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Mindfulness as a Psychological Resource for Academic Performance and Well-Being in University Students

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Abstract. This article presents the results of an empirical study of the relationship between mindfulness and academic performance, psychological well-being, and perceived stress levels among students. The study was conducted as part of a scientific project AR 26102139, «The Application of MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) Practices to Reduce Stress and Depression Among Young People in Kazakhstan», with the support and funding of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The study involved 131 students of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University aged 18 to 22. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) were used to assess mindfulness. Psychological well-being was diagnosed using the PERMA-Profiler questionnaire, and subjective stress levels were assessed using the PSS-14 scale. The grade point average (GPA) was used to assess academic performance. Statistical analysis was performed using Spearman's correlation coefficient. The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between mindfulness and academic performance, as well as positive correlations between individual components of mindfulness and indicators of psychological well-being. The most consistent relationships were found for the component «mindfulness of actions», which is associated with a reduction in perceived stress and distress. The data obtained confirm the importance of mindfulness as a psychological resource that contributes to the emotional stability and academic performance of students.

Keywords: mindfulness, students, academic performance, psychological well-being, stress, self-regulation, emotional stability.

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Introduction

The modern educational environment is characterized by a high pace of learning, an increase in the volume of information overload, and growing demands on students' cognitive and emotional stability. These factors cause an increase in psycho-emotional tension, subjective stress, and a decline in academic performance, as confirmed by the works of authors such as V. Tsoy, G.B. Nietbaeva, K.K. Tusubekova, E.D. Abisheva, and G.T. Bekmuratova (Tsoy et al., 2024). In this regard, there is a growing need to study the psychological resources of students that contribute to maintaining their emotional well-being and academic performance.

Today, psychological research places particular emphasis on the role of mindfulness. This phenomenon is viewed as a metacognitive ability to be aware of current experiences and regulate attention without involvement or evaluative judgments. Despite the historical roots of the concept of mindfulness in Eastern philosophical traditions, its scientific understanding and empirical study were actively developed at the end of the 20th century in the context of psychological and neuroscientific research (Gethin, 2011).

J. Kabat-Zinn made a significant contribution to the development of the scientific understanding of mindfulness by developing a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program, which became the basis for the formation of mindfulness-based interventions (MBI). Within this approach, mindfulness is interpreted as intentional, focused attention on the present moment, accompanied by acceptance and non-judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing interest among the global scientific community in mindfulness practices and, in particular, in the MBSR program used in cognitive therapy for the treatment of depression (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Guides on implementing mindfulness practices have become widely available, but they are aimed at a small audience.

Research conducted by K.W. Brown, R.M. Ryan and J.D. Creswell examined a range of clinical and psychological effects of mindful meditation in terms of its impact on mental health (Brown, Ryan, Creswell, 2007).

J.A. Turner identified a number of psychological effects of mindfulness practices related to psychological well-being, such as improved ability to solve cognitive tasks, ease in making ethical decisions, and increased ability to control one's emotional states (Turner et al., 2016).

B. Stahl and E. Goldstein described the positive effect of mindfulness practices on the experience of pain and the perception of one's own physical condition in practitioners of mindful meditation (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010).

Z.V. Segal, M.G. Williams, and J.D. Teasdale demonstrated the therapeutic effect of MBSR programs on stress, social anxiety syndrome, personality disorders, depression, neuroses, and mood disorders (Segal, Williams &Teasdale, 2013).

K.W. Brown and R.M. Ryan noted the connection between mindfulness and optimism, personal independence, and a positive perception of life and one's place in it (Brown & Ryan,2003). Other studies have revealed a connection between meditation practices and improved sleep and heart rate, indicating a decrease in reactivity and an increase in the adaptability of the nervous system (Shapiro et al., 2006).

J. Eberth and P. Sedlmeier demonstrated the positive effect of mindful meditation on reducing stress levels, improving intellectual abilities, and improving negative traits (desire for dominance, psychoticism, rigidity, etc.) (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012).

V. Ives-Deliperi, M. Solms, E.M. Meintjes proved that the practice of mindfulness affects the nervous processes associated with regulation and self-awareness, and its positive effect is associated with the de-subjectification of the experience, a decrease in its subjective significance and emotional involvement (Ives-Deliperi, Solms & Meintjes, 2011).

N.Yu. Zilberbrand, N.N. Mironenkov, and Yu.S. Shkryleva, considering the practice of applying mindfulness techniques in the educational process, noted their undoubted significance and importance in building motivation and meaning for young people (Zilberbrand, Mironenkov & Shkryleva, 2020).

