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Positive Development of Academic Youth and Functioning as a Student

Pozytywny rozwój młodzieży akademickiej a funkcjonowanie w roli studenta

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Abstract

Aim. The research aimed to attempt to identify the relationships between the individual attributes of positive development and the components comprising functioning as a student. The concept of positive development is known through Richard Lerner. Assumptions of this concept refer to adolescents as a social resource that should be adequately supported. The study is an attempt to apply the guidelines of the concept of positive development to academic youth, *i.e.*, people undertaking a university education, especially until the age of 25: according to the law, these are adults who can reach for the “attributes” of adulthood (*e.g.*, alcohol or sex) with permission. However, according to neuropsychology and developmental psychology, a significant part of the representatives of this social group

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have still not developed the mechanisms enabling them to effectively perform the tasks of adulthood. Consequently, it is important to optimise the development of academic youth to enable them to actively participate in university life and not engage in risky behaviour.

Method. Empirical data were collected using the diagnostic survey method using a questionnaire created by the authors. The answers were statistically analysed.

Results. The study involved 164 students from Polish universities. During the research, the occurrence of correlations between individual attributes of positive development and functioning as a student was proved, especially within the need for self-development. Positive correlations were also revealed for commitment to academic activities.

Conclusion. The research showed that active commitment to the student role can be an alternative to engaging in risky behaviour. Moreover, promoting positive development may co-occur with active engagement in the student role.

Keywords: university students, risk behaviour prevention, positive development, self-development, positive psychology

Abstrakt

Cel. Celem badań uczyniono próbę wskazania zależności zachodzących między poszczególnymi atrybutami pozytywnego rozwoju oraz komponentami składającymi się na funkcjonowanie w roli studenta. Koncepcja pozytywnego rozwoju znana jest za sprawą Richarda Lerner. Jej założenia odnoszą się do adolescentów jako zasobu społecznego, który powinien być odpowiednio wspierany. Omawiana praca jest próbą zastosowania wytycznych koncepcji pozytywnego rozwoju do młodzieży akademickiej, czyli osób podejmując kształcenie w szkołach wyższych, zwłaszcza do 25 roku życia: zgodnie z założeniami prawa są to osoby pełnoletnie, które z pełnym przyzwoleniem mogą sięgać po „atrybuty” dorosłości (np. alkohol lub seks). Jednak z punktu widzenia neuropsychologii oraz psychologii rozwojowej, znaczna część przedstawicieli tej grupy społecznej nadal nie wykształciła mechanizmów, pozwalających na efektywne realizowanie zadań dorosłości. Wskutek tego, ważnym jest optymalizowanie rozwoju młodzieży akademickiej, tak by w aktywnie uczestniczyła ona w życiu szkoły wyższej i nie podejmowała zachowań ryzykownych.

Metoda badań. Dane empiryczne zgromadzono metodą sondażu diagnostycznego za pomocą autorskiego kwestionariusza ankiety. Odpowiedzi zostały poddane analizom statystycznym.

Wyniki. W badaniu udział wzięło 164 studentów z polskich szkół wyższych. W toku postępowania badawczego dowiedziono występowania zależności między poszczególnymi atrybutami pozytywnego rozwoju i funkcjonowaniem w roli studenta, zwłaszcza w zakresie potrzeby samorozwoju. Pozytywne korelacje ujawniono także dla zaangażowania w czynności akademickie.

Wnioski. Z badań wynika, że aktywne zaangażowanie w pełnienie roli studenta może stanowić alternatywę dla podejmowania zachowań ryzykownych. Co więcej, wspieranie pozytywnego rozwoju może współwystępować z aktywnym realizowaniem funkcji studenta.

Słowa kluczowe: studenci szkół wyższych, profilaktyka zachowań ryzykownych, pozytywny rozwój, samorozwój, psychologia pozytywna

Introduction

The implementation of the concept of positive development and the assumptions of positive psychology in educational studies is increasingly popular. This is also reflected in prevention, as it can be guessed, positive prevention, which emphasises the development of strengths, resources, and all protective factors. This type of interaction is particularly popular among children and adolescents. It is less frequently undertaken, in contrast, for a group of academic youth. This paper is an attempt to answer the question: What are the relationships between positive development and functioning as a student? According to the authors, adequate support is crucial for academic youth, who are exposed to a variety of risk factors and, as a consequence, engage in many risky behaviours. Indeed, there is an assumption that supporting the positive development of students may contribute to better engagement in their academic responsibilities.

