

FROM LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TO LEARNER WELL-BEING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF WELL-BEING-ORIENTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Fitri Yuliana¹, Faizatul Hayati ²

^{1,2} Universitas Bahaudin Mudhary Madura

¹fitriyuliana@unibamadura.ac.id, ²faizatulhayati@unibamadura.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Student well-being in English Language Teaching (ELT) is a crucial aspect for students, as their success is measured not only by linguistic proficiency but also by their emotional state. However, studies systematically mapping the development of well-being in ELT remain limited. This study aims to identify research trends, key themes, and research gaps and future directions regarding well-being in ELT. It employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology following PRISMA guidelines. Data were obtained from the Scopus database through a process of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Out of 1,451 initial articles identified, 17 met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results indicate a significant increase in publications concerning well-being in ELT since 2020. The analysis identified four key research themes: psychological factors supporting well-being; the roles of teachers and the learning environment; the relationship between well-being and language learning outcomes; and well-being as an approach within ELT theory and practice. Furthermore, existing research is predominantly characterized by specific national contexts, quantitative approaches, and a view of well-being as an outcome. These findings underscore the importance of integrating well-being into English Language Teaching.

Keywords: *English language teaching, students' well-being, well-being*

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, English language education has generally tended to be oriented towards achieving linguistic competencies such as mastery of grammar or structure, vocabulary, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Furthermore, the success of language learning is often measured through academic achievement, which can be seen from

test scores or the level of English proficiency achieved by students (Rezaei et al., 2024; Muluneh & Bejj, 2024; Castagna et al., 2021). This orientation has contributed significantly to the development of English teaching methodology, but the overly focused focus on cognitive aspects and academic abilities has neglected the psychological dimension of students, which also determines the success of the

language learning process (Wang et al., 2025; Storch & Yang, 2024).

Student well-being has gained growing attention in contemporary educational settings. Well-being is seen as a positive state encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and academic aspects, which can enable an individual to develop optimally (Solms et al., 2025). Several studies have shown that students with high well-being tend to have better learning motivation, are active in the learning process, and are able to face academic challenges more effectively (Siira et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025; Nguyen & Kuyini, 2024). Conversely, students who lack well-being can experience learning obstacles due to academic pressure, anxiety stress, and emotional exhaustion (Petruzziello et al., 2025). This can also reduce the quality of the student's learning experience.

The issue of well-being is increasingly relevant because learning a foreign language often presents certain psychological challenges for students, such as language anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and pressure to achieve certain competencies (Chong et al.,

2025; Qin & Li, 2024). This can impact active participation and learning outcomes. Therefore, researchers and educational practitioners begin to advocate for teaching approaches that prioritize not only improving language skills but also paying attention to student well-being throughout the learning process to maximize student outcomes.

There is a growing interest in integrating well-being principles into English language learning is growing. Several previous studies have examined the relationship between well-being and learning motivation, student participation, academic resilience, and positive psychology in second language learning (Von Bortzell-Szuch et al., 2026; Chen et al., 2024). Integrating well-being with English language learning is considered to create a more meaningful and humane learning experience. However, less research has explored the impact of well-being on English language learning in the classroom. Furthermore, several studies have found that the success of foreign language learning is not solely determined by language or linguistic abilities, but also by the psychological

condition or state of well-being of the students (Mercer & Gregersen, 2025).

Previous research on well-being is distributed across different themes and perspectives. Most studies focus on specific aspects such as foreign language enjoyment, language anxiety, and learning motivation (Yuzlu, 2025; Gao, 2026). Meanwhile, a more comprehensive understanding of the integration of well-being and English language teaching remains very limited. Furthermore, few studies have systematically mapped trends, major themes, research gaps, and future directions related to well-being in English language teaching. This highlights the need for a literature synthesis that can provide a comprehensive overview of the development of the field of well-being in English language teaching.

In response to this gap, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of studies that discuss well-being in the context of English Language Teaching. Specifically, this study aims to identify research trends, map themes that have been explored, and reveal research gaps and future directions. The results of this study are expected

to provide theoretical contributions in enriching the understanding of well-being-oriented English Language Teaching and provide practical implications for educators, researchers, and policymakers in developing English language learning that is not only oriented towards linguistic competence but also towards the well-being of students.