A. Tastanova, M. Moon, and N. Akhtaeva reviewed a number of empirical studies that showed a positive correlation between regular mindfulness practice and creativity. Mindfulness practices allow us to change the way we process information, which is directly related to cognitive flexibility and originality of thinking. In other words, mindfulness contributes to the development of our brain's neuroplasticity, namely its ability to adapt, rebuild, and change. All of these are key factors for the development of creativity (Tastanova, Moon & Akhtaeva, 2023).

Thus, studies have shown that mindfulness practice can change the structure and functioning of the brain, improving cognitive processes related to emotional stability. For example, research at the University of Oxford has confirmed that mindfulness programs such as MBSR have a positive effect on anxiety levels, stress resistance, and overall well-being.

Contemporary research emphasizes that mindfulness is not limited to meditative practice, but is a complex mental process that includes attention regulation, emotional awareness, and metacognitive observation (Kim, 2022).

Analysis of the mechanisms of mindfulness shows that its positive effects are mediated by a number of interrelated components, the key ones being attention regulation, the formation of metacognition, and a change in attitude toward internal experience (Enkema et al., 2020). Neuropsychological studies confirm that regular mindfulness practice is associated with functional and structural changes in areas of the brain responsible for self-regulation, emotional control, and cognitive flexibility, including the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and cingulate cortex (Tang, Hölzel, Posner, 2015). These neurocognitive changes create the conditions for more effective information processing and increased personal adaptability in conditions of increased cognitive and emotional stress.

In the context of learning, the relationship between mindfulness and cognitive processes that are directly relevant to students' academic success is of particular interest. Empirical data indicate a positive relationship between mindfulness and attention, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, which helps to reduce the influence of distractions and decrease the phenomenon of «mind wandering» (Li et al., 2021).

Along with cognitive effects, mindfulness is considered a significant resource for emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Empirical studies demonstrate that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with more effective management of emotional responses, reduced levels of perceived stress, and increased psychological well-being. The results of systematic reviews and meta-analyses confirm the link between mindfulness and lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, reduced negative affect, and higher levels of positive emotional functioning (Indriaswuri et al., 2023).

Despite the active development of mindfulness research in foreign psychology, in the Russian scientific community, as well as in the Republic of Kazakhstan, this issue is represented by a limited number of empirical and review studies. Existing studies tend to address individual aspects of mindfulness, including its relationship with stress, sleep quality, and creativity, while a comprehensive analysis of the role of mindfulness in the context of academic performance and emotional well-being of students remains underdeveloped (Polyvyannaya & Akhtaeva, 2022). In this regard, the nature and extent of the relationship between mindfulness and students' academic success requires further empirical study.

Thus, the combination of contemporary theoretical and empirical data allows us to consider mindfulness as a multi-component psychological resource that influences both cognitive functioning and emotional well-being of students, which determines the focus of this empirical study.

Main part

Materials and Methods

The aim of the empirical study was to identify the relationship between students' level of mindfulness and their academic performance and emotional well-being. In line with the research objective, a hypothesis was put forward that a higher level of mindfulness is associated with more pronounced indicators of psychological well-being, lower levels of perceived stress, and higher academic performance among students.

The study involved 131 students aged 18 to 22 enrolled in their first to fourth years of higher education. The sample included students from various fields of study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all respondents were informed about the objectives of the study and gave their consent to the processing of the data obtained.

To diagnose the level of awareness, the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) developed by K. Brown and R. Ryan was used, as well as the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) authored by R. Baer (Baer, Lykins, Peters, 2012).

Both methods were adapted for the Russian-speaking sample by N.M. Yumartova and N.V. Grishina (2013). The use of two instruments made it possible to assess both the overall level of mindfulness and its structural components.

Psychological well-being was assessed using the PERMA-Profiler questionnaire, developed based on M. Seligman's model of psychological well-being. To determine the level of subjective stress, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14) was used, developed by S. Cohen and G. Williamson and adapted by A.A. Zolotareva (2023). The grade point average (GPA) was used as an indicator of academic performance.

Empirical data was collected remotely using the Google Forms online platform. Respondents completed electronic versions of the diagnostic methods independently, at a time convenient for them. The survey was conducted anonymously, which ensured the confidentiality of responses and reduced the influence of social desirability. The average time to complete the questionnaires was about 20–25 minutes.

Statistical data processing was performed using Jamovi 2.6.13 software. At the first stage, descriptive statistics were performed with the calculation of mean values, standard deviations,

minimum and maximum indicators. To identify the relationships between the level of awareness, indicators of psychological well-being, perceived stress, and academic performance, a correlation analysis was performed using Spearman's coefficient.

At the first stage of the empirical study, the level of students' awareness was analyzed using the MAAS methodology. The results of the diagnosis showed the distribution of students by levels of awareness (Fig. 1).

