

Some Reflections on Covid-19 Impact on Students' Academic Motivation and Psychological Well-being after Lockdowns

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Abstract

In the contemporary landscape, higher education institutions grapple with the daunting task of cultivating skilled professionals across diverse fields, as demanded by our dynamic society. A central challenge within the educational milieu persists—the academic motivation of students. The Covid-19 lockdown intensified this struggle, proving to be a formidable challenge for both educators and learners. Maintaining motivation emerged as a formidable hurdle, acknowledged unanimously by professors and students alike. In the Armenian context, the lockdown period unfolded against the backdrop of a profound crisis—the 44-day war with Azerbaijan. This conflict resulted in over 5000 casualties, a multitude of refugees, and a landscape marred by the constant threat of renewed hostilities. Remarkably, students actively engaged in volunteer work amid these dire circumstances. The confluence of these adversities exerted a profound impact on the students' physical health, psychological well-being, and, significantly, their academic motivation. Recognizing the urgency of understanding this complex interplay, our research focused on investigating the post-lockdown academic motivation of Armenian students. We sought to unravel the intricate connections between their academic drive, health status, and psychological well-being in the aftermath of the challenging period. By delving into these multifaceted dimensions, our study aspired to shed light on the resilience and adaptability of students in the face of unprecedented challenges, providing valuable insights for both educational strategies and broader societal understanding.

1. Introduction

Modern Armenian society is at the crossroads of sweeping transformations, witnessing profound shifts in social, political, and economic realms. These changes intricately mold the collective psychology, behavior, and overall quality of life for its diverse population. Amidst this intricate landscape, the nation grapples with the imminent specter of war, introducing an additional layer of complexity to an already dynamic situation. The subjective perception of well-being among Armenians emerges as a vital metric, serving as a touchstone for the country's holistic progress. Beyond being a reflection of ongoing societal metamorphoses, this perception

significantly influences the academic accomplishments of the nation's students. As Armenia maneuvers through these multifaceted challenges, the interplay between societal dynamics and geopolitical uncertainties emerges as a linchpin, steering the trajectory of Armenia's developmental journey and profoundly shaping the educational outcomes of its aspiring students [1].

The aspiration for university education has consistently held strong appeal among Armenia's youth. Pre-lockdown, motivations driving individuals to pursue psychology as students were diverse and compelling. Whether fueled by a passion for understanding the complexities of the human mind, a desire to contribute to societal well-being, or the pursuit of personal growth, these motivations underscore the enduring enthusiasm of young Armenians for higher education, even in the face of unprecedented challenges like the lockdown [2].

- to become good specialists in different spheres of psychology
- to understand their own psychological problems
- to become a member of the students' group
- to have an opportunity to find a more or less suitable work
- the correspondence of the profession to their interests

Amidst the challenges posed by the lockdown and the backdrop of war, psychology students in Armenia exhibited exceptional resilience and altruism. Many actively engaged in volunteerism, dedicating their time to hospitals and assisting refugees. This hands-on experience provided a unique platform for personal growth, fostering confidence, and allowing them to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical psychology. Through these endeavors, students not only demonstrated their skills but also recognized the profound significance of their profession. The experience served as a catalyst, amplifying their motivation and commitment to contribute meaningfully to society, marking a transformative period in their educational and personal journeys. But after the lockdown, most of the professors

noticed the decrease of students' interest toward their studies, academic results and lack of motivation.

Inevitably, the aftermath of the Covid-19 period necessitated a comprehensive study on the academic motivation and psychological well-being of students. Recognizing the profound impact of the pandemic on educational landscapes, such research becomes imperative for understanding the evolving needs of students and formulating targeted interventions to support their academic endeavors and overall mental health.

2. The Main Objectives of the Study

The primary focus of our research revolved around delving into various factors that impact educational motivation post Covid-19 lockdown. Our objective included a comprehensive analysis of the intricate connections between psychological health, psychological well-being, and educational motivation. By exploring these dynamics, we aimed to contribute valuable insights into the evolving landscape of education in the aftermath of the pandemic, shedding light on the nuanced relationships that shape students' motivation and overall well-being in the educational context post-Covid-19 lockdown.

The main objective was subdivided into several tasks:

- To evaluate the current psychological health of the students after lockdown.
- To evaluate the psychological well-being of the students.
- To evaluate the types and priorities of their academic motivation after lockdown.

