

## CLASSROOM SUPPORT AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG COLLEGES OF EDUCATION STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Classroom support has been hypothesized to facilitate academic achievement. Teachers and classmates play a critical role in facilitating adequate classroom support systems. The main aim of the study was to investigate the impact of classroom support on students' subjective wellbeing within three Colleges of Education institutions in Ghana. A cross-sectional survey design was employed where three Colleges of Education institutions were selected for the study. Participant for this study were students who reported on the support they had received from both their teachers and classmates. A proportionate stratified sampling procedure was used to select 145 students from the three selected institutions. A multidimensional scale for measuring teacher and classmate support was used to solicit data from the participants. Data on the first objective were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically, mean and standard deviation whereas data on objective two were analysed using simple linear regression. Findings of the study showed that teacher and peer support within the Colleges of Education institutions sampled were academic and social in nature. Further, findings also revealed that classroom support was a significant predictor of students' subjective wellbeing. The study recommends that the College of Education tutors should maintain the attitude of rendering academic and social support to students for the purposes of scaffolding students' development.

**Keywords:** Well-being, classroom support, academic engagement, transition and achievement

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The transition from secondary to tertiary education is considered to be a source of considerable stress for students (Dyson & Renk, 2006). Not only do they have to create new social networks, they are also expected to modify their existing relationships with family and friends, and adopt new study patterns (Coninck, Matthijs & Luyten, 2019). Many students may have to learn how to live independently, which entails budgeting their time and money. Literature has shown that students who fail to adapt are more likely to drop out of university than those who adjust well (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004). Most researchers and practitioners would agree that classroom support is an important factor in learning and academic success for students of all ages. Research examining student beliefs and behaviours in classroom contexts has produced findings that support this view and

suggests that students with greater perceptions of support from various sources, such as peers and instructors, generally have less distress and higher levels of academic engagement and achievement (Anderman 2003; Buhs 2005).

Students' need for relatedness or belongingness is defined as the extent to which students feel accepted and supported by teachers and peers, especially at the college level as students often face the need to form and maintain new relationships while transitioning from high school to college (Pittman & Richmond 2008). The majority of belonging studies at the college level has focused attention on the campus community and promoting belongingness among minority students especially in developed economies such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom (e.g., Castellanos & Jones 2003; Nunez 2009; Strayhorn & Saddler 2009; Walton & Cohen 2007). However, Strayhorn (2012) suggests that belonging beliefs which come from support from friends and instructors are context-dependent, such that sense of belonging in a particular context (e.g., department, classroom) has the greatest influence on outcomes (e.g., adjustment, well-being and achievement) in that area. The classroom is often the centre of students' academic experience and as such, warrants more empirical investigation.

Many students interact very well with tutors during their college stay period and the salience of lecturer-student relationships to the academic success has been highlighted in studies (Coninck, Matthijs & Luyten, 2019; Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs & Hawley, 2014). In contrast to students who voluntarily withdrew from college institutions, persistent students reported more interaction with lecturers and rated their instructors higher in the areas of concern for student development and teaching (Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs & Hawley, 2014). Students also spend much of their time with peers (especially, classmates) in college and these relationships can play an important role in retention and success. Students who get supports from peers in most academic settings are reported to have less academic and social struggles (Pittman and Richmond 2008). The quality of the relationship with one's lecturers and classmates' has been found to impact well-being (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Since the concept of social support was first proposed in the academic literature, the discussion about the relationship between social support and subjective well-being has largely been recognized both in developed and developing countries.

In Ghana, the issue of classroom support and academic quality has also been a subject under discussion and investigation (Borti, 2015). The country is made of the youthful population out of which many are pursuing higher education (GSS, 2010). Hence it is only prudent that the classroom quality and well-being of the youth are of concern to researchers and other stakeholders of education. In an attempt to provide good education, many factors have been identified as being responsible for the falling standard of education. Among such factors are the issues of the classroom environment and the well-being of students. Contingent on the foregoing background, this current study, therefore, sought to explore classroom support and the subjective well-being of College of Education students. In the context of higher education, subjective well-being has been associated with important outcomes such as educational aspirations, academic engagement, class attendance, educational track/choice of field of study, and academic achievement, and dropout (Chambel & Curral 2005; Nickerson et al. 2011; Salmela-Aro & Tuominen- Soini 2010). Hence, promoting college students' subjective well-being is an important outcome in itself, and also important for academic and

professional success. Given the relevance of subjective well-being as stated above, it becomes important to better understand the variables that promote college students' subjective well-being. Global School-based Health Survey (GSHS) in Ghana indicated that over 80% of adolescents' reported experiences such as feeling worried, feeling sad and hopeless, and feeling lonely in classrooms of schools which in turn had a negative effect on their daily life activities (Owusu, 2008). The psychosocial needs of college students especially play a critical role in their school and general life endeavours.

