

Factors influencing students' well-being: A comparative study of mental health, social-emotional learning, and educational contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors influencing student well-being, with a focus on mental health, social-emotional learning (SEL), and educational environments. Using data mining on studies from around the world, the results show that stress from school and the environment are the leading causes of anxiety, depression, and poor mental health outcomes in students. These problems often cause students to skip school, do poorly, and take risky decisions in life like dealing with drugs. Researchers found that school-based mental health programs helped with these issues, making it easy for students, teachers, and staff to get help. Adding SEL programs to the curriculum also helps students get to know themselves better, make friends, and become stronger. The researcher suggests a comprehensive strategy to improve the well-being of students. Supportive learning environment, school-based mental health interventions, and integration of SEL in the curriculum are the elements that would improve the academic and emotional growth of the learners.

Keywords: student well-being, Socio Emotional Learning (SEL), mental health, educational context

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INTRODUCTION

Student well-being is now an essential concern in schools all over the world. Schools are widely recognized to be vital places for supporting students' mental health, social-emotional growth, and overall development. The World Health Organization (2020) says that one in seven teens has a mental health problem, with anxiety and depression being the most common. These issues directly affect learning, social relationships, and long-term life outcomes, highlighting the urgency of addressing student well-being within educational systems.

The educational environment significantly influences students' mental health and well-being. Academic pressures, peer influences, and socioeconomic factors can either facilitate or hinder student development (Suldo et al., 2016). Simultaneously, school-based initiatives such as social-emotional learning (SEL) have been shown to enhance academic performance, foster resilience, and improve interpersonal skills (Durlak et al., 2011). However, differences in how easy it is for students to get to these programs, as well as differences in cultural and educational settings, mean that students feel good in different ways.

In the Philippines, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos Jr. signed the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act. Last December 9, 2024, made student mental health a higher priority. This historic law was meant to increase the availability of plantilla posts for school counselors and improve mental health programs in schools. The new law says that all public and private basic education schools must set up complete mental health programs at school, even for students who are not enrolled. This project aims to treat mental health problems, raise awareness, and make school-based suicide prevention efforts stronger (DepEd, 2024).

Despite an increasing amount of literature and regulations on mental health, SEL, and educational contexts, much research is fragmented and context specific. This paper bridges that gap by using a data mining approach to examine and synthesize findings from several global studies thoroughly. By combining research from several continents and linking it with contemporary policy developments, this study gives a comparative picture of how these factors influence student well-being. The global perspective gained through this method provides valuable insights that can help educators, policymakers, and stakeholders develop culturally responsive, evidence-based policies to serve students in a variety of settings.

Statement of the problem

The study will examine the factors influencing the well-being of students. This research aims to answer the following objectives:

1. Investigates the educational context factors that contribute to the stress, anxiety and depression of students which lead to mental health problems.
2. Analyze the effectiveness of school based mental health programs.
3. Analyze the overall well-being of students towards educational context.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a data mining research design to investigate global perspectives on student well-being within educational settings. The design was selected because it enabled the

systematic extraction, analysis, and synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative findings from studies conducted across different countries and continents. Through data mining, the research was able to identify common trends, patterns, and variations concerning the relationship of mental health, social-emotional learning (SEL), educational contexts, and the overall well-being of students worldwide. This approach provided a comprehensive framework that integrated multiple forms of evidence, ensuring that the findings were both rigorous and reflective of diverse international contexts.

In line with this research design, no direct respondents were involved in the study. Instead, the investigation relied exclusively on secondary data. Participants represented in the data were students from all over the world, as documented in previously conducted studies. Information was obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, large-scale international assessments such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and research reports produced in different regions, including Asia, North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. The inclusion of sources from multiple continents ensured that the findings offered a truly global view of student well-being. Moreover, by utilizing data from both international and local research studies, the investigation was able to capture a comprehensive picture of how students' well-being manifests across different school types and socio-cultural settings.

