



Analysing The Impact Of Positive Psychological Capital On Study Engagement Among Students In Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Academic positive psychological capital is a crucial construct to develop and enhance learning, critical thinking, motivation, and personal growth among students. This research investigates the association between study engagement and psychological capital, and tries to find out which components of psychological capital are predictors of study engagement among students. This study is both descriptive and correlational in nature. The population of the research included students studying at different universities and colleges under various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Uttarakhand, India. A sample size of 147 students was selected using a simple random technique. The data was recorded systematically in IBM-SPSS v26 software for further analysis. Pearson correlation and step-wise regression analysis were used to analyse the data. Hence, it was found that there is a statistically significant association between study engagement and psychological capital. Also, hope, self-efficacy, and optimism were found to be good predictors of students' study engagement.

Keywords: Psychological Capital • Study engagement • Stepwise regression • Students • India

Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed drastic changes, be it environmental, societal, political, and technological; everyone is stressed or worried about something or other. Apart from these, individual and organizational factors are likely to affect the potential, efficiency, and overall well-being, which further leads to a lack of engagement. To meet these challenges, previous researchers have suggested building and fostering psychological capital and engagement that has shown a range of positive impacts for both organizations and individuals (Luthans et al., 2004; Toor & Ofori, 2010) viz., better mental health (Krasikova et al., 2015), higher commitment and dedication (Paek et al., 2015), greater productivity and performance, improved job satisfaction and lower turnover and absenteeism (Abbas et al., 2014; Jung & Yoon, 2015a). India's economic and social development depends on its human capital. By

investing in students' psychological capital and study engagement, the country can develop a skilled workforce that is better equipped to face the difficulties that come with living in the 21st century.

However, in the past, the majority of studies on psychological capital and engagement were mainly done in a workplace environment, and not much work was done in academic settings. In the current highly competitive market, businesses are progressively seeking employees who possess not only academic knowledge but also soft skills such as resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism. Students who develop these skills are more confident and motivated, which may help them perform better in their academic pursuits; further boosting their careers. A plethora of evidence suggests that workers with higher levels of psychological capital show organizational commitment (Gupta et al., 2017; Sihag & Sarikwal, 2014; Sweetman &



Luthans, 2010). Human behaviour research has a history of emphasizing weaknesses and issues rather than assets and resources. The discipline of positive psychology refocuses on personal strengths and assets to promote optimal functioning. Given that there is no study that explores psychological capital and study engagement among students of universities or colleges in India. Previous studies have examined the correlation between different constructs of psychology, such as optimism, resilience, efficacy, and hope either individually or in pairs, in relation to their influence on student academic performance. Their performance was primarily assessed by measuring their grades. (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Rand, 2009; Trigueros et al., 2019). The study will shed new light on the higher education sector with respect to students in Indian settings. Hence, the study uses a positive psychology lens. This correlational study first aims to measure the association between study engagement and positive psychological capital among students. Second, it determines the extent of variation in study engagement using psychological capital components as a predictive factor among students of universities and colleges in Uttarakhand, India.

Literature Review

Psychological capital

Psychological capital refers to positive psychological resources that individuals possess; including self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, which facilitate them in overcoming obstacles and achieving their goals (Luthans et al., 2015). Self-efficacy is defined as the person's faith in their own capabilities to accomplish a job (Zulkosky, 2009). Resilience refers to facing every adverse circumstances and overcoming them effectively (Pooley and Cohen 2010). Optimism refers to a cognitive ability to anticipate favourable occurrences in the future, along with the belief that one can attain their

desired objectives (Carver et al., 2010). Hope means having faith in one's own capabilities to bring about desired results (Snyder et al., 1991).

Researchers found a positive association between psychological capital and productivity, intrinsic motivation, and mental health (Gooty et al., 2009; Jung & Yoon, 2015a). It is considered an important resource for individuals to thrive and succeed in life. Furthermore, researchers suggest that the growth and enhancement of psychological capital may be accomplished by the use of interventions such as coaching and training (Demerouti et al., 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021). Building a strong support system with colleagues will help in cultivating healthy relationships and social connections that provide emotional support and encouragement (Luthans et al., 2008). Learning and practicing effective coping strategies, such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and problem-solving skills to reduce stress (Avey et al., 2009). Taking care of one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being through healthy lifestyle choices, regular exercise, and adequate rest. Engaging in self-reflection and learning from past experiences to develop a sense of adaptability and resourcefulness (Selvaraj & Bhat, 2018; Turliuc & Candell, 2022; Younas et al., 2020).

