

Effectiveness of a School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program on Learners' Behavior and Academic Engagement at Batan Elementary School

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Publication history: Received: January 5, 2026; Revised: February 19, 2026; Accepted: February 22, 2026

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of a School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program on learners' classroom behavior and academic engagement at Batan Elementary School. Grounded in global and national mental health frameworks, the intervention addressed observed behavioral and engagement concerns among intermediate learners (Grades 4–6). Using a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, 60 learners participated in a six-week program that included emotional literacy sessions, mindfulness exercises, peer-sharing activities, anti-bullying campaigns, and parental involvement meetings. Data were collected through a Behavioral Observation Checklist and an Academic Engagement Survey administered before and after the intervention. Pretest findings revealed moderate levels of classroom behavior ($M = 2.85$) and academic engagement ($M = 2.78$). Posttest results showed significant improvements in behavior ($M = 3.65$) and engagement ($M = 3.70$). Paired sample t-test analysis confirmed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the intervention had a measurable positive impact. The findings support existing literature emphasizing that structured, school-based socio-emotional programs enhance behavioral regulation and academic participation. The study contributes localized empirical evidence supporting the institutionalization of mental health initiatives within elementary school systems.

Keywords: school-based mental health, academic engagement, classroom behavior, socio-emotional learning, elementary learners, quasi-experimental design

1. Introduction

Mental health is a critical foundation of children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. In elementary education, learners' capacity to regulate emotions, manage interpersonal interactions, and sustain attention significantly influences academic engagement and overall school performance. Empirical research in the Philippine context demonstrates that socio-emotional regulation skills are positively associated with improved classroom behavior and learning persistence among children (Galvez Tan & Alampay, 2021). When mental health needs remain unaddressed, learners may exhibit inattentiveness, disruptive conduct, peer conflicts, reduced intrinsic motivation, and diminished classroom participation—factors that collectively undermine instructional effectiveness and long-term academic success. Evidence further suggests that mindfulness-based school programs can significantly improve emotional awareness, self-control, and respectful peer interactions, all of which are essential to positive classroom functioning (Fernandez et al., 2022).

Globally, school-based mental health initiatives have gained recognition as cost-effective preventive and developmental strategies. The World Health Organization (2021) identifies schools as strategic platforms for promoting mental well-being because children spend a substantial portion of their formative years within structured educational environments. The WHO's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan emphasizes early identification, prevention, and integration of psychosocial interventions within educational systems. In alignment with global directives, the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd, 2022) strengthened its Child Protection Policy and mental health guidelines to institutionalize psychosocial support, emotional learning initiatives, and learner protection mechanisms in public schools. However, implementation challenges—including teacher workload, limited mental health literacy, and coordination barriers—continue to affect program consistency and sustainability in Philippine public schools (ISRG Publishers, 2025).

Recent Philippine-based studies underscore the importance of culturally responsive and multicomponent interventions. Gratitude-based and positive psychology programs, for example, have been shown to foster social support, cognitive engagement, and psychological well-being among Filipino learners (Gomez, 2025). Similarly, Gonzalo and Alibudbud (2024) highlight that effective education-based mental health initiatives in low-resource settings require structured programming, teacher capacity-building, and community involvement to achieve measurable outcomes. These findings reinforce the need for school-level interventions that are preventive, developmentally appropriate, and embedded within existing educational frameworks.

At the local level, Batan Elementary School observed recurring behavioral and engagement concerns among intermediate learners (Grades 4–6), including emotional outbursts, peer misunderstandings, inconsistent participation, and difficulty maintaining focus during academic tasks. Teachers reported that while instructional delivery remained structured and consistent, emotional and behavioral factors appeared to hinder learner engagement and classroom cooperation. These observations aligned with national findings indicating that without systematic socio-emotional support, learners' academic participation may decline despite adequate instructional inputs (Fernandez et al., 2022).

