School environment and personal indicators that support Estonian pupils' subjective wellbeing

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In this report I will focus on the school environment and personal indicators that influence pupils' subjective wellbeing.

Key terminology:

- subjective wellbeing

- pupils' wellbeing

- school wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing is an overall assessment of an individual of the extent they are satisfied with their life.

This assessment includes:

- an overall evaluation of life (satisfaction with life);

- an assessment of specific areas (school, family environment, etc.)

- an emotional evaluation of what is going on in their life (*pleasant emotions /unpleasant emotions*).

(Ed Diener, 1984)

Pupils' wellbeing

Engels, Aelterman, Van Petegem & Schepens (2004) view pupil's wellbeing as a positive emotional state resulting from a harmonious relationship between specific contextual factors and personal needs and expectations.

/Optimal student wellbeing is a sustainable state characterised by predominantly positive feelings and attitude, positive relationships at school, resilience, self-optimisation and a high level of satisfaction with learning experiences./

Pupils' wellbeing and school wellbeing

Tian (2008) relates pupils' subjective wellbeing to school wellbeing, which is linked to pupils' satisfaction with school.

The assessment of school satisfaction is shaped by the daily experience of school environment, which is rated either positive or negative.

Positive (cheerful, happy, satisfied); negative (bored, upset, distressed).

Pupils' wellbeing and health

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity *(The World Health Organisation, 1946).*

The salutogenic approach emphasises the importance of identifying factors that contribute to health while promoting health and wellbeing.

What does research say?

According to the results of an international study of pupils' health behaviour (*HBSC, Health Behaviour of School aged Children*) 2005/2006 and 2009/2010, Estonian pupils' satisfaction with life has gone up:

- among 11-13-year-olds from the 14th-15th position to the 10th position

 - among 15-year-olds to the 8th position, i.e. their indicators of satisfaction with life have moved from the middle of the table to the top ten.

Since 2002, the number of 11-15-year-old pupils with above-average ratings (on the scale 0 is "the worst" and 10 "the best life"; the "above-average" ratings start from 6 points) has continuously increased. In 2010 the proportion of those who were more than average satisfied with their life was 89 % among boys and 86% among girls.

What does research say ?

Different studies have highlighted the following indicators of school environment that influence subjective wellbeing :

•Positive experience in school environment, perceived academic ability, teachers' support

 (*Suldo, Riley, Shaffer, 2006, Suldo, Huebner, 2006; Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, Kannas, 1998; Gilman, Huebner, 2006; Tian, Liu, Huang, Huebner, 2012*);

•Positive pupil-teacher relationships, help received from teachers

 (Suldo, Shaffer, Riley, 2008; Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch & Michalowski 2009; Bird & Markel, 2012).

What does research say ?

•School-related happiness, peer relationships

(Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2012);

•Involvement in the school environment

(Engles, Aelterman, Petegem, Schepens, 2004; Lewis, 2010; Lewis, Huebner, Malone, Valois, 2011);

•Fair treatment and overall school security

(Samdal, et al, 1998);

•Positive academic experience (average grades) and participation in extracurricular hobby activities

 (Soutter, 2012, Gilman, 2001; Gilman, Huebner, 2006).

The sample of the study of Estonian pupils

The questionnaire was conducted at the 2nd (Form 6) and 3rd (Form 9) stages of study in 14 general education schools of Tallinna in the spring (March – May) of 2011

 n = 934, average age 13.9 years

The schools were selected on the principle of convenience sampling from health promoting (n=4); mainstream (n=4) and arts biased (n=6) schools in Tallinn.

The permission to conduct the questionnaire was obtained from the heads of the schools, the questionnaire was carried out during the lessons and in all schools the person conducting the survey was the presenter of this paper.

The questionnaire of the pupils' study

The structured questionnaire relied on the conceptual model of school wellbeing by Konu, Lintonen & Rimpelä (2002)*.

Questions and scales measuring personal factors (health, sense of coherence, self-esteem, getting help in general, overall assessment of life so far; attitude towards the future and wellbeing) were included in the questionnaire.

* The conceptual model of school wellbeing by Konu, et al (2002) focuses on the factors of school environment (physical environment, social relations, opportunities for self-realisation) and personal factors (health).

In our Study

School Relations (with teachers, classmates, schoolmates, school cooperation with parents , bullying in school)

School Conditions (getting help at school, "school is going petter", "feelings when attending lessons", rules, conisiderations, absent)

Self-Realisation (grade point average, involvement, support from school, participation in school activites)

Extracurricular activities (after school days)

Personal indicators (health, self-esteem, …)

The results of the pupils' study

Among the predictors of the wellbeing of the 6th and 9th form pupils personal factors prevailed:

- Self-esteem

- Perceived level of stress

- Getting help in general

- Health assessment

- Assessment of life so far

- Sense of coherence

Among the factors of school environment the involvement of pupils stood out.

How the results were received

School environment and personal indicators related to pupils' wellbeing (p< 0.05) (n = 729).

