

Description of Student Supports and Environment: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract. Understanding how senior high school students perceive their school environment is essential for strengthening student well-being and school outcomes. This mixed methods study employed an explanatory sequential design to examine students' perceptions and experiences of teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and school safety in a public secondary school in Lanao del Norte, Philippines. In the quantitative phase, all 139 senior high school students were surveyed using a standardized student supports and environment questionnaire. Descriptive results showed moderate perceptions of teacher-student relationships and school safety, but a very low sense of belonging. Regression analysis further revealed that teacher-student relationships and school safety significantly predicted students' sense of belonging, with teacher-student relationships emerging as the stronger unique predictor. In the qualitative phase, eight students participated in semi-structured interviews to explain the quantitative patterns in greater depth and context. Thematic analysis showed that students generally experienced teachers as supportive, approachable, patient, and understanding, yet these positive interactions were often insufficient to offset exclusionary peer dynamics and limited opportunities for meaningful participation. Students' sense of belonging was strengthened by structured activities, teacher recognition, and inclusive peer relationships, but weakened by cliques and social exclusion. Perceived school safety was associated with the visible presence of authority figures and the consistent enforcement of rules, whereas overcrowding and inadequate supervision contributed to feelings of vulnerability. The findings indicate that improving students' sense of belonging requires coordinated efforts that strengthen teacher-student relationships, promote inclusive peer engagement, and enhance safety conditions within the school environment. These results also emphasize the value of combining statistical trends with student narratives in understanding school climate.

Introduction

Over the years, education has been proven to be fundamental in developing and improving lives. It provides humans with the knowledge, skills, and values required to manage the world's complexities and contribute to personal growth, social progress, and economic development (Martin, 2023; OECD, 2018). In its vital role, it is essential to recognize that attaining educational success is not just a simple process. One must overcome personal limitations, adapt to new learning methods, manage time effectively, and persist despite setbacks and challenges to achieve an excellent academic performance.

The concept of student supports and environment encompasses various factors within educational institutions that contribute to students' holistic growth and achievement. This includes not only the provision of academic resources and services (Closa & Sarmiento, 2023; DeFrain & Hong, 2020; Voisin et al., 2023) but also the importance of creating inclusive (Lin & Kennette, 2022), nurturing, and culturally responsive spaces (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021; Sande & Burnett, 2023) that address students' diverse needs.

Among these factors, teacher-student relationships are particularly crucial. Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with higher academic achievement, increased classroom engagement, and improved social-emotional development (Nasir, 2023). When teachers establish trust and care, they enhance students' sense of security and belonging in the classroom (Ode et al., 2023; Quill & Kahu, 2022).

Another essential indicator of student well-being and academic success is the sense of belonging—the perception of being accepted, valued, and included in a given environment (Aprianif et al., 2023; Blanchard et al., 2022). Students with a strong sense of belonging are more likely to exhibit positive academic behaviors and persevere through challenges (Allen et al., 2022; Wafaa et al., 2022).

Equally important is school safety, a foundational component of effective learning environments. A safe and secure school enables students to thrive academically and emotionally (Ode et al., 2023; Xi & Reed, 2023). Conversely, perceptions of an unsafe environment may lead to stress and anxiety, impairing students' focus and academic performance (Kaiko et al., 2023; Monica et al., 2022; Modiba, 2022).

This present study is grounded in the Ecological Systems Theory proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 (Mathias, 2023), which serves as the foundation for exploration. This theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of environments that shape an individual's development. In the context of education, it suggests that a child's academic success is influenced by a series of nested systems, ranging from their immediate classroom experience (microsystem) to broader societal factors (macrosystem). Within these systems, student supports and environment like positive teacher-student relationships, a sense of belonging, and a safe learning environment all play a crucial role in fostering academic growth.

Despite the growing recognition of supportive environments in enhancing student well-being and academic success, gaps remain in understanding how these factors are perceived and experienced. Many students still report feelings of disconnection and insecurity within their schools, highlighting a critical gap in understanding the factors contributing to these perceptions. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring both the statistical trends in student perceptions and the lived experiences that inform these views.