B. Method

Design

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize studies that discuss well-being in the context of English Language Teaching (Kitchenham, 2004). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of research trends, identify key themes that have been explored, and uncover research gaps that require continuation (Synder, 2019). Unlike traditional literature review processes, SLR uses systematic, transparent, and replicable procedures that can minimize bias in the process of selecting and analyzing literature.

This study used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic

Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, which consist of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, researchers collected relevant articles through a systematic search of predetermined databases. Next, in the screening stage, researchers eliminated duplicate articles and filtered articles based on titles and abstracts. Articles that passed the initial selection were then evaluated more deeply in the eligibility stage based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, in the inclusion stage, researchers produced a collection of articles that met all criteria and were further analyzed to answer the research questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study were collected through a systematic search of the Scopus database. Scopus was chosen as the sole data source because it is one of the largest and most reputable bibliographic databases indexing high-quality international journals across various disciplines (Mongeon & Paul-hus, 2016). In addition to its broad coverage, Scopus also provides comprehensive metadata, a rigorous

indexing process, and search features that enable more systematic identification of literature. Therefore, Scopus is considered sufficient data to provide a representative representation of the development of research on well-being in the context of English Language Teaching.

The literature search process was conducted using a combination of keywords developed based on the main concepts of the research, namely well-being and English Language Teaching. The keywords are well-being, wellbeing, psychological well-being, flourishing, wellness, happiness, resilience, positive psychology, positive education, learner well-being, student well-being, and teacher well-being. Then, these keywords were combined with terms related to English learning, including English language teaching, ELT, English language learning, EFL, ESL, English as a foreign language, English as a second language, English education, foreign language learning, and foreign language education.

Previous literature searches were conducted using the following query; TITLE-ABS-KEY (("well-being" OR wellbeing OR

"psychological well-being" OR flourishing OR wellness OR happiness OR resilience OR "positive psychology" OR "positive education" OR "learner well-being" OR "student well-being" OR "teacher well-being") AND ("English language teaching" OR ELT OR "English language learning" OR EFL OR ESL OR "English as a foreign language" OR "English as a second language" OR "English education" OR "foreign language learning" OR "foreign language education"). The article selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines, which consisted of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. In the identification stage, the initial search yielded 1,451 documents relevant to the keywords used. Next, in the screening stage, articles were filtered based on several criteria. First, the publication year range was limited to the period 2015–2026, reducing the number of articles to 1,404 documents. Second, the subject area was limited to the fields of Social Sciences and Psychology to ensure relevance to the research focus, resulting in 124 documents. Third, the document type was limited to research articles, leaving 116 documents.

Fourth, the publication language was limited to English, resulting in 113 documents. Fifth, articles were limited to open-access publications, resulting in a total of 55 articles.

In the eligibility stage, all articles meeting the initial criteria were further examined through a review of the title, abstract, and content to ensure their alignment with the research focus. Articles that solely addressed well-being in the context of general education, health, or other fields outside of English language teaching were removed from the selection process. After this evaluation, 17 articles were found to meet all inclusion criteria and were selected for further analysis.

The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis was conducted by identifying research trends and key themes emerging in the literature. Furthermore, this study also analyzed existing research gaps and identified future research directions related to the implementation of well-being-oriented English language teaching. The results of this analysis were used to answer all previously formulated research questions.

C. Finding and Discussion

Trends in Research on Learner Well-Being in English Language Teaching

Temporal Trends of Publication

The publication trend analysis aims to examine research developments regarding well-being in English Language Teaching (ELT). The analysis reveals a significant increase in research on student well-being within the ELT context between 2015 and 2026. During the 2015–2019 period, the number of publications remained relatively low yet stable, with fewer than 40 studies published annually. This finding indicates that the issue of student well-being had not yet received substantial attention and was not a primary focus of instruction.

