School Belonging, Student-Teacher Relationship, and School Climate: A Structural Equation Model on Subjective

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the best-fit model for the subjective well-being (SWB) among private college students in Region XI, focusing on the influence of school belonging, student-teacher relationship, and school climate. A quantitative descriptive and causal research design was employed using the structural equation model (SEM) for analysis. A total of 400 students from various provinces in the Davao Region were selected through stratified random sampling, and data were collected via personal surveys using modified and validated questionnaires to ensure content validity and reliability. Statistical tools were used for data analysis, including mean, standard deviation, Pearson product-moment correlation, linear regression, and SEM. Findings revealed that the level of school belonging was perceived as high, student-teacher relationship as moderate, school climate as very high, and subjective well-being as high. Significant relationships were observed between school belonging and subjective well-being, student-teacher relationship and subjective well-being, and school climate and subjective well-being, confirming that each exogenous variables had a significantly influence on SWB. Among the three generated models, Model 3 was identified as the best fit for the study, with school belonging emerging as the most significant predictor of SWB. The results further **i**ndicated that SWB was best anchored in school belonging**,** which was measured by inclusion to school, and school engagement; teacher-student relationship was characterized by comfort, approval, intimacy, and trust**;** and school climate was described in terms of leadership/staff relations, institutional environment, interpersonal environment, teaching and learning, and safety**.**

Keywords: educational management, subjective well-being, school belonging, student-teacher relationship, school climate, structural equation model, private college students, University of Mindanao, Philippines SDG Indicator: #3: Good Health and Well-being and #4: Quality Education

INTRODUCTION

College students' subjective well-being is increasingly at risk due to academic pressures, financial concerns, reduced social interaction, and heightened emotional distress (Kovalenko et al., 2020; Kasianova & Filonenko, 2021; Strukova & Polivanova, 2023). Financial constraints, academic workload, and declining motivation significantly undermine students' mental health (Mueller & Perreault, 2020). In the Philippines, high rates of depression and anxiety among both students and teachers further highlight the urgency of addressing this issue (Mendoza et al., 2023). The transition to college intensifies these challenges, especially for students with limited access to support services (Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2020; Newton et al., 2021). Supporting student well-being is therefore essential for promoting healthy development and academic success.

Subjective well-being (SWB), comprising individuals' emotional and cognitive evaluations of life, is a key indicator of students' quality of life (Fan, 2020). High SWB predicts stronger academic performance, healthier social behaviors, and better personal development (Ng et al., 2020). In educational settings, SWB enhances engagement and motivation, whereas low well-being diminishes learning and contributes to negative school experiences (Hascher, 2020; Liang & Baek, 2023). Improving SWB is thus central to creating supportive learning environments (Govorova et al., 2020).

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Research consistently highlights school belonging, student-teacher relationships, and school climate as major contributors to students' well-being. A strong sense of school belonging enhances psychological health and academic satisfaction (Karaman & Tarim, 2020; Arslan, 2022). Positive student-teacher interactions further promote emotional security and academic engagement (García-Moya, 2020; Bilz et al., 2022). Supportive, inclusive school climates strengthen these relationships, fostering environments that sustain student well-being (Cocoradă & Orzea, 2021; Aldridge & McChesney, 2020). These interrelated factors highlight the importance of understanding how the school environment collectively shapes students' SWB.

Despite growing research in the Philippines, limited work has examined the combined effects of school belonging, student-teacher relationships, and school climate on SWB, particularly in Region XI (Mendoza et al., 2023; Corpuz, 2023). Studies often address these variables separately, leaving a gap in understanding their interconnectedness within the regional context. Addressing this gap is vital for developing effective mental health and educational interventions (Govorova et al., 2020; Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2021). This study employs structural equation modeling to examine the pathways linking these variables to SWB, offering a holistic view of college students' well-being in Region XI.

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the best-fit model explaining college students' subjective well-being based on school belonging, student-teacher relationships, and school climate. Specifically, it aims to: (1) assess levels of school belonging; (2) evaluate the quality of student-teacher relationships; (3) describe perceptions of school climate; (4) determine levels of SWB; (5) examine the relationships among these variables; and (6) identify the best-fit SEM model for predicting SWB in the Davao Region. The study tests the null hypotheses that no significant relationships exist among the variables and that no best-fit model explains students' SWB.

This study is anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977), which posits that human development is shaped by nested environmental systems. School belonging, student-teacher relationships, and school climate operate within the microsystem, while mesosystem and exosystem interactions—such as home-school linkages and institutional policies—also influence well-being. Recent expansions of the model emphasize dynamic person–environment interactions (Rosa & Tudge, 2021; Tong & An, 2023), reinforcing its relevance in examining school-based influences on SWB.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) complements this framework by explaining how unmet needs for belonging and esteem hinder students' well-being. Supportive school relationships and climates help fulfill these needs, fostering connectedness and positive self-perceptions. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) further supports the analysis by underscoring the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Belonging, strong teacher relationships, and positive school climates facilitate these needs, thereby enhancing students' psychological functioning and SWB.

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual framework, illustrating the relationships among the exogenous variables—school belonging, student-teacher relationship, and school climate—and the endogenous variable, subjective well-being. School belonging is measured through engagement, teacher support, peer support, and inclusion. Student-teacher relationships encompass trust, interaction, intimacy, care, approval, and comfort. School climate includes safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership/staff relations. SWB is assessed through academic satisfaction, academic efficacy, school connectedness, and college gratitude.

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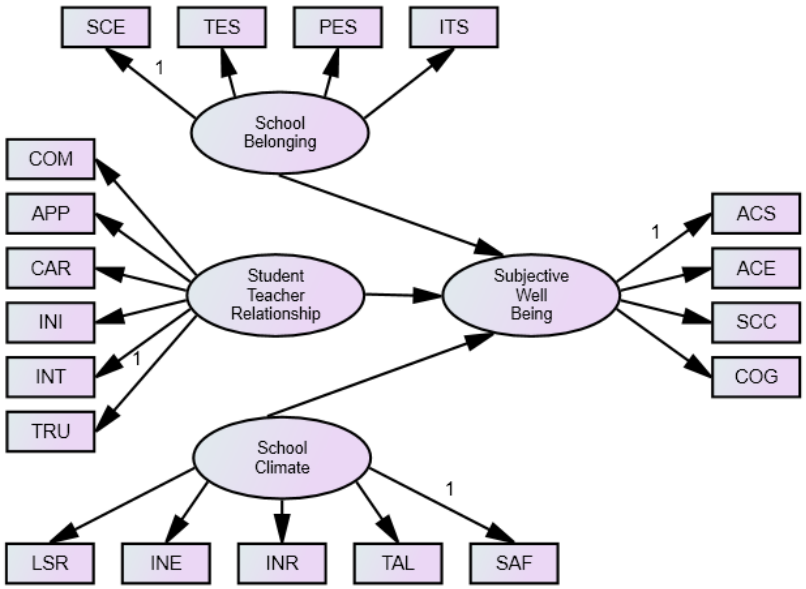

Figure 1. Hypothesized Model on the Influence of School Belonging, Student-

Teacher Relationship, and School Climate to the Subjective Well-Being of College Students

Legend: SCE - School Engagement SAF - Safety

TES - Teacher Support TAL - Teaching and Learning

PES - Peer Support INR - Interpersonal Relationship

ITS - Inclusion to School INE - Institutional Environment

LSR - Leadership/Staff Relations

TRU - Trust

INT - Interaction ACS - Academic Satisfaction

INI - Intimacy ACE - Academic Efficacy

CAR – Care SCC - School Connectedness

APP – Approval COG - College Gratitude

COM - Comfort

School belonging refers to students' feelings of acceptance and inclusion in school (Direkci et al., 2020). Strong belonging enhances academic outcomes, peer and teacher relationships, resilience, and mental health, and reduces anxiety and loneliness (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Zong et al., 2021). Positive peer relations also strengthen belonging and foster engagement in academic and extracurricular activities (Lu, 2023). The School Belonging Scale (SBS) provides a reliable measure of this construct (Direkci et al., 2020).

