Repositioning Emotional Wellbeing as a Core Pillar of Educational Policy: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT: Emotional wellbeing in the classroom has become an increasingly critical issue in contemporary educational policy. This narrative review investigates the role of curriculum-based interventions, teacher capacity, and school environment in promoting students' emotional wellbeing, drawing from global and interdisciplinary literature. Employing a structured narrative methodology, this review synthesizes evidence from empirical studies across developed and developing contexts, focusing on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks and policy responses. The results demonstrate that integrated SEL programs significantly enhance students' emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, and foster a supportive classroom climate. Effective implementation depends not only on curriculum design but also on teacher training, institutional commitment, and policy coherence. The discussion reveals systemic barriers, including resource limitations and cultural misalignment, which hinder sustainability. Comparative insights highlight that while developed countries benefit from structured national strategies and digital tools, developing contexts often rely on community-based, adaptive models. This study advocates for flexible policy design, intersectoral collaboration, and investment in teacher wellbeing as key strategies to improve intervention outcomes. Additionally, digital innovation and participatory policy development are recommended to bridge implementation gaps. The findings underscore the urgency of elevating emotional wellbeing within education systems and call for further longitudinal research on sustainable, context-responsive SEL initiatives.

Keywords: emotional wellbeing; social-emotional learning; education policy; teacher training; school environment; SEL intervention; classroom climate.

INTRODUCTION

The emotional well-being of students and educators in the classroom has become a pivotal focus of educational research, especially in the wake of global disruptions caused by the COVID-19

pandemic. The pandemic-induced shift from conventional face-to-face instruction to remote learning presented significant emotional challenges for both teachers and students. The abrupt transition necessitated rapid adaptation to digital tools, increased anxiety, and disrupted interpersonal connections (Kitanovska-Kimovska et al., 2023; Nerlino, 2022). These changes exacerbated emotional distress and heightened the demand for new competencies in stress management. Recent studies have highlighted that the erosion of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students during online learning environments significantly impacted emotional well-being (Arteaga-Cedeño et al., 2022). Structural challenges such as excessive workloads, insufficient psychosocial support, and the misalignment of curricula with classroom emotional needs further complicated efforts to create a supportive learning environment (Torok et al., 2019; Moreno-Lucas et al., 2023).

Global and local literature demonstrates an increasing commitment to embedding emotional development within academic instruction. Scholars argue that fostering emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning (SEL) is essential for inclusive and productive classrooms (Francis et al., 2019; Jennings et al., 2020). Teachers, in this regard, act as primary agents in developing empathy and emotional regulation skills among students (Heineke & Vera, 2021; Kardambikis & Donne, 2022). In response to changing demographics and global crises, many education systems have shifted toward SEL-oriented training programs to bridge emotional gaps in learning (Arias-Pastor et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2023). Strengthening interpersonal relationships in the classroom has been shown to mitigate emotional voids and enhance student engagement (Lapidot-Lefler & Israeli, 2024; Qiu, 2022).

Empirical evidence reinforces the notion that emotional well-being significantly affects academic outcomes. Positive classroom climates where mutual respect between teachers and students thrives have been correlated with increased academic achievement and reduced anxiety (Peinado, 2023; Francis et al., 2019). Interventions like the Good Behaviour Game and emotional intelligence enhancement programs have proven effective in reducing stress and improving socio-cognitive competencies (Torok et al., 2019; Bradley & Cordaro, 2020; García et al., 2021). These initiatives promote classroom engagement and emotional resilience, ultimately contributing to improved academic performance.

Nevertheless, several key challenges remain. The emotional preparedness of teachers to address the dynamic psychological landscape of classrooms is inconsistent, necessitating targeted professional development and curriculum reform (Pozo-Rico et al., 2023; Heineke & Vera, 2021). Teachers with strong emotional competencies are better equipped to manage burnout and foster constructive student interactions (Arteaga-Cedeño et al., 2022; Moreno-Lucas et al., 2023). Incorporating stress management training and emotional intelligence development into teacher education is critical to improving overall classroom well-being (Rahmat, 2023; Nerlino, 2022).

