



## **Integrating Mental Health Education into School Curricula: Impacts on Student Well-being and Academic Performance**

Arfa Akram (Corresponding Author)

Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan. Email: arfaakram75@gmail.com

Awais Ur Rahman

Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan. Email: sultanawais4344@gmail.com

Rubia Batool

Psychology Lecturer at Capital University of Science and Technology, Pakistan.

Email: rubiabatoolrubia@gmail.com

Tanveer Alam

University of Peshawar, Pakistan. Email: tanviworker@gmail.com

Sami Ullah

Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan.

Sniya Siddique

University of Haripur, Pakistan.

Sundas Sattar

University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal Pakistan.

### **Abstract**

This study examined the impact of mental health education on students well-being and academic performance through qualitative research involving 100 participants, including 60 high school students and 40 teachers from five different schools. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, focusing on the perceived effects of mental health education programs. The findings revealed that mental health education significantly improved students emotional regulation, reduced stress and anxiety, and fostered better peer relationships, which in turn enhanced academic engagement and performance. Teachers observed notable behavioral changes, leading to a more positive classroom environment. This research underscores the importance of integrating mental health education into school curricula to promote emotional resilience and academic success among students.

Keywords: Mental Health Education, Student Well-Being, Academic Performance

### **Introduction**



**Background of the Study:** Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being, yet it is often overlooked in educational settings. Globally, the prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents and young adults has been rising, making it a growing public health concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental health disorders, with half of all mental health conditions starting by the age of 14 (WHO, 2021). Despite the increasing prevalence, many educational systems focus primarily on academic achievement, neglecting the mental health needs of students. This oversight can have detrimental effects, as research has consistently shown a strong link between mental health and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011).

Integrating mental health education into school curricula is gaining attention as a potential solution to this issue. Mental health education aims to increase awareness, reduce stigma, and provide students with the tools to manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges (Kutcher, Wei, & Coniglio, 2016). Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of mental health programs in schools, particularly those that adopt a whole-school approach. These programs not only improve students' mental health but also enhance their social and emotional skills, which are crucial for academic success (Weare & Nind, 2011).

## Problem Statement

Despite the recognition of the importance of mental health education, many schools, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, have not yet adopted comprehensive mental health curricula. In many cases, educators and administrators lack the necessary resources, training, or support to implement such programs effectively. As a result, students continue to struggle with untreated mental health issues, which can lead to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and even higher dropout rates (Fazel et al., 2014).

In countries like the United States, mental health education has been mandated in some states, yet the quality and scope of these programs vary widely. Research suggests that while some programs have been successful, others have failed due to inadequate implementation or insufficient resources (Jones et al., 2018). This inconsistency highlights the need for a standardized approach to mental health education that is adaptable to diverse educational contexts.

## Research Objectives

- 1) Examine the relationship between mental health education and students' mental health outcomes.
- 2) Investigate the effects of mental health education on academic performance.
- 3) Identify the challenges and barriers schools face in implementing mental health programs.
- 4) Provide recommendations for developing a standardized mental health curriculum for schools.

## Literature Review



## **Mental Health Education**

**Concepts and Definitions:** Mental health education involves teaching students about mental health, emotional regulation, coping strategies, and reducing stigma associated with mental illness. It aims to promote students' mental well-being by increasing awareness, building resilience, and providing resources for help-seeking behaviors (Kutcher, Wei, & Coniglio, 2016). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), mental health education is essential in developing students' social-emotional competencies, which are crucial for success in both academic and non-academic aspects of life (APA, 2020). Research highlights that mental health literacy is a key component of mental health education, as it enables students to recognize symptoms of mental health disorders in themselves and others, understand the importance of early intervention, and seek appropriate treatment (Jorm, 2012). Studies show that improved mental health literacy is linked to reduced stigma and increased help-seeking behaviors among young people (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010).

