

Well-Being as a Primary Determinant of Early Childhood Development: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of well-being on early childhood development through a comprehensive literature review. The research employed a library research method by examining national and international articles discussing dimensions of child well-being, including physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and environmental aspects. Content analysis was used to identify patterns, conceptual relationships, and the contribution of well-being to children's holistic development. The findings indicate that well-being serves as a primary predictor of early childhood development. Emotional well-being plays a significant role in enhancing self-regulation, social competence, and emotional stability. Physical well-being—encompassing bodily growth and structured physical activity—has been shown to support motor development and cognitive functioning. In addition, the quality of the educational environment, warm teacher-child interactions, and responsive parenting at home constitute ecosystem factors that strengthen children's well-being. Conversely, low levels of well-being are associated with behavioral problems, learning difficulties, and emotional disturbances. The study concludes that efforts to enhance children's well-being must be carried out through a holistic and collaborative approach involving families, educators, early childhood institutions, and the broader social environment. Such integrative efforts are essential to ensure that children grow healthily, happily, and reach their optimal developmental potential.

Keyword: child well-being; early childhood development; emotional well-being; motor development; early childhood education

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of early childhood serves as the fundamental basis for shaping the quality of an individual's future life. During this golden period, children experience accelerated growth across cognitive, physical-motor, social-emotional, and moral domains, making every experience they acquire have long-term implications (Likhar et al., 2022). Research on factors influencing child development has demonstrated that children's well-being is one of the strongest determinants of early developmental outcomes (OECD, 2020). Well-being is not merely understood as the absence of problems, but rather as a holistic condition encompassing physical health, emotional stability, positive social relationships, and a safe and supportive environment (Child Trends, 2016).

A growing body of literature indicates that children with higher levels of emotional well-being exhibit better self-regulation, more positive social interactions, and stronger learning motivation (Hosokawa et al., 2024). The family environment also plays a pivotal role in shaping child well-being. Responsive caregiving, warmth, and effective communication have been proven to enhance emotional security and prosocial behaviors in children (Frosch et al., 2019). Conversely, parental stress and unsupportive parenting styles increase the risk of emotional and behavioral problems in early childhood (Aprianti et al., 2024).

In addition to the family context, early childhood education environments and the quality of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) services contribute significantly to children's well-being. Competent teachers, warm interactions, stimulating play experiences, and safe learning environments promote social-emotional well-being and school readiness (Koch, 2022; Murray et al., 2025). Cross-national findings further demonstrate that children's well-being is closely linked to self-regulation abilities, social competence, creativity, and future academic performance (OECD, 2020).

From a physical and motor development perspective, well-being also encompasses a healthy body condition and adequate physical activity habits. Empirical studies reveal that positive anthropometric growth is directly associated with motor development in children (Rico-Gonzalez et al., 2024). Both structured physical activities and free play support the development of gross motor skills, cognitive functions, and social interaction (Zeng et al., 2017; Purwanti, 2025).

Despite the growing emphasis on child well-being, gaps in implementation remain, primarily due to fragmented approaches. Many ECED institutions prioritize only a single dimension of well-being such as the emotional aspect without applying it holistically (Lee-Pang et al., 2025). Furthermore, children's perspectives as primary subjects of well-being are seldom integrated into program planning, even though studies show that children hold distinctive views regarding what makes them feel happy and fulfilled (Hernandes-Torrano et al., 2025).

In light of these findings, the investigation of well-being and its influence on early childhood development is both relevant and critical. This research aims to strengthen empirical evidence on how various dimensions of well-being—emotional, social, physical, environmental, and familial—collectively contribute to comprehensive early childhood development. In addition, it provides theoretical and practical foundations for designing interventions in families, schools, and communities to enhance children's well-being.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a library research method, conducted by reviewing a wide range of relevant scholarly sources concerning child well-being and early childhood development. This method was selected because the research aims to collect, analyze, and synthesize findings from various national and international journal articles without conducting field data collection.

A. Data Sources

The data sources for this study consist of nationally and internationally indexed journal articles discussing child well-being, socio-emotional development, physical-motor development, the role of the family, learning environments, and early childhood education factors. The analyzed articles include publications from 2010 to 2025, such as studies by Likhar et al. (2022), Koch (2022), Hosokawa et al. (2024), OECD (2020), Murray et al. (2025), Rico-Gonzalez et al. (2024), and other relevant research.

B. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through the processes of identifying, selecting, and recording information from related literature. The articles were examined based on the following criteria:

- Alignment with the topic of child well-being;
- Relevance to early childhood development;
- Theoretical and empirical contributions;
- Accessibility and validity of the sources.

