

STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH ON IMPROVING INSTITUTIONAL BEST PRACTICES FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IN PUBLIC PUBLIC ADVANCED SECONDARY SCHOOL IN MWANZA REGION, TANZANIA

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of students' mental health on improving institutional best practices for global competitiveness in public advanced secondary schools. A mixed-method research approach with a convergent parallel design was employed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. The study involved 42 students selected through census sampling from a population of 249 students. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews through the Mental Health as Determinant of Improving Questionnaire (MHDIQ) and the Institutional Best Practices for Global Competitiveness (IBPGC). Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages with the aid of SPSS Version 26, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students' mental health significantly contributes to institutional best practices and global competitiveness. Most respondents agreed that positive mental health enhances students' engagement in school initiatives, strengthens collaboration and teamwork, promotes innovative thinking, and increases participation in institutional decision-making processes. The study further found that schools prioritizing mental wellness through counseling services, peer support, stress management programs, and inclusive learning environments cultivate resilient, motivated, and innovative students capable of contributing to institutional success. The findings also demonstrated that mental health initiatives improve institutional effectiveness, academic performance, and school reputation at both local and international levels. The study concludes that students' mental health is a strategic determinant of institutional best practices and sustainable global competitiveness in public advanced secondary schools. The study recommends the integration of comprehensive mental health programs into school policies and practices, promotion of collaborative and innovative learning environments, encouragement of student participation in institutional governance, and continuous evaluation of mental health initiatives to strengthen student well-being and institutional competitiveness.

Keywords: Rethinking, students' mental health, institutional best practices, global, competitiveness

Introduction

Global competitiveness for educational institutions is increasingly based on the capacity to create environments that emphasize the mental health of the students (Jin, 2022). Advanced public secondary schools, as essential platforms for student development, are increasingly facing a challenge in their quest for excellence in academics while considering the psychosocial well-being of their students (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021). Mental health has been identified as a factor in the ability of students to learn, adapt, and succeed in a competitive educational system, as revealed by UNICEF in 2021. This implies that institutions that do not take their students' mental health seriously are in danger of affecting their performance and, in the long run, their contribution to society in

general. Rethinking the mental health of students, therefore, is not just a welfare issue but a matter of strategic best practices for institutions in pursuit of global competitiveness.

Students' Mental Health refers to the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of learners, which influences how they think, feel, behave, and interact within the school environment. It plays a central role in determining how students cope with academic demands, build relationships, and achieve learning success. It is therefore a core determinant of learning outcomes because it directly affects cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, motivation, and social interaction among learners. According to the World Health Organization (2023), the promotion of mental health in learning institutions improves learning outcomes and enhances students' ability to achieve educational goals. Public advanced secondary education institutions should, therefore, implement whole-school strategies that incorporate psychosocial support services, inclusive practices, and preventive interventions to safeguard students' well-being. The integration of students' mental health into school systems enables institutions to create a supportive learning environment where learners are not only academically competent but also emotionally equipped to manage challenges (Cavanagh et al., 2024). This approach ensures that learning institutions remain competitive in a globalized education environment characterized by innovation, resilience, and responsiveness.

Globally, schools are recognized as vital settings for mental health promotion, yet many institutions struggle to identify effective strategies. A global policy review by Margaretha *et al.* (2023) highlights that prioritizing student well-being requires systemic reforms, including teacher training, curriculum redesign, and community engagement. For public advanced secondary schools, this means moving beyond traditional academic metrics to embrace mental health as a determinant of institutional success (Gueldner *et al.*, 2020). Innovative practices such as peer support programs, mindfulness initiatives, and counseling services can transform schools into hubs of holistic development. Such reforms not only improve student outcomes but also enhance institutional reputation and competitiveness. In the public advanced secondary educational setting, mental health concerns like stress, anxiety, and depression are becoming more common. These problems, if left unchecked, will undermine students' capacity to deliver academically and socially. UNICEF (2021) emphasizes that the psychosocial well-being of students has a direct impact on their educational outcomes and future employability. Schools that incorporate mental health concerns into their best practices are better equipped to produce globally competitive, flexible, and innovative graduates (Gueldner *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, a paradigm shift in mental health concerns for schools means embracing proactive strategies that protect students' well-being while pursuing institutional objectives.