Specifically, this study determined the Senior High School students' self-perception of student supports; examined the extent to which perceived teacher-student relationships and school safety predict students' sense of belonging in school; explored how the Senior High School students describe their experiences and interactions with teachers; feel a sense of belonging or exclusion within their school environment; and the factors that contribute to or detract from their sense of safety within the school environment.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed mixed methods explanatory sequential design to examine students' perceptions of student supports and their school environment. This design proved particularly useful for understanding the broad trends and relationships identified in the quantitative phase and elaborating on them through qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach allowed the study to move beyond surface-level data, capturing not only the broad patterns in student perceptions but also school experiences that shaped how students view their school environment.

In the context of this study, the explanatory sequential design first gathered quantitative data from Senior High School students on their perceptions of key variables, including teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and school safety. In the subsequent qualitative phase, selected students participated in interviews to provide deeper insights into their experiences related to these variables.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in a public secondary school in the rural area of Lanao del Norte, which falls under the jurisdiction of the DepEd Division of Lanao del Norte. The school served a population of both junior and senior high school students. It offered diverse strands for senior high school students, including Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), General Academic (GA), Home Economics (HE), and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The study focused on the senior high school students in this setting, capturing their perspectives on the supports and environment provided by the school. This rural setting offered a unique context to understand students' perceptions of educational support, teacher-student relationships, and school safety.

Respondents and Participants

The study adopted a two-phase sampling approach in respondents and participants. In the quantitative phase, the entire population of senior high school students (N = 139) was surveyed using a complete enumeration method to ensure that all student voices were represented. In the qualitative phase, a purposive sampling technique was used to select a smaller group of 8 students (until data saturation was reached) from the survey respondents, selecting students who reflect various perceptions of support and school environment. These students reflected various perceptions of support and school environment and were invited for follow-up interviews to provide a deeper understanding of the trends identified in the survey.

Research Instruments

This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments:

Student Supports and Environment Questionnaire (Appendix A): The quantitative phase utilized a standardized questionnaire adapted from the Social-Emotional Learning Panorama Education (2015). This tool measured perceptions in three main areas: teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and school safety. Each area was rated on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Appendix B): For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the results of the quantitative data. The interview explored students' personal experiences regarding the support systems, relationships with teachers, and sense of safety within the school.

Data Collection

In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a survey administered to all senior high school students. The data were collected using a paper-based method to ensure accessibility for all students. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. In the second phase, qualitative data were collected from selected students via semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted face-to-face. Each interview lasted around 15-30 minutes, was audio-recorded with participant consent, and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided both phases of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study. Students received clear information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was ensured by assigning code numbers to participants and removing identifying information. In the qualitative phase, additional steps were taken to create a comfortable and respectful environment, encouraging honest responses. All data, both quantitative and qualitative, were securely stored and accessible only by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean scores and standard deviations, to summarize students' perceptions of support and environment. To identify trends and notable patterns, jamovi version 2.4.11, a free and open-source computer program for data analysis and performing statistical tests, was used.

For the qualitative phase, the interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Thematic coding was applied to identify recurring patterns and themes that align with or contradict the quantitative results. The integration of both phases occurred during the interpretation stage, where the qualitative data were used to explain the relationships and patterns discovered in the quantitative analysis.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the integrated findings from quantitative (descriptive statistics) and qualitative (thematic analysis) data, organized by research question to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' self-perceptions and experiences within their school environment.

Students' Level of Self-Perception on Student Supports and Environment

Table 1 displays the senior high school students' self-perception of student supports and environment in terms of teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and school safety. The data indicates that the senior high school students perceived moderate teacher-student relationships ($M = 3.12$; $SD = 0.92$). This means that students feel that their teachers are moderately respectful, concerned about their well-being, interested in their lives, and someone they would be excited to have as a teacher again. This is supported by Bilgiler et al. (n.d.), who found that the relationship between teachers and students in secondary schools is moderate. Their study remarks that student-teacher relationships are present in secondary schools, but teachers do not prioritize them when managing classroom activities. Similarly, a study by Roorda et al. (2017) underscores the importance of teacher-student relationships in fostering positive academic outcomes and emotional well-being.

