



Case Study on Impact on Student Well-being *Norway*

Aims

Improving the well-being and integration of foreign students who have recently arrived in Norway.

Methods

This is a pilot program where we have asked some senior and highly motivated students to conduct a volunteer program where they were responsible for helping these students integrate into the school community and navigate a different school system. The peer mentoring program we present has a focus on integration and resilience.

Findings and conclusions

Through a series of questionnaires (before the beginning of the program and afterwards) and meetings with the senior students, the GS-class (foreign students who have recently arrived in Norway) and teachers, we concluded that the program has had a significant positive impact on the mental health, resilience, and overall well-being of both migrant and senior students.

For the GS-class students, participating in cultural and language exchange activities, peer mentoring, and sports has provided them with a sense of belonging and connection to their new school community. These activities have also helped them build new relationships and friendships, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, participating in these activities has provided them with opportunities to learn new skills, and gain a sense of accomplishment and pride.

The activities organized have also helped migrant students improve their language proficiency, increase their cultural understanding, develop a sense of belonging, and improve their academic performance.

For senior students, being involved in the program has provided them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills, build empathy and understanding for others, and improve their own resilience.



Context

The case study we are going to present is aimed at improving the well-being and integration of foreign students who have recently arrived in Norway and may be facing language and cultural barriers. These students are placed in an immersion class where they are expected to learn the equivalent to the 10th grade Norwegian syllabus in different subjects. These objectives are very difficult to reach for some the students and place a great deal of pressure both on teachers and students. The students are placed in their own classrooms in the main school building but have little or no relationship with other students at school, making it easy for some of our students to feel isolated from the main programs and students. These two elements, academic and social pressure, are important for us teachers to work with, and present us with many different

challenges we need to face. This class receives the name of GS-class (Grunnskole class) and our students come from different continents, linguistic, social, and economic backgrounds, and present different literacy levels.

The students in the GS class are typically between the ages of 15 and 19 years old and may have only spent a short time in Norway. Many of them may also be refugees. The program description is available on the school's webpage, offering more detailed information about its objectives and curriculum, but the main aim, as mentioned before, is trying to improve their language and academic skills in order to reach the same level as a Norwegian 10th grade student.

The idea we present in this case study is a pilot program where we have asked some senior and highly motivated students to conduct a volunteer program where they were responsible for

helping these students integrate into the school community and navigate a different school system. Norway, like many other countries, has experienced a significant influx of immigrants in recent years. These immigrants often face a wide range of challenges when integrating into their new communities, including language barriers, cultural differences, and trauma from their past experiences.



One of the most important factors in successful integration is the creation of a supportive and inclusive community. Schools play a critical role in this process, as they are often the first point of contact for immigrant students and their families. By creating programs aimed at these students and their well-being, schools can help to foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment, where all students feel valued and supported.

The peer mentoring program we present has a focus on integration and resilience. Our main aim is to provide valuable emotional support and guidance to immigrant students who may be struggling to adjust to their new environment, creating a safe space where they can feel welcomed and where they can develop their individual well-being. By being assigned a mentor group and an individual mentor, students can develop a sense of belonging and community, which can help them feel more comfortable and confident in their new environment. Together, students can learn valuable strategies for coping with stress and adversity, which can be especially important for immigrant students who may be dealing with different types of stress from their past experiences; besides, these strategies can also be important for the mentor students in order to develop their resilience and reduce their academic stress levels, as we will present in our findings.

Impact on Staff:

Three teachers were involved in this project during a period of one school year. The project will be repeated the next school year, and necessary comparisons and reflections in order to improve the project will be assessed. We worked with a group of around 25 GS-class students combined with a group of 20 volunteer senior students. We presented the program to the volunteer students and helped them understand what was required of them, mainly helping recently arrived students and promoting well-being through different activities. Furthermore, the students had a lot of freedom to decide the necessary activities they wanted to conduct, as long as they promoted well-being. The students held different meetings and successfully gave the project their own identities and interests; this helped the project have young and fresh



approach, something that would be very different if the activities were decided by the teachers.

The students decided to conduct regular fundraising to finance these activities, which helped secure the necessary funding and demonstrated their commitment to the project. As teachers, we played a coordinating role, assisting the students in designing the program and helping them connect during their initial meetings. Over time, the students became more independent and were able to organize meetings without our assistance.

The positive impact of the program on students' mental health, resilience, and well-being can also benefit us teachers in several ways. By creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for their students, teachers may experience less stress and burnout, as well as greater job satisfaction. The project can also encourage teachers to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences into their teaching. Additionally, by working closely with senior students and migrant students, teachers may develop stronger relationships with their students, leading to better communication, cooperation, and classroom management. Overall, the program can help us create a more positive and fulfilling teaching experience, while also improving the mental health and well-being of our students.

