

The Concept of the Good Life in Education and Its Relationship with Adolescent Well-Being: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to explore adolescents' perceptions of the good life in educational contexts and to identify how their lived educational experiences are related to psychological, relational, social, and future-oriented well-being.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study was conducted using a descriptive phenomenological approach. Participants were 20 adolescents aged 14–18 years who were studying in secondary schools in Tehran, Iran. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation in gender, educational grade, school type, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews lasting approximately 45–70 minutes. Interviews explored adolescents' understandings of the good life, experiences of school, relationships with teachers, peers, and family members, perceptions of autonomy and academic achievement, and expectations for the future. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. Data collection continued until saturation was reached. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were addressed through repeated examination of transcripts, member checking, peer review of codes, documentation of analytical decisions, and detailed description of the research process.

Findings: Analysis of participants' experiences resulted in three major themes: personal flourishing and inner balance, relational belonging and social recognition, and educational agency and hopeful future orientation. Personal flourishing included emotional security, self-acceptance, autonomy, competence, and balance between academic achievement and everyday life. Relational belonging reflected the importance of family support, respectful teacher relationships, peer acceptance, fairness, dignity, and opportunities for social contribution. Educational agency emphasized meaningful learning, student voice and choice, mastery-oriented achievement, a psychologically safe school climate, and hope for attainable future pathways.

Conclusion: Adolescents conceptualized the good life as a multidimensional form of educational flourishing that extends beyond academic success and

includes psychological balance, supportive relationships, personal agency, meaningful learning, dignity, and future hope. Educational environments that integrate these dimensions may contribute more effectively to adolescents' comprehensive well-being and healthy development.

Keywords: *Good Life; Education; Adolescent Well-Being; Educational Flourishing; Psychological Well-Being; Phenomenology; Qualitative Research*

1. Introduction

The question of what constitutes a “good life” has long occupied philosophy, ethics, psychology, and education because it concerns not only whether individuals feel happy, but also whether they are able to develop their capacities, form meaningful relationships, exercise agency, pursue worthwhile goals, and participate constructively in social life. Within education, this question becomes particularly important because schools do more than transmit academic knowledge; they influence young people's conceptions of success, identity, relationships, responsibility, aspiration, and personal worth. Educational environments therefore contribute, directly and indirectly, to adolescents' understandings of what makes life valuable and how such a life may be achieved. Contemporary educational thought increasingly recognizes that schooling should not be reduced to examination performance or preparation for employment but should also contribute to students' capacity to live meaningful, flourishing, and socially responsible lives. Discussions of curricula as preparation for an “art of living” illustrate this broader conception of education, according to which learning should prepare young people not merely to accomplish external tasks but to make judgments, establish relationships, develop values, and navigate the complexity of human life (Cowper & Teschers, 2023). Similarly, philosophical reflection on the losses experienced by adolescents during major disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized that the value of young people's lives cannot be evaluated solely in terms of lost schooling; friendships, autonomy, developmental opportunities, recreation, social participation, and other dimensions of flourishing must also be considered (Schweiger, 2023). Thus, understanding the good life from adolescents' own perspectives provides an important basis for reconsidering the purposes and practices of education.

Adolescence is especially significant in this regard because it is a developmental period during which individuals increasingly evaluate themselves, develop more complex identities, form future aspirations, renegotiate relationships with parents and peers, and acquire greater awareness of their position within educational and social

structures. Well-being during this period is consequently multidimensional and cannot be understood simply as the absence of mental illness. Conceptual analyses of adolescent well-being have emphasized physical, psychological, emotional, social, relational, and contextual dimensions and have drawn attention to the dynamic relationship between young people and their environments (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021). Positive mental health likewise involves more than the prevention or treatment of disorders; it includes knowledge and capacities that support emotional regulation, positive functioning, resilience, relationships, and constructive engagement with life (Carvalho et al., 2022). Research on subjective well-being among adolescents further demonstrates the importance of mental-health-related knowledge and psychosocial conditions in explaining how young people evaluate their lives (Adigüzel, 2024). Adolescents' quality of life and perceptions of their own health are also connected to their educational experiences and broader developmental context, suggesting that school-age well-being reflects the interaction of personal, relational, behavioral, and institutional factors (Fernandes & Lemos, 2022). Accordingly, the good life in adolescence is better conceptualized as an integrated pattern of feeling well, functioning well, belonging, developing, and perceiving one's life as meaningful and promising.

One of the central psychological foundations of this broader conception of well-being is the adolescent's developing sense of self. Self-concept and self-efficacy are closely associated with subjective well-being because young people's evaluations of their capacities and personal worth influence how they experience challenges, relationships, achievement, and future possibilities (Céspedes et al., 2021). Educational environments are particularly consequential for this process because they repeatedly communicate judgments about competence, achievement, behavior, and social value. The formation of educational identity involves processes through which adolescents explore, evaluate, and commit to educational goals and pathways, making schooling a significant context for identity construction rather than merely a location for academic instruction (Christiaens et al., 2022). At the same time, the relationship between educational achievement and well-being may

become problematic when performance is experienced as the primary measure of personal worth. Qualitative research on adolescents' school experiences has shown that well-being may be interpreted as "welldoing," whereby students experience pressure to demonstrate worth through scores, productivity, and visible accomplishment (Clarke, 2023). Such a performance-centered understanding can narrow the meaning of a good life by equating flourishing with measurable success. The broader literature therefore suggests the need to distinguish between education that promotes personal development and education that encourages adolescents to define themselves primarily through external indicators of achievement.

Academic pathways and future expectations are another major dimension linking education with the good life. Adolescents frequently evaluate present educational experiences in relation to imagined futures, including higher education, employment, social mobility, independence, and adult identity. Family expectations and resources shape these future orientations in important ways. Research examining postsecondary future selves demonstrates that families can strongly influence how adolescents imagine who they might become, what forms of success appear attainable, and how they interpret educational possibilities (Carey, 2021). Educational plans are also influenced by psychological resources and their interaction with broader social and generational conditions, indicating that motivation and aspiration cannot be understood independently of structural context (Mont'Alvão & Mortimer, 2025). Conversely, downward educational mobility may be related to life satisfaction among both adolescents and their parents, demonstrating the emotional importance attached to educational trajectories and perceived achievement (Pollmann-Schult, 2022). Research on school re-entry similarly shows that continued participation in education is shaped by multiple individual, familial, and contextual conditions, particularly where social and economic barriers threaten adolescents' educational continuity (Henzan et al., 2021). In migration contexts, young people's future aspirations may even function as collective family projects rather than purely individual decisions, highlighting the relational and cultural construction of future life plans (Chicherina, 2023). These findings suggest that the good life in education encompasses both present well-being and the perceived possibility of a desirable future.

