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## UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC SATISFACTION AMONG GENERATION Z: THE ROLE OF MENTAL WELLBEING AND INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY\*

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**Abstract.** The study focuses on the analysis of factors influencing the satisfaction of Generation Z students with the university environment, particularly in the areas of interpersonal relationships, mental well-being, and the perception of inclusiveness. The aim of the research was to examine how Generation Z students perceive the quality of interpersonal relationships and inclusive conditions at the university, and how these dimensions affect their satisfaction with the academic and support environment. The research sample consisted of 277 respondents from Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín. Based on data from a questionnaire survey and subsequent multiple linear regression analysis, two models were tested. In the first model, a statistically significant impact of the perceived quality of relationships with teachers and the university's care for mental health on students' satisfaction with the accessibility of instructors was demonstrated. In the second model, satisfaction with the support system for students with specific needs was significantly influenced by the perception of equal opportunities, while the subjective importance of inclusion proved to be a less convincing predictor. However, the combination of both variables increases the explanatory power of the model. The findings point to the need to systematically strengthen the interpersonal competencies of teachers, develop programs to support mental well-being, and translate inclusive values into visible measures. Universities that actively support relationships, equality, and mental well-being create more favorable conditions for the academic development of students.

**Keywords:** Generation Z; mental health; interpersonal relationships; inclusion; university environment

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## 1. Introduction

University studies represent a significant developmental phase for young people, which is associated not only with academic demands but also with personal and social development. Generation Z students in particular face specific challenges related to the environment in which they grew up. Digitalization and constant connectivity through technology influence their ability to concentrate, build relationships, and effectively cope with stress (Dwidienawati et al., 2025; Mabungela et al., 2025). Research by Dwidienawati et al. (2025) points out that the well-being of students of this generation is influenced by a combination of internal factors, such as extraversion or resilience, and external factors, such as social support or technological habits. Their findings confirm that social support has a strong positive impact on mental well-being – both directly and indirectly through the strengthening of resilience. In contrast, the impact of technological factors, such as FOMO or excessive screen time, was not statistically confirmed in their research, which indicates the need for further investigation.

In relation to reducing students' psychological burden, mindfulness has proven to be an effective strategy – a technique focused on conscious and non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Alvarado-García et al. (2025) demonstrated in their study that a systematic twelve-week mindfulness program led to a reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression among university students, while also improving sleep quality, perception of social support, and overall life satisfaction. These results support the need to incorporate psychological interventions into the regular university environment as part of preventive and developmental programs for students.

An important element that shapes not only the academic experience but also the overall well-being of students is the quality of interpersonal interactions. The study by Wong and Chapman (2023) analyzed various forms of interactions – formal and informal relationships among students and interactions with the instructors themselves – and found that each of these forms of interaction significantly influences different aspects of study satisfaction. Their research shows that quality relationships in the academic environment can significantly contribute to a better university experience and higher overall student satisfaction with their studies.

From the above, it follows that students' mental well-being and academic satisfaction are the result of the interplay of multiple factors – personality traits, the quality of the social environment, and specific supportive approaches. The purpose of this study is to build on existing knowledge and examine how mindfulness, social support, and the quality of interactions influence the subjective well-being and satisfaction of students in the university environment. The focus is to identify key variables that contribute to creating a positive academic experience for Generation Z students, and thereby support the development of effective intervention approaches in the field of higher education.

## 2. Literature review

Research on the satisfaction of Generation Z students with the academic environment is gaining increasing importance in the context of the growing emphasis on mental health, inclusion, and the quality of relationships within higher education. The starting point is the fact that a significant portion of students enter university already showing symptoms of mental disorders, while only a small fraction of them use the available mental health services (Osborn et al., 2022). This indicates a significant mismatch between needs and the availability of support, which is especially crucial for Generation Z students, who have been profoundly affected by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Shaikh et al., 2023).

