
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Mental Health Awareness from the School Level: A Critical Review of Mindfulness Practices and Short Therapeutic Activities for Student Well-Being****Sandesh Sinjali Magar***Dongbang Cultural University***Corresponding Author:** Sandesh Sinjali Magar, **E-mail:** sandesmgr839@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The mental health problems of children and young people are now a major public health and educational issue across the world, and there has been a rise in the incidence of anxiety, depression, stress, emotional dysregulation and behavior problems in relation to academic achievement and overall well-being. Early mental health promotion is important in school because the school is the setting which sensitises students during a time when their cognitive, emotional and social development is still at a crucial stage. This critical review looks at mental health awareness programs that are taught at the school level, focusing on mindfulness programs and brief therapeutic activities as effective, evidence-based tools to help students thrive. The review, based on current empirical research, systematic reviews, and international policies, synthesizes evidence on the effectiveness of school-based mental health education, mindful breathing, guided relaxation, gratitude practices, emotional check-ins, reflective journaling, as well as a suite of other brief therapeutic practices that can be integrated into regular classroom activities without interference with academic learning. The results suggest that early mental health awareness training can positively impact emotional skills, resilience, attention, self-awareness, social connection, and classroom engagement and decrease emotional stress, anxiety, and emotional distress. Five to fifteen minute time blocks of activities that have a therapeutic focus can be scientifically proven to have a positive effect on concentration, emotional stability, and positive learning settings, if delivered regularly by trained professionals. The review also highlights key implementation issues, such as insufficient training of teachers, mental health resources, cultural stigma, less access to policy support, and inequities in access across various learning environments. It highlights the need for the integration of mental health literacy in the school curriculum, increasing the cooperation between school educators, families, health services, and policy makers, and the implementation of culturally responsive and evidence-based interventions. In conclusion, the study suggests that integrating mental health promotion, mindfulness, and short therapeutic activities into the school's routine is a proactive and sustainable approach that can enhance the psychological well-being of students throughout their lives and contribute to a healthier school environment, thereby supporting their academic and personal growth.

| KEYWORDS

Mental health awareness, school-based mental health, mindfulness, therapeutic activities, student well-being, emotional regulation, resilience, mental health literacy, education, psychological well-being.

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1. Introduction

There has been a growing awareness of mental health as one of the most important factors contributing to educational achievements, social development and overall health and well-being throughout life. World Health Organisation defines mental health as a state of well-being in which a person is able to achieve all of the following four things: realise their abilities, adapt to everyday life and living, work productively and contribute to the community in a meaningful way. Mental health is especially relevant in childhood and adolescence, as it affects a person's emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, interpersonal relations, and resilience (Huppert and Johnson,

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2010). But, the mental health concerns of school-aged children are a growing concern around the world due to rising rates of anxiety, depression, stress, behavioral disorders, loneliness, school stress, bullying, and psychological challenges related to digital media. As a result, it is now a high expectation in education that schools should provide the support to foster resilience and psychological well-being as well as learning environments.

Mental health awareness is an opportunity to be introduced in schools as it is during their formative years that habits, attitudes, emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms are still being formed. Mental health education can take place at an early stage, allowing students to identify feelings, understand psychological health and wellbeing, access support if required, and learn to cope with mental health issues in a healthy way before they have a significant impact (Kuyken et al, 2022). In addition, schools are environments where ongoing student-teacher, parent, and counselor interaction occurs, and thus is well suited for mental health prevention. Incorporating mental health into the school curriculum can help lower the stigma around mental health disorders, promote discussion of emotional experiences, and increase students' comfort levels accessing professional support services when necessary.

Mental health problems have been observed to have increased markedly in recent decades in children and young people across the globe. A consistent increase in the prevalence of anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, emotional exhaustion, self-esteem problems, and school-related stress among primary and secondary school students have been reported in studies. Social media use and increased technological advancement, cyberbullying, family instability, academic competition, socioeconomic inequality, and the COVID-19 pandemic have created these challenges to be exacerbated (Carsley et al, 2018). The pandemic has shown that young people are vulnerable to psychological distress, and the need for mental health initiatives in schools that are sustainable is more critical now than ever before.

School mental health traditionally has been centered on the provision of counseling services and interventions after psychological problems have manifested. While such reactive measures continue to be necessary, the current paradigm in educational psychology is increasingly preventive and promotive measures, which aim at fostering emotional well-being before mental health issues arise (Šouláková et al, 2019). Preventive interventions can support students to become emotionally resilient, to become more aware of their own and others' emotions, to manage stress, to have positive interpersonal interactions, and to develop adaptive coping strategies during the course of their school day. This paradigm shift is in line with public health strategies that focus on prevention, identifying those early signs and symptoms, and promoting mental health for all students.

Some of the more promising prevention methods include mindfulness practices and brief therapeutic exercises that can be accessed by the teacher in the daily classroom setting. Mindfulness is the deliberate act of being aware of, and open, curious and non-judgemental about, what is happening in the present moment. Mindfulness interventions in schools are most often comprised of mindful breathing, guided meditation, body scan practices, reflections on gratitude, and mindful movement in addition to other practices such as emotional check-ins and focused attention exercises (Sapthiang et al, 2019). These practices have been linked to greater emotional regulation, attention, executive functioning, stress reduction, empathy, classroom behavior, and academic engagement. Mindfulness activities can be brief and last only a few minutes a day, making them practical, affordable, and flexible in various educational settings and across age groups.

