

Nurturing School Well-being: Insightful Perspectives on Key School Features for Students with Autism

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Abstract

There is a growing focus on the holistic welfare of students within educational settings, yet there is still a notable gap in understanding the experiences of students with autism in relation to school well-being. The purpose of this study is to examine parental perspectives on the concept of school well-being for their primary school-aged children with autism, as well as identifying the school attributes perceived to bolster their well-being. Employing semi-structured interviews, the study engaged with 12 parents of primary school students with autism in Jordan. Thematic analysis served as the methodological approach to analyze the data at hand. Parents construed school well-being as a multidimensional and contextually nuanced construct. From their accounts, two overarching themes emerged elucidating the essence of well-being within the school environment: positive emotions and holistic achievement. Furthermore, three principal themes surfaced regarding the school features instrumental in nurturing well-being: effective educational practices, fostering a positive school climate, and facilitating communication with parents. Within these themes, positive emotions were underscored as pivotal sources of joy, while relationships were depicted as crucial sources of support. Additionally, dynamic information exchange, transparent communication, and active involvement in decision-making processes were highlighted as integral components collectively contributing to school well-being.

Keywords: Autism, school well-being, parent perspectives, inclusive education, Jordan.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable surge in attention toward student well-being, prompted by an acknowledgment of its profound influence on academic achievement and subsequent outcomes in adulthood (Danker et al., 2019). Traditional adherence to the medical model has considerably limited the conceptualization of a thriving life for individuals with autism (Pellicano & Heyworth, 2023). Departing from perceiving autism solely as a disorder necessitating intervention, contemporary research directions increasingly emphasize the pursuit of fulfilling lives for individuals with autism, placing a distinct emphasis on well-being (Lam et al., 2021).

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Autism, characterized by deficits in social communication and the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), affects approximately one in 36 children in the United States (Maenner et al., 2023).

Globally, it is estimated that there are 52 million cases of autism, with 1-2% of the population diagnosed with autism (Pervin et al., 2022, p. 2). Prevalence rates vary across regions, with recent reviews suggesting global rates of 0.6%, 0.4% in Asia, 1% in America, 0.5% in Europe, 1% in Africa, and 1.7% in Australia (Salari, 2022, p. 1). Autism also prevalent phenomenon in the Arab world (Alallawi et al., 2020). The principal aim of educating students with autism is to foster enhancements in their social communication skills and behavioral patterns (Ruble et al., 2023). Due to the diverse characteristics inherent in autism spectrum disorder, students with autism encounter challenges that affect their social integration and academic achievement, thereby impacting their overall school well-being (Keen et al., 2016).

While mainstream education may offer benefits to certain students with autism, research shows that their experiences within such settings are often fraught with challenges. A burgeoning body of research suggests that the experiences of students with autism in mainstream education are multifaceted and frequently demanding (Horgan et al., 2023). For instance, Williams et al. (2019) conducted a metasynthesis of qualitative studies aimed at elucidating the experiences of students with autism in mainstream educational settings. Their findings underscored difficulties faced by these students, including those arising from the nature of the disorder itself, interpersonal relations with peers, and the accessibility of the school environment. Similarly, Goldman and Preece (2023) conducted a comprehensive literature review encompassing 23 studies, which illuminated challenges pertaining to peer interactions, teacher characteristics, instructional methodologies, and the overall classroom and school environment.

Additionally, studies have underscored further challenges faced by students with autism, including experiences of rejection, bullying, and limited peer relationships (Horgan et al., 2023), alongside issues concerning peer understanding and attitudes (Larcombe et al., 2019). Moreover, inadequate teacher knowledge and training (Attard & Booth, 2023; Lebenhagen, 2022; Mithimunye et al., 2018; Roberts & Webster, 2020), deficiencies in training on effective classroom strategies (Van der Steen et al., 2020), diminished quality of life (Folta et al., 2022), scarcity of resources (Lebenhagen, 2024), and lack of parental involvement in decision-making (Ballantyne et al., 2022) have been identified as important impediments.

Moreover, parental apprehensions regarding the inclusion of their children with autism have been well-documented. Attard and Booth (2023) explored the viewpoints of parents of children with autism enrolled in mainstream education in Malta, highlighting the prevailing concern of insufficient teacher training and expertise. McKinaly et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study into the attitudes and experiences of parents, unveiling their perception that their children encountered social challenges in mainstream school, consequently affecting their overall well-being adversely.

In summary, the educational journeys of students with autism and the experiences of their families hold pivotal importance in molding their well-being, affecting their academic achievements, emotional resilience, and social interactions (Horgan et al., 2023). A comprehensive comprehension of these experiences is indispensable for delivering tailored services to address the requirements of students with autism in mainstream education (Lam et al., 2020).

Students with Autism and School Well-Being

The concept of student well-being lacks a unified definition due to extensive study across diverse disciplines (Boboyi, 2024; Danker, 2020; Modna et al., 2023; Shoqeirat et al., 2023). Historically, well-being has been examined through hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives (Hossain et al., 2023). From a hedonic perspective, well-being encompasses both emotional elements (such as feelings of happiness versus experiencing negative emotions) and cognitive components (such as satisfaction with life), whereas the eudaimonic perspective emphasizes functioning well rather than solely feeling well (Danker, 2020). Recent theoretical frameworks perceive school well-being as a multidimensional construct, reflecting children's subjective experiences within the school environment. However, despite a general consensus on the multifaceted nature of student school well-being, there exists disagreement regarding the specific domains influencing it, resulting in a fragmented body of research (Danker et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2023).