The mental health of Generation Z students is also closely related to the use of digital technologies. Research has shown that technology dependency is a significant predictor of depression, anxiety, stress, and sleep disorders (Surat et al., 2021). Similar findings were also presented in a study focused on smartphone addiction among Generation Z university students, which demonstrated that excessive use of mobile devices negatively affects their mental health and the quality of their social life (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). High demands for constant connectivity may contribute to weakened student well-being, which also affects their assessment of the availability and quality of relationships with teachers.

Positive perception of relationships with teachers has repeatedly proven to be a strong predictor of academic engagement, satisfaction, and performance. A systematic review (Prananto et al., 2025) confirms that perceived support from instructors is closely linked to students' motivation and persistence. The meta-analytic approach by Göktaş and Kayu (2023) distinguishes between intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of pedagogical relationships, with the interpersonal dimension (a positive student–instructor relationship) having a moderately strong positive effect on academic performance. These findings are also supported by the research of Liu (2024), which demonstrated that a positive relationship between student and teacher directly increases academic engagement, with this effect being partially mediated by perceived social support and the level of academic pressure.

In a similar vein, Di Lisio et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of the dimensions of a ‘safe haven’ and a ‘secure base’ within attachment theory. These dimensions support not only academic outcomes but also the prevention of early dropout. Quality interpersonal bonds can thus serve as a protective factor against failure and demotivation. These findings are also confirmed by a systematic review of 37 longitudinal studies, which demonstrated that the quality of the teacher–student relationship is strongly linked to academic (dis)engagement, (under)achievement, and early school leaving, with a particularly strong protective effect for vulnerable groups of students - e.g., socially disadvantaged, those with special needs, or with mental health issues (Di Lisio et al., 2025).

Inclusive education and equal opportunities appear as other key aspects of student satisfaction. In the European context, these topics are increasingly perceived as a standard of academic quality (Siri et al., 2022). However, approaches to diversity, as well as support for students with various needs, remain insufficiently addressed at a systemic level, as illustrated by students' own statements about the need for personalized and targeted support (Hitches et al., 2024). Slovak research (Širotová & Michvocíková, 2023) pointed to specific categories of needs identified by students in the areas of personal growth and educational support, which often remain unmet.

The complex interconnection between equality, quality, and the availability of inclusion in the university environment was elaborated by an international team within the B-CAUSE project (Khoo et al., 2024), where it was shown that an inclusive academic environment must be conceived as a whole-institutional process with an emphasis on participation, openness, and plurality. Factors such as teaching style, availability of support, and organizational flexibility have direct implications for the satisfaction of especially marginalized groups of students (Li et al., 2024).

At the same time, it appears that the social support students perceive in the university environment influences their motivation and academic engagement. This mechanism was also demonstrated through a chain mediation model (Chen et al., 2023), which highlights the importance of life satisfaction as a mediating factor between social support and engagement. Similarly, Xin (2022) identified that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) mediated the relationship between social support and engagement, with this effect being more pronounced among students with a higher level of gratitude.

Similarly, feelings of belonging and satisfaction with the university have been shown to be predictors of academic success, especially among students in science-related fields (Kenney & O'Halloran, 2024), where adaptation problems tend to be the most pronounced. Increasing student satisfaction is also a significant pillar for the sustainable development of university campuses (Pedro et al., 2023), which highlights the connection between the ecological and social dimensions of the university environment.

Barriers to accessing mental health care among racially marginalized students have been identified as multilayered and culturally conditioned (Hardy et al., 2025), with evidence showing that systemic discrimination and cultural incompetence play a significant role in the underutilization of support. These findings confirm the need for culturally sensitive interventions and adapted support models.

The importance of inclusive education has been further confirmed by studies that emphasize the need for systematic teacher training and the removal of barriers in the implementation of inclusive measures (Jardinez

& Natividad, 2024; Lister et al., 2022). The ‘Universal Design for Learning’ approach appears to be a practical framework for creating an environment accessible to all.

