



Review

Cultivating Growth: A Review of Flourishing Students in Higher Education

Faizah Faizah ^{1,2} , Dewi Retno Suminar ^{1,*} and Nono Hery Yoenanto ¹

¹ Doctoral Psychology, Airlangga University, Surabaya 60286, East Java, Indonesia; faizah-2022@psikologi.unair.ac.id or faizah_hermawan@ub.ac.id (F.F.); nono.hery@psikologi.unair.ac.id (N.H.Y.)

² Department Psychology, Brawijaya University, Malang 65145, East Java, Indonesia

* Correspondence: dewi.suminar@psikologi.unair.ac.id

Abstract: The flourishing of university students is influenced by various factors that significantly impact their well-being and academic performance, with suboptimal levels being a serious concern. Global issues of high dropout rates and low levels of flourishing among university students have prompted this study to identify factors contributing to student flourishing and describe the characteristics of students who achieve it. The review followed a rigorous protocol, including a comprehensive search across multiple databases, screening based on pre-established criteria, quality assessment using the MMAT tool, data extraction using NVivo 12 version 12.6.0.959 (64-bit), and matrix synthesis to identify patterns and gaps in the literature. Results reveal that psychological factors, meaning and purpose, personal projects, social support, social relationships, and environmental factors influence student flourishing. Flourishing students exhibit emotional and psychological well-being (37.5%), positive social functioning (31.25%), achievement and competence (18.75%), and positive psychological functioning (12.5%). These findings, consistent with previous research and flourishing theory, suggest the need for a holistic approach to promoting student flourishing through targeted interventions and recognition of flourishing characteristics. This comprehensive mapping of factors and characteristics of student flourishing can guide theory development and practical implementation in universities. Future research should consider longitudinal studies, replication in different contexts, qualitative research, and exploration of additional factors.



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1. Introduction

The study of adolescents attending college is classified as emerging adulthood, which is sensitive to alignment in optimal development [1,2]. The transition to adulthood is not without stress that may exceed some young people's ability to cope. According to Arnet [1] that instability is characteristic of this period, some emerging adulthood experiences high levels of insecurity and serious mental health problems such as anxiety and depression [1,2]. Many of the difficulties that may occur at this stage stem from a mismatch between young people's needs or desires for period-specific developmental tasks and the opportunities created by the context [2,3]. Thus, while emerging adulthood holds the potential for significant growth, the gap between the developmental needs and available support during this phase can critically hinder the ability to flourish, reflected in widespread academic and emotional challenges among college students.

It is estimated that approximately 70% of students will experience mental health issues during their college years. Of these, 41% will exhibit symptoms of clinical depression and 36% will experience anxiety [4]. This situation contributes to high college dropout rates, with 32.9% of college students in the United States leaving their studies each year due to factors such as financial problems (42%), family commitments (32%), and field of study

mismatch (30%) [5]. Low levels of flourishing among college students have a significant impact on academic performance, with long-term consequences including reduced career opportunities and lower earning potential than those who complete their education [5]. The phenomenon of high student dropout rates represents a significant global concern. Globally, approximately 32.9% of undergraduate students do not complete their degree program, with dropout rates reaching 25.7% among first-time undergraduate degree seekers [6]. In the United Kingdom, the number of students who did not complete their programs reached an all-time high, with a 28% increase in a year [7]. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the number of students who cease their studies at all levels of higher education has increased significantly, with 375,134 students dropping out by 2022 [8,9].

The available evidence indicates that approximately 41% of students can be classified as exhibiting low levels of flourishing, 39% are in the medium category, and only 20% demonstrate high levels of flourishing [10]. The findings of the Healthy Minds Study, conducted in 2020–2021 with 115,225 college students in the United States, indicated low levels of flourishing. It was determined that only one in thirty-six students exhibited flourishing behaviors, with lower percentages observed among female students, sexually-oriented students, and students of color [11]. Those who exhibit low levels of flourishing tend to experience elevated levels of academic stress and negative affect, which in turn limits their opportunities for self-compassion. The combination of high learning loads and a multitude of educational demands can result in stress and stunted growth. Unfortunately, this appears to be the case, as research has indicated that students who are unable to cope with stress are more likely to experience difficulties in achieving mental well-being [12]. Students who do not feel they are flourishing appear to lack motivation to learn, which can impede their social and academic development [10]. Many students with low flourishing have reported difficulties with finding meaning and purpose in their lives, which can result in feelings of aimlessness and hopelessness [13].

The term ‘flourishing’ is defined as ‘the state of being fully functional psychologically and socially, and experiencing positive emotions about one’s life’ [14,15]. Flourishing represents a significant aspect of well-being, with a substantial body of evidence indicating its association with a range of positive outcomes. These include enhanced mental health, elevated academic achievement, and increased life satisfaction [11,16,17]. However, research indicates that the majority of adolescents in higher education are not flourishing. Indeed, some studies have found that as many as 37.39% of students lack flourishing [18,19]. Low levels of flourishing have a significant impact on various aspects of student life. In an academic context, students exhibiting low levels of flourishing tend to demonstrate a reduction in both academic achievement and engagement in academic activities [20–22]. It also indicates poor psychological well-being, high negative affect, and decreased quality of social relationships [23,24]. A significant proportion of high school and college students are at risk of languishing, as shown by the findings of Andersen et al. [25], Didaskalou et al. [26], and Knoesen and Naudé [27]. Student transition stages, such as the first year at high school or university, are particularly critical in developing students because they are mainly influenced by a number of factors such as environmental changes, academic pressure and lost social contact, which cause them to not develop as optimally as needed [27,28]. Students may in fact have other challenges including functional disabilities, student workload, isolation issues, and victimization risk [27]. According to these studies, flourishing has been associated with having a host of lasting impacts, including low readiness for work and in developing professional skills. Low flourishing thus has long-term activity effects, such as having poor readiness for work and difficulties in developing professional skills [29,30]. Such a multifaceted impact would make some researchers assert that an educational milieu should be built in such a way as to foster students’ flourishing through a range of interventions [24,31,32].

