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DESIGN OF AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM BASED ON CAROL RYFF'S MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT UNIVERSIDAD METROPOLITANA

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Abstract

The present study aimed to design an intervention program based on Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being, directed at first-year students at Universidad Metropolitana. The research was conducted as a feasibility study, using a documentary and analytical approach, supported by a review of specialized literature and previous experiences applying the model in educational contexts. A total of 10 empirical studies and 4 intervention manuals were analyzed, making it possible to identify effective strategies and best practices adaptable to the university setting. As a result, the program "Start UNIMET: Well-being at Your Beginning" was developed, consisting of six modules designed to strengthen self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth. The feasibility analysis confirmed the technical, economic, organizational, and operational viability of the proposal, ensuring its sustainability. The program constitutes a relevant and innovative alternative to foster university adaptation and the holistic well-being of students.

Keywords: psychological well-being, college students, educational intervention, university adjustment, personal development.

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1. Introduction

Entering higher education is a critical milestone and a phase that places high demands on students' ability to adapt, marked by a profound reorganization in the personal, academic, and social spheres. This transition period is characterized by the inescapable need to adjust to a new organizational and pedagogical context governed by explicit and implicit norms that students must decipher in order to successfully adapt (Figuera et al., 2003). The intense activity and substantial increase in the academic workload from the very first semester—in stark contrast to the previous experience in high school—represent the initial challenge in this adaptation process (Figuera & Torrado, 2012). Thus, the first year of college requires a significantly greater and more complex adjustment effort compared to subsequent years (Renk & Smith, 2007), placing incoming students in a position of institutional vulnerability if adequate support is not available (Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

From a psychosocial perspective, this adjustment becomes critical when students subjectively perceive that the demands of the university environment exceed the personal resources they actually have available (Hobfoll, 1989). This cognitive discrepancy or imbalance often triggers recurring adverse reactions, such as persistent feelings of insecurity, task overload, significant declines in self-esteem, and high levels of anxiety (Cutrona, 1982; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Caught up in this dynamic, many first-year students perceive themselves as unable to adapt effectively to the university teaching-and-learning system (Pérez et al., 2020), which leads to unfavorable consequences: while a considerable percentage chooses to drop out early, others mistakenly attribute the problem to a lack of vocational fit, deciding to change their major hastily (Moran et al., 2016). Consequently, initial experiences during this period are critical for long-term adjustment, as they constitute the first factual assessment of the alignment between the student's prior expectations and the reality of university life (Beaupère et al., 2007; Castaño et al., 2008, as cited in Álvarez et al., 2011).

Traditionally, psychology and academic administration have taken a reactive approach focused on alleviating distress or correcting poor performance. However, the rise of Positive Psychology has driven a paradigm shift centered on the study and promotion of the optimal aspects of the human experience, such as positive emotions, strengths, and institutional factors that facilitate holistic development (Seligman, 2002). In the field of higher education, this approach has demonstrated robust scientific efficacy; empirical evidence indicates that preventive interventions based on positive psychology significantly increase motivation, reduce academic stress and anxiety, promote resilience, and substantially improve students' socio-

emotional adjustment and performance in university settings (Mora et al., 2023; Morales-Dechoudens et al., 2019). However, to structurally counteract variables such as early dropout or low self-esteem (Bravo, 2025; Moya et al., 2023), it is necessary to move beyond purely hedonic happiness and address psychological well-being from a eudaimonic perspective—understood as the continuous process of self-actualization, the development of individual capabilities, and positive human functioning (Díaz et al., 2006).

To operationalize this construct, the Multidimensional Psychological Well-Being Model developed by Carol Ryff (1989) provides a rigorous and multidimensional theoretical framework. This model encompasses six essential and interrelated dimensions that act as protective factors and determinants of student success and retention: self-acceptance (positive self-evaluation), positive relationships with others (mutually supportive bonds), autonomy (independence and personal coherence), mastery of the environment (ability to manage academic and social challenges), life purpose (meaningful goals that provide direction), and personal growth (continuous learning and development of competencies) (Ryff, 1989, 2014). Students with well-developed profiles in these subdimensions not only cope better with stress but also achieve optimal adaptation to college life (Mora et al., 2023). For this reason, the scientific literature strongly suggests that student counseling and support centers stop structuring isolated orientation programs and, instead, integrate the six dimensions of Ryff's model in a coordinated manner into their ongoing support processes (Rodríguez & Berrios, 2012; Smith & Zhang, 2009).

