

WELLBEING LITERACY IN ADOLESCENTS: A SCOPING REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICES AND EVIDENCE

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Abstract. Vocational identity refers to a clear and stable understanding of an individual's career-related goals, interests, and talents. College students with a strong vocational identity are able to recognize their interests, values, beliefs, and career aspirations, thereby enhancing their readiness to enter the workforce. This study aims to identify both internal and external factors that influence the development of vocational identity among college students. A systematic literature review method was employed, focusing on peer-reviewed research articles published between 2021 and 2025. Literature was retrieved using the Publish or Perish application with the keywords: "Vocational Identity" AND "College Student" OR "University Student" OR "Undergraduate Student," resulting in 450 articles. The inclusion criteria encompassed articles published in reputable journals, written in English, that employed quantitative or qualitative methods, involved student participants, and specifically addressed factors influencing vocational identity. The screening process was conducted using Rayyan.ai, yielding 17 articles that met the inclusion criteria. The study design follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The review findings reveal various determinants that influence students' vocational identity, which may serve as the basis for developing recommendations to enhance vocational identity development in higher education settings.

Keywords: vocational identity, determinant factors, college students, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a crucial developmental period marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. During this stage, individuals often encounter a range of challenges that can significantly affect their mental health and overall wellbeing. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and other psychological difficulties among adolescents (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). These trends have prompted educators, psychologists, and policymakers to seek effective, developmentally appropriate approaches to enhance the resilience and mental health of young people. One emerging concept that offers promise in this area is wellbeing literacy.

Wellbeing literacy refers to the vocabulary, knowledge, and skills necessary to understand, communicate, and intentionally use language about wellbeing in ways that support oneself and others in living a good life (Oades et al., 2021). It emphasizes not only knowledge about mental health but also the ability to express, reflect on, and act intentionally to improve personal and collective wellbeing. In educational settings, fostering wellbeing literacy has been linked to improved emotional regulation, stronger social relationships, and better academic engagement (Waters & Loton, 2019).

While interest in wellbeing literacy has grown in the past decade, most existing research has concentrated on university students and adult populations. This creates a significant research gap concerning how wellbeing literacy is conceptualized, implemented, and experienced by adolescents aged 12–18 years in junior and senior high schools. Adolescents have unique developmental needs, and it remains unclear whether existing models and practices of wellbeing literacy are suitable or effective for this age group. Furthermore, few studies have systematically mapped the interventions, frameworks, or outcomes associated with wellbeing literacy among secondary school students.

This knowledge gap is particularly urgent, given that adolescence is a pivotal time for developing lifelong wellbeing competencies. Schools offer an accessible and influential context for promoting such competencies, yet there is limited guidance on how to integrate wellbeing literacy into school curricula and psychosocial programs (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). In the absence of a clear synthesis of existing research, it becomes difficult for practitioners and policymakers to design age-appropriate, culturally responsive interventions that foster adolescents' wellbeing.

In response to these needs, this scoping review aims to systematically identify, map, and synthesize the current literature on wellbeing literacy in adolescents aged 12–18 years. The review will explore how wellbeing literacy is defined in this age group, the types of interventions and practices implemented, the contexts in which they are applied (e.g., schools, communities), and the outcomes reported. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of current practices and evidence while identifying key gaps to inform future research, educational programming, and mental health policy.

METHODS

The present study applied the Scoping Review method and adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) study design (PRISMA, 2025). A scoping review is defined as a systematic and iterative approach used to identify and synthesise the literature on a particular topic (Jones, 2019). In essence, scoping reviews aim to delineate the scope, range, and nature of the existing literature, while simultaneously identifying gaps within the scientific literature in a thorough, systematic, and structured manner. This enables the review and synthesis of findings from studies relevant to a particular topic (Mak & Thomas, 2022).

The systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the steps delineated in the PRISMA framework. The procedure was initiated by formulating the research or review question in a clearly defined manner. Subsequently, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was established to screen relevant literature. The subsequent phases entail conducting a literature search, meticulously selecting studies based on predetermined criteria, conducting a thorough quality assessment of each selected study, and extracting pertinent data from the articles. Subsequently, the data obtained is analysed and presented systematically, and finally, the results are interpreted to draw conclusions (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). In this study, three main databases were used: Scopus, Crossref and Google Scholar. The utilization of these three databases was undertaken with the objective of expanding the scope of the literature obtained and enhancing the quality of the findings. This approach was selected due to its perceived superiority over the utilization of solely two data sources, a practice that has the capacity to result in information limitations (Baas et al., 2020). The literature search encompassed journal articles and scientific conference proceedings published between 2020 and 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the steps set out in the PRISMA framework. The process began with the clear formulation of the research or review question. Next, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined to screen the relevant literature. Next came the literature search, followed by the selection of studies based on the predetermined criteria, the quality assessment of each selected study and the extraction of data from the articles. The obtained data was then analysed and presented systematically before the results were interpreted to draw conclusions (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). For this study, three main databases were used: Scopus, Crossref, and Google Scholar. Using these three databases broadened the scope of the literature obtained and improved the quality of the findings. This approach was chosen because relying on only two data sources has the potential to cause information limitations (Baas et al., 2020). The literature search included journal articles and scientific conference proceedings published between 2020 and 2025.

The systematic literature search for this study was conducted using three databases: PopCite, Google Scholar and PubMed. The search focused on articles published between 2021 and 2025 that were written in either English or Indonesian and involved adolescents aged 10–19 years. Only studies using quantitative or qualitative research designs that focused on wellbeing literacy were included. The initial search yielded a total of 1,344 articles, comprising 345 results from Google Scholar, 200 from PopCite, and 799 from PubMed.

To narrow the selection, the articles were first screened based on their titles, abstracts, and keywords. This resulted in the exclusion of 15 articles that could not be accessed in full by the researchers. Additionally, articles not related to the study's focus on wellbeing literacy in adolescents were excluded.

