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Subjective well-being level as a predictor of university students' psychological engagement in blended learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the level of subjective well-being of university students in blended learning, investigate the relationship between subjective well-being and psychological engagement, determine the differences in their subjective well-being level in terms of gender and academic discipline variables, and explore the predictability of psychological engagement level through subjective well-being. For this purpose, the descriptive comparative correlative approach was utilised. Three hundred and sixteen male and female students participated in this research. For data collection, the College Subjective Well-being Questionnaire and the psychological engagement scale were applied to the participants. Results demonstrated that students had a high level of subjective well-being in all its dimensions, there was a statistically significant correlation at (0.01) level between psychological engagement and subjective well-being, the level of psychological engagement can be predicted through the level of subjective well-being, there were statistical differences in the subjective well-being level and all its dimensions due to gender in favour of female students, there were no statistical differences in the level of subjective well-being as a whole due to the academic discipline variable, while there were statistical differences in all its dimensions due to the academic discipline in favour of the literary disciplines.

Keywords: Blended learning, psychological engagement, subjective well-being.

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1. Introduction

Subjective well-being is one of the positive psychology variables. Recently, various research concentrates on different qualitative aspects related to certain areas including career subjective well-being, social well-being, marital well-being, and student well-being that relates to different academic fields, activities, and situations within the college (Chen et al., 2013). College student subjective well-being (CSSW) reflects a broad multi-faceted phenomenon that refers to a psychological, emotional, and physical adjustment that is affected by social structures such as family, gender, society, and race (Eybers, 2018). It is the state through which individuals realise their possessions and enable them to face the pressures of university life and work efficiently. It consists of the academic quality of life, inner satisfaction, and personal experiences (Lane et al., 2018).

Subjective well-being is a significant predictor of student's mental health, in general, and academic achievement of college students in particular (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2016), as it is the student's self-perceptions and beliefs about internal events. It includes the personal and socially desirable patterns of thinking for college students, which depend on perception and emotion in educational fields and is called positivity.

Furthermore, it is related to the five biggest factors of personality, where extraversion was correlated positively with subjective well-being, acceptance with a sense of gratitude, a conscience with academic satisfaction, and academic aptitude among college students, while neuroticism is negatively related to academic coherence (Zhang & Renshaw, 2020).

CCSW comprises the degree of efficient performance of the student in school or a permanent state of mood, positive attitude, resilience, good relationships, and experiences at the university, and efficient optimism in the university community. It is related to the state of internal feelings and the level of motivation (Fraillon, 2004).

Renshaw (2018) determined four main dimensions of CSSW, on which the current study relied as follows: a) Academic Satisfaction: Cognitive evaluation of the academic field in general, such as satisfaction with academic study, and satisfaction with the relationships between students and their professors. b) Academic Efficacy: The student's belief in his abilities and effectiveness in achieving his or her academic goals, high-efficiency students perceive the tasks required of them as challenges to their abilities rather than threats, and they have high levels of success (Chemers et al., 2001). It is related to the amount of time spent studying, and academic achievement (Chow, 2007). C) School Connectedness: The student's sense of belonging to the college, and the interest and acceptance of others in it. It has a high impact on college students' academic performance and is associated with low levels of loneliness and difficulty in adjustment (Duru, 2008). It is also related to emotional learning and achievement motivation (Turki et al., 2018). D)College Gratitude: A set of indicators and perceptions that reflect students' sense of learning pleasure, academic coherence, clarity of objectives, and belief in academic achievement (Renshaw, 2018).

High optimism, self-esteem, and personal competence contribute to predicting student subjective well-being in the first and second year of the university, and a low level of stress, anxiety, and depression leads to high student happiness levels (Williams et al., 2017). Nair et al. (2021) also found that high levels of stress are associated with low levels of subjective well-being. In addition, college students' subjective well-being is associated with improved mental health (Herke et al., 2018).

