*



The authors argued that the four aspects of the *ikigai* framework, along with the purpose statement writing framework used in this study, are consistent with the life-crafting intervention components proposed by Napier et al. (2024a), as shown in Table 1. More importantly, pursuing a life purpose guided by the *ikigai* framework aligns with the three basic needs of Self-determination Theory. It allows individuals to choose a path that is intrinsically motivating ("what you love", autonomy), utilise their strengths ("what you are good at" and "what you can be paid for", competence), and contribute to society ("what the world needs that you care about", relatedness), leading to a sense of meaning and authenticity (Napier et al., 2024a; Nagata et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2014), as justified in Table 1. While the four aspects of the *ikigai* framework are commonly used for career purposes, the authors argued that career consideration is an important part of life purpose crafting, especially in developing countries like Malaysia, where there is a strong desire to meet financial needs. Hence, the *ikigai* framework is considered practical and relevant to support students' reflections in crafting their life purpose in this study. Additionally, the simple framework of *ikigai* makes it accessible to first-year students.

**Table 1**

*Comparing the ikigai framework, life-crafting intervention components (Napier et al., 2024a) and basic human psychological needs of SDT*

<i>ikigai</i> Framework (Garcia & Miralles, 2017)	Life-crafting Intervention Components (Napier et al., 2024a)	Basic human psychological needs of SDT with justification
1 'what you love'	the exploration of personal values, developing intrinsic interests	Autonomy: Pursuing a path that is intrinsically motivating allows individuals to choose actions based on their values and interests.
2 'what the world needs that you care about'	fostering supportive relationships and social contribution	Relatedness: Contributing to society aligns with the need for social connection and belonging
3 'what you are good at', and 'what you can be paid for'	developing intrinsic interests	Competence: Utilising one's strengths fulfils the need for efficacy and mastery
4 Purpose statement writing framework: I will (action) ('what you love' and 'what the world needs' towards (community or cause) using my ('what you are good at' and 'what you can be paid for')	creating a coherent life narrative, and setting self-concordant goals and goal plans	Sense of meaning and authenticity: Pursuing personally valued goals is central to one's sense of meaning and authenticity. When goals align with an individual's values, they experience intrinsic motivation, meaning, authenticity, and well-being.

Existing studies comparing students across disciplines have found variations in purpose profiles (Kuusisto et al., 2023; Thian et al., 2025), indicating that the academic discipline is a theoretically relevant variable in understanding purpose development. The variation could be because certain disciplines, such as medicine, engineering, and law, have a more direct career orientation than business and social sciences, which aligns with the career path within the *ikigai* framework.

Since this study focused on first-semester students, it is relevant to explore whether transitioning students can recognise the alignment between their life purposes and their chosen academic disciplines. The perceived alignment may indicate the students' perceived meaningfulness and engagement in learning. A low perceived alignment may signal a need for instructional intervention to engage students to learn more meaningfully. In addition, research shows that vocational identity, sense of self at work, develops through exploration and reflection, is shaped by disciplinary and professional contexts, and is closely associated with academic engagement,

career decision-making, and sense of meaning in learning (Gee et al., 2021; Porfeli & Lee, 2012). Hence, students' ability to articulate how their studies connect to future professional roles reflects an emerging vocational identity, suggesting that alignment between life purpose statements and academic disciplines may signal both identity formation and perceived meaningfulness of learning. Therefore, it is essential to investigate whether students from various disciplines exhibit varying levels of alignment.

In short, while the efficacy of life purpose-crafting interventions has been documented in Western contexts, there is a lack of literature within the Asian context to address potential sociocultural differences in how students articulate their purpose (Hall et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2023; Moran, 2018; King et al., 2016). In addition, limited research exists in the Asian context on whether students' life purpose statements align with their chosen academic disciplines. In addition, more empirical studies are needed to understand students' life purpose crafting, including the effects of students' disciplines (Napier et al., 2024a; Pfund et al., 2020). The simplicity and practicality of the *ikigai* framework are well-suited to serve this study. Hence, the following research questions were developed to address this gap in the literature, focusing on the application and efficacy of purpose-crafting interventions within a non-Western higher education environment through this exploration study.