Student-teacher relationships (STRs) shape students' academic performance, social development, and emotional well-being (Bai et al., 2022). Indicators such as trust, interaction, care, and comfort foster a supportive learning environment (Pianta, 2020; Roorda et al., 2021). Positive STRs promote engagement, motivation, reduced dropout rates, and better mental health (Seligman, 2021; Poulou, 2020). Fairness and high teacher expectations also contribute to students' academic goals (Wentzel, 2020).

School climate encompasses norms, values, relationships, safety, teaching practices, and organizational structures (Bochaver et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2021). Positive school climates are associated with higher academic achievement, improved mental health, reduced problem behaviors, and stronger engagement (Daily et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2021; Ebbert & Luthar, 2021). Supportive climates enhance belonging and identification with school, promoting academic success (Frontiers, 2023).

Subjective well-being (SWB) includes students' cognitive and emotional evaluations of life and schooling (Renshaw, 2018). Higher SWB is linked to stronger academic performance, school connectedness, and mental health (Seepersad et al., 2020). It encompasses life satisfaction, positive affect, and low negative affect (Katajavouri et al., 2023; Khairuddin & Mahmud, 2020). The pandemic further emphasized the importance of SWB in sustaining motivation and resilience (Kiuru et al., 2020).

This study has global relevance as it contributes to understanding how educational environments promote well-being, aligning with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). Positive school environments foster resilient, engaged individuals who contribute to societal progress. For students and teachers, the findings underscore the importance of nurturing supportive relationships and climates. For future researchers, this work offers a foundation for further exploration of environmental and relational factors that shape student well-being.

METHOD

This section outlines the research design, research locale, population and sample, research instruments used to measure constructs of interest, data collection, statistical tools, and ethical considerations.

Research Respondents

The study involved students from large private colleges across four provinces in Region XI (Davao del Sur, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, and Davao de Oro). Davao Occidental was excluded due to the absence of private colleges. From a total population of 20,408 second-, third-, and fourth-year students, 400 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional and equitable representation (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Each province contributed 100 participants.

A sample size of 400 meets recommended requirements for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which typically ranges from 200 to 400 for valid and stable estimates (Ranatunga et al., 2020; Yahaya et al., 2021).

Inclusion criteria required respondents to be currently enrolled in private colleges in Region XI and to have completed at least one academic year. First-year students and those not enrolled within the region were excluded to ensure respondents had sufficient exposure to their academic environment. Participation was voluntary, and students were free to withdraw at any time. The researcher upheld all ethical and institutional guidelines to protect respondents' rights and well-being.

Materials and Instrument

This study used four adapted and validated survey questionnaires to measure the key variables. The first instrument, developed by Renshaw (2018), assessed students' subjective well-being through 16 items covering academic satisfaction, academic efficacy, school connectedness, and college gratitude. The second instrument, created by Direkci et al. (2020), measured school belonging using 23 items reflecting school engagement, teacher support, peer support, and inclusion. The third questionnaire, developed by Bai et al. (2022), evaluated student–teacher relationships through 29 items assessing trust, interaction, intimacy, care, approval, and comfort. The fourth instrument, adapted from Durham et al. (2022), measured school climate using 12 items across domains such as safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership/staff relations.

To interpret the levels of school belonging, student–teacher relationship, school climate, and subjective well-being, a five-point descriptive scale was used:

4.20–5.00 (Very High), 3.40–4.19 (High), 2.60–3.39 (Moderate), 1.80–2.59 (Low), and 1.00–1.79 (Very Low). All instruments were modified to better fit the local educational context. One school belonging indicator was reframed from alienation to inclusion to maintain a more positive and consistent construct, as recommended by panel reviewers. Expert validation yielded an overall rating of 4.66, indicating excellent content validity.

Following validation, pilot testing with 30 college students demonstrated strong reliability across all scales as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Part I (Subjective Well-Being), achieved a coefficient of .861 for 16 items, reflecting good internal consistency and stability. Part II (School Belonging), recorded a reliability coefficient of .947 for 23 items, affirming excellent dependability, while Part III (Student-Teacher Relationship), achieved a score of .870 for 29 items, indicating good measurement consistency. Part IV (School Climate), demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of .944 for 12 items, underscoring its robustness as a reliable tool. These high reliability values confirmed the instruments' suitability for full-scale data collection and ensured accurate measurement of the intended constructs.

Design and Procedure

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative research design to examine the relationships among school belonging, student–teacher relationships, school climate, and college students' subjective well-being. This design allowed the measurement of variables as they naturally occur and supported the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test hypothesized associations and predictive pathways.

SEM was used to develop the best-fit model and assess direct, indirect, and mediating effects among the constructs. As a robust multivariate technique, SEM incorporates both factor analysis and path analysis, enabling the evaluation of measurement errors and overall model fit (Byrne, 2020; Hair et al., 2020; Memon et al., 2021).

Data collection was conducted in large private colleges across Region XI, specifically in Davao del Sur, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, and Davao de Oro. Davao Occidental was excluded due to the absence of private colleges. Before data gathering began, the researcher secured permission from the Dean of the UM Professional Schools and coordinated with participating institutions. Surveys and informed consent forms were personally administered, and data collection commenced in May 2025. After retrieval, responses were organized and analyzed using several statistical techniques. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the exogenous and endogenous variables. Pearson's correlation assessed the strength and significance of relationships among variables. Linear regression identified predictors of subjective well-being. SEM was then applied to evaluate the overall structural model.

Model adequacy was evaluated using widely accepted fit indices: Comparative Fit Index (CFI $\geq$ 0.95), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI $\geq$ 0.95), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA $\leq$ 0.06), following the cutoff criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler (2019). These measures ensured that the resulting model accurately represented the relationships among the study variables.

This research complied with the ethical standards of the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC), Protocol No. UMERC-2024-196, and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and protection of rights were strictly maintained throughout the study. The research posed no physical, psychological, or socioeconomic risks, and while participation was uncompensated, the findings aim to benefit students and academic institutions. Academic integrity was ensured through the use of plagiarism detection tools such as Turnitin and Grammarly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented and discussed in this section are the data analysis and findings on school belonging, student-teacher relationship, school climate, and their influence on subjective well-being. It provides a comprehensive interpretation of the results**,** highlighting key patterns, relationships, and insights from statistical analyses to address the study's research objectives and implications.