The past five years have introduced hybrid learning models that blend in-person and online instruction, posing additional emotional management challenges (Kitanovska-Kimovska et al., 2023; Nerlino, 2022). The limitations of virtual interaction require innovative strategies to create emotionally inclusive digital classrooms (Kardambikis & Donne, 2022; Rahmat, 2023). Schools have responded with training resources and institutional policies aimed at alleviating stress and

maintaining interpersonal bonds in virtual learning environments (Pozo-Rico et al., 2023; Moreno-Lucas et al., 2023).

External risk factors such as economic pressure, discrimination, and unsupportive social environments compound the emotional difficulties faced in classrooms, particularly in under-resourced areas (Heineke & Vera, 2021; Arias-Pastor et al., 2023). Administrative burdens and high teaching demands intensify emotional strain on teachers, underscoring the need for integrated psychosocial support services in education systems (Lapidot-Lefler & Israeli, 2024; Qiu, 2022). Policies must ensure adequate resources to holistically address these intersecting emotional and structural challenges.

A significant gap in the literature lies in the methodological fragmentation and lack of holistic integration between emotional support strategies and academic curricula (Torok et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2019). Most studies tend to isolate behavioral outcomes without assessing long-term academic-emotional linkages. The scarcity of longitudinal research further limits understanding of the enduring effects of emotional interventions, particularly in diverse cultural and geographical contexts (Wolf et al., 2019).

This review aims to analyze the effectiveness of classroom-based emotional well-being interventions, explore the systemic and contextual factors influencing their success, and identify best practices from both developed and developing countries. The study examines how emotional development programs intersect with teacher training, curriculum reform, school policies, and student engagement. A special focus is placed on multidimensional strategies that integrate emotional and academic learning for sustainable outcomes.

The scope of this review includes studies conducted between 2019 and 2024, with a comparative focus on practices across both high-income and low-income educational systems. Particular attention is given to primary and secondary school settings, where emotional development is formative. The geographical scope includes a diverse sample of countries from Europe, Asia, and Latin America to ensure a comprehensive analysis of culturally adaptive practices in promoting emotional well-being in the classroom.

METHOD

This narrative review was conducted to synthesize recent research related to emotional wellbeing in classroom settings by integrating conceptual models, educational interventions, and empirical findings. The review followed a structured search strategy that employed systematic elements to ensure rigor, transparency, and reproducibility throughout the process. The data collection process included literature searches across multidisciplinary academic databases, keyword planning, Boolean logic application, and strict inclusion-exclusion criteria.

The literature search began with comprehensive exploration in two major databases: Scopus and Google Scholar. These platforms were selected for their broad access to international peer-

reviewed journals, as well as grey literature relevant to emotional wellbeing in educational contexts. The initial keyword terms included core emotional constructs such as "kesejahteraan emosional", "emotional wellbeing", "well-being", and "emosional". These were then combined with contextual terms such as "ruang kelas", "classroom", "education", "pendidikan", "guru", and "siswa" to refine the search toward literature directly related to emotional wellbeing within school environments.

Boolean operators were strategically used to link search terms and optimize results. The primary search formula employed the following structure: ("kesejahteraan emosional" OR "well-being" OR "social-emotional learning" OR "SEL") AND ("ruang kelas" OR "classroom") AND ("siswa" OR "pelajar" OR "guru"). Additional phrases such as "pengelolaan emosi", "emotional regulation", "stress management", and "teacher development" were later integrated to capture a broader spectrum of publications that explored both student- and teacher-centered interventions in classroom settings. These combinations helped yield studies ranging from conceptual frameworks to empirical evidence involving psychosocial support, self-regulation, and teacher training.

