



Subjective Well-Being Among Students with Disabilities in Kazakhstan: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the factors that mediate the impact of physical disabilities on the subjective well-being of learners with disabilities in Kazakhstan. Classified as descriptive research, the study sample consists of students from four to eight Kazakh language classes in Almaty, Kazakhstan, totaling 76 male and female students. Subjective vitality is considered one of the indicators of subjective well-being. The data show that the meaningfulness of life has the strongest correlation with the Vt-d scale. The study findings also reveal that personal efforts, an active role in one's own situation, and a desire for self-development serve as the foundation for harmonious personal development and subjective well-being. An analysis of variance reveals a statistically significant effect of disability on life satisfaction; however, the vast majority of differences appear at the trend level and/or are caused by the combined impact of gender and disability factors. The study's findings enable the development of recommendations for educational policymakers and specialists working in the disability assistance system.

KEYWORDS

Disabilities; exploration of practice; students; subjective well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan is currently experiencing an increase in learners with various pathologies due to a variety of factors. This category of children is extremely heterogeneous, but their common main characteristic is a violation or delay in development (Allan & Omarova, 2022; Gulis et al., 2021). There is an urgent need to understand the problems of disabled children, to respect and recognize their educational rights, and foster a desire and willingness to include them in the children's community (Al-Hassan et al., 2022; Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2021; Then & Pohlmann-Rother, 2023). To achieve this goal for children with disabilities in educational institutions that implement adapted general education programs, it is critical to create the necessary conditions that consider student characteristics and ensure the full inclusion of this group of children in the mainstream learning process (Ainscow, 2020; Kefallinou et al., 2020).

An important issue remains the inconsistency in the structure of subjective well-being. Various theoretical approaches converge on the idea that the determinants of an individual's subjective well-being are multifaceted, necessitating the integration of diverse scientific fields to develop a comprehensive theoretical model of this phenomenon (Das et al., 2020; Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Ruggeri et al., 2020). To examine the subjective well-being of schoolchildren with disabilities, it is essential to identify the specifics of its construction and its structural components. Most researchers describe a universal structure of subjective well-being that applies to all age groups (Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2021; Shoqairat et al., 2023; Takács et al., 2021).

However, the components of this well-being are heavily affected by the characteristics of the age group. The obvious fact that the consequences of subjective ill-being can cause irreparable harm to both the physical and psychological health of an individual justifies the need to identify the factors and situations that cause subjective ill-being (Franzen et al., 2021). Consequently, studying this phenomenon among schoolchildren with disabilities in inclusive educational settings is crucial for understanding the effectiveness and adequacy of the conditions created to meet the educational needs of these children (Benson, 2020; Hosshan et al., 2020).

In this regard, it is critical to develop new and more rigorous criteria to determine the subjective well-being of disabled students in Kazakhstan. Unfortunately, the lack of a sufficient research base in the country leads to unclear starting positions and, to a certain extent, the impossibility of reconciling the results of empirical research. This situation, although it must be admitted, has been acceptable to researchers until recently. In this study, the question of the subjective well-being of learners with disabilities is not posed as a question about purely clinical aspects of their quality of life or the role of mental compensation for organic deficiencies, but rather as a question about personal factors that mediate the influence of the initial starting conditions of development on the subjective well-being of the individual (Abdullahi et al., 2020; Nucifora et al., 2022).

Research Questions

What factors mediate the impact of physical disabilities on the subjective well-being of learners with disabilities in Kazakhstan?