Institutional best practices refer to the most effective, evidence-based policies, strategies, and operational approaches adopted by educational institutions to ensure optimal performance, quality service delivery, and the achievement of desired educational outcomes (Koh et al., 2020). Institutional best practices need to adapt to the growing importance of mental health in education. According to the World Health Organization (2023), there is a need to adopt health-promoting schools that incorporate mental health into institutional policies, daily practices, and school infrastructure. For public advanced secondary schools, this involves ensuring safe and supportive learning environments, strengthening positive teacher–student relationships, and integrating psychosocial education into the curriculum (Romanovska & Novak, 2024). These practices not only reduce risks to students' mental health but also enhance institutional effectiveness and learning outcomes. By prioritizing mental health, educational institutions align themselves

with international standards, thereby improving their competitiveness in global education rankings and strengthening opportunities for international collaboration and partnerships.

The connection between mental health and competitiveness in institutions is mutual. When schools focus on mental health, they are able to benefit from the improved performance of the students, reduced dropout rates, and increased trust in the community. Margaretha et al. (2023) posit that the promotion of mental health helps to build the resilience of the institutions to cope with the changes brought about in the global arena, such as technological advancements and diversity. Advanced secondary public schools that have incorporated innovative mental health practices in their operations are leaders in the reforms in the education sector (Dike & Tagbo, 2024). As such, they are in a position to compete with other international institutions. Mental health reconsideration involves the evaluation and reconceptualization of the understanding and handling of mental health issues within the educational system. Mental health reconsideration means moving away from the personal aspect of dealing with such problems to the institutional aspect whereby all parties including learners are involved. Mental health also requires acknowledging the role of teachers and caregivers. UNICEF (2021) emphasizes that supporting educators' mental health is integral to sustaining student well-being. Public secondary schools must therefore adopt comprehensive strategies that address both student and teacher needs. This dual focus ensures that institutions maintain high standards of teaching while fostering environments conducive to transformative learning (Nouri, 2024). By embedding mental health into institutional best practices, schools can achieve sustainable competitiveness, balancing academic rigor with psychosocial support.

In the USA, Margaretha et al. (2023) found that the integration of psychosocial well-being into school structures increases the resilience, performance, and credibility of institutions. The results showed that institutions implementing practices based on mental health strategies perform better and have better reputations in international education systems. Likewise, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2022) stated that comprehensive mental health programs in schools decrease absenteeism, increase engagement, and improve the effectiveness of institutions. These studies illustrate that mental health plays a crucial role in reforming the best practices of American public secondary schools and preparing them for global competition.

In Britain, for example, the Public Health England (2021) highlighted that the integration of mental health in school policies helps in the development of inclusive learning environments that are important for the overall performance of the institutions. For example, the report noted that schools that focus on the promotion of psychosocial well-being have higher student retention rates compared to others. Such cases are in line with the global competitiveness standards. Additionally, Weare and Nind (2011) noted that the promotion of mental health in British schools helps in the development of emotional resilience and reputation. Such values are important in the development of a conducive learning environment where students are encouraged to perform well in both academic and social situations. Thus, in Britain, mental health is viewed as an important determinant of best practices in the development of global competitiveness. In India, Deb et al. (2015) studied the mental health of adolescents in secondary schools and noted that stress, anxiety, and depression affect the academic performance of students. The study highlighted the importance of schools offering counseling and psychosocial support, which is beneficial in enhancing the credibility and standards of the school. In the same country, Kumar (2019) noted that the importance of mental health in Indian schools is based on the need to promote innovations, flexibility, and competitiveness in the global

education arena. The above studies suggest that mental health is an indicator of best practices in schools, ensuring the schools' competitiveness in the global arena.