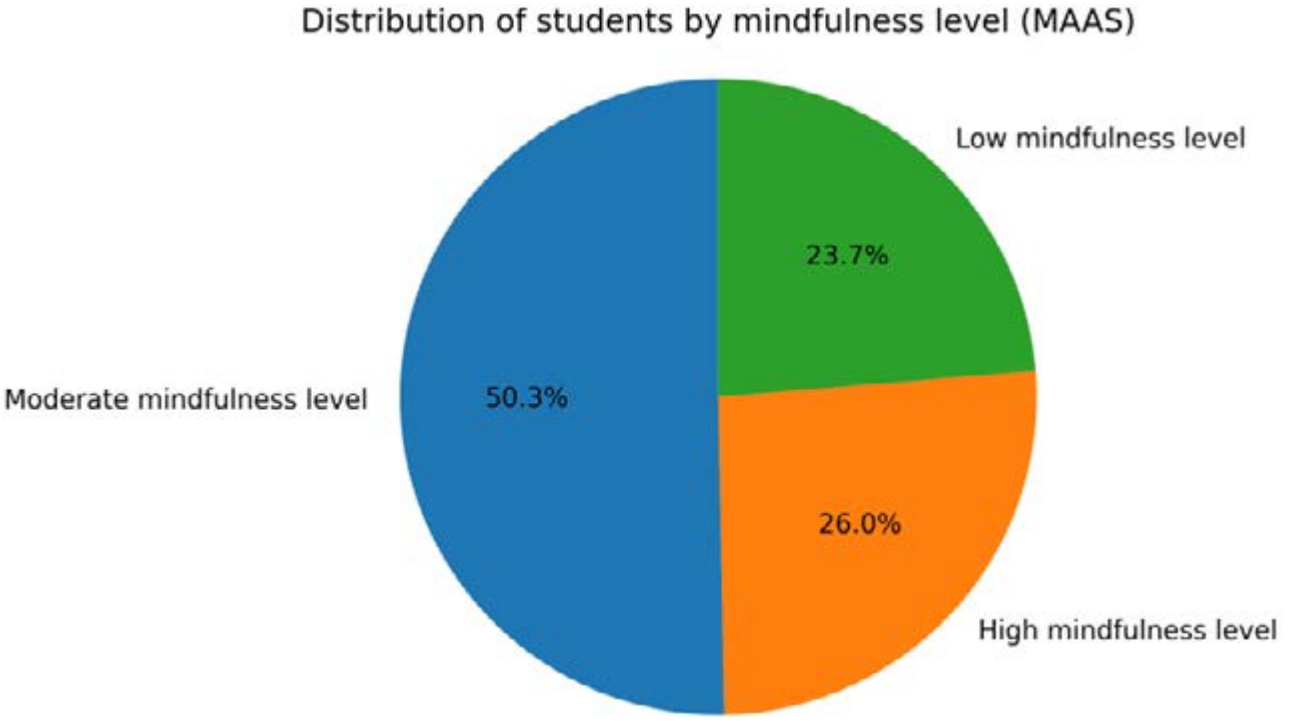

Figure 1. Distribution of students according to their level of mindfulness based on the MAAS methodology (%).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority of respondents (50.3%) were found to have an average level of mindfulness. A high level was recorded in 26% of students, while a low level was recorded in 23.7% of the sample.

The data obtained indicate that most students are characterized by partial presence in the current moment and a moderate ability to consciously control their attention, while maintaining a tendency toward automatic reactions.

For a more detailed analysis of the structure of mindfulness, a five-factor mindfulness questionnaire (FFMQ) was used to assess the severity of individual components of mindfulness (Fig. 2).

