Article

Fostering Well-Being and Belonging among International Graduate Students: A Positive Psychology Approach

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ABSTRACT

International students often feel less belonging and well-being due to adapting to new life and culture. Positive psychology has been widely used to enhance individuals' well-being and resilience. Previous research has applied positive psychology interventions in various contexts. However, few studies have explored the possibility of implementing positive psychology interventions to support international students' well-being and belonging. Therefore, this study is designed to help international students in the U.S. develop well-being and a sense of belonging through positive psychology reflection activities. Nine international students completed the surveys, orientation, and 4-week weekly reflection activities, and 8 also completed the optional interviews. The results demonstrated an increase in psychological well-being and the general belongingness score. The participants reported positive attitudes through surveys and interview responses. Future research and implications are suggested.

Keywords: attitude, positive psychology, reflection, sense of belonging, well-being

According to the Institute of International Education (2024), over ten million international students were studying in the U.S. as of 2024. International students bring diversity and economic strength to the host country (Abdullah et al., 2014). However, with the rapid life changes they encounter, international students report challenges across multiple aspects, including language and English proficiency (Clark et al., 2021; Martirosyan et al., 2015; Soruç et al., 2021), a sense of belonging (McKenzie et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022), and cultural barriers (Hofhuis et al., 2024; Lewthwaite, 1996). These challenges are closely linked to and impact international students' mental health and well-being (Hyun et al., 2007).

As awareness of mental health issues in higher education has increased over the years (Eisenberg et al., 2007; Storrie et al., 2010), the need to support international students'

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well-being has also become a critical issue (McKenzie et al., 2023; Minutillo et al., 2020). When international students receive support to overcome daily challenges, they encounter a better learning experience, greater academic achievement, and lower dropout rates (Clough et al., 2019). However, few studies have investigated practical ways for international students to develop a stronger sense of belonging to support their mental health and well-being.

Positive psychology practices can enhance an individual's happiness and optimize their vision of a fulfilling life. Research shows strong evidence that positive psychology interventions, such as mindfulness practices, gratitude letters, and best possible self-activity, increase individual well-being (Allen et al., 2021; Auyeung & Mo, 2019; Carrillo et al., 2019; Sheldon & Yu, 2021). These interventions help individuals experience greater happiness and reduce stress and anxiety.

Although empirical studies have revealed a gap in the implementation of positive interventions with international students in higher education, few studies have explored effective designs to help international students develop a stronger sense of belonging that supports their well-being. This study investigates the impact of weekly positive psychology interventions on international students' well-being and sense of belonging at a midwestern university in the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges for International Students

When experiencing a new lifestyle, environment, and culture, international students face stress and depression and feel highly overwhelmed during their time in the host country. As Kim's (1988) cross-cultural adaptation theory highlights, three facets are essential for intercultural transformation: functional fitness, which refers to the stability of environmental factors such as socioeconomic status; psychological health, encompassing mental health and psychological well-being; and intercultural identity, where individuals develop a sense of connection with diverse cultural backgrounds. The facets also apply to international students: functional fitness relates to institutional or fundamental challenges such as financial and language barriers, psychological health connects to their mental well-being, and intercultural identity pertains to their sense of belonging.

Research indicates that international students face more difficulties with mental health and well-being than domestic students do (Mori, 2000; Luo et al., 2019). For example, additional sources of stress, such as cultural differences and language barriers, are common challenges for international students (Clark et al., 2021; Hofhuis et al., 2024; Lewthwaite, 1996). Other studies have shown that international students often experience greater loneliness and lower self-esteem than their domestic peers do (Jones et al., 2019). Researchers suggest that distress rates among international students may be underreported due to the lower acknowledgment of mental health difficulties and a reduced tendency to seek help compared with domestic students (Clarke, 2023; Clough et al., 2019).