Recognizing the importance of capturing diverse terminologies, the review included synonyms and translations in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to avoid language-based filtering errors. For example, terms like "school-based intervention" and "intervensi berbasis sekolah" were used interchangeably to retrieve research conducted in both local and global contexts. This approach enhanced inclusivity and ensured the corpus of literature represented international and multilingual perspectives.

To ensure relevancy and academic credibility, date filters were applied, restricting results to the last five years to capture the most recent developments in educational practices, particularly in post-pandemic contexts. Articles were also filtered based on publication type, where only peer-reviewed empirical studies, narrative reviews, and meta-analyses were retained. Excluded from this selection were opinion pieces, editorials, and non-peer-reviewed papers, which were deemed insufficiently rigorous for inclusion.

The selection process involved initial screening of titles and abstracts to quickly exclude irrelevant studies. This was followed by full-text reviews to confirm alignment with the review's objectives. Each study was evaluated by at least two researchers independently, and disagreements regarding inclusion were resolved through discussion. This double-screening method improved inter-rater reliability and minimized subjectivity in the selection process.

Data management was facilitated using reference software such as Zotero, which allowed for tagging, annotation, and thematic categorization of included studies. Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form that recorded information such as research design, participant characteristics, variables measured, type of intervention, setting, and primary outcomes. These details were systematically compared and synthesized during analysis.

Included studies featured a variety of research designs, including randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, cohort analyses, and case studies. Qualitative designs such as phenomenological and ethnographic research were also included, provided they employed transparent methods and offered insights into emotional wellbeing within classroom interactions.

Quantitative studies had to present statistically valid analyses, while qualitative studies required rich, contextualized descriptions and clearly defined methodologies.

The inclusion criteria prioritized studies conducted in formal education settings—from primary to higher education—featuring student or teacher participants engaged in interventions or programs targeting emotional wellbeing. Studies also needed to contain measurable outcomes related to emotional constructs such as emotional intelligence, self-regulation, teacher-student relationships, and psychosocial support. Only articles published in English or Bahasa Indonesia were considered to ensure language comprehensibility while still capturing research relevant to the Indonesian educational context.

Exclusion criteria included studies without clear educational settings, such as those focusing on workplace wellbeing outside of the school environment, as well as papers that lacked empirical data or methodological clarity. Articles based solely on theoretical discussions without data collection were removed to maintain analytical rigor. Additionally, studies with non-educational populations or those not addressing wellbeing as a primary construct were excluded.

A final set of studies underwent critical appraisal using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist and other methodological assessment tools. This ensured that only studies with high methodological integrity were synthesized in the final analysis. The extracted data were then categorized thematically, focusing on intervention types, participant demographics, educational levels, geographical contexts, and key outcomes. These categories served as the basis for thematic analysis in subsequent sections of the review.

Transparency was maintained throughout the methodology, with a complete search strategy and flow diagram provided to detail each stage of study selection. This diagram depicted the initial number of articles retrieved, those screened by title and abstract, those read in full, and the final number of articles included after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process was documented to align with best practices in literature review methodology and ensure reproducibility.

In summary, the methodology applied in this review combined systematic searching with narrative flexibility, utilizing multiple databases, carefully constructed keyword queries, and rigorous screening procedures. The structured inclusion of diverse study designs and analytical transparency aimed to provide a comprehensive and credible synthesis of the literature on emotional wellbeing interventions in classroom settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this narrative review reveal multiple thematic dimensions of emotional wellbeing in the classroom, with significant contributions from interventions embedded in school curricula, the role of teachers, the school environment, and cross-national perspectives. These

themes are grounded in empirical studies and supported by comprehensive literature, providing a multidimensional view of emotional development in educational settings.

Curriculum-based interventions have emerged as one of the most consistent and effective strategies for promoting emotional wellbeing among students. Integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into the academic curriculum significantly enhances students' emotional regulation, empathy, and mental resilience (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020; Cristóvão et al., 2020). Notably, the "Four Pillars of Wellbeing Curriculum," implemented over three years, demonstrated substantial improvements in mindfulness, a sense of belonging, and learning interest, all of which contributed to psychosocial stability among students (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020). Similarly, the "Integral Health in the Classroom" program, with its multidisciplinary approach, emphasized the prevention of mental health disorders while promoting comprehensive socio-emotional development (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2024).