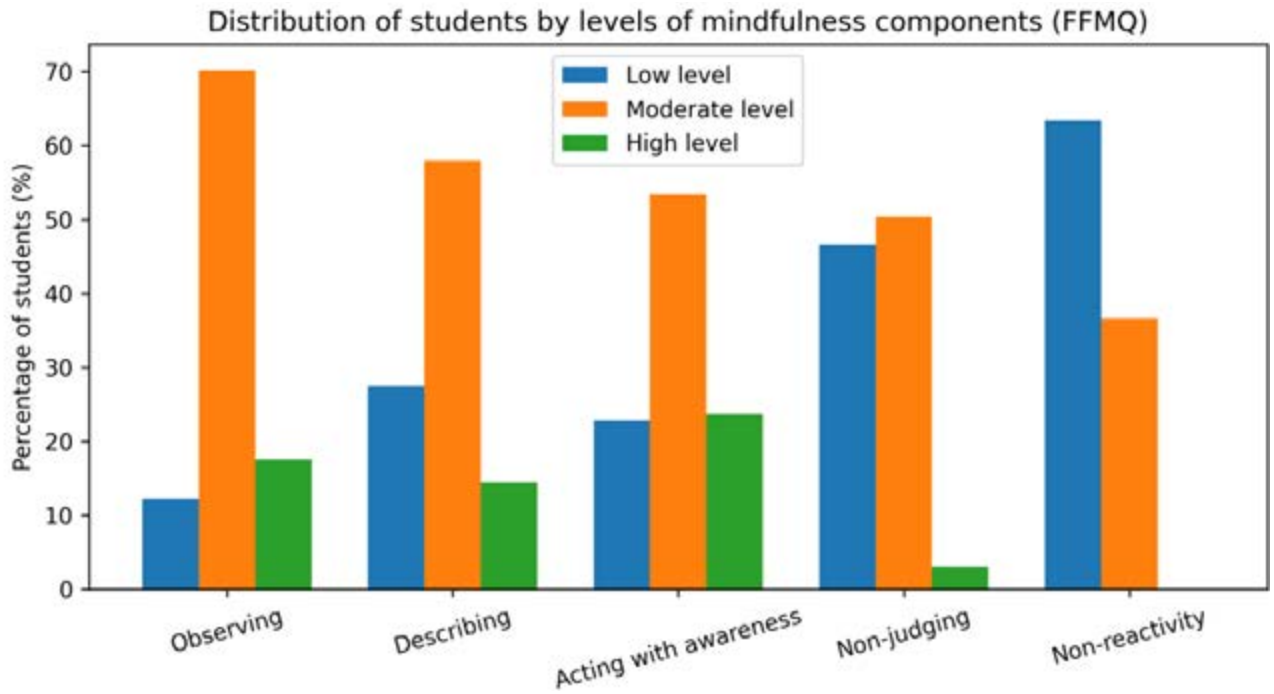

Figure 2. Distribution of students by levels of mindfulness components according to the FFMQ methodology (%).

The data presented in Figure 2 show that the most pronounced component of mindfulness among students is «Observation», while the scales «Non-judgment» and «Non-reactivity» show the least pronounced indicators.

A significant proportion of students demonstrated a low level of development of these components, which indicates a tendency to evaluate their own internal experiences and become involved in emerging thoughts and emotions. These results indicate that students' awareness is predominantly superficial and, to a lesser extent, includes skills of acceptance and non-involvement in experiences.

Summarizing the results of both methods, it can be noted that students generally demonstrate an average level of mindfulness. While most respondents have basic skills of attentiveness and awareness of their current experience, they have not sufficiently developed the deeper aspects of mindfulness associated with non-judgment and non-reaction.

The next stage of the empirical study involved assessing the psychological well-being of students using the PERMA-Profiler questionnaire (Fig. 3).

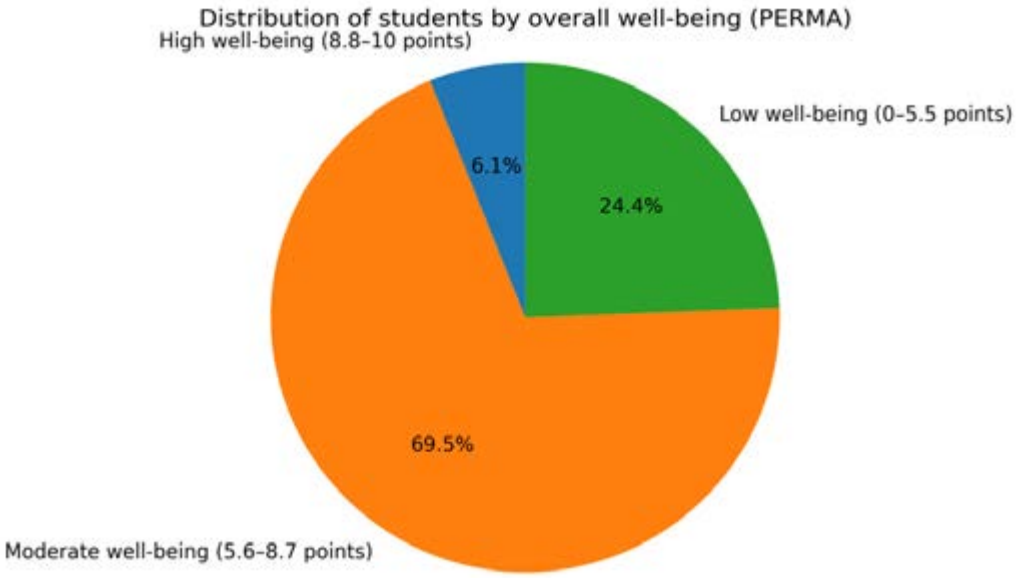

Figure 3. Distribution of students by PERMA overall well-being score (%).