Research specifically focusing on the well-being of students with autism is notably lacking, contributing to important gaps in the literature (Danker et al., 2019). Unfortunately, students with autism frequently encounter lower levels of well-being and quality of life in comparison to their peers without autism (Featherstone, 2023). Regarding the domains that constitute the well-being of students with autism, Danker et al. (2016) synthesized findings from four studies on the domains of well-being among this population. Their results revealed that eight domains shaped the concept,

including relationships with others, experiences of positive and negative emotions, availability of professional support, qualities of teachers, and issues related to the curriculum. In another investigation, Danker et al. (2019) employed participatory methods, such as Photovoice and semi-structured interviews, to explore the perspectives of both high school students with autism and teachers on well-being. Students perceived well-being as multidimensional, encompassing emotional, social, and academic dimensions, as well as a sense of "well-becoming." Conversely, teachers conceptualized well-being with three primary domains: peer relationships, a sense of safety, and engagement, while also identifying barriers and assets that influence well-being.

Therefore, examining the school well-being of students with autism is imperative, as those who experience positive well-being are more likely to make meaningful contributions to society (Danker et al., 2016). Several studies shed light on this critical issue. For instance, Featherstone et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study of the subjective understandings and perceptions of well-being among 21 adults with autism, revealing multidimensional definitions and highlighting the dual impact of social and environmental factors alongside autistic traits. In a different context, Hamadneh and Almogbel (2023) examined well-being among children with disabilities, including autism, in Saudi Arabia. Their findings revealed low levels of well-being in areas such as self-comfort, interpersonal relationships, psychological safety, and coping with life demands. Additionally, Yan and Datu (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of factors promoting well-being among children and adolescents with autism, underlining the important contributions of personal factors (such as self-esteem and emotion regulation), social factors (including interactions with parents, peers, and teachers), and contextual factors (such as inclusive practices). Furthermore, Ayres et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review encompassing 14 studies on the quality of life of adults with autism. Their findings revealed that the quality of life of adults on the autism spectrum tends to be lower than that of typically developing adults, particularly when measured using tools designed for the general population.

The findings from these studies collectively indicate a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the well-being of students with autism. They underscore the complex experiences of students with autism in school, encompassing both positive and negative facets, which importantly impact their overall well-being and academic achievements. The importance of these findings cannot be emphasized enough, as they highlight the needs for future research to delve into the domains deemed critical in shaping school well-being for this population. Therefore, this study endeavors

to address this identified gap by centering on the perspectives of parents of students with autism regarding the well-being of their children.

The present study

Following Jordan's endorsement of the Salamanca Statement, notable changes in services for individuals with disabilities transpired, culminating in the enactment of the Law for the Welfare of Disabled People in 1993 and the Law on Disabled People's Rights No. 31/2007 in 2007 (Alabdallat et al., 2021). Subsequently, the formulation of "The Rights of People with Disabilities Law" in 2016, alongside the introduction of the 10-year strategic plan for inclusive education in 2018, underscored Jordan's commitment to providing accessible and cost-free education for individuals with disabilities (Alabdallat et al., 2021).

In Jordan, it is estimated that there are approximately 10,000 children diagnosed with autism, based on a projected rate of 1 in 50 (Alqhazo et al., 2020; Hyassat et al., 2023). The educational landscape for students with autism in Jordan has experienced both progress and ongoing challenges. Despite endeavors to integrate these students into mainstream educational environments (Ministry of Education - MoE, 2020), the delivery of services remains fragmented, involving engagement with multiple channels and service providers (Benson, 2020).

The fragmented nature of services for students with autism in Jordan has led to important barriers to accessing quality support, resulting in diminished quality of life, social stigmatization, and an increased demand for supplementary support programs (e.g., Masri et al., 2023). Moreover, within the context of inclusive education in Jordan, Al-Hassan et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore teacher perceptions. The findings revealed that while teachers generally exhibited positivity toward the inclusion of children with disabilities, they identified substantial challenges impeding its effective implementation within existing school settings. These challenges encompass insufficient human and physical resources, inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate training, and a perceived lack of parental involvement and support.

Similarly, Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2013) noted that while participating teachers expressed support for the integration of students with autism into mainstream classrooms, they acknowledged a deficiency in knowledge and training on effectively educating these students within inclusive environments. Furthermore, Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2014) discovered that while some parents perceived inclusion positively, a slightly larger proportion harbored negative perceptions.

Concerns were raised regarding the preparedness of public school staff and students without disabilities for inclusion, with apprehensions stemming from the potential for mistreatment, harm, or ridicule in the typical classroom setting.

Al-Dababneh et al. (2017) highlighted parental concerns and anxieties regarding their children's future prospects, including career opportunities, high school completion, and independent living. Additionally, Rincon (2015) emphasized the dissatisfaction of Jordanian parents with educational services compared to financial and medical services, with many families opting to keep their children at home due to the lack of suitable educational options. Despite efforts to advance mainstream education for students with autism in Jordan, persistent challenges persist. Alkhateeb et al. (2016) emphasized that disability stigma, negative perceptions, poverty, and limited access to education continue to contribute to the exclusion of the majority of these children from mainstream educational settings. Addressing these multifaceted challenges remains crucial to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education practices in Jordan.