3. Sample

The study focused on a specific cohort comprising third and fourth-year participants, totaling 110 female students from the Department of Psychology at the Armenian State Pedagogical University (ASPU). Notably, these individuals actively engaged in diverse forms of volunteering during the challenging periods of the pandemic and the 44-day war in October-November 2020. The deliberate selection of students who immersed themselves in volunteering work provided a unique lens to examine the impact of their experiences on psychological aspects. This intentional sampling strategy aimed to capture a nuanced understanding of the interplay between volunteering, psychological dynamics, and the broader socio-political context during these pivotal times.

The investigation was carried out between October 2021 up to May 2023.

4. Techniques

Conducting the study involved a meticulous approach utilizing diverse diagnostic methods across multiple stages. In the initial phase, we employed a bespoke diagnostic tool – our own Questionnaire on the psychological and physical health of the students. This instrument was thoughtfully designed to extract comprehensive insights into various facets of the participants' well-being. Subsequent stages of the research incorporated additional diagnostic methodologies, ensuring a holistic examination of the intricate interplay between psychological and physical health among the student population under investigation.

The comprehensive Questionnaire drew inspiration from a subset of symptoms outlined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [3]. This meticulous approach ensures alignment with established health guidelines, facilitating a thorough assessment of relevant indicators for a more nuanced understanding of potential health concerns. It included the following questions:

- *Have you had Covid?*
- *Do you feel depressed after Covid?*
- *Are you full of energy?*
- *Do you feel anxiety?*
- *Do you have sleep problems?*
- *Do you feel tired or fatigue?*
- *Have you any difficulties thinking and concentrating?*
- *Do you feel that your physical and mental activities are getting worse?*
- *Have you got changes in smell and taste?*
- *Do you feel your mood changes?*

In the second phase of the study, we delved into a detailed assessment of students' psychological well-being using C. D. Ryff's specialized 84-item Scale on Psychological Well-being [4]. This established and widely recognized scale provided a nuanced framework for gauging various dimensions of psychological well-being, enabling a thorough examination of the participants' mental health. The utilization of this scale added depth and specificity to our investigation into the intricate nuances of psychological well-being among the student cohort.

Moving into the third stage of our research, a comprehensive evaluation of students' Academic Motivation was conducted using R. G. Vallerand's

robust Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C28) [5]. This instrument is specifically designed to gauge various dimensions of academic motivation, offering valuable insights into the factors influencing students' drive and commitment in their educational pursuits. The utilization of AMS-C28 allowed for a nuanced examination of motivational dynamics, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between academic motivation and psychological well-being among the participants.

To discern the priorities within students' academic motivation, we employed the Academic Motivation Scale proposed by esteemed Russian psychologists A. Rean and B. Yakunin [6]. This meticulously crafted scale provided a tailored lens to assess the specific aspects influencing students' motivation in their academic pursuits, enriching our understanding of the nuanced factors shaping their educational drive.

To ensure linguistic accuracy, all employed methods underwent a rigorous translation process. Expert language professionals translated them into Armenian, followed by meticulous back-translation into English and Russian. This meticulous linguistic validation process aimed to maintain the precision and integrity of the assessment tools across multiple languages.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Analysis of the Results of the Questionnaire

Every respondent in our study experienced the impact of Covid, with varying degrees of severity. Post-lockdown, a substantial 88% reported experiencing five or more symptoms, reflecting the pervasive nature of the aftermath. Interestingly, 12% noted two to three symptoms, offering a diverse spectrum of experiences within the cohort. Notably, every participant acknowledged grappling with physical or psychological health issues post-Covid. The prevalence of symptoms underscores the pervasive challenges individuals face beyond the acute phase of the virus, highlighting the need for holistic support and understanding. This collective recognition of health issues contributes valuable insights into the multifaceted and long-lasting repercussions of the pandemic on individuals' well-being.

5.2. Analysis of the Results for Ryff's Scale on Psychological Well-being

In the post-lockdown era, prioritizing psychological well-being is paramount for students. Those with elevated levels of psychological well-being are poised for optimal personal development.

This positive psychological state encompasses an individual's capacity to embrace their identity, cultivate meaningful relationships, exercise autonomy, and establish clear life goals [7]. Beyond academic achievement, fostering psychological well-being equips students with the resilience and emotional intelligence necessary for navigating the complexities of life. Recognizing the integral role of psychological well-being in shaping holistic development underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems within educational environments. Nurturing this positive condition not only enhances individual fulfillment but also contributes to creating a more supportive and flourishing educational community in the aftermath of challenging periods like lockdowns.

Ryff and Keyes [8] have intricately categorized psychological well-being into six dimensions, providing a nuanced framework for assessment. These dimensions encompass self-acceptance, fostering positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastering one's environment, cultivating a sense of purpose in life, and promoting continuous personal growth. This comprehensive classification facilitates a detailed exploration of the multifaceted nature of psychological well-being, capturing its diverse facets for a holistic understanding. The results of the answers are in Table 1.