Theoretical Background

The concept of positive youth development, elaborated by Richard Lerner (2001), represents an innovative perspective of young people's behaviour to maximise their proper development. The concept has much in common with the assumptions of positive psychology, which aims at so-called *thriving*. The desired state of development can manifest itself in school achievement, sporting achievement, overcoming one's limitations and much more. Such positive "moderation" of young people's development goes further than the perspective of the developmental norm and fosters health-promoting behaviour and, crucially, risk avoidance (Ostaszewski, 2014). The developers of the concept (Lerner *et al.*, 2005) outline a series of resources that foster youth development. They include, *e.g.*, a positive climate of educational institutions, the presence of adult mentors in adolescents' lives, constructive and engaging extracurricular or out-of-school activities, and easy access to clubs and organisations that support pro-social activities (Ostaszewski, 2014).

Richard Lerner and colleagues (2005) coined the phrase *Five Cs* to refer to the structure of positive youth development. The term indicates a five-stage structure, reflecting attributes indicative of thriving in various areas of life. These attributes are: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring.

Competence is a positive attitude towards activities undertaken in different areas of life, e.g., health, cognitive, educational, occupational, and social. Lerner considers competence to be the ability to cope with various challenges, tasks, and situations that may cause stress (Lerner, 2007). *Confidence* is a sense of self-efficacy and effectiveness, a positive self-perception, and noticing one's talents and potential. It is a high sense of self-worth and a strong belief in one's abilities (Harvard University, n.d.; Lerner, 2007). *Connection* is an individual's bond (or bonds) with others and the immediate social environment. It should be defined as belonging to a group that provides a sense of security. It can be any positive relationship with others and institutions that make up a person's social capital (Harvard University, n.d.; Lerner, 2007). *Caring* is a source of kindness and respect for others, understood as empathy, compassion, and commitment to social justice (Lerner, 2007; Ostaszewski, 2014). Finally, *character* is the most complex component to explain. Lerner (2007) defines it as a sense of responsibility, independence, and individuality. It is a trait understood as an individual regulatory structure. Whereas Krzysztof Ostaszewski (2014) and Harvard University (n.d.) describe this component as a state of moral development presented by respect for social and cultural norms, the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and honesty. Trying to juxtapose these two approaches, it is noted that they can be complementary. Taking Janusz Reykowski's Regulatory Theory of Personality (pl. *Regulacyjna Teoria Osobowości* – RTO) as an example, one can see that the attribute "character" is similar to a value network (pl. *sieć wartości*), i.e., a system built from elements of recognised norms and principles. In the regulation, it functions as a kind of scale with *good* and *bad* polarities. Any information that arrives from the environment undergoes selection and distribution on this subjective scale (Kowalczyk, 2020). Appetitive and emotional mechanisms then determine the direction and moral quality of an individual's behaviour. In this way, it can be observed that character is both the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as a sense of responsibility and individuality, formed on a psychological and moral foundation.

Based on the discussion above, the concept of positive development is a view that can be used to support young people in achieving their life goals, engaging with their communities, as well as enhancing comprehensive development. A person who possesses the attributes of the Five Cs can achieve high results in school, study, and work. From this perspective, it seems reasonable to use this concept to support university students' development. However, one doubt arises – aren't students already "too mature and formed" to moderate their development? Barbara Harwas-