Flourishing theories regarding positive psychology have quite some potential, and Seligman’s PERMA and the theory of Keyes can be said to be two of the biggest contenders among them. PERMA specifies five elements relating to being positive, being engaged,

having relationships, having meaning, and achieving. On the other hand, Keyes proposes three-dimensionalism in his theory: emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. Prior research has identified several factors that contribute to the flourishing of college students. These include emotional and psychological well-being [16,33], positive social relationships [34], a supportive educational environment [35], positive social relationships [36], and emotional and psychological well-being [37]. A recent literature review indicates that flourishing plays an important role in students' academic lives. Datu [16] identified a positive correlation between flourishing and academic achievement and student engagement. Datu et al. [33] further demonstrated the relationship between flourishing and achievement goal orientation and delay of academic gratification. Factors that facilitate student flourishing include engagement in prosocial activities, a sense of attachment to the university [38], and personal, contextual, and temporal aspects [39]. However, Oh [11] identified disparities in flourishing based on gender/sexual identity and race/ethnicity. Attempts to enhance flourishing have been undertaken through initiatives such as Flourish-HE, which demonstrated considerable advancements in multiple domains of student well-being [40]. In 2015 research by Wilson Strydom and Walker [41], the importance of capability approaches in the narrative of flourishing within higher education was highlighted. Similarly, Benlahcene [42] showed that personal best goals mediate the boost in flourishing and student engagement. Jie et al. [38] report some of the potential factors that might affect the development of students. These included demographic data, students' daily schedules and hours dedicated to various activities, as well as their feelings of connectedness with the university. Examples of substantiated or refuted hypotheses include the following: students with additional responsibilities outside of their academic studies tend to engage in more prosocial activities and are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of student development if they report higher levels of belonging. Coffey et al. [43] evaluated and validated the structure of the five facets of PERMA (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement) and its capacity to predict flourishing outcomes. The findings of these two studies indicate that the PERMA model can predict indicators of well-being and flourishing, such as physical health and academic progress. Hirshberg et al. [44] examined the potential of academic coursework and flourishing experiences to enhance the mental health and social-emotional skills of college students.

Despite the existence of numerous previous studies examining flourishing in diverse population groups, there remains a paucity of comprehensive studies integrating the factors influencing flourishing, particularly in the context of higher education students. Furthermore, there is a dearth of in-depth studies elucidating the specific characteristics that differentiate students who achieve flourishing from those who do not. The extant research tends to focus on aspects of well-being in general but has not specifically mapped the dynamics of flourishing in students who have unique challenges and demands in their developmental phase. The present shift towards higher education is an attempt to holistically develop students for reality, which becomes more complicated every day in the requirements of the workplace [45–47]. Higher education institutions have a significant responsibility to cultivate a future generation that is not only academically proficient but also possesses high emotional, spiritual, and social intelligence [48]. It includes the integration of diverse disciplines, an emphasis on humanistic and global values, as well as active and experiential learning methodologies [49–51].

The objective of this study was to examine and elucidate the factors that contribute to flourishing in university students, as well as to identify the characteristics of students who experience flourishing. By exploring both whether specific factors contribute to flourishing and what characteristics are typical in flourishing students, this study could give clues to higher institutions about how to design effective programs and interventions for students to realize or achieve their potential.

2. Materials and Methods

Conducting this literature review, the author sought to answer the question of what has been considered as success determinants and characteristics of the learners in higher learning. To ensure the review's procedure to be transparent and to make it directly replicable, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, research objectives, search procedure, and methods for data analysis were described [52,53].

Identification was performed through carrying out a database search that included Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect and other sources including Google scholar and theses/dissertations. The following search string used was: ("Flourishing") AND ("college student" OR "university student" OR "youth"). As such, the present systematic approach of using this wide search strategy aims to capture a huge number of relevant articles [52,54].

In the first tier of screening, the following criteria were used in the selection process. To select the studies, the authors focused on empirical research published between 2010 and 2024 that were sourced from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect or Google Scholar, or as a thesis or dissertation. The studies could only be either quantitative or experimental in nature and published either in English or in Indonesian. Since the aim was to apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria consistently, the screening of the studies was conducted in two phases—title and abstract and followed by the full-text study check. Not even the citations, reference and in-line citations were altered in any way and, thus, the numbers in the text [55,56].

A new systematic review was recently conducted, and its process was illustrated using the PRISMA flowchart. The review only included searches of databases and registers [57,58]; based on the information from various sources, it was discovered that 761 out of the 913 records that were initially identified were chosen for screening, after eliminating 152 duplicate records. Of the records screened, 729 were excluded, resulting in 32 reports being sought for retrieval. Of these, 5 reports were not retrieved, and 27 reports were deemed eligible for further consideration. Ultimately, only 17 studies satisfied the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the review. The excluded studies, including those that did not report the analytical techniques used, did not measure efficacy, and used scales unrelated to efficacy, illustrating the necessity for clear selection criteria in systematic reviews. The article selection process used the parsif. al tool. Two persons were involved in the selection and inclusion of articles and the Prisma checklist was used to minimise the risk of bias.

