Student Well-being: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract. Research on well-being in adults has developed quite rapidly in recent years, but not on research in child well-being particularly within school context. This article aimed to review: (a) the definition of student well-being and b) measurement of student well-being. The review involved articles published in 2007-2017. The conclusions of this literature review are (a) the definitions used to explain student well-being are based on several approaches, namely mental health, hedonistic and eudaimonic, (b) several aspects that construct the student well-being at school namely dominant positive emotions, school satisfaction, negative emotions, social relations and engagement to school. These findings can provide recommendations for measurement construction and school evaluation related to student well-being.

Keywords: school; students; well-being

Introduction

Well-being has been an exciting topic for research in the last decade. Most studies about well-being involve adults as participants in general life context. However, fewer studies involving children in a specific context such as school have been carried out (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Gadermann, Schonert-Reichl & Zumbo, 2010; Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Besides, previous studies did not differentiate the determinants of well-being in adults and children (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Huebner & Diener, 2008) whereas well-being plays a crucial role in childhood. Children with higher degree of well-being will be more cooperative, self-confident, creative, tolerant, and altruistic (Cohen &

Pressman, 2006; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). These characteristics will enable them to be more positive and self-confident in dealing with the environment, and supporting their academic activities (Mashford-Scott, Church, & Tayler, 2012).

Well-being in the school context is an important indicator to reflect on students' development at school (Elmore, 2010; Huebner & Gilman, 2003; Liu, Tian, Huebner, Zheng, & Li, 2014; Tian, Du, & Huebner, 2015). Students with excellent well-being exhibit several characteristics, for instance: attachment with school, high academic achievements, and be healthier physically and mentally (Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008). Further, Suldo & Shaffer (2008) suggested that students with high level of well-being show satisfaction towards school and higher quality of social relations.

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Well-being has been defined differently in many fields. Therefore, many definitions, indicators, and measurements have been put into practice variably (Pollard & Lee, 2003). World Health Organization (2004) defined well-being as the mental health indicator shown by individual ability to cope with pressures in ordinary life, be productive, and be able to contribute to society. Well-being is not about the absence of illness, disorders, or disability. Instead, it is about how an individual enhances personal and communal capacity and enables them to pursue their objectives (Keyes, 2002). In later studies, well-being measurement includes positive attributes, such as potential, strength, and others, and it is not only about the absence of disorders and illnesses (Keyes & Annas, 2009). Within the school context, student well-being according to this perspective is related to how students can enhance their capability and function fully.

In positive psychology, hedonistic and eudaimonic are two perspectives used to discuss well-being. Hedonistic considers well-being as similar to happiness and joy (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It focuses on the positive mental condition determined subjectively. In this approach, well-being comprises three parts: life satisfaction, the domination of positive emotion, and the absence/lack of negative emotion (Diener, Emmons, & Griffin, 1985). While, eudaimonic perspective explains that psychological well-being will be achieved when an individual realizes his/her potential and functions optimally (Ryan & Deci, 2001). These different perspectives also cause differentiation in defining child well-being, especially in school context.

About the measurement, studies have revealed that student well-being is a multidimensional construct. However, several studies particularly about mea-surement of student well-being, only focus on the cognitive component which is school satisfaction, such as *Student Life Satisfaction Scale* (Huebner, 1991; *Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale* (Huebner, 1994; Malmsjo, Scott, & Kimberly, 2012) and *Brief Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale* (Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003). School satisfaction is the student's evaluation of their life at school. Other research measure several components of well-being (in addition to cognitive) i.e., dominant positive emotion, the lack/absence of negative emotion, and school satisfaction in *Brief Adolescents' Subjective Well-Being in School Scale* (Tian, Wang, & Huebner, 2015) and for research in Indonesian context, *Student Well-Being Scale* (Kurniastuti & Azwar, 2014).

The above explanations conclude three critical points. *First*, there is no agreement among experts about the definition of well-being as various definitions and approaches used today. *Second*, only few studies had been done to discuss well-being in specific contexts such as school. *Third*, previous scales used to measure student well-being did not measure the construct holistically. For that, this article aimed to conduct a systematic literature study to a) compile the definitions of student well-being in previous studies, b) understand how the instrument of student well-being is developed and what are the domains/aspects of the construct.

Discussion

The data extraction was done through online journal database at lib.ugm.ac.id using several keywords: student, well-being/wellbeing, school/in school. The inclusion criteria of this search were: (a) studies carried out during 2000-2017; (b) studies utilizing scales that explain the

aspects/dimensions of *student wellbeing*. The exclusion criteria are: (a) studies with participants other than primary school to high school students, and (b) studies discussing well-being in general (not specific within school context).