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging, a fundamental human need, involves feeling valued, needed, and compatible with others or within a group (Hagerty et al., 1992). According to Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs, love and belonging must be satisfied to enhance self-esteem, self-recognition, and self-actualization. For students, a sense of belonging arises from various aspects. Ahn and Davis (2020) identified four domains of belongingness: academic, social, surrounding, and personal space. Similarly, Allen et al. (2021) proposed an integrated framework with four components:

1. Competencies of belongingness refer to an individual's ability and skills to experience a sense of belonging.
2. Opportunities to belong address barriers to approaching relationships, such as learning challenges that hinder classroom belonging, leading to seeking connections outside of school and increasing the risk of dropout or criminal behavior.
3. Motivations for belonging include intrinsic drivers to connect with others.
4. Perceptions of belonging are influenced by prior experiences, cognition, and emotions.

A sense of belonging in education can come from classroom connections, academic advisors and instructors, or social settings, such as friends and family (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Antonio & Baek, 2022; Kaul & Renzulli, 2022). Myers et al. (2023) reported that peer support is a significant factor in fostering a sense of belonging, a result echoed by the findings of the research of Harben and Bix (2019), which revealed that peer interaction developed a greater sense of belonging than did interactions solely with instructors. For graduate students, Zhang (2016) reported that negative experiences with advisors and programs often lead to a diminished sense of belonging for international doctoral students.

A sense of belonging is strongly correlated with mental health, happiness, and academic achievement (McKenzie et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Walton & Cohen (2011) reported that introducing challenges of belonging early in international students' college journeys positively affects their academic performance and career development (Brady et al., 2020; Walton & Cohen, 2011). It plays a vital role in international students' mental health and well-being (McKenzie et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Therefore, strengthening their sense of belonging is essential to improving their well-being.

Well-Being and Positive Psychology

Positive psychology, introduced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), is a psychology discipline that focuses on the development of human flourishing and well-being. Through the positive psychology approach, well-being considers various factors in life. For instance, Diener (1984) defines subjective well-being as one's reported life satisfaction and emotions, such as happiness. Ryff and Keyes (1995) identify six factors of psychological well-being—the purpose of life, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and self-acceptance—all of which are critical aspects for personal development. Moreover, the PERMA framework of positive psychology

emphasizes five dimensions: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning in life, and achievement (Seligman, 2011).

Research highlights practices that support well-being, including interventions grounded in positive psychology (Allen et al., 2021; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2018). Reflective exercises such as journalizing thoughts and feelings (Czyżowska & Gurba, 2021) have been shown to promote happiness (Kalamatianos et al., 2023; Ouweneel et al., 2013), develop a growth mindset, and enhance long-term well-being (Fiodorova & Farb, 2022; Rash et al., 2011). The application of positive activities can support students' mental health and help enhance their learning experience. For example, Macaskill and Denovan (2011) introduced positive psychology and individual character strengths to college freshmen and reported that students who experienced the intervention had greater self-efficacy and autonomous learning than did the control group. Additionally, Marais et al. (2018) applied the CARE program, an 8-session positive psychology activity, to French doctoral students, and the results revealed a lower anxiety score among the students.

While most interventions focus on mental health, gratitude, and future-oriented goals, fewer studies have explored reflections centered on relationships and a sense of belonging. Most research that implements positive psychology practices with a belongingness center focuses on implications for younger children in school settings (Allen et al., 2022). Recent research by Abeyta et al. (2024) noted that positive nostalgia reflections have the potential to support first-generation college students' sense of belonging. However, more empirical research is needed to explore the implementation of positive psychology interventions to foster a sense of belonging in higher education.

Enhancing International Students' Well-Being and Sense of Belonging

International students require guidance to mitigate cultural shock, manage expectations, and access resources for adapting to new environments (Kelley, 2022; Marangell & Baik, 2022; Minutillo et al., 2020). Glass et al. (2015) recommend institutional interventions for students with low academic preparedness and financial challenges to develop a sense of belonging. Many studies similarly advocate that universities provide academic and personal support systems for international students (Larcombe et al., 2023; McKenzie et al., 2023; Minutillo et al., 2020). Positive psychology interventions have the potential to increase international students' well-being and sense of belonging. This research aims to implement weekly reflective activities for international students in the United States and assess the effects on their well-being and sense of belonging.

