

Specific features of the training seminar in order to improve the subjective well-being of students

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the specific features of the training seminar in order to improve the subjective well-being of university students. The qualitative research method was used in this study. The study group of the research consisted of 72 university students studying at various universities in Almaty, Kazakhstan in the 2021–2022 academic year. Research data were collected with a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers. As a result of the research, students defined subjective well-being as looking at life positively, living life in a planned way, socialising and being a good person. University students evaluated their subjective well-being at a moderate level with suggestions of university students participating in the research to improve subjective well-being, giving importance to personal development, establishing positive relations with the environment and benefiting from activities in universities. In addition, students' opinions on the characteristics of the training seminars for the development of subjective well-being are that they are motivating, provide multidimensional development, have rich content and are held regularly. In line with the findings obtained from the research, it has emerged that the training seminars organised for the improvement of the subjective well-being of university students should be organised frequently, provide multidimensional development and be rich in content.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, educational seminars, university students

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1. Introduction

Since the dawn of ancient civilisations, people have sought to establish a clear and all-encompassing definition of happiness. In this process, they also tried to define the concept of well-being, but they could not reach a consensus. The state of well-being included in the concept of happiness is explained with concepts such as self-actualisation, satisfaction, harmony, economic well-being and quality of life. However, what happiness and well-being are and how they are felt is still a question that positive psychology seeks to answer (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Subjective well-being is defined as having life satisfaction in which positive emotions are dominant and negative emotions are less experienced. It is evaluated as a result of the emotional reactions that the individual has given in the face of events by coming to a conclusion as a result of his evaluation of his own life events (Diener, 1984). Yurcu and Atay (2015) define subjective well-being as a subjective interpretation with inferences about the positive and negative emotions one has and the satisfaction one gets from life.

Considering the concept of subjective well-being in different contexts, it can be said that there is a linear relationship between sociability and subjective well-being. It is stated that individuals who spend time in activities with others have a sense of togetherness and this feeling positively affects the subjective well-being of individuals (Wheatley, 2017).

Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) also conducted studies to increase subjective well-being. According to Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006), being in social relationships is an important strategy to increase subjective well-being. The second important strategy is to engage in direct behaviour related to subjective well-being (showing subjective well-being through physical behaviour, for example, laughing behaviour). The third strategy is to engage in activities that will fulfil the requirements of religious belief. The fourth strategy is maintaining subjective well-being or mental control. The fifth strategy is to act actively and passively. The sixth strategy is to set goals and achieve them.

The first studies on subjective well-being increasing strategies were carried out in three experimental stages. While it had a 9-item number in the first stage, the number of strategies was increased to 14 in the second stage: developing an extroverted personality, increasing close relationships, being known as a good friend, being humble, strengthening an optimistic point of view, being an active person, participating in meaningful activities, planning well and ensuring that these plans are realised, being a participant in studies, being a person good valuable, to live by focusing on the present moment, to stop getting stuck with negative emotions and to get away from worries. In the third stage, it was found that the most effective strategies were to engage in social work, exhibit an extroverted personality, think optimistically, reduce negative thoughts, engage in new pursuits and have an active life (Fordyce, 1983).

Self-efficacy beliefs determine people's feelings, thoughts, behaviours and how they motivate themselves. In other words, people's beliefs in their ability to successfully manage their relationships with others affect their positive thoughts about their future and their own lives (Caprara & Steca, 2005).

1.2. Related research

It is argued that students' evaluations of their school and their experiences at school directly affect their general subjective well-being (Takakura et al., 2010) and that schools should be concerned with increasing the general happiness of students in addition to the academic learning process (Tian et al., 2016).

Social self-efficacy perception has been defined by Wei, Russell and Zakalik (2005) as an effective concept on subjective well-being with its effect on the individual's capacity to develop new friendships and establish social relationships. Lucas and Diener (2001) stated in their study that subjective well-being, which is almost entirely related to psycho-social variables, is mostly associated with personality traits.