The students perceived a very low sense of belonging in their school environment ($M = 1.82$; $SD = 1.11$). This means that students feel a lack of connection, understanding, respect, and importance by their peers and adults within their school community. These findings corroborate Willms (2003), who observed that even students involved in school activities and possessing good literacy skills might exhibit a low sense of belonging. Moreover, more recent literature by Allen et al. (2018) highlights that a sense of belonging is critical for adolescent development and mental health. Schools that fail to create inclusive and supportive environments risk leaving students disengaged and alienated. This lack of belonging can also exacerbate feelings of social exclusion, as noted by Eccles and Roeser (2015), who emphasized the psychological importance of students feeling connected to their educational settings.

Furthermore, as shown in the table, the level of perception of school safety among students is moderate ($M = 2.91$; $SD = 1.16$). This means that students have differing experiences and perspectives regarding school safety. Some students feel relatively safe and secure, while others have experienced or witnessed incidents that make them feel less safe or concerned about their well-being. This finding is consistent with the study of Mowen and Freng (2018), which says that students and schools hold differing opinions on school safety, which are shaped by various factors within the community. Additionally, Astor et al. (2023) highlighted that school safety perceptions can be influenced by factors such as school policies, physical infrastructure, and peer relationships. Creating a safe school environment is essential for students' emotional and academic well-being, as unsafe environments can hinder learning and increase stress (Svetlana et al., 2024).

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers and school administrators prioritize improving teacher-student relationships to establish a more positive and supportive environment, address the low sense of belonging among students by fostering connection and inclusivity, and consider the varying perceptions of school safety among students by implementing measures to enhance security and address concerns to ensure the well-being of all students.

Constructs	Mean	SD	Remarks
Teacher-Student Relationships	3.12	0.92	Moderate
Sense of Belonging	1.82	1.11	Very Low
School Safety	2.91	1.16	Moderate
Overall	2.62	1.06	Moderate

Scale: 1.00 - 1.80 = Very Low; 1.81 - 2.60 = Low; 2.61 - 3.40 = Moderate; 3.41 - 4.20 = High; and 4.21 - 5.00 = Very High

Table 1. Students' Self-Perception of Student Supports and Environment

Teacher-Student Relationships and School Safety as Predictors of Sense of Belonging

Table 2 presents the regression analysis examining how teacher-student relationships and school safety predict students' sense of belonging. The overall model is statistically significant, $F(2, 132) = 14.29$, $p < .001$, and explains 17.8 percent of the variance in students' sense of belonging ($R^2 = .178$; Adjusted $R^2 = .165$). This indicates that, taken together, teacher-student relationships and school safety make a meaningful contribution to how strongly students feel accepted, respected, and connected in their school, although other factors beyond the model also shape their sense of belonging. Comparable proportions of explained variance are reported in recent meta-analytic and systematic reviews that identify school climate and interpersonal supports as consistent predictors of belonging and related academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Allen et al., 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2020; Štremfel et al., 2024).

The results show that teacher-student relationship is a significant positive predictor of sense of belonging ($B = 0.382$, $\beta = 0.385$, $p < .001$). This means that students who perceive more caring, respectful, and supportive relationships with their teachers tend to report a stronger sense of belonging, even when school safety is held constant. In practical terms, improvements in relational quality with teachers are associated with noticeable gains in students' feelings of being valued

members of the school community. This finding is consistent with empirical work showing that warm, supportive teacher-student relationships enhance adolescents' sense of school belonging and engagement (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020; Wong et al., 2019). Likewise, Allen et al. (2021) emphasized that teacher support is a central relational mechanism through which schools foster belonging, and highlighted the importance of everyday interactions where teachers convey care, high expectations, and respect for students' individuality.

School safety also emerges as a significant positive predictor of sense of belonging ($B = 0.297, \beta = 0.209, p = .009$). Students who feel safer in school, both physically and emotionally, are more likely to feel that they belong, even after accounting for the quality of teacher-student relationships. This suggests that a secure environment, where students are protected from violence, bullying, and other threats, provides an important foundation for feeling accepted and included. Consistent with this pattern, Williams et al. (2018) found that students who perceived their schools as unsafe were more likely to avoid school and report lower belonging, with perceptions of safety shaped by bullying, relationships with adults, and clarity of rules. Broader reviews of school safety likewise stress that safety, school climate, and supportive relationships work together to influence students' engagement and connection to school.

