

## CREATING A HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES

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### Abstract

Creating a healthy school environment is an important aspect of developing students' learning capacity and well-being. Various studies have explored the implementation of policies and best practices that support physical, mental and social health in the school environment. The research method used was literature research. The results show that hygiene standards, air quality, nutrition, physical activity, comprehensive health education and emotional support are key factors in creating healthy schools. The multidisciplinary involvement of educators, parents, and health practitioners showed significant improvement in the successful implementation of this policy. In addition, anti-bullying and mental health promotion practices have contributed to a decrease in school violence cases and an increase in students' mental awareness.

**Keywords:** Environment, Healthy School, Policy, Best Practice.

### Introduction

In recent decades, the quest for a healthy school environment has become an important concern for many countries around the world. Education not only serves as a means to acquire academic knowledge, but also as a key platform to instil healthy lifestyles among the younger generation. Healthy schools are considered essential in supporting students' learning process as well as their emotional, physical and social well-being.

A healthy school environment is a critical component in providing a strong foundation for a child's education and development. The focus on creating a conducive environment is not only related to adequate physical facilities, but also includes

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psychological and social aspects that support students' well-being (Adyel, 2020). A healthy school is able to create a positive atmosphere where students feel safe, valued and supported to learn (Akseer et al., 2020). This is important because the quality of the school environment has a direct impact on students' motivation, their mental and physical health, and academic success. This positive environment not only supports academic achievement, but also teaches important skills such as co-operation, empathy and respect for self and others (Alcaraz et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the importance of a healthy school environment is also reflected in students' long-term learning outcomes and quality of life. Studies show that schools that are able to effectively integrate health education into their curriculum, such as teaching about nutrition, physical activity and mental health, contribute to increased knowledge and healthy behaviours among students (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020). This not only improves their academic performance but also prepares them with a solid foundation to lead healthy lives in the future (Arvidsson & Dumay, 2022). Therefore, efforts to create a healthy school environment are an important investment in the future of individuals and society as a whole, creating a generation that is not only academically brilliant but also conscious of health and well-being.

The factors that contribute to the creation of a healthy school environment are diverse, spanning from the physical conditions of the school to the social and emotional aspects of the school community. One key factor is the quality of physical infrastructure, including adequate ventilation, lighting and sanitation, which not only provides students with access to safe learning facilities but also directly affects their physical health (Baah et al., 2021). School environments equipped with facilities that enable physical activity, such as sports fields and open spaces, as well as access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities, are crucial in supporting students' healthy lifestyles (Baduge et al., 2022). Then, learning environment factors, such as modest class sizes and adequate learning equipment, also support a more effective and efficient learning experience, which is part of supporting students' mental health and well-being (Billett, 2020).

On the other hand, social and emotional components also play a crucial role in shaping a healthy school environment. The psychosocial conditions at school, which include the treatment between students, the relationship between teachers and students, and extracurricular activities, have a great influence on students' sense of security and emotional well-being (Blanchard & Thacker, 2023). Schools that promote anti-bullying policies and have mental health support programs, such as student counselling, demonstrate a strong commitment to the creation of healthy learning environments (Boettcher & Conrad, 2021). Emotional and social intelligence taught inside and outside the classroom helps students develop important skills for managing stress, building positive relationships, and making healthy decisions, all of which are

important pillars in supporting students' academic success and overall well-being (Sitopu et al., 2024); (Guna et al., 2024).

In the quest for a healthy school environment, there are various challenges to be faced. Firstly, limited financial resources are often a major barrier, especially in schools located in underprivileged areas or developing countries (Bovill, 2020). Inadequate funding can hinder building proper physical infrastructure, providing learning equipment that meets the needs, or even implementing health and wellness programmes for students and staff (Buse et al., 2023). In addition, a lack of awareness and understanding on the part of the school or community about the importance of a healthy school environment can reduce the prioritisation and support for initiatives aimed at improving health and well-being in the school environment (Chan, 2023). Other challenges come from gaps in access to health services, inadequate nutrition, and difficulties in adopting and executing policies that support healthy and inclusive learning environments (Hairiyanto et al., 2024).