The family constitutes another essential context in adolescents' experiences of flourishing. Parents and caregivers influence adolescents' values, educational

choices, behavioral patterns, emotional security, and perceptions of what counts as a successful or respectable life. Research on the prevention of adolescent behavioral problems has underlined the importance of parental involvement, supervision, communication, and guidance (Agung et al., 2023). Family and school environments have also been associated with adolescent depression, indicating that the quality of adolescents' immediate relational settings can either support or undermine psychological adjustment (Kaur, 2021). Family structures, expectations, and life transitions can additionally affect adolescents' self-concepts, as illustrated in studies examining early marriage and divorce and their implications for young people's developing identities (Lorinda et al., 2023). The role of families is not restricted to emotional care; parents also participate in moral, educational, and future-oriented decision making. Current debates concerning parental rights in public schools reveal the ethical complexity involved in balancing parental authority, educational responsibilities, institutional goals, and the developing agency of young people (Abowitz & Hornbeck, 2025). These tensions are directly relevant to the good life because adolescents' flourishing may require both supportive guidance and opportunities for increasing autonomy. Education therefore becomes a site at which family values, institutional expectations, and adolescents' emerging preferences meet and sometimes conflict.

The relational dimension of adolescent well-being extends beyond the family to peers, teachers, school communities, and other sources of social support. Recent mixed-methods research has highlighted the close relationship between adolescents' mental well-being and social support, reinforcing the view that psychological flourishing is embedded in interpersonal relationships (Cilar et al., 2025). Schools can foster such support not only through counseling or formal mental health programs but also through the ordinary organization of classrooms, extracurricular activities, teacher-student relationships, and peer interaction. A systematic review of school-based interventions has demonstrated the potential of educational settings to promote adolescent mental well-being, while also indicating the importance of intervention design and contextual responsiveness (Cilar et al., 2020). Extracurricular activities may contribute to students' character development by creating spaces for participation, cooperation, responsibility, and the development of interests beyond formal academic work (Rahayu & Dong, 2023). Likewise, participation in organized club activities has been

examined as a pathway to developing citizenship among adolescents, suggesting that education can contribute to social responsibility and civic identity in addition to individual achievement (Park, 2024). These findings support an understanding of the good life as relational and participatory, in which adolescents need opportunities not only to succeed personally but also to belong, contribute, and experience recognition within a community.

School experiences can also affect well-being through physical activity, embodiment, and the opportunity to experience competence and enjoyment beyond conventional academic evaluation. Physical activity and school physical education have been associated with both school satisfaction and life satisfaction, illustrating the potential contribution of embodied participation to positive educational experience (García et al., 2021). Research conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic similarly showed relationships among alienation in physical education, school happiness, and expectations concerning a healthy future life, emphasizing that school experiences influence how adolescents connect present participation with future well-being (Lee et al., 2021). More broadly, adolescent physical health has been treated as an educational and social concern requiring coordinated approaches to health promotion (Liu, 2021). Health-related knowledge acquired through schools can likewise shape adolescents' attitudes and decisions, as demonstrated by research on reproductive health education (Hastuti et al., 2021). More recent school-based evidence concerning adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to intergenerational malnutrition further shows that young people's capacities for a healthy life are influenced by what they learn and how effectively educational settings address practical health concerns (Varshitha et al., 2026). Together, these studies reinforce the multidimensionality of the good life by indicating that educational flourishing includes psychological, relational, intellectual, and physical dimensions.

Emotional capacities also play an important role in the way adolescents experience education and evaluate their lives. Emotional intelligence has been associated with learning achievement, suggesting that academic development and emotional functioning should not be treated as completely separate domains (Yusri et al., 2020). Resilience similarly contributes to adolescents' ability to continue educational development despite difficulties and adverse circumstances (Martina et al., 2020). However, emotional resources should not be interpreted as placing the entire responsibility for well-being on adolescents

themselves. Research on emotional problems among upper-secondary students has shown that adolescent distress is linked to multiple contextual and psychosocial factors and may vary according to gender and other circumstances (Haugan et al., 2021). Adolescents' interpretations of health determinants also become increasingly complex with age and may differ across groups, indicating that young people actively construct explanations of health and well-being rather than simply receiving adult definitions (Deyra et al., 2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in educational experience were associated with children's and adolescents' mental health, further demonstrating how external educational conditions can profoundly influence well-being (Ramírez et al., 2021). Therefore, a meaningful analysis of the good life must consider both personal psychological resources and the social and institutional environments within which those resources develop and are exercised.

Safety, dignity, and protection from harm are equally important components of a life that can reasonably be regarded as good. Adolescents cannot flourish in environments characterized by fear, violence, discrimination, humiliation, or persistent insecurity. Research focusing on threats to adolescent girls has drawn attention to the multiple ways safety may be compromised and to the broader social origins of such threats (Chen, 2023). School environments must therefore be evaluated not only according to instructional effectiveness but also according to whether they provide psychological and social security. A genuinely supportive educational context allows young people to make mistakes, seek assistance, participate without humiliation, and develop confidence in their capacity to act. This perspective is consistent with approaches that frame education in ethical and relational terms. For example, studies of peace education highlight dispositions and educator characteristics associated with moral leadership, social harmony, and constructive human relationships (Saputra et al., 2022). Similarly, moral development approaches grounded in religious education emphasize the formation of character and values as important educational responsibilities (Muhsin et al., 2023). Other research demonstrates that religious and cultural environments can influence self-concept and educational outcomes, showing that adolescents' educational experiences are embedded within wider systems of meaning and socialization (Horwitz et al., 2022). Thus, conceptions of the good life are not culturally neutral; they are formed

through moral, familial, educational, and social narratives concerning what kinds of persons and futures are valued.