The instruments utilized in this study were also secondary in nature, having been derived from prior international research. To ensure a balanced and in-depth exploration, both quantitative and qualitative measures were considered. Quantitative instruments included surveys and questionnaires, such as well-being scales, mental health inventories, and assessments of school climate and students' sense of belonging. Standardized tests, such as PISA's measures of resilience and indicators of well-being, were likewise incorporated into the data pool. In addition, qualitative instruments were reviewed to capture more experiential dimensions of well-being. These included interviews and focus group discussions, which explored students' perceptions and feelings about their health and happiness. Observational methods, such as studies on school mood and student interaction in classrooms, also contributed to the analysis. Furthermore, case studies were examined to provide detailed accounts of wellness programs within specific educational contexts. By combining data from these diverse tools, the study was able to address both the measurable and subjective aspects of student well-being across cultural and social backgrounds.

The process of data gathering involved systematically reviewing and consolidating findings from the identified sources. Only published, peer-reviewed, and publicly accessible materials were included in the dataset to maintain both credibility and ethical integrity. As no primary data collection occurred, there was no direct contact with student participants, thereby eliminating risks associated with confidentiality or informed consent. The use of secondary data also meant that ethical issues were minimized, as the study respected the intellectual property of original authors while ensuring that all sources were properly acknowledged.

The analysis of the data followed a comparative and integrative strategy. Findings from different studies were synthesized in order to highlight similarities and differences across countries and regions. Quantitative data were used to identify statistical trends that revealed broader patterns, while qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes and perspectives on student well-being. By comparing and integrating evidence from different instruments and contexts, the study produced a multi-dimensional account of student well-being.

This approach ensured that the results reflected both objective indicators and subjective experiences, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the factors that influence well-being among students globally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Monash University (2022) explains that academic stress is the leading source of stress, anxiety, and depression among university students. It is highly prevalent and can be overwhelming at times. The key to managing it is to understand the need to address each challenge. Anxiety, stress, or dread related to academic situations or assignments is referred to as academic anxiety. This could include tests, homework, subjects (science, math, or reading), peer or parental demands, or just a general apprehension about studying or group projects in the classroom (Ball State University, 2025).

A study conducted in Pakistan by Deng et al. (2022) found that academic and home stress causes depression in students, reducing their performance and learning. In Eritrea, a study found that academic and environmental stresses were shown to be the most significant contributors to students' stress levels (Yikealo et al., 2018). In Bangladesh, the exams, study pressure, and pressure from instructors, tutors, and parents all have a substantial impact on students' mental health. Students who are stressed appear to be more likely to develop negative behaviors such as procrastination, drunkenness, smoking, and drug addiction (Emran et al., 2024). Córdova Olivera et al. (2023) found that undergraduates were more stressed by self-inflicted stress. This indicates that students' self-demands and self-efficacy views cause significant academic stress. High academic stress is linked to poor mental health among students in Bolivia. Additionally, the Navigate360 Editorial Team (2025) explains that academic stress affects students across all age groups and can impact their mental health in different ways, leading to poor performance, which increases anxiety, notably when school culture prioritizes achievement over well-being.

The academic and environmental stress are the common factors that lead to stress, anxiety, and depression of the students across the globe, which often results in poor performance, absenteeism, poor mental health, procrastination, drunkenness, smoking, and worst drug addiction, which is very alarming.

School mental health programs

American Academy of Pediatrics (2024) outlines that school-based mental health refers to methods that help students boost their social/emotional or behavioral adjustment and wellbeing—establishing mental health initiatives benefits both the students and staff members. The benefits of mental health services in schools are apparent. From destigmatizing mental health to boosting academic outcomes and attendance rates, to reducing stress, anxiety, and depression levels in teachers and kids, these programs are critical today (Talkspace, 2025).

