

RESEARCH REPORTS

Influence of Psychological Capital on Student Engagement in The Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, The Maldives National University

ISMAIL SHIYAR & AISHATH NASHEEDA

The Maldives National University

Villa College

ABSTRACT *The tertiary education expectations differ for students entering university life. Successfully navigating student life in a tertiary education setting requires students to be equipped with the necessary coping skills and to be adequately engaged with studies for a meaningful study experience. The study aimed to examine the relationship between Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Student Engagement (SE) among students at the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, The Maldives National University. PsyCap consists of four dimensions: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism (HERO) that can be developed, managed, and measured to improve the performance of a student. Student engagement consists of Affective and Cognitive engagement and is the student's connection with the educational establishment, peers, faculty, and learning in general. Therefore, understanding PsyCap and its relationship with SE can be imperative in creating a favourable learning environment for students in higher education settings. The study employed a quantitative research design by employing a survey method. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between PsyCap and SE, and multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive influence of PsyCap on individual dimensions of SE. A total of 134 students enrolled on various academic programs at FHTS-MNU were surveyed to gather the data. Upon analysing the data, it was found that PsyCap had a moderate positive relationship with SE. The dimensions that most contributed to SE were Optimism and Resilience. Furthermore, it was found that PsyCap contributed more to Cognitive student engagement than to Affective engagement. The findings highlight key areas for consideration in curriculum design, teaching strategies, and the development of learning materials. The research also facilitates further research into how PsyCap can be enhanced to attain adequate SE.*

Keywords: *Psychological Wellbeing, Higher Education, Hospitality, Tourism Education*

Introduction

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a relatively new field of research in positive psychology. PsyCap is defined as the individual psychological capacity that often results in improved performance and can be managed, measured, and developed (Nolzen, 2018). PsyCap has been extensively studied in the workplace regarding employee well-being and performance, and the concept has recently begun to emerge in academia (Luthans et al., 2016; Vîrgă et al., 2020). Recent studies suggest that PsyCap has a direct association with intrinsic motivation, engagement and academic performance (Datu et al., 2016, as cited in Carmona-Halty et al., 2019; Siu et al.,

2014, as cited in Carmona-Halty et al., 2019).

Student engagement (SE) facilitates a positive, lasting impact on students. It is now understood that psychological factors play a crucial role in student engagement and academic performance, even though student performance was previously based on standardised tests, assignments, GPA, and so on (Martínez et al., 2019). Both PsyCap and engagement are constructs deeply rooted in positive psychology, and students who are engaged learn authentically and develop personally in the long run (Luthans et al., 2016; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, as cited in Luthans et al., 2016). Student engagement is a positive state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption in academic activities (Martínez et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2025). Vigour is defined as the time willingly invested in effort, mental agility and perseverance despite challenges (Luthans et al., 2016; Martínez et al., 2019). Absorption is characterised as being engrossed and immersed in academic work and activities (Luthans et al., 2016; Martínez et al., 2019). Dedication represents the deep involvement that brings joy, enthusiasm and a sense of significance (Martínez et al., 2019).

Compared with the general education system, the expectations set by tertiary institutions for undergraduate students differ. As such, the PsyCap of university students in higher education has a significant impact on student engagement. Efficacy, Optimism, hope and Resilience are the psychological resources that contribute to PsyCap (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Research indicates that students who have Efficacy, Optimism, hope and Resilience have confidence in taking challenges, have a positive outlook on achieving success, are goal-oriented with clearly defined pathways and can get back on track when faced with adversity, making students more engaged with studies (Chai et al., 2022; Luthans et al., 2016; Saleh Abou Elyazied et al., 2022; You, 2016). Thus, the elements of PsyCap facilitate a sense of control, meaning and purpose, and a drive to achieve goals overall (Chai et al., 2022; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Slåtten et al., 2021). In general, PsyCap provides a shared sense of a positive outlook towards situations that facilitate success and determination (Luthans, cited in Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). and occupational segregation.

Country Context

There are currently nine private colleges, a government college, and two government universities in the Maldives (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). Out of the total student enrolment in the country in 2019, 26% of students were registered at The Maldives National University (MNU) to study various courses (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). The student intake in The Maldives National University Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies (MNU-FHTS) for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021 was 628, 518, and 549, respectively; however, the graduating numbers for the same years were 104, 47 and 24, respectively (The Maldives National University, 2022). The difference between student enrolment and graduation rates suggests challenges associated with persistence, motivation and academic achievement. While PsyCap and SE relevance are increasing in the educational context (Pham et al., 2025), there is limited research analysing how these constructs operate within the Maldivian higher education system, especially in hospitality and tourism education. It is imperative to examine the relationship between psychological resources and

engagement to enhance student success and retention. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relationship between PsyCap and SE and determine whether PsyCap significantly predicts SE among students at MNU-FHTS. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between PsyCap and SE and to determine the predictive influence of PsyCap and its dimensions on undergraduate student engagement in MNU-FHTS.

The study adds to the emerging body of literature incorporating PsyCap and SE within higher education in small island developing states. The identification of specific psychological resources that predict student engagement provides evidence-based insights for curriculum development, academic advising and student support within hospitality education. The study extends PsyCap into a culturally distinct academic environment, offering contextual insights into PsyCap and SE within Maldivian higher education.

