STUDENT WELL-BEING AS AN IMPORTANT INDICATOR OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Tanja Grmuša, PhD, Assistant Professor
Head of Marketing and Communication Department
Zagreb School of Business, Croatia
ⓘ **orcid.org/0000-0002-2675-0171**

Abstract

Caring for the well-being of students represents one of the many challenges for maintaining the continuity of the quality assurance system within higher education institutions whose students are important stakeholders. In addition, learning and teaching focused on students, as well as their well-being, are part of the ESG standards, indispensable in the process of evaluating the quality of study programs in national and international frameworks. This motivated us to research the perception of the dimensions of student well-being.

The aim of the work was to identify the perceptions of the dimension of student well-being in the student population and to investigate the role of innovative approaches and the application of new technological solutions in collecting student feedback and improving the quality assurance system. The above-mentioned goals were incorporated into the framework of an online survey conducted in 2024 on Zagreb School of Business students as part of the StudentPulse platform.

The results showed differences in the perception of certain dimensions of well-being between students with regard to the undergraduate and graduate level of study. Furthermore, the use of digital technologies in the approach to students proved to be motivating for their engagement and interaction, as well as that the introduction of innovations can improve the internal quality assurance system.

Keywords: students, quality assurance system, student welfare, research, survey, StudentPulse, innovation.

Introduction

Relevance of the topic. Research on student well-being is gaining importance during and after the Covid-19 virus pandemic, the biggest public health crisis in the last half century that has strongly affected education and everyday life. The existing education system is focused on the achievement of results and the fulfillment of learning outcomes at the course and program level, and less on the well-being of the individual. Also, an additional challenge is represented by increasingly strong requirements for harmonizing the education sector with the needs of the labor market, which makes well-being a secondary topic.

Research problem. The article analyzes the importance of researching student well-being at higher education institutions and the role of ensuring quality feedback using new technologies in monitoring this topic. Monitoring the well-being of students is also important because of the impact on their academic achievements, as well as the decision on possible withdrawal from studies, which can affect the business of private higher education institutions.

Subject of research. The subject of this research is the analysis of student well-being and its role as an indicator of quality assurance and monitoring at the institutional level.

Research aim. This paper seeks to identify the perceptions of the dimension of student well-being in the student population and investigate the role of innovative approaches and the application of new technological solutions in collecting student feedback and improving the quality assurance system.

Research objectives:

1. To identify the perception of the key dimensions of well-being among the student population.

2. To investigate the role of the application of innovations (new technologies) in the collection of student feedback.

3. To determine the connection between feedback and research on the well-being of students in the context of improvement within the quality assurance system at higher education institutions.

Research method. Taking into account the specificity of the research (well-being concept), the survey method was chosen. The survey questionnaire based on elements of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) was taken from the StudentPulse platform and adapted to the needs of the organization in which it is being conducted, taking into account the research objectives.

StudentPulse well-being framework considers various dimensions contributing to well-being (emotional, social, and academic well-being). Before the implementation of the survey questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with the aim of clarifying the content of the questions, as well as measuring the validity of the measuring instrument. Completed for StudentPulse by Aalyia Rehman (EdD candidate) and Dr. Jennifer Laffier at the Mental Health in the Digital Age Lab through the Mitch and Leslie Frazer Faculty of Education, Ontario Tech University. The aforementioned contributed to the internal consistency of the measuring instrument, but also ensured the possibility of interpreting the research results.

1. Students – key stakeholders of the quality assurance system

Management of higher education institutions is not only a managerial component, but also requires attention regarding the quality assurance system. Institutions whose quality is not recognized or is deficient risk their reputation, and thus the loss of potential students. This can be a problem especially if we are talking about private higher education institutions (Kinser & Jason, 2017: 2). A key challenge is maintaining the continuity of quality in the higher education system, especially since the concept of quality is defined differently and measured differently (Harvey, 2006 & Harvey & Green 2006 according to Kinser & Jason, 2017: 4).

Historically, quality has been measured through student output and the collection of information from students or focused on the confidentiality of learning outcomes (Kinser & Jason, 2017: 4). But quality assurance involves internal and external judgement; let's remind you that the first is carried out independently by internal stakeholders (self-evaluation), and the second by accredited external evaluators. Quality assurance offers a wealth of information about the institution – the reports contain indicators „used to evaluate the learning outcomes of the program and institutional capacities to support learning" (Kinser & Jason, 2017: 9). This information is important for policy makers and founders in the context of funding decisions, as well as for other higher education institutions.