In Nigeria, a study conducted by Atilola, O. et al. (2022) highlights that school-based depression-literacy programs have the potential to significantly improve students' and teachers' knowledge, attitude, and confidence. The study's findings in Iran demonstrated that implementing individual counselling and group training in schools enhances mental health. Thus, recognizing student issues, fostering parent-teacher collaboration, and seeking advice from qualified

counsellors can all help to provide workable and efficient solutions in this area (Shahraki-Sanavi et al., 2020). Other findings on the benefits of school mental health programs from combined respondents in Asia, Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe find that in low- and middle-income countries, school-based mental health programs are particularly effective in reducing depression and PTSD among students. Interventions are most effective when they are implemented by trained personnel and are accompanied by parental involvement and follow-up.

Nevertheless, their efficacy in alleviating anxiety and attention disorders is restricted, suggesting that more targeted approaches are required. The study emphasizes the importance of incorporating mental health support into schools, particularly in resource-limited contexts. (Grande et al., 2022). Additionally, in six countries in Europe (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, and Romania), a study utilized PROMEHS (Promoting Mental Health at Schools) a viable universal mental health program that is available to Romanian students at all educational levels revealed that students' prosocial behaviors and social and emotional competencies had improved. In contrast, their internalizing and externalizing behaviors had decreased. In the USA, a study by Wegmann et al. (2017) utilized the School-Based Support (SBS) Program, which statistically significantly increased report card grades for general literacy, reading abilities, writing skills, and kindergarten through second grade (K-2) reading levels.

A finding from the study of Canenguez et al. (2022) indicates that the Skills for Life (SFL) program in Chile effectively enhances student attendance and social relationships by providing school-based mental health support. It has demonstrated adaptability and scalability, as evidenced by its ability to maintain services during the COVID-19 pandemic and reach over 676,000 students by 2021. Lastly, a study by Berger et al. (2022) on a systematic review of the long-term benefits of school mental health and wellbeing interventions for students in Australia shows that specific school-based interventions demonstrated long-term positive effects on students' physical and psychological health and wellbeing.

Having a school-based mental health program in schools is a great initiative to assess the mental and emotional needs of every individual compared to those who do not have this kind of program. It not only helps the students but also the teachers and staff, who are also prone to stress, anxiety, and depression. Having this program will improve the wellbeing and interactions of every individual, helping them see things in a positive light.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Program

The social emotional learning (SEL) is a system that assists students of all ages in better understanding their emotions, experiencing those feelings altogether, and demonstrating empathy for others (National University, 2025). These taught behaviors are then used to assist students in making constructive, responsible decisions, creating frameworks for achieving their goals, and developing positive connections with others. The purpose of SEL is to help individuals become more resilient, compassionate, and socially responsible, as well as to assist them in forming positive connections and reaching their full potential (Incredible Years, n.d.).

According to the study of Sharma & Sharma (2021), Indian students' social skills, empathy, and emotional control have significantly improved, according to a study on Delhi's Happiness Curriculum. There have been reports of improved student involvement and positive classroom

behaviour. Students in Jakarta who participated in a pilot SEL program showed gains in their interpersonal and emotional control. Instructors noticed more student participation and harmony in the classroom. Limited teacher preparation and cultural opposition to unconventional teaching approaches were obstacles, nevertheless. In China, a study conducted by Jin et al. (2025) found that SEL can improve students' academic performance and psychological resilience when it is incorporated into the curriculum. It emphasizes how extensive SEL programs must be incorporated into Chinese educational changes. Pham (2024) discusses that executive skills like attention control and perseverance are improved by social-emotional learning, which leads to measurable gains in academic performance.

Furthermore, by reducing anxiety, increasing empathy, and bolstering resilience, SEL supports emotional well-being. National University (2022) reports that in the USA, the SEL initiatives improved attendance and grades by 11 percent. Personal skills gained in a SEL program help students cope with emotional stress, solve challenges, and avoid peer pressure to engage in undesirable behavior. In Colombia, a study assesses the implementation of the 'Think Equal' SEL programme, a country recovering from a protracted conflict. It reveals the beneficial effects of SEL programmes on children's emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills, which contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion in post-conflict settings (Poverty Action Lab, 2021).

