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## Student Voices for Student Minds: A Scoping Review of Student-Led Initiatives in Mental Health Advocacy and Welfare

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### ABSTRACT

Mental health has become a growing concern in schools and universities as more students struggle with the emotional and psychological effects of academic pressure and life changes. While institutions are taking steps to address these challenges, student-led research is also increasing. These contributions, rooted in real experiences, offer insights for improving mental health support. Recognizing and bringing these results together can help create programs that reflect students' needs, making support systems more effective and relatable. A wide-ranging review of published works explored how students have contributed to mental health and welfare efforts in academic settings. The approach gathered meaningful insights from student-led initiatives and highlighted common themes, patterns, and contributions using a careful selection and comparison process. This study found that student-led initiatives provide valuable insights into real-life mental health and welfare challenges in educational settings. Students offered meaningful contributions that inform more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and student-centered support programs by reflecting on their lived experiences. The findings affirm that integrating student perspectives into institutional strategies strengthens the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of welfare and mental health services. The results suggest that mental health and welfare programs are more impactful when grounded in students lived experiences. Institutions could actively involve students in shaping support systems that reflect their emotional, academic, and social needs to foster well-being and resilience.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

In recent years, mental health has become a growing area of concern and attention within academic institutions as students face increasing pressures that affect their emotional and psychological well-being (Aller *et al.*, 2021). This growing awareness has led to a rise in research on mental health, particularly within schools, colleges, and universities. Institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of creating supportive environments where mental wellness is prioritized alongside academic success (Taja-on & Vergara, 2025). Alongside this shift, student-led initiatives have emerged as powerful forces in mental health advocacy. Often created and driven by students, these efforts aim to promote mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and provide peer-based support systems (Sotiropoulos & Perry, 2022). Student-led research and programs reflect a unique and essential perspective, as they are rooted in lived experience and a deeper understanding of the challenges their peers face (Haripottawekul & Wang, 2025). Concurrently, the increasing focus on mental health in academia and the rise of student-driven initiatives form a meaningful response to students' complex and evolving needs today.

Building on the growing involvement of students in mental health advocacy and study, there is increasing value in exploring student-led publications as a source of insight into the effectiveness and relevance of mental health

and welfare programs in higher education (Ternenge & Kashimana, 2019). These works offer a grounded and firsthand perspective that often reflects the real and immediate needs of the student body—something that may be overlooked in top-down approaches. Institutions can develop more responsive and inclusive support services by drawing from the experiences and observations of students themselves (Rodriguez Espinosa & Verney, 2021). Furthermore, systematically reviewing these student-led contributions allows for identifying recurring themes, successful strategies, and gaps that need addressing. Such reviews not only consolidate existing knowledge but also create a clearer, more cohesive picture of how student involvement can shape the future of mental health initiatives in schools and universities (Bangdiwala, 2024). In this way, student-led publications become both a resource and a catalyst for more meaningful, effective advocacy and support systems in academic settings.

Despite the growing number of student-led research efforts focused on mental health and student welfare, only a small portion of these studies are formally published (Elbanna & Child, 2023), and those that often remain underutilized in shaping programs or informing policy (Steingard & Rodenburg, 2023). In areas such as Bukidnon, several academic institutions actively encourage the publication of student papers, yet many of these works are overlooked, stored in archives with

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limited access and little practical application (Caseres *et al.*, 2020; Amutuhaire, 2022). While faculty and students have shown interest in gathering and reviewing these studies to guide the development of relevant programs and activities, these efforts are often informal and fragmented (Sumayang *et al.*, 2023; 2024; 2025). There is a noticeable gap in structured attempts to systematically compile and assess these student-led publications, especially in ways that could lead to clear, actionable outcomes in mental health advocacy and support. This lack of organized review limits the potential impact of student research and creates a missed opportunity to develop more grounded and effective mental health initiatives within the academic community.