### **Research questions**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are first-semester students able to craft their life purpose statements guided by the *ikigai* framework?
2. How does the ability vary among students from different academic disciplines?
3. To what extent do the students craft a life purpose statement aligned with their chosen academic disciplines?
4. How does the alignment between the purpose statements and academic disciplines differ among students from various disciplines?

In this study, ability referred to students' demonstrated capacity to produce a complete written life-purpose statement that incorporates the core elements of the *ikigai* framework. Ability was assessed based on the level of completeness of the written statements guided by a rubric. Alignment referred to whether students' disciplinary capabilities, as defined by their chosen academic disciplines, were explicitly articulated in their life purpose statements.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive research design (Tripodi & Bender, 2010) to examine the application of a life-purpose crafting intervention among first-semester university students. The study focused on students' ability to use the *ikigai* framework and the subsequent alignment of their purpose statements with their academic disciplines.

## Participants and Context

The study was conducted at a private university in Malaysia that offers professionally oriented programmes. Approximately 40% of the student body consisted of international students from various developing nations. The students' ages ranged from 19 to 22. The participants were drawn from two cohorts of first-semester bachelor's degree students:

- a) March 2023 Intake: Out of 1,931 eligible students across 22 disciplines, 1,357 (70%) submitted purpose statements as a voluntary learning activity.
- b) September 2023 Intake: Out of 3,313 eligible students across 22 disciplines, 3,181 (97%) submitted purpose statements as part of a graded course assessment.

All students were enrolled in a compulsory module as part of the university's "Purpose-led Learning" strategic initiative. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's ethics committee.

## Measures and Materials

The primary data consisted of written life purpose statements. Two main constructs were measured:

- a) Ability (Completeness): This referred to the student's capacity to produce a complete statement incorporating the core *ikigai* elements. Ability was assessed using a four-level rubric (refer to Table 2): Outstanding (all three writing components present), Mastering, Developing, and Beginning (unintelligible or no components present). Students were considered able, at a satisfactory level, if their purpose statements were deemed 'Outstanding' or 'Mastering' in completeness.
- b) Alignment: This referred to whether the student's disciplinary capabilities (e.g., specific skills or knowledge from their field) were explicitly articulated within their purpose statement. The outcomes is either "yes" or "no".

Students were provided an *ikigai* writing framework to craft their life purpose statement. It is a scaffolded prompt that says: "I will (action) (what I love and what the world needs) towards (which community/cause) using my (what I am good at and can be paid for)". The statement started with 'I will (action verb)' to encourage students to commit to the statement by taking action (Schippers et al., 2020). Students had to fill in the three components of the writing framework as underlined above. How they wrote the three components were analysed to indicate the level of completeness and ability.

## Procedure

The intervention took place over a six-week period. Module facilitators first introduced the value of life purpose using examples of inspiring figures. Students were then introduced to the four domains of the *ikigai* Venn diagram (love, strengths, global needs, and rewards) to support their personal reflection. Students were encouraged to consider the relationship between their life purpose and their chosen academic disciplines. For the March cohort, submission was encouraged but not assessed; for the September cohort, the statement was a graded requirement, though grading focused on the ability to craft the statement rather than the specific content of the goals.

Data analysis was conducted by nine facilitators divided into three groups, each led by a researcher. To ensure consistent judgement among the facilitators, a moderation process was implemented. Researchers independently analysed 30 sample statements and compared judgement. Discrepancies were discussed until alignment was reached. This process was repeated within facilitator groups to ensure consistency across the entire data set. The resulting data were analysed to identify the ability and alignment levels and variations across different academic disciplines guided by the research questions.

To provide a more concise overview of disciplinary trends, the 22 specific disciplines were aggregated into five broad academic disciplines: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Formal Sciences, and Applied Sciences (“Outline of academic disciplines”, 2026), as follows.

