

Subjective Well-being in the midst of Digital Transformation among Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract:

This article discusses the influence of digital transformation on subjective well-being within Higher Education Institutions, with emphasis on both students and academic staff. While digital transformation offers opportunities for enhanced efficiency and innovative pedagogies, they also introduce challenges that influence individuals' emotional and psychological health. The review summarizes findings from 20 studies globally, highlighting how digital shifts have affected workloads, work-life balance, social connections, and mental health. However, limited research addresses the subjective well-being of academic staff, despite their central role in institutional success. The article therefore emphasizes the need for supportive policies and targeted interventions to mitigate negative effects, promote resilience, and encourage sustainable digital environments. It also calls for broader, cross-cultural research to understand diverse experiences on subjective well-being of academic staff across regions like Africa.

Keywords: digital transformation, subjective well-being, academic staff, Higher Education institutions.

INTRODUCTION:

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has immensely changed the landscape of higher education institutions (HEIs) globally, ushering in a new face of teaching, research, and carrying out administrative processes. HEIs are increasingly embracing digital transformation to enhance operational efficiency, expand access, and facilitate innovative pedagogies. However, alongside these opportunities come significant challenges that influence the subjective wellbeing of the students and academic staff; yet for the academic staff, this is often overlooked as a critical component of the institutional success.

Subjective wellbeing, which is an individual's own evaluation of their life based on their perceptions and experience according to Diener (1984) has become an essential element of organizational sustainability and productivity (Ocasal et al., 2024). For students and academic staff, the transition to the active use of digital technologies can evoke a complex mix of experiences regarding their lives. We see that, while digital technologies can streamline workloads and facilitate collaboration, they may also introduce new pressures and uncertainties that influence the subjective wellbeing of individuals. It is thus important to consider the experiences of academic staff because they are central to an institutional success.

This research topic aims to bring together a set of papers that will enable the scientific community have a better understanding of the relationship between digital transformation and subjective wellbeing of both students and academic staff within HEIs. Alongside this, we have sought to show that as digital initiatives accelerate, understanding their implications on student and academic staff SWB is vital to inform policies that foster a supportive and sustainable academic environment. Moreso, this paper also aims to highlight the limited literature on the influence of digital transformation on the subjective wellbeing of academic staff in HEIs. This is important for the establishment of targeted interventions to mitigate the potential negative

influence on their personal and professional lives. The 20 articles that comprise it represent a significant contribution to how these digital changes are implemented and sustained and their influence on the students and academic staff in HEIs around the world.

This editorial is organized into three sections, which seek to provide a common framework for understanding subjective well-being in the midst of digital transformation. It shall be organised as follows: in the first section, a foundational framework of understanding Subjective wellbeing from the social sciences in which the 20 works are inscribed. The second part describes the main theme that organize the monograph and briefly presents each of the 20 articles that comprise it. Finally, important considerations are highlighted that have been extracted from the theoretical and empirical materials presented in the monograph, composed of relevant voices from different geographies and traditions.

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN HIGHER EDUCATIONS INSTITUTIONS

Subjective wellbeing is an important concept in understanding human development. Many studies have examined its causes and impacts overtime. In both academia and public policy, the interest in understanding subjective wellbeing has grown over the last two decades (Oyanedel et al., 2015). A lot of emphasis has been on student populations, whereas, academic staff in higher education contexts have received less attention. The very important role that higher education institutions play in peoples' personal and professional career paths requires the need for a better understanding of the subjective wellbeing of their academic staff. Consequently, a supportive and productive academic environment is fostered that becomes a breeding ground for a stable mental health, engagement and overall institutional success.

With a focus on the many phases of life development, the notion of quality of life is understood in terms of objective components as well as subjective experiences that guarantee wellbeing (Voukelatou et al., 2021). This latter component, referred to as "subjective wellbeing," is the one that has gained more attention recently. The most prominent researcher to discuss the concept of subjective well-being was Ed Diener, an American Professor in Psychology. He authored the foundational paper on subjective well-being published in 1984 and *The Satisfaction with Life Scale*, published in 1985. According to Diener (1984), SWB refers to an individual's emotional and cognitive assessment of their life. It is also seen as an indicator of happiness and globally, people have regarded it as an important aspect in their lives than financial prosperity (Diener & Lucas, 2000). This highlights the growing recognition that emotional and psychological fulfillment often outweighs material wealth. SWB is often theorized into a tripartite structure which includes; Life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect. The term, affect, as it is used throughout the decades of SWB research means feelings or emotions experienced by an individual (Diener, 1984).

