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Emerging Issues in Psychological Research and Their Implications for Education and Mental Health Care

Tran Van Toan

Thai Binh Mental Health Hospital, Hung Yen Province, Vietnam

Nguyen Van Viet

Thai Binh Mental Health Hospital, Hung Yen Province, Vietnam

Abstract---Mental health has become a global priority as rapid social, technological, and educational changes continue to influence psychological functioning across diverse populations. This review examines emerging issues in contemporary psychological research and discusses their implications for education and mental health care. A qualitative literature review was conducted by analyzing peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, academic books, and official reports published primarily between 2020 and 2026, together with foundational theoretical works. The reviewed literature was synthesized using thematic analysis to identify major developments in the field. Five major themes emerged: psychological well-being, psychological resilience, self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, social support, and preventive psychological interventions. The findings indicate that contemporary psychology has increasingly shifted from a disorder-centered paradigm toward a strengths-based approach emphasizing flourishing, adaptive functioning, and preventive mental health care. The review also highlights the essential role of educational institutions in promoting psychological well-being through supportive learning environments, resilience-building programs, social-emotional learning, and mental health literacy. Furthermore, healthcare systems are encouraged to expand preventive, community-based, and evidence-based psychological services. The study concludes that integrating educational psychology, positive psychology, developmental psychology, and public mental health provides a comprehensive framework for addressing emerging psychological challenges. The findings offer valuable implications for educators, mental health professionals, researchers, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable psychological well-being and improve quality of life across diverse populations.

Keywords---psychological well-being, resilience, mental health, social support, self-efficacy, positive psychology, education, psychological intervention.

Introduction

Mental health has become one of the most important global public health challenges in the twenty-first century. Rapid technological development, educational transformation, economic uncertainty, and the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly influenced psychological functioning across all age groups. The World Mental Health Report (World Health Organization, 2022) emphasizes that mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness but a fundamental resource that enables individuals to cope with challenges, achieve their potential, and contribute to society. Consequently, psychological research has increasingly shifted from treating mental disorders toward promoting psychological well-being, resilience, and preventive mental health care.

This shift has been strongly influenced by positive psychology, which focuses on human strengths and flourishing rather than psychological deficits. Diener (1984) conceptualized subjective well-being as individuals'

evaluations of life satisfaction and emotional experiences, while Ryff (1989) proposed psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct including autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and positive relationships. Building on these perspectives, Seligman (2011) introduced the PERMA model, emphasizing positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as essential components of flourishing. Likewise, Fredrickson (2001) demonstrated that positive emotions broaden cognitive and behavioral resources, thereby enhancing long-term adaptation and well-being.

Recent psychological research has also highlighted resilience, self-efficacy, and motivation as essential psychological resources. Resilience enables individuals to adapt successfully to adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001), while self-efficacy enhances persistence and adaptive coping (Bandura, 1997). Similarly, grit has been associated with long-term achievement and psychological well-being (Duckworth et al., 2007). These findings suggest that positive psychological characteristics contribute significantly to both educational success and mental health.

Another major development concerns the growing recognition of social support as a key determinant of psychological well-being. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory emphasized that human development is shaped by interactions among individuals, families, schools, and communities. Consistent with this perspective, recent studies show that social support reduces psychological distress while enhancing resilience and life satisfaction (Shin & Park, 2022; Zeidner & Matthews, 2016). Systematic reviews further indicate that supportive relationships significantly improve university students' mental health and quality of life (Vicary et al., 2024; Ruihua et al., 2025). In addition, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggests that satisfying the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness promotes intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being.

Recent evidence also demonstrates increasing interest in preventive psychological interventions. Programs that strengthen resilience, emotional regulation, positive emotions, and social support have shown significant benefits for mental health across different populations (Romera-Gasparico et al., 2026). These developments indicate that contemporary psychology is increasingly integrating educational, developmental, and public health perspectives to promote well-being throughout the lifespan.

Despite substantial progress, important research gaps remain. Existing studies have mainly examined individual psychological constructs, whereas relatively few reviews integrate resilience, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, motivation, and social support into a comprehensive framework while discussing their combined implications for education and mental health care. Therefore, this review aims to synthesize emerging issues in contemporary psychological research and examine their implications for educational practice and mental health care. By integrating major theoretical perspectives with recent empirical evidence, the review provides a comprehensive overview of current developments and offers recommendations for future research, educational policy, and mental health promotion (D'Alfonso, 2020).

