

Belongingness matters: A qualitative exploration of peer acceptance and rejection among high school students

Mary Joy Montecillo, Jeanette L. Pejoto, Reynaldo V. Moral*
College of Teacher Education, Cebu Normal University, Philippines
*moralr@cnu.edu.ph

Received: June 11, 2024
Revised: July 15, 2024
Accepted: August 9, 2024

Abstract

Peer acceptance and rejection among high school students profoundly influence their emotional and social development, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive research in this domain. This qualitative study explores the experiences and perspectives of 20 high school students on peer acceptance and rejection. Utilizing a phenomenological design, the research was conducted in a private school in Cebu through in-depth interviews. The thematic analysis revealed that students highly value positive and supportive peer relationships, which enhance their sense of belonging and self-worth. Conversely, experiences of peer rejection and negative interactions were linked to feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and anxiety about losing social acceptance. Participants often went to great lengths to avoid rejection and maintain their social status, significantly impacting their mental health. Coping strategies reported included distraction, self-soothing, self-care, and engaging in creative activities. The findings suggest that educators and policymakers should prioritize fostering healthy peer relationships by promoting tolerance and empathy. Creating a safe and supportive environment that encourages self-expression and open communication is crucial. These measures can help schools develop a more inclusive and supportive environment, contributing to the social, emotional, and academic well-being of students.

Keywords

High school students, peer acceptance, peer rejection.

INTRODUCTION

Belongingness is a fundamental human need that becomes particularly significant during the high school years when social acceptance and peer relationships gain importance [1]. High school students often seek validation and a sense of belonging from their peers as they explore their identities and social standing. The significance of belongingness in improving overall well-being, mental health, and self-worth cannot be overstated. Globally, mental health issues among high school students are on the rise, with the World Health Organization (WHO) reporting

that approximately 10-20% of teenagers experience mental health conditions, with half of these conditions starting by age 14 [2]. Students with strong social connections and a sense of belonging are less likely to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, whereas a lack of belonging can exacerbate these mental health issues.

In the digital world, social media has had a significant impact on high school students' sense of belonging. Research conducted in 2019 indicates that teenagers who frequently use social



media are at a higher risk of experiencing depression [3]. While social media can foster connections and a sense of belonging, it also increases the risk of exclusion and cyberbullying, negatively affecting students' mental health and self-esteem. In the educational setting, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that students who feel a strong sense of belonging at school perform better academically and have lower absence rates [4]. Schools that promote a sense of belonging can produce better learning environments, resulting in higher academic performance and student engagement.

In the Philippines, mental health among high school students is a growing concern. A 2019 survey by the Department of Health (DOH) showed that about 16% of Filipino students aged 13-17 have thought about suicide [5]. The stigma around mental health often stops students from seeking help, highlighting the need to promote a sense of belonging in schools and communities to provide necessary support. Bullying and peer relationships also greatly affect students' sense of belonging. According to UNICEF Philippines [6], 7 out of 10 children in the Philippines have experienced some form of violence, including bullying. Addressing bullying and creating inclusive environments in schools is essential to fostering a sense of belonging among Filipino teenagers.

For the researchers, belongingness is a critical factor in adolescent development especially for high school students, impacting mental health, identity formation, and academic success. This research aims to explore the urgent need for understanding adolescent belongingness, supported by data from both local and global contexts. Addressing these issues through research can help develop effective interventions to support teenagers' well-being and growth.

For high school students, having a group of friends provides a vital sense of identity, pride, and belonging. Researchers stress the value of social connection because it fosters a sense of safety and acceptance. Establishing a group enables individuals to discover new facets of themselves and grow in self-reliance [7]. It is well-documented that people who have a sense of social belonging are happier and healthier. On the other hand, social exclusion or isolation is associated with negative emotions like

depression, anxiety, anger, and humiliation. For high school students, a sense of belonging is crucial as it gives them security, acceptance, and connection as they discover their identities and grow into independent young people [8].