Influence of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) on Student Engagement (SE)

Student engagement encompasses a student's connection with the institution, peers in the classroom, faculty members, lessons, and the overall learning experience (Abou Elyazied et al., 2022). The four domains of engagement include academic, behavioural, affective (psychological or emotional) and cognitive engagement that exist in a varying continuum (Bond et al., 2020; Abou Elyazied et al., 2022; Fredrick et al., 2004, as cited in Tuljannah & Ayuningtias, 2020; Waldrop et al., 2018; Waldrop, 2012). However, it is believed that internal psychological process domains, such as affective and cognitive processes, precede observable behaviours, such as academic and behavioural influences (Waldrop et al., 2018). Students who are engaged affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally perceive greater emotional and social support from parents, teachers, and peers (Lam et al., 2012, as cited in Chong et al., 2018). However, studies have shown that cognitive engagement, such as openness to problem-solving, contributed more towards success than affective engagement, such as interest in learning (Fung et al., 2018). On the other hand, studies have shown that students with high cognitive and behavioural engagement but low emotional engagement had comparable GPAs and dropout rates to students with high engagement across all areas (Wang & Degol, 2014). Even though engagement is multidimensional, cognitive engagement plays an important role in predicting academic success, as evidence suggests. Therefore, educational strategies should ensure that cognitive engagement is actively embedded alongside affective and behavioural aspects to maximise engagement.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

Efficacy

High self-efficacy facilitates self-assurance and confidence, and individuals with high self-efficacy traits work towards achieving goals and accept challenges; thus, self-efficacy has a positive relationship with performance (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Siu et al., 2014). According to Lin (2020), self-efficacious individuals are more confident in seeking novelty, open to exploring, and more likely to absorb new knowledge. Students who have high self-efficacy cultivate confidence by strengthening their capacity to understand academic requirements, meet learning expectations, and resolve challenging academic tasks with appropriate solutions (Elyazied et al., 2022; Siu et al., 2021). Furthermore, international students who report higher self-efficacy

appear to adjust more effectively to the host environment's cultural norms (Lee & Ciftci, 2014, as cited in Chai et al., 2022). Providing students with structured plans to navigate challenges and achieve goals may facilitate the development of self-efficacy and self-confidence (Siu et al., 2021). Thus, it is evident that self-efficacy enhances performance as students develop confidence in managing their study load.

Optimism

Optimism is understood as a state of mind, and heightened awareness of this attribute facilitates intentional effort to maintain a constructive, positive outlook (Seligman, 1998, as cited in Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). A positive outlook encourages perseverance and the overcoming of obstacles by upholding the perspective that challenges are surmountable, as their causes are not fixed but changeable (Li et al., 2023). Individuals with an optimistic orientation interpret experiences positively and anticipate favourable outcomes in the future (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Martínez et al., 2019; Siu et al., 2021). Optimistic students tend to experience enjoyment in academic work rather than exhaustion (Barratt & Duran, 2021). Collectively, the findings suggest that Optimism is not only a positive state of mind but also a cognitive and motivational mechanism that shapes how individuals view challenges and thus regulate individual effort. By viewing challenges as temporary and changeable, optimistic individuals are better able to persevere and maintain goal-directed behaviour. In the academic context, the adaptive attribute buffers individuals from exhaustion while enhancing academic enjoyment. Thus, Optimism is seen as a protective factor against academic challenges while enhancing academic experiences.

Hope

Hope denotes an individual's determination to identify and create pathways that facilitate goal attainment (Lin, 2020; Nasreen et al., 2024). The theory of hope comprises three components: goal identification, pathway generation, and the willpower to pursue them (Snyder et al, 1991, as cited in Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Snyder et al, 1991, as cited in Martínez et al., 2019; Snyder et al, 1991, as cited in Onivehu, 2020). The development of hope among students is supported by setting deliberate goals and formulating strategic routes to achieve the desired outcomes (Barratt & Duran, 2021; Martínez et al., 2019). The perspectives suggest that hope functions as a structured system with both cognitive and motivational alignment rather than a passive emotional state. The integration of goals, pathways and willpower showcases that hopeful individuals are strategically oriented and driven by motivation, facilitating individuals to navigate obstacles and achieve adaptive flexibility. The dynamics between cognitive planning and motivational energy enhance students' capacity and engagement, despite challenges that significantly shape overall PsyCap.

Resilience

Resilience is a fundamental component of PsyCap that supports sustained performance under pressure. It is defined as the ability to recover from adversity, failure, or conflict and to persevere in pursuing goals (American Psychological Society, 2017, as cited in Onivehu, 2020; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Students who are resilient exhibit adaptive coping in the face of challenges and maintain sustained focus on goal attainment (Onivehu, 2020). Resilience can be

developed by strengthening an individual's capacity to identify available resources, evaluate potential vulnerabilities, and strategically mobilise coping mechanisms to manage adverse circumstances effectively (Masten et al., 2009, as cited in Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Siu et al., 2021). The perspectives indicate that Resilience acts as a dynamic adaptive mechanism that enables sustained goal pursuit despite setbacks and challenges. The ability to recover from adversity is not reactive, but rather a reflection of proactive coping processes that involve identifying resources, appraising the situation, and adjusting strategically. Therefore, Resilience strengthens PsyCap by providing adaptive coping, sustained perseverance, and persistent goal-directed performance despite challenges and adversity.