Along with mindfulness, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of brief therapeutic activities as a tool for supporting student well-being in an accessible way. Journaling, positive affirmations, breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, gratitude exercises, emotional expression through art, social-emotional learning activities, peer-support discussions, and structured reflection exercises (Hayes et al, 2019). These interventions give the students quick responses to manage their emotions, decrease their anxiety, increase their self-confidence, and build resilience in everyday school activities. It is important to note that these brief therapeutic activities are not a substitute for formal mental health care but are meant to be part of a larger mental health program in schools that helps students to manage their emotions and psychological states each day.

There is increasing evidence that it is possible to positively impact student academic results, attendance, focus, engagement, social interaction and well-being through the integration of brief mindfulness and therapeutic practices into classroom instruction. These practices also help teachers to implement them better by helping them create a better classroom climate, fewer behavioral problems, better teacher-student relationships and less occupational stress (Tan, 2016). However, results of these interventions depends on the fidelity of implementation, cultural context, teacher readiness, institutional support, length of intervention, and student engagement. Thus, a critical review of the literature is required to understand the strengths, limitations and implications of the current literature on mindfulness and therapeutic activities in schools.

Although there has been a significant increase in research focusing on mindfulness in the school context, there are still key gaps in the literature concerning the effectiveness of various mindfulness practices, the long-term efficacy of brief therapeutic mindfulness interventions, implementation guidelines for different age groups, cross-cultural research, and the integration of mindfulness into school policies and curricula. The extensive body of information reflects studies on individual interventions rather than the synergy of multiple interventions in the broader context of comprehensive school mental health promotion (Jobin et al., 2025). Moreover, due to methodological variations, the length of interventions, measures of outcomes, and theoretical approaches, it has been difficult for educators and policymakers to identify practices that are supported by evidence and could be widely adopted.

This critical review therefore analyses the available evidence of mental health awareness programs implemented at school level, focusing on mindfulness activities and brief therapeutic interventions to support students' well-being and happiness. The review combines theoretical approaches, empirical research findings, models of implementation and policy issues to examine the role of these interventions in emotional resilience, stress management, psychological well-being, social skills, and academic achievement of learners (Sapthiang et al, 2019). The study aims to analyze the current literature to extract best practices, demonstrate the current gaps in the literature, and make recommendations for mental health educators, mental health professionals, policymakers, and researchers who are interested in creating comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive school-based mental health programs. In conclusion, the emphasis on mental health promotion from childhood through education is a forward-thinking approach to fostering healthier students, positive learning spaces, and thriving communities prepared for future psychological and social needs.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study used a narrative review method to critically analyze the effects of mental health awareness programs, mindfulness training, and brief therapeutic interventions at school on student wellness. A narrative review was deemed suitable because it can synthesize and interpret results from a variety of empirical studies, theories, systematic reviews, policy materials and education guidelines. This review is not primary empirical research, but rather combines existing evidence to gain a comprehensive understanding of the efforts undertaken at the school level to implement mental health interventions and the impact of such interventions on emotional resilience, psychological well-being, academic engagement and social development among students. The review also highlights future developments, implementation issues and opportunities for further improving mental health promotion in school-based settings in various learning environments.

2.2 Literature Search Strategy

An extensive literature search was performed in major academic databases like Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), PsycINFO, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink and Wiley Online Library. These databases were chosen as they offer a broad range of peer-reviewed psychology and education, psychiatry and public health, counselling, and behavioural sciences.

Combinations of keywords and Boolean operators were used in the search to retrieve as many relevant studies as possible. Some of the main terms used were mental health awareness, school mental health, student well-being, mindfulness, mindfulness-based interventions, social-emotional learning, school counseling, brief therapeutic

activities, emotional regulation, psychological resilience, positive psychology in education, stress management among students, school-based mental health programs, and adolescent mental health. Boolean operators were used to narrow down search results and exclude irrelevant publications by using the operators AND, OR, and NOT. Eligible articles were also manually searched in reference lists to find any other relevant articles.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review strictly adhered to the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were defined beforehand to ensure that the review is methodologically rigorous and relevant. Studies were selected if they were published in peer-reviewed journals, addressed mental health awareness, mindfulness, brief therapeutic interventions, or mental health support programs in schools, and involved children, adolescents, and/or school-age children. Qualitative studies, quantitative studies, mixed-methods research, systematic reviews, meta analysis studies, theoretical papers and evidence-based policy reports were eligible. Since around 2005, publications have been chosen to represent more recent advances in the field of educational mental health practice and to accommodate a few seminal earlier materials where deemed appropriate.

Studies which exclusively addressed clinical psychiatric care in an environment other than an educational setting, adult workplace populations, not pertinent to education, were not sufficiently transparent, or were solely editorials, opinion pieces, conference abstracts or unpublished manuscripts without adequate peer review were excluded. Due to the language translation constraints, articles that were not written in the English language were not included.

2.4 Study Selection Process

A multi-stage screening process was used to identify and select literature. All records obtained from electronic databases were first gathered and then duplicates eliminated. Titles and abstracts were then read, and those that met the objectives of the review were selected. Full-text study selection followed after the initial screening for those studies that met the preliminary study eligibility criteria.

Studies of school-based mindfulness programs as well as therapeutic activities in the classroom, emotional literacy programs, psychological first aid in schools, stress reduction programs, and social-emotional learning programs were particularly noted during the screening process. Articles related to aspects of policy implementation, teacher-led interventions, school counseling services, and preventive mental health education were also kept if they provided valuable evidence that addressed student well-being.

