(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Psychological levels of social support in education and their influence on student well-being and academic performance

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Abstract

This study examines the complex interrelationship among social support, psychological adjustment, and student performance. Underpinned by the buffering hypothesis and attachment theory, the investigation probes how perceived forms of social support—emotional, informational, and instrumental—provided by family, friends, and teachers impact student achievement. With a correlational design, 287 students between 12 and 24 years old were assessed with standardized instruments: the Academic Performance Scale, the Psychological Well-Being Scale (18 items), and the Social Support Questionnaire. Using statistical analysis with SPSS, there was a significant positive correlation between general social support and academic performance (r = 0.186, p = 0.002), meaning that a higher level of perceived support corresponds with better academic achievement. Nevertheless, the relationship between social support and psychological well-being was not statistically significant (r =0.112, p =0.057). Surprisingly, a very high positive correlation was observed between positive interpersonal relationships and overall psychological well-being (r =0.527, p <0.001), highlighting the imperative role of good connections in emotional well-being. The results indicate that although overall social support helps in academic achievement, particular relational factors propel psychological well-being. This research is part of an increasing volume of literature calling for supportive school settings and demands more research involving longitudinal designs, mixed methods, and cross-cultural insights to advance our knowledge on these dynamics.

1. Introduction

1.1. Social support is key in determining the psychological well-being and academic performance of students

It is usually categorized into three dimensions: emotional, informational, and instrumental. Emotional support is the expression of empathy, encouragement, and concern from family members, peers, and teachers that leads to feelings of belonging, motivation, and self-esteem [1]. Informational support constitutes guidance, counsel, and critique that aid in student management of academic problems, while instrumental support delivers concrete material that can encompass economic assistance, learning material provision, and teaching assistance [2]. Collectively, both supports function as major buffers against the experience of academic strain and create resilience. Academic performance, typically measured by grades, examination results, or performance in class, is a multi-determinate outcome influenced by personal talent, motivation, socio-economic background, and support systems from outside the environment. Time and again, evidence shows a strong positive relationship between subjective social support and academic performance. For example, high supported students show greater self-efficacy, persistence, and academic involvement [3]. Social support not only increases students' academic investment but also enhances their ability to make and pursue educational goals.

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Of equal significance is the correlation between social support and psychological well-being, encompassing emotional stability, self-esteem, and stress management skills.

Higher levels of psychological well-being have been associated with more adaptive coping styles, lower anxiety, and higher academic motivation [4]. Supported students are more likely to have a positive attitude, be emotionally resilient, and confront academic challenges with confidence and direction. This emotional basis plays an important role in general school adaptation and achievement. The explanatory framework for these dynamics is based on the buffering hypothesis and attachment theory.

Based on the buffering hypothesis, social support functions to buffer against negative consequences of stress, especially in high-stress settings such as in schools [5]. Attachment theory adds strength to this perception by highlighting the need for secure relationships in the early years as the foundation of psychological resilience and feelings of competence [6]. Those students with secure attachment towards caregivers, teachers, or peers will be better placed to have faith in themselves and continue through challenges. The empirical evidence confirms these theories. For instance, perceived social support strongly predicts both psychological well-being and academic performance [7], and secure attachments are linked with increased emotional regulation and persistence at school [8]. Although there has been considerable literature verifying the beneficial role of social support, there are still gaps in explaining how certain forms of support— emotional, informational, and instrumental—differentially impact student populations. Given rising academic pressures, transitions, and mental health struggles among students, it is critical to explore these links more closely. By determining which elements of support are most effective, schools can structure interventions that create supportive learning environments, improve student motivation, and enhance mental health.

This research aims to explore the link between perceived social support and students' psychological well-being and academic achievement.

In particular, it aims to learn how emotional, informational, and instrumental support affect students' coping with school difficulties, their self-esteem, and success in school. The research also explores the mediating psychological variables, including stress and self-esteem, in this relationship. By this analysis, the study aims to offer evidence-based recommendations for the development of support systems that promote student resilience, engagement, and achievement. The value of this study is that it can inform educational policies and practices.