Gender equality of opportunity remains a challenge, as shown by research in Spain, where many future teachers lack sufficient knowledge of the basic concepts of gender equality (Merma-Molina et al., 2025). Educational innovations in this area can significantly contribute to reducing stereotypes and prejudices already within teacher training.

Equally important is the continuity of support for students from marginalized backgrounds throughout their entire studies – as shown by a 2021 study (Matabane & Matabane, 2021), systematic support leads to better academic outcomes and higher retention. The importance of non-pedagogical factors for student satisfaction is also confirmed by research from Slovenia, which shows that not only the quality of teaching, but also administrative support and the physical environment influence satisfaction with studies (Jereb et al., 2018).

From the perspective of Generation Z psychology, it is important to pay attention to their future expectations and anxieties. Students express uncertainty, concerns about employability, and a tendency to migrate abroad (Dikec et al., 2023), which may influence their motivation and perception of the university environment.

### 3. Methodology

The main objective is to examine how Generation Z students perceive the quality of interpersonal relationships and inclusive conditions at the university, and how these dimensions affect their satisfaction with the academic and support environment.

Two research questions emerged from this objective:

- **Research Question 1:** What factors influence students’ satisfaction with the availability of teachers and interpersonal relationships at the university?
- **Research Question 2:** What factors influence the perception of university support for students with specific needs and minorities?

To answer them, two analytical models were formulated consisting of the following variables and hypotheses:

#### **Model 1 – Satisfaction with the Availability of Teachers**

- **Dependent variable (Y):** Satisfaction with the availability of teachers outside of teaching
- **Independent variables:**
  - **X1:** Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers
  - **X2:** Perception of the university’s care for mental health

#### **Formulated hypotheses:**

- **H1:** Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers positively influences satisfaction with their availability outside of teaching.
- **H2:** Perception of the university’s care for mental health positively influences satisfaction with the availability of teachers.
- **H3:** The combination of perceived interpersonal relationships and mental well-being is a significant predictor of satisfaction with teacher availability.

#### **Model 2 – Perception of University Support for Disadvantaged Students**

- **Dependent variable (Y):** Perception of support for students with specific needs
- **Independent variables:**
  - **X1:** Subjective importance of an inclusive environment
  - **X2:** Perception of equality of opportunity

#### **Formulated hypotheses:**

- **H4:** The importance of inclusion positively influences the evaluation of university support for students with specific needs.

- **H5:** Perception of equality of opportunity positively influences the evaluation of university support for disadvantaged groups.
- **H6:** The combination of perception of inclusion and equality of opportunity is a significant predictor of the perception of university support.

The empirical part of the research was focused on identifying the attitudes of Generation Z students towards selected aspects of the academic environment – specifically on the perception of interpersonal relationships, availability of pedagogical support, mental well-being, inclusion, and equality of opportunity. Data collection took place in December 2024 in the territory of the Slovak Republic, specifically at Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín in Trenčín.

The target group consisted of students from various faculties and study programs belonging to Generation Z. A total of 277 respondents participated in the survey, with the sample being representative in terms of the structure of the university's student population. Data collection was conducted voluntarily and anonymously and was carried out in cooperation with the university, which increased the credibility of the responses.

The questionnaire was created using the Microsoft Forms tool. The questions were formulated in the form of statements, which respondents evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented the statement 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree.' This form of scale made it possible to capture the degree of agreement or disagreement with individual statements and at the same time ensured the quantifiability of responses for the purposes of statistical processing.

Two statistical methods were used to test the hypotheses:

- Correlation analysis, which made it possible to identify the direction and strength of relationships between individual variables.
- Multiple linear regression analysis, through which the predictors of the dependent variables in both models were tested. Statistical testing was conducted at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

Linear regression modeling (LRM) was applied as a suitable tool for the analysis of responses obtained through the Likert scale. The assumptions for the use of linear regression were met – the assumption of normality was verified, linearity was ensured by the positive orientation of the statements, autocorrelation is excluded due to one-time data collection, and multicollinearity was not detected.