Academic psychological capital

It refers to the focus on students and their academic performance and well-being. Previous researchers (Bahadori Khosroshah et al., 2012; Datu & Valdez, 2016) emphasized the importance of academic psychological capital because it can help students overcome barriers and challenges they confront in their academic endeavors. In turn, this can lead to better academic performance, good psychological well-being, and success in life. They become more motivated, confident, and better able to handle academic stressors, which can lead to better grades and higher levels of academic achievement (Jafri, 2013; Ortega-



Maldonado & Salanova, 2018). Da costa et al., (2021) said that students who develop psychological capital in the academic context are better prepared for the difficulties they may encounter in their future careers. They are more adaptable, resilient, and better able to handle setbacks and failures, which can help them achieve greater success in their chosen fields. It improves social relationships which further can help an individual build stronger connections with their peers and colleagues (Bakker et al., 2017).

Academic Engagement

Siu et al., (2014) modelled on the construct of study engagement after work engagement. It's a term used to describe how committed, enthusiastic, motivated, and interested a student is in their academic activities. Students who were actively engaged and showed a willingness to allocate their time and exert effort towards the process of learning attained better academic and life outcomes. They are curious, motivated, and have a positive attitude towards learning (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2003; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). They are also more likely to seek positive feedback, interact with their teachers, and collaborate with their peers.

The literature identifies several factors that can positively influence student engagement. These may include supportive and learning environments, personalized learning experiences, opportunities for active participation, positive teacher-student relationships, and the use of innovative pedagogical approaches (Reeve, 2013). Individual factors such as student motivation, self-regulation skills, and personal interests also play a role in determining engagement (Sun & Rueda, 2012). On the other hand, there are some factors that have been identified in the literature as potential contributors to student disengagement, including lack of motivation, low interest in academic subjects, negative school experiences, low self-efficacy, external distractions, absenteeism, lack of

participation in class and personal or family issues resulting in unsatisfactory performance in academia. Kahu and Nelson (2018) emphasize that personal attributes, including personality traits, learning styles, and socioeconomic or cultural origins, could potentially drive students away. It has social and emotional consequences for students, like strained relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors, and reduced opportunities for social and emotional development. Hence, they experience increased stress, anxiety, frustration, and low self-esteem, which can negatively impact their overall well-being and mental health (Weare, 2013).

Psychological capital and Engagement

Researchers found a favourable relationship between psychological capital and employee engagement. Employees with a positive attitude and belief about their abilities and future outcomes lead to increased motivation and commitment to their work and tend to perform better in their job roles (Sekhar, 2022; Simons & Buitendach, 2013). In addition, psychological capital can also serve as a buffer against workplace stressors, such as job demands and workload, and can help employees recover from negative experiences (Sweetman & Luthans, 2010). Avey et al, (2011) identified a strong positive relationship between psychological capital and employees' productivity at work by conducting meta-analysis research. Bakker et al., (2007) mentioned the negative relationship between work engagement and absenteeism that contributes to reduced turnover, with more engaged employees taking fewer sick days. Employees who are highly engaged and have a high degree of psychological capital have been found to be more focused on providing quality service and interacting positively with customers. Good and Cooper (2016) found that engaged employees were more likely to be proactive in helping customers and were perceived as more helpful and friendly by customers. Avey et al., (2009) mentioned that



positive psychological capital contributes to a more innovative and creative work environment. According to the literature, psychological capital and work engagement have a variety of favorable impacts on organizational success, including improved job performance, reduced turnover and absenteeism, increased customer satisfaction, enhanced creativity and innovation, job satisfaction, and improved employee well-being.

Methodology

The study uses a cross-sectional research design. A simple random sample approach was used to acquire data from students studying at DAV PG College, Dev Bhoomi University, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Doon University, DIT University, GB Pant University, Graphic Era University, HNB Garhwal University, Himgiri Zee University, IMS Unison University, Uttaranchal University, and Uttaranchal College of Science and Technology located in Uttarakhand, India.

Participants: The sample consisted of 147 students, out of which 46% (n=68) were female, and 54% (n=79) were male students. Students studied in different universities and colleges under various undergraduate and post-graduate programs in Uttarakhand. Of the 147 students, 20.4% (n = 30) were within the age of 17 to 20, 66.4% (n = 98) were within the age of 21 to 24, 10.2% (n =15) were within the age of 25 to 28, and 2.9% (n =4) were above the age of 28, when the data was collected.

Procedures: The potential respondents were randomly approached through personal visits, and emailing google forms. Before this, a permission letter was shown to them, in which the introduction and aim of the research were addressed and the students were requested to take part in the study by filling out the questionnaires. The objectives and instructions were clearly mentioned for filling out the

questionnaire and it was made sure that all responses were anonymous and could not be associated with any particular person. The inclusion criteria for students are: being a student studying either at a university or college in Uttarakhand. The exclusion criteria were as follows: (a) not answering all the items of the questionnaires; (b) questionnaires with unengaged responses. The data was recorded systematically in IBM-SPSS v26 software for further analysis.