Student-centered learning is one of the ESG standards (2015) important in evaluation processes, and it is a new approach and a new paradigm of education that encourages the strengthening of transversal skills and critical thinking, as well as improving teaching as a whole (Warming and Frydensberg, 2017 according to Gover et al., 2019: 6). Wiberg emphasizes the importance of student participation in quality assurance processes. The partnership relationship with the university and teachers is crucial for understanding another perspective, working conditions, as well as the well-being of the staff (2006: 9), as well as crisis prevention and successful problem solving. Quality assurance is a long-term and complex process that (in)directly affects students (Khali et al. 2004 according to Oktarina et al., 2023: 264). The benefits of the quality assurance system for people and for the institution are as follows: „transparency, effective learning, status improvement and social integration" (2023: 266). Indirect benefits are „motivation and excellent connection" (Oktarina et al., 2023: 266), therefore the role of internal audits is important in an independent, objective and transparent assessment of the organization's achievements with the participation of all participants in the organization (Tavares et al., 2017 according to Oktarina et al., 2023) and ensuring the improvement of the teaching process, teaching methods and student satisfaction. The inclusion of students in the quality assurance system also carries certain challenges such as motivating them, highlighting issues of power and (in)equality in the academic community, as well as ensuring appropriate training (Tinapay et al., 2024: 79). Their work emphasizes the value of collaboration as the most effective strategy in the quality assurance system, and the positive impact of student-centered teaching in ensuring academic achievement, skill development and motivation, as well as strengthening trust in the academic community as a whole.

Involvement of students and receiving feedback from them requires transparent and open communication, and this contributes in the long term to the understanding of the process within the quality assurance system (Smith and Jones, 2021 according to Tinapay et. al., 2024: 79). The implementation of student-centered learning requires careful planning, with continuous checking and improvements, warn the authors (2024: 80). It is a process that takes students' needs into the center, ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders, and striving to improve educational outcomes and institutional credibility (Tinapay et al., 2024: 83). Baik et al. (2017) highlight the role of educators in

strengthening and promoting student well-being through a) adopting new practices and creating a learning environment in which students will fulfill their goals, as well as realizing a sense of autonomy and belonging, and b) redesigning conditions or practices that contribute to limiting or demotivating students (Baik et al., 2017: 10). Although the job of university teachers is not to replace psychologists, the authors believe that teachers can do a lot with curriculum changes and methods of evaluating students' work, which represent fundamental stressors from the educational environment (Baik et al., 2017: 12), and in this way promote inclusion and positive interpersonal relationships into a sense of belonging (Baik et al., 2017: 13).

2. Research on student well-being – literature review

2.1. Well-being and mental health – the same or different? Determination of the concept of well-being

Student well-being is a phrase whose definition is broad, and Kiltz et al. favored that of Beiser from 1974 (according to 2023: 32). Insecurity, lack of concentration, departure from routine, financial insecurity, separation from close people, are just some of the reasons that influenced the perception of well-being (Taylor, 2019 according to Kiltz et al. 2023: 320). At the same time, the concept of well-being is used synonymously with the concept of mental health in public discourse (Baik et al., 2017). Furthermore, mental health is in the focus of the public today, but that it is still not perceived as valuable and possible for research, but it is understood more as an ordinary phrase or movement (Keyes 2007 according to Vuletić et al. 2018: 116), and the reason this is also the reason for the continued presence of certain stereotypes, including prejudice against the study of mental health.

Woolf & Digby (2021: 6) warn of the ambiguity of the term well-being; and while some use it to describe general happiness, others view it in the context of physical or psychological health (Baik, 2017; Woolf & Digby, 2021; Ramadan, 2021). The multidisciplinary approach to mental health is also reflected in the broad WHO definition, which includes the following three components: emotional well-being, social and psychological well-being (Vuletić et al., 2018: 113). His work analyzes metrics (metric characteristics) and the „factor structure of the Croatian version of the MHC-SF mental health assessment instrument" (2018: 113). At the same time, that questionnaire „measures mental health using 14 particles grouped into 3 subscales" (2018: 113) – emotional, sociological and psychological well-being. Mental health is inseparable from physical health, but social interactions play an important role. Mental health is associated with numerous concepts such as optimism, hope, professionalism, control (Keyes, 2007: 95 – 108 according to Vuletić et al., 2018: 114). The authors further recall earlier research that confirmed the positive connection „between mental health and educational achievement, productivity at work, and the development of social ties" (Vuletić et al., 2018: 114).