RQ 1: Do international students' sense of well-being and belongingness change after four weeks of reflection activities?

RQ 2: What are international students' attitudes toward and experiences with positive psychology interventions?

METHOD

Research Design and Procedure

We used a mixed methods research design, collecting quantitative and qualitative data through pre- and post-surveys and interviews. Through this convergence design, qualitative data can help support and further explore quantitative data results (Creswell, 1999). The procedure began with an in-person orientation session that briefly introduced well-being and positive psychology activities. The participants completed a survey before the session started and an attitude-to-experience survey after the session. At the end of the fourth reflection activity, the participants were invited to complete a survey to collect their responses concerning their well-being, belongingness, and experience with the activity. The participants were encouraged to sign up for an interview to share more details of their experience with the weekly reflection activity. Incentives were given to participants who completed all the surveys and reflections.

Participants

A total of 14 international graduate students from a midwestern R1 University in the United States were recruited through snowball sampling. Nine students completed all four weeks of reflection activities and pre-and post-survey. Among the 9 participants, 3 were male, 6 were female, 7 were East Asian, one was Southeast Asian, and one was Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, 7 were doctoral students, and 2 were master's students. Among the 9 participants, 8 students volunteered for the interview.

Surveys

The self-reported pre- and post-test surveys included the 18-item 7-point Scale of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) to assess one's psychological well-being state. The scale measures six dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, with elements such as "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world."

The 10-item 5-point Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2013) and the 7-item 7-point General Belonging Scale (Malone et al., 2012) were used to evaluate participants' sense of belonging. The general belonging scale contains questions such as "When I am with other people, I feel included." The need-to-belong scale includes items such as "If other people don't seem to accept me, I don't let it bother me."

Three aspects of subjective well-being were collected via the 8-item 4-point Short-Form of R-UCLA Loneliness Scale (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987) for negative affect, with items such as "People are around me but not with me." The 7-item Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) for positive affect, through 7-point scale items, including "In general, I consider myself not a very happy person (1) or a very happy person (7)"; and the 5-item 7-point Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) for the life satisfaction aspect, for instance, "In most ways my life is close to my ideal."

The participants' attitudes toward the experience were also assessed after each type of activity: once after the orientation session and again after completing the post-test survey to evaluate their experience of the reflection activity, the Attitudinal Learning Inventory, a 15-item 5-point self-report inventory (ALI, Watson et al., 2018), was used. The ALI examines four facets of participants' attitudinal learning responses, affective, cognitive, social, and behavioral learning, through items such as "The experience made me more knowledgeable" and "My behaviors changed as a result of this experience." This could help researchers better understand participants' feelings about each session and connect with the interview results.

The Orientation and Training Workshop

The participants were required to join a mandatory orientation and training workshop online or in person. The workshop started with a short welcome session to introduce the researcher and the experimental process, followed by a discussion of the challenges that international students commonly face. The workshop then introduced well-being and how it relates to our everyday life. Next, the researchers demonstrated the weekly reflection activity and the experimental participation policy so that the participants could better understand the procedure. Additional information about mental health and well-being resources was provided to the students at the end of the session.

Weekly Reflection

The participants were asked to conduct a positive reflection activity for four weeks. The weekly reflection included two components: (1) a scale of positive and negative experiences (Diener et al., 2010) to help participants reflect on their feelings and (2) a written reflection focused on what went well and recalled positive moments with a strong sense of belonging.

The weekly reflection took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and the activity reminders were sent out at the end of each week. This reflection provided insights into participants' well-being state and sense of belonging as the semester progressed. Example reflection instructions and questions are shown below:

> Please recall a specific event or interaction from the past week where you felt a strong sense of belonging, what made this experience stand out to you? What are your thoughts and emotions throughout the event or interaction?

