



Understanding Students' Wellbeing in a Maltese Post-Secondary Academic Setting

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Abstract

This case study, carried out at a Maltese post-secondary school, was informed by Bradburn's Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) theory. This framework suggests that individuals interpret the concept of wellbeing differently, shaped by their distinct life experiences. It also emphasises that wellbeing is influenced by the interplay of positive elements that evoke positive emotions and negative elements that trigger negative emotions. The objectives of the research were to understand what post-secondary school students comprehend by the term 'wellbeing'; to identify what they perceive by positive and negative factors that influence their emotions; and to elicit recommendations from students for initiatives or processes to enhance overall wellbeing within the school context. The research employed a qualitative interpretative approach, conducting 12 semi-structured interviews with convenience-sampled students. Data analysis followed the Braun-Clark method, and an inductive interpretivist approach was used to derive results and conclusions. Students emphasised the significance of family, teachers, friends, physical activity, mental health, nutrition, lifestyle choices and the environment as positive factors contributing to their wellbeing. Conversely, they identified workloads, deadlines, poor academic performance, stress, anxiety, negative peer influence, being compared to others, and physical health issues as negative factors affecting their emotional state and overall wellbeing. Beyond school-related factors, students also highlighted the impact of hostile parental relationships and chaotic home environments on their wellbeing. As recommendations, students proposed that educators reduce student workloads and deadlines, organise more sports tournaments and extracurricular activities, update gym equipment, and periodically communicate with students to remind them of available guidance and counselling services. The researcher concluded by providing her own reflections on the study.

Keywords: coping, living, resilience, education, striving

1. Introduction

This paper presents an empirical case study conducted in one of Malta's largest post-secondary schools, which provides non-compulsory education to students aged 16 to 18 (Eurydice, 2023a). The school attracts students from across the country and diverse socio-economic backgrounds, focusing exclusively on academic rather than vocational subjects. Post-secondary education at this school spans two years, culminating in the national MATSEC (Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate) examinations (MEDE, 2017). These exams include advanced-level subjects, commonly known as A-levels, and intermediate-level subjects. Importantly, these qualifications serve as entry requirements for the majority of tertiary-level courses offered by the University of Malta and other higher education institutions.

The school in this case study strives to provide its students with an optimal educational experience. Achieving this objective requires prioritising students' health and wellbeing, which have become increasingly significant and complex challenges (European Union, 2021). This need is underscored by national statistics revealing that one in four Maltese adolescents aged 15 and above experience wellbeing-related issues (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2019). A local study conducted in 2022 by the National Statistics Office (NSO) found that only 25.5% of adolescents aged 16 to 17 reported high levels of overall life satisfaction (NSO, 2024). Similarly, a recent study involving medicine and pharmacy students at the University of Malta indicated that eight percent had contemplated suicide due to the pressures of academic stress (Blundell & Degiovanni, 2024). These findings highlight the critical need to prioritise wellbeing. Accordingly, this study focuses on understanding the perceptions of students at a specific post-secondary school to lay the groundwork for implementing targeted measures aimed at enhancing wellbeing. The research values student input and aligns with recommendations from the Directorates for Education, which advocate for inclusive pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and address diversity within the curriculum (Directorates of Education, 2021). Such an approach ensures that the needs of all students, regardless of the level of attention or support they require, are effectively met.

Malta has demonstrated its commitment to mental health and wellbeing through the *Maltese Mental Health Strategy 2020–2030*, which highlights mental health as a central pillar of national health policy (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2019). This comprehensive strategy adopts a proactive approach, advocating for initiatives that span education, community engagement, and systemic reform. A key focus is the integration of mental health services into schools to enhance resilience and foster emotional wellbeing among both students and educators. Additionally, the strategy emphasises the importance of community-based mental health services to create a holistic support system (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2019).