Bridging the gap between student-led research and its practical application can be vital in improving student welfare programs and mental health services within academic institutions (Flores *et al.*, 2025). When the insights and findings from student-conducted studies are actively used, they can serve as a guide in developing programs that are more relevant, inclusive, and effective (Dag-um *et al.*, 2025). These studies often reflect the authentic experiences and challenges students face, offering valuable input for tailoring initiatives that respond to the actual needs of the student body. Institutions can create better-informed strategies that go beyond generalized solutions and instead foster meaningful support systems rooted in student realities by recognizing the potential of these works (Amit, 2019; Baik *et al.*, 2019; Magbanua *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, addressing the current underutilization of student research can significantly contribute to strengthening mental health advocacy efforts on campus (Aller *et al.*, 2021). When systematically reviewed and brought together, research findings create a stronger foundation for unified and evidence-based action (Scherer & Leshner, 2021; Abelson *et al.*, 2022; Goldstein *et al.*, 2022; Sumayang, 2025). This process amplifies student voices and encourages collaboration among students, faculty, and administrators in building a culture of mental wellness (Dag-um *et al.*, 2025). It promotes a proactive approach where student contributions are acknowledged and valued, empowering the student community to take an active role in shaping their mental health environment (Morrish, 2019; Stegenga *et al.*, 2021; Priestley *et al.*, 2022; Mulvogue *et al.*, 2023). Harnessing the full potential of student-led research becomes an essential step toward creating more responsive, sustainable, and impactful mental health initiatives in higher education (Sumayang *et al.*, 2023; 2024; 2025; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

Given the limited volume of research in Bukidnon that focuses on student-led mental health initiatives, this study is relevant in promoting mental health literacy and encouraging a more inclusive approach to mental health advocacy. This study helps fill a noticeable gap in the local academic literature by shedding light on these initiatives. The study supports ongoing conversations about mental health by offering a structured overview of practices that can be adapted or improved locally.

## Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on several key national policies emphasizing the importance of research-based programs in improving student welfare and mental health support in higher education. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 21, series of 2006, underscores the importance of developing and implementing Student Affairs and Services (SAS) that are responsive to the needs of students, including their emotional and psychological well-being. Additionally, CMO No. 9, series of 2013, highlights research as a core function in higher education institutions, encouraging studies that directly improve institutional programs and student support services. Reinforcing this foundation is Republic Act 11036, also known as the Mental Health Act of the Philippines, which mandates the integration of mental health services in various sectors, including education, and supports efforts to raise mental health awareness, provide access to support, and promote overall mental well-being. Concurrently, these policies provide a strong basis for studies exploring, evaluating, and enhancing student-centered mental health initiatives. In line with these frameworks, student welfare services and mental health advocacy efforts are central to institutional responsibilities toward holistic student development. Research-based approaches to improving these services ensure that interventions are informed by real student experiences and needs, making them more effective and sustainable. The study supports the development of programs grounded in the voices of those they are meant to serve by focusing on student-led initiatives, ensuring that welfare services evolve in meaningful and impactful ways for the student community.

## Objective of the Study

This study seeks to gather and examine published review works that focus on student-led research related to these areas with the growing recognition of the importance of mental health and student welfare in academic settings. The objective is to better understand how student-driven efforts contribute to mental health advocacy and the development of support systems by compiling and analyzing these studies. These insights are intended to support the continuous improvement of student welfare services, ensuring that activities and initiatives are rooted in actual student experiences and evidence-based approaches.

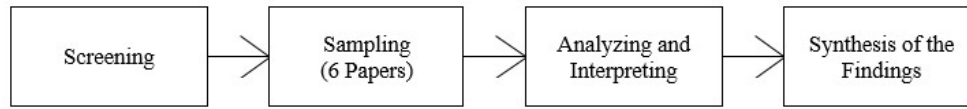
## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Method and Design

The study uses a scoping review research design (Logan *et al.*, 2024) to explore and map the existing literature on student-led initiatives related to mental health advocacy and student welfare. This approach is appropriate for identifying key concepts, types of evidence, and research gaps in an area that is still emerging. A scoping review allows for a broad examination of studies without limiting the findings to specific outcomes, which is

essential when looking into various forms of student-led contributions. The study aims to gather a wide range of insights from existing research to better understand

how student-led efforts have shaped and can continue to influence mental health and welfare programs in academic institutions.



**Figure 1:** Schematic diagram of the study

The study screened 229 published articles from the Academic Search Engines archives to conduct this review. The researchers selected six papers that directly focused on student-led initiatives in mental health and student welfare using specific inclusion criteria. These selected studies were then closely analyzed and interpreted to identify relevant findings and insights. The results were organized and synthesized based on two main themes: student welfare services and mental health advocacy. This structured process allowed the researchers to draw meaningful conclusions from the data and provide a comprehensive understanding of how student-led research can support and guide the development of effective programs and services within educational institutions.

