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A Study on the Current Status of Well-being among Ethnic Minority University Students in Yunnan from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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Abstract: As positive psychology has gained prominence, well-being, as a core indicator of mental health, has increasingly attracted the attention of the academic community. Ethnic minority university students (EMUS) in Yunnan, as a special group, may experience unique influences on their well-being due to their cultural backgrounds and social adaptation processes. This study employed a well-being scale based on the PERMA model to investigate the current status of well-being among EMUS in Yunnan. The findings revealed that the majority of EMUS rated their overall well-being highly. Compared with Han ethnicity university students, EMUS scored significantly higher in the dimensions of relationships and overall well-being, but showed no significant differences in positive emotion, meaning, engagement, and achievement dimensions. In terms of gender differences, EMUS exhibited no significant differences in positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and overall well-being between genders, but males scored significantly higher than females in the dimensions of engagement and achievement. Additionally, no significant differences were observed in the dimensions of well-being across different educational levels and grades.

Keywords: Positive psychology; Ethnic minority university students; Well-being

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1. Introduction

With the rapid development of higher education in China, the proportion of ethnic minority university students (EMUS) in the higher education system is continuously increasing. Yunnan, one of the provinces with the most ethnic minorities in China, boasts rich ethnic cultural resources and a diverse educational environment. However, EMUS face unique challenges and pressures in their pursuit of academic and career development, which may significantly impact their well-being [1]. Positive psychology, as a discipline that studies positive psychological

qualities and happy lives in humans, provides a new perspective for understanding the well-being of EMUS. In recent years, positive psychology has been widely applied in research on the mental health and well-being of university students, but studies focusing specifically on EMUS remain relatively scarce. This study focuses on EMUS in Yunnan, aiming to reveal their current well-being status through empirical research from the perspective of positive psychology.

2. Literature review

Positive psychology, an emerging branch of psychology since the late 20th century, has gradually attracted widespread attention from the academic community. Unlike traditional psychology, which focuses on psychological problems and pathology in humans, positive psychology emphasizes the study of positive qualities, strengths, potentials, and well-being in humans, aiming to promote individual comprehensive development and mental health [2].

2.1. Definition and measurement of well-being

Well-being, as an important research area in positive psychology, has always been a focal point for scholars. Well-being is generally divided into subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). SWB is an individual's comprehensive assessment of their quality of life based on their own life standards [3]. PWB refers to a state of life in which individuals seek true meaning and can cope with difficulties while striving to realize their inner beliefs [4].

Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, proposed the well-known PERMA model of well-being. This model includes five core elements: Positive Emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). Seligman argued that these five elements together constitute human well-being, and each element is measurable and cultivable [5].

In the PERMA model, positive emotion refers to the pleasant, satisfied, and happy emotional experiences that individuals have in life. Engagement refers to the state in which individuals are fully focused and immersed in an activity. Relationships refer to the positive interactions and close connections between individuals and others. Meaning refers to the valuable, purposeful goals and missions that individuals pursue in life. Accomplishment refers to the achievements and progress that individuals make in life.

In terms of well-being measurement, scholars have developed various scales. For example, Diener et al. developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale, which is widely used to measure individual life satisfaction [6]. Butler and Kern developed a well-being scale based on the PERMA model, which has been widely applied and validated among university students; this scale has also been widely used in China [7].

2.2. Research on the well-being of Chinese university students

As an important social group, the well-being level of university students has always attracted the attention of the academic community. For example, Ren and Zhao conducted a survey of 652 university students in Xi'an and found that the overall well-being level of university students is relatively high, but some students still have lower well-being levels [8]. Lin et al. conducted a survey of 751 university students in Fujian Province and found that the overall well-being of university students is good [9].