Analysis of the overall psychological well-being score in Figure 3 showed that the majority of respondents (69.5%) had an average level of well-being. A low level was recorded in 24.4% of students, while a high level of psychological well-being was observed in only 6.1% of the sample. The data obtained indicate that, despite the availability of certain resources, most students do not achieve a state of stable subjective well-being.

In addition, the main components of psychological well-being were analyzed using the PERMA model (Fig. 4).

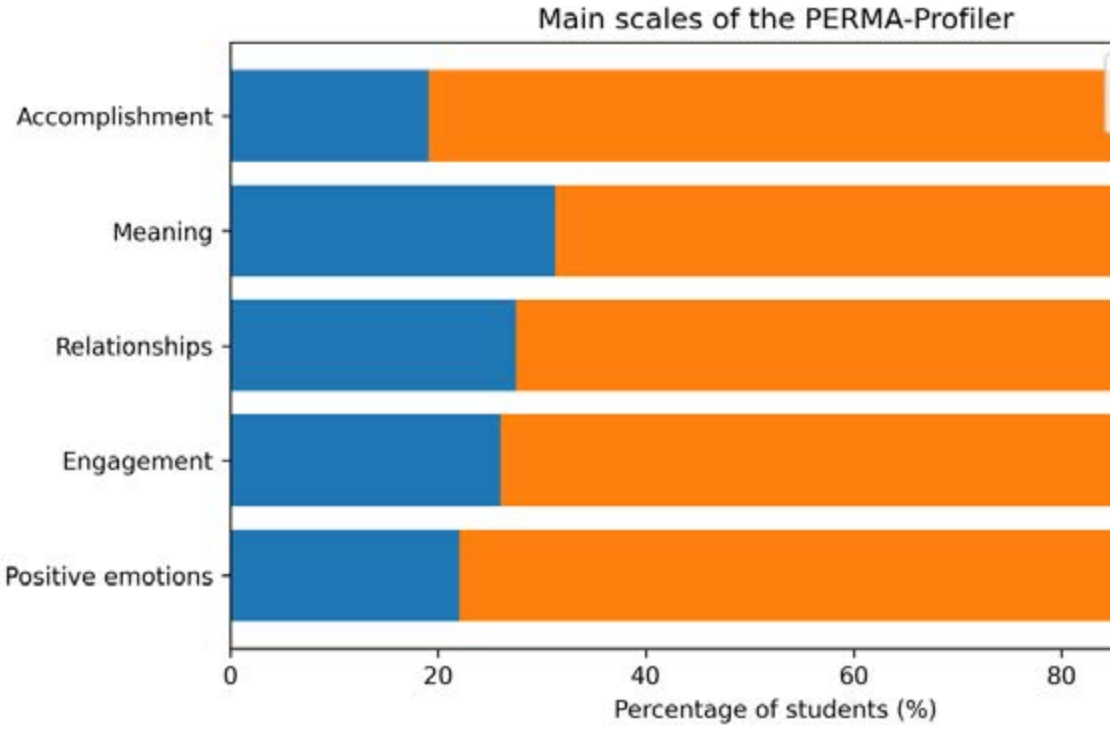

Figure 4. Indicators of the main scales of the PERMA-Profiler methodology (%).

An analysis of the main components of psychological well-being according to the PERMA model in Figure 4 showed that the most pronounced scales among students are «Achievement», «Positive Emotions», and «Engagement». At the same time, the scales «Relationships» and «Meaning» showed more pronounced variability, which may indicate difficulties in the sphere of social connections and existential certainty among some respondents.

For a more detailed analysis, additional scales of the PERMA-Profiler methodology were considered (Fig. 5).