Objectives

This study aims to examine the factors that mediate the impact of physical disabilities on the subjective well-being of learners with disabilities in Kazakhstan.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it addresses the current issue of subjective well-being among learners with disabilities in Kazakhstan. Traditionally, research on students with disabilities has primarily focused on mental and physical developmental challenges, often framing disability in terms of deficits (Alibekova et al., 2022; An et al., 2020; Rollan & Somerton, 2021). However, beyond this scope, there is emerging recognition of the compensatory role of physical disabilities and the importance of considering not just the negative aspects but also the positive outcomes in overcoming obstacles. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the factors that mediate how physical disabilities impact the subjective well-being of learners with disabilities in Kazakhstan. The findings advance understanding of how personality traits can mitigate the effects of chronic challenges, highlighting the positive role of personal resources in managing disability and overcoming adaptive tensions and subjective disadvantages.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Subjective well-being serves not only as a measure of quality of life but also as an internal regulator of human behavior and activities (Zhang et al., 2022). Thus, this issue remains pertinent today, drawing researchers' attention to happiness, life satisfaction, personal characteristics, and other factors influencing individuals (Zablotsky et al., 2019). Steinmayr et al. (2019) identified two key periods in the evolution of subjective well-being research. The first explores concepts aligned with contemporary understandings of subjective well-being, while the second period focuses directly on examining its content, structure, and variations impacted by age, gender, social, economic, and other life conditions.

Seligman (2011) identified positive emotions, meaning, engagement, positive relationships with others, and achievements as components of subjective well-being. His approach is distinctive for shifting psychological research focus from negative aspects of human life—such as depression, aggression, and difficult life circumstances—to positive factors that contribute to happiness and enhance people's lives.

Researchers suggest that subjective well-being is affected by various internal and external factors (Bücker et al., 2018; Jabery & Arabiat, 2024; Kaya & Erdem, 2021). According to Amholt et al. (2020), the foundation of subjective well-being lies in individuals' personal relationships with themselves, their activities, and important life events, shaped by learned norms, attitudes, and behavioral models through socialization. Tobia et al. (2019) argue that cultural norms acquired during socialization play a crucial role in shaping well-being. These norms may prioritize emotional balance at certain stages, personal growth or autonomy at

others, and overall satisfaction with different life aspects, reflecting the individual's values and certainty.

Changes in the system of personal relationships during the socialization process considerably affect the quality of well-being. According to Bortes et al. (2021), while subjective well-being is often portrayed as inherently positive, there has been a historical emphasis in psychology on addressing personal dissatisfaction with one's life as a condition needing improvement. However, acknowledging experiences of dissatisfaction, to some extent, can be an important factor in maintaining dynamic equilibrium. The depth and duration of dissatisfaction, rather than its mere presence, can play a pivotal role in maladjustment, deterioration of psychological and physical health, and ultimately subjective distress. Bardach et al. (2020) and Holzer et al. (2022) focus on the dependence of the cognitive component of subjective well-being depends on the developmental social context across different age groups. Clarke et al. (2023) illustrate how characteristics of the educational environment affect students' subjective well-being. Klapp et al. (2023) examine the structure of adolescents' subjective well-being and its variations based on the psychological safety levels within educational settings. Wu et al. (2020) synthesize theoretical data from various studies on measuring children's subjective well-being, detailing validated questionnaires used internationally. Collectively, subjective well-being is understood as a state of dynamic equilibrium—a sense of inner balance achieved through satisfaction with diverse aspects of life activities. Research on the subjective well-being (SWB) of students with disabilities has garnered attention worldwide, acknowledging the distinct challenges these students encounter and emphasizing the pivotal role of well-being in their academic and personal growth. While these studies offer valuable insights, they predominantly focus on Western contexts. This leaves gaps in understanding cultural, social, and educational differences in regions like Central Asia, which may limit the broader applicability of these findings.

Regional studies often prioritize examining structural and institutional barriers over exploring the personal and subjective experiences of students. Additionally, these studies frequently rely on descriptive approaches rather than employing robust qualitative methodologies that can capture the nuanced aspects of SWB. Based on the review of existing literature, several gaps have been identified.

1. Lack of focus on subjective well-being: Many studies in Kazakhstan have primarily focused on accessibility and inclusion, often neglecting to adequately address the subjective well-being of students with disabilities.
2. Insufficient qualitative data: There is a lack of qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of these students, crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of their subjective well-being (SWB).
3. Limited longitudinal studies: There are few studies that longitudinally track the SWB of students with disabilities, thereby missing opportunities to understand how their well-being evolves in response to educational and social changes.
4. Analysis of policy impacts: There is a need for more studies to assess the effectiveness of national policies and initiatives on SWB of students with disabilities.