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Checklist was utilized to evaluate the quality of the studies that were included [59]. Investigation of five critical dimensions for quantitative research work has been designed: the sample representation to the assumed target population, appropriateness of the measures, completeness of outcome data, how well confounding factors have been controlled, and purity of intervention. A cut-off score of 70% on the MMAT was employed in the final analysis to obtain the highest quality papers only [55,56].

Data extraction was performed using NVivo software. This means that the articles have been coded and classified under two major categories: Factors of Flourishing and Characteristics of Flourishing. These receive sub-codes according to thematic similarities, facilitating a more in-depth study of the literature [60].

Matrix query analysis in NVivo was then used to compile data in which cross-tabulation tables were generated comparing determinants with authors and characteristics with authors. This approach provided a holistic summary of the existing evidence about the concept of flourishing for students in higher education institutions, presenting patterns and gaps in the current literature [53,61].

This methodological framework, therefore, ensured a comprehensive and systematic literature review on students' flourishing based on a very solid understanding of the underlying factors and characteristics. The findings of such examination will be disclosed in line with the PRISMA guidelines to ensure that all essential aspects are properly ad-

dressed [55–57]. Details of the identification, screening, and inclusion process are illustrated in Figure 1.

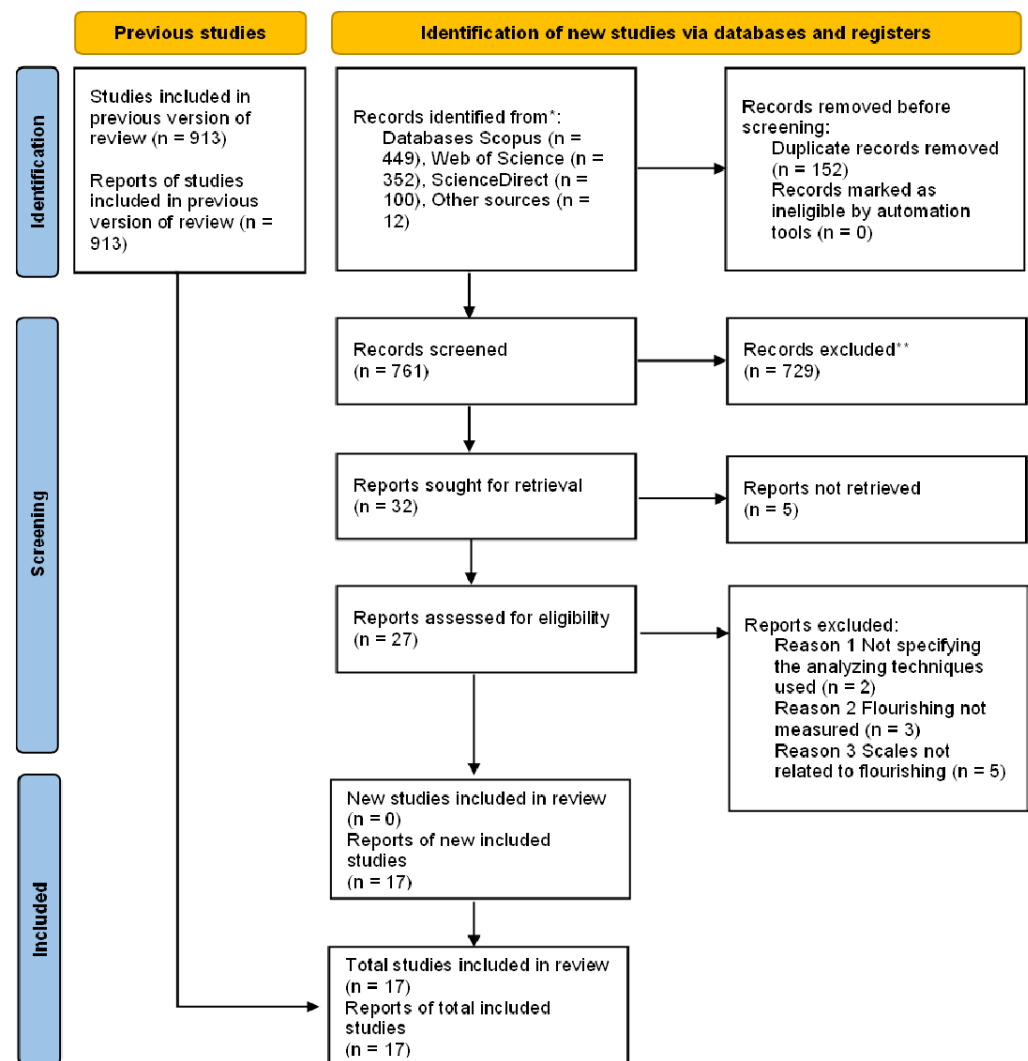


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram [57] for updated systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only. * Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers). ** If automation tools were used, indicate how many records were excluded by a human and how many were excluded by automation tools.

