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Collaborative leadership between principals and school counselors as a predictor of students' PERMA well-being in wetland-based senior high schools

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Abstract

Student well-being is increasingly recognized as a core indicator of educational quality, yet its structural and leadership determinants remain underexplored in wetland-based school systems. This study critically examines whether collaborative leadership between principals and school counselors predicts students' PERMA well-being in public senior high schools in Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia. Using a multisite quantitative survey, data were collected online from 12 randomly selected schools involving 12 principals, 36 school counselors, and 515 students. Three Likert-scale instruments were developed from Stone and Dahir's framework and Seligman's PERMA model. Descriptive analyses show consistently high levels of collaboration. Structural analysis reveals a strong and significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$). These findings extend the literature on collaborative leadership and school well-being to an ecologically marginalized context and underscore the need for policies that institutionalize collaborative, data-informed, and emotionally responsive leadership practices.

Introduction

Students' psychological well-being has become one of the primary indicators of success in modern education, particularly as schools face increasing social, emotional, and academic complexity (Sedeh & Aghaei, 2024). From the perspective of positive psychology, well-being is understood as a state of student flourishing reflected through the PERMA model Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationssships, Meaning, and Achievement which emphasizes that students are not merely free from problems but are able to thrive optimally within their learning environment (Seligman, 2011; Kovich et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2025). This framework is increasingly adopted in international research as a foundation for understanding student well-being in educational contexts (Ramadhanti et al., 2023; Tan, 2023; Cheng & Chen, 2021; Wibowo et al., 2021; ElSayary, 2023; Lu et al., 2025; Duan et al., 2020).

In schools located in the wetland regions of Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan, geographic conditions, socio-ecological realities, and uneven access to educational resources present additional challenges for students (Aziz et al., 2022; Mohammad et al., 2022). These factors

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necessitate school leadership practices that are adaptive, collaborative, and responsive to contextual needs (Dahir & Stone, 2015; A'yun et al., 2024; Budimansyah et al., 2018). Principals play a strategic role in cultivating a healthy school culture, while school counselors serve as key providers of guidance and counseling services focused on student development and problem prevention (Hermawan & Pransiska, 2020; Reese, 2021; Bali-Mahomed et al., 2022). The professional interaction and collaboration between these two roles are essential to ensuring that students' well-being is supported in a sustainable manner (Seligman, 2011; Sumartiningsih et al., 2023; Nichols et al., 2017; Hendarman, 2022; Wibowo et al., 2021; Ramadhanti et al., 2023).

Previous studies highlight that effective collaboration between school leaders and school counselors can strengthen the emotional climate, enhance service accountability, and contribute to students' social and academic development (Jordan, 2022; Lowery et al., 2019; Geesa et al., 2022; Gonzales et al., 2022). At the same time, the emphasis on collaborative leadership models, the use of data in decision-making, and the presence of structural supports underscore that the quality of the principal–counselor relationship is a key determinant of the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services as well as the implementation of student development programs (Fajriani et al., 2023; Tumanggor, 2020; Maullasari, 2021; Saleh & Suriansyah, 2021; Hafiza & Firman, 2023; Mappiare-at et al., 2020; Vetrycia & Mukhaiyar, 2023; Dahir & Stone, 2015).

Nevertheless, collaborative leadership, professional collaboration, and PERMA-based psychological well-being among students remain underexplored, particularly within senior high schools located in wetland areas that possess distinct characteristics and intervention needs compared to schools in other geographic regions (Sumarmi, 2022; Ismail et al., 2022; Kasumaningrum et al., 2024; Kamila & Kustiwan, 2024; Wimberly & Brickman, 2018; Faizuddin, 2020; Harmon, 2017; Sari, Nor, Suriansyah & Sulistyana 2025). This research gap highlights the need for a deeper investigation into the extent to which collaboration between school principals and counselors can function as a predictor of student well-being (Lowery et al., 2019; Saputra et al., 2021; Hermawan & Pransiska, 2020; Jumail et al., 2024; Vetrycia & Mukhaiyar, 2023). Such understanding is essential for developing school-based interventions, strengthening educational leadership capacity, and formulating policies that enhance guidance and counseling services in ways that are more adaptive to local geographic and cultural characteristics (Adinda et al., 2023; Khusumadewi et al., 2023; Rio, 2021; Reese, 2021).

