

## **Well-being: An Important Determinant to Students' Learning and Academic Achievement**

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**ABSTRACT :** *Well-being is a concept that plays an important role on students' learning and academic achievement and includes economic, social, emotional, psychological dimensions, health and physical fitness related aspects. Presumably, students' learning and academic achievement is dependent upon their state of wellbeing. Major aspects of affective wellbeing include health and physical fitness, financial status and interpersonal engagement while aspects of cognitive well-being include satisfaction in all forms. This article reviews theoretical assumptions, components of wellbeing, types of wellbeing and their relationship with students' learning and academic achievement. Positive state of well-being affects academic achievement positively as good health, physical fitness and wellness, good economic status, psychological stability, collaboration and positive relationship among learners and instructor, stress-free learning environment will positively affect academic achievement and vice-versa.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Wellbeing, students' learning, academic achievement*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Different words such as welfare, happiness, individual well-being, subjective well-being, quality of life, life satisfaction and self-actualization have been used interchangeably to refer to well-being (Allin 2007). It is referred to or seen as something that happens within a person or group of people (Carruthers and Hood, 2004). According to Diener (1984); Diener et al. (1999); Lyubomirsky et al. (2004), well-being is an umbrella term that refers to all different forms of evaluating one's life or emotional experience, such as life satisfaction, positive affect, and low negative affect. On the other way around, Helliwell et al. (2009); Kahneman (2003); Kahneman and Krueger (2006) and Layard (2010) see wellbeing as a quantitative assessment of an individual's daily living conditions in order to determine whether or not they have the capabilities and opportunities to live a comfortable life in a particular community, environment or society. According to Knoop and Delle-Fave (2013), well-being is more holistic and contextual, reflecting meaningful and sustainable interactions between an individual and their social and physical environment. Equally, well-being is seen as a process as the New Economic Foundation (NEF) described well-being as a dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or 'mental capital'. The World Health Organization's working definition of well-being is the realization of one's physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual potential. Ereauntand Whiting (2008) argue that, wellbeing is what people in a given society collectively agree makes a "good life" or what brings happiness or what enable an individual to achieve a stated objective with facing certain problems from the environment around him. Dodge et al. (2012) views well-being as the balance between resources and challenges. According to them, well-being refers to a situation where an individual has the psychological, social and physical resources he or she requires to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. From the above views, wellbeing can be defined as a state of being comfortable, happy, healthy, belonging and being able to handle situations when in different environments with limited or no stress.

Wellbeing can be classified as health or physical Wellbeing, psychological well-being, economic Wellbeing, social wellbeing and emotional wellbeing.

#### ***Health or physical wellbeing***

Health is defined, as a state of high-level physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual wellness (Shank & Coyle, 2002) or the absence of dysfunctions and symptoms of illness. Health is very important in determining students' learning and academic achievement. Good health is directly linked to wellbeing. Good health leads to general happiness and life satisfaction as revealed by many studies. Learners with medical distress are at risk for low academic achievement (Spernak, Schottenbauer, Ramey, & Ramey, 2006) as poor health impedes participation in daily school activities (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004). Frequent absence,

discomfort or pain, movement limitations, sleeplessness, physical and psychological side effects of received medications among other factors limit students' abilities to engage in the education process (Fowler, Davenport, & Garg, 1992). In addition to the deleterious outcomes related to school functioning, children with medical conditions experience restrictions in developing critical emotional bonds with teachers (Needham, Crosnoe, & Muller, 2004).

Health behavior is closely related to academic achievement (Sigfusdottir, Kristjaansson, & Allegrante, 2007). Therefore, improving a child's physical health has the potential to be a valuable protective factor in improving a learner's academic performance (Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005; Telford et al., 2012). A Learner's physical health, and in particular physical fitness, is associated with improved confidence, increased attention, reduction in health problems, improved social engagement, reduction in obesity, increased organization, and a host of potentially protective factors for students at risk for poor school outcomes (Sallis, 2010).

Given the crucial role that health plays in a learner's educational development, it is of utmost importance for school psychologists to become responsible for leading efforts to improve students' health and consequently decrease the risk associated with various medical issues. Research indicates that healthy students perform better in academics than unhealthy students.

### ***Psychological Well-being***

Psychologically, well-being refers to positive mental and developed through a combination of emotional regulation, personality characteristics, identity and life experiences (Helson & Srivastava, 2001). According to Diener, (2000), psychological wellbeing is referred to as subjective wellbeing which is the extent to which people experience positive emotions and feelings of happiness. Ryff & Singer, (2006) states that an individual who intends to achieve stated purposes in life, he or she must strive for psychological wellbeing as psychological wellbeing is systematically related to a higher social economic status in terms of learning and academic performance. Psychological wellbeing is usually conceptualized as a combination of positive affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As summarized by Huppert (2009), there exist a positive interpersonal relationship between psychological well-being and how well life is.