Internationally, various institutions of higher education have successfully adopted this preventive approach. Recent initiatives, such as the Saludablemente+ project in La Rioja, have demonstrated the high effectiveness of group activities and therapies in promoting holistic well-being (Cadena SER, 2025). Similarly, the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico and the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja in Ecuador have implemented positive psychology programs and workshops specifically geared toward incoming students, reporting notable improvements in social cohesion, the ability to cope with academic challenges, and participants' perception of emotional well-being (Universidad Panamericana, 2025; Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, 2025). Furthermore, the Universidad del Rosario in Colombia has established orientation strategies for first-semester students and peer support networks focused on mental health and self-care, thereby strengthening the resilience and sense of belonging within its community (Universidad del Rosario, 2025).

In the Venezuelan context, and specifically at the Universidad Metropolitana (UNIMET) located in Caracas, there is evidence of a solid institutional infrastructure focused on student support. The institution has the Office of Student Development and Well-being (DDBE), a body responsible for directing, planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehensive support programs in the areas of personal development, career counseling, mentoring, and psychological support at both the individual and group levels (Universidad Metropolitana, 2023). However, despite the availability of these clinical and pedagogical resources, to date the institution has not

implemented a comprehensive, preventive program that systematically and simultaneously addresses all dimensions of psychological well-being according to Ryff's model for the specific population of incoming freshmen (Universidad Metropolitana, 2023). This lack of a unified positive psychology strategy limits the ability to offer preventive and structured support that equips students early on with critical coping tools to address the initial demands of college life (Rodríguez & Berrios, 2012).

Taking into account this gap in the curriculum and the urgent need to facilitate the transition from high school to college (Figuera & Torrado, 2012; Forner et al., 2000, as cited in Figuera et al., 2003), the following research question is formulated: How can an intervention program based on Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Model be designed to promote the well-being of incoming students at the Metropolitan University?

To address this question, this study sets the following general objective: To design an intervention program based on Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Model for first-year students at the Metropolitan University. To achieve this goal, the following specific objectives are established: to analyze previous studies of intervention programs based on this model in educational contexts; to identify practical strategies linked to the development of its dimensions; and, finally, to develop specific interventions for the target population.

2. Method

This study was conducted as a feasibility project, with the purpose of structuring an intervention proposal aimed at mitigating adjustment difficulties among first-year students through a literature review and a feasibility study (Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, 2016). The research process involved conducting a systematic content analysis, which included a literature search, data refinement, and a critical review of the existing literature (Reyes-Ruiz and Carmona-Alvarado, 2020). Information sources were obtained from empirical reports, specialized texts, and academic theses indexed on Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science.

Specific eligibility criteria were established for selecting the material: articles published between 2018 and 2025, samples consisting of first-year or young college students, and the inclusion of an instructional design or plan for practical activities. Conversely, studies of a purely theoretical or historical nature were excluded, as were those that omitted the operational phases of their programs. The search queries combined search terms in Spanish and English, such as "Ryff's psychological well-being in college students," "positive psychology interventions in first-year college students," "Ryff psychological well-being," and "positive psychology interventions in university students."

From an initial pool of 3,500 records, the application of filters resulted in the inclusion of 10 scientific articles and the additional support of four specialized manuals on school mental health. A thorough review of these sources facilitated the identification of structural variables,

instructional components, and effectiveness rates of previous models. This systematization of evidence served as the indispensable empirical foundation for designing the functional strategies of the final program, ensuring its alignment with the needs of the incoming freshman class at the Metropolitan University (UNIMET).

3. Results

Based on the review of the selected literature, there was clear consensus regarding the effectiveness of interventions focused on psychological well-being in optimizing indicators of university adjustment. Various authors agree that the implementation of workshops, group activities, and structured sessions leads to significant improvements in the dimensions of self-acceptance, interpersonal relationships, and life purpose (Mora et al., 2023; Valle, 2024; Vergara et al., 2024). These positive effects consistently translate into reduced academic stress, increased subjective well-being, and improved environmental management and decision-making, especially when programs incorporate goal-setting components and psychoeducational approaches (Carranza, 2024; Rodríguez & Berrios, 2012).

Regarding methodological approaches, two main strands were observed in previous studies. On the one hand, certain programs prioritize relational aspects through exercises in " " gratitude, and social support (Barrientos, 2018; Ramírez et al., 2023); on the other hand, approaches oriented toward autonomy and environmental mastery through academic planning were identified (Carranza, 2024; Rodríguez & Berrios, 2012). The findings demonstrate that hybrid interventions—which combine group dynamics with individual reflection and tools such as mindfulness or strength-based approaches—achieve a greater multimodal impact compared to single-factor designs, mitigating emotional distress and fostering personal growth (Mora et al., 2023; Saucedo et al., 2021). For the incoming student population, the evidence suggests that brief, practical programs during the first few months optimize retention and initial social adjustment (Silvera et al., 2020; Vergara et al., 2024).

