

Mapping the Predictive Factors and Longitudinal Outcomes of Emotional Well-being in Higher Education Students: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Emotional well-being among higher education students has increasingly become a central focus in the global literature, particularly in light of escalating psychosocial challenges, academic stress, and adaptation pressures in the post-pandemic era. This study aims to systematically map the principal predictive factors and longitudinal outcomes of emotional well-being among higher education students through a systematic literature review (SLR) based on the PRISMA protocol. A total of 75 selected articles from the Scopus database, published between 2021 and 2025, were analyzed using thematic approaches, concept matrix mapping, and network analysis. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence, resilience, and social support are the most consistently identified determinants of emotional well-being across countries and disciplines. The longitudinal relationships between these factors and emotional well-being are dynamic, forming complex causal, mediating, and moderating patterns throughout the course of study. Longitudinal outcomes of emotional well-being include improved academic performance, enhanced mental resilience, higher quality of social relationships, and better preparedness for transition into the workforce. However, research gaps remain in the predominance of cross-sectional designs, limited longitudinal studies, insufficient exploration of mediating and moderating mechanisms, and underrepresentation of samples from developing countries and vulnerable groups. Recommendations are directed towards advancing longitudinal and mixed-methods research, expanding sample representativeness, and conducting ongoing evaluations of evidence-based interventions to support policies aimed at enhancing the emotional well-being of students globally.

Keywords: *Emotional Well-Being; Higher Education Students; Systematic Literature Review.*

INTRODUCTION

Emotional well-being among higher education students has emerged as a central concern in international literature over the past decade, particularly in response to the rising prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression, and academic pressure within student populations (Carreño-Flores et al., 2024; Greco et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025). The transition to university is a critical period characterized by changes in learning environments, the formation of adult identity, and the challenges of socio-emotional adjustment (Bagnall et al., 2024; Packer et al., 2022). Longitudinal studies have shown that unsupported transition experiences can have long-term impacts on students' psychological well-being, academic motivation, and learning outcomes (Bagnall et al., 2024; Greco et al., 2025).

Several studies highlight that students' emotional well-being is influenced by a combination of individual, environmental, and social-institutional support factors (Carreño-Flores et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2025). Predictive factors such as academic

engagement, emotion regulation, resilience, and social support from peers and family have been shown to play significant roles in reducing psychological distress and enhancing academic satisfaction and performance (Greco et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025). For instance, Hu et al. (2025) found that resilience mediates the relationship between positive emotions and social support with students' psychological well-being, while Greco et al. (2025) emphasized that academic engagement is significantly associated with enhanced well-being and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety among students utilizing counseling services.

In addition, campus environmental factors such as transitions in learning systems, relationships with lecturers, and institutional policies also contribute to the dynamics of students' emotional well-being (Packer et al., 2022; Bagnall et al., 2024). Institution-based interventions that emphasize strengthening coping skills, active engagement, and the creation of supportive environments have proven effective in reducing transition anxiety and fostering long-term adaptation (Bagnall et al., 2024). Nevertheless, to date, there has been no systematic mapping that integrates the main predictive factors and longitudinal outcomes of students' emotional well-being across the diverse contexts and cultures of higher education.

This gap is becoming increasingly relevant given post-pandemic dynamics, the challenges of mental health, and the critical importance of building institutional capacity to sustainably support student well-being (Carreño-Flores et al., 2024; Greco et al., 2025). Therefore, a systematic literature review is needed to comprehensively map the predictive factors and longitudinal outcomes of emotional well-being among higher education students at the individual, social, and institutional levels.

Driven by these issues, the identified urgency, and the defined scope, this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aims to achieve four primary objectives. First, it identifies and maps the key predictive factors consistently recognized in the literature as primary determinants of emotional well-being among higher education students. Second, this review elucidates the longitudinal evolution of these factors, examining the temporal dynamics, patterns of causality, and the roles of mediating or moderating variables—such as resilience, engagement, and social support—throughout the course of university study. Third, the study synthesizes the empirical evidence regarding the longitudinal outcomes of student well-being across academic, psychological, and social domains, including academic performance, mental health trajectories, and interpersonal satisfaction. Finally, by identifying persistent research gaps in the international literature, this SLR provides evidence-based recommendations for future research directions and the strategic development of institutional interventions.