3. Results

3.1. The Following Factors Have Been Identified as Influencing Student Flourishing

The term “student flourishing” refers to a set of elements and conditions that facilitate students’ optimal development and well-being during their academic life. These factors can be defined as interacting components that impact students’ ability to flourish and maintain their psychological well-being. This includes a range of psychological factors, such as mindfulness, self-compassion, self-efficacy, self-regulation, resilience, and positive emotions. It also encompasses meaning and purpose, including the sense of meaning in life and gratitude. Personal projects, social support, and social relationships are also key factors. Social support can be defined as the support provided by social networks, while parental support can be defined as the support provided by parents. Environmental factors, such as religiosity and place characteristics, can also influence student flourishing. The mind map of the factors for the flourishing of university students can be seen in Figure 2.

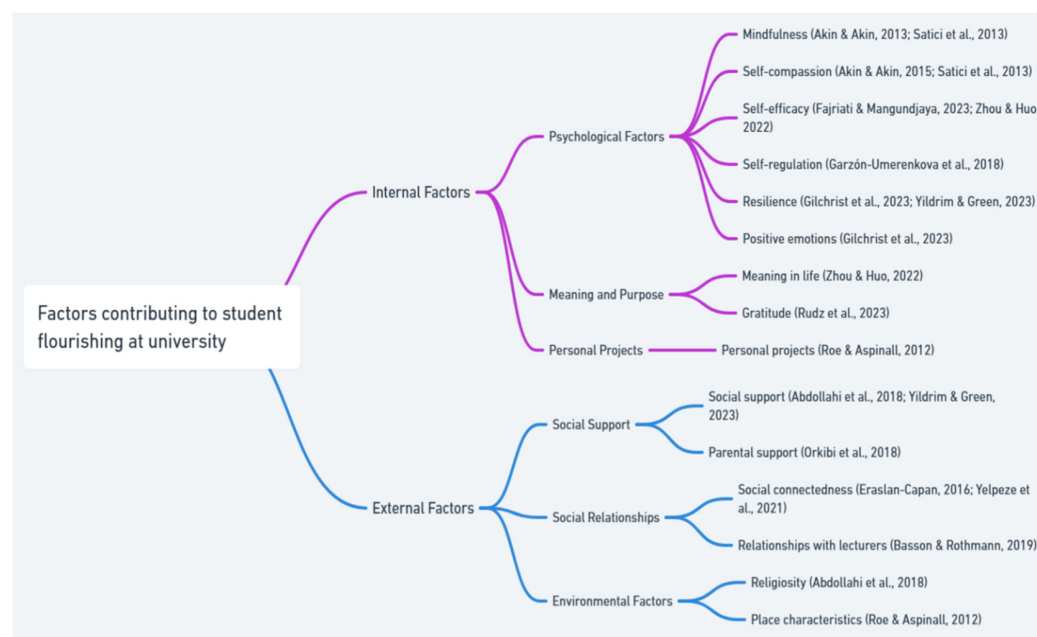


Figure 2. Mindmapping factors contributing to student flourishing at university [62–78].

Student success is dependent on a multidimensional interplay of many factors. Psychological conditions such as mindfulness, self-compassion, and self-efficacy were found to have an important place in enhancing the flourishing of university students. According to previous research performed by Akin and Akin, a positive correlation exists between mindfulness and flourishing [62], enabling students to better cope with the academic challenges they may come across. Moreover, self-compassion, defined as self-kindness, recognition of shared humanity, and mindfulness, has been associated positively with flourishing [62,63]. More self-compassion causes the student to be more resilient towards various negatives in life and allows them to flourish academically and personally. In addition, self-efficacy has a good impact on the flourishing process [64]. Moreover, it has been proven that self-efficacy enhances self-regulation, which is significantly positively related to flourishing and wellbeing [65]. Resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity, is correlated in a positive and significant way with both life satisfaction and flourishing [76]. Resilience with positive feelings creates reciprocal reinforcement, showing that the two elevating levels of each can predict flourishing [67]. According to Giles et al., experiencing positive emotions has been associated with many benefits such as increased resilience and improved well-being. These can therefore contribute to a positive upward spiral toward flourishing [67]. Students with more positive emotions tend to possess more resilience and satisfaction with their academic life. Resilient students are more prone to overcome setbacks and to remain motivated toward their goals in pursuing them. Also, the meaning and purpose component plays a vital role in measuring the flourishing levels of students.

The meaning and purpose component, which encompasses gratitude and searching for meaning in life, interacts with several other components to help students flourish. Gratitude has been shown to have a relationship with psychological elements such as mindfulness and self-compassion. Indeed, college students with higher gratitude participate in mindfulness practice and self-compassion more than those with lower gratitude. The above activities are associated with higher flourishing levels [62,63,68]. Also, Zhou and Huo [69] found that meaning in life is a mediator for physical activities and flourishing. Furthermore, it is also found that meaning in life relates to self-efficacy as well. Students who are high in self-efficacy may consider themselves able to find and acquire meaning, thus positively increasing flourishing levels [64,69]. In addition, carrying out a personal project is one of the most important elements in the flourishing of university students. It is through personal projects that the interplay occurs between individual characteristics and environmental

features in their influence on flourishing [70]. The active engagement of students in meaningful personal projects aligned with their values has also been shown to lead to personal growth, satisfaction in life, and overall well-being. Meaningful personal projects challenge students and yet are within reach, offering new ways to grow skills, develop competencies, and achieve realistic success. Furthermore, involvement in significant personal projects shows evidence of self-efficacy enhancement from students [64] and better self-regulation [65], both contributing to flourishing. External factors such as social support and relationships and parental involvement have also been found to relate to students' flourishing from psychological and meaning and purpose factors, as well as individual and project factors.