The chosen methodological approach made it possible to reveal which psychological and social factors within the academic environment are decisive for the satisfaction of Generation Z students with relationships at the university and with the support system intended for disadvantaged groups.

#### 4. Findings

This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis, the aim of which was to verify the assumed relationships between selected psychological, social, and value variables in the context of higher education. The analysis was carried out using two regression models, each corresponding to one of the research questions. Model 1 focused on identifying predictors of students' satisfaction with the availability of teachers, specifically the influence of interpersonal relationships and care for mental health. Model 2 was oriented towards examining the influence of perceived inclusiveness and equality of opportunity on the evaluation of support provided to students with specific needs. The following text gradually presents the results of descriptive statistics, correlation relationships, and multiple linear regression analysis for each model separately.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the observed variables (model 1)

|                    | X1 | X1         | X2         | Y          |
|--------------------|----|------------|------------|------------|
| Mean               |    | 3,98916968 | 3,27436823 | 3,88086643 |
| Standard Error     |    | 0,08596414 | 0,09114714 | 0,08063317 |
| Standard Deviation |    | 1,43072839 | 1,51699075 | 1,34200341 |
| Kurtosis           |    | -0,2758946 | -1,2275888 | -0,4944717 |
| Skewness           |    | -1,0575273 | -0,234711  | -0,7955876 |

Source: own elaboration

In the sample of 277 respondents, the highest average level of agreement was recorded for the variable ‘Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers’ (X1), where the mean value reached 3.99. This result suggests that students predominantly perceive interpersonal relationships with teachers positively. This is followed by ‘Satisfaction with the availability of teachers’ (Y) with an average of 3.88, indicating a relatively high level of satisfaction with the possibility of communicating with teachers outside of teaching. The lowest average value was recorded for the variable ‘Perception of care for mental health’ (X2), which reached 3.27, indicating some diversity of opinions in this area.

The variance of responses was highest for variable X2 (SD = 1.52), which indicates differing perceptions of the university’s level of care for mental health. In contrast, the most consistent responses appeared for the dependent variable Y (SD = 1.34), which reflects a relative agreement among respondents in evaluating the availability of teachers.

All three variables showed skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range ( $\pm 2$ ), which supports the assumption of approximately normal data distribution.

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis (model 1)

|    | X1         | X2         | Y |
|----|------------|------------|---|
| X1 | 1          |            |   |
| X2 | 0,52889278 | 1          |   |
| Y  | 0,47297152 | 0,36494123 | 1 |

Source: own elaboration

Based on the correlation analysis between the variables, it can be stated that all observed relationships are positive, which means that higher values of one variable are associated with higher values of the other. The strongest relationship appeared between “Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers” (X1) and “Perception of care for mental health” (X2), where the value of Pearson’s correlation coefficient reached  $r = 0.529$ , representing a moderately strong positive correlation. This result suggests that students who positively evaluate the quality of interpersonal relationships with teachers also more frequently perceive that the university cares about their mental well-being.

A similar, slightly weaker relationship was found between X1 and the dependent variable Y, where the coefficient reached  $r = 0.473$ . This indicates that students who perceive high-quality relationships with teachers are also more satisfied with their availability outside of teaching. The weakest, yet still positive and significant correlation was found between X2 and Y, with a value of  $r = 0.365$ , which can be interpreted as a mildly strong positive relationship. This implies that if students perceive the university as an entity that cares about their mental health, their satisfaction with pedagogical support increases accordingly.

Overall, it was shown that all variables are logically and statistically related, which creates a solid basis for testing causal relationships within the regression model.