In the workplace, SWB is increasingly seen as an important indicator of how work experiences may influence one's overall quality of life. As the future of work leans toward more flexible, digitally mediated environments, SWB becomes a key metric because it reflects employees' perceptions, adaptations and resilience in the face of change. When employees experience high SWB, they tend to be more engaged and committed to work (Kau & Flotman, 2025). These qualities are essential for successfully navigating digital transformation in the workplace. However, not only is SWB concerned with the individual but it has strategic implications for the organization such as resilience and long-term sustainability of work systems (Smaliukiene & Bekesiene, 2020).

From a public policy perspective, the effort to assess individuals' subjective well-being has drawn more attention because it is perceived as an effective instrument for comprehending a nation's fulfilled life (Ben-Arieh, 2008). This is because it enhances the conventional notion of subjective wellbeing, which to a great extent is characterized by access to income, and enables development programs to be more holistic and humanized (Oyanedel et al., 2015). How citizens view their lives gives important information on how to enhance the quality of life for this social group as recipients of state policy (Ben-Arieh, 2008).

Research in wellbeing in the educational contexts has revealed the mechanisms through which factors such as teachers' role, peer relationships, school environment, and job satisfaction influence people's subjective

wellbeing. Further, it has provided the opportunity to examine the link between subjective wellbeing and desirable outcomes such as attainment, and personal characteristics such as resilience, courage, and self-esteem. Higher education in particular is an important form of investment in human capital development. This investment through the specialized knowledge it offers makes the necessary contribution together with other factors to the success of national efforts to boost productivity and economic growth (Fagoyinbo, 2013).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic altered the educational environment, for example, traditional teaching and learning styles transformed into an online or virtual experience. These changes also altered the social aspects that underpin student and academic staff engagement (Rivera-Vargas et al., 2021). These social relations are important to the students' and the academic staffs' sense of purpose making it an important factor for their subjective well-being. Therefore, understanding how the digital transformation influences subjective wellbeing of academic staff is key in order to address any challenges that may hinder their work progress in the digital educational environments.

MONOGRAPH STRUCTURE

A total of 20 articles from the following 17 countries have been included in this monograph: China, Taiwan, Tanzania, Turkey, Russia, USA, Poland, Lithuania, Turkey, India, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Slovakia, Colombia, Czech-republic and Hungary. From the articles identified, 6 centered on academic staff while fourteen centered on students in HEIs and they shall be grouped into 2 categories accordingly.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF

Buda and Kovács (2024) investigated the digital factors related to the subjective well-being of academic staff in the University of Debrecen, which is one of Hungary's biggest Universities. Moreso, the study included lecturers at other HEIs teaching minority languages but are affiliated to the University of Debrecen. The study revealed that despite the potential benefits of the digital tools, they also present challenges which impact on academic staff's subjective wellbeing. Therefore, there's need for careful management and institutional support to mitigate stress and promote balance.

Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė, Duobienė, et al. (2021) investigated how institutional support affects educators' subjective well-being in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown and as the institutions adopted virtual working mechanisms. The educators were from secondary, further and higher education institutions in China. In the study, it was found that that without adequate institutional support, online teaching can lead to decreased subjective well-being and heightened burnout. Therefore, it's important for institutions to design strategic but also supportive frameworks in order to foster a positive and sustainable digital education environment in the future.

In their monograph, Knapková et al. (2022) focused on identifying the changes and trends in the use of time on the subjective well-being of academic staff in Universities across four European countries. They include; Hungary, Poland, Czech-republic and Slovakia with questionnaires used as a mode of collecting data during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that during the COVID 19 period, the academic staff's work load increased with staff working up to 10 hours per week. This ultimately affected their work-life balance, however, the academic staff still maintained a positive attitude, though some administrative functions did cause stress. In the study, the notable impact of digital transformation on the emotions and organization were highlighted thus stressing the need to consider teachers' experiences for future higher education strategies.

