



Understanding school-related well-being in primary education: A systematic review and integrated framework

Dac-Thanh Nguyen¹, Phuong Xuan Vu² and Nguyen Tan Loi³

¹Faculty of Educational Sciences, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (ORCID: 0000-0001-7436-7188)

²Faculty of Cultural Industries, Thu Dau Mot University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (ORCID: 0009-0004-0948-7879)

³Faculty of Educational Sciences, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (ORCID: 0000-0003-0289-3095)

Corresponding Author: Nguyen Tan Loi, kv.loint@hcmue.edu.vn

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Abstract

School-related well-being has received increasing attention as schools are expected to support children's broader development alongside academic achievement. However, evidence remains fragmented because of inconsistent conceptualisations, varied measurement approaches, and limited integration of how school-related well-being is understood in primary education. This systematic literature review followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines to synthesise research on school-related well-being in primary school contexts. Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and five major publisher platforms were searched for English-language studies published between 2016 and 2026. Following a post-hoc eligibility re-audit, 18 primary empirical studies met the inclusion criteria and were analysed using thematic synthesis. The findings show that school-related well-being is commonly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct reflecting students' emotional, cognitive, relational, and developmental experiences at school, although overlap with related constructs remains. Measurement approaches varied considerably, limiting comparison across studies. School-related well-being was associated with relational and instructional conditions and may be linked to positive educational outcomes, including engagement, motivation, academic self-concept, social functioning, and health-related experiences. Based on the synthesis, the review proposes an integrated conceptual framework linking school conditions, students' school experiences, and educational outcomes. The findings highlight the need for clearer conceptual boundaries, more consistent measurement, and further longitudinal, comparative, and context-sensitive research.

Keywords: Educational outcomes; Primary education; School environment; School-related well-being; Systematic literature review

1. Introduction

Primary school years represent an important period in children's educational, social, and personal development. As schools are increasingly expected to support students beyond academic achievement alone, school-related well-being has become an important dimension of educational research and school effectiveness (Govorova et al., 2020). Students' experiences at school are shaped through classroom climate, relationships, peer interactions, and the wider school environment, which can influence how they participate, engage, and adjust to everyday school life (Ryan, 2023; Wang & Degol, 2016; Yu, 2024; Zagkotas, 2026). In a broader sense, subjective well-being encompasses both cognitive evaluations, such as life satisfaction, and affective experiences involving positive and negative emotions (Diener et al., 1999; Zengin & Akçakın, 2025). Within educational settings, school and classroom climates are closely associated with students' academic, social, and psychological outcomes, while primary school students' perceptions of school climate have also been linked to school happiness (Akyürek, 2024; Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Wang et al., 2020). Taken together, this literature supports viewing school-related well-being as intertwined with students' educational development rather than as a secondary outcome, because schools function as recurring social and developmental contexts as well as places of academic learning (Govorova et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). In this sense, schools may be understood not only as places for academic learning but also as environments in which students' everyday experiences contribute to broader development, adjustment, and well-being.

However, despite growing attention to school-related well-being, conceptual and methodological understanding in this area remains fragmented. Studies vary in how student well-being is defined, operationalised, and measured, and there is still no clear consensus regarding the

domains that should constitute the construct (Hossain et al., 2023; Losada-Puente et al., 2024; Sarzhanova & Nurgabdeshev, 2025). Related concepts such as school well-being, school satisfaction, happiness at school, and subjective well-being overlap considerably and are not always clearly differentiated across studies, which can complicate comparisons and synthesis across the literature (Hossain et al., 2023; Medvedev & Landhuis, 2018). Indeed, school-specific well-being is increasingly conceptualised as a multidimensional and context-dependent construct encompassing several aspects of students' experiences within school rather than as a single indicator of positive affect or satisfaction (Morinaj & Hascher, 2019; Obermeier et al., 2022). To improve conceptual consistency, this review uses *school-related well-being* as an overarching term while distinguishing several closely related constructs according to their primary emphasis. School happiness is used here to refer predominantly to students' positive affective experiences associated with school, whereas school satisfaction refers primarily to their cognitive appraisal of the quality of their school experiences. Subjective well-being is broader in scope, generally incorporating cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction together with positive and negative affect across life domains (Medvedev & Landhuis, 2018). In contrast, school-related well-being is conceptualised in this review as a multidimensional, school-specific construct encompassing students' emotional and cognitive evaluations of school life together with relevant relational and developmental experiences (Hossain et al., 2023; Morinaj & Hascher, 2019; Obermeier et al., 2022). These distinctions are adopted as analytical boundaries for the present review rather than as universally agreed definitions, given the substantial conceptual overlap among these constructs. Conceptual and measurement challenges are particularly relevant in primary education. Recent primary-school-specific reviews confirm that well-being has been operationalised through diverse constructs and multidimensional instruments and that consensus regarding the components required for a holistic assessment remains limited (Losada-Puente et al., 2024). Thus, although primary-school well-being has begun to receive systematic review attention, existing syntheses have tended to address particular aspects of the field, especially conceptualisation and measurement. A broader synthesis that brings together how school-related well-being is conceptualised, assessed, associated with educational experiences, and supported during the primary school years therefore remains warranted. Accordingly, this review systematically synthesises previous research on school-related well-being in primary school contexts by examining its conceptualisations, measurement approaches, determinants, and educational outcomes.

This review was conducted to bring together evidence on school-related well-being in primary school contexts and to provide a clearer understanding of how the field has developed. Although studies in this area have increased, research remains dispersed across conceptual definitions, measurement approaches, determinants, and educational outcomes, with limited synthesis at the primary school level. By examining these areas together rather than in isolation, the review seeks to provide a more connected understanding of how school-related well-being is represented within students' educational experiences. Unlike previous systematic reviews that have focused primarily on broad student well-being, specific intervention approaches, or educational stages beyond primary education, the present review focuses exclusively on primary school contexts while integrating conceptualisation, measurement, determinants, and educational outcomes within a single synthesis. In addition, this review establishes a consistent operational definition that harmonises related school-based constructs - including school happiness, school satisfaction, and positive school experiences - under a common interpretive framework when they explicitly refer to students' experiences in school. By bringing these elements together, the review extends existing literature beyond isolated aspects of school-related well-being and provides a more integrated understanding of how school experiences, contextual conditions, and educational outcomes are related in primary education. Based on patterns identified across the included studies, the review also proposes an interpretive framework that considers school-related well-being as part of the educational process through which school experiences may be associated with broader educational development. In this way, the review aims to support future research and educational discussion

by providing a clearer basis for examining school-related well-being in primary education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This review draws on Social-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), and Stage-Environment Fit Theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993) to synthesise research on school-related well-being in primary school contexts. These theories were selected based on the view that school-related well-being cannot be understood only through students' individual characteristics but should also be considered in relation to their experiences at school and their developmental needs. Together, the three perspectives provide complementary lenses for understanding how school environments, students' experiences, and developmental processes may be associated with school-related well-being.

Social-Ecological Theory provides the broad perspective for understanding school-related well-being in this review. From this perspective, children's development and well-being are understood as emerging through ongoing interactions with their environments, and school is regarded as one of the settings most closely associated with students' everyday experiences. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). School-related well-being is therefore understood as more than students' personal feelings and includes how they experience life at school. These experiences may involve classroom interactions, teacher support, peer relationships, opportunities for learning, and wider school conditions (Wang & Degol, 2016). Previous studies have shown that students in more supportive school environments tend to report more positive well-being experiences, particularly when schools promote stronger teacher-student relationships, greater peer connectedness, and inclusive learning settings (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Wang et al., 2020). At the same time, differences in students' well-being across similar school settings suggest that school conditions alone may not fully explain why students experience school in different ways.

Self-Determination Theory helps explain why students may experience the same school environment differently by focusing on the psychological experiences that support well-being. According to the theory, positive development is associated with the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). In school settings, these needs are more likely to be supported when students have opportunities to participate, feel capable in learning, and experience positive relationships with teachers and peers. Previous studies have reported that higher levels of need satisfaction are associated with stronger engagement, motivation, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Buzzai et al., 2021; Skinner et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2014). At the same time, students do not necessarily respond to similar school experiences in the same way, suggesting that developmental readiness may also shape how students experience and benefit from school environments.

Stage-Environment Fit Theory adds another perspective by suggesting that students' experiences at school depend partly on how well school expectations match their developmental needs (Eccles et al., 1993). From this view, educational environments are more supportive when they provide age-appropriate expectations, opportunities to participate, and meaningful social relationships. When this fit is weaker, students may be less likely to experience positive adjustment and well-being. Although the theory was originally developed in adolescent contexts, it remains relevant to primary education because children continue to experience important cognitive, emotional, and social changes during these years. Together, these three perspectives suggest that school-related well-being cannot be explained by school conditions alone. Students' experiences at school also depend on how they interpret those experiences and whether school environments respond to their developmental needs. Guided by this perspective, the present review examines how school-related well-being has been defined and measured, which school conditions are associated with it, and how it has been linked to students' educational experiences and outcomes in primary school contexts.

