

Well-Being Literacy: A Scoping Review of Conceptualization, Measurement, Outcomes, and Interventions

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Well-being literacy (WL)—the capability to comprehend and compose well-being language across contexts with the intention of maintaining or improving the well-being of oneself, others, or the world—is an emerging construct at the intersection of positive psychology, literacy studies, and health promotion. Despite growing attention since its introduction in 2017, the literature had not previously been systematically mapped. This scoping review followed the Arksey and O'Malley framework, with reporting per the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR). Six databases (PsycINFO, MEDLINE/PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, CINAHL, and ERIC), Google Scholar, and grey-literature sources were searched in March 2026 with coverage through 2025. Sixty-one full-text reports were assessed; 22 sources met the inclusion criteria, of which 17 with recoverable full text were charted, spanning 2017–2025 across samples from Australia, China, Turkey, Austria, Brazil, French-Canada, Israel, Portugal, and multi-country studies. The Well-being Literacy 6-item scale (Well-Lit 6), the sole validated instrument, showed consistent psychometric properties across Australian, Chinese, Turkish, Brazilian, and French-Canadian samples. WL was positively associated with life satisfaction and resilience and negatively with depression and anxiety, explaining incremental variance beyond emotion regulation. School-based positive education and group psychological training were associated with WL gains, sustained at one-month follow-up in one controlled study. Six priority gaps are identified: provisional measure, cross-sectional designs, limited representation of non-Western populations, absent randomized controlled trials, underexplored mechanisms, and restricted applied contexts. WL is a theoretically distinctive, practically actionable construct whose empirical potential remains to be realized.

Keywords. Well-being literacy; positive psychology; scoping review; well-being measurement; capability approach; positive education

The global burden of poor mental health, estimated by the World Health Organization to affect more than 450 million people worldwide, has intensified interest in proactive, capability-building approaches to well-being promotion (Martí-García, 2023). Traditional public health frameworks have focused heavily on diagnosing and treating mental disorders, a paradigm reflected in foundational constructs such as mental health literacy—defined by Jorm and colleagues in 1997 as "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention" (Jorm, 2000, p. 396). Similarly, health literacy, defined by the WHO as the degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand basic health information to make appropriate decisions, has been central to health promotion efforts for several decades (Lynch & Franklin, 2019). However, these established constructs share a predominantly deficit-oriented orientation, focusing on what is broken or absent rather than on capabilities and flourishing (Hou et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, a new construct has emerged: *well-being literacy (WL)*¹. First conceptualized by Oades and Johnston in 2017

as "mindful language use about and for well-being" (Oades et al., 2020, p. 697) and subsequently formalized by Oades and colleagues in a series of theoretical and empirical papers from 2020 onwards, WL is defined as the ability to understand and use well-being language across different situations, aiming to promote or enhance the well-being of oneself, others, or the world (Oades et al., 2021; Oades et al., 2020). This definition situates WL firmly within the capabilities tradition of Amartya Sen, positioning it as a freedom to be and to do in the domain of well-being, rather than merely a set of factual health-related knowledge (Oades et al., 2021).

WL is conceptually distinct from, yet related to, its predecessor literacy constructs. Unlike mental health literacy, which centers on recognizing mental disorders and help-seeking, WL explicitly orients toward positive psychology principles and the enhancement of flourishing (Hou et al., 2021). Unlike health literacy, which predominantly focuses on navigating health systems and understanding clinical information, WL emphasizes the role of language as a constructive medium for well-being experience and development (Oades et al., 2021). WL also draws conceptual parallels with emotional literacy, food literacy, financial literacy, and digital literacy, each representing a domain-specific application of the broader multiliteracies paradigm (Oades et al., 2021).

Since its formal introduction, WL has attracted increasing

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scholarly attention, resulting in theoretical papers, a validated measurement scale, cross-cultural adaptations, and exploratory intervention studies. However, the field remains nascent. No comprehensive, systematic synthesis of extant literature has been conducted to date. A scoping review is therefore warranted to map the conceptual landscape, identify what has been studied, in whom, and with what instruments and outcomes, and delineate knowledge gaps that should inform future research priorities. The following research questions guided this review:

RQ1: How has well-being literacy been conceptualized and defined in the literature?

RQ2: What theoretical frameworks underpin WL?

RQ3: What instruments have been developed to measure WL, and what are their psychometric properties?

RQ4: In what populations and contexts has WL been studied?

RQ5: What are the empirical associations between WL and well-being and ill-being outcomes?

RQ6: What WL-informed interventions have been reported, and with what outcomes?

RQ7: What are the key gaps in the literature?

Method

Study Design

This review was designed and conducted as a scoping review following the six-stage framework originally proposed by Arksey and O'Malley and subsequently refined by Levac and colleagues and the Joanna Briggs Institute (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010; Westphal et al., 2021). Reporting adheres to the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR), a 22-item checklist developed by Tricco and colleagues to ensure transparent, complete, and reproducible reporting of scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). Consistent with most scoping reviews, this study was not preregistered.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria: (1) A peer-reviewed journal article, empirical study, or grey-literature scale-development or measurement project pertaining to well-being literacy as a construct; (2) sources addressing conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, correlates, determinants, or applications of WL; (3) published in English language; (4) no date restriction applied, given the recent emergence of the construct (indexed literature identified from 2017 onwards).

Exclusion criteria: (1) Papers in which the term "well-being literacy" appears incidentally or tangentially without substantive engagement with the construct; (2) opinion pieces without conceptual or empirical content; (3) papers focused exclusively on adjacent constructs (e.g., health literacy, mental health literacy, financial literacy) without reference to WL; (4) conference abstracts for which no full text was recoverable; (5) book chapters. Book chapters were excluded from the charted evidence base because the review's aim at the charting stage was to map the empirical and measurement literature on WL; the substantial body of conceptual and theoretical WL scholarship published as book chapters (notably by the originating research group) is nonetheless drawn upon as background in the framing of the construct (see the Introduction and

the Results sections from Evolution of the Well-Being Literacy Construct through The Five-Component Capability Model of Well-Being Literacy) and in the Discussion, where it is cited as conceptual literature rather than counted among the charted studies. In operational terms, a source was judged to engage substantively with WL when the construct was named in the study aims or research questions, adopted as a guiding framework, or measured (via the Well-Lit 6, an adaptation thereof, or a construct-specific task); sources in which the term appeared only in keywords, passing citation, or general discussion were excluded as incidental. Examples of sources excluded on this basis include a study of emotional-literacy development that referenced well-being only in passing, a paper on literacy for sustainability, and records concerning reading literacy and numeracy in early-years and family contexts, none of which engaged the well-being literacy construct substantively. Studies of adjacent constructs (health literacy, mental health literacy, emotional literacy) were included only when they explicitly engaged the WL label or measured WL alongside the adjacent construct; thus, Burns et al. (2024) and Chng et al. (2022) were included because both explicitly investigate wellbeing literacy by name using construct-specific discrimination tasks.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