The connection between happiness and schooling has consequently become an increasingly explicit area of educational inquiry. Work addressing happiness and well-being within the school environment has attempted to bring everyday experiences of satisfaction, emotional quality, and flourishing into conversations that have traditionally prioritized academic attainment (Cezar & Reis, 2024). Such perspectives challenge narrow educational models by asking whether schools help students develop lives they themselves regard as meaningful. At the same time, a good life cannot be understood as permanent happiness or the avoidance of all difficulty. Growth often involves effort, disappointment, uncertainty, ethical conflict, and developmental challenge. What appears more important is whether adolescents possess supportive relationships, meaningful opportunities, a sense of competence, personal agency, and realistic hope while navigating these difficulties. Educational settings can contribute to these conditions by respecting adolescents as developing persons, providing opportunities for participation, supporting identity exploration, and broadening definitions of achievement. They can also undermine them through excessive competition, rigid control, social comparison, exclusion, and a failure to recognize individual differences.

Despite increasing attention to adolescent mental health, subjective well-being, school satisfaction, educational identity, social support, resilience, health literacy, and future aspirations, the available literature is often fragmented across separate variables and disciplinary perspectives. One body of research examines mental health and well-being, another emphasizes educational achievement and identity, while other studies focus on family relationships, physical health, character education, citizenship, or future planning. Yet adolescents experience these domains simultaneously in everyday life. Their understanding of a good life may integrate emotional calm, positive self-regard, supportive friendships, family acceptance, fair treatment at school, meaningful learning, autonomy, health, moral values, achievement, and hope for the future. A qualitative approach is particularly valuable for examining this integration because it allows adolescents to define well-being in their own terms rather than requiring them to respond within predetermined measurement categories. It can also reveal contradictions within educational experience, such as wanting academic success while rejecting excessive competition, valuing parental guidance while seeking

autonomy, or recognizing the importance of effort while questioning educational experiences that appear disconnected from personally meaningful goals.

This need is especially salient in culturally and socially specific settings, where the meaning of a good life may be shaped by educational competition, family expectations, social norms, economic uncertainty, cultural values, and adolescents' perceptions of available future opportunities. Existing international studies provide important evidence about adolescent well-being, educational experiences, health, identity, and social relationships, but they cannot automatically capture how adolescents in Tehran conceptualize the relationship between education and living well. A context-sensitive qualitative investigation can therefore complement variable-centered research by identifying the meanings adolescents attach to flourishing and the conditions they believe enable or obstruct it. Such knowledge can contribute to educational psychology, philosophy of education, school counseling, curriculum planning, and adolescent mental health by clarifying what young people themselves regard as essential to a worthwhile educational life.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to explore the concept of the good life in education from the perspectives of adolescents in Tehran and to identify how their lived educational experiences are related to their psychological, relational, social, and future-oriented well-being.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore adolescents' lived experiences and perceptions of the concept of the good life within the educational context and to understand how these perceptions are related to their psychological, emotional, social, and educational well-being. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the concept of the good life is multidimensional, value-laden, and closely connected to individuals' subjective interpretations of happiness, meaning, personal development, interpersonal relationships, educational experiences, and expectations for the future. Phenomenology provided an appropriate methodological framework for examining how adolescents understand and experience these dimensions in their everyday educational lives rather than imposing predetermined theoretical

categories on their experiences. The study population consisted of adolescents studying in secondary schools in Tehran, Iran. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling with maximum variation to obtain diverse perspectives regarding educational experiences, perceptions of a desirable life, and well-being. A total of 20 adolescents participated in the study. Participants were selected from different secondary schools in Tehran and represented variation in gender, age, educational grade, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background to the extent possible. Eligibility criteria included being an adolescent enrolled in a secondary school in Tehran, being willing and able to describe personal educational and life experiences, having sufficient verbal communication ability to participate in an in-depth interview, and providing informed assent along with parental or legal guardian consent when required. Adolescents who were unwilling to continue the interview, were unable to participate effectively in the interview process, or withdrew their consent at any stage were excluded from the study. Recruitment and interviewing continued until data saturation was achieved, meaning that subsequent interviews did not produce substantially new concepts, meanings, or categories relevant to the research questions. Saturation was judged through the continuous comparison of newly collected data with previously identified codes and categories. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Before each interview, the purpose and procedures of the research were explained to participants in understandable language, and they were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by assigning codes to participants instead of using identifying information, and all research data were used exclusively for scientific purposes.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, which served as the primary data collection instrument. The interview guide was developed in accordance with the study objectives and the conceptual domains of the good life, education, adolescence, and well-being. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to address a relatively consistent set of topics across participants while providing sufficient flexibility for adolescents to explain their experiences, interpretations, values, and concerns in their own words. Interviews began

with broad and open-ended questions intended to encourage participants to describe their personal understanding of a good and desirable life. Participants were asked questions such as what a good life means to them, what characteristics they believe a person with a good life possesses, how school and education can contribute to or interfere with a good life, which experiences at school make them feel happy, meaningful, successful, valued, or satisfied, and how relationships with teachers, classmates, family members, and the school environment influence their well-being. Additional questions explored the role of academic achievement, autonomy, freedom of choice, personal interests, future goals, social relationships, emotional security, self-development, fairness, belonging, and perceived meaning in adolescents' conceptions of a good life. Participants were also encouraged to describe educational experiences that had positively or negatively influenced their emotional state, motivation, self-esteem, sense of purpose, life satisfaction, and perceptions of their future. Probing questions such as "Can you explain this further?", "Can you give an example?", "How did that experience affect you?", and "Why is this important for a good life?" were used when necessary to clarify participants' meanings and obtain richer descriptions. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and private setting that provided participants with sufficient comfort and confidentiality to discuss their experiences openly. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 70 minutes, depending on the participant's willingness to elaborate and the richness of the information provided. With participants' permission, interviews were digitally audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also recorded immediately after the interviews to document contextual information, notable emotional expressions, nonverbal observations, and the researchers' preliminary analytical reflections. Data collection and preliminary analysis were conducted concurrently, allowing issues emerging from earlier interviews to be examined more deeply in subsequent interviews. The interview guide was therefore used flexibly and was refined during the data collection process without altering the central focus of the study.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, which provides a systematic procedure for identifying the essential meanings and structures embedded in participants' lived experiences.

