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Psychological Factors Influencing School Well-Being: A Systematic Review

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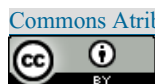
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ABSTRACT

School well-being is a key determinant of students' academic engagement and mental health, yet the range of psychological factors shaping it has not been comprehensively synthesised. This systematic literature review identifies and synthesises psychological factors influencing school well-being among students. A systematic search was conducted across PubMed, Science Direct, and ERIC for empirical quantitative studies published between 2016 and 2026, following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Of 1,264 records identified, 40 studies met the inclusion criteria and were appraised using JBI Critical Appraisal Checklists. Findings show that emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, resilience, intrinsic motivation, emotion regulation, growth mindset, and gratitude consistently and positively predict school well-being, with resilience and social support frequently acting as mediators. Perceived teacher, peer, and parental support also contributed indirectly through these psychological pathways. The review concludes that school well-being is substantially shaped by internal psychological resources rather than structural factors alone, supporting the integration of psychological skill-building programmes into school-based interventions. Longitudinal and cross-cultural research is recommended to strengthen causal inference.

INTRODUCTION

School well-being reflects students' subjective experience of satisfaction, positive affect, and meaningful engagement within the school context (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002). It is a critical determinant of academic performance, mental health, and long-term life outcomes, and low school well-being has been linked to anxiety, depression, and academic disengagement (Huebner & Gilman, 2006; Fiorilli et al., 2020).

Psychological factors internal to the student play a particularly influential role. Self-efficacy shapes how students approach academic challenges (Bandura, 1997); emotional intelligence enables adaptive management of emotions in social and academic contexts (Fiorilli et al., 2020); resilience buffers against adversity and stress (Surzykiewicz et al., 2022); and intrinsic motivation, rooted in Self-Determination Theory, sustains engagement and

satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Grassinger et al., 2024). Dispositional traits such as gratitude and growth mindset have also been linked to need fulfilment at school (Tian et al., 2016; Himmelberger et al., 2024).

Despite growing empirical interest, the literature lacks a comprehensive, methodologically rigorous synthesis of psychological factors as a collective set of determinants of school well-being. Existing reviews tend to focus narrowly on single constructs or specific populations, limiting generalisability (Limone & Toto, 2022). This systematic literature review (SLR) addresses this gap by identifying, critically appraising, and synthesising empirical studies on psychological factors influencing school well-being among students across educational levels, following PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and JBI critical appraisal methodology. The guiding research

question is: What psychological factors significantly influence school well-being among students, and what is the nature of these relationships?

METHODS

This review was conducted and reported according to PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Eligibility was defined using a PICO framework: Population — students at primary, secondary, or tertiary level; Issue — psychological factors as predictors; Context — formal school settings; Outcome — school well-being or closely related constructs. Only empirical, quantitative or mixed-methods studies published in English or Indonesian between 2016 and 2026, with accessible full text, were included. Qualitative studies, proceedings, books, book chapters, theses, dissertations, and opinion articles were excluded, as were studies not addressing psychological factors as a primary variable or lacking relevance to the review's aim.

A systematic search was conducted across ScienceDirect, PubMed, and ERIC. The search strategy applied in ScienceDirect used keyword combinations with Boolean operators: ("school well-being" OR "school wellbeing" OR "student wellbeing") AND ("student" OR "psychological" OR "psychosocial" OR "emotional"). The search strategy applied in PubMed used keyword combinations with Boolean operators: ("school well-being" OR "school wellbeing" OR "student well-being") AND ("psychological factors" OR "self-esteem" OR resilience OR "self-efficacy" OR "emotion

regulation" OR motivation OR "psychological capital" OR "sense of belonging" OR "social support") AND ("student"). The search strategy applied in ERIC used keyword combinations with Boolean operators: ("school well-being" OR "school wellbeing" OR "quality of school life") AND (student* OR adolescent*) AND ("psychological factor*" OR psychosocial OR resilience OR anxiety OR stress OR motivation OR "self-esteem") The search yielded 1,264 records (ScienceDirect = 885; PubMed = 314; ERIC = 65). After removing 17 duplicates, 1,247 records were screened by title and abstract, of which 1,128 were excluded as not relevant to school well-being. Of 119 reports sought for retrieval, 53 were not accessible in full text, leaving 66 reports assessed for eligibility. 26 reports did not meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria and were excluded, resulting in 40 studies included in the final synthesis (see Figure 1, PRISMA 2020 flow diagram).