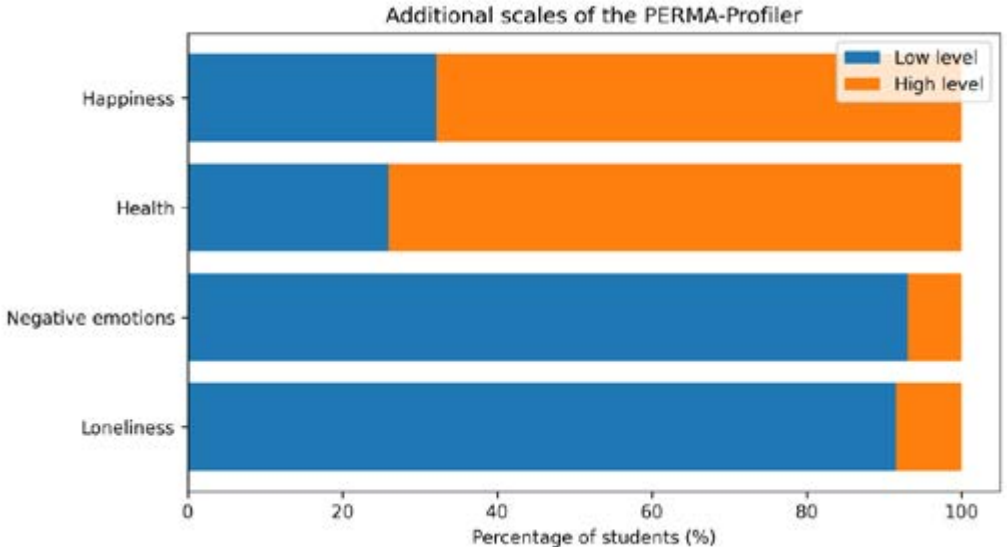

Figure 5. Indicators of additional scales of the PERMA-Profiler methodology (%).

Analysis of the additional PERMA-Profiler scales in Figure 5 showed that most students scored high on the «Happiness» and «Health» scales and low on the «Loneliness» and «Negative Emotions» scales. This suggests a generally favorable emotional background and the presence of social resources, despite a moderate overall level of psychological well-being.

To assess factors that could potentially hinder the feeling of well-being, the level of perceived stress was analyzed using the PSS-14 method (Fig. 6).

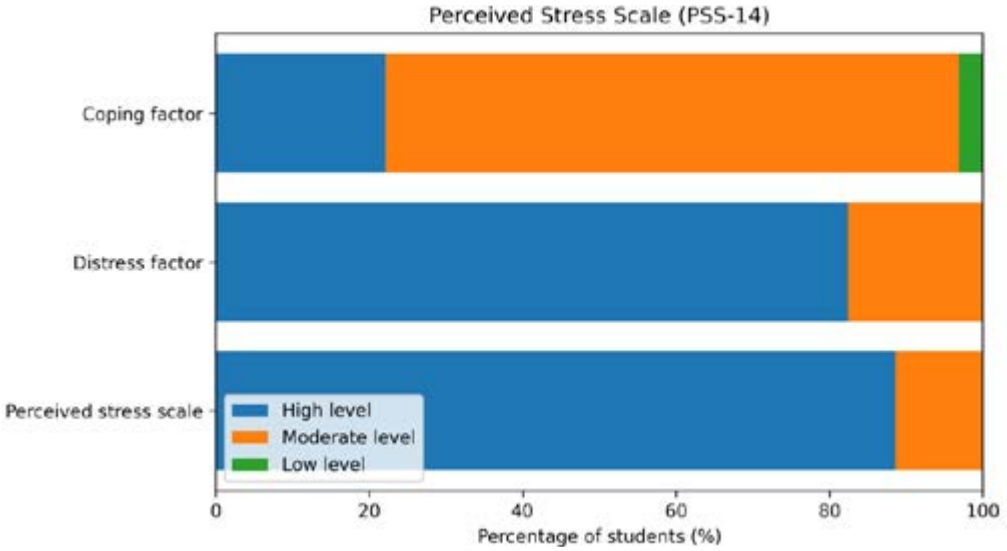

Figure 6. Indicators according to the PSS-14 Perceived Stress Scale methodology (%).

The results in Figure 6 showed that the vast majority of students (88.6%) experience high levels of subjective stress, accompanied by pronounced distress and emotional tension. At the same time, the majority of respondents showed an average level of coping behavior, which indicates the presence of basic resources and strategies for overcoming stressful situations, despite the high level of psycho-emotional stress.

The study used grade point average (GPA) as an indicator of academic performance. The average GPA in the sample was 3.53, reflecting the average level of academic achievement of students. Since the distribution of the GPA indicator differed from normal, this indicator was considered using nonparametric statistical methods in further analysis of the relationships.

One of the key stages of this study was to examine the relationships between students' level of mindfulness, their academic performance, psychological well-being, and perceived stress.

First, the relationship between the level of mindfulness and students' academic performance was examined (Table 1).

Table 1

Correlation between students' level of mindfulness and their academic performance

Mindfulness component	GPA	p-value
Overall mindfulness	0,635***	<.001
Observing	0,182*	0,037
Describing	0,119	0,177
Acting with awareness	0,178*	0,042
Non-judjing	0,085	0,334
Non-reactivity	-0,048	0,585

Notes: p < .05, p < .01, *p < .001.

