

A Model of School Social Well-Being for Elementary School Students: A Mixed-Methods Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop and validate a comprehensive model of school social well-being for elementary school students. The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was conducted based on research synthesis and semi-structured interviews with 15 academic experts and education practitioners, selected through purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was achieved. In the quantitative phase, a fuzzy Delphi method was used to screen and confirm the importance of the identified components and indicators. Subsequently, a researcher-developed questionnaire was administered to 375 elementary school principals and teachers selected through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis, partial least squares structural equation modeling, and the Best–Worst Method for prioritization, with analyses performed in SPSS, SmartPLS, and LINGO software. Inferential results supported a five-dimensional model of school social well-being, including social relationships, school environment and atmosphere, individual factors and personal interactions, cultural and educational factors, and structural and managerial factors. All factor loadings exceeded the acceptable threshold and were statistically significant. The measurement and structural models demonstrated adequate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Path analysis indicated that all five dimensions had significant positive effects on school social well-being. Model fit indices and predictive relevance measures confirmed a strong overall model fit. Prioritization results showed that social relationships had the highest relative importance, followed by school environment and atmosphere, individual factors and personal interactions, cultural and educational factors, and structural and managerial factors. The findings indicate that school social well-being among elementary students is a multidimensional construct shaped by relational, environmental, individual, cultural, and organizational factors.

Keywords: social well-being, elementary school students, individual factors and personal interactions, structural and managerial factors, school environment and atmosphere

1. Introduction

Social well-being has increasingly been recognized as a core dimension of mental health across childhood and adolescence, reflecting individuals' perceived quality of functioning in their social world, their sense of belonging and acceptance, and their capacity to participate meaningfully in social settings. Within developmental psychology, social well-being is not merely a downstream "outcome" of psychological adjustment; rather, it is a foundational context in which self-regulation, identity formation, learning engagement, and adaptive coping are cultivated through relationships and everyday interactions. Contemporary scholarship positions social well-being as a key determinant of children's and adolescents' mental health, emphasizing that disruptions in social connection, perceived support, and relational safety are associated with emotional and behavioral difficulties, reduced school engagement, and broader psychosocial vulnerability (Šauerová & Jirásková, 2023). From this perspective, schools are uniquely consequential because they are the most structured and socially dense environments children routinely inhabit outside the family, offering repeated opportunities for peer interaction, adult mentorship, normative learning, and the development of social competence.

The salience of school-based social well-being became even more apparent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when restrictions, educational disruption, and social distancing altered children's access to peer networks and school routines. Evidence from multiple contexts indicates that adolescents' psychosocial well-being changed meaningfully in the aftermath of the pandemic, with variations linked to social and contextual factors (Soest et al., 2022). Research also suggests that vulnerabilities were not solely attributable to the crisis itself, but were shaped by pre-pandemic family influences that continued to affect adolescents' psychosocial functioning during the pandemic period (Wong et al., 2022). In parallel, qualitative and applied reports from urban contexts underscore how pandemic-era stressors may manifest in children's mental health and psychosocial well-being, often through relational strains, educational instability, and decreased access to supportive services (Silan, 2023). Collectively, these findings reinforce a central implication for school psychology: social well-being is sensitive to systemic shocks, yet it is also shaped by modifiable environmental

supports—many of which can be designed, implemented, and evaluated within school settings.

While the construct of social well-being has been examined in clinical and community populations, school contexts require additional conceptual specificity because the school is not simply a backdrop for social life; it is a structured system with explicit norms, power relations, educational aims, and institutional resources. Work in clinical populations highlights the protective role of perceived social support for social well-being, showing that stronger perceived support is associated with higher social well-being even among individuals experiencing complex emotional dysregulation (Gull et al., 2022). Related findings among women with panic disorder indicate that social well-being can be predicted by health-oriented lifestyle factors and cognitive variables such as irrational beliefs, suggesting that social well-being reflects both interpersonal resources and individual cognitive-behavioral processes (Mosafid & Mehr Mohammadi, 2022). Intervention research further demonstrates that social well-being is responsive to structured psychosocial programs; for example, group logotherapy has been linked to improvements in mental and social well-being among older adults, underscoring that meaning-centered interventions can influence perceived social functioning and connectedness (Saffarinia & Dortaj, 2018). Although these studies focus on non-school populations, they provide an important theoretical bridge: social well-being is multi-determined, malleable, and influenced by both relational supports and intrapersonal resources—assumptions that are directly relevant to school-based modeling for children.