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School Belonging

Depicted in Table 1 is the level of school belonging of college students in terms of school engagement, teacher support, peer support, and inclusion to school. It obtained an overall mean score of 4.10 with a standard deviation of 0.59, which is high. This means that the level of school belonging is oftentimes observed. Among the indicators of school belonging, peer support obtained the highest mean score of 4.28 with a standard deviation of 0.75, which is described as very high. Conversely, teacher support achieved the lowest mean score of 3.98 with a standard deviation of 0.73, which is still considered as high.

Table 1 Level of School Belonging of College Students

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
School Engagement	0.67	4.01	High
Teacher Support	0.73	3.98	High
Peer Support	0.75	4.28	Very High
Inclusion to School	0.76	4.13	High
Overall	**0.59**	**4.10**	**High**

The very high descriptive level on one indicator is due to the respondents very high ratings on spending time with friends at school, feeling happy to do activities with friends at school, and feeling valuable among friends at school. These results suggest that students feel most connected to their peers, which is a crucial factor in fostering a sense of inclusion and emotional security. The high descriptive levels on the rest of the indicators are due to feeling accepted and valued, feeling safe at school, and respecting students' ideas which demonstrates that students positively perceive their relationships with teachers and feel integrated into the academic environment. Overall results imply that supportive interpersonal relationships and inclusive school environments are vital in nurturing a strong sense of belonging, which can positively impact students' academic motivation, mental health, and overall well-being. The high results of school belonging support with the research conducted by Karaman and Tarim (2020) and Burton (2020) highlighting the importance of social and emotional support in cultivating school belonging. Students who feel supported by peers and educators are likelier to experience a strong sense of belonging and academic engagement.

Student-Teacher Relationship

As shown in table 2, student-teacher relationship is measured by trust, interaction, intimacy, care, approval, and comfort. It obtained an overall mean of 3.33 or labelled as moderate, with a standard deviation of 0.76. This implies that the level of student-teacher relationship is sometimes observed. Among the indicators of student-teacher relationship, trust received the highest mean score of 3.97 with a standard deviation

Table 2 Level of Student-Teacher Relationship of College Students

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Trust	0.64	3.97	High

Interaction	0.91	3.50	High
Intimacy	1.05	2.56	Low
Care	0.94	3.36	Moderate
Approval	0.94	3.14	Moderate
Comfort	0.96	3.44	High
Overall	**0.76**	**3.33**	**Moderate**

of 0.64, described as high. Conversely, intimacy obtained the lowest mean score of 2.56 with a standard deviation of 1.05, described as low. The high descriptive levels on three indicators of student-teacher relationship can be attributed to the respondents' consistent belief that most teachers possess a wealth of teaching knowledge, engage in interaction and active listening, and create an environment where students feel happy and comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgement. Additionally, the respondents moderately acknowledged that their teachers provide guidance and support not just in academic matters such as making appointments but also in helping them cope with stress and maintain their personal well-being. However, one indicator received a low descriptive level, suggesting limited emotional closeness or personal connection between students and teachers, as reflected in the lack of social interactions such as going out, playing, eating, or traveling together to build a closer relationship. These findings imply that while functional and academic interactions are strong, deeper relational ties, such as mentorship or personal rapport, are lacking.

The high levels of trust, interaction and comfort observed in the study align with the findings of Pianta (2020) and Brinkworth et al. (2021), who emphasized that positive student-teacher relationship, characterized by trust, meaningful interaction, intimacy, care, approval, and emotional comfort, form the foundation of a supportive and effective learning environment. Such relationships foster secure attachments, enhance student engagement and confidence, and significantly contribute to higher levels of subjective well-being. However, the low level of intimacy observed in this study suggests the importance of close mentoring relationships in enhancing students' sense of belonging and long-term academic success (Wentzel, 2020). While students appear to respect and trust their teachers' capabilities, the presence of emotional distance indicates an area for improvement particularly in fostering deeper connections that supports holistic student development.

School Climate

Presented in Table 3 is the level of school climate as determined by safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, institutional environment, and leadership/staff relations. It obtained an overall mean score of 4.32 or categorized as very high, with a standard deviation of 0.60. This suggests that the level of school climate is always manifested. Among the indicators of school climate, teaching and learning got the highest mean score of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.70, described as very high. Conversely, safety obtained the lowest mean score of 4.26 with a standard deviation of 0.78, although still classified as very high.

Table 3 Level of School Climate of College Students

Indicators	**SD**	**Mean**	**Descriptive Level**
Safety	0.78	4.26	Very High
Teaching and Learning	0.70	4.37	Very High
Interpersonal Relationship	0.68	4.35	Very High

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Institutional Environment	0.69	4.30	Very High
Leadership/Staff Relations	0.74	4.31	Very High
Overall	**0.60**	**4.32**	**Very High**

The very high ratings given by the respondents to each indicator of school climate account for the overall very high descriptive levels. Items that received very high ratings include using supportive teaching practices such as encouragement and constructive feedback; providing varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; supporting risk-taking and independent thinking; fostering an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning; offering academic challenges; and giving individual attention. Additionally, students highly valued the practice of mutual respect for individual differences (e.g., gender, race, culture, etc.) across all levels of the school community such as student-to-student, adult-to-student, adult-to-adult, while promoting overall norms of tolerance. Other positively rated aspects include creating and communicating a clear vision, while remaining accessible and supportive of school staff and their professional development, practicing cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials, and ensuring that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school. These results imply that students view their academic environment positively, characterized by supportive relationships, effective teaching, a sense of safety, and strong institutional and leadership structures.

This very high level of school climate supports with the findings of Daily et al. (2021) who emphasized that a positive school climate is linked to greater student satisfaction, higher academic achievement, improved mental health and emotional well-being, and decreased involvement in negative behaviors. Similarly, Wong et al. (2021) confirms these findings by highlighting that a nurturing school climate contributes to better emotional health, fewer emotional and behavioral problems, and enhanced overall well-being. Furthermore, studies by Bradshaw et al. (2021) and Ebbert and Luthar (2021) reinforce these results, emphasizing that a supportive school climate can reduce disruptive behaviors, foster a culture of respect and inclusion, and ultimately enhance student engagement and academic success.

Subjective Well-Being

Reflected in Table 4 is the level of subjective well-being across the dimensions of academic satisfaction, academic efficacy, school connectedness, and college gratitude. It obtained an overall mean score of 4.10 categorized as high, with a standard deviation of 0.49. This signifies that the level of subjective well-being is oftentimes observed. Among the indicators of subjective well-being, college gratitude recorded the highest mean score of 4.74 with a standard deviation of 0.42, described as very high. Conversely, academic efficacy received the lowest mean score of 3.79 with a standard deviation of 0.70 and still marked as high.

Table 4 Level of Subjective Well-Being of College Students

Indicators	**SD**	**Mean**	**Descriptive Level**
Academic Satisfaction	0.70	3.92	High
Academic Efficacy	0.70	3.79	High
School Connectedness	0.72	3.94	High
College Gratitude	0.42	4.74	Very High
Overall	**0.49**	**4.10**	**High**

The very high descriptive level on one indicator of subjective well-being is attributed to respondents' being so thankful that their getting a college education. The high descriptive levels on the remaining indicators of subjective well-being are due to respondents' high ratings. Among the items that received high evaluations are their feelings of being a real part of the school, having a great academic experience, and being hard working and doing well in their classes. These results imply that students feel emotionally connected to their school environment, satisfied with their academic experiences, and confident in their academic capabilities. These factors collectively contribute to their overall subjective well-being.