**Article Selection**

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the selection process to ensure that the review gathered only the most relevant and appropriate studies. These criteria served as the basis for screening the initial pool of articles and identifying those that align with the purpose and scope of the study. The researchers aimed to maintain the quality and focus of the review while ensuring that only articles with meaningful contributions to the topic were considered for analysis by using a structured selection process.

**Table 1:** Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Included	Excluded
Research Type	Student-Led Researches	Non-Student-Led Researches
Source	Systematic Reviews Articles	Non-Review Articles
Publication Type	Peer-Reviewed	Grey Literature
Time Frame	Between 2020 to 2025	Before 2020
Focus	Mental Health and Welfare	Other Disciplines and Field
Language	English	Other Language
Geography	Philippines	Outside Philippines

As summarized in Table 1, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were based on several key aspects, including the type of research, sources, publication type, time frame, focus, language, and geography of the articles.

The research type considered whether the studies were empirical or review-based, while the sources and publication type ensured that articles came from reliable, peer-reviewed, and accessible platforms. The time frame helped narrow the articles to timely and relevant ones, while the focus emphasized works that specifically highlight student-led initiatives in mental health and welfare. These criteria guided the screening process and helped select studies that would provide a well-rounded and meaningful contribution to the review.

**Literature Search and Inventory**

The study identified and sampled six articles that employed a systematic review method and directly aligned with the focus on student-led mental health and welfare initiatives by following the application of the established selection criteria. These articles were selected for their relevance, methodological soundness, and potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of how student-led efforts influence institutional programs and advocacy work. Each article offered a unique perspective on student involvement in educational development.

**Table 2:** Categorization of student-led article used in the study (N=6)

Article	Author (Year)	Feature
Art-1	Sumayang <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Student Research as a Reflection of Real-Life Issues and Academic Engagement
Art-2	Sumayang <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Student Publications as Catalysts for Inclusive and Responsive Educational Practices
Art-3	Sumayang <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Empowering Students as Changemakers Through Personal and Socially Relevant Research
Art-4	Tuquib <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Faith-Based Practices as Pillars of Holistic Student Development
Art-5	Sumayang (2025)	Integrating Student Realities into the Development of Welfare Services
Art-6	Flores <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Student-Led Mental Health Insights Driving Inclusive Program Development

The details of the selected articles are organized in Table 2, which presents the article numbers alongside their respective authors, publication years, and key features. The articles are arranged chronologically to show the research's progression and evolving focus. This arrangement helps to trace how student participation in research and advocacy has shifted to become more inclusive and action-oriented. The features of each article provide insight into the main themes and areas of emphasis. Earlier works leaned toward establishing the academic relevance of student research, while later publications increasingly highlighted the transformative impact of student voices on mental health and welfare policy development. The study creates a clearer picture of how student-led research has grown into a meaningful contributor to institutional change and student-centered program development by categorizing the articles this way.

### Data Analysis

The study employed a multi-level approach to analyze the selected articles to ensure a thorough and organized examination of the data. The process began with a cross-study comparison (van Berkel *et al.*, 2020), where each article was reviewed individually to identify key themes, unique contributions, and patterns related to student-led initiatives in mental health and welfare. This initial step allowed the researchers to understand each study's perspectives and contexts. After this, a comparative analysis (Bolbakov *et al.*, 2020) was conducted to draw connections, highlight similarities and differences, and

identify recurring concepts across all six articles. This step helped synthesize the findings and establish common ground among the studies, revealing how student-led research collectively shapes inclusive and responsive programs. The study ensured that both individual insights and broader trends were captured, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of student voices in mental health advocacy and student welfare development.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of the study provide a comprehensive overview of the findings derived from the six selected articles, offering valuable insights into the role of student-led initiatives in mental health advocacy and student welfare. The following sections present tables summarizing the key aspects of these articles, including their objectives, methodologies, findings, and the implications of their results. These tables help organize and convey the information in a way that facilitates a better understanding of these studies' contributions to the broader conversation on mental health and welfare in educational institutions.

Table 3 presents a summarized overview of the specific objectives outlined in each reviewed article. This table helps illustrate the individual focus and intent behind each study, allowing readers to understand the particular contributions of student-led research to the broader theme of mental health and welfare initiatives.