In the study conducted by Suldo et al. (2009), on the support from teachers and the subjective well-being of adolescents, the subjective well-being of adolescents was associated with the perceived support from their school life, especially from the teacher. The findings showed that perceived teacher support partially affected students' subjective well-being. Emotional support (trust and love) and instrumental support (sparing time and financial assistance) fully explain subjective well-being.

Ho, Cheung and Cheung (2009) examined the relationships between meaning of life, optimism and well-being in their study with 1807 adolescents living in Hong Kong. According to the research findings, a positive relationship was found between life satisfaction and optimism, and a negative relationship was found with psychological problems.

Bücker et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining the relationship between subjective well-being and academic achievement. As a result, data were obtained from a total of 47 studies. In fact, they obtained a result opposite to the perception that there is no positive relationship between known subjective well-being and academic achievement, i.e., students with low academic achievement will have low subjective well-being.

Garcia (2011) stated in his study that the personality traits of the individual have an important effect on the development of subjective well-being. Gilman and Huebner (2006) also revealed in their research that the high self-efficacy perception observed in individuals contributes positively to social relationships and life satisfaction.

1.3. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the specific features of the training seminar in order to improve the subjective well-being of university students. For this purpose, the following sub-objectives have been developed:

1. What are the perceptions of university students regarding the concept of subjective well-being?
2. How do university students evaluate their subjective well-being?
3. What are the suggestions for improving the subjective well-being of university students?
4. What are the opinions of university students about the training seminars to be given to improve their subjective well-being?

2. Method and Materials

In this section, there is information about the research method, study group, process, data collection and data analysis.

2.1. Research method

The qualitative research method was used in this study. Qualitative research, which focuses on the phenomena in the flow of social life and tries to examine these phenomena without any transformation, includes a wide variety of perspectives used to determine the multifaceted and complex nature of modern social life (Maxwell, 2008). Tracy (2019) also summarises the characteristics of qualitative research as follows: it is rich and holistic; it offers more than the instant situation; focuses on lived experiences in a context; and honours the local meanings of the participants. In addition, qualitative research interprets participants' perspectives and stories; cares about how research presentations construct reality and affect the questions we can ask and what we know; it shows how multiple interpretations are possible; and how some are theoretically compelling/persuasive, morally meaningful or practically important compared to others. Accordingly, in this study, qualitative research method was used to evaluate certain characteristics of educational seminars in order to improve the subjective well-being of university students.

2.2. Participants

The study group of the research consisted of 72 university students studying at various universities in Almaty, Kazakhstan in the 2021–2022 academic year. The study group of the research was formed on a voluntary basis. Of the students participating in the research, 17 were studying at the faculty of education, 29 at the faculty of engineering and 26 at the faculty of social sciences. 32 participants are 1st-year students, 9 are 2nd-year students, 15 are 3rd-year students and 16 are 4th-year students. In addition, 49 of the university students participating in the research were female and 23 were male.

2.3. Data collection tools

Four semi-structured questions were prepared in order to evaluate the university and subjective well-being of the university students, who constitute the study group of the research, and to get opinions on the content of the training seminars. Opinions of two field experts were taken to evaluate the compatibility of the prepared questions with the content of the research. Semi-structured interview questions created in line with expert opinions are given below.

1. What does 'subjective well-being' mean to you?
2. How do you evaluate your own subjective well-being? Please give a reason by evaluating yourself in one of the very high, high, medium, low and very low categories.
3. What do you think can be done to improve subjective well-being?
4. In your opinion, what should be the characteristics of training seminars for the development of subjective well-being in universities?

2.4. Data collection process

The data in the study were collected using the e-interview technique. In the qualitative research method, one of the most basic techniques used to obtain data about the social world is the interview

(Davies, 2012). E-interviews do not require a common space and space-limited time where the researcher and participant meet face-to-face; they are based on computer-based communication (Linabary & Hamel, 2017:99). Semi-structured interviews with students required multiple e-mails to be sent and received. It took approximately 2 months for all university students to answer the questions and to send them back to the researchers.