2.2. Recent Review Studies on School-Related Well-Being in Primary School Context

Recent review studies suggest that student well-being is influenced by multiple educational experiences and conditions, although findings remain dispersed across concepts, intervention approaches, and educational contexts. Existing reviews have commonly described well-being as a multidimensional construct that includes psychological, emotional, physical, and social dimensions (Diener et al., 1999; Govorova et al., 2020). Educational research has also increasingly linked students' school experiences with motivation, learning, adjustment, academic achievement, and broader patterns of development. At the same time, studies suggest that school-related well-being may change across educational stages and is often reported to decline during periods of transition and adaptation (Govorova et al., 2020; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2020; Herke et al., 2019; Marquez & Long, 2021; Obermeier et al., 2022). These findings indicate that school-related well-being should not be treated as a fixed student characteristic but as an educational experience that may vary across contexts and stages of development. This also points to the need for continued conceptual and empirical work, particularly in understanding how school-related well-being is experienced and supported in primary school settings. Indeed, while overarching secondary reviews have mapped general patterns of student well-being across diverse age groups (e.g., Liu, 2026; Ly & Vella-Brodrick, 2024), there remains a critical gap in synthesizing how school-related well-being is uniquely configured and sustained specifically within the primary education phase.

Recent reviews have increasingly moved beyond asking whether well-being matters and have focused more on understanding the school conditions and experiences associated with it. For example, Sarzhanova and Nurgabdeshev (2025) brought together evidence showing that emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, motivation, resilience, social support, institutional support, and digital literacy were commonly associated with more positive well-being experiences, whereas academic stress and excessive social media use appeared repeatedly as challenges. Their review also reflected growing interest in mindfulness-based approaches, AI-supported practices, and the use of Self-Determination Theory to explain differences in students' well-being experiences. Reviews focusing on environmental conditions also reported positive associations between supportive school experiences and student well-being. For example, nature-based school interventions contributed to emotional, physical, and social well-being despite variation in methodological quality, while broader school-based reviews similarly identified benefits for mental health, social-emotional development, behaviour, and educational outcomes (Engels et al., 2004; Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2020; Weare & Nind, 2011).

2.3. The Current Study

Despite growing interest in student well-being and increasing attention to educational conditions that support positive development, existing review evidence remains fragmented across conceptual perspectives, intervention approaches, and broader well-being outcomes. Previous reviews have advanced understanding of factors associated with student well-being; however, limited attention has been given to school-related well-being as a distinct educational construct within primary education. In particular, prior reviews have rarely synthesised how school-related well-being has been conceptualised, measured, shaped by contextual conditions, and associated with educational outcomes across primary education contexts.

To address this need, the present study provides a systematic review of research on school-related well-being in primary education. Rather than focusing only on intervention effects or broad indicators of student well-being, the review examines how school-related well-being has been understood across studies and how it relates to students' school experiences and educational outcomes. Drawing on the reviewed literature and the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier, the review also considers how school conditions, students' experiences, and developmental processes may be understood together within primary education contexts. Existing reviews have contributed valuable insights into individual aspects of school-related well-being, such as intervention effectiveness, determinants, or broad indicators of student well-being. However, they provide limited explanation of how these components relate to one another within primary education. As a

result, researchers lack an integrative conceptual structure that explains how school conditions, students' school experiences, and educational outcomes may be understood as interconnected rather than isolated phenomena. The present review addresses this limitation by developing an integrated conceptual framework derived from the synthesis of primary empirical evidence. Rather than simply combining existing findings, the framework organises the literature into a coherent explanatory structure that illustrates how contextual conditions, students' school experiences, and developmental outcomes are conceptually connected within primary education. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1) How has school-related well-being been conceptualised in primary education contexts?

RQ 2) How has school-related well-being been measured across studies conducted in primary education?

RQ 3) What determinants have been identified as shaping school-related well-being in primary education?

RQ 4) What educational outcomes have been associated with school-related well-being in primary education?

3. Method

This study employed a systematic literature review to examine existing research on school-related well-being in primary school contexts. Systematic reviews provide a structured and transparent way to identify, evaluate, and interpret relevant studies through explicit and replicable procedures (Akkan & Horzum, 2024; Fadillah et al., 2025; Rowley & Slack, 2004). Compared with traditional narrative reviews, this approach offers a more systematic way of bringing evidence together and helps reduce selection bias while identifying patterns, limitations, and gaps across existing research (Liberati et al., 2009). A systematic review was considered appropriate because research on school-related well-being remains dispersed across definitions, measurement approaches, determinants, and educational outcomes, making it difficult to develop a clearer understanding of the field. Rather than estimating effect sizes, this review used qualitative synthesis to examine how school-related well-being has been defined, measured, experienced, and associated with educational experiences in primary education. To support transparency and consistency throughout the review process, the study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), which guided literature searching, study selection, data extraction, quality appraisal, and synthesis of findings.

3.1. Search Strategy and Study Selection

A systematic electronic search was conducted to identify studies examining school-related well-being in primary school contexts. To achieve broad coverage across education and related fields, searches were carried out in major indexing databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, and supplemented with Google Scholar and full-text platforms, including ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, SpringerLink, Sage Journals, and Taylor & Francis Online. The search was initially conducted on 15 January 2026 and updated on 15 May 2026 prior to the final synthesis. The search included studies published between 2016 and 2026 and was limited to English-language publications to support consistency in screening and interpretation (Plonsky & Kim, 2016). Only peer-reviewed journal articles were included because they generally undergo formal scholarly evaluation and are more likely to reflect established developments in the field (Plonsky & Kim, 2016). Theses and dissertations were excluded because of variation in accessibility and publication status (Plonsky & Kim, 2016). Google Scholar results were sorted by relevance and the first 200 records were manually exported and independently screened by two reviewers. The conceptual keyword blocks are presented in Table 2, and Table 3 reports, for each of the eight sources searched, the complete field-qualified search string, the fields searched, the filters applied, and the platform-specific yield and retained count, so that the search can be independently reproduced. Because ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, SpringerLink, and Sage Journals do not support wildcard truncation or the full Boolean syntax used in Scopus and Web of Science, the search

string was adapted for each platform (e.g., truncated terms such as "school*" were expanded into explicit singular/plural forms, and long strings were split into linked sub-searches), and these platform-specific adaptations are documented in Table 3 rather than aggregated under a single generic string. Additionally, backward and forward citation searching was conducted on the final included papers to ensure corpus saturation, and the number of records screened, excluded, and retained through this citation-chaining process is reported separately in Table 3 rather than only described narratively. Duplicate identification and the reference-management software used for deduplication are likewise specified in the note beneath Table 3.

Table 1

Operational definition and construct boundaries used for study selection

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Inclusion in this review</i>	<i>Operational criterion</i>
School-related well-being	Included	Primary construct reflecting students' emotional, cognitive, relational, and psychological experiences within school contexts.
School satisfaction	Included	Included when conceptualised as students' cognitive evaluation of school experiences.
School happiness	Included	Included when referring to positive emotional experiences specifically associated with school.
Positive school experiences	Included	Included when representing school-context experiences relevant to students' well-being.
Subjective well-being	Conditionally included	Included only when explicitly measured or analysed within the school context.
Psychological well-being	Conditionally included	Included only when findings were explicitly linked to students' experiences at school.
General life satisfaction or general well-being	Excluded	Excluded unless a distinct school-specific component was reported separately.
Population (age range)	Included	Students in regular primary education, operationalised for this review as approximately 6-12 years of age (may vary slightly by national schooling system); studies involving secondary-age or pre-primary samples were excluded.

The search strategy was developed using predefined keyword groups and related educational terminology. Search terms were organised into three concept domains: (1) school-related well-being and related constructs ("school-related well-being", "well-being at school", "student well-being", "subjective well-being", "school happiness", "happy schools", "happiness at school", "school satisfaction", "positive emotions", "psychological well-being", and "positive school experiences"); (2) primary education contexts ("primary school", "elementary school", "primary education", or "elementary education"); and (3) target populations (child*, student*, pupil*, "school child*", or youth). Terms within each concept group were connected using OR and combined across domains using AND. Searches were conducted within article titles, abstracts, and keywords (see Table 2).

To ensure conceptual consistency during study selection, an operational definition of school-related well-being was established before screening. In this review, school-related well-being refers to students' emotional, cognitive, relational, and psychological experiences that are explicitly situated within school contexts. Accordingly, studies examining school satisfaction, school happiness, or positive school experiences were included only when these constructs were operationalised to reflect students' experiences, perceptions, or functioning at school. Studies investigating subjective well-being or psychological well-being were included only when the measurement or analysis explicitly isolated the school context. In contrast, studies focusing on general life satisfaction, overall psychological well-being, or broader mental health without a distinct school-specific component were excluded. This operational definition provided a

Table 2

Search terms for target databases

Category	Search Terms
Well-being and Happiness	"school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "subjective well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "happy schools" OR "happiness at school" OR "school satisfaction" OR "positive emotions" OR "psychological well-being" OR "positive school experiences"
AND	
Elementary School and Primary School	"primary school*" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education" OR "elementary education"
AND	
Children	child* OR student* OR pupil* OR "school child*" OR youth

consistent basis for distinguishing school-related well-being from broader well-being constructs while allowing conceptually related school-based constructs to be synthesised within a common interpretive framework.

Following retrieval, duplicate records were removed prior to screening to improve search accuracy and reduce repeated entries (Kwon et al., 2015). Duplicate records were identified using EndNote 21, applying automated matching on DOI, title, author, and publication year, and manually verified before screening. After removing 412 duplicate records, 874 unique records remained for title and abstract screening. Title and abstract screening and full-text eligibility assessment were conducted independently by two reviewers using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion and, when necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. Studies were included if they: (a) reported primary empirical research; (b) involved students in regular primary education (operationalised as approximately 6-12 years of age); (c) examined school-related well-being or related school-based constructs according to the operational definition described above; (d) were published in English-language peer-reviewed journals; and (e) reported original empirical findings. Studies focusing on general subjective well-being or psychological well-being without a distinct school-specific component, as well as review articles, conference papers, book chapters, theses, and dissertations, were excluded. Following title, abstract, and full-text screening, 97 articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 66 were excluded because they involved ineligible educational settings or populations ($n = 22$), did not examine school-related well-being as operationally defined ($n = 16$), were secondary or conceptual publications ($n = 18$), or did not provide school-specific findings suitable for synthesis ($n = 10$). Consequently, 31 primary empirical studies initially met all eligibility criteria and were included in the database-search synthesis (see Table 3 and Figure 1). A subsequent post-hoc re-audit against the population and construct criteria in Table 1 identified 13 of these 31 studies as ineligible; these were removed, leaving 18 primary empirical studies in the final synthesis (Table A1).