Data analysis began immediately after the first interviews and proceeded simultaneously with data collection. Initially, each audio-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim, and the researchers read each transcript several times to become immersed in the data and develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' accounts. During repeated readings, significant statements directly related to adolescents' perceptions of the good life, their educational experiences, and various dimensions of well-being were identified and extracted. The underlying meanings of these significant statements were then formulated while remaining as close as possible to participants' original descriptions. Similar formulated meanings were compared and grouped into initial codes, and codes reflecting conceptually related experiences were subsequently organized into subcategories and broader thematic categories. Throughout the analytical process, continuous comparison was used to examine similarities and differences among participants' experiences and to ensure that the emerging categories adequately represented the diversity of perspectives within the dataset. Categories were progressively integrated into higher-order themes that represented the central dimensions of adolescents' conceptualizations of the good life in education and the perceived connections between educational experiences and well-being. The researchers repeatedly returned to the original interview transcripts to verify that the emerging themes were supported by participants' statements and that interpretations had not moved beyond the meanings expressed in the data. A comprehensive description of the phenomenon was then developed by integrating the identified themes and their relationships, after which the fundamental structure of adolescents' experiences of the good life and educational well-being was formulated. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the interview data, repeated examination of transcripts, member checking with selected participants, and discussion of codes and categories among members of the research team. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining a clear record of decisions made during coding and theme development, while confirmability was promoted by grounding interpretations in participants' accounts and documenting analytical reflections throughout the study. Transferability was facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the participants, research setting, sampling process, interview procedures, and contextual characteristics of the study. Data collection and analysis continued until theoretical and experiential redundancy was reached and no

substantively new codes or themes emerged from additional interviews. The final thematic structure was reviewed against the complete dataset to ensure internal coherence within each theme, meaningful distinction between themes, and consistency with the overall purpose of the study.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 20 adolescents from secondary schools in Tehran participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 18 years, with a mean age of approximately 16.2 years. Of the participants, 11 were girls and 9 were boys. In terms of educational level, five participants were studying in the ninth grade, five in the tenth grade, six in the eleventh grade, and four in the twelfth grade. Thirteen participants attended public schools and seven attended non-public schools. Participants were recruited from different areas of Tehran in order to obtain variation in educational environment, socioeconomic background, family circumstances, academic performance, and lived experience of schooling. The participants also differed in their reported levels of academic achievement and their perceptions of school satisfaction, allowing the study to capture a relatively broad range of adolescent perspectives on education, well-being, and the good life. Analysis of the interviews showed that adolescents did not understand the good life merely as happiness, academic success, material comfort, or the absence of difficulties. Rather, they conceptualized it as a multidimensional state in which psychological balance, personal growth, meaningful relationships, social recognition, educational agency, and hope for the future coexist. The analysis resulted in three major themes: personal flourishing and inner balance, relational belonging and social recognition, and educational agency and hopeful future orientation. These major themes consisted of 15 interrelated subthemes. Although the themes were analytically distinguishable, participants' accounts demonstrated substantial interaction among them. Psychological well-being was strengthened when adolescents experienced supportive relationships and meaningful educational opportunities, while persistent pressure, humiliation, lack of autonomy, interpersonal rejection, and uncertainty about the future were described as conditions that undermined their experience of a good life. Data saturation became evident after the eighteenth interview, as subsequent interviews did not generate substantively new themes or categories. The final two

interviews were retained to confirm the stability and completeness of the thematic structure.

Table 1

Overall Thematic Structure of Adolescents' Conceptions of the Good Life in Education and Its Relationship with Well-Being

Main Theme	Subtheme	Central Meaning
Personal flourishing and inner balance	Emotional security and psychological calm	Experiencing inner stability, reduced excessive anxiety, and the ability to live without constant fear or psychological pressure
Personal flourishing and inner balance	Self-acceptance and positive self-regard	Accepting personal characteristics, limitations, strengths, appearance, and abilities without excessive self-criticism
Personal flourishing and inner balance	Autonomy and authenticity	Having freedom to make age-appropriate choices and being able to live according to personal values and interests
Personal flourishing and inner balance	Competence and personal growth	Experiencing progress, mastery, learning, and development rather than merely competing for grades
Personal flourishing and inner balance	Balance between achievement and everyday life	Maintaining an appropriate balance among schoolwork, rest, recreation, family life, friendships, and personal interests
Relational belonging and social recognition	Family support and emotional availability	Experiencing understanding, acceptance, guidance, and emotional security within the family
Relational belonging and social recognition	Respectful and supportive teacher relationships	Being treated with dignity, fairness, encouragement, and understanding by teachers
Relational belonging and social recognition	Peer belonging and friendship	Having trustworthy friendships and feeling accepted within the peer group
Relational belonging and social recognition	Fairness and freedom from humiliation	Experiencing school as a context free from degrading comparison, ridicule, discrimination, and unjust treatment
Relational belonging and social recognition	Social contribution and mutual care	Experiencing well-being through helping others, being useful, and participating positively in social life
Educational agency and hopeful future orientation	Meaningful and relevant learning	Perceiving educational content as understandable, purposeful, applicable, and related to real life
Educational agency and hopeful future orientation	Choice and student voice	Having opportunities to express opinions and participate in decisions affecting learning and school life
Educational agency and hopeful future orientation	Mastery-oriented achievement	Viewing success as learning, improvement, and competence rather than solely obtaining high grades
Educational agency and hopeful future orientation	Safe and supportive school climate	Experiencing school as psychologically and socially secure and as a place where mistakes can occur without fear
Educational agency and hopeful future orientation	Future hope and perceived pathways	Believing that education can open realistic pathways toward a personally meaningful and attainable future

As shown in Table 1, the adolescents' understanding of the good life was organized around three interconnected domains rather than a single definition of happiness or success. The first theme, personal flourishing and inner balance, represented the intrapersonal dimension of the good life and emphasized emotional security, self-acceptance, autonomy, development of competence, and balance between academic demands and other areas of life. Participants frequently differentiated genuine well-being from temporary pleasure and described a good life as one in which they could feel psychologically calm, develop as individuals, and pursue meaningful goals without being overwhelmed by academic and social pressures. The second theme, relational belonging and social recognition, demonstrated that well-being was strongly dependent on the quality of relationships within the family, school, and peer

environment. Adolescents emphasized that being respected, understood, accepted, and treated fairly was essential to their sense of worth and psychological security. The third theme, educational agency and hopeful future orientation, reflected adolescents' expectation that education should enable them to understand themselves, acquire meaningful competencies, participate actively in learning, and develop realistic hope regarding their future. Across all three themes, well-being appeared to emerge when education supported both the internal development of the adolescent and the relational and social conditions necessary for flourishing. Conversely, education was perceived as inconsistent with the good life when it became excessively competitive, externally controlled, humiliating, disconnected from meaningful goals, or dominated by fear of failure and uncertainty about the future.

