

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN THE SPORTS ENVIRONMENT

V. RAZMIREȚ¹ V. LEȘCO¹

Abstract: *The well-being of international students significantly influences their academic success and socio-cultural adaptation. This study examines differences in psychological well-being between international students who engage in sports and those who do not. The objectives include assessing well-being levels based on sports participation, analyzing its impact on academic performance, and outlining distinct psychological profiles for each group. Using literature review and empirical data, the findings emphasize that sports participation positively affects students' psychological well-being, supporting better academic outcomes and smoother cultural integration.*

Key words: *dimension, psychological well-being, international student, psychological profile, sports environment.*

1. Introduction

Foreign students represent a growing category in higher education in recent years in the Republic of Moldova. According to the report (*on the organization of the admission session in higher education institutions in RM*), the number of foreign students enrolled in undergraduate and master's degree programs in 2024-2025 increased by 15% compared to 2023. This fact has prompted us to study the well-being of these students in the host country and in the educational institution where they study and operate [11].

The psychological adaptation of foreign students to the host country and the

institution where they study is often marked by emotional, social, and cultural challenges, accentuated by the detachment from their familiar environment, academic pressures, and difficulties integrating into the host society.

In this regard, Leșco and Razmireț emphasize that participation in sports activities can facilitate emotional regulation, resilience, and social belonging, thus supporting a smoother adaptation process in multicultural environments [4].

In the context of research, psychological well-being plays a central role in supporting emotional balance and academic performance among foreign

¹ Department of Physical Culture, Institute of Physical Education and Sport of Moldova State University

students [3]. Nevertheless, few studies analyze these dimensions.

Achieving personal growth, professional success, career development, and interpersonal relationships also depends on the intrapersonal dimension, which is important for each individual and is expressed through well-being, which reflects our psychological balance, largely dependent on social aspects [1].

A review of the specialized literature allows us to state that the concept of well-being includes two main types: *objective* – socio-cultural status, educational resources, and health condition; *subjective* – happiness, perception of life quality, and life satisfaction, etc. [7].

Paladi O. presents the model developed by Ryff (1989), which defines well-being as positive psychological health, including six dimensions: *self-acceptance, personal growth and continuous development, the belief that life has purpose and meaning, quality relationships with others, the ability to manage life, and autonomy* [7].

Taylor S. and Brown J. note in their works that positive illusions about oneself are favorable factors for mental health. The authors argue, through empirical studies, the role of optimistic self-beliefs in increasing happiness, satisfaction, the ability to care for others, and to perform productive and creative work — all of which are accepted by various researchers as elements of mental health [10]. In line with this perspective, Purnomo and Ma'mun emphasize that sports serve as an effective context for integrating social values such as cooperation, respect, and empathy, which further reinforce psychological well-being and prosocial behavior [8].

Recent studies highlight that regular physical and sports activities are among the most important behavioral factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of psychological well-being [2].

D'Angelo and Makarova emphasize the essential role of sport as a factor for social integration, autonomy, motivation, and energy for foreign students — all of which are fundamental components in the creation of well-being [3].

Sport is widely recognized as having the potential to improve the lives of individuals and communities and to generate positive social impacts in society [6], [9].

Thus, sports activities can be viewed not only as physical movement but also as psycho-social interventions with an impact on mental balance and self-satisfaction of young people, especially in cultural adaptation contexts, such as in the case of foreign students. They become effective support mechanisms for shaping an active and healthy lifestyle, both physically and emotionally.

Studying well-being in the context of foreign students' involvement in sports activities is extremely relevant and important, especially during this period marked by a large influx of foreign students who need full psychological support for effective adaptation to the university environment.

The authors Leşco, V., Onoi, M., et al. highlight and propose sports activities in which students not only demonstrate performance but also form strong relationships that provide emotional support and strengthen the sense of belonging to the community. These activities significantly contribute to the integration process due to their unique

characteristics, helping to reduce negative effects such as anxiety and low level of tolerance [5].