The issues identified in the existing literature regarding the education of students with autism in Jordan highlight an urgent necessity to further explore their well-being within the educational sphere. This study carries significant importance as it aims to address critical gaps in current understanding, specifically focusing on the well-being of students with autism in Jordan, an area thus far neglected by existing research in the region. By examining the perceptions of parents, particularly those grappling with challenges in mainstream education despite national plans for inclusive education, this research takes a pioneering step beyond the current body of literature.

In contrast to the predominant focus on Western cultural contexts in research on student well-being, as highlighted by Hossain et al. (2023), this study responds to the call for increased research in non-Western cultural settings. Recognizing that students with autism encounter multifaceted challenges considerably impacting their well-being, from academic and sensory demands in mainstream placements to transitional and social demands, this study sets out with dual objectives: (1) to grasp parents' perspectives on the concept of school well-being, and (2) to explore parents' perceptions regarding the essential elements that should be integrated into mainstream schools to ensure the well-being of their children.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to not only provide substantive contributions to the understanding of well-being in a non-Western context but also offer actionable insights for educational policymakers, practitioners, and parents to enhance the overall well-being of students

with autism in Jordan. In doing so, this research fills a critical gap in the literature and establishes a foundation for future studies in similar cultural settings.

Method

Research Design

The research aimed to provide a descriptive account of how Jordanian parents perceive the school well-being of their children with autism, employing a descriptive qualitative method to generate a rich dataset (Bryman, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The rationale behind this approach is to prioritize the participants' language and concerns, ensuring detailed descriptions and examples that delve into the specifics of their experiences (Leavy, 2022). By adopting this qualitative approach, the study captures the unique context of Jordanian parents of children with autism (Lune & Berg, 2017), facilitating a nuanced understanding of their experiences. The intention is to inform and guide key stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and entities such as the Higher Council of Persons with Disabilities, inspiring actions to enhance the quality and intensity of school well-being initiatives for children with autism in Jordan.

Participants

The study purposefully selected 12 parents of children with autism, recruited from a large autism center in Amman, Jordan. The selection criteria deliberately targeted parents meeting the following criteria: (1) all parents have children with autism who are currently receiving education at the center, (2) all parents have been informed that their children will be partially mainstreamed in the upcoming academic year, and (3) parents have voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

In this regard, the first author initiated contact with the center, explained the research objectives, and provided parents with pertinent study materials, comprising participant information sheets and consent forms. The voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any point, and guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity were explicitly conveyed to the parents. It was emphasized that the collected data would be utilized solely for this research purpose.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participating parents. Among the respondents, four were fathers, while the remainder were mothers, with an average age of 41.6 years, ranging from 31 to 48 years. Educational backgrounds varied, with five parents holding graduate degrees, six possessing bachelor's degrees, and one having a diploma degree. Regarding

the children involved in the study, the average age was 8.6 years, ranging between 6 and 11 years. Seven of the children were identified as boys, with the remaining being girls. Additionally, five children were scheduled for mainstreaming two days per week, while the remainder were designated for three days per week, as determined by the children's center.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Parent's code	Age	Educational level	Relationship to the child	Child's age	Child's gender	Child's code	Mainstream time/per week
Parent 1	48	Graduate/Ph.D.	Father	11	Boy	Ch6	3 days
Parent 2	36	Bachelor	Mother	9	Girl	Ch9	2 days
Parent 3	45	Graduate/master	Father	10	Girl	Ch12	3 days
Parent 4	39	Bachelor	Mother	7	Boy	Ch4	2days
Parent 5	42	Bachelor	Mother	8	Boy	Ch11	2 days
Parent 6	44	Graduate/master	Mother	9	Girl	Ch2	3 days
Parent 7	43	Bachelor	Mother	10	Boy	Ch3	3 days
Parent 8	45	Graduate/master	Mother	9	Girl	Ch10	3 days
Parent 9	31	Diploma	Mother	6	Boy	Ch8	2 days
Parent 10	47	Bachelor	Father	10	Boy	Ch7	3 days
Parent 11	42	Bachelor	Mother	7	Boy	Ch5	2 days
Parent 12	38	Graduate/master	Father	8	Girl	Ch1	3 days
Means	41.6	--	--	8.6	--	--	--

Data Collection Tool

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method for data collection. The interview questions were designed to align with the two research objectives and prompted parents to: (1) articulate their understanding of the concept of school well-being from their perspective and (2) provide insights into the elements that, in their opinion, schools should incorporate to ensure the well-being of their children (refer to Table 2 for specific interview questions).

Table 2

Interview Guided Questions

No	Interview question
1.	What is your child's gender and age? Additionally, for how many days will he/she be attending the prospective mainstream school in the upcoming academic year?
2.	Could you please share your age, educational level, and your relationship with the child?
3.	Are you familiar with the concept "School well-being?"
4.	How would you define or perceive school well-being in the context of your child's education?
5.	Could you provide further elaboration on your perception of [aspect]? Can you offer specific examples or scenarios that illustrate your perceptions or expectations regarding [the aspect discussed]?
6.	Regarding your child's transition to a mainstream school, do you believe there are specific aspects critical for ensuring their well-being? If so, could you provide additional details?"
7.	Can you provide some examples related to [the aspect discussed]?
8.	Do you have any additional thoughts you'd like to share?.....
Thank you for your participation.	