Complementing this, the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030* places wellbeing at the core of its vision, recognising the intrinsic link between mental health, wellbeing, and educational success. This strategy employs a person-centred approach, aiming to improve the quality of life for educators and students alike. It prioritises fostering a sense of belonging within schools, equipping individuals with socio-emotional skills, and addressing contemporary challenges that may impact the overall wellbeing and mental health. By creating supportive and inclusive educational environments, this strategy underscores the importance of wellbeing, resilience and lifelong learning as key outcomes (MEYR, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the overarching goal of this case study was to place the students themselves at the centre of the research by asking them to provide their perceptions of

wellbeing and suggest ways the school can foster greater wellbeing. Efforts to enhance wellbeing should be tailored to the specific needs of the individuals who utilise these services (Gatt, 2022). Consequently, it is crucial to first assess the perspectives and needs of students within their educational environment to ensure the effectiveness of such initiatives (Bettencourt et al., 2021). Hence, this case study seeks to investigate the concept of wellbeing among post-secondary students to identify practical initiatives that the school can implement. These initiatives aim to enhance its existing practices and foster higher levels of wellbeing, mental health and resilience within its student community.

1.1 The Notion of Wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing has deep historical roots, with anthropological evidence from ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indian, and Chinese civilisations depicting efforts to achieve happiness and fulfilment (Naeem et al., 2016). Aristotle introduced the notion of "eudaimonia" in ancient Greece, defining wellbeing as the pursuit of virtue and happiness (Feng & Xuanyu, 2024). Over time, the term evolved, with "wellness" first appearing in 1654 to describe the absence of disease (Scaria et al., 2020). The World Health Organisation (WHO) expanded this definition in 1947, framing wellbeing as a holistic state encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions (Schramme, 2023).

Bradburn's Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) theory, developed in 1969, marked a significant milestone in the scientific study of wellbeing, defining it as a balance of positive and negative emotions (Bradburn, 1969). Modern definitions, such as those by Dodge et al. (2012) and Diener (2009), focus on equilibrium and subjective evaluations of life satisfaction. These frameworks have been instrumental in shaping contemporary wellbeing initiatives, particularly within educational contexts.

Globally, organisations like WHO, UNESCO, OECD, and UNICEF work to promote wellbeing through initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), educational reforms, and social-emotional learning programmes (WHO, 2024). These efforts focus on fostering physical, mental, and social wellbeing in schools and beyond (UNESCO, 2022). Locally, Maltese organisations like the Malta Foundation for Wellbeing Society, Richmond Foundation, and Sedqa support wellbeing through research, mental health services, and educational outreach, addressing diverse aspects of wellbeing such as social inclusion, mental health awareness, and substance abuse prevention (Cefai et al., 2024).

These global and local initiatives highlight the growing importance of wellbeing and the collaborative efforts required to foster it in schools and communities.

1.2 Wellbeing in Schools

Schools adopt practices that foster wellbeing that promotes the interconnectedness of psychological, emotional, and physical health. This holistic perspective acknowledges that the overall wellbeing of every student is influenced by the resources they have available, the environment in which they grow and the social support system they have (WHO, 2022). Different studies show that positive factors, positive emotions and thus the promotion of wellbeing in schools correlates with better academic performance, reduced absenteeism and an overall positive school climate, besides preventing the negative factors that generate negative emotions and hence mental health problems and other adversities (Cefai & Cooper, 2017, OECD, 2023). Such results advocate for higher investments into wellbeing practices and resources for teacher training in mental health, integrating of social-emotional learning into the

curriculum and the implementation of policies that support the creation of safe and inclusive schools (Cefai & Cooper, 2017, Fazel et al., 2014).

The deliberate teaching of life skills that are instrumental in promoting mental health and wellbeing among students especially because at the post-secondary level they are not provided with Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) lessons anymore (Bianchi, 2024). This subject is provided to all students during compulsory education (MEYR, 2023). However, during these years of the post-secondary, students experience “considerable stress and increased risk for mental health challenges (Campbell et al., 2022) and still need to be equipped with skills such as emotional regulation, stress management, resilience building and interpersonal communication (Pascoe et al., 2019). Educators are the ones who provide them with invaluable tools to navigate the challenges they encounter during their academic journey. Moreover, the cultivation of these skills fosters a sense of self-efficacy among students, empowering them to actively engage in the pursuit of their own wellbeing (Mendes de Oliveira et al., 2022).

