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Conceptualizing Student Educational Wellbeing in Sri Lankan Context

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Abstract

This paper is developed from open-access databases available online in order to have an overview of the concepts regarding students' educational wellbeing. Databases that have been used to review include Sage Journals, Scopus, Google Scholar, Educational Resource Centre (ERIC), JSTOR-Journal Storage, Emerald, Science Direct, SpringerLink, Taylor and Francis and Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ). Keywords for searching information are student's well-being, educational wellbeing and student learning. The conceptualization of this study is entirely developed based on sociological theories and secondary data but incorporating current literature reviews collected from different perspectives and sources. Different definitions and interpretations have been developed in conceptualizing student wellbeing by different scholars and organizations based on their different thematic motivations. In this study, student educational wellbeing was conceptualized with five components, namely access to educational resources, enhancing soft skills, social skills, hard skills and skills functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Keywords: Student Wellbeing, Educational Wellbeing, Student Learning.

Introduction

A high level of student wellbeing strongly relates to their learning, complete school education, mental health, reduced problem behaviours, responsible and lawful lifestyle, and improved skills, success, and high academic achievement (Cadime et al., 2016; Noble & McGrath, 2012; Noble et al., 2008). Other relevant matters include a sense of belonging and connection to the school, resilience, physical activeness, feelings of safety and security at school, social and emotional competence, and optimism about the future (Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012; Holsted, 2015; Miller et al., 2013; Turashvili & Japaridze, 2012). For functions in the present and future, the sustainability of student wellbeing demands investments for obtaining academic, work-related, and non-cognitive skills. Well-being is a dynamic state, and thus students cannot enjoy it as adults without sufficient investments to enhance present capabilities (OECD, 2017).

Students can develop nations with their talents; if furnished with useful information and skills, they can contribute to the economic and social development of the country. Education has a vital role in equipping young people with the knowledge, understanding, and

skills they need to live fulfilling lives and be productive in the flexible and innovative workforce required in the 21st century. A school-based focus on supporting children to develop a deep sense of wellbeing is a central component of effective education for their future, their country and the world (Noble & McGrath, 2015). However, there is commonly no accepted definition for student educational wellbeing. This paper focuses on conceptualising student educational wellbeing in Sri Lankan settings based on several theories, models and empirical studies.

Methodology

This paper is developed from open-access databases available online in order to have an overview of the concepts regarding students' educational wellbeing. Databases that have been used to review include Sage Journals, Scopus, Google Scholar, Educational Resource Centre (ERIC), JSTOR-Journal Storage, Emerald, Science Direct, SpringerLink, Taylor and Francis and Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ).

Keywords for searching information are student's well-being, educational wellbeing and student learning. These were either unpublished (conference presentations, technical reports, etc) or published (as in journals, book chapters). Based on the abstracts of these several hundred articles, we lessened our search to several studies as being related to our theme. Accordingly, 88 articles were reviewed for this study. The grey literature technique was used to analyse for the conceptualisation of this paper. Grey literature can be used for a systematic review that is not available in commercial publications and the importance of grey literature can be avoided to conceptualise the themes. Grey literature can include academic papers, consisting of research and committee reports, conference papers, theses, dissertations, government reports, ongoing research, among others (Paez, 2017).

Human Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a complex term that encompasses different dimensions of psycho-social life. Wellbeing means a positive state of being, frequently referring to a person's overall sense of wellness and health; a person's feelings of general satisfaction or happiness with his/her quality of life; and the experience of fulfilment and contentment with one's life circumstances (Abeyasekera et al., 2008). Well-being can be operationalized as the absence of unfavourable conditions such as anxiety, substance abuse and depression from health and clinical perspective (Keyes & Haidt, 2002). Well-being is the process of becoming because to experience wellbeing, a person must work towards achieving it. When a person's individual, collective, and relational needs are fulfilled, then wellbeing is said to be experienced (Prilleltensky et al., 2001).

Community workers and sociologists consider wellbeing in terms of "broader meanings and difficulties in social processes in young people's lives and how these impact individual behaviour" (Bourke & Geldens, 2007). Contemporary psychologists defined wellbeing in terms of satisfaction with life and happiness and the presence of a significant number of positive self-attributes.

When talking about wellbeing, it can be seen that two broad perspectives have dominated. The first dominated wellbeing perspective is about pleasure or happiness. The second often overlooked view links it to meaning and assets, which define subjective wellbeing (SWB) as a result of life's positive functioning, not just positive feelings about one's life (Rickson et al., 2018). Well-being is operationalised differently by scholars based on their fields and their thematic approaches. As a result, various educational scholars in educational circles operationalize the term "wellbeing" in relation to students and education.