Woolf & Digby cite the American psychologist Martin Seligman and his model – the PERMA model, which highlights five key elements of happiness and well-being: Positive Engagement – Engagement – Positive Relationship – Meaning – Accomplishment (2021: 6). Teaching well-being should be integrated into all elements of the educational process (2021: 12: 13), and include other stakeholders outside the educational community. However, in addition to students, teachers also have to take care of their well-being, because that is the only way they can contribute to the maximum fulfillment of their professional role.

Hossain, O'Neill & Strnadová (2023) also warn about the breadth of the concept of well-being, as well as the growing number of researches on this topic. In their work, they summarized and mapped different concepts, approaches and domains that thematize well-being. In the period from 1989 to 2020, 33 studies on well-being were found (2023: 447), where the meta-analysis as a method was used. Although it has been established that well-being influences academic success, theorists have not yet agreed on the domain of this concept (Dauker et al., 2019; Soutter et al., 2004; Svane et al., 2019 according to Hossain et al., 2023: 448). They warn that „the concept of well-being can be built around two philosophical perspectives: a) hedonic (focus on feeling good, satisfaction with education and life, which includes cognitive and affective domains" (Keyes and Annos, 2009 according to Hossain et al., 2023: 448) and b) eudaimonic (focus on educational success).

Hedonic well-being includes „the feeling of happiness and satisfaction, and interest in life" (Vuletić et al., 2018: 115), while eudaimonic includes the individual's individual desires and self-actualization. „Subjective well-being is a cognitive evaluation of a life filled with pleasant emotions, but without unpleasant emotions (Oish et al., 1999). Thus, the concept of well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning and experience" (Brdar, 2006: 672). He adds that in the last two decades, a large amount of research and understanding of the role of goals and the long-term sense of well-being has been observed (Eumous, 1996 according to Brdar, 2006: 672). People who set goals have a greater sense of subjective well-being and optimism. Understanding an individual's goals is important, since they reflect his or her orientation, and also influence behavior, says Brdar. Furthermore, when setting goals (personal, life), one should know that they arise from psychological needs, therefore they are also included in explaining the concept of well-being. The paper deals with the role of extrinsic and intrinsic goals in the student population and investigates how their fulfillment affects the feeling of well-being.

Sertić reminds that Bologna as a reform emphasized the importance of student-oriented teaching, but an analysis of the content of documents created as part of ministerial conferences from 2001 to 2020 showed that the concepts of happiness and well-being were omitted from them (Sertić, 2022: 671). Sertić sees the subordination of the education system to the market and the economy as problematic, especially due to the marginalization of the role of man and his well-being (Sertić, 2022: 680). He warns that in its reports, the EU tries to emphasize the desirable skills and competencies of students, but omits the issue of personal happiness and personal development (Sertić, 2022: 686). The author further states that the Bologna reform marginalizes the role of diverse professions. Namely, since 2017, the STEM field has been intensively promoted, while social sciences and humanities are put in the background (Sertić, 2022: 690). On the other hand, in 2024, the European Commission, aware of the challenges faced by young people and their educators in the digital environment, issued manuals with mental health guidelines for teachers, students, and educational policy makers (Wellbeing and mental health at school: Guidelines for school leaders, teachers and educators, 2024; Wellbeing and mental health at school Guidelines for education policymakers, 2024), which indicates a new direction in following this topics.

2.2. A review of research on student well-being

Asikainen, Kaipainen & Katajavouri warn that one third of students in Finland are faced with mental problems that can affect academic success and drop out of studies. At the same time, as many as 50% of students who experienced mental problems did not seek help (Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust and Golberstein, 2009 according to Asikainen et al., 2019: 2). Research conducted by Alves (2022) on Portuguese students examined the role „of social factors (family, friends, romantic relationships) in the subjective well-being and practice of risky behaviors" (2022: 583) among students. It was established that there is a positive connection between social interaction and the consumption of psychoactive substances, and a negative connection between risky behaviors and the realization of romantic interpersonal relationships (Alves, 2022: 583).