While existing studies have established a foundation for

understanding the challenges of students with disabilities, there are significant gaps in exploring their subjective well-being. This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the personal experiences of students with disabilities, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their SWB. Findings from this research will contribute to developing improved support mechanisms and enhancing the overall quality of life for students with disabilities in Kazakhstan.

METHODS

Research Methods

This study is classified as a descriptive study (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). A defining characteristic of descriptive studies is their approach of observing data without intervening in events or testing hypotheses about causes (Williams et al., 2020). Data derived from descriptive studies can subsequently be utilized in analytical studies to test hypotheses.

Research Sample Formation

The study sample consisted of students from Kazakh language classes in four schools: School No. 5, School No. 1, and Gymnasium School No. 208, all located in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The total sample comprised 76 male and female students. Details provided by the respondents are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Table 1.

Descriptive information provided by the respondents

A class where students study	Respondents	Boys	Girls	Mean age	Standard deviation
4	16	10	6	10,3	0.48
5	15	7	8	11.7	0.42
6	13	8	5	12.9	0.32
7	16	5	11	13,9	0.32
8	16	7	9	14,9	0.32

Study Sample

Seventy-six students from various schools in Almaty, Kazakhstan, participated in the survey. The group of students with disabilities was highly diverse, including individuals with hearing, vision, speech, musculoskeletal, autism spectrum disorders, moderate to severe speech delays, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and cerebral palsy with musculoskeletal impairments. Students with physical disabilities were assessed by a psychologist-medical-pedagogical commission, and all participants demonstrated preserved intelligence. The sample consisted of 39 girls (82%) and 37 boys (18%).

According to international human rights documents and Kazakhstan's legislation, the principle of equal rights to education is ensured for all children in the country. This principle enables children with disabilities to attend regular general education schools alongside their

non-disabled peers, integrate into their teams, and develop their skills. There are various methods for integrating children with disabilities into general education settings that offer additional educational programs, tailored to developmental needs, parental preferences, and organizational capabilities. Analysis of existing educational approaches reveals several basic options. These inclusive classes typically accommodate groups of no more than 9-12 students, implementing additional educational programs that cater to each child's learning capabilities. Adapted programs use individualized methods of information assimilation, ensuring that students receive the same education as their classmates with specialized support to facilitate learning. External conditions conducive to successful inclusive education are carefully considered when establishing these inclusive classrooms.

The willingness of parents to educate their child alongside non-disabled children and their readiness to support the child's learning process; - Availability of opportunities to provide qualified assistance to children with disabilities; - Establish conditions for implementing various models of integrated learning and ensure internal factors conducive to successful inclusive education;- The opportunity to achieve mastery of the general educational standard within the typical timeframe allocated for typically developing children; - Psychological readiness of the child to participate in learning within an inclusive classroom setting. An essential component is the presence of a psychological and pedagogical support service (psychological-medical-pedagogical council) within the educational institution. This support service, also known as the School Council, is a structural unit that ensures optimal conditions for the education and development of children, both with typical and disabled health conditions. It plays a crucial role in facilitating their successful socialization and integration into society

Data Collection Tools

The Subjective Dispositional Vitality Scale (Vt-d) was utilized to collect data for the study. This scale measures vitality as a stable trait and aims to assess an individual's characteristic level of vitality, which remains consistent over time and reflects aspects of their personality (vitality as a personality trait). Each statement in the scale is rated on a seven-point Likert scale, where respondents indicate the extent to which each statement is true about their life in general, ranging from "absolutely false" to "absolutely true." Scores from each statement are summed up, with points 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 being direct indicators and point 2 serving as a reverse indicator. The scale was translated into Kazakh without alterations for use in the study.

A technique of life-momenting orientations

The study investigates the development of perceptions about life based on attributes such as having future goals, the meaningfulness of life prospects, interest in life, satisfaction with life, and self-concept as an active, self-determined individual who controls their own life. The test comprises 20 pairs of opposing statements, each assigned numerical values representing various degrees of intensity for each state, ranging from -3 to +3.