## **Prevalence of Mental Health Issues Among Students**

Mental health problems among children and adolescents have been identified as a significant public health issue globally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders, and these issues often go untreated due to stigma and lack of resources (WHO, 2021). Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are the most common conditions, which can severely affect students' educational outcomes and quality of life (Polanczyk, Salum, Sugaya, Caye, & Rohde, 2015). Several studies have demonstrated that untreated mental health conditions can lead to long-term negative outcomes, including school dropout, lower academic achievement, substance abuse, and increased risk of suicide (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). For example, Kessler et al. (2005) found that mental disorders that emerge during childhood or adolescence are associated with significant functional impairment across the lifespan, highlighting the need for early intervention through educational programs (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas, & Walters, 2005; Wang, et al., 2007).

## **The Role of Schools in Promoting Mental Health**

Schools are uniquely positioned to promote mental health, as they provide an environment where students spend a significant amount of their time. Mental health programs in schools can identify and address mental health issues early, preventing more serious problems from developing. Schools can also provide a supportive environment where students can learn coping mechanisms and social-emotional skills that contribute to their overall well-being (Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan, & Ford, 2014). According to Weare and Nind (2011), the most effective school-based mental health interventions are those that adopt a whole-school approach, integrating mental health promotion into the school's ethos, policies, and practices. This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a positive school climate, training teachers and staff to recognize



signs of mental distress, and involving parents and communities in supporting student well-being.

## **Impact of Mental Health Education on Academic Performance**

There is substantial evidence suggesting that mental health and academic performance are closely linked. Students with good mental health are more likely to attend school regularly, participate actively in class, and perform better academically (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Conversely, students experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety or depression are more likely to struggle academically due to difficulty concentrating, absenteeism, and lower motivation (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). A meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) demonstrated that school-based mental health programs not only improve students' social and emotional skills but also lead to significant improvements in academic achievement. Similarly, a study by Suldo, Thalji-Raitano, Kiefer, and Ferron (2016) found that students who participated in mental health interventions had higher academic performance and reported better well-being compared to their peers who did not receive such support.

## **Challenges in Implementing Mental Health Education**

Despite the proven benefits, there are several challenges to implementing mental health education in schools. One of the primary barriers is the lack of trained staff to deliver mental health programs. Many teachers and school administrators feel unequipped to address students' mental health needs due to inadequate training in this area (Reinke et al., 2011). Additionally, there are often financial constraints, with limited funding allocated to mental health services in schools, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Cultural factors can also play a significant role in the implementation of mental health education. In some cultures, mental health issues are highly stigmatized, and parents may be reluctant to allow their children to participate in programs that address mental health (Kutcher et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is often a lack of consensus on the best approach to integrate mental health education into the curriculum, with some schools favoring a stand-alone course while others prefer to embed it across various subjects (Weare & Nind, 2011).

## **Theoretical Frameworks for Mental Health Education**

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to guide the implementation of mental health education in schools. One of the most widely used models is the social-emotional learning (SEL) framework, which emphasizes the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). SEL programs have been shown to improve students' mental health, behavior, and academic performance (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Another relevant framework is the public health model, which focuses on a tiered approach to mental health interventions, ranging from universal programs that target all students to



more intensive interventions for those with significant mental health needs (Weist, 1997). This model emphasizes the importance of early identification and prevention and has been successfully implemented in several countries (Fazel et al., 2014).

## Methods

Our research employed a qualitative approach to explore the impact of mental health education on students well-being and academic performance. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a total of 100 participants, including 60 high school students and 40 teachers from five different schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic background. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. The data analysis was facilitated using qualitative analysis software, NVivo, which helped organize, code, and analyze the interview transcripts for thematic patterns. Microsoft Excel was also utilized to manage participant data and track demographic information. The qualitative data gathered provided rich insights into how mental health education programs influence both the emotional and academic outcomes of students.

## Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the impact of mental health education on students well-being and academic performance, based on the data collected from 100 participants. The results are divided into two main sections: (1) Impact on Students Well-Being, and (2) Impact on Academic Performance. These results are supported by qualitative themes emerging from the interviews and focus group discussions.

**Impact on Students Well-Being:** The introduction of mental health education in schools had a notably positive impact on students emotional well-being. Most participants reported improved emotional regulation, a better understanding of their mental health, and increased self-awareness. Table 1 shows a summary of the positive effects reported by students and teachers.

Table 1: Positive Impact of Mental Health Education on Students Well-Being

Theme	Number of Participants Reporting	Percentage
Improved emotional regulation	65	65%
Increase self-awareness	60	60%
Reduced stress and anxiety	55	55%
Enhanced peer relationships	52	52%





From the qualitative data, many students indicated that the mental health programs helped them recognize and manage their emotions more effectively. For instance, a student noted, "I used to feel stressed often, but now I have tools to handle that, and it's much easier for me to talk about my feelings with my friends." Teachers also observed a general improvement in students mood and behavior, with a reduction in disciplinary issues and conflicts among students.

**Impact on Academic Performance:** Participants also reported that mental health education contributed positively to students academic performance. Teachers highlighted that students who were better able to manage their emotions were more focused and engaged in the classroom, leading to improved academic outcomes. Table 2 summarizes the findings related to academic performance.

Table 2: Positive Impact of Mental Health Education on Academic Performance

Theme	Number of Participants Reporting	Percentage
Increased focus on class	58	58%
Improved attentadance	53	53%
Enhanced problem-solving skills	50	50%
Higher academic performance	48	48%
Better time management	45	45%

Several students indicated that learning how to manage stress allowed them to concentrate better on their studies. One student remarked, "I used to get overwhelmed with schoolwork, but now I can handle it better and I'm not falling behind anymore." Teachers also pointed out that students were more punctual and showed greater consistency in completing assignments.

### Themes from Teacher and Student Feedback

Through the analysis of the qualitative data, several key themes emerged that underline the success of the mental health education program:

- 1) Improved Emotional Resilience:** Many students demonstrated a greater ability to cope with stress, especially during exam periods.
- 2) Positive Behavioral Changes:** Teachers reported that students were more empathetic towards their peers, contributing to a more harmonious classroom environment.
- 3) Motivation and Engagement:** There was a noticeable increase in students' motivation to participate in class activities, leading to better academic engagement and retention.



**4) Academic Progress:** Students who initially struggled academically saw noticeable improvements, particularly in subjects that required higher concentration and problem-solving skills.

## Discussion

The findings reveal that the integration of mental health education into school curricula has produced overwhelmingly positive outcomes. By providing students with the tools to manage their mental health, schools not only enhanced students' emotional well-being but also contributed to academic success. These results indicate that mental health education should be considered an essential component of school programs, as it directly supports both personal development and educational achievement.

The thematic analysis showed that students benefited significantly in terms of emotional regulation, stress management, and academic focus. Teachers' feedback further reinforces the value of such programs, as they observed tangible improvements in student behavior, peer relationships, and classroom engagement. Overall, this study demonstrates the importance of mental health education in fostering well-rounded, emotionally resilient, and academically successful students.

## Conclusion

Our research explored the impact of mental health education on students well-being and academic performance through qualitative data collected from 100 participants, including students and teachers. The findings revealed significant positive effects of mental health education, highlighting improvements in emotional regulation, stress reduction, and interpersonal relationships among students. These enhancements not only contributed to better emotional well-being but also led to increased focus, engagement, and academic success in the classroom. Teachers reported observable improvements in student behavior and classroom dynamics, reinforcing the effectiveness of these programs. Overall, this study emphasizes the critical importance of integrating mental health education into school curricula to foster emotionally resilient, well-rounded, and academically successful students, while also suggesting avenues for future research to examine the long-term effects and broader applications of mental health education in diverse educational contexts.

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