Literature Review

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being has evolved into one of the central concepts in contemporary psychology, reflecting individuals' capacity to function effectively and experience meaningful lives rather than merely the absence of mental illness. Early studies distinguished between hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of well-being. Diener (1984) conceptualized subjective well-being as comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and low levels of negative affect. This hedonic perspective emphasizes individuals' evaluations of happiness and emotional experiences.

In contrast, Ryff (1989) proposed a broader eudaimonic framework in which psychological well-being consists of six dimensions: self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, and purpose in life. This multidimensional model has become widely adopted because it captures the complexity of human functioning beyond temporary emotional states.

More recently, Seligman (2011) expanded positive psychology through the PERMA model, suggesting that flourishing emerges from the interaction of Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Similarly, Keyes (2002) argued that mental health exists on a continuum ranging from languishing to flourishing, highlighting that positive mental health represents an independent dimension rather than simply the opposite of mental illness. These theoretical developments have encouraged researchers to investigate factors that promote optimal psychological functioning across educational, occupational, and healthcare settings.

Growing evidence indicates that psychological well-being is associated with numerous positive outcomes, including higher academic achievement, greater work engagement, healthier interpersonal relationships, and improved physical health. Consequently, psychological well-being has become an important indicator for evaluating educational quality, organizational effectiveness, and public health policies (Luo & Hancock, 2020).

Psychological Resilience and Positive Mental Health

Psychological resilience has attracted increasing scholarly attention because of its role in enabling individuals to adapt successfully to adversity, uncertainty, and stressful life events. Luthar et al. (2000) defined resilience as a dynamic process involving positive adaptation despite significant adversity, emphasizing that resilience is not a fixed personality trait but rather develops through interactions between individuals and their environments.

Similarly, Masten (2001) introduced the concept of "ordinary magic," arguing that resilience results from ordinary developmental systems such as supportive families, effective schools, and positive communities rather than extraordinary personal characteristics. This perspective shifted research from identifying risk factors to understanding protective mechanisms that facilitate healthy psychological development.

Positive mental health has been closely linked with resilience. Srivastava (2011) suggested that resilient individuals generally demonstrate stronger emotional regulation, greater optimism, and higher psychological well-being. These individuals are better able to manage stressful experiences, recover from setbacks, and maintain productive functioning under challenging circumstances.

Recent research continues to confirm that resilience functions as an important protective factor against depression, anxiety, academic stress, and occupational burnout while simultaneously promoting life satisfaction and emotional well-being. Consequently, resilience-building interventions have become increasingly integrated into educational programs and community mental health initiatives.

Self-efficacy, Motivation, and Personal Development

Self-efficacy represents one of the most influential psychological constructs explaining human behavior and achievement. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute actions required to achieve desired outcomes. Individuals possessing high self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, persist despite difficulties, regulate emotions effectively, and recover quickly after failure.

Motivation also plays a critical role in psychological functioning. Self-Determination Theory proposes that psychological well-being depends upon satisfying three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When these needs are fulfilled, individuals experience greater intrinsic motivation, higher engagement, and improved psychological adjustment.

Closely related to motivation is the concept of grit, introduced by Duckworth et al. (2007), which refers to perseverance and sustained passion for long-term goals. Research has demonstrated that grit predicts academic success, occupational performance, and psychological well-being beyond cognitive ability alone. Together, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and grit constitute essential psychological resources that support learning, career development, and lifelong adaptation.

Social Support as a Protective Psychological Resource

Social support has consistently been identified as one of the strongest protective factors influencing mental health and psychological well-being. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provides an important theoretical foundation by emphasizing that individual development occurs within multiple interacting environmental systems, including families, schools, peer groups, communities, and broader cultural contexts.

Empirical evidence strongly supports this ecological perspective. Zeidner & Matthews (2016) found that social support mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health, suggesting that emotionally competent individuals benefit from stronger interpersonal relationships. Likewise, Shin & Park (2022) demonstrated that social support enhances psychological well-being indirectly through satisfying basic psychological needs.

Among university students, social support has emerged as an especially important determinant of mental health. Systematic reviews conducted by Vicary et al. (2024) and Ruihua et al. (2025) concluded that support from family members, peers, and educational institutions significantly reduces depression, anxiety, loneliness, and psychological distress while improving academic adjustment and life satisfaction. Furthermore, Shuo et al. (2022) reported that social support and psychological resilience jointly mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among postgraduate students.

Collectively, these findings indicate that social support serves not only as a buffer against psychological stress but also as an important developmental resource that facilitates resilience, motivation, and flourishing across different life stages.

Emerging Psychological Interventions and Future Directions

Recent psychological research has increasingly shifted toward preventive and strength-based interventions designed to promote well-being before mental disorders develop. Positive psychology interventions, resilience training, mindfulness-based approaches, cognitive-behavioral strategies, emotional intelligence development, and peer-support programs have demonstrated promising outcomes across educational and healthcare settings.

