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The Problem of Academic Well-Being of University Students: Analysis of Influencing Factors

Abstract

Introduction. Since the academic well-being of students at modern universities is determined by their desire for continuous learning and skill development, there is a need to pay close attention to the study of students' academic well-being through the prism of their personal perceptions. *Methodology and Methods.* The aim of this study is to examine the sources that contribute to student academic well-being from the perspective of two different groups of students, namely first-year and senior students of the Faculty of General Medicine in a developmental environment through training sessions. Focus groups were used as the main method of obtaining information. *Results.* Two student groups, including 25 first-year students from the Faculty of General Medicine and 27 fifth-year students from the same faculty, participated in this study to illustrate the overall picture of sources of academic well-being. According to the results of the empirical study, first-year students demonstrated three points of view: an emphasis on the pleasure of balancing study and life, personal values and aspirations, and academic activity. The opinions of senior students focused on internal sources related to professional development, concerning their targeted academic development and the implementation of activity through self-management. Practical suggestions are offered for optimizing the development of a psychological and pedagogical curriculum to better support students' academic well-being. *Scientific novelty.* The main sources contributing to the academic well-being of students in the context of interactive learning at the university have been identified. *Practical significance.* The developed approach can be applied to improve the quality of the educational process, achieve certain goals in interactive learning and maintain the well-being of students in both personal and professional activities.

Keywords: personal well-being, academic success, medical university students, academic well-being, training sessions

Introduction. Since the start of the pandemic, students' academic well-being has been a hot topic for higher education researchers. Our main task in the field of scientific and pedagogical activity is to create educational conditions conducive to the successful personal and professional development of highly qualified specialists. As defined by foreign scientists, academic well-being is "a dynamic state and an indicator of a person's perseverance in learning, academic achievements and the development of competencies" (Huamán & Berona, 2021), is understood as the influence of student engagement on the school climate and subjective well-being of the individual (Na'imah et al., 2025), the role of resilience

and social support in the psychological well-being of university students (Anjum, 2022), it is also a kind of relationship between positive emotions of a person and a sense of satisfaction with personal choices in learning, the learning environment. (Tuominen-Soini et al., 2012), the power of perseverance and motivation on academic success and personal well-being (Obeng et al., 2025).

It is well known that medical education is inherently a complex and demanding process, so it is only logical that students are subject to significant academic, emotional, and physical demands. Practice shows that insufficient academic performance to meet all these requirements can lead to poor performance,

increased stress, and an increased risk of expulsion for students at medical universities. In medical education, the well-being of students is considered from all sides (including psychology, sociology, and medicine) (Eleje et al., 2025; Saad et al, 2025; Van der Merwe et al, 2020; Luibl et al), thereby identifying various adaptation problems in the educational process faced by students, thus providing an understanding of the complex components of well-being.

It is believed that personal involvement influences the relationship between academic resilience and subjective well-being among students. Medical university students generally perceive the educational environment positively and demonstrate academic resilience when faced with academic challenges and difficulties in achieving well-being while studying and living away from home. According to Van der Merwe L.J. et al., “the ability of the individual to cope with difficulties will ensure the well-being of future medical professionals” (Van der Merwe et al, 2020). Students’ adaptability and well-being are enhanced by the help of friends and fellow students in the form of mentoring (Akinla et al, 2018).

The research context chosen is the environment of developmental learning through training, when trainings help to recreate a future practical situation and thereby develop them, while teachers become coordinators who support student learning (Kolmos et al., 2021). It turns out that the comprehensive development of the student’s personality occurs through interaction in practice-oriented learning. The study of the question “How do interactive learning environments (trainings) provide diverse sources of support for students’ learning and contribute to their academic well-being?”. It was determined by the scientific study IRN AP19678139 “Assessment of socio-psychological opportunities for intensive growth of the well-being of students in Western Kazakhstan”. Existing research on student well-being has shown that self-compassion and self-kindness, academic motivation, and single-mindedness enhance mental and academic well-being.

Materials and Methods. Due to its rich history, the concept of “well-being” is quite interesting to define: from a hedonistic point of view, it is a feeling of happiness and joy, while from an eudaimonistic point of view, it is a dynamic process of life with all stages of personal development.