Systematic searches were conducted in six bibliographic databases (APA PsycINFO via ProQuest, MEDLINE/PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, CINAHL Ultimate via EBSCOhost, and ERIC) and in Google Scholar. Because well-being literacy is a named construct, the search targeted it directly using five exact phrases, searched in the title, abstract, and author-keyword fields of each database and combined with the Boolean operator OR: "wellbeing literacy," "well-being literacy," "Well-Lit 6," "Well Lit 6," and "wellbeing language." The search deliberately excluded broad keyword combinations and adjacent-construct terms; a pilot search using such combinations returned large volumes of off-target records without identifying additional sources that named the well-being literacy construct. Grey literature searches were conducted via Google Scholar, Open Science Framework registries, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, and institutional repositories and author profile pages. All searches were conducted on 14 March 2026, with coverage from database inception through 31 December 2025; publications dated 2026 were excluded so that the review window corresponds to 2017 to 2025. The five phrases were combined with the Boolean operator OR. The complete search strings as executed in each database, together with the grey literature search procedures, are presented in Supplementary Appendix S1. For Google Scholar, the first 200 relevance-ranked results per search string were screened, with duplicates across strings removed before abstract screening. Institutional repositories and author profile pages of core WL research group members were hand-searched. Reference lists of all included sources were hand-searched for additional relevant records, and forward citation tracking was conducted via Google Scholar for the five most-cited WL papers. All records identified through these channels were screened against the same eligibility criteria as database records.

Data Charting and Synthesis

Data were charted using a standardized extraction form that captured author(s), year, country, study design, population, adopted



Figure 1. The five-component capability model of well-being literacy (adapted from Oades et al., 2021)

WL definition, theoretical framework, measurement instruments, key findings, and limitations. No formal quality appraisal was performed, consistent with PRISMA-ScR guidance and Joanna Briggs Institute methodology for scoping reviews, because the aim of this review was to map the extent and nature of the evidence rather than to synthesize effect sizes or grade the certainty of findings (Tricco et al., 2018). Data were synthesized thematically using narrative synthesis. Descriptive statistics were used to characterize the body of literature by study type, country, population, and year. Thematic groupings followed the review's seven research questions.

Results

Study Selection

The phrase-focused search identified 181 records across the six databases (Scopus 86, Web of Science 42, APA PsycInfo 20, MEDLINE/PubMed 13, ERIC 12, and CINAHL 8), together with grey-literature records (Open Science Framework, 12; ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2). After removing approximately 86 duplicate records, approximately 105 records were screened; 44 were excluded at the title and abstract, and 61 were assessed at full text. Of these, 42 were excluded (31 book chapters, consistent with the eligibility criteria, and 11 with insufficient substantive engagement. The criteria are those in the Eligibility Criteria subsection of the Method), leaving 19 database records that met the inclusion criteria. Reference-list and forward citation tracking identified a further three eligible journal articles not captured by the database search (Waters & Higgins, 2021; Chng et al., 2022; Porfirio et al., 2022), yielding 22 included sources in total. Figure 2 presents the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram of study selection.

Full-text charting was completed for the 17 included sources with recoverable full text (15 peer-reviewed journal articles and two

grey-literature scale-development projects). Five further included records named the WL construct in their titles but were not recoverable in full text at the time of writing and therefore await charting; these are listed in Supplementary Appendix S1, and their addition may raise the number of charted studies, hence excluded. Two of the 17 charted sources were identified through grey-literature channels (Open Science Framework scale-development registrations).

Charted by study type, the 17 sources comprised six measurement or scale-development studies (the Well-Lit 6 development study and its Chinese, Turkish, and Brazilian/French-Canadian adaptations, together with two grey-literature scale projects), five correlational or cross-sectional survey studies, two intervention studies, one qualitative study, two conceptual or theoretical journal papers that introduced and formalized the construct, and one framework/proposal paper. By setting, the charted sources drew on samples from Australia (five sources), mainland China (four sources), and single studies conducted in Turkey, Austria, Portugal, and Israel, together with two multi-country studies (a Brazilian and French-Canadian invariance study and a five-nation community-adult comparison); the country of origin of the two grey-literature scale projects was not specified in the retrieved records. The literature spans 2017–2025, with accelerating publication rates from 2020 onwards, coinciding with the formal introduction of the WL capability model (Oades et al., 2021).

Evolution of the Well-Being Literacy Construct

The construct of WL emerged from the observation, advanced by Oades and Johnston in 2017 and further developed in subsequent publications, that language is innate to human social life and is central to how people relate to one another, and that how people relate is, in turn, central to well-being (Johnston & Oades, 2018).

The foundational premise is that literacy—understood as the control of language use—is context-specific and can be deliberately applied to the domain of well-being (Johnston & Oades, 2018). The earliest conceptualizations positioned WL as a plausible, generalizable capability underlying the efficacy of positive psychological interventions (PPIs), addressing two persistent challenges in the PPI literature: the problem of generalizability across contexts and the problem of non-sustained gains (Oades et al., 2020).

Oades and Johnston's original formulation (2017) framed WL as controlled use of well-being language, drawing on sociocultural literacy theory, which understands literacy not as a neutral, autonomous skill but as purposeful language practice embedded in social context (Johnston & Oades, 2018). This framing explicitly connected WL to existing "literacies" in allied fields, including emotional literacy, health literacy, and mental health literacy, while positioning WL as distinctively oriented toward positive mental health and human flourishing rather than deficit reduction (Oades et al., 2021).

The construct was significantly elaborated in a 2020 special issue of the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, in which Oades, Ozturk, Hou, and Slep introduced WL as a capability in the formal sense of Sen's Capability Approach and outlined five necessary conditions for its realization (Oades et al., 2020). The 2021 capability model paper by Oades and colleagues in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* provided the most comprehensive theoretical articulation to date, offering a multi-component definition and situating WL within an epistemological framework drawing on constructivism and contextualism (Oades et al., 2021). The unresolved definitional tensions arising from these successive formulations are examined in the Unresolved Conceptual Issues subsection of the Discussion.

Conceptual Definitions

Across included sources, two principal definitions of WL were in circulation. The first, and most widely used, derives from Oades et al. (2021): "a capability to comprehend and compose well-being language, across contexts, with the intention of using such language to maintain or improve the well-being of oneself, others or the world" (Oades et al., 2021, p. 719). This definition explicitly positions WL as a capability (in Sen's sense), encompassing comprehending and composing as its active dimensions, and underscoring the multimodal nature of language use—not merely reading and writing, but also listening, viewing, speaking, and creating (Oades et al., 2021). The second definition, employed in the development of the Well-Lit 6 scale, describes WL as vocabulary, knowledge, and language skills that may be intentionally used to maintain or improve one's or others' well-being (Hou et al., 2021). This working definition was chosen for operationalization because it aligns with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) definition of literacy (Hou et al., 2021).