**Table 3.** Regression analysis (model 1)

| <i>Regression Statistics</i> |                     |                       |               |                |                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Multiple R                   | 0,49193106          |                       |               |                |                       |
| R Square                     | 0,24199617          |                       |               |                |                       |
| Adjusted R Square            | 0,2364633           |                       |               |                |                       |
| Standard Error               | 1,17265046          |                       |               |                |                       |
| Observations                 | 277                 |                       |               |                |                       |
| <i>ANOVA</i>                 |                     |                       |               |                |                       |
|                              | <i>df</i>           | <i>SS</i>             | <i>MS</i>     | <i>F</i>       | <i>Significance F</i> |
| Regression                   | 2                   | 120,2886963           | 60,1443481    | 43,7378734     | 3,27327E-17           |
| Residual                     | 274                 | 376,7798958           | 1,37510911    |                |                       |
| Total                        | 276                 | 497,0685921           |               |                |                       |
|                              | <i>Coefficients</i> | <i>Standard Error</i> | <i>t Stat</i> | <i>P-value</i> |                       |
| Intercept                    | 1,96486039          | 0,21663665            | 9,06984294    | 2,3728E-17     |                       |
| X1                           | 0,36457808          | 0,058131087           | 6,27165424    | 1,3861E-09     |                       |
| X2                           | 0,14098665          | 0,054825514           | 2,57155185    | 0,01065211     |                       |

Source: own elaboration

Based on the results of the multiple linear regression, it can be stated that both independent variables – “Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers” (X1) and “Perception of care for mental health” (X2) – have a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable “Satisfaction with the availability of teachers” (Y). The value of the coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.242$  indicates that the model explains approximately 24.2% of the variability in the dependent variable. In the social sciences, this represents an adequate explanatory power, with practical implications for the university environment.

The ANOVA test confirmed that the model is statistically significant as a whole ( $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the variables X1 and X2 jointly explain changes in students’ satisfaction with pedagogical support.

From the perspective of individual effects, the factor “Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers” had the greatest impact ( $B = 0.3646$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which suggests that the better students evaluate interpersonal relationships at the university, the higher satisfaction they express with the availability of teachers. “Perception of care for mental health” also had a positive and statistically significant impact ( $B = 0.1410$ ;  $p \approx 0.011$ ), although its intensity was weaker.

The resulting regression equation is as follows:

$$Y = 1,9649 + 0,3646 X1 + 0,1410 X2$$

This model shows that social interaction and support for mental well-being are key determinants of students’ satisfaction with the accessibility of their teachers – the more positively these factors are perceived, the higher the satisfaction reported by respondents.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics of the observed variables (model 2)

|                    | X1         | X2         | Y          |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Mean               | 4,53068592 | 4,28519856 | 3,64259928 |
| Standard Error     | 0,05591067 | 0,07503721 | 0,06953152 |
| Standard Deviation | 0,93053898 | 1,24886806 | 1,15723516 |
| Kurtosis           | 2,34725729 | 1,17563057 | -0,6310011 |
| Skewness           | -1,7885604 | -1,5433876 | -0,1743799 |

Source: own elaboration

In the sample of 277 respondents, the highest average level of agreement was recorded for the variable “Subjective importance of an inclusive environment” (X1), with a mean value of 4.53, which indicates a high level of importance that students attribute to inclusion in the academic environment. This is followed by the variable “Perception of equal opportunities” (X2), where the mean reached 4.29, confirming a positive perception of the university’s approaches toward different groups of students. The lowest mean value was observed for the dependent variable – “Perception of support for students with specific needs” (Y), where the mean reached 3.64, which may indicate a certain caution or reservation on the part of respondents when evaluating specific support.

In terms of response variability, the greatest dispersion was recorded for the variable X2 (SD = 1.25), while the most compact responses were for X1 (SD = 0.93). The variable Y lies between them with a value of SD = 1.16, indicating moderate agreement in the perception of this area.

The skewness and kurtosis values of all three variables fall within the acceptable range from -2 to +2, confirming the approximate normality of the data.

**Table 5.** Correlation analysis (model 2)

|    | X1         | X2         | Y |
|----|------------|------------|---|
| X1 | 1          |            |   |
| X2 | 0,14677011 | 1          |   |
| Y  | 0,14648807 | 0,22872445 | 1 |

Source: own elaboration

Based on the correlation analysis between the observed variables, it can be stated that all identified relationships are direct and positive. This means that higher values of one variable are associated with higher values of the other.

