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Social support for students at US universities

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Abstract

Relevance. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the need to assess the effect of social support on the academic success of students from United States universities in comparison with Ukrainian students.

Purpose. In this regard, this study is aimed at organising an experimental survey to assess the impact of social support for students in United States universities, revealing theoretical aspects of social support for United States students and the state of the system under study, describing the impact of social support on future professional achievements of students, identifying performance criteria, their indicators, levels of social support for students, and providing recommendations on methods for implementing social support in universities.

Methodology. The main method of studying this problem is the questionnaire, which allowed comprehensively assessing the impact of social support for students on their academic achievements. This study also used the following research methods: analysis, synthesis, deduction, systematisation, comparison, and analysis of scientific sources.

Results. The paper presents the results of an experimental survey, evaluates the impact of social support for students in United States universities, reveals the theoretical aspects of social support for United States students and the state of the system under study, describes the impact of social support on future professional achievements of students, identifies performance criteria, their indicators, levels of social support for students, and provides recommendations on methods for implementing social support in educational institutions.

Conclusions. The materials of the study are of practical value for sociologists, psychologists, teachers, heads of higher educational institutions, as well as students and teachers.

Keywords: education management; training and development of students; forms and sources of social support; social support; academic achievements.

Introduction

Student training involves consideration of physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects. Their attitudes, habits, and abilities develop throughout their lives, and students experience significant socio-emotional changes during their university studies that contribute to their future growth. It is believed that student learning and development are key to many future outcomes. The relationships, experiences, and environment that a student faces are crucial for effective learning and development [1]. Social support (SS) is one of the most

popular concepts that can play a crucial role in predicting student burnout. Social support is a student's subjective sense that they are being taken care of, they receive help from their parents, teachers, and friends, which includes a sense of belonging to a supportive social environment. Support resources can be emotional (such as parenting), material (such as tutoring), informational (such as advice), or sociable (such as a sense of belonging). In a stressful situation, SS helps people reduce psychological stress (anxiety, burnout) [2]. Social support is characterised by four elements, namely: emotional support, instrumental

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support, information support, and assessment support; and four sources of SS: from friends, family members, teachers, and the team.

Previous studies have shown that SS significantly affects academic engagement [3]. Academic engagement is a positive state of a student when completing tasks and feeling about them are characterised by three factors, namely: energy, dedication, and immersion in the learning process. Academic engagement is conceptually defined as self-reported behaviours (such as taking initiative, helping solve problems, and making decisions at the University), and is a key component of student engagement in learning. Supportive relationships with peers, parents, and teachers improve students' educational experience and promote their participation in learning. Therefore, it is not surprising that the quality of maintaining a meaningful environment in these diverse social contexts really affects student development. From a psychological standpoint, the relationship between academic performance and social support in the form of peer, parent, and teacher support and team engagement is fairly obvious [4].

The management of higher education institutions is increasingly aware that higher education is a service industry, and attaches more and more importance to meeting the expectations and requirements of participating clients, i.e., students. The rapid development of universities and colleges, changing social and demographic trends, globalisation, and the market for competitive advantages encourage management to think about the stability of educational institutions. For the long-term functioning of educational institutions in this competitive and demanding environment, it is very important to satisfy the main interested parties (students). The expectations of students and the requirements of the educational community have changed radically over the past few decades. Previous studies show that satisfied students will be more productive and achieve greater success in future professional life; students who are satisfied with their education are more likely to compete for better jobs [5]. Thus, student satisfaction is related to learning effectiveness and affects current and future quality of life. Modern educational institutions strive to provide students with the best possible learning experience using all available methods to maintain their competitiveness in the educational market.

In this regard, this study is aimed at investigating the impact of social support of students on the quality of education.