Table 1. Psychological well-being of students after Covid-19

Scales	Percentage of students	Level
self-acceptance	65%	moderate
positive relationships with others	77%	high
autonomy	50%	moderate
environmental mastery	45%	low
purpose in life	43%	low
personal growth	49%	low-to-moderate
total well-being scale	54.6% 38.2% 7.2%	low moderate high

The answers demonstrated the following:

- Moderate levels of self-acceptance signify a degree of dissatisfaction with oneself among students. This suggests that they harbor disappointment regarding their past experiences and may not be fully prepared to confront future challenges. This nuanced observation sheds light on the intricate relationship between self-acceptance levels and the students' perceptions of their past and future, offering valuable insights into their psychological dynamics and readiness for forthcoming endeavors.

- The positive relationships with others scale garnered the highest scores, with an impressive 77% of students expressing genuine happiness in reuniting with friends and engaging in shared interactions. This notable outcome suggests that the dimension of positive relationships contributes significantly to their psychological well-being, serving as an inspirational aspect. The emphasis on social connections underscores the pivotal role of interpersonal bonds in enhancing students' overall mental and emotional states.
- The autonomy scale gauges students' capacity for independent action and self-confidence. Concerningly, only 50% of students scored high on this scale, signaling a potential lack of self-confidence among half of the participants. This observation raises concerns about their readiness for future challenges, emphasizing the need for interventions to bolster self-assurance and empower students in navigating their academic and personal journeys.

The three remaining scales—environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth—reflect consistently low scores. This collective pattern signifies potential challenges among students, such as a lack of self-appreciation, unclear goals for a meaningful life, and a perceived inability to confront future challenges. These scores highlight areas requiring attention and support to foster a more positive and resilient psychological well-being among the student body, ensuring they are better equipped to navigate the complexities of life and education.

For the total well-being scale, the results are as follows:

A noteworthy 54.6% of students exhibited a low level of psychological well-being, indicating a substantial portion facing challenges in this domain. Additionally, 38.2% registered a moderate level, while a mere 7.2% achieved a high score on the psychological well-being scale. These statistics underscore the prevalence of suboptimal psychological well-being among the student population, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

The outcomes from Ryff's test unveiled a persistent trend of low and moderate levels of subjective well-being among students, even after a span of two years since the onset of Covid. It prompts consideration of external factors, particularly the precarious social and political landscape in the region. The looming threat of a potential new conflict contributes to the sustained impact on students' well-being. This enduring challenge underscores the significance of addressing not only the aftermath of the pandemic but also the

broader socio-political environment, recognizing its profound influence on the mental and emotional states of students navigating these complex circumstances.

5.3. Analysis of the Results of the Vallerand's and Rean's and Yakunin's Methods for Academic Motivation of the Students

In the third stage of our study, we delved into the exploration of students' academic motivation types, recognizing its pivotal role in shaping both academic achievement and psychological well-being. Understanding the diverse motivational factors influencing students is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems that can positively impact their educational journey and overall psychological health.

Motivation stands as a potent catalyst, driving the adoption of effective learning strategies that yield positive outcomes and enhance overall well-being. The intrinsic desire for success propels individuals to embrace meaningful and productive approaches to learning, creating a symbiotic relationship between motivation and holistic well-being. This dynamic interplay ensures that the pursuit of knowledge is not merely a task but a fulfilling journey, positively impacting cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. As learners are motivated to explore, understand, and master subjects, their sense of accomplishment contributes significantly to their mental and emotional wellness. Consequently, recognizing and nurturing motivation becomes pivotal in cultivating a positive and enriching educational environment that nurtures both academic success and the broader well-being of individuals.

As previously highlighted, our examination of students' academic motivation employed a dual-method approach. Two distinct methods were meticulously employed to assess both the nature and prioritization of their academic drive. This comprehensive strategy enables a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of student motivation, contributing to a richer understanding of their educational pursuits.

R. G. Vallerand's sophisticated 7-item scale serves as a valuable tool, delineating intricacies within individuals' motivation. This instrument effectively differentiates between three nuanced subscales of intrinsic motivation, three facets of extrinsic motivation, and one comprehensive amotivation subscale. Its precision offers researchers and educators a robust framework to delve into the multifaceted nature of motivational dynamics.