2.5. Data collection analysis

Research data were analysed by the descriptive analysis method. The purpose of descriptive analysis is to bring together the data collected as a result of interviews and observations with the reader in an organised and interpreted way. In most descriptive analyses, the data are classified according to predetermined themes, the findings related to the classified data are summarised, and the summaries are interpreted with the subjective knowledge of the researcher. In addition, the researcher establishes a cause–effect relationship between the findings and, if necessary, makes comparisons between the cases with structural difference analyses (Maxwell, 2008). The findings created in this direction were supported by direct quotations from the answers of the university students participating in the research to the questions.

3. Results

In this section, the findings obtained as a result of the interviews with the university students participating in the research are given. Student responses categorised in the tables were created by frequency and percentage calculations.

In Table 1, the views of university students participating in the research on what subjective well-being means for them are evaluated.

Table 1. Students' views on subjective well-being

Category	Subcategory	F	%
Positive outlook on life	Enjoying life	67	93
	Knowing the value of life		
	Being hopeful about the future		
	Seeing the positive side of things		
Living life planned	Regular and planned living	43	59,7
	Taking responsibility		
	Being solution oriented		
Socialise	Making new friends	19	26,3
	Ability to establish positive family relationships		
	Being assertive in social relations		
To be a good person	Being helpful, understanding and empathetic	13	18
	Adopting universal values		

In Table 1, the views of university students participating in the research about what subjective well-being are expressed and categorised. The students' views on subjective well-being were evaluated in the categories of looking at life positively, living life in a planned way, socialising and being a good person. The students expressed that enjoying life, knowing the value of life, being hopeful about the future and seeing the positive aspects of events means looking at life positively. Living regularly and in a planned way, taking responsibility and being solution-oriented are determined as the sub-categories of living a planned life. Making new friends, establishing positive

family relationships and being assertive in social relationships are sub-categories of socialisation. Being helpful, understanding and empathetic and adopting universal values stated by the students were discussed in the category of being a good person. 93% of the students stated to have a positive outlook on life, 59.7% to live life in a planned way, 26.3% to socialise and 18% to be a good person as subjective well-being.

The opinions of some university students who participated in the research on subjective well-being are given below, using direct quotations.

'I think subjective well-being is a concept about feeling good. Being able to enjoy life and looking to the future with hope can be shown among the factors that increase subjective well-being. I think that subjective well-being includes an active life as well. Loneliness can lead to depression. It is very important to socialise and make new friends'.

'Subjective well-being is directly related to concepts such as looking at life positively, appreciating life, having strong family ties, making future plans, and being solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented. It could even be a combination of all these concepts'.

'I think it starts with being a good person, subjective well-being. Because you put the state of well-being at the foundation of your existence. Being helpful, being honest, being able to empathise positively affects people's well-being. Leading an orderly and planned life also makes us feel good'.

'Enjoying life and thinking good things for the future can be defined as subjective well-being. Socialising, approaching the problems with logical solutions, being able to look at life from the positive side are also the concepts that come to my mind when it comes to subjective well-being'.

In Table 2, the opinions of university students participating in the research on subjective well-being are evaluated.

Table 2. Students' evaluations regarding their subjective well-being

Category	F	%
Very high	7	9,7
High	12	16,6
Middle	29	40,3
Low	19	26,4
Very low	5	7
Sum	72	100

In Table 2, the evaluations of the university students participating in the research on their subjective well-being are evaluated in very high, high, medium, low and very low categories. 9.7% of the students stated their subjective well-being as very high, 16.6% as high, 40.3% as medium, 26.4% as low and 7% as very low. Based on this, it is possible to say that the majority of students find their subjective well-being moderate.

The evaluations of some university students participating in the research on their subjective well-being are given below, with direct quotations.

'I am a person who has a positive outlook on life and is happy with myself. I have good plans for the future. I am satisfied with my life. That's why I find the subjective well-being very high'.

'I believe I have had a good life in many ways. I am very satisfied with my family and friendship relations, I improve myself, I lead an active life and I am a person who values my life. However, from time to time, I overestimate minor issues. Therefore, my answer will be I find it high'.