Psychological well-being can be related to age, education, extraversion, consciousness and decreases with neuroticism (Keyes et al., 2002). The state of happiness or psychological well-being has a central role to play on students learning as well as academic achievement. According to Salami (2010), psychological well-being, happiness, life satisfaction and depression have an important role to play in enhancing students' learning, success and quality of education. In order for learners to achieve their life goals and obtain academic success, it is important to be in a psychologically healthy and stable condition as stressful atmosphere may create and/or elevate psychological distress and reduce their academic performance (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001).

### ***Economic Wellbeing***

Economic well-being is defined as having present and future financial security. Present financial security includes the ability of an individual, family, and community to consistently meet their basic needs (including food, housing, utilities, health care, transportation, education, child care, clothing, etc.), and have control over their day-to-day finances. It also includes the ability to make economic choices and feel a sense of security, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment with one's personal finances and employment pursuits.

Future financial security refers to the ability to absorb financial shocks, meet financial goals, build financial assets, and maintain adequate income throughout the life-span. Economic well-being may be achieved by individuals, families, and communities through public policies that ensure the ability to build financial knowledge and skills, access to safe and affordable financial products and economic resources, and opportunities for generating income and asset-building. It occurs within a context of economic justice within which labor markets provide opportunities to secure full-employment with adequate compensation and benefits for all.

Income and the amount of money an individual has plays an important role on the person's state of wellbeing which eventually affects academic performance. Money can affect the general happiness of an individual over time. It is obvious that a student from a poor background will not be allowed to study if he or she has not paid the fees, or when they are not able to afford to purchase the required learning materials and books. It is clear that some students from poor families cannot even afford three meals a day. Whereas students from rich backgrounds can afford to buy all these things, students from rich backgrounds typically have better school systems with better teachers and more educational resources. The rich students would obviously have more resources. They can afford to hire tutors for their children.

### ***Social Wellbeing***

Social wellbeing simply means the ability to communicate, develop meaningful relationships with others, and maintain a support network that helps you overcome loneliness in any society. It refers to sharing,

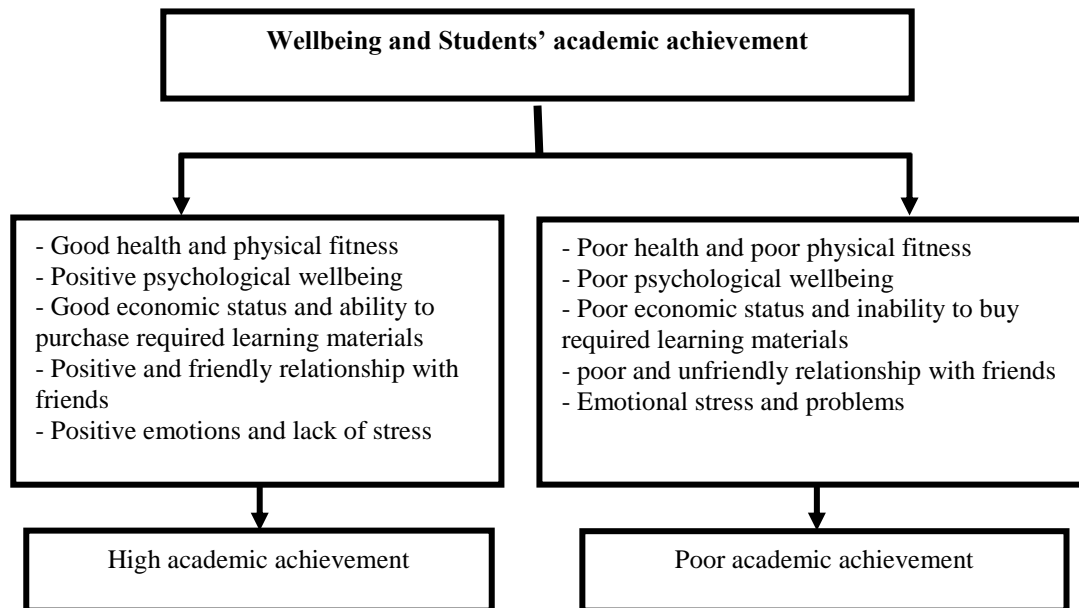
developing, and sustaining of meaningful relationships with others as this allows an individual to feel authentic and valued, and provides a sense of connectedness and belonging. Social wellbeing is seen as something that goes beyond the psychological aspect of being an individual or a group. It is the appraisal of one's circumstance and functioning in society which is characterized by a positive attitude towards other people, the belief in growth of society, understanding of the society, participation in society and identification with the society Keyes (1998). Carruthers and Hood (2004) viewed wellbeing as something that happens within an individual. Socially, wellbeing is seen as something that goes beyond the psychological aspect of being an individual or a group. According to Keyes (1998), and Keyes & Lopez (2002), wellbeing consists of five social aspects as follows: social acceptance which refers to an individual accepting people as they are and being accepted the way they are, social actualization which refers to the positive comfort level with society, social contribution which refers to a feeling that one has a contribution to make to the society and in any area he finds himself, social coherence and social integration which means feeling as a part of the society. As such making connections, taking care of yourself while caring for others, getting active with a friend or family members, build healthy relationships are ways to improve your social wellbeing.

Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) argue that learners displayed higher academic achievement especially when they have a positive relationship with peers in class. Students with positive connection and relationship with friends, instructor and family do not have social problems and as such can demonstrate stronger academic performance and higher engagement than students with a low sense of connectedness (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). High scores reflect the respondent's engagement in meaningful relationships with others that include reciprocal empathy, intimacy, and affection. According to Chen, Chang, Liu and He (2008), students who collaborate in groups displayed high achievement showed higher individual academic achievement and social functioning, and that group features enhanced the association between academic and social performance. Teacher and peer support is a central dimension in creating a social learning environment that facilitates students' learning (Griffith, 1995). According to Jia et al., (2009), Furrer & Skinner (2003), there exists a relationship between social climate, learners' classroom collaboration and academic adjustment.

### ***Emotional Wellbeing***

Emotionally, Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed the concept of emotional intelligence and suggested that individuals differ in the way they handle their emotions. They view emotional wellbeing as knowing and managing one's own emotions, motivating oneself towards mastery and creativity, and recognizing and handling emotions in others. When people are emotionally well, they can guide their thinking and actions and even those of others. Emotional wellbeing is a combination of both positive and negative emotions and satisfaction with the own life together determine the unique degree of emotional wellbeing (Diener, 1984). Research has indicated that emotional wellbeing is related to better health and longer life and academic achievement in learners (Diener & Chan, 2011). The experience of positive emotions is related to more creative thinking (Fredrickson, 2004). This is what makes them important in the context of education. Here positive emotions can promote the process of inventive and empathetic thinking (Seligman et al., 2005). According to Froiland, Oros, Smith & Hirschert (2012), intrinsic motivation is determined by positive emotions. A higher level of intrinsic motivation resulting from positive emotions is in turn related to greater involvement at school and academic achievement (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu & Pagiani, 2009). According to Frederickson (2004), negative emotions lead to a reduction in attention and eventually poor academic achievement. Positive emotions have positive influence on a learner's learning behavior. A possible explanation of the positive relationship between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement is that the broaden-effect of positive emotions leads to a spread of attention, open-minded thinking and more cognitive flexibility (Fredrickson, 2004), which facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge. Emotional well-being ties into social well-being because we can better form and sustain relationships with others when we are able to regulate our own emotions. Having meaningful relationships tends to make us feel better and is a good motivator for managing our emotions.

Goleman, (1996) states that those who are able to manage their emotions effectively are said to be "emotionally intelligent." When someone is emotionally intelligent or emotionally well, when he or she is able to identify their emotions, manage their emotions, motivate oneself, recognize other peoples' emotions and handle relationships Goleman (1996). According to him, individuals with emotional well-being have the tendency to develop leadership skills as well as perform well. Emotional wellbeing determines one's capacity to develop skills and competencies (Cadman & Brewer, 2001). Divergent thinking is an essential prerequisite for exceptional intellectual development and better performance. There is a very definite relationship between emotional skills and academic performance. Emotional intelligence enables a person to demonstrate extensive knowledge and analytical expertise in a vast range of areas. Wong, Day, Maxwell, and Meara (1995) found the ability to understand other people's emotional states, to be a predictor of academic performance.



*Conceptual Framework for wellbeing and academic achievement*

## II. Conclusion

Well-being is pertinent and remarkably affects students' learning as well as their academic achievement. Health or physical well-being, psychological well-being, economic wellbeing, social wellbeing and emotional wellbeing may affect learners' way of life and their studies. Students with positive physical well-being or good health, positive psychological wellbeing, good economic status, positive social wellbeing and good emotions have the tendency to perform better in schools. When learners have a good social environment where they can interact and play or discuss their academic achievement is significantly enhanced. Unlike learners with poor financial status, lack of friend, characterized by stress do perform poorly academically. Students with positive wellbeing feel committed to their academic tasks. This is not the case with students with poor economic and social status, poor health, etc. it can be concluded therefore well-being is an important determinant to students' academic achievement. Physically fit students, students with a sense of belonging, students with good emotions and less stress as well as those with a good economic background turn to perform better in schools and vice versa. It is the duty of the parents, family members, teachers, school administrators, peers and the entire system to ensure that learners or children are stress free and that students' wellbeing must be at the center of any decision making as this will definitely have an impact on the learners as well as their academic achievement.

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