A recent systematic review by [Romera-Gasparico et al. \(2026\)](#) found that psychological interventions significantly improve both mental health and quality of life among older adults. Similar intervention models have also been successfully implemented in schools and universities, where programs focusing on resilience, emotional regulation, social connectedness, and psychological skills contribute to improved academic engagement and reduced psychological distress.

These developments suggest that future psychological research should increasingly integrate multidisciplinary perspectives combining educational psychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, neuroscience, and public health. Such integration will facilitate the development of comprehensive intervention models capable of addressing the increasingly complex psychological challenges emerging in contemporary societies.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to synthesize recent developments in psychological research and examine their implications for education and mental health care. Rather than collecting primary empirical data, the study systematically analyzed existing scholarly publications to identify major research themes, theoretical perspectives, and emerging trends in contemporary psychology.

The literature search was conducted using internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, academic books, and official reports published by reputable international organizations. The search primarily focused on studies published between 2020 and 2026 to capture recent advances in psychological research while also including several classical theoretical works that established foundational concepts, such as psychological well-being, resilience, self-efficacy, positive psychology, ecological systems theory, and self-determination theory.

The literature search employed combinations of keywords including *psychological well-being*, *positive psychology*, *mental health*, *resilience*, *social support*, *self-efficacy*, *self-determination*, *positive emotions*, *psychological intervention*, *college students*, *education*, *quality of life*, and *mental health care*. Boolean operators ("AND", "OR") were applied to refine search results and improve retrieval accuracy.

The retrieved publications were screened according to predefined inclusion criteria. Studies were included if they (1) addressed major psychological constructs related to mental health and well-being, (2) presented empirical evidence, theoretical analyses, systematic reviews, or meta-analyses, (3) were published in English in peer-reviewed academic sources, and (4) demonstrated relevance to educational settings or mental health care. Publications lacking sufficient methodological rigor, duplicate records, conference abstracts without full papers, and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded from the analysis.

Following the screening process, the selected literature was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Similar concepts and findings were grouped into broader thematic categories, allowing the identification of recurring research patterns across studies. Five major themes emerged from the analysis:

Psychological well-being and flourishing; Psychological resilience and positive mental health; Self-efficacy, motivation, and personal development; Social support and ecological influences on mental health; Emerging psychological interventions and future research directions.

The thematic synthesis enabled comparisons across theoretical perspectives and empirical findings while highlighting relationships among psychological constructs. In addition, similarities and differences between classical theories and recent evidence were examined to identify emerging issues and unresolved research questions. Finally, the findings were interpreted from educational and public mental health perspectives to propose practical implications for psychological intervention, educational policy, and future interdisciplinary research.

Findings

The thematic analysis of the selected literature identified five major trends that characterize contemporary psychological research. Across theoretical and empirical studies, the field has gradually shifted from a disease-oriented paradigm toward a strengths-based perspective that emphasizes psychological resources, preventive interventions, and human flourishing. Rather than concentrating solely on diagnosing and treating mental disorders, recent research increasingly investigates factors that enable individuals to maintain psychological well-being, adapt to adversity, and achieve optimal functioning across different stages of life.

The reviewed evidence also reveals that emerging psychological issues are highly interconnected. Psychological well-being is influenced by resilience, self-efficacy, motivation, social support, and environmental conditions, while educational contexts and mental health services play complementary roles in fostering these protective factors. Table 1 summarizes the principal findings synthesized from the reviewed studies.

Table 1
Major emerging issues in contemporary psychological research

Emerging issue	Main findings	Implications for education	Implications for mental health care
Psychological well-being	Well-being extends beyond the absence of illness and includes flourishing, purpose, autonomy, and life satisfaction.	Schools should promote holistic student development alongside academic achievement.	Mental health policies should emphasize prevention and positive functioning.
Psychological resilience	Resilience enables individuals to cope effectively with adversity and recover from stress.	Educational programs should cultivate coping skills and adaptive learning strategies.	Preventive interventions should strengthen resilience across the lifespan.
Self-efficacy and motivation	Self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and grit support persistence, achievement, and psychological adjustment.	Learning environments should encourage autonomy, competence, and goal setting.	Psychological interventions should enhance confidence and self-regulation.
Social support	Family, peers, teachers, and communities significantly influence mental health and well-being.	Educational institutions should strengthen supportive relationships and inclusive school climates.	Community-based mental health services should promote social connectedness.
Psychological interventions	Positive psychology, counseling, resilience training, and mindfulness improve psychological outcomes.	Mental health education should become an integral component of school curricula.	Healthcare systems should expand evidence-based preventive psychological services.