Conversely, peer rejection can lead to a cascade of negative outcomes, including depression, social withdrawal, and academic underachievement. Peer acceptance significantly impacts students across various domains [9]. Socially and emotionally, acceptance boosts self-esteem and confidence, while rejection can lead to loneliness, low self-worth, and depression. Academically, acceptance motivates students, enhancing their engagement and performance, while rejection may result in disengagement and academic struggles [10]. Accepted students often exhibit positive behaviors like cooperation and empathy, while rejected students may display negative behaviors such as aggression or withdrawal [11]. Psychologically, acceptance correlates with higher life satisfaction and lower stress levels, while rejection is linked to greater psychological distress [12]. Therefore, fostering a culture of acceptance and inclusion in schools is crucial for supporting students' social, emotional, academic, and behavioral development.

This qualitative study aims to investigate high school students' lived experiences and perspectives on peer acceptance, rejection, and psychological health.

By understanding these experiences, educators and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to support students' social and emotional development in school. This study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do high school students' interactions with their peers affect their sense of belonging and self-esteem?; (2) What emotional responses do high school students experience when they feel accepted or rejected by their peers?; (3) How can educators and policymakers support high school students' social and emotional well-being based on their experiences with peer dynamics?

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study utilized a descriptive phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences and perspectives of high school students regarding peer acceptance, rejection, and psychological health. Descriptive phenomenology, as founded by the philosopher

Edmund Husserl, aims to describe the essence of experiences as they are lived and perceived by individuals [13]. Through in-depth interviews and analysis, the researchers aimed to capture the essence of how these students interpret and make sense of their social interactions. Purposive sampling ensured the selection of participants who could provide rich, detailed descriptions of their experiences. The findings were presented using direct quotes to illustrate key themes, providing a nuanced understanding of how peer relationships influence psychological well-being.

Research participants

The participants in this study are 20 high school students from a private school in Cebu. They were selected based on their willingness to participate and their availability for interviews. The selection process ensured a diverse range of perspectives and experiences among the participants. The study aimed to capture the nuanced experiences of these students regarding peer acceptance, rejection, and psychological health. Participants in this study were selected based on their self-identification as experiencing either peer acceptance, rejection, or both, with 10 participants in each category. Additionally, participants were chosen for their ability to provide rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences and perspectives. This selection criterion aimed to ensure that the study captured a diverse range of experiences related to peer interactions among high school students, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of peer acceptance and rejection.

Data gathering procedure

Data for this study was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. The interviews were conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage open and honest communication. Prior to the interviews, participants provided informed consent for audio recording. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis, allowing for a detailed examination of the participants' narratives and experiences.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic data analysis, a method that identifies common themes in interview data [14]. The analysis involved clustering the data based on key informants' familiar narratives and presenting

them in vignettes. The transcripts were examined to identify recurring themes related to peer acceptance, rejection, and psychological health. These themes were then analyzed to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Ethical standards

This study adheres to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, and they are assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Participants are also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The study is conducted under the guidelines set forth by the school and relevant regulatory bodies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results are presented in the following seven themes.

Theme 1: Impact of interactions

Peer interaction plays a significant role in shaping individuals' self-esteem, mental health, and social development. As highlighted by Participant 6, Participant 9, and Participant 10, respectively.

P6: It makes me happy and welcome when people in school accept me.

P9: I noticed I've been more comfortable being myself and I can express my feelings comfortably. Maybe because of that classmate I have she does help me a lot in expressing myself.

P10: It was this one time that I felt accepted, when during a conversation a classmate of mine was talking and doing a chitchat with my friend and I was really feeling out of place when my friend said, "Oy ichika pd niya." It warmed my heart so much and I felt joy that they were willing to open their doors for a friendship

Participant 6 expressed that being accepted by peers makes them feel happy and welcomed in school, indicating that positive peer interactions contribute to a sense of belonging and well-being. This finding aligns with research by Arslan [15] who found that peer acceptance is positively associated with the self-esteem and well-being of a person. Additionally, Participant 9 noted feeling more comfortable being themselves and

expressing their feelings, possibly due to the support of a classmate, emphasizing how supportive peer relationships can develop self-expression and emotional well-being. This finding is supported by research by Shalaby and Agyapong [16] who found that peer support is linked to the greater emotional well-being of an individual. This shows that peer support from their classmates and friends has an important impact on the student's behavior.

Furthermore, Participant 10 provided a personal account of experiencing acceptance, showing the significant influence of modest acts of kindness on a person's feelings of happiness and acceptance. This is consistent with studies conducted by Shillington et al. [17] who discovered that acceptance encounters, no matter how brief, can have a good effect on a person's mood and sense of belonging.