In educational settings, WL has been further described as the ability to understand the concepts and language of well-being and has been identified as a "new construct within the field of positive education" that captures the connection between the words people use to describe well-being and their understanding of it (Waters & Higgins, 2021, p. 22). More recent formulations have described WL as the ability to intentionally communicate about and for well-being

in ways that are appropriate to the context and use multiple modes of expression, emphasizing its embeddedness in community and cultural discourse (Lemon et al., 2025). Across all definitions, three essential features are consistently present: intentionality, multimodality of communication, and contextual sensitivity. Points of divergence are equally instructive. The theoretical definition of Oades et al. (2021) frames WL as a capability in the sense of Sen, whereas the working definition underlying the Well-Lit 6 (Hou et al., 2021) treats WL as a set of vocabulary, knowledge, and language skills; the educational framing of Waters and Higgins (2021) and the communicative formulation of Lemon et al. (2025) occupy intermediate positions. This capability-versus-skills shift between theory, and operationalization is examined further in the Unresolved Conceptual Issues subsection of the Discussion.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Capability Approach. The most prominent theoretical framework underpinning WL is Sen's Capability Approach (CA), supplemented by Nussbaum's philosophical elaborations (Oades et al., 2021). The CA holds that effective conceptualizations of well-being must account for genuine opportunities to experience well-being as defined by the person, and that societies with the highest well-being are those that commit to maximizing freedom of choice (Oades et al., 2021). WL is conceptualized as a capability—what people can be and do—that enables individuals to convert environmental opportunities into meaningful well-being achievements, or "functionings" (Oades et al., 2021). The higher an individual's WL, the more options are available to convert internal or external environmental conditions into well-being experiences; if the skill level in WL components is low or environmental affordances are constrained, the capability level is correspondingly lower or absent (Oades et al., 2021).

Constructivism and Contextualism. WL is grounded in two additional epistemological commitments: *constructivism*, which holds that language shapes reality, and *contextualism*, which holds that words carry different meanings across contexts (Oades et al., 2021). The constructivist premise draws on a long tradition in the philosophy of language and literacy studies, supporting the view that language is not merely a tool for reporting pre-existing states but a mechanism for constructing social realities, including well-being experiences (Roache et al., 2025). The contextualist premise recognizes that the meaning of "well-being" varies across cultures, institutions, and developmental stages, and that WL must therefore be responsive to the specific discursive community in which it is exercised (Oades et al., 2021). People with high WL are aware of these contextual differences and adapt their language accordingly recognizing, for instance, that how one communicates to a 12-year-old about well-being differs markedly from how one communicates to a 60-year-old, and that even this difference must be further adapted for specific settings such as school versus community (Oades et al., 2021).

Multiliteracies Theory. WL draws explicitly on the theory of multiliteracies, which expanded traditional notions of literacy beyond alphabetic text to include pictorial, visual, aural, and combined symbolic systems (Oades et al., 2021). This theoretical commitment informs the multimodal scope of WL's definition, encompassing reading, listening, viewing, writing, speaking, and

creating as modes of comprehending and composing well-being language (Oades et al., 2021). By embracing multiliteracies, WL distinguishes itself from narrow conceptions of literacy as decoding text and positions itself as a richer, more ecologically valid capability for 21st-century life.

Positive Psychology and Related Constructs. WL sits within the broader intellectual tradition of positive psychology—the scientific study of what makes life most worth living—and is explicitly positioned in relation to positive psychology interventions (PPIs) (Oades & Mossman, 2017). PPIs are defined as treatment methods or intentional activities aimed at cultivating positive feelings, behaviors, or cognitions, and a large meta-analytic literature documents their effectiveness in enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Bolier et al., 2013). WL is proposed as a mediator or moderator of PPI outcomes—a capability that allows individuals to generalize skills across contexts and sustain gains beyond the intervention period—addressing two central criticisms of the PPI literature (Oades et al., 2020). WL is also situated within the Engine of Well-being Model, which organizes well-being theories around inputs, processes, and outcomes (Oades et al., 2021).

The Five-Component Capability Model of Well-Being Literacy. The formal capability model of WL comprises five interacting components that together constitute the construct (Oades et al., 2021):

1. Vocabulary and Knowledge: The first component requires proficiency in well-being-relevant vocabulary, the ability to articulate what one values and to speak meaningfully about well-being-relevant experiences—as well as substantive knowledge of evidence-based principles about well-being (Oades et al., 2021). Knowledge ensures that language use is "about something" meaningful and relevant to the individual. This component aligns with the WHO's conception of health literacy as the ability to access and understand health-relevant information (Lynch & Franklin, 2019).

2. Comprehension of Multimodal Texts: The second component encompasses the ability to comprehend well-being-relevant communications across multiple modalities: reading, listening, and viewing (Oades et al., 2021). In contemporary information environments, individuals with high WL can access and critically engage with well-being-relevant content across diverse platforms, including books, digital media, video, and social media. This comprehension dimension parallels the understanding dimension of health literacy (Speros, 2005).

3. Composition of Multimodal Texts: The third component addresses the capacity to compose well-being-relevant "texts" across multiple modalities: writing, speaking, and creating (Oades et al., 2021). Just as a skilled communicator adapts the register and modality of communication to the audience and context, a well-being-literate person composes well-being-relevant expressions that are appropriate to the value systems and social contexts of their interlocutors. Examples include verbally expressing one's feelings to a trusted other, writing reflective journal entries, crafting social media posts oriented toward well-being, or creating artwork as a vehicle for well-being experience.

4. Context-Sensitivity: The fourth component reflects the

insight—derived from the theory of contextualism—that language use must be sensitive to the who, where, and when of communication (Oades et al., 2021). Contemporary literacy theory frames literacy as a social construct shaped by contexts that can be physical (home, school, workplace) or digital (internet, social media). Context-sensitivity in WL involves metacognitive awareness of how well-being language must be adapted for different audiences, settings, and developmental stages, and the ability to enact this adaptation flexibly and purposefully.

5. Intentionality: The fifth and arguably most philosophically distinctive component requires ongoing intention on the part of the individual to maintain or improve the well-being of self, others, or the wider world through language use (Oades et al., 2021). This "habit of intention" aligns with Buddhist notions of right speech as part of the ethical eightfold path and implies a moral dimension to WL: language is not used neutrally but is deployed with a conscious orientation toward flourishing. The concept of mindful language—being aware of why language is used in certain ways and intentionally adapting its use—is central to this component (Oades et al., 2021).