In Indonesia, Suryani et al. (2020) carried out a study on mindfulness-based interventions for adolescents in schools. This is important since mindfulness practices have been found to be vital in improving emotional intelligence, resiliency, and academic engagement. From the study, it is clear that schools that implement mental health programs can build their resiliency and competitiveness. This is a clear indication that the incorporation of mental health is vital in meeting global education standards. Therefore, it is safe to say that in Indonesia, mental health is a catalyst for reform in improving competitiveness in secondary education. In Nigeria, for instance, Adewuya et al. (2007) studied the prevalence of depression among secondary school students and its effects on academic and institutional performance. The researchers found that depression has negative effects on academic and institutional performance and recommended the integration of mental health care into the school system to enhance performance. Recently, Okeke (2021) emphasized the significance of prioritizing the psychosocial well-being of students in Nigerian schools for the enhancement of best practices and global competitiveness. This shows that mental health is a factor of institutional performance in secondary schools in Nigeria.

In Kenya, the study by Muthoni (2020) was conducted to assess the role played by school counseling in enhancing the well-being of students. The study concluded that mental health interventions enhance the academic performance and effectiveness of the school. Another study by Nyutu & Gysbers (2008) was conducted in Kenya to assess the effect of counseling interventions in reducing stress levels and enhancing resilience in secondary school students. From the studies conducted in Kenya, it is clear that mental health is a determinant of best practices in institutions, ensuring that the institutions remain competitive in the global arena. In Tanzania, Masanja (2019) argued that stress and anxiety undermine academic success and institutional credibility in secondary schools. His study emphasized that integrating psychosocial support into school frameworks enhances resilience and competitiveness. Additionally, UNICEF Tanzania (2021) reported that schools prioritizing mental health achieve better student engagement and institutional outcomes, aligning with global competitiveness standards. These studies demonstrate that mental health is a determinant of institutional best practices in Tanzania, ensuring that students are empowered to succeed academically and socially.

Therefore, the mental health of students is an important consideration that determines the best practices in public advanced secondary schools in terms of institutional competitiveness at the global level. For example, the UNICEF (2021), WHO (2023), and Margaretha et al. (2023) reports highlight the need for systemic reforms that take into consideration the mental health of the student population. By doing so, the institutional competitiveness at the global level is greatly enhanced. Thus, rethinking the mental health of the student population is an important consideration for advanced secondary schools in the global arena. The introduction provided in the essay is meant to lay the groundwork for further discussion on the redefinition of institutional competitiveness in the context of mental health-based best practices in the global arena.

Purpose of the Study

1. To determine the rethinking students' mental health as determinant of improving institutional best practices for global competitiveness in public advanced secondary school.

Methods

A mixed method research approach was used in the study. A mixed research approach combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The use of a mixed research approach in the study was aimed at helping the research gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data in the research was aimed at ensuring that the findings of the research were credible. A convergent parallel research design was used in the study. In the convergent parallel research design, both quantitative and qualitative data were used in the research. The use of both data in the research was aimed at ensuring that the findings of the research were credible. In the convergent parallel research design, the two data sets are used in parallel in the research process. The two data sets can be used in the research process in the following manner: the results obtained from the use of one data set can be used to support the findings obtained in the use of the other data set.

A census sampling method was used in the research to select the respondents. Rather than using a sampling method to select the respondents, the research used the census sampling method by targeting the entire 42 students from the total population of 249 students in the study area who met the inclusion criteria. Census sampling is used when the target population is relatively small and easily accessible. The method is used to ensure that the views of all the participants in the study are taken into account in order to avoid sampling bias. Data collection was carried out using two data collection instruments designed by the researchers. The data collection instruments used in the research were the Mental Health as Determinant of Improving Questionnaire (MHDIQ) and the Institutional Best Practices for Global Competitiveness (IBPGC). The two data collection instruments were used to measure the variables under study. In order for the data collection instruments to be valid in the collection of the data in the research, the two questionnaires were reviewed and cleared by experts in Measurement and Evaluation.