Recently, the focus is increasing on psychological engagement through activities that the student enjoys doing and that are important for his development (Ramey et al., 2015). Students' psychological engagement is active participation in the learning process that contributes to deeper and more

meaningful learning (Huang et al., 2017). It indicated the extent of interest, curiosity, optimism, attentiveness, and positive emotions that students demonstrate when they are learning, which accordingly affects the level of motivation they must have to advance in their learning (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

Psychological engagement reflects an individual's subjective and personal experiences while participating in an activity, and thus may express a good 'fit' or 'fit' between the context of the activity and the individual's strengths or needs (Kashif & Basharat, 2014). Students' psychological engagement is meaningful in the learning environment. Thus, psychological engagement is understood as the relationship between the students and the following learning environment elements: school community, school adults, student peers, educational situation, and curriculum (Martin & Torres, 2016).

Psychological engagement typically involves three dimensions: the behavioural dimension which emphasises participation in academic, social, and curriculum activities, the emotional dimension indicating the focus on the nature of positive and negative feedback from teachers, classmates, academics, and the school, and the cognitive dimension that focuses on the students' investment in learning level (Ramey et al., 2019; Timms et al., 2018).

Psychological engagement is characterised by: preoccupation (a feeling of alertness and complete preoccupation), devotion (a level of passion for one's work that is considered meaningful and psychologically satisfactory), and vitality (high levels of energy and mental flexibility and work energises and spends time) (Kashif & Basharat, 2014).

This psychological state is associated with reduced risk of suicide prediction (Ramey et al., 2016), increased sense of community and social responsibility (McGuir & Gamble, 2006) and enjoyment and self-esteem (Adachi & Willuoghby, 2014), higher quality education (Coates, 2007), high academic performance (Delfino, 2019), academic success (De Villiers & Werner, 2016), learning achievement (Wonglorsaichon et al., 2014), educational success and mental health (Wang & Peck, 2013), and academic resilience (Romano et al., 2021).

Besides, the students' psychological engagement is positively correlated to students' subjective well-being. Kim et al. (2020) indicated that psychological engagement mediates the relationship between psychological engagement and academic psychological capital (PsyCap). Psychological engagement helps improve the level of mental health and positive growth. Ramey et al. (2019) found that it is necessary to promote engagement in students' academic tasks as one of the areas of psychological integration for its role in developing positive growth, enjoyment, and challenge to solve problems and psychological pressures.

Anttila et al. (2018) indicated that the positive interaction between faculty members and their students, between students and their colleagues inside the classrooms and in learning situations and academic activities, and activating the role of the faculty member in guiding students and providing continuous academic support, in addition to the transfer of knowledge contributes in student achievement, psychological well-being, positive growth, and engagement.

The prevalence of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and behavioural problems in university education, may lead to academic failure and college dropout (Beiter et al., 2015). Hence, university education encounters many challenges imposed by the current circumstances such as health challenges that impede the universities role.

In recent years, the education role has shifted from providing traditional education focusing on academic competence to providing the experiences and opportunities they need to become contented and steadfast in the face of pressures that students need (Lumby, 2011). The student-teacher needs to have these experiences to present them to his students after preparing him at the College of Education. Psychological and cultural pressures at this time affect their subjective well-being and psychological engagement levels. Nevertheless, many first-year students have difficulties engaging in academic tasks and stress. Morales (2008) found that 80% of high school graduates enter the university and have great poverty in some basic skills and competencies.

With the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions have had to turn to an online educational platform to continue education. Failure to prepare for this transition has created many challenges for learners and educators. One of the challenges teachers faced was disengaging learners. It has been reported that the main reason for the high dropout rates and lack of quality in the student is the low levels of student engagement. Consequently, student engagement became more significant as learners felt more isolated and disconnected in the recent environment.

