

Student Subjective Wellbeing: The Impact of Belief in Just World and Instructors' Immediacy Behavior

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Abstract

This study presents research on the dimensions of belief in just world (BJW) and instructor's immediacy (II) and student's subjective well-being (SWB). To examine instructor's immediacy, general and personal belief in just world as a predictor of student subjective well-being cross-sectional research was used. Four hundred and forty-four university students completed measures of subjective well-being. The data was analyzed using SPSS. The finding showed that personal and general belief in just world emerged as a significant predictor of student's subjective well-being that positively affects the subjective well-being of students. Additionally, the instructor's immediacy predicts the subjective well-being of students positively.

Keywords: subjective wellbeing, belief in just world, instructor's immediacy

Introduction

If parents are asked in two words or less what they want for their children, most of them would respond, "happiness", "confidence", "health", "satisfaction", "kindness" and the like (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). In other terms, parents desire the well-being (WB) of their children. Since the advent of positive psychology, an abundance of research has concentrated on people's strengths and capacities that result in optimal functioning (Seligman, 2001). This approach has caused the emphasis to shift from ill-being to well-being (Yıldırım & Tanrıverdi, 2020).

Studying at university is considered an important period of life. Students in universities are thought to be the leaders of the future. Students face a variety of obligations and difficulties during their academic careers. This may be the primary cause of stress and anxiety which is accompanied by new challenges and experiences (Bukhari & Khanam, 2017).

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Many institutions place too much emphasis on students' performance, particularly their grades, at the expense of additional important factors that ought to be considered as their personal growth (Tomás et al., 2020). Smith et al. (2003) emphasize that academic satisfaction may be a significant indicator of university students' degree of WB; nevertheless, other factors that can impact the WB of students should be focused.

Aggleton, Dennison, and Warwick (2010), suggested that the educational environment influences the WB of students. Therefore, it is considered that the environment the university provides to students is considered important and impacts the WB of students. Student's life seems challenging as one's personal identity is crucial as the transitions experienced by students require mental health and SWB. As the study of Formica et al. (2017) stated the challenges students faced overlap due to the specificity of the youth life course stage. Yet, students might encounter justice or injustice in their education life where they receive grades that are not always fair which in turn makes the student vulnerable and anxious (Gorbunova, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to look into the justice-psychological and WB elements when it comes to students in higher education. This study aims at analyzing the relationship of BJW on students' SWB.

Additionally, higher educational institutions play a significant role in building up society. The behaviors of the instructors can help to build up the students and institution as a whole. It is assumed that the Instructor's Immediacy Behaviors (IIB) are one of those behaviors that help in improving a student's WB. Mehrabian (1971), in their study, described behaviors that communicate approachability are immediacy behaviors. A plethora of research suggested that people like to interact with and get close to such people they like and avoid conversations they dislike (Mehrabian, 1971; Sidelinger, 2010; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). A positive relationship in class is built by the instructor by enhancing affective, cognitive and behavioral learning (Booth-butterfield, 1992 as cited in Sidelinger, 2010). Thus, the study's objective is to investigate how IIB affects students' SWB.

This study holds considerable significance both in academic and applied contexts. In recent years, the mental health and subjective well-being (SWB) of university students have become pressing concerns (Yan et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025; Marquez & Long, 2020), particularly in developing countries (Quansah et al., 2023) where resources are limited and psychosocial challenges are intensifying. Understanding the predictors of SWB is essential for promoting healthier and more effective educational environments.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research expands the body of knowledge by exploring two underexamined psychological and institutional predictors of student well-being: BJW and IIB. While BJW has been linked to emotional regulation, motivation, and resilience in Western contexts, its relevance and functioning within the South Asian cultural and academic setting remain largely unexplored. By examining BJW within Pakistani higher education, this study contributes culturally grounded evidence to global discussions on justice perception and well-being.

Moreover, although IIB is widely studied in communication and education literature, it has rarely been investigated in relation to students' psychological well-being. This study thus bridges a gap between instructional behavior research and student wellbeing literature, offering a more holistic perspective on how classroom environments shape student experiences beyond academic performance.

Practically, the findings of this study can offer actionable insights for educational institutions, administrators, and policymakers. By identifying psychological and relational factors that enhance well-being, universities can foster more inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments. Encouraging immediacy behaviors in instructors and recognizing the role of fairness perceptions can lead to more student-centered teaching approaches and institutional practices.