Scientific and theoretical research in this field shows a variety of understandings and definitions of the phenomenon of “well-being,” but there is still no single definition. Scientists’ keen interest in personal well-being at universities is explained by the acquired “experience of student learning, which is called academic well-being” (Perkins et al., 2021). Hascher T. demonstrates his definition “as an emotional experience characterized by the predominance of positive feelings and perceptions of school, people at school, and the school context” (Hascher, 2021), while Fiorilli C. and a number of other scholars believe that academic well-being is “self-efficacy, identity, personal autonomy, perceived difficulties, and engagement in the learning process” (Fiorilli et al., 2017).

Global educational experience has revealed methods for assessing the academic well-being of students, mainly in general education schools (subjective well-being scale, psychological well-being methodology, including PASS, PISA, PERMA, etc.). Recent studies show a causal relationship between “the deterioration of a student’s health and their poor academic performance and stress” (Barbour & van Meggelen, 2023). Conversely, “happiness and joy from success in learning lead to academic well-being of students” (Kovich et al., 2023).

We agree with the assertion that academic well-being is directly dependent on the value-volitional sphere, emotional-cognitive processes and states, as well as the nature of interaction with the surrounding reality, including “interpersonal relationships and conditions” (Eloff et al., 2022). This is, according to Brooker A., Baik C., and Larcombe W., academic well-being as “a student’s personal experience and achievements gained through their values and external circumstances” (Brooker et al., 2017). Thus, internal sources include the value-

volitional sphere, goals, and self-identification, while external sources include interpersonal relationships and learning conditions. All social connections of learners are undoubtedly important, literally every social role they play during this period of time.

Of course, constructive feedback and respectful relationships among medical university students create a positive attitude among students, as they are signs of professional recognition and self-identification in future medical practice. Good family and friendly relationships also contribute to their academic well-being (Govorova et al., 2020). Therefore, comprehensive efforts by all authorities are necessary to promote the academic well-being of students, including internal university policies (mission, policies, statutes, youth policy), academic content (programs, syllabi, auditing and monitoring the quality of educational services offered), and the “system of social and psychological support for students, university infrastructure” (Eloff et al., 2022).

This study of well-being at the regional level is being conducted at one of the medical universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, namely the Marat Ospanov West Kazakhstan Medical University in the city of Aktobe. The

study involved faculty members and first- and fifth-year students enrolled in the bachelor’s program in medicine at this university. The curriculum for this specialty includes general education, basic, specialized, and elective courses, which together form the professional competence of a doctor as a modern competitive specialist. Forms of education, such as classroom (lectures, seminars, laboratory classes, independent work under the guidance of a teacher, etc.) and extracurricular (internships, etc.), in fact contribute to the academic well-being of students, although the mechanisms of their improvement require clarification. Therefore, there is a need to study the sources of the formation of students’ academic well-being in an interactive learning environment.

As a theoretical basis, we have taken internal and external sources of academic well-being, which are studied by the «Likert scale tool with 37 points» (Chen, Du, et al., 2023). Students’ opinions about the resources of their academic well-being are necessary for the methodological development of the science of well-being (Lomas et al., 2021). We decided to use the proposed internal and external areas of personality interaction within the framework of four substructures as a questionnaire (Table 1),

Table 1. *Focus group questionnaire*

Domains	Topics	Statements
Internal sources	Personal values	1) I am satisfied with my education;
		2) I am motivated to learn;
		3) I have high goals in terms of good education and career growth;
		4) I choose a study program that suits my goals and interests;
		5) I can be responsible for my own education;
		6) I can develop my professional competencies during the learning process;
		7) I am able to interact with different people;
		8) I am able to be financially stable in my studies;
		9) I have harmony in my personal life and studies;
	Agency actions	1) I understand the connection between my future goals and academic achievements;
		2) I can handle any situation;
		3) I can correctly formulate goals according to my interests and abilities;
		4) I have good time management skills;
		5) I can make reasonable decisions;
		6) I motivate myself to realize my personal potential;
		7) I am capable of completing any educational tasks;
		8) I am stress-resistant in the learning process.

External sources	Interaction in learning environments	1) I communicate effectively with all people; 2) I can argue my point in debates and discussions; 3) I can work in a team; 4) I can coordinate joint actions to achieve a common goal; 5) I take an active role in teamwork; 6) I am respected by my colleagues; 7) I feel psychologically safe in the learning environment; 8) I am aware of the correct assessment of my academic performance;
	External support	1) I share my achievements with my family and friends; 2) I have a good relationship with my teachers; 3) I always share my learning experiences with my friends; 4) I have experience communicating with professional communities; 5) I have access to all the possibilities for searching for information on the Internet; 6) I have opportunities to receive social and psychological support.