In this context, analytical studies of the literature emphasize that psychological well-being becomes evident through sports and holds particular importance in the university environment, as foreign students often face social isolation and a lack of support networks, which can hinder the process of adapting to academic and social life in the host country [3, 7].

The results obtained from the study of the correlation between participation in sports activities and the level of psychological well-being among foreign students will ensure a deeper understanding of possible interventions to support them in the university environment.

Therefore, the central problem of the research is to highlight the psychological well-being of foreign students and the way in which involvement in sports activities influences it, and to what extent it can be considered a protective factor in the process of academic and socio-cultural adaptation.

The purpose of the research consists in evaluating and comparing, as well as outlining the psychological profile of the level of psychological well-being of foreign students, depending on their participation in sports activities, and formulating recommendations for promoting an active lifestyle among them as a means of supporting social integration and mental health.

To achieve the proposed goal, the research pursued the following specific objectives:

1. Measuring the psychological well-being of foreign students using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index questionnaire.

2. Comparing the scores obtained on the dimensions of well-being between systematically physically active and inactive students.

Outlining the psychological profile of the foreign student who is physically active and inactive, based on the evaluated dimensions.

2. Materials and methods

In the present research, the achievement of the proposed objectives was ensured by the following methods of data collection: theoretical methods: the study of concepts and the analysis of theoretical approaches and scientific studies; empirical methods: the observational experiment; well-being assessment techniques: the WHO questionnaire (1998 version), which includes 5 positively worded items (joy, good mood), related to positive mood (feeling calm), vitality (energy), rest (waking up rested), and life interest. Each item is rated on a Likert scale from 0 ("never") to 5 ("all the time"), with the total score ranging from 0 to 25. A higher score indicates a high psychological well-being.

The questionnaires were completed anonymously and voluntarily. The participants were divided into two groups: Group A: Students who regularly practice sports (at least 3 times per week). Group B: Foreign students who do not regularly practice sports activities.

Statistical methods: descriptive statistics, the independent samples t-test, and Pearson's correlation coefficient were applied. The analysis was carried

out in SPSS, with the significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results and Discussions

In what follows, we will present some sequences from the conducted research regarding the level of well-being of foreign students. According to the proposed objectives, the level of well-being among foreign students was determined.

We considered it important for the conducted research to determine the levels of manifestation of the components of well-being in foreign students who practice sports, as enumerated and described.

We mention that the research sample consists of 134 foreign students enrolled at one of the universities in the Republic of Moldova. Among them, 25.4% came from Ukraine, 15.7% from Romania, 17.9% from Greece, 14.2% from Russia, and 26.9% from regions of the Middle East and from India.

The ethnically and culturally diverse structure highlighted above allowed for a

deeper analysis of preferences for sports activities depending on the geographical area and the cultural traditions of the students.

The data presented in Table 1 regarding participation in various sports reveal the sports orientation of foreign students who are physically active, and a correlation between geographical origin and preferred sports; at the same time, the preferences of foreign students regarding practiced sports disciplines are illustrated, highlighting a diversity of choices correlated both with geographical origin and with their cultural values and lifestyles. A predominance of contact sports can be observed (Muay Thai – 28%, Wrestling – 18%, Kickboxing – 3%), practiced especially by students from India, the Middle East, Ukraine, and Russia, which indicates an orientation toward self-discipline, strength, and psychological resilience. Team sports such as football and volleyball are preferred by students from Ukraine, Romania, and Greece, highlighting a social and collaborative profile.

