INSIGHTS OF THE STUDENTS WELL-BEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION (THE CASE OF GEORGIA)

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INSIGHTS OF THE STUDENTS WELL-BEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION (THE CASE OF GEORGIA)

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Abstract

The study relied on the secondary analysis of the Eurostudent Georgia national survey database collected in 2022. The sample consisted of 3207 BA university students (1743 female and 1464 male) from different Georgian universities.

The research aims to investigate the factors influencing the well-being of students in higher education settings. To accomplish this, the study adopted the PERMA well-being model as a conceptual framework, analyzing specific items from the Eurostudent survey that aligned with the dimensions of the PERMA model. These dimensions encompass positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment experienced by students in higher education.

Through exploratory factor analysis, the study identified well-being as a construct comprised of five self-reported variables: feeling cheerful, experiencing calmness, being active, waking up rested, and having interesting activity-filled days.

To assess the predictors of student well-being, a multiple regression model was constructed, explaining 37% of the variance (R^2adj = 0.371, F (16,556) = 22.05, $p < 0.000$). The research identified several predictors of student well-being, including satisfaction with the teaching process, encounters with discrimination and isolation, motivation levels, positive feedback and support from professors, positive classroom relationships, engagement in scientific research activities, satisfaction with academic achievements, and more. These factors were examined within the framework of the PERMA model of well-being. Notably, the study also revealed significant additional predictors, such as students' overall health conditions and financial situations. Surprisingly, the financial well-being of parents has a negative impact on students' well-being. Additional study-related factors that negatively affected student well-being emerged, possibly due to the stress stemming from study-related factors. These outcomes might also mirror the effects of implementing new standards associated with the ongoing reform of the higher education system in Georgia.

The findings are also discussed in respect to the sample characteristics, such as student gender and age, as well as their parents' educational background.

Keywords: Well-Being, students, PERMA Model, Eurostudent, Higher Education, Georgia.

1 INTRODUCTION

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that not only envelopes aspects such as happiness, life satisfaction, and an overall sense of life quality but also plays a pivotal role in shaping a student's educational experiences and attainments [1].

While it is largely recognized that student well-being is intimately tied to academic prosperity, the parameters aiding in well-being demonstrate varied manifestations across distinctive cultural contexts and academic environments. Therefore, this research aims to delve into the factors that contribute to higher education students' well-being in the Georgian context and equip us with insights to devise efficacious strategies and support networks.

In an effort to structure our understanding and approach, we have employed the PERMA model of well-being as our conceptual framework. This model, which is an exemplification of the acronym for Positive Emotions (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A), was introduced by the positive psychology pioneer, Martin Seligman [2]. The PERMA model equips us with a structured understanding of what constitutes well-being and a comprehensive approach to interventions and practices aimed at augmenting the mental and emotional well-being of students in higher education.

This study endeavors to probe the intricacies of these factors within the framework of Georgian higher education with the objective to unpack the ways in which these factors foster the well-being of students, thus facilitating their academic pursuits.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by analyzing existing data from the Eurostudent Georgia national survey database, which was compiled in the spring term of 2022.

"Eurostudent" is a large-scale international research project carried out by the EUROSTUDENT International Consortium, focused on studying the social, economic, and living conditions as well as education-related issues affecting students at European universities. Georgia is one of the participating countries in this project.

The Eurostudent survey collects data online using a standardized questionnaire that is shared across all participating countries via students' university emails. The survey uses a stratified representative sample which includes active-status students, enrolled in authorized higher Educational Institutions of Georgia. For additional information about the Eurostudent survey, visit: www.eurostudent.eu.

The current study focused on a specific group of participants, namely 3,207 BA students of over the 40 universities of Georgia. The gender distribution within the sample consisted of 1,743 female students and 1,464 male students. The majority of Students (82%) were under 22 years old.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Data analysis

The Principal Component Analysis was used to determine the well-being's factorial structure. Multiple regression analysis was used in order to determine predictors for variability of well-being scores. The statistical operations were performed with help of IBM. SPSS 24.0.

