



Subjective well-being is reciprocally associated with academic engagement: A two-wave longitudinal study

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that subjective well-being promotes a wide range of adaptive psychological outcomes. However, the role of subjective well-being in the school context, as a potential facilitator of key academic outcomes, remains underexplored. The primary objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the different dimensions of subjective well-being—life satisfaction, positive affect, and (low levels of) negative affect—were associated with academic engagement through a two-wave longitudinal study. Three hundred and eighty-nine Filipino high school students participated in this research project. Cross-lagged analysis revealed that Time 1 life satisfaction positively predicted Time 2 academic engagement, and that Time 1 negative affect negatively predicted Time 2 academic engagement, even after controlling for autoregressor effects. We also found evidence of reciprocal effects with prior academic engagement predicting subsequent well-being. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a broad concept that pertains to individuals' overall quality of life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). SWB is a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive and affective dimensions (Diener, 1984). The cognitive dimension, commonly known as life satisfaction, refers to an individual's overall evaluation of contentment with his or her life (Diener, 1984; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), whereas the affective dimensions include positive affect (momentary experience of positive feelings) and negative affect (momentary experience of negative feelings) (Diener, 1984).

Generally speaking, research has shown that individuals with higher levels of SWB experience greater levels of success in various domains of life, such as health, work, or social relationships (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In recent years, however, there has also been an increasing recognition of the importance of fostering happiness and well-being in the educational context (Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, & Parker, 2016; Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009) given that students' well-being and academic success are closely intertwined (Seligman et al., 2009). In the school context, studies have found that different dimensions of SWB (i.e., positive affect, life satisfaction, or negative affect) may be linked to academic outcomes in different ways. First, previous investigations have shown that students who have high life satisfaction exhibit higher levels of academic performance (Chow, 2005; Datu, 2018; Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Heffner & Antaramian, 2016; Ng, Huebner, & Hills, 2015; Rode et al., 2005; Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, 2010) and greater academic engagement (Datu, 2018; Heffner & Antaramian, 2016; Lewis, Huebner, Malone, & Valois, 2011; Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, 2010). Second, many studies have shown that

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students who experience frequent positive affective states are likely to achieve higher academic marks (Datu, 2015, 2018; Nickerson, Diener, & Schwarz, 2011; Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2013, 2016), to exhibit greater self-regulation (Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2016), to show higher levels of academic engagement (Datu, 2016; King, McInerney, Ganotice, & Villarosa, 2015; Lewis, Huebner, Reschly, & Valois, 2009), and to adopt autonomous types of motivation (Datu, 2017; Isen & Reeve, 2005). Third, research has also shown that students who experience high levels of negative emotions are more likely to exhibit low levels of academic achievement (Hashim, Freddy, & Rosmatunisah, 2012; Villavicencio, 2011), engagement (Garvik, Idsoe, & Bru, 2013; Hashim et al., 2012; Villavicencio, 2011), and motivation (Elmelid et al., 2015).

Although a number of studies have provided evidence as to how individual dimensions of SWB relate to school functioning, relatively few studies have simultaneously taken into account the three dimensions of SWB. For one, Ng et al. (2015) examined how life satisfaction was associated with subsequent academic achievement after controlling for the effects of positive and negative emotions felt in school as well as age, gender, race, and participation in school lunch program through a short-term longitudinal study. These authors demonstrated that life satisfaction positively predicted subsequent academic achievement even after controlling for the influence of the abovementioned covariates. This result suggests that life satisfaction may be linked to higher levels of school-related performance over and beyond the effects of positive and negative affect as well as demographic covariates. Similarly, Heffner and Antaramian (2016) explored the link between life satisfaction and academic engagement, after controlling for the influence of positive and negative affect through a cross-sectional investigation. They found that life satisfaction positively predicted academic engagement even after taking into account the possible effects of such covariates. Although both of these investigations measured all three domains of SWB, it is important to note that these studies primarily concentrated on exploring the unique contributions of life satisfaction to academic achievement. That is, the affective dimensions of SWB (i.e., positive and negative affect) were only used as covariates. Without exploring the simultaneous influence of all SWB domains on academic functioning, however, it may be difficult to understand the differential contributions of cognitive and affective well-being on key learning processes and outcomes in the school context. Indeed, more studies are needed to explore the association of SWB dimensions on other equally important educational outcomes like academic engagement.