At the same time, more scholars have begun to pay attention to the well-being of EMUS in China. For example, Hou et al. conducted a survey of 2780 EMUS and Han ethnicity university students (HEUS) in 10

universities in Nei Monggol [10]. The study found that there were no significant differences in PWB and overall well-being between Mongolian students and HEUS in Nei Monggol, but there were significant differences in SWB, with HEUS scoring higher than Mongolian students. Yin and Yu surveyed the well-being and influencing factors of 240 EMUS and HEUS in two typical universities in Yunnan Province [1]. The results showed that the well-being of HEUS was significantly higher than that of EMUS, and there were no significant differences in well-being among EMUS with different genders, grades, and ethnicities.

In summary, positive psychology provides a new perspective and methodological basis for well-being research. Chinese scholars have conducted extensive research on the well-being of university students and achieved rich research results. However, there is a relative lack of research on EMUS based on positive psychology theory, and there is a lack of systematic theoretical frameworks and sufficient empirical support. Therefore, this study utilized Seligman's PERMA model to explore the current status of well-being among EMUS in Yunnan.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research population

The research population for this study consists of all current university students at Yunnan Technology and Business University (YTBU) in China. The university currently has 25,607 registered students, of whom 7,796 are EMUS, accounting for approximately 30% of the total student population. These EMUS come from various ethnic groups within Yunnan Province.

3.2. Research instruments

Two research instruments were used in this study: a Demographic Information Questionnaire (DIQ) and a University Student Well-being Questionnaire (USWQ).

The DIQ was designed to collect basic personal information from participants, including gender, ethnicity, grade, and educational level. The USWQ was developed based on the well-being scale by Butler and Kern, which is grounded in the PERMA model [7]. It comprises six dimensions: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, and overall well-being, with a total of 16 items. The questionnaire uses an 11-point Likert scale, where 0 represents "not at all" and 10 represents "completely." The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the USWQ was 0.967, the overall validity analysis was significant at less than 0.05, and the KMO test statistic was 0.971, indicating that the questionnaire possesses acceptable reliability and validity.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

In this study, the questionnaires were distributed to university students at YTBU via the Questionnaire Star APP. A total of 1,352 valid questionnaires were collected, with EMUS accounting for 31.29% (N=423) and HEUS accounting for 68.71% (N=929).

The data analysis for this study utilized SPSS 26.0 software. The data collected through the questionnaires were primarily analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-tests, and one-way ANOVA.

4. Data analysis results

4.1. DIQ data analysis results

Analysis of the 1,352 valid questionnaires revealed that EMUS accounted for 31.29% (N=423), while HEUS

accounted for 68.71% (N=929). Among the EMUS sample, the gender distribution was as follows: 220 males (52.01%) and 203 females (47.99%). The grade distribution was as follows: 196 freshmen (46.34%), 82 sophomores (19.39%), 112 juniors (26.48%), and 33 seniors (7.8%). The distribution of educational levels was as follows: 46 students (10.87%) were in the Associate Degree program (ADP); 312 students (73.76%) were in the Bachelor's Degree program (BDP); and 65 students (15.37%) were in the Associate-to-Bachelor's Degree program (ABDP).

4.2. USWQ data analysis results

4.2.1. Overall well-being of emus

The survey of the overall well-being of EMUS revealed that the majority of respondents' well-being scores were concentrated between 5 and 10. The most common score was 8, with 97 respondents (22.93%) selecting this option. This was followed by scores of 10, 5, and 7, with 88 (20.8%), 67 (15.84%), and 65 (15.37%) respondents selecting these options, respectively. Relatively fewer respondents chose lower scores, such as 0 and 1, with only 2 (0.47%) and 3 (0.71%) respondents selecting these options, respectively. These results indicate that the majority of respondents rated their overall well-being highly, although some respondents felt less happy.

Additionally, to further analyze the central tendency and dispersion of the data, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. The mean was approximately 8.442, and the standard deviation was 2.046, also indicating that respondents generally rated their well-being highly.