Psychological Well-being Has Become the Central Focus of Contemporary Psychological Research

One of the most prominent findings is the increasing emphasis on psychological well-being as the primary indicator of mental health. Earlier psychological research largely concentrated on identifying psychopathology and reducing psychological symptoms. However, contemporary studies increasingly recognize that optimal mental health also requires positive psychological functioning, meaningful life engagement, and personal growth.

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that psychological well-being encompasses multiple dimensions, including positive emotions, life satisfaction, autonomy, purpose in life, personal development, and healthy interpersonal relationships. These dimensions contribute not only to individual happiness but also to academic success, occupational productivity, and social participation. Consequently, psychological well-being has become an important outcome variable in educational psychology, developmental psychology, organizational psychology, and public health research.

This shift reflects the broader influence of positive psychology, which advocates developing psychological strengths rather than merely addressing psychological deficits. Educational institutions are therefore increasingly

expected to promote emotional development, positive learning experiences, and supportive environments that contribute to students' long-term flourishing.

Resilience Is Recognized as a Critical Protective Factor

Another major finding concerns the expanding role of psychological resilience in explaining successful adaptation to adversity. Across diverse populations, resilience consistently predicts lower levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion while supporting recovery following adverse life events.

The reviewed studies indicate that resilience should be understood as a dynamic developmental process rather than a fixed personality characteristic. Individual resilience develops through continuous interactions among personal competencies, supportive relationships, and favorable environmental conditions. This perspective aligns with developmental psychology and ecological approaches emphasizing the importance of protective systems surrounding individuals.

Educational research increasingly incorporates resilience-building activities through social-emotional learning, problem-solving instruction, emotional regulation training, and stress-management programs. Similarly, healthcare systems have begun integrating resilience-based interventions into preventive mental health services because strengthening adaptive capacity may reduce future psychological disorders and improve overall quality of life.

Self-efficacy and Intrinsic Motivation Promote Positive Psychological Development

The literature consistently identifies self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation as fundamental psychological resources that facilitate learning, persistence, and psychological adjustment. Individuals with strong self-efficacy demonstrate greater confidence when facing challenges, invest more effort in difficult tasks, and recover more effectively after setbacks.

Likewise, intrinsic motivation contributes to sustained engagement because individuals pursue activities based on personal interest and internal satisfaction rather than external rewards alone. Studies grounded in Self-Determination Theory suggest that learning environments supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness significantly improve both academic performance and psychological well-being.

Research on grit further extends these findings by demonstrating that perseverance toward long-term goals predicts educational success, occupational achievement, and emotional adjustment. Collectively, these psychological characteristics form an integrated system of personal resources that enhances adaptive functioning throughout the lifespan.

Social Support Emerges as One of the Strongest Determinants of Mental Health

Perhaps the most consistent finding across recent studies is the substantial influence of social support on psychological well-being. Family members, teachers, peers, colleagues, and communities provide emotional, informational, and practical resources that help individuals cope with stress and maintain positive mental health.

The reviewed systematic reviews demonstrate that supportive interpersonal relationships reduce loneliness, anxiety, depression, and psychological distress while simultaneously promoting resilience, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and academic adjustment. These relationships appear particularly important during major developmental transitions such as entering university, adapting to professional careers, or aging.

Educational institutions therefore play an essential role in creating psychologically supportive environments. Positive teacher-student relationships, peer mentoring, collaborative learning, and inclusive school cultures collectively contribute to students' psychological development beyond academic achievement. Similarly, community-based mental health care increasingly recognizes social connectedness as an important protective factor supporting long-term psychological recovery.

Preventive and Strength-Based Psychological Interventions Represent the Future Direction of Mental Health Care

The final major finding concerns the growing emphasis on preventive psychological interventions. Rather than waiting until psychological disorders become clinically significant, contemporary mental health care increasingly prioritizes early intervention, psychological education, resilience enhancement, and promotion of well-being.

The reviewed literature demonstrates positive outcomes from interventions including positive psychology programs, resilience training, mindfulness-based practices, cognitive-behavioral approaches, emotional intelligence

development, and structured social support initiatives. These interventions have shown effectiveness across schools, universities, workplaces, healthcare settings, and community organizations.

Importantly, psychological interventions are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Educational psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and public health are progressively integrated to address complex psychological challenges associated with technological change, academic pressure, demographic aging, and evolving social environments.