Student Well-Being

The term 'student wellbeing' has replaced terms such as 'student welfare' or 'student health' in educational circles (Cahill et al., 2014). A logical starting point for educating for student wellbeing is to work from a robust and evidence-based definition of student wellbeing that has the power to guide educational policy and school practices effectively. An educational perspective focuses on schools and school systems' actions to help children and young people flourish within a school context (Noble & McGrath, 2015). There are many definitions of student wellbeing in educational circles. For instance, Engels et al (2004) defined student wellbeing as

"a positive emotional state that is the result of a harmony between the sum of specific context factors on the one hand and the personal needs and expectations towards the school on the other hand" (p. 128)

Moreover, De Fraine et al (2005) defined student wellbeing as "the degree to which a student feels good in the school environment." and Fraillon (2004) defined student wellbeing as "the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community."

Notably, Noble et al (2008) defined student wellbeing incorporating multiple dimensions using modified Delphi methodology when they carried out an international literature review for the Australian Federal Government as follows;

"A student's level of wellbeing at school is indicated by their satisfaction with life at school, their engagement with learning and their social-emotional behaviour. It is enhanced when evidence-informed practices are adopted by schools in partnership with families and the community. Optimal student wellbeing is a sustainable state, characterized by predominantly positive feelings and attitude, positive relationships at school, resilience, self-optimism and a high level of satisfaction with learning experiences." (p,30).

Moreover, Education Review Office New Zealand (2015) stated that a student's level of wellbeing at school is indicated by their engagement with learning, their social, emotional behaviours, and satisfaction with life at school. Moreover, the review highlighted that if students feel secure and safe at school, his/her sense of success and achievement will be enhanced and affect their resilience.

On the other hand, the definition posited by OECD (2017) associates "children's right approach", which stresses the rights of children for a happy life "here and now", with a "development approach" that highlights the essentials of students developing the skills to enhance their wellbeing (Ben-Arieh et al., 2013). More comprehensively, OECD (2017) defines students' wellbeing as "the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life". Accordingly, Awang et al. (2014) and Cahill et al. (2014) highlighted that student wellbeing includes the interrelated nature of the physical, social, cognitive, psychological, relational and material health of children, as well as their experience in learning, academic attainment and adapting to academic life.

Furthermore, the Psychosocial Wellbeing Framework of Sri Lanka (2009), conceptualized well-being as an individual (student or family or community) experiences well-being when they can: access physical, material, and intellectual resources; experience competence and self-worth; exercise participation; build social connections and enhance

physical and psychological wellness. This framework has been focused on the equity of social justice approach, especially regarding the distribution of resources, whether in terms of materials, social or cultural (Amarasuriya et al., 2009).

Student Wellbeing and Learning

Student wellbeing is strongly related to students' engagement in learning, better mental health, and decreasing problem behaviour at school, which is ultimately due to a higher level of student wellbeing resulting in a higher level of academic achievement. This is evidenced by the conclusion of Noble et al (2008) revealed based on a literature review that students with a higher level of wellbeing tend to perform highly in educational outcomes, complete school education, have better mental health, and be more pro-social, responsible, lawful lifestyle. Furthermore, Noble et al (2008) demonstrated that student wellbeing is enhanced through four main mechanisms such as increasing student motivation to participate, increasing student engagement with, and participation in learning, increasing student attendance and increasing school completion and decreasing problem behaviour at school which is ultimately due to a higher level of student wellbeing which results in a higher level of academic achievement directly or indirectly.

Moreover, Noble and McGrath (2015) designed the PROSPER student wellbeing framework, representing the integration of crucial thoughts in positive psychology with the most up to date scientific knowledge on social, emotional, and student wellbeing. This framework consists of seven pathways to students' wellbeing: encouraging 'Positivity', building 'Relationships', facilitating 'Outcomes', focusing on 'Strengths' fostering a sense of 'purpose', enhancing 'Engagement', and teaching 'Resilience' (PROSPER). Moreover, they suggested that students need to view learning and school activities as valuable and meaningful (purpose); need to realize their abilities and strengths (strengths); to feel interested, absorbed and connected in learning and school life (engagement). They suggest that students need to have a sense of belonging at school, experience positive emotions, feel safe, and the community should have positive relationships learners need to feel that if they work hard persistently with their capacities towards goals, they will get achievements.

Several well-being studies have been in developed countries. For instance, the OECD (2017) concluded Korean student well-being results in line with PISA (2015) well-being study. While an average of 59% of students in OECD member countries indicated that they strive to be the best students in their class, 82% of Korean students indicated that they do their best to perform well in the study. PISA showed that Korea is a country that performs at a high level in student engagement with science. PISA concluded that students in Korea have a stronger sense of belonging than students in other OECD partner countries, and that 86 percent of Korean students performed above average in science proficiency.