1.1. SWB and academic engagement

Although many studies have documented the linkages between SWB and academic achievement, academic engagement has also been increasingly recognized as an important outcome in the educational and school psychology literature (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Engels et al., 2017; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Shoshani, Steinmetz, & Kanat-Maymon, 2016; Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn, 2009). This is because research has shown that engaged students are more likely to achieve higher grades (Dotterer & Lowe, 2012; Ladd & Dinella, 2009; Li & Lerner, 2011; Reeve & Tseng, 2011) and to exhibit higher levels of adjustment (Fredericks et al., 2004) in the school context. Engagement is defined as the degree of a student's overall involvement in the school setting (Fredericks et al., 2004), and is a multifaceted construct that includes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions. Cognitive engagement concerns the degree to which students engage in complex cognitive and metacognitive strategies when studying a subject (Wolters, 2004). Behavioral engagement concerns the extent to which students actively perform academic tasks (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Emotional engagement refers to the degree to which students experience positive emotional states during classroom activities or other academic tasks (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn, 2009).

Studies examining how the three dimensions of SWB are associated with academic engagement have suggested that SWB and academic engagement may be linked in three different ways. The first possibility is that SWB predicts subsequent academic engagement. The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001) posits that positive emotions are inherently adaptive because they broaden the mindsets that are useful in building durable social, psychological, and physical resources. Academic engagement can be considered as a key resource that is consolidated through frequent experiences of positive well-being. This first hypothesis is supported by numerous studies that have shown that SWB positively predicted behavioral (Heffner & Antaramian, 2016; King et al., 2015), emotional (Heffner & Antaramian, 2016; King et al., 2015), cognitive (Heffner & Antaramian, 2016), and overall academic engagement (King et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2011). Existing literature has demonstrated that different SWB dimensions relate to various indicators of engagement. Positive affect has been associated not only with behavioral and emotional engagement (King et al., 2015) but also with overall student engagement (which encompasses affective, behavioral, and cognitive; Lewis et al., 2009). Life satisfaction has been linked to higher levels of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement (Heffner & Antaramian, 2016). Furthermore, Salmela-Aro and Tuominen-Soini (2010) have shown that life satisfaction could predict student engagement (which they defined through the following dimensions: (a) vigor, (b) dedication, and (c) absorption) after two years.

The second possibility is that academic engagement positively predicts SWB. Academic functioning is a key part of students' lives (Suldo, Gormley, DuPaul, & Anderson-Butcher, 2014; Suldo & Huebner, 2006) and success in school may help students feel good about themselves. Previous studies have shown that academic engagement was linked to higher levels of well-being (Lewis et al., 2011; Ng et al., 2015; Ouweneel, Le Blanc, & Schaufeli, 2011; Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, & Antaramian, 2008). Longitudinal studies have also shown that engaged students are less likely to experience burnout and depression (Li & Lerner, 2011; Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, & Nurmi, 2008). Furthermore, those who experience a deeper sense of enjoyment, involvement, and motivation in various domains have experienced higher levels of well-being (Asakawa, 2004; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). Although these studies have not directly assessed SWB, these investigations indirectly point to the possibility that academic engagement may serve as a predictor of SWB than the other way around.

Finally, the third possibility is that SWB and academic engagement are reciprocally related. The upward spiral hypothesis (Fredrickson, 2001, 2013) argues that well-being promotes the development of durable physical, social, psychological, and other key

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