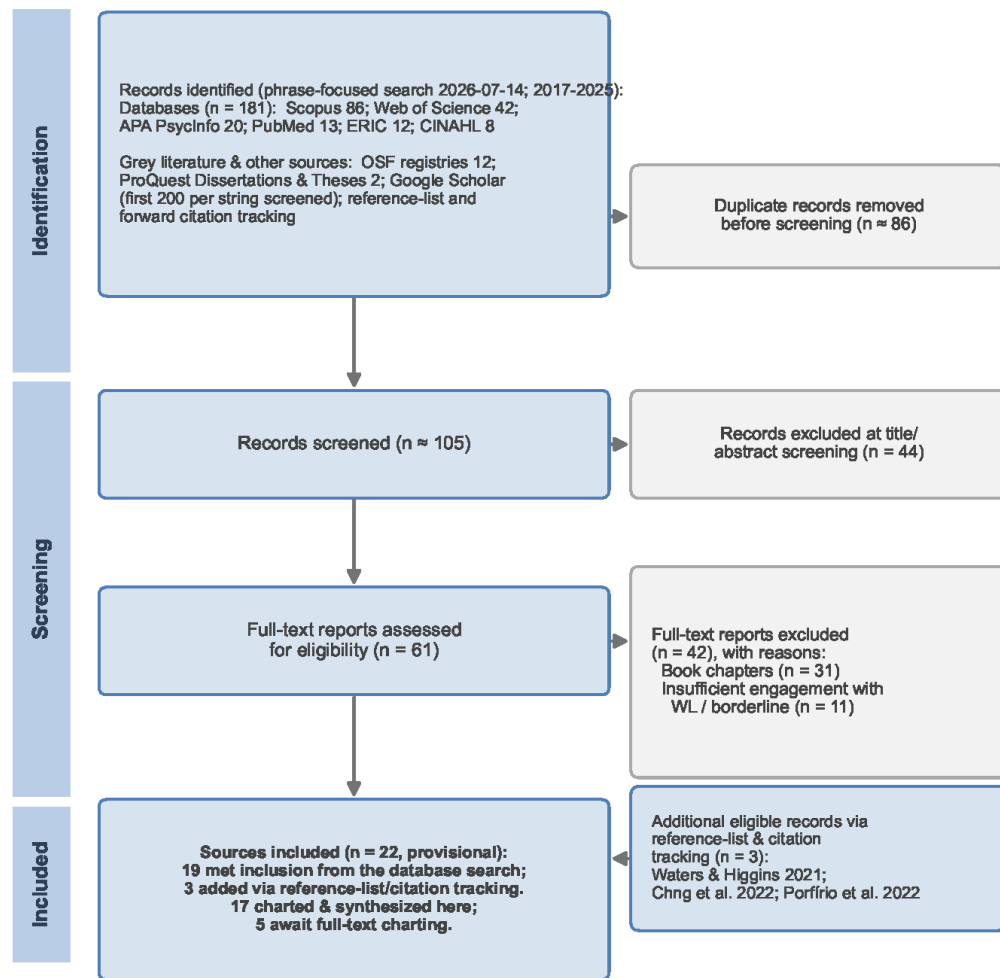
These five components interact dynamically with internal and external environmental conditions to produce WL capability at various levels. The WL capability model presents WL as a mediator (or moderator) in the well-being experience: a capability that influences the process by which individuals convert available well-being opportunities into meaningful well-being achievements (Oades et al., 2021). Unresolved conceptual issues surrounding this model are considered in the Unresolved Conceptual Issues subsection of the Discussion.

Well-Being Literacy in Relation to Adjacent Constructs

A necessary step in establishing the scientific legitimacy of WL as a distinct construct is differentiating it from conceptually related constructs. Four principal adjacent constructs emerge from the literature.

Health Literacy is defined by the WHO as the social and cognitive skills that determine a person's motivation and ability to access, understand, and use information in ways that promote and maintain good health (Ríos-González, 2022). The defining attributes of health literacy, as established in concept analyses, include reading and numeracy skills, comprehension, the capacity to use information in healthcare decision-making, and successful functioning as a healthcare consumer (Speros, 2005). WL shares with health literacy the emphasis on comprehension and use of domain-specific information, and the recognition that such literacy has functional consequences for well-being outcomes. However, WL differs substantially in its focus on language use as an active, generative, and intentional capability oriented toward positive flourishing rather than health system navigation.

Mental Health Literacy (MHL), introduced by Jorm and colleagues in 1997, is defined as "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention" (Jorm, 2000). MHL encompasses the ability to recognize specific disorders, knowledge of risk factors and causes, knowledge of self-treatment and professional help available, and attitudes that promote appropriate help-seeking (Jorm, 2019). MHL is specifically disorder-focused and is often assessed using clinical



Note. Identification counts are from a phrase-focused search on 2026-07-14 limited to publications through 2025 (five exact phrases: "wellbeing literacy," "well-being literacy," "Well-Lit 6," "Well Lit 6," "wellbeing language" in title/abstract/keywords). The deduplication figures (≈ 86 removed; ≈ 105 screened) are from record-level matching of 7 of the 8 sources; Web of Science (42) overlaps almost entirely and adds an estimated 0-2 unique records. Book chapters and borderline records were excluded per the eligibility criteria; the title/abstract-and-full-text screen is a first-reviewer pass requiring author verification at full text. Nineteen database records met inclusion; three further eligible journal articles were added via reference-list/citation tracking (total n = 22). Seventeen sources with recoverable full text were charted and synthesized; five WL-named records await full-text charting. The included count is provisional. Reporting follows the PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018).

Figure 2. The PRISMA-ScR flow diagram

vignette methods or knowledge questionnaires (Gilham et al., 2023). WL differs from MHL in its positive orientation: while MHL focuses on what is "broken" and needs fixing, WL focuses on what is possible and what can be cultivated (Hou et al., 2021). Empirically, a study found that community adults can often discriminate between indicators of mental health and well-being, though they frequently classify both as reflecting "both mental health and well-being," suggesting that the two are related but distinguishable dimensions of psychological health in lay understanding (Chng et al., 2022).

Emotional Literacy refers to the competence to understand and use emotions and has a long history in educational psychology (Allingham, 2007). WL encompasses emotional literacy as one domain of well-being-relevant communication but extends beyond emotions to include the full multi-dimensional landscape of well-being—relationships, strengths, meaning, coping, mindfulness, and other pathways. In educational contexts, WL research distinguishes

itself from emotional literacy research by adopting an explicitly positive psychology framework and emphasizing capabilities rather than deficits (Waters & Higgins, 2021).

Well-Being Measurement, as a field, differs from WL in that it focuses on assessing subjective well-being states rather than the linguistic and communicative capabilities that may enable or sustain them. Existing well-being measures are extensive systematic review of adult self-report instruments identified 99 measures covering 196 dimensions of well-being across six thematic domains—but none explicitly assess WL (Linton et al., 2016). WL is thus positioned as a process or capability variable distinct from, but predictive of, well-being outcomes measured by these instruments (Oades et al., 2020).