The high level of subjective well-being supports Suldo et al.'s (2020) finding that students who perceive strong school connectedness and support report higher levels of well-being and life satisfaction. Similarly, the study of Kiuru (2020) emphasized that student well-being is positively influenced by supportive school environments, academic satisfaction, greater resilience and a strong sense of belonging. In addition, Froh et al. (2021) found that gratitude among students is positively associated with academic motivation, school satisfaction, and overall psychological well-being, which directly aligns with the very high levels of college gratitude observed in this study.

Relationship between School Belonging and Subjective Well-Being

Displayed in Table 5 are the test results of the relationship between school belonging and the subjective well-being of college students in the Davao Region. As indicated in the hypothesis, the relationship was tested at a .05 level of significance. The overall R-value of .752 with a p-value of less than .05 showed that the null hypothesis was rejected. This result suggests a significant relationship between school belonging and the subjective well-being of college students in the Davao Region. The correlation

Table 5 Significance of the Relationship between School Belonging and Subjective Well-being of College Students

School Belonging	**Subjective Well-being**				
	Academic Satisfaction	Academic Efficacy	School Connectedness	College Gratitude	**Overall**
School Engagement	.646** .000	.479** .000	.678** .000	.315** .000	**.720** ** **.000**
Teacher Support	.512** .000	.360** .000	.574** .000	.322** .000	**.592** ** **.000**
Peer Support	.316** .000	.291** .000	.455** .000	.378** .000	**.466** ** **.000**
Inclusion to School	.559** .000	.438** .000	.661** .000	.290** .000	**.662** ** **.000**
Overall	**.624** ** **.000**	**.483** ** **.000**	**.730** ** **.000**	**.404** ** **.000**	**.752** ** **.000**

coefficient, r = .752, further supports this strong relationship, highlighting that school belonging is closely linked to the subjective well-being. Specifically, the findings show that all indices of school belonging have a significant relationship with the subjective well-being, as indicated by p-values less than .05.

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The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms that school belonging plays a **crucial** role in shaping and sustaining subjective well-being**.** This implies that

a positive and well-established school belonging fosters greater academic performance, academic satisfaction, motivation, school connectedness and gratitude, ultimately enhancing students' **l**earning outcomes, happiness and overall psychological well-being**.** Additionally, the significant relationship across all indices of school belonging suggests that a supportive, safe, inclusive, and healthy institutional environment strengthens subjective well-being by emotional security, social connectedness, and a sense of purpose in life.

The results support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977), which emphasizes that positive, reciprocal, and consistent relationships within a student's immediate environment such as engagement with school, relationships with teachers and peers and feelings of inclusion are central to promoting optimal development and well-being. The study further reinforces Bronfenbrenner's assertion that healthy and supportive environments are essential for positive developmental outcomes. These findings also affirms the argument of Fan (2020) that a cohesive and nurturing school environment serve as powerful determinant of students' emotional and psychological health, ultimately lead to their overall quality of life. Similarly, Hascher (2020) supports these results by highlighting that high levels of positive peer interactions foster both better social integration and improved academic outcomes.

Relationship between Student-Teacher Relationship and Subjective Well-Being

Presented in Table 6 are the results of the test of the relationship between student-teacher relationship and the subjective well-being of college students in Davao Region. As indicated in the hypothesis, the relationship was tested at .05 level of significance. The overall R-value of .534 with a p-value less than .05 showed that the null hypothesis was rejected. It can be deduced that there is a significant relationship between student-teacher relationship and subjective well-being of college students in Davao Region. Individually, each indicator of student-teacher relationship correlates positively with subjective well-being, having p-values of less than .05.

The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that student-teacher relationship plays a critical role in fostering and enhancing the subjective well-being of college students**.** This implies that strong student-teacher relationships- characterized by trust, interaction and comfort- contribute to higher academic success, satisfaction, motivation, sense of connectedness and overall psychological well-being. Moreover, the positive correlation of these three indicators of student-teacher relationship reinforces the idea that supportive and emotionally secure relationships with teachers are essential for

Table 6 Significance of the Relationship between Student-Teacher Relationship and Subjective Well-being of College Students

Student-Teacher Relationship	**Subjective Well-being**				
	Academic Satisfaction	Academic Efficacy	School Connectedness	College Gratitude	**Overall**
Trust	.501**	.390**	.519**	.282**	**.570****
	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**
Interaction	.497**	.380**	.460**	.097	**.504****
	.000	.000	.000	.052	**.000**
Intimacy	.392**	.262**	.393**	.015	**.382****
	.000	.000	.000	.767	**.000**
Care	.391**	.253**	.414**	.110*	**.406****
	.000	.000	.000	.028	**.000**

Approval	.359** .000	.239** .000	.354** .000	.047 .344	**.354** .000**
Comfort	.500** .000	.343** .000	.481** .000	.161** .001	**.513** .000**
Overall	**.520** .000**	**.365** .000**	**.515** .000**	**.129** .010**	**.534** .000**

promoting positive psychological outcomes among students. Conversely, the weaker correlation of the remaining indicators of student-teacher relationship, such as intimacy, approval and care, with low relationship on college gratitude dimension of SWB suggests that students' feelings of gratitude toward their college experience are not substantially influenced by the emotional closeness or perceived approval from their teachers, or the frequency or quality of their interpersonal interactions. This implies that while students deeply value trust, interaction, and comfort from teachers, they do not necessarily require deep emotional intimacy or affirmation to feel grateful about their educational experience.

These results support attachment theory, which posits that secure and supportive relationships contribute to emotional regulation, resilience, and overall psychological well-being (Bowlby, 2020). Consistent with this theory, the study affirms that emotionally secure and supportive relationships with teachers play a crucial role in fostering positive psychological outcomes among students. Furthermore, the findings align with Noddings' (2021) ethic of care, which emphasizes the importance of nurturing relationships in educational settings to promote student growth and satisfaction. Empirical studies, such as Roorda et al. (2021), also support this by demonstrating that positive affective relationships with teachers significantly enhance students' academic engagement and emotional functioning.

owever, the non-significant correlations between certain STR indicators, such as intimacy, interaction, and approval, with college gratitude suggest possible cultural nuances in relational expectations, particularly in collectivist societies like the Philippines, where emotional closeness with authority figures is often less emphasized (Bernardo et al., 2020). These mixed findings imply that while core emotional support from teachers is vital to student well-being, not all relational dimensions of STR hold equal importance across different cultural contexts.

Relationship between School Climate and Subjective Well-Being

Displayed in Table 7 are the results of the test of the relationship between school climate and the subjective well-being of college students in Davao Region. As indicated in the hypothesis, the relationship was tested at a .05 significance level. The overall R-value of .449 with a p-value less than .05 showed that the null hypothesis was rejected. This suggests a significant relationship between school climate and subjective well-being of college students in the Davao Region. Specifically, the findings indicate that each dimension of school climate is significantly associated with subjective well-being as evidenced by p-values below the .05 threshold.