Interview

The participants were invited to volunteer for a 30-minute semistructured interview. The individual interviews were conducted in person or online by the same researcher, who was fluent in both English and Mandarin. The interview questions include five areas, starting with students' motivations for participation, including expectations they had before signing up for the study. Next, the interviewer invited the students to reflect on their experiences and the impact of the activity with questions such as "What did you like the most about the activity? During the four weeks, how did the writing process continue? What kind of differences did you see as weeks went by?". Finally, the interviewer invited

the participants to share their perspectives on future implementations and additional suggestions, with questions such as "Would you recommend this activity to others? What population would you recommend it for? What kind of support or adjustment do you think would be helpful for future implementations?"

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher deidentified and cleaned the data before conducting further data analysis. Owing to the small sample size, the survey data were analyzed via SPSS to perform the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which assesses the pre- and post-differences for each factor. Researchers transcribed and coded the interview data in Dedoose via an inductive approach. The data were collected and analyzed following the Institutional Review Board's approval.

RESULTS

RQ 1: Do International Students' Sense of Well-Being and Belongingness Change After Four Week Reflection Activities?

The following survey results revealed changes in international students' psychological and subjective well-being and their sense of belonging.

Table 1: Results of Psychological Well-Being through the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

	Pre		Post		z	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Autonomy	9.78	2.95	11.22	2.68	-1.19	0.126
Positive relations with others	8.67	3.16	8.56	2.40	-0.42	0.362
Environmental mastery	9.89	3.76	12.78	2.59	-2.52	0.007
Purpose in life	8.67	1.87	9.11	1.69	-0.66	0.275
Self-Acceptance	9.22	4.74	11.22	3.35	-2.20	0.018
Personal growth	5.67	1.80	9.33	1.94	-2.27	0.004
Total score	51.89	14.89	62.22	11.23	-2.67	0.005

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Psychological Well-Being

The scale for psychological well-being consists of 18 items. According to Table 1, the results revealed a significant difference between the overall pre- and post-psychological well-being scores among the participants ($z = -2.67$, $p = 0.005$), in which the post-well-being score ($M = 62.22$, $SD = 11.23$) was greater than the pretest score ($M = 51.89$, $SD = 14.89$). The scale includes six subscales. The results indicate significant improvements in Environmental mastery ($z = -2.52$, $p = 0.007$), Personal growth ($z = -2.67$, $p = 0.004$), and

Self-acceptance (z = -2.20, p = 0.018) in the post-test scores. However, no significant differences were found in positive relationships with others (z = -0.42, p = 0.362), autonomy (z = -1.19, p = 0.126), or purpose in life (z = -0.66, p = 0.275).

Subjective Well-Being

As shown in Table 2, students' subjective well-being was evaluated on the basis of affective aspects (loneliness and happiness) and life satisfaction. No significant differences were observed between the pre- and post-test scores for loneliness (z = -1.26, p = 0.229), happiness (z = 0.17, p = 0.930), or life satisfaction (z = -1.30, p = 0.213).

Table 2: Result of Subjective Well-Being through the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

	Pre		Post		z	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Satisfaction with life	21.36	3.25	23.33	5.87	-1.30	0.213
Loneliness	16.89	6.39	17.89	5.23	-1.26	0.229
Subjective happiness	4.42	1.21	4.42	1.13	0.17	0.930

Note. *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation.

Belongingness

Table 3 presents the results of the general belongingness survey. The participants showed significant improvement in their general belongingness scores (z = -2.00, p = 0.025) following the four-week activity. The post-test score (*M* = 59.89; *SD* = 15.07) was notably higher than the pretest score (*M* = 47.22, *SD* = 2.82). However, no significant change was observed in the students' need-to-belong scores (z = -0.77, p = 0.481).

