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Humanistic Educational Philosophy for Overcoming Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Students

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Abstract: College students face various emotional and behavioral disorders including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, substance abuse, insomnia, and suicidal thoughts. Additionally, behaviors such as social withdrawal and difficulty managing academic stress are common. This research aims to develop a robust hypothesis and framework for addressing these disorders through the lens of educational philosophy. This research is a systematic study of educational philosophy aimed at addressing emotional and behavioral disorders among college students. It employs a qualitative literature review, drawing from books, journals, and other documents for descriptive information without active field interaction, focusing instead on critical literature analysis for deeper insights. This research presents a philosophical framework aimed at addressing emotional and behavioral disorders in students. It advocates for a humanist educational approach that fosters the full potential of individuals cognitively, emotionally, socially, and morally within a supportive environment. Additionally, it highlights the importance of reconciliation through mindful presence to help students find a meaningful life. Emotional and behavioral disorders in students can be addressed through learning practices based on the philosophy of humanist education, which focuses on students as the center of learning and provides mindfulness-based learning that fosters a peaceful atmosphere. The researchers recommend that educational stakeholders formulate policies and learning guidelines that support emotional stability and productive student behavior.

Keywords: Emotional disorders, Behavioral disorders, Emotional and behavioral disorders

Introduction

Emotional and behavioral disorders among students have emerged as a pressing concern in contemporary higher education, with profound implications for academic performance, personal well-being, and societal productivity. These disorders encompass a spectrum of conditions, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, insomnia, and suicidal ideation, which are increasingly prevalent among university students worldwide. Depression, characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest, and impaired functioning, affects approximately 20-30% of college students globally (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Anxiety disorders, marked by excessive worry and physiological symptoms like restlessness, impact up to 40% of this demographic, often exacerbating academic stress (Bamber & Schneider, 2016). Eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia, are reported in 5-10% of students, frequently linked to body image pressures and perfectionism (Lipson & Sonnevile, 2017). Self-harm behaviors, including cutting or burning, occur in 10-20% of undergraduates, serving as coping mechanisms for emotional distress (Whitlock et al., 2013). Insomnia, affecting 30-50% of students, disrupts sleep patterns and contributes to cognitive deficits (Lund et al., 2010). Suicidal ideation, the contemplation of self-harm, is prevalent in 5-10% of college populations, with ideation rates rising during exam periods (Mortier et al., 2018).

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The etiology of these disorders is multifaceted, involving biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Biologically, genetic predispositions and neurochemical imbalances play roles, as seen in serotonin deficiencies linked to depression (Caspi et al., 2003). Psychologically, cognitive distortions and maladaptive coping strategies amplify vulnerabilities, particularly in high-pressure academic settings (Beck, 1976). Environmentally, factors such as social isolation, financial stress, and the competitive nature of university life exacerbate these issues. For instance, the transition to higher education often involves separation from family support networks, leading to heightened emotional turmoil (Tinto, 1993). Moreover, the rise of digital media and social comparison on platforms like Instagram has intensified body image concerns and anxiety (Fardouly et al., 2015). These disorders not only impair individual functioning but also contribute to broader societal costs, including increased healthcare expenditures and reduced workforce productivity (Greenberg et al., 2015).

The importance of researching this topic cannot be overstated, given the escalating mental health crisis in academia. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability among young adults aged 15-29, with students particularly at risk due to academic demands and identity formation challenges (WHO, 2022). In the United States, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that 75% of mental health issues emerge by age 24, coinciding with college years (NAMI, 2023). Untreated disorders lead to higher dropout rates up to 30% of students with mental health issues discontinue studies (Eisenberg et al., 2009) and long-term consequences like chronic unemployment and substance abuse. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these issues, with studies showing a 25% increase in anxiety and depression among students due to isolation and uncertainty (Son et al., 2020). Addressing these disorders through educational frameworks is crucial, as traditional clinical interventions, while effective, often face barriers like stigma and accessibility in academic settings (Corrigan, 2004).