Table 7 Significance of the Relationship between School Climate and Subjective Well-being of College Students

School Climate	**Subjective Well-being**				
	Academic Satisfaction	Academic Efficacy	School Connectedness	College Gratitude	**Overall**
Safety	.270** .000	.221** .000	.245** .000	.235** .000	**.317** .000**

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Teaching and Learning	.327** .000	.296** .000	.322** .000	.283** .000	**.402** .000**
Interpersonal Relationship	.319** .000	.319** .000	.331** .000	.341** .000	**.424** .000**
Institutional Environment	.280** .000	.262** .000	.302** .000	.317** .000	**.373** .000**
Leadership/Staff Relations	.285** .000	.269** .000	.320** .000	.302** .000	**.381** .000**
Overall	**.351** .000**	**.324** .000**	**.360** .000**	**.350** .000**	**.449** .000**

The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that a positive and supportive school climate significantly contributes to the enhancement of student well-being. Schools that prioritize high-quality teaching, encourage positive interpersonal relationships, ensure a safe and inclusive environment, and demonstrate effective leadership are more likely to foster students who are academically confident, satisfied with their educational experience, feel connected to their school, and express gratitude for their college life. Additionally, the strong correlation across all dimensions of school climate highlights its vital role in enhancing teaching quality, relationships, safety, leadership, and institutional environment, ultimately leading to improved overall student well-being.

The results support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), highlighting on how a student's development is shaped by their immediate environment, particularly the microsystem, which includes school settings. A positive climate within this system can nurture emotional, academic, and social growth. Similarly, the results confirm with Cohen et al. (2021), who argued that a positive school climate fosters better student outcomes by promoting supportive relationships, a sense of safety, and engagement in learning.

Additionally, these results support with Suldo et al. (2020), who found that students in schools with more positive climates reported higher levels of well-being and academic functioning. The consistently significant correlations in this study underscore the multifaceted impact of school climate, not just on academic performance but also on emotional outcomes like gratitude and connectedness. The highest correlations, particularly for interpersonal relationships and teaching and learning, reinforce the importance of human-centered and instructionally rich environments in fostering holistic well-being (Thapa et al., 2021).

Influence of School Belonging, Student-Teacher Relationship, and School Climate on Subjective Well-Being of College Students

Table 8 shows the influence of school belonging, student-teacher relationship, and school climate on subjective well-being of college students in Davao Region. The regression model, indicated by a p-value of .000 and a corresponding F=value of 182.026, is statistically significant. This result leads to rejecting of the null hypothesis, suggesting that the combined exogenous variables can predict subjective well-being of college students.

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Table 8 Significance of the Influence of School Belonging, Student-Teacher Relationship, and School Climate on Subjective Well-being of College Students

Subjective Well-being					
(Variables)		B	β	t	Sig.
Constant		1.413		10.831	.000
School Belonging		.538	.646	14.887	.000
Student-Teacher Relationship		.081	.126	3.056	.002
School Climate		.049	.061	1.570	.117
R	.761				
R^2	.580				
ΔR	.576				
F	182.026				
ρ	.000				

The rejection of the null hypothesis indicates that the predictors such as school belonging, student-teacher relationship, and school climate are significant contributors to students' subjective well-being (SWB), engagement, and sustainability. This suggests that a strong sense of school belonging, positive student-teacher relationships, and a supportive school climate enhance college students' overall well-being by creating a psychologically safe and nurturing academic environment. Consequently, strengthening these factors can lead to better academic performance, increased motivation, enhanced social connections, and lasting emotional resilience.

Among the three variables, school belonging shows as the most influential factor. When students feel accepted, included, and valued within the school community, their emotional, academic, and social well-being significantly improve. Likewise, a positive student-teacher relationship, marked by trust, supportive communication, and comfort contributes meaningfully to student well-being by creating environments where students feel seen, supported, and motivated. Although school climate did not show a significant unique contribution when analyzed alongside the other variables, it should not be disregarded. Its influence may be indirect or overlapping with the effects of school belonging and student-teacher relationships. Overall, the findings highlight that psychosocial bonds and interpersonal connections have a greater impact on student well-being than institutional factors alone. This underscores the need for higher education institutions to prioritize cultivating meaningful relationships and a strong sense of community among students to promote sustained well-being, engagement, and academic success.

Statistically, school belonging ($\beta = .646$, $p < .001$) emerged as the strongest and most significant predictor of subjective well-being, followed by student-teacher relationship ($\beta = .126$, $p = .002$)**.** In contrast, school climate ($\beta = .061$, $p = .117$) did not significantly contribute to the model when considered alongside the other variables. This suggests that its unique predictive power is minimal, like due to overlapping effects with school belonging and student-teacher relationship.

Moreover, the R value of .761 indicates a strong multiple correlation between the combined predictors and subjective well-being. This suggests a robust linear relationship between school belonging, student-teacher

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relationship, and school climate with students' subjective well-being. The R^2 value of .580 shows that approximately 58 percent of the variance in subjective well-being is explained by the three predictors combined, namely: school belonging, student-teacher relationship, and school climate, demonstrating a substantial influence effect. The high F-value of 182.026, and $p < .001$ further confirms that the overall regression model is statistically significant. However, the relatively small standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .061$) for school climate, along with its non-significant p-value, implies that when students experience a strong sense of belonging and maintain positive relationships with teachers, the independent influence of general school climate becomes statistically negligible.

These findings have meaningful implications. The dominance of school belonging underscores its foundational role in shaping student well-being. This suggests that interventions aimed at increasing students' emotional and psychological connection to their school through engagement, inclusion, and peer/teacher support could be especially impactful. Moreover, the modest yet significant role of student-teacher relationship highlights that trust, care, and emotional support from faculty still matter, although to a lesser extent than the broader sense of belonging. On the other hand, the non-significant result for school climate may reflect conceptual or statistical overlap with school belonging and STR, or it may indicate that in the context of college students, perceived belonging takes precedence over environmental or systemic factors.

Best Fit Model of Subjective Well-Being

This part examines the interrelationships among the variables in the study. Three models were generated to obtain the best-fit model for subjected well-being of college students. The models were assessed against the given fit indices and served as a basis to accept or reject the model.

Revealed in Table 9 are the goodness-of-fit results for the three generated models. Models 1 and 2 were not a good fit due to their failure to meet the acceptable goodness-of-fit criteria**.** Model 1 exhibited a high chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF = 6.122), indicating a poor model

Table 9 Summary of Goodness of Fit Measures of the Three Generated Models

Model	**P-value (>0.05)**	**CMIN / DF (0<value<2)**	**GFI (>0.95)**	**CFI (>0.95)**	**NFI (>0.95)**	**TLI (>0.95)**	**RMSEA (<0.05)**	**P-close (>0.05)**
1	.000	6.122	.809	.840	.816	.817	.113	.000
2	.000	4.093	.859	.905	.879	.889	.088	.000
3	.089	1.270	.977	.996	.981	.993	.026	.992

Legend: CMIN/DF – Chi Square/Degrees of Freedom NFI –Normed Fit Index
GFI – Goodness of Fit Index TLI – Tucker-Lewis Index
RMSEA – Root Mean Square of Error Approximation CFI – Comparative Fit Index

fit, while its Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = .809), Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .840), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .113)

fell outside acceptable thresholds. Similarly, Model 2, though an improvement, still had CMIN/DF = 4.093**,** with GFI (.859), CFI (.905), and RMSEA (.088) failing to meet standard fit indices. The p-values of both models were .000, further confirming that they do not adequately represent the data.