Theme 2: Emotional responses to acceptance and rejection

The answers about acceptance show how deeply it affects people emotionally as they share respectively.

"The people who accepted me made me feel like I can be myself I can act as crazy as I want. When we would have a pick your partner my friend would pick me or squeeze me in her group."

"It made my heart warm, the feeling of being accepted by people like you gave you comfort and strength to do so."

"The bond between the peers who have accepted me is more strong and I believe I could treat them as one of my family and my main cause of happiness."

Respondent 7 highlights the comfort of being oneself without judgment and expresses a sense of liberation and honesty. Participant 9 and Participant 10 agree, describing a warm sense of acceptance and a close relationship with their peers that they compare to family. The way in which Participant 9 describes receiving comfort and strength from acceptance is consistent with research conducted by Laible, Carlo, and Roesch, which emphasizes the significance of peer acceptance in promoting emotional health and self-expression [18]. Additionally, Participant 10's emphasis on the familial bond built with accepting peers. Furthermore, Delgado et al. highlight the role that peer attachment plays in

promoting emotional well-being by showing how social acceptability can result in emotional support and a sense of belonging—two things that are essential for general well-being. All of these findings point to the possibility that people who have welcoming and encouraging peer interactions may feel more at ease and self-assured when expressing themselves [19].

In contrast, responses about rejection convey feelings of loneliness and inadequacy. Participant 2 and Participant 5 recall a specific instance during Buwan ng Wika when they felt isolated and unapproached, leading to a sense of loneliness.

"During Buwan ng Wika. Last year, 2023. No one approached me. I was by myself. It felt lonely a bit"

"Well, when I want to talk to them they just leave."

The impact of social rejection, Itzchakov's research aligns with Participant 2's experience, illustrating the broader consequences of feeling ignored or dismissed [20]. Social rejection can lead to a profound sense of exclusion and worthlessness, as individuals may perceive themselves as unworthy of attention or belonging. This sense of exclusion can extend beyond immediate social interactions, affecting one's overall self-esteem and confidence in future social encounters. Moreover, the feeling of being ignored or dismissed can create a barrier to forming meaningful connections, reinforcing feelings of isolation and inadequacy. This suggests that social rejection not only impacts one's immediate emotional state but also has lasting effects on their social interactions and sense of self-worth [21].

Theme 3: Thirst for approval

The participants' responses highlight a fundamental need for acceptance and approval from their peers, demonstrating the significant impact these elements have on their behavior and mental health as Participant 5 and Participant 10 share,

When I look at my more popular classmates, I observe that they tend to share a similar personality type. And they have lots of friends from schoolmates from the same grade or higher grade levels. And it made me subconsciously try to act like them a bit. And

it made me develop a mentality subconsciously, "Maybe this is what's acceptable because more people seem to like it. I want to be liked, so maybe I should try to be like them"

It has had a really big impact on my mental health because as a growing teenager, you feel the need for approval from the people surrounding you.

The remark made by Participant 5 about popular classmates points to a complex process of social comparison that shapes behavior and self-perception. People match their activities with perceived societal norms, even at the expense of their true selves, in an attempt to fit in and be accepted [22]. This conduct reflects a desire for identity and a sense of belonging in a social group in addition to seeking approval. It is a reflection of a deeper psychological desire for approval and validation, which can affect mental health and self-worth [23]. Moreover, the observation made by Participant 10 emphasizes even more how important social acceptance is for forming one's self-concept and mental stability, especially during the sensitive teenage years. The urge for acceptance is a basic psychological trait that affects how people view themselves and relate to others [22]. It goes beyond just being a desire for popularity. Peer interactions have a significant impact on how people perceive themselves and their feelings, influencing their identity and emotional development. These reactions demonstrate how critical it is to understand how the desire for acceptance affects behavior and mental health.