In light of these converging findings, the regression results suggest that efforts to improve senior high school students' sense of belonging should focus on two complementary strands. First, strengthen teacher-student relationships through consistent care, formative feedback, and relational classroom practices that communicate respect and high expectations. Second, address school safety through clear and fairly enforced rules, anti-bullying and anti-harassment initiatives, and visible adult presence in classrooms and common areas. Enhancing these relational and safety conditions is likely to be especially important in contexts where descriptive results show a low sense of belonging, because even modest improvements in teacher-student relationships and perceived safety can translate into meaningful gains in how students experience their school community.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.20	.419		2.87	.005
Teacher-Student Relationship	.382	.079	.385	4.86**	.000
School Safety	.297	.113	.209	2.64**	.009
Model Summary					
R = .422 R ² = .178 Adjusted R ² = .165 F(2, 132) = 14.29** p = .001					

Table 2. Regression Analysis of the Influence of Teacher-Student Relationship and School Safety on their Sense of Belonging

Students' Description of their Experiences and Interactions with Teachers

Senior high school students generally describe their experiences with teachers as positive, emphasizing support, approachability, and understanding. Teachers are seen as patient and empathetic guides who provide academic and personal assistance, foster open communication, and adapt to students' needs. While some teachers are strict, this is balanced by their willingness to help and create a structured, yet supportive, learning environment. The major themes in this section are:

Teachers as Supportive Guides. Teachers are viewed as supportive figures who go beyond their instructional roles to provide assistance with academic challenges. This theme emphasizes their dedication to student success, evident in their willingness to offer extra help, adapt to students' needs, and provide guidance during difficulties. Supportiveness fosters trust and strengthens the teacher-student relationship. Participant 8 mentioned:

"If I don't understand something, I can go to them, and they explain it again. Their willingness to help makes me feel like they prioritize the students. (Participant 8)"

This reflects Anila et al.'s (2024) findings, which emphasize that strong teacher-student relationships significantly enhance academic engagement and emotional well-being. Similarly, Singleton (2023) underscored that teacher empathy and responsiveness contribute to creating a student-centered environment that supports academic and personal development. In addition, Ma (2021) found that consistent teacher support improves students' resilience and self-efficacy, particularly in handling challenging academic tasks.

Approachability and Open Communication. Teachers create an environment where students feel comfortable seeking help, asking questions, or discussing challenges. Approachability builds trust and fosters an accessible learning atmosphere, allowing students to freely express their concerns and clarify doubts. The accounts of Participant 2 revealed:

"The teachers are very approachable. It's easy to go to them if you need something or have questions." (Participant 2)

This finding is consistent with Rogers' (1983) theory of unconditional positive regard, which stresses the importance of empathetic and accessible teacher-student interactions. Recent research by Ahmad et al. (2024) further validates this, showing that teacher approachability enhances students' willingness to communicate, ultimately improving academic outcomes. Moreover, studies by Nazish et al. (2024) revealed that when students perceive teachers as approachable, their academic motivation and classroom participation increase significantly.

Patience and Understanding. Teachers are described as patient and empathetic in dealing with students' academic and personal struggles. They show understanding by re-explaining lessons, offering deadline extensions, and addressing personal concerns without judgment. This patience fosters a supportive and non-intimidating learning environment. Participant 2 shared:

"If we don't get the lesson, they explain it again. If we can't finish the requirements on time, they understand and give us extra time." (Participant 2)

These practices align with findings by Kim et al. (2024), who identified emotional competence as a key factor in fostering supportive and non-intimidating learning environments. Additionally, Basak and Basu (2024) emphasized that patient teaching approaches enhance students' confidence and willingness to persist through academic challenges.

Balance of Strictness and Support. While some teachers are perceived as strict, students understand that this stems from the need to uphold school policies and maintain discipline. This strictness is balanced by teachers' willingness to help and empathize, which creates a fair and structured learning environment. Participant 6 stated:

"Even though some are strict, they are still good because they explain things clearly and have patience." (Participant 6)

This perspective mirrors Žerak et al.'s (2023) research, which highlights that authoritative teaching styles—characterized by high expectations paired with warmth—promote student success. Furthermore, Salainti et al. (2024) demonstrated that balancing strictness with support cultivates a sense of security and fairness among students, which positively impacts their academic and social development.

