

Teachers' Role in Promoting Student Well-being: A Qualitative Study from a Positive Psychology Perspective

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Abstract - In the contemporary educational landscape, the mandate of schooling has expanded beyond academic instruction to encompass the psychological flourishing of learners. This study investigates the pivotal role of teachers in promoting student well-being through the lens of Positive Psychology, specifically utilizing Martin Seligman's PERMA model as a theoretical anchor. Adopting a qualitative, phenomenological research design, the study explores the lived experiences and pedagogical strategies of 20 secondary school teachers and their interactions with students in an urban Indian context. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was employed to categorize findings. Five major themes emerged: (1) Relational Anchoring through Empathy; (2) Fostering a Culture of Strengths-Based Recognition; (3) Creating Psychologically Safe Classroom Climates; (4) Integrating Mindfulness and Emotional Literacy; and (5) Nurturing Student Autonomy and Agency. The findings indicate that while systemic pressures of the "grade race" persist, teachers act as critical "well-being architects" by facilitating positive emotions and meaningful relationships. The study concludes that successful well-being initiatives require a shift from remedial interventions to proactive, relational pedagogies. The results offer significant implications for teacher training programs and institutional policy, suggesting that teacher well-being is a necessary prerequisite for student flourishing.

Keywords: Student Well-being, Positive Psychology, PERMA Model, Teachers' Role, Qualitative Study, Classroom Environment.

I. Introduction

The traditional paradigm of education has long been dominated by a "deficit-correction" model, focusing primarily on remedial academic support and the mitigation of behavioral problems. However, in the 21st century, there is a growing global consensus that the deeper purpose of education is not

merely to produce "exam-passers" but to nurture "successful people" equipped with resilience and psychological health. Student well-being is defined as a multidimensional construct involving emotional stability, positive social relationships, and a sense of purpose. In the Indian context, this shift is officially recognized in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes holistic development and the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) into the core curriculum.

Teachers occupy a unique position as the primary influencers of a student's emotional and cognitive world. They are not merely transmitters of knowledge but significant adults who shape the classroom's "affective climate". Research suggests that a teacher's attitude—whether conveying distrust or fostering optimism—profoundly impacts how young people perceive their potential and the world at large. Despite this importance, the current educational atmosphere in India is characterized by high-stakes testing, academic burnout, and rising levels of student anxiety.

Rationale and Research Gap

While quantitative studies have established correlations between teacher support and student engagement, there is a scarcity of localized, detailed qualitative research exploring *how* teachers subjectively understand and enact their role as well-being promoters in the Indian classroom. Most existing literature on Positive Psychology in education originates from Western contexts, often overlooking the collectivist and hierarchical nuances—such as the "guru-shishya" bond—that define Indian pedagogy. This study seeks to fill this gap by centering the voices of educators navigating these complex dynamics.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore teachers' perceptions of their role in supporting student well-being.
2. To identify specific pedagogical practices that foster psychological flourishing.

3. To analyze the barriers and facilitators that influence the implementation of positive psychology principles in the classroom.

II. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in the principles of **Positive Psychology**, a scientific field that prioritizes human strengths and virtues over pathologies.

Martin Seligman's PERMA Model:

The primary lens for analysis is Seligman's (2011) **PERMA model**, which identifies five pillars of well-being:

- **P – Positive Emotions:** Cultivating joy, gratitude, and hope to build cognitive flexibility and resilience.
- **E – Engagement:** Facilitating "flow" by aligning academic tasks with student strengths.
- **R – Relationships:** Building supportive social connections within the school community.
- **M – Meaning:** Helping students find a larger purpose in their learning journey.
- **A – Accomplishment:** Recognizing progress and fostering self-efficacy.

Broaden-and-Build Theory

The study also draws upon Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build theory, which posits that positive emotions broaden an individual's "thought-action repertoire," enabling them to build enduring physical, intellectual, and social resources. In a classroom, when a teacher induces positive affect—even through small gestures of candy or humor—it can significantly improve creative problem-solving and long-term learning outcomes.

III. Review of Literature

Recent global research underscores that teacher-student relationships are the strongest predictor of student engagement and academic persistence. Studies in Western contexts indicate that students in "intervention schools" focusing on well-being performed significantly better on national exams, suggesting that well-being and achievement are mutually reinforcing rather than a trade-off.

Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2000) introduced positive psychology as a paradigm shift focusing on human strengths and flourishing rather than deficits. Building on this, Seligman (2011) proposed the PERMA model, which identifies five essential elements of well-being:

positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This framework has been widely applied in educational settings through the concept of positive education, which integrates academic learning with well-being promotion.

Sarah Coulombe *et al.* (2021) critically reviewed positive education initiatives and argued that while such approaches improve student well-being, they often lack attention to socio-ecological and cultural contexts. Similarly, Yasuhiro Kotera *et al.* (2022) found that positive psychology interventions, including mindfulness and strengths-based practices, significantly enhance students' mental health and engagement, reinforcing the applicability of positive psychology in education.

Christopher Murray *et al.* (2024) emphasized that student well-being is strongly influenced by relational factors within the school environment, particularly teacher-student relationships. Their findings suggest that supportive and respectful interactions contribute to students' sense of belonging and emotional security. In a similar vein, Emily P. Nimasari *et al.* (2024), through a qualitative study, demonstrated that dialogic teaching practices and meaningful teacher engagement significantly enhance students' emotional experiences and motivation.