Table 2

Personal Flourishing and Inner Balance as a Dimension of the Good Life

Subtheme	Representative Initial Codes	Interpretive Meaning
Emotional security and psychological calm	Feeling calm, absence of constant worry, reduced fear of failure, manageable academic stress, freedom from excessive pressure, emotional stability	The good life requires a psychological state in which adolescents are able to experience school and daily life without chronic anxiety or persistent threat
Self-acceptance and positive self-regard	Accepting oneself, not constantly comparing oneself with others, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, feeling worthy despite mistakes, accepting personal differences	Well-being depends on developing a stable sense of personal worth that is not entirely dependent on grades, appearance, or external approval
Autonomy and authenticity	Making personal choices, choosing interests, expressing opinions, having privacy, selecting educational goals, freedom from excessive parental or school control	Adolescents experience a better life when they perceive themselves as active agents rather than passive recipients of decisions
Competence and personal growth	Learning new skills, improving over time, overcoming difficulties, discovering abilities, experiencing mastery, understanding rather than memorizing	Personal development and the experience of becoming more capable were central indicators of flourishing
Balance between achievement and everyday life	Having time to rest, recreation, hobbies, sports, friendships, adequate sleep, family interaction, freedom from continuous studying	Academic success was considered beneficial only when it did not eliminate other essential dimensions of adolescent life

The first major theme, personal flourishing and inner balance, represented the adolescents' understanding of the good life as an internally sustainable form of well-being rather than a temporary emotional state. Emotional security and psychological calm emerged as particularly important because many participants associated excessive educational pressure with anxiety, irritability, exhaustion, loss of motivation, and persistent fear of failure. Participants distinguished between reasonable academic demands, which could motivate development, and excessive pressure, which they believed transformed education into a source of psychological distress. Within their accounts, a good educational life was therefore not an effortless or challenge-free life; instead, it involved encountering manageable challenges while maintaining a sense of psychological safety and personal control. Self-acceptance was another prominent aspect of personal flourishing. Adolescents repeatedly described the harmful consequences of evaluating themselves exclusively through examination scores, class rank, physical appearance, or comparison with highly successful peers. Their narratives suggested that well-being was enhanced when they were able to acknowledge both their strengths and limitations without interpreting every weakness as evidence of personal inadequacy. Autonomy and authenticity were also closely connected to

well-being. Participants valued opportunities to choose their interests, express opinions, make decisions about future educational pathways, and experience some control over their everyday lives. Excessive interference by adults, rigid educational expectations, and pressure to pursue fields inconsistent with personal interests were perceived as threats to a good life because they diminished the adolescent's sense of ownership over his or her future. Competence and personal growth constituted a further dimension of flourishing. Adolescents described meaningful progress, discovery of abilities, development of skills, and overcoming previously difficult tasks as more psychologically satisfying than merely receiving high grades. This finding indicates that adolescents' well-being was associated with a mastery-oriented understanding of achievement in which learning contributes to personal development. Finally, participants strongly emphasized the importance of balance. Continuous studying, inadequate sleep, absence of leisure, and lack of opportunities for friendship, exercise, hobbies, and family interaction were regarded as incompatible with a good life even when they produced academic success. Accordingly, personal flourishing was constructed as a balanced integration of achievement, emotional stability, autonomy, self-respect, development, and ordinary experiences of adolescent life.

Table 3

Relational Belonging and Social Recognition as a Dimension of the Good Life

Subtheme	Representative Initial Codes	Interpretive Meaning
Family support and emotional availability	Being listened to, parental understanding, emotional support, reasonable expectations, guidance without excessive control, feeling safe at home	Family relationships create the emotional foundation through which adolescents interpret educational difficulties and personal worth
Respectful and supportive teacher relationships	Teacher encouragement, respectful communication, being taken seriously, receiving help, teachers noticing effort, non-threatening correction	Teachers influence well-being not only through instruction but also through the quality of interpersonal recognition they provide
Peer belonging and friendship	Having close friends, being accepted, sharing problems, companionship, mutual trust, absence of exclusion, feeling part of a group	Friendship and peer acceptance provide emotional support and strengthen adolescents' sense of social identity and belonging
Fairness and freedom from humiliation	Equal treatment, absence of ridicule, no public shaming, fair grading, freedom from discriminatory treatment, respectful discipline	Psychological well-being requires an educational environment in which dignity is protected and social comparison does not become degrading
Social contribution and mutual care	Helping classmates, supporting friends, being useful, participating in group activities, contributing to school, caring for others	The good life was associated not only with receiving support but also with experiencing oneself as valuable and helpful to others

The second major theme, relational belonging and social recognition, showed that adolescents understood the good life as fundamentally relational. Participants did not describe well-being as an exclusively private psychological condition; instead, they consistently connected their emotional state and sense of self-worth to the way they were treated by parents, teachers, classmates, and significant others. Family support was particularly important because the family was perceived as the primary context in which adolescents sought reassurance, emotional understanding, and guidance during educational and personal difficulties. Participants valued parents who listened to their concerns, recognized differences in ability and interest, maintained realistic expectations, and offered guidance without excessive control. In contrast, continuous comparison with siblings or peers, pressure for unrealistically high academic performance, and lack of emotional responsiveness were perceived as significant barriers to well-being. Teacher relationships also had considerable psychological importance. Adolescents described supportive teachers as individuals who communicated respectfully, noticed effort, provided understandable guidance, allowed mistakes, and avoided humiliating students when difficulties occurred. Respect from teachers appeared to function as a form of

social recognition that strengthened students' confidence and willingness to participate in learning. Peer belonging represented another central component of the good life. Participants regarded close friendships as sources of emotional security, enjoyment, identity development, and protection against feelings of isolation. Social exclusion, ridicule, bullying, and unstable friendships were described as experiences capable of affecting both school engagement and broader psychological well-being. The importance of fairness and freedom from humiliation was especially evident across participant accounts. Adolescents were sensitive to situations in which students were publicly compared, criticized, mocked, or treated differently according to academic achievement or other characteristics. Such experiences were interpreted not simply as unpleasant events but as threats to dignity and personal worth. In addition, participants associated well-being with social contribution. Helping friends, supporting classmates, participating in collective activities, and feeling useful to others were described as meaningful experiences that strengthened a sense of purpose. Therefore, the relational dimension of the good life involved reciprocal processes of being respected and supported while also having opportunities to care for and contribute to others.