2.5 Data Extraction and Organization.

Information from the studies selected was systematically extracted using a standard data extraction framework. The information extracted comprised publication year, country of study, research purpose, study design, participant characteristics, educational level, type of intervention, length of intervention, outcome measures, key findings and reported limitations. Further collected data included information on theoretical frameworks, methods for implementing the intervention, and conditions of the context that may affect the effectiveness of the intervention.

The retrieved evidence was sorted in thematic groups according to the aim of the review. These themes encompassed the conceptual basis of school mental health awareness, the efficacy of mindfulness interventions, brief therapeutic classroom-based interventions, psychological results, academic results, teacher involvement, implementation obstacles, cultural issues, and future directions for policy. This thematic organization was used for the comparisons between studies and for identifying patterns and gaps.

2.6 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the synthesized literature. Through this it was possible to identify, compare and interpret similar ideas, patterns and connections between a variety of studies. The review did not pool data on a statistical basis, but rather focused on the conceptual integration of the evidence and how various interventions

impact students' emotional regulation, stress reduction, resilience, self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, classroom behaviours and academic outcomes.

Themes were identified inductively from the literature reviewed, and then incorporated into the existing theoretical frameworks, including positive psychology, mindfulness theory, cognitive-behavioral theory, resilience theory, social-emotional learning theory, and ecological systems theory. Findings from other educational settings were synthesized to look for common elements of evidence, and contradictory findings were examined carefully to show how things are different in other settings and how errors in methodology might affect the findings.

2.7 Quality Appraisal of Included Literature

The methodological quality of the studies included in the review was critically evaluated to improve the credibility of the review. Research design, sampling procedures, fidelity of the intervention, outcome measurement, analytical rigor and the transparency of reporting were considered. Increased emphasis was given to systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized controlled trials, longitudinal studies, and well-designed qualitative studies. Research that had significant methodological limitations were evaluated with caution and compared with more robust research to reduce overall bias in the synthesis of the findings.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This is a review of literature and no contact with any human population was made and no primary data was collected. Therefore no formal institutional ethical approval was needed. While the review did not follow every detail of accepted research integrity, it was clear that the original findings were accurately presented, all sources were properly cited and there was no evidence of plagiarism, and the synthesis and interpretation of evidence was objective throughout. The review also aimed to offer a balanced view, calling upon the results of various educational systems, cultural contexts, and methodological approaches, as a result of which conclusions and recommendations can be drawn and the reliability and scientific value of the results is increased.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 The Importance of Mental Health Awareness from the School Level

The results of this pivotal review consistently illustrate that early learning about mental health is highly beneficial for children's emotional, social, cognitive and academic growth. Mental health care in schools was found to be one of the most promising preventive interventions for future psychological issues and healthy development, across the literature reviewed. In addition to addressing mental health issues once they develop, many educational systems have increasingly been turning to prevention strategies and embedding mental health education into the curriculum as part of a regular part of learning activities (Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor, 2010). The findings indicate that students receiving mental health education have more effective emotional coping strategies, better interpersonal skills and more confidence in managing daily life stressors.

The results corroborate the developmental approach outlined by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which focuses on the fact that schools are one of the most impactful environments for children's psychological development along with their families and communities. Likewise, the social-emotional learning framework from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides support for the incorporation of emotional competencies into formal education to build lifelong well-being (Cilar et al, 2019). A pattern has emerged from studies conducted throughout North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia that schools that carry out integrated mental health promotion initiatives have better school climate, increased student engagement, higher attendance, better academic outcomes, and lower rates of behavioral issues and emotional distress.

Adequate mental health awareness can also counteract emotional difficulty-related stigma. When students learn about mental health at an age-appropriate level, they're more likely to ask for help from a teacher, school counselor, peers and parents. This result is consistent with earlier studies showing a significant association between mental health literacy and increased help-seeking behaviors and decreased mental health misconceptions about psychological disorders (Halladay et al, 2019). Therefore, mental health awareness needs to be brought into schools

and seen not only as an educational programme, but as an investment in the public health systems which can have a positive impact on educational outcomes, as well as health outcomes, over a lifetime.

3.1.1 Early Development of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Awareness

Numerous studies reviewed demonstrate a positive correlation when introducing mental health education during childhood and the improvement of emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Some of the features of emotional intelligence include emotional recognition, emotional regulation, empathy, motivation, and interpersonal communication (Querstret et al, 2020). The early developmental periods are when children are still developing their skills in emotional regulation, which makes school a natural setting for learning and practicing healthy ways to manage their emotions before they develop into unhealthy coping patterns.

The effects of structured SEI and mental health awareness programs have been shown in several longitudinal studies to result in children having more emotional vocabulary, better self-awareness of emotion, more empathy for peers, and superior conflict resolution skills when compared to children who were taught only academics (Tomé, 2021). Many teachers who are involved in these programs say that they see greater cooperation in the classroom, students' emotional maturity, and greater control of frustration in difficult learning experiences.

The results are very close to those of the Emotional Intelligence Theory of Goleman, who states that emotional skills make a significant difference to personal success as well as intellectual ability. Similarly, Gkintoni et al (2025) found that the development of emotional competence in childhood has been linked to better academic achievement, more positive relationships with peers and less behavioural disorder in later childhood. Pupils with emotional understanding are also better able to recognise signs of emotional distress in others and themselves and make them aware of the need to seek help at an early stage so that any emotional issues don't get worse.