**Table 3:** Overview of the objectives of the student-led articles reviewed

Article	Author (Year)	Study Objective
Art-1	Sumayang <i>et al.</i> (2023)	To examine student research outputs and explore how they contribute to institutional learning and real-world engagement.
Art-2	Sumayang <i>et al.</i> (2024)	To assess the broader value of student publications in promoting educational reform and inclusive development.
Art-3	Sumayang <i>et al.</i> (2025)	To investigate how student-led research enriches academic growth through personal relevance, community impact, and social awareness.
Art-4	Tuquib <i>et al.</i> (2025)	To evaluate the effectiveness of religious formation programs in enhancing students' spiritual and emotional development.
Art-5	Sumayang (2025)	To review existing research and determine how student welfare services can be improved based on emerging student needs.
Art-6	Flores <i>et al.</i> (2025)	To analyze student-led research on mental health and identify how these insights can enhance advocacy and institutional mental health programs.

The review of the six articles revealed a consistent effort to link academic work with real-world concerns, especially in the context of mental health, student welfare, and institutional development. Several articles highlighted how student research goes beyond classroom learning by offering practical insights that help shape inclusive programs and responsive services. A shared emphasis on emotional well-being, inclusive development, and social awareness was evident across the selected works. Moreover, student-led studies on mental health were particularly notable for their relevance in informing

advocacy efforts and guiding institutional responses to student needs. The review found that most employed grounded approaches that drew from students lived experiences, making the findings both relevant and deeply connected to the realities of the student body. This alignment between student perspectives and institutional goals underlines the growing importance of student voices in shaping more meaningful and effective academic and support programs.

Table 4 presents the assessment of bias for qualitative studies using the description of Hawker *et al.* (2002) of

the articles used in the study. This table critically evaluates the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the selected studies, highlighting any potential biases that could impact the reliability or generalizability of the findings.

**Table 3:** Assessment of bias for qualitative studies (description of Hawker *et al.* (2002) tool for the methodological quality of qualitative and quantitative studies)

Article	Abstract & Title	Introduction & Aim	Method & Data	Sampling	Data Analysis
Art-1	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Art-2	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Art-3	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Art-4	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Art-5	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Art-6	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good
Article	Ethics & Bias	Results	Transferability or Generalizability	Implication & Usefulness	
Art-1	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	
Art-2	Good	Fair	Good	Good	
Art-3	Good	Fair	Good	Good	
Art-4	Good	Good	Good	Good	
Art-5	Good	Good	Good	Good	
Art-6	Good	Good	Good	Good	

The assessment of the six reviewed articles using the Hawker *et al.* (2002) tool showed that the studies demonstrated fair to good methodological quality, with most scoring well in some areas. The analysis revealed that while most articles clearly defined their research purpose and used appropriate data collection methods, some showed limitations in some areas. Despite these minor gaps, the sources remained valuable, especially due to their focus on lived experiences and direct engagement with student concerns. The evaluation confirmed that,

although varying in methodological strength, the studies still offered meaningful and credible contributions, reinforcing the importance of student-led insights in understanding mental health and welfare within academic settings.

Table 5 presents the articles' methodologies and data sources of the published articles. It outlines the research designs, data collection methods, and sources of information used in each study, providing a deeper understanding of how the research was conducted and the types of data that informed the findings.

**Table 5:** Article methodologies and data source of the student-led articles

Articles	Design	Methodology	Data Sources
Art-1	Qualitative review	Comparative and cross-study analysis	4 Published Articles
Art-2	Qualitative review	Comparative and cross-study analysis	7 Published Articles
Art-3	Qualitative review	Comparative and cross-study analysis	11 Published Articles
Art-4	Qualitative review	Comparative and cross-study analysis	5 Published Articles
Art-5	Qualitative review	Comparative and cross-study analysis	10 Published Articles
Art-6	Qualitative review	Comparative and cross-study analysis	9 Published Articles

The review of the methodologies and data sources used across the six articles revealed a strong preference for qualitative approaches. The methods allowed the researchers to explore the personal experiences, community dynamics, and social concerns that shaped their mental health and welfare initiatives. The majority relied on direct engagement with students, highlighting the importance of lived experience as a valuable data source. The consistent use of firsthand narratives and context-driven insights across the articles contributed to a

more grounded and authentic picture of student needs and challenges, reinforcing the unique contribution of student research to institutional learning and development.

Table 6 presents the summary of the different findings of the articles that were included in the research. This table synthesizes each study's key results and conclusions, offering a clear overview of the major themes and insights related to student-led mental health and welfare initiatives.