Meanwhile**,** Generated Model 3 met all the criteria for model fit across all indices. As displayed above, it obtained a p-value of .089, a CMIN/DF of 1.270, a Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of .977, a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of .996, a Normed Fit Index (NFI) of .981, a Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of .993, an RMSEA of .026, and a P-Close of .992. These fit indices collectively meet the required thresholds, indicating that Model 3 is the best-fit model. This is consistent with structural modeling standards which emphasize using multiple fit

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indices for confirmation (Byrne, 2020; Hair et al., 2020). Consequently, all exogenous variables are appropriately incorporated, supporting Model 3 as the most suitable framework for examining the subjective well-being of college students in Davao Region.

The model satisfies the thresholds for each fit index: CMIN/DF is below 2, and GFI, CFI, NFI, and TLI all exceed .95, while RMSEA is less than .05 with a P-Close greater than .05. These results align with the standards outlined by Arbuckle and Wothke (2000), who recommend CMIN/DF values below 2, and TLI, CFI, NFI, and GFI values above .95 for acceptable model fit. Furthermore, the RMSEA and P-Close values adhere to the guidelines provided by MacCallum and Browne (1996), where RMSEA values of .01, .05, and .08 correspond to excellent, sound, and mediocre fit, respectively, with a P-Close greater than .05 indicating a robust model fit.

The best fit of Model 3 confirms the theoretical expectation that psychosocial school variables significantly influence subjective well-being among college students. As per Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), environments that fulfill basic psychological needs (e.g., belonging and supportive relationships) enhance well-being outcomes.

Table 10 Regression Weights of the 3 Generated Models

	Exogenous Variables to Endogenous Variables		
Model	**School Belonging**	**Student-Teacher Relationships**	**School Climate**
1	.803***	.178***	$.035^{NS}$
2	$.950^{***}$	$-.006^{NS}$	$-.060^{NS}$
3	$.888^{***}$	$.015^{NS}$	$-.029^{NS}$

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p=.000

Depicted in Table 10 are the regression weights of the three generated models. In Generated Structural Model 1, two exogenous variables such as school belonging and student-teacher relationship have a significant positive effect on the endogenous variable, subjective well-being while school climate does not. As presented in Table 10, school belonging exhibits the strongest influence (β=.803, p=.000), highlighting its critical role in shaping student subjective well-being. This is followed by student-teacher relationship (β=.178, p=.000), which also contributes positively, but with a smaller effect. In contrast, school climate (β=.035, p>.05) does not significantly contribute to the model when examined alongside the other variables.

Meanwhile, in Generated Structural Model 2, school belonging maintains the strongest predictor (β=.950, p=.000), as shown in Table 10, emphasizing its importance in shaping the outcome. In contrast, both student teacher relationship (β=-.006, p>.05) and school climate (β=-.060, p>.05) are non-significant indicating a diminished role when school belonging is accounted for. This model suggests that school belonging is the primary driver, while both student-teacher relationship and school climate contribute minimally in this specific context.

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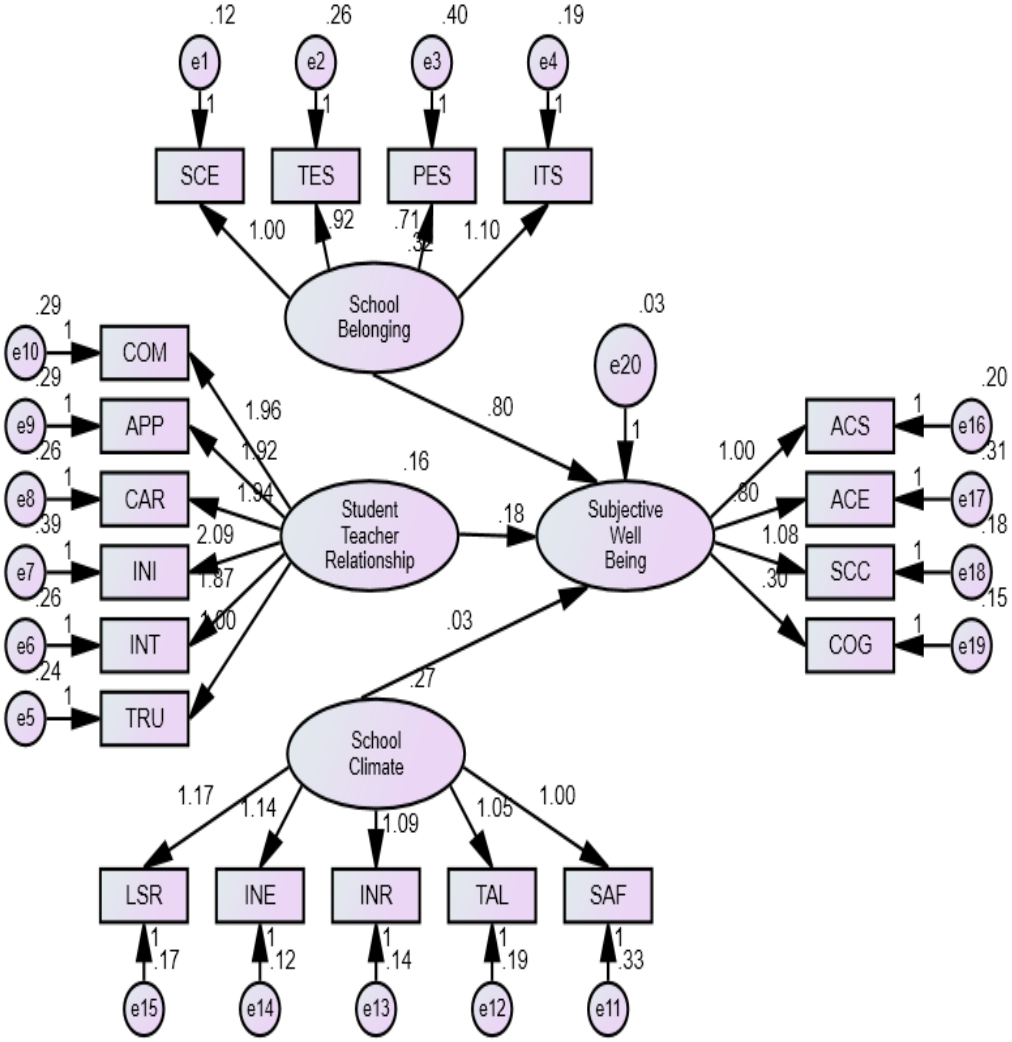

Legend:

SCE-School Engagement	INI-Intimacy	TAL-Teaching and Learning
TES-Teacher Support	INT-Interaction	SAF-Safety
PES-Peer Support	TRU-Trust	ACS-Academic Satisfaction
ITS-Inclusion to School	LSR-Leadership/Staff Relations	ACE-Academic Efficacy
COM-Comfort	INE-Institutional Environment	SCC-School Connectedness
APP-Approval	INR-Interpersonal Relationship	COG-College Gratitude
CAR-Care		