Theme 4: Coping with rejection

The participants' responses illustrate various coping mechanisms employed to manage experiences of rejection. For instance, one participant mentioned, *"I just play games I like and that's it,"* indicating a preference for distraction as a way to cope [24]. Another participant shared, *"Whenever I'm struggling I just take a rest and do my favorite things and come back to the thing that I have been struggling with and do it. Taking a rest can improve my confidence and mental health"* suggesting a strategy of self-care and rejuvenation to rebuild confidence after rejection. Another participant mentioned, *"I just stay home, avoid contact, and decide to work on myself and my thoughts"* indicating a proactive approach to self-

improvement and introspection. Additionally, one participant expressed, *"The most important thing I do is pray. Because prayer is always the answer. I talk to my parents to seek guidance. I listen to music or do peaceful leisure activities to relax myself. I watch motivational and inspirational videos about struggle,"* revealing a reliance on spirituality, family support, and positive reinforcement to navigate feelings of rejection. Another participant shared, *"Yes, I draw when I feel like I am in a bad mood. My drawing shows my feelings"* highlighting the use of creative expression as a means to process and externalize emotions related to rejection [25]. These responses demonstrate how diverse coping mechanisms are essential for dealing with rejection in a way that matches each individual's needs.

Theme 5: Impact of support system

Participants' verbatim comments provide complex insights into how supportive relationships affect people's well-being and self-perception. Participant 5's response, *"They make me much more confident and satisfied with myself"* demonstrates the direct impact of a support system on self-worth. This implies that positive affirmations and encouragement from supportive relationships can considerably improve a person's self-esteem and overall satisfaction with life. Found that positive affirmations from significant others significantly boost self-esteem and life satisfaction by reinforcing a positive self-concept and reducing negative self-perceptions [26]. Additionally, supportive relationships can buffer against stress and foster a sense of belonging and purpose, further contributing to overall well-being [27]. Furthermore, participant 4's remark, *"I do seek support and help from my family and friends. Because of that, I would receive words of encouragement and affirmation, allowing me to develop my character"* highlights the developmental benefits of seeking support. This response suggests that supportive words and actions from family and friends contribute to personal growth and character development. Supportive family and peer relationships are vital for character development, including the enhancement of moral values, empathy, and prosocial behaviors indicating that supportive relationships play a crucial role in shaping an individual's identity and resilience [28].

Moreover, Participant 1's reflection, *"Supported and comforted by teachers and peers, especially when a student tells their problems"* underscores the role of support in providing emotional solace and a sense of belonging. This indicates that the act of sharing personal problems and receiving support from teachers and friends creates a supportive environment that fosters emotional well-being and social connection. Finally, Participant 7's acknowledgment, *"Yes, because if I just bottle up my emotions I would overthink a lot,"* highlights the negative consequences of lacking a support system. This suggests that without an outlet to express emotions and receive support, individuals may experience increased stress and overthinking, underscoring the importance of supportive relationships in promoting mental health and well-being.

These reactions demonstrate how supportive relationships provide numerous benefits, including increased self-esteem, personal growth, comfort, and stress relief. They demonstrate how social support is critical for well-being, emphasizing its role in conquering life's challenges. Individuals with strong social support networks experience greater self-esteem, personal growth, and reduced stress levels [29].

Theme 6: Educator and policymaker support

The verbatim answers of participants provide profound insights into the impact of educator and policymaker support on kids' well-being and academic progress. Participant 1 describes a case in which teachers not only consoled and supported them in the face of criticism but also offered a proactive method to resolving the issue, emphasizing educators' role in advocating for students' interests, emphasizing the need for teachers to advocate for equitable access to resources and opportunities, noting that such advocacy is vital for addressing disparities and ensuring all students can thrive. Participant 2's story highlights the powerful impact of educator support in assisting them in navigating social problems, demonstrating how educators may play a critical role in enabling students' social and emotional development, emphasizing the importance of teacher training to effectively support students' social and emotional growth, noting that well-prepared educators can create a positive classroom climate that nurtures students' development [30]. Similarly, Participant 3's experience highlights the importance of

educators' words of encouragement and direction, demonstrating how such support can create resilience and confidence in students undergoing transformations.

Furthermore, Participant 5's acknowledgment of being recognized as a bright student demonstrates the favorable influence of educator recognition on students' self-esteem and drive. It emphasizes that teacher praise and acknowledgment can enhance students' intrinsic motivation and drive to succeed, leading to better educational outcomes [31]. Participant 6 provides a broader perspective, emphasizing the importance of lawmakers in impacting students' well-being through educational policies. This response underlines the need for policies that foster a friendly and conducive learning environment, while warning against those that may unintentionally burden students. These responses underline the essential roles that educators and policymakers play in providing students with a pleasant and empowered educational experience, emphasizing the importance of supporting and inclusive educational policies and practices, emphasizing that inclusive education policies contribute to better academic and social outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities, by ensuring access to appropriate resources and support.