Namabira et al. (2022) were interested in ascertaining the happiness of lecturers in the HEIs of Tanzania during the period of massification which involves a mass enrolment of students in order to address the issue of equity in education. The study revealed that the lecturers were generally happy apart from the activity of assessing the students which affected their subjective wellbeing. They recommended that the HEIs do more in regard to adopting e-assessments technology in order to benefit both the lecturers and students.

Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2022) found that reducing job demands while increasing job resources can improve on the extent to which college teachers' online experience teaching anxiety which has implications on their

mental health. Moreso, they found that a high level of subjective well among the academic staff is important for institutional success. Their study was conducted among colleges in Jiangsu, China and data was collected through questionnaires sent online. Therefore, the study recommended for the provision of resources to reduce or manage the online teaching anxiety among the college teachers.

Lastly, Bangun et al. (2021) investigated the role of happiness in the midst of the digital transformation and its impact on the performance of academic staff in Bandung Institute of Technology, one of the leading HEIs in Indonesia. The findings of study revealed that the happiness of the academic staff was a key factor in their acceptance and use of the digital tools being introduced in the institution. Ultimately, their satisfaction with the job and performance in the organization improved. Therefore, the need for lecturers to be happy and the preparation of academic staff to embrace the rapid digital changes are of paramount importance in HEIs.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING OF STUDENTS IN HEIS

Kim and Kim (2017) conducted a study among college students examining how the use of social media has influenced their ability to network with diverse groups of people ultimately influencing their subjective wellbeing. The college students were from a public university in south eastern United states of America. They found out that social media use has a positive relationship with the college students' ability to network with the diverse groups of people. Most importantly, is that this ability to network with diverse groups of people was also strongly associated with enhanced levels of subjective well-being. The study recommended that universities should actively encourage college students to network with diverse groups of people via social media platforms because this enhances their subjective wellbeing.

Yang et al. (2019) investigated the association between problematic smart phone use and subjective wellbeing amongst other factors in undergraduate students. The study was carried out in a university in south China. The findings revealed that poor self-regulation of smart phone usage predicts a high problematic smartphone use and this correlates with subjective wellbeing though this relationship to a small extent. Therefore, it was determined that the relationship was uncertain. However, the study recommended that in order to enhance the students' mental health and subjective wellbeing, better self-regulation and awareness of problematic smart phone use should be encouraged.

Alturki and Aldraiweesh (2021) sought to understand how students use of the Learning management system (LMS) during covid 19 pandemic influenced their peer relations and subjective wellbeing. The study was carried out in King Saud University in Saudi Arabia where data was collected using an online survey. It was revealed that using the LMS produced positive outcomes for the students such as continuous engagement in learning engagement throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. The students felt attached to their class mates even though they were all separated but studying online and this positively influenced their subjective wellbeing. So, the use of the LMS in higher Education should be optimized in order to enhance learning as sustainability participation.

Similarly, Dutta et al. (2021) discovered that subjective wellbeing influences the intention to adopt e-learning through four factors, which include; online course quality, system quality, perceived service quality, and perceived closeness. The study was conducted among university students in Taiwan and the data was collected through questionnaires. Their study aimed to investigate the factors influencing the sustainable adoption of cloud-based e-learning systems such as the intention of the students to adopt the systems and the influence on their subjective well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Huang and Zhang (2022) investigated how perceived social support influences subjective well-being among college students who were studying online in China. Data was collected using online questionnaires and the findings revealed that those who perceived greater social support tended to experience higher subjective wellbeing. The study recommended that Universities should ensure to incorporate social support services for those students learning online because this would enable them maintain a stable subjective wellbeing.

In a study conducted in four countries and among students studying online during the covid 19 pandemic, Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė, Aslan, et al. (2021), aimed to ascertain whether their digital competence influence stress levels, burnout and subjective wellbeing. The countries involved in the study included; Poland, Lithuania, Turkey and India. The study revealed that subjective wellbeing, stress and burnout were positively influenced by digital competencies. This implies that those students who possessed strong digital competencies are in a better position to manage stress and burnout which eventually improves their subjective wellbeing.