Measurement of Well-Being Literacy

The Well-being Literacy 6-Item Scale (Well-Lit 6). The primary measurement instrument for WL is the Well-being Literacy 6-item scale (Well-Lit 6), developed by Hou, Chin, Slemp, and Oades and reported in the International Journal of Environmental

Research and Public Health in 2021 (Hou et al., 2021). The scale was derived from the working definition of WL—vocabulary, knowledge, and language skills intentionally used to maintain or improve the well-being of oneself or others—and developed in alignment with ACARA's definition of literacy (Hou et al., 2021). Each of the six items maps to one of the five necessary conditions of WL (vocabulary and knowledge, comprehension, composition, context-sensitivity, and intentionality as a conceptual backdrop) (Hou et al., 2021). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The scale was initially validated across three Australian samples administered as part of a large community well-being project: students ($N=1,392$; M age 14.47 years, $SD=1.77$), parents ($N=584$; M age 42.69 years, $SD=6.32$), and school staff ($N=317$; M age 42.45 years, $SD=11.95$) (Hou et al., 2021). Exploratory factor analysis demonstrated that the six items loaded on a single independent factor, distinct from other well-being scales, with variance explained ranging from 56.59% to 69.74% across samples and factor loadings ranging from 0.675 to 0.901 (Hou et al., 2021). Internal consistency reliability was acceptable across all samples (students: $\alpha=0.84$; staff: $\alpha=0.91$; parents: $\alpha=0.91$) (Hou et al., 2021). Convergent validity was established through moderate-to-strong correlations (-0.268 to 0.566) in expected directions with life satisfaction, emotional/psychological/social well-being, emotion regulation, and resilience (positive), and with anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness (negative) (Hou et al., 2021). Incremental validity analyses demonstrated significant additive variance in life satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 0.027$), anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness over and above demographics, emotion regulation, and resilience (Hou et al., 2021). Hou and colleagues themselves acknowledged the Well-Lit 6 as "a useful provisional measure" and recommended developing a more comprehensive scale with separate subscales for each WL component, allowing fuller exploration of facets, antecedents, and consequences (Hou et al., 2021).

Cross-Cultural Adaptations and Validations. The Well-Lit 6 has been adapted and validated in several international contexts, demonstrating promising cross-cultural transportability. A Chinese-language version was developed and validated in a sample of 3,218 undergraduate students from five Chinese military academies (Jia et al., 2024). Psychometric analyses in this sample yielded very high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.973$; split-half reliability = 0.981), and the Chinese items all loaded on a single factor, explaining 93.01% of the variance (Jia et al., 2024). Coefficients of this magnitude, with a single factor accounting for 93.01% of item variance, may reflect item redundancy rather than superior measurement and should be interpreted with caution. The Chinese version demonstrated strong convergent validity (significant positive correlations with subjective well-being, life satisfaction, emotion regulation, and resilience; significant negative correlations with depression, anxiety, and expression inhibition) and incremental validity over established predictors (Jia et al., 2024). Notably, female cadets scored significantly higher on WL than male cadets, and senior-year cadets scored lower than those in earlier years, potentially reflecting the compounding pressures of thesis completion and assignment decisions in the final year (Jia et al., 2024).

A Turkish adaptation of the Well-Lit 6 was conducted and reported by Akalın and Işık (2024), demonstrating good fit indices in confirmatory factor analysis, test-retest reliability of 0.75, and a Cronbach's α of 0.88 in a sample of 307 adults (Akalın & Işık, 2024). The Turkish adaptation found a positive, moderate relationship between WL and general well-being ($r = 0.413$), and that socioeconomic level predicted WL at a low but significant level (Akalın & Işık, 2024).

A cross-national invariance study by Romano and colleagues (2025) compared Brazilian ($N=323$) and French-Canadian ($N=1,134$) populations using multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (Romano et al., 2025). Configural, metric, and scalar invariance were established across both nationality and gender, supporting the instrument's comparability across cultures and its applicability to diverse populations (Romano et al., 2025).

Objective Measurement Approaches. Recognizing the limitations of self-rated attitude scales—including their inherent subjectivity and susceptibility to social desirability bias—Wu (2022) proposed the development of an objective measurement tool for WL based on the PERMA model (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment), aiming to complement the existing subjective Well-Lit 6 and to examine the correlation between subjective and objective measures (Wu, 2022). This represents an emerging frontier in WL measurement that has not yet produced a validated published instrument. A further scale development initiative by Griffith (2023), registered on the Open Science Framework, aimed to develop a more comprehensive measure of WL for the general population, explicitly building on Hou and colleagues' recommendation for instruments with greater facet granularity (Griffith, 2023). This instrument remains in development. Both initiatives are registered Open Science Framework projects without published validation data at the time of writing.

Populations and Contexts Studied

School-Aged Students .The most extensively studied population in the WL literature comprises school-aged students, particularly in Australian educational contexts. Hou and colleagues' foundational measurement study included 1,392 students with a mean age of 14.47 years, demonstrating that WL is measurable in adolescent populations and is associated with key well-being and ill-being outcomes (Hou et al., 2021). Waters and Higgins (2021) examined WL in 231 students in grades 5–7 (ages 11–13) across three Australian schools, using qualitative thematic analysis of students' written descriptions of well-being before and after a teacher-based positive education intervention (Waters & Higgins, 2021). Conceptual and theoretical chapters by Oades and colleagues discuss WL as applicable from school age through adulthood, framing it as a literacy that can be progressively developed through education in ways analogous to academic literacy development (Oades et al., 2022; Oades et al., 2021).

University, College, and Upper-Secondary Students. University students have emerged as a major focus of WL research, particularly in China. Xie and colleagues (2025) examined the mediating roles of self-esteem and resilience in the relationship between WL and subjective well-being in 1,030 college students, finding that WL directly and positively predicted subjective well-

being ($\beta=0.206$, $p<0.001$) and that self-esteem significantly mediated this relationship (accounting for 47.78% of the total effect) (Xie et al., 2025). A dual-factor model study by Guo and colleagues found that a model incorporating both positive indicators (WL) and negative indicators (anxiety, depression) provided the best fit for the internal structure of mental health in a college student sample (Guo et al., 2024). Smid and colleagues (2024) examined WL in a qualitative study of 42 Austrian English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) learners in their final year of secondary school, identifying five categories of WL knowledge: conceptual understanding of well-being, factors impacting well-being, coping strategies, the role of systemic factors, and EFL-context-specific issues (Smid et al., 2024).

Military Personnel. Chinese military academy cadets have been a notable population for WL research, representing a unique sociocultural context with compounded academic and military stressors. The large-scale validation study by Jia and colleagues (2024, $N=3,218$) demonstrated the psychometric robustness of the Chinese Well-Lit 6 in this context and revealed higher reliability coefficients than in civilian samples, hypothesized to reflect the collectivist culture of military academies in which individual emotional well-being is intertwined with group cohesion and morale (Jia et al., 2024). An intervention study by Jia, Lyu, and Du (2023) applied group psychological training based on WL theory to 116 military cadets, finding significant interaction effects of group $\times$ time on WL scores, cognitive reappraisal, psychological resilience, and subjective well-being, with effects sustained at one-month follow-up (Zhen et al., 2023).

Parents and School Families. The WL measurement study by Hou and colleagues included 584 parents as a distinct sample and found similar psychometric properties for the Well-Lit 6 ($\alpha=0.91$) and comparable patterns of convergent and discriminant validity to those observed in student and staff samples (Hou et al., 2021). Theoretical papers by Oades and colleagues discuss WL as applicable in family contexts, where it can function as a resource enabling well-being-oriented communication between family members—for instance, through active listening as a generalized comprehension capability (Oades et al., 2021).