3.2. Data Extraction

Following study selection, information from the included studies was extracted using a standardised extraction form developed for this review. The extraction process was guided by established recommendations for systematic reviews and evidence synthesis to maintain consistency and ensure alignment between the review questions and the analysis (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Briner & Denyer, 2012). An Excel-based review matrix was used to organise study information, with each study entered as a separate row and extraction categories organised into predefined columns.

The extraction framework was developed from the four research questions guiding the study. Extracted information was organised into four areas: (1) study characteristics (e.g., publication year, country, participants, research design, and educational context); (2) conceptualisation of school-related well-being (e.g., definitions, dimensions, and related constructs); (3) measurement

Table 3
Complete Database-Specific Search Strings and Citation-Search Yields

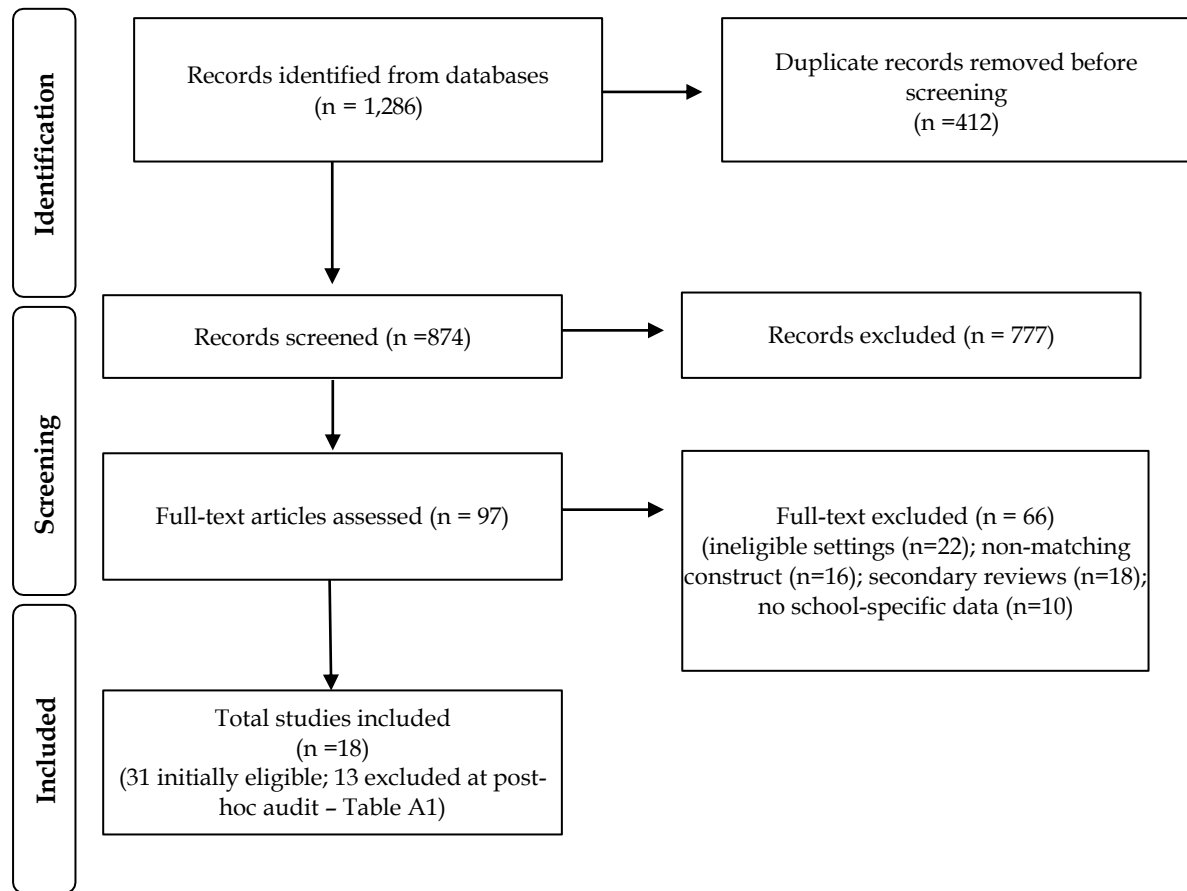
Database Platform	Complete Search String	Filters Applied	Yield	Retained
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "subjective well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "happy schools" OR "happiness at school" OR "school satisfaction" OR "positive emotions" OR "psychological well-being" OR "positive school experiences") AND ("primary school*" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education" OR "elementary education") AND (child* OR student* OR pupil* OR "school child*" OR youth))	Article; English; 2016-2026; Social Sciences/Psychology	392	12
Web of Science	TS= (("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "subjective well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "happy schools" OR "happiness at school" OR "school satisfaction" OR "positive emotions" OR "psychological well-being" OR "positive school experiences") AND ("primary school*" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education" OR "elementary education") AND (child* OR student* OR pupil* OR "school child*" OR youth))	Article; English; 2016-2026; Education/Psychology (WC)	369	11
ScienceDirect	Title, abstract, keywords: ("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "school satisfaction" OR "psychological well-being") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education") AND (child OR student OR pupil OR youth).	Research articles; English; 2016-2026; Social Sciences	96	1
Wiley Online Library	Anywhere: ("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "school satisfaction") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school") AND (child OR student OR pupil OR youth).	Journal articles; English; 2016-2026	58	1
SpringerLink	Within: ("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "school satisfaction") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school") AND (child OR student OR pupil OR youth).	Article; English; 2016-2026; Discipline: Education	84	1
Sage Journals	Abstract: ("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "school satisfaction") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school") AND (child OR student OR pupil OR youth)	Research article; English; 2016-2026	41	0

Table 3 continued

<i>Database Platform</i>	<i>Complete Search String</i>	<i>Filters Applied</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Retained</i>
Taylor & Francis Online	Abstract: [(school-related well-being) OR (well-being at school) OR (student well-being) OR (school happiness) OR (school satisfaction)] AND [(primary school) OR (elementary school)] AND [(child) OR (student) OR (pupil) OR (youth)]	Article; English; 2016–2026	46	1
Google Scholar	("school-related well-being" OR "well-being at school" OR "student well-being" OR "school happiness" OR "school satisfaction") ("primary school" OR "elementary school") (child OR student OR pupil OR youth) [no field restriction or truncation available]	Sorted by relevance; first 200 records screened	200	4
Backward citation search	Reference lists of the 31 included studies were hand-searched in Scopus and Google Scholar to trace cited works meeting the inclusion criteria.	Applied to final included studies (n = 31); English; 2016–2026	96	0*
Forward citation search	"Cited by" records for the 31 included studies were retrieved via Scopus and Google Scholar Citation Chaining to trace citing works meeting the inclusion criteria.	Applied to final included studies (n = 31); English; 2016–2026	58	0*
Total Literature Search Yield	Duplicate records removed using EndNote 21 automated DOI/title-author-year matching, followed by manual verification by two reviewers	–	1,286 (databases) + 154 (citation)	31 → 18 (primary empirical studies, after post-hoc eligibility re-audit)

Figure 1

Adapted PRISMA flow diagram showing study selection process



approaches (e.g., instruments, indicators, and assessment features); and (4) findings related to the determinants and educational and developmental outcomes associated with school-related well-being in primary school contexts. All extracted information was recorded using predefined coding categories and checked before analysis to maintain consistency across studies. To improve reliability, coding and interpretation were reviewed independently and differences were discussed until agreement was reached (Iden & Eikebrokk, 2013). When clarification was needed, the original studies were reviewed again to confirm coding decisions and maintain consistency throughout the final synthesis.

3.3. Methodological Quality Appraisal and Data Analysis

Following data extraction, the methodological quality of the included studies was assessed to support interpretation of the review findings. Because the studies represented different research designs, quality assessment was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool [MMAT] (Hong et al., 2018), which was developed for systematic reviews that include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies. Each study was assessed using the MMAT criteria appropriate to its research design, and the results were recorded in the review matrix. Quality assessment was used to guide interpretation of the findings rather than as a basis for excluding studies from the synthesis. To strengthen consistency and reduce subjective judgement, quality appraisal was conducted independently by two reviewers. Following independent assessment, appraisal decisions were compared, and any discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. Where methodological details were insufficiently reported, the original studies were revisited to clarify appraisal decisions. The resulting quality evaluations were subsequently considered during evidence interpretation and in assessing the overall credibility of the synthesised findings.

Although the review adopted an inductive thematic synthesis approach, the interpretation of

the synthesised themes was informed by the theoretical framework presented in Section 2.1. Following initial open coding, recurring patterns were aligned with Social-Ecological Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Stage-Environment Fit Theory to provide a coherent interpretive structure. Rather than applying predefined categories during coding, these theoretical perspectives were used during the analytical synthesis to interpret relationships among the emerging themes and strengthen conceptual integration across the reviewed studies. Table 4 presents the alignment between each theoretical perspective, the synthesised codes, and their analytical application.