A detailed synthesis of the reviewed methodological designs, their corresponding dimensions, and the reported results is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Findings					
Reference	Ryff Dimensions Addressed	Reported Results	Relevance to the target population	Strategies and activities suggested or implemented in the study	Strategies and activities taken from intervention guidelines and manuals
Valle (2024)	All dimensions	Significant improvement in self-acceptance, social relationships, and sense of purpose	New college students, especially freshmen	Group workshops, personal reflection exercises, social integration activities	Practical exercises in self-awareness and emotional well-being (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021; Cataluña, 2017)
Mora et al., 2023	Self-acceptance, positive relationships, personal growth	Stress reduction, increased subjective well-being, and academic adjustment	Young college students	Positive psychology programs, personal strengths development, mindfulness sessions	Activities to develop character strengths and gratitude (Niemiec, 2019)
Rodríguez & Berrios, 2012	Autonomy, mastery of the environment	Improved autonomy and management of the academic environment	College students in the process of adjusting to college life	Individual and group counseling sessions, problem-solving techniques	Group dynamics and positive reinforcement for social cohesion (Arguís et al., 2012)
Silvera et al. (2020)	All dimensions	Increased psychological well-being and reduced emotional distress	College students from various majors	Intervention protocols combining workshops and individual follow-up	Practical exercises in well-being and personal development (Catalonia, 2017)
García & Ramos (2022)	Purpose, personal growth	Improved stress management and academic motivation	First-Year College Students in Transition	Coping strategies, goal setting, and self-awareness activities	Activities to Strengthen a Sense of Purpose and Academic Goals (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021)
Ramírez et al., 2023	Self-acceptance, positive relationships	Increased overall and social well-being	College students in various majors	Group activities, social integration exercises, gratitude exercises	Character strengths and gratitude exercises (Niemiec, 2019)
Carranza (2024)	Mastery of the environment, autonomy	Improved academic performance and adaptation to the environment	First-year students at urban universities	Workshops on decision-making and academic planning	Group dynamics and positive reinforcement for social integration (Arguís et al., 2012)

Saucedo et al., 2021	Self-acceptance, purpose, personal growth	Increased psychological well-being and academic satisfaction	College students in special education and physical education	Self-awareness and personal development exercises, individual follow-up	Practical exercises in well-being and self-efficacy (Catalonia, 2017)
Vergara et al., 2024	All dimensions	Increased overall well-being and reduced stress	First-year college students at risk of dropping out	Psychological well-being workshops, individual and group coaching sessions	Practical activities for the holistic development of well-being and strengths (Cataluña, 2017; Niemiec, 2019)
Barrientos (2018)	Positive relationships, mastery of the environment	Improved social skills and adaptation to the academic environment	Health sciences students	Cooperative group activities, conflict resolution strategies	Group dynamics and social integration activities (Arguís et al., 2012; Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021)

Proposed Intervention

Based on the evidence gathered, a psychoeducational support program called Start UNIMET: Well-being at the Start was developed. The program lasts six weeks and consists of weekly 90-minute in-person sessions. In the initial phase, the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (Díaz et al., 2006) is administered to establish the students' baseline profile across each of the dimensions that make up the construct. The scheduled activities and interventions are experiential and reflective in nature, methodologically tailored to the critical demands that characterize the process of transition to higher education. The fundamental purpose of this sequence is to strengthen institutional adaptation mechanisms, optimize academic performance, reinforce the perception of self-efficacy, and increase overall satisfaction rates among first-year students, adopting a flexible approach that recognizes the diversity of individual trajectories and the specific demands of the environment (Arguís et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the program incorporates methodologies grounded in cooperative learning, following the guidelines of Arguís et al. (2012), which encourage shared responsibility, mutual support, and interpersonal cohesion through the collective completion of tasks. This interactive approach helps foster a safe and inclusive classroom environment, alleviating initial isolation and promoting engagement with university life. In line with what is proposed in the specialized literature on effective interventions, the architecture of the proposal aims to enable incoming students to recognize and value their own competencies, identify and validate the psychological resources of their peers, and intentionally apply these tools to set academic goals that are sustainable over time (Ryff, 2014; Smith & Zhang, 2009).

Objective

To strengthen the psychological well-being and university adjustment of incoming students at the Universidad Metropolitana through activities based on the six dimensions of Carol Ryff's model, with the aim of promoting self-acceptance, positive interpersonal relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, life purpose, and personal growth, thereby contributing to their academic retention, sense of belonging, and holistic development.