Methodological quality was independently assessed by two reviewers using JBI Critical Appraisal Checklists appropriate to each design: the 8-item Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies (n = 28 studies) and the 9-item Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies (n = 12 studies). No study was excluded based on quality score; scores were instead used to contextualise the strength of evidence. Given substantial heterogeneity in designs, populations, and outcome measures, a narrative synthesis was conducted, with studies grouped thematically by psychological factor.

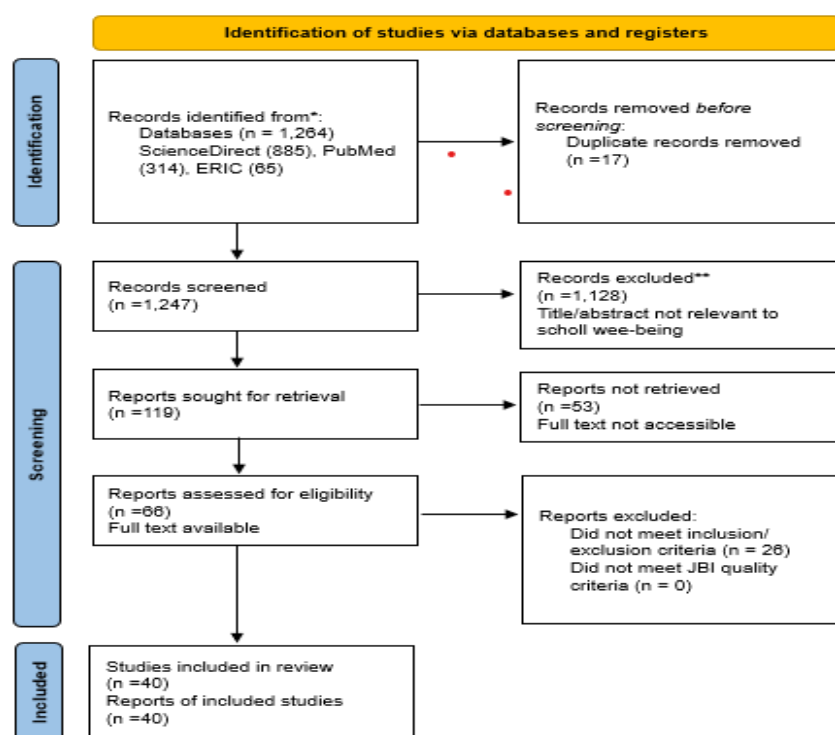


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study Characteristics. The 40 included studies were published between 2016 and 2026 across more than 15 countries, most commonly China, the United States, and European nations. Designs were predominantly cross-sectional ($n = 28$) with 12 quasi-experimental or RCT studies. Participants ranged from primary school children to university

students, with sample sizes from 24 to 8,376. Quality appraisal indicated generally high methodological rigour (mean JBI score: 79.9% for cross-sectional and 78.7% for quasi-experimental studies), with the main weaknesses being inconsistent control of confounding variables and incomplete follow-up reporting.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

No	Authors & Year	Country & Sample	Main Findings (RQ Relevant)
1	Holzer et al. (2024)	Austria; 1,550 primary school students and 134 teachers	Teacher joy was positively associated with instructional quality, while teacher anger showed a direct positive association with students' intrinsic motivation. No significant mediation effect of instructional quality on students' school well-being was found.
2	Hinze et al. (2024)	United Kingdom; 8,376 secondary school students	A positive school climate consistently predicted higher well-being and lower depressive symptoms and behavioral difficulties over a two-year follow-up,