In the school ecology, social well-being can be understood as a product of interlocking layers that include peer relationships, teacher-student interactions, classroom climate, institutional norms, and broader family and community resources. This multi-level logic is supported by evidence linking social and relational factors to psychosocial outcomes in youth. For instance, marital conflict has been shown to relate to adolescents' psycho-social well-being through mediating and moderating pathways, suggesting that family stressors can shape young people's social adjustment and vulnerability in ways that may spill over into school functioning (Kitoshvili, 2023). Similarly, research on self-concept and academic motivation indicates that intrapersonal representations of the self can influence motivational development during adolescence, implying that school social well-being may be partly shaped by the child's evolving self-system and the feedback they receive in social

contexts (Shikari, 2025). At earlier developmental stages, family socio-economic status has been linked to parenting sense of competence through chain mediation processes involving social support and psychological capital, highlighting how social resources and positive psychological capacities can transmit contextual advantage or disadvantage into parenting and, ultimately, children's developmental experiences (Yuan et al., 2025). These lines of evidence converge on a practical point: a school social well-being model for children must be sufficiently comprehensive to capture environmental inputs (e.g., climate, relational quality), interpersonal processes (e.g., support, participation), and individual resources (e.g., competence beliefs, problem-solving, psychological capital).

A growing body of research is also documenting how digital life intersects with youth social well-being and school functioning. Smartphone addiction has been associated with differences in social well-being and emotional self-awareness, with the quality of the parent-child relationship implicated as a relevant factor among high-ability students (Shasizadeh et al., 2022). At the same time, screen time has been discussed in relation to adolescents' social well-being, reinforcing concerns that digital exposure may displace face-to-face interaction or affect relational experiences and self-perception (Danmaisoro & Mozayani, 2024). Systematic evidence further indicates that social media use has complex associations with social well-being, prompting calls for more nuanced models that can differentiate patterns of use, psychological mechanisms, and contextual moderators (Murari et al., 2024). These findings suggest that contemporary school social well-being cannot be conceptualized without considering children's digitally mediated social experiences, especially as school-age children increasingly negotiate peer relationships and belonging across both offline and online contexts.

School-based interventions and preventive programs provide additional justification for developing explicit models of school social well-being, as they clarify which domains may be targeted and how change can be assessed. Positive education approaches, for instance, have been operationalized as structured packages delivered in school settings, with evidence indicating improvements in students' social well-being following program participation (Sadat S, 2022). Mindfulness-based interventions delivered at school have also been examined as a means of addressing social media burnout while enhancing adolescents' well-being, pointing to the potential of school-based practices to buffer

stressors linked to digital demands and to strengthen adaptive functioning (Ünlü et al., 2025). Importantly, these intervention studies imply that school social well-being is not an abstract concept; it can be translated into teachable skills, supportive routines, and institutional practices. However, effective intervention design requires a clear and context-sensitive conceptual framework—particularly for elementary school students, where developmental needs, classroom structures, and patterns of adult supervision differ from those in secondary school.

Recent research has also sought to refine measurement approaches for social well-being within school-relevant populations. The adaptation of social well-being scales for teachers and school staff is instructive because it underscores that social well-being is embedded in the school's relational system, not only within students, and that staff social well-being may influence the relational climate experienced by children (Bilbao et al., 2025). At the level of individual psychological resources, psychological capital has been shown to predict psychological and social well-being in clinical populations, suggesting that hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism may be relevant antecedents of social well-being and may have analogues in educational settings (Esmaili & Zargar Moradi, 2025). Complementing this, research in early learning contexts has characterized social problem-solving skills in structured activities, highlighting that children's capacities to navigate interpersonal challenges can be observed, supported, and developed through educational tasks (Zhan, 2025). In secondary education contexts, perceived social support and academic self-efficacy have been linked with learning engagement, suggesting that social well-being-adjacent constructs interact with motivational and academic processes (Yang & Lian, 2025). Taken together, these studies reinforce the view that school social well-being is a measurable construct with identifiable correlates and potential mechanisms, yet its optimal conceptualization may vary by age group and educational stage.

Cross-cultural and contextual evidence also strengthens the case for a model tailored to specific school systems and populations. A qualitative study of schools in Kalar emphasized impairments in school performance and psychological and social well-being, and highlighted the role of counselors, illustrating how school-level supports and professional roles can be central in responding to students' well-being needs (Nazdar Qudrat, 2019). Broader thematic reviews of mental health and psychosocial well-being—such as work synthesizing decades of research and interventions

in Afghanistan—underscore that well-being is deeply influenced by socio-political conditions, institutional capacity, and service accessibility, and that psychosocial support must be culturally and contextually grounded (Alemi et al., 2023). Similarly, research on youth social well-being has conceptualized “state of mind” as a component of social well-being, suggesting that subjective psychological states and appraisals can function as integral elements of how young people experience their social world (Diakova et al., 2023). These perspectives caution against adopting one-size-fits-all frameworks and instead encourage model development that reflects the lived realities of students, the organizational characteristics of schools, and the local educational governance context.