Materials and Methods

This study is an experimental, flexible, thematic comparative survey, which involved a sample of students ($N_1 = 522$) from 20 universities in the United States (US), and a sample of students ($N_2 = 257$) from 11 higher educational institutions in Ukraine. The sample of American students is experimental. The sample of Ukrainian students was considered as a control group, because the level of SS in Ukrainian universities is extremely low, the concept of social support at the official level means providing benefits/scholarships, but not psychological support for young people. The data was collected using a questionnaire method in the form of an online survey. An email with a link to the survey was sent

to all students who volunteered to take part. Participants were asked to read the details of the survey and give their consent if they agreed to participate in the study. Only students who agreed to participate were allowed to take part in the survey. The experimental group was asked to rate SS on a scale that included a separate SS score from teachers, family, friends, and fellow students. All participants were asked to provide their GPA (Grade Point Average) in all subjects for the last completed semester. The study calculates the arithmetic mean of the average scores of American students:

$$X = (x_1 + x_2 + \dots + x_{20})/20 = 81.9. \quad (1)$$

Then the arithmetic mean of the average scores of Ukrainian students:

$$Y = (y_1 + y_2 + \dots + y_{11})/11 = 72.9. \quad (2)$$

Arithmetic mean of the average SS score of American students:

$$Z = (z_1 + z_2 + \dots + z_{20})/20 = 7.5. \quad (3)$$

However, since SS is obviously not the only aspect of the impact on the academic performance of American students, its impact is defined as 25% of the total difference between the academic performance of American and Ukrainian students due to the presence of three other factors of learning support:

$$(X - Y) * 25\% = 2.25. \quad (4)$$

Since American students on average rated SS at their universities at 7.5 points out of 10, then its effectiveness will be expressed in absolute points:

$$A * 75\% = 1.7. \quad (5)$$

Next, the impact of SS on the difference between the academic results of American and Ukrainian students will be estimated as a percentage:

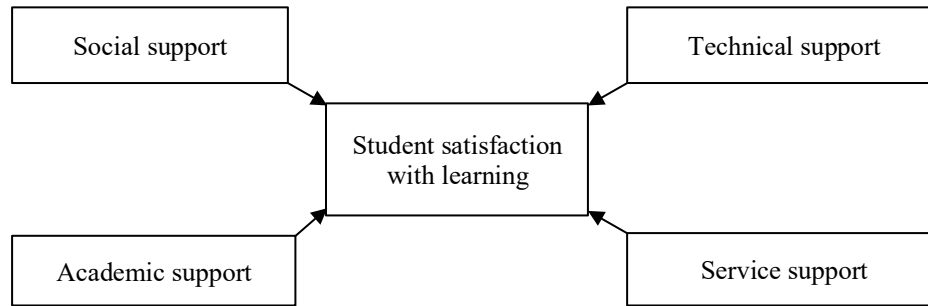
$$1.7 * 100\% / (X - Y) = 18.9\%. \quad (6)$$

This study also used the following research methods: analysis, synthesis, deduction, systematisation, comparison, and analysis of scientific sources. The analysis was used for a more detailed investigation of SS in US universities as a complex system that has a psychological, psycho-emotional, social, and cultural component, and which is aimed at ensuring stable motivation of students and preventing burnout and stress. Using the synthesis, four aspects of social support were identified from the data obtained as a result of the analysis. The deduction was used to investigate SS based on true assumptions that indicate the need for support to maintain people's psychological stability during periods of stress. With the help of deduction, the concepts of objective and subjective support were defined. The systematisation method was used to compile Figure 1. Using the comparison, the difference between the academic results of Ukrainian and American students was revealed. The

analysis of scientific literature helped to form a reasonable opinion about the object of research and make sure that SS has a positive impact on students' achievements.

Results and Discussion

Social support is a component of the student satisfaction with the educational process (Figure 1), which collectively



Components of influencing student satisfaction with educational process

The process of studying at the university is influenced by various factors, which can be divided into internal and external. Internal factors consist of a student's characteristics, attitude to learning, interest in learning, intelligence, motivation to learn, achievement, and self-confidence. At the same time, external factors are characterised by the student's environment (teachers, peers, and parents), the student's curriculum, and learning tools [6]. Social support is a feeling in which people are confident that they are trusted, loved, appreciated, and are members of social interaction. Supportive interaction between people is a defence mechanism against chaos or accidents. In addition, an adequate level of support reduces stress and its symptoms [7]. In addition, SS has a positive effect on people's overall well-being. However, these definitions mostly stem from clinical problems. As for the educational context, SS is a normal manifestation of children, adolescents, and young people in an educational environment that is aimed at facilitating the learning process. For example, SS from various sources helps students adapt to learning difficulties and helps them solve problematic issues. Moreover, social support contributes significantly to reducing student maladaptation. There are four sources of social support in an educational context: support from parents, teachers, classmates, and close friends. There are also four aspects of social support. Detailed descriptions are provided below:

1. Emotional support. Emotional support is defined as the emotional presence of a loved one when needed. Emotional support is demonstrated through various feelings, such as trust, care, compassion, love, acceptance, intimate interaction, etc.