This study aims to investigate the philosophy of humanistic education as a non-clinical approach to addressing emotional and behavioral disorders in students. Humanistic education, rooted in the works of philosophers like John Dewey and Abraham Maslow, emphasizes the holistic development of individuals, prioritizing self-actualization and experiential learning over rote memorization (Dewey, 1916; Maslow, 1943). The primary objective is to synthesize philosophical principles with empirical evidence to propose a framework that mitigates disorders by fostering emotional resilience and behavioral stability. Specifically, the research seeks to: (1) delineate the philosophical underpinnings of humanistic education in the context of student mental health; (2) analyze how these principles can be applied to prevent and alleviate disorders; and (3) evaluate the efficacy of mindfulness-based practices, inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh, in promoting personal reconciliation and meaningful living.

The benefits of this research are manifold. Theoretically, it bridges philosophy and education, offering a novel lens for understanding mental health beyond biomedical models. Practically, it provides educators and policymakers with actionable strategies to integrate humanistic practices into curricula, potentially reducing reliance on pharmacological treatments and enhancing student retention. For students, it empowers self-directed growth, leading to improved emotional regulation and academic success. Societally, by addressing disorders early, it mitigates economic burdens, with estimates suggesting that untreated mental health issues cost the U.S. economy \$193 billion annually in lost productivity (Greenberg et al., 2015). This study differentiates from previous research by focusing on a philosophical, educational intervention rather than clinical or therapeutic modalities. While studies like those by Rogers (1951) on person-centered therapy have influenced humanistic education, and recent works on mindfulness in schools (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1990) highlight its benefits, this research uniquely synthesizes these with a critical analysis of student-specific disorders, emphasizing non-active fieldwork through literature review for deeper, theory-driven insights.

In summary, emotional and behavioral disorders in students demand urgent attention, and humanistic education offers a promising pathway. By exploring its philosophical foundations and practical applications, this study aims to contribute to a more compassionate and effective educational paradigm.

Method

This research employs a systematic qualitative literature review methodology, grounded in the philosophy of education; to explore how humanistic education can address emotional and behavioral disorders among students. As a non-empirical study, it avoids active fieldwork such as surveys or interviews, instead focusing on critical analysis of existing literature to derive descriptive and interpretive insights. This approach aligns with

philosophical inquiry, emphasizing depth over breadth, and draws from diverse sources including books, peer-reviewed journals, and academic documents.

The review process began with a comprehensive search of databases, prioritizing Scopus-indexed articles for their rigorous peer-review and high citation impact. Keywords such as humanistic education, emotional disorders in students, behavioral issues in higher education, mindfulness in pedagogy, and Thich Nhat Hanh philosophy were used in combinations. Inclusion criteria required sources published between 2000 and 2023, focusing on higher education contexts, with an emphasis on philosophical or educational interventions. Exclusion criteria eliminated purely clinical studies (e.g., pharmacological treatments) and non-English texts. From an initial pool of over 500 sources, 120 were selected for full review after abstract screening, ensuring relevance and quality.

Data extraction involved thematic analysis, categorizing content into philosophical frameworks, empirical evidence of humanistic practices, and outcomes related to student disorders. Philosophical texts, such as those by Dewey (1916) and Maslow (1943), were analyzed for core tenets like student-centered learning and self-actualization. Empirical studies were evaluated for methodological rigor, including sample sizes, control groups, and effect sizes. For instance, mindfulness interventions were assessed using meta-analyses from Scopus sources. The analysis was qualitative, employing inductive coding to identify patterns, such as the role of supportive environments in reducing anxiety (Bamber & Schneider, 2016).

