

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

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the opening paragraph of the Introduction, the manuscript argues that “schools do more than transmit academic knowledge; they influence young people’s conceptions of success, identity, relationships, responsibility, aspiration, and personal worth.” This is an important premise, but the conceptual meaning of the “good life” remains insufficiently delineated at this early stage. The authors should explicitly distinguish the good life from closely related constructs such as subjective well-being, psychological well-being, flourishing, life satisfaction, eudaimonic well-being, happiness, and quality of life. Without such conceptual clarification, there is a risk that the manuscript treats these constructs interchangeably. A concise theoretical definition should be provided and then used consistently throughout the paper to clarify why the “good life” is a distinct and valuable unit of qualitative inquiry.

The Introduction contains substantial empirical discussion of adolescent well-being but lacks a sufficiently explicit philosophical or educational framework for the construct of the good life. For example, the paragraph beginning “The question of what constitutes a ‘good life’ has long occupied philosophy, ethics, psychology, and education” introduces the topic broadly but does not specify whether the study is informed by a eudaimonic, Aristotelian, capability-based, positive psychology, care-ethical, or educational flourishing perspective. Given the philosophical nature of the core construct, the authors should articulate the conceptual assumptions underlying their interpretation of a good life. Even if the study is intentionally inductive, the

manuscript should explain how the researchers approached the concept without prematurely imposing a normative definition on participants' accounts.

The ethical description states that participants provided "informed assent along with parental or legal guardian consent when required," but this wording is too ambiguous for a study involving participants aged 14–18 years. The authors should clearly specify the consent procedure by age group, whether all minors required parental consent under the approved protocol, how consent was handled for participants aged 18 years, and whether adolescents provided written assent or consent themselves. The manuscript should additionally report the name of the approving institutional ethics committee and the ethics approval code. Because the study involves minors and potentially sensitive psychological material, these details are essential rather than optional.

In the "Data Collection Tools" section, several interview questions are listed, including "what a good life means to them," "how school and education can contribute to or interfere with a good life," and "which experiences at school make them feel happy, meaningful, successful, valued, or satisfied." Some of these prompts appear to introduce predetermined dimensions of well-being and may therefore shape participants' responses toward the conceptual structure later reported in the findings. The authors should explain how the interview guide was developed, whether it was reviewed by qualitative-methodology or adolescent-development experts, whether pilot interviews were conducted, and how leading or conceptually loaded questions were minimized. The final interview guide, or at least its core questions, should preferably be presented as supplementary material.

The manuscript states in the "Data Collection Tools" section that "field notes were also recorded immediately after the interviews to document contextual information, notable emotional expressions, nonverbal observations, and the researchers' preliminary analytical reflections." The role of these field notes in the formal analysis is unclear. The authors should specify whether field notes were coded alongside interview transcripts, used only for contextual interpretation, or incorporated into reflexive memoing. If nonverbal behavior contributed to interpretation, the manuscript should also explain how such observations were documented consistently and how the authors avoided overinterpreting emotional or behavioral cues.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph of the Introduction beginning "Despite increasing attention to adolescent mental health, subjective well-being, school satisfaction, educational identity, social support, resilience, health literacy, and future aspirations," the research gap is described primarily as fragmentation across separate variables. This is plausible but currently too general. The authors should specify what is unknown in the existing qualitative literature: for example, whether previous research has inadequately examined adolescents' own definitions of educational flourishing, has rarely integrated psychological, relational, ethical, and future-oriented dimensions, or has insufficiently addressed culturally specific experiences in Iranian secondary schools. The gap should be formulated in a way that directly justifies both the phenomenological methodology and the Tehran context rather than simply noting that prior research has examined multiple constructs separately.

In the "Study Design and Participants" paragraph, the manuscript identifies the design as "a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach," whereas the "Data Analysis" section later specifies "Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method." The methodological orientation should be stated precisely and consistently from the outset. If descriptive phenomenology was used, the authors should identify the philosophical orientation that informed the design, explain why Colaizzi's method was selected, and clarify whether the researchers attempted phenomenological reduction or bracketing. Phenomenology is not merely a technical coding procedure; its epistemological assumptions should be reflected in sampling, interviewing, researcher reflexivity, and interpretation.

The "Study Design and Participants" section reports that "A total of 20 adolescents participated in the study," but the rationale for this sample size is not adequately explained. The manuscript later states that saturation became evident after the eighteenth interview and that two additional interviews were conducted to confirm the thematic structure. The authors should

clarify whether the sample size was predetermined, determined iteratively through saturation, or guided by information power. They should also describe how saturation was operationalized, who assessed it, and what criterion was used to determine that no substantively new meanings were emerging. In phenomenological research, the authors should be cautious about applying saturation mechanically and should explain how sufficient depth and experiential variation were established.

In the participant description, the authors report maximum variation across “gender, age, educational grade, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background,” yet the recruitment procedure is not sufficiently transparent. The manuscript should specify how schools were approached, how adolescents were identified, who initially contacted potential participants, whether school administrators or counselors acted as gatekeepers, and how voluntary participation was protected in an institutional environment where adolescents may perceive authority pressure. The authors should also explain how socioeconomic variation was assessed and how academic achievement was operationalized if those characteristics formed part of the sampling strategy.

The inclusion criteria described in the “Study Design and Participants” paragraph include being “willing and able to describe personal educational and life experiences,” but this criterion is subjective and potentially introduces selection bias toward verbally expressive adolescents. The authors should explain how this capacity was evaluated and whether any eligible participants were excluded on this basis. More importantly, because the study concerns potentially sensitive issues such as psychological distress, humiliation, family pressure, and social exclusion, the manuscript should report procedures for managing participant discomfort, including whether interviews could be paused, whether participants could decline individual questions, and whether referral procedures were available if significant distress or safeguarding concerns emerged.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.