Measures

Psychological Capital- To assess the psychological capital of students (Luthans et al., 2007) was used with 24 items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) and four dimensions were used: "Hope" (6 items), "I can think of many ways to reach my current goals regarding my studies", "Self-efficacy" (6 items), "I feel confident contributing to discussions about strategies for my studies", "Resilience" (6 items), "I usually take stressful things in stride with regard to my studies", "Optimism" (6 items), "I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to my studies". In order to remove response bias from three items, one from "Resilience" and two from "Optimism" were negatively phrased. The internal consistency coefficient alpha was found at 0.907 for the total scale, 0.793 "Hope", 0.826 "Self-efficacy", 0.726 "Resilience", and 0.702 "Optimism". According to (Nunnally & Nunnally, 1978) Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 is regarded as acceptable and satisfactory.

Study Engagement- To assess the academic engagement of students (Schaufeli et al., 2002) scale was used with 17 items ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (Always) and three sub-scales. Vigor (6 items) is characterised by having a lot of energy and an ability to concentrate while working "As far as my studies are concerned, I always persevere, even when things do not go well", Dedication (5 items) refers to when someone is totally focused on their work and feels like they are doing something significant.



“I find my studies full of meaning and purpose”, Absorption (6 items) is described as being fully involved and happy with what you're doing, and separation from tasks becomes impossible “I feel happy when I am studying intensely” are a few items from the instrument. Overall, Cronbach’s alpha is 0.916 for Study engagement, 0.820 for “Absorption”, 0.707 for “Dedication”, and 0.811 for “Vigor.

Results

The data collected from the participants was put into IBM SPSS 26 for statistical analysis. In order to respond to the research questions, descriptive statistics, correlational analyses and step-wise multiple regression methods were used.

Research question 1. What is the association between study engagement and Psychological Capital among students?

The descriptive statistics of the variables are shown in Table 1. The statistics include means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the association among the variables. As Table 1 shows, there is a statistical significant association between study engagement & psychological capital ($r = 0.56, p < 0.01$). This suggests that increasing psychological capital corresponds to increasing study engagement. According to the findings; psychological capital dimensions, namely “hope” ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$) and “self-efficacy” ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$), exhibited the strongest associations with study engagement. On the other hand, “optimism” ($r = 0.44, p < 0.05$) and “resilience” ($r = 0.37, p < 0.01$) show comparatively low relationships with study engagement. Therefore, it is stated that psychological capital and study engagement among students have a statistically significant correlation.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Correlation among the variables (N= 147)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Hope	27.25	5.39	–								
2. Self-Efficacy	26.57	5.59	0.69*	–							
3. Resilience	26.53	4.55	0.59*	0.54*	–						
4. Optimism	27.98	3.86	0.51*	0.49*	0.63*	–					
5. PsyCap	108.35	16.1	0.86*	0.85*	0.82*	0.76**	–				
6. Absorption	24.35	6.67	0.46*	0.42*	0.30*	0.38**	0.48**	–			
7. Vigor	24.19	6.80	0.49*	0.54*	0.38*	0.41**	0.56**	0.84**	–		
8. Dedication	22.01	5.00	0.47*	0.43*	0.32*	0.40**	0.50**	0.71**	0.72**	–	
9. Study Engagement	70.55	17.0	0.52*	0.51*	0.37*	0.44**	0.56**	0.94**	0.94**	0.86**	–

Note. ** $p < 0.01$, PsyCap = Psychological capital

Research question 2. To what degree do Psychological Capital components predict the variability in study engagement?

The study’s aim is to answer whether a model exists that could adequately account for the variance in study engagement caused by Psychological Capital. The overall study

engagement score, which is the sum of the meanings of the three study engagement dimensions, served as the dependent variable, while the Psychological Capital dimension served as the predictor variable. The following independent variables are: “Hope”, “Self-Efficacy”, “Resilience”, “Optimism”, as



predictors (Keith, 2014). Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to predict study engagement among students. Before that, Pearson correlation was used to assess how well all Psychological Capital dimension variables were included in the regression model. No psychological capital dimensions exhibited statistical insignificance with the dependent variable before subsequent regression analysis. No problems were

detected, no outliers were found in the view of (Hoaglin & Iglewicz, 1987), and there was multicollinearity (tolerance: 0.44 to 0.56; VIF: 1.77 to 2.24). Finally, three regression models were produced via regression analysis (see Table 2), and a linear combination of three of the four Psychological Capital dimensions has been found to be the most accurate predictors of Study Engagement i.e. Hope, Self-efficacy, and Optimism.