2. Instrumental support. Instrumental support is defined as providing assistance in various forms, such as borrowing money, helping in a difficult situation, spending time together, and providing the necessary materials. If necessary, it also includes practical (physical) assistance and the provision of material assistance, such as training tools.

3. Information support. Information support is defined as providing someone with knowledge or advice. For example, providing valuable advice to solve a problem,

provides the student with motivation to learn (social support), provides their needs for material and technical support of the learning process (technical support), guarantees the provision of up-to-date information (academic support), and provides the student with the means to better process the information provided (service support).

providing information related to the problem, providing advice on more alternatives, etc.

4. Evaluation support. Evaluation support is defined as providing evaluation feedback and providing rewards in a variety of ways, such as verbally affirming, praising, and expressing feedback on progress. This type of support also involves constructive criticism or evaluation suggestions as a method of self-evaluation [8].

Social support is a broad term covering various constructs, but it can be divided into two types: objective and subjective support, including material support and network support (stable social relationships such as marriage, colleagues, friends, etc., and unstable social contacts such as informal groups, etc.), independent of the individual's perception [9]. Thus, emotional support and a sense of respect and understanding from others in public life are closely related to the subjective feelings of the individual. Therefore, SS can be seen as subjective support through various social relationships based on the individual's social network or its objective impact on the individual [10]. In addition to rapid economic development, one of the prerequisites for implementing the practice of social support in US universities was that for decades universities were enriched intellectually, culturally, and educationally by enrolling international students who brought their experience, culture, and knowledge to the educational institutions of the host country [11; 12]. The researchers highlight the valuable perspectives and experiences that international students bring to the intellectual environment, improving innovation and contributing to the development of global perspectives among all students. Universities have also benefited from the economic contribution of international student enrolment. This has been seen in colleges and universities not only in the United States, but also in Canada, Australia, and Western Europe. In the United States, since 1954, universities have increased the number of international students [13], which actively influenced the development of modern social support practice.

Social support for students at US universities takes place with the help of professional psychologists, counselling centres, students have round-the-clock access to a hotline organised by the university; the creation of new

social connections occurs through students' visits to public spaces that are accessible and free, and are located on campus (for example, a recreation room, gym, church); the university leadership encourages the creation of student unions; for those students who study online, unique information materials are created that help in learning,

including open access to all offline resources of the university [14]. Table 1; 2 show the average academic scores of participants in the survey, as well as the results of self-assessment by American students of the quality of SS at their universities and in their environment.

Table 1. Data on American students

No.	Name of the University	Number of students	Arithmetic mean of average scores, GPA	Average assessment of social support
1	New York University	71	84	7.5
2	University of California (San Diego)	62	77	6.9
3	Arizona State University	53	80	7.1
4	University of California (Berkeley)	46	82	7.5
5	University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign)	41	76	7.4
6	Northeastern University	38	76	7.6
7	University of California (Los Angeles)	34	83	7.8
8	Purdue University	31	85	8.0
9	Boston University	26	79	7.3
10	Washington State University	22	79	7.0
11	Columbia University	17	87	7.9
12	University of Texas	17	81	7.5
13	Penn State University	14	87	7.7
14	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	13	85	7.4
15	University of Minnesota	11	80	6.8
16	University of South Carolina	9	78	6.9
17	University of Michigan	8	83	7.5
18	Ohio State University	5	82	7.6
19	Carnegie Mellon University	3	86	8.1
20	Indiana University	1	88	8.1

Note: the average score is converted from the American GPA rating system to one hundred points to facilitate further calculations.