Population

The program is aimed at incoming undergraduate students at the Universidad Metropolitana, a group composed of late adolescents and young adults of Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Participation is voluntary and organized into heterogeneous groups of 25 students from various majors to foster a diversity of perspectives. The following guidelines have been established for participant selection:

- Inclusion criteria: Students officially enrolled in their first academic term, aged 17 to 22, who express interest, have the necessary time availability, and complete the pre-test assessment.
- Exclusion criteria: Students who have been enrolled at the institution for more than one academic term, or incoming students who show sustained disinterest or fail to complete the initial assessments.

Content and Structure of the Intervention

To ensure the relevance of the intervention and establish a baseline for determining the initial level of incoming students, a pre-test assessment is administered using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, adapted into Spanish by Díaz et al. (2006). The Start UNIMET program is organized in an experiential and participatory manner over six weeks, consisting of one 90-minute weekly session, with participants voluntarily divided into heterogeneous groups of 25 students from various disciplines. Each of the six sessions corresponds independently to one dimension of the model:

- Module 1 (Self-Acceptance): Focuses on reflecting on achievements and potential through guided journaling, creating an academic timeline, and mindfulness practices.
- Module 2 (Positive Relationships): Strengthens social bonds and a sense of belonging through peer mentoring activities and the creation of a support network map.

- Module 3 (Autonomy): Develops self-efficacy and personal management through a values-based decision-making workshop and role-playing exercises for problem-solving.
- Module 4 (Mastering the Environment): Promotes the optimal use of academic resources through time-management workshops and strategies for healthy technology use.
- Module 5 (Life Purpose): Enhances clarity of goals and motivation through reflection on personal meaning and future visualization exercises.
- Module 6 (Personal Growth): Stimulates resilience and adaptability by exploring the comfort zone versus the learning zone and developing interdisciplinary collaborative projects.

At the conclusion of the intervention, the post-test of the Ryff Scale (Díaz et al., 2006) is administered to conduct a comparative analysis and evaluate the program's impact, in line with the psychoeducational impact evaluation designs reported in the literature (Mora et al., 2023; Zubieta & Delfino, 2010).

Table 2. Operational and Analytical Matrix of the Start UNIMET Program

Module / Phase	Associated Dimension	Specific Objective	Key Techniques and Activities	Teaching Resources	Indicators and Expected Outcomes
Initial Phase	Diagnostic Assessment	Establish the baseline psychometric profile of new participants.	Self-administered pre-test of the Ryff Scale (39 items, 4-point Likert scale).	Digital form (Google Forms).	Individual and group diagnostic profile of psychological well-being.
Module 1	Self-Acceptance	Fostering a positive self-perception and recognition of personal strengths.	Guided journaling (individual and in small groups), academic timeline, and guided mindfulness practice.	Reflection question guide, drawing materials, low-stimulation space.	Increased self-confidence and reduced negative self-criticism.
Module 2	Positive Relationships with Others	Fostering the development of healthy interpersonal bonds and institutional support networks.	Group peer mentoring sessions, analytical mapping of support networks, and group dynamics for building collective identity.	Network of mentors from upper-level courses, whiteboards, markers, and a collaborative bulletin board.	Increased perceived social support and reduced isolation during the adjustment period.

Module 3	Autonomy	Fostering independent decision-making and self-management based on values.	Interactive analysis of academic/social dilemmas and role-playing to resolve college conflicts.	Complex case scenarios and axiological justification matrices.	Greater self-confidence, self-efficacy, and negotiation and conflict resolution skills.
Module 4	Mastering the Environment	Strengthening effective management of academic demands and environmental self-regulation.	Classifying pending tasks by urgency/importance quadrants, training in the Pomodoro Technique, and a workshop on healthy digital optimization.	Covey Matrix, timers, web-based tools (Google Calendar, Trello, Notion, Forest).	Academic stress management, reducing procrastination, and setting digital boundaries.
Module 5	Purpose in Life	Facilitate the development of meaningful goals and the articulation of a vision for the future.	Written formulation of a personal short-, medium-, and long-term action plan and a guided “ ” mental visualization technique.	Structured goal-setting guide, reflective visualization script in a low-stimulation environment.	Strengthening of intrinsic motivation and clarity in vocational orientation.
Module 6	Personal Growth	Fostering openness to continuous learning and resilience in the face of academic challenges.	Behavioral classification in a graphical matrix (comfort, learning, panic) and rapid development of interdisciplinary collaborative projects.	Learning zone matrix, cooperative workrooms organized by academic departments.	Proactive openness to change, tolerance for frustration, and academic co-creation.
Final Phase	Post-Intervention Evaluation	Assess the program’s impact on the evaluated construct and gather qualitative feedback.	Post-test re-administration of the Ryff Scale, digital satisfaction survey, and facilitation of a group closing session.	Digital psychometric questionnaire, qualitative feedback guides.	Quantitative impact data (pre-post analysis), satisfaction matrix, and personal wrap-up.