Teachers and School Staff. School staff were included in Hou and colleagues' foundational measurement study ($N=317$; $\alpha=0.91$), and the literature highlights teachers as critical agents in the development of WL in students (Hou et al., 2021). The Waters and Higgins (2021) intervention study framed teachers as the primary conduits through which WL is modeled and transmitted in schools: when teachers were trained in the SEARCH framework (Strengths, Emotional management, Attention and awareness, Relationships, Coping, Habits and goals) and its associated language, students' WL significantly expanded across multiple dimensions (Waters & Higgins, 2021).

Community Adults. Burns, Sargent-Cox, and Crisp (2024) conducted a cross-national investigation of mental health and WL in adults across Australia, the United Kingdom, Singapore, South Africa, and Malaysia ($N=1,044$) (Burns et al., 2024). This study employed discrimination tasks rather than the Well-Lit 6, finding that community members can mostly discriminate between mental health and well-being statements in initial tasks but tend to classify

most statements as reflecting "both mental health and well-being" when given that option, suggesting that for lay community members, distinguishing between mental health and well-being may be less important than focusing on overall psychological health (Burns et al., 2024). Chng and colleagues (2022) similarly investigated mental health and WL in a sample of 705 Australian adults, finding that participants generally discriminated correctly between mental health and well-being indicators, with those in a positively framed condition demonstrating slightly higher WL (Chng et al., 2022).

Healthcare Settings. Porfirio and colleagues (2022) investigated WL among healthcare professionals working in ambulatory surgery and operating room settings ($N=32$), finding that most were satisfied with their well-being at work and identifying resource management as a key factor requiring attention (Porfirio et al., 2022). This study used WL as a lens for examining professional well-being rather than applying the Well-Lit 6 specifically.

Empirical Associations Between Well-Being Literacy and Well-Being Outcomes

Associations with Well-being. Across all populations studied with the Well-Lit 6, WL demonstrated consistent positive associations with indicators of well-being. In Australian students, parents, and staff, WL was positively correlated with life satisfaction, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being (Hou et al., 2021). Among Chinese military cadets, WL was significantly and positively correlated with subjective well-being (r range: 0.166–0.280) and life satisfaction (Jia et al., 2024). In the Turkish adaptation study, a positive moderate relationship was found between WL and general well-being ($r=0.413$) (Akalin & Işık, 2024). Among Chinese college students, WL directly and positively predicted subjective well-being ($\beta=0.206$, $p<0.001$), with self-esteem and resilience serving as sequential mediators, accounting for 47.78% and 21.08% of the total effects, respectively (Xie et al., 2025).

Associations with Ill-Being. WL was consistently negatively associated with indicators of ill-being across studies. In the Australian foundational study, negative associations were found with depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness, ranging from -0.232 to -0.268 across student, parent, and staff samples (Hou et al., 2021). Among Chinese military cadets, WL was significantly negatively correlated with depression ($r=-0.224$) and anxiety ($r=-0.223$) (Jia et al., 2024). Incremental validity analyses in the foundational Australian student sample showed that WL explained significant additional variance in anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness after controlling for demographics, emotion regulation, and resilience, although ΔR^2 values were notably smaller for ill-being than for well-being outcomes (Hou et al., 2021). This asymmetry has been theorized to reflect the possibility that WL, as a positive-oriented capability, contributes more strongly to positive well-being than to the reduction of ill-being—consistent with arguments in the positive psychology literature that strengths contribute more to positive well-being while vulnerabilities relate more to ill-being (Hou et al., 2021).

WL as an Incremental Predictor. A key contribution of the WL measurement literature is the demonstration that WL explains incremental variance in well-being and ill-being outcomes above and beyond established predictors. In the foundational Australian study, WL explained incremental variance in life satisfaction,

depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness after controlling for demographics, emotion regulation, and resilience—the two most studied well-being predictors—providing preliminary evidence for WL's status as a distinct and uniquely valuable construct (Hou et al., 2021). In a study of Chinese military cadets, ΔR^2 values ranged from 0.036 to 0.067 for subjective well-being and life satisfaction, and from 0.009 to 0.017 for depression and anxiety, after controlling for known demographic and psychological predictors (Jia et al., 2024).

Mediating Pathways. Emerging research has begun to examine the mechanisms through which WL influences well-being outcomes. Xie and colleagues (2025) demonstrated that the pathway from WL to subjective well-being in college students was partially mediated by self-esteem (accounting for 47.78% of the total effect via $\beta=0.757$ for WL $\rightarrow$ self-esteem and $\beta=0.491$ for self-esteem $\rightarrow$ SWB) and that self-esteem and resilience together formed a significant chain-mediating pathway (accounting for 21.08% of total effect) (Xie et al., 2025). These findings suggest that WL functions as a cognitive resource that enables active identification of positive environmental cues, which, in turn, strengthens the self-system (self-esteem) and adaptive coping resources (resilience), ultimately enhancing subjective well-being (Xie et al., 2025).

Well-Being Literacy Interventions

Teacher-Based Positive Education Interventions. The most extensively documented WL intervention in the literature is the teacher-based positive education approach evaluated by Waters and Higgins (2021). The Visible Well-being (VWB) intervention trained teachers in the SEARCH framework across six overarching well-being pathways over an eight-month period using the principles of distributed learning, with students ($N=231$, ages 11–13) providing written descriptions of their understanding of well-being before and after the intervention (Waters & Higgins, 2021). Results revealed significant changes in student WL: the proportion of students with generic or unclear definitions of well-being decreased substantially (general descriptions declining by 40%, "don't know" responses declining by 15%) while specific SEARCH-pathway references increased significantly (total SEARCH score increasing from 30 to 170, $\chi^2=98$, $p<0.001$) (Waters & Higgins, 2021). Thematic analysis identified that student WL evolved in four keyways post-intervention: it became more detailed, strength-based, multidimensional, and relational (Waters & Higgins, 2021). New themes of agency, perspective, and connectedness emerged only post-intervention, reflecting an enriched conceptual understanding of well-being (Waters & Higgins, 2021).

Psychological Training in Military Settings. Jia, Lyu, and Du (2023) investigated the effect of group psychological training based on WL theory on military cadets ($N=116$), with the experimental group ($n=58$) receiving seven 90- to 100-minute group training sessions over 3 weeks (Zhen et al., 2023). Significant group $\times$ time interaction effects were observed for WL total score, cognitive reappraisal, psychological resilience, and subjective well-being (all $p<0.05$ to $p<0.001$), with these effects maintained at one-month follow-up (Zhen et al., 2023). This represents the first controlled intervention study directly testing a WL-based program on WL outcomes.

Storying Methods and Arts-Based Practices. In a conceptual book chapter cited here as background rather than as a charted study,

Colla, Williams, and Oades (2025) explored the intersection of WL and participatory storying methods, arguing that storying practices—drawn from oral traditions, qualitative research, and arts-based inquiry—can build WL by fostering shared understanding and generating insights that enable well-being (Colla et al., 2025). These authors propose that storying practices create a virtuous cycle at the nexus of research and practice: as WL is built through storytelling, the resulting well-being enables richer storying, which, in turn, further develops WL (Colla et al., 2025). This represents an emerging and promising yet empirically under-evaluated application of WL principles.