			highlighting the importance of supportive school environments.
3	Veerman et al. (2023)	Netherlands; 31 primary school students	The Funds of Identity intervention significantly improved student engagement, social initiative, motivation, self-efficacy, and school well-being based on quantitative and qualitative findings.
4	Stapleton & Blanchard (2026)	Australia; 1,535 primary school students	Daily mindfulness practice significantly improved well-being and reduced emotional and behavioral problems, with the greatest improvements occurring during the first week of implementation.
5	Kassis et al. (2021)	Greece & Switzerland; 814 lower secondary students	Teacher support and resilience were significant predictors of school well-being. Students with high self-determination and self-efficacy reported the highest levels of school well-being.
6	Sudarnoto et al. (2025)	Indonesia; 357 school and university students	Learning motivation positively predicted student well-being, whereas interpersonal relationships and attitudes toward online learning did not show significant effects.
7	Beatty et al. (2025)	United States; 412 university students	Sense of purpose was positively associated with student well-being, with self-management emerging as the strongest socio-emotional competency related to well-being.
8	Hassani (2024)	Europe; 266 students (8–14 years)	Social-emotional learning reduced internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems, although no significant direct improvement in school well-being was observed.
9	Holopainen et al. (2020)	Finland; upper secondary students	School well-being was significantly influenced by parental income, schoolwork difficulties, and students' self-esteem, with self-esteem identified as a key protective factor.
10	Hailikari et al. (2025)	Finland; 782 university students	Students with higher self-compassion demonstrated better well-being and academic achievement, whereas self-critical students showed greater burnout risk.
11	Xu & Li (2025)	China; 1,206 music university students	Autonomy-supportive teaching positively influenced well-being both directly and indirectly through flow experiences and collaborative learning.

12	Noman et al. (2021)	Malaysia; 436 final-year university students	University support reduced the impact of employment and financial anxiety through improved well-being and purpose in life, thereby lowering dropout intention.
13	Anonymous (2025)	United States; 51 university students	Therapeutic horticulture significantly enhanced academic resilience and well-being while reducing perceived stress and anxiety.
14	Liu et al. (2025a)	China; 1,560 boarding junior high school students	Psychological resilience and school belonging partially mediated the negative relationship between bullying and students' mental health.
15	Ting et al. (2025)	China; 1,336 university students	Depression negatively predicted psychological well-being, whereas resilience acted as a positive mediator and egoism strengthened the relationship.
16	Cuhadar et al. (2026)	Türkiye; 578 sport science students	Academic perfectionism negatively affected life satisfaction, mediating the relationship between self-esteem and well-being.
17	Himmelberger et al. (2024)	United States; 4,180 medical students	Growth mindset and instructors' growth mindset significantly promoted students' flourishing, resilience, and overall well-being.
18	Cécillon et al. (2024)	France; 311 primary school students	Growth mindset intervention improved classroom climate, school motivation, and students' positive emotional experiences at school.
19	Reyes-Perez et al. (2025)	Peru; 459 university students	Spirituality enhanced happiness directly and indirectly through psychological resilience, explaining a substantial proportion of well-being variance.
20	Forycka et al. (2022)	Poland; 1,858 medical students	Higher resilience was associated with better well-being, lower burnout, and more positive attitudes toward hybrid learning.
21	Williams et al. (2020)	United States; 24 first- and second-year medical students	Mindfulness training significantly increased mindfulness levels and improved perceived well-being. Participants also reported stronger peer relationships and social support despite no significant reduction in perceived stress.
22	Peng et al. (2025)	China; 328 university students	Adversity quotient positively influenced student well-being through sequential mediation involving emotional support, mental toughness, and blunt sensitivity, highlighting the importance of psychological resources in promoting well-being.
23	Vidas et al. (2025)	Australia; 50 international university students	The <i>Tuned In</i> music-based intervention enhanced emotion regulation confidence and healthy music use, leading to improvements in students' emotional well-being.
24	Capone et al. (2021)	Italy; 269 university students	Self-efficacy and career ambition remained positively associated with students' mental well-being and