Table 4

Theoretical Mapping and Theoretical Alignment of Inductive Themes

<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	<i>Framework Pillar</i>	<i>Inductive Synthesis Codes</i>	<i>Analytical Synthesis Application</i>
Social-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977)	Microsystemic Interpersonal Interactions	Teacher support; peer friendships; school climate.	Used to categorize and code relational determinants of well-being.
	Mesosystemic Connections	School-family partnerships; parental emotional support.	Categorized multi-informant perspectives on school well-being.
Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017)	Need for Relatedness	Peer social belonging; peer inclusion; support.	Coded social-emotional well-being processes.
	Need for Competence	Academic self-efficacy; active participation.	Coded eudaimonic functioning in school.
	Need for Autonomy	Choice in tasks; creative learning activities.	Evaluated developmental constraints in early childhood.
Stage-Environment Fit Theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993)	Developmental Match of Conditions	Evaluation stress; transition declines; workload pressure.	Analyzed systemic stressors and transition-related drops in well-being.

The complete study-level methodological quality appraisal is presented in Table 5, which reports the methodological design, applicable MMAT criteria, criterion-level Yes/No/Cannot-tell decisions with a study-specific, criterion-referenced justification for each included study; consistent with MMAT 2018 guidance, these criterion-level decisions were not combined into a single overall quality rating. The appraisal findings were used to inform the interpretation of the synthesised evidence rather than to determine study eligibility, in the specific ways described at the end of this sub-section.

The unit of analysis consisted of the empirical findings, reported results, and author interpretations presented in each of the 18 included primary studies. Following data extraction, two reviewers independently conducted inductive coding using a predefined Excel-based review matrix. Rather than coding entire articles line by line, the coding focused on text relevant to the four review questions, including conceptual definitions, measurement approaches, determinants, and educational outcomes related to school-related well-being. Initial codes representing similar findings were compared across studies and iteratively grouped into descriptive themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). These descriptive themes were then synthesised into broader analytical domains that reflected recurring patterns across the literature. Throughout the process, coding decisions were reviewed independently, compared, and discussed until consensus was reached. Where disagreements remained, the original studies were revisited and, when necessary, a third reviewer was consulted to support the final coding decision. During the interpretive stage of the synthesis,

Table 5
Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool Quality Matrix for Primary Studies

Study ID	Design Category	MMAT Cat.	S1	S2	Criterion-Level Ratings (Yes / No / Cannot tell)	Study-Specific Justification (Criterion-Referenced)
Akyürek (2024)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	4.4 Cannot tell – non-response rate not reported in source article.
Allen et al. (2018)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	Large multi-school sample (n=2,345) with validated HIFAMS tool; 4.4 Cannot tell – response/attrition rate not reported.
Altıntaş and Canbulat (2024)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 Y; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 Y; 3.5 Y	SEM path model with covariates controlled (3.4); valid measurement model.
Bozgün and Akın-Kösterelioglu (2021)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 Y; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 Y; 3.5 Y	Validated mediation model with clear theoretical grounding; confounders addressed (3.4).
Dempsey et al. (2024)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 Y; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 Y; 3.5 Y	Cross-lagged panel model; MICE used for missing data (3.3).
Erol and Erol (2026)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	Validated SWBS (α > .80) supports 4.3; 4.4 Cannot tell – school-based convenience sample with no reported response rate.
Erol and Köksal (2025)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 Y; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 Y; 3.5 Y	Non-randomized comparison-group design with baseline covariate matching (3.4); not an RCT – no random allocation or blinding was used.
Gómez-Baya et al. (2021)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	Cross-national ISCWeB school-based sampling supports 4.1/4.2; 4.4 Cannot tell – response rate not uniformly reported across the seven countries.
Klemp et al. (2025)	Qualitative	1	Y	Y	1.1 Y; 1.2 Y; 1.3 Y; 1.4 Y; 1.5 Y	Systematic content analysis with acceptable intercoder agreement (κ = .66) supports 1.3.
Leung et al. (2021)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 Y; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 Y; 3.5 Y	Longitudinal sample (n=786) with low attrition supports 3.3; validated fit indices.

Table 5 continued

<i>Study ID</i>	<i>Design Category</i>	<i>MMAT Cat.</i>	<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>Criterion-Level Ratings (Yes/No/ Cannot tell)</i>	<i>Study-Specific Justification (Criterion-Referenced)</i>
López-Pérez et al. (2022)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	Cross-cultural comparative sampling supports 4.1; 4.4 Cannot tell – response rate not detailed for the open-ended survey.
Matsumoto et al. (2024)	Mixed methods	5	Y	Y	5.1 Y; 5.2 Y; 5.3 Y; 5.4 Y; 5.5 Y	Waitlist-trial quantitative data and thematic diary analysis jointly address the RQ (5.2).
Matsumoto et al. (2025)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 N; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	4.2 No – small convenience sample (n=204) with gender non-disclosure limits representativeness; 4.4 Cannot tell – response rate not reported.
Moliner et al. (2021)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 CT; 4.5 Y	Delphi-validated instrument and CFA support 4.3; 4.4 Cannot tell – response rate not reported.
Nanda et al. (2025)	Qualitative	1	Y	Y	1.1 Y; 1.2 Y; 1.3 Y; 1.4 Y; 1.5 Y	Photovoice methodology with high participant engagement supports 1.2/1.4.
Oh et al. (2020)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 Y; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 N; 3.5 Y	3.4 No – single-group pre-post design with no comparison group to account for confounders.
Rahm et al. (2024)	Quant non-randomized	3	Y	Y	3.1 N; 3.2 Y; 3.3 Y; 3.4 Y; 3.5 Y	3.1 No – authors note selection bias from volunteer recruitment in some cohorts.
Schwerter et al. (2024)	Quant descriptive	4	Y	Y	4.1 Y; 4.2 Y; 4.3 Y; 4.4 Y; 4.5 Y	PIRLS sampling protocol documents response rates, supporting 4.4.

these analytical domains were examined through the lenses of Social-Ecological Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Stage-Environment Fit Theory. This theoretical alignment supported the interpretation of relational, instructional, environmental, psychological, and developmental patterns while preserving the inductively generated coding structure.

To support conceptual consistency across studies using different terminology, conceptually related constructs - including school happiness, school satisfaction, subjective well-being, positive school experiences, and affective school evaluations - were harmonised under the broader construct of school-related well-being only when studies explicitly referred to students' experiences, functioning, or evaluations within school contexts. For example, studies measuring school satisfaction, school happiness, or positive school experiences were coded under school-related well-being when the measures focused specifically on students' experiences in school. In contrast, studies examining general life satisfaction, overall subjective well-being, or psychological well-being without a distinct school-specific component were not coded under this construct. When constructs partially overlapped, coding decisions were guided by the operational definition presented in Table 1, with priority given to the contextual meaning of the construct rather than its label. Representative examples of these harmonisation decisions are presented in Table 6. Throughout the coding process, priority was given to preserving conceptual meaning while enabling comparison across studies using different terminology.

Table 6

Construct Harmonisation Framework Used During Thematic Synthesis

<i>Construct reported in primary study</i>		<i>Representative construct/example</i>		<i>Included as school-related well-being?</i>	<i>Coding rationale</i>
School satisfaction		School satisfaction		✓ Yes	Represents students' cognitive evaluation of school experiences.
School happiness		School happiness		✓ Yes	Refers to positive emotional experiences explicitly situated within school contexts.
Positive school experiences		Positive school experiences		✓ Yes	Reflects students' experiences and functioning within school contexts.
Subjective well-being	well-	Subjective well-being at school		Conditional	Included only when the construct was explicitly measured or analysed within the school context.
Psychological well-being	well-	Psychological well-being in school		Conditional	Included only when findings specifically referred to students' school experiences.
General life satisfaction	life	General life satisfaction		✗ No	Represents overall life evaluation rather than school-specific experiences.
General mental health	mental	General mental health		✗ No	Does not specifically isolate school-related experiences.

4. Results

4.1. General Description of the Studies

Table 7 summarises the main patterns identified across the 18 studies included in this review and provides an overview of how school-related well-being has been defined, assessed, and examined in primary school contexts. Detailed characteristics for each of the 18 included studies - including geographical location, sample size, design, and main findings - are documented in Appendix 1, Table A1.

Table 7

General description of the 18 studies included in the review

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Key Synthesized Findings</i>	<i>Included Studies</i>
Conceptualizing School-Related Well-being	School-related well-being was most often understood as a multidimensional construct that combined students' emotional experiences with broader aspects of development. Definitions varied across cultural and educational contexts, and studies involving children placed greater emphasis on connectedness and feelings of competence.	Erol and Erol (2026); Gómez-Baya et al. (2021); Klemp et al. (2025); López-Pérez et al. (2022)
Measuring School-Related Well-being	Studies increasingly used child-centred and developmentally appropriate self-report approaches while also recognising the value of collecting information from multiple sources when examining students' school experiences.	Allen et al. (2018); Moliner et al. (2021)
Key Determinants Shaping School-Related Well-being	Findings suggested that school-related well-being was associated with a combination of relationships, learning experiences, and wider school conditions. Across studies, school climate and social relationships appeared consistently as important influences.	Akyürek (2024); Erol and Köksal (2025); Matsumoto et al. (2024); Matsumoto et al. (2025); Nanda et al. (2025); Oh et al. (2020); Rahm et al. (2024); Schwerter et al. (2024)
Educational Outcomes Associated with School-Related Well-being	Higher levels of school-related well-being were commonly associated with stronger academic, motivational, and social outcomes, suggesting that students' experiences at school may be linked with broader educational development.	Altıntaş and Canbulat (2024); Bozgün and Akın-Kösterelioğlu (2021); Dempsey et al. (2024); Leung et al. (2021)

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that school-related well-being is understood as a multidimensional educational experience that extends beyond emotional responses alone (Klemp et al., 2025). Across the literature, four related areas emerged: conceptualisation, measurement, determinants, and educational outcomes. Although these areas are presented separately for analytical purposes, the findings indicate that they are closely connected in how school-related well-being is understood across studies. Studies focusing on conceptualisation showed increasing attention to students' emotional experiences alongside broader aspects of development, while also reflecting differences across cultural and educational contexts (López-Pérez et al., 2022). In relation to measurement, recent studies increasingly used child-centred and developmentally appropriate approaches and highlighted the value of drawing on more than one source of evidence when examining students' experiences (Allen et al., 2018; Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021). Findings on determinants pointed to the importance of school relationships, learning experiences, and wider school conditions, with school climate appearing consistently across studies as an influential factor (Schwerter et al., 2024). Studies examining outcomes reported that school-related well-being was associated with educational experiences extending beyond academic performance, including engagement, motivation, academic self-concept, and broader developmental indicators (Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021; Dempsey et al., 2024).