Table 4

Educational Agency and Hopeful Future Orientation as a Dimension of the Good Life

Subtheme	Representative Initial Codes	Interpretive Meaning
Meaningful and relevant learning	Understanding why something is learned, connection with real life, practical usefulness, engaging lessons, meaningful content, applying knowledge	Education contributes to the good life when learning is perceived as purposeful rather than as the mechanical accumulation of information
Choice and student voice	Expressing opinions, participating in classroom decisions, choosing some activities, selecting areas of interest, being consulted, having educational freedom	Student agency strengthens motivation and promotes the perception that education belongs to the learner rather than being externally imposed

Mastery-oriented achievement	Improvement, learning from mistakes, understanding concepts, personal progress, skill acquisition, reduced obsession with ranking	Healthy achievement is defined through growth and competence rather than competition and external comparison
Safe and supportive school climate	Feeling comfortable asking questions, freedom to make mistakes, absence of fear, supportive counseling, predictable rules, respectful discipline	Psychological safety allows adolescents to participate in education without perceiving school as a constant evaluative threat
Future hope and perceived pathways	Having goals, believing effort can influence the future, knowing educational options, career hope, confidence in future opportunities, developing life plans	Education supports well-being when it enables adolescents to imagine attainable and personally meaningful futures

The third major theme, educational agency and hopeful future orientation, reflected the participants' belief that education contributes to a good life when it provides meaningful learning experiences and enables adolescents to imagine, construct, and pursue valued futures. Participants repeatedly distinguished meaningful learning from memorization aimed solely at examinations. Educational content was perceived as valuable when adolescents understood its purpose, could connect it with everyday life, or believed that it contributed to intellectual, personal, or practical development. When learning was experienced as disconnected from real life and dominated by examination preparation, participants described reduced motivation and a weaker sense that education contributed to their well-being. Student voice and choice represented another central component of educational agency. Adolescents wanted to be able to express opinions, ask questions, participate in some decisions related to learning, and have meaningful input regarding their educational and occupational futures. These expectations did not necessarily imply complete independence from adults; rather, participants favored guided autonomy in which teachers and parents provided information and support while allowing adolescents to retain a meaningful role in decisions affecting their lives. Participants also expressed a mastery-oriented interpretation of achievement. Although grades were considered important because of their practical educational consequences, high grades alone were not regarded as sufficient indicators of a good educational life. Adolescents emphasized understanding, improvement, ability development, and learning from mistakes. Excessive competition and constant ranking were often perceived as detrimental because they encouraged comparison and fear rather than genuine learning. A safe and supportive school climate was likewise central to educational well-being. Participants believed they learned more effectively when they could ask questions, admit confusion, make mistakes, and request assistance without fear of embarrassment or punitive responses. Finally, future hope emerged as one of the strongest links between education and the good life. Adolescents described well-being as partly dependent on having meaningful goals

and believing that there were realistic pathways toward achieving them. Education contributed positively to well-being when it expanded perceived possibilities, enabled adolescents to recognize personal abilities, provided information about future options, and created a sense that present effort could influence future outcomes. By contrast, uncertainty, perceived lack of opportunity, pressure to pursue unwanted educational paths, and fear that effort would not lead to meaningful outcomes weakened motivation and psychological well-being.

Taken together, the findings showed that the concept of the good life among adolescents was neither exclusively hedonic nor exclusively achievement-oriented. Participants described the good life as a dynamic condition of flourishing characterized by emotional balance, self-respect, autonomy, personal development, supportive relationships, social belonging, meaningful education, and hope for the future. Education was therefore understood as having a dual potential. Under supportive conditions, it could strengthen adolescents' well-being by creating opportunities for competence, identity formation, meaningful relationships, autonomy, and future planning. Under restrictive or highly pressurized conditions, however, education could become a source of anxiety, exhaustion, self-doubt, interpersonal insecurity, and loss of meaning. The relationship between education and well-being was consequently not determined by academic participation alone but by the quality of adolescents' educational experiences. The findings indicate that adolescents experience education as supportive of the good life when schools simultaneously address academic development, psychological needs, interpersonal dignity, participation, and future-oriented meaning. The three themes were therefore understood as mutually reinforcing components of a broader conception of educational flourishing: adolescents were more likely to experience psychological well-being when they felt internally balanced, relationally valued, and capable of exercising meaningful agency within an educational environment that offered realistic hope for personal and social development.

4. Discussion

The present study explored adolescents' conceptions of the good life in education and the ways in which educational experiences were related to their well-being. The findings revealed three interconnected major themes: personal flourishing and inner balance, relational belonging and social recognition, and educational agency and hopeful future orientation. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that adolescents did not define the good life solely in terms of pleasure, academic success, or material achievement. Rather, they described it as a multidimensional condition involving emotional security, self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, balanced living, supportive relationships, fairness, meaningful learning, student participation, and hope regarding the future. This interpretation is consistent with multidimensional conceptualizations of adolescent well-being that emphasize the integration of psychological, emotional, social, relational, and contextual domains (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021). It also corresponds with positive mental health perspectives in which flourishing involves effective functioning, personal capacities, emotional competence, meaningful relationships, and the ability to deal constructively with life demands rather than merely the absence of psychological disorders (Carvalho et al., 2022). The findings therefore suggest that adolescents evaluate the quality of education partly according to whether it helps them become psychologically balanced, socially connected, competent, autonomous, and hopeful persons.

The first major theme, personal flourishing and inner balance, included emotional security, self-acceptance, autonomy, competence and personal growth, and balance between achievement and everyday life. Participants repeatedly described psychological calm as a prerequisite for a good educational life and distinguished productive challenge from chronic academic pressure. When educational demands were perceived as manageable and meaningful, they could encourage effort and development; however, when they became excessive, continuous, or accompanied by fear of failure, adolescents associated them with anxiety, exhaustion, reduced motivation, and diminished well-being. This finding is consistent with evidence demonstrating that subjective well-being during adolescence is closely linked with psychological resources, mental health knowledge, and broader contextual conditions (Adıgüzel, 2024). It also corresponds with findings showing considerable emotional difficulties among adolescents during upper-secondary education and emphasizing that

school-related and psychosocial conditions may contribute to emotional problems (Haugan et al., 2021). Research conducted during the COVID-19 period similarly demonstrated that changes and disruptions in educational experiences were related to mental health outcomes among children and adolescents (Ramírez et al., 2021). These convergent findings indicate that the psychological quality of educational experience cannot be separated from educational outcomes because persistent fear, pressure, and emotional insecurity may influence how young people understand both schooling and their broader lives.

