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## Thriving school climate and growth mindset leadership for sustainable well-being in elementary education

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**Abstract:** The pursuit of sustainable school well-being constitutes an indispensable imperative in contemporary educational transformation, particularly within primary education, which must rigorously balance academic excellence with holistic development. Growth mindset leadership and a thriving school climate function as non-negotiable catalysts for institutional resilience, collaborative efficacy, and long-term academic flourishing. This study systematically examines the empirical literature to determine the structural relationships among growth-mindset leadership, a thriving school climate, and overarching school well-being in primary educational settings. Strictly adhering to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a rigorous Systematic Literature Review was executed across premier international and national academic databases. Thematic analysis dictates four definitive trends: a critical escalation of scholarly focus on post-pandemic school well-being; the decisive role of growth mindset leadership in driving educator motivation and an adaptive institutional culture; the empirical positive influence of a thriving climate on sustainable well-being; and the establishment of an integrated framework linking leadership, climate, and well-being as the absolute foundation of a robust school ecosystem. The findings unequivocally assert that sustainable school well-being is attainable exclusively through leadership paradigms that systematically cultivate intellectual growth, inclusivity, and a collective institutional purpose. Ultimately, this review establishes critical theoretical insights and authoritative policy implications, directing future research trajectories to align with national curricula and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for quality education.

**Keywords:** Thriving School Climate; Growth Mindset; Leadership; School Well-Being; Elementary Education.

## Introduction

The emphasis of twenty-first-century education is shifting from student academic performance, as measured by grades or report cards, towards a more holistic approach that prioritises each student's psychological, social, and emotional well-being. This shift is becoming increasingly urgent owing to several concerns, including declining teacher performance, low student motivation, and inadequate systemic support for school well-being. The concept of school well-being encompasses both individual and collective dimensions, both of which are crucial for meaningful and sustainable education (Obeidat, 2024). Accordingly, two interrelated elements with a significant influence on school sustainability are educational leadership underpinned by a growth mindset and a thriving school climate. Growth mindset leadership is characterised by cultivating a collaborative environment, embracing flexibility, and learning from mistakes, thereby encouraging innovative teaching methods and fostering a supportive academic environment in classrooms.

The comprehensive environment and well-being of school communities have been a central focus of educational research and policy discussion in recent decades. A supportive school environment, characterised by a positive culture encompassing physical and emotional safety, positive interpersonal dynamics, sound pedagogical approaches, and supportive organisational structures, is widely regarded as a determinant of students' social-emotional development, academic engagement, and overall learning outcomes. Obeidat's (2024) mapping of thirty-three years of research on school climate and students' well-being confirms that the scholarly literature on this intersection has grown substantially, and that safety, belonging, and teacher-student relationships constitute the most consistently documented dimensions of school climate affecting well-being. These findings underscore the importance of a positive school climate as a determinant of a wide range of educational outcomes. The growth mindset paradigm, as originally conceptualised by Dweck (2006), has prompted significant changes in pedagogical approaches and educational leadership. Research examining educators' mindsets emphasises the substantial impact of growth-oriented transformational leadership practices within school environments (Laine & Tirri, 2023). Transformational leadership was determined to have a direct effect on organisational health (Velarde et al, 2022).

When these two dimensions are combined, opportunities arise to design strategies that not only improve student well-being in the short term but also sustain it as part of the school's long-term functioning. The concept of sustainable well-being in the school context encompasses efforts to maintain and strengthen the school's physical, psychological, social, and ecological conditions, so that well-being becomes an integral part of educational goals and everyday practice (Zhou et al., 2025). Both the whole-school approach and the Education for Sustainable Development framework emphasise the importance of embedding sustainability values at the core of a school's culture (Mogren et al., 2018).