Several studies in western jurisdictions (i.e. developed countries) have demonstrated that school social support (i.e. lecturer support and classmates support) has a positive effect on adolescents' health and subjective wellbeing (Gini, Carli, & Pozzoli, 2009; Lindsey, Joe, & Nebbitt, 2010). However, in developing country like Ghana, there appears to be a paucity of empirical information regarding classroom support (i.e. Tutors/lecturers support and classmates support) on the subjective well-being of Colleges of Education students. This is probably so because most researchers have focused much attention on issues such as; social support and stress impact on academic performance (Glozah & Pevalin, 2014), academic stress and psychological well-being of senior high school students (Duncan-Williams, 2015), marriage and subjective well-being (Addai, Opoku-Agyeman & Amanfu, 2015), the adolescent meaning of health and well-being (Glozah, 2015), predictors of subjective well-being among older Ghanaians (Calys-Tagoe et al., 2014), classroom quality of preschoolers (McCoy & Wolf, 2018) and challenges in Ghana classrooms (Borti, 2015). Clearly, the above studies show that subjective well-being and classroom support has been looked at independently, however, the two variables, that is classroom support and subjective well-being of college students have not been studied jointly.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical underpinning of this study is a developmental ecological theory by Anderson and Mohr (2003). The theory preaches that adolescents do not simply develop within contexts, but rather, they interact with and are impacted by the environment in which they are situated. In other words, according to this perspective, the manner in which adolescents develop is the result of inseparable interactions between the adolescent, caregivers, and environmental factors. Put simply, throughout development, adolescents encounter a variety of different stimuli that can serve to either enhance or hinder developmentally-relevant competencies (Anderson & Mohr, 2003). Environments characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships with recognizable norms, values, and goals are considered functional communities. Serving as a functional community may be critical to schools fulfilling their purpose of enhancing students' developmental capabilities. One such avenue through which to achieve this goal would be to facilitate caring and supportive relationships in schools.

In the literature, subjective well-being (SWB) has been conceptualized as the scientific term for happiness. While "happiness" is subject to many different interpretations, SWB refers to the global experience of positive reactions to one's life (Diener & Diener, 1994). This higher-order construct can be broken down into three correlated, yet separate components including affective and cognitive judgements. Namely, SWB is thought to be comprised of cognitive appraisals of one's life as a whole (i.e., one has a good life), as well as a ratio of the ideally

high level of positive affect to the ideally low level of negative affect (Diener & Diener, 1995). The combination of these units appears to not only predict positive development but also serves as a factor that enhances and maintains optimal functioning (Park, 2004). Composite measures of SWB are typically comprised of the three aforementioned components (life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect). Life satisfaction is sometimes examined in isolation due to findings that indicated that it does transcend beyond evaluations of the current moment (Diener & Diener, 1996), influence behaviour change (Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seeley, 1991), and remain relatively free of social desirability bias (Diener & Diener, 1994). Empirical evidence provides support for the link between classroom support relationships and students' well-being. Siddall et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between school-related social support (i.e., peer support for learning, and teacher-student relationships) and middle school students' satisfaction with life and discovered that social support was associated with subjective well-being (i.e., global life satisfaction). Again, in a different study, Liu, Mei, Tian, and Huebner (2016) discovered that teacher and classmate support variables were identified as unique predictors of students' subjective well-being. Furthermore, a longitudinal study by Stiglbauer, Gnambs, Gamsjäger, and Batinic (2013) also provided support for a more dynamic relationship between social support and the SWB of students. Studies as highlighted above seem to point to fruitful classroom interaction as one of the relevant ingredients for education quality. Hence the need for contemporary investigation on the status of classroom support and its impacts on the subjective wellbeing of college students.

### **3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The overall aim of the study was to explore classroom support and college of education students' subjective well-being. Specifically, the study sought to examine:

1. Nature of classroom support (i.e. teacher support and classmates supports) within Colleges of Education in Ghana.
2. Impact of classroom support on the subjective well-being of students.