The reliability of the instruments was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, a statistical measure of internal consistency. The subscale coefficients were sufficiently high, indicating that the items within each subscale consistently measure the same underlying construct and are suitable for data collection in the study. Hence, quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques with the help of SPSS Version 26, mainly frequencies and percentages. The results were presented in tables and pie charts to show the distribution of responses and the interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, where similar ideas were grouped into themes and used to support and explain the quantitative findings.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' Responses on the Influence of Students' Mental Health on Institutional Best Practices for Global Competitiveness in Public Advanced Secondary Schools (N = 42)

Respondents' Responses on Mental Health Influence	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)
1. Students' mental health positively affects their engagement in school initiatives for global competitiveness.	1 (2.4)	2 (4.8)	4 (9.5)	20 (47.6)	15 (35.7)

2. Good mental health enhances students' ability to collaborate effectively on institutional projects.	1 (2.4)	3 (7.1)	3 (7.1)	19 (45.2)	16 (38.1)
3. Mental wellness promotes innovative thinking that supports best practices in school management and competitiveness.	2 (4.8)	2 (4.8)	3 (7.1)	18 (42.9)	17 (40.5)
4. Addressing students' mental health challenges improves participation in institutional decision-making processes.	1 (2.4)	3 (7.1)	4 (9.5)	19 (45.2)	15 (35.7)
5. Prioritizing mental health contributes to a culture of continuous improvement and global competitiveness in schools.	1 (2.4)	2 (4.8)	5 (11.9)	18 (42.9)	16 (38.1)

Source: Field Data, (2026)

Data in Table 1 showed that the majority of the respondents agreed that students' mental health positively influences institutional best practices for global competitiveness in public advanced secondary schools. Specifically, 83.3% (A = 47.6%, SA = 35.7%) agreed that students' mental health enhances engagement in school initiatives, while 83.3% (A = 45.2%, SA = 38.1%) agreed that good mental health improves collaboration on institutional projects. Similarly, 83.4% (A = 42.9%, SA = 40.5%) agreed that mental wellness promotes innovative thinking, 80.9% (A = 45.2%, SA = 35.7%) agreed that addressing mental health challenges improves participation in institutional decision-making, and 81.0% (A = 42.9%, SA = 38.1%) agreed that prioritizing mental health promotes a culture of continuous improvement and global competitiveness. These findings indicate that students' mental well-being plays a significant role in enhancing institutional best practices and strengthening schools' global competitiveness.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that students' mental health influences engagement in school initiatives. The findings showed that students' mental health positively influences their engagement in school initiatives aimed at promoting global competitiveness. The majority of the respondents agreed that students who receive adequate mental health support are more likely to participate actively in school programmes, clubs, projects, and other institutional activities that contribute to school development. The findings further indicated that mentally healthy students demonstrate greater commitment, responsibility, and enthusiasm in activities that improve institutional performance and global visibility. This suggests that promoting students' mental well-being enhances their level of participation and commitment to institutional goals, thereby strengthening the school's competitiveness. The findings are in consonance with the study of Margaretha et al. (2023), who found that integrating psychosocial well-being into school programmes improves students' resilience, participation, and institutional effectiveness. Similarly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) reported that school-based mental health programmes reduce absenteeism, improve students' engagement, and enhance institutional performance, thereby supporting schools in achieving global standards.

The findings of the study revealed that students' mental health enhances collaborative ability. The findings showed that good mental health enhances students' ability to collaborate effectively in school activities and institutional programmes.

