

Ingredients for increasing students' sense of belonging & well-being in vocational and higher education

Research question:

What elements in educational approaches contribute to an increase in sense of belonging and well-being for students in vocational and higher education ?

Study 1 : Stakeholders

33 Stakeholders (teachers, mentors, tutors, well-being officers, student deans, and staff) from 3 institutions (Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Noorderpoort & Leiden University) participated in one of the ten mixed online semi-structured focus group meetings

Study 2 : Students

22 Students participated in one of two fishbowl focus group meetings at each institution. The fishbowl meetings consisted of a group of students (n = 2 to 5) discussing their sense of belonging and well-being during and after the pandemic. Stakeholders (n=16) from the same institution were invited to participate in the fishbowl meetings



Ingredients for increasing students' sense of belonging

Peer to peer

Provide supervision/ mentoring by senior students to increase first year students' sense of belonging



Personal approach

Offer opportunities for teachers to build good relationships with students



Social activities

Organize opportunities for (introduction) activities like class outings and quizzes. Make sure these activities are well communicated



Warm welcome

Make sure students feel welcome at the start and even before the start of the programme



Sticky campus

Provide a space where students feel at home



Interactive teaching

Interactive lessons and collaboration ensure a pleasant learning environment



Skills & awareness

Give students tools to recognize well-being problems and offer workshops to address them



Peer support

Let students share their experiences and support each other in support groups



Ingredients for increasing students' Well-being

Tailor-made trajectories

Enable customized study programmes to feed students' needs



Personnel infrastructure

Invest in an adequate number of staff to enable attention to student well-being



Marketing of support services

Ensure that support services are well communicated and easily accessible



Identification of well-being issues

Teachers who connect with students are more likely to identify issues related to well-being



Teacher development

Provide teachers with tools to recognize well-being problems and know how to address them



Study support

Give students the opportunity to develop the skills needed to study successfully



Communication about curriculum

Make sure all teachers communicate expectations unambiguously



Optimizing schedule

Take students' well-being into account when scheduling, such as travel time and holidays



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Conclusion & discussion

Teachers and students broadly recognize the same ingredients for increasing sense of belonging and well-being. However, across institutions it is shown to be challenging to reach students and have them participate in activities that support their sense of belonging and well-being.



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