Napierała and Janusz Trempała (2000), in their periodisation of human life, distinguish the period of adolescence, which lasts from 10/12 to 20/23 years of age. They divide this period into two smaller ones: 10/12–15 years of age – the sub-period of early adolescence, and 16–20/23 years of age – the sub-period of late adolescence. According to the authors, only after that time does early adulthood follow. It is also worth emphasising that in Poland, the time of higher education is, in most cases, the years 19–24. Thus, following the division according to Harwas-Napierała and Trempała (2000), university students can be classified as late adolescents. For confirmation, the opinion of James Côté (2006) may be mentioned, who states that the adolescence period may extend over time and postpone the moment of the end of the moratorium. The author refers to this phenomenon as an *institutionalised moratorium*. The term is used to describe the process of acquiring a particular identity that does not end in late adolescence but in emerging adulthood. The institutionalised moratorium is a time in which a person continues to search for his or her identity and experiment with different social roles, which may not yet be permanent. At this point, it is also worth noting the neuropsychological changes that continue to progress during the period of undertaking higher education. Bartłomiej Cieślik (2020) points out that the brain develops at a very rapid pace until around the age of 20. Marek Kaczmarzyk (Pezda, 2020) adds that brain development never ends. However, by the age of 20–25 the selection of neural connections in the cerebral cortex, which is characteristic of adolescence, is completed. Only then are the young people capable of making fully rational decisions, planning correctly and anticipating the consequences of their activities.

It should therefore be emphasised that students are a social group that is highly exposed to risk factors. They are adults who have already received their identity cards and can take full responsibility for themselves. Starting university is usually associated with leaving the family home and moving to a larger city, which correlates with reduced parental control and a greater sense of anonymity. When starting university, it is necessary to make new friends and fit in with a new group, which can—like other major life changes—generate stress and a sense of confusion. It is well known that students can, with the full consent of the law, take on the attributes of adulthood (such as alcohol, tobacco, and sex) without having yet acquired the psychosocial skills necessary for proper adulthood. Therefore, academic youth should, in the opinion of the authors of this paper, be provided with specific interventions aimed at increasing their resources and using them for pro-health as well as pro-developmental activities, *e.g.*, active involvement in the role of a student. When this does not happen, university students may turn to a variety of risky behaviours. As research shows, students often engage in them, *e.g.*, alcohol use (*e.g.*, Brodziak-Dopierała *et al.*, 2020; Herrero-Montes *et al.*, 2022; López-Moreno *et al.*, 2021; Pyżalski *et al.*, 2020; Teixeira da Silva *et al.*, 2022), drug and legal high use (*e.g.*, Blows & Isaacs, 2022), smoking behaviour (*e.g.*, Suhányi *et*

al., 2020; Wiraszka & Obierżyńska, 2019; Yaseen *et al.*, 2020), unconventional sexual behaviour such as unprotected sex and sex with random people (*e.g.*, Chen *et al.*, 2023; Dai *et al.*, 2023; Santos *et al.*, 2024), chemsex (*e.g.*, Guerra *et al.* 2020; Malandain *et al.*, 2021); providing sexual and quasi-sexual services for money (*e.g.*, Gerassi *et al.*, 2024; Wylęgły, 2019), and sexting even to random receivers (*e.g.*, Bereźnicka, 2019; Wylęgły, 2021). Following these reports, it is again important to emphasise the importance of adequate motivation for students, which encourages them to actively and successfully perform the student role.

The basic purpose of studying is defined in the applicable in Poland–*Ustawa o szkolnictwie wyższym z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r.* [Act on higher education of 2018, 20 July]. Article 107 states that students are obliged to respect the content of the oath and the regulations of the university. According to the regulations, students must attend classes, as well as participate in examinations, undertake work placements and comply with other requirements set out in their study programme (Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] 2018, item 1668). However, it is known that most universities offer a range of extracurricular activities that can be used to acquire new skills, develop interests and meet new people. Such activities can have many advantages. Rumpa Roy and Hesham El Marsafawy (2023) state that extracurricular activities are implemented to enhance mental health, build community and gain academic success and, in the future, career success. Indeed, it appears that involvement in various student associations may intensify academic success, as well as support the building of social networks that contribute to development (Buckley & Lee, 2021).

Łukasz Jach (2013) describes forms of student activity used to build their individual career capital. He mentions, among others: a) studying in several fields of study at the same time; b) membership in academic circles, often associated with the preparation of debut publications and active participation in scientific conferences; c) involvement in student organisations, such as the student government; d) membership in national or international student organisations; g) work for money; h) volunteering.