The results (Table 1) showed a strong positive correlation between the level of mindfulness according to the MAAS method and the GPA (rho = 0.635; p < .001). This indicates that students with a higher level of awareness and attentiveness to what is happening in the present moment demonstrate higher academic performance on average.

In addition, weak but statistically significant positive correlations were found between academic performance and individual components of awareness according to the FFMQ method. Thus, the components «Observation» and «Awareness of Actions» were found to be associated with GPA, which may indicate the importance of the ability to notice what is happening and consciously perform learning activities to maintain concentration and organization in the learning process. The other components of mindfulness did not show statistically significant correlations with academic performance.

Next, the relationship between mindfulness and indicators of students' psychological well-being was analyzed (Table 2).

Table 2

Correlation between students' level of mindfulness development and psychological well-being scales

	Overall mindfulness	Observing	Describing	Acting with awareness	Non-judging	Non-reactivity
Overall psychological well-being	0,074	0,128	0,213*	0,236**	-0,038	0,128
Positive emotions	0,068	0,009	0,178*	0,164	-0,098	0,157
Engagement	0,089	0,183*	0,161	0,257***	-0,084	0,131
Relationships	0,070	0,290***	0,274**	0,119	0,012	0,139
Meaning	0,061	0,053	0,110	0,222*	0,027	0,027
Accomplishment	0,015	-0,014	0,104	0,240**	-0,059	0,069
Happiness	0,077	0,097	0,248**	0,220*	0,023	0,179*
Health	0,048	-0,012	0,143	0,172*	0,078	0,102
Loneliness	-0,139	-0,121	-0,209*	-0,213*	-0,234**	-0,029
Negative emotions	-0,133	-0,026	-0,081	-0,083	-0,116	-0,056

Notes: $p < .05$, *$p < .01$, **$p < .001$.

The level of mindfulness according to the MAAS method did not show significant correlations with well-being indicators (Table 2); therefore, the main focus was on analyzing individual components of mindfulness.

The largest number of significant correlations was found for the component «Mindfulness of actions». This component was positively associated with the overall indicator of psychological well-being, as well as with such aspects as engagement, achievement, meaning of life, happiness, and health. This suggests that the ability to act consciously, without automatic reactions, contributes to a higher level of life satisfaction and emotional stability.

A negative correlation was also found between mindfulness and loneliness, indicating the role of mindful behavior in maintaining social contacts and reducing feelings of isolation.

The «Description» component showed significant correlations with indicators of happiness and relationship quality, as well as a negative correlation with feelings of loneliness. This suggests that the ability to recognize and express one's own emotions and experiences has a positive effect on subjective well-being and interpersonal relationships.

The «Observation» component was found to be primarily associated with indicators of relationships and engagement, which points to the importance of the ability to notice what is happening in the present moment for more conscious interaction with others.

The final stage of the analysis was to study the relationship between mindfulness and the level of perceived stress (Table 3).

Table 3

Correlation between the level of mindfulness development in students and the level of perceived stress

	Perceived Stress Scale	Distress factor	Coping factor
Overall mindfulness	-0,186*	-0,174*	-0,128
Observing	-0,188*	-0,157	-0,153
Describing	-0,282**	-0,260**	-0,197*
Acting with awareness	-0,435***	-0,405***	-0,301***
Non-judging	-0,051	-0,064	-0,015
Non-reactivity	-0,238**	-0,176*	-0,219*

Notes: $p < .05$, $*p < .01$, $**p < .001$.

It was found (Table 3) that the level of mindfulness is negatively associated with indicators of perceived stress and distress, which indicates a lower level of emotional tension in mindful students.

The most pronounced negative correlations with all stress scales were found for the «Mindfulness of Actions» component. This suggests that the ability to act mindfully and control automatic reactions contributes to reducing stress and forming more effective coping strategies.

The components «Description» and «Non-reaction» also showed negative correlations with stress indicators, which emphasizes the importance of awareness and acceptance of internal experience for emotional regulation. The «Observation» component showed a weak but significant correlation with reduced perceived stress, while «Non-judgment» did not reveal any statistically significant correlations in this sample.

Conclusion

The results of the study confirm the significant role of mindfulness as a psychological resource associated with academic performance, emotional well-being, and the level of perceived stress among students.

It was found that higher levels of mindfulness, in particular, fullness of consciousness and awareness of actions, are associated with higher academic performance. This allows us to consider mindfulness as a factor that contributes to increased learning effectiveness through better concentration, organization, and self-regulation.

In addition, it was found that individual components of mindfulness are positively associated with indicators of psychological well-being, including engagement, subjective happiness, sense of meaning in life, and quality of interpersonal relationships, and are negatively associated with feelings of loneliness and negative emotional states. The most stable connections were found for the component «Awareness of actions», which emphasizes its key role in maintaining psycho-emotional balance.

