

Exploring Cost of Living, Learning Environment, Financial Aid and Academic Achievement Influencing Well-Being Among B40 University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of cost of living, learning environment, financial aid, and academic achievement on the well-being of B40 university students. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey, data were collected from 157 UiTM students through random sampling. Results showed a moderate positive relationship between cost of living and learning environment with well-being, but no significant link between financial aid and academic achievement. While the study is limited to UiTM and a few variables, it highlights the importance of ensuring financial aid meets students' needs and suggests that educational providers consider these factors to improve student well-being.

Keywords: Academic achievement, cost of living, financial aid, learning environment, students' well-being

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian university students from the Bottom 40% (B40) income group face challenges in academic performance, learning environments, and financial stress (Shamsuddin et al., 2024). Financial difficulties worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic affect many students, with 60% at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) from B40 households (Bunyan, 2024). Limited resources like technology and textbooks contribute to academic and psychological stress. A supportive learning environment improves student outcomes and resilience (Mansor et al., 2022; Sabri et al., 2023). Financial behaviour and strong support systems are essential to reduce stress and enhance financial well-being (Shamsuddin et al., 2024).

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Financial aid is crucial for easing financial burdens and improving academic performance (Sia, 2024). Despite benefiting 3.67 million students through PTPTN, accessibility and sufficiency remain concerns (Malay Mail, 2024). Financial pressures exacerbate stress and academic difficulties. However, studies often overlook cost-of-living factors like housing and transportation in relation to academic success and mental health.

While most research focusses on enrollment and retention, the impact of financial aid on well-being and academic performance remains underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how financial stress affects B40 students and identifying effective support systems. The findings will provide insights to improve student support, learning environments, and financial aid, reducing financial instability and enhancing performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Well-Being of University Students

Well-being is a multifaceted concept encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual health, and contributes to happiness and personal growth (Myers & Sweeney, 2005; Jarden & Roache, 2023). A significant portion of Malaysian university students experiences mental health issues such as depression (42.2%), anxiety (73.7%), and stress (34.8%) (Shahira et al., 2018). These issues can impact academic performance and overall well-being (James, 2016; Salleh et al., 2024).

Cost of Living and Financial Strain

The rising cost of living disproportionately affects lower-income students, particularly B40 students, and can lead to financial instability, risking dropouts (Rashid et al., 2023; Sani et al., 2020). Financial pressures are exacerbated by the increasing costs of essentials, undermining educational sustainability and future opportunities (Cribb et al., 2023).

Learning Environment and Financial Aid

The quality of the learning environment and access to support systems like tutorials and peer connections can alleviate stress and promote academic success (Pérez-Villalobos et al., 2023). Financial instability, worsened by the rising cost of living and limited access to part-time jobs, particularly affects B40 students (Salleh et al., 2022). Timely financial aid is crucial to support students' mental health and academic performance (Bakar et al., 2019; Sabri et al., 2023).

Academic Achievement

A strong link exists between academic success and well-being, where high academic achievement correlates with greater resilience and life satisfaction (Cobo-Rendon et al.,

2020; Shamsuddin et al., 2024). However, stress and low motivation, common among students, can hinder academic performance (Joharry, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research design to collect and analyse numerical data using structured and validated tools (Trafimow & MacDonald, 2017). The approach enabled researchers to generate useful statistics for descriptive and statistical analysis, and make generalisations from a sample to a larger population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). A correlation method was used to examine relationships between multiple variables and assess differences within the sample (Williams, 2007).

Data collection was conducted through a survey questionnaire created using Google Forms. A non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted, distributing the questionnaire via WhatsApp to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia students. This sampling method was chosen for its accessibility and widespread use in social science research (Winton & Sabol, 2022). The questionnaire, available in both the English and Malay Language, was developed based on a literature review to ensure its relevance (Fink, 2019).

The study sample consisted of 157 UiTM students. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0, with Pearson correlation analysis used to assess relationships between cost of living, learning environment, financial aid, academic achievement, and student well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Profile

The study involved 157 B40 university students, including 139 females (88.5%) and 18 males (11.5%). Most were aged 20-23, with 50.3% studying for diplomas and 49.7% for degrees. The sample was mostly full-time students (98.7%), with 42% in semester two. Most participants were from the Faculty of Business and Management (70.7%), and all came from households earning less than RM4850 monthly.

Hypothesis Testing

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between cost of living, learning environment, financial aid, and academic achievement in relation to the well-being of B40 university students. The results revealed a moderate positive correlation between well-being and both cost of living ($r = 0.351$, $p < 0.001$) and learning environment ($r = 0.584$, $p < 0.001$). However, financial aid ($r = 0.021$, $p = 0.398$) and academic achievement ($r = 0.052$, $p = 0.260$) were not significantly related to well-being.

The cost of living and supportive learning environments positively correlate with well-being, as financial security and a sense of inclusion improve mental health (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Riva et al., 2020). Financial aid's stability and availability are key, with its type less important as long as it meets students' needs (Nasr et al., 2024). Well-being is shaped by emotional, social, and financial factors, not just academic performance. High academic pressure can cause stress, negatively impacting well-being (Wahyuni et al., 2022; Klapp et al., 2024). Overall, reducing financial stress and improving the learning environment should be prioritised to enhance student well-being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examines the well-being of B40 university students, focussing on cost of living, learning environment, financial aid, and academic achievement. The findings show a moderate positive relationship between cost of living and learning environment, while financial aid and academic achievement are not statistically significant to their well-being. Financial aid has little impact, suggesting it should meet students' actual monetary needs rather than just being from loans, scholarships, or self-funding sources. The study also found no evidence that academic achievement is positively correlated with well-being, as well-being is influenced by various factors beyond academics. Recommendations include teaching budgeting skills to manage expenses, creating effective study spaces, providing work-study programmes, offering emergency grants, and promoting time management. Future research should explore qualitative or longitudinal studies to capture changes over time and include additional variables like mental health support and social capital.

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