

Generation Z in Focus: Investigating the Impact of Positive Perception and Personal Growth Initiative on Youth Well-Being

Saumya Sharma and Vandana Nanglu
IIS (deemed to be University), Jaipur, Rajasthan

Generation Z stands out as a new-age learner group, shaped by digital immersion, individualism, and unique socio-cultural experiences. Within this backdrop, Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) has emerged as a key construct in understanding self-directed development and its impact on overall well-being. While existing research suggests that Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) positively influences Psychological Well-Being (PWB), the literature reveals that empirical work integrating Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), Positive Perception (PP), and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among youth remains limited, with no comprehensive synthesis to clarify this relationship. To address these gaps, the present study investigates the mediating effect of PP on the relationship between PGI and PWB among young adults. The data was collected from a sample of university students using standardized psychometric instruments. Pearson's correlation, regression analysis, and mediation analysis were conducted to explore direct and indirect links between the variables. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between PGI and PWB ($r = 0.601, p < 0.01$), PGI and PP ($r = 0.597, p < 0.01$), as well as PP and PWB ($r = 0.717, p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further supported that both PGI ($B = 1.071$) and PP ($B = 1.806$) positively predicted PWB. Mediation analysis indicated that PP partially mediated the relationship between PGI and PWB. The findings not only deepen insights into the role of PGI and its mediating pathways through PP in shaping PWB, but also offer actionable directions for educators, policymakers, and mental health practitioners. By aligning with the vision of NEP-2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), this study marks the importance of fostering personal growth and positive outlooks among youth, thereby promoting holistic growth.

Keywords: Personal Growth Initiative, Positive Perception, Psychological Well-Being, Generation Z

Generations develop distinct cultural identities shaped by the social trends and world events experienced during their formative years. These generational differences often influence college students' beliefs, expectations, and approaches to learning, including how they view the roles of teachers and students. As a result, each generational cohort carries unique characteristics that shape educational dynamics (Hampton & Keys, 2017). Undergraduate populations today are predominantly composed of Generation Z,

encompassing individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (Hampton & Keys, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Compared to earlier cohorts, this generation demonstrates unique values, expectations, and learning preferences (Shatto & Erwin, 2016). Given that Positive Perception and Personal Growth Initiative are integral for navigating challenges and fostering psychological well-being, examining these constructs within Generation Z is crucial. Their developmental context makes them a unique population in understanding how growth-oriented mindsets

and positive outlooks contribute to sustained well-being in academic and personal domains. The college years represent a critical developmental stage filled with both challenges and opportunities for growth. As students transition from adolescence to adulthood (Thomas & Maree, 2021), they face a wide range of pressures across various domains, including academics, career planning, interpersonal relationships, and identity exploration. Navigating these demands requires not only resilience but also an active orientation toward self-development. In this context, Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) emerges as a valuable psychological resource that enables college students to enact positive change and engage in intentional personal growth. Defined as a person's active and intentional involvement in changing and developing as a person, PGI comprises four core components: Readiness for Change, Planfulness, Using Resources, and Intentional Behavior (Robitschek et al., 2012). PGI goes beyond mere willingness, it represents a proactive mindset and behavior pattern that drives individuals to seek self-improvement, adapt constructively to life challenges, and align their actions with long-term developmental goals.

Research consistently supports the strong association between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and indicators of positive mental health and well-being. Beri and Jain (2016) found that higher Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) was positively related to emotional self-efficacy and general well-being among undergraduate students, suggesting that individuals who proactively engage in self-improvement are better equipped to handle emotional challenges. Similarly, Sharma and Rani (2014) reported that mental health significantly predicted Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), indicating that psychologically healthy individuals are more likely to engage in intentional growth-

oriented behaviors. Expanding this relationship, Robitschek and Keyes (2009) integrated Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) into Keyes's model of mental health, demonstrating that PGI served as a parsimonious predictor of flourishing, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Together, these findings suggest that PGI not only enhances individual coping and adaptation but also functions as a critical resource for fostering holistic well-being in emerging adults, particularly in contexts demanding academic, career, relational, and personal development.

Positive perception (PP) refers to the cognitive tendency to view oneself, time, and humankind in an optimistic, hopeful, and constructive light, encompassing a positive view of the self, one's past, present, and future, as well as an affirming belief in human nature (Ickson & Pines, 2013). This mindset, which can be seen both as a personal trait and a situational state, plays a vital role in well-being across the lifespan. Research with older adults as studied by Kotter-Grühn and Smith (2011), has shown that declines in positive future perception, which is characterized by reduced optimism and fewer plans often precede declines in psychological well-being, suggesting a temporal link between outlook and mental health. Research on university students' well-being highlights the central role of positive perception in shaping both emotional stability and social connectedness. A psychosemantic analysis found that students most often associate well-being with emotional qualities—such as calmness, joy, happiness, and stability as well as with the fulfillment of basic and material needs. Complementary findings show that positive perception, which is characterized by self-worth, self-confidence, and optimism, significantly predicts higher social well-being, enabling students to engage more meaningfully in

relationships and to remain resilient in the face of challenges. This indicates that young adults' well-being is not only grounded in emotional balance and security but is also enhanced by constructive, forward-looking perceptions that strengthen both personal and social functioning (Vasileva, Chumakov, & Chumakova, 2024; Temel & Tekin, 2023). Similarly, a grounded-theory study with medical undergraduates found that students who viewed research as personally relevant, autonomy-supportive, and guided by inspiring role models displayed greater motivation to engage, highlighting how optimism and meaning fuel personal and academic growth (Ommering et al., 2020).