Theme 7: Promoting empathy and understanding

The participants' responses advocate for various strategies to cultivate empathy and social understanding among students. Integrating social-emotional learning curricula, as suggested by Participant 1 and Participant 3, underscores the importance of developing emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills, essential for fostering empathetic interactions. Encouraging students to share their viewpoints, as proposed by Participant 5, promotes understanding and respect for diverse perspectives, fostering a culture of empathy and open-mindedness. Participant 2 emphasizes the role of socialization, communication, and understanding in creating positive peer interactions, highlighting the importance of empathy in building meaningful relationships.

Additionally, Participant 3's advice on human nature and communication encourages a mindset that values empathy and understanding in social interactions, promoting a more empathetic and

compassionate school community. These insights collectively suggest a comprehensive approach to promoting empathy, encompassing curriculum development, peer interactions, and self-awareness, highlighting its pivotal role in creating a harmonious and inclusive school environment, promoting self-awareness and reflective practices in students can help them better understand their own emotions and the emotions of others, further enhancing empathetic interactions and reducing conflicts [32].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has provided important insights into the significant effect of peer interactions on the social and emotional well-being of high school students. It reveals that good peer connections are critical in developing a strong sense of belonging and self-worth in students, but rejection frequently results in

feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem. The different emotional responses to peer acceptance and rejection illustrate the complex nature of teenagers' social dynamics, as well as the critical role these encounters play in shaping their identities and emotional resilience.

In light of these findings, educators and policymakers should prioritize activities that promote young people's social and emotional development. Peer mentoring programs, conflict resolution training, and accessible emotional support services can all help students improve their overall well-being. Furthermore, advocating for inclusive policies and building empathy in educational settings are critical steps toward providing a supportive and nurturing atmosphere for all kids. By addressing the nuances of peer interactions, schools can better prepare students for good social relationships and lifetime resilience.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. Ahmadi, M. Hassani, and F. Ahmadi, "Student- and school-level factors related to school belongingness among high school students," *Int. J. Adolesc. Youth*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 741–752, Dec. 2020.
- [2] World Health Organization, "Mental health of adolescents," 2021.
- [3] K. E. Riehm *et al.*, "Associations Between Time Spent Using Social Media and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Among US Youth," *JAMA Psychiatry*, vol. 76, no. 12, p. 1266, Dec. 2019.
- [4] OECD, *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I)*. Paris: OECD, 2023.
- [5] R. Alibudbud, "Suicide among the youth and school-based suicide prevention: Exemplar and reflections from the Philippines," *Asian J. Psychiatr.*, vol. 83, p. 103538, May 2023.
- [6] S. Noorani, "Child protection: Ensuring children and adolescents grow up in a safe and protective environment," 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/child-protection>.
- [7] L. Goossens, "Theories of adolescence," in *Handbook of adolescent development*, 1st ed., S. Jackson and L. Goossens, Eds. London: Psychology Press, 2020, pp. 11–29.
- [8] E. H. Erikson, *Identity youth and crisis*. Norton & Company, Inc, 1968.
- [9] F. J. García Bacete, V. Muñoz Tinoco, G. Marande Perrin, and J. F. Rosel Remírez, "Stability of Peer Acceptance and Rejection and Their Effect on Academic Performance in Primary Education: A Longitudinal Research," *Sustainability*, vol. 13, no. 5, p. 2650, Mar. 2021.
- [10] A.-M. Țepordei *et al.*, "Children's peer relationships, well-being, and academic achievement: the mediating role of academic competence," *Front. Psychol.*, vol. 14, p. 1174127, May 2023.
- [11] M. E. McDoniel, "Direct and Indirect Effects of Early Adverse Childhood Experiences on School Adjustment across Elementary School," Pennsylvania State University, 2020.
- [12] G. C. Blackhart, B. C. Nelson, M. L. Knowles, and R. F. Baumeister, "Rejection Elicits Emotional Reactions but Neither Causes Immediate Distress nor Lowers Self-Esteem: A Meta-Analytic Review of 192 Studies on Social Exclusion," *Personal. Soc. Psychol. Rev.*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 269–309, Nov. 2009.
- [13] W. R. B. Gibson, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958.
- [14] V. Clarke and V. Braun, *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage Publications Ltd., 2013.
- [15] G. Arslan, "School belongingness, well-being, and mental health among adolescents: exploring the role of loneliness," *Aust. J. Psychol.*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 70–80, Jan. 2021.
- [16] R. A. H. Shalaby and V. I. O. Agyapong, "Peer Support in Mental Health: Literature Review," *JMIR Ment. Heal.*, vol. 7, no. 6, p. e15572, Jun. 2020.
- [17] K. J. Shillington, A. M. Johnson, T. Mantler, and J. D. Irwin, "Kindness as an Intervention for Student Social Interaction Anxiety, Affect, and Mood: The KISS of Kindness Study," *Int. J. Appl. Posit. Psychol.*,

- vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 23–44, Apr. 2021.
- [18] J. Wang, Q. Yang, X. Yu, and L. Hu, “Effects of Adolescent Empathy on Emotional Resilience: The Mediating Role of Depression and Self-Efficacy and the Moderating Effect of Social Activities,” *Behav. Sci. (Basel)*, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 228, Mar. 2024.
 - [19] E. Delgado, C. Serna, I. Martínez, and E. Cruise, “Parental Attachment and Peer Relationships in Adolescence: A Systematic Review,” *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 1064, Jan. 2022.
 - [20] G. Itzhakov, N. Weinstein, D. Saluk, and M. Amar, “Connection Heals Wounds: Feeling Listened to Reduces Speakers’ Loneliness Following a Social Rejection Disclosure,” *Personal. Soc. Psychol. Bull.*, vol. 49, no. 8, pp. 1273–1294, Aug. 2023.
 - [21] K. Weir, “The pain of social rejection,” *Am. Psychol. Assoc.*, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 50, 2012.
 - [22] M. R. Leary and S. Gabriel, “The relentless pursuit of acceptance and belonging,” in *Advances in Motivation Science*, 9th ed., A. J. Elliot, Ed. Elsevier Inc., 2022, pp. 135–178.
 - [23] S. Fairlamb, “We need to talk about self-esteem: The effect of contingent self-worth on student achievement and well-being,” *Scholarsh. Teach. Learn. Psychol.*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 45–57, Mar. 2022.
 - [24] M. Barr and A. Copeland-Stewart, “Playing Video Games During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Effects on Players’ Well-Being,” *Games Cult.*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 122–139, Jan. 2022.
 - [25] C. N. A. Botchway, “Emotional Creativity,” in *Creativity*, S. M. Brito and J. Thomaz, Eds. IntechOpen, 2022.
 - [26] M. A. Harris and U. Orth, “The link between self-esteem and social relationships: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies,” *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, vol. 119, no. 6, pp. 1459–1477, Dec. 2020.
 - [27] Y. Sulimani-Aidan and T. Tayri-Schwartz, “The role of natural mentoring and sense of belonging in enhancing resilience among youth in care,” *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.*, vol. 120, p. 105773, Jan. 2021.
 - [28] BetterHelp Editorial Team, “The Importance of Supportive Friendships,” *BetterHelp*, Mountain View, CA, 24-Apr-2024.
 - [29] K. Lee, “Social support and self-esteem on the association between stressful life events and mental health outcomes among college students,” *Soc. Work Health Care*, vol. 59, no. 6, pp. 387–407, Jul. 2020.
 - [30] M. Ferreira, B. Martinsone, and S. Talić, “Promoting Sustainable Social Emotional Learning at School through Relationship-Centered Learning Environment, Teaching Methods and Formative Assessment,” *J. Teach. Educ. Sustain.*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 21–36, Jun. 2020.
 - [31] R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, “Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions,” *Contemp. Educ. Psychol.*, vol. 61, p. 101860, Apr. 2020.
 - [32] J. Usprech and G. Lam, “Self-Awareness and Empathy as Tools to Mitigate Conflict, Promote Wellness, and Enhance Performance in a Third-Year Engineering Design Course,” in *Proceedings 2020 Canadian Engineering Education Association (CEEAA-ACEG20) Conference*, 2020, pp. 1–8.