From a review of student offerings at Polish higher education institutions, the most popular are academic circles, student government, and other organisations. Bartłomiej Majewski (2020) defines them as follows:

Academic circles: the most popular and numerous student organisations oriented mainly towards scientific activities. They enable the acquisition of first scientific experiences, such as debut publications or organisation of scientific conferences.

Student government, or more precisely, its specific organs. Their main task is to defend the rights of students. Such governments are obliged to inform the university authorities, *e.g.*, about the disturbing behaviour of lecturers, or they are involved in setting the prices applicable in the dormitories. Majewski argues that student government

is a proposal for people who find themselves in leadership roles, often with political predispositions and interests.

Other organisations for students include diverse teams, foundations, and associations cooperating with the university. These can include international associations, organisations responsible for international student exchanges, student media, graduate organisations, academic choirs, and others.

Sylwia Jaskulska (2013), in her research, found that a significant proportion of the students surveyed are involved in associations. Volunteering is much less popular. Monika Chorab (2016), meanwhile, reports that involvement in students' duties depends on their obligatory character: 95.7% of respondents regularly participate in obligatory activities, but only 14.3% of respondents participate in optional activities. Furthermore, students who regularly participate in extra-curricular forms are as follows: participation in seminars, and scientific conferences – 12.1%, activity in academic circles – 10.3%, and activity in student government – 3.7%.

Ewa Poniatowska (2020) described the motives of students of the Białystok University of Technology to participate in academic circles. According to her research, the fundamental ones are: the desire for continuous development, the desire for higher education and a well-paid job in the future, and the desire for contact with peers and friends. However, the research shows that a small percentage of students belong to research clubs. Those individuals who are actively involved say that the association is an important element for their further self-development – both personal and professional.

The need for self-development, as seen, therefore, can be an important motive for undertaking additional activities during studies. This, in turn, is defined broadly in the field of self-development psychology (*e.g.*, Bohdan, 2020; Fedan, 2021; Onipko, 2021). According to respected researchers in this area, human self-development is correlated with the process of self-improvement in the course of which a person strives for maximum self-realisation as well as understanding of his or her spiritual world. It is a process that facilitates a deeper self-awareness and a sense of personal purpose in an individual's life. Furthermore, self-development can be recognised as a life strategy for individuals who seek continuous improvement and better performance in their activities (*e.g.*, academic or professional; Prisniakova *et al.*, 2023).

Based on the theoretical considerations, the decision was made to frame functioning as a university student as a set of the following elements: 1) commitment to academic activities – both obligatory (such as attendance and preparation for classes) and optional (such as participation in academic circles or student government); 2) need for self-development, understood as acquiring the skills needed to achieve educational and professional success, as well as striving to be a “better person” in a holistic perspective; 3) avoidance of risky behaviour, *i.e.*, being responsible for one's health and development, as well as having “responsible” forms of leisure time.

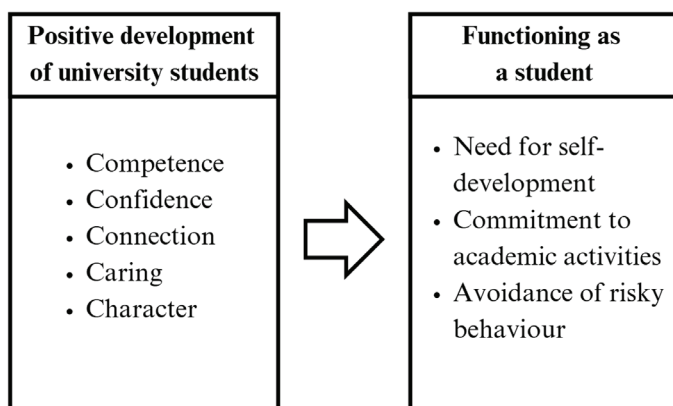
Methodological Concept of the Own Study

Problem and Aim of the Study

The present study aims to indicate the relationships between functioning as a student and the positive development of academic youth. In the conceptualisation of the research process, two global variables were identified (*positive development of university students* and *functioning as a student*). These were assigned specific variables, which are the components that comprise the global variables (in the case of the independent variable, the choice of specific variables was based on the theoretical approach according to Lerner. In the case of the dependent variable, the choice of detailed variables depended on the theoretical approach of the authors of this paper).