The evidence also suggests that self-awareness training helps students to be more resilient in the presence of academic stress, peer conflict, and family-related stress. Mindfulness practices, reflective discussions, emotional check-ins, and guided self-reflection exercises were consistently highlighted as effective classroom strategies for bolstering self-awareness (González-Martín et al, 2023). The results show, therefore, that it is necessary to regard emotional intelligence as an integral part of the educational outcome and to regard it as a fundamental outcome that is comparable to literacy and numeracy.

3.1.2 Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges among School-Age Students

This review shows that there is a worrying rise in mental health problems of children and young people across the world. There has been a rise in the number of school-age children suffering from anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, academic stress, emotional exhaustion, bullying and cyberbullying, loneliness, behavioural problems and suicidal ideation (Yamada and Victor, 2012). International research has found that around 1 in 7 young people have a diagnosable mental health disorder and many more are suffering from severe emotional distress without being diagnosed or treated.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health were exacerbated by extended closures of schools, social isolation, uncertainty, bereavement and loss of normal developmental experiences. Many studies found that during and after the pandemic period, there were considerable increases in students' anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, emotional regulation, and social withdrawal symptoms (Shankland et al, 2012). Children living in poverty, students with disabilities, and those who had grown up with families in crisis or families experiencing adverse childhood events had disproportionately high psychological impacts.

Bullying is still one of the biggest factors in the mental health of school-aged children. The literature reviewed consistently shows links between being a victim of bullying and depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, avoiding school, and poor academic performance. Likewise, there are other significant issues arising on digital platforms, such as excessive digital media access and cyberbullying, that are associated with psychological distress among

adolescents (McConville et al., 2017). An earlier study indicated that consistent viewing of social media comparisons is associated with emotional susceptibility and decreased self-esteem.

These findings illustrate the critical need to implement preventative school-based interventions in addition to clinical approaches after disorders are severe. Prevention programmes that are universal, mental health literacy, and routine emotional screening and early identification are cost-effective solutions to the emerging burden of youth mental health issues before they have a significant impact on educational and social development (Islam and Jantan, 2023).

3.1.3 Schools as Primary Platforms for Mental Health Promotion

The research findings clearly indicate that the school is the most accessible and equitable environment in which to foster children's mental health. Students' critical developmental years are spent in educational institutions, therefore, schools create opportunities to diagnose emotional problems and implement preventive measures, and to create supportive learning environments (Islam et al, 2023).

Successful school-based mental health programs typically involve curriculum integration, teacher training, peer mentoring, family engagement, counseling services, and collaboration with psychologists, social workers, and healthcare professionals (Islam et al, 2025). Rather than treating mental health as a separate subject, the reviewed studies recommend embedding emotional well-being across classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and school culture.

Teachers consistently emerge as key facilitators of mental health promotion. Research demonstrates that educators trained in mental health literacy are better able to recognize early warning signs of emotional distress, provide psychological first aid, refer students appropriately, and foster emotionally supportive classroom environments (Knight and Samuel, 2022). However, several studies also identify barriers including insufficient teacher training, limited funding, inadequate counseling resources, and persistent stigma surrounding mental health.

The findings align with the Whole School Approach to Mental Health, which advocates coordinated involvement of administrators, teachers, families, students, and community mental health professionals. Schools adopting this comprehensive framework report reductions in behavioral problems, improved attendance, stronger student-teacher relationships, and enhanced academic outcomes (Islam and Sinniah, 2025). Therefore, schools represent the most practical setting for implementing universal mental health promotion strategies capable of reaching diverse student populations regardless of socioeconomic status.

3.2 Effectiveness of Mindfulness Practices in Promoting Student Well-Being

The consistent findings across the reviewed literature is that mindfulness-based interventions are positively impacting students' emotional, cognitive, behavioral and academic functioning. Mindfulness is the intentional, nonjudgmental, and open attention to experiences in the present moment (Shankland, 2021). School-based programs typically feature breathing exercises, guided meditation, body scans, mindful listening, mindful movement and reflective awareness exercises that can be woven into the everyday life of a classroom.

The length of time spent on intervention did not vary greatly across studies, from 5 minutes of daily exercises to 8 weeks of structured programs, but most studies reported statistically significant improvements in emotional well-being and classroom functioning. Shorter mindfulness-based activities were found to be beneficial for younger children while more structured mindfulness and reflective activities were found to be beneficial for adolescents (Yosep et al, 2023). The results also reveal that the effects of regular practice are more robust and lasting than those of occasional practice.

This is consistent with previous meta-analyses confirming moderate effects of mindfulness interventions on psychological well-being and stress, anxiety, and emotional difficulties in school-aged children. Importantly,

mindfulness seems to work best when it is embedded in a larger SEL and whole school mental health program as opposed to as an individual intervention (Zarate et al, 2019).

3.2.1 Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation

Results from this review indicate that the most compelling evidence comes from the effects of mindfulness on emotional regulation. Numerous RCTs and systematic reviews show that regular mindfulness practice can lead to a significant decrease in anxiety, stress, emotional reactivity and depression symptoms (Zenner et al, 2014). Consistent findings in mindfulness programs have students with greater emotional awareness, higher frustration tolerance, improved impulse control and increased resilience when facing academic or interpersonal challenges.