External factors, such as social support, social relationships, and parental support, interact and contribute to flourishing in university students [71,72]. Heavy course demands create a state of depletion that further reduces mental resources available to perceive resources within one's learning environment [72]. Overwhelming academic work may lead to a reduction in motivation, engagement, and performance, but when students are appropriately resourced in time and support, perceived heaviness of academic demands is lessened, and these students are more likely to cope well [72]. The role of social support in maintaining and promoting positive experiences among university students, in terms of supportive relationships with lecturers, is critical as this energizes and motivates students [72]. Encouraging, approachable, and caring lecturers can help create a positive learning environment that is not conducive to student growth and development. Furthermore, positive and meaningful social relationships, including parental support, are also important factors in promoting flourishing. Despite the transition to independence that university students are undergoing, they still have a desire to feel supported by their parents, which remains visible and influential on their well-being [73]. Those who flourish tend to have more satisfying interpersonal relationships in general, and flourishing has been shown to increase personal resources in a variety of situations [74]. It can therefore be seen that social connectedness represents a significant concept with a meaningful influence on the process of flourishing [74]. Social connectedness exerts a direct effect on well-being, which is partially mediated by psychological vulnerability [75]. Furthermore, social support has been demonstrated to be significantly and positively associated with resilience, life satisfaction, and flourishing [66]. In addition to internal and external factors, environmental factors such as religiosity and place characteristics also exert a complex influence on the flourishing of university students.

The relationship between religiosity and well-being is complex. Some studies indicate that religiosity (intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation) serves as a substitute resource for older individuals, exerting a beneficial influence on their well-being [71]. However, the nature of the relationship between religiosity and well-being is complex and may be influenced by other factors, such as place characteristics. The campus environment and the places students frequent may interact with religiosity in a manner that influences flourishing. The personal project serves as a conduit through which individual characteristics, including religiosity, and place characteristics exert an influence on the phenomenon of flourishing [70]. To illustrate this, university students who adhere to a high degree of religiosity may perceive that their well-being is enhanced by their involvement in religious activities within places of worship or religious communities. Furthermore, the characteristics of places that facilitate personal growth, such as campus environments that provide spaces for reflection, contemplation, and spiritual practices, may interact with students' religiosity in promoting flourishing. An environment conducive to religious expression and exploration can assist students in integrating their beliefs with their academic and social experiences, thus creating a greater sense of meaning and purpose. However, it is also important to note that the relationship between religiosity, place characteristics, and flourishing may vary depending on cultural, social, and individual contexts. The influence of college students' flourishing can generally be moderated by factors such as personal

values, religious affiliations, and spiritual practices regarding the type or characteristics of a place or environment.

One thread running through the entire study is that the success of students is multi-factorially determined, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. Some of these include the perceived psychosocial factors such as mindfulness, self-compassion, self-efficacy, and resilience, as well as the positive emotions component, but also meaning and purpose components such as gratitude, meaning in life, and personal projects, which are all important in the promotion of flourishing. Furthermore, external factors, including social support, social relationships, parental support, and social connectedness, have been shown to contribute significantly to student success and flourishing. Environmental factors, such as religiosity and place characteristics, also influence student flourishing through complex interactions with other factors. By understanding and considering these various factors, more holistic strategies to support student success and flourishing can be developed.

3.2. *The Characteristics of Flourishing College Students*

The characteristics of flourishing college students can be defined as a combination of positive qualities that enable students to develop and function optimally in various aspects of life. Flourishing students demonstrate emotional and psychological well-being, positive social functioning, good performance and competence, and healthy psychological functioning. In other words, flourishing in university students is a condition in which they experience high life satisfaction, have meaningful social relationships, are actively involved in academic and non-academic activities, and can overcome challenges with resilience and flexibility. Detailed information on the characteristics of the flourishing students can be found in Table 1.

The data in the table indicate that university students manifest four distinct flourishing characteristics, with varying degrees of support. The most frequently referenced characteristic in the literature is emotional and psychological well-being, with 37.5% of the articles supporting this assertion. Flourishing college students evince positive emotions, enthusiasm for life, personal growth, positive social relationships with others, freedom from mental illness, full emotional vitality, and positive functioning in life [71,72,77]. Furthermore, they experience a range of emotions, including both positive and negative, and employ adaptive coping strategies [62]. They also display a number of positive characteristics, including enthusiasm, a sense of purpose, optimism, vitality, self-determination, and positive interpersonal relationships [65]. Furthermore, positive social functioning is an additional crucial characteristic of flourishing students, as evidenced by 31.25% of the articles in favor. These college students report greater satisfaction with their social relationships, experience fewer limitations in daily activities, contribute to their communities [62], are actively involved in society [78], report more satisfying interpersonal relationships in general, and demonstrate the capacity to leverage personal resources in various situations [74]. Furthermore, they exhibit positive interpersonal relationships [67] and a proclivity for social engagement and supportive connections [63].