Within educational psychology, school climate has emerged as a particularly robust contextual predictor of student outcomes, and recent evidence indicates that school climate can influence students’ social well-being, potentially through mediating mechanisms such as social capital (Podineh Aghaei & Nasti Zeiai, 2025). The social capital pathway is theoretically meaningful because it bridges institutional arrangements (e.g., trust, participation opportunities, fairness) and individual experiences (e.g., belonging, support, security), providing a plausible mechanism by which school climate becomes “psychologically real” for students. Moreover, emerging work in teacher education and interprofessional practice emphasizes the role of connection and self-care strategies in sustaining social well-being, implying that relational maintenance is an active process rather than a passive condition (Jordan, 2023). When translated into school settings, this suggests that both children and adults may require structured opportunities to build, repair, and sustain relationships, and that a comprehensive school social well-being model should integrate relational processes with institutional supports.

Despite this growing body of evidence, several gaps remain in the literature that justify the development of a comprehensive model of school social well-being specifically for elementary school students. First, many empirical studies are conducted among adolescents or clinical populations, whereas elementary students represent a distinct developmental period characterized by rapid social learning, high dependence on teacher scaffolding, and heightened sensitivity to classroom norms. Second, existing research often isolates single predictors (e.g., screen time, family factors, school climate) rather than integrating them into a coherent, multi-dimensional model that can guide

assessment and intervention planning in schools. Third, the proliferation of interventions—such as positive education packages and mindfulness programs—creates a need for validated frameworks that clarify which components of school social well-being should be targeted and how their relative priorities may be established (Sadat S, 2022; Ünlü et al., 2025). Fourth, the complexity of contemporary childhood social life, including digital contexts, increases the likelihood that school social well-being is shaped by interacting influences that require integrative modeling (Murari et al., 2024; Shasizadeh et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the present study is positioned to contribute by articulating and empirically validating a model that is both theoretically grounded and operationally usable for school systems. A model that identifies major dimensions (e.g., relational, environmental, individual, cultural-educational, structural-managerial) can help align school mental health services with educational aims, support the development of screening tools, and inform multi-tiered interventions that address both contextual determinants and student competencies. By drawing on prior evidence that social well-being is shaped by perceived support (Gull et al., 2022), by family and socio-economic pathways (Wong et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2025), by individual psychological resources (Esmaeili & Zargar Moradi, 2025), and by school climate and social capital (Podineh Aghaei & Nasti Zeiai, 2025), the study can establish a rigorous conceptual foundation while ensuring relevance to everyday school practices. At the same time, integrating insights about pandemic-related disruptions (Silan, 2023; Soest et al., 2022), digitally mediated social experiences (Danmaisoro & Mozayani, 2024; Murari et al., 2024), and culturally contingent psychosocial contexts (Alemi et al., 2023; Diakova et al., 2023) strengthens the model’s ecological validity and enhances its applicability within contemporary educational environments.

This study aimed to develop and validate a comprehensive model of school social well-being for elementary school students.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study employed an exploratory mixed-methods design. Accordingly, the research design was of a mixed-methods type, and given that no prior model existed in this area and the researcher sought to discover such a model, a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach (qualitative-quantitative) was adopted. In the qualitative

phase, thematic analysis was used. At this stage, the researcher first reviewed the gaps identified in the theoretical foundations related to the presentation of a school social well-being model for elementary school students, based on the categorized variables, components, and factors. Subsequently, gaps that were inconsistent with the research topic and target population were eliminated, and the remaining gaps were considered as the main gap-related factors in the domain of social well-being. Based on these factors, the interview framework was developed. The core dimensions identified in the qualitative phase were then subjected to judgment by the statistical population, and their importance was quantitatively determined.