The reality of practice in many primary education contexts demonstrates that attempts to improve well-being are frequently only partially successful: unsupportive school cultures and structures can undermine long-term positive effects, whilst psychosocial interventions or mental health programmes are typically transient and dependent on external resources (Aldridge et al., 2024; March et al., 2024). A promising approach to achieving long-term well-being, therefore, is to refocus attention on leadership that fosters a growth mindset and cultivates a vibrant school environment.

Although a substantial body of research exists on school climate, growth mindset, and well-being, integrating these two areas reveals several significant gaps. First, much research on growth mindset concentrates on the effects of interventions on academic

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performance and individual learning, without examining how school-level leadership might systematically embed growth mindset principles within school structures, policies, and culture. Second, research on school climate is frequently descriptive or demonstrates correlations with well-being without examining the underlying organisational mechanisms. Third, a lack of learning-focused leadership, resources, and structural support causes many well-being interventions to fail over the longer term. With respect to growth mindset at the whole-school level, Laine and Tirri's (2023) systematic literature review, published in *Frontiers in Education*, confirms that whilst teachers' growth-oriented practices have significant effects, their systematic embedding within whole-school leadership strategies remains underexplored. Zhou and Guo (2024), in a large-scale study published in the *European Journal of Education* (Wiley, Scopus), demonstrated that principals' transformational leadership behaviours have a direct, statistically significant positive effect on teachers' psychological well-being and professional success, underscoring the critical role of leadership quality in shaping teacher welfare outcomes. This review seeks to analyse, integrate, and synthesise existing research on thriving school climate, growth-mindset leadership, and sustainable well-being in elementary education to address this gap.

## Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. It examines and synthesises research findings on the relationships among growth mindset in educational leadership, positive school culture, a conducive school climate, and school well-being within the context of basic education. This approach provides a comprehensive overview of current research trends, conceptual gaps, and theoretical and practical contributions within the field of educational leadership. The principal stages of this method comprise literature identification, literature screening, eligibility assessment, and the determination of articles for inclusion in the final synthesis.

The systematic search was conducted across nine national and international databases. Inclusion criteria required that articles: (1) were published between 2020 and 2025; (2) addressed growth mindset leadership, school climate, teacher well-being, student well-being, or their interrelationships; (3) focused on primary or elementary education contexts, or on educational leadership more broadly applicable to this level; and (4) were peer-reviewed publications in national or international journals. Exclusion criteria eliminated articles that lacked a connection between leadership, school climate, and well-being, or that were unrelated to the context of basic education.

Data analysis used thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns, theoretical gaps, and emerging conceptual frameworks across the reviewed studies. Four thematic areas were identified through this process: (1) academic focus versus well-being orientation in elementary education research; (2) growth mindset leadership and school culture formation; (3) school climate and teacher-student well-being; and (4) integrated frameworks for sustainable school well-being. The use of PRISMA 2020 ensured methodological transparency and reproducibility throughout the review process.

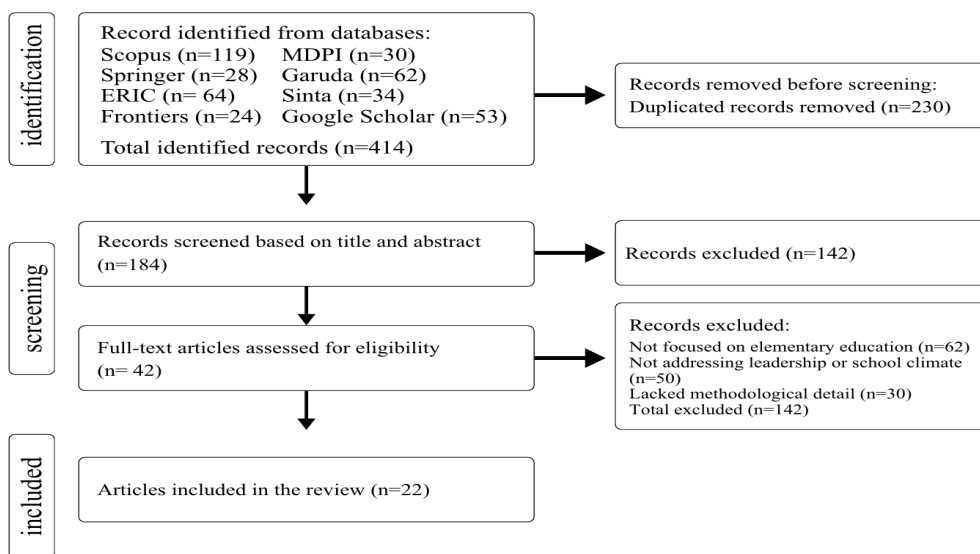
## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