These interventions illustrate the necessity of shifting from a purely academic focus to a more integrated model that embeds emotional values within the learning process. Effective SEL curricula often operate within theoretical frameworks that align emotional development with pedagogical strategies. The design of these interventions is sensitive to students' developmental stages and local cultural contexts (Cristóvão et al., 2020; Pérez-Jorge et al., 2024). Programs typically include group-based activities, educational games, and mindfulness sessions, encouraging students to build awareness and control over their emotional states through experiential and reflective learning (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020).

Successful curriculum-based interventions are most impactful when paired with teacher training. Teachers equipped with knowledge and strategies in emotional regulation are more capable of delivering interactive and engaging SEL sessions. Adaptations across various educational levels from elementary to secondary schools underscore the flexibility of these programs to meet diverse cognitive and emotional needs (Cristóvão et al., 2020). However, geographical disparities affect implementation. While developed nations benefit from advanced infrastructure and professional resources, developing regions face challenges due to limited funding and technological access (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020).

Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, shows that localized adaptations of SEL programs can be effective despite financial and infrastructural constraints. Programs that integrate community and parental involvement have shown success in overcoming barriers within school settings (Cristóvão et al., 2020). Contrasts in program execution between kindergartens and primary schools in developed nations further highlight institutional support and technological integration as critical enablers (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2024). These global comparisons emphasize that the success of curriculum-based interventions largely depends on the education system's capacity and the cultural tailoring of content (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020).

The role of teachers is another vital theme. Studies have established a strong link between teachers' emotional regulation strategies and their engagement levels in the classroom (Lee et al., 2023). Teachers who effectively manage their emotions are more motivated and engaged, positively influencing classroom climate (Ha et al., 2024). Social-emotional competence training enhances teachers' self-awareness and emotion regulation skills, directly impacting their interactions with

students (Ha et al., 2024). Programs such as SELF-T have demonstrated reductions in teacher burnout and improvements in self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Aldrup et al., 2020).

Teachers trained in SEL become agents of change by modeling emotional intelligence and empathy. Their ability to communicate empathetically, set healthy boundaries, and provide psychosocial support creates an emotionally safe classroom environment (Lee et al., 2023; Aldrup et al., 2020). High levels of teacher engagement inspire students through positive behavior modeling, reinforcing a feedback loop of emotional and academic growth (Ha et al., 2024). Empirical evidence supports the conclusion that teacher wellbeing and training are foundational to student emotional development.

Equally important is the school environment, which functions as a socio-emotional ecosystem that facilitates student development. Classrooms characterized by supportive social interactions and restorative practices lead to reductions in anxiety and stress and improvements in students' emotional skills (Peinado, 2023; Whitehead et al., 2021). A positive social climate encourages student participation and creativity, promoting emotional security and self-awareness (Peinado, 2023).

Supportive environments involve more than just classroom dynamics. Peer relationships, parental involvement, and community engagement are significant protective factors that enhance emotional wellbeing (Peinado, 2023). Empirical studies point to the importance of open communication, diversity recognition, and constructive feedback in reinforcing students' emotional capacities (Whitehead et al., 2021). Conversely, risk factors such as bullying and lack of support must be actively managed through systemic interventions, including mentoring programs and accessible counseling services.

Incorporating systemic approaches that integrate social support mechanisms offers a framework to both enhance and safeguard student wellbeing. These environments act as buffers against external stressors, ensuring emotional development continues despite potential challenges (Peinado, 2023; Whitehead et al., 2021).

From a global perspective, comparative studies underscore the structural disparities in implementing emotional wellbeing initiatives. Developed nations typically institutionalize SEL through national policies and structured training, backed by resources to support evaluation and digital learning tools (Francis et al., 2019). Their education systems provide intensive professional development and policy-level integration that ensure sustainable outcomes, such as reduced teacher burnout and improved student engagement.