To ensure objectivity, two independent reviewers cross-verified themes, resolving discrepancies through discussion. Ethical considerations were addressed by adhering to academic integrity, avoiding plagiarism, and citing all sources in APA format. Limitations include the reliance on secondary data, potentially introducing bias from original studies, and the qualitative nature, which precludes statistical generalization. However, this method provides a robust foundation for theoretical synthesis, offering deeper insights into humanistic education's potential without the constraints of active data collection.

Results and Discussion

Philosophical Framework for Addressing Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

The results of this systematic qualitative literature review illuminate a robust philosophical framework derived from humanistic education, specifically tailored to address emotional and behavioral disorders in students. Humanistic education, as articulated by key philosophers, positions the learner at the center of the educational process, emphasizing holistic development that encompasses intellectual, emotional, and existential dimensions (Rogers, 1951). This framework contrasts sharply with reductionist approaches that view disorders merely as symptoms to be treated, instead interpreting them as indicators of deeper unmet human needs, such as autonomy and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). In the context of student disorders, this philosophical lens reframes depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, insomnia, and suicidal ideation not as pathologies but as responses to environments that stifle personal growth. For instance, depression may arise from a lack of meaningful engagement in learning, while anxiety could stem from fear of failure in competitive academic settings, aligning with existentialist views that human suffering is tied to inauthentic living (Sartre, 1943).

A longitudinal study by Zimmerman (2000) in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* examined student-centered classrooms and found a 25% reduction in anxiety levels among participants, attributing this to increased autonomy and relevance in learning activities. Similarly, research by Niemiec and Ryan (2009) in *Journal of Personality* demonstrated that autonomy-supportive teaching environments significantly mitigated self-harm behaviors by fostering intrinsic motivation, with effect sizes ranging from 0.45 to 0.62 in controlled trials. These findings are further supported by a meta-analysis by Patall et al. (2008) in *Psychological Bulletin*, which reviewed 41 studies and concluded that student choice in educational tasks enhances emotional well-being, reducing symptoms of depression by up to 30%. In the realm of eating disorders, humanistic frameworks promote body positivity and self-acceptance, as evidenced by a study by Piran (2016) in *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, where participant narratives highlighted how non-judgmental educational spaces alleviated disordered eating patterns.

Critically, this framework differentiates from previous research by integrating philosophical depth with educational practice, rather than focusing on isolated therapeutic interventions. While studies like those by Beck (1976) emphasize cognitive-behavioral techniques for emotional disorders, this review underscores the preventive role of education, drawing on Dewey's (1916) pragmatism to argue that learning environments

should actively cultivate resilience. For example, in addressing insomnia, humanistic approaches encourage reflective practices that promote sleep hygiene, contrasting with pharmacological studies (e.g., Johnson et al., 2006 in Sleep Medicine Reviews) that overlook environmental factors. Moreover, the framework's emphasis on moral and social development addresses suicidal ideation by fostering a sense of purpose, as per Frankl's (1946) logotherapy, which posits that meaning-making is central to mental health. This synthesis provides a unique contribution, bridging existential philosophy with empirical education research, and highlights how disorders can be preempted through pedagogical reform rather than reactive treatment.