Each article was documented using the APA 7th edition citation format to ensure reference accuracy.

C. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which involved the following steps:

1. Categorizing research findings into well-being dimensions (physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and environmental);
2. Identifying patterns and relationships among the findings across articles;
3. Comparing consistencies and discrepancies among research results;
4. Formulating thematic syntheses to explain the influence of well-being on early childhood development.

The analysis was conducted narratively to produce a comprehensive understanding of how well-being contributes to various aspects of children's development.

D. Research Limitations

This study is limited to accessible published literature sources. No primary data were collected; therefore, the findings are descriptive-analytical in nature and rely solely on previous research results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Dimensions of Early Childhood Well-Being*

The concept of child well-being in contemporary literature is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical health, emotional well-being, social competence, cognitive development, and environmental conditions that support children's growth. The OECD (2020) asserts that children's well-being is not merely the absence of risks, but rather a positive condition enabling children to grow healthily, safely, and actively engage in learning. This perspective aligns with Child Trends (2016), which categorizes well-being into the domains of physical health, social-emotional functioning, behavior, educational development, and family support as the core ecosystem of child development.

Furthermore, a scoping review conducted by Lee-Pang et al. (2025) reveals diversity in well-being models within the literature, depending on disciplinary backgrounds such as developmental psychology, education, and public health. Although definitions vary, most studies agree that well-being is a critical prerequisite for children's future success emotionally, academically, and socially. However, the review also notes that the implementation of well-being concepts in Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) institutions remains fragmented and has yet to integrate all dimensions holistically.

In addition, children's perspectives must be recognized as part of well-being dimensions. Hernandez-Torrano et al. (2025) emphasize that children aged 4–7 perceive well-being through positive emotions, engagement in play activities, and supportive social relationships. This enriches the definition of well-being by affirming that children's perceptions and everyday experiences serve as direct indicators of their well-being. Therefore, well-being encompasses both structural aspects (environment and adult support) and children's subjective experiences.

B. *The Influence of Emotional Well-Being on Child Development*

Emotional well-being is one of the strongest predictors of socio-emotional development in early childhood. Hosokawa et al. (2024) demonstrate that Social-Emotional Learning programs significantly improve children's abilities to recognize emotions, build empathy, and manage conflict. These improvements directly affect children's social competence and academic readiness, as emotionally stable children are generally more focused and engaged in learning activities. This finding underscores the importance of prioritizing emotional well-being in early childhood education.

Moreover, the emotional climate established by teachers profoundly influences children's well-being. Murray et al. (2025) report that early childhood educators observed an increase in socio-emotional challenges after the pandemic, highlighting the need for warmer, more stable, and emotionally attuned interactions. Teachers who cultivate secure and affectionate relationships enable children to develop self-regulation and confidence in classroom exploration. This demonstrates that emotional well-being is inseparable from the quality of interpersonal relationships within educational settings.

From the family perspective, Frosch et al. (2019) explain that relational health the quality of parent child relationships is foundational to emotional well-being. Warm and responsive parenting can support children with even highly reactive temperaments. Conversely, parental stress reduces sensitivity and increases the likelihood of emotional instability and behavioral issues in young children (Aprianti et al., 2024). Thus, a child's emotional well-being results from complex interactions between the child, family, and school, necessitating collaborative interventions.

C. *The Influence of Physical Well-Being on Motor and Cognitive Development*

Physical well-being plays a crucial role in children's motor and cognitive development. Rico-Gonzalez et al. (2024) state that anthropometric indicators such as height, weight, and body composition are significantly associated with preschoolers' physical fitness and motor abilities. Children with healthy body proportions tend to possess better balance, coordination, and movement speed compared to those with suboptimal nutritional status, reaffirming the importance of physical well-being as the foundation of motor development.

A systematic review by Zeng et al. (2017) further shows that structured physical activity significantly enhances both gross and fine motor skills. Additionally, physical activity positively affects cognitive development, especially executive functions and problem-solving abilities. These findings support the argument that physical well-being is not merely related to bodily health but also affects how children think and learn optimally.

Purwanti (2025) adds that both structured and free physical play provide opportunities for children to develop body control, balance, courage, and social interaction. Similarly, research on coordination training in

preschool children shows that motor interventions improve not only physical fitness but also inhibitory control or executive functions (Başarir et al., 2025). Thus, physical well-being is multidimensional: it influences motor development, behavior, concentration, and academic readiness.

D. The Role of Educational Environments in Supporting Children's Well-Being

The learning environment is one of the most influential external factors shaping early childhood well-being. Koch (2022) found that even during pandemic restrictions, children's well-being could be maintained when ECED institutions implemented small-group interactions, stable routines, and sensitive pedagogical approaches. This illustrates that the quality of interaction matters more than temporary external conditions.