This section reports the synthesis of twenty-two articles that met the inclusion criteria for this study. The analysis examined the relationship between growth-mindset leadership, a developing school climate, and sustainable school well-being within the context of basic education, addressing four research questions. The reviewed findings represent the most recent advancements in educational leadership and school well-being, drawn from national and international publications released between 2020 and 2025.

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Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Chart – Study Selection



The systematic literature selection procedure, utilising the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, is depicted above. A total of 414 articles were identified in the first phase across nine national and international databases. Following the removal of duplicates, 230 distinct articles remained, and their titles and abstracts were subsequently analysed. A total of 184 articles satisfied the preliminary requirements for further review; 142 articles were excluded because they lacked a connection between leadership, school climate, and well-being, or were unrelated to the context of basic education. The remaining 42 articles underwent the eligibility assessment phase. Owing to methodological limitations or an unsuitable research focus, 20 articles were excluded from the full review. Ultimately, 22 articles were retained as the primary source for thematic synthesis.

Table 1. Literature Matrix Forming the Basis of Systematic Analysis

No.	Author	Title	Purpose of Study	Key Findings and Relevance
1.	Dang et al (2024)	Self-efficacy and stress on school climate and teachers' job satisfaction	Examines the relationship between school climate, stress, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction	Positive school climate enhances teacher engagement, mediated by trust and collaboration
2.	Sahin (2026)	School Climate as a mediator between job satisfaction and sustainability	Investigates the links among job satisfaction, school climate, and career sustainability	Positive school climate enhances teacher engagement, mediated by trust and collaboration
3.	Velarde et al (2022)	Healthy school climate	Explores transformational leadership attributes of school principals	Collaborative climate strengthens organisational health
4.	Lee et al. (2022)	Growth Mindset Leadership and Teacher Innovation	Examines the influence of leadership mindset on teacher innovation	Growth-oriented leadership fosters teacher creativity and innovation
5.	Gaol (2021)	School leadership in Indonesia	Reviews leadership capacity and principal selection processes in Indonesia	Leadership training fosters a positive school climate
6.	Karakus et al (2024)	Educational leadership on teachers' subjective well-being	Examines the role of leadership in shaping teachers' professional well-being	Well-being serves as the foundation of school culture
7.	Fleming et al (2023)	Psychological Safety and Growth Leadership	Investigates the effect of psychological safety on teacher collaboration	Psychological safety enhances teacher collaboration and co-learning

