

A Multiple Perspectives Approach on the Well-Being of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract : As a consequence of the increased evidence of the bi-directional relationship between student well-being and positive educational outcomes, there has been a surge in the number of research studies dedicated to understanding the notion of student well-being and the ways to enhance it. In spite of these efforts, the concept of student well-being remains elusive. Additionally, studies on student well-being mainly consulted adults' perspectives and failed to take into account students' views, which if considered, could contribute to a clearer understanding of the complex concept of student well-being. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies focusing on the well-being of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and these students continue to fare worse in post-school outcomes as compared to students without disabilities, indicating a significant gap in the current research literature. Findings from research conducted on students without disabilities may not be applicable to students with ASD as their educational experiences may differ due to the characteristics associated with ASD. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how students with ASD, their parents, and teachers conceptualise student well-being. It also aims to identify the barriers and assets of the well-being of these students. To collect data, 19 teachers and 11 parents participated in interviews while 16 high school students with ASD were involved in a photovoice project regarding their well-being in school. Grounded theory approaches such as open and axial coding, memo-writing, diagramming, and making constant comparisons were adopted to analyse the data. All three groups of participants conceptualised student well-being as a multidimensional construct consisting of several domains. These domains were relationships, engagement, positive/negative emotions, and accomplishment. Three categories of barriers were identified. These were environmental, attitudes and behaviours of others, and impact of characteristics associated with ASD. The identified internal assets that could contribute to student well-being were acceptance, resilience, self-regulation, and ability to work with others. External assets were knowledgeable and inclusive school community, and having access to various school programs and resources. It is crucial that schools and policymakers provide ample resources and programs to adequately support the development of each identified domain of student well-being. This could in turn enhance student well-being and lead to more successful educational outcomes for students with ASD.

Keywords : autism spectrum disorder, grounded theory approach, school experiences, student well-being

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