Students' Feelings of Sense of Belonging or Exclusion within their School Environment

Senior high school students develop a sense of belonging through participation in group activities, school events, and teacher-supported tasks that foster interaction, recognition, and connection with peers and teachers. Supportive friendships and teacher acknowledgment play crucial roles in reinforcing inclusion, while exclusive peer dynamics, social cliques, or lack of engagement can lead to feelings of exclusion. These experiences highlight the importance of structured activities, inclusive peer relationships, and teacher support in creating a welcoming school environment. This section presents the following major themes:

Participation in Structured and Interactive Activities. A sense of belonging is fostered when students engage in structured group tasks, collaborative projects, or interactive classroom activities. These provide spaces where students can interact meaningfully, feel valued, and contribute to shared goals. The absence of such opportunities may hinder feelings of connection, especially for students without strong social networks. Participant 3 shared:

"I feel connected when we have school events and other activities. I always join the programs, and I get to meet other students too." (Participant 3)

This supports Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis, which posits that meaningful social interactions are essential for psychological well-being. Similarly, Bhullar et al. (2024) emphasized that participation in extracurricular and group activities significantly improves students' sense of community and connection. Such activities provide opportunities for collaboration, reinforcing a sense of inclusion and shared purpose.

Teacher Support and Recognition. Teachers play a pivotal role in fostering inclusion by creating supportive learning environments, guiding students during activities, and recognizing individual efforts. Teacher acknowledgment helps students feel valued even when peer support is lacking, acting as a stabilizing factor for students' sense of belonging. Participant 6 reported:

"The teachers made me feel included because, even though I don't always answer during recitations, they still recognized my effort. I felt like I was still important in the class." (Participant 6)

This finding aligns with Francis et al.'s (2024) research, which highlights the buffering role of teacher acknowledgment in reducing feelings of exclusion and fostering inclusivity. Moreover, Dukynaitė and Dudaitė (2017) found that teacher recognition of student efforts enhances feelings of classroom belonging, particularly for students who struggle with peer acceptance.

Peer Relationships and Dynamics. Peer relationships significantly shape students' sense of belonging. Supportive friendships and inclusive behaviors promote connection and a sense of community. Conversely, exclusive peer dynamics, such as cliques or neglect in social or academic settings, lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion. Participant 4 and Participant 7 recounted:

"I feel like I belong at school because my friends are always there for me; they support me, and I feel like I'm not alone." (Participant 4)

"There were times I felt left out by my classmates, especially when they organized outings and didn't invite me; it felt they didn't include me because I'm not close to them." (Participant 7)

These experiences align with Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory, which underscores the importance of relatedness in promoting social well-being and intrinsic motivation. Additionally, Montecillo et al. (2024) highlighted that fostering inclusive peer cultures within schools can significantly mitigate feelings of exclusion and promote a greater sense of belonging.

Students' Descriptions on the Factors that Contribute to or Detract from their Sense of Safety within the School Environment

Students' sense of safety in school is bolstered by the visible presence of authority figures, such as teachers and security personnel, who provide reassurance and maintain order. Clear rules and consistent enforcement create a structured environment that fosters trust, while overcrowding and insufficient supervision during high-risk periods contribute to feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. Overall, students view attentive authority, proactive care, and organized settings as critical to their perception of safety within the school. The major themes in this section are:

Presence of Authority Figures Enhances Safety. A sense of safety is heightened when authority figures, such as teachers and security guards, are visibly present and actively monitoring the school environment. Their presence provides reassurance and psychological security, especially during unstructured times such as breaks and dismissal. Conversely, the absence of authority figures leads to feelings of unease and vulnerability. Participant 1 shared:

"For me, I feel safe at school because there are security guard and teachers who watch over us. I experienced a time when there was trouble outside the gate, but the guard kept an eye on us, so I felt safe." (Participant 1)

This finding aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which highlights the importance of proximal processes, such as active supervision, in creating safe and supportive environments. Similarly, Freeman et al. (2024) reported that active monitoring significantly reduces violence and fosters trust in school systems. Adding to this, Wendy et al. (2024) emphasized that consistent adult presence in schools strengthens perceptions of safety and reduces behavioral issues during high-risk periods.