			academic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite increased employability concerns.
25	Fenizia & Parrello (2025)	Italy; 645 high school students	Positive teaching practices promoted students' sense of school belonging through increased school trust. Greater belonging was associated with higher self-efficacy, greater life satisfaction, and lower risk of depression and school dropout.
26	Delshad et al. (2026)	Iran; 452 health sciences students	Emotional intelligence and self-compassion significantly predicted academic resilience, with self-compassion partially mediating the relationship between emotional intelligence and resilience.
27	Mori et al. (2026)	Switzerland; 685 eighth-grade students	Although overall well-being declined over time, students with stronger intrinsic motivation and better peer relationships consistently demonstrated higher levels of positive well-being.
28	Chhajer & Hira (2024)	India; 180 senior secondary students	Positive psychology and mindfulness interventions significantly improved well-being, gratitude, resilience, connectedness, and positive emotions while reducing stress and negative emotions.
29	Al-Wardat et al. (2024)	Jordan; 416 university students	Emotion regulation and physical activity independently contributed to mental well-being. Higher cognitive reappraisal and physical activity were associated with lower depression and anxiety, whereas expressive suppression predicted greater anxiety.
30	Huang & Kou (2025)	China; 804 undergraduate students (plus 30 interview participants)	Academic self-efficacy and learning agility positively predicted psychological well-being through academic buoyancy, indicating the importance of adaptive learning capacities.
31	Alzahrani et al. (2025)	Saudi Arabia; 198 pharmacy students	Nudge-based well-being activities strengthened students' intrinsic motivation and intentions to maintain healthy behaviors, suggesting sustained benefits for student well-being.
32	Mülder et al. (2022)	Germany; 2,882 university students	Students demonstrating higher levels of study crafting experienced greater engagement, lower emotional exhaustion, and better general well-being than those with lower study crafting profiles.
33	Liu et al. (2025b)	China; 369 university students	Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills positively predicted life satisfaction through students' sense of belonging, emphasizing belongingness as a central pathway to well-being.
34	Shubayr & Dailah (2025)	Saudi Arabia; 324 nursing students	Emotional intelligence positively predicted self-efficacy and reduced perceived stress, indicating that

			emotional competencies contribute to improved psychological well-being.
35	Fuentes-Vilugrón et al. (2024)	Chile; 1,321 teachers	Teachers with better emotion regulation reported higher resilience and self-efficacy and lower emotional exhaustion, suggesting indirect benefits for students' well-being through improved teaching quality.
36	Sheer et al. (2021)	United States; 239 medical students and residents	Resilience-focused wellness interventions significantly improved students' well-being, although reductions in burnout were not consistently observed among medical residents.
37	Körner et al. (2024)	Germany; 205 university students	Mindfulness-based interventions enhanced study crafting, engagement, and psychological well-being, with mindfulness partially mediating improvements in student outcomes.
38	Elaiho et al. (2025)	United States; 1,626 students (321 survey respondents)	Trauma-informed school programming improved emotion regulation, coping skills, motivation, and school connectedness, contributing to enhanced student well-being and engagement.
39	Mahin et al. (2025)	Bangladesh; 417 university students	Self-esteem emerged as the strongest predictor of quality of life across all domains, while poor sleep quality was consistently associated with lower psychological well-being.
40	Dost (2025)	United Kingdom; 430 undergraduate and postgraduate students	Academic anxiety and COVID-19-related stress reduced students' sense of belonging and well-being. Loneliness significantly mediated these relationships, particularly among international students.

Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy

Emotional intelligence emerged as one of the most consistently significant predictors of school well-being. Shubayr and Dailah (2025) found emotional intelligence significantly associated with self-efficacy and inversely related to perceived stress among nursing students in clinical practice. Liu et al. (2025b) similarly found emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.32$) and conflict resolution skills jointly predicted life satisfaction among Chinese university students, mediated by sense of belonging. Academic self-efficacy consistently predicted well-being: Fenizia and Parrello (2025) found self-efficacy linked to school trust and reduced dropout risk among high school students in disadvantaged communities, while Huang and Kou (2025) found academic self-efficacy

positively predicting psychological well-being and academic buoyancy among undergraduates. These findings suggest emotional and self-belief competencies operate as core internal resources for thriving at school.