METHODS

The development of this article was conducted in two main stages: (1) a comprehensive literature review and (2) systematic analysis and discussion of the findings (Göcke et al., 2022; Waqas et al., 2021). This study adopts the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework (Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA was selected due to its wide recognition as a rigorous and standardized protocol for systematic literature reviews and its extensive application across multiple disciplines. The utilization of PRISMA is also believed to enhance methodological quality and reporting standards in systematic review research, thereby strengthening the scientific credibility and acceptability of the literature screening process (see Figure 1).

The primary data source utilized in this systematic literature review is Scopus. Scopus is an internationally recognized bibliographic database that provides access to peer-reviewed scientific literature and is considered credible due to its stringent journal selection process. Scopus was chosen for its broad coverage in the social sciences and humanities (Aghaei Chadegani et al., 2013), as well as its capacity to provide comprehensive bibliometric analyses not only in terms of citation counts but also through a wider range of evaluative indicators. This approach enables a more holistic assessment of scientific contributions.

The literature search process targeted publications released between August 2015 and September 2025. The keyword "Emotional Well-being in Higher Education" was specifically applied to the "article title, abstract, and keywords" fields in Scopus to ensure the relevance of the studies included in relation to the research topic (Lim et al., 2022). The systematic review, following the PRISMA model, was conducted through the following stages:

1. Identification of keywords, inclusion criteria, and relevant search boundaries;
2. Screening of articles based on relevance;
3. Reference checking from selected articles and consideration of potential exclusions;
4. Review of the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the selected articles;
5. Documentation and data extraction from each eligible article;
6. Implementation of classification analysis, network analysis, hypothesis network development, and data visualization.

An initial total of 1,000 documents were identified before screening was conducted. To narrow the scope of the reviewed literature, the following criteria were applied:

1. Only published articles indexed in Scopus;
2. Publications within the period 2021–2025;
3. Journals ranked in Scopus quartiles Q1–Q4.

This restriction on publication period was intended to ensure the evidence base remains relevant, thereby allowing the review to represent the current knowledge landscape and to integrate the most recent findings. Moreover, this time limitation is an effective strategy for updating previous systematic literature reviews, as it allows for focused identification of newly published studies that have not been covered in earlier reviews, which are then synthesized in the present analysis. This methodological approach also minimizes the risk of including outdated or less relevant studies by prioritizing up-to-date scientific literature, which is more aligned with contemporary scientific practice and understanding.