Discussion

The findings of this review indicate a clear shift in contemporary psychological research from a deficit-oriented approach, focused primarily on mental disorders, to a strengths-based perspective emphasizing psychological well-being, resilience, self-efficacy, social support, and preventive mental health care. This transition is consistent with the principles of positive psychology proposed by [Seligman \(2011\)](#) and extends earlier conceptualizations of subjective well-being ([Diener, 1984](#)), psychological well-being ([Ryff, 1989](#)), and flourishing ([Keyes, 2002](#)). Together, these studies suggest that mental health should be understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, psychological, and social functioning rather than merely the absence of illness.

The review also confirms previous theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the importance of resilience. While [Luthar et al. \(2000\)](#) and [Masten \(2001\)](#) described resilience as a dynamic process of positive adaptation, more recent studies demonstrate that resilience is strengthened through self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and social support. For instance, [Yıldırım & Çelik Tanrıverdi \(2020\)](#) and [Shuo et al. \(2022\)](#) found that resilience mediates the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among university students. Likewise, [Bandura's \(1997\)](#) theory of self-efficacy and [Deci & Ryan's \(2000\)](#) Self-Determination Theory remain highly relevant, as recent evidence consistently shows that individuals with greater self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy experience better psychological adjustment and academic engagement. Research on grit ([Duckworth et al., 2007](#)) further supports the role of perseverance in promoting both educational success and positive mental health.

Another important finding is the increasingly recognized influence of social support on mental health. Consistent with [Bronfenbrenner's \(1979\)](#) ecological systems theory, recent systematic reviews ([Vicary et al., 2024](#); [Ruihua et al., 2025](#)) demonstrate that support from families, peers, teachers, and educational institutions significantly reduces psychological distress while enhancing resilience and well-being. Similarly, [Shin & Park \(2022\)](#) showed that social support promotes well-being through satisfying basic psychological needs. These findings suggest that mental health promotion should extend beyond individual treatment and involve families, schools, healthcare providers, and communities.

Compared with earlier research, contemporary psychology also places greater emphasis on prevention rather than treatment. Recent evidence indicates that interventions focusing on resilience, positive emotions, emotional regulation, and social connectedness effectively improve psychological well-being and quality of life ([Romera-Gasparico et al., 2026](#)). This preventive orientation aligns with the recommendations of the World Health Organization (2022), which advocates integrating mental health promotion into education, healthcare, workplaces, and community settings.

These findings have important implications for education. Schools and universities should move beyond traditional academic instruction to foster students' psychological competencies through social-emotional learning, resilience education, mental health literacy, and accessible counseling services. Such initiatives contribute not only to improved psychological well-being but also to stronger academic engagement, persistence, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, educational quality should be evaluated in terms of both learning outcomes and students' mental health.

The implications are particularly relevant for Vietnam, where rapid digital transformation, educational competition, and socioeconomic change have increased psychological pressures on students. Although awareness of mental health has improved, school-based counseling services remain limited because of shortages of trained professionals, inadequate facilities, and uneven implementation across regions. Based on the findings of this review, Vietnam should strengthen mental health education throughout the curriculum, improve teachers' capacity to identify and support students experiencing psychological difficulties, expand professional school counseling services, and promote collaboration among schools, families, healthcare providers, and local communities. Community-based psychological services and digital mental health technologies should also be developed to improve accessibility, especially in underserved areas.

Despite significant advances, several challenges remain. Most existing evidence originates from developed countries, limiting its applicability across different cultural contexts. Moreover, longitudinal and cross-cultural studies remain relatively scarce. Future research should therefore evaluate culturally appropriate intervention models

and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration to better understand how psychological well-being can be promoted across diverse educational and healthcare settings. Overall, the present review provides strong evidence that integrating positive psychology, resilience theory, ecological perspectives, and preventive interventions offers an effective framework for improving education and mental health care, particularly in rapidly developing countries such as Vietnam.

Conclusion

This review highlights the growing shift in contemporary psychological research from a deficit-oriented perspective toward a strengths-based approach that emphasizes psychological well-being, resilience, self-efficacy, motivation, social support, and preventive mental health interventions. The findings underscore the importance of integrating these psychological resources into educational practice through supportive learning environments, social-emotional learning, and school-based mental health services, while encouraging healthcare systems to prioritize prevention and community-based care. For Vietnam, these insights suggest the need to strengthen mental health literacy, enhance school counseling services, improve teachers' capacity to support students' psychological development, and promote collaboration between education and healthcare sectors. Although this review is limited by its qualitative approach and the predominance of studies from developed countries, it provides a comprehensive foundation for future cross-cultural and longitudinal research and offers practical implications for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable psychological well-being and quality of life.

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