Past research has highlighted that supportive networks have a positive impact on academic engagement and mental health. Students with supportive relationships are more motivated, emotionally secure, and academically resilient [9]. Likewise, teacher and peer perceived emotional and instrumental support are strong predictors of both academic motivation and performance [10]. By recognizing these effects, educators, counselors, and policy makers can design interventions that address student well-being alongside academic success. Building learning settings that combine emotional nurture, guidance, and hands-on support not only enhances academic outcomes but also can help foster healthier, more resilient students.

1.2. Hypothesis

- There is no significant relationship between social support and psychological well-being among students.
- There is no significant relationship between social support and academic achievement among students.
- Appraisal support does not significantly influence students' autonomy and personal growth.
- Tangible support does not significantly influence students' environmental mastery and academic achievement.
- Self-esteem support does not significantly influence students' self-acceptance and purpose in life.
- Belonging support does not significantly influence students' positive relations with others and overall psychological well-being.

1.3. Research Design

This study uses a correlational design to examine the relationship between social support, student well-being, and academic success.

1.4. Operational Definitions

Academic Performance: Measurable attainment of a student within educational environments, quantified by grades, test scores, and academic achievement in general [11].

Psychological Well-being: A student's general mental health and emotional resilience, shaped by stress levels, self-efficacy, and coping styles [12].

Social Support: The informational, instrumental, and emotional support provided by family, peers, teachers, and other support systems that helps a student in his/her academic and psychological development [13].

1.5. Sampling Technique

This study employed a convenience sampling technique, where the researcher conveniently selected young adults.

1.6. Inclusion criteria

- Students aged 12–24 who are in school or college.
- Students who get support from family, friends, or teachers.
- Students with information about their well-being and school performance.

1.7. Exclusion criteria

- Students younger than 12 or older than 24, or not in formal education.
- Students who don't get support from family, friends, or teachers, or are homeschooled.
- Students with serious mental or physical health problems or any psychological issues

1.8. Procedure

The questionnaires were converted into Google Forms and were circulated among the participants. After explaining the goal of the study and getting their permission to be evaluated, they were given instructions on how to complete each Google form tool and asked to submit honest responses. They received guarantees that the information they provided would be used only for research purposes and that their answers would remain confidential.

1.9. Tools for the Study

- **Academic Performance Scale (APS):** Developed by researchers from Saginaw Valley State University, the APS is an 8-item, 5-point Likert scale used to assess students' academic achievement. It has high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.89$) and test-retest reliability (0.85), making it a reliable tool to evaluate performance indicators such as grades and test scores.
- **Psychological Well-Being Scale (18 items):** Created by Carol D. Ryff, this scale measures six dimensions of psychological well-being using 18 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale. It shows moderate to high reliability ($\alpha = 0.65$–0.80) and strong validity, correlating positively with life satisfaction and negatively with psychological distress.
- **Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ):** Developed by Sarason et al. (1983), the SSQ measures perceived social support in terms of availability (SSQ-N) and satisfaction (SSQ-S). It has high internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.90$) and strong validity. The tool helps assess the impact of support from friends, family, and teachers on student well-being and academic outcomes.

1.10. Ethical consideration

- The researcher will circulate the form among the participants, explain the study, and request his or her participation.
- The participants will be informed that their responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes.
- Every participant will be made aware of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any point and that their participation is entirely voluntary.
- Throughout the form-filling process, participants will be given chances to ask questions about the program and their involvement in general through emails.
- The participants will be debriefed after the study.

2. Results

Table 1 Correlation Between Social Support and Psychological Well-being Among Students

Variable	1	2
Social Support Scale Average	—	0.112
Well-being Scale Average	0.112	—

Note. N = 287. All correlations were non-significant at p < 0.05 level. H1: Relationship between Social Support and Psychological Well-being

There was no significant correlation between social support and psychological well-being among students (r = 0.112, p = 0.057). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 2 Correlation Between Social Support and Academic Achievement Among Students

Variable	1	2
Social Support Scale Average	—	0.186**
Total AP	0.186**	—

Note. N = 287. **p < 0.01.