Performance and competence were also identified as key factors contributing to the flourishing of university students, with 18.75% of the articles supporting this view. Students who flourish can perform above the norm and withstand academic and social pressure [72]. They have competence and purpose in life [67] and are said to have psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy [75]. Also, 12.5% of the articles referred to positive psychological functioning. Whereas high-performing yet socially as well as psychologically well-functioning students may be defined by flourishing [74], theoretical construction is end-specifically by self-efficacy [64]. How one would prioritize intervention and support development to help students reach a flourishing state could be understood through the analysis of the different addend attributes together with their item descriptions. For instance, more emphasis could be placed on the promotion of emotional and psychological well-being, as well as positive social functioning, without undermining the importance of performance, competence, and positive psychological functioning.

Table 1. Flourishing characteristics of university students.

No	Characteristics	Characteristic Traits	Author	Number of Articles Supporting		
1	Emotional and psychological well-being	Having positive emotions, enthusiasm for life, personal growth, positive social relationships with others, and feeling connected to others	Abdollahi et al., 2018 [71]	1	6	37.5%
		Be free from mental illness, have full emotional vitality, and function positively in life	Abdollahi et al., 2018 [71]; Akin and Akin, 2015 [62]; Basson and Rothmann, 2019 [78]	3		
		Experience negative and positive emotions, and have adaptive coping strategies	Akin and Akin, 2015 [62]	1		
		Possess characteristics such as positive emotions, enthusiasm, sense of purpose, optimism, vitality, self-determination, and positive interpersonal relationships.	Garzón-Umerenkova et al., 2018 [65]	1		
2	Positive social functioning	Enjoy better social relationships, experience fewer limitations in daily activities, and contribute to their community	Akin and Akin, 2015 [77]	1	5	31.25%
		Actively involved in the community	Basson and Rothmann, 2019 [72]	2		
		Having more satisfying interpersonal relationships in general, and being able to leverage personal resources in various situations	Eraslan-Capan, 2016 [74]			
		Have a positive relationship	Gilchrist et al., 2023 [67]	2		
		Have a social need for involvement and supportive relationships	Yelpaze et al., 2021 [75]			
3	Performance and competence	Perform well and be able to handle the pressures of academic and social life	Basson and Rothmann, 2019 [72]	1	3	18.75%
		Having competence and meaning in life	Gilchrist et al., 2023 [67]	1		
		Have psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy	Yelpaze et al., 2021 [75]	1		
4	Positive psychological functioning	Function well psychologically and socially	Eraslan-Capan, 2016 [74]	1	2	12.5%
		Have a high level of self-efficacy	Fajriati and Mangundjaya, 2023 [64]	1		

The analysis using the mixed-methods appraisal tool, a technique that assesses the methodological quality of studies, would commence after a description of research results from articles reviewed in this systematic review. This is important because it guarantees that all findings and conclusions are adequately grounded and reliable. An MMAT (the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool) approach encompasses the evaluation of various aspects such as research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of results. This will then give a broader picture of the methodological quality of the studies as well as strengthening the credibility and validity of those findings presented in this systematic review. Details of each study are shown in Table 2.

Based on quality assessment using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), the majority of the analyzed studies demonstrated good quality, with MMAT scores ranging from 70% to 100%. Of the 17 studies, 7 studies achieved a perfect score of 100%, 6 studies scored between 80 and 90%, and 4 studies scored 70%. None of the studies had an MMAT score below 70%, indicating that all analyzed manuscripts met the minimum criteria for sufficiently good quality according to MMAT standards. Overall, it can be concluded that

most of the studies in this analysis have strong and adequate methodologies in line with the MMAT guidelines.

Table 2. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Checklist.

Study Label	Title	3.1 *	3.2 *	3.3 *	3.4 *	3.5 *	%
Garzón-Umerenkova et al., 2018 [65]	A linear empirical model of self-regulation on flourishing, health, procrastination, and achievement, among university students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	80%
Roe and Aspinall, 2012 [70]	Adolescents' Daily Activities and the Restorative Niches that Support Them	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Yelpaze et al., 2021 [75]	Association between social connectedness and well-being: A study of the mediating role of psychological vulnerability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	100%
Zhou and Huo, 2022 [69]	Chinese Youths' Physical Activity and Flourishing During COVID-19: The Mediating Role of Meaning in Life and Self-Efficacy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Akin and Akin, 2015 [77]	Examining the predictive role of self-compassion on flourishing in Turkish university students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	80%
Satici et al., 2013 [63]	Investigating the relationship between flourishing and self-compassion: A structural equation modeling approach	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	Cannot tell	80%
Akin and Akin, 2015 [62]	Mediating role of coping competence on the relationship between mindfulness and flourishing	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	80%
Orkibi et al., 2018 [73]	Pathways to Adolescents' Flourishing: Linking Self-Control Skills and Positivity Ratio Through Social Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Rudaz et al., 2023 [68]	Presence of meaning in life mediates the effects of gratitude and caring for bliss on flourishing in college students: a three-wave longitudinal study	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	No	70%
Yildirim and Green, 2024 [66]	Social support and resilience mediate the relationship of stress with satisfaction with life and flourishing of youth	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Cannot tell	70%
Fajrianti and Mangundjaya, 2023 [64]	Efikasi Diri Sebagai Prediktor Munculnya Flourishing Pada Mahasiswa	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Cannot tell	70%
Basson and Rothmann, 2019 [72]	Pathways to flourishing among pharmacy students: The role of study demands and lecturer support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	90%
Abdollahi et al., 2018 [71]	Perceived stress as a mediator between social support, religiosity, and flourishing among older adults	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	90%
Gilchrist et al., 2023 [67]	Reciprocal associations between positive emotions and resilience predict flourishing among adolescents	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Cannot tell	70%
Eraslan-Capan, 2016 [74]	Social Connectedness and Flourishing: The Mediating Role of Hopelessness	Cannot tell	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	Cannot tell	70%
Nelson et al., 2016 [79]	Supplemental Material for Do Unto Others or Treat Yourself? The Effects of Prosocial and Self-Focused Behavior on Psychological Flourishing	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	80%
Kandaris, 2013 [80]	The moderating effect of hope on the relationship between emotional approach coping and flourishing in college students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%

* 3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population? 3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention? 3.3. Are there complete outcome data? 3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis? 3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered as intended?