'I can say neither high nor low. Medium I guess. There are things in my life that I am satisfied with and things I am not satisfied with. For example, my life energy is high, but I have anxiety about the future. I think that some positive and negative thoughts like this make my subjective well-being average'.

'I am not a person who is at peace with myself. I have a lot of features that I don't like. I am very emotional. I am very affected by negative events. I am generally pessimistic. My subjective well-being is low'.

'I could be depressed. I don't enjoy anything I make. I am not happy. I don't have much hope for the future. I do not have many friends. I'm an introvert and I've been lonely lately. Subjective well-being is very low in my opinion. Because I don't feel well at all'.

In Table 3, suggestions for improving subjective well-being of university students participating in the research were evaluated.

Table 3. Students' suggestions for improving subjective well-being

Category	Subcategory	F	%
Giving importance to personal development	Being open to self-improvement	63	87,5
	Adopting the principle of positive thinking		
	Lead an active life		
	Living with a plan		
	Setting future goals		
Build positive relationships with the environment	Being open to meeting new people	39	54,1
	Strengthening friendships		
	Strengthening family relationships		
Benefit from events at universities	To follow the activities within the university	22	30,5
	Attending university seminars		

In Table 3, suggestions for improving subjective well-being of university students participating in the research are evaluated in the categories of giving importance to personal development, developing positive relations with the environment and attending seminars at universities. Being open to self-development, adopting positive thinking as a principle, living an active life and living in a planned manner were presented as suggestions for improving subjective well-being and were discussed in the category of giving importance to personal development. It was expressed by the students as being open to meeting new people, strengthening friendship relations and strengthening family relations, establishing positive relations with the environment. It was expressed by the students as following in-university activities, participating in university seminars and benefiting from activities in universities. 87.5% of the students gave importance to personal development, 54.1% of them made positive relations with the environment and 30.5% of them made use of the activities in universities as suggestions to improve their subjective well-being.

The suggestions of some university students who participated in the research to improve subjective well-being are given below, with direct quotations.

'I think the most important thing is to develop oneself. Some people are very closed to change. You need to be open to change and self-development'.

'It is necessary to succeed in being a positive person. You need to make good friends. Setting goals for the future can also positively affect people's well-being'.

'I believe this is possible with personal development. In order to ensure personal development, it is necessary to follow the events organised in universities on this subject in universities. Subjective well-being can be improved by participating in these activities or seminars'.

'I believe that making new friends, strengthening family relationships, being willing to meet new people has a very positive effect on living a social life and feeling good'.

In Table 4, the opinions of university students participating in the research on the characteristics of training seminars for the development of subjective well-being are evaluated.

Table 4. Students' views on the characteristics of training seminars for the development of subjective well-being

Category	Subcategory	F	%
Should be motivating	Must be interesting to the student	59	81,9
	It should give pleasure to the student		
	Encourage the student		
It should provide all-round development	Contribute to personal development	46	63,8
	Be able to guide students to develop positive relationships		
	Universal values should be transmitting		
It should be rich in content	Encourage career planning	21	29,1
	It should be comprehensive		
It should be done regularly	Must be able to present examples from life	14	19,4
	Should be repeated at regular intervals		
	Must be repeated often		

In Table 4, the opinions of the university students participating in the research on the characteristics of the training seminars for the development of subjective well-being are given. 81.9% of the students stated that training seminars should be motivating, including the subcategories. It should be interesting for the student, give pleasure to the student and encourage the student. The sub-categories of the category of multifaceted development should be provided. It should contribute to personal development, guide students to develop positive relationships, convey universal values and encourage career planning. The sub-categories of being comprehensive and able to present examples from life were evaluated under the category of being rich in content. Finally, the students expressed the regularity of training seminars in the sub-categories that should be repeated at regular intervals and repeated frequently. 81.9% of the students answered that it should be motivating, 63.8% answered that it should provide versatile development, 29.1% answered that it should have rich content and 19.4% answered that it should be done it regularly.