3.1.1 Factor analysis for Well- being

In order to determine well-being's factorial structure for BA students from higher education in Georgia, the 5 items were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA). Suitability of data was assessed using Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin [3], where the value .89 exceeded the recommended value of .6 and Bartlett test (ρ < .000) [4] reached statistical significance. The principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation revealed that the well-being component consists of 5 items and in total explains a large share of 75.14% of variance respectively. Each item has a factor loading greater than [.80]. See "Tab 1"

Table 1. Well-being factor structure

	Well- being
1.Over the past 2 weeks: I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	.840
2.Over the past 2 weeks: I have felt calm and relaxed	.858
3.Over the past 2 weeks: I have felt active and vigorous	.866
4.Over the past 2 weeks: I woke up feeling fresh and rested	.854
5.Over the past 2 weeks: My daily life has been filled with thing that interests me	.818

Factor extraction method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization
Loadings below [.80] have been suppressed.

3.1.2 Regression analysis

The study applied correlation and multiple linear regression analysis to determine the predictors of well-being scores. The BA students' well-being scores were used as a dependent variable, meanwhile for independent variables there were 16 different types of factors. These consisted of *general health, satisfaction with the learning process, students' financial difficulties, sense of isolation, financial well-*

being of parents, experience of discrimination, culturally sensitive environment, educational crisis management skills, adhering to academic values and ethics, parents' education level, networking with potential employers, writing in accordance with academic standards, caring for academic success, positive, supportive learning climate and *involvement in projects*. Table 5 summarizes the descriptive statistics and analysis results.

The multiple regression model with all 16 predictors produced R^2 = .388, F (16, 572) = 22,04, p<.001. Model of 16 factors in total explains 38.8% variability of well-being scores.

The multiple regression analysis revealed a number of positive and significant predictors for student's sense of well-being. Specifically, *general health* (variable 1)*, satisfaction with the learning process* (variable 2)*, students' financial difficulties* (variable 3)*, culturally sensitive environment* (variable 8)*, educational crisis management skills* (variable 9)*, parents' education level* (variable 11)*, writing in accordance with academic standards* (variable 13)*, supportive learning climate* (variable 15) and *involvement in projects* (variable 16). Table 5 summarizes the descriptive statistics and analysis results. Some of these predictors are personal to students, while others are dependent on higher education institutions.

The personal well-being predictors indicate that student's with good health, general satisfaction by the educational process, financial difficulties, and well-educated parents have higher scores on the well-being scale. Meanwhile, institution-dependent well-being predictors indicate that a student's well-being is directly and positively affected by institutions attempts to culturally integrate foreign students, develop crisis management, and academic writing skills in their students, and offer supporting learning environments. To measure the supporting learning environment (variable 15), the variable was broken down into 6 sub-bullets (such as "*I know a lot of fellow students with whom I can discuss subject related questions*," "*I would recommend my current study program*," etc.). A principal component analysis resulted in all 6 items having factorial loading greater than .40. This indicates that the more supportive and positive the learning environment is, the higher do the students score on the well-being scale ("See PCA results in Tab 2").

Table 2. Variable N 15 - factor structure for Positive, supportive learning climate

	Positive, supportive learning climate
1. The lecturers normally give me helpful feedback on how I am going.	.776
2. The lecturers motivate me to do my best work	.848
3. The lecturers are extremely good at explaining things	.870
4. I know a lot of fellow students with whom I can discuss subject related questions	.653
5. I would recommend my current (main) study programme	.784
6. It was always clear I would study in higher education one day	.483

Factor extraction method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization
Loadings below [.40] have been suppressed.

Academic involvement is the final positive predictor on well-being; this necessitates for students to attend institutions that have access to research grants competitions and for the students to actively engage by participating.

The multiple regression analysis also revealed five negative significant predictors for a student's sense of well-being. Three of the variables were personal, specifically: *sense of isolation, financial well-being of parents,* and *experience of discrimination.* Meanwhile, two of the variables were institution-dependent, specifically *writing in accordance with academic standards* and *caring for academic success*. *Sense of Isolation* is a variable that combines 4 questions to measure how often a student feels isolated from fellow students, family, partners, friends and others. It should be noted that we performed principal component analysis in order to reveal items factorial loadings; each item has a factorial loading greater than .80. Negative and significant regression weight indicates that as the student's sense of isolation increases, the self-reported well-being scores decrease. "See Tab 3".

Table 3. Variable N 4 - factor structure for Sense of isolation

	Sense of isolation
1. How often do you feel isolated: from your friends	.926
2.How often do you feel isolated: from others in general	.901
3.How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner	.900
4. How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme	.896

Factor extraction method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization
Loadings below [.80] have been suppressed.