8.	Gray & Downie, 2024	Thriving School Ecosystems	Explores strategies to enhance student well-being in educational settings	Adaptive leadership strengthens collective well-being and organisational resilience
9.	Wibowo et al (2023)	Effective Leadership	Identifies traits and skills of effective school leadership	Effective leadership cultivates a culture of peer learning through structured reflection
10.	Meiedirk & Fleischer, 2020	Mindset and resilience of student teachers	Examines mindset and resilience among pre-service teachers	Growth mindset is associated with higher teacher resilience in challenging contexts
11.	Nwafor & Ololube (2024)	Barriers structures on the Performance of School Principals	Investigates the impact of structural barriers on principal performance	Hierarchical structures and compliance demands impede innovation and growth leadership
12.	Widyarnarko et al, (2025)	Main Factors of Job Satisfaction	Analyses the influence of leadership, work environment, and work culture on teacher job satisfaction	Collaborative culture increases teacher job satisfaction and reduces burnout
13.	Setyawati et al (2026)	Transformational Leadership and Organizational Climate	Examines transformational leadership and organisational climate in Indonesian public elementary schools	Positive school climate predicts organisational resilience in Indonesian schools
14.	Bardach et al (2022)	Teacher Effectiveness, Teachers' Well-being, Retention, and Interpersonal Relations	Systematically reviews the role of teachers' psychological characteristics	Provides a framework for well-being-oriented professional development
15.	Patras et al (2023)	School Well-Being	Formulates well-being recommendations for full-day schools	Well-being is established as a primary indicator of educational quality
16.	Gunawardena et al (2020)	Well-Being and Flourishing Schools Framework	Develops a global framework for school well-being	Well-being is positioned as a primary indicator of global educational quality
17.	Cameron (2021)	Positive Organisational Scholarship in Education	Examines the implementation of Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) in schools	Positive organisational values promote resilient and thriving school organisations
18.	Veletic et al, (2023)	Teachers' and principals' perceptions of school climate	Investigates differences in school climate perceptions between principals and teachers	Cultural adaptation and local context reinforce a positive school climate
19.	Wida Wati et al (2025)	Growth Mindset and Student Well-Being	Examines the implementation of growth mindset among elementary school students	Growth mindset is associated with higher student motivation and joy of learning
20.	Pradika et al (2025)	Principal Leadership as a Moderator: Enhancing the Impact of Work Environment and Motivation on Teacher Performance	Analyses principal leadership as a moderator between work environment, motivation, and teacher performance	Principal leadership moderates the effects of work environment and motivation on teacher performance
21.	Zhang & He (2024)	Perceived School Climate Support Moderates the Relationship	Examines the moderating role of perceived school climate support on the	Growth mindset positively predicts work engagement;

		Between Teachers' Growth Mindset and Work Engagement	growth mindset-work engagement relationship	school climate support strengthens this effect
22.	Mesler, Corbin & Martin (2021)	Teacher Mindset is Associated with Development of Students' Growth Mindset	Examines the relationship between teacher mindset and student growth mindset development	Teacher growth mindset has a positive, statistically significant association with students' growth mindset development

### Discussion

A review of the twenty-two articles published between 2020 and 2025 reveals a shift in the orientation of basic education research, moving from an academic focus towards the development of a school ecosystem that fosters psychological and social well-being. National and international education policy directions for sustainable development are consistent with this pattern; national curriculum policy emphasises character development and well-being as pillars of successful learning. The principal themes that emerge are educational leadership underpinned by a growth mindset, a positive school environment culture, and school well-being. The principal's role as an educational leader is to act as an advocate for teacher professionalism and to facilitate learning through growth-mindset-based leadership (Dweck, 2006; Fullan, 2020; Lee et al., 2022). In accordance with growth mindset theory, teachers who believe they can develop their abilities are more engaged in their professional roles, a relationship confirmed by Zhang and He (2024) as a statistically significant positive predictor of work engagement, moderated by school climate support.

Obeidat's (2024) bibliometric analysis of thirty-three years of school climate and student well-being research provides an important macro-level contextualisation for the present review. The analysis maps the exponential growth of publications on this topic, confirming that school climate is now recognised as a multifaceted construct encompassing safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the institutional environment. The bibliometric findings indicate that the intersection of school climate and well-being has become one of the fastest-growing research domains within educational science, validating the contribution that the present SLR seeks to make to this trajectory. Critically, Obeidat (2024) identifies that quantitative correlational studies dominate the field, whilst integrated theoretical frameworks for sustainable well-being remain underdeveloped, which is precisely the gap that this review addresses.

