



Reframing Student Mental Health and Well-Being in Post-Pandemic Education

A Global Opinion Grounded in Evidence

¹John Ibanga Isaac*, ¹Stephen Zira Kumazhege, ¹Abraham Olawuyi
Emmanuel Egunsola

Corresponding Author: * isaacjohn@mau.edu.ng

¹ Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria

Article submitted:

10 December 2025

Revised:

25 December 2025

Accepted:

26 December 2024

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly reshaped global education systems, not only disrupting learning processes but also intensifying long-standing concerns regarding student mental health and well-being. This article offers an opinion-based scholarly analysis supported by contemporary literature to critically examine the escalating mental health challenges faced by students in the post-pandemic era. Key issues include the surge in anxiety and depression, heightened academic pressure, digital overload, and the growing prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying. Drawing upon global evidence, this paper argues that educational systems have been insufficiently responsive to the psychosocial dimensions of learning, particularly in contexts where stigma and limited institutional support persist. Using a conceptual framework that integrates individual, pedagogical, digital, and systemic factors, this article synthesizes empirical findings and policy discourses to illuminate structural gaps in current educational practices. The results and discussion are organized into three thematic sub-sections addressing post-pandemic mental health trends, digitalization-related stressors, and systemic barriers to student well-being support. The paper concludes by advocating for a paradigm shift toward holistic, inclusive, and culturally responsive mental health strategies within education, emphasizing the urgency of embedding psychosocial well-being as a core educational priority rather than a peripheral concern.

Keywords: Student Mental Health; Well-Being; Post-Pandemic Education; Digital Overload; Cyberbullying; Psychosocial Support; Global Education

Introduction

Student mental health and well-being have emerged as critical global concerns in contemporary education, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. While education systems worldwide focused primarily on learning continuity during school closures, the psychosocial consequences of prolonged isolation, uncertainty, and digital dependency were often underestimated [1], [2]. As students returned to face-to-face or hybrid learning environments, a significant increase in anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and disengagement became evident across educational levels and regions [3], [4].

From a global perspective, mental health challenges among students are not entirely new; however, the pandemic acted as a catalyst that amplified pre-existing vulnerabilities within education systems [5], [6]. Academic pressure intensified as institutions attempted to compensate for perceived learning loss, while digital technologies, initially positioned as solutions, contributed to cognitive fatigue, screen exhaustion, and reduced social interaction [7], [8]. At the same time, bullying and cyberbullying

evolved in complexity, with online platforms extending harassment beyond physical school spaces and into students' private lives [9], [10].

Despite growing recognition of these challenges, educational responses remain largely fragmented and reactive. In many contexts, mental health support is still viewed as an auxiliary service rather than an integral component of educational quality [11], [12]. Moreover, stigma surrounding mental health continues to inhibit help-seeking behaviors among students, particularly in collectivist and resource-constrained societies [3], [13]. This disconnect between policy rhetoric and practical implementation raises fundamental questions about the priorities and capacities of contemporary education systems.

This article adopts an opinion-based approach grounded in a critical review of recent literature to argue that student mental health must be reframed as a central educational issue rather than a peripheral welfare concern. By synthesizing global evidence and theoretical perspectives, the paper seeks to (1) examine dominant post-pandemic mental health challenges affecting students, (2) analyze systemic and digital stressors within educational environments, and (3) highlight structural barriers that limit effective psychosocial support. In doing so, the article contributes to ongoing debates on how education systems can evolve toward more humane, inclusive, and resilient models of learning in a post-pandemic world [1], [14].

Material and Methods

A. Opinion-Based Scholarly Approach

This study employs an opinion-based scholarly methodology supported by a systematic engagement with contemporary literature on student mental health and well-being in education. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the article synthesizes peer-reviewed research, global reports, and policy documents published predominantly between 2020 and 2025. This approach is particularly appropriate for addressing complex and multidimensional issues such as mental health, which require interpretative analysis across disciplinary and contextual boundaries [15].

The literature was selected to represent diverse geographical contexts, including both Global North and Global South perspectives, in order to avoid a narrow or culturally biased interpretation of student well-being. Emphasis was placed on studies examining post-pandemic mental health trends, digital learning environments, bullying and cyberbullying, and institutional support mechanisms within education systems [16], [17].