Additionally, this study can benefit counselors, student support services, and mental health practitioners working in academic settings. Understanding how perceptions of justice and classroom dynamics affect students' emotional states can aid in designing more effective well-being interventions and support programs.

In sum, this study contributes to the academic literature on student well-being while offering culturally relevant recommendations for improving educational practice and mental health support in Pakistan's higher education sector.

According to our knowledge, there is no evidence of the IIB and student's SWB relationship. Additionally, the association between BJW and SWB was less evident in Pakistan and was examined in other contexts (Fatima & Suhail, 2010; Yasien, 2015). Thus, the study focus would be to replicate and extend previous findings by investigating the impact of BJW, IIB on SWB of students.

Literature Review

Subjective Wellbeing

Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) defined SWB as a wide range of objects, such as domain satisfaction, people's feelings, and overall assessments of life satisfaction. The plethora of research on WB does not

present a common definition because of a different focus. From the time of Aristotle to the present, researchers have used a variety of methodologies to conceptualize and operationalize this concept. Modern psychologists propose two traditions in WB research, building on Aristotle's foundation: subjective well-being and psychological well-being (See: Jyung, Lee & Choi, 2024). Despite coming under the WB umbrella (Disabato et al., 2016), these two traditions emphasize distinct facets of wellness (Fowers et al., 2010; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2019).

Pursuing and achieving one's potential is a key component of psychological WB, which is characterized by high psychological functioning in six domains: purpose in life, autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relationships, personal development, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1995). On the other hand, SWB emphasizes a person's assessment of life, encompassing overall life satisfaction, positive affect, and the lack of negative affect (Diener et al., 1999).

Conclusively, SWB has different dimensions that include affective (emotions, mood; how a person feels), cognitive (satisfaction) factors, and actual and habitual well-being (Cheng, Yang, & Kang, 2025; Dalbert, 2013). The expansion of positive feelings and the decrease of negative emotions are two other categories into which emotional experience can be separated (Zhang et al., 2023).

There are two different dimensions: the hedonic view, which emphasizes the happiness a person experiences and life satisfaction, and the eudemonic perspective, which focuses on self-realization and psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonistic philosophical notions of well-being have been linked to the SWB theory (Lambert et al., 2015). Diener, Lucas, and Oishi (2002) explained SWB as a cognitive and emotive assessment of an individual's life. SWB measures a person's happiness, sense of achievement, peace, and life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Most of the theories focus on SWB that indicate the feelings of a person feelings and life satisfaction.

SWB considers the lack of negative effects and the existence of positive effects (Zhang et al., 2023). Positive effect considers a person's level of engagement and pleasure with the environment and includes a person's determination, enthusiasm, energy level, interest, joy, and mental alertness. In contrast, negative affect predicts subjective suffering in the broadest sense and represents a variety of unpleasant emotional states, including disgust, disdain, anger, fear, and anxiety (Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988).

Prior studies on SWB have demonstrated its significance for both physical and mental health fitness (Lenneis et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2022). Furthermore, research studies revealed that due to SWB adolescents'

psychological resilience is strengthened and increases overall happiness which helps them better handle the different obstacles in their personal and academic lives (Ericson et al., 2023).

Belief in the Just World and Subjective Well-Being

Inequalities and injustices are seen in the societies we are living in. Specifically, the inequality in education, health care, and uneven distribution of wealth are just a few examples of injustices and inequalities in society. The people who experience injustices react differently. However, the theory of a just world explains the justice-driven reactions of individuals. Lerner (1980) put out the theory that in order for individuals to live their lives with hope, faith, and confidence in the future, they must and desire to believe that the world is just.

Evidence from just world theory suggests that BJW has three meanings i.e., to act fairly, trust, and assimilation (Dalbert, 2001). The trust function gives someone the assurance that they are receiving the right or fair treatment from others (Zuckerman & Gerbasi, 1977). The term assimilation means that if a person experiences an unjust in any situation, they try to relate it to their BJW intuitively. This can be done by avoiding or forgiving or by playing down the injustices. This belief results in strong world believers in their life events and they will be convinced that their right deeds will benefit them in the future. Furthermore, such belief decreases anxiety and negative feelings as they view that everyone will get what they deserve because the world is orderly and fair.