An increase in publications regarding well-being in English Language Teaching (ELT) is evident between 2020 and 2025; the number of publications rose from 56 in 2020 to 394 in 2025. This upward trend indicates a growing focus on well-being within the field of ELT and suggests that the need to address student well-being in the learning process has become increasingly apparent, prompting research to address these concerns. Furthermore,

this development can be linked to the rise of the positive psychology perspective in language education, which emphasizes the importance of emotional, psychological, and social aspects of language learning. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, also contributed to heightened attention regarding student mental health and well-being within the educational context.

Although the number of publications in 2026 decreased compared to the previous year, this was because the 2026 data did not yet cover all well-being-related research until the end of the year. Therefore, this cannot be considered a decrease because the data collected did not cover a full year. Figure 1 shows the number of well-being research based on the year.

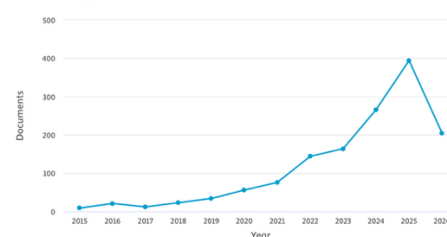


Figure 1 Temporal trends of publication of well-being issue based on the year

Overall, the analysis indicates that research on well-being in English Language Teaching has significant

development. This growth reflects the increasing attention researchers and academics are studying the psychological and emotional aspects of students' English language learning. Furthermore, the expansion of research into well-being demonstrates a growing awareness of the importance of mental health.

Distribution Across Subject Areas

Analysis based on subject areas reveals that the social sciences dominate research on well-being in English Language Teaching, accounting for a total of 978 publications (40.1%). This dominance indicates that the issue of well-being in English language teaching is extensively examined by academics and practitioners from the perspectives of education, the learning process, social interaction, and factors influencing students' learning experiences.

The field of Arts and Humanities ranks second with 594 publications (24.4%), followed by Psychology with 386 publications (15.8%). The significant contribution of these two fields demonstrates that psychological aspects such as emotion, motivation, resilience, and mental health are recognized as

important and instrumental to successful language learning. Furthermore, this highlights the close connection between language learning and individual development.

In addition to those three fields, research on students' well-being in English Language Teaching is also found in several other areas, such as computer science (4.4%), medicine (2.1%), engineering (2.0%), neuroscience (1.4%), environmental science (1.2%), multidisciplinary (0.9%), agricultural and biological sciences (0.9%), and other fields (6.7%). Figure 2 shows the distribution by subject area.

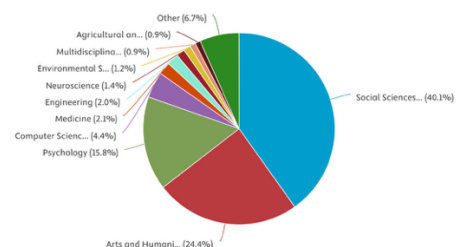


Figure 2 Distribution across subject areas of well-being issue

The dominance of the social sciences, arts and humanities, and psychology fields indicates that the growth of research on student well-being in English Language Teaching (ELT) stems from increasing focus to the educational, social, and psychological aspects of the

discipline. This also reflects an evolution in the focus of ELT shifting from an initial orientation solely toward linguistic proficiency to an approach that recognizes student well-being as a crucial factor contributing to success in the field.

Distribution Across Countries

An analysis of the countries involved is necessary to identify which nations are actively focusing on student well-being and conducting research in this field. The results indicate that research on well-being in ELT is dominated by countries in Asia. China (227 publications) and Turkey (103 publications) have the highest number of publications in this field. Meanwhile, English-speaking countries such as the United States (96 publications), the United Kingdom (82 publications), Australia (35 publications), and Canada (35 publications) also show significant publication output and contribute substantially to the advancement of research on well-being.

The dominance of Asian countries in well-being research indicates a growing focus on student well-being in contexts where English is a foreign language. This trend may stem from the fact that English

Language Teaching (ELT) faces various academic, social, and psychological challenges, prompting academics, practitioners, and researchers to explore ways to address these issues and support student well-being during the learning process. In other words, the rise in well-being publications in these countries is driven by the need to enhance student well-being.