Therefore, there is a need to adapt effective methods of engaging learners in their learning journey, as student engagement is an indicator of quality for higher education institutions that embrace online learning. This can be achieved by alternating between face-to-face education and e-education, as in the blended education system (Vaghjee & Vaghjee, 2022, Ramey et al., 2017).

Blended learning as an educational style is a system that integrates the advantages of traditional education and e-learning and helps in increasing the absorption of learners, improving the interaction network between the teacher and his students. It depends on the activities of virtual networks over the Internet and face-to-face interaction in traditional classrooms and addresses the problems of electronic communication (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Blended learning and communication via the Internet is an opportunity to avoid academic failure and low level of achievement, due to the student's ability to deal with the Internet and their interest in social communication via the Internet, and access to educational content through it while attending lectures face to face and discussing faculty members in this educational content, and presenting various projects and show creativity.

The nature of the blended learning system increases the pleasure of learning, the feeling of gratitude, and satisfaction with his academic activity inside the classroom. The student's feeling of confidence and the ability to show his skills, and the student's satisfaction with his interaction with his teacher increase his motivation (Gallant et al., 2010; Garrison &Vaughan, 2008; Henrie et al., 2015; Krasnova, 2015).

Hence, the current study is concerned with identifying the level of subjective well-being of university students, investigating the relationship between subjective well-being and psychological engagement, determining the differences in their subjective well-being level in terms of gender and academic discipline variables, and exploring the predictability of psychological engagement level through subjective well-being. According to these objectives, these hypotheses have been constructed:

- H1: The university students using the blended learning system -the research sample- have a high level of subjective well-being in the overall degree and its dimensions.
- *H2:* There is a positive correlative relationship between subjective well-being and psychological engagement among the research sample.

- *H3:* There are statistically significant differences in the research sample's subjective well-being level in terms of gender.
- *H4:* There are statistically significant differences in the research sample's subjective well-being level in terms of academic discipline variables.
- *H5*: Psychological engagement level of university students- the study sample- can be predicted through their subjective well-being level.

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

The current research relied on the descriptive comparative correlative approach to identify the students' subjective well-being level and to identify the differences due to gender (male-female) and academic discipline (literary discipline and scientific discipline).

2.2. Study group

The pilot research sample comprised 169 male and female students (mean age = 19.331, SD = 7.99, female = 91, male = 78, literary disciples = 82 (48%), Scientific disciplines =78 (52%)) in the first year of the Faculty of Education, Minia University. They were chosen randomly to verify the research tool's validity and reliability from the undergraduate programs at the university, which are basic education, social studies, English, science, general education, biology, chemistry, history, and geography.

The basic research sample consisted of (316) male and female students in the first year at the Faculty of Education, Minia University (age mean = 19.304, SD = 0.845, female = 167, male = 149, literary disciples = 175 (55%), Scientific disciplines = 141 (45%)). The study tools were applied in the second semester of the academic year 2020/2021 AD.

2.3. Data collection tools

2.3.1. The CSSWQ questionnaire

The CSSWQ was developed by Renshaw (2018). It is a kind of self-reported measurement. The questionnaire consists of (16) items distributed into 4 dimensions as follows: academic satisfaction, academic efficacy, school connectedness, and College gratitude. The instructions ask the participants to rate according to a 7-point Likert-type questionnaire. The degrees of the scale range from (16–112) degrees, and each dimension has four statements, meaning that the degree of the dimension ranges from (7–18) degrees. The questionnaire has well-documented evidence of good psychometric properties.

Apart from the well-documented evidence of the scale's psychometric properties, the scale was presented after translating into Arabic to 2 Language jury members to determine the suitability of statements to measure the students' subjective well-being. After applying their recommendations, the scale in its initial form was presented to five mental health and psychology professors. They agree on the questionnaire statements while paraphrasing some of them.

The factorial analysis through principal components was administered to the pilot study participants. Based on the factor analysis of a large-item pool of this variable, four factors were identified. The results indicated that the four factors achieved 65% of the total variance. The factor loadings of items ranged between 0.302 and 0.866. Besides, the researcher followed the Gilford criterion (0.03) to choose the significant factor loadings, confirming the scale validity.

Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were employed to define the scale reliability, where the value of the reliability coefficients of the scale total degree and dimensions were greater than 0.7. The results of the internal consistency coefficients of the scale revealed that there were positive correlation coefficients at (0.01) level between the degree of each item with the total degree of the dimension to which it belongs, after omitting the degree of the items out of the total degree of the dimension.

2.3.2. The psychological engagement scale

A psychological engagement scale was designed by Ramey et al. (2015). The scale comprised (9) items distributed into 3 dimensions as follows: the cognitive dimension (3 items), the affective dimension (3 items), and the relational/spiritual dimension (3 items). Ratings for psychological engagement items were as follows: 1 (not at all), 2 (a little bit), 3 (somewhat), and 4 (a lot). Composites for each dimension were created by averaging the responses of each individual. The scores range from (9–45). The scale has well-documented evidence of good psychometric properties.

Apart from the well-documented evidence of the scale's psychometric properties, the scale was presented after translating into Arabic to 2 Language jury members to determine the suitability of statements to measure the students' subjective well-being. After applying their recommendations, the scale in its initial form was presented to five mental health and psychology professors. They agree on the questionnaire statements while paraphrasing some of them.

The factorial analysis through principal components was administered to the pilot study participants. Based on the factor analysis of a large-item pool of this variable, four factors were found. The results indicated that the four factors explained 64.2% of the total variance. The factor loadings of items ranged between 0.827 and 0.332. Besides, the researcher followed the Gilford criterion (0.03) to choose the significant factor loadings, confirming the scale validity.

Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were employed to define the scale reliability, where the value of the reliability coefficients of the scale total degree and dimensions were greater than 0.7. The results of calculating the internal consistency coefficients of the scale illustrated that there were significant positive correlation coefficients at (0.01) level between the degree of each item with the total degree of the dimension to which it belongs, after omitting the degree of the items out of the total degree of the dimension.

2.4. Data Analysis

The researcher used the following statistical methods to obtain the study results: mean, percentages, the t-test for differences between independent samples, linear regression analysis, and Pearson correlation.

3. Results

3.1. Results of the first hypothesis

'The university students using the blended learning system -the research sample- have a high level of subjective well-being in the overall degree and its dimensions. To ensure the validity of the hypothesis, the hypothetical mean was calculated on the dimensions of the scale and its total degree, and the t-test was utilised to verify the significance of the differences between the hypothetical mean and the arithmetic mean on the subjective well-being scale as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the t-Test to Indicate the Differences Between the Hypothetical Mean and the Arithmetic Mean of the Responses of the Sample Members on the Subjective Well-Being Scale (n = 316)

Dimensions	N. of items	N. of responses	Mean	Sd	Hypothetical mean	t-value	fd	Sig. level	Sig.
Academic satisfaction	4	5,934	18.779	4.409	16	11.201	315	0.000	Sig.
Academic efficacy	4	6,632	20.987	4.083	16	21.712	315	0.000	Sig.
College connectedness	4	7,107	22.491	3.362	16	34.316	315	0.000	Sig.
College gratitude	4	7,141	22.598	4.557	16	25.737	315	0.000	Sig.
Total Score	16	26,814	84.854	14.263	64	85.814	315	0.000	Sig.

Table 1 illustrates that the statistical mean of the subjective well-being scale is higher than the default average of the scale and its four dimensions. Besides, the t-test was calculated between the default and statistical means and the value was statistically significant.