Positive Education Curriculum Integration. The potential for integrating WL into existing school curricula is discussed in conceptual literature. In a book chapter cited here as background, Oades, Baker, Francis, and Taylor (2021) argued that WL provides an avenue to integrate positive education into education systems by drawing on existing multimodal learning and teaching capacities while simultaneously addressing curriculum requirements—particularly in literacy education. This framing positions WL not as an add-on but as a conceptual bridge between well-being education and academic literacy instruction. Among the charted sources, Ronen and Kerret (2020) proposed "sustainable well-being literacy" as a framework for integrating positive education and environmental education in schools, offering 10 practical implementation rules (Ronen & Kerret, 2020).

Well-Being Literacy Across Cultural and Linguistic Contexts

An increasingly prominent theme in WL literature concerns the cultural and linguistic dimensionality of well-being and its implications for WL. Oades and colleagues' contextualist epistemological commitment acknowledges that the meaning of "well-being" is culturally variant and that WL must therefore involve different interpretations across settings with distinct cultural roots and language systems (Hou et al., 2021). Lomas's work on cross-cultural lexicography of well-being is directly relevant, demonstrating that over 1,600 "untranslatable" words related to well-being exist across the world's languages, organized into 12 categories, suggesting that WL is not exhausted by English-language concepts but extends to a rich cross-cultural vocabulary (Lomas, 2020). Joshanloo and colleagues identified four fundamental cross-cultural differences in conceptualizations of mental well-being—relating to the centrality of hedonic experience, self-enhancement, autonomy, and contextual factors—each of which would affect how WL is understood, measured, and applied across different global regions (Joshanloo et al., 2021).

The invariance of the Well-Lit 6 across Brazilian and French-Canadian populations (Romano et al., 2025) provides encouraging preliminary evidence for cross-cultural validity (Romano et al., 2025), and the successful Chinese adaptation suggests translatability beyond English-language contexts (Jia et al., 2024). However, all validated versions of the Well-Lit 6 remain anchored to an ACARA literacy definition that is itself embedded in an Australian curriculum framework, raising questions about whether the instrument captures culturally specific conceptions of well-being language in, for example, Indigenous communities, non-Western collectivist cultures, or low-income country settings (Sollis et al., 2024).

Well-Being Literacy in the Context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been discussed as a context of urgency for WL in the conceptual book-chapter literature, cited here as background rather than as charted evidence. Oades, Taylor, Francis, and Baker (2021) framed WL as both a model and a capability for transforming well-being education "during and post the COVID-19 pandemic," arguing that the habitual, intentional use of well-being language—and its six modes of communication—can serve as a mechanism for resilience during prolonged adversity and social disruption (Oades et al., 2021). The post-pandemic educational context, characterized by heightened student anxiety, grief, and mental health challenges, has intensified calls for well-being-oriented educational practices that can be practically integrated into existing teaching and learning structures, and WL has been proposed as a unifying framework for such practices (Oades et al., 2022).

Well-Being Literacy in Workplace and Organizational Contexts

Conceptual papers and book chapters by Oades and colleagues, cited here as background, discuss the workplace as an important context for WL application. Active listening—a generalized well-being comprehension capability within the WL model—has been highlighted as directly relevant to building positive workplace relationships, with evidence that listening styles such as active, empathic, and supportive listening increase positive affect, improve coping behaviors, and enhance individual and relational health and well-being (Oades et al., 2021). WL is proposed as a means for practitioners to understand and plan well-being communications in organizational contexts, and future research is called for to examine WL's role in organizational well-being programs (Oades et al., 2021). However, no published empirical study has applied the Well-Lit 6 or a validated WL-specific instrument to a workplace population to date, which represents a significant gap.

Discussion

State of the Field

The scoping review has mapped a nascent but rapidly expanding literature on well-being literacy, characterized by a small number of highly productive research groups—centered primarily on the University of Melbourne and collaborating institutions—and an accelerating pace of international replication and extension. The literature demonstrates a characteristic developmental trajectory common to newly introduced psychological constructs: beginning with theoretical conceptualization, proceeding to initial operationalization and scale development, and now entering a phase of cross-cultural validation and early intervention research (Oades et al., 2021; Hou et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2024). The degree of conceptual coherence achieved within a relatively brief period (2017–2025) is notable, with the five-component capability model providing a common framework that has survived across diverse empirical investigations. Much of the extant evidence, however, originates from a limited set of research teams and settings. The originating network centered on the University of Melbourne contributed the foundational theory, the development of the Well-Lit 6, the principal educational intervention study (Waters & Higgins, 2021), and several of the cross-cultural validation studies; the Chinese empirical

literature clusters within overlapping author teams working in military academy contexts. Fully independent replications thus remain scarce: to date, the evidence closest to independent replication comes from one Australian National University team (Chng et al., 2022; Burns et al., 2024), the Turkish adaptation (Akalin & Işık, 2024), and the Austrian EFL study (Smid et al., 2024). Consistently, the diversification of WL research beyond its originating networks is identified in the Implications for Research subsection of the Discussion as a research priority.

Conceptual Contributions and Distinctive Features

WL makes several distinctive conceptual contributions to the well-being science and positive psychology literatures. First, it explicitly addresses the language of well-being—the role of linguistic and communicative practices in constructing, sustaining, and transmitting well-being—a dimension that has been relatively neglected in mainstream positive psychology and well-being science, which tend to focus on psychological states, traits, and behaviors rather than on language as a well-being mechanism (Roache et al., 2025). Second, WL provides a potential mechanism for understanding how positive psychology interventions work and why their effects sometimes fail to generalize or persist: if WL is a necessary mediating capability, then PPI gains may be conditional on the development of WL, and interventions that fail to build WL may produce short-term state changes without lasting capability development (Oades et al., 2020). Third, WL's grounding in the Capability Approach positions it as sensitive to issues of justice, freedom, and choice in well-being—distinguishing it from approaches that impose predefined well-being outcomes without attending to individual values and agency (Oades et al., 2021).

Gaps and Limitations of the Literature

Several significant gaps in the extant literature were identified. First, the measurement gap: the Well-Lit 6 is an acknowledged provisional measure with only 6 items, lacks separate subscale scores for the 5 WL components, and is subject to single-factor solutions that may mask theoretically important facet distinctions (Hou et al., 2021). Comprehensive measurement of WL—including its comprehension, composition, and intentionality dimensions separately—remains an unmet need, and the planned objective measurement tool has not yet been published (Wu, 2022; Griffith, 2023).

Second, the longitudinal gap: almost all empirical studies of WL are cross-sectional, making it impossible to draw conclusions about the directionality of observed associations or the temporal dynamics of WL development (Hou et al., 2021). WL is theorized as a developable capability, but whether it increases over time, in response to which experiences or interventions, and with what consequences for well-being trajectories, remains unknown.