This search found 21 relevant articles according to the inclusion criteria. In general, almost all studies use affective components, positive and negative emotions as indicators of student well-being. The cognitive component comprises general evaluation of school life and social component that can be seen from student behaviors or interaction with peers, teachers and staff at school. Lastly, the behavioral component was explained through the student involvement with learning processes at school.

Table 1 shows that several definitions of well-being were applied in previous studies. Findings reveal that the definition of student well-being used tend to focus on the positive aspects of student well-being rather than the negative aspects like disability or disorder. Besides, the data probing methods used were structured interview, observation, and valid and reliable questionnaire/scale. Unfortunately, there are only few questionnaires/scales constructed according to child perspective. There is only one study that conducted a structured interview to students with an aim to develop the student well-being scale (Engels, Aelterman, Van Petegem, & Schepens, 2004)

In Table 1, the number of participants involved in research varied between 49-5170 students. Methods used also varied: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Soutter et al. (2014) carried out qualitative research using classroom observation for students and teachers. Engels et al. (2004) and Hascher (2007, 2008) used mixed methods involving data gathering with a semi-structured interview (qualitative) and questionnaire/scale (quantitative). Engels et al. (2004) obtained initial data by conducting semi-structured interviews, and the findings were then used to construct a student well-being scale. Hascher (2007, 2008) combined qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a better understanding of student well-being at school. Nearly all studies discussed in Table 1 applied quantitative approach using scale/questionnaire/ student self-report.

Table 1.
Description of Student Well-Being Definitions at School

Researchers	Year	N	Subjects	Definition of Well-being	Instrument
Opdenakker & Van Damme	2000	4889	Junior High School Students	Well-being is assessed in two perspectives, social and affective. The indicators are a) student well-being at school, b) student social integration in the classroom, c) student social relation with the teacher, d) student's interest to assignments, e) motivation toward lessons, f) attitude toward homework, g) attention in the classroom, h) academic self-concept	School Well Being in School
Engels, Aelterman, Van Petegem, & Schepens	2004	342 & 2054	First to sixth graders (342 students for the interview, 2054 student filled in the scales)	The indicators are feeling (affective), satisfaction (cognitive), and behavior.	Interview to construct the instrument of Well Being Questionnaire
Hascher Hascher	2007 2008	2014	High School Students	Student well-being is defined as the emotional experience shown by the domination of positive emotion and cognition about the school, people at school and school context, and its comparison with negative emotion and cognition about school.	Student Well-being Scale Semi-structured interview with 58 students about relevant emotions at school.
De Fraine, Van Landeghem, Van Damme, & Onghena	2005	3788	Junior High School Students	Student Well-being is the rate of how students feel happy/right in the school environment.	Student Well-being at school scale. Item consists of 4 themes: interest in studying, relation with the teacher, like school and attention in the class.
Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel, & Creemers,	2007	1701	The ninth graders of a technical and vocational school	Positive emotion derives from harmony among factors in a specific context, individual needs, and expectations to school.	Well-being inventory for High School, Teacher Interaction Questionnaire
Petegem, Aelterman, Keer, & Rosseel,	2008	594	High school students of a technical and vocational school	Positive emotion derives from harmony among factors in a specific context, individual needs, and expectations to school.	Well-being inventory for High School, Teacher Interaction Questionnaire

Researchers	Year	N	Subjects	Definition of Well-being	Instrument
Long, Huebner, Wedell, & Hills	2012	921	Teenagers	Student well-being is a positive emotion felt often, the lack of negative emotion felt, and the positive evaluation of the whole school life.	Scales comprising 4 model factors of subjective well being about school (positive emotion, negative emotion, fear related to negative emotion and school satisfaction)
Soutter, O'Steen, & Gilmore	2014	49 students & teachers	Students age 17-21 years	Well being consists of 7 domains, *Having, Being, Relating, Feeling, Thinking, Functioning dan Striving*.	Student and teacher observation in the classroom
Miller, Connolly, & Maguire	2013	1081	students age 7-11 years	Well-being is viewed from 3 dimensions, including psychological well-being, bound with school, and relationships with family and peers.	Sub-scale of *KIDSCREEN*
Tian, Liu, Huang, & Huebner	2013	221 140	Students at early teen ages and middle teen ages	Student well-being is the interaction among positive emotion, school satisfaction	*School Well-being Scale* (school satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect)
Holfve-Sabel	2014	1560	Sixth graders of 30 primary schools	Student well-being includes how students' attitudes individually about his life at school and their attitude about school, teachers, and peers.	Students' self-report about their attitude to school, teachers and peers.
Sarkova et al.	2013	3694	Primary school students	Well-being is viewed from two factors. Students undergo depression/anxiety and social dysfunction compared to the reasonable condition they have.	Well-being is measured using *General Health Questionnaire* 12 (Depression/Anxiety & Social Dysfunction)
Pietarinen, Soini, & Pyhältö,	2014	170	Fifth and seventh graders	School well-being is explained by measuring positive emotion (such as the satisfaction about a particular domain at school) and negative emotion (psychological factor indicating its presence at school)	Cognitive Engagement Scales and School Well-being Scale