Facing these challenges requires comprehensive and integrated policies from the school and support from the government and community. These policies can include the allocation of adequate funds to improve school facilities and infrastructure, as well as curriculum development that includes comprehensive health and wellbeing education (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). Governments can play a key role by increasing investment in education and school health and encouraging collaboration between sectors to support programmes such as access to good nutrition and mental health services in schools (Chang et al., 2020). Furthermore, policy implementation should integrate student-focused approaches, placing student well-being at the centre of learning and promoting community participation and engagement in the development of conducive school environments. Through this multi-faceted strategy, the challenges of creating a healthy school environment can be addressed more effectively, contributing to the physical, social and emotional well-being of the entire school community (Chatterjee, 2020).

While the importance of this issue has been recognised, there are still gaps in the research, particularly in a thorough literature review of what policies have been and are being implemented, as well as best practices that have proven successful.

This research aims to shed light on the policies and best practices that can lead to healthy schools. With a focus on literature review, this research will identify, analyse and synthesise the findings of previous studies related to the issue to support more effective policy making and implementation of better practices in schools.

## **Research Methods**

The literature research method is an approach that relies on analysing published or documented data from various sources to investigate a research question. In a literature study, the researcher collects data and then identifies, collates, and analyses

various existing information related to the research topic. There are several data collection techniques in this method such as keyword search, which allows researchers to search for related sources through catalogues, indexes, or search engines. (Abdussamad, 2022); (Adlini et al., 2022); (Afiyanti, 2008).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Healthy School Environment**

A healthy school environment is a condition that supports the optimisation of students' learning and their physical and mental health. Such an environment not only includes the cleanliness and physical condition of the school but also involves harmonious emotional, psychological and social aspects. The physical aspects include clean water, hygienic toilets, well-ventilated and lit classrooms, and safe sports facilities and playgrounds (Christiansen et al., 2024). In addition, school canteens should also provide nutritionally balanced food options. To support mental and emotional health, schools should create a pleasant learning atmosphere, promote extracurricular activities, and provide support through school counsellors or psychologists (Christie & Lingard, 2020).

An effective school health programme requires the integration of health education into the curriculum. Students need to gain knowledge about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including nutrition, physical fitness, and disease control and prevention. Education on reproductive and social health is also important to fortify students against risky behaviours (Clark et al., 2020). Student engagement in school health programmes can be enhanced through health clubs or student leadership programmes. Such programmes are not only educational, but also provide opportunities for students to practice being individuals responsible for the health of themselves and others in their environment (Cullen et al., 2022).

Parental and community involvement is crucial to the success of creating a healthy school environment. Schools should collaborate with parents to ensure consistency of health messages provided both at school and at home (Dang et al., 2021). Healthy school programmes can be enriched by the involvement of local communities, such as health workers, nutritionists, and non-profit organisations that focus on child and adolescent health. This increased awareness and engagement not only strengthens support for a healthy school environment but also models positive behaviours that students can adopt in their daily lives (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

### **Healthy School Environment Policy**

A healthy school environment policy is a set of rules, guidelines and practices designed to ensure that the school environment supports the health, well-being and educational success of all students. These policies generally include standards for air and water quality, facility cleanliness, nutrition programmes, and student physical and

mental safety (Davys & Beddoe, 2020). It is important for schools to establish clear guidelines for the quality of food consumption in school canteens, procedures for dealing with health emergencies, and effective methods of teaching students about health (Day et al., 2020).

The policy should also include initiatives to encourage students' active participation in physical activity through regular sports lessons and access to safe and well-maintained sports facilities (Edelman & Kudzma, 2021). The integration of physical and mental health education into the curriculum is an important component, so that students gain a strong understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The importance of implementing non-violent discipline, establishing bullying prevention programmes and tolerance should also be part of the policy to foster a conducive and safe school environment for all (Fathurrochman et al., 2021).

Adopting a healthy school environment policy also involves support and training for teaching staff as well as education personnel. This includes equipping them with the ability to recognise and address student health issues, both physical and mental, and provide support to students who need it (Finkelstein et al., 2021). In addition, it is important to establish effective communication channels between schools, students and parents to ensure that feedback and concerns about health and safety in schools are addressed quickly and effectively.