H2: Relationship between Social Support and Academic Achievement

There was a significant positive correlation between social support and academic achievement among students (r = 0.186, p = .002). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3 Correlations Between Appraisal Support, Autonomy, and Personal Growth

Variable	1	2	3
Total Appraisal Support Subscale	—	-0.040	0.085
Total Autonomy	-0.040	—	0.275**
Total Personal Growth	0.085	0.275**	—

Note. N = 287. **p < 0.01.

H3: Influence of Appraisal Support on Autonomy and Personal Growth

Appraisal support was not significantly correlated with autonomy (r = -0.040, p = 0.504).

Appraisal support was not significantly correlated with personal growth (r = 0.085, p = 0.151). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 4 Correlations Between Tangible Support, Environmental Mastery, and Academic Achievement

Variable	1	2	3
Total Tangible Subscale	—	-0.003	0.090
Total Environmental	-0.003	—	0.110
Total AP	0.090	0.110	—

Note. N = 287. All correlations were non-significant at p < 0.05 level.

Table 5 Correlations Between Self-esteem Support, Self-acceptance, and Purpose in Life

Variable	1	2	3
Total Self-esteem	—	0.077	0.013
Total Self-acceptance	0.077	—	0.084
Total Life	0.013	0.084	-

Note. N = 287. All correlations were non-significant at p < 0.05 level.

H5: Influence of Self-esteem Support on Self-acceptance and Purpose in Life

Self-esteem support was not significantly correlated with self-acceptance (r = 0.077, p = 0.195).

Self-esteem support was not significantly correlated with purpose in life (r = 0.013, p = 0.831). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 6 Correlations Between Belonging Support, Positive Relations, and Overall Well-being

Variable	1	2	3
Total Belonging Support	—	0.065	0.081
Total Positive Relation	0.065	—	0.527**
Well-being Scale Average	0.081	0.527**	—

Note. N = 287. **p < 0.01.

H6: Influence of Belonging Support on Positive Relations and Overall Well-being

Belonging support was not significantly correlated with positive relations with others (r = 0.065, p = 0.272).

Belonging support was not significantly correlated with overall psychological well-being (r = 0.081, p = 0.169). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

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3. Discussion

The current research explored the links between social support dimensions and psychological well-being and academic performance in students. The results are revealing of the ways in which the different forms of support impact student outcomes, some conforming to prior studies and some deviating.

3.1. Social Support and Psychological Well-being

To our surprise, the research did not identify any link between total social support and psychological well-being (r = .112, p = .057). This result is at odds with sizeable literature pointing toward positive relationships between social support and mental health outcomes. For example, [14] used a meta-analysis that showed moderate positive correlations between social support and well-being in diverse populations. Also, [15] identified that lower quality social support among college students was associated with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

Our study's non-significant result can be accounted for by several factors. One is that, as posited by Cohen and Wills (1985), social support might be more valuable when there is stress through buffering effects rather than affecting well-being directly. Second, cultural or contextual characteristics unique to our sample may impact the perception and use of social support, as [16] discovered cultural variations in the efficacy of various forms of social support.

Third, as Uchino (2009) elaborated, social support and health outcomes have an intricate relationship that is frequently mediated by psychological, behavioral, and physiological pathways that may not be measured with direct correlational analyses.

3.2. Social Support and Academic Achievement

The strong positive correlation between academic achievement and social support (r =.186, p =.002) is consistent with previous research. Rosenfeld et al. (2000) illustrated that pupils with high support from parents, teachers, and peers performed more academically than those who had low support. Likewise, Malecki and Demaray (2006) established that perceived teacher social support was significantly predictive of adolescents' academic competence.