Self-acceptance and positive self-regard emerged as another important component of personal flourishing. Participants emphasized that a good life required the ability to recognize strengths and weaknesses without defining personal worth exclusively through examination scores, class rank, appearance, or comparison with others. This finding is aligned with research demonstrating significant associations among adolescent self-concept, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being (Céspedes et al., 2021). It also provides qualitative support for concerns regarding the tendency of educational systems to transform well-being into "welldoing," whereby students feel that their value is demonstrated primarily through measurable performance (Clarke, 2023). The present findings extend this perspective by showing that adolescents themselves recognize the psychological costs of excessive performance-based comparison. Their narratives suggest that academic achievement supports well-being when it is interpreted as evidence of development and competence, whereas it may undermine well-being when it becomes the dominant basis for self-evaluation. This interpretation is further consistent with research indicating that educational outcomes and psychological resources are closely intertwined, although their benefits may vary across social and generational contexts (Mont'Alvão & Mortimer, 2025).

Autonomy and authenticity were likewise central to adolescents' definitions of a good life. Participants valued opportunities to express preferences, choose areas of interest, participate in educational decisions, and develop future goals compatible with their own abilities and values. They did not reject adult guidance, but they preferred support that preserved their sense of agency. This finding is especially important because adolescence involves a developmental transition toward greater self-determination while young people remain embedded in family and institutional systems. Debates surrounding parental rights and educational authority similarly highlight the complexity

of balancing parental influence, institutional responsibility, and the emerging agency of young people (Abowitz & Hornbeck, 2025). Furthermore, research on educational identity indicates that adolescents actively explore and commit to educational pathways, suggesting that educational development is deeply related to identity formation and personal decision-making (Christiaens et al., 2022). Family influence on adolescents' postsecondary future selves also demonstrates that educational aspirations are constructed within relationships rather than in isolation (Carey, 2021). The present findings therefore indicate that autonomy in the good life should not be understood as independence from others, but as the ability to participate meaningfully in decisions concerning one's education and future while receiving appropriate relational support.

Participants also described competence and personal growth as more meaningful than grades alone. Their accounts emphasized learning, overcoming difficulty, discovering abilities, developing skills, and understanding new ideas. This orientation is consistent with evidence linking resilience to adolescents' educational advancement and capacity to continue developing despite challenges (Martina et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence has also been associated with learning achievement, illustrating the interconnectedness of emotional and academic development (Yusri et al., 2020). The adolescents in this study appeared to regard successful education as a process through which they became more capable rather than merely more credentialed. At the same time, they stressed the importance of balancing academic achievement with sleep, recreation, friendships, sports, family interaction, and personal interests. This finding supports broader philosophical arguments that losses affecting adolescents cannot be reduced to interruptions in formal schooling because opportunities for friendship, leisure, autonomy, development, and participation are themselves essential components of young people's lives (Schweiger, 2023). In this sense, the good life requires an educational structure that supports achievement without allowing academic demands to consume the entirety of adolescent life.

The second major theme, relational belonging and social recognition, demonstrated that adolescents understood well-being as deeply embedded in relationships. Family support, respectful teacher relationships, peer belonging, fairness, freedom from humiliation, and opportunities for social contribution were described as central elements of a desirable educational life. This finding strongly aligns with evidence showing the importance of social support for

adolescent mental well-being (Cilar et al., 2025). Family environments in particular have been associated with adolescent psychological functioning and depression, indicating that emotional support and relational quality within the home play important roles in adjustment (Kaur, 2021). Parental involvement has also been identified as important in preventing behavioral difficulties among adolescents, particularly through communication, supervision, and guidance (Agung et al., 2023). The present study adds to this evidence by showing that adolescents valued not merely parental presence but a specific quality of support characterized by listening, emotional availability, realistic expectations, and guidance without domination.

Teacher relationships also emerged as influential in shaping students' well-being. Participants valued teachers who communicated respectfully, recognized effort, provided assistance, and allowed students to make mistakes without humiliation. These findings reinforce the broader view that school-based promotion of adolescent mental well-being cannot be limited to separate psychological programs but should also include the relational climate of ordinary educational practice. Systematic evidence suggests that school-based interventions can improve adolescent mental well-being, although their effectiveness depends on design, implementation, and context (Cilar et al., 2020). The current findings imply that teachers' daily interactions may themselves function as important mechanisms of well-being. A school can offer mental health programs while simultaneously undermining students' psychological security if routine disciplinary and instructional practices involve humiliation, unfair comparison, or persistent fear. The significance of respectful educational relationships is also compatible with perspectives on peace education that emphasize educators' ethical dispositions, constructive relationships, and commitment to human dignity (Saputra et al., 2022).

Peer belonging was another important dimension of relational well-being. Adolescents described friendship, acceptance, mutual trust, and shared experiences as essential to the good life, while social exclusion and ridicule were viewed as threats to both emotional security and school engagement. These findings are consistent with the wider understanding of adolescent well-being as socially embedded (Avedissian & Alayan, 2021). Participants also emphasized fairness and freedom from humiliation, suggesting that school dignity is not merely an ethical concern but an important determinant of well-being. This is particularly relevant when considering the broader

vulnerabilities adolescents may experience in relation to social safety, including gendered threats and other forms of insecurity (Chen, 2023). Adolescents' emphasis on respect therefore indicates that school safety should encompass psychological and relational safety in addition to physical protection.

Another significant aspect of relational belonging was social contribution. Participants reported that helping others, supporting classmates, participating in group activities, and feeling useful contributed to their sense of meaning. This finding corresponds with research suggesting that participation in extracurricular and collective activities may support character education and positive development (Rahayu & Dong, 2023). Organized club activities have likewise been associated with the development of citizenship-related capacities among adolescents (Park, 2024). Moral education research also emphasizes the role of educational contexts in developing character, responsibility, and values (Muhsin et al., 2023). Thus, the good life identified by participants was not purely individualistic. Adolescents wanted to receive support and recognition, but they also derived well-being from contributing to others and participating in a social community.