Since the government emphasizes the National Education Policy (NEP-2020) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as frameworks for fostering holistic growth, resilience, and well-being among youth, recent scholarship highlights their psychological relevance. NEP-2020's learner-centric, flexible structure, integration of digital education, and alignment with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2023) have been identified as key drivers for enhancing adaptability, resilience, and inclusive growth-oriented learning environments, while also necessitating deliberate strategies to safeguard emotional well-being. Together, these perspectives affirm that policy-driven emphasis on psychological strengths can act as a catalyst for developing Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and fostering Positive Perception (PP) among youth (Kumar et al., 2025; Sony & Gayatri, 2024; Das & Amiruddin, 2023). The present study is significant in this context, as it bridges these policy aspirations with empirical evidence, demonstrating how Positive Perception (PP) mediates the relationship between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB), thereby contributing to both academic discourse and actionable strategies for youth development.

Objectives

- To analyze the relationship between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), Positive Perception (PP) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Generation Z.
- To understand the role of Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), Positive Perception (PP) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Generation Z.
- To assess the indirect effect of Positive Perception (PP) on the relation between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Generation Z.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), Positive Perception (PP) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Generation Z.
- Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and Positive Perception (PP) predict Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Generation Z.
- Positive Perception (PP) mediates the relation between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Generation Z.

Method

Sample

A sample of 200 male and female participants was taken through the Purposive Sampling method. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before collecting data. Emerging adults belong to the Generation Z who fall in the age group between 18-26 years, were college-going and enrolled in Undergraduate and

Postgraduate courses with a basic understanding of the English language, belonging to the upper-middle class with an urban domicile, were selected. Personal Growth Initiative scale- II (Robitschek, 2010), Positive perception (Icekson, 2013) and PERMA Profiler Measure (Butler & Kern, 2016) were used to measure the variables of the study.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and correlation matrix of the variables of the study

	M	SD	PGI	PP	PWB
PGI	63.31	10.57	-	0.597**	0.601**
PP	50.08	7.47	-	-	0.717**
PWB	123.94	18.83	-	-	-

Note p<0.01**

Table 2. Regression analysis for the study variables

Outcome Variables	Significant Predictors	Beta	t value	Significance	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F
PWB	PGI	1.07	10.55	0.000	0.36	0.35	111.45
	PP	1.80	14.43	0.000	0.54	0.51	208.40
PP	PGI	0.42	10.45	0.000	0.357	0.354	109.29

Note p<0.05

Table 3. Mediation estimates of Positive Perception (PP) between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB)

Effect	Estimate	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Direct	0.478	0.105	0.271	0.685
Indirect	0.592	0.108	0.411	0.834
Total	1.070	0.101	0.870	1.270

Discussion

Fostering and sustaining well-being is crucial for today's youth as it directly impacts their academic success, personal fulfillment, and preparation for future challenges (Call et al., 2002). This study aimed to elucidate the relationship between PGI and PWB among Generation Z, with PP serving as a mediator, offering a nuanced understanding of how self-driven growth efforts and a positive outlook enhance psychological health in emerging adults.

According to the findings, PGI shows a significant positive correlation with PWB ($r=0.601$, $p<0.01$). Prior research demonstrates that personal growth is positively correlated

with gratitude, hope, and curiosity constructs that are themselves strongly tied to enhanced well-being (Sharma & Garg, 2016; Bhattacharya & Mehrotra, 2013). The direct pathway analysis also confirms this relation ($R^2=0.361$, $B=1.07$, $F=111.45$, $p<0.05$). Within the Indian psychology framework, well-being is seen as deeply intertwined with self-transformation, where personal growth is not merely about achieving goals but about aligning one's inner potential with one's external life. This perspective suggests that PGI acts as an important factor that allows individuals to cultivate inner strengths, embrace constructive change, and orient themselves toward eudaimonic fulfillment (Menon, Rajaraman, & Kuchibotla, 2018). Interestingly, the findings also indicated that coping styles and strategies (but not coping self-efficacy) were significantly linked to PGI, except for the Using Resources dimension. Specifically, higher Intentional Behavior, combined with lower Readiness for Change and Planfulness, was associated with Positive Reinterpretation and Growth. This suggests that students who actively engage in growth behaviors, even without clearly defined plans

or timing, are more likely to perceive stressful situations as opportunities for development (Weigold et al., 2024).