The results of the students were as follows:

A mere 15% of students exhibited intrinsic motivation to know, underlining a potential gap in their curiosity-driven engagement with learning. Additionally, a minimal 3% demonstrated intrinsic

motivation toward accomplishment, and only 2% expressed intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation. These findings suggest a need for targeted interventions to nurture diverse intrinsic motivations, promoting a more comprehensive and personalized approach to academic engagement among the student population.

Within extrinsic motivation, distinct subscales emerged: external regulation, with 14% of respondents, indicating a reliance on external factors for motivation; introjected regulation, observed in 5% of students, suggesting a partially internalized motivation; and identification, exhibited by 3% of respondents, signifying a stronger internalization of motivation tied to personal values and goals. These diverse manifestations underscore the multifaceted nature of extrinsic motivation.

The amotivation scale yielded the highest scores, with a substantial 58% of students scoring high on this subscale. This indicates a prevalent lack of intrinsic interest in their studies, possibly manifesting as disinterest, feigned classroom engagement, or a passive continuation without deep engagement [9]. This notable prevalence of amotivation underscores the importance of addressing underlying factors contributing to a lack of interest, aiming to cultivate a more meaningful and engaged approach to their academic pursuits among the student body.

Given the unsatisfactory outcomes of this study, a supplementary research phase was initiated. Employing Rean's and Yakunin's method, students were presented with 16 statements outlining motives for education. Their task was to select the five most significant motives among the options provided. This additional research approach aimed to delve deeper into the intricacies of students' educational motivations, offering a more nuanced perspective that could inform targeted interventions and strategies to enhance the overall educational experience for the student population. The results are as follows:

- *getting diploma* 43%
- *communicative* 25%
- *motives of avoiding failure* 17%
- *professional*-10%
- *creative self-realization* 5%

The comparative analysis of two academic motivation methods reveals a predominant inclination towards extrinsic motives and amotivation among students. This pattern suggests that external factors and a notable lack of intrinsic motivation play significant roles in shaping students' academic motives. Recognizing and addressing these predominant motivational tendencies is crucial for

implementing effective interventions to foster a more intrinsic and meaningful academic engagement.

Despite the passage of two years since the lockdown, both the academic motivation and psychological well-being of students persistently remain unsatisfactory. This enduring state underscores the prolonged challenges students face in navigating the aftermath of the lockdown. Addressing these ongoing concerns is crucial to fostering an environment that supports improved academic motivation and enhances the overall psychological well-being of the student population.

6. Conclusion

As per the OECD report [10], academic achievements and students' well-being are progressively recognized as pivotal elements in education. The increasing significance of these factors underscores the need for an expanding body of research dedicated to comprehending the contributors to elevated levels of students' well-being and academic motivation. Such research endeavors are essential for informing educational policies and interventions that aim to cultivate a supportive environment, fostering both academic success and the overall well-being of students in the contemporary educational landscape.

Thus, a paradigm shift in educational institutions is warranted, transcending the exclusive emphasis on academic achievements. The imperative lies in the adoption of proactive measures that prioritize the safeguarding of students' psychological health and holistic well-being. Establishing a comprehensive educational environment, attuned to the diverse needs of students, becomes paramount. This approach fosters a more balanced and supportive educational experience, recognizing the interconnectedness of academic success and mental well-being. By acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted dimensions of students' needs, educational institutions can play a pivotal role in nurturing a conducive atmosphere for overall development and growth.

Our research on the interrelationships of the psychological health, well-being and academic motivation has a number of limitations.

In the initial phase, preliminary results are available, acknowledging the constraints of the sample size. It is crucial to note that studies of this nature provide a short-term and somewhat simplistic perspective on the psychological well-being challenges faced by students post-pandemic. The inherent limitations in sample size necessitate caution in drawing comprehensive conclusions, emphasizing the need for ongoing, more extensive research to gain a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the long-term impacts on students' psychological well-being.

The constrained participant pool prohibits broad generalization of the findings. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the various factors influencing students' motivation for learning in the post-pandemic period, future research should delve deeper. A preference lies in conducting similar studies across diverse higher education settings, encompassing varied and larger samples. This approach aims to explore potential divergences in students' views regarding their motivation for learning, fostering a more nuanced understanding that transcends the limitations inherent in the current study's sample size and context.

The psychological well-being of students serves as a poignant indicator, prompting educational institutions to reflect on the future of the younger generation. Neglecting this aspect may lead to the emergence of a traumatized generation and a shortage of psychologically healthy specialists. Prioritizing students' mental and emotional health is pivotal not only for their individual growth but also for cultivating a generation of professionals equipped with the resilience and well-being essential for addressing the challenges of the future.

7. References

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8. Acknowledgements

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