- a) Humanities: Law, Performing Arts.
- b) Social Sciences: Accounting, Business, Finance, Psychology, Social Science.
- c) Natural Sciences: Biotechnology.
- d) Formal Sciences: Actuary, Computing.
- e) Applied Sciences: Architecture, Design, Education, Engineering, Food Science, Health Science, Hospitality & Tourism, Medical, Media & Communication, Pharmacy, Quantity Surveying, Robotic.

**Table 2**

*Rubric to assess the completeness of the life purpose statement*

	Outstanding	Mastering	Developing	Beginning
Description	A purpose statement is completed with the three components of the writing framework.	A purpose statement is partially completed with the two components of the writing framework.	A purpose statement is partially completed with the 1 component of the writing framework.	A purpose statement is not completed with any of the components of the writing framework.
	Meets both requirements below: a) The statement is actionable. b) The components have a relation to one another.	Meets at least one requirement below: a) The statement is actionable. b) The components have a relation to one another.	Does not meet any requirements below: a) The statement is actionable. b) The components have a relation to one another.	OR The statement is unintelligible.  Inaccurate attempt.

## Results

### Ability to craft life purpose statements guided by the *ikigai* framework

In response to the first research question, the data from both semesters appeared to be consistent, with an average of 79% of university students demonstrating ability to craft their purpose statement (mastering and outstanding levels) guided by the *ikigai* framework and the purpose statement writing framework, as shown in Table 3. While minor variations in distribution across categories were observed, particularly an increase in the proportion of students achieving the Outstanding level in the September intake, the overall pattern remains comparable across both cohorts.

**Table 3**

*Level of ability in crafting a life purpose statement*

Level of Completeness (ability)	March 2023 intake: % of students	September 2023 intake: % of students	Average: % of students
Outstanding	45	60	56
Mastering	29	21	23
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>(74)</i>	<i>(81)</i>	<i>(79)</i>
Developing	21	14	16
Beginning	5	5	5
Total	100	100	100

The following examples illustrate the students' life purpose statements at various ability levels. The following two examples show an outstanding ability.

'I will provide help and consultation to reduce psychological distress for those facing mental health problems using my psychology expertise.'

'I will provide healthy food for underprivileged young children using my food science knowledge and cooking skills.'

The following two examples show a mastering ability.

'I will showcase my pastry artistry for the delight of food enthusiasts using my baking skills.'

'I will design processes to help new entrepreneurs for (and) business owners using my business acumen.'

The following two examples show a developing ability.

'I will create and innovate for society using my passion in both music and engineering.'

'I will create a positive environment towards negative-minded people using my positive thinking and influencing skills.'

The following two examples show a beginning ability.

'I will use my critical thinking to encourage others to be positive towards my friends who are in a down mood now using my skill of communicating with others and finding the common ground and interest between the two of us.'

'I will adapt to one another so that they are able to provide their potential.'

Answering the second research question, students in the Natural Sciences (97.3%) and Humanities (93.0%) demonstrated the highest overall ability levels. While Applied Sciences had the lowest satisfactory rate (76.4%), this was heavily influenced by the lower performance in the voluntary March intake. This category showed a significant positive shift once the activity was integrated into the graded assessment. The high rate of success across such a large and diverse sample (N>4,500) supports the use of *ikigai* framework as a practical and scalable metacognitive tool for first-semester university students.

**Table 4**

*Ability to craft life purpose statements by broad disciplines*

	<b>Broad Discipline</b>	<b>Number of Students (N)</b>	<b>% Satisfactory</b>
1	Natural Sciences	73	97.3
2	Humanities	193	93.0
3	Formal Sciences	734	80.1
4	Social Sciences	1,360	79.8
5	Applied Sciences	2,178	76.4
	Total	4,538	79.0

**Alignment between life purpose statements and academic disciplines**

Responding to the third research question, the data indicated that approximately 69% of students' purpose statements and academic disciplines are aligned. 31% of students' purpose statements and academic disciplines lack evidence of alignment.

Subsequently, the alignment between the students' life purpose statements and their academic disciplines was further analysed in relation to the ability to craft life purpose statements. The following two examples of life purpose statements align with academic disciplines: one is at a satisfactory level of ability, and the other is not.