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method for data collection from the participating parents. The choice of semi-structured interviews was deliberate due to their inherent flexibility, allowing for a natural flow of responses to the posed questions (Kvale, 1996; 2009). This approach facilitated the capture and exploration of the essential ideas raised during the interviews (Bryman, 2012). All interviews were audio recorded, conducted in Arabic (the participants' native language), and lasted approximately 40 minutes each. They were conducted at the center where the parents were recruited.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed techniques aimed at confirming their validity. To ensure credibility, the respondent validity technique was employed (Bryman, 2012). Transcripts of the interviews were emailed to the parents, providing them with an opportunity to review for accuracy and suggest any necessary changes. All parents expressed satisfaction with the transcripts and did not request any modifications. Regarding dependability, the first author meticulously maintained detailed notes, documenting the process of code generation and the connections between emerging themes. Additionally, the authors independently coded the data and then deliberated to reach a consensus, contributing to what could be considered

inter-coder reliability. This rigorous process enhances the reliability and credibility of the study's outcomes (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected for this study due to its suitability in exploring novel opinions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis:

1. Familiarization with the data through transcribing, reading, and re-reading.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Identifying themes within the codes.
4. Reviewing and refining themes and related data.
5. Naming and defining themes into easily understood concepts.
6. Reporting the data.

The authors extensively and independently engaged with the data, iteratively moving through these steps. They familiarized themselves with the data, generated initial codes, identified overarching themes, reviewed and refined these themes, and ultimately named and defined them into clear concepts. Throughout this process, the authors regularly met to discuss emerging themes, address any contradictions, and reconcile the final codes and themes. This iterative approach facilitated a deep understanding of how parents perceive the concept of school well-being and what key features they believe should be present in schools to support the well-being of children with autism. Consequently, the researchers were able to effectively address the research objectives with robust evidence and justification for their findings.

Findings

This study was designed to address two primary objectives pertaining to the notion of school well-being for children with autism and the characteristics of a school environment that ensure children's well-being, as perceived by parents. Figure 1 illustrates the major themes and associated sub-themes encapsulating parents' perspectives on the conceptualization of school well-being and the key features of schools to ensure the well-being of their children with autism. The subsequent

presentation of the results is organized based on the research objectives and elucidated thematically.

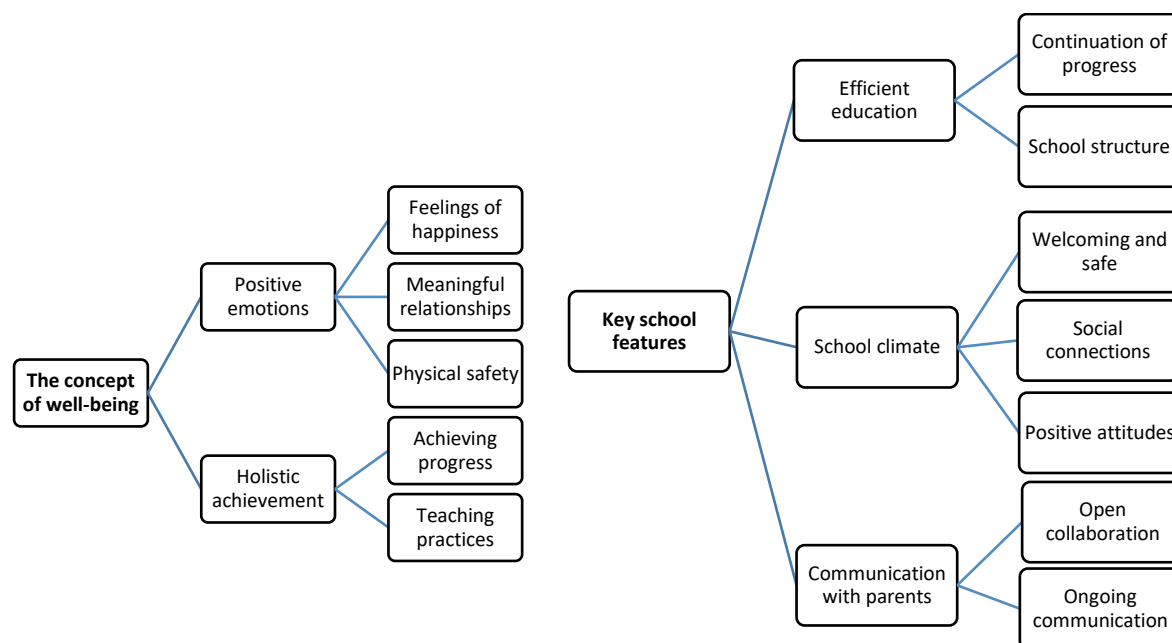


Figure 2. Major Themes and Related Sub-Themes for Both Objectives

Conceptualization of School Well-Being

The responses from parents regarding their perceptions of the concept of school well-being for their children with autism revealed a multifaceted construct, consisting of two main themes: positive emotions and holistic achievement. Each of these themes encompassed several sub-themes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to school well-being for children with autism.

Positive Emotions

All parents expressed familiarity with the term "school well-being." When asked about the concept of "school well-being" for their children, the predominant theme unanimously identified by all parents was the experience of positive emotions. Upon further exploration of the meaning of positive emotions, three distinct sub-themes emerged: feelings of happiness, meaningful relationships, and physical safety.

Feeling of happiness

All parents expressed the belief that feelings of happiness, joy, and contentment are essential for their children to experience well-being in school. For example, one father stated,

"Being excited to get up, getting ready in the morning, wanting to go to school...this lets me sense she is happy" (P12. Father. 38).

Similarly, a mother remarked, *"When he comes home with that glow after school...it warms my heart"* (P7. Mother. 42).