Researchers	Year	N	Subjects	Definition of Well-being	Instrument
Kurniastuti & Azwar	2014	600	Fourth, fifth and sixth graders of primary school	Psychological well-being consists of self-growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, life goal, positive social relation, and control over the environment	Student Well-being Scale
Tian, Wang et al.,	2015	311	Students age 11-18 years	Student subjective well-being at school is the subjective and emotional evaluation of their experience at school.	*Brief Adolescent Subjective Wellbeing in School Scale (BASWSS)*
Kern, Waters, Adler, & White	2015	514 143	High School Students School Staffs	PERMA Model Theory of Seligman, with five main elements of psychological well-being: positive emotion, bound, relation, meaning, achievement.	Well-being was measured using pillars of well-being PERMA (positive emotion, bound, relation, meaning, and achievement)
Mclellan & Steward,	2015	5170	Primary school and junior high school students	There are two aspects of well-being: personal well-being (emotional well-being, life satisfaction, vitality, resilience and self-esteem, and positive functioning (autonomy, competence, bound, meaning, objectives) and social well-being (Supportive relation and trust) and ownership.	*Self Report Wellbeing*
Liu, Mei, Tian, & Huebner	2016	2158	Fourth to eleventh graders	Student subjective well-being at school is the students' subjective and emotional evaluation about their experience at school	*Brief Adolescents' Subjective Well-Being in School Scale*
Liu et al.	2014	230	Forth to sixth graders of primary school	Student subjective well being includes: positive emotion, student satisfaction to school, and negative emotion about school life	*Elementary School Student's Subjective Wellbeing in School Scale* (Sub-scale: school satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect at school)
Renshaw, Long, & Cook	2015	1002	Sixth to eighth graders	Well-being defined as the teen self-perception about health and success in school life. Four main domains of well-being are a connection to the school, academic self-efficacy, preference of studying, education goal.	*Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire* (contains four subscales: connection to the school, academic self-efficacy, preference of studying, education goal

Researchers	Year	N	Subjects	Definition of Well-being	Instrument
Donat, Peter, Dalbert, & Kamble	2016	1792	Students age 12-17 years	Student well-being at school explained as the absence of negative emotion and cognition and the presence of positive emotion at the same time.	Subjective well-being questionnaire with six subscales: (1) positive attitude about school, (2) academic self-esteem, (3) enjoying/happiness at school, (4) somatic complaint, (5) social problems at school, (6) the worry about school.

Table 2 shows that most studies about student well-being used four main domains of well-being: positive emotion, social relation, the lack of negative emotion, and engagement at school. Based on 21 studies discussed in this article, eight studies are using the hedonistic approach, describing student well-being in three main components: life satisfaction, the domination of positive emotion, and the lack of negative emotion (Engels et al., 2004; Hascher, 2007, 2008; Liu, Mei, Tian, Huebner, 2016; Liu et al., 2014; Long et al., 2012; Pietarinen, Soini, & Pyha, 2014; Tian, Liu, Huang, & Huebner, 2013). In the school context, student well-being is defined as the domination of positive emotion experienced at school, the lack of negative emotion about school, and student satisfaction. Diener (1994) mentioned that positive emotion is the feeling of joy, enjoyment, and satisfaction.

In the school context, positive emotion can emerge from student interaction with others and activities they like at school (McGrath & Noble, 2010). School satisfaction is the students' cognitive evaluation of their experience in school life. The satisfaction with school can be included into the domain of positive emotion felt by students. Positive emotion about school was studied by 17 out of 21 articles (De Fraine, Van Landeghem, Van Damme, & Onghena., 2005; Donat, Peter, Dalbert, & Kamble, 2016; Engels et al., 2004; Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015; Liu et al., 2016a, 2014; Long et al., 2012; Miller Connolly, & Maguire, 2013; Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2000; Van Petegem et al.,2008; 2014; Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015; Tian, et al., 2015; Tian et al., 2015).

Negative emotion was analyzed in 10 studies (Donat et al., 2016; Hascher 2007, 2008; Liu et al., 2016; Long et al., 2012; McLellan & Steward, 2015; Renshaw et al., 2015; Tian et al., 2013; Tian et al, 2015). Negative emotions are described as emotions, which encompass anxiety, grievance, and wariness or fears felt by students about school. Meanwhile, relations involve social interactions between students and teachers, school staff, and peers. This relation domain was explained in 14 studies (De Fraine et al., 2005; Donat et al., 2016; Engels et al., 2004; Hascher, 2007, 2008; Holfve-Sabel, 2014; Kurniastuti & Azwar, 2014; Miller et al., 2013; Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2000; Van Petegem et al., 2008; Pietarinen et al., 2014; Renshaw et al., 2015).