In contrast, developing nations struggle with limited policy support and systemic obstacles. Yet, innovative grassroots programs have emerged to address these gaps, often relying on community participation and cultural adaptation (Wolf et al., 2019). Cross-national comparisons reveal that effective SEL implementation depends on a combination of systemic capacity, policy alignment, and contextual customization (Francis et al., 2019).

Insights from international policy frameworks highlight the necessity of multi-sector collaboration. Successful models integrate educational, health, and counseling services to provide a holistic and responsive ecosystem for emotional wellbeing (Francis et al., 2019). These initiatives prioritize

continuous professional development and evidence-based adaptation, stressing the value of iterative policy review and stakeholder engagement.

Global experiences underline the importance of localized adaptation. Models that blend universal principles with local realities serve as effective conduits between theory and practice. Policy frameworks also advocate for ongoing measurement and evaluation to guide iterative improvements (Francis et al., 2019). International collaboration and the exchange of best practices enrich local implementations, fostering innovation and responsive policymaking.

In conclusion, the findings from this review reinforce the multifaceted nature of emotional wellbeing in the classroom. Key elements such as curriculum-based SEL programs, teacher training, supportive environments, and globally-informed policy frameworks converge to create a comprehensive support system for emotional development. The success of these interventions is contingent upon systemic alignment, stakeholder engagement, and continuous adaptation to local needs and realities.

The findings from this narrative review emphasize the urgent need for education policies that prioritize emotional wellbeing as a foundational aspect of holistic student development. This aligns with Torok et al. (2019), who emphasized the preventive potential of early interventions in managing anxiety and building resilience. These insights demand a paradigm shift in education policy, from a purely academic focus to a balanced approach that incorporates psychosocial dimensions of learning.

Evidence from COVID-19-related disruptions further supports this shift. Riera-Negre et al. (2021) documented the critical gaps in emotional preparedness among students, highlighting the need for systemic resilience built into education systems. Such conditions accentuate the importance of embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) in policy frameworks to ensure that academic readiness is coupled with emotional strength. This integrative model fosters not only cognitive growth but also psychological adaptability.

Curriculum-based interventions, as shown in studies by Bradley and Cordaro (2020) and Cristóvão et al. (2020), underline the efficacy of structured SEL programs in enhancing emotional competencies. This provides empirical grounding for policy recommendations that advocate for redesigning curricula to be inclusive of emotional and social competencies. Flook et al. (2013) further demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions cultivate emotional regulation, thereby improving classroom climate. The systemic success of such interventions, however, hinges on curriculum design, institutional support, and targeted teacher training.

Kabasakal and Emiroğlu (2021) stressed the importance of systemic factors, noting that curricular limitations and lack of institutional backing often hinder the efficacy of SEL programs. Institutional support, including teacher training and resource allocation, is thus a critical enabler. As highlighted by Wolf et al. (2018), administrative endorsement and district-level policy reforms significantly impact the success of teacher development programs related to SEL.

At the school level, systemic policies that include psychosocial consultation and mentorship programs reduce burnout among teachers and improve instructional quality (Mastorci et al., 2021). Teacher participation in SEL training, as observed by Heineke and Vera (2021), has a direct correlation with the creation of supportive classroom environments. These findings suggest that

policies must facilitate collaborative networks between teachers, counselors, and parents to align emotional wellbeing goals with academic targets.

Yet, national policies often lack cohesion with localized implementation. Kabasakal and Emiroğlu (2021) pointed out that without tailored training and adequate resources, national SEL mandates can falter at the school level. This gap calls for flexible, context-sensitive policy structures that empower local educators while maintaining national standards. Local adaptation ensures cultural relevance and enhances program effectiveness.