To better understand the distribution of overall well-being among EMUS across various demographic variables, this study constructed **Table 1**. As shown in **Table 1**, female students generally reported lower overall well-being compared to their male counterparts. Among EMUS, those in the ABDP exhibited relatively higher overall well-being, while those in the BDP reported relatively lower well-being. Additionally, EMUS in their sophomore year had relatively lower overall well-being, whereas those in their junior year reported higher levels of well-being.

Table 1. Mean of overall well-being among EMUS across demographic variables

Demographic variable	Category	N	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	220	8.527	2.015
	Female	203	8.350	2.080
Educational level	ADP	46	8.500	2.147
	BDP	312	8.410	1.961
	ABDP	65	8.554	2.378
Grade	Freshman	196	8.505	1.975
	Sophomore	82	8.037	2.180
	Junior	112	8.589	2.108
	Senior	33	8.576	1.855

4.2.2. Differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being between EMUS and HEUS

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the well-being dimensions and overall well-being scores between EMUS and HEUS. The results, as shown in **Table 2**, indicated that there were no significant differences between EMUS and HEUS in the dimensions of meaning, achievement, engagement, and positive emotion ($P>0.05$). However, significant differences were observed in the dimensions of relationships and overall well-being ($P<0.05$), with EMUS scoring significantly higher than HEUS in these dimensions.

Table 2. *t*-test analysis results of well-being dimensions and overall well-being between EMUS and HEUS

Dimension	Ethnicity	N	Mean	SD	*t*	*P*	Cohen's *d*
Meaning	HEUS	929	23.04	6.04	-1.901	0.058	0.111
	EMUS	423	23.71	5.96			
Achievement	HEUS	929	23.41	5.84	-1.433	0.152	0.084
	EMUS	423	23.90	5.66			
Engagement	HEUS	929	24.05	5.44	-0.858	0.391	0.050
	EMUS	423	24.32	5.28			
Positive Emotion	HEUS	929	23.87	5.92	-1.846	0.065	0.108
	EMUS	423	24.50	5.66			
Relationships	HEUS	929	23.80	5.65	-2.240	0.025*	0.131
	EMUS	423	24.53	5.44			
Overall Well-being	HEUS	929	8.13	2.15	-2.517	0.012*	0.148
	EMUS	423	8.44	2.05			

Note: *P<0.05; **P<0.01

4.2.3. Gender differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being among EMUS

Independent samples *t*-tests were also conducted to examine gender differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being among EMUS. The results, as shown in **Table 3**, revealed that there were no significant differences in the dimensions of positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and overall well-being between male and female EMUS (P>0.05). However, significant differences were found in the dimensions of engagement and achievement (P<0.05), with male students scoring significantly higher than female students in these dimensions.

Table 3. *t*-test analysis results of well-being dimensions and overall well-being among EMUS by gender

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	SD	*t*	*P*	Cohen's *d*
Meaning	Male	220	24.19	5.94	1.726	0.085	0.168
	Female	203	23.19	5.95			
Achievement	Male	220	24.66	5.39	2.919	0.004**	0.284
	Female	203	23.07	5.85			
Engagement	Male	220	25.03	5.21	2.895	0.004**	0.282
	Female	203	23.56	5.26			
Positive Emotion	Male	220	24.92	5.62	1.579	0.115	0.154
	Female	203	24.05	5.69			
Relationships	Male	220	24.66	5.60	0.508	0.612	0.049
	Female	203	24.39	5.29			
Overall well-being	Male	220	8.53	2.01	0.891	0.373	0.087
	Female	203	8.35	2.08			

Note: *P<0.05; **P<0.01

4.2.4. Differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being across educational levels among EMUS

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being across different educational levels among EMUS. The results, as shown in **Table 4**, indicated that there were no significant differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being across educational levels ($P>0.05$).