B. Conceptual Framework

To structure the analysis, this article proposes a conceptual framework that situates student mental health and well-being at the intersection of individual, pedagogical, digital, and systemic dimensions of education. The framework reflects the argument that mental health outcomes are not solely individual issues but are shaped by broader educational and socio-cultural ecosystems [18], [19].

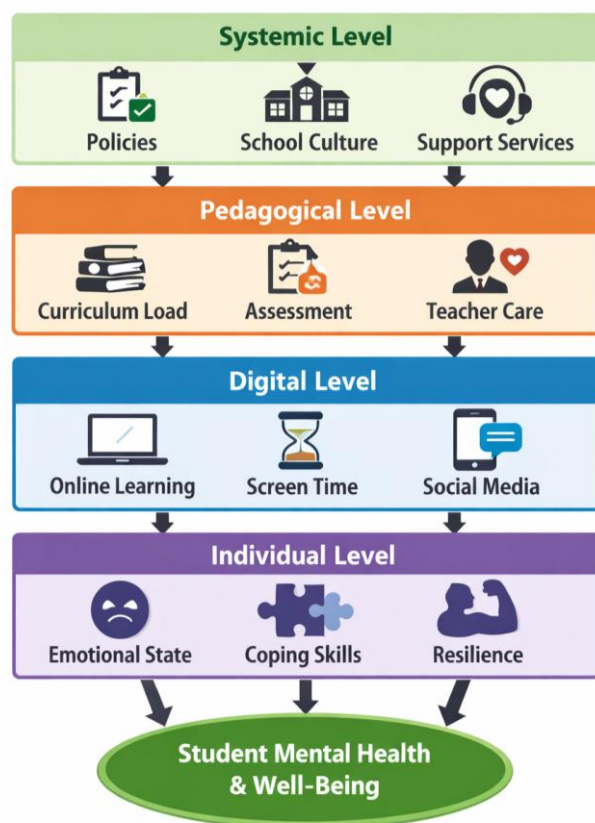


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of Student Mental Health and Well-Being

Framework Description: At the individual level, students' emotional states, coping mechanisms, and resilience influence how they experience academic and social pressures. The digital level captures the role of online learning environments, screen exposure, and social media in shaping cognitive and emotional well-being. The pedagogical level emphasizes curriculum demands, assessment practices, and teacher-student relationships as determinants of stress or support. Finally, the systemic level includes policies, school culture, and the availability of psychosocial services that either enable or constrain holistic well-being initiatives [20], [21].

Results and Discussion

A. Post-Pandemic Escalation of Student Mental Health Challenges

A consistent finding across global studies is the sharp increase in mental health problems among students following the pandemic. Symptoms of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and emotional exhaustion have been widely reported at primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels [3], [22]. These trends suggest that the pandemic did not merely create temporary distress but exposed deeper structural weaknesses in how education systems address psychosocial well-being [5], [17].

Academic pressure has emerged as a major post-pandemic stressor. In many countries, accelerated curricula and intensified assessment practices were introduced to address learning loss, often without sufficient consideration of students' emotional readiness [6]. Such approaches risk exacerbating stress

and disengagement, particularly among vulnerable learners who experienced disproportionate disruption during school closures [7], [18].

Table 1 synthesizes key post-pandemic mental health challenges among students reported in recent literature, including rising anxiety and depression, intensified academic pressure, social isolation, emotional fatigue, and uncertainty about future prospects, all of which negatively affect learning engagement, motivation, and overall educational outcomes.

Table 1. Post-Pandemic Student Mental Health Challenges

Aspect	Manifestation	Educational Implication
Anxiety and Depression	Increased emotional distress	Anxiety and depressive symptoms negatively affect students' concentration, memory, and learning motivation, indicating the need for supportive instructional strategies, flexible learning environments, and institutional policies that prioritize students' mental health and psychological well-being.
Academic Pressure	Intensified workload and assessments	Excessive academic pressure resulting from heavy workloads and frequent assessments increases the risk of student burnout, highlighting the importance of balanced curricula, realistic academic expectations, formative assessment practices, and adequate academic counseling support.
Social Isolation	Weakened peer relationships	Social isolation that weakens peer relationships can reduce students' sense of belonging within the learning environment, suggesting that educators should intentionally design collaborative activities, group discussions, and peer interaction to foster social connectedness.
Emotional Fatigue	Chronic exhaustion	Chronic emotional fatigue diminishes students' active engagement in learning processes, leading to reduced participation and creativity, and therefore requires more human-centered instructional designs that consider emotional balance, cognitive load, and students' psychological resilience.
Uncertainty about Future	Fear of academic and career prospects	Uncertainty regarding future academic and career pathways heightens student stress levels, emphasizing the need for career guidance programs, future-oriented learning experiences, and educational content that is relevant to real-world skills and long-term life planning.