Participation of foreign students in different sports disciplines

Table 1

<i>Practiced sport</i>	<i>% (percentage)</i>	<i>Student's country</i>
Muay Thai	28%	India
Football	21%	Ukraine, Romania, Greece
Wrestling	18%	Ukraine, Russia, Central Asia
Gymnastics	9%	Russia, Ukraine
Volleyball	6%	Romania, Greece
Judo	3%	Middle East, Ukraine
Swimming	3%	Greece, Romania
Taekwondo	3%	India, Middle East

The analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaire diagnosing the well-being of those students who are

actively involved in sports activities, including performance sports, and of the

foreign students who have a more that participation in sports activities influences the psychological well-being of foreign students.

Each of the five dimensions evaluated by the WHO-5 questionnaire was

sedentary lifestyle, reveals statistically analyzed and compared between the group practicing sports and the one not involved in physical activities (Table 2).

Table 2

Comparative analysis of the WHO-5 dimensions of physically active and inactive foreign students

Dimensions of well-being	Group A (with sport) Average \pm DS	Group B (without sport) Average \pm DS	t Student	p (meaning)	Interpretation
Positive mood (joy, good mood)	3,9 \pm 0,9	2,7 \pm 1,1	6,45	p < 0,001	Significant difference; physically active students exhibit a significantly more positive mood
Relaxation (feeling of calm)	3,7 \pm 1,0	2,9 \pm 1,2	4,10	p < 0,01	Sporting students are more relaxed; physical activity reduces tension
Vitality (energy, activity)	3,8 \pm 0,8	2,5 \pm 1,0	7,02	p < 0,001	Sport increases energy and daily activity levels
Rest (waking up rested)	3,5 \pm 1,1	2,8 \pm 1,3	3,02	p < 0,01	Active students sleep better and feel more rested in the morning
Interest in life (daily enthusias)	3,4 \pm 1,2	2,6 \pm 1,2	3,36	p < 0,01	Sports increase daily engagement

The data presented in Table 2 reflect a significantly higher average score (3.9 \pm 0.9) in the well-being dimension (positive mood) for physically active students compared to inactive students (2.7 \pm 1.1), with a highly significant statistical difference (t=6.45; p<0.001). This result indicates that sports visibly contribute to maintaining a positive mood among foreign students, reducing the risk of apathy or sadness in a foreign country.

In the dimension of relaxation (feeling calm), students who practice sports reported a higher level of relaxation

(3.7 \pm 1.0) compared to those who do not practice sports (2.9 \pm 1.2), a statistically significant difference (t=4.10; p<0.01). Participation in physical activities can help reduce psychological tension and anxiety related to adapting to the institution and the foreign country, the vitality dimension (energy, activity) recorded the greatest difference.

Physically active students showed a high level of energy (3.8 \pm 0.8) compared to inactive students (2.5 \pm 1.0), with the result being extremely statistically significant (t=7.02; p<0.001).

This supports the idea that physical exercise directly contributes to increasing the overall level of psychophysical activation; in the rest dimension, students involved in sports reported better sleep quality and more restful awakening (3.5 ± 1.1) compared to inactive students (2.8 ± 1.3), with a significant difference ($t=3.02$; $p<0.01$).

Regular physical exercise is correlated with deeper and more regenerative sleep; in the dimension of interest in daily life, higher scores among physically active students (3.4 ± 1.2) compared to the inactive group (2.6 ± 1.2) ($t=3.36$; $p<0.01$) suggest a higher level of involvement, curiosity, and daily motivation. This aspect is essential in maintaining emotional balance and personal satisfaction in adapting foreign students to the host country.