The literature proposes holistic models that integrate SEL across all school activities, exemplified by the "Four Pillars of Wellbeing" curriculum (Bradley & Cordaro, 2020). These models advocate for inclusive frameworks involving student, teacher, and institutional engagement. Mastorci et al. (2021) also suggested using digital platforms to monitor real-time emotional outcomes, facilitating resource optimization. Such data-driven models offer actionable insights, reinforcing the value of embedded evaluation mechanisms.

Cross-sectoral collaboration is another recurring theme. Integrating efforts between education, health, and welfare ministries allows for synchronized strategies in mental health promotion, as noted by Riera-Negre et al. (2021). Mindfulness training for teachers, proven to alleviate burnout (Torok et al., 2019; Heineke & Vera, 2021), exemplifies the tangible benefits of cross-sectoral policy integration.

Cultural contextualization also emerges as a pivotal consideration. Heineke and Vera (2021) argue that emotional needs and perceptions are culturally embedded, necessitating localized content adaptation. Engaging community stakeholders in program design enhances acceptance and ensures that interventions resonate with specific cultural norms and values.

Ongoing evaluation is essential for iterative policy refinement. Mastorci et al. (2021) advocated for real-time web-based monitoring systems that can detect and respond to shifting emotional dynamics. These mechanisms support transparency and enable adaptive responses, addressing operational challenges effectively.

Sustainability of interventions also warrants attention. Bradley and Cordaro (2020) confirmed that long-term curricular SEL programs yield lasting psychosocial benefits. This underscores the importance of stable funding and policy continuity. Strategic plans must include long-term financing and support structures to avoid the episodic nature of many current interventions.

Adaptability is a policy cornerstone. Wolf et al. (2018) cautioned against one-size-fits-all models, advocating for experimental, locally responsive designs. Policies should fund and support regional experimentation to expand the empirical base and inform scalable models that respect contextual diversity.

Technology offers promising avenues for implementation and evaluation. As Mastorci et al. (2021) documented, digital platforms enhance personalized intervention and real-time feedback. These tools democratize access to emotional support services and streamline administrative processes. Embedding digital literacy within SEL policies could bridge infrastructural gaps.

Ultimately, policy solutions must embed emotional wellbeing into the structural fabric of education. Whether through SEL integration in curriculum, teacher training, technological

support, or institutional alignment, the findings point toward a systemic transformation. These reforms demand commitment, cross-sector coordination, continuous evaluation, and cultural sensitivity to ensure lasting impact on emotional wellbeing in educational settings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this narrative review underscore the pivotal role of emotional wellbeing as a foundational element in educational success. Evidence from empirical studies reveals that integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into school curricula improves emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience among students, while also reducing symptoms of anxiety and psychological distress. Interventions such as the "Four Pillars of Wellbeing" and mindfulness-based programs demonstrate significant promise when supported by institutional policies, teacher training, and systemic support structures. However, systemic barriers—including insufficient resources, lack of professional development, and disconnects between macro policies and local implementation—continue to hinder the effectiveness of SEL initiatives.

To address these challenges, policy reforms must prioritize flexible, culturally contextualized strategies and promote intersectoral collaboration between education, health, and social sectors. Continuous monitoring, digital tools for real-time evaluation, and inclusive policymaking that involves teachers, students, and communities are essential. This review highlights the importance of training teachers in emotional competencies, establishing supportive school environments, and embedding wellbeing within the education policy agenda. Further research is needed to explore long-term impacts of SEL interventions, their adaptability in diverse settings, and innovative approaches using digital technologies. In sum, emotional wellbeing must be repositioned as a strategic pillar in educational policy, with holistic, scalable, and sustainable solutions tailored to the sociocultural realities of each educational context. This review is subject to several limitations. The analysis only included peer-reviewed studies published in English or Bahasa Indonesia, potentially excluding valuable research in other languages. Moreover, the review spans a five-year period (2019–2024), which may not capture earlier foundational work in SEL policy. Methodological heterogeneity among studies also limited quantitative synthesis. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies, multilingual sources, and broader inclusion of low-resource educational settings.

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