

Investigating the well-being status of private university students in China from the perspective of positive psychology

Tian SUN^{1,*}, Ziyi LIU¹, Yiyang ZHANG²

¹ Yunnan Technology and Business University, Kunming 651700, China

² Civil Aviation Management Institute of China, Beijing 100102, China

*Corresponding author

E-mail address: 376208995@qq.com

Abstract: This study, grounded in positive psychology theory and framed by the PERMA model, explores the well-being status of private university students (PUS) in China. The results indicate that the overall well-being (OW) of PUS is at a moderately high level. Male PUS scored significantly higher than female PUS in the dimensions of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, and achievement. Student leaders demonstrated superior performance in all dimensions of well-being and OW. Freshmen had significantly higher well-being than sophomores. Based on these findings, this study suggests that universities implement differentiated mental health education programs tailored to the characteristics of different groups to comprehensively enhance the well-being of PUS.

Keywords: positive psychology; private university students; well-being

1 Introduction

In contemporary society, the psychological health issues of university students (US) are increasingly drawing attention [1]. With the popularization of higher education, the number of US is continuously growing, and they are confronted with numerous challenges in their studies, life, and future planning. Well-being, as an important indicator of psychological health, holds significant importance for the comprehensive development of university students. Positive psychology, an emerging branch of psychology, emphasizes focusing on human strengths and virtues, providing a unique perspective and theoretical foundation for researching US' well-being [2].

In recent years, private higher education in China has experienced rapid development, and the number of students in private universities has also been increasing. Private university students (PUS) have unique characteristics in terms of academic pressure, employment prospects, and family background. Compared with public university students, private university students may face more psychological challenges. However, there is currently a relative lack of research on the well-being of private university students, especially within the framework of positive psychology. This study aims to fill this research gap by thoroughly exploring the well-being status of PUS to provide a scientific basis for improving their psychological health.

2 Research methodology

The research population consists of all the students at Yunnan Technology and Business University (YTBV), a private

university (PU) in China, with a total student population of 25,607. YTBV was selected as the research site because it is a representative PU in Yunnan Province.

Two research instruments were utilized in this study: a demographic information questionnaire (DIQ) and a university students well-being questionnaire (USWQ). The DIQ was designed to collect basic information. The USWQ was developed based on the well-being scale by Butler and Kern [3], which is grounded in the PERMA model. It encompasses six dimensions: positive emotion (PE), engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, and overall well-being (OW), with a total of 16 items. The USWQ uses an 11-point Likert scale, where 0 represents "not at all" and 10 represents "completely". Data analysis revealed that the overall Cronbach's alpha of USWQ was 0.967, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test statistic value was 0.971.

In this study, the questionnaires were distributed to the students of YTBV via the Questionnaire Star APP. A total of 1,352 valid questionnaires were eventually collected. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS AU software.

3 Data analysis results

DIQ data analysis results: In terms of gender, there were 698 male PUS (51.63%) and 654 female PUS (48.37%). 295 PUS (21.82%) held student leadership positions, while 1,057 PUS (78.18%) did not. As for grade distribution, there were 660 freshmen (48.82%), 255 sophomores (18.86%), 327 juniors (24.19%), and 110 seniors (8.14%).

OW status of PUS: The majority of PUS' OW scores were concentrated between 5 and 10, with the highest number of PUS (277, 20.49%) scoring 8. The next most common scores were 10 (247 PUS, 18.27%), 5 (219 PUS, 16.20%), and 7 (205 PUS, 15.16%). Relatively fewer PUS chose lower scores, such as 0 (11 PUS, 0.81%) and 1 (8 PUS, 0.59%). These results indicate that most PUS had a relatively high self-assessment of their OW, although a portion of PUS felt less happy. In addition, the mean was 8.227, and the standard deviation was 2.123, which also suggests that PUS generally had a high self-evaluation of their OW.

Differences between genders: The independent samples t-test results indicated that there were no significant differences in the relationships and OW scores between male and female PUS ($p > 0.05$). Significant differences were observed in the PE, engagement, meaning, and achievement dimensions ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, male PUS scored significantly higher than female PUS in these dimensions.

Differences between student leaders and non-student leaders: The results of the independent samples t-test indicated significant differences in all well-being dimensions and OW scores between student leaders and non-student leaders ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, student leaders scored significantly higher than non-student leaders in these dimensions.

Differences across grades: The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated that no significant differences were found in the relationships dimension across grades ($p > 0.05$). Significant differences were found in the PE dimension ($F = 3.204$, $p < 0.05$). Post-hoc multiple comparisons using the least-significant difference (LSD) test revealed that freshmen had significantly higher PE scores than sophomores, and juniors had significantly higher PE scores than sophomores. Significant differences were also found in the engagement dimension ($F = 4.396$, $p < 0.05$), with the LSD test showing that freshmen had significantly higher engagement scores than sophomores and seniors. Significant differences were found in the achievement dimension ($F = 6.757$, $p < 0.05$), with the LSD test showing that freshmen had significantly higher achievement scores than sophomores and juniors, and seniors had significantly higher achievement scores than sophomores. Significant differences were found in the meaning dimension ($F = 4.526$, $p < 0.05$), with the LSD test showing that freshmen had significantly higher meaning scores than sophomores and juniors. Significant differences were found in the OW dimension ($F = 3.313$, $p < 0.05$), with the LSD test showing that freshmen had significantly higher OW scores than sophomores.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Conducting gender-differentiated mental health education

Given the significant differences in some well-being dimensions between genders, PU should pay attention to the special needs of female PUS in terms of PE, engagement, meaning, and achievement. For example, specialized psychological counseling courses or activities can be designed for female PUS to help them enhance their self-efficacy, increase PE experiences, and improve their engagement in studies and life, thereby promoting their well-being in these dimensions.

4.2 Leveraging the leadership role of student leaders

The higher well-being scores of student leaders in all dimensions and OW indicate their advantages in university life. PUS can fully utilize the leadership role of student leaders by organizing student leader training programs and team building activities to further enhance their comprehensive quality and leadership skills. Encouraging student leaders to actively participate in campus culture construction and social practice activities can also set an example for more students to engage in campus life and improve their well-being.

4.3 Paying attention to the psychological needs of students at different grades

PU should develop targeted mental health education plans based on the psychological characteristics and needs of students at different grades. For freshmen, the focus should be on helping them adapt to university life, guiding them to actively participate in club activities and academic competitions, cultivating their interests and team spirit, and enhancing their PE and engagement. For sophomores, attention should be paid to their confusion regarding academic pressure and career planning, with more career guidance and psychological counseling provided to help them clarify their goals and relieve pressure. For juniors and seniors, the focus should be on the employment pressure and social adaptability issues they face. This can be addressed by holding career guidance lectures, providing internship opportunities, and offering career planning consultations to help them enhance their employability and self-confidence.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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About the author

Tian Sun, whose research interests lie in educational research. Ziyi Liu, whose research interests lie in educational research. Yiyan Zhang, whose research interests lie in educational research.