Experience of discrimination is a variable that combines 11 questions and refers to student's judgments about how often they feel discriminated against. (Such as "been treated as if you are unfriendly, unhelpful, or rude," "been asked inappropriate, offensive, or overly personal questions," "exposed to unwanted sexual attention" etc.) A principal component analysis revealed that all 11 items have factorial loadings greater than .70, clearly indicating that the students' who have often been discriminated against have low scores on the well-being scale. "See Tab 4".

Table 4. Variable N 7 - factor structure for Experience of discrimination

	Experience of discrimination
1. Would you say that because of who you are: you have been called names or heard/saw your identity used as an insult	.842
2.Would you say that because of who you are: you have been stared or pointed at	.833
3.Would you say that because of who you are: you have been told that you should think, act, or look more like others	.827
4.Would you say that because of who you are: you have heard that you or people like you don't belong	.814
5.Would you say that because of who you are: you have been treated as if you are less smart or capable than others	.800
6.Would you say that because of who you are: you have asked inappropriate, offensive, or overly personal questions	.784
7.Would you say that because of who you are: you have been treated as if you are unfriendly, unhelpful, or rude	.780
8.Would you say that because of who you are: you have been treated as if others are afraid of you	.779
9.Would you say that because of who you are: you have been subjected to physical violence	.776
10.Would you say that because of who you are: you have heard, saw, or read others joking about or laughing at you	.760
11. Would you say that because of who you are: you have experienced sexual harassment	.734

Factor extraction method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization
Loadings below [.70] have been suppressed.

Additionally, students' thoughts about how financially well off their parents are compared with other families (variable 5), student's perception about institutional support - specifically whether a higher education institution cares about one's academic success or not (Variable 15), and an institutions curriculum's ability to helps students develop skill adhering to academic values and ethics (variable 15) also shows negative and significant regression weight on well-being scores.

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis

	B	*Std. Error*	*β*	*t*	*sig*
constant	-1,990	,221		-9,020	,000
1.General health	,266	,038	,261	6,938	,000
2.Satisfaction with the learning process	,093	,045	,091	2,060	,040
3.Students financial difficulties	,092	,030	,118	3,019	,003
4.Sense of Isolation	-,140	,040	-,134	-3,520	,000
5.Financial well-being of parents	,177	,046	-,147	3,895	,000
6. Sex (female)	,140	,069	,071	2,030	,043
7.Experience of discrimination	-,120	,044	-,104	-2,721	,007
8.Culturally sensitive environment	,077	,028	,109	2,734	,006
9.Educational crisis management skills	,092	,027	,154	3,360	,001
10.Adhering to academic values and ethics	-,109	,033	-,161	-3,315	,001
11. At least one parent has higher education	,222	,085	,089	2,632	,009
12. Networking with potential employers	-,067	,023	-,113	-2,900	,004
13.Writing in accordance with academic standards	,056	,025	,093	2,206	,028
14.Caring for academic success	-,120	,039	-,145	-3,070	,002
15.Positive, supportive learning climate	,137	,054	,128	2,551	,011
16. Involvement in projects	,076	,038	,072	2,001	,046

Note: Dependent variable – Well -being

4 CONCLUSIONS

The research paints a multi-faceted picture of the issues that shape well-being in Georgia's higher education environment. The analysis makes clear that both personal factors (such as health, and financial difficulties) and institutional factors (such as the learning environment and support for academic success) play significant roles in influencing the well-being of undergraduate students in Georgia.

Looking closely at the personal aspects, the research highlights the damaging effects of discrimination on the mental well-being of individuals. This is of particular concern when considering that such harmful behaviors can and do occur even within education establishments. Economically, the study found that not only palpable financial issues can be problematic, but also a student's perception of their own financial situation can significantly alter their well-being.

The influence of the institution cannot be dismissed either. The research shows just how essential the role of higher education institutes is in determining students' well-being. The study found that institutions, which encourage an intermingling of cultures and actively embrace foreign students within Georgian academia, had higher ratings of student well-being. This emphasizes the crucial need for fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive as a means to enhance the students' well-being experience.

However, we did find two significant factors that were negatively linked to students' well-being: perceived lack of institutional support for academic success and perceived inadequacies in the curriculum in instilling adherence to academic and ethical values. Such negative perceptions, our research suggests, would undermine individual well-being at these institutions — a finding that foregrounds the importance of addressing these issues to foster a healthy student environment.

These findings offer insights that can guide educational institutes and policymakers in nurturing student well-being through practical interventions and systemic improvements in the environments where students learn and grow.

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