Digital wellbeing has become a critical focus for post-secondary students navigating the demands of academic life and personal development. Wellbeing applications on mobile, tablets and laptops app, offer a promising solution by enhancing emotion regulation and resilience through targeted digital interventions (MacIsaac et al., 2024). Such tools have shown potential in reducing stress and improving mental health outcomes among young adults, addressing the rising levels of anxiety and depression in this population (MacIsaac et al., 2024). Similarly, Austin et al. (2025) emphasise the effectiveness of digital therapy platforms in overcoming barriers to mental health support, such as stigma and accessibility challenges, particularly for marginalised groups. Together, these approaches demonstrate the role of digital solutions in fostering a balanced and supportive environment for students' mental health and wellbeing.

The journey towards fostering student wellbeing, extends beyond just acknowledgement of proactive engagement and intervention (Gatt, 2022). Through the establishment of trusting relationships and the imparting of essential skills, educators play a vital role in nurturing a culture of holistic wellbeing within the post-secondary school.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework chosen to guide this study is Bradburn's Subjective Wellbeing (SWB), which underscores the importance of recognising each student as a unique individual with specific strengths and needs (Bradburn, 1969). The framework highlights that wellbeing is a subjective experience shaped by an individual's personal circumstances and diverse life experiences (Ștefărcățu et al., 2014). Bradburn (1969) conceptualised SWB as the result of a dynamic balance between positive factors that generate positive emotions and negative factors that generate negative emotions, positing that an individual's wellbeing is enhanced when positive emotions outweigh negative ones.

This theoretical framework provides a valuable lens for understanding the nuances of students' wellbeing, particularly in educational contexts. By adopting Bradburn's theory, this study seeks to explore the factors that contribute to students' positive and negative emotions and how these influence their overall sense of wellbeing. The theory's emphasis on the interplay between emotions enables a comprehensive examination of subjective wellbeing, aligning with the study's aim to place students' lived experiences at the forefront. Furthermore, Bradburn's framework has been widely applied in educational research, where it has proven effective in identifying actionable insights to support wellbeing in learning environments (Adler &

Seligman, 2016). This theoretical foundation allows for a nuanced approach to investigating student wellbeing, recognising the complex and multifaceted nature of wellbeing in schools.

1.4 The Research Gap

Several local studies have explored the subjective wellbeing of students during their compulsory education years (Askeff Williams et al., 2013, Cefai et al., 2014, Cefai & Cooper, 2017, Debono, 2018, Haber, 2020) and at the tertiary level (Borg & Cefai, 2014, Camilleri & Galea, 2017, Cauchi & Degiovanni, 2015). However, research focusing on the post-secondary years, particularly among students enrolled in academic rather than vocational schools, remains scarce. This lack of research prompted the present study, which was conducted in one of Malta's largest academic post-secondary schools, marking the first investigation of its kind in this setting. By prioritising students' perspectives, the educators at this school, who are dedicated to advancing wellbeing, can deepen their understanding and adopt effective strategies to enhance student wellbeing (Cefai & Cooper, 2011).

2. Objectives and Research Questions

The primary goal of this case study was to explore how post-secondary students at a specific school define and interpret the concept of 'wellbeing.' Using Bradburn's Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) theory (1969) as a guiding framework, the study aimed to uncover the students' perspectives on the positive factors that evoke emotions contributing to greater wellbeing, as well as the negative factors that generate emotions diminishing their overall sense of wellbeing. The research also sought to collect actionable suggestions and recommendations from students on how the school could foster an environment that promotes higher levels of wellbeing. By placing the students' voices at the centre, the study endeavoured to gain a comprehensive understanding of their needs and experiences to inform targeted wellbeing strategies.

To achieve these objectives, the research was driven by one overarching question:

What do post-secondary school students understand by the term 'wellbeing'?

This was further explored through three subsidiary questions:

1. What positive factors do students identify as contributors to positive emotions that enhance wellbeing?
2. What negative factors do students believe lead to negative emotions that decrease their sense of wellbeing?
3. What initiatives or strategies do students recommend the school implement to improve overall student wellbeing?