In the first qualitative stage, a research synthesis was conducted using journals, websites, theses, and other documented sources. Participants in the second qualitative phase, aimed at identifying the dimensions and components constituting each concept, included academic experts and knowledgeable practitioners from the education sector of Alborz Province who had at least two related publications in the field of school social well-being for elementary school students and more than ten years of professional experience. A total of 15 participants were selected through purposive sampling, and theoretical saturation was achieved after the twelfth interview. The statistical population in the quantitative fuzzy Delphi section, conducted to screen the research dimensions, components, and indicators and to determine their importance, consisted of 15 experts. In the subsequent quantitative phase, 375 questionnaires were collected from principals and teachers in elementary schools of the Alborz Province Department of Education based on Cochran's formula and using simple random sampling. In the third quantitative phase, for the purpose of prioritizing the indicators, 15 academic experts and knowledgeable practitioners from the education sector of Alborz Province were consulted. The research instruments included semi-structured interviews in the qualitative phase and a researcher-developed questionnaire derived from the qualitative findings in the quantitative phase.

Given the interpretive nature of thematic analysis, its validity and reliability were also addressed. To assess credibility, an auditing method was used, which was confirmed by two reviewers. This process was carried out by key informants through a consultative procedure involving the researchers and faculty members. To calculate reliability, coding was conducted through line-by-line reading of the selected sources and was performed manually by two individuals independently. After the completion of coding,

the results of the two coding processes were compared using Holsti's method.

To examine the validity of the questionnaire, expert judgment was used in this study. For this purpose, an initial version of the questionnaire was provided to five specialists and faculty members to assess its content validity, and their suggested revisions were ultimately incorporated into the questionnaire. For data analysis, thematic analysis and thematic network analysis were applied in the qualitative phase using MAXQDA software. In the quantitative phase, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling techniques, and dimension prioritization were conducted using SPSS, SmartPLS, and LINGO software.

3. Findings and Results

In the qualitative section of this study, 15 individuals were interviewed. Of these participants, 40% (6 individuals) were female and 60% (9 individuals) were male; 34% (5 individuals) held a doctoral degree, 33% (5 individuals) held a master's degree, and 33% (5 individuals) held a bachelor's degree; 13% (2 individuals) had 1–10 years of work experience, 60% (9 individuals) had 11–20 years of experience, and 27% (4 individuals) had more than 21 years of experience; 33% (5 individuals) were aged 30–40 years, 47% (7 individuals) were aged 41–50 years, and 20% (3 individuals) were aged 51 years and above. All stages of qualitative thematic analysis were conducted in six phases based on the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Overall, 113 initial codes were identified. In the third stage, during the search for selective codes, incomplete or irrelevant codes as well as repetitive codes were removed, resulting in 30 selective codes. In interviews 13, 14, and 15, no new codes were identified due to the achievement of data saturation. In the subsequent stage, the researcher aggregated the selective codes into broader semantic domains, leading to the identification of subthemes and main themes, with 10 subthemes identified. The fifth stage began when a satisfactory representation of the subthemes was achieved. In this study, the definition and naming of the main themes and the preparation of the thematic analysis report were conducted based on the division of themes within a thematic network into basic, organizing, and overarching themes. As presented in Table 1, the extracted subthemes, also referred to as organizing themes, were categorized into five overarching themes titled school environment and atmosphere, social relationships, individual factors and

personal interactions, cultural and educational factors, and structural and managerial factors.

Table 1

Basic, Organizing, and Overarching Themes Extracted from the Interviews

Basic Themes	Subthemes (Organizing Themes)	Overarching Theme
Creating a motivating and safe atmosphere	Appropriate educational and psychological environment	School environment and atmosphere
Reducing stress and anxiety		
Supportive environment for positive interaction		
Adequate facilities and equipment		
Equal access to facilities for all students	Justice and equal opportunity	
Avoidance of discrimination and inequality in opportunities and resources		
Friendly relationships and empathy among students	Positive and supportive relationships	Social relationships
Mutual respect and acceptance of differences		
Group support and cooperation		
Creating a sense of belonging and social security	Role of teachers and staff	
Supportive role of teachers		
Positive and motivating behavior of school staff		
Ability to establish effective communication	Students' social skills	Individual factors and personal interactions
Problem-solving and conflict management skills		
Enhancing self-confidence		
Sense of acceptance within the group	Sense of individual belonging and security	
Feeling calm and reduced isolation		
Satisfaction with school relationships		
Strengthening empathy and respect	Social and cultural education	Cultural and educational factors
Teaching ethical and cultural values		
Diverse and engaging educational programs		
Activating participation in decision-making	Student participation	
Encouraging cooperation and teamwork		
Participatory and collective programs		
Existence of supportive and coherent policies	School policies and procedures	Structural and managerial factors
Planning to enhance social well-being		
Continuous monitoring and evaluation		
Coordination among teachers, parents, and students	Management of school interactions	
Managing conflicts and behavioral problems		
Establishing support networks		

In the first step, the quantitative fuzzy Delphi phase was conducted to identify the final components and indicators of the study. Based on the expert interviews conducted in the qualitative phase, the screening and assessment of the importance of the items were performed according to experts' opinions using a fuzzy Delphi questionnaire. Ultimately, all identified factors of the school social well-

being model for elementary school students demonstrated the expected level of importance and were approved by the panel of experts, and consensus agreement among the experts was achieved.