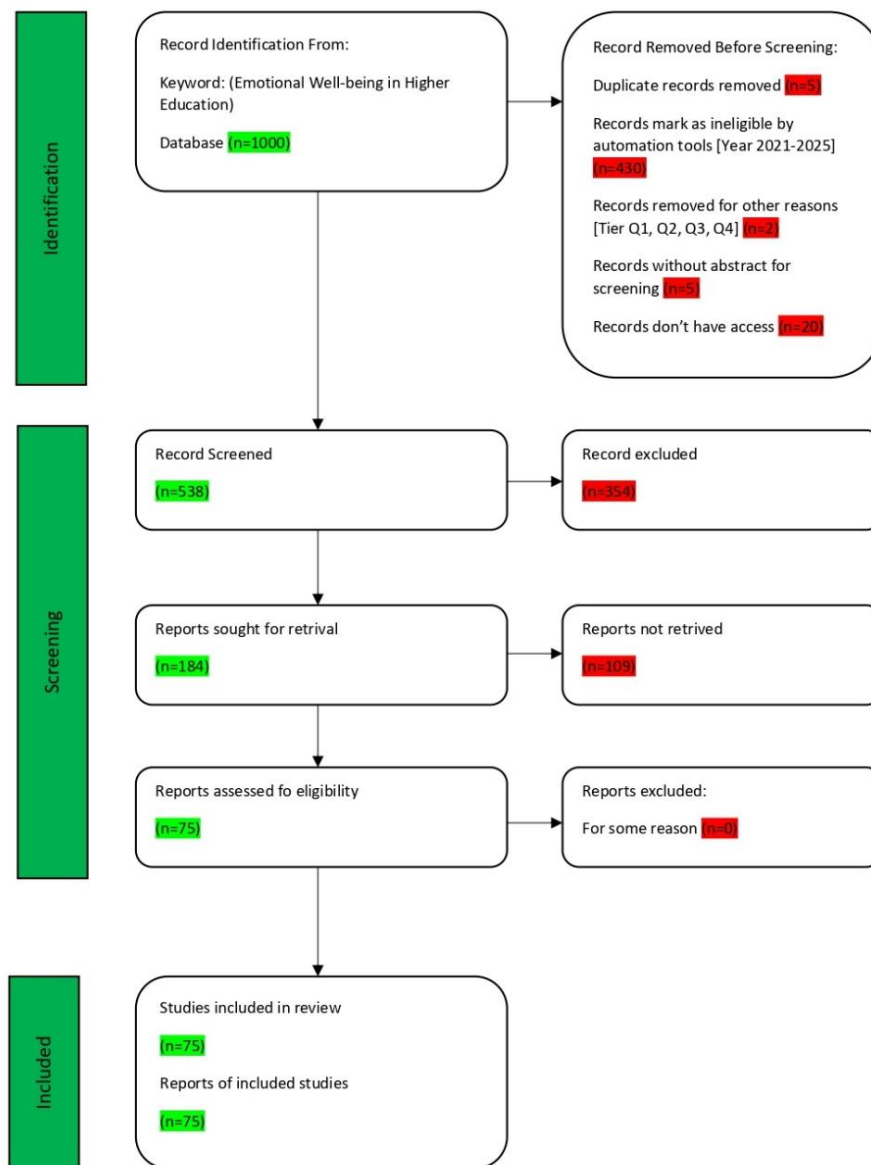


Figure 1. PRISMA Model

The selected articles were then analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, followed by network hypothesis analysis after identifying relevant articles in

accordance with the PRISMA protocol. The thematic analysis was conducted based on the SPAR-4-SLR framework for the assessment component (Paul et al., 2021), utilizing a concept matrix to categorize and map the collected data. This method facilitates systematic organization and analysis of information. In addition, network hypothesis analysis was employed to identify correlations among variables within the topic, aiming to uncover potential new research models, particularly concerning the relationships between variables and mediation mechanisms.

Furthermore, the concept matrix was also utilized to analyze research gaps within the reviewed literature. This framework is designed to highlight areas with significant potential for further exploration that have received limited scholarly attention, thereby effectively addressing existing knowledge voids. It should be noted that Miles (2017) refers to the model developed by Müller-Bloch and Kranz (2015), which is an extension of the foundational framework proposed by Robinson et al. (2011). In addition to identifying research gaps, Cooper's (1988) Taxonomy of Literature Reviews was also adopted to synthesize knowledge in a neutral manner, avoid critical bias, and ensure that the organized findings can be appropriately contextualized within the historical development of the respective field of study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From an initial pool of 1,000 records, the selection was refined to 538 after excluding inaccessible or irrelevant entries. Subsequent semantic screening narrowed the field to 184, while final quality assessment based on journal quartiles yielded 75 eligible articles for analysis. Temporal distribution (2021–2025) shows a fluctuating but overall upward trend, peaking at 19 publications in 2025 (see Figure 2).

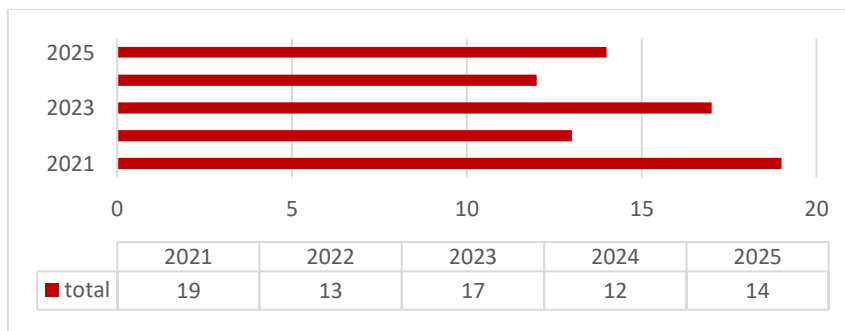


Figure 2. Publications past five years

These fluctuations reflect the scientific community's responsiveness to current issues as well as methodological and applicative developments in the field under review. The findings indicate that the research topic has maintained growing relevance and has garnered increasing attention from global researchers, particularly in the most recent years of observation.