Figure 1

Dependent and independent variables: global and specific



For the study, the research problem was posed. This is as follows: Are there correlations between the positive development of university students and functioning as a student? Due to the dependent character of the research problem, it was assumed that there is a research hypothesis: The higher the attributes of positive development, the higher the components of functioning in the student role.

Research Method

The data was collected using a survey. The research tool was a questionnaire consisting of 35 items and a personal data form (metric), prepared by the authors.

The survey began with general information about the study and a text of informed consent. After agreeing to participate in the study, the respondent proceeded to the questions. All questions took the form of statements to which respondents had to respond

by selecting the appropriate point on a five-point scale (estimated Likert), where “1” meant *strongly disagree* and “5” meant *strongly agree*. The questions in the tool were made with specific measures defining each variable. The details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Specific variables and the measures defining them

Variables	Measures ¹
Competence	1. I can make the right decision without any problems. 2. I have no problem assimilating the material presented during classes. 3. I use the knowledge I have acquired in everyday life. 4. I can overcome everyday difficulties because I have the experience and knowledge to deal with them.
Confidence	5. I believe I have much potential. 6. I can identify my strengths. 7. I consider myself to be a person of value. 8. I believe that I will be able to achieve what I am working for.
Connection	9. I belong to a group that gives me a sense of security. 10. I have people in my life who can count on. 11. Relatives can count on me. 12. I have many relationships/acquaintances that make it easier to achieve my goals.
Caring	13. I consider myself a compassionate and empathetic person. 14. I engage with the socially excluded community (homeless, elderly, sick, etc). 15. I care for my loved ones. 16. I try to care for people who are in a worse situation than mine.
Character	17. It is important to me to respect social norms. 18. I consider myself to be an honest person. 19. I believe that social rules exist to be broken. 20. When I have the choice to take actions that are universally recognised as good or bad, I always choose the good ones.
Need for self-development	21. Self-development is very important to me. 22. I am constantly trying to improve my competencies and qualifications. 23. I can't imagine having a job that doesn't allow me to develop myself. 24. I am constantly trying to be a better person.
Commitment to academic activities	25. I try not to skip classes/lectures at my university. 26. I regularly prepare for my college classes. 27. I believe that just going to class is not enough to be a “good” student. 28. I get involved in academic circles, student government and other student associations. 29. I have very good grades in my studies (predominantly very good grades).

¹ The survey was conducted in Polish, so the measures were in Polish. The translation was done for the purpose of this paper.

Variables	Measures ¹
Avoidance of risky behaviour	30. I never arrange meetings/dates with people I have met online/dating apps.
	31. I don't add people I don't actually know to my friend lists.
	32. I send erotic photos of myself online (to other people).
	33. I often add pictures of myself in lingerie/swimsuits on social media.
	34. I never engage in online challenges, even when they may be harmful to my health (<i>e.g.</i> , drinking alcohol, eating spicy foods, <i>etc.</i>).
	35. I happen to use pro-ana blogs.

A metric that asked for sociometric data was included at the end of the questionnaire. The survey was an online tool, sent to respondents electronically.

The statistical analysis of the empirical data used Spearman’s correlation. Calculations were performed using Statistica 13.3 with an academic licence and Jamovi version 2.2.5.

Research Sample

Non-probability sampling was used to recruit respondents – university students were asked to participate in the survey. The selection technique used was snowball sampling. Students who took part in the survey provided a request to distribute the tool be distributed to others. Data were collected with the anonymity of respondents. Total number of responses: $N=168$ (three persons, having read the informed consent, did not participate in the study; the fourth form was not completed to the end). Data from 164 responses (142 women, 19 men, 3 people who did not specify gender) were therefore statistically analysed. The survey was conducted in May–November 2024. The exact location of the students is unknown because the tool was sent to students at various universities (*e.g.*, in Wrocław or Opole) and was also made available on different student portals with participants from the whole of Poland. There is also no information about the average age of the participants (including a division by gender), as the participants did not enter a numerical value themselves, but referred to age ranges (18–24, 25–35, and more than 35). However, it is known that the largest group of respondents was in the 18–24 age group ($n=122$).