Furthermore, Sertić mentions two fundamental theories of well-being – subjective and objective, which was authored by Derek A. Parfit, a British philosopher. The subjective is made up of hedonism (increasing comfort and pleasure, moral, intellectual, etc.) and the theory of wish fulfillment (self-perception of happiness), while the objective is made up of the theory of objective truth (the question of values and indicators of happiness) (Sertić, 2022: 682, 683). The field of well-being is organized into two theories: „1) hedonic well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001) or subjective well-being (Diener, 1984 according to Brajša et al., 2014: 30), and 2) eudemonic well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001) or psychological well-being" (Ryff and Keyes, 1995 according to Brajša-Žganec et al., 2014: 31). The multidimensional approach is towards psychological well-being, which represents six aspects of human actualization: „self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, managing the environment, the meaning of life and personal growth" (Ryff and Keyes, 1995 according to Brajša-Žganec et al., 2014: 31, 32). Earlier research showed the influence of personality factors with dimensions of psychological well-being (Schmutte and Ryff, 1997 according to Brajša-Žganec, 2014: 33, 34). Gender differences in psychological well-being on the part of women have been established – they seek more meaning in life, and are oriented towards close and positive relationships with others (Reardon, 1998).

The connection between extraversion and autonomy in managing the environment, the meaning of life, positive relationships, personal growth and self-acceptance was also confirmed (Brajša-Žganec, 2014: 42).

Research conducted by Rijavec et al. (2011) on a sample of 835 students in Croatia aimed to classify participants into groups according to life aspirations. Using four questionnaires, it was determined that well-being is influenced by extrinsic and intrinsic goals. Mirjanić et al. warn that the well-being of students can be threatened due to exposure to stressors (short-term and long-term) that have an impact (Abbey and Andrews, 1985 according to Mirjanić et al., 2011: 712). Furthermore, they add that most people's perception of subjective well-being is stable most of the time, i.e. it results in a positive balance „between personal characteristics, psychological investment variables and subjective well-being" (Mirjanić et al., 2011: 712). And while in some people there is a dominance of satisfactory experiences in relation to unsatisfactory ones, in others the ratio is different (Headay and Wearing, 1991 according to Mirjanić et al., 2011: 712). Therefore, in their work, the authors analyzed the connection between self-esteem and the application of coping strategies with stressors. „The mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between different ways of coping and achieving subjective well-being" was established (Mirjanić et al., 2011: 711).

Well-being is related to intrinsic motivation and the desire for personal growth and development, and it is also a personality trait. Earlier research showed that curiosity can be seen as an important mechanism in achieving the well-being of individuals (Kashdan and Steger, 2007 according to Miljković, Jurčec, 2016: 105). The aim of the work of Miljković and Jurčec was to determine „the relationship between curiosity, the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and the well-being of students at two different faculties" (2016: 105). Curiosity proved to be an important predictor of the satisfaction of basic needs, positive effects of curiosity on well-being (Miljković, Jurčec, 2016: 121). Furthermore, Rijavec et al. investigated the role of flow with educational outcomes. It is a psychological state that is characterized by comfort, and occurs when performing tasks that people are completely preoccupied with (2016: 164). Previous research has shown a positive correlation between flow and academic achievement/educational outcomes and greater well-being. The frequency of experiencing flow at the university and outside it, i.e. in everyday life, was examined, as well as the relationship between flow and well-being, with the dominant group being female students of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb. The experience of rapture mainly occurs in situations where students have an active role in the educational process (seminars, exercises), compared to situations where this is not the case (e.g. a lecture). Also, it was confirmed that greater flow is present during non-academic activities (Rijavec et al., 2016: 164, Rijavec et al., 2017). Flow in academic pursuits that lead to achievement is directly related to well-being, whereas in other cases it is not.

In the research conducted by Kararić, the existence of gender differences related to psychological well-being was confirmed in favor of men, but there were no differences in life satisfaction. At the same time, differences in psychological well-being depend on the year of study, while differences between life satisfaction and psychological well-being in relation to the marital status of the respondents have not been determined (Kararić, 2012: 47). Adam, Urbančić-Rak and Crnić researched the feeling of „discomfort and anxiety of dental faculty students" (2021: 186) in Zagreb during the Covid crisis. Namely, this is a profession that was very threatened during the lockdown, when numerous practical exercises were canceled, which caused negative emotions among students. Although the second wave of lockdowns was milder, students were concerned about their competencies in the clinical setting (Adam et al., 2021). The results of these findings motivated us to investigate the well-being of our students.