By investigating these questions, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the students' subjective experiences and offer a foundation for implementing initiatives that resonate with their specific needs, ultimately strengthening the school's efforts to promote a supportive and nurturing environment.

3. Methodology

This case study was conducted within an interpretivist philosophical framework, which is well-suited for understanding human behaviour in its social and relational context. Interpretivism, as an epistemological stance, emphasises the importance of studying individuals as social actors, recognising that human actions are influenced by unique identities, lived experiences, and interpersonal dynamics (Saunders et al., 2007). Through this lens, the study sought to delve into students' subjective experiences and uncover the realities shaping their perceptions of

wellbeing. By valuing the diversity of perspectives, this approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted concept of wellbeing.

The research adopted an inductive methodology, focusing on deriving insights directly from the participants and their contextual realities rather than testing pre-existing theories. This approach aligns with qualitative research principles, which assert that knowledge is not fixed but socially constructed and deeply intertwined with individuals' interpretations and lived experiences (Saunders et al., 2007). Guided by this interpretivist and inductive framework, the study prioritised the voices of students to develop an in-depth understanding of their wellbeing perceptions.

3.1 Research Process

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve students selected through a convenience sampling method. The selection process involved consultation with the Head of School to ensure the participants reflected a range of experiences and perspectives. Each participant received an information sheet detailing the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, the data collection process, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point. During the interviews, conversations were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed word-for-word. To ensure accuracy and participant validation, copies of the transcripts were shared with the interviewees, giving them an opportunity to confirm or amend the recorded information.

3.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), was used to analyse the interview data. This systematic method involved multiple readings of the transcripts to familiarise the researcher with the data. Significant pieces of information were identified and coded, allowing patterns and themes to emerge. These themes were then refined, with the most relevant and impactful ones being selected for deeper analysis. Finally, the findings were synthesised into a coherent narrative that highlighted the key insights derived from the data, providing a clear account of the students' perspectives on wellbeing.

4. Findings and Discussions

The findings reveal that students define wellbeing through various interconnected terms, including family, environment, friends, time, mental health, physical health, diet, lifestyle, emotions, stress, quality of life, capability, challenges, and balance. One student described wellbeing as “the person's quality of life and how physically, mentally and emotionally healthy they are” (Student 2).

The students' conceptualisation of wellbeing closely aligns with the definition provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024), while also incorporating additional elements from the Malta Wellbeing Index (Cefai et al., 2024) and Chapter 456 of Maltese legislation concerning public health (Legislation Malta, 2007). Notably, mental and emotional health, which students identified as key components of wellbeing, are absent from the WHO's definition (2024). Instead, their perspective resonates more strongly with the definition in the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, which highlights “physical, socio-emotional, mental, and digital wellbeing” (MEYR, 2023, p.38). Interestingly, despite being part of a generation deeply immersed in technology, none of the students mentioned digital wellbeing in their responses.

Furthermore, the emphasis students placed on mental wellbeing aligns with Chapter 456 of Maltese legislation, which defines public health as “the physical and mental wellbeing of the community” (Legislation Malta, 2007). This alignment underscores the importance of mental health in the broader understanding of wellbeing, as reflected in both student perceptions and legislative definitions.

For a school to foster greater wellbeing, it is imperative to prioritise the voices of its students. Understanding what students perceive as wellbeing is the first step, given its inherently subjective nature. By engaging students in defining wellbeing, the school can lay a foundation for developing targeted initiatives that align with their needs and experiences. This participatory approach ensures that any future interventions are relevant, effective, and responsive to the unique challenges faced by students.

4.1 Theme 1: Positive Factors that Promote Wellbeing

When asked to identify positive factors that generate emotions and enhance their wellbeing at school, students mentioned teachers, family, friends, environment, guidance and counselling, sports, food, and school-organised activities. These findings emphasise the importance of a comprehensive approach to fostering wellbeing in educational settings.