Furthermore, the number of publications produced by countries such as Saudi Arabia (71), Malaysia (59), Australia (35), and Indonesia (35) indicates that research on well-being in ELT is advancing, particularly within educational and cultural contexts. This also demonstrates that student well-being is an issue attracting attention across various nations, with research being conducted to address the challenges students may face, even though the volume of research varies by country. Figure 3 below illustrates the distribution across countries.

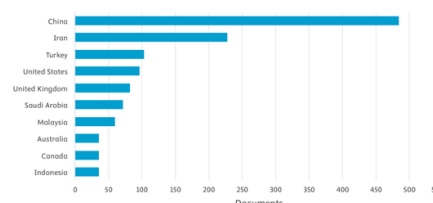


Figure 3 Distribution across countries of well-being issue

The analysis of distribution across countries shows that the issue of well-being is not only widely researched in Western countries but is also experiencing rapid development in Asia. This finding indicates that student well-being in ELT is indeed a crucial factor to consider to maximize the learning process and allow students to learn without feeling stressed or anxiety.

Document well-being focused on ELT

Out of the 55 articles screened, the author focuses on analyzing 17

research studies that explore well-being integration into English Language Teaching (ELT). Table 1 presents these 17 articles, listing the author, year, country, research purpose, publisher or journal, and the number of citations.

Table 1 Themes Have Been Explored in Studies on Learner Well-Being in ELT

No	Authors and year	Country	Purpose of the Research	Publisher/Journal	Citation
1	Zhang et al. (2026)	China	To explore the relationship between Chinese high school students' perceived teachers' academic support and their self-regulated learning, as well as the chain mediation effect of school belonging and resilience in this relationship	Elsevier	0
2	Rashid & Malik (2026)	Pakistan	The roles of perceived teacher support, L2 grit, and Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) in willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among Pakistani university students, thereby filling a contextual	MDPI	2

			gap in Pakistani multilingual society.		
3	Tunca & Bahsi (2025)	Turkey	The mediating role of resilience and mindfulness in the relationship between international students' perceptions of social exclusion and language learning anxiety.	Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association (Türk PDR Association)	0
4	Shen & Guo (2025)	China	The direct and indirect effects of teacher growth mindset and resilience on burnout among Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers (n = 557).	Springer Nature	1
5	Liu et al. (2025)	China	A quantitative design to examine the relationships among resilience, anxiety, and academic achievement among a cohort of 863 Chinese senior high school students learning English as a foreign language.	Springer Nature	5
6	Zhaleh & Estaji (2025)	Iran	To mitigate this research caveat, this qualitative study with a phenomenological research design explored 55 Iranian EFL undergraduates' perceptions of and emotional responses to their lived experiences of teacher justice in university EFL classes.	Springer Nature	3
7	Peng & Wang (2025)	China	To examine the relationships between perceived TCL and PWB via self-efficacy.	Wiley	2

8	Li et al. (2025)	China	This study explores the effects of mindfulness, resilience, and self-efficacy on foreign language anxiety among Chinese college students and identifies the most significant predictor of foreign language anxiety.	Institute of Advanced Engineering and Science (IAES)	1
9	Sukkaew et al. (2025)	Thailand	The current study aims to investigate the dual impact of debates on cooperative learning and foreign language anxiety (FLA) among Thai EFL students.	Foundation Pro Scientia Publica (Poland)	0
10	Rashid & Malik (2025)	Pakistan	This study investigates the influence of Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) on affective dimensions of English language learning among 515 Pakistani EFL learners, addressing a key gap in Global South research.	MDPI	6
11	Liu et al. (2025)	China	This study aimed to explore the relationships among language learning curiosity, foreign language anxiety, and academic achievement among junior high school students.	MDPI	11
12	Alipour et al. (2025)	Iran	Objective. To investigate the relations of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' resilience, mindfulness, and foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE) in prediction of their attitudes	Lomonosov Moscow State University	1