Vitality test

The test is designed to identify factors that contribute to successful stress management, as well as to reduce and prevent internal tension in stressful situations. The test includes 47 items containing forward and reverse questions from the three scales of the questionnaire (involvement, control, and risk taking).

Validity and reliability

The test aims to identify factors contributing to effective stress management and to mitigate and prevent internal tension in stressful situations. It comprises 47 items, consisting of both forward and reverse questions across three scales of the questionnaire: involvement, control, and risk-taking.

Validity and reliability

In developing the research techniques, the internal consistency of the Kazakh language versions was ensured through a systematic process. Initially, two professional translators independently performed direct translations of the techniques. Due to variations in the translated statements, all versions were retained for further evaluation. In the second stage, the translated statements were assessed by three experts to evaluate the adequacy of their grammatical structures. These experts included university teachers from various disciplines: psychologists (n = 6), linguists (n = 5), sociologists (n = 2), and teachers (n = 2). The experts selected statements that most accurately reflected the components of subjective well-being. Subsequently, the construct validity of the methods and the comparability of the resulting statements were assessed. A pilot study involving 30 students (ages 9-14) was then conducted to validate the techniques.

Ethical compliance

Ethical considerations were important in organizing educational research. The primary requirement for participating in empirical research was the voluntary consent of students. Before the survey began respondents were informed about the study's confidentiality and anonymity, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers. Anonymity and confidentiality are interconnected concepts: anonymity ensures that no data can identify the respondent, while confidentiality ensures that the information provided remains undisclosed to third parties. Respondents were assigned alphanumeric identifiers to use in all surveys and assessments instead of their names. Parental consent forms were also signed before participation.

Data Analysis

After gathering all necessary information, the collected data underwent initial analysis and the results were processed using the SPSS 20 software.

RESULTS

The data presented in [Table 2](#) indicate variations in the use of the Vt-d scale across different samples.

Table 2.*Vt-d scale item scores*

Class at school	4	5	6	7	8
N points	7	7	7	7	7
Number of respondents	16	15	13	16	16
Mean	32.14	27.46	33.04	31.48	32.28
Sum	4320	2821	2563	2813	2463
Standard deviation	8.27	7.26	7.12	7.82	7.72
Dispersion	57.45	58.26	59.23	54.69	68.57
Asymmetry	0.37	0.36	0.62	0.18	0.27
Excess	0.15	0.18	0.74	0.06	0.39
Minimum	11	5	9	7	6
Maximum	45	43	48	48	48
α Cronbach's	0.84	0.91	0.83	0.83	0.89
α (standard)	0.85	0.92	0.87	0.87	0.87
Average inter-item correlation	0.5	0.68	0.53	0.53	0.54

Table 3.*The Specifics of the Identified Relationships*

Participants (n=76)		Life satisfaction	
Technique scales		r	p
Subjective vitality test	Dispositional vitality	0,464**	<0.001
A technique of Life-Meaning Orientations	General indicator	0,512**	<0.001
	Meaningfulness of the goal	0,364**	<0.004
	Meaningfulness of the process	0,457**	<0.001
	Meaningfulness of the result	0,412**	<0.002
	Locus of control over "I"	0,570**	<0.001
	Locus of control "Life"	0,434**	<0.001
Vitality test	General indicator	0,545**	<0.001
	Engagement	0,535**	<0.001
	Control	0,431**	<0.001
	Risk	0,438**	<0.001
Tolerance of uncertainty		0,246	<0.058
Self-efficacy		0,456**	<0.001

The distribution of results obtained using the Vt-d scale approximates a normal distribution. The data have preliminarily identified criteria for assessing the severity of

subjective vitality. For the Vt-d scale, a normative level can be considered as Vt-d = 32.8, with a standard deviation of 8.8. Standard indicators typically range from 19.4 to 37 points.

Table 3 shows the personal resources of the participants and outlines the specifics of the identified relationships.

The correlation matrices show strong and statistically significant relationships between personal stability resources and life satisfaction. This suggests that adequate personal resources for psychological stability in adverse conditions contribute significantly to the life satisfaction of the study participants. The factor analysis of management strategies and the life satisfaction of the participants is presented in [Table 4](#).