**Table 6:** Summary of the significant findings of the student-led articles

Articles	Significant Findings
Art-1	The study revealed that student-led research significantly contributes to academic and institutional growth by addressing real-world themes such as critical thinking, mental health, and cultural identity. These projects reflect students' engagement with their personal and educational realities, positioning them as active contributors to knowledge creation within their academic communities.
Art-2	Findings show that student research is rich with insights into everyday academic and personal struggles. Topics such as mental health, spirituality, and inclusivity highlighted the value of these outputs in promoting institutional reforms that are more responsive to student diversity and lived experience.
Art-3	Student research increasingly focuses on themes of social well-being, personal relevance, and community impact. The findings emphasize that students are not only knowledge consumers but are becoming proactive changemakers who use reflective and meaningful research methods to address current educational issues.
Art-4	This review found that spiritual practices like retreats, Bible reading, and sacramental theology enhance students' emotional and moral development. Engaging in these activities strengthens identity, promotes interpersonal growth, and builds a strong sense of community among students.
Art-5	Research on student welfare revealed that emotional stress, financial hardship, and technological challenges significantly affect student well-being. Effective welfare systems include mental health literacy, inclusive support, and culturally grounded services that address real-life challenges experienced by students.
Art-6	The study highlighted that student-led research introduces innovative mental health support practices such as storytelling and daily rituals. It identified the need for gender-sensitive and culturally aware programs that bridge personal experience and institutional responsibility in fostering emotional well-being.

The findings from the reviewed articles showed that student-led research often reflects a deep connection to real-life challenges and experiences, particularly those related to mental health, personal identity, and community well-being. These studies explored a wide range of themes, from emotional stress and inclusivity to cultural practices and spirituality, indicating that students are not just responding to academic prompts but actively shaping knowledge based on their realities. Reflective methods and thematic analyses allowed students to highlight overlooked issues such as gender sensitivity, financial struggles, and the importance of daily coping rituals.

Additionally, these findings revealed a clear desire among students to contribute to change within their institutions, offering practical insights that support more inclusive and responsive policies. The findings reinforce that student research is valuable for academic growth and a meaningful tool for advocacy and institutional development. Table 7 presents the summary of the implications of the results of the articles that were included in the research. This table explores how the findings from each article can inform future mental health programs and student welfare services, helping to identify actionable recommendations for improving institutional practices and supporting student well-being.

**Table 7:** Summary of the implication of the results of the student-led articles

Articles	Implication of Results
Art-1	The study suggests projects that offer practical insights into real-life concerns such as mental health and cultural identity. Institutions can better align their welfare programs with learners lived experiences and promote engagement in community-relevant issues by acknowledging and documenting the academic contributions of students.
Art-2	The study proposes interventions that include structured support for student researchers and mechanisms to integrate their work into institutional planning. Highlighted topics such as mental health, spirituality, and inclusive learning indicate that student insights can guide reforms in support services and educational practices.
Art-3	The study recommends structured mentorship, institutional support, and the creation of inclusive research spaces that encourage students to explore socially relevant topics like community well-being and emotional health. These strategies foster reflective learning and deepen students' roles in shaping welfare initiatives.
Art-4	The study proposes strengthening spiritual formation programs through a blend of formal instruction and personal spiritual experiences. Institutions are encouraged to implement flexible and inclusive religious services that nurture identity, well-being, and a sense of belonging.
Art-5	This review recommends interventions that prioritize mental health literacy, address financial burdens, and enhance technological access. Schools could engage in evidence-based planning to build sustainable support systems that promote holistic student development.

Art-6	The article advocates for mental health programs that reflect students' personal realities through creative, gender-sensitive, and culturally informed approaches. Institutions are urged to co-design services with students to create emotionally safe, inclusive, and sustainable mental health systems.
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The implications drawn from the reviewed articles highlight the importance of recognizing student-led research as a meaningful source of knowledge that can guide institutional improvements. These studies suggest that educational institutions should integrate student insights into the planning and implementation of support services by focusing on themes such as mental health, cultural identity, spirituality, and emotional well-being. Schools can respond more effectively to pressing concerns like financial struggles, technological gaps, and emotional stress. Additionally, incorporating flexible and culturally aware practices into welfare and spiritual programs can foster a greater sense of belonging and identity among students. These findings indicate that student voices offer valuable contributions and play a vital role in shaping inclusive, relevant, and sustainable support systems in educational settings.

The results from the reviewed articles show a consistent pattern of student-led research making strong contributions to mental health advocacy and welfare development in educational institutions. The findings collectively highlight the importance of recognizing students as active participants in creating meaningful change. Their work reflects their personal experiences and community values and provides concrete ideas for improving support systems in schools. The identified implications further suggest that when institutions respond to these student contributions, they create spaces that are more inclusive, supportive, and grounded in lived realities.