The geographical distribution of studies identified in this SLR demonstrates a highly diverse contribution from various countries, underscoring the global nature and universality of the issue under investigation. China occupies the top position with 13 publications, followed by the United States (8 articles), and both the United Kingdom and Spain with 7 articles each. Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and India, also exhibit significant participation with 4 publications each. In addition, several countries from other continents including Ethiopia, Peru, Italy, Iran, and Hong Kong, each contributed 2 articles. Contributions from other countries, such as Germany, France, Russia, Belgium, Canada, Norway, Slovakia, Mexico, Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Jordan, Turkey, South Africa, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Singapore, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Ghana, and Somalia, each with one publication, further enhance the diversity of geographical representation (see Figure 3).

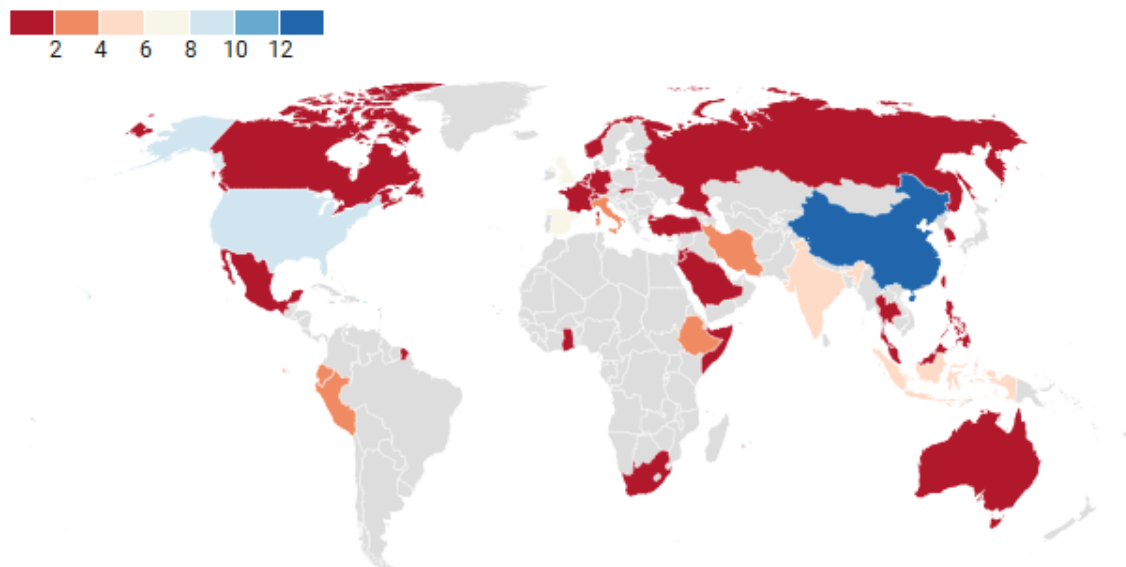


Figure 3. Geographical distribution of studies

These findings affirm that research on the topic under review has received widespread international attention and indicate the potential for expanding cross-country collaborations to enrich perspectives and research outcomes in the future. Moreover, the diversity of national backgrounds offers opportunities for comparative analyses and the identification of contextual factors that influence the implementation and results of studies across different regions.

From a methodological standpoint, an analysis of the distribution of research methods employed in the included studies reveals a predominance of quantitative approaches, particularly cross-sectional designs, which account for 43 publications. Other quantitative approaches, such as longitudinal studies, are also well represented, with 14 publications, while experimental/pre-post,

computational/modeling, multilevel (cross-sectional), and descriptive cross-sectional designs are each employed in one study. In addition, mixed-methods approaches constitute a relevant proportion, with 7 publications utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and 2 publications specifically integrating systematic literature review (SLR) and meta-analysis. On the other hand, qualitative approaches are represented by 4 publications employing the SLR method and one publication using an integrative review (see Figure 4).