The consistent emphasis on experiencing happiness and enjoyment in parents' responses underscores the importance of positive emotional well-being in schools as a crucial aspect of the broader concept of well-being.

Experiencing meaningful relationships

The importance of meaningful relationships with teachers and peers emerged prominently in the responses of most parents. For all parents, fostering meaningful relationships with teachers was deemed important.

For instance, one mother expressed, *"My son's well-being means, in my opinion, that he has a good relationship with a calm, warm, and supportive teacher"* (P4, Mother, 39).

Another mother emphasized, *"All students need a good teacher...my daughter too. Having a teacher who loves the students is the best experience she can have, actually for me too"* (P6, Mother, 44).

Parents not only highlighted the importance of teachers' characters but also underscored the importance of teachers' abilities to effectively work with their children.

"I have always stressed that our children need well-prepared teachers to teach them...teachers who can significantly make a difference in their skills," stated one father (P3, Father, 45).

Moreover, the prioritization of relationships with teachers appeared to overshadow the importance placed on relationships with peers, potentially influenced by the specialized educational environment of an autism center. Merely three parents highlighted the necessity for their children to cultivate friendships, underscoring the potential enhancement of their well-being through such social connections.

One parent articulated,

"...I also want her to have friends too. If possible... I want him to play with others... it's good to have a sense of friendship... [I know] that may not be entirely practical, but at least it is important to have friends" (P6. Mother. 44).

In discussions about these relationships, parents emphasized the paramount importance of their quality, stressing elements such as mutual respect, acceptance, fostering a sense of connection, and providing sincerity, understanding, advocacy, and support.

A parent expressed,

"The bond between my child and his teachers holds profound significance. Trust and comfort signify the establishment of a supportive relationship. As a parent, knowing that there are individuals who comprehend and cater to my child's specific needs fosters a sense of happiness and contributes greatly to his overall well-being" (P10. Father.47).

Physical safety

Seven parents expressed that their children's well-being is significantly bolstered when they are physically safe and shielded from harm. For instance, a parent emphasized,

"I want my child to be safe... away from danger, and fully guarded around the clock" (P8. Mother. 45).

Another parent reflected on their child's active nature, stating,

"He moves around a lot... I expect a few scratches and bruises... [it's ok] ...for me, encouragement from his teacher... being motivated and reinforced for all of his actions, that's what all matters" (P9. Mother. 31).

Furthermore, one parent elucidated that safety encompasses being attended to individually and purposefully. They expressed,

"My son is capable of many things, particularly drawings. Being recognized, valued, and embraced by teachers is the haven of understanding. My child finds not only protection but also a space in which his unique emotional landscape is respected."

Holistic Achievement

Holistic achievement surfaced as a prevalent theme among all participating parents, highlighting its importance for their children's well-being, irrespective of their children's difficulties and challenges. Within this framework, parents emphasized two crucial issues: (1) achieving progress

and (2) teaching practices, representing interconnected sub-themes pertinent to this overarching theme.

Achieving progress

The imperative nature of achieving progress, both academically and functionally, was underscored unanimously by all parents as they articulated their perceptions regarding their children's well-being. Parent 3 encapsulated this sentiment directly, stating,

"I know she has difficulty concentrating, but regardless, I want her to participate in learning to the best of her abilities" (P3. Father. 45).

Furthermore, Parent 8 emphasized the importance of celebrating every small achievement, noting, *"Every small achievement my child reaches becomes a cause for celebration... even the slightest moments of connectedness"* (P8. Mother. 43).

For eight parents, the concept of achievement extended beyond academic milestones to encompass improvements in communication, emotional regulation, social interactions, and daily living skills. Parent 11 highlighted the importance of acquiring daily living skills, noting that they *"will help him grow independence in the future"* (P11. Mother. 42).

Another parent articulated a similar sentiment, emphasizing the importance of fundamental skills such as communication and appropriate play:

"It's not the academic stuff that I pay attention to... it's the most essential things like talking to others and playing appropriately. If she can achieve that... I can say she has experienced well-being" (P8. Mother. 43).

Teaching practices

Parents expanded the conceptualization of their children's achievement to encompass the role of teachers in motivating their children to learn. They emphasized the importance of maintaining flexible instruction, integrating classroom management practices that accommodate children's behaviors, and employing diverse teaching styles to address their children's varying learning needs. One parent particularly highlighted the importance of teachers in her son's well-being, stating,

"The strategies his teachers use to engage him will have an impact on his well-being. Teachers need to incorporate his interests and inputs [and those of other students'] in lessons, present lessons with lots of hands-on activities, scaffold difficult tasks into small parts, and harness his strengths whenever possible" (P4. Mother. 39).

In response to the initial objective, parents clearly delineated what well-being entails for them. They asserted that experiencing positive emotions, a sense of safety, quality relationships, and progress in achievements were crucial domains of their children's well-being.

Securing Well-Being in Mainstream Schools

The second objective aimed to illuminate parents' perceptions regarding the elements that should be incorporated into schools to safeguard their children's well-being. From parents' responses, three distinct themes surfaced, namely, (1) effective education, (2) positive school climate, and (3) parent-school communication.

Efficient Education

Continuation of progress

For the majority of parents, effective education, seen as pivotal for their children's academic and functional advancement, emerged as a recurring focal point in their responses. Parents strongly advocated for new schools to provide their children with access to comprehensive education and support. They stressed the necessity for these schools to implement tailored support systems that acknowledge their children's learning needs and behavioral challenges, ensuring success in mastering the school curriculum and fostering social development.