Results

Factor Analysis and Reliability of the Measurement Scale

The first stage of the research was factor analysis, which aimed to check the compatibility of the assumed structure of the research tool with the structure resulting from the empirical analysis. This procedure was undertaken to check the adequacy of the distinguished attributes of the Five Cs and the three other components. The items measuring

the various attributes and behavioural categories were created based on a literature review. It was, therefore, necessary to check whether all items had the correct position in the factor structure. In addition, the analysis was intended to reduce the data set consisting of multiple variables to a smaller number of them. Bartlett's and KMO tests were performed before the procedure. The result of Bartlett's test of sphericity proved to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=2227$, $df=595$, $p<0.001$), while the KMO index showed $p>0.05$ values (overall MSA result was 0.79). The Promax rotation method was used, which allows for the possibility of correlations between the separated factors. It is important to note that item 27 ("I believe that just going to class is not enough to be a 'good' student") was removed from further analysis because it did not demonstrate a relationship with the others. Based on the procedure used, it was confirmed that the items were in the correct place in the factor structure. The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Factors (variables) extracted in factor analysis with Promax rotation

	Factors							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Item 1								0.666
Item 2								0.419
Item 3					0.319			0.617
Item 4								0.749
Item 5			0.349				0.712	
Item 6							0.666	
Item 7							0.788	
Item 8							0.750	
Item 9	0.539							
Item 10	0.491	0.400						
Item 11	0.750							
Item 12	0.713							
Item 13		0.658						
Item 14		0.800						
Item 15		0.806						
Item 16		0.479						
Item 17				0.784				
Item 18				0.595				
Item 19				-0.794			0.312	
Item 20				0.709				

	Factors							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Item 21			0.689					
Item 22			0.711					
Item 23			0.688					
Item 24			0.564					
Item 25					0.690	-0.376		
Item 26					0.779			
Item 28		-0.311			0.412		0.405	
Item 29			0.373		0.657			
Item 30						0.741		
Item 31						0.638		
Item 32						0.596		
Item 33						0.603		
Item 34						0.443		
Item 35					-0.315	0.712		

During the discussion of the extracted factors, Cronbach's α was calculated to test the reliability of the tool. The highest score was achieved for the component "avoidance of risky behaviour" ($\alpha=0.806$). All scores obtained were higher than 0.70, which confirms the reliability of the scale. The details are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The reliability of each variable

	Cronbach's α
Competence	0.766
Confidence	0.756
Connection	0.767
Caring	0.780
Character	0.777
Need for self-development	0.757
Commitment to academic activities	0.777
Avoidance of risky behaviour	0.806

Correlations Between Positive Development and Functioning as a Student

In the crucial step of the research process, Spearman's correlation was used (because the distribution does not follow a Gaussian curve, both in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests). Based on the analyses, single correlations were established

between the specific components of positive development and functioning in the role of the student. The strongest correlation occurred between the “need for self-development” and “confidence” ($\rho=0.560$, $p<0.001$). This relationship seems justified if only from the perspective of Albert Bandura’s (1977) concept of self-efficacy. Taking action to improve one’s competence is justified when the individual believes in his or her abilities. Without having the belief: “I can cope,” it is difficult to make efforts to advance in an educational or professional career.

The relationship between the “need for self-development” and “competence” ($\rho=0.408$, $p<0.001$) was also found to be relatively strong (in the set in discussion). This relationship is certainly due to the need to improve one’s competencies and use them in everyday life. It can be guessed that individuals characterised by such a co-occurrence of traits do not show cognitive difficulties when learning new activities and perceive the need to develop their resources to intensify their life skills (used, *e.g.*, in education).