Building on this context, the present study emphasizes the examination of the structural relationships between principals' collaborative leadership, professional collaboration with school counselors, and students' psychological well-being based on the PERMA model (Alzahrani & Albeladi, 2023; Baharuddin et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022; Song et al., 2025). A quantitative design was employed to enable a comprehensive analysis of the latent constructs underlying these relationships (Mokodenseho et al., 2024; Platon, 2021; Krasniqi, 2021; Yıldız, 2021; Clemens et al., 2009). This study is expected to provide empirical contributions that enrich theoretical understandings of school well-being while offering new evidence regarding the role of collaborative leadership in wetland-based schools a context that has received limited scholarly attention.

Methods

Design

This study employs a multisite quantitative survey design to examine the influence of collaborative leadership between school principals and counselors on students' psychological well-being, as conceptualized by the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), in all schools located in the wetland areas of Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan. The design was selected because it allows for structural analysis across multiple school sites, enabling both descriptive and inferential conclusions about the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables. All

operational steps from defining the population and determining the sampling technique to distributing instruments and conducting statistical analyses are described in sufficient detail to allow the study to be fully replicated by other researchers.

Participants

The research population encompasses all public senior high schools in South Kalimantan Province during the current academic year, totaling 114 schools, 280 counselors, and 55,030 students enrolled in Grades 10 to 12. The population data were obtained from the Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan (Education and Culture Office of South Kalimantan Province, 2025) to ensure a proportional sampling structure. A multistage random sampling technique was employed to select the sample schools while ensuring the representation of wetland areas. In the first stage, all regencies and cities were included as the primary clusters. In the second stage, one school was randomly selected from each cluster, resulting in 12 selected schools. From each school, respondents were selected using simple random sampling, consisting of 1 principal, 2–3 counselors, and 35–40 students. The selection criteria were based on the student-to-counselor ratio stipulated in the Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nomor 111 Tahun 2014 tentang Bimbingan dan Counseling pada Pendidikan Dasar dan Pendidikan Menengah (Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 111 of 2014 concerning Guidance and Counseling in Basic and Secondary Education) and its derivative regulations. This regulation states that one guidance and counseling teacher should ideally serve 150–160 students and is required to handle at least 150 students per year across one or more educational units. The population distribution is presented in Table 1, and the actual respondents obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Population of Public Senior High Schools in Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan in 2025.

No.	District / City	Schools	School Counselors	Students	Student-Counselor Ratio	Proportion (%)
1.	Kabupaten Balangan	9	10	2,242	224:1	4.5%
2.	Kabupaten Banjar	12	33	5,663	172:1	11.8%
3.	Kota Banjarbaru	5	17	4,411	259:1	8.6%
4.	Kota Banjarmasin	13	60	11,362	189:1	18.8%
5.	Kabupaten Barito Kuala	15	26	5,527	213:1	10.0%
6.	Kabupaten Hulu Sungai Selatan	7	14	2,806	200:1	5.2%
7.	Kabupaten Hulu Sungai Tengah	9	25	3,920	157:1	6.8%
8.	Kabupaten Hulu Sungai Utara	6	13	1,699	131:1	4.5%
9.	Kabupaten Kotabaru	8	13	3,000	231:1	10.9%
10.	Kabupaten Tabalong	9	17	3,211	189:1	5.9%
11.	Kabupaten Tanah Bumbu	11	27	5,562	206:1	9.2%
12.	Kabupaten Tanah Laut	10	24	5,077	212:1	9.5%
13.	Kabupaten Tapin	5	7	1,550	221:1	3.4%
Total		**114**	**280**	**55,030**	—	**100%**

Table 2. Research Respondents Obtained

Respondent Group	Population	Target Sample	Sample Obtained	Statistical Adequacy
Principals	114	12	12	Adequate as organizational units; one principal per site ensures contextual representation and replicability.
School Counselors	280	24–36	36	Adequate for estimating exogenous constructs; sufficient stability for structural modeling.
Students	55,030	420–480	515	Very strong sample size; exceeds recommended threshold (>350), ensuring high analytical power.