The strongest correlation occurred between the variables “Perception of equal opportunities” (X2) and “Perception of support for students with specific needs” (Y), where Pearson’s correlation coefficient reached a value of  $r = 0.229$ . This relationship represents a weak to moderate positive correlation, which suggests that the more positively respondents evaluate equal treatment of students from different backgrounds, the more often they believe that the university provides adequate support for students with specific needs.

Furthermore, a weak positive correlation was found between the variables “Subjective importance of an inclusive environment” (X1) and “Perception of equal opportunities” (X2), with a value of  $r = 0.147$ . The result suggests that respondents who consider inclusion an important part of the university environment also slightly more often evaluate the university as equal and fair toward different student groups.

The third observed relationship – between X1 and Y – also shows a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.146$ ), which points to a connection between how strongly students emphasize the importance of an inclusive approach and how they perceive the level of support provided by the university for students with specific needs.

Overall, it appears that despite the moderate intensity of all correlations, the relationships are logically interconnected and provide a suitable basis for further testing through regression analysis.

**Table 6.** Regression analysis (model 2)

| <i>Regression Statistics</i> |                     |                       |               |                |                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Multiple R                   | 0,25562882          |                       |               |                |                       |
| R Square                     | 0,06534609          |                       |               |                |                       |
| Adjusted R Square            | 0,0585238           |                       |               |                |                       |
| Standard Error               | 1,12286176          |                       |               |                |                       |
| Observations                 | 277                 |                       |               |                |                       |
| <i>ANOVA</i>                 |                     |                       |               |                |                       |
|                              | <i>df</i>           | <i>SS</i>             | <i>MS</i>     | <i>F</i>       | <i>Significance F</i> |
| Regression                   | 2                   | 24,15304895           | 12,0765245    | 9,57832083     | 9,5315E-05            |
| Residual                     | 274                 | 345,4642796           | 1,26081854    |                |                       |
| Total                        | 276                 | 369,6173285           |               |                |                       |
|                              | <i>Coefficients</i> | <i>Standard Error</i> | <i>t Stat</i> | <i>P-value</i> |                       |
| Intercept                    | 2,151403            | 0,383799022           | 5,60554579    | 5,0603E-08     |                       |
| X1                           | 0,14351868          | 0,073428722           | 1,95453052    | 0,0516554      |                       |
| X2                           | 0,1962472           | 0,054712175           | 3,58690186    | 0,00039618     |                       |

Source: own elaboration

The results of the multiple linear regression showed that the model consisting of the variables “Subjective importance of an inclusive environment” (X1) and “Perception of equal opportunities” (X2) is statistically significant as a whole, which means that these factors significantly influence the “Perception of support for students with specific needs” (Y).

The value of the coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.065$  indicates that approximately 6.5% of the variability in the dependent variable is explained by this model. Although this is not a high proportion, considering the nature of social phenomena, the model can be considered relevant.

From the perspective of individual effects, the strongest predictor is the variable X2 – Perception of equal opportunities ( $B = 0.1962$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which confirms that students who perceive the university as egalitarian are more likely to believe in sufficient support for specific groups. The variable X1 – Subjective importance of an inclusive environment showed borderline statistical significance ( $p \approx 0.052$ ), which indicates a potential but less convincing influence on the dependent variable.

The resulting regression equation is as follows:

$$Y = 2,1514 + 0,1435 X1 + 0,1962 X2$$

This result indicates that the concepts of inclusion and equal opportunities are not only value-based but also quantitatively linked to how students evaluate specific university measures concerning the support of vulnerable groups.

Based on statistical analyses, it was possible to verify all proposed hypotheses in the context of two separate models.