			toward loving pedagogy in Iran.		
13	Zhang (2023)	China	This study aims to explore the effects of EI on English speaking in the context of China's universities.	Nova Southeastern University	5
14	Aldosari et al. (2022)	Saudi Arabia	The first objective of this study was to investigate the foreign language enjoyment (FLE) levels of FL teachers in Saudi Arabia. The second objective was to investigate the level of enjoyment felt by these teachers when they were FL students. Third, gender differences with regard to the level of enjoyment were studied. Finally, the sources of enjoyment were explored.	Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav (Ukraine)	3
15	Uslu (2022)	Turkey	The present experimental study was conducted to examine the effects of foreign language acquisition on preschool children's self-regulation and social skills.	Taylor & Francis	1
16	Mercer (2021)	Austria	Well-being is a basic human right according to the World Health Organization. It is the foundation of a life well lived and ought to be the basis of all educational endeavours and encounters. In this article, I urge ELT to make well-being a priority for research and practice.	Oxford University Press (OUP)	204

17	Khajavy et al. (2019)	Kare Publishing (Turkey)	this research intends to assess the role of PsyCap in learners' second/foreign (L2) willingness to communicate (WTC), L2 motivational self system, and L2 achievement.	Kare Publishing (Turkey)	23
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Themes Have Been Explored in Studies on Learner Well-Being in ELT66

A thematic analysis of 17 articles identified four main themes related to student well-being in ELT: psychological factors supporting well-being; the roles of teachers and the learning environment; the relationship between well-being and language learning outcomes; and well-being as an approach within ELT theory and practice. These themes indicate a shift from focusing solely on individual psychological characteristics to considering a broader range of aspects. The most dominant theme identified was the psychological factors supporting well-being. Several factors play a crucial role in building and sustaining student well-being, including resilience, mindfulness, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, grit, curiosity, psychological capital, a sense of school belonging, and self-regulation. These factors demonstrate that positive psychological resources

serve as protective elements, helping students navigate challenges during the learning process. They also assist students in managing emotions, fostering and maintaining learning motivation, and enhancing self-regulation. Consequently, students' psychological states help create and sustain their well-being, enabling them to engage in the learning process more effectively.

The second theme concerns the role of teachers and the learning environment in supporting well-being. Forms of support identified in the research include teacher support, teacher caring, teacher fairness, and a teacher growth mindset. Such support fosters a more positive learning experience, strengthens interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, and reduces the pressure experienced by students. Therefore, it can be said that student well-being is also influenced by the quality of social

interactions and the classroom learning climate.

Another identified theme is the relationship between well-being and language learning. Previous research indicates a strong link between well-being and various academic and affective factors, such as foreign language anxiety, willingness to communicate, academic achievement, speaking performance, burnout, and foreign language enjoyment. These studies show that students with high levels of well-being exhibit lower anxiety, whereas those with low well-being experience higher anxiety. This suggests that well-being is not merely a matter of psychological state but also encompasses aspects that support an optimal learning process.

Another theme emerging from previous research is well-being as an approach within ELT practice and theory. This theme highlights well-being as a key principle in the delivery of language instruction. Such studies demonstrate that the goal of language learning is not merely to enhance linguistic competence but also to support students' well-being; consequently, ELT can become a

more humanistic, inclusive, and sustainable form of learning.

Research Gaps and Future Directions Identified in the Existing Literature

Although the analysis of previous articles yields valuable insights, several research gaps remain regarding student well-being within the context of ELT. Geographically, prior research has been dominated by specific countries, such as China, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. While studies from other regions, including Southeast Asia, remain limited. This indicates that research on student well-being is often grounded in specific social contexts and educational settings, meaning that findings from earlier studies cannot yet be fully generalized to ELT contexts in other countries.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that the majority of prior studies employ a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between well-being and positive psychological resources—such as resilience, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence—while research utilizing qualitative and mixed-methods approaches remains very limited. This dominance of quantitative research

has hindered an in-depth discussion of students' well-being within the context of ELT. Moreover, previous studies have largely focused on well-being as an outcome influenced by psychological factors, whereas there has been limited exploration of well-being as a pedagogical strategy, an element of instructional design, or a direct intervention.