Student Engagement (SE)

Affective engagement

Affective engagement represents a critical dimension of SE and plays a foundational role in shaping the emotional connection to the academic environment. It is defined as the student experience related to a sense of belonging and to positive interpersonal relationships with academicians and peers within the educational setting (Barratt & Duran, 2021; Bond et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2019; Shi & Tan, 2020; Slåtten et al., 2021). The manifestation of affective engagement occurs through experiences of mutual respect, institutional identification, enjoyment, psychological safety, and a sustained sense of belonging (van Uden et al., 2013). Evidence suggests that affective engagement precedes and significantly influences academic involvement and behavioural participation in students (Waldrop et al., 2018). Affective engagement thus facilitates the emotional foundation that enhances belongingness, psychological safety, and mutual respect, which contribute to the internalisation of student academic identity. The emotional connectedness, therefore, operates as a motivational driver that precedes observable academic and behavioural participation. When students feel valued and securely integrated into the institutional context, there is a high likelihood of effort, persistence, and active participation in learning. Thus, effective engagement acts as a precursor that shapes the quality and intensity of academic involvement.

Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement is a vital dimension of student engagement that shapes the depth and quality of student learning experiences in educational contexts. It is defined as the mental effort students exert to demonstrate sustained commitment to academic activities (Waldrop et al., 2018). Cognitive engagement portrays the level of energy invested by students and the willingness that is facilitated through self-regulatory processes to exert effort despite obstacles and challenges (Bond et al., 2020; Schaufeli et al., 2002, as cited in Martínez et al., 2019; Shi & Tan, 2020; Slåtten et al., 2021). Cognitive engagement surrounds internal mental investment and self-regulatory processes; however, the processes often translate to observable behavioural involvement showcasing enthusiasm towards academic tasks (Bond et al., 2020; Schaufeli et al., 2002, as cited in Martínez et al., 2019; Shi & Tan, 2020; Slåtten et al., 2021). Cognitive engagement highlights the significance of self-regulation in learning, deliberate goal setting, and perceiving the relevance of academic tasks and learning to attain future goals and aspirations (Waldrop et al., 2018). The perspectives strongly suggest that cognitive engagement acts as

an intellectual engine of student engagement, facilitating depth of processing and persistence in learning tasks and activities. The strong emphasis on self-regulation and goal orientation suggests that cognitively engaged students constantly appraise, regulate, and direct individual learning behaviour. Thus, cognitive engagement serves as a central mechanism linking motivational processes to observable academic performance.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine the influence of PsyCap on SE among students at MNU-FHTS. A quantitative approach was most appropriate as the stated research questions intended to examine the strength, direction and predictive relationship between measurable constructs (PsyCap and SE) using statistical analysis. A cross-sectional design was adopted, as the data were collected at a single point in time.

The correlational design aimed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between PsyCap and SE. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis determined the predictive influence of overall PsyCap on the dimensions of SE, Affective and Cognitive Engagement. Thus, the selected quantitative design and statistical procedure were methodologically appropriate for testing the hypotheses and examining the predictive relationships between measurable variables.

Participants and sampling

The target population consisted of 183 students enrolled in various programs at MNU-FHTS as of May 2024, including students from Certificate 3 in Front Office Operations (n = 11), Certificate 3 in Culinary Arts (n = 27), Advance Certificate in Hospitality and Tourism Studies (n = 49), and Bachelor of International Hospitality Management and Bachelor of International Tourism Management programs (n = 96). The sample size was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator (Raosoft, nd), assuming a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a 50% response rate. The recommended minimum sample size for a population of 183 was 125 participants. A total of 134 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum requirement. Disproportionate stratified sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation across academic levels. The final sample included 26 respondents from Certificate 3 programs, 44 from the Advance Certificate program and 84 from Bachelor's degree programs.

Instruments

Psychological Capital was measured using the Revised Compound Psychological Capital Scale (CPC-12R) developed by Dudasova et al. (2021). The CPC-12R consists of 12 items that assess hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). On the other hand, Student Engagement was measured using the Student Engagement Instrument - College Version (SEI-C) developed by Waldrop et al. (2018). The SEI-C measures affective and cognitive engagement using a 7-point Likert scale. The pilot study was conducted with 26 participants to assess internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.91 for Student Engagement and 0.84 for PsyCap, indicating good internal consistency.

Procedure

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed electronically to enrolled students at MNU-FHTS. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to completing the survey. The questionnaire required approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. No identifying information was collected, and responses were treated confidentially.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the overall levels of PsyCap and SE. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between PsyCap and SE. Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive influence of the PsyCap dimensions (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism) on affective and cognitive engagement.

Ethical considerations and bias control

The study is approved by Villa College (ethics approval number: VC/CPS/2024/E-007) and the ethics committee of The Maldives National University (ethics approval number: RC/2024/ATCRMNU/02). Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the right to withdraw at any stage of the study without penalty. As the data were collected through self-report measures, there is a possibility of social desirability bias and common-methods bias. To minimise the risk, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Data was stored securely and used solely for academic research.

Findings

Demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic data reveal that 134 students participated in the study, of whom 56% (n = 75) were female and 44% (n = 59) were male. The majority of participants (61.9%, n = 83) were aged 16-21 years, followed by 22-27 years (29.1%, n = 39). Participants aged 27 years or older represent less than 10% of the sample. In terms of work status, 49.25% (n = 66) were full-time students, while 50.75% (n = 68) were either working or interning part-time or full-time. Findings indicate that a substantial proportion of students balance full-time academic commitment with considerable work responsibilities. Regarding program enrollment, 58.9% were enrolled in Bachelor’s degree programs, 29.1% in advanced certificate programs, and 12% in certificate programs. The demographic distributions provide a context for understanding the student population at MNU-FHTS.