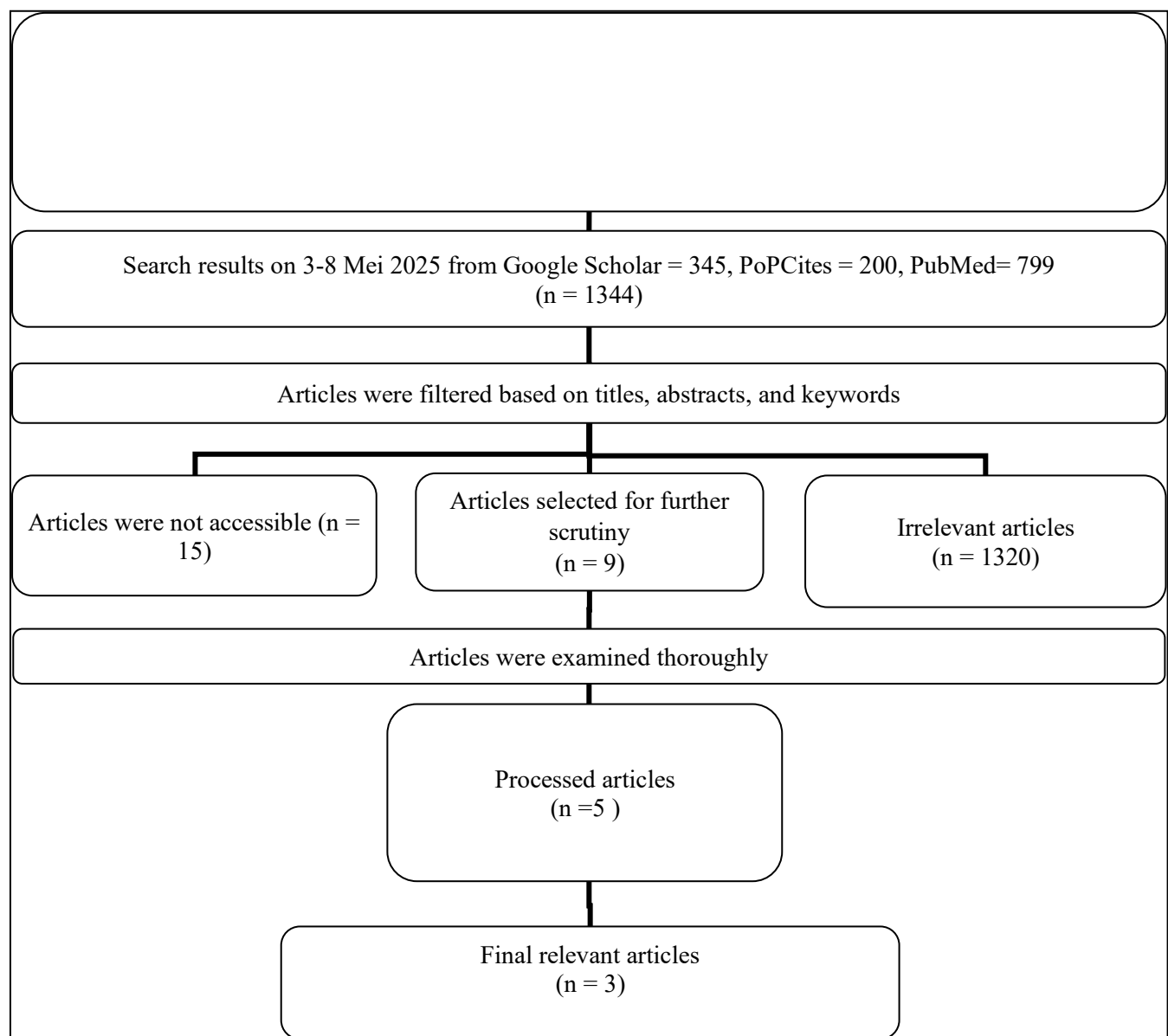


Figure 1. PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis*)

Recent studies have demonstrated that wellbeing literacy is a crucial factor in shaping students' mental health and academic success. Hunter and Hill (2024) conducted a longitudinal study involving 12,962 New Zealand students, examining how those from different ethnic backgrounds conceptualize wellbeing. The study revealed that students expressed their wellbeing in terms of social relationships, competence, and achievement. Notably, peer support was identified as the most commonly cited instrumental value across all ethnicities, although its interpretation varied across different groups. For example, Pacific students emphasized the concept of *ako* (reciprocal teaching and learning), highlighting the importance of cognition and relationships in their understanding of wellbeing. Gender differences were also observed, with female students more frequently mentioning relationship-related values and emphasizing accuracy and understanding.

Similarly, Watters and Higgins (2022) examined the impact of teacher-led interventions on wellbeing literacy among 231 Australian students aged 11–13. Following the intervention, the students' understanding of wellbeing expanded in four key ways: it became more comprehensive, incorporating emotional management and coping strategies; more strength-based, focusing on personal strengths; more multidimensional, recognizing the interconnectedness of the emotional, mental and relational aspects of wellbeing; and more interconnected, with students demonstrating an understanding of how relationships contribute to their own and others' wellbeing. These findings highlight the positive impact of teacher-led interventions on enhancing students' wellbeing literacy and deepening their understanding of it.

More broadly, Hou et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between wellbeing literacy and psychological health among a large group of Australian students, parents, and school staff. The study revealed that wellbeing literacy is a distinct and quantifiable concept, distinct from notions such as wellbeing, resilience, and emotional regulation. It was demonstrated that students with higher levels of wellbeing literacy reported greater life satisfaction and lower levels of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and stress. These results highlight the importance of promoting wellbeing literacy to enhance mental health and prevent psychological distress among students.

Together, these studies emphasize the importance of wellbeing literacy in fostering emotional resilience and mental health among students. The research indicates that wellbeing is shaped not only by personal strengths and emotional regulation, but also by social relationships and teacher support. Therefore, wellbeing literacy should be considered a vital component of educational practices designed to enhance students' mental and emotional wellbeing. These insights provide a compelling argument for integrating wellbeing literacy into school curricula and intervention programs to support students' overall development.