In the continuation of this quantitative phase, the general characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, and educational level, are described in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Male	173	46
Female	202	54
31-40 years	75	20

41–50 years	203	54
50 years and above	98	26
Bachelor's degree	101	27
Master's degree	195	52
Doctoral degree	79	21

Subsequently, to estimate the conceptual model of the study and test the hypotheses, the partial least squares (PLS) method was employed using SmartPLS software. Table 3 presents the factor loadings, average variance extracted

(AVE), and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each construct. The values reported in this table indicate adequate and acceptable reliability of the constructs.

Table 3*Indicators of the Studied Constructs*

Dimension	Component (Latent Variables)	Indicator	Factor Loading	t-value	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
School environment and atmosphere	Appropriate educational and psychological environment	S1	0.759	16.191	0.528	0.866	0.720
		S2	0.839	19.710			
		S3	0.820	18.503			
		S4	0.839	16.760			
Justice and equal opportunity	S5	0.961	73.110	0.670	0.890	0.840	
		S6	0.885	14.759			
Social relationships	Positive and supportive relationships	S1	0.821	13.716	0.690	0.799	0.894
		S2	0.749	9.991			
		S3	0.845	18.763			
Role of teachers and staff	S4	0.744	8.704	0.772	0.859	0.906	
		S5	0.885	5.783			
		S6	0.785	11.521			
Individual factors and personal interactions	Students' social skills	S1	0.822	20.828	0.716	0.882	0.924
		S2	0.819	6.894			
		S3	0.812	16.214			
Sense of individual belonging and security	S4	0.882	28.340	0.737	0.899	0.903	
		S5	0.900	37.736			
		S6	0.826	18.103			
Cultural and educational	Social and cultural education	S1	0.760	8.901	0.651	0.784	0.893
		S2	0.901	68.452			
		S3	0.773	10.608			
Student participation	S4	0.768	13.709	0.761	0.872	0.913	
		S5	0.799	15.793			
		S6	0.774	12.639			
Structural and managerial	School policies and procedures	S1	0.817	17.612	0.786	0.842	0.892
		S2	0.828	18.430			
		S3	0.789	15.706			
Management of school interactions	S4	0.732	6.948	0.752	0.889	0.921	
		S5	0.895	38.695			
		S6	0.797	11.247			

Regarding factor loadings, since the factor loadings of all components were above 0.50 ($t\text{-value} > 1.96$), all dimensions were included in the analysis, indicating adequate and

acceptable reliability of the research constructs. To assess construct validity or discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was used.

Table 4*Correlation Matrix and Square Root of the Average Variance Extracted of the Variables*

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. School Environment and Atmosphere	0.750				
2. Social Relationships	0.128	0.816			
3. Individual Factors and Personal Interactions	0.261	0.329	0.747		
4. Cultural and Educational	0.163	0.401	0.319	0.716	
5. Structural and Managerial	0.190	0.200	0.115	0.389	0.752

According to the data presented in Table 4, the square root of the average variance extracted for all variables is greater than their correlations with other variables. Therefore, the discriminant validity criterion for the research variables is also satisfied.

After determining the measurement models, structural equation modeling was employed to estimate the conceptual research model, ensure the presence or absence of causal relationships among the research variables, and examine the

goodness-of-fit between the observed data and the conceptual model. The research hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. A critical value with a significance level smaller than 0.05 indicates a significant difference between the estimated regression weights and zero at the 95% confidence level. The output of the conceptual model using SmartPLS software is presented in Figures 1 and 2.