4. Discussion

The objective of this study is to identify and comprehensively analyze the factors that contribute to the flourishing condition of university students, as well as to describe the characteristics of students who achieve flourishing in their academic and personal lives. The term ‘flourishing’ is defined as ‘the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of one’s life are good, including the context in which the person lives’ [81]. The results demonstrated that the factors contributing to the flourishing of students can be classified into two main categories: internal factors (psychological factors, meaning and purpose, personal projects) and external factors (social support, social relationships, and environmental factors). Additionally, studies examining the contribution of each factor have been described, including research on mindfulness, self-compassion, self-efficacy, resilience, positive emotions, gratitude, parental support, social attachment, religiosity, and place characteristics. These factors are interrelated and play an important role in determining the success and flourishing of students during their university education.

The findings related to the student flourishing determinants appear to be in consonance with a number of earlier studies. Akin and Akin [62] showed that mindfulness and self-compassion are significant predictors of flourishing among university students; similarly, Yıldırım and Green [66] established a positive correlation between social support and resilience, life satisfaction, and flourishing. According to research conducted by Basson and Rothmann [72], academic demands and relationships with lecturers have a significant impact on student flourishing. In their study, Gilchrist et al. [67] highlight the importance of positive emotions and resilience. Similarly, Fajriati and Mangundjaya [64] revealed that self-efficacy positively affects the flourishing of students. Flourishing has a direct correlation with academic achievement; students who flourish are likely to achieve much in academics, engage very well, and score high in academic goal orientation [16,17,33]. Flourishing is framed by the students as self-actualization and success, having vital dimensions of academic and social engagement [39,82]. Many influences can stem from an individual’s ability to flourish; personal best goals, student engagement, other roles, prosocial activities, and attachment to the university can affect flourishing [38,42]. This research outlines the importance of integrating flourishing into educational practice for improved well-being and academic outcome of students, and this can happen with social-justice-focused approaches and interventions for flourishing [41,83]. Overall, the integration of concepts regarding flourishing in education may give long-term advantages to the well-being of students and their academic success.

These results may be interpreted under different perspectives of flourishing theory, which are numerous and further illustrate the concept of human well-being. The systemic, for example, baseline wherein happiness, health, meaning, character, as well as social relations, are harmonized with each other [23] is also filled by the existential dimensions of balance between self-fulfillment and moral responsibility, intersubjectivity [84]. The other medical, social science [85], as well as ethical [86], points of view add pragmatic and philosophical weight to the argument. Perspectives from psychology [87] and evolution [88] underscore the importance of positive emotions acting as triggers of flourishing [89] as they represent strong stimuli in their study findings. There is also the gender [90] and theology [91] perspective wherein these two now have explanations for what flourishing would mean in emerging adults. Here, the nuances of this age group as well as the all-important spiritual dynamic of their relationship with God, and others, integrated living, and lived fidelity to one’s calling are addressed. The very many lenses present here present a perfect picture of flourishing, which can only be attained if well-aligned with all the elements of life.

Flourishing among university students is in fact very complicated and multidimensional; it refers to a state that is positive at the psychological level, where it is found in positive emotions, engagements, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment [83]. It is also closely associated with personal growth, realization of potential, and success in the context of higher education [82]. More recent research indicates that demographic factors,

social engagement, psychological well-being, and academic achievement are aspects that closely determine the level to which a college student flourishes [16,17,38]. This study identified the following aspects of flourishing characteristics in university students: emotional and psychological well-being at 37.5%; positive social functioning at 31.25%; performance and competence at 18.75%; and positive psychological functioning at 12.5%. Identification of these key features is consistent with previous research that has identified emotional and psychological well-being [62,71,72], as well as positive social functioning [67,74] performance, competence, and psychological needs, as leading indicators of flourishing college students. These characteristics align with the conceptualization of flourishing as a state in which individuals effectively function psychologically and socially, and experience positive affectivity with regard to their lives [14]. In addition, students involved in both academic and extracurricular activities, who have other obligations outside of the university context but who would still maintain a commitment to learning and personal development, exhibit higher levels of these flourishing indicators [82]. Emotional and psychological well-being is the foundation of flourishing, consisting of positive emotions, personal growth, and optimal functioning [71]. Furthermore, positive social functioning, which includes the presence of satisfying relationships and contributions to the community, is also an important component [74]. Good performance and competence also allow students to handle academic pressure and achieve their academic goals [75].