Figure 2: Model 1 in Standard Solution

In Generated Structural Model 3, school belonging remains a strong predictor (β=.888, p=.000), as depicted in Table 10, though with slightly reduced influence compared to model 2. In contrast, both student teacher relationship (β=.015, p>.05) and school climate (β=-.029, p>.05) are non-significant indicating a diminished role in the presence of school belonging. This model suggests that school belonging is again the primary force, while both student-teacher relationship and school climate contribute minimally in this framework. The model also highlights the central role of school belonging

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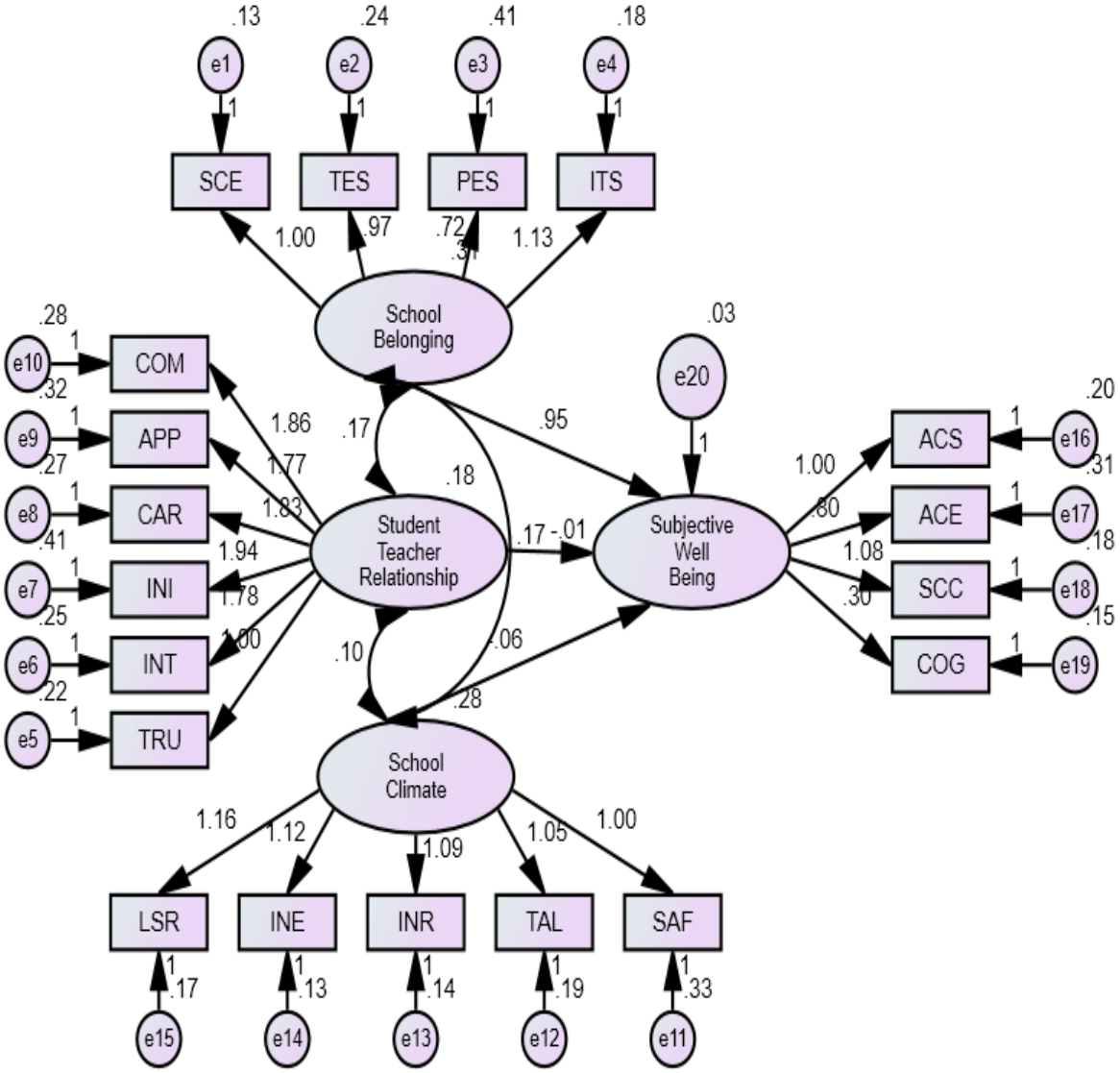

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COM-Comfort	INE-Institutional Environment	SCC-School Connectedness
APP-Approval	INR-Interpersonal Relationship	COG-College Gratitude
CAR-Care		

Figure 3: Model 2 in Standard Solution

in fostering student well-being despite other relational and environmental factors. The results further underscore that enhancing students' sense of belonging may yield the most substantial impact on their overall well-being. These values mentioned under model 3 suggest that Figure 4 is the best fit model to account for subjective well-being of college students in Davao Region.

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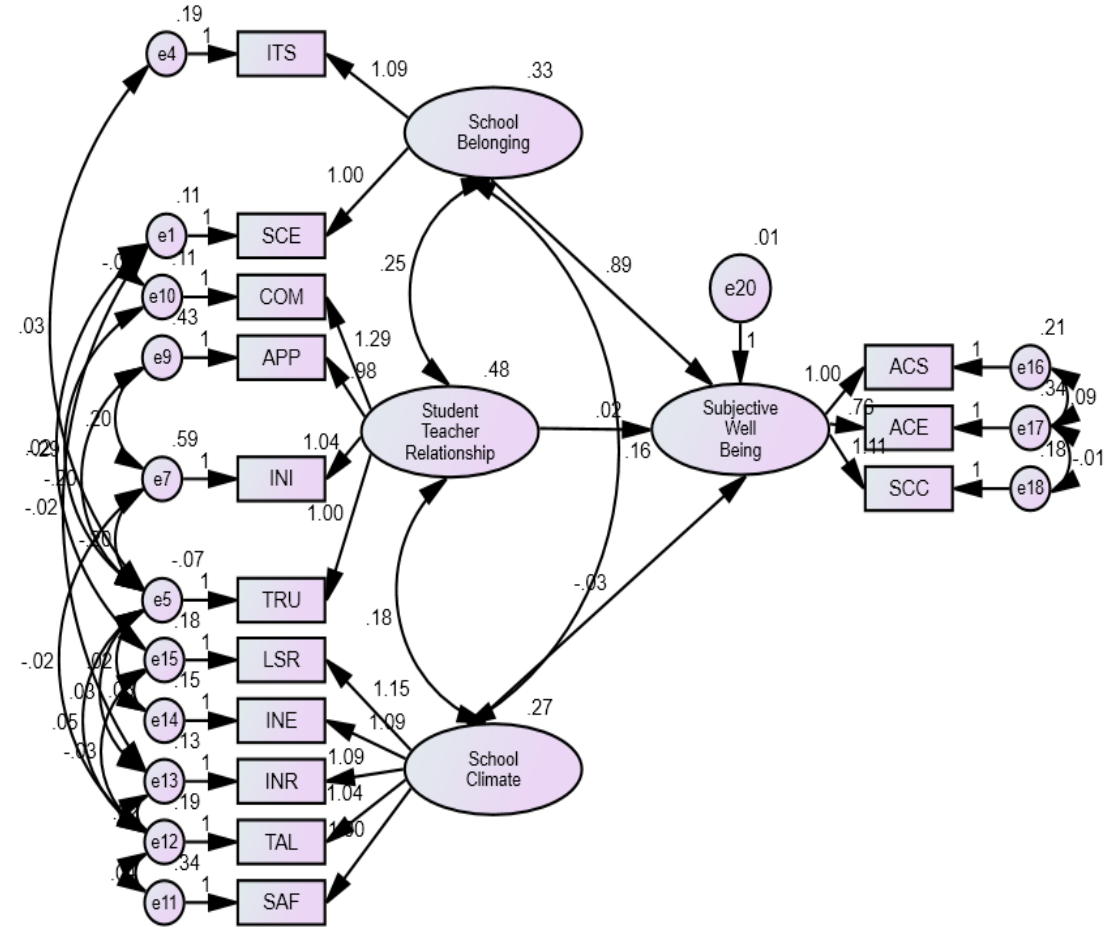