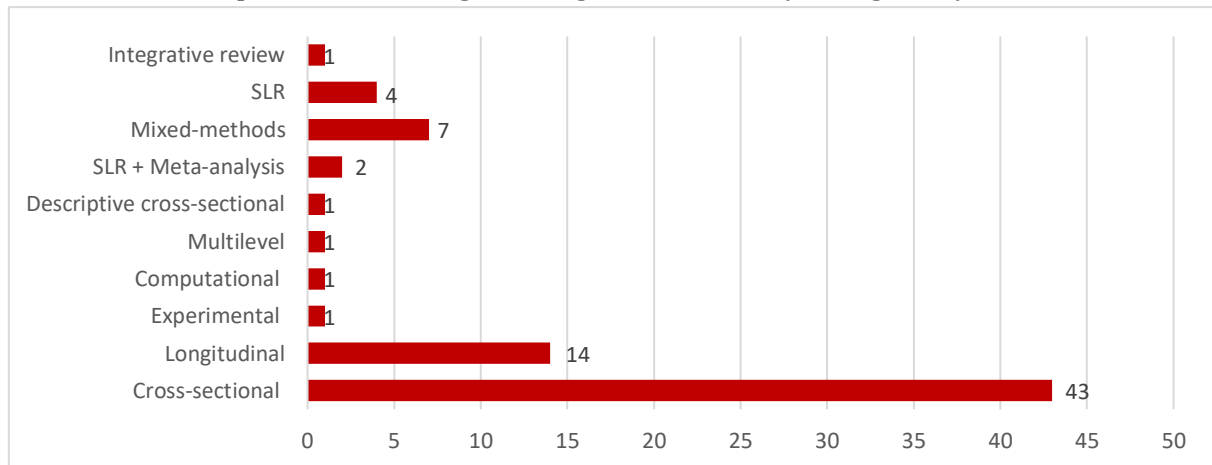


Figure 4. Distribution of research methods

These findings demonstrate a clear preference for the use of quantitative methods in addressing research questions in this field, while also indicating efforts to achieve a more comprehensive understanding through the integration of mixed-methods and qualitative approaches. This methodological diversity constitutes a distinct strength for the literature synthesis, enabling triangulation of findings and broadening the scope of analysis and interpretation of the phenomena under study.

Key Predictive Factors

Based on a systematic review of dozens of studies across countries and contexts, several key predictive factors can be consistently identified as determinants of emotional well-being among higher education students. These factors can be categorized into the following main clusters.

First, individual-psychological factors serve as the most fundamental basis for determining students' levels of emotional well-being. Emotional intelligence (EI) emerges as the most dominant predictor, exerting both direct and indirect effects through the mediation of self-efficacy, resilience, and coping (Britwum et al., 2025; Bereded et al., 2025; Acebes-Sánchez et al., 2025; Baños et al., 2023; Shengyao et al., 2024; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2024; Sánchez et al., 2021; Muhibbin et al., 2023). EI dimensions such as clarity, repair, and emotion regulation have been shown to protect students from distress and burnout, as well as to enhance engagement and academic satisfaction (Ruiz-Camacho et al., 2025; Gemawati, 2025; Lacomba-Trejo

et al., 2022; Acebes-Sánchez et al., 2025). In addition to EI, resilience also plays a significant role as both a mediator and direct predictor in maintaining life satisfaction and adaptation during the course of study (García-Pérez et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022; Thanoi et al., 2023; Rossi et al., 2023; Fuentes et al., 2021). Self-efficacy and self-esteem are also identified as protective factors against distress and burnout, both in cross-cultural contexts and among vulnerable groups (Calizaya-Rios et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Zakiah et al., 2021; Baños et al., 2023). Furthermore, adaptive coping skills, emotion regulation, self-compassion, and stress management are critical in reducing distress and enhancing emotional well-being (Ruiz-Camacho et al., 2025; Gemawati, 2025; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023; Setiyowati et al., 2024; Lacomba-Trejo et al., 2022). Personality characteristics such as extraversion, emotional stability, and low neuroticism have also been demonstrated as protective factors against psychological risk (Seema & Manju, 2023; Joshanloo, 2022; Mei et al., 2022; Yang & Koo, 2022; Clabaugh et al., 2021).