A positive school environment is characterised by open communication, trust, and psychological safety among school members (Sahin, 2026). It is also characterised by a shift from administrative leadership to leadership focused on improving the quality of learning. This approach encourages teachers to develop a culture of self-reflection and to increase collaboration within the school learning community when developing school programmes such as literacy programmes (Wibowo et al, 2023). Therefore, leadership needs to support increased teacher involvement and the creation of a positive learning environment (Manke et al, 2025). The effectiveness of school principal leadership can indirectly improve teacher performance in the workplace (Pradika et al., 2025). Zhou and Guo's (2024) study of 520 Chinese EFL teachers confirmed, through structural equation modelling, that transformational leadership behaviours directly and significantly predict teachers' psychological well-being ( $\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$ ) and professional success, with positive organisational climate perceptions mediating this relationship. This provides robust empirical support for the conceptual model proposed in this review.

Leadership underpinned by a growth mindset contributes significantly to the creation of a positive school climate in four ways: (1) by cultivating interpersonal

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relationships that support psychological safety; (2) by establishing organisational structures that support continuous learning; (3) by cultivating collective values and beliefs; and (4) by methodically enhancing teachers' professional capacity (Lee et al., 2022; Nwafor & Ololube, 2024). Principals who instil the belief that abilities can be developed through effort and reflection encourage teachers to experiment, collaborate, and learn from mistakes (Dweck, 2006; Fullan, 2020). Open communication and empathy from leaders increase trust among school members (Widyanarko et al, (2025), whilst coaching and peer observation strengthen teacher agency (Meiedirk & Fleischer, 2020). More specifically, support from colleagues outside the school and supervisor support (external social capital) and collaboration and trust in management (internal social capital) predicted well-being positively across time (Beausaert et al, 2021). However, the implementation of growth-oriented leadership is often hampered by bureaucracy, limited collaborative time, and cultural resistance (Patras et al, 2023; Nwafor & Ololube, 2024). Laine and Tirri's (2023) systematic review, published in *Frontiers in Education* and synthesising studies on teachers' mindsets and growth-oriented practices, confirms that whilst individual teachers' mindsets are amenable to professional development, the systematic integration of growth mindset principles within whole-school leadership structures remains the critical unmet challenge in the literature.

A thriving school climate has been shown to influence the well-being of teachers and students strongly (Sahin, 2026). Schools with a positive climate foster a sense of safety, connectedness, and meaningful work that strengthen long-term well-being (Widyanarko et al, (2025); Fleming et al, 2023). Participatory structures, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and regular reflection, have been shown to increase job satisfaction and reduce fatigue (Meiedirk & Fleischer, 2020). The PERMA framework confirms that a positive school climate strengthens positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Bardach et al, 2022; Gaol, 2021; Nwafor & Ololube, 2024). Zhang and He (2024) study provides direct empirical evidence that perceived school climate support serves as a significant moderator of the relationship between teachers' growth mindset and work engagement, confirming that the effects of growth mindset on professional outcomes are substantially amplified within supportive school climates, and attenuated within unsupportive ones. This finding carries important practical implications: investment in school climate improvement may be a prerequisite for growth mindset interventions to achieve their full potential.

Numerous studies demonstrate that teacher well-being is a prerequisite for student well-being. Teachers channel positive energy into the learning process and create a welcoming classroom environment when they feel valued and supported (Karakus et al, 2024; Setyawati et al, 2026). A thriving school climate thus becomes a platform that allows well-being values to flourish through daily interactions. In Indonesia, the values of cooperation (*gotong royong*), empathy, and collaboration are local elements that strengthen this thriving climate. A thriving school climate also contributes to professional and organisational well-being by rendering teachers more adaptive, open to change, and resilient (Gray & Downie, 2024li). Conversely, administrative burdens and number-based evaluation systems can hinder the development of a positive climate (Patras et al, 2023; Nwafor & Ololube, 2024).