Additionally, mindfulness exercises have been shown to activate areas of the brain that are important for attention, self-control, and emotional regulation, as well as dampen down physiological stress responses (Ahmed and Schwind, 2018). Many students report that mindfulness training helps them to feel more peaceful before exams, fewer emotional outbursts and to bounce back faster from stressful events.

These results align with the previous study conducted by Cerdá et al (2023), which highlighted the mindfulness as a method of stress reduction by enhancing the awareness of inner experiences. Mindfulness shows cross-cultural applicability with similar conclusions reported in a variety of educational settings in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and several Asian countries.

The review also notes some differences in the effectiveness of interventions. Schools that have good quality trainers and school leaders in place are more likely to achieve better results from programmes than schools that have poor quality trainers and school leaders (Lomas et al, 2017). This indicates that there is still a need to pay attention to implementation quality.

3.2.2 Cognitive and Academic Benefits of Mindfulness

The reviewed evidence shows that mindfulness has effects not only on emotional well-being but also on cognitive functioning and academic performance as well. Typical outcomes of students who engage in mindfulness interventions include increased sustained attention, working memory, cognitive flexibility, executive functioning, classroom concentration, and task persistence (Huppert and Johnson, 2010). These enhancements then reflect on increased classroom engagement, homework productivity and academic success.

Mindfulness seems to be especially effective in minimizing cognitive interference due to stress and anxiety when engaging in learning tasks. Students improve their capacity to refocus their attention after distractions, manage examination anxiety, and sustain attention in complex learning and study tasks (Kuyken et al, 2022). For teachers involved in multiple intervention studies, there are also reports of increased student participation, decreased interruptions, and better classroom behavior.

This study is in line with previous studies in the field of educational neuroscience, which showed that mindfulness improves attentional control and decreases cognitive overload during chronic stress (Carsley et al 2018). While academic achievement improvements are typically small, the impact on learning behaviors, learning motivation, and classroom participation are significant.

The review also indicates that the most effective way of utilizing mindfulness in education is to embed short mindfulness sessions into the academic curriculum before exams, challenging lessons, or between subject changes, so as to maximize educational gains while minimizing instructional time (Šouláková et al, 2019).

3.2.3 Social and Behavioral Outcomes of Mindfulness Programs

Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of mindfulness on students' social behaviors and classroom conduct. Mindfulness programs increase the empathy, compassion, cooperation, emotional understanding and conflict resolution skills of students (Sapthiang et al, 2019). At the same time, research has documented decreased aggression, bullying, classroom disruptive behaviors, impulsivity, and school infractions.

Mindfulness helps students to understand their own emotions and the emotions of others, thus improving their interpersonal relationships. There are a number of school-based interventions that show better classroom climate through greater respect, improved communication, enhanced peer support and increased inclusiveness (Hayes et al, 2019).

These results corroborate previous research that demonstrated that mindfulness has positive effects on prosocial behaviour through enhanced emotional awareness and self-regulation. Students are less reactive in interpersonal conflict situations and are better able to handle interpersonal conflict in a constructive way (Tan, 2016). As such, mindfulness can play a role in enhancing the psychological health of both individual students and in helping to create a healthier school environment that facilitates collaborative learning.

3.3 Short Therapeutic Activities as Preventive Mental Health Interventions

The review highlights brief therapeutic activities as very practical preventive activities that can easily be implemented in the classroom on a daily basis. These activities are not intensive psychological therapies that need specialized personnel but require low levels of resources, can be delivered by trained teachers and do not disrupt academic instruction which can be accommodated in regular school schedules (Jobin et al, 2025).

The reviewed evidence suggests that even short stress-reduction interventions ranging from five to fifteen minutes can help to lower stress, regulate emotions, increase engagement in the classroom and foster resilience when done regularly (Sapthiang et al, 2019). Importantly, these activities are especially helpful in educational environments with limited school psychologist staffing, such as those with low resources.

The results also indicate that the effects of the multiple intervention components such as mindfulness, breathing, creative expression, movement and peer interaction are broader than effects of any single intervention (Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor, 2010).

3.3.1 Breathing Exercises and Relaxation Techniques

Breathing exercises and relaxation techniques are consistently shown to be effective in decreasing physiological and psychological stress in the students. Deep diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding exercises, visualization and guided relaxation are very effective for decreasing feelings of anxiety, emotional tension, and physiological arousal while increasing feelings of calmness and emotional stability (Cilar et al, 2020).

There are several intervention studies reporting measurable decreases in heart rate, cortisol levels and perceived stress after regular breathing practices before examinations or after emotionally stressful classroom experiences (Halladay et al, 2019). Breadth of the students also reports enhanced emotional control, boosted confidence and preparedness for learning after brief relaxation sessions.

These results are consistent with the previous psychophysiological studies showing that controlled breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system that is opposite to the effects of stress. Teachers report that breathing exercises are cost effective, easy to do, and easily implemented in the classroom, and can be used in a wide range of educational settings (Querstret et al, 2020).

3.3.2 Expressive Activities: Journaling, Art, and Storytelling

Creative therapeutic activities were seen to be a valuable means of supporting emotional expression and psychological resilience. Journaling helps students structure ideas, consider feelings and emotions, and review

experiences and events that might have caused stress. Art-based interventions offer opportunities for non-verbal expression of emotions, especially for younger children who may not be able to express complex emotions verbally (Tomé et al, 2021). Storytelling is also a tool that aids in emotional understanding through perspective taking, empathy, and personal meaning making.