Table 3: Results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Belongingness

	Pre		Post		z	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Need to belong	30.89	7.18	31.89	5.21	-0.77	0.481
General belongingness	47.22	2.82	59.89	15.07	-2.01	0.025

Note. *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation.

RQ 2: What are International Students' Attitudes toward and Experiences with Positive Psychology Interventions?

To answer the second research question, students' attitudes toward the experience were collected through the ALI and interviews.

Attitudinal Learning Inventory

The researchers collected participants' attitudes toward the two main activities of the experiment via the ALI. As shown in Figure 1, the participants presented high mean scores

for all four dimensions, with the affective learning (AL) aspect being the highest for the orientation session and the cognitive learning (CL) aspect being the highest for the reflection activity. This was followed by social learning (SL), with means of 3.61 and 3.78. The participants reported the behavioral learning (BL) dimension as the lowest for both sessions, with means of 3.22 and 3.00, respectively.
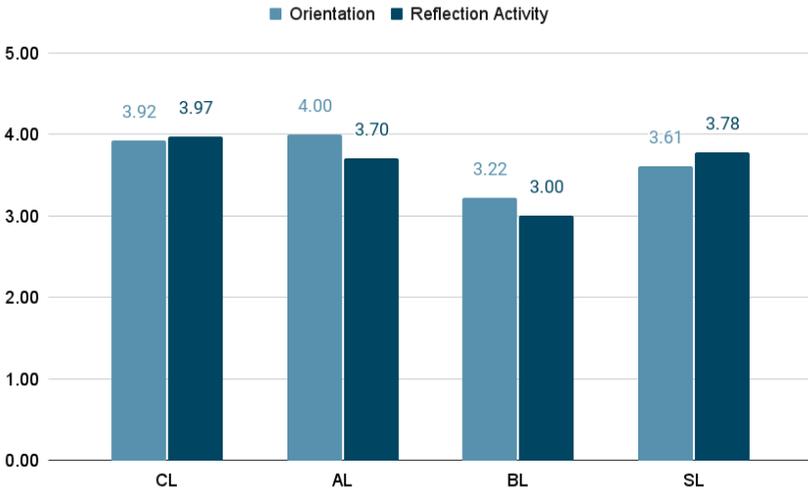

Figure 1: Bar graph of the average ALI dimension scores for each activity

Interview

Overall, seven out of eight participants had a positive attitude toward the experiment and found it helpful in gaining awareness and reflecting on their emotions. One participant had a neutral response but still found it to be beneficial and would recommend it to others. The students reported that reflecting was initially challenging but became easier over time through practice. Student 7 noted, "In the beginning, that was a little hard to like, reflect, and see about belonging and well-being. However, later, it was not as tough, I would say." Other students echoed this sentiment:

> I don't know why I have these emotions. Gradually, week by week from these questions, from this reflect, I gradually started to understand a little. Maybe this one week by one week is a little push. Yeah. And a little… Like… Like a little project or a little aim to me.

The other student mentioned, "At first, I didn't have experience typing notes, or recalling things, but after the first week, I could anticipate the questions and prepare. I think I spent less time after the first week answering them." Three additional themes were identified through the interview response.

Opportunity for Self-Reflection and Self-Discovery. Most students did not have specific expectations when they signed up for the experiment. However, the participants indicated that their primary motivation was the opportunity to practice self-reflection. For

example, Student 2 mentioned, "I want to change my attitude toward life and learning. I want to find some ways to address these issues." Other participants also mentioned:

> I think it was a good chance for me to self-evaluate. I've never had an appropriate reason to ever do this. Because we tell ourselves we need to self-evaluate and then we forget about it. But for this event, you have to record and document weekly. So, I thought it was a pretty good excuse for myself to treat this as a serious issue.

The participants who had experience in journaling or regular reflection exercises noted that this activity was distinct. For example, Student 3 shared, "It's like a way to practice, to keep practicing what I already do sometimes." Student 5 stated:

> I think it is an interesting experience. Because… although I already have some… I have a habit of writing a journal. Like daily. But it is kind of different. If someone else guides me to reflect on some special topic. Then that is different.