Results. Opinions of 25 students (14 women and 11 men) in their first year and 27 students (17 women and 10 men) in their fifth year of medical school who had participated in training sessions at the psychology department on sources contributing to their academic well-being were obtained and analyzed.

The focus group interview procedure was conducted in a standard format during classroom sessions on the subjects of “Psychology” for first-year students and “Communication Skills in Medical Practice” for fifth-year students at the Department of Psychology during the 2024-2025 academic year. The questionnaires were printed and distributed to students, and all ethical rules and standards were observed in advance. To answer the question “Which sources do you think influence your academic well-being?”, participants were asked to rate a number of statements on a scale from the most significant (+4) to the least significant (-4). Personal information such as gender and course of study was also collected.

Three factors were identified in relevance group 1, emphasizing: a) enjoyment of the balance between study and life (factor 1); b) personal values and aspirations (factor 2); c) academic activity (factor 3).

Factor 1: “Enjoyment of studying and life”. Ten participants, including six women and four men, showed a significant load on factor 1, emphasizing the importance of enjoying studying while maintaining a balance between

studying and personal life. The academic well-being of these participants was supported by a sense of enjoyment of learning itself and motivation. Their career success was driven by their academic success, their ability to solve complex problems, and their ability to work effectively in a team. This was reflected in their high assessment of the quality of communication. According to the participants, they managed to find a balance between their studies and their personal lives, which allowed them to achieve academic well-being. This was made possible by their self-control and responsibility.

Interestingly, the 18 participants (twelve girls and six boys) in Factor 1 devalued the presence of clear goals and reflecting with colleagues on their progress in working toward common goals as statements that fully support academic well-being. The statements “challenge yourself to reach your full academic potential” and “monitor your academic growth to achieve your goals” were rated lowest due to their negativity: “For me, academic achievements are not that important. After all, I just want to live, and not constantly control everything and achieve something”.

The discovery was the fact that family and friends were not very involved in the academic life of students, especially in their academic well-being and success: “In fact, my education and all my achievements are necessary for me and depend only on me. My closest circle of friends and family can be happy for me or not,

but nothing depends on them”. Even external assessments of their education, such as grades in teachers’ journals, were not that important to them.

Factor 2 showed that 17 participants in this group (nine girls and eight boys) highly valued their personal beliefs, emotions, and aspirations. These values include the desire to make a successful career, motivation and interest in learning, and the comfort of being in any environment. It was enough for these guys to understand the close relationship between a successful career and academic well-being. According to factor 1, academic motivation and a sense of personal success were important sources for students: “I like my contribution to my future”.

They also noted the importance of a supportive educational environment, as they needed to feel comfortable in their physical learning environment in order to maintain their academic well-being: “I need comfort and understanding from others, otherwise I won’t be able to study comfortably”. There were also those who did not prioritize harmonious connections between their studies and their personal lives, teamwork, effective communication, and friendly relationships.

The next factor was factor 3, which included 17 students (six women and eleven men) who valued a high level of responsibility and competence. Their strong desire for personal and team success and well-being sets them apart from others. The motivation for everything was the belief that the ability to find the right solutions in educational and professional tasks, as well as stress resistance, would lead to good work in the future, and support from others helped students in this. A sense of personal comfort and group self-identification helped them achieve academic well-being.

The focus group method allowed us to understand the thoughts of different groups of students about the main factors of academic well-being: the prevailing needs of students are to enjoy themselves through a balance between study and personal life; between life values and personal aspirations; between internal motivation and academic well-being.

Discussion. Based on the identified points of view, first-year and fifth-year students in the Medicine educational program emphasized internal motivation in promoting their academic well-being, especially in terms of enjoyment of what they are studying and feelings of motivation. If we compare the opinions of the groups, it is obvious that undergraduates, compared with freshmen, are already focused on practical activities, careers and adulthood (many of them are already married and have children). Internal sources of academic well-being, such as the pursuit of professional development in medicine, have become dominant. As a result of the discussion, it is clear that internal sources play a more important role in maintaining the academic well-being of students. Therefore, willingness to study together, effective communication, and self-management contribute to the academic well-being of students (Bowman et al., 2019).