These challenges highlight the need for education systems to move beyond remediation-focused strategies toward trauma-informed and emotionally responsive pedagogies [8], [21]. Without such shifts, academic recovery efforts may inadvertently deepen psychological harm rather than promote holistic development [9].

B. Digital Overload, Bullying, and Cyberbullying in Learning Environments

The rapid digitalization of education during and after the pandemic fundamentally altered students' learning experiences. While digital tools enabled instructional continuity, they also introduced new forms of stress linked to prolonged screen time, constant connectivity, and blurred boundaries between academic and personal life [1], [7]. Research indicates that digital overload contributes significantly to cognitive fatigue and emotional dysregulation among students [10], [19].

In parallel, bullying dynamics evolved as interactions increasingly shifted online. Cyberbullying expanded in frequency and severity, often occurring beyond the temporal and spatial limits of school supervision [9], [20]. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can be persistent, anonymous, and publicly visible, intensifying its psychological impact [11].

Table 2 summarizes key digital stressors influencing student well-being, including excessive screen exposure, continuous online connectivity, cyberbullying, social media-driven comparison, and limited



face-to-face interaction. Collectively, these factors contribute to cognitive fatigue, heightened anxiety, emotional distress, reduced self-esteem, social withdrawal, and a weakened sense of social connectedness among students.

Table 2. Digital Stressors Affecting Student Mental Health

Digital Factor	Description	Impact on Well-Being
Screen Overexposure	Prolonged daily screen time	Excessive screen exposure can lead to cognitive fatigue, sleep disturbances, and increased psychological stress, reducing individuals' ability to maintain focus, regulate emotions, and sustain mental resilience in both academic and everyday digital activities.
Online Surveillance	Constant monitoring and notifications	Continuous digital monitoring and frequent notifications contribute to heightened anxiety and a persistent sense of pressure, as individuals feel constantly observed and compelled to remain responsive, which negatively affects autonomy, emotional security, and overall psychological well-being.
Cyberbullying	Online harassment and exclusion	Experiences of cyberbullying cause significant emotional trauma, including fear, sadness, and social withdrawal, which may undermine self-confidence, disrupt academic engagement, and increase vulnerability to long-term mental health challenges.
Social Media Pressure	Comparison and validation-seeking	Social media environments that encourage comparison and validation-seeking behaviors can lower self-esteem, intensify feelings of inadequacy, and distort self-perception, particularly when individuals equate online feedback with personal worth and social acceptance.
Reduced Offline Interaction	Limited face-to-face socialization	Limited opportunities for direct, face-to-face social interaction contribute to loneliness and social isolation, weakening interpersonal skills, emotional support systems, and a sense of connectedness that is essential for psychological well-being.

The evidence suggests that digital literacy initiatives alone are insufficient to address these challenges. Instead, schools must adopt comprehensive digital well-being policies that integrate ethical technology use, emotional education, and protective mechanisms against online harassment [12]. Without such measures, digital learning environments risk undermining the very well-being they aim to support [13].

C. Systemic Barriers: Limited Psychosocial Support and Persistent Stigma

Despite growing awareness of student mental health issues, systemic responses remain uneven and often inadequate. One of the most frequently cited challenges is the limited availability of school-based psychosocial support services, including counselors, psychologists, and social workers [14], [18]. In many low- and middle-income countries, such services are either absent or severely under-resourced, placing the burden of mental health support on teachers who are often untrained in this domain [15].

Stigma represents another significant barrier to effective intervention. Cultural norms and misconceptions about mental health discourage students from seeking help and inhibit open dialogue within educational communities [16]. This stigma is particularly pronounced in contexts where mental health is associated with weakness or moral failure rather than recognized as a legitimate health concern [23].