Respondents agreed that mentally healthy students participate more confidently in group discussions, team projects, and collaborative learning activities, thereby promoting teamwork and institutional efficiency. The findings imply that emotional stability encourages effective communication, conflict resolution, and cooperation among students, which are essential for achieving institutional best practices and global competitiveness. The findings are in consonance with the study of Public Health England (2021), which reported that schools that promote students' mental well-being create inclusive environments that improve collaboration and academic achievement. Similarly, Weare and Nind (2011) found that positive mental health initiatives strengthen teamwork, social relationships, and collaborative learning, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness.

The findings of the study revealed that students' mental health promotes innovative thinking. The findings showed that students' mental wellness promotes creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills that support effective school management and global competitiveness. Respondents agreed that students who are mentally healthy are more capable of generating new ideas, participating in innovative projects, and contributing meaningfully to institutional improvement. The findings suggest that reducing psychological stress creates opportunities for students to think creatively and support the implementation of best practices within the school system. The findings are in consonance with the study of Kumar (2019), who found that schools that integrate mental health programmes encourage innovation, adaptability, and institutional growth. Likewise, Suryani et al. (2020) reported that psychosocial support enhances students' resilience, creativity, and institutional performance, thereby improving school competitiveness.

The findings of the study revealed that students' mental health enhances participation in decision-making. The findings showed that students' mental health positively influences their participation in school decision-making processes. The respondents agreed that mentally healthy students are more confident in expressing their opinions, participating in school committees, and contributing to institutional planning and governance. This indicates that adequate mental health support empowers students to become active participants in decision-making, thereby strengthening institutional effectiveness and promoting democratic school governance. The findings are in consonance with the study of Okeke (2021), who reported that mental health support increases students' confidence and participation in school governance. Similarly, Nyutu and Gysbers (2008) found that counselling and psychological support improve students' involvement in institutional decision-making and contribute to school effectiveness.

The findings of the study revealed that prioritizing students' mental health promotes continuous institutional improvement. The findings showed that prioritizing students' mental health contributes significantly to continuous institutional improvement and global competitiveness. The respondents agreed that schools that invest in counselling services, wellness programmes, and mental health interventions create positive learning environments that enhance students' resilience, academic performance, innovation, and commitment to institutional excellence. The findings imply that mental health is not only essential for students' well-being but also serves as a strategic factor in achieving sustainable institutional development and global competitiveness. The findings are in consonance with the study of Masanja (2019), who found that schools promoting students' mental well-being recorded higher levels of institutional performance and continuous improvement. Similarly, UNICEF Tanzania (2021) reported that integrating mental health initiatives into school programmes enhances student engagement, institutional resilience,

and educational quality, thereby improving schools' competitiveness at both national and international levels.

Conclusion

This study was able to establish that the mental health of students has a significant effect on the implementation of the best practices in the global competitiveness of public advanced secondary schools. The findings of the study pointed out that students who are mentally supported tend to be more engaged, collaborative, innovative, and willing to participate in the decision-making process in the institutions. Prioritizing the mental well-being of students does not only benefit the students individually but also the schools in terms of global competitiveness. The findings of the study are in agreement with the international findings that mental health is a critical factor in the effectiveness of the school as well as the transformational practices in the schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the study recommends the followings:

1. Implementing school mental health programs, schools should provide structured counseling services, stress management workshops, and peer support programs that would help in promoting student well-being and increasing institutional competitiveness.
2. Mental health integration in institutional policies, the integration of mental health in school policies and project planning is essential in ensuring that the mental well-being of students would contribute to institutional success.
3. Fostering a collaborative and innovative learning environment, schools should encourage group projects and activities that would promote creativity and teamwork among students.
4. Encouraging student participation in decision-making, students should participate in school decision-making processes and planning activities that will help in developing a sense of ownership and responsibility among them.
5. Evaluating mental health initiatives, schools should have feedback mechanisms in order to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of mental health initiatives in promoting student well-being and increasing institutional competitiveness.

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