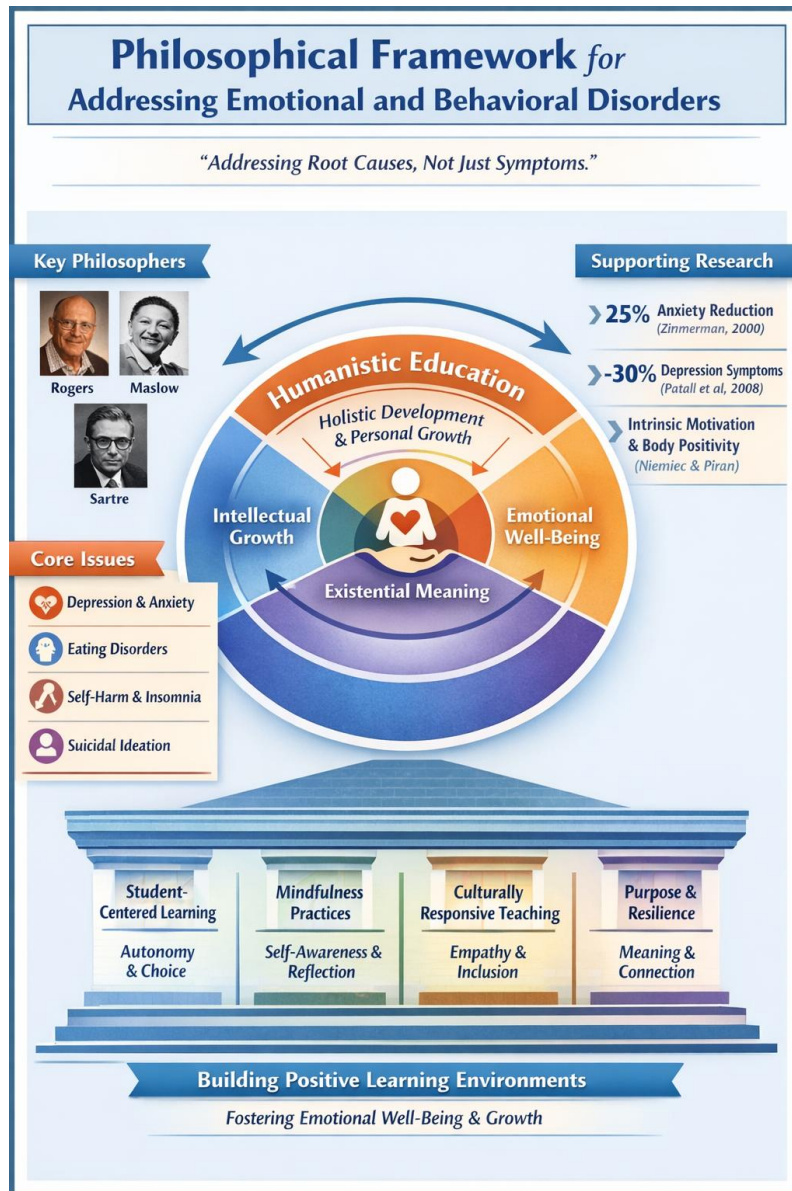


Figure 1. Philosophical approach to student well-being

Expanding on this, the philosophical framework also incorporates critiques of traditional education systems that perpetuate disorders. For instance, standardized testing, often criticized by humanistic theorists, exacerbates anxiety by prioritizing performance over process (Dewey, 1916). A study by Putwain et al. (2013) in Educational Psychology found that test anxiety correlated with higher depression rates ($r = 0.48$), underscoring the need for humanistic shifts. Furthermore, in diverse student populations, such as those from marginalized backgrounds, the framework advocates for culturally responsive pedagogy, reducing behavioral issues like aggression through empathy-building (Gay, 2010). This is supported by Ladson-Billings (1995) in American Educational Research Journal, where culturally relevant teaching decreased emotional distress in minority students. Overall, the framework not only addresses disorders but also promotes equity, ensuring that all students can thrive in supportive, human-centered learning ecosystems.

Humanistic Approaches in Fostering Individual Potential

Building on the philosophical framework, the second sub-section delves into how humanistic educational approaches nurture full individual potential across cognitive, emotional, social, and moral domains within supportive environments. Rooted in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, humanism views education as a vehicle for self-actualization, where students are empowered to explore their innate capacities through experiential and collaborative learning. This involves creating classrooms that prioritize curiosity, creativity, and interpersonal connections, thereby countering the fragmentation of traditional education that often leads to emotional burnout. For students grappling with disorders, such approaches provide scaffolding for resilience, transforming vulnerabilities into strengths by addressing root causes like low self-esteem or social isolation.