The participants had mixed responses regarding growth in their sense of belonging. Three participants stated that not much had changed over the past four weeks. However, others expressed heightened awareness of their surroundings and a newfound sense of belonging. For example, Student 2 said, "For me, it is an emotional relief, and it feels like I've found a sense of belonging." Student 7 shared similar thoughts, reflecting on her appreciation for meaningful moments during the past weeks.

> For a sense of belonging, I think it's about appreciating the people around you, feeling grateful for the chance to be together and accomplish things as a group. It brings a sense of happiness, knowing that such moments exist. Usually, after finishing something, if you don't take a moment to reflect, you might just move on to the next thing and feel lonely all over again. But if you do look back, you realize that over the past week, there were actually meaningful moments worth remembering. Often, those feelings pass quickly if you don't record them.

> **Practice Expressing Feelings.** Most participants found it initially difficult to articulate their emotions: "Sometimes I don't know how to express precisely, and then sometimes I'm not sure if the feeling is related to the question or not" (Student 6). Student 3 echoed this, saying:

> I think it can be challenging. It can be very challenging for people who have not experienced going deep into themselves. Maybe they will answer random things, yeah right, because they are not used to it, and that is why the literature the emotional literacy comes because they don't have the vocabulary to express what they feel. Um, they might even not be conscious of what they are feeling because it can be so many emotions in just one time.

Another participant highlighted the difficulty of emotional expression, even in their native language:

> I think we are not trained to write those emotional things. Yeah, we are trying to write down scientific rationale… it's hard to find the word. Explicitly describing the feeling…Even using [participant's native language], I might not be that good at picking the word (Student 5).

International students mentioned that the activity was particularly helpful for expressing their feelings in English:

> Maybe [the activity] helped me become more conscious about it in English. And being more able to express it also in English. Because, you know, the process can be very personal. And it can be in your own language. But when I have to write it and express it in English, it makes it easier to communicate my emotions in English with people here. So, I will say that the activity helped me to think about it and to express it in English, which is necessary for living here with other people as an international student. (Student 3)

Beneficial to All Students across the Campus. The participants had varying opinions on who might benefit most from such reflection activities. For example, Student 4 suggested that doctoral students could find the activity especially helpful given the repetitive and linear nature of their work:

> I think it's helpful for PhD students especially. Because the PhD student life is unique. It's very linear and uncomplicated. And I do think there's also the factor of, because you're in this repetitive process for such a long time, four or five years, I can see a lot of this being very helpful. If you bring in this aspect of saying, hey, let's be a little bit more self-aware, let's break down your emotions for a week. It becomes very helpful for someone to sit down and think through. It could involve a lot of different emotions for that week.

In contrast, another student suggested that undergraduate students may benefit more than graduate students.

> Graduate students may be more mature and they can deal with a lot of belongingness or loneliness stuff. But for undergrads, they're still learning, still reflecting, and seeing themselves in a different kind of way. So maybe undergrads will benefit.

Finally, several students recommended adopting the activity for international student programs to support their adjustment and well-being. For example, Student 8 mentioned, "I think it'll benefit international students most. They have different lifestyles and might struggle with feeling connected. This could help them reflect and adjust." Student 6 had a similar thought: "Maybe graduate schools or ISS (International Student Services) could modify this activity and use it as a check-in tool for international students. I would highly recommend it."

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to explore the potential of introducing positive psychology practices to support international students' well-being and sense of belonging. The results demonstrated a positive impact on students' psychological well-being. However, compared with the significant differences observed in psychological well-being, no notable changes were found in the subjective well-being factors.