Table 2: Step-wise Multiple Regression result for predicating study engagement score (N= 147)

Variable	B	95% CI		SE B	B	R ²	Δ R ²
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.27	.27***
Hope	1.64***	1.20	2.08	0.22	.52***		
Step 2						.31	.04**
Hope	1.01***	0.41	1.61	0.30	.32***		
Self-Efficacy	0.87**	0.29	1.45	0.29	.28**		
Step 3						.34	.02*
Hope	0.82**	0.20	1.43	0.31	.26**		
Self-Efficacy	0.72*	0.13	1.30	0.29	.23**		
Optimism	0.84*	0.13	1.54	0.35	.19**		

Note. CI = Confidence interval, LL= Lower limit, UL= Upper limit

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the impact of dimensions of psychological capital on study engagement. In step 1, the R² value of 0.27 revealed that the Hope explained 27% of the variance in the study engagement with $F(1, 145) = 54.13, p < .001$. The results of the study indicated that hope positively predicts study engagement ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). In step 2, the R² value of 0.31 showed that Hope and Self-efficacy explained the 31% variability in the study engagement with $F(2, 144) = 33.03, p < .001$. The results indicated that “Hope” ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and Self-efficacy positively predict study engagement ($\beta = 0.28, p < .01$). In step 3, the R² value of 0.34 showed that Hope, Self-efficacy, and Optimism explained the 34% variation in study engagement with $F(3, 143) = 24.57, p < .001$. The results of the study indicated that Hope ($\beta = 0.26, p < .01$), Self-efficacy ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), and optimism positively predicted study engagement ($\beta = 0.19, p < .01$). The Δ R² value of 0.02 showed

a 2% change in the variance of models 1, 2 and 3 with $\Delta F(1, 143) = 5.55, p = .05$.

Discussion

Psychological capital and study engagement are crucial for the academic, professional, and personal development of students in India. By developing these resources, students can improve their academic performance, enhance their employability, protect their mental health, and contribute to the country's overall development. The study supports the previous research and confirms that psychological capital and study engagement have a statistically significant association (Martínez et al., 2019). (Table 1) exhibits a significant correlation between study engagement and psychological capital and their subvariables. Further, the most important finding of this research is revealed in (Table 2) where regression analysis confirmed 34% of the variability in student engagement in their study. The most significant predictors of



Psychological Capital variables are— hope, self-efficacy, and optimism. Findings of this study supported (Ouweneel et al., 2011) that students with a high degree of hope, efficacy, and optimism are likely to show a greater tendency to participate in academic activities. In addition, this works as a preventive factor against psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety, pertaining to mental health. Through the cultivation of these resources, students have the potential to enhance their mental well-being and effectively navigate the obstacles they face throughout their lives. From a practical perspective, the findings of the study are significant for Higher education institutions in their counseling centers for offering proactive programmes to enhance psychological Capital among students which will further help them in increasing engagement in their studies. Specifically targeting students at risk (e.g., first year students, with learning impairments and those who performed poorly on their admission exams); with the ultimate goal of addressing underlying issues such as mental health, overcoming hindrances to academic accomplishment (such as stress, fatigue, and intolerance to change) and providing a competitive edge for students seeking placement and career success in a challenging job market. Supports like academic counselling, mentoring, peer support, social-emotional learning programs, and interventions targeting motivational and parental support are also recommended by (Greenberg et al., 2003). Thus, more research into constructs improving study engagement should be done. The research only included data from one Indian state, which is Uttarakhand. Future researchers can do a comparative study between different states with a longitudinal approach by using controlled experimentation to find out the observable effects of the growth of Psychological Capital on study engagement in their studies. There is an urgent need to better

understand the reasons and effects of student disengagement, and to create effective techniques and interventions to promote student engagement.

Conclusion

This is the first study to the authors' knowledge in HEI in Indian settings which shed some light on predicting the association between study engagement and psychological capital among students of different Universities and Colleges in Uttarakhand, India. Psychological capital has significant potential to help students deal with everyday pressures. Additionally, according to Nafees and Jahan (2017) Psychological capital has the potential to serve as a strategic approach to mitigating academic stress among students, fostering elevated aspirations, and cultivating positive attitudes. This can be achieved through the implementation of targeted programmes that aim to enhance the positive attributes of hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. Overall, academic psychological capital and engagement are important constructs for students to develop. By cultivating self-efficacy, hope, and optimism within the academic context, students can not only improve their academic performance but also enhance their overall well-being and future success. It enhances learning, promotes critical thinking, increases motivation and achievement, fosters personal growth, and builds positive relationships. It is important for educators, parents, and students themselves to recognize and prioritize these constructs as a key factor in student success. Instruction like project-based learning, experiential learning, student-centered approaches, feedback, promoting autonomy and ownership of learning, and addressing individual student needs and interests are also important for promoting and maintaining a positive outlook among students.



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