It should be recognized that some external sources have not been implemented at the university, which is a clear omission of the teachers. For example, students may feel shy and afraid to seek social and psychological help because of ridicule. Only through the competent actions of the university administration in establishing a comprehensive system of social, psychological, and pedagogical support, as well as creating a psychologically safe learning environment, is it possible to improve the psychological culture of students. According to scientists, students need to be taught not to be afraid of mistakes and difficulties, because “mistakes are learning opportunities, and wrong actions are also experience” (Molloy et al., 2021).

We have already noted that close relationships within the family and among friends are still not a fundamental source of academic well-being for students. Nevertheless, despite mental characteristics (respect for elders, emotional connection with parents, reverence for traditions, etc.), our young students prefer to be independent in their choices and actions and rely only on their own inner strength. Deep family relationships are important for setting strategic goals and life plans for young people, but they are not leading (Kovic et al., 2023).

Undoubtedly, achieving and strengthening academic well-being requires individual and institutional efforts. It is important for the faculty of the Medical University to understand the specifics of the educational process, the specifics of the curriculum, and other sources that contribute to improving the academic well-being of students. Given the personal characteristics and necessary character qualities that play an important role in their academic well-being, teachers should nevertheless learn how to ensure the further academic well-being and professional development of specialists in the role of facilitators (Barbour, Meggelen, 2023; Kolmos et al., 2021).

All higher education institutions need to pay more attention to student academic well-being when developing educational programs. The culture of a modern university should be focused on the culture of academic well-being, should provide students with opportunities to use all sources to satisfy their own needs for academic well-being (Barbour, Meggelen, 2023; Chen et al., 2023). For example, we implemented scientific results into the educational activities of University No. 73 on June 25, 2025, under the name "Training programs for promoting well-being in the university environment". The form of implementation is training scenarios for promoting well-being based on social communication in the educational process at Marat Ospanov WKMU in all practical classes, trainings, and master classes.

Training, in a general sense, is interactive learning aimed at developing skills. Unlike other forms of learning and knowledge transfer (lectures, seminars, etc.), taking into account the training features (activity, interactivity of participants, activity modeling, imitation of individual physical and cognitive actions, orientation towards behavior change (algorithms), scenarios (sets of algorithms for various tasks and situations), motivation of behavior, etc. The systematic use of training exercises in all types of classes and the training sessions themselves at the Department of Psychology allows all educational goals to be achieved. This study took into account training exercises and classes in the subjects

"Psychology" for first-year students and "Communication Skills in Medical Practice" for fifth-year students.

Our educational programs should also provide flexibility and clarity in terms of content and structure, so that students adjust their educational trajectory in a timely manner. Analyzing the results of focus group interviews, external factors were identified as dominant sources of academic well-being for first-year students. In order to correct their educational activities, university teachers and administrators should provide them with academic freedom of choice, depending on their needs and personal characteristics, expand opportunities for interdisciplinary and intercultural cooperation, and strengthen socio-psychological support at the beginning of their studies at the university.

Undergraduates, on the contrary, prefer internal resources, so they need to be given the opportunity to study on the job and practice medical practice in order to introduce future doctors to professional medical communities and enhance their professional and general competencies. Despite the availability of support services – the Professional Growth Center https://ospanov.university/centers/center-prof_rost.html, the Professional Skills Center <https://ospanov.university/centers/cpn/cpn.html>, the Nursing Excellence Center https://ospanov.university/centers/center-sestr_delo.html, Social and Psychological Support Service <https://ospanov.university/services/service-psiho.html>, Youth Affairs Service <https://ospanov.university/services/service-youngs.html>). We think that, in general, all medical universities create a favorable climate for the academic well-being of their students, as this affects the number of applicants and the quality of graduates.

Conclusion. The topic of well-being, especially academic well-being, will always be relevant for education, since corrective actions on the part of subjects of education should be constant and aimed at improving the quality of education. So, by studying the personal views of future doctors in different courses of study, we focused on existing internal and external sources of academic well-being. The obtained

results of the focus group interview method helped to see the overall picture of students' academic well-being, their attitude towards it, and identify important factors as sources for achieving academic well-being.

The subject of the study was considered in the context of medical education, in particular, an interactive learning environment using training exercises and the training session itself in the first and fifth years of study as part of a comprehensive educational program. It was found that academic well-being remains a complex phenomenon, which is directly influenced by many factors. The factors identified by the participants of our focus group

as the main sources of academic well-being are quite understandable and understandable, but still need to be further clarified and studied from a methodological perspective. Based on this research, new studies may be conducted in the future, followed by interviews with large groups of students with different levels of education and different professional backgrounds.

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