Rules Strengthen a Sense of Order and Security. Clear rules and consistent enforcement provide students with a sense of predictability and protection, fostering feelings of safety. Guidelines, such as wearing IDs, dispersing crowds, and ensuring safe movement during high-traffic times, contribute to an organized environment that students perceive as secure. Strict enforcement, while sometimes inconvenient, is viewed as necessary for maintaining order. Participant 5 shared:

"Most of the time, I feel safe at school because there are many rules being followed. I experienced being reprimanded by the guard for not wearing my ID. Even though it was strict, I felt safe because they had guidelines." (Participant 5)

This observation aligns with Upsher et al.'s (2022) findings, which emphasize the role of structured policies in mitigating risks and promoting student well-being. Furthermore, Urquiola and Motus (2024) noted that transparent communication of rules and consistent enforcement significantly reduce instances of peer aggression and enhance students' confidence in the school system.

Overcrowding and Lack of Supervision Cause Vulnerability. Overcrowding, particularly in hallways, classrooms, and school grounds, exacerbates feelings of vulnerability. Students report heightened unease in situations where supervision is limited or delayed responses to conflicts occur. Chaotic conditions, such as fights, bullying, or unmanaged crowds, detract from their sense of security and trust in the school environment. Participant 2 expressed:

"I don't feel very safe when other students gather and cause trouble. I had an experience where there was a fight on the school grounds, and even though I was far, I felt scared because no one controlled the situation right away." (Participant 2)

These concerns echo Johnny et al.'s (2023) findings, which identified overcrowding and lack of supervision as key contributors to school-related anxiety and insecurity. Similarly, Byxbe and Urbina (2015) highlighted that schools with high student densities often face increased disruptions, emphasizing the need for better crowd management strategies and improved supervision to reduce fear and ensure a secure learning environment.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study reveal that senior high school students' perceptions of their school environment are shaped by a complex interaction of relational, social, and environmental conditions. Although teacher-student relationships and school safety were both perceived at a moderate level, students reported a very low sense of belonging, indicating that feeling accepted, valued, and connected within the school remains a significant concern. The study further established that teacher-student relationships and school safety significantly predicted students' sense of belonging, with teacher-student relationships emerging as the stronger unique predictor. Qualitative results reinforced these patterns by showing that supportive, approachable, and understanding teachers contribute meaningfully to students' trust and engagement, yet such support alone may not be sufficient when peer exclusion, limited structured participation, overcrowding, and inadequate supervision persist within the school environment.

These findings carry important implications for educational practice. First, they suggest that strengthening teacher-student relationships is central to improving students' sense of belonging. Relational practices characterized by empathy, recognition, clear communication, and consistent support appear to function as important conditions for student inclusion and engagement. Second, the findings imply that belonging is not produced solely through classroom interaction, but also through broader school experiences shaped by peer relationships, participation in structured activities, and opportunities for meaningful social connection. Third, school safety should be understood not only as protection from harm, but also as a condition that supports emotional security and school connectedness. The visible presence of authority figures, consistent implementation of rules, and orderly school routines appear to reinforce students' perceptions of safety, while overcrowding and limited supervision may weaken these perceptions.

The study also has implications for school leadership, student support systems, and policy development. For school administrators and teachers, the findings highlight the value of cultivating inclusive and supportive school climates where students are recognized, guided, and meaningfully engaged. For guidance programs and student development initiatives, the results point to the importance of addressing peer exclusion and promoting positive social interaction as part of efforts to strengthen belonging. At the policy level, the findings suggest the need to revisit school-based support structures, safety practices, and inclusion-oriented programs to ensure that they respond to students' lived experiences and not merely to institutional expectations.

Finally, the study has implications for future research. The low sense of belonging reported by students, despite moderate perceptions of teacher-student relationships and safety, suggests that other contextual and personal factors may also shape students' school experiences. Future studies may therefore examine additional influences such as family support, peer culture, student diversity, and participation in school programs. Longitudinal and intervention-based research may also provide deeper insight into how improvements in relational support and school safety translate into stronger and more sustained student belonging over time.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to privacy, confidentiality, and ethical restrictions involving human participants, but may be available from the corresponding authors on reasonable request and subject to appropriate ethical approval.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.