The student sample of 515 participants meets the recommendations proposed by Kline (2023) and Hair et al. (2022), exceeding the minimum respondent requirements (>350) and ensuring parameter stability and high analytical power. The number of school counselors obtained (36 participants) is sufficient for the measurement of exogenous constructs, while the number of principals (12 participants) is adequate to represent school-level leadership contexts within a multisite study. The distribution of respondents by group is also illustrated in Figure 1.

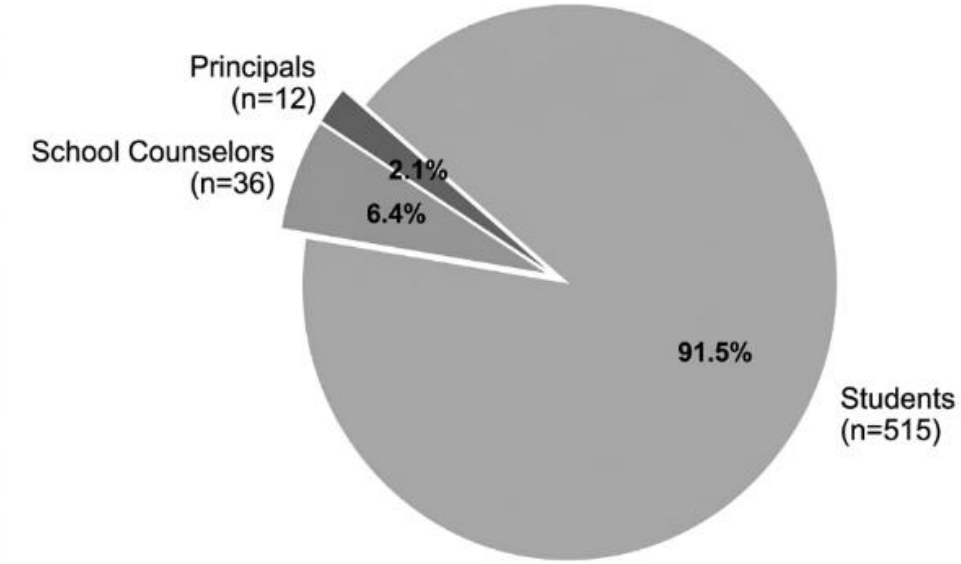

Figure 1. Distribution of Research Respondents by Group (N = 563 Total)

Figure 1 displays the proportional composition of research respondents. Students constitute the dominant group (91.5%, n = 515), reflecting the primary unit of analysis for the endogenous variable (PERMA well-being). School counselors represent 6.4% (n = 36) and principals 2.1% (n = 12), together providing data on the exogenous collaborative leadership construct. This distribution aligns with the multisite design objectives and supports adequate statistical power for structural modeling.

Instruments

The research instruments consisted of three separate questionnaires developed for principals, school counselors, and students. All items were developed based on Dahir & Stone's (2015) framework for collaborative leadership and Seligman's (2011) conceptualization of students' psychological well-being. Each instrument employed a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The instruments were

distributed online using Google Forms. Data collection was conducted between November and December 2025. Detailed information on each instrument's dimensions, indicators, example items is presented in Table 3, and psychometric properties (validity and reliability) are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Research Instruments: Dimensions, Indicators, and Example Items

Instrument	Dimension	Indicators	No. Items	Example Item
Principal Collaboration Scale (Dahir & Stone, 2015)	Accountability & Data-Driven Decision Making	Student data usage; Data-driven program evaluation; Evidence-based decision making	4 items	"Saya secara rutin menggunakan data siswa untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas program konseling." "Saya memanfaatkan laporan kehadiran dan prestasi akademik sebagai dasar kebijakan sekolah."
	Collaborative Leadership	Shared vision; Participatory decision-making; Counselor role support atau Support for the counselor's role	8 items	"Saya melibatkan konselor sekolah dalam merumuskan kebijakan program bimbingan dan konseling." "Saya mendorong konselor untuk memimpin program pengembangan siswa."
	Healthy School Climate & Culture	positive emotional climate; Students' sense of safety and well-being; Culture of mutual respect	8 items	"Saya memastikan setiap siswa merasa aman dan diterima di lingkungan sekolah." "Saya memprioritaskan kesejahteraan emosional seluruh warga sekolah."
	Coordination & Resource Support	Counseling service time allocation; Facility provision; Coordination among stakeholders	12 items	"Saya menyediakan ruang dan waktu yang memadai bagi konselor untuk menjalankan layanannya." "Saya mengkoordinasikan sumber daya sekolah untuk mendukung program bimbingan."
Counselor Collaboration Scale (Dahir & Stone, 2015)	Program & Service Collaboration	Collaborative program design; Collaborative service implementation; Cross-functional activity coordination	8 items	"Saya berkolaborasi dengan kepala sekolah dalam merancang program bimbingan tahunan." "Saya melaksanakan layanan konseling sesuai program yang telah disepakati bersama."