Table 1. Demographics of the respondents

N = 134	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	75	55.97
Male	59	44.03
Age group		
16 – 21 years	83	61.94

22 - 27 years	39	29.10
28 - 33 years	7	05.22
34 - 39 years	3	02.24
40 or above	2	01.49
Work / Internship		
Full time work / internship	41	30.60
Part time work / internship	28	20.90
Full time student	65	48.51
Hours worked per week		
48 hrs and more	29	21.64
30 - 47 hrs	29	21.64
20 - 29 hrs	6	4.48
Less than 20 hrs	4	2.99
Do not work	66	49.25
Program enrolled		
Cert 3 Front Office	4	3.00
Cert 3 Culinary Arts	12	9.00
Advance Cert in H&T	39	29.1
Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality	42	31.3
Bachelor's Degree in Tourism	37	27.6

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Student Engagement (SE) by gender, age, work/internship status, hours worked per week, and program enrolled

As seen in Table 2, SE across various demographic groups shows that males ($M=5.53$, $SD = .75$) have a similar mean SE compared to the female counterpart ($M = 5.50$, $SD = .80$). Regarding age, students in the 28-33 age category ($M = 6.11$, $SD = .73$) had the highest mean SE, while students in the 34-39 age category ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.60$) had the lowest mean SE. Both part-time ($M = 5.62$, $SD = .83$) and full-time working students ($M = 5.60$, $SD = .77$) showed higher SE means than full-time students ($M = 5.41$, $SD = .76$). This indicates that students who work full- or part-time are more engaged in their studies than full-time students. Student who worked from 30 to 47 hours ($M = 5.70$, $SD = .73$), 20 to 29 hours ($M = 5.65$, $SD = .80$) and less than 20 hours ($M = 5.70$, $SD = .99$) showed the highest levels of SE, while students who works 48 hours and above ($M = 5.40$, $SD = .83$) and student who did not work ($M = 5.43$, $SD = .76$) showed the lowest mean for SE. The Cert 3 in Front Office students showed the highest SE mean ($M = 6.54$, $SD = .59$), while the Bachelor of IHM students showed the lowest SE mean ($M = 5.35$, $SD = .85$).

Table 2. PsyCap and SE by gender, age, work status, hours worked, and program enrolled

Demographic Group	Mean	Std Dev	SE Mean	SE Std Dev
Female	4.27	.76	5.50	.80
Male	4.70	.61	5.53	.75
Age 16-21	4.34	.74	5.50	.76

Age 22-27	4.60	.66	5.50	.74
Age 28-33	4.94	.84	6.11	.73
Age 34-39	4.83	.30	4.90	1.60
Age 40+	4.96	.29	5.70	.37
Full time work	4.69	.70	5.60	.77
Part time work	4.43	.77	5.62	.83
Full time student	4.33	.70	5.41	.76
48+ hrs/week	4.66	.72	5.40	.83
30-47 hrs/week	4.50	.73	5.70	.73
20-29 hrs/week	4.60	.72	5.65	.80
<20 hrs/week	5.10	.62	5.70	.99
Do not work	4.30	.7	5.43	.76
Cert 3 - Culinary Arts	4.00	.85	5.60	.69
Cert 3 - Front Office	4.75	.85	6.54	.59
Adv Cert H&T	4.48	.78	5.40	.73
Bachelor IHM	4.54	.68	5.35	.85
Bachelor ITM	4.47	.65	5.70	.69

Psychological Capital and Student Engagement scores among MNU-FHTS students

Findings from Table 3 reveal the overall mean score for PsyCap is $M = 4.46$, $SD = .72$ (on a 6-point Likert scale), demonstrating that students have a moderately high level of PsyCap overall. Looking at individual dimensions of PsyCap, Optimism has the highest mean ($M=4.93$, $SD = .96$), followed by Efficacy ($M = 4.59$, $SD = .86$), while Resilience ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.01$) and Hope ($M=4.14$, $SD=0.94$) were the lowest of the four dimensions. Variability was seen highest in resilience dimension ($SD=1.01$) that suggests that students have varied abilities in navigating student life when faced with challenges.

The overall SE score is $M = 5.5$, $SD = .77$ (on a 7-point Likert scale), indicating that students have a high level of SE. In comparison, Cognitive engagement had the highest mean ($M = 5.63$, $SD = .76$), followed by affective engagement ($M = 5.40$, $SD = .94$). This indicates that students in MNU-FHTS are more mentally and practically invested in studies than emotionally involved in studies.

Table 3. Overall PsyCap and individual dimensions (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism) scores and Overall SE and individual dimension scores (Affective Engagement and Cognitive Engagement)

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	4.46	.72	2.83	5.92
Hope	4.15	.94	1.67	6.00
Efficacy	4.60	.86	2.67	6.00
Resilience	4.18	1.01	1.33	6.00

Optimism	4.93	.96	2.33	6.00
Affective Student Engagement	5.40	.94	3.20	7.00
Cognitive Student Engagement	5.63	.76	3.83	7.00

Note: a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Overall relationship between Psychological Capital and Student Engagement

Findings to establish the relationship between PsyCap and student engagement: a Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a statistically significant, moderate positive relationship between overall PsyCap and SE ($r = .445$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .198$) indicates that approximately 19.8% of the variance in SE can be explained by PsyCap. This suggests that students with stronger PsyCap resources tend to report higher levels of SE in academic activities. Although the relationship is moderate rather than strong, it shows that PsyCap is a meaningful contributor to engagement in the higher education setting. Therefore, the hypothesis “there is no significant relationship between psychological capital and student engagement in MNU-FHTS” is rejected.