Table 4.

Factor analysis of management strategies and life satisfaction of participants

Participants (n=76)	Factors
<i>Factor 1 (explanatory variance 21.3%)</i>	
Behavioral care (-0.764)	Active coping
Active management (0.728)	
Positive Reframing (0.646)	
Planning (0.654)	
Humor (0.663)	
Religion (-0.577)	
<i>Factor 2 (explanatory variance 17.3%)</i>	
Instrumental social support (0.848)	Using environmental resources
Emotional social support (0.754)	
Suppression of competing activity (0.692)	
<i>Factor 3 (explanatory variance 14.3%)</i>	
Denial (0.762)	Defensive Strategies
Mental withdrawal (0.724)	
Sedatives (0.492)	
Humor (0.453) - trend	
<i>Factor 4 (13% explanatory variance)</i>	
Acceptance as is (0.818)	Acceptance and waiting
Containment (0.824)	
Life satisfaction (-0.585)	
The total percentage of variance explained at 65.9%	

The factor analysis of control strategies, utilizing normalized varimax rotation, identified four types of control: 1) active coping; 2) utilization of external social support resources; 3) protective (reactive) control; and 4) acceptance and waiting. All identified factors share a common foundation, comprising variables with significant weights. Table 5 shows the role of

life satisfaction within the sustainability resource system as an internal determinant of subjective well-being.

Table 5.

Regression results to assess the relationship between life satisfaction and personal resources

Variable	R	R	Adj. R	F	sig	Beta	t	sig
Life satisfaction *Step 5*								
Resilience	0,544	0,296	0,284	23,674	0,000	0,543	4,864	0.000

Referring to Table 5, the cognitive component involved in managing adverse situations is linked to participants' readiness to confront challenges by taking action to overcome them, thereby enhancing subjective well-being.

DISCUSSION

In the analysis of relationships using subjective vitality scales, results comparable to findings from other studies (Gire et al., 2019; Goldbeck, Hautzinger & Wolkenstein, 2019; Liu & Chung, 2019) were identified. According to the data, no impact of social desirability was found on the results of the Vt-d scale. This suggests that as adaptation mechanisms intensify, reflected in corresponding scale indicators, the available energy level for oneself decreases. This is supported by findings showing significant relationships between personal anxiety and the Vt-d scale ($p < 0.01$), as well as between the Vt-d scale and subjective health assessment ($p < 0.05$). Subjective vitality is recognized as a measure of subjective well-being (Bertrams et al., 2020; Delgado-Lobete et al., 2020;). Furthermore, significant positive relationships between the Vt-d scale and life satisfaction, as well as subjective happiness assessments (ranging from $p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.01$), corroborate this assertion (Hassanein, Adawi & Johnson, 2021). However, the significance level of these relationships varies across samples. According to the data, the most significant relationship is observed between life satisfaction and the Vt-d scale ($p < 0.001$). This relationship pertains to the meaningfulness of various aspects of life (past, present, and future) and confidence in controlling significant events. Similar stable positive relationships were found between Vt-d and self-efficacy ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, personal resilience, serving as a resource for coping with life's challenges, shows significant positive relationships ($p < 0.01$) with subjective vitality (Vt-d). However, the significance of these correlation coefficients varies across different samples. Personal resilience, serving as a resource for overcoming life's challenges, also shows significant positive relationships ($p < 0.01$) with subjective vitality (Vt-d). However, the significance of these correlation coefficients may vary across different samples. Similar relationships were observed between Vt-d and tolerance for uncertainty as a personality resource (ranging from $p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.01$). The significance of these coefficients varies across different samples, sometimes not reaching the level of significance. Additionally, strategies for managing life difficulties in our studies show significant relationships with dispositional vitality (Vt-d). The direction of these relationships depends on whether a specific management strategy