#### Evaluation of hypotheses

|    | Hypothesis Formulation                                                                                                                   | Result |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| H1 | Perception of the quality of relationships with teachers positively influences satisfaction with their availability outside of teaching. | C      |
| H2 | Perception of the university's care for mental health positively influences satisfaction with the availability of teachers.              | C      |
| H3 | A combination of positive interpersonal relationships and mental well-being predicts satisfaction with the study environment.            | C      |
| H4 | The importance of inclusion positively influences the evaluation of university support for students with specific needs.                 | R      |
| H5 | Perception of equal opportunities positively influences the evaluation of support for students with specific needs.                      | C      |
| H6 | A combination of the perception of inclusion and equal opportunities is a significant predictor of the perception of university support. | C      |

**Legend:** C – confirmed (the hypothesis was statistically supported) R – rejected (the hypothesis was not statistically supported)

Within Model 1, which focused on factors influencing students' satisfaction with the availability of teachers, all hypotheses were confirmed. It was shown that both the perception of the quality of relationships with teachers and the perception of care for mental health have individually a statistically significant positive impact on student satisfaction. Likewise, their combined effect was confirmed as a significant predictor. These findings confirm that psychological and interpersonal aspects of the university environment play a crucial role in how students evaluate the accessibility and support provided by teachers.

In the case of Model 2, which examined the relationship between the perception of inclusiveness and the perception of support for students with specific needs, the results were more differentiated. Hypothesis H4, which assumed a direct effect of the subjective importance of inclusion, was not confirmed – the statistical significance of this variable was borderline. In contrast, Hypothesis H5, concerning the perception of equal opportunities, was confirmed, highlighting that the specific perception of the university's fair approach plays an important role in the perception of its support for vulnerable groups. Hypothesis H6 was also confirmed, demonstrating that the combination of both factors (inclusion and equal opportunities) significantly predicts the evaluation of university support.

The overall results thus indicate that social justice, equality, and trust in relationships are key factors shaping students' attitudes toward the university environment. The findings also reveal a difference in the strength of the effect between value orientation (such as the importance of inclusion) and the perception of actual behavior (such as equal opportunities), which is important in terms of applying the results to university management practice.

## 5. Discussion

The obtained results offer a comprehensive view of how Generation Z students perceive selected aspects of the academic environment – particularly the quality of interpersonal relationships, the availability of pedagogical support, mental well-being, as well as issues of inclusion and equal opportunities. The aim of the research was to examine how Generation Z students perceive the quality of interpersonal relationships and inclusive conditions at the university, and how these dimensions affect their satisfaction with the academic and support environment.

In connection with the first research question (RQ1: What factors influence students' satisfaction with the availability of teachers and interpersonal relationships at the university?), it was confirmed that students' satisfaction with the availability of teachers is significantly influenced primarily by the quality of relationships with instructors, and this influence is positive. Students who rated these relationships as high-quality also showed a higher level of satisfaction with the availability of pedagogical support outside of teaching. The

variable related to care for mental health also had a significant impact, although its effect was more moderate. These results are in line with existing findings that a positive academic climate and the emotional availability of teachers play a key role in shaping student engagement and overall satisfaction (Prananto et al., 2025; Di Lisio et al., 2025).

The second research question (RQ2: What factors influence the perception of university support for students with specific needs and minorities?) focused on identifying the factors that influence the perception of university support for disadvantaged student groups. Here, it was shown that the dominant predictor is the perception of equal opportunities. Respondents who perceived the university as a fair and egalitarian institution more often reported that the university provides adequate support for students with specific needs. In contrast, the subjective importance of an inclusive environment was not a statistically significant predictor, which suggests that a value-based belief in the importance of inclusion alone may not be sufficient to reflect in the evaluation of actual support measures. This gap between normative attitude and practical experience is also confirmed by research from Khoo et al. (2024) and Hitches et al. (2024), who point out the insufficient translation of inclusive strategies into concrete everyday practice.