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 2. Data on Ukrainian students

No.	Name of the University	Number of students	Arithmetic mean of average ECTS scores
1	National Aviation University	47	71
2	Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts	42	68
3	Oles Honchar Dnipro National University	41	72
4	Vinnitsia State Pedagogical University	30	75
5	Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture	29	81
6	Kyiv Institute of Business and Technology	23	74
7	Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University	13	73
8	Sumy National Agrarian University	12	67
9	Berdiansk State Pedagogical University	10	69
10	State University of Telecommunications	8	73
11	Interregional Academy of Personnel Management	2	79

Note: ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

Source: compiled by the author.

The average score of American students is 9 points higher than the average score of Ukrainian students. The average score of students from Indiana University (the highest among American universities – 88) is 7 points higher than the average score of representatives of the Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture, which showed the highest score among Ukrainian universities (81). The gap between the least successful average scores is 9 points (76 points each for students of the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) and North-Eastern University and students from Sumy National

Agrarian University). Using the calculations, it was determined that the impact of social support provided an 18.9% difference between the results of American and Ukrainian students. Notably, the study did not consider the difference between curricula in Ukraine and the United States, their complexity, and evaluation criteria for teachers. Thus, a significant impact of SS on students' motivation to study can be assumed. Some theorists believe that SS has a buffer effect in the relationship between stressors (such as academic requirements) and stress (such as student burnout), while others believe that

SS has a direct effect on stress (such as burnout). According to the buffer effect model, SS works when a person is confronted with a stressor that stands between the person and the source of stress. Thus, it protects a person from the negative impact of a stressful factor. On the other hand, the direct impact model states that SS is important regardless of the presence of a stressor. There is evidence that both proposed SS mechanisms are effective, and it is likely that SS has both a buffering and indirect effect.

One of the studies reviewed was aimed at investigating the impact of SS on students' academic performance. A total of 4281 engineering and business students from two polytechnic faculties (P1 and P2) completed an online modified version of the multidimensional perceived SS scale questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 12 elements that measured three groups of factors related to the source of SS (family, friends, and teachers). Cumulative student GPA was used to classify study participants into high-achievement and low/moderate students. The data were analysed using correlation analysis to determine whether SS significantly affected students' academic performance. The results showed that for polytechnic P1, there was a significant positive association between SS factors and students with low/moderate academic performance. For the same group of students, there were also significant positive associations with family and teacher subscales. For polytechnic P2, there was a significant negative association between SS factors and male students with high scores. There was also a significant positive association between the friends subscale and male students with low/moderate academic performance. The results of this study also showed that when gender and SS factors affected students' academic performance, the association was moderate [15; 16].

The results of another study also show that SS can have a positive effect on students with social anxiety. In terms of dialectical behavioural therapy, social support can improve students' ability to feel more comfortable in stressful social situations [17; 18]. The study by A. Poots & T. Cassidy [19] found that academic expectations are the main cause of stress among students. The data show that while these expectations are mostly imposed by parents, they can be imposed by students themselves and can also come from teachers. While education is a global priority and academic stress is a growing issue of global importance, academic expectations continue to rise. In addition, S. Cheng *et al.* [20] found that among all students, those with higher levels of SS scored higher in assessing academic interest, while students with lower levels of SS scored lower levels of academic interest. Previous studies of academic performance among students have shown that people with the evening chronotype are more likely to develop depression, especially among young adults. However, the mechanisms of this relationship remain unknown. Low sleep levels may be a plausible mechanism: students with evening chronotypes do not sleep when their peers are asleep, which can lead to feelings of isolation or low emotional support.

In the study in question, which examined the relationship between chronotype, depression, and social support, data was obtained from 189 students. The chronotype was evaluated on the circadian energy scale and ranged from -2 (definitely morning type) to +2

(definitely evening type). Symptoms of depression were assessed on the scale of the Centre for epidemiological research. SS was evaluated on a multidimensional conscious social support scale that included subscales for family, friends, and significant others. The peer subscale was created using the "Friends" subscale elements. The evening chronotype was associated with higher reported symptoms of depression ($p = 0.018$), lower overall perceived SS ($p = 0.001$), and lower perceived SS provided by family ($p < 0.0001$), friends ($p < 0.0001$), and peers ($p = 0.014$). At the same time, the evening chronotype was associated with symptoms of depression for a higher assessment of perceived SS from significant others. In addition, chronotype-support interactions were observed in relation to depression symptoms; the statistical association between chronotype and depression was only evident in those with low SS from friends and significant others. These findings suggest that a more evening chronotype may be associated with social isolation and reduced opportunities to interact with friends. This may contribute to a long-term circadian association with depression in students. Interventions aimed at expanding university support networks may reduce the impact of depression on students who identify with later sleep chronotypes and schedules [21].