A correlation $\rho=0.410$, $p<0.001$ appears between “need for self-development” and the attribute “caring,” which may suggest that social capital multiplies (or predisposes to the multiplication of) cultural capital. By acquiring new skills and taking different courses, people are continually building social networks, which may have at their core a strong social commitment and a need to build trust. This, in turn, may find justification in another relationship – between “need for self-development” and “connection” ($\rho=0.371$, $p<0.001$). Improving one’s skills also develops soft competencies, which can multiply empathy and concern for others.

It is worth mentioning that the “need for self-development” component also correlates positively with “character” ($\rho=0.336$, $p<0.001$), *i.e.*, the ability to recognise goodness and improve regulatory mechanisms. Such effects can be achieved, *e.g.*, by participating in ethics classes or social skills training.

The research shows that precisely need for self-development seems to correlate most strongly with all attributes of the Five Cs. Moreover, these correlations are strong (against the others in the set). It appears, therefore, that fostering or sustaining positive development in academic students may potentiate the need for self-development. This is undoubtedly related to the phenomenon of thriving, which is at the heart of positive psychology and positive youth development.

A lot of significant correlations are also revealed for the “commitment to academic activities” component. The strongest correlation is between it and “competence” ($\rho=0.337$, $p<0.001$), which can be explained by the fact that people who are committed to higher education are more likely to participate in classes, regularly prepare themselves with assigned content and achieve high grades. These results are reflected in skills (*e.g.*, academic or professional). Another correlation is with the attribute “confidence” ($\rho=0.298$, $p<0.001$), and a little smaller with “character” ($\rho=0.238$, $p<0.002$). These

are already slightly lower values, but indicating the co-occurrence of commitment to academic responsibilities with honesty, confidence in one's abilities, and positive assessment of one's resources.

Only two (moreover, weak correlations) were revealed for the component "avoidance of risky behaviour." This component can be considered controversial when we talk about functioning in the role of a student. Indeed, it is not a rule that students have to engage in risky behaviours. However, from the analysis of the available data, it appears that students often engage in such behaviours, *e.g.*, they achieve high rates of alcoholic beverage use. It turns out that not engaging in risky behaviour shows a positive correlation with another component, *i.e.*, commitment to academic activities ($\rho=0.221$, $p=0.004$), which suggests that active participation in academic life is an alternative to engaging in risky behaviour.

Promoting the positive development of university students may slightly co-occur with not engaging in risky behaviour, and such relationships are evident for the attributes "character" ($\rho=0.194$, $p=0.012$) and "confidence" ($\rho=0.152$, $p=0.49$). This can be explained as follows: the ability to distinguish between right and wrong and the associated regulatory mechanisms is a protective factor for engaging in risky behaviour. Furthermore, a positive self-image does not necessarily require approval and appreciation for risky behaviour. However, it should again be noted that the strength of the correlation is weak, so the findings should be treated with caution.

Table 4

Correlations (Spearman's ρ) between components of functioning as a student and attributes of positive development according to R. Lerner (N=164)

		Competence		Confidence		Connection		Caring		Character	
Need for self-development	Spearman's ρ	0.408	***	0.560	***	0.371	***	0.410	***	0.336	***
	<i>p</i> -value	<.001		<.001		<.001		<.001		<.001	
Commitment to academic activities	Spearman's ρ	0.337	***	0.298	***	0.105		0.145		0.238	**
	<i>p</i> -value	<.001		<.001		0.174		0.061		0.002	
Avoidance of risky behaviour	Spearman's ρ	0.060		0.152	*	-0.010		0.016		0.194	*
	<i>p</i> -value	0.440		0.049		0.898		0.835		0.012	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The use of the attributes of the Five Cs and the assumptions of positive psychology to optimise the positive development of academic students and multiply their potential is still scarce in the literature and professional practice, although there are increasingly some references (*e.g.*, Barranca-Enríquez *et al.*, 2021; Brewer *et al.*, 2018; Demetriou & Powell, 2014; Diert-Boté Moncada-Comas, 2024; Ma, 2021). Irati Diert-Boté and Balbina Moncada-Comas (2024) analyse the construct of academic buoyancy, also known as the Five Cs, which can proliferate educational and developmental success. In the present study, it was decided to refer to R. Lerner's conception, which however, has a fundamental disadvantage – the application of this conception is only valid for people up to about 20/25 years of age (in view of neuropsychological development). However, as is well known, nowadays higher education is also popular among adults and even seniors.