Therefore, future research needs to broaden its scope, so the understanding of students' well-being reaches a wider audience and awareness of its importance increases. Employing qualitative methods is also crucial to allow for a more in-depth exploration of students' well-being. Additionally, there is a need for more research addressing well-being in the context of pedagogical strategies, instructional design, and related areas. Such research could make a significant contribution to fostering students' well-being and advancing both the theory and practice of English language teaching.

Discussion

Issue one: Trends in Research on Learner Well-Being in English Language Teaching

According to research, articles about ELT students' well-being have significantly increased year over year, with a notable increase between 2020 and 2025. This increased tendency reflects a growing understanding of the importance of well-being, particularly within the context of ELT. Positive psychology and second language acquisition (SLA), which emphasize that students' success in ELT is defined not only by language proficiency but also by psychological well-being, are important elements driving this surge in study (Bennett et al., 2024; Shephard et al., 2024; Tan, 2025).

Another factor contributing to the growth in articles regarding student well-being in 2020 was the COVID-19 epidemic. This circumstance changed educational systems in several nations, which had an impact on students' psychological health and motivation (Alamel et al., 2024; Lightner-Laws & Hayduk, 2025). In order to ensure that the learning process proceeded without hiccups, experts looked into measures to preserve students' wellbeing. In other words, well-being is now acknowledged as a critical aspect impacting English language teaching

(ELT) and is no longer only seen through the lens of mental health (Proietti Ergun & Ersoz Demirdag, 2024).

The social sciences, the arts and humanities, and psychology dominate the field of well-being research. This predominance suggests that social interaction and education are seen as directly related to student well-being (Eklund & Tjornstrand, 2020). Both individual characteristics and the learning environment have an impact on well-being. Social contributions are essential to comprehending student well-being in the context of ELT since it is a complicated process influenced by individual, organisational, and social variables (Faraci et al., 2022). Additionally, this pattern shows how multidisciplinary research on student well-being has replaced a purely language focus.

An analysis by country reveals that research on student well-being is not dominated by the UK, but rather by countries where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) such as China, Turkey, and Indonesia. This pattern indicates a growing need to address well-being in these nations. This trend may stem from the fact that EFL

contexts often present challenges including academic pressure, language anxiety, and exam-centric academic systems prompting researchers to develop instructional strategies that prioritize student well-being alongside language proficiency to facilitate a better learning process (Szyszka et al., 2026).

The high volume of publications from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada indicates that student well-being is a key focus in developed countries. This emphasis demonstrates that education is no longer concerned solely with linguistic aspects but also with students' emotional well-being (Street et al., 2024). Furthermore, the growing research focus on mental health enables researchers to explore the factors influencing student well-being and their subsequent impact on English Language Teaching (ELT). Consequently, the significant number of publications across both developed and developing countries highlights that student well-being has become a global issue.

Issue Two: Themes Have Been Explored in Studies on Learner Well-Being in English Language Teaching

Analysis reveals that research on well-being in ELT has evolved from an initial focus on linguistic and psychological characteristics to a more comprehensive approach that encompasses psychological, social, and pedagogical aspects. In other words, well-being can be linked to all these dimensions. The most dominant theme in this field is psychological factors that support well-being, such as resilience and mindfulness indicating a consensus in prior research that positive psychological factors significantly contribute to student success during the learning process by enabling learners to manage their emotions and sustain their learning motivation (Lin et al., 2024). This prevalence of psychological themes also suggests that well-being is not viewed merely as an outcome of learning, but rather as an integral part of the learning process that students can leverage to optimize their learning experience (Sverdlik et al., 2023).

Another dominant theme is that student well-being is significantly influenced by the quality of the learning environment and classroom social interactions. Factors such as teacher support and care play a

crucial role in the learning process (Zeng & Feng, 2025). This demonstrates that student success is determined not only by individual ability but also by a supportive and comfortable learning environment (Meng et al., 2025). Consequently, teachers act not merely as instructors but also as creators of a positive classroom atmosphere. These findings reinforce the view that student well-being is achieved through both psychological and social dimensions.