### Discussion

The discussion of the study brings together the insights drawn from the six reviewed articles to highlight how student-led research contributes meaningfully to mental health advocacy and student welfare development. The integration of these findings suggests that student-led efforts reflect their needs and offer practical frameworks for inclusive, data-informed, and contextually appropriate student support services.

### Student Research as a Tool for Real-World Engagement and Institutional Insight

The study conducted by Sumayang *et al.* (2023) reveals that student-led publications are academically valuable and socially meaningful. The study highlights the capacity of students to address issues that reflect their lived realities by examining a range of topics such as cultural identity, mental health, and critical thinking. The process involved thematic and comparative analysis, which allowed the researchers to capture the deeper relevance of these student initiatives to institutional development. The study suggests that student engagement in research extends beyond academic fulfillment and is crucial in shaping relevant educational practices.

The findings suggest that students use research to voice concerns and propose solutions that reflect personal and collective experiences. The article shows how the process of academic inquiry helps students articulate and navigate issues related to well-being, transitions, and identity. Their contributions demonstrate an awareness of the social and emotional challenges that influence student life and call attention to areas where institutional support may be lacking. These reflections contribute to a more grounded understanding of how research can support holistic development.

The implications of the findings point toward the importance of institutional support for student-led initiatives. The study recommends schools recognize and document these academic efforts to align programs with students' real-life concerns. Such recognition can encourage more students to pursue research with real-world impact and foster a culture of engagement and reflection. Schools are encouraged to adopt policies and practices that make room for these contributions in shaping institutional goals and student-centered services as students continue to share insights through their research (Morrish, 2019; Aller *et al.*, 2021; Magbanua *et al.*, 2021; Goldstein *et al.*, 2022; Haripottawekul & Wang, 2025; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### Transforming Student Publications into Institutional Growth Drivers

Sumayang *et al.* (2024) explored how student-led publications reflect diverse experiences within academic environments. Using structured and thematic analysis, the authors identified recurring topics such as spirituality, mental health, and inclusive learning, illustrating the range and relevance of students' contributions. The findings emphasize that student research provides an authentic lens into the everyday challenges and values that shape student experiences across different settings. These publications are informative and rich in insight, reflecting the personal, social, and emotional dimensions of student life.

The article strongly connects student research to the broader conversation on welfare and mental health services. By bringing attention to students lived experiences, the findings show how research becomes a vehicle for highlighting gaps in institutional care and identifying opportunities for reform. The significance of topics such as spirituality and inclusivity underscores often neglected aspects of student welfare that demand institutional attention. These results affirm that student-authored research is a vital source of feedback in designing more responsive and equitable educational services.

In terms of implications, the article advocates for more structured support systems that allow students to engage in meaningful research. It recommends integrating student insights into institutional planning, particularly in areas

related to wellness and inclusion. By building systems that support student inquiry and promote the visibility of their findings, institutions can better tailor their services to meet the diverse needs of the student population. This approach ensures that policies are grounded in authentic experiences and contributes to a more empathetic and inclusive academic environment (Morrish, 2019; Aller *et al.*, 2021; Scherer & Leshner, 2021; Stegenga *et al.*, 2021; Goldstein *et al.*, 2022; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### **Student Research as a Pathway to Social Awareness and Academic Innovation**

Sumayang *et al.* (2025) framed student-led research as a growing force in academic development. Through careful selection and thematic analysis, the article uncovers how students turn toward research themes centered on social well-being, emotional health, and community involvement. The findings suggest that students reflect on their personal experiences and use those experiences to make broader contributions to their learning environments. This approach positions students as both learners and proactive contributors to institutional improvement.

The article highlights the importance of student engagement in understanding and addressing real-life concerns regarding welfare and mental health advocacy. The research found that students often focus on community issues and emotional well-being, offering practical solutions from direct experience. This active involvement in the research process enables students to identify systemic gaps and call attention to the emotional and social factors affecting academic success. Such findings strengthen the case for viewing student research as a key element in designing effective support services. The article's recommendations highlight the need for mentorship, inclusive research environments, and institutional backing. Schools can promote reflective learning and student empowerment by creating spaces where students feel supported and encouraged to investigate topics that matter to them. These strategies help embed welfare and advocacy into the academic fabric of institutions, ensuring that services evolve in step with the realities students face. This creates a culture where students are equipped and trusted to lead positive change in their educational communities (Aller *et al.*, 2021; Magbanua *et al.*, 2021; Scherer & Leshner, 2021; Priestley *et al.*, 2022; Haripottawekul & Wang, 2025; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### **Faith-Based Practices Supporting Holistic Student Development**