Similar findings were reported by Czyżowska and Gurba (2021), who examined the effects of reflecting on daily stressful events and observed improvements in psychological

well-being but no changes in subjective well-being. This discrepancy might be attributed to the complexity and variability of factors that influence subjective well-being, such as cultural differences, health, relationships, and socioeconomic status (Chen et al., 2013; Diener et al., 2017; Dolan et al., 2008; Jebb et al., 2020). International students represent a diverse population with unique backgrounds and life experiences, which contributes to varied perspectives on well-being.

In terms of the factors related to psychological and subjective well-being, self-development elements such as self-acceptance and personal growth significantly differed. This may be due to the weekly reflection activities that facilitated a self-discovery process. Past research has demonstrated that longitudinal journal activities enhance self-reflection skills (Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Additionally, the environmental mastery factor also showed a notable increase, possibly because the activities encouraged participants to reflect on belonging, thereby fostering awareness of their surroundings. Interestingly, no difference was observed in the "positive relation with others" factor, likely due to individual differences among students and the close link between this factor and subjective well-being factors (Segrin & Taylor, 2007). However, research on the relationships between various well-being factors remains inconsistent (Chen et al., 2013; Diener et al., 2017; Joshanloo, 2019).

No differences were found in the need-to-belong aspect, potentially reflecting the influence of personality traits. However, the significant increase in general belongingness suggests that reflective activities focused on belongingness issues can enhance individuals' sense of belonging. The gratitude component of the activity also encouraged participants to become more aware of their surroundings and emotions. Previous research has indicated that gratitude practices strengthen participants' sense of connection with others (Dennis & Ogden, 2022) and enhance happiness (Kalamatianos et al., 2023). Similar to the environmental mystery factor, the findings align with the participants' interview responses, in which they shared experiences of appreciating positive moments in the past week, which heightened their awareness and gratitude.

Through both interviews and ALI scores, participants expressed an overall positive attitude toward the experience, particularly in its affective and cognitive dimensions. This could be linked to the opportunity to reflect on their emotional journeys and develop written narratives for expressing their thoughts. These findings align with earlier research showing that reflective writing builds trust, increases confidence, and helps individuals articulate their feelings more effectively (Cole et al., 2022; Pais Marden & Herrington, 2022; Travers et al., 2015). Similarly, expressive writing has been shown to help individuals regain control during stress and uncertainty, ultimately supporting well-being (Andersson & Conley, 2008; Booker & Dunsmore, 2017; Ruini & Mortara, 2022).

Moreover, such practices provide international students with opportunities to express their thoughts and emotions in English, a nonnative language. Language barriers are frequently reported as significant challenges for international students (Kuo, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), particularly in written expression (Sasmita & Setyowati, 2021). The reflective writing process required participants to structure and articulate their feelings in English, a task typically undertaken in their native language. This may have contributed to their positive attitudes toward the cognitive learning aspects of the activity. Such opportunities could have broader implications for supporting English language learners in improving their literacy skills.

Overall, our results indicate that reflective activities can enhance international students' well-being and experiences in their host country. The participants suggested that such activities would be suitable for various student populations, including undergraduates, graduate students, and doctoral students. Students facing mental health challenges could also benefit from these practices, as they may provide coping strategies that build resilience against uncertainty. Reflective practice can also be adopted by student success offices to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our research provides evidence that reflective practices support students' psychological well-being and sense of belonging. However, the limited sample size necessitates further research to strengthen these findings. Most participants in this study were Asian, highlighting the need for additional research to account for potential cultural differences and limitations. Our next step involves expanding the study to include a larger and more diverse audience, such as undergraduate international students and students from various cultural backgrounds. Future research should also recruit participants with less interest or motivation for well-being practices or reflection to ensure more rigorous findings and address the needs of students requiring additional support. While our study demonstrated the potential benefits of positive reflective practices in developing students' emotional expression and self-discovery skills, future research should consider integrating such positive psychology interventions into curriculum and instruction designs to provide systematic training. This would create an inclusive learning environment for higher education students from diverse backgrounds and foster students' positive mindsets, which would lead to wellness and success for the students.

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