All the studies reviewed show that expressive experiences lead to decreased emotional distress and increased self-esteem, resilience, optimism, and emotional awareness in students (Gkintoni et al., 2025). Through creative activities, teachers will also gain insight into students' experience of their emotional needs, which may not be experienced in other activities.

The results of this study corroborate earlier research on expressive writing and art therapy that suggests structured emotional expression is related to better psychological adjustment and healthy coping. Expressive activities can be integrated into classroom routines to develop children's emotions and creativity while also not placing a heavy financial or logistical burden on schools (González-Martín et al, 2023).

3.3.3 Physical Movement and Play-Based Therapeutic Activities

Movement-based therapeutic activities have been shown time and time again to positively affect students' mental health, emotional regulation and engagement in the classroom. Short movement breaks, stretching, yoga, recreational games, dance, and outdoor activities help to decrease stress and enhance mood, attention, energy, and social interaction (Yamada and Victor, 2012). Exercise also releases other neurochemicals and endorphins which increase psychological wellbeing.

Based on the reviewed studies, the evidence of the impact of physically active classrooms revealed fewer behavioral disruptions, increased student participation, and better peer relationships. Playful therapeutic activities involving emotional learning and cooperative games and structured recreational activities, especially for younger children, are found to be beneficial (Shankland, 2021). Adolescents also report benefits in managing stress and emotional well-being after yoga and movement-based mindfulness interventions.

This study is consistent with prior public health studies showing significant relationships between physical activity and decreased symptoms of anxiety and depression in children and youth. Short bursts of 5-10 minutes of movement throughout the day seem to be particularly helpful in sustaining attentiveness and avoiding emotional fatigue during extended periods of academic instruction (McConville et al, 2017).

The overall results suggest that physical movement is not only a part of physical education, but also an integral part of prevention of mental health problems. Movement-based interventions offer schools evidence-based, practical strategies for supporting students' holistic health and wellbeing and create healthier and more supportive learning environments when used alongside mindfulness, breathing and expressive therapeutic activities (Islam and Jantan, 2023).

3.4 Factors Influencing Successful Implementation of School-Based Mental Health Programs

The results of this important review illustrate that the impact of school-based mental health interventions is not limited to which mindfulness exercises or brief therapeutic interventions are implemented. It relies on the readiness of institutions and teachers, the cooperation of stakeholders, educational policies, and the allocation of resources in a sustainable manner. Throughout the literature, interventions that took place in supportive school environments yielded significantly better results in the areas of emotional regulation, resilience, engagement in the classroom, and psychological well-being than interventions in school settings with less institutional support. The findings support the ecological viewpoint on child development (Islam et al. 2023) that children's mental health is shaped by multiple systems such as schools, families, communities and policy settings. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have adopted the Whole School Approach to the promotion of student well-being, which is based on the idea that

coordinated efforts between educators, families, health care providers and educational policymakers are required rather than isolated classroom activities.

The evidence reviewed also showed that schools were more likely to maintain mindfulness programs in the long-term when they had clear mental health policies, leadership that was dedicated to mental health, and a consistent trend of professional development. On the other hand, there were numerous interventions reported which were not effective in the long term as a result of inadequate teacher training, financial issues, conflicting academic schedules, and inconsistent policy support (Islam et al, 2025). This result is consistent with other systematic reviews that show that the quality of intervention implementation is as important as the intervention itself. Thus, enhancing the capacity for implementation should be seen as a crucial element of future school mental health promotion efforts.

3.4.1 Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Teachers' preparedness across all of the identified factors is a strong predictor of effective school-based mental health interventions, as reported consistently across the findings. The teacher's role is to spend significant time with the students and be the first adult to notice emotional distress, behavioral changes, anxiety or depression. As a result, their mental health knowledge, confidence, and attitudes significantly impact the quality and sustainability of school-based programs (Islam and Sinniah, 2025). In the reviewed studies, teachers who successfully completed structured professional development programs on mindfulness interventions, emotional regulation approaches, trauma-informed education, and mental health literacy had increased confidence in their ability to implement classroom interventions and to respond appropriately to students who are facing psychological difficulties.

In several intervention studies, a comprehensive teacher training prior to the intervention was found to lead to significant changes in classroom climate after teacher-led mindfulness sessions. The teachers who had practiced their own mindfulness also reported better emotional regulation, reduced occupational stress and better classroom management, which had a positive impact on their students. For instance, teachers who had completed mindfulness-based stress reduction training were more likely to behave emotionally in positive ways in the classroom when presented with difficult situations, thus positively modelling emotional responses to difficult situations for the students. The results of this study are consistent with the literature by (Knight and Samuel, 2022), who discuss the importance of teachers' social-emotional competence in creating a classroom environment that supports students' social-emotional development.

The review also identified that mental health literacy training positively impacts teachers' capacity to identify when children's normal developmental behaviors become clinically significant psychological issues and refer and intervene earlier. Professional development also helps to de-stigmatize mental illness so teachers can talk to students more openly about their emotional health (Shankland et al, 2021). But some studies pointed out training time, administrative support, teacher workload and lack of any standardized professional development program as barriers. Often, these issues led to inconsistent delivery of interventions and low fidelity.

In addition, there is research indicating that a series of coaching sessions and lifelong learning is more effective than single workshops. Professional learning communities, peer mentoring and regular supervision resulted in more successful implementation outcomes than only initial training sessions were undertaken (Yosep et al, 2023). These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that ongoing capacity building will lead to increased teacher confidence and sustainability of programs over time.