One parent, for example, underscored the importance of learning and social interaction at school in ensuring the well-being of her eight-year-old boy:

"In the new school, I know that he has to learn the curriculum. The curriculum is not easy. I think teachers need to make a tremendous effort to help him learn. Teachers also need to be aware of his behavior as well. He also will need help building friendships with others and participating in activities. I'm not sure how they are going to do it all, but they have to do it" (P5. Mother. 42).

Parents also stressed the importance of teachers being equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to effectively teach their children, as well as having practical experience to assist them in overcoming challenges they may encounter. Parent 10 highlighted this aspect, stating: *"My son has sensory issues. He doesn't like loud sounds and crowded places. His current class is spacious and well-organized with plenty of visual aids. I believe the mainstream school he will attend should also prioritize similar accommodations to cater to his sensory needs."* (P10. Father. 47).

School structure

The presence of special education teachers who are currently teaching their children was unanimously deemed essential by all parents. They believed that this would ensure a smooth transition for their children into the new setting by providing continuous consultations and guidance to the new teachers, assisting with instruction, behavior management, and facilitating overall learning experiences.

“I need her current teacher to be with her... if not all the time, at least most of it... my daughter has gotten used to her. She knows her well, she knows that my daughter is capable of learning, but with help” (P3. Father. 45).

Additionally, parents expressed concerns regarding the adequacy of the school's physical structure, classroom size, teacher-to-student ratio, availability of resources, and the sufficiency of shared facilities such as toilets, playgrounds, and the school canteen, as well as transportation arrangements. They perceived these factors as crucial in facilitating their children's experiences at school.

Positive School Climate

A welcoming and safe climate

Parents within this theme emphasized the importance of fostering a welcoming school climate where all students can effectively learn together, viewing it as crucial for their children's overall well-being. They regarded a positive school climate as one that fosters happiness, enables enjoyment of school attendance, promotes feelings of safety, and reduces social isolation.

One parent vividly described the profound impact of a positive school climate on her child's emotional well-being:

“The school must create an environment where my child can feel not just accommodated but genuinely welcomed. This will considerably improve his safety and increase his sense of belonging” (P7. Mother. 43).

For a third of the parents, ensuring that their children are in a safe, secure, and comfortable environment is a crucial aspect of experiencing well-being at school. They highlighted the importance of having clear regulations governing relationships, specific rules to manage the behavior of others, and implementing affirmative measures against bullying and violence.

“For my 6-year-old [boy], well-being means that he feels safe, where no one can mistreat him” (P9. Mother. 31).

Furthermore, parents emphasized that cultivating a love for school is likely to result from having teachers who exhibit traits such as calmness, warmth, humor, empathy, cooperation, and active listening. They believed that this would foster a sense of closeness with the children and ensure their well-being.

Social connections

Social connections with others, especially peers, emerged as a primary concern in the majority of parents' responses. They emphasized the importance of schools, particularly teachers, in creating: *"Opportunities for genuine interactions that reduce feelings of isolation and increase students' participation in all activities"* (Parent 3. Father. 45).

This entails that: *"schools cultivate the concept of acceptance, intervene when bullying occurs, prevent violent interactions, and educate peers about how difficult it can be to make friendships with our children"* (P1. Father. 48).

Furthermore, many parents emphasized that fostering relationships with peers can have several positive impacts on their children's overall well-being. These include enhancing communication skills, fostering a sense of belonging, fostering interpersonal connections, mitigating social isolation, and establishing a supportive network. One parent highlighted the pivotal role of friendships in her son's social development, stating that they would facilitate learning social cues, sharing experiences, and forming bonds over common interests and activities. This, in turn, *"Will push him to get out of his [bubble] and learn to share his interests with others. This is the well-being I want for him"* (P7. Mother. 44).

Positive attitudes

Parents emphasized the importance of fostering positive attitudes within the school environment. They consistently highlighted the importance of a positive attitude among school staff, peers, and the broader school community in shaping the well-being of their children. This can be achieved through attitudes that embrace diversity and unconditional acceptance.

"When teachers and students demonstrate positive attitudes, it sets the foundation of a welcoming environment. It's about creating an atmosphere where differences are accepted and not seen as interferences" (P10. Father. 47).

Moreover, parents acknowledged that attitudes play a significant role in shaping expectations, especially among teachers, peers, and other parents. They believed that when positive attitudes prevail, children can form meaningful friendships, engage in significant interactions, and

participate socially and academically in school and classroom activities on equal footing with their peers.

“The attitudes of teachers and others are reflected in the expectations. If they believe in the potential of our children, they will approach them with optimism. This will inspire a feeling of confidence and accomplishment” (P5. Mother. 42).

Communication with Parents

Open collaboration

The third theme underscored in parents’ responses highlighted the importance of establishing collaborative partnerships between schools and parents. One parent emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration:

“If there is open communication and collaboration between school and home, it contributes significantly to well-being” (P4. Mother. 39).

For many parents, collaboration and partnership must entail open and transparent communication channels where parents feel heard and valued as integral members of their children’s school community:

“Communication and collaboration are crucial. It’s about the school actively listening to my insights, concerns, and aspirations. In fact, this mutual communication will build trust and strengthen the partnership between us and the school” (P5. Mother. 42).

Ongoing communication

To parents, collaboration extends beyond formal meetings to encompass ongoing and proactive exchange of information. Parent 8 highlighted:

“The need for ongoing collaboration, not just during meetings. Ongoing updates about my child’s progress, challenges, and high moments of success will provide assurance for well-being” (P8. Mother. 45).