This connection is explained through multiple mechanisms. Social support can possibly increase motivation and academic task engagement, as suggested by Wentzel.[17]. Furthermore, supportive relationships may assist students in learning efficient methods of learning and equip them with tools to master academic problems (Chen, 2005). The comparatively low correlation in our research indicates that although social support is a factor in academic achievement, cognitive skills, study skills, and institutional resources probably have significant roles to play as well[18].

3.3. Specific Dimensions of Social Support

The insignificant results for particular social support dimensions and their impact on various domains of psychological well-being and academic success are a compelling contrast to certain earlier research. For example, our result that appraisal support does not have a significant impact on autonomy or personal growth is at odds with Thoits' (2011) findings implying that external validation can contribute to self-efficacy and personal development.

In the same vein, the absence of substantial correlations between tangible support and mastery of the environment or academic performance conflicts with some studies like those by Cheng and Chan (2004), who revealed that tangible assistance helped in the management of environmental demands. [19] suggested, however, that how useful diverse forms of support are depends on cultural circumstances and personal inclinations, which may account for our findings.

The non-significant effect of self-esteem support on purpose in life and self-acceptance also departs from works such as Taylor and Turner (2001), which identified emotional support with a more developed self-concept. Nonetheless, as Ryan and Deci (2001) explain in their self- determination theory, intrinsic motivations could be more important for genuine self-acceptance than external approval.

Lastly, the absence of substantial correlation between belonging support and positive relations or general well-being is contrary to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis that states that the need to belong is a basic human motivation with consequences for psychological functioning. It is consistent with Siewert [20] results that the quality, not the presence, of social relationships predicts well-being outcomes.

Notably, our research established a high positive correlation between good relationships with other   people and psychological well-being (r =.527, p <.001), as argued by Ryff and Singer's (2000) definition of positive relationships as a central psychological well-being dimension. This implies that although membership support per se may not be directly linked with well-being, the nature of interpersonal relationships developed by students is still important to their psychological health.

4. Conclusion

This study looked at the relationship between different types of social support and student outcomes in terms of psychological well-being and academic achievement in a sample of 287. It concluded that general social support was related to academic success but not psychological well-being. Individual support dimensions like appraisal, tangible, self-esteem, and belonging did not have significant correlations with their respective hypothesized outcomes. Nonetheless, high-quality interpersonal relationships were strongly associated with psychological adjustment, illustrating the priority of relational quality over type of support. Implications are that educational and support interventions should emphasize students' formation of quality interpersonal relationships rather than promoting social support in general. The limitations of the study are its cross-sectional nature, use of self-reports, and restricted generalizability, implying the value of future longitudinal studies and research among more diverse groups.

4.1. Future Implications

This research has important implications for educational practice, support services for students, and future studies by calling for an emphasis on building supportive environments that promote academic success as well as psychological health. It indicates that schools need to support significant student relationships through programs such as peer mentoring and faculty outreach. Student support services need to surpass broad support strategies and make interventions more specialized by specific support dimensions, and institutional policies need to emphasize inclusive

community-building strategies. The results further provide theoretical contribution by demonstrating that the effect of social support varies by type and setting and so requires more differentiated models in educational research. Causality, subjective experiences, and targeted interventions need to be investigated in future research. At an individual level, learners are also motivated to focus on quality relationships as a key component of psychological health. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive support programs in appreciation of the variability in support efficacy among diverse student populations.

4.2. Limitations of the study

The research has a number of limitations. Its cross-sectional nature constrains the determination of causality, which may be better managed by longitudinal research. The use of self-reported data can be biased, prompting the use of more varied methods of assessment. The limited diversity of the sample constrains generalizability, emphasizing the inclusion of diverse populations in future research. Also, the research concentrated mostly on quantitative components of social support, and the door was open for qualitative work to investigate further insights. Further research must study possible moderators and mediators, including personality, coping mechanisms, and organizational factors, and construct interventions to facilitate effective support systems in schools.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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