It is assumed that the consequence of such adaptive functions is increased subjective well-being, which recommends that BJW positively impacts students' SWB. According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), the action of a human is due to three reasons: behaviors, cognitive and other personal factors, and the external environment. Bandura suggested that the interaction between these three factors serves as a basis of the social cognitive structure of an individual. This means that individuals are affected by their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. A recent study conducted by Lutz et al. (2025) highlighted that individual's sense of justice is dynamic and shaped with daily experiences.

According to Dalbert's (2002b) research, BJW had a negative correlation with SWB and a direct effect on positive mood under conditions that evoked sadness. Recently, Donat, Peter, Dalbert, and Kamble (2016) showed that BJW was significantly related to numerous factors of school-related student's well-being. However, investigations on BJW and student WB mostly researched undesirable areas like distress at school or depressive symptoms (Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Dalbert, 2002a). Moreover, a study by Chobthamkit et al. (2022) suggested that people's belief in karma would result in life satisfaction. Hence, it is proposed that:

H₁: Personal BJW positively impacts the SWB of students.

Nevertheless, a plethora of research on BJW highlighted that the personal BJW is different from the general BJW (Dalbert, 1999; Lipkusa, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996; Lutz et al., 2025). The general BJW concludes that an individual believes the world is fair, whereas personal BJW indicates an individual's opinion that what happens in their own lives is fair. Dzuka and Dalbert (2002) and Lutz et al., (2025) had shown that personal BJW better predicts SWB. Considering this, general BJW is also studied to predict the SWB of students to validate the findings of previous studies (e.g. Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002). Hence, it is proposed:

H₂: General BJW positively impacts the SWB of students.***Instructor's immediacy and Subjective well-being***

Immediacy refers to the actions of an individual that reduces psychological and social space between people (Mehrabian, 1971). Other studies stated that instructor immediacy refers to the "sense of closeness" that might lead to students' engagement (Xu, Pan, & Derakhshan, 2024; Wang & Wang, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2023). The importance IIB was highlighted in a plethora of research studies for fostering fruitful teaching-learning outcomes (Hussain, Batool, & Naz, 2024).

The perceived distance can be decreased by nonverbal immediacy actions such as smiling, vocal diversity, and relaxed body postures (Witt, Wheelless, & Allen, 2004). Based on social cognitive theory, an individual is affected by the external environment in which he lives which suggests that the behaviors an individual experience influence their wellbeing.

However, past studies have revealed a direct relationship between student's learning and instructors' behavior (Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Witt & Wheelless, 2001) and learner satisfaction (Al Ghamdi, Samarji, & Watt, 2016; LeFebvre & Allen, 2014). A study has revealed that immediacy is positively related to improved class attendance (Rocca, 2004). A plethora of research has been conducted on IIB in the context of classrooms and online learning context. Similarly, immediacy behaviors have been studied as a motivation for students to attend school and learn (Christophel, 1990; Pogue & AhYun, 2006).

Prior research has consistently shown that immediacy behaviors improve students' cognitive engagement and have strong positive associations with a variety of multifaceted educational results, including improved academic motivation, better classroom interactions, and higher achievement levels (for example Hou, 2025). The quality of education is indicated by the WB of a student. Therefore, the behavior of the instructor is related to the emotions of students. Moskowitz and Dewaele (2019), in

their study highlighted that students and teachers affect one another through emotional contagion, which means that the behaviour or wellbeing of the teacher would impact wellbeing of the students. According to Mottet and Beebe (2002), students' perceptions of their teachers' immediate behaviors trigger an emotional reaction, particularly a pleasure response, which in turn influences their behavior.

According to a recent study in Pakistan by Hussain et al., (2024) suggested that nonverbal cues like body language, eye contact, and gestures when combined with verbal gestures contribute to a healthy learning environment in the classroom. However, prior research has not studied the effect of IIB on students' SWB. Therefore, it is assumed that IIB would increase the positive effect, decrease the negative effect on students, and overall increases student's SWB. Hence, it is proposed that:

H₃: IIB positively impacts the SWB of students.