### **4.0 METHOD**

#### **4.1 Design**

A cross-sectional survey design was employed for the conduct of this study. The idea behind the choice of this design was that the researchers desired to dig into and report the state of the art knowledge on classroom support and subjective well-being of Colleges of Education students in Ghana (Amedahe, 2002). This particular design also allowed for the use of a large number of respondents and statistical analysis.

#### **4.2 Participants**

The study targeted students within three Colleges of Education institutions within the Central Region of Ghana (names withheld for ethical purposes). The study population were estimated to be 15000 and based on the stated population, 375 was deemed as an appropriate representation of the population according to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) computation of

sample size. However, due to the covid-19 pandemic second wave situation, only 145 students were contacted and used. In coming up with the stated sample, a multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the students from the three selected colleges to serve as respondents of the study. In the first stage, a purposive sampling procedure was used to select the colleges and in the second stage, a stratified sampling procedure was used to select students from the various institutions.

**4.3 Measures**

A multidimensional scale for measuring teacher and classmate supports that was developed by Torsheim, Word and Samdal (2000) was adapted and used. The first dimension, that is, the teacher support dimension has four items with a Cronbach Alpha index of .77. The second dimension which measures classmate support also has four items with a Cronbach Alpha index of .75. All the eight items of the scale were positively worded. The second instrument that was adapted and used was the subjective well-being scale developed by Longo et al., (2017). The well-being scale had 14 number of items with a Cronbach Alpha index of .88. The instrument was pilot-tested and the items were fine-tuned.

**4.4 Data Collection Approach**

The researchers sought ethical clearance from the ethical protocols that were duly adhered to after a panel of experts in Measurement and Evaluation has gone through the entire manuscript including the instrument for purposes of content validation. First of all, the introductory letter was given to the Principals of the colleges. Secondly, respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity before, during and after the study. The researchers made use of six weeks for the data collection exercise.

After the data collection exercise, data to answer the first research objectives were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically, means and standard deviation. However, data to answer the second objective was analysed using simple linear regression.

**5.0 RESULTS**

**5.1 Nature of classroom support.**

The foregoing objective sought to explore the nature of classroom support in the selected Colleges of Education. Classroom support construct was measured using ‘Teacher and Classmate support scale. The scale was a four-point Likert type, for interpretation purposes, this study considered the standard mean score as 2.5. The summary of the results is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1- Classroom support**

Statements	M	SD
Teacher Support-----	----	----

Our teachers treat us fairly.	3.4	.56
When I need extra help I do get it from my teachers.	3.3	.67
My teachers are interested in me as a person.	3.0	.90
Our teachers are nice and friendly when it comes to helping them solve an academic challenge.	3.4	.70
Classmate Support----- -	-----	-----
The students in my class enjoy being together.	3.4	.65
Most of the students in my class are kind and helpful.	3.3	.67
Other students accept me as I am and extend helping hand whenever I need.	3.3	.68
When a classmate is unhappy due to academic frustrations, other students comfort him or her.	3.0	.90
<b>Mean of Means/Average SD</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>.72</b>

Results from Table 1 showed that students received support from both classmates and teachers. Regarding support from teachers, respondents agreed to several items that form the teacher support scale. For example, respondents agreed ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) that their teachers are fair in terms of how they treat them. The foregoing support appears to be more social than academic since fairness as indicated in the item was in reference to the totality of how teachers interact with them. Again, respondents indicated ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) that their teachers are nice and friendly when they consult them on any academic challenge. Respondents also concurred ( $M = 3.3$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) to the fact that when they need extra help from teachers they do get it. Moreover, respondents agreed ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) that their teachers have them at heart when it comes to classroom support.

With respect to support provided by classmates, respondents agreed ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) that they are normally together as friends and they enjoy being together. Adding to the above, respondents agreed ( $M = 3.3$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) that most of their classmates are kind and helpful when it comes to addressing academic challenges at their level. Indicating social support in the class, respondents agreed ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) that when a classmate is unhappy due to academic frustrations, other students comfort him or her. Clearly, results have shown that teacher and peer support are academic and social in nature. This may have unique implications on students subjective wellbeing.

## 5.2 Impact of classroom support on the subjective well-being of students.

The objective was to ascertain the impact of classroom support on the subjective-wellbeing of students. Classroom support construct was measured using the 'Teacher-classmate support' scale while students subjective wellbeing was also measured using subjective wellbeing scale.