Table 4. ANOVA results for well-being dimensions and overall well-being among EMUS by educational level

Dimension		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	*P*	Cohen's *f*
Meaning	Between groups	8.831	2	4.415	0.124	0.884	0.024
	Within groups	14985.982	420	35.681			
Achievement	Between groups	32.586	2	16.293	0.507	0.603	0.049
	Within groups	13500.043	420	32.143			
Engagement	Between groups	29.432	2	14.716	0.526	0.591	0.050
	Within groups	11743.197	420	27.960			
Positive emotion	Between groups	9.731	2	4.866	0.151	0.860	0.027
	Within groups	13528.018	420	32.210			
Relationships	Between groups	22.786	2	11.393	0.383	0.682	0.043
	Within groups	12488.467	420	29.734			
Overall well-being	Between groups	1.282	2	0.641	0.153	0.859	0.027
	Within groups	1765.049	420	4.202			

Note: *$P<0.05$; **$P<0.01$

4.2.5. Differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being across grades among EMUS

One-way ANOVA was also conducted to examine differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being across different grades among EMUS. The results, as shown in **Table 5**, indicated that there were no significant differences in well-being dimensions and overall well-being across grades ($P>0.05$).

Table 5. ANOVA results for well-being dimensions and overall well-being among EMUS by grade

Dimension		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P	Cohen's *f*
Meaning	Between groups	110.791	3	36.930	1.040	0.375	0.086
	Within groups	14884.022	419	35.523			
Achievement	Between groups	201.042	3	67.014	2.106	0.099	0.123
	Within groups	13331.586	419	31.818			
Engagement	Between groups	89.485	3	29.828	1.070	0.362	0.088
	Within groups	11683.144	419	27.883			
Positive emotion	Between groups	115.001	3	38.334	1.197	0.311	0.093
	Within groups	13422.748	419	32.035			
Relationships	Between groups	141.107	3	47.036	1.593	0.190	0.107
	Within groups	12370.146	419	29.523			
Overall well-being	Between groups	17.278	3	5.759	1.380	0.248	0.099
	Within groups	1749.053	419	4.174			

Note: *$P<0.05$; **$P<0.01$

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The present study, grounded in the framework of positive psychology and utilizing the PERMA model, has provided valuable insights into the well-being status of EMUS in Yunnan. The findings highlight several key aspects that warrant attention and intervention to enhance the well-being of this unique student population.

5.1. Conclusions

5.1.1. Overall well-being status

The average overall well-being score of the EMUS was high (8.442, out of 10). This shows that there is a positive appreciation of their quality of life. However, the score distribution also showed that a minority of students were not at all satisfied, where individual differences and room for improvement are likely to exist.

5.1.2. Comparative analysis with HEUS

Compared with HEUS, EMUS reported higher levels of relationships and overall well-being, but not on positive emotion, meaning, engagement, and achievement. Thus, EMUS relates to others more positively and is in a better mood overall than HEUS, but their experiences in terms of emotional satisfaction, purpose, and personal growth are similar.

5.1.3. Gender differences

Male students had significantly higher scores than female students in both engagement and achievement in EMUS. In contrast, no differences by gender emerged in positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and overall well-being, suggesting that these are more equivalent experiences across gender here.

5.1.4. Educational level and grade variations

The study found no differences in dimensions of well-being or overall well-being for educational levels or grade levels. This indicates that EMUS well-being status is fairly steady over time in their academic trajectory.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. Identification of needs among EMUS

The observed gender disparities in engagement and achievement imply that interventions should be personalized. For girls EMUS, programs focusing on higher self-esteem, leadership ability, and participation in extra-curricular activities may help reduce disparities in engagement and achievement. For boys, consider efforts to support emotional intelligence and healthy coping strategies to balance high levels of engagement and achievement with wellness.

5.2.2. Long-term support and monitoring

Higher education institutions need to regularly monitor the well-being of students so they can respond to any new challenges in a timely manner. Using the PERMA model as an assessment model, one can examine well-being among students in a multifaceted way. In addition, building out a specific support system, such as counseling and mental health resources, can provide focused support for students who might be flailing.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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