A global study on a systematic literature review of universal and targeted programs in Pre-K to grade 12 SEL programs may have an impact on students' cortisol levels, cardiovascular reactivity, and brain function, which may be connected to an underlying decrease in stress. In terms of understanding the relationships between physical health, well-being, and social-emotional health, it provides an initial step (Blewitt et al., 2024). In California, research findings by Lindsay (2013) reveal that established SEL programmes repeatedly found that student behaviour and learning improved overall. Furthermore, incorporating daily mindfulness sessions - a prominent component of SEL - into high school regularly reduces aggression and rates of truancy while increasing student relationships, focus, and academic achievement.

Integrating socio-emotional learning (SEL) programs in the curriculum is a good idea to help students assess their emotional needs and regain their sense of self by knowing their full potential and improving their relationships with their teachers, playmates, classmates, parents, and other individuals they interact with.

Students' overall well-being

Well-being is defined as the quality of people's lives and standard of living, and it is a multidimensional concept that includes both objective, material components and subjective, psychological aspects (OECD, n.d).

According to Al-Halwachi (2023) in Bahrain, a friendly and inclusive school culture helps students' wellness. A safe atmosphere, strong staff-student interactions, and a sense of community among all school members are needed. Students succeed intellectually and psychologically when they feel appreciated, respected, and supported. The OECD (2025) conducted a study that demonstrated the most effective predictors of students' satisfaction with life were their relationship with their parents or guardians, their school life, their health, the possessions they possessed, and their appearance, after accounting for student and school characteristics from the PISA 2018 Results (Volume III) in a variety of countries worldwide. A global study from the PISA results in

the 2015 report underscores the substantial impact of school environments on the overall well-being of adolescents, including life satisfaction, anxiety, bullying, motivation, and perceived impartiality from teachers. Better academic and social outcomes are associated with positive well-being (OECD, 2017).

Having a positive well-being for both students and teachers is essential; a better mind leads to better understanding. No matter what problems may come, every individual would be able to overcome them if they felt accepted, belonged, were appreciated, respected, and supported by many. All these would lead someone to a better version of themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of academic and environmental pressures in shaping students' mental health and overall well-being. Findings reveal that these pressures substantially heighten levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, often resulting in negative outcomes such as poor academic performance, absenteeism, and maladaptive coping behaviors. Recognizing that well-being extends beyond academic achievement, the study emphasizes that compromised mental health can permeate all areas of students' lives, underscoring the urgency of prioritizing psychological wellness within the educational system.

The synthesis of evidence further demonstrates that social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a significant buffer against the challenges posed by stress and academic demands. When integrated into the curriculum, SEL programs cultivate self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, enabling students to better manage personal struggles and build healthy relationships. Such programs not only strengthen resilience but also encourage positive interpersonal dynamics within the school community. By fostering these skills, SEL contributes to both academic success and long-term life satisfaction, positioning it as an essential component of holistic education.

School-based mental health initiatives likewise play a pivotal role in improving student outcomes. Interventions that provide accessible counseling services, peer support mechanisms, and awareness campaigns create an inclusive environment where mental health concerns are addressed proactively rather than reactively. Evidence suggests that schools that embed structured mental health programs experience improvements in student attendance, academic performance, and overall school climate. These initiatives also extend benefits to teachers and staff, helping to reduce stress and build supportive professional relationships that positively influence the wider learning environment.

Taken together, the findings affirm that student well-being should not be regarded as an auxiliary concern but as a central pillar of educational success. Schools that implement holistic approaches—combining supportive learning environments, comprehensive mental health programs, and SEL integration—nurture communities in which all individuals feel valued, respected, and empowered. Such environments not only protect against the risks of stress and poor mental health but also enhance academic achievement, social relationships, and personal growth. Ultimately, this study concludes that promoting student well-being is both an educational responsibility and a social imperative, ensuring that learners develop the resilience, confidence, and support needed to thrive in school and beyond.

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