4.1.1 Teachers

Students consistently highlighted the positive impact of teachers on their emotions and overall wellbeing. This aligns with findings from the OECD (2017), which reveal that 71% of students who have strong relationships with their teachers report enjoying their time at school. Oppenheimer (2014) further asserts that “teachers matter more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling” (p.1). Students in this study expressed appreciation for teachers who care for them, motivate them, and provide understanding during challenging times. One student remarked, “There are teachers who kind of let students know that they care, who listen and show that they understand. They acknowledge that school is hard but they motivate” (Student 1). These findings align with the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, which advocates for teacher training to support students' socio-emotional wellbeing (MEYR, 2023).

4.1.2 Family and Friends

Family and friends emerged as pivotal contributors to student wellbeing. Most students referred to family and peer support when defining or describing factors that enhance their wellbeing. Ten students specifically mentioned the importance of friendships in their daily school experience, reflecting the critical role of meaningful relationships. Research supports this, with studies showing that relationships with family, peers, and educators are integral to positive wellbeing (Abela et al., 2024, Ahanonu & Jooste, 2016, Chattu et al., 2020, Ross et al., 2020). One student noted, “The first factor is other people who are ready to hear you, especially when you have problems, like your girlfriend, mother and father. Support helps a lot, and I am sorry for those who don't have it, as honestly, I don't know how I would cope if I was by myself” (Student 8). These findings underscore the importance of fostering strong support networks, in line with broader educational strategies that highlight the significance of collaboration between schools and families.

4.1.3 Environment

The school environment significantly influences student wellbeing, as students appreciated both the physical and social aspects of their surroundings. Ahanonu and Jooste (2016) argue

that schools with healthy, safe environments—including access to hygiene and sanitation—positively impact wellbeing. While students did not specifically mention these factors, they praised the school's library, canteen, and green spaces, which align with Cefai and Cooper's (2017) findings on the benefits of unpolluted, stimulating spaces. For example, the school's large, well-lit library provides an optimal study environment, fostering academic and emotional wellbeing. These observations echo the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, which prioritises creating supportive and inclusive educational environments.

4.1.4 Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling services were identified as vital for emotional wellbeing. Students highlighted the support and empowerment provided by these services, which are available daily. Eurydice (2023b) describes counselling as “a means of relating and responding to clients to give them safe space and time to explore their feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and behaviour” (p.1). Aligning with global and national policies, these services reflect the WHO's emphasis on mental health support in schools and the *Maltese Mental Health Strategy 2020–2030*, which advocates for accessible counselling to foster resilience (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2019).

4.1.5 Sports

Engaging in sports was identified as a key factor in alleviating stress and enhancing mental health. Research corroborates this, with studies showing that regular exercise reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety while promoting happiness and life satisfaction (Pascoe et al., 2020). Gatt (2022) highlights the role of physical activity in supporting adolescent mental health, echoing the WHO's emphasis on integrating physical activity into school curricula (WHO, 2016). These findings underscore the value of embedding sports and physical education within broader educational policies aimed at improving student wellbeing.

4.1.6 Food

Students identified a healthy diet as an important contributor to their wellbeing, reflecting the WHO's (2016) definition of health. Local policies, such as *A Whole School Approach to a Healthy Lifestyle*, emphasise the urgency of promoting healthy eating due to rising rates of childhood obesity in Malta (MEDE, 2015). Students acknowledged the link between nutrition and academic performance, consistent with research suggesting that “improved nutrition enhances learning ability” (MEDE, 2015, p.10). These observations align with both local and international efforts to integrate healthy eating into educational settings.

4.1.7 Activities Organised by the School

School-organised activities, such as weekly clubs and annual events, were appreciated by students for their positive impact on emotions and overall wellbeing. Clubs, ranging from sports to creative arts, provide opportunities for personal development and social interaction. One student remarked, “The activities continue increasing the wellbeing because there is excitement in the school and there is positivity, and I believe that these things raise the wellbeing level” (Student 5). This aligns with the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, which encourages extracurricular programmes as a means to foster engagement and socio-emotional development (MEYR, 2023).