These patterns suggest that school-related well-being is better understood as an experience shaped within school contexts than as a fixed student characteristic. The following sections examine each area in greater detail and use these findings to inform the framework developed in Section 4.6.

4.2. Conceptualizing School-Related Well-Being

Table 8 summarises the main conceptual patterns identified across the reviewed studies and illustrates both shared and differing ways of understanding school-related well-being in educational contexts.

Table 8

Conceptual patterns in school-related well-being across reviewed studies

<i>Study</i>	<i>Conceptual Lens</i>	<i>Core Components of School-Related Well-being</i>	<i>Distinct Conceptual Contribution</i>
Klemp et al. (2025)	Self-Determination Theory	Competence; social relatedness; autonomy	Shows that primary-aged children placed greater emphasis on competence and social connectedness than on autonomy.
López-Pérez et al. (2022)	Cross-cultural perspectives on happiness	Context-dependent dimensions of school happiness	Suggests that meanings attached to school well-being vary across cultural contexts rather than reflecting a single shared experience.
Erol and Erol (2026)	Subjective Well-being framework	School satisfaction; positive affect; reduced negative affect	Highlights the importance of friendship and social belonging in students' experiences of school-related well-being.

The reviewed studies did not converge on a single definition of school-related well-being. Instead, they showed a common tendency to move beyond emotional states alone and include broader aspects of students' experiences at school. Across studies, school-related well-being was typically understood through two related dimensions: how students feel about school and how they participate, connect, and develop within school life. Several studies approached school-related well-being from psychological and developmental perspectives but emphasised different aspects of students' experiences. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, Klemp et al. (2025) found that primary-aged children associated well-being more strongly with competence and social connectedness than with autonomy. These findings suggest that children's experiences of school-related well-being may depend not only on positive emotions but also on feeling capable, involved, and supported at school.

At the same time, the reviewed studies showed that meanings attached to school-related well-being varied across contexts. López-Pérez et al. (2022) reported that school happiness was understood differently across cultural settings, suggesting that local educational and social values shape how children interpret well-being. Erol and Erol (2026) approached the construct through school satisfaction and affective experiences while identifying friendship and social belonging as important conditions shaping students' views of school life. Overall, the findings suggest that school-related well-being is increasingly understood as a multidimensional and child-centred educational experience. Rather than representing a fixed psychological state, it appears to reflect how students experience school through the interaction of emotions, developmental needs, relationships, and educational environments.

Viewed through the theoretical framework adopted in this review, these conceptual patterns reflect complementary perspectives on school-related well-being. The emphasis on competence, belonging, and positive participation aligns with Self-Determination Theory, suggesting that students' experiences of well-being are closely associated with the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs. At the same time, the importance of relationships and school contexts is consistent with a Social-Ecological perspective, in which well-being emerges through interactions between children and their immediate educational environments. The variation observed across cultural contexts further suggests that school-related well-being is best understood as context-dependent rather than as a universal psychological construct.

4.3. Measuring School-Related Well-Being

Table 9 summarises the main measurement approaches and instruments identified across the reviewed studies and shows how school-related well-being has been assessed in primary school contexts.

Table 9

Measurement patterns and instruments used to assess school-related well-being

<i>Study</i>	<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Measurement Focus</i>	<i>Methodological Insight</i>
Allen et al. (2018)	How I Feel About My School	Emotional experiences across school contexts	Demonstrates that young children can meaningfully report subjective school experiences using developmentally appropriate formats.
Bozgün and Akın-Kösterelioğlu (2021)	Subjective Well-being in School Scale	School satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect	Distinguishes cognitive evaluations from emotional responses to capture multidimensional well-being.
Moliner et al. (2021)	Social Well-being at School Scale	Social integration and school belonging	Extends measurement beyond individual emotions toward social experiences in school.
Matsumoto et al. (2025)	Japanese–Stirling Child Well-being Scale	Positive emotional state and positive outlook	Highlights the importance of adapting measures to local contexts.

The reviewed studies showed that approaches to measuring school-related well-being have gradually moved beyond treating well-being as a single emotional outcome. Across studies, assessment increasingly reflected the view that students' experiences at school involve emotional, cognitive, social, and contextual dimensions rather than affective responses alone. This shift also suggests growing attention to how children describe and experience school, not only to the outcomes being measured. Several instruments reflected this broader approach to assessment. Allen et al. (2018), through How I Feel About My School, showed that young children can report their school experiences meaningfully when measures are designed in developmentally appropriate ways. Similarly, the Subjective Well-being in School Scale distinguished school satisfaction from positive and negative affect, suggesting that students' evaluations of school involve both cognitive and emotional experiences (Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021). Moving beyond these dimensions, Moliner et al. (2021) included social integration and school belonging, drawing attention to students' relationships and participation within school communities. Other studies highlighted the importance of context in measurement. Matsumoto et al. (2025) showed that cultural adaptation may influence whether measures remain meaningful across educational settings.

Overall, the findings suggest that measuring school-related well-being increasingly involves balancing students' own experiences with wider school conditions. Rather than converging on a single preferred instrument, the reviewed studies point to the importance of using developmentally appropriate and context-sensitive approaches when examining school-related well-being in primary education.

4.4. Key Determinants Shaping School-Related Well-Being in Primary Education

Table 10 summarises the main conditions associated with school-related well-being across the reviewed studies and shows how students' experiences at school may be shaped through relationships, learning experiences, and school environments.

Table 10

Key determinants associated with school-related well-being in primary school contexts

<i>Study</i>	<i>Determinant Domain</i>	<i>Key Determinants</i>	<i>Synthesized Influence on School-related Well-being</i>
Schwerter et al. (2024)	Relational Conditions	Teacher support; peer bullying experiences	Teacher support consistently enhanced school enjoyment, whereas bullying reduced students' well-being even after accounting for cognitive and demographic differences.
Matsumoto et al. (2025)	Relational Conditions	Family support; teacher support; peer support	Social support strengthened well-being directly and indirectly through improving acceptance, trust, and classroom adjustment.

The reviewed studies suggest that school-related well-being is associated with a combination of relational and instructional conditions rather than any single influence. Across studies, relationships emerged most consistently, followed by learning experiences and wider school environments. This pattern suggests that students' experiences at school are shaped through everyday interactions and participation in school life rather than through individual characteristics alone. Several studies highlighted the importance of supportive relationships with teachers, peers, and family members. Positive relationships were commonly associated with stronger school enjoyment, emotional security, and a greater sense of belonging (Matsumoto et al., 2025; Schwerter et al., 2024). In contrast, bullying and perceptions of unfair treatment were repeatedly linked to less positive well-being experiences, even when demographic and cognitive differences were considered (Schwerter et al., 2024).

Learning experiences also appeared to shape students' school-related well-being, primarily through social support processes rather than through activity type alone. Gratitude-based classroom activities and community-based creative activities were associated with stronger emotional well-being and a greater sense of thriving among students (Matsumoto et al., 2024; Nanda et al., 2025), suggesting that the relational and reflective qualities of learning activities may matter more than their specific format. Overall, the findings suggest that school-related well-being in primary education is better understood through the interaction of relationships, learning experiences, and school environments than through isolated influences. Rather than acting independently, these conditions appear to work together in shaping how students experience school.

The synthesised determinants can also be interpreted through the theoretical framework guiding this review. Relational and instructional conditions correspond closely to the microsystemic processes described in Social-Ecological Theory, suggesting that children's experiences of well-being develop through everyday interactions with teachers, peers, and learning activities. Many of these determinants also appear to support or constrain students' experiences of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, providing an analytical link to Self-Determination Theory. Rather than representing isolated influences, these conditions collectively illustrate how school environments may shape children's experiences of school-related well-being.

4.5. Educational Outcomes Associated with School-Related Well-Being

Table 11 synthesizes the major educational and developmental outcomes associated with school-related well-being identified across the reviewed studies and illustrates how positive school experiences may extend beyond immediate emotional benefits.