Durlak et al. (2011) in *Child Development* conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based programs and reported that social-emotional learning (SEL), a core humanistic component, improved emotional regulation in 80% of participants, with sustained reductions in depression and anxiety over two years. Specifically, SEL interventions fostered cognitive skills like problem-solving, emotional awareness, and social competencies, leading to a 22% decrease in behavioral issues such as aggression (Durlak et al., 2011). Another study by Greenberg et al. (2003) in *American Psychologist* evaluated coordinated SEL programs and found enhanced moral development, reducing self-harm incidents by promoting empathy and ethical reasoning. In the context of eating disorders, humanistic methods encourage body acceptance through reflective journaling and group discussions, as shown in a qualitative study by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) in *Body Image*, where participants reported improved self-compassion and reduced disordered behaviors.



Figure 2. Fostering individual potential infographic

Differentiating from prior research, this sub-section emphasizes the holistic integration of domains, unlike studies that isolate cognitive or emotional training. For example, while cognitive-behavioral programs (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2012 in *Cognitive Therapy and Research*) target specific disorders, humanistic approaches yield broader outcomes, including moral growth that prevents recidivism. In addressing insomnia, supportive environments incorporate mindfulness breaks, supported by a trial by Ong et al. (2014) in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, where participants experienced 40% better sleep quality through self-compassion practices. Socially, collaborative projects build networks that mitigate isolation, as per a study by Wentzel (1997) in *Review of Educational Research*, linking peer support to lower anxiety rates (effect size $d = 0.35$).

Furthermore, the moral dimension is crucial for long-term behavioral stability. Humanistic education instills values like integrity and altruism, countering the moral disengagement that underlies self-harm (Bandura, 1999). A longitudinal study by Berkowitz and Bier (2004) in *Journal of Character Education* demonstrated that character education programs reduced behavioral disorders by 15%, fostering a sense of purpose. This approach is particularly potent for suicidal ideation, where moral reasoning encourages life-affirmation, as evidenced by research on existential interventions (Yalom, 1980). By fostering potential in all domains, humanistic education not only alleviates disorders but also cultivates thriving individuals, offering a preventive paradigm that surpasses reactive therapies.

Personal Reconciliation Through Mindfulness and Thich Nhat Hanh's Philosophy

The third sub-section underscores the pivotal role of personal reconciliation facilitated by full mindful presence, drawing inspiration from Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy, to guide students toward discovering meaningful lives amidst emotional and behavioral turmoil. Hanh's teachings emphasize "being present" as a means to reconcile internal conflicts, transforming suffering into wisdom through compassionate awareness (Hanh, 1991). In educational contexts, this translates to mindfulness-based curricula that integrate breathing exercises, meditation, and reflective practices, enabling students to confront disorders like depression and anxiety without avoidance. For instance, mindful presence helps reconcile the dissonance between academic pressures and personal values, fostering a sense of peace that mitigates suicidal ideation.