Instrument	Dimension	Indicators	No. Items	Example Item
	Accountability & Data Reflection	Data-driven service reflection; Program results reporting; Service impact evaluation	8 items	"Saya mendokumentasikan dan melaporkan hasil layanan konseling kepada kepala sekolah secara berkala." "Saya menggunakan data kasus untuk merefleksikan efektivitas pendekatan konseling saya."
	Professional Participation & Partnership	Involvement in meetings; Professional partnership; Collaborative professional development	8 items	"Saya aktif berpartisipasi dalam rapat dewan guru dan pertemuan lintas profesi di sekolah." "Kepala sekolah mendukung program konseling saya dengan memberikan sumber daya yang memadai."
	Empathic Leadership & Social Support	Emotional care; Leader social support; Professional role recognition	8 items	"Kepala sekolah menunjukkan kepedulian terhadap beban kerja dan kesejahteraan saya sebagai konselor." "Saya merasa dihargai dan didukung secara emosional oleh pimpinan sekolah."
Student PERMA Well-Being Scale (Seligman, 2011)	Positive Emotion (P)	Subjective well-being at school; Future-oriented optimism; Positive emotional experiences	6 items	"Saya merasa bahagia ketika berada di sekolah." "Saya memiliki pandangan yang optimis terhadap masa depan akademik saya."
	Engagement (E)	Active engagement in learning; Deep focus; Enthusiasm for learning	6 items	"Saya merasa terlibat penuh saat mengikuti pelajaran di kelas." "Saya berkonsentrasi dan hadir secara penuh dalam setiap kegiatan belajar."
	Relationships (R)	Peer relationship quality; Support from teachers and counselors; Sense of community.	6 items	"Saya memiliki teman-teman yang saling mendukung di sekolah." "Saya merasa didukung oleh guru dan konselor dalam menghadapi tantangan belajar."
	Meaning (M)	Sense of meaning in learning; Clear life purpose; Contribution to larger values	6 items	"Saya merasa bahwa kegiatan belajar di sekolah memiliki tujuan yang jelas dan bermakna." "Saya percaya bahwa pendidikan yang saya

Instrument	Dimension	Indicators	No. Items	Example Item
				tempuh memiliki makna penting bagi masa depan saya."
	Achievement (A)	Academic achievement; Sense of competence; Perceived progress	6 items	"Saya merasa bangga atas pencapaian akademik yang saya raih di sekolah." "Saya mengalami kemajuan nyata dalam penguasaan materi pelajaran."

Note: All instruments used a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Example items are written in Bahasa Indonesia to reflect the actual instrument administered to participants. Instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing prior to data collection.