In response, Batan Elementary School implemented a six-week School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program aimed at strengthening emotional literacy, empathy, self-regulation, and academic engagement. The program incorporated weekly guidance sessions, mindfulness activities, peer-sharing circles, anti-bullying campaigns, and parental involvement meetings. Rather than emphasizing corrective discipline, the initiative adopted a preventive and developmental orientation consistent with global and national mental health frameworks (World Health Organization, 2021; DepEd, 2022). Such multicomponent approaches—combining learner skills development with adult support systems—have been identified as effective mechanisms for improving mental health literacy and classroom engagement in resource-constrained contexts (Gonzalo & Alibudbud, 2024).

Despite growing advocacy for mental health integration in Philippine schools, there remains limited localized empirical evidence—particularly within small public elementary schools—demonstrating measurable effects on classroom behavior and academic engagement. Many existing studies focus on adolescents or tertiary-level learners, leaving a gap in intervention-based research targeting younger children (Fernandez et al., 2022). Addressing this gap, the present study sought to determine whether the implementation of a structured School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program significantly improved learners' classroom behavior and academic engagement at Batan Elementary School. Examining behavioral and engagement outcomes before and after program implementation, this study contributes context-specific evidence to inform data-driven school improvement planning and the institutionalization of mental health initiatives in elementary education.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest research design to determine the effectiveness of the School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program on learners' behavior and academic engagement. The design allowed the researcher to measure changes in classroom behavior and engagement levels before and after the implementation of the intervention. Since the program was introduced to a single group of learners without a comparison group, the design was appropriate for evaluating the impact of a school-based initiative within a real educational setting. The pretest-posttest structure enabled the researcher to assess whether observable improvements occurred following the six-week intervention period.

2.2 Research Participants

The participants of the study consisted of sixty intermediate learners enrolled in Grades 4 to 6 at Batan Elementary School during the School Year 2025–2026. The participants were selected through complete enumeration, as all learners within the identified grade levels participated in the program. These learners were considered appropriate respondents because intermediate-level pupils had demonstrated behavioral and engagement concerns that the intervention sought to address. Their developmental stage also made them suitable recipients of structured emotional literacy and mental health awareness activities.

2.3 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Batan Elementary School. The intervention took place within regular classroom environments and designated activity areas within the school premises. The school was selected as the research locale because teachers and school administrators had observed recurring concerns related to learners' emotional regulation, peer interaction, classroom cooperation, and academic participation. These concerns justified the implementation and evaluation of a structured mental health awareness program within the institution.

2.4 Intervention Procedure

The School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program was implemented for a duration of six weeks. The intervention consisted of structured activities designed to promote emotional awareness, behavioral regulation, empathy, and academic engagement among learners. Weekly guidance sessions were conducted to develop emotional literacy and appropriate emotional expression. Mindfulness exercises were introduced to improve learners' focus and self-control during academic tasks. Peer-sharing sessions were organized to strengthen empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution abilities. Anti-bullying campaigns were carried out to promote respectful peer interactions, while parental orientation meetings were

conducted to encourage reinforcement of positive behavioral practices at home. The program emphasized preventive and developmental approaches rather than corrective disciplinary measures.

2.5 Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were utilized to collect data for the study. The first instrument was a Behavioral Observation Checklist completed by class advisers. This checklist measured learners' classroom behavior across several indicators, including emotional management, cooperation, empathy, attentiveness, rule-following, task completion, and minimization of disruptive behavior. The instrument used a four-point rating scale ranging from rarely observed to always observed. The second instrument was an Academic Engagement Survey administered to learners as a self-assessment tool. The survey measured participation in classroom discussions, attention during lessons, persistence in completing tasks, emotional connection to school, and overall engagement in learning activities. The instrument used a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Both instruments were administered before the intervention to obtain baseline data and again after the six-week program to measure changes in behavior and engagement. Prior to data collection, the instruments underwent face and content validation by experienced teachers and school administrators to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and relevance to the learners' developmental level.