Second, social factors play an essential role in supporting or undermining students' emotional well-being. Social support from family, peers, faculty, and institutions consistently emerges as a principal determinant of emotional well-being, exerting both direct protective effects and serving as a mediator against stress and psychosocial pressures (Mohamed & Jeilani, 2025; Li Ruihua et al., 2025; Estrada-Araoz et al., 2024; Liverpool et al., 2023; Chyu & Chen, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022; Janse van Vuuren et al., 2021). Sense of belonging and social connectedness have also been shown to enhance emotional well-being and contribute to improved academic achievement and long-term retention (van Kessel et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2022; Boylan et al., 2025; Plakhotnik et al., 2021). Moreover, academic engagement and satisfaction with the learning environment often function as mediators between various psychosocial factors and emotional well-being outcomes (Greco et al., 2025; Chaudhry et al., 2024; Franzen et al., 2021; Klinkenberg et al., 2023).

Third, academic and environmental factors also exert significant influence. Academic stress and burnout are consistently identified as negative predictors of emotional well-being, while adaptive coping and resilience can mitigate the adverse effects of academic stress (Ruiz-Camacho et al., 2025; Barbayannis et al., 2022; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2024; Keshavarzi et al., 2024; Setiyowati et al., 2024). Additionally, the quality of the campus physical environment including ventilation, lighting, noise levels, and instructional quality also contributes to emotional well-being, both directly and through impacts on stress and academic satisfaction (Wen et al., 2024; Rubach et al., 2022; Al Jumaili & Sabbagh, 2024; Konstantinidis, 2024).

Fourth, demographic and contextual factors cannot be overlooked. Recent studies (Wan et al., 2025; Fischer et al., 2025; Bøe et al., 2021; Bennett et al., 2023; Paton et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2022) emphasize that gender, socioeconomic

status, minority status, as well as risk factors such as trauma and loneliness, may either strengthen or weaken students' emotional well-being.

The findings of this SLR reinforce the understanding that emotional well-being among higher education students is multifactorial and shaped by the interaction of individual psychological, social, academic, environmental, and demographic contextual factors. Emotional intelligence, resilience, and social support are the three most frequently identified determinants across countries, disciplines, and are consistently significant in predicting emotional well-being. In addition, factors such as self-efficacy, adaptive coping, academic engagement, and sense of belonging further reinforce protective effects against distress and the risk of dropout.

Longitudinal Relationships between Predictive Factors and Students' Emotional Well-Being

Longitudinal studies in the recent literature, as identified in this SLR, consistently affirm that the relationship between key predictive factors (such as emotional intelligence, resilience, social support, and academic stress) and students' emotional well-being is dynamic and evolves throughout the course of higher education. This relationship is not merely linear, but may also form complex patterns of causality, mediation, and moderation, depending on the stage of study, life events, and institutional context.

Stability and Change in Emotional Well-Being Trajectories

Several longitudinal studies, for instance those by Fischer et al. (2025, Germany), Paton et al. (2023, UK), and Wang et al. (2022, China), have identified several main trajectories of students' emotional well-being, including groups with consistently high emotional well-being, gradually increasing emotional well-being, and fluctuating or declining emotional well-being.

The principal predictors contributing to the maintenance or improvement of emotional well-being over time include: (1) Resilience and Adaptive Coping: Resilience has been shown to be a strong predictor for sustaining long-term emotional well-being and serves as a buffer against the negative effects of stress and burnout (Rossi et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Students with high levels of resilience tend to maintain positive emotional well-being, are more resistant to academic pressure, and have lower risks of distress and dropout. (2) Social Support: Social support, whether from family, peers, or institutions, demonstrates long-term effects in enhancing and maintaining students' emotional well-being. Studies by Li Ruihua et al. (2025) and van Kessel et al. (2025) underscore that a sense of belonging and social connectedness during studies can mediate the effects of stress and foster academic persistence and adaptation. (3) Emotional Intelligence (EI): EI plays a crucial role in establishing stable and positive emotional well-being patterns, not only through direct effects but also by enhancing self-efficacy, engagement, and emotion regulation skills (Shengyao et al., 2024; Acebes-Sánchez et al., 2025).

Longitudinal studies indicate that interventions to improve EI during university years can have significant cumulative impacts on emotional well-being and academic outcomes.

Mediation and Moderation Effects

Longitudinal research also reveals that many predictive factors operate indirectly through mediation and moderation mechanisms. For example, resilience can mediate the effects of burnout on life satisfaction (Wang et al., 2022), while social support and EI frequently serve as mediators in the relationship between academic stress and emotional well-being (Baños et al., 2023; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2024).