4.2 Theme 2: Negative Factors that Lower Wellbeing

When asked to identify negative factors that diminish their wellbeing, students mentioned workload, deadlines, stress, poor academic performance, illness, parental conflicts, arguments

with friends, negativity, bullying, substance abuse, hatred, and anxiety. These perceived negative factors highlight the various challenges students face that influence their emotional and mental health.

4.2.1 Workload, Deadlines, and Stress

Nine out of the twelve students interviewed identified workload, deadlines, and stress as key factors that negatively impact their wellbeing. These findings are consistent with research by Abela et al. (2024), Cefai and Cooper (2017), Cefai et al. (2024), MEDE (2017), Ogrodniczuk et al. (2021), and Pascoe et al. (2020), which highlights excessive school workload as a significant source of stress for students. One student explained, “When I have too much work and I can’t have time for myself, as if I can’t take a break, I feel stressed” (Student 11). The *National Education Strategy 2024–2030* underscores the need to balance academic demands with socio-emotional wellbeing by embedding time management and stress management skills into the curriculum (MEYR, 2023). This approach aligns with recommendations to prioritise student mental health within educational frameworks.

4.2.2 Negativity

Students reported that negative attitudes from those around them, including peers and educators, have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing. Fredrickson’s (2001) *Broaden-and-Build Theory* explains that negative emotions can have a contagious effect, leading to a cycle of reduced emotional resilience among individuals in close social environments. The *National Education Strategy 2024–2030* highlights the importance of fostering positive relationships and emotional support within schools to mitigate the impact of negativity (MEYR, 2023).

4.2.3 Parental Conflicts and Chaos at Home

Although post-secondary students are transitioning into adulthood, the study reveals that conflicts at home, particularly between parents, continue to affect their wellbeing. As Abela and Walker (2014) explain, parental disputes undermine a sense of security, creating a stressful and emotionally taxing home environment. One student shared, “Personally, and even friends and people my age say that the biggest thing that upsets our wellbeing are parents fighting, or when there's substance abuse at home” (Student 12). The *Maltese Mental Health Strategy 2020–2030* recognises the role of family dynamics in influencing youth mental health and calls for family-oriented interventions to support holistic wellbeing (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2019).

4.2.4 Fighting with Friends and Bullying

Disputes with friends and instances of bullying were also identified as factors that adversely affect student wellbeing. Research shows that bullying can lead to short-term effects, such as physical injuries, emotional distress, and social isolation, as well as long-term consequences, including anxiety, disengagement from school, and lower academic performance (Cefai & Cooper, 2017, Cefai et al., 2024). Additionally, repeated bullying can harm self-esteem and exacerbate mental health issues (Cefai et al., 2008). Educational policy frameworks, such as the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, stress the importance of anti-bullying measures and the creation of safe, inclusive school environments to support student wellbeing (MEYR, 2023). Addressing bullying through evidence-based interventions is essential for fostering a positive and supportive school culture.

4.2.5 Social Comparison

Social comparison, particularly when students are compared to siblings or peers, was highlighted as a negative factor affecting wellbeing. Such comparisons can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-worth. Gibbons and Buunk's (1999) *Social Comparison Theory* and Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) *Expectancy Value Theory* explain that these comparisons can have lasting negative effects on students' confidence and motivation. Although the long-term implications of these comparisons extend beyond the scope of this study, it is crucial to note their impact on students' immediate emotional wellbeing. Educational policies could address this issue by fostering a strengths-based approach that focuses on individual growth and achievement rather than comparison.

4.3 Suggestions from Students to Enhance Wellbeing in the School Community

Finally, this study invited students to recommend initiatives or processes that can be implemented by the school to enhance the overall students' wellbeing. Students suggested assigning less work to lighten students' workload and reduce deadlines, organising more frequent sports tournaments and other activities, sending occasional messages to remind students that the school offers help when needed, upgrading gym equipment, introducing daily physical exercise, and providing an anonymous suggestion box.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

While this study provides valuable insights into the wellbeing of post-secondary students in academic settings, it has certain limitations that warrant consideration. Notably, the research does not include broader data collection or comparative analysis with vocational schools. This limitation stems from two primary factors. First, the study's scope was restricted to a single academic post-secondary institution due to resource and time constraints, which precluded the inclusion of additional data sources. Second, there is a significant lack of local research focusing on vocational schools in Malta, making direct comparisons unfeasible. This gap in the existing literature underscores the need for future studies to explore wellbeing in vocational educational settings, facilitating a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of student wellbeing across diverse educational contexts.