Conceptual Model

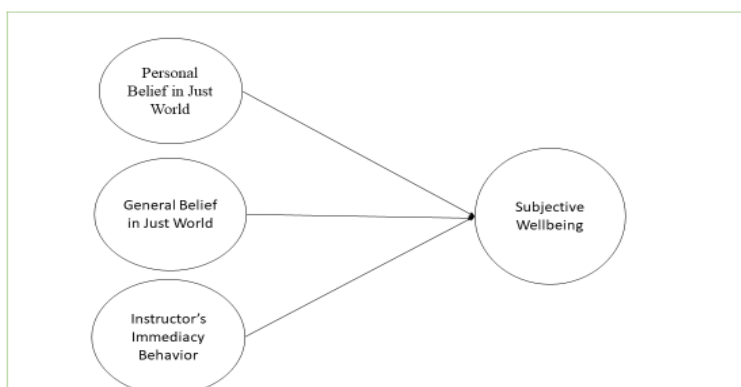


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Method

Participants and procedure

The data was gathered from the students of three public sector universities of Quetta using convenience sampling. The relevancy of the study and anonymity of the participants were described at the start of the questionnaire. In total 500 students received the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed to students and collected after a day. A total of 453 questionnaires were collected back from students giving a response rate of 90.6%. After removing the questionnaire with missing data from the analysis of the study, 444 responses were obtained yielding

a response rate of 88.8%. The sample consists of 60.6 % male respondents and 39.4% female respondents. Moreover, participants were recruited from different degree programs: Bachelors 62.5% ($n=349$), Masters 34.4% ($n=87$), and PhD 3.2% ($n=8$) students. Students ranged in age from 17 to 27 and older.

Measures

To measure the constructs in the study, previously developed and validated scales were used for research purposes. The survey questionnaire covers the following measures.

Subjective wellbeing: The outcome variable for the study was subjective wellbeing. It was assessed using three scales: positive and negative affect and life satisfaction (Pavot, 2008). Life satisfaction was measured using the life satisfaction scale by Pavot and Diener (1992) which consists of five items. Examples of items includes “I am satisfied with my life”. The response was collected using a seven-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree). The scale showed good internal reliability of .843. The affective component of subjective wellbeing was measured by Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) scale by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). The scale comprised of 20 items, particularly 10 for positive effects and 10 for negative effects. Participants were asked to indicate how they generally feel. Sample items of positive and negative affect includes: “interested” and “ashamed” respectively. The response was collected using five-point scale 1: very slightly to 5: extremely. The scale showed good reliability of .800.

Belief in just world was measured using the belief in just world scale by Dalbert (1999). The scale was composed of 13 items that specifically had 6 items of general BJW and 7 items for personal BJW. Examples of items of general BJW include: “Overall events in my life are just”. The Cronbach alpha reliability was .876. Examples of an item of personal BJW include: “I think basically the world is a just place”. The Cronbach alpha reliability was .877. The responses were collected on a seven-point Likert scale 1: strongly disagree- 7: strongly agree.

Teacher’s immediacy behaviors were measured using Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey (1987) teacher’s immediacy behavior scale. The scale consisted of 14 items; examples include “Uses monotone/dull voice when talking to the class”. The responses were collected using five scales 1: Never to 5: very often. The scale demonstrated good reliability of .941.

Results

Personal BJW and SWB were positively correlated, according to the results displayed in Table 1($r=0.354$, $p<0.01$), general BJW and

SWB($r=0.279$, $p<0.01$), and IIB and SWB ($r=0.274$, $p<0.01$). The results of multiple linear regression are presented in Table 2. The result of the first hypothesis showed that personal BJW significantly impacts student's SWB ($\beta=.649$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, the H_1 hypothesis has supported. The second hypothesis H_2 suggested that the general BJW positively impacts the SWB of students. The result showed the positive impact of general BJW and SWB ($\beta=.406$, $p<0.01$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported. Finally, the result of hypothesis H_3 showed a positive impact of IIB on students' SWB ($\beta=.830$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was accepted.

Table 1 Pearson Correlation

	JW	GJW	NVI	SWB
JW	1			
GJW	.439**	1		
NVI	-.401**	-.384**	1	
SWB	.354**	.279**	.274**	1

Moreover, in order to test the multicollinearity using VIF and tolerance value were taken into consideration (Hair et al., 2018). Sarstedth et al., (2017) suggests that VIF to be less than 5 and the tolerance value greater than 0.2. The values of VIF and tolerance are depicted in Table 2 which suggests no problem of multicollinearity.