Table 1. Findings of the Article Review Results

No	Author	Year	Participants	Method	Key Findings	Country
1	Hunter & Hill	2024	12,962 students in Grades 3–10 (ages 8–16) from 115 schools in New Zealand. Diverse ethnicities: African (N=274), Asian (N=1,083), Indian/Pakistani (N=701), Māori (N=2,541), Middle Eastern (N=163), New Zealand European (N=5,541),	Longitudinal; Online Qualtrics survey; Combined deductive–inductive reflexive thematic analysis in NVivo 12	1. Ultimate Values (UVs): Accomplishment, Cognitions, Engagement, Meaning, Perseverance, Positive Emotions, Relationships. 2. Top Instrumental Values (IVs) overall: Peer support, Accuracy, Learning new things, Understanding, Teacher support, General support, Reciprocity. 3. Peer support was the most cited IV across all	New Zealand

No	Author	Year	Participants	Method	Key Findings	Country
			Pacific (N=2,597), Unspecified (N=62).		ethnicities, though specific IVs serving UVs varied by cultural context. 4. Female students mentioned all relationship-related IVs more often than male students; females also cited understanding and accuracy more than males. 5. Pacific students interpret peer support through the concept of <i>ako</i> (reciprocal teaching–learning), emphasizing cognition and relationships as the foundation of mathematical wellbeing. 6. Overall, students are able to articulate their wellbeing in terms of social relationships, competence, and achievement within the learning context.	
2	Watters & Higgins	2022	231 students aged 11–13 years (grades 5, 6, 7); 49% female, 51% male; from three schools in Australia; post-intervention response rate 87%, dropout rate 13%.	intervention; qualitative research; thematic analysis and Inferential frequency-based statistical analyses	Students' comprehension of wellbeing developed in four key ways, becoming more: (1) comprehensive: wellbeing descriptions became more detailed and expanded to include aspects like emotional management, coping, and relationships; (2) strength-based approach: increased references to using personal strengths for wellbeing; (3) expanded/multidimensional: more students described wellbeing as multifaceted,	Australia

No	Author	Year	Participants	Method	Key Findings	Country
					including mental and emotional states, relationships, and strengths; and (4) interconnected: post-intervention, students demonstrated an understanding that relationships contribute to their own and others' wellbeing. Teacher-based interventions significantly enhanced students' wellbeing literacy, making their understanding more detailed, strength-based, expanded, and relational.	
3	Hou et al.	2021	Students (N = 1,392; age M = 14.47, SD = 1.77); Parents (N = 584; age M = 42.69, SD = 6.32); School staff (N = 317; age M = 42.45, SD = 11.95)	Cross-sectional online survey; EFA (discriminant validity), Pearson correlation (convergent validity), hierarchical regression analysis (incremental validity)	Wellbeing literacy has been established as a unique, measurable, and distinct construct, separate from related concepts such as wellbeing itself, resilience, and emotion regulation. In a student sample, wellbeing literacy demonstrated a significant positive correlation with measures of wellbeing (e.g., life satisfaction) and a significant negative correlation with psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, and stress).	Australia

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this scoping review underscores the crucial role of wellbeing literacy in enhancing students' emotional and psychological wellbeing, as well as their academic success. The reviewed studies reveal that wellbeing literacy is a multifaceted construct that is positively correlated with increased life satisfaction and reduced psychological distress. Teacher-led interventions were found to effectively broaden students' understanding of wellbeing, making it more comprehensive, strength-based, and interconnected. However, cultural and gender differences were also found to influence how students perceive wellbeing, highlighting the need for culturally responsive approaches in interventions. These findings emphasize the importance of

integrating wellbeing literacy into educational curricula and support services, advocating for its inclusion as a core component in the development of emotional resilience and mental health. Further research is needed to explore the link between wellbeing literacy and mental health outcomes, as well as to investigate effective strategies for promoting wellbeing in diverse educational settings.

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