In terms of the complexity of the results, it can be stated that in the case of satisfaction with the availability of teachers, the decisive factor is the quality of interpersonal relationships and the overall impression of care from the university. In the case of the perception of support for disadvantaged students, the key role is played by the specific belief in justice and equal opportunities in the academic environment. The comparison of both models suggests that while interpersonal and psychological dimensions are crucial for students' everyday experience, institutional questions of equality have a greater impact on the perception of systemic support. These findings also point to the different nature of the influence of value-based and functional aspects of academic life, where the importance of inclusion as a norm does not always automatically predict a positive evaluation of university policies. Similarly, research from the workplace environment confirms that trust is a key mediating factor between organizational practices and the feeling of satisfaction – which can also be applied to the academic environment, where trust in the fairness and care of the university fundamentally influences the perception of support (Jaškevičiūtė et al., 2021).

From a practical perspective, the research suggests several recommendations that could contribute to increasing student satisfaction and improving the university environment. First and foremost, universities should systematically support the development of interpersonal relationships between students and teachers – not only through formal educational interactions but also by promoting informal communication, supervision, and training focused on the interpersonal competencies of instructors. The quality of these relationships has proven to be a key predictor of satisfaction with pedagogical availability. The importance of supporting interpersonal ties is also confirmed by the research of Zhang et al. (2024), according to which the quality of relationships and psychological capital play an important role in the overall well-being of university students. In addition, care for mental health should be understood as part of institutional culture, not merely as a supplementary service. Preventive programs focused on mental well-being should be accessible, actively promoted, and respectful of the digital preferences of the current generation.

It is equally essential that the declared values of inclusion be transformed into concrete measures that are understandable and visible to students. Universities should transparently communicate the available support mechanisms and regularly monitor the perception of fairness among different groups of students. According to the results, the experience of equal opportunities has a greater impact on the evaluation of university support than the abstract importance students attribute to inclusion. In this context, it would be beneficial to develop individualized forms of assistance for students with diverse needs, in accordance with the principles of universal design for learning. It is also important to ensure continuity of support throughout the entire course of study, including the first years and transitional periods, which tend to be the most psychologically demanding.

In the future, it would be appropriate to consider expanding the research to include additional psychological and organizational variables, such as academic stress, sense of belonging, quality of teaching, or experiences with systemic barriers. At the same time, it would be beneficial to complement the quantitative findings with qualitative accounts from students, which could offer a deeper insight into the subjective interpretations of the

university environment. There is also the possibility of comparisons between multiple institutions or countries, which would allow for testing the universality of the identified relationships and their contextual specificity.

## Conclusions

This study focused on analyzing the factors that influence Generation Z students' satisfaction with the academic and support environment at the university, with particular attention given to interpersonal relationships, mental well-being, and inclusive conditions. Based on two models, it was shown that interpersonal relationships with teachers, the perception of care for mental health, and equal opportunities represent significant predictors of student satisfaction.

The results of Model 1 confirm that students who positively perceive the quality of relationships with teachers and the university's care for their mental health are more satisfied with the availability of instructors. The findings thus support the importance of the emotional availability of teachers and the anchoring of mental well-being as part of university culture. Model 2 showed that while the value of inclusion alone is not a sufficient predictor of satisfaction, the perception of equal opportunities plays a key role in evaluating the specific support provided by the university for students with specific needs. The combination of both factors represents the most significant predictor of support perceived as fair and targeted.

The findings of this study confirm that students' subjective experience is not only a reflection of their individual attitudes but also a result of the quality of interactions and the systemic conditions created by the university. It follows that academic institutions should place emphasis not only on the formal aspects of teaching but also on the social dimension of the university environment – from relationships between instructors and students to structured support mechanisms for various student groups.

For university practice, this implies the need to strengthen training in the interpersonal competencies of teachers, implement sustainable programs focused on students' mental well-being, and ensure transparency and visibility of inclusive measures. From a research perspective, it would be appropriate to expand the analysis to include additional variables, such as feelings of belonging, academic stress, or qualitative accounts from students, which can offer deeper context and interpretation of the quantitative findings. There is also room for comparative studies between different types of universities or within an international framework.

Overall, it can be stated that a university environment that actively supports quality interpersonal relationships, mental well-being, and equal opportunities creates a foundation for more satisfied, engaged, and academically successful student communities.

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