Table 4. Summary of Validity and Reliability Coefficients for All Instruments

Instrument / Dimension	Factor Loading (min)	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Principal Collaboration Scale	≥ 0.62	0.84	0.52	0.86	Valid & Reliable; CFA confirmed; HTMT < 0.85
Accountability & Data-Driven	0.64	0.82	0.54	0.83	Valid per CFA criteria
Collaborative Leadership	0.62	0.81	0.52	0.84	Valid per CFA criteria
Healthy School Climate	0.65	0.83	0.55	0.85	Valid per CFA criteria
Coordination & Resource Support	0.63	0.80	0.51	0.82	Valid per CFA criteria
Counselor Collaboration Scale	≥ 0.60	0.82	0.51	0.83	Valid & Reliable; CFA confirmed; CR ≥ 0.70
Program & Service Collaboration	0.63	0.82	0.52	0.83	Valid per CFA criteria
Accountability & Data Reflection	0.62	0.80	0.51	0.82	Valid per CFA criteria
Professional Participation	0.60	0.81	0.50	0.81	Valid per CFA criteria
Empathic Leadership & Social Support	0.61	0.80	0.51	0.81	Valid per CFA criteria
Student PERMA Well-Being Scale	≥ 0.61	0.83	0.53	0.87	Valid & Reliable; All loadings ≥ 0.50; α ≥ 0.80
Positive Emotion (P)	0.62	0.82	0.53	0.83	Valid per CFA criteria
Engagement (E)	0.65	0.84	0.55	0.85	Valid per CFA criteria
Relationships (R)	0.63	0.83	0.53	0.84	Valid per CFA criteria
Meaning (M)	0.64	0.83	0.54	0.85	Valid per CFA criteria

Achievement (A)	0.61	0.81	0.52	0.83	Valid per CFA criteria

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis; HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. All values meet the recommended thresholds: Factor Loading ≥ 0.50; CR ≥ 0.70; AVE ≥ 0.50; Cronbach's α ≥ 0.70; HTMT < 0.85 (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023).

Table 4 presents the psychometric properties of all three instruments used in this study. The Principal Collaboration Scale demonstrated adequate construct validity with factor loadings ranging from 0.62 to 0.65, Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.84, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.52, and Cronbach's α of 0.86. The Counselor Collaboration Scale yielded factor loadings between 0.60 and 0.63, CR of 0.82, AVE of 0.51, and α of 0.83. The Student PERMA Well-Being Scale produced factor loadings between 0.61 and 0.65, CR of 0.83, AVE of 0.53, and α of 0.87. All values meet the recommended thresholds proposed by Hair et al. (2022) and Kline (2023): factor loadings ≥ 0.50, CR ≥ 0.70, AVE ≥ 0.50, Cronbach's α ≥ 0.70, and HTMT < 0.85. These results collectively confirm that all instruments possess strong construct validity and satisfactory reliability, supporting the robustness of the measurement model for subsequent structural equation modelling.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through institutional contacts. School principals and counselors were contacted directly, while students completed instruments via links administered by their respective schools. All participants provided informed consent. The study followed ethical standards, including voluntary participation, confidentiality safeguards, and institutional ethics approval. Instruments were first pilot-tested and validated through expert review prior to full deployment. The instruments were then distributed online to ensure equitable access across geographically dispersed wetland school locations.

Data Analysis

The analysis procedure began with data cleaning, examination of missing values, outlier detection, and assessment of univariate and multivariate normality. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was then estimated using the maximum likelihood approach. Model fit was evaluated using the χ^2/df ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Construct validity was examined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), applying criteria of factor loadings ≥ 0.50 and composite reliability ≥ 0.70, while discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. For qualitative aspects, descriptive means and standard deviations were computed for each dimension. Statistical analyses were conducted using AMOS 24.0.

Results

This section presents and interprets the key findings of the multisite quantitative study examining collaborative leadership between school principals and school counselors as a predictor of student well-being (PERMA) in wetland-based schools. Its primary purpose is to explain how the findings address the research hypotheses and advance theoretical understanding, particularly within the frameworks proposed by Dahir & Stone (2015) and Seligman (2011).

Principal Counselor Collaboration: Principals' Perspectives

Principals' perceptions of principal–school counselor collaboration indicate that the overall level of collaboration falls within the very strong category ($\mu = 4.335$; $\sigma = 0.633$). This finding provides strong preliminary evidence that the leadership foundations within the sampled schools are well positioned to support comprehensive guidance and counseling

services (Tumanggor, 2020; Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020; Omollo et al., 2022). Detailed findings for each dimension of collaboration are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Mean Scores by Dimension of Principal Collaboration

No.	Collaboration Dimension	Mean Score (μ)	Std Dev (σ)	Interpretation
1.	Accountability and Data-Driven Decision Making	4.486	0.880	Very Strong (Highest)
2.	Collaborative Leadership	4.361	0.577	Very Strong
3.	Healthy School Climate and Culture	4.298	0.669	Very Strong
4.	Coordination and Resource Support	4.194	0.554	Strong (Lowest)
Total		**4.335**	**0.633**	**Very Strong**

Note: All dimensions fall within the "Very Strong" or "Strong" categories, indicating overall positive perceptions of collaboration among principals. Scale: 4.21–5.00 = Very Strong; 3.41–4.20 = Strong.

