THE IMPACT OF WELL-BEING ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: THE ROLE OF DIRECT AND PASSIVE TEACHER SUPPORT

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Introduction

Action Research Overview
In education, the academic success of students is no longer viewed in isolation from their emotional and social well-being. This study addresses how the overall classroom environment could affect a student's academic performance and classroom productivity. It has been previously discovered that the wellbeing plays a large role in the academic progress of any learner (Durlak et. al., 2011). This research explores how varying types of classroom support, both direct teacher involvement and passive support mechanisms such as scaffolding and peer-based learning, affect students' well-being, and consequently, their academic outcomes.

Background of the Problem
This study draws upon foundational educational theories and studies by Vygotsky (1978), Hattie (2009), Deci and Ryan (2000), Gillies (2004), and Durlak et al. (2011), which consistently highlight the importance of balancing learning autonomy, structured support, and positive social interactions within the classroom to promote a more motivating learning environment around the student.

Educational settings often emphasise academic achievement without sufficiently considering the well-being factors that underpin those outcomes. Traditional models of direct teacher instruction, where teachers act as the sole source of knowledge and authority, can lead to reduced motivation and feelings of isolation among students (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Conversely, approaches that provide scaffolding, encourage peer collaboration, and foster classroom autonomy have been shown to enhance both academic outcomes limitingly and emotional well-being to a high degree. Yet, educators often lack clarity on which balance of these methods is most effective for fostering both elements together.

This research seeks to contribute to the achievement of the golden balance point between the enrichment of students' classroom comfortability and their ability to perform at the highest productivity rate, in order to get the most out of their subject lessons. The study has done this via comparing the effects of three distinct classroom support strategies on students' academic achievement and observed well-being within a Year 7 Arabic developing class.

Literature Review

Several key studies underpin this research:
- Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) introduced the idea that students learn best when tasks are slightly beyond their current capability but achievable with temporary structured support (scaffolding).
- Hattie (2009) emphasised the significant influence of teacher-student relationships and structured guidance on academic outcomes, while also cautioning against over-reliance on teacher-led instruction without promoting student autonomy.
- Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory argued that student motivation thrives when autonomy and competence are supported, suggesting that overly direct instruction can limit intrinsic motivation.
- Gillies (2004) demonstrated that collaborative group-based learning enhances social skills, peer learning, and engagement, though it can risk uneven participation and knowledge distribution.
- Durlak et al. (2011) found that interventions supporting student social-emotional learning positively impact academic performance and well-being.

This research positions itself within these frameworks to explore which combination of support mechanisms most effectively promotes well-being and academic achievement.

Research Methods

The study was conducted within a single Year 7 developing class comprising of 15 students, including a focused subgroup of 5 students (3 boys, 2 girls). The research was structured over three terms, each featuring a different teaching approach:

- Term 1: Direct teacher contact - students primarily received direct instructional support as needed, with optional lunchtime support sessions.
- Term 2: Group-based learning - students worked collaboratively in groups of 3–4, using collective strengths and peer support to navigate tasks.
- Term 3: Independent learning with scaffolding and selective direct teacher support - students worked independently with structured resources (scaffolds) and received teacher support only when essential, alongside regular praise and encouragement.

Data Collection Methods

Two primary types of data were collected:

- Quantitative: Termly student test scores were recorded over 3 academic terms and compared to measure academic progress.
- Qualitative: Observations of classroom behaviour, participation, and focus levels were noted. Additionally, student interviews provided insight into personal preferences, motivation, and perceptions of support methods.

Results

Quantitative Results

The academic test score improvements by teaching method were:

- Direct Support: 30% improvement
- Group Assignments: 33% improvement
- Scaffolding with Some Teacher Support: 41% improvement

This data suggests that scaffolding combined with selective teacher involvement produced the highest academic gains.

Qualitative Results

Out of the 15 students, 5 were chosen as a focus subgroup. They were chosen due to their varying abilities and classroom participation levels. These students were interviewed using the same 6 questions that asked them a variety of questions spanning from the number of years they have been studying Arabic for, all the way to the type of learning method they personally preferred the moat and why.

The student interviews and observations revealed nuanced findings:

- Social Well-Being in Group Work: Students like Student 2 preferred group work due to the collaborative environment, stating, "working with my friends helps me learn from them new words." This highlights the role of peer support and social well-being in learning.
- Autonomy and Teacher Praise: Student 5 thrived in the scaffolding environment, valuing independence paired with teacher encouragement: "I like when I work things out by myself and I get it correct." This underscores the motivational power of self-directed success reinforced by positive feedback.

Overall Analysis

The findings align closely with Vygotsky's ZPD and Hattie's theories, affirming that scaffolded tasks with occasional teacher intervention promote both

autonomy and academic growth. As well as Gillies (2004) and Durlak et al (2011), who observed benefits in group learning for social engagement and peer-driven academic support. Finally, the study also heavily supports Deci & Ryan (2000) and Zimmerman (2002), highlighting the limitations of exclusive direct teacher instruction, which risks undermining student motivation and learning autonomy.

Reflections

This study highlighted the value of combining scaffolding with occasional teacher support, which not only improved academic outcomes but also boosted student confidence and motivation. Group work enhanced social well-being and peer learning, though uneven participation was a challenge. I recognised that relying too heavily on direct instruction can reduce learning autonomy and engagement. Moving forward, I am encouraged to adopt more scaffolded, independent tasks, use group roles to balance collaboration, and introduce simple well-being check-ins to better monitor student experiences in class.

Conclusion

This study concludes that scaffolding with occasional direct teacher support provides the most effective approach for enhancing both academic performance and classroom well-being in a Year 7 developing class. Group-based learning offered moderate benefits, especially for social engagement, while teacher-only instruction was least effective, supporting the literature's emphasis on autonomy-supportive and collaborative learning environments.

References

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