Influence of Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism dimensions of Psychological Capital on Student Engagement

Table 4 depicts positive relationships between all dimensions of Psychological Capital and Student Engagement (SE) among students at MNU-FHTS. Hope and SE showed a medium positive relationship ($r = .364$, $p < .001$), with hope explaining 13.2% of the variance in SE ($r^2 = .132$), indicating that hope plays a significant role in predicting SE. Efficacy and SE demonstrated a small but statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .220$, $p = .011$), with efficacy explaining 4.84% of the variance in SE ($r^2 = .0484$). Resilience and SE also showed a medium positive relationship ($r = .367$, $p < .001$), with resilience explaining 13.5% of the variance in SE ($r^2 = .135$), suggesting that resilience significantly contributes to SE. Similarly, Optimism and SE had a medium positive relationship ($r = .40$, $p < .001$), with optimism explaining 16.2% of the variance in SE ($r^2 = .1632$). Based on these findings, all null hypotheses related to Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism influencing Student Engagement were rejected, indicating that all four dimensions of Psychological Capital significantly influence Student Engagement among students at MNU-FHTS.

Table 4. Correlation table: Hope – SE, Efficacy – SE, Resilience – SE and Optimism – SE

	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)	Strength of Correlation	Coefficient of Determination (r^2)
Hope & Student Engagement	.36	< 0.001	Medium	.13
Efficacy & Student Engagement	.22	0.011	Small	.05

Resilience & Student Engagement	.37	< 0.001	Medium	.14
Optimism & Student Engagement	.40	< 0.001	Medium	.16

Influence of overall Psychological Capital on Affective and Cognitive Engagement

As shown in Table 5, looking at the overall influence of PsyCap on Affective Engagement in SE, the relationship is positive ($r = .39$), indicating that it is statistically significant ($P < .001$), which is below the 0.05 standard alpha. The relationship between PsyCap and Affective SE is medium ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the hypothesis, “There is no significant influence between overall Psychological Capital and Affective Student Engagement in MNU-FHTS,” is rejected. Looking at the overall PsyCap influence on Cognitive Engagement in SE, the direction of the relationship ($r = 0.48$) is positive, indicating that if PsyCap increases, Cognitive Engagement increases as well. This is a good indication that PsyCap plays a significant role in predicting Cognitive SE. The relationship between PsyCap and Cognitive SE is statistically significant ($P < .001$), which is below 0.05 standard alpha. The relationship between PsyCap and Cognitive SE is medium ($r = .48$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the hypothesis, “There is no significant influence between overall Psychological Capital and Cognitive Student Engagement in MNU-FHTS,” is rejected.

Table 5. Correlation table – PsyCap – Affective SE and PsyCap – Cognitive SE

Correlations	PsyCap vs AffectiveSE	PsyCap vs CognitiveSE
Pearson Correlation	.39**	.48**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
N	134	134

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Most Influenced Dimension of Student Engagement by Overall Psychological Capital

To examine how the independent variable PsyCap (HERO) individually contributes to Affective SE and Cognitive SE, two separate multiple regression analyses were conducted. As per Table 6, the Affective SE model was significant, $F(4, 129) = 6.97$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 17.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.178$). Similarly, as shown in Table 6, the Cognitive SE model was significant, $F(4, 129) = 9.05$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 21.9% of the variance ($R^2 = .219$). For Affective SE, both Optimism ($B = 0.21$, $t(129) = 2.30$, $p = .23$) and Resilience ($B = 0.22$, $t(129) = 2.26$, $p = .25$) were significant positive predictors. However, Hope and Efficacy were not significant predictors of Affective SE. For Cognitive SE, both Optimism ($B = .23$, $t(129) = 3.15$, $p = 0.02$) and Resilience ($B = 0.15$, $t(129) = .48$, $p = .48$) were significant positive predictors. However, Hope nor Efficacy were a significant predictor of Cognitive SE. It is evident that PsyCap had a much stronger

effect on Cognitive SE than Affective SE. Thus, the hypothesis “The Psychological Capital factors taken as a whole account for more variance in Affective Student Engagement factors than Cognitive Student Engagement factors in MNU-FHTS students” is rejected. The hypothesis “The Psychological Capital factors taken as a whole account for more variance in Cognitive Student Engagement factors than Affective Student Engagement factors in MNU-FHTS students” is accepted.

Table 6. Regression Model Summary and Predictor Influence of Psychological Capital on Affective and Cognitive Student Engagement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	F Value	Significance (p-value)	Predictors	Significant Predictors
Affective SE	.42	.18	.15	.86	6.97	< 0.001	Optimism, Efficacy, Hope, Resilience	Optimism (B=0.21, p=0.023), Resilience (B=0.22, p=0.025)
Cognitive SE	.47	.22	.195	.68	9.05	< 0.001	Optimism, Efficacy, Hope, Resilience	Optimism (B=0.23, p=0.02), Resilience (B=0.15, p=0.048)

Discussions

The primary aim of the study was to examine the influence of PsyCap on SE among the students at MNU-FHTS. The findings revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between PsyCap and SE. This suggests that psychological resources such as Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism play an important role in shaping student academic engagement in higher education. Although PsyCap explained slightly more variance in Cognitive Engagement (22%) than in Affective Engagement (18%), the difference between the two models is relatively modest. This suggests that PsyCap functions as a broad psychological resource, influencing both emotional and self-regulatory dimensions of engagement. However, given the relatively small difference in explained variance, it would be inappropriate to conclude that PsyCap operates exclusively through cognitive mechanisms; rather, PsyCap contributes meaningfully to both dimensions, with a slightly stronger alignment with cognitive processes.