3. How can research on student well-being improve the quality assurance system? Experiences Zagreb School of Business

3.1. Research methodology

Planning for the implementation of research on the well-being of students of the Zagreb School of Business (ZSB) was designed at the beginning of 2024 in cooperation with a foreign partner - StudentPulse. Several meetings were held in which, in addition to the representative of the partner

(Patrick Bak Munksø), the vice dean for teaching and students, the president of the internal Quality Assurance Committee, participated. StudentPulse is a platform that operates in 15 countries, and whose goal is to „empower educational institutions in collecting feedback from students and encourage them to use the said data in meaningful actions" (StudentPulse, 2024). The platform relies on the use of advanced analytics and recommendations driven by artificial intelligence. A set of questions was agreed that would cover different categories of well-being (academic, social, psychosocial as well as their sense of fulfillment). Based on previous experiences and cooperation of the StudentPulse platform with other educational institutions, it was concluded that the mentioned four dimensions, „when it comes to SWB (subjective well-being), are easily understood by educational institutions, and it is equally important that they cover all important aspects of how students progress, including hedonic ("pleasure and happiness") as well as eudaimonic ("purpose and meaning") approaches" (StudentPulse, 2024). Also, an implementation period was agreed which would cover the summer semester of the academic year 2023/2024, and data collection was carried out in cycles.

The research was conducted during the summer semester of the academic year 2023/2024 by using the online survey method. In agreement with the partners from the StudentPulse platform, an implementation plan was created that included 10 weeks of pilot research and 3 check-in researches were designed that took place over three months (March, April, May). The check-in concept was chosen because of the short questionnaire that provides a quick and easy access to data collection (Osborn et al., 2022), but also a higher response rate from respondents (Kost et al., 2018; Sharma, 2022). The research included students of undergraduate professional studies at ZSB (Marketing and Communications, Management and Production in Culture, Management of Supply Chains) and students of professional graduate studies (Marketing and Communications). The number of questions in each check-in should not exceed 7-8 questions in order to ensure the quality of the input. Check-ins are based on an attitudinal scale ranging from 0 to 10. The reasons for this are as follows: establishing a central point, ensuring a wide range of responses (taking into account extremes and nuances), and the sensitivity of the measuring instrument in such a way as to ensure a more detailed and clearer insight into the different dimensions of well-being. Furthermore, the goal is to allow the respondents time to think about the answer and in this way to collect suggestions for improvements in the system, as well as to understand the suggestions of the respondents.

A combination of open and closed questions with single or multiple choice was used. The questions/statements are written in the first person singular and always created so that they span the direction from negative (0) to positive (10). Most of the questions in the questionnaire ensured the provision of additional information through the possibility of entering comments depending on the grade that the student circled.

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3.2. Research results

The first check-in was carried out in March 2024, more precisely from 11/03/2024 to 15/03/2024. For the purposes of the research, a six-question questionnaire was created that could be accessed via a QR code or via a link that leads to surveys. One QR code was prepared for each study program. The schedule of lectures was reviewed, and the days on which students of all years of study have general

compulsory courses were selected. Teachers who have classes on those days were sent an e-mail with an invitation to participate and motivate students to respond, and in some courses the president of the quality assurance committee, who is also the institutional coordinator for quality assurance, motivated the students with her personal presence. A total of 115 out of 202 students of the ZSB who were enrolled in individual courses participated in the survey (response rate of 56.94% = 57%). As part of the first check-in, a total of 500 student comments were collected. The details about students who were reached, just as those who enrolled the survey are visible in the tables below.

Table 1. 1. Check-in

Programme	Student reached	Students enrolled	Response rate	Completion rate	Comments	Year selected			
Management and Production in Culture, BSc: 1st year	6	14			32				
Marketing and Communication, BSc	107	123			458	Year 1: 21	Year 2: 45	Year 3: 41	No year selected: 0
Marketing and Communication, MSc	2	56	56,93%	78,26%	10	Year 1: 2	Year 2: 0		
Supply Chain Management	0	9			0				
SUM	**115**	**202**			**500**				

Source: author's work.