Third, the intervention gap: only two intervention studies have been reported, the uncontrolled pre-post evaluation by Waters and Higgins (2021) and the controlled group psychological training study reported by Jia and colleagues (2023), and no randomized controlled trials have explicitly tested WL-specific interventions. The field lacks randomized controlled trials with adequate sample sizes, active comparison conditions, and prespecified WL outcomes (Oades et al., 2020).

Fourth, the population and cultural gap: the extant literature is dominated by WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) populations, with the notable exception of Chinese military samples. Indigenous populations, communities in low- and middle-income countries, older adults, and clinical populations are conspicuously absent (Sollis et al., 2024). Given the explicit claim in WL theory that WL is contextually sensitive and culturally variant, the field urgently requires research on culturally diverse populations that are underrepresented in current evidence.

Fifth, the mechanistic gap: while emerging research has identified self-esteem and resilience as mediators of WL effects on subjective well-being, the precise psychological, linguistic, and social processes through which WL capability is acquired, exercised, and translated into well-being gains remain poorly understood (Xie et al., 2025). Research using experimental designs, ecological momentary assessment, behavioral observation, and qualitative methods is needed to map these mechanisms.

Sixth, the boundary conditions gap: little is known about the limits of WL or the conditions under which it may be ineffective or contraindicated. For example, WL theory has not yet addressed whether deliberate language about well-being can be counterproductive in certain cultural contexts, among people with certain personality profiles, or during acute mental health crises (Oades et al., 2021).

Unresolved Conceptual Issues. Beyond these empirical gaps, three conceptual issues remain unresolved in the extant literature. First, the capability versus skill/trait tension: theoretical literature defines WL as a capability in the sense of Sen, whereas the operational definition underlying the Well-Lit 6 treats WL as a set of skills, and the single-factor structure of the Well-Lit 6 sits uneasily with the five-component theoretical model. Second, the normative dimension of intentionality: the fifth component carries an explicit moral loading, in that language is deployed with a conscious orientation toward flourishing, and the literature has not resolved whether such intentionality is a definitional requirement, a correlate, or an aspiration. Third, boundary conditions with adjacent literacies: the discriminant boundaries between WL and emotional, health, and mental health literacy remain conceptually asserted rather than empirically established.

Implications for Research

Based on this review's findings, several priorities for future research are advanced. Priority research questions identified in the WL capability model paper—including how laypeople define well-being through language, how WL relates to well-being over time, how WL can be increased, and whether WL is a mediator or moderator of well-being interventions—remain largely unanswered and should direct research programs over the next decade (Oades et al., 2021). Development of a comprehensive WL instrument with validated subscales for each component is a prerequisite for more nuanced empirical investigation. Longitudinal cohort studies tracking WL alongside well-being outcomes are needed to establish temporal ordering and causal inference. Large-scale, adequately powered randomized controlled trials of WL-informed programs should be developed and preregistered.

Implications for Practice

WL has several important implications for practice. In educational settings, the evidence suggests that teacher-led positive education programs that explicitly develop well-being vocabulary, language practices, and multimodal communication skills can significantly enhance student WL in relatively brief time frames (Waters & Higgins, 2021). Schools can systematically integrate WL development into existing literacy curricula, leveraging the structural parallels between reading/writing instruction and well-being language instruction (Oades et al., 2021). In healthcare and public health settings, WL offers a complementary orientation to existing health literacy programs, shifting the emphasis from deficit management to capability development and from health system navigation to proactive well-being enhancement (Hou et al., 2021). In workplace contexts, WL provides a framework for understanding and improving communication about well-being between managers, teams, and organizations, with implications for leadership development, employee assistance programs, and organizational culture initiatives (Oades et al., 2021).

Strengths and Limitations of This Review

This scoping review offers a comprehensive, PRISMA-ScR-compliant synthesis of a rapidly emerging field that has not previously been systematically mapped. Key strengths include the breadth of the search strategy, the inclusion of both empirical and theoretical sources, and the attention to cross-cultural and measurement dimensions. Limitations include the rapid pace of publication in this field, which means that sources published after the search date are not captured, and the absence of formal quality assessment, which is methodologically appropriate for a scoping review but requires interpreting individual study findings with attention to design limitations. The absence of formal quality appraisal limits the strength of causal inferences that can be drawn regarding the relationship between WL and well-being or ill-being outcomes; the associations summarized here derive predominantly from cross-sectional designs and should be interpreted accordingly. Lack of protocol-registration and single-screener as limitations are noteworthy limitations as well. Given the small size of the eligible literature, the review's conclusions should be treated as mapping an emergent field rather than providing definitive evidence on effect sizes or causal claims.

Conclusions

Well-being literacy represents a scientifically promising, theoretically grounded, and practically relevant construct that occupies a unique position at the intersection of well-being science, positive psychology, literacy studies, and health promotion. Originating from the work of Oades and colleagues in 2017, WL has been formally defined as a capability to comprehend and compose well-being language across contexts with the intention of maintaining or improving well-being of self, others, or the world, and has been operationalized through a five-component model encompassing vocabulary and knowledge, comprehension of multimodal texts, composition of multimodal texts, context-sensitivity, and intentionality (Oades et al., 2021). The Well-Lit 6 provides a validated provisional measure with acceptable psychometric properties across Australian, Chinese, Turkish, Brazilian, and French-Canadian populations, providing preliminary

evidence that WL is empirically distinguishable from well-being, resilience, and emotion regulation, and that it explains incremental variance in both well-being and ill-being (Hou et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2024; Akalın & Işık, 2024; Romano et al., 2025). Preliminary intervention evidence suggests that WL can be developed through teacher-based positive education programs and group psychological training in diverse populations (Waters & Higgins, 2021; Zhen et al., 2023).

The field now requires a transition from conceptual elaboration and provisional measurement to rigorous, longitudinal, cross-cultural, and interventional research programs. The development of comprehensive WL measurement instruments with subscale granularity, the conduct of randomized controlled trials with preregistered WL outcomes, and the systematic study of WL in underrepresented populations are the most pressing research priorities. Well-being literacy may yet prove, as its proponents suggest, to be the catalyst for sustained and generationally transmitted well-being gains—but this promise awaits fuller empirical realization (Oades et al., 2022).

Notes

¹The difference between “well-being” and “wellbeing” is a distinction that is purely orthographic (a matter of spelling style: hyphenated vs. non-hyphenated), not conceptual. However, the author acknowledges that the choice of spelling may carry meaningful disciplinary and stylistic signals. For purposes of this review, the hyphenated form “well-being” is used throughout the body text, while original spellings are preserved in the titles of cited works and in the proper name of the Wellbeing Literacy 6-item scale (Well-Lit 6).

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethics Approval. This study did not involve human subjects or utilize individual, identifiable data. Therefore, an ethics approval statement is not applicable.

Consent Statement. This manuscript did not involve human participants, and therefore consent was not required.

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Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use. Artificial-intelligence tools (Anthropic Claude; Google Gemini; Scite; Grammarly) were used to assist with editing, searching, and generating figures. For instance, executing and documenting the database search strings, cross-database deduplication, a first-reviewer title/abstract and full-text screen subsequently verified by the author, and language editing and formatting]. The author reviewed and verified all AI-assisted

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