2.6 Data Collection Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the school head prior to implementation. Parents were informed about the objectives and procedures of the program, and participation was conducted within regular school activities. Pretest data were collected using the Behavioral Observation Checklist and the Academic Engagement Survey before the intervention commenced. Teachers completed the observation checklist based on learners' classroom behavior, while learners responded to the engagement survey under guided supervision. Following the six-week implementation of the Mental Health Awareness Program, the same instruments were administered as posttests. Teachers again completed the behavioral observations, and learners answered the engagement survey to determine any changes that occurred after the intervention period.

2.7 Data Analysis

The collected data were encoded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean scores were computed to determine the levels of learners' classroom behavior and academic engagement before and after the intervention. A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. The level of significance was set at 0.05 to determine whether the observed differences were statistically meaningful.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards in educational research. Participation was voluntary, and learners were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Data collected were securely stored and were accessible only to the researcher. The study ensured that the intervention activities were developmentally appropriate and beneficial to the learners' well-being.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Level of Learners' Classroom Behavior Before the Implementation of the Program

The pretest results revealed that learners demonstrated a moderate level of positive classroom behavior prior to the implementation of the School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program, with a mean score of 2.85. This finding indicated that while learners occasionally exhibited appropriate emotional regulation, cooperation, and attentiveness, these behaviors were not consistently observed. Indicators such as managing emotions when corrected, remaining calm during challenging tasks, and minimizing disruptive behavior were present but not stable across classroom situations. The moderate behavioral level suggested that learners possessed emerging socio-emotional competencies but required structured reinforcement and guidance. This result is consistent with findings by Galvez Tan and Alampay (2021), who reported that Filipino children often demonstrate developing self-regulation skills that can be strengthened through structured mindfulness and socio-emotional programs. Similarly, Fernandez et al. (2022) emphasized that without targeted interventions, classroom behavioral challenges such as inattentiveness and peer misunderstandings may persist and negatively influence learning environments. The baseline data therefore justified the need for the structured mental health awareness intervention implemented at Batan Elementary School.

3.2. Level of Learners' Academic Engagement Before the Implementation of the Program

The pretest results further indicated that learners' academic engagement was at a moderate level, with a mean score of 2.78. This suggested that while learners sometimes paid attention during discussions, participated in activities, and completed assigned tasks, their engagement was inconsistent. Indicators such as sustained focus, persistence during difficult lessons, and active participation reflected variability among learners. Moderate academic engagement prior to intervention aligns

with research indicating that emotional and behavioral regulation significantly influences cognitive engagement in elementary learners (Fernandez et al., 2022). When emotional needs are unmet, learners may struggle with sustained attention and task completion. Moreover, Gomez (2025) highlighted that positive psychological functioning, including emotional well-being and perceived teacher support, directly contributes to higher levels of classroom participation and learning motivation. The pretest engagement data indicated that learners required structured support to strengthen both emotional resilience and academic involvement.

3.3. Level of Learners' Classroom Behavior After the Implementation of the Program

Following the six-week implementation of the School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program, posttest results revealed a significant improvement in learners' classroom behavior, with a mean score of 3.65. This score reflected a high level of positive behavior. Learners more consistently demonstrated emotional regulation, cooperative group participation, respectful peer interaction, and adherence to classroom rules. The increase from a mean of 2.85 to 3.65 indicated a substantial behavioral shift toward more stable and observable positive conduct. Improvements were particularly noted in indicators related to empathy, conflict resolution, and task completion. These findings support the effectiveness of structured socio-emotional learning activities in strengthening behavioral competencies. The improvement aligns with evidence presented by Fernandez et al. (2022), who found that mindfulness-based school interventions significantly improved emotional awareness and respectful peer interactions. Furthermore, Gonzalo and Alibudbud (2024) emphasized that multi-component mental health initiatives combining skills training and supportive adult involvement yield measurable behavioral improvements, particularly in low-resource educational settings. The behavioral outcomes observed in this study suggest that preventive and developmentally oriented mental health programming can positively influence classroom dynamics and learner conduct at the elementary level.