Furthermore, the second check-in was carried out in April, more precisely from 15/04/2024 to 26/04/2024. At that time, the StudentPulse platform also developed an application for accessing the survey via mobile devices with the aim of ensuring better feedback from students. ZSB is, based on the recommendation of colleagues and based on the results of the first check-in, which faced challenges in the distribution of the survey (incorrect e-mail addresses of students, receipt of invitations to fill out the survey in spam, low readership of imperative notifications via the internal communication channel Eduneta, as well as forgetfulness individual teachers in charge of motivation to mention the importance of class participation), decided to test a new technical solution in a new cycle of research. By relying on new technologies and the principle of gamification, we tried to get closer to new generations of students, most of whom are digital natives, i.e. students who have been in contact with technology since birth. Also, by providing access to the survey via device at the time when the students want it, an effort was made to ensure immediate feedback. At the same time, the application provides the possibility of customizing the user experience, which is particularly important for students who have, for example, dyslexia as one of the most common neurocognitive disorders. Although the degree of completion of the survey remained relatively high (69.05%), a lower response rate (20.79%) was noticeable, especially in certain study programs with a smaller number of students (culture and logistics).

Table 2. 2. Check-in

Programme	Student reached	Students enrolled	Response rate	Completion rate	Comments	Year selected			
Management and Production in Culture, BSc: 1st year	0	14			0				
Marketing and Communication, BSc	30	123			82	Year 1: 27	Year 2: 0	Year 3: 0	No year selected: 3
Marketing and Communication, MSc	12	56	20,79%	69,05%	36	Year 1: 11	Year 2: 1		
Supply Chain Management	0	9			0				
SUM	**42**	**202**			**118**				

Source: author's work.

Finally, the third cycle of research was conducted from 22/04/2024 to 26/04/2024. The degree of completion of the survey remained consistently high (69.23%), while the share of collected feedback grew compared to the second check-in (25.74%), since students from two study programs (culture and logistics) got involved and participated. A significant number of collected comments was recorded.

Table 3. 3. Check-in

Programme	Student reached	Students enrolled	Response rate	Completion rate	Comments	Year selected			
Management and Production in Culture, BSc: 1st year	6	14			22				
Marketing and Communication, BSc	27	123			98	Year 1: 21	Year 2: 1	Year 3: 5	No year selected: 0
Marketing and Communication, MSc	16	56	25,74%	69,23%	61	Year 1: 8	Year 2: 8		
Supply Chain Management	3	9			10				
SUM	**52**	**202**			**191**				

Source: author's work.

Table 4. Data comparioson of all check-ins.

1. Check-in				
#	Questions	Question Replie	Student amount	%
1	I am feeling happy.	110	202	**54,46%**
2	I would recommend others to study at PVZG.	104	202	**51,49%**
3	I know what to do if I'm struggling with personal issues.	99	202	**49,01%**
4	I am feeling good about myself.	96	202	**47,52%**
5	I feel socially included.	100	202	**49,50%**
6	PVZG provides me with what I need to succeed in my studies.	93	202	**46,04%**
2. Check-in				
#	Questions	Question Replie	Student amount	%
1	I would recommend others to study at PVZG.	29	202	**14,36%**
2	I feel socially included.	29	202	**14,36%**
3	I find my studies to be intrinsically rewarding and interesting.	39	202	**19,31%**
4	I rarely feel anxious about exams or assignments.	32	202	**15,84%**
5	I feel that my educational journey has a clear purpose.	30	202	**14,85%**
6	What I am currently experiencing as a student meets the expectation I had before I started the semester.	30	202	**14,85%**
3. Check-in				
#	Questions	Question Replie	Student amount	%
1	I know what to do if I'm struggling with personal issues.	47	202	**23,27%**
2	I feel socially included.	42	202	**20,79%**
3	The way I am evaluated as a student is fair and unbiased.	39	202	**19,31%**
4	I am happy with what I am learning in this course.	38	202	**18,81%**
5	It is clear to me what I can expect from being a student at PVZG.	38	202	**18,81%**
6	I am satisfied with my study-life balance as a student.	36	202	**17,82%**

Source: author's work.

During the first check-in conducted in March 2024, the KPIs *Happiness* and *Willingess to Recommend* were analyzed, which show a high proportion of students who feel positive and who are ready to recommend the course they are studying at (51.49%). The next two statements (*I know what to do if I'm struggling with personal issues*. and *I am feeling good about myself*.) examined the perception

of the dimension of personal well-being, and showed a high proportion of students' awareness of personal problems (49.01%), as and that most of them felt well at the time of the research (47.52%). The statement *I feel socially included.* examined the perception of social well-being and showed that the majority of respondents (49.02%) had no difficulties with social isolation. This statement was repeated in the next two evaluation cycles with the aim of detecting risk factors of social well-being. Finally, the statement *PVZG provides me with what I need to succeed in my studies.* showed a high perception of institutional support (46.04%) during studies as one of the dimensions of academic well-being.