Demographic details

Most students at MNU-FHTS are aged 16-21 (61.9%), and there are more female students (56%) than male students (44%). As per Martinez et al. (2019), students joining higher education systems directly from secondary education often find it challenging to meet the higher expectations, which may explain why many younger students focus only on full-time study. It is seen that 48.5 per cent of participants are full-time students, and 51.5 per cent work/intern either full-time or part-time. The PsyCap and SE means were highest among students engaged in full-time work (M=4.69 and M=5.60) and part-time work (M=4.43

and $M=5.62$) compared to full-time students who were not working ($M=4.33$ and $M=5.41$). The findings suggest that older students and those engaged in work or internships may demonstrate higher PsyCap and SE because of greater age and industry exposure in the hospitality context giving rise to stronger confidence, resilience and goal oriented attitudes towards studies, Martinez et al. (2019) and Barratt and Duran (2021) stated that students balancing studies with work (dual demands) can have an impact on PsyCap by adapting to changes by having a sense of hope and establishing a variety of ways to achieve the goals.

Overview of psychological Capital

The pattern of PsyCap scores suggests that students at MNU-FHTS draw on psychological resources that facilitate and support student well-being and academic demand. According to the participants, optimism had the highest mean score ($M=4.92$), indicating that students generally hold positive expectations for future academic performance. Seligman (1998) supports the notion by stating that optimism is a critical factor that guides students to view and approach challenges with a positive outlook. Students who have high levels of optimism see studies as opportunities rather than burdens (Seligman, 1998). Thus, reflecting on simple positivity, optimism may function as a cognitive appraisal mechanism in which students view academic challenges as temporary and manageable. In addition, Efficacy was the second-highest dimension ($M = 4.60$), suggesting that students perceive themselves as capable of meeting academic requirements and handling complex tasks. Individuals with higher self-efficacy are self-confident and self-assured in accepting challenges and working towards achieving goals, and are therefore positively correlated with performance (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Lin, 2020; Chai et al., 2022). In line with social cognitive theory, stronger efficacy beliefs may facilitate increased willingness to initiate challenging work, persist in learning activities, and apply strategic problem-solving approaches. Thus, the prominence of Optimism, together with Efficacy, facilitates a strong self-regulatory and motivational mindset that supports sustained engagement with academic tasks at MNU-FHTS.

Overview of Student Engagement

The overall student engagement score ($M = 5.50$) indicates that students at MNU-FHTS report a high level of involvement in academic activities, with cognitive engagement ($M = 5.63$) slightly exceeding affective engagement ($M = 5.40$). A stronger cognitive engagement orientation suggests that students may place greater importance on effortful learning, strategic thinking, and task-focused persistence than on merely being emotionally attached to the institution. Cognitive engagement reflects self-regulation and active mental participation in learning and has been shown to contribute to academic success (Waldrop et al., 2018). Fung et al. (2018) stated that students who are cognitively engaged showed perseverance in academic tasks even when emotional engagement is lower. However, the present study suggests that, while both dimensions of engagement are strongly represented, students may be slightly more inclined towards effortful and self-regulatory learning processes.

Psychological Capital and Student Engagement

The results obtained are consistent with the literature review by Fati et al. (2019), who stated that students with higher Optimism, Resilience, and hope are more engaged in studies. Hope and Optimism dimensions in PsyCap particularly facilitate keeping students motivated even in the face of adversity, leading to greater engagement (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Thus, the literature aligns with the study at hand, suggesting that greater PsyCap is associated with higher SE. By catering to students' PsyCap needs, studies can foster better student engagement.

PsyCap influence on Cognitive engagement

The stronger predictive influence of Optimism and Resilience on cognitive engagement warrants closer interpretation. Prior research demonstrated that action participation in learning facilitates improved academic outcomes (Waldrop et al., 2018). The present

findings suggest that forward-looking expectations (Optimism) and the ability to bounce back through adaptive recovery processes (Resilience) may be significant in sustaining mental investment in academic tasks. From a broader perspective, positive emotional orientations may enhance cognitive flexibility and resource adaptability, enabling students to persist in approaching complex tasks (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Martínez et al., 2019). Resilience, in turn, may serve as a buffer against stress, sustaining cognitive effort in the face of challenges. Most importantly, the findings do not suggest that Optimism and Resilience operate in isolation; rather, they appear to play a comparatively stronger role in keeping student effort and self-regulatory aspects engaged. The findings therefore suggest the potential of educational environments that encourage adaptive coping strategies, reflective learning practices, and structured academic experiences, which may strengthen students' psychological resources and support sustained cognitive engagement.

Working hours and student engagement

The pattern observed across work hours categories showed a potentially nonlinear relationship between working hours and student engagement. As shown in table 1, students who reported working up to 20 hours per week demonstrated comparatively higher PsyCap and engagement scores, whereas those working more than 48 hours per week reported lower engagement with studies. While these findings are more descriptive than inferential, the findings suggest that moderate work involvement may coincide with stronger psychological resources and academic involvement. One possible explanation is that structured work exposure may provide opportunities to develop skills such as time management, responsibility, and adaptive coping, which, in turn, can reinforce Efficacy and Resilience. However, working excessively long hours may drain cognitive and emotional resources, leading to fatigue and thus reducing sustained academic engagement. Prior studies have suggested that heavy workloads are associated with burnout and disengagement among students (Martínez et al., 2019), which aligns with the lower levels of engagement observed among students working longer hours. Thus, the findings suggest that employment functions as both a resource-building and a resource-depleting factor, depending on the hours invested at work.