Table 2 Hypothesis Results

Relationships	Unstandardized Measures		I	p-value	Collinearity Statistics		
	B	S.E.			Tolerance	VIF	Decision
(Constant)	27.14	3.242	8.37	.000			
JW→SWB	.649	.062	10.53	.000	.744	1.34	Supported
GJW→SWB	.406	.058	7.05	.000	.756	1.32	Supported
NVI→SWB	.830	.061	13.66	.000	.786	1.27	Supported

The regression model summary in Table 3 reveals that the predictors (NVI, GJW, JW) moderately correlate with the dependent variable, SWB, based on the multiple correlation coefficient (R) value of 0.632. This reveals a relatively strong linear relationship between the variables. The fact that R Square has a value of 0.399 reveals that about 39.9% of SWB's variance was accounted for by the model, which is a significant contribution. Also, the Adjusted R Square value of 0.395 attests to the fact that the model's explanatory power is still significant after removing the effect of the number of predictors, which means the model is not suffering from overfitting.

Table 3 Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Model Statistics		
				F Change	Sig. Statistics	Durbin-Watson
.632 ^a	.399	.395	10.814	97.477	.000	1.516

Most importantly, the F-statistic value of 97.477 and its associated significance value ($p < 0.001$) affirm the fact that the overall regression model is statistically significant, meaning the predictors collectively impact SWB. Also, the value of the Durbin-Watson statistics is 1.516, which means there is no significant concern about autocorrelation of residuals, but values close to 2.0 are optimal. Generally, the regression model reveals a good fit and reliability in predicting subjective well-being differences based on the provided predictors.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine IIB, general BJW, and personal BJW as indicators of students' SWB. According to the results, BJW significantly predicts SWB of the students. The study's findings were consistent with those of earlier research that examined the same relationship. (Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Kamble & Dalbert, 2012; Nartova-Bochaver, Donat, & Rüprich, 2019; Yu et al., 2018). The more students BJW, the more they believe that they are being treated fairly in educational institutions which increases the SWB of the students.

Additionally, it was anticipated that general BJW positively impacts students' SWB. The findings confirmed that general BJW and SWB are directly related. Previous research on general BJW and SWB suggests the same relationship (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002; Chobthamkit et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the study's findings showed that personal BJW is the most significant predictor of SWB. This finding is consistent with a prior study that was conducted on karma and well-being which showed that the strength of personal BJW is more than general BJW (Chobthamkit et al., 2022). Those who firmly believe in a personal just world are better equipped to handle the challenges they face on a daily basis. Thus, the more one has personal BJW, they assess others and their life events as fair (e.g., Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006). This results in individuals perceiving the world as meaningful which gives an individual control over their lives.

Moreover, this research study examined how IIB would impact student's SWB. It was hypothesized that university students are affected by IIB in their classrooms. Our result showed a positive impact of IIB on SWB. The result suggests that IIB positively predicts the WB of the students. According to a study by Riva et al. (2020), teachers are crucial in establishing a learning environment for pupils, which might have an effect on their WB. Furthermore, previous research on IIB showed immediacy behaviors activate the emotional response specifically the pleasure response, and as a result affect student's behavior (Mottet & Beebe, 2002). The increase of effects on students can increase in overall WB of the students.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations to the study. First, the study used self-reported surveys that did not provide accurate responses. Future research should consider longitudinal or experimental designs and include more diverse educational settings to validate and extend these findings. Second, due to time constraints, the researcher could not collect sufficient data. More data can be collected from different universities to test these relationships. The study measured students' perceptions of IIB, which might not accurately reflect actual instructor behavior. Future research could include observational or mixed-method approaches for a more comprehensive assessment. Potential moderators or mediators were not investigated in this study (e.g., personality traits, cultural background, classroom environment) that could affect how the BJW, teacher immediacy, and SWB are related.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

The current study offers insightful information about student's self-reports, demonstrating the significance of how policies and practices in the provision of facilities and services related to WB are shaped. The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that predict students' subjective well-being (SWB). Data were collected from students enrolled in various disciplines at the university. The findings revealed that instructors' immediacy behaviors (IIB) and students' BJW are significant predictors of students' SWB. These results highlight the important role that both interpersonal dynamics in the classroom and individual belief systems play in influencing students' psychological WB.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, they underscore the value of instructor-student interaction in promoting positive emotional and psychological outcomes among learners. Training faculty to adopt more immediate and engaging behaviors could be an effective strategy for enhancing student WB. The significance of nonverbal behaviors (such as body orientation, tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact) should be emphasized in student-teacher training programs. These behaviors can foster stronger teacher-student connections and create more supportive learning environments.

Second, the role of BJW suggests that fostering a sense of fairness and justice—both personally and societally—may contribute to students' resilience and life satisfaction. Additionally, it supports the inclusion of justice beliefs and interpersonal communication (like nonverbal immediacy) in models of student well-being.

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