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Getting help at school r =-0.5
Relationship with teachers r = -0.4
What are your feelings when attending lessons r = -0.4
School's cooperation with parents r = -0.3
Relationship with schoolmates r = -0.3
Involvement (rules) r = -0.3

r –Pearson correlation coefficient describing the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables ($r \leq 0.3$ – *weak relationship*; $0.3 < | r | < 0.7$ – *moderate relationship*; $| r | \geq 0.7$ – *strong relationship*).

School environment and personal indicators related to pupils' wellbeing (p< 0.05) (n = 729)

PERSONAL INDICATORS

Sense of coherence r =-0.5
Self-esteem r = 0.5
Perceived level of stress r =-0.5
Getting help in general r =-0.5
Life so far r =- 0.5

r - Pearson correlation coefficient describing the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables.

Means of assessments of wellbeing by pupils of Forms 6 and 9: factors of school environment

Predictor	Form 6 M	SD	Form 9 M	SD	t-value	p	Form 6	Form 9
Average grade	4.14	0.63	3.94	0.61	4.16072***	0000035	471	472
Relations with teachers	16.45	5.14	15.94	4.59	1.56620	.156620	474	434
Relations with classmates	7.48	3.09	7.14	2.86	1.71493	1.71493	485	440
Involvement, rules	16.61	5.32	17.2	4.94	-1.74421	-1.74421	459	422
Relations with schoolmates	6.77	3.19	6.29	3.09	2.32231*	2.32231	488	441
Parents-school	3.79	1.84	4.10	2.06	-2.43799*	-2.43799	482	438
Being bullied	1.91	1.16	1.36	0.82	8.20902***	8.20902	490	443
Being a bully	1.69	0.94	1.42	0.84	4.64461***	4.64461	490	443
Help at school	2.67	0.87	2.81	0.85	-2.56711**	-2.56711	486	441

Means of assessments of wellbeing by pupils of Forms 6 and 9: personal factors

Predictor	Form 6		Form 9		t-value	p	Form 6	Form 9
Sense of coherence	58.06	11.1	58.2	11.11	-2.1356	.830935	461	434
Self-esteem	26.3	7.26	27.4	7.23	-2.32849*	.020109	462	432
Health	1.52	0.67	1.71	0.81	-3.78644***	.000163	490	444
Health disorder	1.81	0.39	1.77	0.42	1.13530	.256544	487	444
Perceived stress level	3.89	2.42	4.65	2.67	-4.55006***	.000006	487	444
Wellbeing	17.5	5.03	16.4	4.45	3.66916***	.000257	484	441
Getting help	2.05	0.8	2.14	0.88	-1.69572	.090276	485	442
Life so far	2.12	0.93	2.30	0.95	-2.89894**	.003832	487	443
The future	1.72	0.75	1.79	0.76	-1.42512	.154460	487	442

Personal and school environment factors predicting subjective wellbeing in pupils of forms 6 and 9 (n = 934) R^2= .40220273 p<0.0000 (regression analysis)

Variables	BETA	St error	B	B St error	t (771)	p
Intercpt			2.17	0.23	9.30	0.000
Self-esteem	0.21	0,03	0.02	0.00	5.44	0.000
Perceived stress level	-0.21	0,03	-0.06	0.10	-6.77	0.000
Getting help in general	-0.18	0,03	-0.17	0.30	-5.63	0.000
Health	-0.09	0,03	-0.10	0.32	-3.26	0.00
Involvement (rules,...)	-0.07	0,02	-0.01	0.00	-2.36	0.18
Life so far	-0.08	0,03	-0.07	0.03	-2.47	0.13
Sense of coherence	0.08	0,03	0.00	0.00	2.33	0.19

Predictors of wellbeing (Form 6)

Regression analysis to describe the relationships between indicators (**dependent variable wellbeing**):

Personal indicators (R^2= 40): getting help in general, stress, self-esteem, life so far, health disorder and health

Indicators of school environment (R^2 =19): relationship with teachers, relationship with classmates, experiencing bullying and getting help at school

Personal and school environment together (R^2=42): getting help in general, perceived stress level, self-esteem, life so far, relationship with teachers, health disorder and relationship with classmates.

Predictors of wellbeing (Form 9)

Regression analysis to describe the relationships between indicators (**dependent variable wellbeing**)

Personal indicators (R^2 =41): self-esteem, stress, sense of coherence, getting help in general

Indicators of school environment (R^2 =14): getting help at school, relationship with schoolmates, relationship with teachers.

Personal and school environment together (R^2=38): self-esteem, perceived stress level, getting help in general, sense of coherence, getting help at school and relationship with teachers.

Conclusions

- Personal indicators more frequently occurred as the predictors of wellbeing compared to the indicators of school environment;

- Among the indicators of school environment the strongest predictor of wellbeing is involvement (rules, ...); school- relations (classmates, scoolmates, teachers)

Conclusions

The indicators of school environment are not necessarily any less important, since they have a direct effect on personal indicators:

- self-esteem
- sense of coherence
- the perceived level of stress
- health
- getting help in general
- life so far