**Table 3- Regression analysis of classroom support and subjective-wellbeing.**

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized coefficient		
Model	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	18.754	2.894		6.480	.001
C.Support	1.095	.110	.641	9.977	.001

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of classroom support on students subjective well-being. In line with this, results show that the model was significant  $F(1, 143) = 99.54, p = .001, R^2 = .410$ . This is to say that the level of support that an individual student receives in class is an important predictor of student subjective wellbeing. Further analysis of the data showed that a “one-unit increase in-classroom support received by students leads to 1.095 increase in students subjective wellbeing”. This means that as classroom support improves at least by a unit, the student's wellbeing which is a relevant psychological state for better performance also increases by 1.095 unit. In a nutshell, adequate classroom support edges the good psychological state of the learners which subsequently may lead to better performance of academic tasks.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The first objective of the study was to explore the nature of classroom support in the selected Colleges of Education institutions. The study discovered that classroom support which takes the form of teacher and peer support were academic and social in nature. The support was positive because social warmth and academic assistance were provided by both teachers and classmate. The foregoing finding corroborates with earlier findings in the literature that also reported cordial teacher-lecturer relationship (Coninck, Matthijs & Luyten, 2019; Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs & Hawley, 2014). Colleges of Education students who are under training to become professional teachers are expected to have the skill of interacting with classmates in order to know how to work in a group situation. Basically, such a group-work phenomenon happens in the form of group discussions or a student receiving or giving supports to colleague(s). This study made a discovery of peer-support which were purely academic and social in nature which aligns with the findings of Pittman and Richmond (2008) who had earlier postulated that students who spends much time with peers' in school experience less of academic and social struggles. All in all, the positive relationship among teachers and students which yield effective teacher and classmate support is a good social phenomenon in the context of education for fruitful teaching and learning encounter (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The second objective of this study was to examine the impact of classroom support on the subjective well-being of students. Subjective well-being which is a positive reaction to one's life or simply put 'happiness' has been identified as a phenomenon that is often acquired within a group context which has numerous academic benefits such as optimal functioning and satisfaction for academic work (Park, 2004). Based on the foregoing significance of the issue of subjective well-being in the school context and the fact that the nexus (i.e. classroom

support and subjective well-being) has not yet been investigated within the Ghanaian context, it became necessary for the examination of classroom support and subjective well-being nexus to be done. Findings revealed that the level of support that an individual student receives in class is an important predictor of student subjective wellbeing. This means that as classroom support improves at least by a unit, the student's wellbeing which is a relevant psychological state for better performance also improves. This obviously has an implication on preservice teachers' sense of competence and effectiveness in learning relevant school materials. Teacher and peer supports may have distinct contributions to the subjective well-being of students, however, in all, classroom support as a composite has an impact on subjective well-being variable. The findings agree with Siddall et al. (2013) who discovered that social support was associated with subjective well-being (i.e., global life satisfaction). Again, the finding also confirms that of Liu, Mei, Tian, and Huebner (2016) whose study showed that teacher and classmate support variables were unique predictors of students' subjective well-being. Clearly, classroom support which is academic and social in nature has a psychological benefit on college students (Stiglbauer, Gnambs, Gamsjäger, & Batinic, 2013) which on a whole may in turn positively affect academic work at school.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

Students are more likely to benefit from instruction and have effective training toward their intended teaching career as a result of positive teacher and peer support existing in the classrooms of the colleges that were studied. The result is worthwhile since the desire of all academic institutions are directed toward quality education with the focus of helping the nation achieves the Sustainable Development Goal 4. The appropriate psychological well-being of students plays a relevant role in classroom teaching and learning. It can further be concluded that as students enjoy adequate teacher and classmate support in the form of social and academic, the students benefit psychologically. This is to say that adequate classroom support affects the psychological well-being of the students which consequently may impact classroom performance.

## **8.0 LIMITATIONS**

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution since the study made use of only three Colleges of Education institutions within a single region in Ghana (i.e. Central Region). Hence the generalizability of the findings to other Colleges of Education institutions in other regions in Ghana may be somewhat problematic even though the findings are generally useful and make a great contribution to literature. Future researchers are encouraged to replicate the study in other regions in Ghana to add up to the current study's generalizability.

## **9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE AND POLICY**

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. College of Education tutors should maintain the attitude of rendering academic and social support to students for the purposes of scaffolding students' development.



2. In the light of harnessing positive subjective well-being that creates a classroom atmosphere that facilitates teaching and learning, workshops activities on classroom management should place more emphasis on classroom support since it has an impact on the psychological wellbeing of students.
3. Finally, Colleges of Education guidance and counselling coordinators should as a matter of policy organize sensitization programs on peer support to sustain and improve the cordial atmosphere for cooperative learning.

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