Similarly, Peña-López (2016) revealed, based on PISA (2015) results the students' wellbeing in New Zealand. PISA confirms that 15-year-old New Zealand students have a positive attitude toward their academic abilities and school life. For instance, PISA found that students were strongly motivated to achieve academically, and almost half of the students expected to complete a university degree. PISA revealed that most students felt they belonged at school and could make friends easily, and the majority of students reported that they could access ICT at a high level.

Moreover, Wu and Zhou (2010) found that Chinese adolescents receive more support from their parents, and adolescents can understand and comprehend friendship deeply and fully. They discovered, however, that adolescent wellbeing varies significantly by nationality,

academic record, and grade. Moreover, Casas et al. (2013) conducted a study in Spain and Romania among high school students to determine the relationship between subjective wellbeing in school and overall life satisfaction. They found that while students' school satisfaction is positively related to teachers' satisfaction, they are poorly connected to overall life satisfaction. On the other hand, they found that while satisfaction with school friends and classmates is highly related to overall life satisfaction, it is poorly associated with school satisfaction.

Furthermore, Lawes and Boyd (2018) revealed that student wellbeing varied substantially between New Zealand schools. They demonstrated that while only 68% of students reported on the statement "I feel I belong at school" at the school with the lowest level of student wellbeing, 97% reported on schools with greater student wellbeing levels. They found that while only 2% of students reported bullying at primary school with lower levels of aggressive behaviours, 42% of students indicated that they were penalized by bullying at least weekly. Further, Aldridge et al (2016) found that the school environment characteristics influence students' wellbeing among students in public high schools in Perth, Western Australia. The study showed that a sense of belonging and positive peer relationships impact students' wellbeing. They suggest that schools could offer several opportunities to expand students' relationships, which leads to a sense of connection.

Furthermore, Ratnik and Rütel (2017) conducted a study on school-related factors which affect Estonian pupils' subjective wellbeing at primary school. They found that a higher level of wellbeing was expressed by the relationship with schoolmates and teachers, receiving assistance from the school and parents' relationship with the school and both age groups. They indicated that the school's pro-social organization is a more important factor for students' wellbeing. Moreover, Tian et al. (2015) revealed that social contextual factors in terms of teacher support and classmate support are essential for adolescents' subjective wellbeing in school in China.

Moreover, Turashvili and Japaridze (2012) carried out a study on the correlation between students' psychological wellbeing and academic performance in Georgia. The study revealed that most students have a middle level of wellbeing, and average self-evaluated academic performance and depression.

This is evidenced by Ramli et al (2016) 's findings which focused on student wellbeing based on the dimensions such as having dimension, loving dimension, being dimension and health condition in Indonesia. They found that while students' psychological wellbeing was high, they were less satisfied, less comfortable, less secure, and more stressed as a result of the school environment. They demonstrated that students were satisfied with their peers on the loving dimension, but not with their teachers. They revealed that students were have not been fully involved and optimal in following the school activities in terms of being a dimension.

Furthermore, Nirmala et al (2018) illustrated their findings from the wellbeing study in India across the six main dimensions: social, emotional, environmental, spiritual, intellectual, and physical wellbeing. They found that support from parents, siblings, peers, and teachers leads to more vital wellbeing. They asserted that most adolescent students stated that they felt confident (emotional) when their parents trust them and most of the students reported that they felt safe at home and in the school (environmental). Furthermore, the study revealed that the majority of students stated that they do their best in school, but do not always get the desired results (intellectual).

Several student wellbeing studies in third world countries illustrate that even though students are satisfied with social support up to a certain level, they are probably not happy with the having dimensions or the facilities available for their learning at school and home. Due to the educational wellbeing of students, which was defined in this study as access to educational resources, hard skills, soft skills, and social skills functioning, and capabilities, students require a happy and fulfilling life, as detailed in the empirical studies.

On the one hand, students' wellbeing is defined by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) as 'the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life'. On the other hand, the Psychosocial Wellbeing Framework of Sri Lanka (2009) conceptualised well-being when an individual (student or family or community) can: access physical, material and intellectual resources; experience competence and self-worth; exercise participation; build social connections, and enhance physical and psychological wellness.

In this study, student educational wellbeing is operationalised based on the Psychosocial Well-being Framework of Sri Lanka (2009), considering the association of 'children's rights approach' that stress the rights of children for a happy life 'here and now', and with a 'development approach' that highlights the essentials of developing skills. Accordingly, students' educational wellbeing refers to the access to educational resources, soft, social and hard skills functioning and capabilities that they need to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Conclusion

Student educational wellbeing conceptualized in this study is based on sociological theories and secondary data but incorporates current literature reviews collected from different perspectives and sources considering the association of "children's right approach" which stresses the rights of children for a happy life "here and now", with a "development approach", that highlights the essentials of students developing the skills to enhance their wellbeing. Accordingly, in this study, students' educational well-being conceptualized that the access to educational resources, hard skills, soft skills and social skills functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life.

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