The Indian Context: From Rote to Happiness

In India, the **Delhi Happiness Curriculum (2018)** serves as a landmark initiative in positive education. It integrates mindfulness, storytelling, and reflective discussions into the daily school schedule. Qualitative assessments of the curriculum show significant improvements in students' emotional regulation and peer relationships. However, challenges remain in standardizing delivery and overcoming initial teacher resistance due to workload.

Furthermore, research on Indian teachers indicates a high prevalence of "emotional exhaustion," with 42% of educators reporting burnout due to systemic pressures. This is critical because a teacher's own psychological health is a prerequisite for promoting student well-being; depressed or anxious teachers are less resilient and can adversely affect student achievement.

IV. Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative, phenomenological approach** to explore the "essence" of the teacher's role in well-being. This interpretive paradigm allows for a deep

understanding of the subjective meanings' teachers assign to their interactions with students.

Participants

The participants were 20 secondary school teachers (12 female, 8 male) from urban government and private schools in Murshidabad district, West Bengal, India. **Purposive sampling** was used to select educators with at least five years of experience who had expressed an interest in student counseling or holistic education.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered through **semi-structured interviews** (45–60 minutes) conducted either in person or via digital platforms. Questions focused on their understanding of student well-being, specific interventions they used, and their perceived impact on student behavior. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to **thematic analysis**, involving initial coding, categorization, and the development of overarching themes.

Ethical Considerations

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymization, and teachers were assured that their responses would not affect their professional appraisals.

V. Findings / Results

Five major themes emerged from the data, illustrating the multifaceted nature of the teacher's role in well-being.

Theme 1: Relational Anchoring through Empathy

Participants emphasized that the "guru-shishya" bond—a relational dynamic of mutual respect—serves as the "glue" for well-being. Teachers described acting as "mentors" rather than just "instructors." One teacher noted, *"I ask them how they are doing before I ask about their homework. A five-minute check-in can change their entire mood"*. This empathetic interaction creates a sense of belonging that buffers against academic stress.

Theme 2: Fostering a Culture of Strengths-Based Recognition

Teachers identified the importance of recognizing "unconventional" student strengths beyond grades. By celebrating a student's kindness, artistic ability, or perseverance, teachers foster the "Accomplishment" (A) pillar of PERMA. Participants mentioned that shifting from "deficit-

correction" to "strength-spotting" improved student self-esteem and intrinsic drive.

Theme 3: Creating Psychologically Safe Classroom Climates

A recurring theme was the creation of a "safe space" where emotional expression is welcomed and mistakes are treated as learning tools. One participant shared, *"In my class, students know they won't be mocked for a wrong answer. That safety allows them to engage deeper"*. This psychological safety is essential for reducing "fear of negative evaluation".

Theme 4: Integrating Mindfulness and Emotional Literacy

Influenced by initiatives like the Happiness Curriculum, many teachers reported using mindfulness and storytelling to improve student focus and empathy. They described these activities as "therapeutic techniques" that help students manage the tremendous pressure of high-stakes exams.

Theme 5: Nurturing Student Autonomy and Agency

Teachers who provided choices in assignments or allowed students to take leadership in class projects reported higher levels of student engagement (E). By meeting the need for "Autonomy," teachers help students feel in control of their learning process, which is a core nutrient for flourishing.

VI. Discussion

The findings illustrate that teachers act as "well-being architects" by operationalizing the PERMA model in their daily interactions.

Interpretation through PERMA

The "Relational Anchoring" theme aligns with the **Relationships (R)** pillar, while "Strengths-Based Recognition" directly supports **Accomplishment (A)**. The use of mindfulness and storytelling serves as a vehicle for **Positive Emotions (P)** and **Meaning (M)**. Crucially, the data suggests that in the Indian context, "Relatedness" is the primary nutrient that enables the other four pillars; students are only willing to explore their strengths or engage deeply when they feel a secure bond with the teacher.

Comparison with Previous Studies

While international studies focus on individual "choice" as the driver of autonomy, this study finds that Indian students often find their volition *through* the collective support of the teacher-mentor. This highlights a culturally nuanced "collectivist autonomy". Additionally, the findings reinforce the idea that "teacher presence" satisfies the need for

relatedness, which is often lost in isolated virtual learning environments.

New Insights

The concept of "**Strength-Spotting**" as a form of social justice emerged. Teachers reported that for students from marginalized backgrounds (SEDGs), recognizing non-academic virtues helped dismantle "identity shame" and fostered a sense of legitimacy within the school.

VII. Implications

For Teachers: Relational Pedagogy

Teachers should transition from being "transmitters of information" to "mentors of motivation." This involves adopting "motivation mapping" to understand each student's unique drivers and using "voice circles" to share emotional hurdles.

For Institutions: Supporting the Supporters

Institutions must recognize that teacher well-being is the foundation for student well-being. Schools should prioritize "Institutional Development Plans" (IDP) that include mental health support and professional development in SEL for teachers.

For Policymakers: Shifting the Metric

Policymakers should use the framework of NEP 2020 to move away from enrollment-focused metrics toward learning-centered and well-being-centered assessments. Mental health and psychological fulfillment should be integrated as core indicators of institutional quality.

VIII. Conclusion

This qualitative inquiry has demonstrated that the teacher's role in promoting well-being is not a peripheral responsibility but a core pedagogical imperative. By fostering empathy, recognizing strengths, and creating safe emotional environments, teachers provide the psychological "nutrients" necessary for students to flourish. In the high-pressure Indian academic landscape, the shift from a "grade race" to a "well-being race" is essential for producing resilient and purposeful citizens. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies of teacher-led well-being interventions and the specific challenges faced by educators in rural, under-resourced regions of India.

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