Furthermore, parents emphasized that collaboration should aim at formulating effective education strategies to address the unique needs of their children with autism.

“Collaborative partnerships should result in actionable plans that address my child’s strengths and challenges” (P6. Mother. 44).

Parents emphasized the pivotal role of the school in fostering collaboration among parents. They expressed that other parents would have the opportunity to: *“Gain more insights into our world,*

understand our daily struggles, facilitate interactions between children, and extend well-being beyond the school doors” (P11. Mother. 42).

In summary, parents perceived collaboration as a dynamic and ongoing process that involves transparent communication, active involvement in decision-making, and a shared commitment to the well-being of all children.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

Examining parents’ perspectives on the well-being of their children with autism in school settings in this study has provided valuable insights, offering a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of this complex concept. The identified themes in this study align with and contribute to the existing literature on autism and school well-being. Two key findings emerged from this study: 1) Parents conceptualized their children’s well-being as multidimensional, which resonates with findings from other studies (e.g., Danker et al., 2016; Danker et al., 2019); 2) The emergent themes were found to be interrelated and interconnected for both objectives, underscoring the context-dependent nature of the concept of school well-being (e.g., Hossain et al., 2023).

In addressing the first objective, parents in Jordan conceptualized school well-being as a multidimensional construct. The findings revealed two primary themes: positive emotions and holistic achievement. Parents consistently emphasized the importance of experiencing positive emotions, such as happiness, joy, and contentment, as pivotal components in shaping their children's well-being within the school environment. This finding resonates with prior research (e.g., Danker et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2023). The presence of positive emotions, in contrast to negative ones, was deemed essential for students' emotional well-being, consequently enhancing their overall school-based well-being (Saggers, 2015). Schools can facilitate positive emotional experiences by fostering autism awareness among peers to mitigate instances of bullying, thereby cultivating feelings of safety and joy within the school community. Moreover, schools can organize extracurricular activities tailored to students' strengths and talents, nurturing their self-esteem and augmenting their happiness.

Moreover, parents identified meaningful relationships with both peers and teachers as pivotal in shaping their children's well-being. This finding is congruent with findings from other studies (e.g., Danker et al., 2016; Esqueda Villegas et al., 2022). These relationships are perceived as catalysts

for fostering a sense of belonging, mitigating social isolation, facilitating socio-emotional development, and contributing to an inclusive educational environment. Of particular importance, parents emphasized the crucial role of teachers in understanding autism and embodying essential qualities such as calmness, warmth, and enthusiasm. The implication of this finding for educators is the necessity to establish strong rapport with their students. Through this, teachers cultivate a safe and supportive milieu wherein students with autism feel secure and tranquil. Teachers can offer guidance and assistance to these students throughout the school day, particularly during transition periods. By being composed and supportive, teachers serve as a source of solace for students with autism, aiding them in navigating the often overwhelming, noisy, and bustling school environment.

Consequently, parents emphasized the paramount importance of their children experiencing high-quality relationships with peers, recognizing the pivotal role these connections play in fostering the school well-being of their children. This finding resonates with existing research (e.g., Poon et al., 2014; Saggars, 2011). It underscores the need for schools to foster understanding and awareness about autism among peers. Well-informed and autism-aware peers possess the potential to importantly contribute to the well-being of their counterparts by actively combating teasing and bullying, demonstrating acceptance, and offering support as needed. Thus, parents in this study not only acknowledged the importance of these relationships, but also underscored their profound impact on their children, underscoring the importance for these connections to evolve beyond mere associations and evolve into meaningful relationships.

This finding aligns with other studies (e.g., Danker et al., 2019; Yan & Datu, 2022). The implication of this finding is that schools can create opportunities for students to socialize with their peers by organizing more non-academic activities during the school day. Research has shown that physical exercises can effectively reduce externalizing behaviors and enhance the social competence of students with autism (Healy et al., 2018). Parents can also benefit from these activities as they provide opportunities to socialize with their children and other parents, thereby reducing feelings of isolation, improving attitudes, and diminishing social stigma.

Lastly, the theme of school achievement surfaced in parents' perceptions, underscoring the pivotal role of achievement, whether in academic learning or personal growth, in bolstering children's well-being. This acknowledgment aligns with prior literature (e.g., Boer et al., 2010; Danker et al., 2019). Parents emphasized that achievement becomes feasible when teachers offer ample support,

including adaptability in instructional methods and classroom management, and foster positive attitudes that influence expectations regarding their children.

Moving to the second objective, parents' responses were primarily influenced by their perceptions of what constitutes their children's school well-being. Effective education, positive school climate, and communication with parents emerged as three crucial themes. These themes were in line with findings in the literature (e.g., Majoko, 2019). According to most parents, these themes play a vital role in fostering an inclusive culture within schools, a goal that Jordan is actively pursuing. For all parents, effective education is paramount in ensuring their children's academic, behavioral, and functional development while minimizing academic segregation.