Impact on Students:

As mentioned before, the program involved 25 GS-class students combined with a group of 20 volunteer senior students during the period of one academic year. We consider that the program has had a significant positive impact on the mental health, resilience, and overall well-being of both migrant and senior students.

For the GS-class students, participating in cultural and language exchange activities, peer mentoring, and sports has provided them with a sense of belonging and connection to their new school community. These activities have also helped them build new relationships and friendships, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, participating in these activities has provided them with opportunities to learn new skills, and gain a sense of accomplishment and pride.



In addition, the program has helped migrant students cope with the trauma and stress they may have experienced in their home country, during their migration journey or settling in Norway. By participating in the different activities presented by their peers, they have learned coping strategies and techniques for managing stress and adversity. Having access to these resources and supportive relationships can help to prevent the development of mental health issues and promote overall well-being.

The activities organized have also helped migrant students improve their language proficiency, increase their cultural understanding, develop a sense of belonging, and improve their academic performance. These activities have also challenged negative stereotypes and biases, while promoting a culture of inclusivity and diversity.

For senior students, being involved in the program has provided them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills, build empathy and understanding for others, and improve their own resilience. By serving as mentors and organizers, they have gained valuable experience in communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Additionally, building positive relationships with migrant students has provided them with a sense of purpose and fulfilment, which can also contribute to their own well-being and resilience.

Some of the activities we worked with were especially enjoyable for the students. Some of the activities conducted were:

- Cultural exchange activities: activities that allowed the students to learn about each other's cultures and traditions (sharing food, music, dance etc.); students could share their traditions, customs, and experiences. We hope that these activities helped break down barriers and create a more inclusive community.
- Language exchange activities: students with different language backgrounds practiced each other's languages. This might have helped break down language barriers and build stronger relationships between the students.
- Peer mentoring: our senior students were paired up with our recently arrived students, in order to have a contact person in the group they could refer



to. The mentor's responsibility was providing emotional support, guidance, and advice.

- Board game tournaments: students competed against each other; students were trying to build connections and promote friendly competition while reducing stress and academic focus.
- Movie nights: movie sessions where students watched and discussed movies from different cultural backgrounds; this might have promoted cultural understanding, helped to break down stereotypes and prejudices, and reduced academic stress.
- Arts and crafts: creative activities, aimed at reducing stress and promoting relaxation.
- Workshops: students organized mini-sessions to reflect on possible problems and challenges GS-students were experiencing, trying to find strategies for building resilience and coping with stress and adversity
- Sports: Organizing sports and fitness activities provided an opportunity for students to get active, relieve stress, and connect with other students in a fun and relaxed environment.

Some of our activities were inspired by our visit to Batley School of Girls in the UK, a school that excels at working with the mental well-being of their students. One approach that we

observed in our visit to England was to take students out of the traditional classroom setting and incorporate the use of outdoor and local spaces such as the library, health-promoting walks, and cultural activities like theatre visits. In addition, our project involved senior students who fundraised to organize a meal and social events; ensuring that the students have enough funds to participate in social events is something that we also observed in our visit to their school.

Another effective strategy was to use arts and crafts as a health-promoting activity, as creative activities can reduce stress and promote relaxation. Lastly, we noted the importance of ensuring that students are taking advantage of the free school meals offered in the cafeteria, as some



students may struggle with accessing these resources. These are all valuable ideas and activities that we suggest schools consider when working with immigrant students to promote their integration, well-being, and success.

Measurement and Evaluation:

The impact of the program was evaluated based on various factors such as language proficiency, cultural understanding, sense of belonging, academic performance, and character development. Questionnaires, interviews, and observations were used to measure the impact of the program.

Here we can read some examples of testimonials and anecdotal evidence based on what the students said during the interviews and during informal gatherings:

"The students in GS expressed that they appreciated these activities. The majority mentioned that they enjoyed getting to know other students through games. Especially because it was easier to communicate when you didn't know the language very well. Some mentioned that they were introverted and struggled to make friends, but because of these activities they felt safer. Especially when someone smiled or greeted them in the corridors."

Overall Findings:

The program has had a positive impact on both migrant and senior students. It has helped build a more supportive and inclusive school community where all students feel valued and supported in their personal growth and development. The program has also helped to promote cultural understanding, improve language proficiency, and develop leadership skills.