The third major theme, educational agency and hopeful future orientation, comprised meaningful learning, student voice and choice, mastery-oriented achievement, a safe school climate, and future hope. Participants consistently stated that learning was more valuable when it was understandable, applicable, engaging, and related to real life. This finding is consistent with broader educational perspectives that conceptualize curricula as preparation for an "art of living" rather than simply as mechanisms for transmitting disciplinary knowledge (Cowper & Teschers, 2023). It also converges with efforts to explicitly address happiness and well-being within schools and to broaden educational conversations beyond conventional academic indicators (Cezar & Reis, 2024). The current findings demonstrate that adolescents themselves perceive meaningfulness as a central criterion for evaluating education: they are more likely to view schooling as supportive of a good life when they understand why they are learning something and how it connects with their present lives or future possibilities.

Student voice and agency were similarly important. Participants wanted opportunities to express their opinions and participate in decisions related to learning and educational pathways. This finding complements evidence regarding educational identity processes and the importance

of exploration and commitment in adolescent educational development (Christiaens et al., 2022). It also has relevance for adolescents whose educational and life plans are embedded within family expectations. Migration research, for example, has shown that young people's aspirations can be structured as collective family projects rather than purely individual preferences (Chicherina, 2023). Similarly, religious and cultural contexts may shape self-concept and educational outcomes in ways that influence adolescents' understanding of desirable futures (Horwitz et al., 2022). The present results suggest that adolescents' well-being depends partly on whether they can negotiate these external influences while maintaining a meaningful sense of personal authorship over their educational lives.

Future hope was one of the most important links between education and well-being identified in the study. Participants described a good life as involving goals, realistic pathways, confidence that effort could influence future outcomes, and opportunities to imagine satisfying adult lives. Previous research has demonstrated that family processes shape adolescents' future educational selves and postsecondary aspirations (Carey, 2021), while downward educational mobility may be associated with reduced life satisfaction among adolescents and parents (Pollmann-Schult, 2022). The importance of educational continuity is also evident in studies examining school re-entry, in which multiple structural and social conditions determine whether adolescents can continue their educational pathways (Henzan et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the interpretation that hope is not simply a personal attitude but is influenced by perceived educational opportunities and social conditions. Adolescents are more likely to experience education as meaningful when they believe it offers realistic pathways toward valued futures.

The findings also suggest that educational well-being incorporates physical health, health knowledge, and embodied experiences. Although these did not form a separate major theme, participants' emphasis on balance, safety, recreation, and a healthy school life is consistent with research showing positive associations between physical activity, physical education, school satisfaction, and life satisfaction (García et al., 2021). Changes in physical education experiences have also been associated with school happiness and expectations regarding a healthy future life (Lee et al., 2021). More broadly, adolescent health promotion has been identified as an important educational challenge (Liu, 2021). School-based health education can enhance adolescents' knowledge and attitudes regarding

important developmental issues (Hastuti et al., 2021), while current research demonstrates the relevance of adolescents' health-related knowledge and practices for long-term well-being (Varshitha et al., 2026). Adolescents' own interpretations of health determinants also become increasingly sophisticated across development, emphasizing that young people actively interpret the conditions influencing their well-being (Deyra et al., 2025). Consequently, educational conceptions of the good life should include opportunities for healthy living, informed decision-making, and embodied participation.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the good life in education is best understood as a form of educational flourishing in which psychological, relational, social, and future-oriented dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Adolescents appear to flourish when they experience emotional security, self-respect, autonomy, supportive relationships, fairness, meaningful participation, competence, and credible future possibilities. Conversely, chronic pressure, comparison, humiliation, lack of agency, social exclusion, and uncertainty regarding the future undermine the relationship between education and well-being. This interpretation explains why academic success alone cannot serve as an adequate indicator of adolescent flourishing. Educational systems may generate high performance while simultaneously weakening emotional balance or interpersonal belonging. A more comprehensive approach requires attention to what adolescents are becoming through education, how they experience themselves and others within educational environments, and whether schooling expands their capacity to construct meaningful lives.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study included a relatively small purposively selected sample of 20 adolescents from secondary schools in Tehran, and therefore the findings should not be generalized statistically to all adolescents in Tehran, Iran, or other sociocultural contexts. Second, the study relied on adolescents' self-reported experiences during semi-structured interviews, and their accounts may have been influenced by memory, current emotional state, perceived social expectations, or reluctance to disclose sensitive experiences. Third, although maximum

variation was sought, the sample could not represent the full diversity of socioeconomic, educational, cultural, family, and school conditions present among adolescents. Fourth, the phenomenological approach focused on participants' subjective meanings and did not directly examine the perspectives of parents, teachers, counselors, or school administrators. Finally, because the study was cross-sectional, it captured adolescents' conceptions at a particular developmental period and could not determine how understandings of the good life change across adolescence or in response to major educational transitions.

Future research should examine the concept of the good life among adolescents in more diverse geographical, cultural, and educational settings and compare experiences across gender, socioeconomic status, school type, developmental stage, and academic track. Longitudinal qualitative studies could investigate how adolescents' definitions of flourishing change as they progress from early adolescence to late adolescence and transition into higher education or employment. Mixed-methods studies could also develop quantitative instruments based on the themes identified in the present study and examine the relationships among educational flourishing, psychological well-being, academic engagement, school belonging, autonomy, perceived social support, and future hope in larger samples. Future studies may additionally include parents, teachers, school counselors, and educational policymakers to compare different understandings of the good life and identify areas of convergence or conflict. Comparative research across cultural contexts could be particularly valuable for distinguishing universal dimensions of adolescent flourishing from those shaped by specific educational and sociocultural conditions.

In practice, schools should adopt a broader understanding of educational success that incorporates adolescent well-being alongside academic achievement. Educational environments should reduce unnecessary performance pressure, public comparison, and humiliating disciplinary practices and instead promote psychological safety, respectful communication, mastery-oriented learning, and recognition of individual progress. Teachers should be supported in creating classrooms where students can ask questions, make mistakes, express opinions, and participate meaningfully in learning decisions. School counselors and administrators should strengthen systems for emotional support, peer belonging, anti-bullying efforts, and early identification of students experiencing excessive academic or social pressure. Families should also be engaged in

programs that encourage realistic expectations, supportive communication, and age-appropriate autonomy. Curricula and extracurricular programs should provide opportunities for practical learning, physical activity, creativity, moral development, social contribution, and exploration of future educational and occupational pathways. Such practices can help transform schools from environments primarily centered on performance into settings that actively support adolescents in developing meaningful, balanced, socially connected, and hopeful lives.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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