In this context, parents perceive efficient education as necessitating individualized support mechanisms tailored to their children's unique needs and challenges. This finding underscores the importance for schools to embrace strength-based initiatives that can potentially cultivate students' talents, such as in art or music, and align curriculum activities accordingly. Achieving this requires enhancing teacher qualities (e.g., knowledge of autism and training), providing adequate support (especially from special education teachers), and establishing a conducive school structure that fosters interactions and relationships, particularly in Jordan. This finding offers valuable insights for teachers, who need to identify and implement evidence-based practices to address the unique challenges faced by students with autism in school settings. Schools can facilitate this process by offering professional development opportunities to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in effective instructional methods. Additionally, the Ministry of Education in Jordan can play a pivotal role by providing nationwide training programs aimed at enriching teachers' competencies. By implementing these measures, the Ministry can effectively steer the education system toward greater inclusivity, thereby enhancing students' abilities and addressing the challenges outlined in previous studies. This proactive approach will not only improve educational outcomes but also mitigate issues related to staff, structure, and attitudes, fostering a more supportive and inclusive educational landscape in Jordan.

In the second theme, parents underscored the importance of cultivating an overall positive school climate that promotes a welcoming atmosphere and embodies the essence of inclusivity within schools. The school's positive climate is perceived as an external asset that supports the well-being of students with autism (Danker et al., 2016). The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature (e.g., Danker et al., 2016). In this context, parents emphasized the importance of positive

attitudes as drivers of children's well-being. These attitudes, which influence the expectations of teachers, peers, and the school community, play a pivotal role in shaping positive experiences for children (e.g., Boer et al., 2010).

Attitudes toward individuals with autism constitute an important concern in Jordan, especially as the culture of inclusivity gains momentum. Parents of children with autism have emphasized the critical importance of promoting positive attitudes for the well-being of their children. This revelation carries profound implications for schools, calling for activities that transcend traditional boundaries. Engaging in community-oriented endeavors, such as public speeches, lectures, and workshops, serves not only to strengthen ties between schools and the community but also to foster a more informed and empathetic understanding of how individuals with autism should be treated. In the context of Jordan, where stigma surrounding autism is pervasive and detrimentally affects the quality of life for both children and parents, addressing attitudes becomes imperative. The emphasis on nurturing a supportive school climate holds profound implications for educational leaders. They must display unwavering commitment to fostering an inclusive school culture where every student feels valued and accepted. This imperative gains further importance as Jordan endeavors to promote inclusivity within its educational institutions gradually.

Finally, parents emphasized the vital importance of collaboration between parents and schools in ensuring the well-being of their children. They viewed collaboration as a dynamic and ongoing process encompassing transparent communication, active participation in decision-making, and a shared commitment to the well-being of children with autism. These collaborative partnerships not only enrich the educational experience but also contribute to the emotional and social well-being of children within the school setting. This emphasis aligns with literature advocating for robust partnerships between home and school environments (e.g., Attard & Booth, 2023; Majoko, 2019). The implication of this finding underscores the necessity for communication between schools and parents to utilize various channels (e.g., scheduled meetings, the use of school-home inventories, phone calls, etc.). Such communication should be characterized by honest dialogue about achievements and challenges, with parents' perspectives being valued and sought for advice.

Conclusion

Our study of parental perspectives has unveiled a comprehensive understanding of school well-being of students with autism in Jordan. It underscores the multifaceted and contextual nature of school well-being, which encompasses positive emotions, holistic achievement, and supportive relationships within the school environment. Parents emphasized the importance of nurturing positive emotions such as happiness and contentment, in addition to fostering meaningful relationships with both teachers and peers. Furthermore, holistic achievement, encompassing academic success and improvements in communication and social interactions, was identified as crucial. Key elements within schools that were identified as essential for fostering well-being included the provision of efficient education tailored to individual needs, cultivating a positive and inclusive school climate, and fostering open communication between schools and parents. These findings highlight the critical role of inclusive and responsive educational practices in enhancing the well-being of students with autism. They advocate for the adoption of inclusive practices and the creation of nurturing environments that support the diverse needs of students with autism. By prioritizing personalized education, cultivating a positive school climate, and promoting effective communication between parents and schools, educators, policymakers, and communities can collaborate to develop more adaptable and responsive educational systems. This collaborative effort ultimately aims to enhance the educational experiences and overall well-being of students with autism in Jordan.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study's limitations primarily revolve around the small participant pool, which constrains the generalizability of findings to other parents in Jordan. Expanding the participant pool to encompass a more diverse range of individuals could shed light on potential variations in perceptions, considering factors such as socioeconomic status, education level, or geographic location within Jordan. This broader sampling approach is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of parental perspectives on school well-being. Secondly, the study's focus was exclusively on primary school students' well-being through the lens of parental perceptions. Future research could benefit from incorporating the viewpoints of both students and teachers to provide a more nuanced

understanding of school well-being dynamics. Thirdly, while the study examined the concept of well-being within the context of school environments, it represents only one facet of a broader exploration of inclusive education for students with autism. Comprehensive research encompassing various aspects of inclusion is warranted in Jordan. Such research could delve into factors facilitating or hindering inclusion, the correlation between internal and external supports and well-being or overall inclusion, and the necessary support systems required to enhance inclusivity and transform the country's inclusion strategy concerning students with autism.

As a result, a fourth limitation of this study lies in its exclusive focus on primary school students who are anticipated to enroll in mainstream education. Exploring the same topic following the implementation of mainstreaming could offer deeper insights into the concept of well-being in this context. Additionally, the study concentrated solely on Jordanian parents, potentially overlooking the influence of cultural factors on their perceptions of school well-being. Given this, caution is warranted when generalizing the findings beyond the Jordanian cultural context. Thus, broadening the scope of research to encompass cross-cultural comparisons would enrich our understanding of how cultural nuances shape perceptions of school well-being. Such comparisons could uncover both shared experiences and distinct challenges across different cultural contexts.

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