It seems that the finding shows that the activities had a positive impact on the well-being, resilience, and mental health of both the senior and migrant students involved. By providing a supportive and inclusive community, the program helped to foster a sense of belonging and connection among students, which can improve mental health and well-being.



Additionally, peer mentoring, cultural exchange, and language exchange activities helped to develop leadership skills and social support networks, which can increase resilience and provide a sense of purpose and meaning. These factors can be particularly important for migrant students who may be facing challenges related to language, culture, and trauma.

These activities also helped to promote a more supportive and inclusive school community, where all students feel valued and supported in their personal growth and development. Some of our findings suggest that these activities promoted:

- **Increased language proficiency:** by participating in language exchanges, migrant students can improve their language skills, making it easier for them to communicate. This reduced their stress and anxiety levels caused by nonbeing still proficient in their new common language.
- **Improved cultural understanding:** organizing cultural events can foster a greater understanding and appreciation of different cultures, which can help create a more inclusive community.
- **Increased sense of belonging:** by being assigned a mentor, our students can develop a sense of belonging and community, which can help them feel more comfortable and confident in their new environment.
- **Improved academic performance:** by providing support and guidance, migrant students seem to be better equipped to understand and succeed in the academic system in Norway
- It was also an excellent way to help our senior students to relax and engage in meaningful activities outside of the classroom, while also promoting a greater sense of community and understanding with other types of students.
- It also helped us challenge negative stereotypes and biases, while building leadership skills and promoting a culture of inclusivity and diversity.
- Students developed holistically with these experiences; emphasizing the development of the whole person rather than simply focusing on academic achievement is something that our students need, since character development is extremely important for young people.



By building resilience and fostering a sense of community and support, recently arrived students may experience a smoother start into Norwegian society. Our school senior students may also develop a greater appreciation for cultural diversity and gain valuable skills and experiences that can be useful in their future careers.

These activities can also promote a more inclusive and diverse school community, where all students feel valued and respected for their unique cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Overall, the project has the potential to be a positive and impactful experience for all involved and can contribute to building a more inclusive and resilient community. We suggest, therefore, that this program has had a significant positive impact on the mental health, resilience, and well-being of both migrant and senior students, providing them with the resources and support they need to thrive in their new school environment.

However, we need to acknowledge the limitations of our project since not all schools may have senior students who are able to commit to such an extensive volunteer program. Therefore, we suggest that school leaders at schools working with immersion classes dedicate time and resources to develop similar projects, in order to improve the integration and well-being of these students (module 5, school policy). Additionally, it is important to recognize the value of meaningful extracurricular activities for senior students, and the positive effect of these in their own well-being and resilience.

Suggestions:

Based on the findings, it is suggested that similar programs be implemented in other schools to promote well-being and integration of migrant students. It is also recommended that future initiatives focus on character development and leadership skills to help students develop holistically.

Future initiatives could further emphasize the development of well-being and resilience among both migrant and native students. This could involve providing



training for mentors and teachers on how to recognize and address mental health issues, as well as implementing stress-reduction techniques in the school environment. By prioritizing these aspects of students' personal growth and development, schools can help create a more supportive and inclusive community, where students can overcome challenges and achieve their full potential, something especially relevant when teaching recently arrived students.

Conclusions:

The findings lead to the conclusion that activities that promote cultural exchange, language exchange, and peer mentoring can help improve the well-being and integration of migrant students. These activities also help to build a more supportive and inclusive school community, where all students feel valued and supported in their personal growth and development. Such initiatives should be continued in the future to improve the well-being of all students.

The integration and well-being of migrant students should not be viewed as a separate issue from the overall well-being of the school community. In Norway, as in many other countries, there is a need to address the lack of interaction and understanding between migrant and Norwegian students. Creating opportunities for cultural exchange can help break down barriers and promote cultural understanding. Moreover, it is crucial that the school system actively works to combat prejudices and discrimination towards migrant students. By prioritizing the well-being and integration of all students, schools can create a more positive and supportive learning environment.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that many Norwegian students may not be aware of the challenges faced by immigrant students, as they often focus mainly on academic performance and grades. This can lead to a lack of understanding and empathy towards their peers from different backgrounds. Furthermore, studies have shown that Norwegian students experience high levels of anxiety and other mental



health issues related to academic pressure. It is therefore crucial to provide more opportunities for extracurricular activities that promote well-being and cultural exchange, not only for recently arrived students but for all students.

In addition, these activities can also have a positive impact on the well-being and resilience of the teachers involved. Engaging in meaningful and rewarding activities that promote diversity and inclusivity can lead to a sense of purpose and fulfilment, which can in turn improve the mental health and well-being of teachers.

PICTURES: (EVIDENCE)



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