3.2. Results of the second hypothesis

'There are significant differences in the research sample's subjective well-being level in terms of gender. To check the validity of the hypothesis, a t-test for independent samples was utilised as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. The Significance of the Differences Between Male and Female Students in the Subjective Well-Being Scale, its Dimensions, and the Total Score

Dimension	Male mean	SD	Female mean	SD	<i>T</i> value	Sig. level	Sig
Academic satisfaction	16.6980	3.37259	20.634	4.40476	8.972	0.000	Sig.
Academic efficacy	20.3557	4.07211	21.550	4.02202	2.620	0.009	Sig.
College connectedness	21.5570	2.48341	23.323	3.80436	4.936	0.000	Sig.
College gratitude	21.0537	4.55712	23.976	4.10400	5.962	0.000	Sig.
Total score	79.6644	12.61038	89.485	14.08958	6.538	0.000	Sig.

Table 2 demonstrates that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study sample on the subjective well-being scale due to gender (males- females) in favour of female students.

3.3. Results of the third hypothesis

'There are significant differences in the research sample's subjective well-being level in terms of academic discipline variables'. To check the validity of this hypothesis, a t-test for independent samples was utilised as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. The Significance of the Differences Between Students in Literary and Scientific Specialisations in the Subjective Well-Being Scale, its Dimensions, and the Total Score

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Dimension	Mean (Literary specialisation)	SD	Means (Scientific specialisation)	SD	<i>T</i> value	Sig. level	Sig
Academic satisfaction	20.8800	4.20077	3.07282	11.497	11.497	0.000	Sig.
Academic efficacy	22.8629	3.90012	2.95884	10.889	10.889	0.009	Sig.
College connectedness	23.0400	3.62520	2.87331	3.369	3.369	0.000	Sig.
College gratitude	23.8171	4.21965	4.52057	5.501	5.501	0.000	Sig.
Total score	90.6000	13.95189	11.10541	9.135	9.135	0.000	N.S

Table 3 reveals that there are no statistically significant differences between the degrees of students of the literary and the scientific specialisations on the scale of academic subjective well-being in the total score, while significant differences are found in all dimensions in the direction of literary specialisation students.

3.4. Results of the fourth hypothesis

'There is a positive correlative relationship between subjective well-being and psychological engagement among the research sample. To ensure the validity of the hypothesis, Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Between CSSWQ and PSY ENG

Variables	CSSWQ: academic satisfaction	CSSWQ: academic efficacy	CSSWQ: school connectedness	CSSWQ: college gratitude	CSSWQ: total score
PSY ENG	0.829**	0.751**	0.744**	0.659**	0.811**

^{**}CSSWQ = College Student Subjective Well-being Questionnaire; PSY ENG = Psychological Engagement; n = 316; ** Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-tailed).

Results in Table 4 approve that there is a strong, direct, significant correlation at the level of 0.01 between psychological engagement and academic well-being (the four dimensions and the total score), indicating the verification of the second hypothesis.

3.5. Results of the fifth hypothesis

'Psychological engagement level of university students- the study sample- can be predicted through their subjective well-being level'. To check the validity of this hypothesis, the linear regression analysis was employed as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5. Linear Regression Analysis Between CSSWQ and PSY ENG (n = 316)

PSY ENG							
Model	R	R square	(Constant)	В	Beta	F	t
CSSWQ	0.829	0.688	10.992	0.317	0.829	691.498***	26.296***

CSSWQ = College Student Subjective Well-being Questionnaire*. Correlation is significant at 0.01; PSY ENG = Psychological Engagement.

Table 5 indicates that there is a statistically significant correlation between psychological engagement and subjective well-being. Thus, psychological engagement can be predicted through students' subjective well-being level. The predictive regression equation can be formulated as follows:

Psychological engagement = 10.992 + 0.317 (students' scores on subjective well-being scale)

4. Discussion

In the current research, the level of subjective well-being among university students using blended learning was measured and the relationship between this level and their psychological engagement was investigated. In addition, the extent to which the variables of gender and academic specialisation can affect the students' subjective well-being was examined. The findings illustrated that the students of the research sample have a high level of subjective well-being. This result is consistent with various study results, indicating that blended learning meets the students' basic psychological needs, which makes them achieve academic contentedness, satisfaction, and coherence, and develop their sense of gratitude (Al Deen & Ahmed, 2021; Wong, 2022).