The hypothesis about the connection between mindfulness and a decrease in the level of perceived stress and distress was also confirmed. Students with more developed mindfulness

demonstrate a higher ability to cope with stressful situations, which contributes to maintaining emotional stability under academic stress.

The results expand our understanding of the importance of mindfulness in the context of the student environment and highlight the promise of introducing mindfulness practices into the educational process as a tool for supporting students' psychological well-being and academic success.

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Contribution of the authors

Zh. Abishev – writing the text of the article and translating it into English.

K. T. Kuanzhanova – writing the text, approving the final version of the article for publication.

L.M. Gitikhmayeva – significant contribution to the concept or design of the work; collection, analysis and interpretation of the results of the work.

D.E. Teterina – writing the text of the article and critically reviewing its content.

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Университет студенттерінің академиялық үлгерімі мен психологиялық әл-ауқатының психологиялық ресурсы ретіндегі саналы зейін (mindfulness)

Аңдатпа. Мақалада студенттердің саналы зейіні (mindfulness), академиялық үлгерімі, психологиялық әл-ауқаты және қабылданатын стресс деңгейі арасындағы өзара байланысын зерттеуге арналған эмпирикалық зерттеу нәтижелері ұсынылған. Зерттеу Қазақстан жастары арасында стресс пен депрессия деңгейін төмендетуге бағытталған AP 26102139 «MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) практикаларын қолдану» ғылыми жобасы аясында жүргізілді және Қазақстан Республикасының Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің қолдауы мен қаржыландыруымен орындалды.

Зерттеуге Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университетінің 18–22 жас аралығындағы 131 студенті қатысты. Саналы зейін деңгейін бағалау үшін Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) және Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) әдістемелері қолданылды. Психологиялық әл-ауқат PERMA-Profiler сауалнамасы арқылы, ал субъективті стресс деңгейі PSS-14 шкаласы бойынша анықталды. Академиялық үлгерімді бағалау үшін студенттердің орташа оқу көрсеткіші (GPA) пайдаланылды. Статистикалық талдау Спирменнің рангтік корреляция коэффициенті көмегімен жүргізілді.

Зерттеу нәтижелері саналы зейін деңгейі мен студенттердің академиялық үлгерімі арасында мәнді оң байланыстың бар екенін, сондай-ақ саналы зейіннің жекелеген компоненттері мен психологиялық әл-ауқат көрсеткіштері арасында оң корреляциялар анықталғанын көрсетті. Ең тұрақты өзара байланыстар қабылданатын стресс пен дистресс деңгейінің төмендеуімен байланысты «әрекеттегі саналы зейін» компоненті бойынша байқалды. Алынған деректер саналы зейіннің студенттердің эмоционалдық тұрақтылығы мен оқу тиімділігін арттыруға ықпал ететін маңызды психологиялық ресурс екенін дәлелдейді.

Түйін сөздер: саналы зейін, mindfulness, студенттер, академиялық үлгерім, психологиялық әл-ауқат, стресс, өзін-өзі реттеу, эмоционалдық тұрақтылық.

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Осознанность (mindfulness) как психологический ресурс академической успеваемости и психологического благополучия студентов университета

Аннотация. В данной статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования взаимосвязи осознанности с академической успеваемостью, психологическим благополучием и уровнем воспринимаемого стресса студентов. Исследование выполнено в рамках научного проекта AP 26102139 «Применение практик MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) для снижения стресса и депрессии среди молодежи Казахстана» при поддержке и финансировании МНВО РК. В исследовании приняли участие 131 студент Евразийского национального университета им. Л.Н. Гумилева в возрасте от 18 до 22 лет. В исследовании были использованы методики Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) и Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) для оценки осознанности. Психологическое благополучие диагностировалось с помощью опросника PERMA-Profiler, уровень субъективного стресса – по шкале PSS-14. Средний балл (GPA) использовался для оценки академической успеваемости. Статистический анализ проводился с использованием коэффициента корреляции Спирмена. В результате анализа было выявлено наличие значимой положительной связи между уровнем осознанности и академической успеваемостью студентов, а также положительные корреляции отдельных компонентов осознанности с показателями психологического благополучия. Наиболее устойчивые взаимосвязи были выявлены для компонента «осознанность действий», связанного со снижением воспринимаемого стресса и дистресса. Полученные данные подтверждают значимость осознанности как психологического ресурса, способствующего эмоциональной устойчивости и учебной эффективности студентов.

Ключевые слова: осознанность, mindfulness, студенты, академическая успеваемость, психологическое благополучие, стресс, саморегуляция, эмоциональная устойчивость.

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