Furthermore, Zhao (2021) examined the different ways college students use social media and its influence on addiction to social media as well as their subjective wellbeing in a Chinese University. The study utilized quantitative means to collect data and the results revealed that the use of social media for entertainment increases the likelihood of addiction which negatively influences subjective well-being. On the other hand, social media use for the purpose of socially connecting with others enhances the subjective wellbeing of the students especially those who are not addicted. One of the study recommendations is that college students should be sensitized on the benefits of using social media rationally especially given the benefit of establishing health social connections.

Afshar Jahanshahi and Polas (2023) investigated the perception of students' towards the imposed online engagements and its influence on their mental health and happiness during Covid 19 pandemic. The data was collected from undergraduate students in a private Mexican University using an online survey. In the findings, it was revealed that their mental health was moderate in terms of the anxiety and depression prevalence. Regarding their happiness, male students were found to be happier as well as those with shorter online classes of approximately 50 minutes. The study recommended that teachers should interact with the students more often online but the Government should also invest more in education research about the online learning.

In the Health sector, Rivadeneira et al. (2023) examined the influence of health technology literacy on subjective wellbeing among university students from both a public and private university in Ecuador. The sample was invited to complete an online survey to elicit information from the students and the data was analyzed using bivariate linear regressions. The study found that health technology and subjective wellbeing had a significant relationship. This implies that those students with a high literacy level in health technology are better able to use the digital resources to improve their health and subjective wellbeing. Therefore, it's important for university management to improve health technology literacy levels among their universities in order to improve their subjective wellbeing.

Furthermore, in the health care field, Barragán-Giraldo et al. (2021) examined the ways that healthcare professionals working in Colombia experienced and developed their subjective wellbeing while completing postgraduate studies remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Narratives from interviews held and questionnaires were used and the findings indicated that the professionals appreciated activities that supported their subjective wellbeing while studying remotely during the lockdown. The study recommended that practices that enhance subjective wellbeing should be developed and/or supported in educational spaces whether they are physical or remote spaces in order to improve professional satisfaction.

A study on adult education was conducted by Shi and Jiang (2024) to investigate older adults' participation in adult education and its influence on their subjective wellbeing. Particularly, the study aimed to understand how physical and digital isolation serve as mediating factors while educational level serves as a moderator in the relationship. The data was collected from a larger survey carried out in 2018 among older adults in China. The findings indicated that the older adults' experience an improved subjective wellbeing when they participate in the adult education. In addition, both physical and digital isolation serve as mediators in these relationships. It was also found that, educational level influences the strength of the relationship between older adults' participation in adult education and their subjective wellbeing.

Digital games addiction was investigated to find out its influence on university students' subjective wellbeing in Istanbul university (Sart, 2023). The diverse students were educated in social, health, educational and

engineering sciences and the data was collected using questionnaires. The findings revealed that digital game addiction has a negative effect on the students' subjective wellbeing. Therefore, it's important for establishment of strong and supportive parent-child relationships which involves good communication in order to avoid the detrimental effects of addiction to digital games on their behaviors in the short and long run.

Timokhin et al. (2021) investigated the psychological mechanisms underlying self-regulation, motivation for learning activities, and the subjective wellbeing of students engaged in a digital educational environment. The sample consisted of freshman students from different disciplines in the V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University located in Russia. In the study, it was found that certain factors such as interest in learning, quality of interactions with teachers and peers, and satisfaction with remote work conditions, play an important role in shaping students' subjective wellbeing in a digital learning context.

Aydoğan et al. (2024) conducted a study among college students in Turkey to investigate the role of belief in one's self to succeed in online learning as a predictor of their subjective wellbeing. The study found that belief in one's self to succeed in online learning is related to a positive subjective wellbeing. This indicates that trusting oneself to handle online education helps improve mental health and overall subjective wellbeing, especially during difficult periods.

CONCLUSION

This article highlights the limited literature regarding the subjective well-being of academic staff who are the main beneficiaries of these technological advancements in HEIs. In addition, the existing studies are concentrated in specific regions such as Asia, China, and some European countries. This leaves a lack of diverse cultural perspectives on how digital transformation affects subjective well-being across different contexts such as Africa. Neglecting the subjective well-being of the academic staff especially may lead to resistance to the digital changes, decreased job engagement, exhaustion and burnout ultimately affecting the quality of education rendered.

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