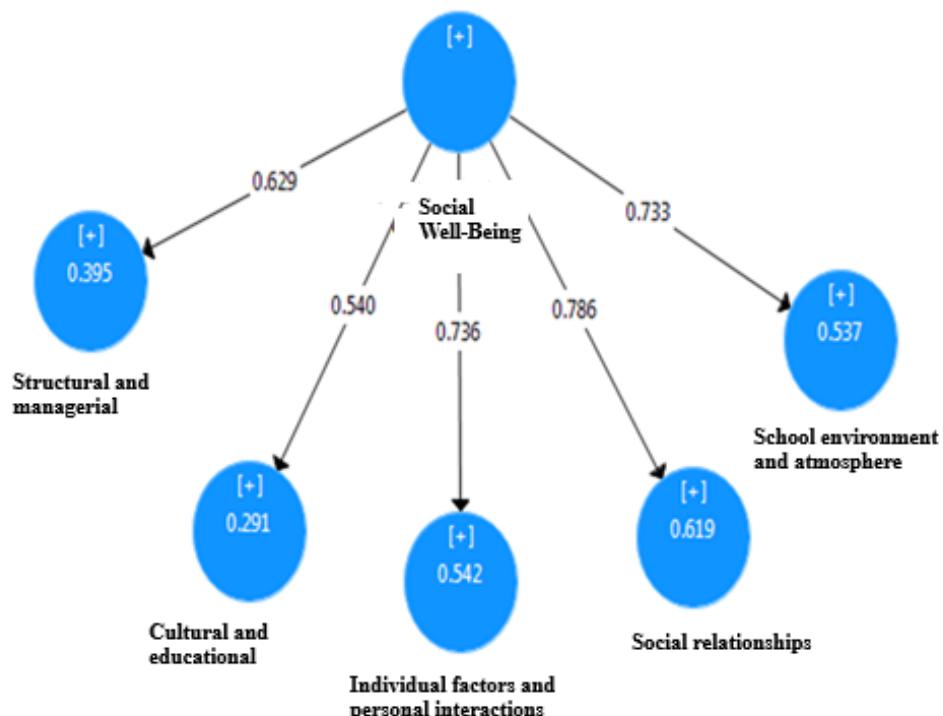
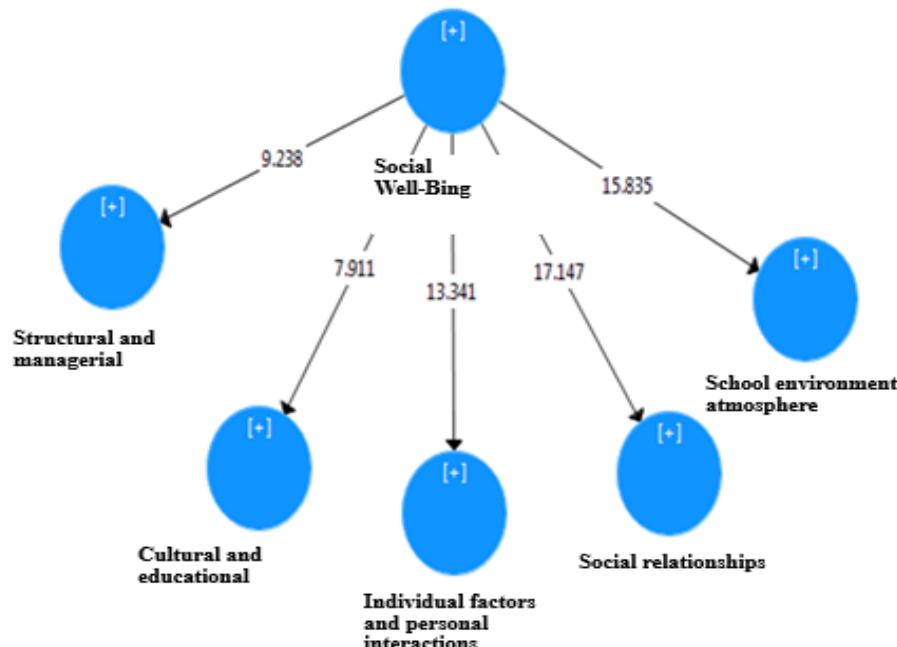
Figure 1*Measurement of the Overall Model in the Standardized Mode*

Figure 2*Measurement of the Model in the Significant Mode***Table 5***Coefficient of Determination and Stone-Geisser Criterion*

Criteria	R ²	Status	Q ²	Status
School environment and atmosphere	0.537	Moderate fit	0.342	Moderate predictive relevance
Social relationships	0.619	Moderate fit	0.637	Strong predictive relevance
Individual factors and personal interactions	0.542	Moderate fit	0.598	Strong predictive relevance
Cultural and educational	0.291	Weak fit	0.412	Strong predictive relevance
Structural and managerial	0.395	Moderate fit	0.419	Strong predictive relevance

Based on Table 5, the coefficients of determination and the Stone-Geisser criterion values for the components were acceptable. In addition, the overall model fit value was 0.457, indicating a strong model fit. Subsequently, path analysis was used to examine the relationships between

independent and dependent variables and to confirm the overall model. The significance coefficients and results of the relationships proposed in the research model are reported in Table 6.