'I will provide healthy food for underprivileged young children using my food science knowledge and cooking skills.' (a food science student, at a satisfactory level of ability)

'I will help the people at rural places for medical.' (a medical student, not at a satisfactory level of ability)

The following two examples of life purpose statements show a lack of alignment with academic disciplines. One is at a satisfactory level of ability, and the other is not.

'I will put importance on educating people around me about human trafficking using my communication skills.' (a health science student, at a satisfactory level of ability)

'I will provide some suggestions on how to relieve stress for my fellow coursemates by using my thoughts.' (a finance student, not at a satisfactory level of ability)

As shown in Table 5, the percentage of alignment is lowest when the level of ability is lowest. This could partly due to incomplete information about the purpose statements, which means that the lack of evidence of alignment could be caused by a lack of ability to craft the 'purpose statement' itself. Hence, the level of alignment positively correlates with the level of ability.

**Table 5**

*Alignment (between the life purpose statement and academic discipline) against the level of ability*

Level of Ability	% Aligned
Beginning	10.0
Developing	38.7
Mastering	68.8
Outstanding	84.0

The final research question was about how the alignment between the purpose statements and academic disciplines differ among students from various disciplines. As shown in Table 6, students in the Humanities (81.6%) and Formal Sciences (78.1%) categories demonstrated the strongest perceived connection between their personal purpose and their academic path. This finding may suggest these students entered their degree with a clearer sense of how their skills and passions intersect with their professional identity. The Social Sciences category exhibited the lowest alignment at 64.7%. This finding may be due to the disciplines being less directly linked to a particular profession or career compared to the law, medical and engineering disciplines. Across the entire student body, nearly seven out of ten students were able to successfully align their purpose with their academic discipline. This reinforces the study's conclusion that the *ikigai* framework is a scalable and effective tool for fostering early vocational identity in undergraduate education.

**Table 6**

*Alignment between a life purpose statement and academic discipline by broad disciplines*

Broad Discipline	Number of Students (N)	% Aligned
1 Humanities	193	81.6
2 Formal Sciences	734	78.1
3 Natural Sciences	73	72.5
4 Applied Sciences	2,178	68.3
5 Social Sciences	1,360	64.7
Total	4,538	69.4

## Discussion

While the concept of life crafting is new in literature (Napier et al., 2024a), the findings of this study showed that the majority (79%) of first-semester university students from Malaysia and various developing countries were able to craft life purpose statements guided by the *ikigai* framework

and a purpose statement writing framework aligned with the Self-determination Theory. This study within an Asian context is consistent with the limited existing studies (Napier et al., 2024b; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). At the discipline level, it is noted that a range of 76% to 97% of the students across the broad disciplines can craft life purpose statements.

The findings are significant because they validate the framework's utility as a metacognitive tool accessible to a broad audience across disciplines. The positive findings support the efficacy of using a structured, visual framework, such as the *ikigai* Venn diagram, to prompt reflection and facilitate the articulation of purpose, especially among first-year university students across disciplines, who are in the crucial developmental stage of emerging adulthood. Structured activities, particularly writing about personal goals and plans, are crucial for enabling self-regulation and discovering meaning (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019; Schippers et al., 2020).

Additionally, the findings support the theoretical intention of making learning more meaningful for students through purpose crafting, which can lead to improved emotional well-being and enhanced academic performance in an Asian context (Hall et al., 2023; Schippers et al., 2020). Purpose is strongly associated with subjective well-being and helps individuals buffer the effects of daily stressors, promoting greater resilience and adaptive coping. This connection is vital, as studies show that enhancing purpose is particularly effective when integrated into the curriculum during the emerging adulthood period (Pfund et al., 2020; Shirley, 2020; Schippers & Ziegler, 2019).

Based on these findings, universities in Asia may consider incorporating life purpose exploration into their first-year curriculum. This arrangement may make their learning more meaningful, leading to greater engagement and improved academic outcomes (Schippers et al., 2020). However, this study also revealed that some students still struggle to craft their life purpose statements, which is supported by the *ikigai* framework. This indicates a need for further study to understand the challenges students face and how they may be better supported.