Table 11

Educational and developmental outcomes associated with school-related well-being

<i>Study</i>	<i>Outcome Domain</i>	<i>Key Educational Outcomes</i>	<i>Synthesized Relationship with School-related Well-being</i>
Dempsey et al. (2024)	Psychosocial and Cognitive	Prosocial behavior; academic self-concept	Higher school-related well-being was associated with later improvements in prosocial behavior and more positive academic self-perceptions, suggesting that well-being may function as an early developmental resource.
Altıntaş and Canbulat (2024)	Academic and Motivational	Academic grit; attitudes toward language learning	School-related well-being supported persistence, active participation, and more positive attitudes toward learning through stronger academic grit.
Bozgün and Akın-Kösterelioğlu (2021)	Academic and Motivational	Reading motivation; writing motivation	Higher levels of well-being were associated with stronger intrinsic motivation and appeared to strengthen the translation of social-emotional development into learning engagement.
Leung et al. (2021)	Academic and Relational	Academic achievement; later happiness	Positive school experiences appeared to reinforce academic success, which subsequently contributed to later well-being, indicating reciprocal developmental pathways.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that school-related well-being is associated with a broad range of educational and developmental outcomes spanning academic, motivational, psychosocial, and health-related domains. Across studies, higher levels of well-being were commonly associated with stronger engagement with learning, more positive self-perceptions, improved social functioning, and more favorable health outcomes, suggesting that well-being may function not only as an educational outcome but also as a condition supporting broader student development. Several studies highlighted links between school-related well-being and academic engagement. Altıntaş and Canbulat (2024) reported that higher levels of well-being were associated with greater persistence, active participation, and more positive attitudes towards learning alongside stronger academic grit. Similarly, Bozgün and Akın-Kösterelioğlu (2021) found that students with stronger school-related well-being also reported higher intrinsic motivation for reading and writing, suggesting that positive school experiences may be associated with greater engagement in learning.

Beyond academic and motivational outcomes, the reviewed studies also identified relationships with psychosocial and developmental experiences. Dempsey et al. (2024) reported that stronger early well-being was associated with later improvements in prosocial behaviour and more positive academic self-concept. Leung et al. (2021) likewise suggested that school experiences and academic achievement may reinforce one another over time. Overall, the findings suggest that school-related well-being in primary education is associated with outcomes that extend beyond emotional experiences alone. Rather than representing an isolated educational outcome, school-related well-being appears to be connected with how students participate, learn, relate to others, and experience school over time.

From the perspective of Stage-Environment Fit Theory, these educational outcomes may be interpreted as reflecting the extent to which school environments correspond with children's

developmental needs. Educational contexts that provide age-appropriate expectations, opportunities for participation, and positive social relationships appear more likely to be associated with engagement, motivation, and positive adjustment. Although the reviewed studies do not establish causal pathways, the synthesis suggests that developmental fit provides a useful interpretive lens for understanding why similar school conditions may be associated with different well-being experiences and educational outcomes across students.

4.6. Integrative Synthesis: A Proposed Framework

The findings across the reviewed studies suggest that school-related well-being may be better understood not as a final educational outcome but as part of the process through which students experience and respond to school. Although previous studies have provided valuable evidence on conceptualisation, measurement, determinants, and outcomes, these areas have often been examined separately. As a result, there remains limited understanding of how school experiences may be associated with broader patterns of student development across primary education contexts. The organisation of this framework was informed not only by the recurring themes identified through inductive synthesis but also by the theoretical perspectives guiding the review. Specifically, Social-Ecological Theory informed the interpretation of contextual conditions, Self-Determination Theory informed the conceptualisation of students' well-being processes, and Stage-Environment Fit Theory informed the interpretation of developmental adjustment and educational outcomes.

In Figure 2, school-related well-being is conceptualised as a possible interpretive link between school conditions and students' developmental outcomes rather than as an established statistical mediator. The conceptual pathways represent potential bidirectional associations identified through the qualitative synthesis and should be interpreted cautiously as conceptual associations rather than verified causal relationships. To bring these findings together, this review proposes the Integrated Framework of School-related Well-being in Primary Education (Figure 2). Rather than treating school-related well-being as an isolated construct, the framework organises the reviewed evidence into three connected areas: school conditions, students' school-related well-being experiences, and educational and developmental outcomes. The first area, school conditions, refers to the educational experiences and contexts associated with students' well-being. Across the reviewed studies, these conditions included relationships (e.g., teacher, peer, and family support) and learning experiences (e.g., meaningful classroom activities) (Schwerter et al., 2024). The reviewed evidence suggests that these conditions are not experienced in isolation. Instead, their educational meaning appears to depend partly on how students experience school in everyday contexts.

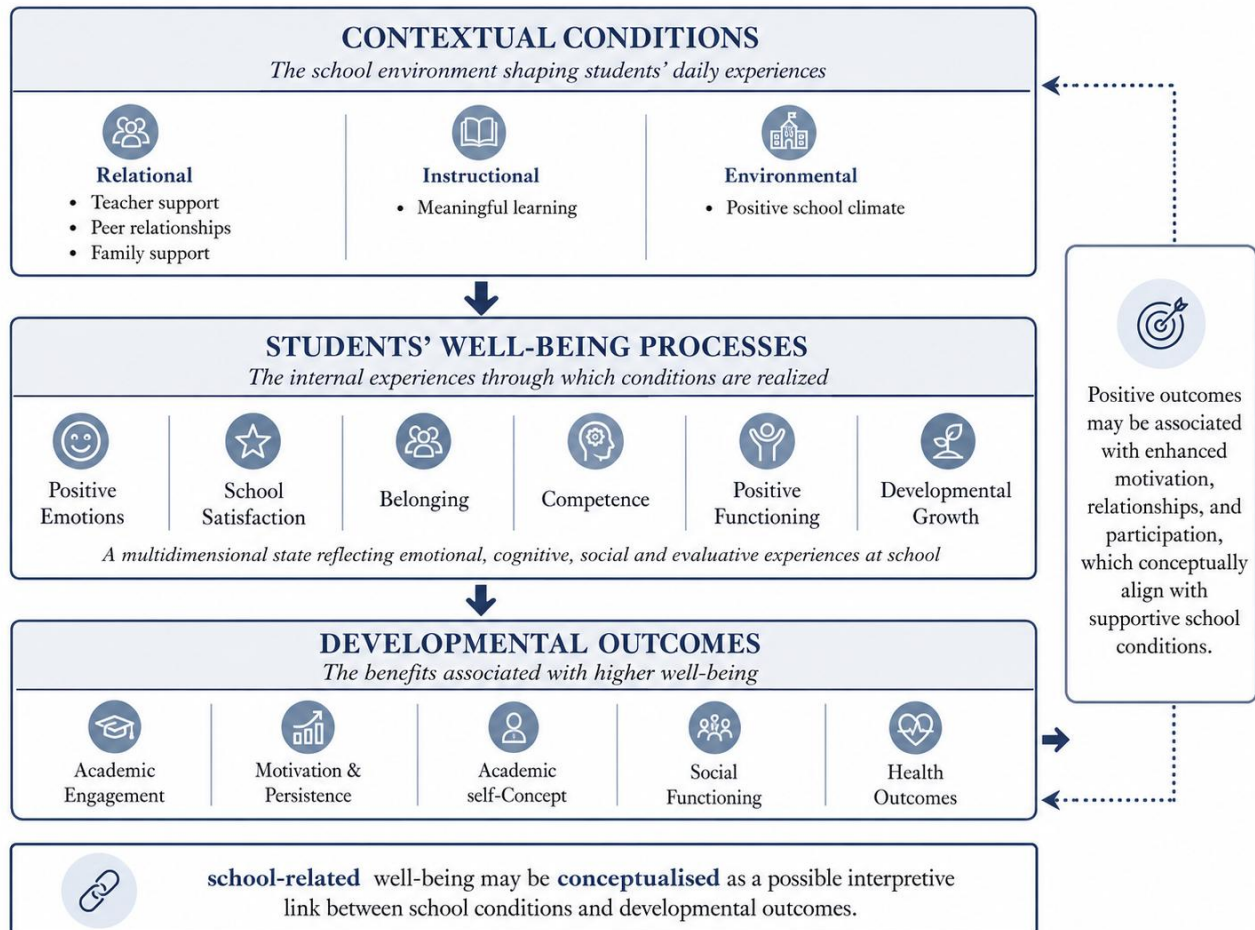
Drawing on the conceptual and measurement findings, school-related well-being is therefore conceptually positioned as a potential interpretive link through which school experiences may be understood by students. Across the reviewed studies, this process was reflected through emotional experiences, school satisfaction, belonging, competence, positive functioning, and developmental experiences (Erol & Erol, 2026; Klemp et al., 2025). The findings also point to the importance of using child-centred and developmentally appropriate approaches when examining these experiences (Allen et al., 2018; Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021; Matsumoto et al., 2025). The reviewed studies further suggested that stronger school-related well-being was associated with greater engagement, stronger persistence, more positive academic self-concept, and stronger social functioning (Altıntaş & Canbulat, 2024; Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021; Dempsey et al., 2024). Some evidence also suggested that these outcomes may, over time, relate to continued participation, motivation, and positive school relationships, potentially creating more supportive educational experiences (Leung et al., 2021). However, these patterns should be interpreted as conceptual relationships derived from synthesis rather than as causal pathways.

Compared with earlier reviews that often examined determinants, measurement, or outcomes separately, the proposed framework offers a way of considering these findings together. It does not assume direct pathways between school conditions and student outcomes. Instead, it

highlights school-related well-being as one possible process through which students experience and interpret school. In this sense, the framework is intended as an interpretive structure to support future empirical work rather than as a predictive model. Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that continued development in this area may benefit from clearer conceptual boundaries, greater consistency in measurement, and more research that considers different educational contexts, multiple perspectives, and changes over time.