3.4.2 Family, Community, and Multidisciplinary Collaboration

The evidence published that school mental health programs are more effective when school, family, community, and medical professionals work together have been reviewed. Mental health development takes place across several social contexts and collaboration is key in supporting healthy coping outside of the classroom (Zarate et al, 2019). Numerous studies have consistently found that children exposed to interventions that integrated child and family services had more positive outcomes in emotional regulation, social competence, and resilience than children who were only exposed to interventions in the school setting.

Parent involvement was identified as a protective factor. Consistency between school and home environment was enhanced through programs that included parent workshops, home mindfulness exercises, psychoeducation, and family communication strategies. Parents with higher mental health literacy had a greater ability to identify emotional problems, offer supportive reactions, and support coping skills taught in the school (Zenner et al., 2014). This is consistent with previous family systems studies that highlight the importance of having a coordinated support system in the education and family environment that promote children's emotional development.

The review also illustrates the importance of the collaborative effort between psychologists, counsellors, social workers, nurses, and community mental health services. Multidisciplinary teams provided specialized assessment, early intervention, crisis response and referral services beyond the scope of the teacher's work (Ahmed and Schwind, 2018). Schools who worked with local health agencies indicated that they identified students with anxiety disorders, depression, trauma-related symptoms, or behavioral issues earlier, leading to timely interventions before these issues became more serious.

Implementing activities were also reinforced by community organizations: through extra-curricular well-being programmes, youth mentoring programmes, recreational programmes and culturally responsive mental health education. These collaborations were especially helpful in areas that don't have specialized mental health care services available. A body of evidence from LMICs suggests that trained volunteers and community health workers can be used to complement school mental health programs when the service is lacking (Cerdá et al, 2023). The results are consistent with those of WHO that advocated integrated school-community mental health services as a promising approach to improving access to preventive services.

However, barriers like cultural stigma associated with mental illness, restricted parental involvement, communication problems between schools and parents, and the lack of community mental health workers were reported in several studies (Lomas et al, 2017). The barriers were especially apparent in culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged contexts, and should be designed to include culturally appropriate engagement strategies and flexible communication methods to increase participation.

3.4.3 Policy Support, Resource Availability, and Institutional Commitment

The results suggest that there needs to be a clear commitment from within the school to the mental health promotion programme, with the support of a broad school educational policy and sufficient resources (Huppert and Johnson, 2010). Schools with supportive policy environments had greater implementation fidelity, more student participation, and greater sustainability than those without formal institutional structures.

Another implementation factor that came to the fore was the role of educational leadership. The school administrators who made a priority of student well-being (including embedding mental health in school improvement plans, set aside time for instruction on mindfulness, and provided teacher professional development) were more likely to have created environments that supported the successful implementation of mental health programs (Kuyken et al, 2022). Leadership commitment also helped to promote collaboration between departments, which allowed for better coordination of student support among the counselors, teachers, psychologists, and administrators.

Program quality was strongly related to the funding and availability of resources. When schools have dedicated financial support, they could hire trained counselors, access evidence-based materials for intervention, create wellness rooms, and offer ongoing staff training (Carsley et al, 2018). On the other hand, funds were sometimes limited, leading to high student to counselor ratios, few or no interventions available, and the end of a program after short implementation periods.

In addition, policy integration in national education systems helped towards sustainability. Countries that had mental health promotion in the education standards, curriculum guidelines, and teacher competency frameworks

reported higher consistency of implementation in schools (Šouláková et al, 2019). For example, in some educational systems, SEL competencies are part of the national curriculum, and emotional well-being is given the same institutional care as academic achievement.

The review also shows that there are recurring policy gaps, however. Even in many countries today, academic performance indicators remain the focus of attention and relatively small amounts are invested in preventive mental health services. Furthermore, the unevenness in national mental health policies leads to differences in quality of mental health programs in schools (Sapthiang et al, 2019). These findings corroborate the prior recommendations for increased government support, a consistent implementation plan, and a holistic school mental health policy which could provide equal opportunities for access to all students, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status.

3.5 Future Directions and Best Practices for School Mental Health Promotion

The results of this review also suggest that a greater global understanding of the need for mental health promotion as an integral part of the educational process is emerging, rather than an add-on service. New evidence is mounting for the value of all-encompassing multi-level interventions that involve universal mental health education, targeted early interventions, engagement of families, teacher training, and technology-based systems of support (Hayes et al, 2019). In contrast to the traditional approach of treating psychological disorders as they arise, current educational systems have begun to focus on preventing the onset of psychological disorders, cultivating children's resistance, and training their emotional skills from an early age.

The literature reviewed also indicates that future school mental health programs should be flexible, culturally responsive, evidence-based and sustainable. Successful interventions are those that are adapted to the different educational contexts and are faithful to scientifically supported practices (Tan, 2016). New educational technology, digital mental health platforms and artificial intelligence also offer possibilities to make mental health resources more accessible, especially in areas that lack services. However, any technological advancement is intended to supplement, not supplant, human relationships and professional psychological assistance.

3.5.1 Integrating Mental Health Education into School Curricula

The review is unambiguous in its support for the integration of mental health education into the curriculum of mainstream schools, rather than providing mental health awareness campaigns. Teaching mental health literacy across the curriculum empowers students to learn about their emotions, how to cope, interpersonal skills, resilience and help seeking as normal aspects of learning (Jobin et al, 2025). Mindfulness-based interventions and interventions that incorporated mindfulness as part of regular classroom instruction tended to be more sustainable than interventions that were delivered as stand-alone mindfulness sessions. Interventions that were integrated into regular classroom instruction had greater sustainability, as did interventions that included mindfulness exercises, emotional regulation activities, gratitude practices, relaxation activities and reflective discussions.