This study proved, for example, that actively participating in student life (*i.e.* preparing for classes, taking part in student associations, etc.) has a positive correlation with the avoidance of risky behaviour. Trinh Le (2013) reached similar conclusions among teenagers. She showed that participation in extracurricular activities significantly reduces involvement in risky behaviour among adolescents in Australia. Similar observations are made by Laura M. Crispin and colleagues (2017). However, these are again studies among secondary school students. Access to such research among university students is more difficult.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, there are certain similarities between secondary school pupils and university students. That is why the subject matter of the study seems important, because it may suggest the need for changes in upbringing and educational interventions for university students. The moment of entering higher education is a crucial moment for many young people when they leave their family homes and take their first steps towards independence. It is also a time when parental control decreases. Entering new social roles, the desire to meet new people and the need to reduce stress can lead to engaging in risky behaviour. As educational practitioners, we should take appropriate action, based on our knowledge of these mechanisms and the positive correlations with extra-curricular activities. We can, *e.g.*, ensure a positive academic environment for university students, and take on the role of positive mentors who will not only judge from learning outcomes but also support the acquisition of soft competencies. Applying interactions based on the Five Cs of R. Lerner's model, it is possible to intensify students' engagement and support their self-development. It is worth remembering that higher education has not only an educational function but also a bringing up one. Moreover, young adults are still susceptible to all influences. It would therefore be

appropriate to consider supporting their positive development for their continued success, the importance of the relationships they establish and their healthy development.

Despite the presence of certain limitations, the study undertaken raises a very important topic that may have an impact not only on the didactics of university students and their professional success but also on the prevention of risky behaviour.

The research undertaken could be a contribution to further research, *e.g.*, on a larger and more diverse population. It could be interesting, *e.g.*, for students of different levels of education and different faculties, to identify these relationships. In this way, it would be possible to diagnose which groups are especially in need of pro-developmental influences.

Limitations

The main limitation, already mentioned in the previous sections, is the small and not sufficiently diverse research sample. For this reason, the present research results cannot be generalised. There is a large predominance of women among the respondents, which may be because more women have recently entered higher education at Polish universities. The fact that the majority of respondents are students of the humanities and social sciences is also a limitation. To be able to successfully generalise the results to the entire population, it would be necessary to reach more representatives of science and technology faculties.

Conclusion

During the research procedure carried out, a series of steps were taken to answer the research problem. The first of these was a factor analysis, and then—the crucial—to prove the correlation between the attributes of positive development as defined by R. Lerner and functioning as a student. It is worth remembering that the precursors of this concept used/use it to explain the intensification of resources inherent in young people. This concept seems interesting also in the population of university students, who—according to the law—are adults, but—according to the assumptions of developmental psychology and neuropsychology—may still demonstrate behaviours typical for adolescents.

It should be emphasised that positive correlations are apparent between the individual attributes of positive development and the components of functioning as a student. Writing about functioning as a student, the authors of this paper understand a set of three components: need for self-development, commitment to academic activities, and avoid-

ance of risky behaviour. It is a view that combines the motivation to improve one's competence and involvement in the academic community as an alternative to engaging in risky behaviour.

Particularly large and strong for the component "need for self-development." This can be justified, from the point of view of Lerner's concept, as individuals who possess the Five Cs attributes tend to prosper (or so-called thriving on the grounds of positive psychology) in various areas of life. Commitment to academic activities correlates to a lesser extent, and the strengths of the correlations are lower. Avoidance of risky behaviour correlates least with the Five Cs attributes; however, it correlates positively with a commitment to academic activities, which demonstrates, in turn, the protective power of active participation in student life. The study, therefore, confirms Lerner's concept on the example of a university student population.

It is also worth emphasising that the previously mentioned factor analysis confirmed the compatibility of the assumed structure of the research tool with the structure resulting from the empirical analysis. It turned out that the research scale proposed by the authors is sufficiently reliable. However, it requires repeated verification in more diverse and numerous groups.

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