Schools should endeavour to maintain an environment that is not only healthy from a physical point of view but also social and emotional. This can be done by developing a culture that is inclusive and encourages diversity, and instils the values of openness and respect for one another (Fiock, 2020). Student participation in making school decisions that affect their health and well-being can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility. Creating partnerships with outside entities, such as hospitals, health clinics and public health organisations, can also enrich the implementation and benefits of a healthy school environment policy (Fiorino, 2023).

### **Best Practices in Creating a Healthy School Environment**

Best practices in realising a healthy school environment involve a comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach, embracing the physical, psychological and social aspects of health. One of the key foundations is the implementation of high health and safety standards, from providing access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation facilities, to ensuring regular and effective rubbish removal and classroom cleaning (Fusar-Poli et al., 2021). Ensuring that the air in classrooms is free of pollutants is also important, such as using air purifiers or good natural ventilation to reduce the risk of respiratory diseases (Garbe et al., 2020).

Furthermore, integrating health education into the school curriculum is vital. This includes not only knowledge about nutrition and physical fitness, but also aspects of mental health and social-emotional skills. Programmes such as project-based learning

that engage students in health campaigns in schools or communities can increase students' awareness and empowerment on health issues (Gilbertson et al., 2022). Comprehensive sexual education that educates about reproductive health and avoiding risky behaviours is also important to implement in an age-sensitive and appropriate manner (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022).

Anti-bullying policies and emotional support for students are also concrete forms of a healthy school environment. Schools need to establish an effective grievance redress system and provide access to counselling for students who need it (Gueldner et al., 2020). Training for teachers and staff to recognise signs of stress or mental illness in students and how to respond positively and supportively is important. Initiatives such as mental awareness programmes, mental health days, and peer support training can strengthen support networks for students (Tubagus et al., 2023); (Aslan & Shiong, 2023).

Finally, the involvement of parents and the local community enhances the success of creating a healthy school environment. Schools can organise workshops and seminars on health topics by inviting outside experts, thus helping to build parents' awareness and capacity to support healthy lifestyles at home (Harris et al., 2021). Collaboration with local organisations, such as community health centres or sports clubs, can provide additional resources and opportunities for students to engage in health and wellness activities. This collaborative approach reinforces messages about the importance of health, while involving more parties in the effort to create healthier schools that are conducive to all (Hayes et al., 2022).

In conclusion, implementing best practices in creating healthy school environments requires an integrated approach involving education, emotional support and environmental policies. Through setting high health standards, integrating health education in the curriculum, anti-bullying policies, and active involvement from parents and the community, schools can establish a supportive environment for both learning and the overall well-being of students. These initiatives not only improve students' physical health and fitness, but also their mental health and social capabilities, ensuring that they are prepared not only academically but also holistically for the future. Any endeavour in this direction is a positive step towards establishing a strong foundation for a healthier and more health-conscious generation.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of policies and best practices in realising a healthy school environment is essential in preparing the next generation that not only excels academically but also has optimal physical fitness and mental health. A holistic approach that involves meeting sanitation standards, integrating health education into the curriculum, and creating a supportive learning atmosphere, contributes greatly to achieving this goal. Teaching about nutrition, fitness, mental and social-emotional

health, along with the implementation of anti-bullying policies, can build a strong foundation for students to lead healthier and more productive lives.

Intensive parental and community involvement in the process of health education and practice makes these efforts not only limited to the school environment but also integrated into students' daily lives. Open dialogue between school, home and the wider community facilitates the exchange of information and best practices to support student wellbeing. Thus, learning becomes not only about knowledge acquisition but also about forming sustainable healthy habits.

Promoting and practising a healthy school environment should therefore be a shared goal for all stakeholders in the education system. This includes not only teachers and policy makers but also parents and the general public. Through cooperation, commitment and concrete actions from all parties, schools can become holistic learning centres that prepare students not only to succeed in the world of work but also to lead healthy and harmonious lives.

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