Table 3 presents key systemic barriers to student mental health support, including limited access to psychosocial services, fragmented institutional policies, inadequate teacher training, persistent cultural stigma, and financial constraints. Collectively, these challenges impede early identification and intervention, discourage students from seeking help, limit service effectiveness, and undermine the long-term sustainability of comprehensive, school-based mental health initiatives.



Table 3. Systemic Barriers to Student Mental Health Support

Barrier	Description	Consequence
Limited Support Services	Shortage of counselors and psychologists	Insufficient professional support leads to unresolved psychological distress, declining academic performance, increased absenteeism, and long-term mental health risks.
Policy Fragmentation	Lack of integrated mental health policies	Fragmented policies result in inconsistent interventions, weak coordination among stakeholders, limited accountability, and reduced effectiveness of mental health programs.
Teacher Capacity Gaps	Insufficient training in mental health	Teachers lack skills to identify and respond appropriately to student distress, causing delayed support and ineffective classroom-based interventions.
Cultural Stigma	Negative perceptions of mental illness	Stigmatizing attitudes discourage students from seeking help, normalizing silence, emotional suppression, and untreated psychological problems within schools.
Funding Constraints	Insufficient budget allocation	Limited funding restricts program continuity, professional staffing, resource development, and scalability of school-based mental health initiatives.

Addressing these barriers requires systemic transformation rather than isolated interventions. Embedding mental health within educational policy, teacher education, and school culture is essential for sustainable change [17]. From an opinion standpoint, failure to prioritize psychosocial well-being reflects a narrow conception of educational success that privileges academic metrics over human development [18].

Conclusion

This article has argued that student mental health and well-being constitute one of the most pressing yet insufficiently addressed challenges in post-pandemic education. Drawing on global literature, the analysis demonstrates that rising mental health problems, digital overload, bullying, and systemic neglect are deeply interconnected phenomena rather than isolated issues. Educational systems that continue to treat mental health as an auxiliary concern risk undermining both learning outcomes and long-term societal resilience.

From an opinion-based yet evidence-grounded perspective, this paper calls for a paradigm shift toward holistic education models that integrate psychosocial well-being into the core mission of schooling. Such a shift requires coordinated policy action, culturally sensitive stigma reduction, teacher capacity building, and the institutionalization of mental health support services. Ultimately, prioritizing student well-being is not only an ethical imperative but also a strategic investment in the sustainability and humanity of global education systems.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

[1] B. Dreer, ‘Witnessing well-being in action: Observing teacher well-being during field experiences predicts student teacher well-being’, *Front. Educ.*, vol. 8, Mar. 2023, doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.967905.

[2] UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and OECD, ‘What’s Next? Lessons on Education Recovery: Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education amid the COVID-19 Pandemic’, June 2021, doi: 10.1596/36393.