In the second check-in conducted in April 2024, the *Willingess to Recommend* KPI was analyzed, which was 14.36% with a lower student response in this research cycle. Let us remind you that students of certain study programs did not participate in filling out the survey. The perception of social well-being was examined through the statement *I feel socially included.* (14.36%), which represents a significantly weaker result compared to the previous month. For those who (over)assessed their social inclusion more poorly, the comments show that this feeling is contributed to by the afternoon class schedule, which does not leave enough time to hang out with friends (it is assumed that these are full-time students), and there are also those who confirmed that are introverted people. When asked what would contribute to a greater sense of social inclusion, students pointed out the need for more conversations instead of spending time on phones, more socializing with colleagues even during breaks, and more involvement in projects. At the same time, it should be emphasized that there are also students who confirmed that they do not feel socially isolated. The next two statements (*I find my studies to be intrinsically rewarding and interesting.* and *I rarely feel anxious about exams or assignments.*) were aimed at researching the perception of academic well-being. The results show a positive attitude towards the study program (19.31%), which is the only statement with which the most respondents expressed their attitude in this cycle (39). When asked what could be done to make the study better and more interesting, the students pointed out the following: greater engagement of individual teachers, fewer seminars, more guest lecturers, scripts, better connection with employers, connection with the real sector, availability of materials through the Eduneta system instead of sending by an e-mail. When asked what makes the study interesting for them, the following comments were recorded: the impression that it helps them in their work, the engagement of people from the profession and the transfer of practical knowledge, more practice and field teaching, a diverse range of electives, the possibility of participating in exchanges, the proximity of the faculty, the relationship with professors and interacting with them. At the same time, 15.84% of respondents confirmed that exams and study assignments do not cause them anxiety. Finally, the last two statements related to *Fulfillment* (*I feel that my educational journey has a clear purpose.* and *What I am currently experiencing as a student meets the expectation I had before I started the semester.*), and recorded the same perception in of the respondents. Namely, 14.85% of them consider their educational path purposeful, and they explain this with the following comments: because they are studying what they are interested in, well-designed teaching, a clear purpose of education, a better workplace and clear expectations.

The third check-in conducted in May 2024 examined all dimensions of well-being, but the greatest emphasis was placed on academic well-being. The fact that this cycle of evaluation recorded the response of students from all study programs offered by ZSB is particularly pleasing. Statement *I know what to do if I'm struggling with personal issues.* reflects the dimension of personal well-being, and the largest share of respondents (23.27%) in this part of the analysis shows that they know what to do in case of personal problems. Comments for personal well-being show that respondents learned to cope with challenges thanks to parenting, life experience, education and advice. Furthermore, research on the perception of social well-being through the statement *I feel socially included.* shows that the majority of respondents (20.79%) have no problems with interaction. Students achieve social inclusion by socializing, going out, and choosing the people they hang out with. Those who feel socially excluded, and there are very few of them (only a few comments), attribute this to character, fears or the consequences of the lockdown during the pandemic. The next few statements probed perceptions of academic well-being. Statements *I am happy with what I am learning in this course.* and *It is clear to me what I can expect from being a student at PVZG.* they have an equal share of perception among respondents (18.81%). Analysis of the comments shows that teachers clearly define their expectations,

and regularly inform students about this. Furthermore, students appreciate the orientation to practice, not just theory, and the teachers' good attitude towards students, their practical experience, evaluation method, evaluation of participation in lectures, encouraging interaction, timely information, accurate definition of expectations are also worth mentioning. Finally, the *statement I am satisfied with my study-life balance as a student.* as a dimension that examines *fullfillment*, it showed the lowest degree of sending respondents with the same (17.82%), while differences were observed between students of individual study programs with regard to the quality of interaction in the study group, but also private and business obligations.

4. Discussion

As shown by previous works researching the dimensions of student well-being (Baik, 2017; Vuletić et al. 2018; Woolf & Digby, 2021; Ramadan, 2021) makes a significant contribution to examining student satisfaction during studies and acts preventively in identifying the risk of dropping out of studies (Asikainen et al., 2019). Taking into account the fact that the student population represents key stakeholders in the education system, but also in quality assurance (Wiberg, 2006; Gover et al., 2019; Oktarina et al., 2023), in the context of ensuring a student-centric approach, it is important to hear their opinion. However, collecting feedback in this population is not a simple task since it depends on the students' motivation (Tinapay et al., 2024), as well as about the methods of accessing them, which was shown in the different response during the three cycles of well-being evaluation. The results of the research presented in this article provide insight into the research into the perception of the key dimensions of student well-being (personal, social, psychological/fullfilment and academic well-being) and their role in improving the quality assurance system at a higher education institution. Taking into account the differences in the response rate during the process of conducting research on the role of the application of innovations in the collection of student feedback and the connection with research on student well-being, and in order to confirm the conclusions, it is necessary to continue the implementation of the concept of this research on larger samples of the student population.