Theoretical mechanisms and support for PsyCap and SE

The relationship between PsyCap and SE observed in the study can be interpreted through several complementary theoretical frameworks. The Broaden-and-Build theory by Fredrickson states that positive emotional orientations facilitate Optimism and Resilience, enhancing students' approach to academic challenges through problem-solving strategies and sustained mental effort, leading to engagement (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Martínez et al., 2019). This mechanism may help explain why Optimism demonstrated a comparatively stronger association with cognitive engagement, as broadened cognitive resources facilitate task-focused investment. Bandura's social cognitive theory delves into the notion of self-efficacy and its role in academic success (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Martínez et al., 2019). Students who believe they have the ability to succeed (Efficacy) are more engaged in their studies and thus more resilient to challenges. Additionally, the Conservation of Resources Theory by Hobfoll states that psychological resources/dimensions, such as Resilience and hope, facilitate students' resistance to stress and thus help them be more engaged in studies.

Implications

It is established that higher levels of PsyCap lead to high SE. Catering to activities that enhance PsyCap can significantly improve engagement, particularly by improving Optimism and Efficacy, which have a positive impact on academic performance (Fati et al., 2019; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Thus, it is worth considering embedding activities into educational programs that cater to students' PsyCap, which would, in turn, improve SE in the long run. The curriculum can

be designed in ways that foster the development of individual elements (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism), which, in turn, foster affective and cognitive student engagement.

Limitations of the study

There are several types of limitations that research may possess, including internal and external threats to validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The internal threats relevant to this study include history, maturation, selection and mortality (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Since the data was collected during the final quarter of 2024, a potential limitation related to historical validity should be acknowledged. Furthermore, participants may have experienced developmental, academic, or personal changes, and thus may mature and change during the research study, affecting the validity and contributing to the research's limitations. The students who participated in the research were from the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, and the findings may be limited to the characteristics of students in the hospitality education setting, further limiting the research's wider understanding.

External validity also poses a limitation to the research. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), the interaction of selection, setting and history, and treatment poses a significant threat to external validity. Regarding the interaction between selection and treatment, the students selected for the study were from MNU-FHTS; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to students from other faculties and programs, as faculty viewpoints and functions may differ from those at MNU-FHTS. Furthermore, regarding the interaction between setting and treatment, the psychological Capital and engagement of students in the MNU-FHTS setting cannot be superimposed on other contexts, such as the workplace or general environments. Finally, regarding the interaction between history and treatment, the researcher cannot generalise the results to past and future student cohorts, as circumstances differ over time and the study is time-bound.

Directions for future research

The direction for future research could expand the research further into academia. The study could be expanded across multiple faculties to improve generalizability. This could also facilitate tapping into a larger sample size across various demographics. As this study was conducted cross-sectionally, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how PsyCap and SE change among students over time. As it takes time to deploy such resources (PsyCap and SE), it is imperative to assess the success rate of these programs in overall PsyCap and SE. In addition, future research can take into account external factors such as cultural background, family upbringing, and educational exposure regarding PsyCap and SE. In addition, different work hours (full-time and part-time) affected SE, and thus could help evaluate the optimal number of hours for full-time students to work without being overwhelmed or burning out.

Statement of conflict

The author has no known conflict of interest to declare.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted as part of a student thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Psychology at Villa College. The researcher is now publishing the thesis in the Maldives National Journal of Research (MNJR).

We thank all parties involved in conducting the research. We acknowledge and appreciate the support rendered by the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies (FHTS). We also extend our gratitude to the School of Psychology and Counselling at Villa College and the Research Development Office of the Maldives National University for their assistance and support throughout the research process.

References

- Abou Elyazied, L. S., Mahmoud, R., & Mohamed, S. (2022). Influence of psychological capital on nursing students engagement. *Egyptian Journal of Health Care*, 13(2), 488–498. https://journals.ekb.eg/article_231192_d59578ae121376806797a9205c37166f.pdf
- Barratt, J. M., & Duran, F. (2021). Does psychological capital and social support impact engagement and burnout in online distance learning students?. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 51, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2021.100821>
- Bond, M., Buntins, K., Bedenlier, S., Zawacki-Richter, O., & Kerres, M. (2020). Mapping research in student engagement and educational technology in higher education: A systematic evidence map. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17(1), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0176-8>
- Carmona-Halty, M., Salanova, M., Llorens, S., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2019). How psychological Capital mediates between study-related positive emotions and academic performance. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20(2), 605-617. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-9963-5>
- Chong, W. H., Liem, G. A. D., Huan, V. S., Kit, P. L., & Ang, R. P. (2018). Student perceptions of self-efficacy and teacher support for learning in fostering youth competencies: Roles of affective and cognitive engagement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 68, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.07.002>
- Chai, D. S., Chae, C., & Lee, J. (2022). International students' psychological capital in Japan: Moderated mediation of adjustment and engagement. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 59(1), 101-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2021.1943417>
- Creswell J.W., & Creswell J.D. (2023). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. (6th ed.) Sage.
- Dudasova, L., Prochazka, J., Vaculik, M., & Lorenz, T. (2021). Measuring psychological Capital: Revision of the compound psychological capital scale(CPC-12). *PloSone*, 16(3), e0247114. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247114>