Figure 2

Integrated framework of school-related well-being in primary education



5. Discussion

This review brought together findings from 18 studies to examine how school-related well-being has been understood, measured, associated with school conditions, and linked to educational outcomes in primary school contexts. Across the reviewed studies, school-related well-being was rarely treated as an emotional experience alone. Instead, the findings suggested that students' well-being at school was shaped through a combination of emotional experiences, relationships, participation, and opportunities for development within school life. Although growing attention has been given to student well-being in recent years, the synthesis showed that understanding in this area remains dispersed across definitions, measurement approaches, school conditions, and reported outcomes. This fragmentation makes it difficult to explain how students' experiences at school may relate to broader patterns of learning and development. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives guiding this review, the findings suggest that school-related well-being may be understood as part of the process through which students experience, interpret, and respond to school environments. From this perspective, school-related well-being is not positioned as a competing educational outcome but as one way of understanding how school experiences may become associated with broader educational and developmental experiences across primary

education. By focusing exclusively on primary-level empirical studies, this review complements existing secondary reviews (e.g., Liu, 2026; Ly & Vella-Brodrick, 2024) which examine youth well-being at a macro level, thereby providing a highly specialised and homogeneous unit of analysis for younger learners.

A major finding of this review concerns how school-related well-being has been understood across studies. The reviewed evidence suggests a gradual shift away from viewing well-being mainly as an emotional outcome towards broader understandings that include emotional, cognitive, social, and developmental experiences (Klemp et al., 2025; López-Pérez et al., 2022). This pattern is consistent with Social-Ecological Theory, which views students' experiences as developing through interactions within educational environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasises competence, relatedness, and autonomy as conditions associated with positive functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). At the same time, the reviewed studies suggest that these perspectives may not operate in the same way across contexts and developmental stages. Klemp et al. (2025) reported that primary-aged children appeared to place greater importance on competence and social connectedness than on autonomy. López-Pérez et al. (2022) likewise showed that meanings attached to school happiness differed across cultural settings. Viewed together, these findings suggest that school-related well-being may be better understood as an educational experience shaped through students' participation in school rather than as a universal psychological state. This interpretation highlights that children's experiences of well-being appear to develop through the interaction between developmental needs and the educational contexts in which those experiences occur.

The findings regarding measurement further support this interpretation. Across studies, assessment practices increasingly shifted towards child-centred and developmentally appropriate approaches while recognising the value of capturing broader educational experiences (Allen et al., 2018; Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021; Matsumoto et al., 2025; Moliner et al., 2021). Importantly, the observed variation in measurement approaches appears to reflect more than methodological diversity; it may indicate underlying conceptual uncertainty regarding what school-related well-being represents. Some instruments emphasised emotional experiences and school satisfaction, whereas others incorporated belonging, relationships, functioning, and contextual conditions. This suggests that differences in measurement may partly explain why findings across contexts remain difficult to compare and integrate. Rather than assuming that measurement simply captures existing constructs, the reviewed evidence suggests that assessment practices may also shape how school-related well-being is interpreted and represented in educational research. Taken together, these findings indicate that advancing this field may require stronger alignment between conceptual foundations and measurement decisions.

Another important contribution of this review concerns the interpretation of determinants shaping school-related well-being. Existing studies consistently identified relational and instructional influences, including teacher support, peer relationships, family support, and meaningful learning experiences (Matsumoto et al., 2025; Schwerter et al., 2024). At the same time, bullying repeatedly emerged as a condition associated with less positive school experiences (Schwerter et al., 2024). However, the present synthesis suggests that these factors should not be interpreted as isolated predictors operating independently. Instead, their educational significance appears to be realised through students' subjective experiences of school. This interpretation is consistent with Social-Ecological Theory and extends Stage-Environment Fit Theory by suggesting that developmental fit may depend less on objective school conditions and more on how those conditions are experienced and interpreted by students (Eccles et al., 1993). This perspective may also help explain why similar educational environments are associated with different well-being outcomes across students. These findings suggest that supporting school-related well-being may require greater attention to the design of everyday educational experiences rather than isolated support initiatives.

The findings also offer a broader interpretation of the role of well-being in educational development. Across the reviewed studies, school-related and closely related forms of subjective

well-being were associated with a range of academic and socio-emotional outcomes, including academic grit, motivation, attitudes toward learning, academic self-concept, and prosocial behaviour (Altıntaş & Kutluca Canbulat, 2024; Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021; Dempsey et al., 2024). Similar associations have also been observed between subjective academic well-being and academic competencies among elementary school students (Zengin & Akçakın, 2025). Importantly, these findings position well-being within educational development rather than solely as a desirable outcome of schooling. This broader developmental perspective is also consistent with evidence that students' educational outcomes are shaped by supportive processes extending beyond the classroom, with meta-analytic findings indicating a positive, although modest, contribution of parental involvement to student achievement (Danişman, 2017). Longitudinal evidence provides further insight into the temporal ordering of well-being-related associations. Early school well-being predicted later academic self-concept and prosocial behaviour in the first years of primary education, whereas the reverse pathways were not significant (Dempsey et al., 2024). In a separate longitudinal study, earlier parent-child and peer relationships were associated with later academic achievement, and academic achievement contributed to the pathway linking these relational experiences with subsequent happiness (Leung et al., 2021). Although these findings should not be interpreted as evidence of causal or universally reciprocal pathways, they indicate that well-being, relational experiences, and educational functioning may become connected over time through different developmental processes. This interpretation encourages a shift away from viewing well-being primarily as a response to difficulties or negative outcomes. Instead, the reviewed evidence suggests that school-related well-being may be understood as one dimension of educational development associated with students' capacity to learn, relate to others, and function positively within school contexts. From this perspective, educational quality and school-related well-being may be better understood as complementary priorities rather than competing goals.

Building on these findings, the framework proposed in this review offers one way of bringing different strands of evidence together to understand school-related well-being in primary education. Rather than viewing conceptualisation, measurement, determinants, and outcomes as separate areas of inquiry, the framework considers how these findings may be understood in relation to one another within students' school experiences. Drawing on the reviewed studies, the framework suggests that relationships, learning experiences, and wider school environments become meaningful partly through how students experience school. These experiences were reflected across studies through positive emotions, belonging, competence, school satisfaction, and positive functioning before being associated with broader educational and developmental experiences. In this sense, the framework positions school-related well-being not as an endpoint but as part of the process through which school experiences may relate to students' development over time. This interpretation does not seek to explain causal pathways or predict outcomes. Instead, it offers an interpretive structure for considering how school conditions and students' experiences may be connected across primary education contexts. From this perspective, school-related well-being may be understood less as an additional educational goal and more as one dimension of how students experience educational quality and development within school. Our proposed Integrated Framework extends existing theoretical perspectives by linking the contextual conditions described in Social-Ecological Theory with the psychological processes emphasised in Self-Determination Theory while incorporating the developmental perspective of Stage-Environment Fit Theory. Rather than considering these perspectives separately, the framework provides an integrated interpretation of how school environments may be associated with children's well-being through experiences of belonging, competence, autonomy, and positive functioning. As an interpretive framework derived from qualitative synthesis, it should be regarded as a conceptual model that requires empirical validation. Future research could examine these proposed relationships using Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling, multilevel path analysis, or longitudinal designs across diverse educational contexts to test, refine, and extend the framework.

6. Implications

This review offers implications for future research and educational practice related to school-related well-being in primary school contexts. The findings suggest a need for greater conceptual clarity and more consistent measurement, as reviewed studies differed considerably in how school-related well-being was defined, assessed, and interpreted (Allen et al., 2018; Bozgün & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021; Matsumoto et al., 2025). This variation makes comparison across studies more difficult and limits understanding of how findings may accumulate across contexts. The framework proposed in this review may provide a useful point of reference for future research by bringing together school conditions, students' experiences of school, and broader educational outcomes. Rather than treating these areas separately, the framework may help guide future work that examines how students experience and respond to different educational conditions. Future studies may also benefit from using longitudinal, multi-informant, and context-sensitive approaches to better understand how school-related well-being changes across educational stages and sociocultural contexts (Leung et al., 2021; Matsumoto et al., 2025). Including perspectives from students, teachers, families, and schools may further support a more complete understanding of how school-related well-being is experienced and sustained over time.

Several implications also emerge for educational practice. Rather than approaching well-being primarily through prevention or remediation, schools may consider creating educational conditions that support students' positive school experiences. Evidence across the reviewed studies suggests that supportive teacher-student relationships, peer connectedness, meaningful learning opportunities, extracurricular engagement, and inclusive school environments are associated with stronger school-related well-being (Schwerter et al., 2024). Practices that encourage student participation, collaborative learning, and stronger school-family collaboration may represent a supportive condition associated with both school-related well-being and broader student development. To translate these findings into educational practice, several stakeholder-specific recommendations can be considered. Teachers may incorporate brief, structured daily check-ins to monitor students' emotional well-being and strengthen teacher-student relationships. School leaders may support school-related well-being by creating collaborative learning environments that foster students' autonomy, competence, and sense of belonging. Policymakers may further support these efforts by incorporating student well-being indicators into school quality assurance and evaluation frameworks alongside academic performance measures.

More broadly, the findings suggest that school-related well-being may be considered one dimension of educational quality and should be understood as complementary to, rather than competing with, students' broader educational development (Altıntaş & Canbulat, 2024; Dempsey et al., 2024).

7. Limitations and Future Directions

This review is not without limitations, and the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the review design. Although a systematic and transparent procedure was followed in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), the review included only studies published in English and was restricted to selected databases and peer-reviewed journal articles. Consequently, relevant evidence published in other languages or formats may not have been captured, potentially limiting the cultural, geographical, and methodological breadth of the synthesis. This limitation may be particularly relevant in research on school-related well-being, as students' experiences and understandings of well-being are shaped by educational and sociocultural contexts. In addition, restricting the review to peer-reviewed journal articles and excluding theses, dissertations, and other forms of grey literature may have introduced publication bias, as studies reporting positive findings are generally more likely to be published than those reporting non-significant or mixed results. Consequently, the synthesised evidence may overrepresent positive associations between school-related well-being, its determinants, and educational outcomes while underrepresenting weaker or inconsistent findings. This may have contributed to the relatively consistent patterns identified across the reviewed studies and should be considered when

interpreting the proposed framework. Future reviews could reduce this limitation by incorporating grey literature and a broader range of evidence sources.