- [3] WHO, *WHO interactive multistakeholder hearing on noncommunicable diseases and mental health for young professionals*. World Health Organization, 2025. doi: 10.2471/b09509.
- [4] World Bank, *Learning Recovery to Acceleration: A Global Update on Country Efforts to Improve Learning and Reduce Inequalities*. World Bank, 2023. doi: 10.1596/40012.
- [5] J. Lee, 'Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19', *Lancet Child Adolesc. Health*, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 421, June 2020, doi: 10.1016/s2352-4642(20)30109-7.
- [6] H. Patrinos and R. Donnelly, 'Learning Loss During COVID-19: An Early Systematic Review', May 2021, doi: 10.21203/rs.3.rs-518655/v1.
- [7] M. Alanoglu, 'The role of instructional leadership in increasing teacher self-efficacy: a meta-analytic review', *Asia Pac. Educ. Rev.*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 233–244, Oct. 2021, doi: 10.1007/s12564-021-09726-5.
- [8] K. J. Baker, 'Mays Imad on Trauma-informed Pedagogy', *Natl. Teach. Learn. Forum*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 5–6, Feb. 2022, doi: 10.1002/ntlf.30313.
- [9] R. M. Kowalski and M. E. Morgan, 'Cyberbullying in Schools', *Wiley Handb. Violence Aggress.*, pp. 1–12, Sept. 2017, doi: 10.1002/9781119057574.whbva099.
- [10] B. Leurent, M. Dodd, E. Allen, R. Viner, S. Scott, and C. Bonell, 'Is positive school climate associated with better adolescent mental health? Longitudinal study of young people in England', *SSM - Ment. Health*, vol. 1, p. 100033, Dec. 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.ssmmh.2021.100033.
- [11] F. Gao, C. Wang, H. Xie, and J. Hong, 'Social interaction and online learning efficiency for middle school students: The mediating role of social presence and learning engagement', *Behav. Sci.*, vol. 14, no. 10, p. 896, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14100896>.
- [12] N. Selwyn, *Education and Technology*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. doi: 10.5040/9781350145573.
- [13] H. Yin, K. J. Wardenaar, G. Xu, H. Tian, and R. A. Schoevers, 'Mental health stigma and mental health knowledge in Chinese population: a cross-sectional study', *BMC Psychiatry*, vol. 20, no. 1, June 2020, doi: 10.1186/s12888-020-02705-x.
- [14] E. S. Y. Tang, A. Griffiths, and G. F. Welch, 'The Impact of Three Key Paradigm Shifts on Disability, Inclusion, and Autism in Higher Education in England: An Integrative Review', *Trends High. Educ.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 122–141, 2024, doi: 10.3390/higheredu3010007.
- [15] R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, 'Acting as One', *Oxf. Handb. Self-Determ. Theory*, pp. 1173–1176, Feb. 2023, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197600047.013.59.
- [16] T. Hascher, S. Beltman, and C. Mansfield, 'Swiss Primary Teachers' Professional Well-Being During School Closure Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Front. Psychol.*, vol. 12, July 2021, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.687512.
- [17] E. Doğan, İ. E. Y. Şen, and Y. L. Şahin, 'The relationship between cyber victimization, social media addiction, social media literacy, and platform usage in adolescents', *Curr. Psychol.*, vol. 44, no. 15, pp. 13859–13871, July 2025, doi: 10.1007/s12144-025-08098-y.
- [18] L. Darling-Hammond, 'Securing the Right to Learn: Policy and Practice for Powerful Teaching and Learning DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Distinguished Lecture', *J. Educ.*, vol. 189, no. 1–2, pp. 9–21, Jan. 2009, doi: 10.1177/0022057409189001-203.
- [19] M. Fullan, 'The Rapid and Profound Spread of Deep Learning With Collaborative Professionalism', presented at the Proceedings of the 2019 AERA Annual Meeting, AERA, 2019. doi: 10.3102/1436226.
- [20] F. Zabek *et al.*, 'Roles and Functions of School Mental Health Professionals Within Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems', *School Ment. Health*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 1–18, July 2022, doi: 10.1007/s12310-022-09535-0.
- [21] 'Mapping well-being in France', Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2709–8168, Apr. 2024. doi: 10.1787/fffb2de8-en.
- [22] 'What's Next? Lessons on Education Recovery: Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education amid the COVID-19 Pandemic', June 2021, doi: 10.1596/36393.
- [23] C. S. Lehmann, 'Christianity and mental illness stigma: Critical and constructive perspectives on blame and social distancing', *J. Relig. Spiritual. Soc. Work Soc. Thought*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 66–89, 2022.

Authors



Isaac John Ibanga    is a scholar, researcher, and lecturer in the Sandwich Degree Programme of the Faculty of Education at Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria. He specializes in Electrical Technology Education, with academic interests centered on technical and vocational education, skills development, and technology-based learning. Through teaching and research activities, he is committed to strengthening practical and professional competencies among learners and contributing to the advancement of electrical technology education in higher education institutions. (email: isaacjohn@mau.edu.ng)



Dr. Stephen Z. Kumazhege  is an accomplished academic and researcher in the Department of Technology Education at Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria. He holds a PhD in a technology education-related field and specializes in instructional design, educational technology, curriculum integration, and teacher professional development. His research focuses on innovative teaching approaches, technology integration, and learning outcomes. He is dedicated to bridging academia and industry through collaborative partnerships that enhance educational quality and societal development. (email: skumazhege@gmail.com)



Dr. Egunsola Abraham Olawuyi Emmanuel  is a lecturer in the Department of Vocational Education at Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria. He is a dedicated educator and prolific scholar with numerous publications in vocational education. His academic interests include vocational skills development, teacher training, and educational research. In addition to teaching and research, he actively mentors students and contributes to university administration through committee work, demonstrating strong commitment to academic leadership and institutional development. (email: regunsola2010@yahoo.com)