- Fati, M., Ahmed, U., Ali Umrani, W., & Zaman, F. (2019). Academic press and student engagement: Can academic psychological Capital intervene? Test of a mediated model on business graduates. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 8(3), 134-147. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v8n3p134>
- Fung, F., Tan, C. Y., & Chen, G. (2018). Student engagement and mathematics achievement: Unraveling main and interactive effects. *Psychology in the Schools*, 55(7), 815-831. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22139>
- Li, R., Che Hassan, N., & Saharuddin, N. (2023). Psychological Capital related to academic outcomes among university students: a systematic literature review. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 3739-3763. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S421549>
- Lin, Y. T. (2020). The interrelationship among psychological Capital, mindful learning, and English learning engagement of university students in Taiwan. *Sage Open*, 10(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020901603>
- Luthans, K. W., Luthans, B. C., & Palmer, N. F. (2016). A positive approach to management education: The relationship between academic PsyCap and student engagement. *Journal of Management Development*, 35(9), 1098-1118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-06-2015-0091>
- Luthans, F., & Youssef-Morgan, C. M. (2017). Psychological Capital: An evidence-based positive approach. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 4(1), 339-366. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113324>
- Martínez, I. M., Youssef-Morgan, C. M., Chambel, M. J., & Marques-Pinto, A. (2019). Antecedents of academic performance of university students: Academic engagement and psychological capital resources. *Educational Psychology*, 39(8), 1047-1067. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2019.1623382>
- Ministry of Higher Education. (2020). Higher education statistics 2019. <https://www.mohe.gov.mv/images/resources/resources/Higher%20Education%20Statistics%202019.pdf>
- Nasreen, I., Rathore, K., & Jabeen, N. (2024). Unpacking psychological Capital: a systematic review of hope, Optimism, Resilience, and self-efficacy in the workplace. *Journal of Excellence in Social Sciences*, 3(3), 232-243. <https://doi.org/10.69565/jess.v3i3.396>
- Nolzen, N. (2018). The concept of psychological Capital: a comprehensive review. *Management Review Quarterly*, 68(3), 237-277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-018-0138-6>
- Onivehu, A. O. (2020). The relationship between psychological Capital and academic performance of social work students. *Sociální pedagogika | Social Education*, 8(1), 53-67. <https://doi.org/10.7441/soced.2020.08.01.03>
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS Survival Manual* (7 ed.). Routledge.

- Pham, H. T., Nguyen, P. V., Nguyen, L. T., Pham, H. P. V., & Nguyen, L. T. (2025). A Scoping Review on Psychological Capital and Its Impact on Academic Outcomes. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Policies and Practices*, 284-298. <https://doi.org/10.52296/vje.2025.688>
- Raosoftware. (n.d.). Sample size calculator. <http://www.raosoftware.com/samplesize.html>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1998). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *The American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>
- Shi, M., & Tan, C. Y. (2020). Beyond oral participation: A typology of student engagement in classroom discussions. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(1), 247-265. doi.org/10.1007/s40841-020-00166-0
- Siu, O. L., Bakker, A. B., & Jiang, X. (2014). Psychological Capital among university students: Relationships with study engagement and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 15(4), 979-994. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9459-2>
- Siu, O. L., Lo, B. C. Y., Ng, T. K., & Wang, H. (2021). Social support and student outcomes: The mediating roles of psychological Capital, study engagement, and problem-focused coping. *Current Psychology*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01621-x>
- Slåtten, T., Lien, G., Evenstad, S. B. N., & Onshus, T. (2021). Supportive study climate and academic performance among university students: the role of psychological Capital, positive emotions and study engagement. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 13(4), 585-600. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJQSS-03-2020-0045>
- The Maldives National University. (2022). 2021 Annual report. https://mnu.edu.mv/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Annual_Report_MNU_2021.pdf
- Tuljannah, S., & Ayuningtias, H. G. (2020). The Influence of Student Engagement Towards Learning Achievement of Creative Industry Telkom University Bandung. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Politik dan Humaniora*, 3(1), 33-41. <https://doi.org/10.36624/jisora.v3i1.42>
- van Uden, J. M., Ritzen, H., & Pieters, J. M. (2013). I think I can engage my students. Teachers' perceptions of student engagement and their beliefs about being a teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 32, 43-54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.004>
- Virgă, D., Pattusamy, M., & Kumar, D. P. (2020). How psychological Capital is related to academic performance, burnout, and boredom? The mediating role of study engagement. *Current Psychology*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01162-9>

- Waldrop, D. M. (2012). An examination of the psychometric properties of the Student Engagement Instrument-College Version (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia). UGA Open Scholar
- Waldrop, D., Reschly, A. L., Fraysier, K., & Appleton, J. J. (2018). Measuring the engagement of college students: Administration format, structure, and validity of the student engagement instrument-college. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 52(2), 90-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481756.2018.1497429>
- Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. (2014). Staying engaged: Knowledge and research needs in student engagement. *Child Development Perspectives*, 8(3), 137-143. <https://doi-org.ezalumni.scu.edu.au/10.1111/cdep.12073>
- Wang, X., Wan Jaafar, W. M., & Sulong, R. M. (2025). Building better learners: Exploring positive emotions and life satisfaction as keys to academic engagement. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1535996. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2025.1535996>
- You, J. W. (2016). The relationship among college students' psychological Capital, learning empowerment, and engagement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 49, 17-24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.05.001>