Future research could address these gaps by adopting a comparative approach, investigating how the factors influencing wellbeing differ between academic and vocational school settings. Such studies could explore the unique stressors, resources, and support systems present in vocational schools and compare them to those in academic environments. Moreover, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how wellbeing evolves over time, particularly as students transition between educational stages or into the workforce.

Additionally, expanding the scope of data collection to include perspectives from educators, counsellors, and parents could enrich the understanding of wellbeing dynamics in educational settings. Mixed-methods research could be particularly beneficial, combining quantitative surveys to capture broad trends with qualitative interviews to explore individual experiences in depth.

Future studies could also consider the impact of digital wellbeing, a factor that students in this study did not explicitly mention but is increasingly relevant in today's technology-driven educational landscape. Investigating how digital tools, screen time, and online learning

environments influence wellbeing could yield actionable insights for schools aiming to foster a balanced digital culture.

Finally, cross-cultural studies examining wellbeing across different regions or countries could provide comparative insights and identify best practices that can be adapted to the Maltese context. Such research would help contextualise findings within global frameworks, ensuring that local initiatives align with international standards and trends in educational wellbeing.

Despite these limitations, this case study contributes significantly to understanding the specific needs of students in academic post-secondary environments. It establishes a foundation for future research, which could extend the inquiry to vocational schools and other educational settings, thereby enhancing the broader applicability and impact of wellbeing initiatives in Malta's education system.

5.2 Practical Implications and Researcher's Reflections

While students may perceive certain factors as negative, it is essential to recognise that these factors might not inherently be negative. The school can leverage these insights by offering targeted training sessions to help students reframe their perception of challenges such as workloads and deadlines. For instance, educators can be trained to guide students in modifying how they perceive stressors, equipping them with skills to evaluate situations from a more positive perspective and extending their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, the school can provide training in time management, organisational skills, positive psychology, growth mindset, and resilience. As students progress in their studies or future careers, workloads and deadlines will inevitably increase. Therefore, while educators empower, encourage, and motivate students, the school should equip them with the necessary skills to navigate these challenges effectively. Furthermore, fostering a culture of positive psychology and a growth mindset encourages students to view situations optimistically.

In line with broader educational policy frameworks, such as the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, these practical recommendations support the creation of inclusive and supportive learning environments that prioritise student wellbeing. Similarly, global initiatives like UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the OECD's Wellbeing Framework emphasise embedding socio-emotional learning and mental health support within educational systems. By aligning the school's initiatives with these policy goals, the implementation of recommendations, such as gym equipment, sports tournaments, and other engaging activities, not only addresses immediate student needs but also contributes to long-term educational objectives. This alignment underscores the relevance of these practices in shaping holistic strategies to promote wellbeing across educational contexts.

Lastly, the researcher recommends further exploration of the outcomes following the implementation of these initiatives to evaluate their effectiveness and ensure continued alignment with both local and international policy recommendations.

5.3 Result

This study reveals students' perceptions of wellbeing at a post-secondary school. Students identified various components that contribute to the concept of wellbeing, including family, environment, friends, personal time, mental health, physical health, diet, lifestyle, emotions, stress, and quality of life. Additionally, they recognised negative factors such as workloads, deadlines, poor academic performance, stress, anxiety, negative influence, and feelings of

illness. Beyond school-related issues like strained parental relationships and chaos at home were identified by students that impact their academic lives. Students recommended several measures including reducing workload and deadlines, organising more sports tournaments and activities, updating gym equipment, and sending occasional reminders about available guidance and counselling services. These recommendations were reflected upon by the researcher and shared with the senior leadership team of the school for consideration and potential implementation in school policies or practices.

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