Another limitation relates to the scope and diversity of the reviewed studies. While this review synthesised evidence across conceptualisation, measurement, determinants, and educational outcomes, it focused specifically on school-related well-being and therefore should not be generalised to broader dimensions of child well-being beyond school contexts. In addition, the included studies varied considerably in conceptual definitions, measurement approaches, educational settings, and participant characteristics. While this variation provided a broader view of how school-related well-being has been examined, it reduced comparability across studies and limited interpretation of how students' experiences may develop or change over time. Future research may benefit from establishing clearer conceptual boundaries and adopting more consistent measurement practices. Greater use of longitudinal, comparative, and context-sensitive designs may also support understanding of how school-related well-being develops across educational stages and settings. Collaborative work across different educational systems may further help examine whether similar patterns emerge across contexts and support continued refinement of the framework proposed in this review.

8. Conclusion

This systematic review examined how school-related well-being has been understood, measured, associated with school conditions, and linked to educational outcomes in primary school contexts. Across the reviewed studies, school-related well-being was rarely treated as an emotional experience alone. Instead, the findings suggest that students' well-being at school reflects broader experiences of participation, belonging, functioning, and development. The reviewed evidence also showed increasing attention to child-centred and developmentally appropriate perspectives, although substantial variation remained in how school-related well-being was defined and assessed, limiting comparison across studies. School-related well-being was commonly associated with relationships, learning experiences, and wider school environments, and may also be associated with outcomes including engagement, motivation, academic self-concept, social functioning, and health-related experiences. Rather than viewing school-related well-being as a separate educational goal, the findings suggest that it may be better understood as an educational dimension through which students experience and respond to school contexts.

Building on these findings, this review proposes an interpretive framework that brings together school conditions, students' experiences, and broader educational outcomes. From this perspective, school-related well-being is conceptually positioned not as an endpoint but as a possible interpretive link which school experiences may be associated with students' development over time. The framework is intended to organise relationships identified across studies rather than imply fixed pathways or established causal mechanisms. Overall, the findings point to the need for clearer conceptual boundaries, greater consistency in measurement, and closer attention to the school conditions shaping students' everyday experiences. Continued progress in this area may benefit from more longitudinal, comparative, and context-sensitive research across educational settings to further examine these conceptual relationships across diverse educational contexts.

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Data availability: No new datasets were generated or analyzed in this study. All data underlying the review were obtained from publicly available published literature. The sources included in the review and the study selection process are reported in the article.

Declaration of AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: The authors used ChatGPT solely to assist with grammar correction, language refinement, clarity, and stylistic editing during manuscript preparation. All scientific content, including the study conception, literature search, screening, data extraction, quality appraisal, synthesis, interpretation of findings, conclusions,

tables, figures, and the proposed framework, was developed entirely by the authors. The authors reviewed and approved all revisions and accept full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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Appendix A. Included Studies

Table A1

Characteristics of Included Studies ($n = 18$)

Author(s) (Year)	Country	Sample (N)	Age / Grade	Study Design	Construct Measured	Measurement Instrument	Main Findings	MMAT Criteria Met (Table 5)	RQs Addressed
1. Akyürek (2024)	Turkey	539	Primary school sample, Turkey	Quant descriptive	School Happiness	Happiness Scale at School	Positive school climate was significantly associated with school happiness (cross- sectional, quantitative- descriptive design).	4 Yes, 1 CT	RQ3 (Determinants)
2. Allen et al. (2018)	UK	2,345	4–8 years (HIFAMS instrument age range)	Quant descriptive	Well-being at school	HIFAMS Scale	Validated the HIFAMS measure; found girls reported higher school well-being.	4 Yes, 1 CT	RQ2 (Measurement); RQ3 (Determinants)
3. Altıntaş and Canbulat (2024)	Turkey	225	Primary school students	Quant non-rand.	SWB at school	SWBS (Tian, 2008)	Subjective well-being and grit were associated with attitudes toward target-language learning (cross-sectional SEM path model).	5 Yes	RQ4 (Outcomes)
4. Bozgün and Akın- Kösterelioğlu (2021)	Turkey	582	Primary school students	Quant non-rand.	SWB at school	SWBS	Well-being statistically mediates the association with social-emotional development and motivation (cross- sectional SEM; not a test of temporal mediation).	5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants); RQ4 (Outcomes)
5. Dempsey et al. (2024)	UK	206	M = 5.3 years at T1 (first year of primary school)	Quant non-rand.	Well-being at school	HIFAMS Scale	Early school well-being predicted later prosociality and academic self-concept (longitudinal, cross- lagged panel design).	5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants); RQ4 (Outcomes)

Table A1 continued

<i>Author(s) (Year)</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Sample (N)</i>	<i>Age / Grade</i>	<i>Study Design</i>	<i>Construct Measured</i>	<i>Measurement Instrument</i>	<i>Main Findings</i>	<i>MMAT Criteria Met (Table 5)</i>	<i>RQs Addressed</i>
6. Erol and Erol (2026)	Turkey	279	Primary school children (Roma students, Türkiye)	Quant descriptive	SWB at school	SWBS	Loneliness statistically mediates the association between friendship quality and subjective well-being (cross-sectional, quantitative-descriptive design; not a test of temporal mediation). Friendship-education interventions were associated with higher school well-being scores (non-randomized comparison-group design; not a randomized controlled trial).	4 Yes, 1 CT	RQ3 (Determinants)
7. Erol and Köksal (2025)	Turkey	94	Primary school students	Quant non-rand.	Psych. Well-being	Stirling PWB Scale	Friendship-education interventions were associated with higher school well-being scores (non-randomized comparison-group design; not a randomized controlled trial).	5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants)
8. Gómez-Baya et al. (2021)	7 EU nations	7,445	10 years old	Quant descriptive	School Satisfaction	ISCWeB Survey	School relationships were the strongest correlates of child happiness across the seven-nation sample (cross-sectional survey design).	4 Yes, 1 CT	RQ3 (Determinants)
9. Klemp et al. (2025)	Germany	42	Primary school children	Qualitative	Well-being	Focus groups	Competence and relatedness are children's core psychological needs at school.	5 Yes	RQ1 (Conceptual)

Table A1 continued

<i>Author(s) (Year)</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Sample (N)</i>	<i>Age /Grade</i>	<i>Study Design</i>	<i>Construct Measured</i>	<i>Measurement Instrument</i>	<i>Main Findings</i>	<i>MMAT Criteria Met (Table 5)</i>	<i>RQs Addressed</i>
10. Leung et al. (2021)	HK (China)	786	Primary school students	Quant non-rand.	Happiness	Subj. Happiness Scale	Peer and parent relationships were more strongly associated with happiness than academic achievement (longitudinal design, low attrition).	5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants)
11. López-Pérez et al. (2022)	UK/Spain	644	M = 10.6–11.0 years (English and Spanish samples)	Quant descriptive	School Happiness	Open-ended feedback	Meanings of school happiness are culturally and gender-dependent.	4 Yes, 1 CT	RQ1 (Conceptual)
12. Matsumoto et al. (2024)	Japan	48	7–8 years	Mixed methods	Well-being	J-SCWBS	“WE diary” gratitude interventions were associated with improved emotional well-being (non-randomized waitlist-controlled design; not a randomized controlled trial).	5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants)
13. Matsumoto et al. (2025)	Japan	204	7–12 years (2nd–6th graders)	Quant descriptive	Well-being	J-SCWBS	Awareness of social support was associated with better classroom adjustment (cross-sectional, quantitative-descriptive design).	3 Yes, 1 No, 1 CT	RQ3 (Determinants); RQ4 (Outcomes)
14. Moliner et al. (2021)	Spain	486	10–12 years (Grades 4–6)	Quant descriptive	Social Well-being	Social Well-being Scale	Validated a seven-factor tool for measuring multidimensional social well-being.	4 Yes, 1 CT	RQ2 (Measurement)

Table A1 continued

Author(s) (Year)	Country	Sample (N)	Age /Grade	Study Design	Construct Measured	Measurement Instrument	Main Findings	MMAT Criteria Met (Table 5)	RQs Addressed
15. Nanda et al. (2025)	India	30	Primary school students	Qualitative	Flourishing	Photovoice	Community-based creative activities foster school- related student thriving.	5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants)
16. Oh et al. (2020)	South Korea	582	11-13 years (Grades 4-6)	Quant non-rand.	Emotional SWB	Resilience Scale	Horticultural therapy was associated with a reduction in school-related stress, though the single-group pre-post design without a comparison group limits causal interpretation. Targeted "happiness lessons" were associated with reduced negative school affect (non-randomized design; volunteer-recruited cohorts limit generalisability).	4 Yes, 1 No	RQ3 (Determinants)
17. Rahm et al. (2024)	Germany	491	Fourth-grade students	Quant non-rand.	Well-being	KIDSCREEN-52	Teacher support was associated with a buffering (moderating) pattern against the negative effects of bullying on enjoyment (cross-sectional, quantitative-descriptive design).	4 Yes, 1 No	RQ3 (Determinants)
18. Schwerter et al. (2024)	Germany	3,959	M = 10.34 years (Grade 4, PIRLS)	Quant descriptive	School Enjoyment	PIRLS items		5 Yes	RQ3 (Determinants); RQ4 (Outcomes)