Students are always expected to be able to act as agents of change that can bring change to society. Students are usually expected to be more independent, proactive, responsible, and mature in their thinking and behaviour. Students must not only have academic abilities but also have social skills and be interested in discussion to convey what they have understood [22]. However, in everyday life, there are still many students who prefer to remain silent during seminars, who are too lazy to ask questions, do not express their thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires to others, and do not dare to express disapproval, they find it difficult to accept criticism from others [23]. This leads to the fact that students become passive, withdrawn, they experience fear, and do not feel satisfied in their studies; such students are less able to express their desires and emotions, so they lack support, actions from sources of SS. Assertiveness is the ability of a person to honestly and openly express their opinion, while conveying their emotions and defending their own rights [24; 25]. The development of assertiveness through an increase in SS is a promising area for attracting passive students to study, because showing sincere interest on the part of family, friends, team, and teachers will strengthen the student's confidence in their own importance and, as a result, will give an impetus to overcoming their own fears and insecurities.

The analysed study aimed to determine the contribution of parents' self-esteem and SS collectively to students' academic stability during online learning. The study population consisted of 304 students with a sample of 173 students who were selected using a proportional stratified random sample. The tools used were self-assessment inventory, a parent SS scale, and an academic sustainability scale with a Likert model that met the requirements for reliability and reliability. These studies were analysed using simple regression and multiple regression methods. The findings show that: average self-esteem, SS of parents, and academic stability of students in

learning online are in the middle category; self-esteem contributes 43% of academic stability in learning online; SS of parents contributes 56.8% of academic stability in learning online; self-esteem and SS of parents together contribute 65% of academic stability in learning online [26]. Many countries are urgently switching from conventional education to online education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, many students report negative consequences of such learning. For example, in New Zealand, 39% of students reported difficulty maintaining motivation while studying. This is caused by the unavailability of help from teachers or peers [27; 28]. In addition, students from the United Arab Emirates have been critical of problems with time-wasting efficiency, user safety, low engagement, an uncomfortable environment that reduces concentration during learning, problems with technology, and insufficient support from teachers and fellow students [29]. Teachers and parents of students in Hong Kong also complain of low satisfaction with online learning programmes, as they face difficulties in engaging their children in learning [30; 31].

Socio-psychological support, which arises as a result of interaction in the lives of individuals, has a decisive influence on their behaviour and adaptation. Effective adaptation and development of people is possible due to the strong interaction of family, friends and elements of the social support system of a person. Knowing the sources of SS gives a person different opportunities to overcome difficulties [32; 33]. SS, for example, acts as a psychological defence, increasing a person's endurance in the face of adverse life circumstances. Due to changes in the sources of personal support, the level of SS may decrease and, accordingly, new sources of support may develop. In situations where social relationships are not supportive enough, a person may turn to social media for reasons such as loneliness and the need to share. At this stage, the influence of the level of perception of SS by an individual on the attitude to the use of social networks is of great importance, since poor perception of SS can affect a person's propensity to use social networks. On the other hand, the use of social networks, which allows creating an immeasurable number of communities in virtual environments, is growing rapidly among students and, thus, new forms of relationships are emerging. Widespread use of social media among students can lead to weakened relationships with peers and loneliness. In this context, the social networks that have taken a permanent place in students' lives and the strength of interaction they contain are an important factor that directly or indirectly affects the level of SS of family and peer groups, which are important sources of student support [34-36].

In a highly competitive environment, students need to prepare for career development as early as possible to find a job. Preparation for professional life begins with making decisions about the profession that the student plans to pursue. Later, during their studies, students need the ability to adapt to their chosen profession. In addition, social support is required. The study in question was conducted on students of one of the private universities. The results of testing using the structural equation model showed that there is a significant positive association between the ability to adapt to career, social support, and self-efficacy in career decision-making. It also concluded that SS

partially mediates the relationship between career adaptability and self-efficacy in career decision-making [37; 38].