The statistical data allowed the outlining of a psychological profile of the foreign student who practices a sport and a psychological profile of the well-being state of the inactive student with different dimensions of well-being (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. *Psychological profile of the well-being of the physically active foreign student (Personal contribution)*

Based on the results obtained from the WHO-5 questionnaire applied to foreign students who consistently practice sports, we can outline a balanced and positive psychological profile, characterized by the following traits: a stable positive mood, expressed through optimism, a friendly attitude, and openness toward others. This dimension reflects emotional resilience, an essential factor in adapting to a new cultural and academic environment; inner calm and emotional self-regulation, which allow them to respond adaptively to social and academic challenges in the host country; energy, motivation, psychophysical activation. Physically active students feel energetic, dynamic, and motivated to participate in academic, social, and extracurricular activities. Sport supports mental alertness and the desire to be involved, offering an active and structured lifestyle that favors a sense of personal efficiency and competence; enthusiasm, curiosity, involvement — they are more curious, more motivated to explore the new cultural context, and more engaged in social relationships. This dimension of well-being reflects a proactive attitude, a desire to learn, participate, and assert oneself in an international environment. Sport, as a social and emotional activity, contributes to the sense of belonging and combats social and cultural isolation.

In contrast, the lack of involvement in sports diminishes these psychological resources, increasing vulnerability to stress, anxiety, or isolation. This aspect is essential for foreign students, who frequently face challenges related to adaptation, cultural distancing, and academic pressures. In this sense, low well-being contributes to a diminished sense of belonging and may accentuate

tendencies toward social and cultural isolation.

For better understanding, Figure 2 presents a synthetic model of the psychological profile of the physically inactive foreign student, outlined based on the five dimensions of well-being evaluated through the WHO-5 questionnaire (Figure 2).

The psychological well-being of foreign students in sample B, who do not engage in sports activities, exhibits defining traits of a profile vulnerable from an adaptive and functional point of view.

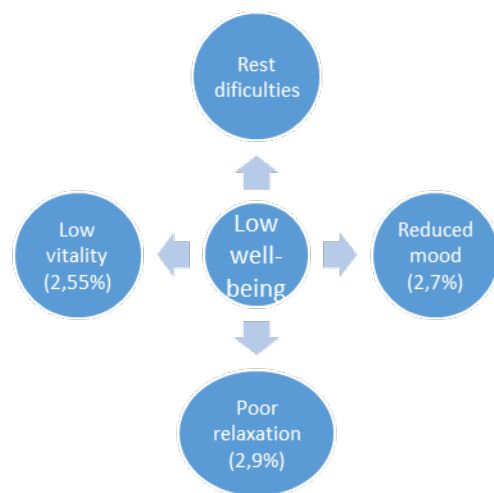


Fig. 2. *Psychological Profile of the Well-Being of the Physically Inactive Foreign Student (Personal Contribution)*

The analysis of the five dimensions of psychological well-being, measured by the WHO-5 questionnaire, allows a differentiated evaluation of the impact of a sedentary lifestyle on the mental, emotional, and social functioning of foreign students.

The proposed psychological structure is vulnerable and directly affects the academic integration and intercultural adaptation of foreign students.

The data support the hypothesis that systematic engagement in physical activity contributes to reducing the levels of stress and anxiety typically associated with adaptation processes in foreign students. In addition, sport facilitates the development of emotional resilience, self-control, and a sense of belonging to the university community — factors identified in prior research as central to well-being and intercultural integration [5].

Institutional interventions that promote integration through sport, physical activity, and group sports activities can correct these imbalances and support the development of a balanced and sustainable state of well-being.

4. Conclusions

The study confirmed that regular participation in sports activities influences the level of psychological well-being among foreign students, serving as a protective factor in the process of socio-cultural and academic adaptation.

The comparative analysis of the obtained data highlighted statistically significant differences between physically active and inactive students. Across all five analyzed dimensions — positive mood, relaxation, vitality, rest, and interest in life — the average scores were significantly higher in the active sports group.

Recommendations:

1) Higher education institutions should encourage the integration of sport into the lives of foreign students, not only as a form of performance or recreation, but as a strategy for psychological support and inclusion.

2) It is recommended to develop sports activity programs adapted to multicultural contexts, taking into account the ethnic,

religious, and gender preferences of students.

3) Encouraging participation in sports activities can contribute to reducing anxiety, increasing academic performance, and developing a sense of belonging in a foreign environment.

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