Tuquib *et al.* (2025) provided valuable insights into how spiritual practices influence student well-being. The article evaluated five studies on religious formation using a thematic and comparative framework, highlighting activities such as retreats, Bible study, and theology as meaningful to students' emotional and moral growth. These practices, when integrated thoughtfully into

school life, help students develop a sense of identity and belonging. The study demonstrates that spirituality remains relevant and powerful in shaping student welfare in contemporary settings.

The article suggests that spiritual development can stabilize student life. Practices that promote introspection, moral reasoning, and community interaction help foster resilience and emotional strength. These spiritual experiences serve as informal support systems that complement existing institutional programs, providing students with a deeper sense of purpose and connection. The paper underscores the importance of including spiritual development in holistic welfare strategies.

The article recommends that institutions implement flexible and inclusive faith-based programs that respect diverse beliefs while promoting growth. Structured religious services should be paired with opportunities for personal reflection and communal participation. Schools can address students' emotional and interpersonal needs in respectful and impactful ways by creating spiritually supportive environments. This integration enriches welfare programming and provides students with a foundation for long-term personal development (Alviar, 2020; Aller *et al.*, 2021; Rosmarin *et al.*, 2021; Scherer & Leshner, 2021; Del Castillo *et al.*, 2023; Mulvogue *et al.*, 2023; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### **Grounding Student Welfare in Lived Realities and Holistic Support**

Sumayang (2025) presented a comprehensive review of how academic, emotional, and social challenges influence student welfare. Through a multi-stage analysis of ten articles, the study found that mental health, financial hardship, and technological access shape students' overall well-being. These themes reveal students' complex realities and the importance of developing supportive structures that address these interconnected challenges. The findings reflect a growing awareness that student success depends more on academic instruction.

The article highlights that welfare systems must be inclusive, sustainable, and grounded in lived experiences. Community engagement, mental health services, and technology-inclusive practices are emphasized as key components of effective support. The study shows that when students are involved in identifying and addressing these issues, institutions can better create responsive and relevant programs. The paper highlights the value of student perspectives in shaping comprehensive welfare strategies.

The article urges institutions to use research as a foundation for service design and policy-making. It recommends developing programs that are evidence-based, culturally grounded, and adaptable to the realities of modern student life. These approaches help institutions stay attuned to the evolving needs of their communities while promoting equitable access to support. The study supports a welfare model where student voices guide institutional development and foster environments that

nurture both academic and personal growth (Amit, 2019; Aller *et al.*, 2021; Magbanua *et al.*, 2021; Stegenga *et al.*, 2021; Priestley *et al.*, 2022; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### **Student-Led Mental Health Insights for Inclusive Advocacy and Program Development**

Flores *et al.* (2025) explored how student-led research informs mental health initiatives in academic institutions. The study found that students often introduced creative and culturally grounded practices into their recommendations using a structured analysis of nine selected articles. These contributions reflect a strong link between personal experience and effective support strategies, showing how student research can guide the development of more responsive mental health systems. The findings demonstrate that students deeply understand the emotional landscape of academic life. The reviewed articles emphasized emotional safety, stigma reduction, and gender sensitivity, areas where student-led research provided unique and actionable insights. These reflections help expand the understanding of mental health beyond traditional clinical approaches, offering a more holistic and inclusive framework that aligns closely with student realities.

The study encourages institutions to co-create mental health programs with students in response to these findings. It advocates for a balance between structural support and personal experience to build sustainable and inclusive systems. Schools can design emotionally relevant and culturally aware services by incorporating student voices into program development. This approach not only strengthens the support network for students but also fosters a campus culture grounded in empathy and shared responsibility (Aller *et al.*, 2021; Magbanua *et al.*, 2021; Scherer & Leshner, 2021; Abelson *et al.*, 2022; Goldstein *et al.*, 2022; Mulvogue *et al.*, 2023; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### **Contribution of Student Research to Welfare Services and Mental Health Advocacy**

The analysis of the six articles reviewed reveals a consistent pattern in how student-led research contributes meaningful insights into mental health and welfare realities in academic settings. Each article emphasizes that student initiatives are deeply grounded in lived experiences, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of challenges such as emotional well-being, identity formation, and institutional responsiveness. Studies from Sumayang *et al.* (2023, 2024, 2025), Tuquib *et al.* (2025), and Flores *et al.* (2025) illustrate how students actively engage in exploring themes that are both personally relevant and socially impactful. These works affirm that student researchers are not only participants in the educational process but also contributors to institutional knowledge.