There was a positive correlation between PGI and PP ($r = 0.597$, $p < 0.01$). The regression analysis further confirms this relation ($R^2 = 0.357$, $B = 0.422$, $F = 109.29$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that PGI is predictive of positive perception of self, time and human nature. Generation Z confronts a host of modern challenges affecting their relationships and well-being, shaped by their hyperconnected digital environment and evolving social norms. This Generation grapples with complex social pressures like social comparison, cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out (FOMO), often leading to anxiety, loneliness, and mental fatigue (Arora et al., 2024). Previous research suggests that PGI not only buffers the negative effects of adversity and alleviates depressive symptoms (Chang et al., 2018) but also fosters a constructive mindset that enables individuals to interpret challenges in a more optimistic manner. By encouraging proactive problem-solving and enhancing adaptive capacity across diverse situations, PGI promotes positive perception, allowing individuals to view difficulties as opportunities for learning and self-improvement (Weigold et al., 2024; Stith and Jiang, 2023)

Additionally, results show that PP and PWB shared a positive relation ($r = 0.717$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further indicated that PP predicts PWB ($R^2 = 0.51$, $B = 1.806$, $F = 208.401$, $p < 0.05$), highlighting that a positive outlook plays a significant role in enhancing psychological health among youth. These findings align with previous research demonstrating that positive perception nurtures adaptive coping, optimism, and meaning-making, thereby fostering both social and psychological well-being (Temel & Tekin, 2023). In a large-scale study with 2,287 Gen Z participants, optimism, perceived health, and happiness were found

to be closely interconnected, with optimism and health together explaining nearly 29% of the variance in happiness—underscoring optimism's critical role in overall well-being. Complementing this, emerging research on young adults and Generation Z highlights the importance of meaning-making, where actively seeking purpose and constructing personal narratives function as developmental processes that enrich life satisfaction and foster adjustment (Woodward, 2019; Zambelli et al., 2024). Research suggests that individuals' perceptions of their future, known as future time perspective, relate to well-being across different life stages. Their study reveals that individuals who perceive the future as open and meaningful tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being. This sense of future orientation enhances life satisfaction, goal-directed behavior, and a positive outlook on one's personal trajectory. Conversely, a limited or pessimistic view of the future correlates with diminished emotional functioning and lower well-being (Coudin and Lima, 2011).

The mediational analysis indicated that PP serves as a significant mediator between PGI and PWB. The bootstrapped confidence interval for the indirect effect (LLCI = 0.411, ULCI = 0.834) did not include zero, confirming a genuine mediation effect. Specifically, PP was found to partially mediate this relationship, suggesting that while PGI directly contributes to PWB, part of its influence operates through fostering a positive outlook. Consistent with these findings, PGI has been associated with fostering PP, alongside higher levels of assertiveness, awareness of intentional growth strategies, an internal locus of control, multidimensional well-being (Shorey et al., 2007). Positive perceptions, in turn, have been shown to contribute directly to PWB. For instance, Brookings and Serratelli (2006) found that optimistic self-views, conceptually

related to PP, were positively associated with subjective well-being, indicating that cultivating a favorable outlook can enhance happiness and life satisfaction. However, they also noted that overly favorable self-perceptions (positive illusions) were negatively related to personal growth, suggesting that while PP may bolster mood and protect self-esteem in the short term, maintaining a balance between optimism and self-reflection is essential for sustained personal development. Taken together, these findings suggest that PGI can promote PWB partly by enhancing PP, but that an optimal level of PP, one that supports both well-being and ongoing growth is most beneficial.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the intricate relationships between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), Positive Perception (PP), and Psychological Well-Being (PWB). PGI, PP, and PWB among youth. The findings highlight that PGI not only directly predicts PWB but also exerts its influence indirectly through PP, suggesting that fostering an optimistic outlook is a key mechanism through which growth-oriented individuals experience enhanced well-being.

Future research may aim to replicate and extend this model by including participants from diverse cultural, academic, and socio-demographic backgrounds to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal studies are particularly important to trace how PGI, PP, and PWB interact and evolve across different developmental stages of Generation Z students. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups could provide richer insights into the lived experiences of young adults, uncovering new antecedents and outcomes of positive perception and well-being that may not emerge through quantitative methods alone. Structured interventions targeting personal growth skills can significantly enhance well-

being, and that growth-oriented mindsets help individuals maintain meaning and purpose even in adverse contexts (Hongell-Ekholm et al., 2024; AD et al., 2023; Arikatt & Mohanan, 2020).

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Saumya Sharma, Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, IIS (deemed to be University), Jaipur, Rajasthan, India e-mail id: saum12yasharma@gmail.com

Vandana Nanglu, Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, IIS (deemed to be University), Jaipur, Rajasthan, India