Inci and Akin (2024) identify several essential elements that foster well-being, including warm teacher-child relationships, structured routines, safe classrooms, and opportunities for free play. When children feel emotionally and physically secure, they demonstrate increased learning motivation, self-confidence, and curiosity. Such learning environments support not only cognitive growth but also the development of a positive self-identity.

At the same time, Murray et al. (2025) report challenges faced by educators, such as heightened emotional needs among children, limited training, and high workloads. Therefore, professional development, supervision, and ongoing training are crucial to ensure educators can effectively support children's well-being. These findings suggest that children's well-being is closely tied to educators' well-being, necessitating systemic approaches to enhance ECED quality.

E. The Role of Family and Social Environments as Foundations of Children's Well-Being

The family serves as the primary ecosystem for the development of children's well-being. Mil (2025) asserts that responsive parenting, parental emotional stability, and warm family interactions foster emotional security, self-confidence, and prosocial behavior. When parents actively engage and provide stimulating play experiences, children exhibit optimal linguistic, motor, and emotional development.

Additionally, maternal well-being significantly influences child development. Tough et al. (2010) found that mothers experiencing high stress, depression, or low social support tend to have children at greater risk of developmental difficulties upon entering school. This indicates that interventions supporting parental mental health can serve as effective strategies for improving early childhood well-being.

Broader social environments—including communities, digital media, and public spaces—also contribute to shaping well-being. Awaliyah et al. (2025) reveal that in hybrid learning contexts, balancing online and offline interactions is crucial for maintaining children's psychological health. Direct social interaction is essential for empathy, sharing, and other socio-emotional skills that cannot be replaced by digital engagement. This demonstrates that well-being emerges from complex interactions among family, school, and social contexts.

F. Synthesis: Well-Being as a Key Predictor of Early Childhood Development

A synthesis of the literature shows that well-being is a key factor influencing various aspects of early childhood development. Emotional well-being enhances self-regulation, social competence, and learning motivation (Hosokawa et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2025). Physical well-being supports motor and cognitive development through optimal nutrition, growth, and physical activity (Rico-Gonzalez et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2017; Purwanti, 2025). Meanwhile, environmental well-being is shaped by the quality of interactions within the family and school (Frosch et al., 2019; Inci & Akin, 2024).

These findings affirm that well-being is not a singular construct but an integrated system functioning as a predictor of holistic child development. When well-being dimensions are fulfilled, children exhibit resilience, advanced social capabilities, and stronger academic readiness. Conversely, low levels of well-being increase the risk of behavioral problems, learning difficulties, and other developmental barriers (Tough et al., 2010).

Thus, interventions aimed at strengthening children's well-being must adopt a collaborative approach involving families, schools, educators, and social environments. Such a holistic approach ensures that children grow healthily, happily, and reach their full developmental potential.

4. CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates that early childhood well-being is a primary determinant influencing comprehensive child development, encompassing physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and environmental aspects. Well-being is not merely understood as a state free from risk, but rather as a positive and holistic condition that enables children to grow securely, healthily, and confidently. Numerous studies

consistently affirm that emotional well-being, supportive social relationships, optimal physical health, and responsive learning and family environments constitute essential foundations for children's future success.

The review findings indicate that emotional well-being plays a significant role in enhancing self-regulation, emotional awareness and management, as well as children's social interactions. Children with strong emotional well-being are better prepared to engage in learning activities and are more capable of forming positive relationships with teachers and peers. Meanwhile, the physical dimension of well-being has been shown to support motor and cognitive development, where healthy physical growth and structured physical activity contribute substantially to fitness, motor coordination, and children's thinking abilities.

Beyond internal factors, the educational environment and family context substantially shape children's well-being. Competent and sensitive teachers, safe learning environments, and warm interactions within early childhood education settings strengthen children's self-confidence and learning motivation. Conversely, the quality of parenting and parental emotional conditions—particularly parental stress—play a decisive role in determining children's emotional stability and behavioral outcomes. Social interactions within the community, alongside a balanced integration of digital and face-to-face activities, have become increasingly crucial in contemporary child development.

Overall, early childhood well-being serves as a strong predictor of long-term developmental outcomes, including school readiness, academic achievement, mental health, and social competence. Low levels of well-being heighten the risk of maladaptive behaviors, emotional problems, and other developmental challenges. Therefore, interventions aimed at enhancing well-being must adopt a holistic and collaborative approach involving families, educators, early childhood institutions, and the wider social environment. Such collective efforts are essential to ensuring that every child grows healthily, joyfully, and reaches their fullest developmental potential.

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