Resources

Implementing the program requires the participation of qualified staff, led by psychologists affiliated with the Office of Student Development and Well-being at the Universidad Metropolitana, who serve as primary facilitators to ensure that activities align with the theoretical framework. This team is supported by interns from the School of Psychology at the same institution and from other universities in Caracas, who are responsible for co-facilitating group dynamics, supervising individual assignments, and recording the progress made in each session. From

a logistical and infrastructure standpoint, the interventions require the allocation of flexible classrooms suitable for cooperative work, equipped with multimedia projection systems, fixed whiteboards, and wireless internet connectivity.

The instructional materials are divided into physical resources—such as notebooks, printed self-analysis guides, markers, and drawing tools for creating the timeline and support maps—and digital resources, which include multimedia presentations, weekly planning templates, and structured visualization scripts. Finally, the primary assessment tool is the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (1989), in the version adapted into Spanish by Díaz et al. (2006). This instrument consists of 39 self-administered items with a 4-point Likert-type response format that assesses the six dimensions of the construct. It is administered online using automated Google forms, optimizing the efficiency of psychometric processing and facilitating the subsequent comparative analysis of the scores obtained.

Feasibility Analysis

The institutional feasibility of implementing Start UNIMET is based on four interrelated strategic dimensions. From a technical perspective, the program has a solid scientific foundation, as it is based on Ryff's model (1989), ensuring psychometric quality through the digitization of the assessment instrument and the competence of management and support staff. Economically, the proposal has a minimal financial impact on the institution, as it leverages the university's existing physical infrastructure, uses low-cost supplies, and optimizes internal human resources, thereby mitigating the need for budget allocations for external contracting and ensuring the project's sustainability.

Furthermore, the program's organizational and operational feasibility is ensured by its modular design, which integrates organically with the quarterly academic calendar and with existing support networks such as the student mentoring system, thereby preventing interference with the regular course load. Likewise, the pre- and post-test evaluation framework provides the intervention with an internal scientific audit mechanism to systematically measure its impact, while the flexibility in session capacity allows for adjusting the number of sections according to enrollment fluctuations in each academic period. In summary, the indicators confirm the program's viability by efficiently combining the availability of institutional resources with a methodological structure that is easily replicable in the long term.

4. Conclusions

This study provided the basis for designing the Start UNIMET program, a psychoeducational intervention protocol structured around Carol Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being Model for incoming students at the Universidad Metropolitana. The theoretical and empirical evidence analyzed demonstrates that the operational approach to the six dimensions of the construct

consistently mitigates academic stress and optimizes the transition processes to higher education. By structuring the sessions around a predominantly experiential and participatory approach, the program goes beyond the mere transmission of theoretical information, promoting a direct transfer of self-management and socio-emotional regulation skills to the student's real-world environment.

Furthermore, analyses of technical, economic, organizational, and operational feasibility confirm the long-term viability and sustainability of the proposal. By integrating the activities with the existing physical infrastructure and operational institutional support networks—such as the mentoring system—the program maximizes the use of internal human resources without incurring additional costs for the institution. In conclusion, Start UNIMET stands as a robust, replicable, and low-cost methodological tool that effectively addresses the adaptive needs of Generation Z, offering a viable alternative for designing university policies aimed at student retention and holistic development from the very beginning of academic life.

5. Recommendations

To optimize the program's implementation and strengthen its methodological rigor, it is a priority to incorporate automated tracking systems and intersession psychometric self-assessments that monitor longitudinal progress across each evaluated dimension. Likewise, permanent channels for qualitative feedback between facilitators and participants should be established, allowing for audits and dynamic adjustments to the content and duration of activities, thereby ensuring that the intervention responds flexibly to the emerging needs of the student body.

From an institutional perspective, it is recommended to formally integrate Start UNIMET into the Metropolitan University's orientation sessions and ongoing psychosocial support strategies, unifying well-being efforts under a preventive and cross-cutting approach. Finally, for the scientific community, it is suggested that this protocol be replicated in larger cohorts and at various institutions of higher education. This external validation will allow for a comparison of the program's effectiveness across different sociocultural contexts, as well as enable an empirical correlation analysis between post-test levels of psychological well-being and critical variables of academic success, such as retention rates, cumulative academic performance, and the development of student resilience.

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