Furthermore, demographic factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and minority status may moderate the strength of these relationships, indicating that students from vulnerable groups require more specific and sustained interventions (Paton et al., 2023; Bennett et al., 2023).

Contextual and Study Stage Effects

Several studies indicate that the influence of predictive factors may vary at different stages of study (e.g., first year vs. final year) and can be affected by major events such as the pandemic or the transition to online learning. First-year students are generally more vulnerable to fluctuations in EW due to academic and social adaptation, making the roles of EI, resilience, and social support particularly vital during this phase (Wan et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025).

In contrast, in the final year, resilience and sense of belonging become more important in maintaining motivation, persistence, and readiness for the transition to the workforce (Hu et al., 2025; Fischer et al., 2025).

Long-Term Impact

Longitudinal studies with extended timeframes, such as Boylan et al. (2025, US) and Joshanloo (2022, Australia), indicate that students with stable emotional well-being and robust protective factors during their studies experience higher quality of life, lower risk of mental health disorders, and better social and professional adaptation after graduation. Additionally, other longitudinal and multiwave studies, such as those by Rubach et al. (2022), Franzen et al. (2021), Liu et al. (2024), Li et al. (2023), Davis & Hadwin (2021), Yaghi (2021), Zhang et al. (2022), Janse van Vuuren et al. (2021), and De Clercq et al. (2021), further reinforce the importance of instructional quality, academic satisfaction, self-esteem, peer support, as well as the role of context and study stage in the longitudinal dynamics of students' emotional well-being.

Longitudinal Outcomes as Consequences of Students' Emotional Well-Being

An analysis of the longitudinal studies identified in this SLR indicates that the level of students' emotional well-being has significant long-term impacts, not only in psychological aspects, but also within academic and social domains. Various studies across countries, disciplines, and timeframes reinforce empirical evidence

regarding the importance of emotional well-being as a multidimensional predictor for the following outcomes:

Academic Domain

Longitudinal studies consistently demonstrate that students with higher levels of emotional well-being tend to achieve better academic performance. This is reflected in improved cumulative grade point averages (GPA), more active engagement in learning activities (academic engagement), and higher levels of academic resilience and persistence (Bereded et al., 2025; van Kessel et al., 2025; De Clercq et al., 2021; Boylan et al., 2025; Rubach et al., 2022; Franzen et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022; Janse van Vuuren et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023; Davis & Hadwin, 2021).

These findings are not limited to formal academic output measures but also encompass students' ability to manage tasks, achieve personal targets, and maintain long-term motivation for learning. The studies also emphasize that robust emotional well-being can serve as a protective factor against a variety of academic pressures, both internal (e.g., perfectionism, test anxiety) and external (e.g., curricular demands, learning environment dynamics). Conversely, a decline in emotional well-being is identified as a major risk factor for deteriorating academic performance, increased burnout, and the potential for dropout, whereby students experiencing prolonged emotional distress are more vulnerable to academic failure and disengagement from their institutions (Bennett et al., 2023; Paton et al., 2023; Yaghi, 2021; Plakhotnik et al., 2021). In particular, instructional quality, institutional support, and social relationships within the campus environment are shown to reinforce the longitudinal relationship between emotional well-being and academic success.

Psychological Domain

The longitudinal impact of emotional well-being is especially evident in students' mental health. High emotional well-being functions not only as a protective factor against the development of depression, anxiety, and long-term psychological distress (Rossi et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024; Franzen et al., 2021), but also supports better psychological adaptation during academic transitions. Students with low emotional well-being are more likely to experience chronic distress, burnout, and even an increased risk of serious mental disorders such as clinical depression and excessive anxiety (Paton et al., 2023; Boylan et al., 2025; Yaghi, 2021).

In contrast, good emotional well-being facilitates the development of resilience, emotion regulation abilities, and increased self-efficacy and personal growth. These factors play a critical role in helping students overcome academic challenges, sustain intrinsic motivation, and build resilience in the face of changing academic and social environments (Hu et al., 2025; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2024; Davis & Hadwin, 2021). This further underscores the importance of preventive and

promotive interventions aimed at enhancing emotional well-being to support students' long-term mental health.