Resilience and Emotion Regulation

Resilience was frequently identified as both a direct predictor and a mediating mechanism. Forycka et al. (2022) found that among Polish medical students approximately 72% exhibited low-to-very-low resilience, with higher resilience strongly associated with better well-being and lower burnout risk, underscoring the need for systematic resilience-building in educational settings. Delshad et al. (2026) found emotional intelligence and self-compassion jointly explained 65% of variance in academic

resilience among health science students. Emotion regulation capacity showed similar protective effects: Al-Wardat et al. (2024) found expressive suppression associated with heightened anxiety, whereas adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal buffered against stress-related declines in well-being.

Motivation, Growth Mindset, and Gratitude

Intrinsic motivation showed a consistent positive relationship with school well-being: Mori et al. (2026) found that intrinsic motivation and peer relationships significantly predicted higher well-being throughout a 10-week school intervention among Swiss eighth-grade students. Sudarnoto et al. (2025) similarly found that learning motivation positively impacted student well-being independent of online learning modality, consistent with the motivational cycle posited by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Growth mindset was independently associated with student well-being: Himmelberger et al. (2024) found that both students' own growth mindset and their perception of instructors' growth mindset positively predicted flourishing and resilience while negatively predicting burnout and maladaptive psychological symptoms, with these associations strongest among students from historically marginalised backgrounds. Gratitude-based interventions similarly enhanced well-being, resilience, and reduced perceived stress in structured outdoor and positive-psychology programmes (Chhajer & Hira, 2024).

The Role of Social Support

While relational in nature, perceived social support from teachers, peers, and parents consistently operated through psychological mediation pathways. Kassis et al. (2021) found that teacher support and resilience significantly predicted school well-being patterns among migrant and native adolescents in Greece and Switzerland, with the highest well-being profile characterised by high self-efficacy, self-determination, and low fear/depression. Fenizia and Parrello (2025) found that positive teaching enhanced sense of school

belonging through the mediating role of student trust in teachers. These findings indicate that interventions targeting how students perceive and appraise available support—rather than support provision alone—may be particularly effective.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

These findings extend the Konu and Rimpelä (2002) school well-being model by specifying the psychological mechanisms underlying its "being" and "loving" dimensions, consistent with broader evidence that emotional intelligence buffers school burnout through resilience and reduced academic anxiety (Fiorilli et al., 2020), self-efficacy for self-regulated learning is strongly associated with psychological well-being (Pedditzi & Scalas, 2024), and resilience predicts well-being through self-esteem and perceived social support (Surzykiewicz et al., 2022). For practitioners, the consistent influence of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and resilience supports prioritising psychological skill-building—such as social-emotional learning, mindfulness, and resilience training—alongside academic interventions. The bidirectional relationship between intrinsic motivation and well-being (Grassinger et al., 2024) further suggests that fostering autonomous engagement may create self-reinforcing positive cycles. Teacher training in autonomy-supportive, emotionally available communication is a particularly cost-effective intervention point, as perceived teacher support is among the strongest relational predictors of school well-being, partly mediated by sense of belonging (Valcke et al., 2022).

Limitations.

The predominance of cross-sectional designs limits causal inference; restriction to English- and Indonesian-language publications may have introduced language bias; and heterogeneous operationalisation of "school well-being" across studies complicated direct comparison. Reliance on self-report measures also raises the possibility of common method bias.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review demonstrates that school well-being is significantly and consistently shaped by psychological factors, most prominently emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, resilience, intrinsic motivation, emotion regulation, growth mindset, and gratitude. These factors operate both directly and through pathways involving basic psychological need fulfilment, coping capacity, and appraisal of social support. The evidence supports integrating psychological skill-building programmes into school systems to promote student well-being. Future research should prioritise longitudinal and experimental designs, expand to diverse cultural contexts, and work toward a consensus operationalisation of school well-being to enable stronger cross-study comparison.

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