Conversely, there is a deficiency of research into what defines the non-flourishing students in the scope of higher education. Gokcen et al. [82] identified that university students conceptualize flourishing as a combination of positive interpersonal relationships, engagement in meaningful activities, and achievement of academic goals. Jie et al. [38] proved that university students who spend more of their time-consuming media and assume extra responsibilities, such as caregiving and work, have reduced flourishing levels. As emphasized in Finn and Rock [92], school engagement is a very important component of academic resilience. With this as a reference, Beckmann and Minnaert [93] indicated some non-cognitive characteristics, such as low self-concept, perfectionism, and problems in interpersonal relationships, which also are very common with gifted students with learning difficulties. Fagioli et al. [94] found that college students who have high levels of negative emotions and low self-perception face the most challenges with their academics. What is required of learning institutions is the creation of such educational programs to champion flourishing students, especially those under-represented in the student population [95] incorporating personal best (PB) goals within the curriculum to create better engagement and foster student flourishing [42]. Reading these studies, therefore, one may conclude that students who are unfavorable in their conditions and do not flourish show many traits of either low academic and social engagement, high media consumption, low role engagement, negative emotions, low self-perception, or low school engagement [38,82,92–94].

These findings highlight the necessity for a comprehensive strategy to foster flourishing in university students. It is perhaps also pertinent for the universities to consider devising interventions and support programs that would help in addressing issues such as enhancing students' mindfulness, self-compassion, and self-efficacy through training and counseling. Equally important is the creation of a supportive social environment, which may be attained through promoting connectedness and social resources. They must consider the students in their design and implementation of quite flexible requirements and demands as adapted to their capacities. More so, there is an advantage in further encouraging positive interaction between students and their faculty. Implementing programs on self-regulation, positive emotions, and resilience would allow them to develop optimally as well. Furthermore, identifying the advantages and characteristics that have a positive influence would help the universities in developing effective interventions. The most benefits can be accrued for students from encouraging initiatives that enhance the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals, as well as those that consider the advent of pro-social functioning. Performance and competence have also been encouraged through academic

support and development opportunities. In general, this study points to the need for an extensive and integrated approach to the full potential of university students.

This study contributes something particular to the academic field in question by thoroughly mapping out the influences of flourishing and the qualities of flourishing students. The study is thus more inclusive of different elements and thus much broader in understanding the concept of flourishing, especially in a higher educational context. The results provide the foundation for narrower theories on flourishing that apply to student populations and are practical guides for universities in the deliberate design of effective interventions and policies. A longitudinal study could also be conducted to capture a comprehensive picture of how influence and flourishing change over time. The same findings could also be used to extend generalizations by being replicated in other culture-influenced institutional contexts. In-depth qualitative studies provide an avenue toward understanding the subjective experiences of flourishing as conceived by students. Finally, the concept of flourishing among college students can be enhanced by investigating more variables such as personality, spirituality, or campus involvement.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that there are internal and external factors influencing student flourishing. These include psychological elements such as mindfulness, self-compassion, and self-efficacy, as well as factors related to meaning and purpose, including a sense of meaningfulness and gratitude. Personal projects, social support, social relationships, and environmental factors such as religiosity and place characteristics also play a role. These factors interact to promote students' flourishing during their educational experience at the university level. In addition, the study found that flourishing students have the following main characteristics: emotional and psychological well-being (37.5%), positive social functioning (31.25%), achievement and competence (18.75%), and positive psychological functioning (12.5%).

The significance of the findings from this investigation in terms of the activities of students entails that they should actively pursue all aspects of themselves and practice mindfulness, self-compassion, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and resilience for optimal development (flourishing) along with fostering positive emotions, meaning and purpose in life, developing gratitude, and pursuing personally meaningful activities as they should also be proactive in developing supportive social relationships with friends, lecturers, and parents, building a sense of community, and wisely choosing and participating in environments and activities that strongly match with the values in their lives. By developing internal and external factors and choosing the right environment in a balanced and integrated way, students can achieve flourishing, characterized by psychological well-being, academic achievement, and optimal social functioning.

These findings have significant implications for the design of effective interventions and support programs at the university level, with the objective of promoting student flourishing. A comprehensive strategy that encompasses key elements such as enhancing mindfulness, self-compassion, and self-efficacy and fosters a nurturing social context can facilitate students' realization of their full potential. Indeed, academic tasks are such that they need to be handled with students' ability and promote good relations between students and their professors. Efforts directed at student emotional and psychological improvement as well as developing positively correlated social functioning can pay significant dividends for students.

This research presents a distinct contribution in the form of a total mapping of the parameters affecting flourishing and features of flourishing students. With the integration of these various aspects, this work provides a better understanding of the dynamics of flourishing in higher education. The results pave the way for developing theories that are much more specific to flourishing student populations, in addition to practical contributions to universities' guidance in designing useful interventions and policies. Although this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of flourishing in higher education,

it is essential to acknowledge that the concept of flourishing holds varying meanings when viewed through different theoretical lenses. The concept of flourishing has different meanings depending on the perspective and theory used in a research study. These different perspectives show that flourishing is only one concept among many that can be interpreted in different ways. This limitation needs to be recognized so that the understanding of flourishing is not taken as the only absolute truth.

Future studies should probably include longitudinal ones, analyzing the dynamics of flourishing at university from time to time. This should also include individual, psychological, social and environmental factors complexly interacting. Research should also explore the effectiveness of targeted higher education interventions regarding sustainable flourishing. This should especially focus on underrepresented groups likely to suffer from lack of flourishing. Students experiencing difficulties in academic settings, disengaged students, and having severe psychosocial challenges are among those student populations that would benefit greatly from research initiatives. By looking into these populations, researchers can gain fresh ideas on how to better optimize the educational experience and improve the provision for holistic student development.

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