Social Domain

The longitudinal consequences of emotional well-being are highly relevant for supporting students' social functioning. Students with positive emotional well-being are demonstrably better at establishing and maintaining healthy social relationships, developing a sense of belonging within the academic community, and actively participating in various campus activities (van Kessel et al., 2025; Li Ruihua et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2022; Plakhotnik et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023).

These strong social relationships not only provide emotional support but also enhance adaptive capacity and the overall quality of the educational experience. Furthermore, positive emotional well-being during the period of study is also identified as a predictor of readiness for workforce transition, maturity in post-campus social interactions, and better integration into professional and broader societal environments (Calizaya-Rios et al., 2025; Boylan et al., 2025). This aspect illustrates that emotional well-being plays a vital role in shaping soft skills, social networks, and preparedness for challenges beyond the academic setting.

Cross-Domain and Cumulative Effects

Several long-term studies, such as Boylan et al. (2025) over 20 years, Fischer et al. (2025) over 4 years, and Joshanloo (2022), emphasize that the positive outcomes of emotional well-being are not only domain-specific but also cumulative and mutually reinforcing across domains. Students who consistently maintain good emotional well-being throughout their studies tend to experience more optimal personal growth, stronger psychological stability, and higher academic and social achievement, even long after graduation. These cumulative effects also contribute to improved quality of life, readiness to face career challenges, and long-term social adaptation, underscoring the importance of emotional well-being in the development of sustainable higher education policies and interventions.

Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

Although research on students' emotional well-being has made substantial progress, the literature analysis in this SLR identifies several significant gaps that continue to constrain understanding and the impact of interventions in this field. First, the majority of studies remain dominated by cross-sectional designs based on self-report measures, resulting in limited evidence of causality and a restricted understanding of the longitudinal dynamics between predictive factors and the outcomes of emotional well-being.

While longitudinal studies have begun to emerge, their number and depth are not yet sufficient to capture changes in emotional well-being throughout the course of study, as well as the complex mechanisms of mediation and moderation.

Second, the exploration of interactions and relational mechanisms among predictive factors such as emotional intelligence, resilience, social support, and coping strategies remains suboptimal. Most studies tend to analyze these factors in isolation, without considering potential interactions, mediation or moderation effects by demographic and contextual variables such as gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background. Moreover, the populations studied are not yet globally representative; students from the Global South, vulnerable groups, and those with special needs are often underrepresented, despite the fact that social and cultural factors can significantly modify the dynamics of emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the longitudinal outcomes evaluated in the literature are still largely focused on short-term academic and psychological aspects, while the long-term impacts in social domains, career readiness, and professional integration receive less systematic attention. Assessments of the effectiveness of emotional well-being interventions are also rarely conducted using standardized experimental or quasi-experimental approaches based on longitudinal data and objective indicators.

Based on the identification of these gaps, future research should focus on the development of longitudinal and mixed-methods studies that can more deeply examine the dynamics, causal patterns, and mechanisms of mediation and moderation. Holistic and multilevel models are highly recommended to capture the complex interactions among factors and cross-level effects at the individual, group, and institutional levels. In addition, expanding sample representation to include minority groups and students from developing countries is essential to achieve a more inclusive and globally relevant understanding. Future studies are also encouraged to evaluate long-term social and professional outcomes, as well as to develop and test the effectiveness of standardized, sustainable, and evidence-based interventions that are adaptive to students' needs. The active involvement of higher education institutions and the development of data-driven policies are key to ensuring the sustainability and positive impact of programs to enhance students' emotional well-being in the future.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review affirms that the emotional well-being of higher education students is a multidimensional construct that is profoundly influenced by the interaction of individual factors (such as emotional intelligence and resilience), social factors (including social support and sense of belonging), as well as academic and environmental factors. The longitudinal relationships between these predictive factors and emotional well-being are dynamic and highly dependent on context, stage of study, and demographic characteristics. The longitudinal outcomes of emotional well-being encompass not only academic achievement and mental health,

but also social adaptation, career readiness, and post-study quality of life. Although the literature has demonstrated significant progress, important gaps remain in terms of longitudinal methodologies, cross-domain variable integration, and global sample representation. Therefore, future research should be directed towards more inclusive and contextual longitudinal, mixed-methods, and multilevel approaches, as well as the development of sustainable evidence-based interventions to support higher education institutional policies in comprehensively enhancing students' emotional well-being.

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