is protective or constructive. Strategies such as cognitive reframing, planned problem-solving, active coping, and humor demonstrate significant positive relationships with subjective vitality. In contrast, strategies involving behavioral avoidance of problem-solving and reliance on sedatives show negative relationships with subjective vitality. The subjective well-being of the participants is affected by their personal orientation toward their own circumstances; the readiness to confront and accept challenges is an effective strategy for managing difficult life situations and contributes to greater life satisfaction. However, the presence of disabilities somewhat reduces life satisfaction among the study participants. The gender factor serves as a mediator in impacting personal characteristics affected by disabilities. The analysis indicated that regardless of gender, students with disabilities exhibit lower life satisfaction. Additionally, a stronger inclination toward using the coping strategy of "mental escape" was observed ($p < 0.05$). This strategy falls under defensive coping mechanisms aimed at alleviating mental stress in challenging situations. Students with disabilities frequently rely on mental switching more than their peers (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020), likely due to chronic stress from disability-related discomfort. Regardless of gender differences, these students tend to experience greater post-traumatic personal growth, notably in their altered attitudes toward others ($p < 0.1$). The challenging experience of living with a disability may contribute to positive changes in interpersonal perspectives. Gender-specific findings highlight that girls with disabilities more often utilize planning ($p < 0.05$) and emotion-focused coping strategies ($p < 0.05$). They also exhibit heightened post-traumatic personal growth, particularly in their shifts in attitudes toward others ($p < 0.05$). The analysis of additional variables integrated into factors for students with disabilities reveals the specific meanings of different types of coping strategies. The factor labeled "active coping" is characterized by active management strategies, positive reframing, and planned problem-solving. Humor is also included in this factor, suggesting that during active coping, humor serves as a tool for positively reframing difficulties. The factor termed "use of environmental resources" centers around coping mechanisms involving seeking emotional and social support. This factor is specialized, focusing on strategies such as seeking comfort, advice, or help in performing challenging tasks. The third factor, "Defense Strategies," encompasses varied coping methods including "mental withdrawal" and "taking sedatives," with humor remaining at a trending level within this factor. The final factor, "acceptance and waiting," is characterized by strategies such as accepting the situation as it is and practicing containment. The personal regulation observed among students with disabilities serves to shield them from dynamic shifts in their semantic frameworks, which is crucial when facing challenges like disability or severe stress. This ability to act despite adversity and feelings of abandonment enables individuals to enhance their life satisfaction. Further data analysis revealed that among the participants, life satisfaction predicts resilience and thus serves as a personal resource. The parameter of vitality, significantly associated with physical well-being, remains distinct. This indicates that declines in overall well-being do not necessarily reduce the efficacy of the participants' ability to regulate their activities. Concurrently, the personal resources of students

with disabilities are structured such that meaning can be restored through increased self-efficacy, reflecting the immediate success assessment of the subject's activities (Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda & Fernández-Cerero, 2022; Halstead, Griffith & Hastings, 2018; Vanderkerken et al., 2019;).

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigates the factors that mediate the impact of physical disabilities on the subjective well-being of learners with disabilities in Kazakhstan. It highlights that personal efforts, an active stance toward one's situation, a drive for self-development, and the provision of social support are foundational for harmonious personality development and subjective well-being. Effective utilization of personal stability resources enhances life satisfaction among participants with disabilities. The cognitive aspect of managing challenging situations, characterized by embracing challenges and taking proactive steps to overcome them, also contributes significantly to subjective well-being. Factor analysis underscores a statistically significant effect of disability on life satisfaction, although many differences are observed at a trending level or result from the combined influence of gender and disability factors.

Gender differences among girls with disabilities include a higher propensity for using planning and emotional focus as management strategies, along with more pronounced post-traumatic personal growth in terms of changing attitudes toward others. Regression analysis findings reveal that among participants, life satisfaction is affected not only by the meaningfulness of life but also functions independently as a crucial resilience resource. Examining the systemic organization of personal resources among participants reveals a distinct architecture designed to mitigate the consequences of disability. The participants' system of personal resilience resources serves as a primary mechanism for self-regulation, preventing hypercompensatory mental distortions and maintaining psychological health and subjective well-being. The tension observed in adaptation mechanisms among participants does not indicate maladaptation but rather characterological traits developed through overcompensation for organic deficiencies.

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