3.4. Level of Learners' Academic Engagement After the Implementation of the Program

Posttest findings indicated that academic engagement improved to a high level, with a mean score of 3.70. This reflected increased learner participation, improved attention during discussions, greater persistence in completing schoolwork, and stronger emotional connection to school activities. The increase from a pretest mean of 2.78 to a posttest mean of 3.70 demonstrated a marked enhancement in learners' engagement behaviors. Learners reported feeling more confident participating in classroom activities, asking questions when uncertain, and maintaining focus during independent work. This finding is consistent with the World Health Organization (2021), which emphasized that promoting mental well-being within schools enhances learners' ability to concentrate and actively participate in academic tasks. Similarly, Gomez (2025) found that positive psychology-based interventions strengthen cognitive engagement and intrinsic motivation among Filipino learners. When learners develop emotional security and self-confidence, their willingness to engage academically increases. The observed improvement supports the premise that emotional literacy and self-regulation training can positively influence academic involvement.

3.5. Significant Difference in Learners' Behavior and Academic Engagement Before and After the Program

A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the differences between pretest and posttest scores were statistically significant. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in classroom behavior scores ($p < 0.05$) and academic engagement scores ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicated that the improvements observed were not due to chance and that the School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program had a measurable positive effect on learners. The significant difference confirms that structured mental health awareness interventions can produce meaningful behavioral and engagement outcomes within a relatively short intervention period. This result is supported by Durlak et al. (2011), whose meta-analysis demonstrated that school-based socio-emotional learning programs significantly improve behavioral adjustment and academic performance. Additionally, Gonzalo and Alibudbud (2024) emphasized that evidence-based school mental health initiatives enhance learner resilience and classroom participation when systematically implemented. The statistical findings provide empirical validation for integrating mental health initiatives into elementary school programs. The results further support the Philippine Department of Education's (DepEd, 2022) advocacy for embedding psychosocial support within school systems.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings of the study demonstrated that the School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program implemented at Batan Elementary School was effective in improving learners' classroom behavior and academic engagement. Pretest results indicated moderate levels of behavioral regulation and academic involvement; however, following the six-week intervention, both variables significantly increased to high levels. The statistically significant differences between pretest and posttest scores confirmed that the structured mental health initiative contributed to measurable improvements in emotional regulation, empathy, attentiveness, participation, and task completion. These outcomes support existing literature emphasizing that school-based socio-emotional interventions enhance both behavioral adjustment and academic functioning (Durlak et al., 2011; Fernandez et al., 2022). The study therefore concludes that integrating preventive,

developmentally appropriate mental health programs within elementary schools can foster a more positive learning environment and strengthen learners' overall academic engagement.

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that Batan Elementary School sustain and institutionalize the School-Based Mental Health Awareness Program as part of its School Improvement Plan to ensure program continuity and long-term impact. Teachers should be provided with ongoing training in basic mental health literacy, classroom-based socio-emotional strategies, and learner support mechanisms to strengthen program implementation. Strengthening collaboration between parents and the school is also recommended to reinforce emotional regulation and positive behavioral practices at home. Furthermore, future research should consider incorporating control groups, larger sample sizes, and extended intervention periods to enhance the generalizability and robustness of findings. Expanding the program to other grade levels and neighboring schools may also provide broader validation of its effectiveness.

The study was limited by its use of a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, which restricted the ability to fully attribute improvements solely to the intervention. The sample was confined to sixty intermediate learners from a single public elementary school, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or educational settings. Additionally, the intervention duration was limited to six weeks, which may not fully capture long-term behavioral and engagement outcomes. Future studies may address these limitations by employing experimental or mixed-method designs, including longitudinal follow-up assessments, and expanding the participant pool to strengthen external validity and reliability of results.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study complied with established ethical guidelines for research involving children. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the school head, and parents were informed about the objectives and procedures of the program. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity of learners were strictly maintained. All data were used solely for research purposes and were securely stored by the researcher.

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