Table 6*Significance Testing of the Estimated Path Coefficients of the Model*

Dimensions	Path	Criteria	t-value	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	Significance Level	Result
School social well-being for elementary school students	→	School environment and atmosphere	15.835	0.733	0.088	< .001	Confirmed
School social well-being for elementary school students	→	Social relationships	17.147	0.786	0.089	< .001	Confirmed
School social well-being for elementary school students	→	Individual factors and personal interactions	13.341	0.736	0.199	< .001	Confirmed
School social well-being for elementary school students	→	Cultural and educational	7.911	0.540	0.076	< .001	Confirmed
School social well-being for elementary school students	→	Structural and managerial	9.238	0.629	0.087	< .001	Confirmed

According to the findings in Table 6, and given that the t-values for all paths are greater than 1.96 and the obtained significance levels are lower than 0.05 and even 0.01, all of the above relationships are supported.

For prioritizing the components of the dimensions of the school social well-being model for elementary school students, the Best–Worst Method was applied using LINGO software. The calculated consistency ratio was 0.039, which is close to zero, indicating that the comparisons had good consistency and stability. The results showed that these dimensions differed significantly from one another. The indicators were ranked as follows: the social relationships dimension ranked first, school environment and atmosphere ranked second, individual factors and personal interactions ranked third, cultural and educational ranked fourth, and structural and managerial ranked fifth.

4. Discussion

The present study sought to develop and empirically validate a comprehensive model of school social well-being for elementary school students, and the findings provide robust support for the multidimensional structure of this construct. The results of the measurement and structural models demonstrated that school social well-being is best understood as a system of interrelated dimensions, including social relationships, school environment and atmosphere, individual factors and personal interactions, cultural and educational factors, and structural and managerial factors. All hypothesized paths were statistically significant, and the overall model exhibited strong goodness-of-fit indices, indicating that the proposed conceptualization offers an adequate and coherent explanation of social well-being within the elementary school context. These findings are consistent with contemporary perspectives that conceptualize social well-being as an outcome of dynamic interactions between individual psychological resources and contextual social systems rather than as a single, isolated attribute (Šauerová & Jirásková, 2023).

Among the identified dimensions, social relationships emerged as the strongest predictor of school social well-being. This result underscores the central role of peer relations, perceived support, empathy, and cooperative interactions in shaping children's sense of belonging and social functioning at school. Prior research has repeatedly emphasized that perceived social support is a key determinant of social well-being across diverse populations, including individuals with emotional and psychological

vulnerabilities (Gull et al., 2022). In school-aged populations, the quality of peer and adult relationships has been shown to buffer stress, enhance engagement, and foster adaptive coping, particularly in times of social disruption. Studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that disruptions to peer contact and school routines were closely associated with declines in psychosocial well-being, further highlighting the protective function of stable and supportive social relationships (Silan, 2023; Soest et al., 2022). The prominence of this dimension in the present model therefore aligns with both developmental theory and empirical evidence, suggesting that strengthening relational quality within schools is a critical pathway for enhancing children's social well-being.

The school environment and atmosphere constituted the second most influential dimension in the model, reflecting the importance of a psychologically safe, equitable, and resource-rich educational setting. This finding is consistent with research on school climate, which has demonstrated that students' perceptions of fairness, safety, and emotional support are closely linked to their social and psychological outcomes. Recent evidence indicates that school climate exerts both direct and indirect effects on students' social well-being, with social capital functioning as a key mediating mechanism (Podineh Aghaei & Nasti Zeai, 2025). A supportive environment not only facilitates positive interactions but also signals to students that they are valued members of the school community, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging. Moreover, research conducted in varied socio-cultural contexts suggests that institutional conditions, including access to resources and the consistency of school policies, play a decisive role in shaping children's everyday social experiences (Alemi et al., 2023; Nazdar Qudrat, 2019). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that environmental and atmospheric factors remain salient predictors of social well-being even at the elementary level, where children may be especially sensitive to contextual cues of safety and inclusion.

Individual factors and personal interactions also showed a strong and significant association with school social well-being, highlighting the role of students' social skills, self-confidence, and perceived personal security. This result is in line with studies emphasizing the contribution of intrapersonal resources to social adjustment and well-being. Research on psychological capital has shown that individual capacities such as self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism are positively associated with both psychological and social

well-being, even among populations facing chronic health challenges (Esmaeili & Zargar Moradi, 2025). Similarly, work on self-concept and academic motivation indicates that children's and adolescents' internal representations of competence and worth shape their engagement and social functioning within educational contexts (Shikari, 2025). At earlier developmental stages, social problem-solving skills observed in structured learning activities have been identified as foundational for navigating interpersonal challenges and maintaining positive peer relations (Zhan, 2025). The present findings suggest that fostering these individual capacities within schools can meaningfully enhance students' social well-being, particularly when such efforts are integrated with supportive relational and environmental conditions.