It was observed that most students in this study (69%) craft a life purpose statement aligned with their academic disciplines during the first year. At the discipline level, it is also encouraging to note that a range from 64 to 81% of students across the broad disciplines craft a life purpose statement aligned with their chosen academic disciplines. Although the literature has not actively explored this, this finding is, in a way, an indication that majority of students can see how their life purpose relates with their vocational identity.

However, the observed differences in ability or alignment across broad disciplines may reflect that students entered their degrees with varying levels of clarity on their life purpose and how their skills and passions intersect with their vocational identity. Different professional disciplines necessitate different orientations toward the world; observing which disciplines struggle or succeed indicates where pedagogical refinement is necessary to connect vocational skills ("what you are good at" and "what you can be paid for") to broader prosocial aims ("what the world needs"). This directly addresses the research gap regarding the correlation between students' disciplines and their ability in crafting life purpose statements.

In addition, this study also revealed that some students still do not craft a life purpose statement aligned with their chosen academic disciplines by the end of the first semester. Hence, universities may consider offering subsequent engagement, built into the curriculum of a later year, for

students to reflect on their life purpose statements and alignment with their academic disciplines. The engagement provides students with more opportunities to connect their academic pursuits with their life purpose. Further studies are needed to investigate whether subsequent engagement encourages students to become more engaged in their learning, ultimately contributing to improved academic performance.

This study does not consider the effect of students' background, such as gender, nationality, and language proficiency, on their ability to craft life purpose statements or on the alignment between their life purposes and academic disciplines. Future research may investigate this effect to gain a deeper understanding of the case. Beyond students' abilities and alignment, future research could classify the life purposes students have chosen and examine them by discipline to make a greater contribution to the literature. Future studies could analyse whether students with clearer, more aligned purpose statements performed better academically. In addition, future studies may investigate whether there is a correlation between the ability to craft life purpose statements and well-being. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the long-term impact of this life purpose-crafting intervention on students.

In summary, these findings at the disciplinary level provide direct guidance for practitioners and researchers interested in tailoring purpose-enhancing practices. Identifying specific academic disciplines with lower ability and a lack of alignment enables the university to implement targeted resources, aligning with calls for educational programmes to adapt to student needs.

## Conclusion

This study examined the use of the *ikigai* framework, supported by principles of SDT, to guide the crafting of life purposes among first-semester university students in Malaysia. The intervention targeted emerging adults enrolled in professional-oriented programmes, a critical developmental phase for exploring identity and purpose. This intervention is important as having a life purpose has been associated with more meaningful life and emotional well-being.

The findings empirically validate the utility of this structured approach, known as the life purpose-crafting intervention, in a non-Western context. The data consistently showed that the majority of students (an average of 79%) were able to craft their life purpose statements guided by the *ikigai* and purpose writing frameworks. This outcome is consistent with prior, limited existing studies on life crafting. The study also confirmed that 76 to 97% of students across the broad academic disciplines can craft their life purpose statements. This suggests the framework serves as a versatile guide across various fields of study.

The use of the *ikigai* framework proved practical and relevant, aligning the pursuit of purpose with SDT's basic psychological needs, enabling students to identify a path that is intrinsically motivating (autonomy), utilise their strengths (competence), and contribute to society (relatedness). Furthermore, the inclusion of career consideration ("what you can be paid for") within the *ikigai* model was deemed relevant given the strong desire in developing countries like Malaysia to meet financial needs. On the other hand, differences in ability or alignment across disciplines highlight the interplay among academic disciplines, purpose profiles and vocational identity. Future research should build upon these findings by investigating the influence of student

demographics, conducting longitudinal studies to assess long-term efficacy, and exploring the empirical correlations between academic disciplines, purpose alignment, academic performance, and student well-being.

In summary, this study extends the existing literature on crafting life purpose statements by providing evidence from a non-Western higher education context. It highlights the alignment of disciplinary capability in life purpose statements as a potential indicator of emerging vocational identity. By focusing on students' demonstrated ability to craft life purpose statements, this study offers a pragmatic and scalable model supporting the integration of purpose statement crafting into early undergraduate curricula.

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