The opinions of some university students participating in the research on the characteristics of training seminars for the development of subjective well-being are given below, with direct quotations.

'I think the most important feature of the training seminars aimed at improving subjective well-being is that they are motivating. It has to be interesting. Students should be encouraged to develop themselves. It also doesn't have to be one-way'.

'Content-rich seminars should be organised. It should encourage the student by supporting it with real stories. It is also very important that these seminars are held at regular intervals. I think it should be done often'.

'If seminars are to be organised to improve subjective well-being, it is important to first encourage students in this regard. It is especially beneficial in terms of planning the process after graduation. It should provide personal development. It should have a mission to convey universal values'.

'I think subjective well-being is more about living an active life. Therefore, these seminars can be a guide for exhibiting positive behaviours in the development of social relations. It should enable students to develop in more than one field'.

4. Discussion

University students participating in the study were asked what subjective well-being means to them. Students defined subjective well-being as looking at life positively, living life in a planned way, socialising and being a good person. Gallagher et al. (2009) stated in their study that one of the factors affecting subjective well-being is hope. In the study, it was stated that as the level of hope increases, subjective well-being also increases. Alexandrova (2005), on the other hand, identified subjective well-being with the concept of happiness and expressed it as feeling less negative emotions and intensely feeling positive emotions.

Evaluations of the university students participating in the research on their subjective well-being, considering the very high, high, medium, low and very low categories, showed that the majority of students stated that they had moderate subjective well-being with suggestions of university students participating in the research to improve subjective well-being. It has been categorised as giving importance to personal development, establishing positive relationships with the environment and benefiting from activities in universities. Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006), on the other hand, revealed in their study that they can increase students' subjective well-being in line with five important strategies. In the research, these strategies are expressed as getting positive reaction from the environment, responding positively to the environment, satisfying the desires, fulfilling the requirements of religious belief and protecting happiness.

The opinions of the university students participating in the research on the characteristics of the training seminars for the development of subjective well-being are that they are motivating, provide multidimensional development, have rich content and are held regularly. In his study, Lerner (2017) suggested that various programmes are needed for university students to successfully overcome their developmental tasks, adapt to life by solving their problems and increase their subjective well-being levels. Seligman et al. (2006) stated in their study that positive psychology intervention programmes aimed at increasing subjective well-being should include more than one activity rather than just one. In their study, Nickerson et al. (2011) revealed that the activities carried out in universities to improve the subjective well-being of university students increase their academic success in parallel with the increase in the subjective well-being of the students. Emmons and McCullough (2003) also suggested in their study that the programmes implemented to increase

students' subjective well-being levels should have features such as teaching positive thinking, enabling individuals to write down the events that make them happy, identifying people to be grateful for and providing meaning from life experiences.

5. Conclusion

As a result of the developments in our age, the high subjective well-being of employees in business life has become an extremely important issue. It has been found important to evaluate the subjective well-being of the students who will enter the business life in this direction. In this direction, in this research, in order to improve the subjective well-being of university students, certain features of the training seminar were discussed in line with student opinions. As a result of the research, students defined subjective well-being as looking at life positively, living life in a planned way, socialising and being a good person. University students evaluated their subjective well-being at a moderate level with suggestions of university students participating in the research to improve subjective well-being, giving importance to personal development, establishing positive relations with the environment and benefiting from activities in universities. In addition, students' opinions on the characteristics of the training seminars for the development of subjective well-being are that they are motivating, provide multidimensional development, have rich content and are held regularly.

6. Recommendations

As a result of the findings obtained from the research, the following suggestions were developed in line with the students' opinions:

1. It is important to organise training seminars for the improvement of the subjective well-being of university students frequently and to inform the students in advance of the seminar calendar.
2. It is important that the educational seminars organised for the improvement of the subjective well-being of university students are interesting, motivating and providing the multifaceted development of the student.
3. It is important that the training seminars organised for the improvement of the subjective well-being of university students are prepared with rich content and that the students are satisfied and developed.

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