The cultural and educational dimension, although ranking lower than relational and environmental factors, nonetheless demonstrated a significant contribution to the overall model. This dimension captures the role of value-based education, social learning opportunities, and participatory practices that promote empathy, respect, and collective responsibility. Prior intervention research supports the relevance of this domain, as school-based positive education programs have been shown to improve students' social well-being by explicitly targeting strengths, values, and constructive social behaviors (Sadat S, 2022). Mindfulness-based interventions implemented in school settings have similarly been associated with enhanced well-being and reduced social media burnout, suggesting that educational practices can cultivate reflective awareness and emotional regulation that indirectly support social functioning (Ünlü et al., 2025). In addition, research on social media use and screen time has raised concerns about the potential erosion of face-to-face social competencies, reinforcing the importance of intentional cultural and educational programming that fosters healthy interpersonal engagement (Danmaisoro & Mozayani, 2024; Murari et al., 2024). The present findings indicate that cultural and educational initiatives remain a meaningful, albeit complementary, component of a holistic approach to school social well-being.

Structural and managerial factors also emerged as significant predictors, underscoring the influence of school policies, leadership practices, and coordination among teachers, parents, and students. This dimension reflects the institutional backbone that enables or constrains the effectiveness of relational and educational processes. Evidence from school-based research highlights that coherent policies, consistent monitoring, and collaborative

governance structures are essential for sustaining supportive environments and addressing students' psychosocial needs (Nazdar Qudrat, 2019). Moreover, studies focusing on educators' own social well-being emphasize that staff relational health and organizational support systems can shape the broader school climate experienced by students (Bilbao et al., 2025). The significance of this dimension in the current model suggests that efforts to enhance student social well-being must extend beyond classroom-level interventions to include systemic organizational strategies.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, the prioritization of dimensions in the present study—social relationships, school environment and atmosphere, individual factors and personal interactions, cultural and educational factors, and structural and managerial factors—offers an empirically grounded hierarchy that aligns with existing literature while adding specificity for elementary school contexts. The findings resonate with research showing that family and contextual influences continue to shape children's psychosocial functioning and school experiences, including pathways involving social support and psychological resources (Wong et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2025). They also complement evidence linking state-of-mind appraisals to social well-being in youth, suggesting that subjective experiences and interpretations are integral to how children evaluate their social worlds (Diakova et al., 2023). By integrating these diverse strands of research, the present study contributes a coherent framework that captures the complexity of school social well-being while remaining actionable for educational practice.

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design of the quantitative phase limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships among the model dimensions. Second, data were collected within a specific educational and cultural context, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other regions or school systems. Third, reliance on self-report and expert judgment may introduce response biases, particularly in the assessment of subjective constructs such as social well-being. Finally, although the mixed-methods approach enhanced conceptual depth, longitudinal and multi-informant data were not incorporated.

Future research should aim to validate the proposed model using longitudinal designs to examine developmental

trajectories and causal pathways among the identified dimensions. Comparative studies across different cultural, socio-economic, and educational contexts would further clarify the model's generalizability and contextual sensitivity. Additionally, incorporating multiple informants, such as parents and peers, alongside student and teacher reports, could provide a more nuanced understanding of school social well-being. Future studies may also explore the moderating or mediating roles of digital engagement, family dynamics, and individual psychological resources within the proposed framework.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of prioritizing relational quality and supportive school environments in efforts to enhance elementary students' social well-being. Schools should invest in programs that strengthen peer relationships, teacher-student interactions, and a sense of belonging, while also fostering students' social skills and personal competencies. Integrating value-based education and participatory practices into the curriculum can further reinforce positive social norms. At the organizational level, coherent policies, collaborative leadership, and sustained monitoring are essential for creating conditions in which social well-being initiatives can be effectively implemented and maintained.

Authors' Contributions

A.M. conceptualized the study, designed the mixed-methods research framework, and led the qualitative synthesis and model development. S.K.M. contributed to data collection in both qualitative and quantitative phases, coordinated expert interviews and Delphi rounds, and assisted in instrument development. S.P. conducted the quantitative analyses, including fuzzy Delphi, confirmatory factor analysis, and indicator prioritization, and contributed to interpretation of findings. All authors collaboratively drafted and revised the manuscript, approved the final version, and are accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

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

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