Conclusions

1. The results of the research showed that research into the dimensions of student well-being (personal, social, psychological and academic) is an important part of research about student life. Differences in the perception of well-being were determined with regard to the individual analyzed dimensions, but also with regard to the study program that the students are attending and the status of the student. Graduate students (Marketing and Communications study program) show a higher degree of satisfaction with various levels of well-being, especially academic, social and personal, which can be attributed to experience related to years of study, as well as satisfaction with social interactions and social life in general. On the other hand, in the group of undergraduate students, significant differences were observed with regard to the study program (Marketing and Communications, Management and Production in Culture, Supply Chain Management), as well as the year of study. Thus, students of Management and Production in Culture are more critical in (pre)evaluating the perception of social well-being, which was shown to be a consequence of poor interpersonal relations and weak interaction within the group itself, while students of logistics are more critical in (pre)evaluating the perception of academic well-being in the context of expectations of a stronger positioning of studies and ensuring its greater visibility. At the same time, we are pleased with the positive results related to academic well-being and indicators of satisfaction with the study program, communication with teachers, fulfillment of expectations, as well as the desire to recommend the study to future students.

2. Collecting feedback from students is not an easy task considering the generational differences between full-time and part-time students, but also the motivation of students to fill in the surveys they are often exposed to. The implementation of innovations that rely on the creative approach used in this case (quick and easy access to the questionnaire, gamification, and the use of the StudentPulse application to complete the survey on student well-being) can be a good solution in ensuring greater reach. However, the introduction of innovations in the context of new technologies that student

generations use with ease, does not always have to result in success. The introduction of innovations must be communicated to all stakeholders in a timely manner and must motivate them to participate. This is evidenced by the second check-in in which, despite the introduction of the innovation, the feedback was less than expected.

3. Collecting student feedback on student well-being through new approaches and methods can ensure improvements within the quality assurance system as a whole. Namely, the amount of collected comments (praise, but also criticism) ensured added value for the institution, since the above was not detected by relying on standard traditional methods of previously collecting student feedback. the continuation of the implementation of this project would certainly contribute to further connecting with students as key internal stakeholders within the quality assurance system, to its long-term strengthening and to the prevention of drop-outs by timely detection of difficulties. Research on student well-being is an important part of taking care of the mental health of young people, which is very often put to the test, but it also helps educational institutions in strengthening institutional capacities with the aim of ensuring an adequate response.

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STUDENT WELL-BEING AS AN IMPORTANT INDICATOR OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Tanja Grmuša, PhD, Assistant Professor

Summary

Analyzing the well-being of students comes to the center of attention of the academic community, especially during the Covid-19 virus pandemic and the impact and consequences of social exclusion on the mental health of young people. However, it is still a question of a multidimensional concept that is interpreted differently, and which includes issues of happiness, personal satisfaction, etc.

Caring for the well-being of students represents one of the many challenges for maintaining the continuity of the quality assurance system within higher education institutions whose students are important stakeholders. In addition, learning and teaching focused on students, as well as their well-being, are part of the ESG standards, indispensable in the process of evaluating the quality of study programs in national and international frameworks. Previous research has shown the impact of well-being on academic success, curiosity and tendency towards risky behaviors, as well as dropping out of studies. These results motivated us to examine the perception of students' well-being in the post-pandemic period.

The aim of this paper was to examine the perception of the well-being of students of the Zagreb University of Business through four dimensions (academic, social, psychological, fulfillment). The research was conducted in three phases during the summer semester of the academic year 2023/2024. using the quantitative online survey method integrated within the StudentPulse platform.

The results showed differences in the perception of certain dimensions of well-being between students with regard to the undergraduate and graduate level of study. Furthermore, the use of digital technologies in accessing students proved to be somewhat motivating for their engagement and interaction, as well as that the introduction of innovations can improve the internal quality assurance system by providing better student feedback.

Keywords: students, quality assurance system, student welfare, research, survey, StudentPulse, innovation.