The results also indicate that student-led research consistently aligns with the core needs of student welfare and mental health advocacy. For instance, Sumayang *et al.* (2023, 2024, 2025) and Flores *et al.* (2025) uncover

how reflective research efforts by students highlight the necessity of responsive support services. Tuquib *et al.* (2025) emphasize spiritual well-being as an essential but often overlooked element of student life. Sumayang (2025) presents emotional and financial challenges as key areas where welfare support is most needed. These recurring themes suggest that students can identify gaps in current systems and offer valuable suggestions that could lead to more inclusive and meaningful interventions.

The implications of these findings point to the importance of directly involving students in shaping welfare programs. The reviewed articles encourage institutions to co-design services with students, support research mentorship, and create flexible spaces for inquiry. Structured religious formation (Tuquib *et al.*, 2025), gender-sensitive mental health programs (Flores *et al.*, 2025), and culturally responsive welfare services (Sumayang, 2025) were among the most promising directions for development. These suggestions underscore a shift toward a more participatory and holistic approach to support systems that respect student voices as agents of change.

The review highlights the need for institutional reforms that recognize student-led research as a valuable source of data for improving services. Instead of viewing student outputs as academic exercises, these studies show they can inform evidence-based planning. Institutions are called to listen to students, incorporate their insights, and invest in structures that allow continuous feedback and innovation. Schools can make substantial strides in fostering environments that are more emotionally safe, inclusive, and empowering for all learners by embracing the contributions found in these six articles (Alviar, 2020; Aller *et al.*, 2021; Magbanua *et al.*, 2021; Goldstein *et al.*, 2022; Mulvogue *et al.*, 2023; Haripottawekul & Wang, 2025; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

### **CONCLUSION**

The review of student-led initiatives revealed a growing commitment among students to address mental health and welfare concerns through reflective, experience-based research. Across the articles, students explored pressing issues such as emotional well-being, academic stress, socio-economic challenges, cultural identity, and spiritual formation. Their research illuminated the realities they face and offered practical insights into how institutions can better support holistic development. Creative expressions like music and storytelling, rituals such as coffee routines, and faith-based practices like retreats were shown to help students manage stress and foster a sense of identity and belonging. Moreover, students emphasized the importance of inclusive, gender-sensitive, and culturally responsive approaches that connect individual experiences with institutional support. These efforts demonstrated that their insights can drive meaningful reforms in mental health services and student welfare programs when they are empowered to lead.

The study offered new knowledge on how student-led research contributes significantly to designing

and improving mental health and welfare services in educational institutions. Students highlighted the value of combining emotional, academic, spiritual, and social dimensions in support programs through personal narratives and community-based approaches. The findings confirmed that student perspectives are relevant and essential in creating responsive and sustainable mental health initiatives. The study underlined the importance of fostering environments sensitive to student realities, bridging the gap between lived experiences and institutional policies by capturing these voices. The results reinforce student inquiry's role as a vital tool for shaping inclusive and practical support systems in higher education.

### Recommendations

Based on the results, student welfare services and mental health advocacy programs could be developed with direct input from students to ensure they reflect actual experiences and address real challenges. Institutions are encouraged to create spaces where students can safely express their concerns and contribute to program planning and evaluation. Support services should be flexible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive, integrating practical strategies such as peer-led sessions, creative outlets, and accessible counseling. Programs that promote emotional safety, belonging, and identity formation should be expanded and adapted to diverse student needs. Schools could also invest in training faculty and staff to recognize and respond to mental health concerns with empathy and understanding. Aligning institutional efforts with student perspectives will lead to more effective and meaningful support systems.

### Further Studies

Future studies may focus on evaluating the long-term impact of these efforts on institutional mental health policies and student well-being to expand the understanding of student-led initiatives. Research can also explore how specific practices, such as faith-based programs or creative expression, contribute to coping and emotional resilience across student groups. Comparative studies between institutions or regions could offer broader insights into effective advocacy models. It is also recommended that future researchers continue conducting yearly inventories of student publications to track evolving themes and strengthen the evidence base for student-centered welfare programs.

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