There were only three studies explaining student well-being through the negative indicator of mental health problems (Kern et al., 2015; Sarkova et al., 2013) and reports of somatic symptoms (Donat et al., 2016). Kern et al. (2015) mentioned that student well-being was measured through mental health, including problems related to depression and the intention of suicide. Sarkova et al. (2014) also used anxiety/depression and social dysfunction as a negative indicator of student well-being at school. Donat et al. (2016) included somatic complaints as a negative indicator in which students felt certain somatic symptoms. The shift of mental health paradigm might be the reason why mental health perspective is less used as the domain of student well-being at school. A healthy mental condition is not only seen as the absence of disorder or disability but also by how an individual can showcase their capability to gain objectives and function optimally in society.

Table 2.
Aspects of Student Well-being

Researchers	Year	Aspects of student well-being								
		Positive emotion	Negative emotion	School satisfaction	Relation	Mental health	Intra Personal	Bond	Somatic complaint	Achievement
Opdenakker & Van Damme	2000						✓	✓		
Engels et al.	2004	✓			✓			✓		
Hascher,	2007, 2008	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
De Fraine et al.,	2005	✓			✓			✓		
Van Petegem, Creemers, Rossel & Aelterman	2007	✓			✓			✓		
Van Petegem et al.	2008	✓			✓			✓		
Long et al.	2012	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
	2011, 2014									
Miller et al.	2013	✓			✓			✓		
Tian et al.	2013	✓	✓				✓			
Holfve-Sabel	2014				✓			✓		
Sarkova et al.	2014					✓				
Pietarinen et al.	2014	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Kurniastuti & Azwar,	2014	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓
Tian, Wang, Huebner	2014	✓	✓		✓					
Kern et al.	2015	✓	✓			✓				✓
McLellan & Steward	2015	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓
Liu,Mei,Tian,Huebner	2015	✓	✓	✓						
Liu, Tian, Huebner, Zheng & Li	2015	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Renshaw et al.	2015	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Donat et al.	2016	✓	✓		✓		✓			
Total		**17**	**10**	**5**	**14**	**2**	**6**	**10**	**1**	**5**

Engagement becomes a domain of student well-being in 10 studies (De Fraine et al., 2005; Engels et al., 2004; Holfve-Sabel, 2014; Kern et al., 2015; Long et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2013; Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2000; Petegem et al., 2008; Soutter et al., 2014). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) explained that engagement at school comes in three forms: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. These cognitive, emotional and behavior aspects can be seen from students' participation in school activities, attendance, obedience to school rules, and the extent of efforts done in learning processes.

Intrapersonal factor becomes a domain in six studies. It includes academic self-esteem (Donat et al., 2016), academic self-concept (Opdenakker & Van Damme (2000), self-efficacy (Renshaw et al., 2015), life goal and environmental mastery (Kurniastuti & Azwar, 2014).

Then, five studies utilized achievement as an indicator of student well-being. Achievement is described as the student's ability to finish daily assignments and feeling accomplished and competent (Kern et al., 2015). Kern et al. (2015) explained that achievement comes in the form of students' study goal attainment at school. On the other side, achievement as the student well-being indicator can be explained as the competency learned (McLellan & Steward, 2015) and environmental mastery (Kurniastuti & Azwar, 2015).

Conclusion

Student well-being at school becomes an essential topic that must be considered because it is related to a number of important matters such as attachment to school, high academic achievement, and healthier physical and mental states (Suldo, et al., 2006; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008).

This literature review provides a number of conclusions. First, only few studies have been conducted about well-being within the school context. It can be an opportunity to do more studies to further examine the well-being of students at various levels of education. Second, previous studies focused on positive aspects to explain student well-being rather than the negative aspects (such as anxiety, stress, and depression). This literature study found that the domains of student well-being include positive emotions, social relationships, the lack of negative emotions, engagement with school, interpersonal factors, and achievement. For researchers who will construct the measurement scale for student's well-being at school, the findings can be used as foundations for it. Third, schools and education policymakers can consider these student's well-being aspects when designing programs to improve student well-being. It can be an output for educational goals.

The findings of this literature study can be used as the foundations for development of student well-being research and intervention in Indonesia. This study found that the emphasis of student well-being was placed more on the positive domain of students; namely positive emotions, social relationships, the lack of negative emotions, engagement with school, interpersonal factors, and achievement; compared to problems or disorders. This emphasis can be a starting point for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in Indonesia to narrow down research and interventions in identifying and promoting the positive strengths of students. Further research is needed to discover concepts and determinants

specific to the circumstances of education in Indonesia.

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