From this synthesis, a conceptual model of a thriving school ecosystem for sustainable school well-being emerges, comprising three mutually reinforcing components: (1) growth mindset leadership as a driver of values and the direction of change (Fullan, 2020; Karakus et al, 2024); (2) collaborative structures and practices, such as PLCs and coaching (Lee et al., 2022; Gaol, 2021; Nwafor & Ololube, 2024); and (3) thriving school climate as a social container that strengthens well-being (Sahin, 2026; Gunawardena et al, 2020). Although principals and teachers differ in their views

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of school climate (Veletic et al, 2023), these three components interact cyclically and are reinforced by community partnerships (Bardach et al, 2022) and the alignment of education policies (Karakus et al, 2024).

These findings reveal a general pattern in which growth mindset leadership acts as a catalyst that enables the school climate to flourish. Such leadership does not rely upon hierarchical power but rather upon influence, empathetic communication, and learning by example. When principals demonstrate that they themselves continue to learn and adapt, teachers and students follow suit. Teachers' growth mindset has a positive, statistically significant relationship with students' growth mindset development (Mesler et al, 2021). Students are more likely to adopt a growth mindset in classrooms where teachers employ guided learning, and in schools that emphasise social-emotional development. Conversely, students are more likely to adopt a fixed mindset when teachers assign differentiated tasks based on perceived ability (Yu et al, 2022). This is referred to as deep learning leadership: leadership that focuses on meaningful learning for the entire school community (Fullan & Quinn, 2021).

However, not all contexts yield uniform results. In schools with a highly bureaucratic culture, the application of growth mindset values is often hampered by evaluation and reward systems that continue to emphasise compliance over innovation (Patras et al, 2023). The influence of transformational leadership and organisational culture on teacher performance, both separately and in combination, is supported by Raharja et al. (2022) and Nellitawati et al. (2024). The transformation towards a thriving school climate, therefore, requires structural support from top-level policy, for example, by revising the performance indicators for principals and teachers to include aspects of well-being and collaboration as measures of success.

## Conclusion

The school principal, as an educational leader who prioritises growth mindset principles and a dynamic, thriving school environment, is a key element that works in concert with others to foster long-term school well-being. A synthesis of 22 relevant national and international articles from 2020 to 2025 demonstrates that school well-being is dynamic and is fostered by organisational structures that support reflective leadership styles, a collaborative culture, and a shared willingness to learn among all school members. This thematic analysis identifies four principal trends: (1) increasing academic attention to school well-being; (2) the role of school principals with a growth mindset in motivating teachers and cultivating a positive school culture that is adaptive to developments in science and technology; (3) the positive impact of a thriving school climate on sustainable well-being; and (4) the development of an integrated framework linking well-being, educational leadership, and school climate as the foundation of the school ecosystem.

These findings, situated within the broader bibliometric landscape mapped by Obeidat (2024) and the empirical leadership evidence provided by Zhou and Guo (2024), indicate that the pathway towards long-term school well-being lies in educational leadership that prioritises inclusivity and a sense of collective togetherness in achieving the school's vision and mission. Consistent with national curriculum priorities and the SDGs for quality education, this review offers theoretical insights, policy implications, and directions for further research. Successful schools promote not only academic achievement but also a positive social-emotional environment in which every member of the school community feels safe, comfortable, valued, and appreciated.

Several strategic recommendations follow from the study's practical implications. First, school principals should receive training that prioritises mental transformation and emotional intelligence to develop reflective and compassionate leadership skills. Second, educational institutions and governments should adopt policies that place

teacher and student well-being on an equal footing with academic achievement as measures of school quality. Third, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) between schools and among teachers should be strengthened to promote social welfare and professional development. Fourth, the national curriculum should be implemented with attention to fostering collaboration, empathy, and creativity in schools, alongside flexibility in learning. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to link well-being with academic and social-emotional outcomes, to involve student perspectives through participatory approaches, and to examine the moderating role of school climate support in the effectiveness of growth mindset leadership.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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