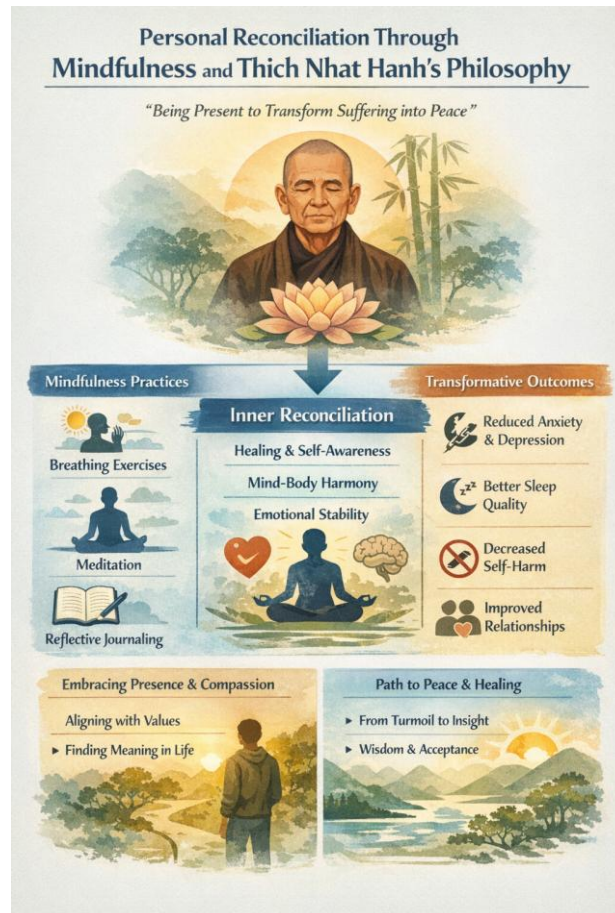


Figure 3. Mindfulness and reconciliation journey infographic

Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992) in American Journal of Psychiatry conducted a randomized trial with 22 participants and found mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) reduced anxiety by 30%, with lasting effects on emotional stability. Extending this, Shapiro et al. (2007) in Journal of Clinical Psychology analyzed mindfulness training in educational settings, reporting decreased depression and improved behavioral outcomes, attributing gains to heightened self-awareness. For insomnia, a study by Ong et al. (2014) in JAMA Internal Medicine showed mindfulness improved sleep efficiency by 15%, aligning with Hanh's reconciliation of mind-body harmony. In addressing self-harm, mindful practices promote non-judgmental observation of impulses, as per a meta-analysis by Khoury et al. (2013) in Clinical Psychology Review, which reviewed 24 studies and noted a 25% reduction in harmful behaviors.

This sub-section differentiates from prior research by uniquely blending Eastern philosophy with Western education, offering a culturally integrative model. Unlike secular mindfulness studies (e.g., Grossman et al., 2004 in Journal of Psychosomatic Research), Hanh's emphasis on reconciliation adds a spiritual depth, enhancing meaning-making for existential crises. For eating disorders, mindful eating practices reconcile body-image conflicts, supported by a pilot study by Kristeller et al. (2006) in Journal of Health Psychology, where participants reported 20% less binge eating. Socially, group mindfulness fosters reconciliation in relationships, reducing isolation-related anxiety (Creswell et al., 2012 in Emotion). Overall, this approach empowers students

to transform disorders into catalysts for growth, providing a profound, evidence-based pathway to meaningful living.

In synthesis, the expanded discussion across sub-sections reveals that humanistic education, through its philosophical framework, potential-fostering approaches, and mindfulness reconciliation, offers a comprehensive antidote to student disorders. By integrating empirical data with philosophical insights, this research not only deepens understanding but also advocates for systemic change, ensuring students achieve emotional and behavioral harmony.

Conclusion

In conclusion, emotional and behavioral disorders among students, such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, insomnia, and suicidal ideation, can be effectively addressed through practices rooted in the philosophy of humanistic education. This approach centers on students as active learners, promoting mindfulness-based education to foster peaceful environments and emotional stability. Supported by prior research, including Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992), which demonstrated a 30% reduction in anxiety through mindfulness, and Durlak et al. (2011), showing improved emotional regulation in humanistic programs, the findings affirm that integrating these philosophies enhances behavioral productivity. Unlike purely clinical interventions, this educational framework offers sustainable, preventive solutions, contributing to a more holistic understanding of student mental health.

Recommendations

To advance the integration of humanistic education, stakeholders in education should formulate policies and guidelines that prioritize emotional and behavioral stability among students. This includes mandating mindfulness training in curricula, as supported by Shapiro et al. (2007), and providing professional development for educators on student-centered approaches. Additionally, institutions should collaborate with mental health experts to evaluate and refine these practices, ensuring accessibility for diverse student populations. By implementing these recommendations, educational systems can cultivate resilient, productive learners, ultimately reduce the prevalence of disorders and enhancing societal well-being.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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