The concept of SS is multidimensional and can be incorporated into a larger context called social capital, where SS and social networks are part of it. SS and social networks are described in different ways; they can mainly be represented: structurally and functionally; formally and informally. The help of a psychologist can, for example, be a formal support for people who do not have close friends. The structural aspect of SS refers to the existence and size of a social network, and the extent to which a person is connected to that social network, such as the number of social connections (number of relationships) and the characteristics of social exchanges between people (SS activity, frequency of interactions) [39; 40]. Relationships with family, friends, and members of organisations can promote social integration. The functional aspect of SS refers to a person's assessment of SS that they are experiencing, or how much the person is integrated into their social network; that is, the quality or depth of the relationship. In addition, the specific functions that social network participants can perform, such as: emotional (assurances of value, compassion, affection), instrumental (material assistance), and informational (advice, guidance, feedback), are also vital aspects of SS. Thus, social support refers to the cognitive/functional qualitative aspects of human relationships, such as the content and accessibility of relationships with significant others, while social network refers to the quantitative and structural aspects of these relationships.

Conclusions

The study revealed data on the impact of social support on the academic success of students from the United States in comparison with students from Ukraine, which is 18.9%. Interpreting the data obtained, the author came to the conclusion that the general theory of social support corresponds to reality. This is indicated by the experimental survey, which revealed the relationship between the SS scores provided to the student by the university and the environment, and the average academic performance. In addition, after analysing other studies of the effect of social support on students, it can be concluded that it has a positive effect on the psychological state, motivation for knowledge, relationships with the environment, and even on the prospects for future career success. SS guarantees psychological stability, prevents burnout, and reduces stress and anxiety levels. In the course of the study, the factors of development of the culture of social support in US universities were described, which helped in understanding the establishment of the system under study. In addition, this study shed light on the content of social support in US universities; it was found that it is characterised not only by information materials aimed at preventing depression/anxiety/stress, but also involves all areas of students' lives to guarantee them versatile support, making new social contacts, developing in hobbies and education.

Future studies on the topic of social support of students, according to the author, should focus on determining the effectiveness of SS, taking into account the level of stress from studying, the complexity of the curriculum, and the

level of academic expectations. This will help to assess the positive impact of SS more fully and will become a strong argument for the introduction of SS programmes in universities that do not have such programmes. The author sees great prospects in the spread of social support practice in universities, because this will stimulate the improvement of the quality of students' education, which, in turn, will be a big step towards improving the professional knowledge of graduates, increasing the importance of higher education and, in the future, the

economic development of the country by increasing the number of professional specialists in all areas.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Соціальна підтримка студентів в університетах США

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Анотація

Актуальність. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю оцінити вплив соціальної підтримки на академічну успішність студентів американських університетів у порівнянні з українськими студентами.

Мета. У зв'язку з цим метою даного дослідження є організація експериментального дослідження для оцінки впливу соціальної підтримки студентів в університетах США, розкриття теоретичних аспектів соціальної підтримки студентів США та стану досліджуваної системи, опис впливу соціальної підтримки на майбутні професійні досягнення студентів, визначення критеріїв ефективності, їх показників, рівнів соціальної підтримки студентів, а також надання рекомендацій щодо методів реалізації соціальної підтримки в університетах.

Методологія. Основним методом дослідження цієї проблеми є анкетування, яке дозволило комплексно оцінити вплив соціальної підтримки студентів на їхні академічні досягнення. У цьому дослідженні також використовувалися такі методи дослідження: аналіз, синтез, дедукція, систематизація, порівняння, аналіз наукових джерел.

Результати. У статті представлено результати експериментального дослідження, оцінено вплив соціальної підтримки студентів в університетах США, розкрито теоретичні аспекти соціальної підтримки студентів США та стан досліджуваної системи, описано вплив соціальної підтримки на майбутні професійні досягнення студентів, визначено критерії ефективності, їх показники, рівні соціальної підтримки студентів, а також надано рекомендації щодо методів реалізації соціальної підтримки в закладах освіти.

Висновки. Матеріали дослідження мають практичну цінність для соціологів, психологів, педагогів, керівників вищих навчальних закладів, а також студентів і викладачів.

Ключові слова: управління освітою; навчання та розвиток учнів; форми та джерела соціальної підтримки; соціальний супровід; навчальні досягнення.