Results illustrated also that there were significant differences in the subjective well-being level among the participants due to the gender variable (male-female) in favour of the female students. This result agrees with the results of previous research indicating that female students enjoy a higher level of subjective well-being than males most of the time when stress levels are low (Nair et al., 2021) and differs from other studies stating that there were no differences between male and female students in this level (Wilcox & Nordstokke, 2019).

There were also no significant differences in the subjective well-being level among the participants due to the students' academic discipline variable, while there were significant differences in the dimensions of the subjective well-being scale in favour of the literary specialisation. This result can be attributed to their few attendance and students of scientific specialisations prefer practical practices and face-to-face lectures. In addition, these students feel more cognitive loads and academic responsibilities that deprive them of enjoyment. They usually fear failure and the method of teaching makes them lose the sense of the joy of learning. Besides, the nature of the age stage with its pressures and emotional fluctuations, and the nature of studying at the university, which differs from studying in the pre-university education stage, affects their academic compatibility and happiness.

The results of this hypothesis are consistent with previous study results indicating that studying theoretical subjects is commensurate with blended teaching, which helped them develop and employ their skills, feel academically efficient, think and feel grateful for the opportunity provided by the system for creativity in their theoretical academic fields, unlike practical and scientific disciplines as in the current research (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). Furthermore, studying on campus helps with high concentration and interaction with colleagues, and this is difficult to achieve in the blended learning system.

The current study shows that students with a scientific specialisation have psychological and academic pressures, which led to a decrease in their sense of academic cohesion. The student's sense of belonging to the college was affected by distance and lack of presence. The student needed to establish friendships with students he had not known before, as he is in the first year of college and needs direct follow-up and academic and psychological support to feel grateful.

Results also approved that there was a correlative relationship between university students' subjective well-being and psychological engagement and that their psychological engagement level can predict the students' subjective well-being level. This result can be attributed to the nature of blended learning activities which helps students to feel more knowledgeable and confident about applying their knowledge to solve problems they face inside and outside the classroom. This naturally leads to high academic success and efficiency. Teachers also concluded that the blended learning environment improves pupil engagement as they interact regularly with web-based learning tools and are motivated to share their knowledge.

5. Conclusion

Blended learning has become a key strategy to help fulfil the university's access mission. This study found that a high level of academic well-being among first-year college students can be predicted through their psychological engagement level. Besides, results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the dimensions of academic well-being in favour of female students and those with literary disciplines, indicating the needs of males and those with scientific specialisations to have counselling programs that improve their level in the sub-dimensions of subjective well-being. Finally, academic satisfaction, gratitude, academic connectedness, and academic competence are important factors because they are related to students' subjective well-being and linked to academic engagement. Male first-year students with scientific disciplines must increase their student participation in various activities and request academic and psychological support.

6. Recommendations

In light of the above-mentioned research results, the current study recommends the need to prepare a counselling program to improve the level of university students' academic well-being because it increases their psychological engagement level, which has positive effects on them. In addition, University enters psychological services and counselling should provide more psychological and academic support to raise the students' subjective well-being level and encourage students' participation in academic and sports activities and develop ways of implementing them using modern technological applications. There is also a need to activate the role of academic guidance services in solving students' academic problems.

Further future research is needed to investigate the variable of subjective well-being and psychological engagement among other university stages and disciplines, the effect of some psychological programs based on behavioural activation, and meta-cognitive to develop the variable under study. The study also does not address the effect of some mediating variables for example: academic success and the student's family socio-economic level. Therefore, further studies ate recommended to examine the factors that may decrease the level of students' subjective well-being and psychological engagement such as cognitive loads, or factors that may contribute to its development such as psychological hardiness and academic buoyancy.

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