Furthermore, well-being is closely linked to various aspects of language learning and serves as an approach within English Language Teaching (ELT). Research has shown connections between well-being and factors such as foreign language anxiety and speaking performance (Heino et al., 2023). This indicates that students' well-being is not merely an independent psychological aspect but also a contributing factor to language learning performance and success (Zhou & Liu, 2025). Additionally, the emergence of well-being as an ELT approach reflects a paradigm shift moving from a primary focus on linguistic proficiency toward a more humanistic approach to learning. Therefore, integrating well-being into

education is crucial to ensure that language learning fosters not only academic achievement but also students' well-being.

Issue Three: Research Gaps and Future Directions Identified in the Existing Literature

Findings regarding the geographical gap indicate that research on student well-being in ELT remains unevenly distributed globally. China, Iran, and Turkey are countries where such research is frequently conducted, suggesting that attention to student well-being is growing in specific educational contexts that have already integrated psychological aspects into the learning process. This situation may limit our understanding of student well-being, given that educational practices vary across countries; in other words, the factors supporting student well-being are influenced by the social and cultural settings in which learning takes place (Schwab et al., 2024). Therefore, research from more diverse contexts is needed to ensure a more representative understanding of student well-being.

A methodological gap has also been identified, revealing that research on student well-being

remains dominated by a positivist paradigm focused on measuring relationships between variables. While quantitative approaches have successfully demonstrated a positive link between well-being and various psychological factors, they have yet to provide a comprehensive explanation of how students construct their well-being during the learning process. Consequently, the prevailing understanding focuses merely on the factors influencing well-being rather than on the processes through which well-being is formed and developed (Brennan et al., 2026; Emaliana et al., 2025). Thus, qualitative or mixed-methods approaches are needed to complement quantitative findings, ensuring that the resulting explanations are more comprehensive, in-depth, and contextual.

Furthermore, the finding that most research focuses on well-being as an outcome suggests that previous studies have concentrated solely on the relationships between variables. Focusing exclusively on variable relationships limits the contribution to the learning process due to the resulting lack of comprehensive explanation. Therefore, research is

needed on the development and evaluation of pedagogical strategies specifically aimed at enhancing students' well-being. Such development seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to reinforce the role of well-being within a more humanistic ELT process.

The various identified gaps indicate that research on student well-being in ELT offers significant opportunities for further study, as there are numerous areas requiring investigation. These findings also suggest a need for greater diversity in research contexts and methodological approaches, as well as an exploration of well-being as a pedagogical approach. Such efforts would not only enrich knowledge regarding student well-being but also yield practical implications that support both academic success and student well-being.

D. Conclusion

Research findings indicate a significant increase in attention toward student well-being, particularly after 2020. This suggests that the success of the language learning process depends not only on students' linguistic abilities but also on their

psychological and emotional states. Furthermore, research on student well-being is dominated by the social sciences, psychology, and the arts and humanities, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of well-being studies. Geographically, research on student well-being in ELT remains concentrated in countries such as China and Iran, indicating that knowledge regarding this topic is still influenced by specific educational and social factors.

Thematic analysis identified four key themes in research on student well-being: psychological factors supporting well-being; the roles of teachers and the learning environment; the relationship between well-being and language learning outcomes; and well-being as an approach within ELT theory and practice. These findings indicate a shift from language instruction focused solely on linguistic knowledge to an approach that also addresses student well-being—one that is more holistic and learner-centered. In other words, student well-being is viewed not merely as an end result of the learning process, but as an integral part of that process for optimizing student outcomes.

This study contributes by providing a comprehensive overview of the evolution of research on student well-being in ELT and identifying various research gaps that offer opportunities for future studies. Findings from previous research indicate a need to expand the research context to underrepresented regions, employ more diverse methodologies, and examine well-being as a pedagogical strategy, an element of instructional design, and a form of educational intervention. Advancing research in these areas is expected to yield both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of language learning processes that prioritize student well-being.

However, this study has several limitations. It relied solely on articles indexed in the Scopus database and focused on open-access data; consequently, relevant studies may have been excluded. Therefore, future research is advised to utilize a wider range of databases and expand literature sources to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student well-being in ELT.

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