Legend:

ITS-Inclusion to School	TRU-Trust	SAF-Safety
SCE-School Engagement	LSR-Leadership/Staff Relations	ACS-Academic Satisfaction
COM-Comfort	INE- Institutional Environment.	ACE-Academic Efficacy
APP-Approval	INR-Interpersonal Relationship	SCC-School Connectedness
INI-Intimacy	TAL-Teaching and Learning	

Figure 4: Model 3 Best Fit Model in Standard Solution

Figure 4 presents the standardized estimates of Generated Model 3, highlighting the strong influence of school belonging on subjective well-being (SWB). The findings emphasize the importance of cultivating an inclusive and engaging school environment where students feel accepted, valued, and connected. Within this construct, inclusion to school and school engagement emerged as critical components, as shown by their high factor loadings, underscoring the role of participation and inclusion in fostering SWB and building a supportive and productive school environment. While student-teacher relationships also positively influence SWB through indicators such as comfort, approval, intimacy, and trust, their effect appears secondary to the impact of school belonging. In contrast, school climate does not show a significant direct effect on SWB, suggesting that a positive institutional environment alone may be insufficient without the reinforcing presence of belongingness and supportive student-teacher connections. Nevertheless, dimensions of school climate including leadership and staff relations, institutional environment, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, and safety demonstrate strong loadings, indicating their continued relevance within the construct.

Table 10.1 Covariances: (Group number 1 – Best Fit Model)

Variables			Estimates	S.E.	P-value
Student Teacher Relationship	<-->	School Climate	.181	.022	***
School Belonging	<-->	Student Teacher Relationship	.250	.024	***
School Belonging	<-->	School Climate	.160	.022	***

Table 10.1 presents the covariances among the exogenous variables in the best fit model, showing that all relationships are positive and statistically significant at $p < .001$. The strongest covariance was found between school belonging and student–teacher relationship with an estimate of .250, and standard error of .024, indicating that students who experience stronger connections with their teachers also report a higher sense of belonging in school. This was followed by the relationship between student–teacher relationship and school climate with an estimate of .181, and standard error of .022, suggesting that positive interactions with teachers contribute to a more favorable perception of the overall school environment. The weakest, though still significant, was between school belonging and school climate having an estimate of .160, and standard error of .022, reflecting that while school climate plays a role in students' sense of belonging, it is less influential compared to direct teacher relationships. Overall, these results highlight that supportive teacher–student interactions and a positive school climate are critical in fostering students' sense of belonging within the academic setting.

In summary, the fit statistics confirm that Model 3 accurately represents the observed data, highlighting school belonging and student-teacher relationship as key drivers in fostering subjective well-being. While school climate may offer additional value, its impact depends on the presence of a strong sense of school belonging and supportive student-teacher relationship. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating school belonging and nurturing positive student-teacher relationship as foundational elements for enhancing SWB. This conclusion aligns with existing research by Zhou et al. (2023), Li et al. (2024), Kovalenko et al. (2020), Kasianova & Filonenko (2021), Strukova & Polivanova (2023), Mendoza et al. (2023) and Corpuz (2023) which underscores the critical interplay between school belonging, student-teacher relationship, and school climate in enhancing academic satisfaction, academic efficacy, and school connectedness within SWB.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study revealed that college students in the Davao Region perceive school belonging as high, student-teacher relationships as moderate, school climate as very high, and subjective well-being as high. Correlational analysis showed significant positive relationships among school belonging, student-teacher relationships, school climate, and subjective well-being. Among these, school belonging emerged as the strongest influence, followed by student-teacher relationships and school climate. However, regression analysis indicated that only school belonging and student-teacher relationships significantly predicted subjective well-being. School climate, while conceptually important, did not show a unique predictive contribution when analyzed alongside other variables. Of the three tested models, Model 3 demonstrated the best fit.

These findings align with key psychological frameworks emphasizing the importance of positive and supportive environments. Strong school belonging, meaningful teacher-student relationships, and an encouraging school climate contribute to students' psychological needs, including connection, competence, and self-confidence. These elements collectively promote academic satisfaction, stronger engagement, and enhanced overall well-being.

Despite generally high ratings across variables, targeted improvements are still necessary. The moderate rating of student-teacher relationships, particularly the low score in intimacy, highlights the need for deeper emotional connection, trust, and genuine care. Schools may address these concerns by implementing structured mentorship programs, strengthening advising systems, promoting wellness initiatives, and providing safe spaces for open, non-academic conversations. Training teachers in socio-emotional learning and empathetic communication can further enhance rapport, while informal interactions and advisory sessions can help humanize student-teacher dynamics. To improve perceptions of care and approval, faculty are encouraged to adopt more student-centered practices, such as showing authentic concern for students' well-being, giving timely and constructive feedback, and recognizing academic efforts. These practices can build a classroom environment where students feel valued, supported, and respected.

School belonging, although rated high overall, showed slightly lower support from teachers and engagement in academic activities. Institutions can address these gaps by investing in professional development that strengthens teacher-student rapport, promoting inclusive events, expanding student-led organizations, and enhancing opportunities for meaningful campus engagement. Regular assessment of student perceptions can help institutions refine strategies to ensure that all students feel connected and included.

While subjective well-being was rated high, especially in gratitude, continuous improvement is still recommended. Programs that promote reflection, gratitude journaling, or recognition activities can reinforce students' appreciation for their educational experiences. Strengthening school connectedness through peer support groups, student organizations, and collaborative learning can enhance satisfaction and belonging. Targeted academic support and personalized feedback can improve students' sense of competence and efficacy, contributing to better motivation and resilience.

Although school climate was rated very high, safety while still strong, received the lowest rating among its dimensions. This indicates minor concerns regarding physical or emotional security that should be carefully monitored. Enhancing safety protocols, expanding mental health services, and fostering open communication channels can further strengthen students' sense of security. Regular climate surveys can guide ongoing improvements to maintain a positive, supportive environment.

Overall, the study confirms the central role of school belonging, student-teacher relationships, and school climate in fostering the well-being of college students in the Davao Region. Future research should incorporate triangulation methods, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, to capture deeper insights into students' lived experiences. Expanding research to other regions or institutions can improve generalizability and reveal contextual differences. Additional variables such as mentorship quality, mental health support, relational skills training, and student resilience should also be explored to build a more comprehensive understanding of the factors sustaining well-being in higher education. Strengthening these areas will contribute to evidence-based strategies that promote emotionally supportive and academically thriving learning environments.

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