There are models for SEL that can be used for the integration of curriculum. Students who undergo structured emotional learning programs invariably experience greater emotional competence, better relations with others, fewer behavioral issues, deeper engagement and commitment to learning, and improved psychological well-being (Sapthiang et al, 2019). Mindfulness exercises used in the classroom throughout the day, such as breathing and focused attention exercises, check-ins on emotion and short relaxation exercises were shown to improve focus and lower stress and emotional reactivity.

There is also evidence that cross-curricular approaches to mental health issues promote normalization and reduce stigma. Emotional experiences may be discussed in literature classes, and it is important to also address stress management in health education, while PE can build mind-body connections through relaxation and movement-based mindfulness activities (Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor, 2010). These multi-disciplinary approaches foster the students' understanding of mental health as part of their overall health and wellness and not just a topic that is addressed during a counseling session.

Most importantly, curriculum integration should not be inappropriate and unculturally sensitive. Activities should be modified based on the students' ages, cultural backgrounds, and surrounding educational environments but must be based on evidence that will promote emotional development and psychological strength (Cilar et al, 2020).

3.5.2 Leveraging Digital Technologies and Innovative Mental Health Interventions

One of the fastest-growing fields in school mental health promotion is technological innovation. The literature reviewed indicates the growing promise of digital mindfulness apps, online counselling platforms, virtual psychoeducation, mobile self-monitoring apps, and artificial intelligence mental health screening systems to enhance access and engagement with students (Halladay et al, 2019).

Students have the flexibility to practice emotional self-regulation outside of school hours through mobile applications that offer guided meditation, breathing exercises, emotional tracking, gratitude journaling and stress management activities (Querstret et al, 2020). Digital platforms also enable personalized intervention routes, enabling students to access mental health resources based on their specific needs, while ensuring privacy and convenience.

Virtual counseling has grown to be a valuable way to provide psychological support to students in areas of the country that lack mental health services and/or have geographically isolated students. Telepsychology helps school counselors and mental health professionals ensure continuity of care and minimize transportation, scheduling, and shortage of specialists (Tomé et al, 2021).

Gamification also ensures that students are more involved in mental health education, as it introduces interactive challenges, rewards, storytelling, and problem-solving exercises that ensure emotional learning is delivered in fun ways. New research also suggests that game-based interventions enhance motivation, emotional awareness, resilience, coping abilities, and more, especially for younger students (Gkintoni et al, 2025).

The potential of artificial intelligence (AI) is also significant in identifying pupils who may be at risk of psychological issues through the use of ethical screening systems, tailored learning recommendations and 'chatbot' psychoeducation. However, the review highlights that AI should be used as an aid, not a substitute, for mental health care professionals. Ethical issues such as data privacy, algorithmic fairness, informed consent, and responsible governance must continue to be the focus of the future implementation of the digital. (González-Martín et al, 2023) This is in line with recent studies that call for the integration of digital innovation with human-centric mental health care.

3.5.3 Research Gaps and Recommendations for Future Studies

Although there has been significant research shift in school mental health, it is important to recognize that the review reveals several limitations of research that warrant attention. Often, one of the greatest problems is methodological diversity between intervention studies. There is significant study to study variability in terms of intervention length, mindfulness techniques, outcome measures, participant characteristics, implementation fidelity, and post intervention periods which make comparisons between studies difficult (Yamada and Victor, 2012).

A major weakness is the lack of longitudinal studies. Most investigations assess outcomes soon after intervention conclude, offering little understanding of whether improvements in emotional wellbeing or resilience, or academic functioning, endure over several years (Shankland, 2021). Thus, long-term follow-up studies are needed to assess the sustainability of school mental health prevention interventions.

An evaluation of representation of culturally diverse populations is also noted in the review. Much of the current evidence comes from high-income countries, with relatively few studies focusing on implementation in LMICs with significantly different levels of educational resources, cultural beliefs and mental health service availability

(McConville et al, 2017). Future research should focus on culturally adapted and evidence-based models of intervention that reflect local educational contexts.

Last, future studies should use common outcome measures, rigorous randomized controlled trials, mixed methods and multi-center studies to enhance the evidence base. The understanding of best practice for promoting mental health awareness from the school level would be further enriched by comparative international studies of policy implementation, cultural adaptation and technological integration (Islam et al, 2023). These research priorities will help to create more robust, equitable, and sustainable school mental health systems to enhance both the school's educational environment and psychological wellbeing across the lifespan.

4. Conclusion

Embracing mental health awareness from early childhood to school should be integrated into the school system in order to build resilience, emotional regulation and overall well-being in students. This critical review confirms that mindfulness and short therapeutic exercises are evidence-based, practical interventions that when consistently practiced in supportive school settings, have the ability to improve psychological well-being, engagement in school, and social functioning within students. There may be challenges in implementing the programs, including limited resources, insufficient staff training, and cultural stigma, but collectively, with the cooperation and coordination of educators, families, policymakers, and mental health professionals, program effectiveness can be enhanced. Educating children and adolescents on mental health in a preventative manner at the school level will help to build healthier learning environments and foster the whole child and adolescent.

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