This pattern is illustrated in Figure 2.

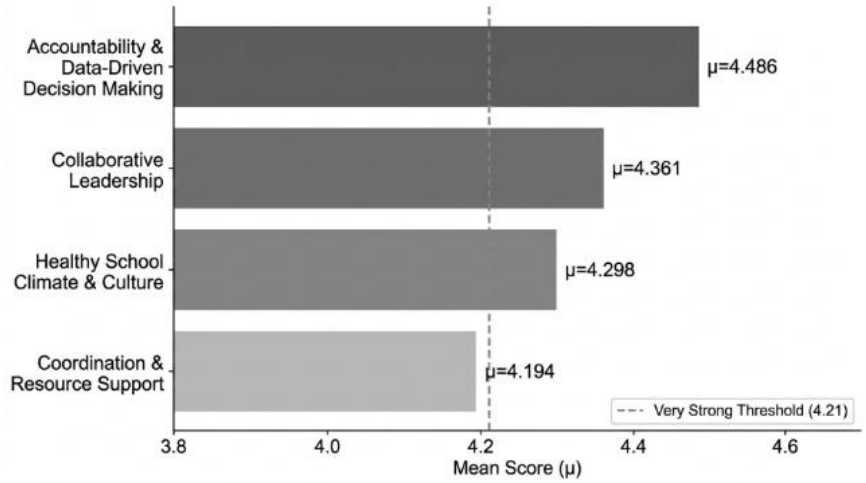

Figure 2. Comparison of Mean Scores Across Dimensions of Principal–Counselor Collaboration Based on Principals' Perceptions

Figure 2 displays a horizontal bar chart comparing mean scores across the four dimensions of principal collaboration. The highest-rated dimension, Accountability and Data-Driven Decision Making (μ = 4.486), surpasses the "Very Strong" threshold (4.21), while Coordination and Resource Support (μ = 4.194), though still high, falls just below this threshold, indicating this as the relative area of constraint. The findings indicate that the strongest dimension in principals' perceptions of collaboration is accountability and data-driven decision making (μ = 4.486). This high mean score underscores principals' strong commitment to using student data such as attendance records, academic achievement, and case reports as a foundational basis for school-level decision making (Phillips et al., 2024). This pattern is highly consistent with the framework proposed by Dahir & Stone (2015), which emphasizes that proactive, data-informed leadership constitutes the core of effective comprehensive school counseling programs (Dahir & Stone, 2003; Lowery et al., 2019; Isrofin et al., 2024).

A significant contrast emerges in the weakest dimension, namely coordination and resource support (μ = 4.194). Although this aspect remains within the strong category, its

comparatively lower score suggests that principals face their greatest challenges not in their intention to collaborate which is notably high but rather in the logistical implementation of collaboration (Saputra et al., 2021; Tahili et al., 2021; Rasmitadila et al., 2022; Aryani & Haryadi, 2023). Within the context of wetland-based schools, such resource constraints may be further intensified by geographical and administrative barriers (Kasumaningrum et al., 2024; Sasaki et al., 2024).

Principal Counselor Collaboration: Counselors' Perspectives

School counselors' perceptions of principal school counselor collaboration indicate that the overall level of collaboration from the counselors' perspective falls within the strong category ($\mu = 4.193$; $\sigma = 0.553$). This score is slightly lower than principals' own perceptions ($\mu = 4.335$), suggesting the presence of differing interpretations regarding the effectiveness of the working relationship. Detailed findings across specific collaboration dimensions are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Mean Scores by Dimension of Counselor Collaboration

No.	Collaboration Dimension	Mean Score (μ)	Std Dev (σ)	Interpretation
1.	Program and Service Collaboration	4.255	0.632	Very Strong (Highest)
2.	Accountability and Data Reflection	4.208	0.583	Strong
3.	Professional Participation and Partnership	4.167	0.595	Strong
4.	Empathic Leadership and Social Support	4.151	0.590	Strong (Lowest)
Total		**4.193**	**0.553**	**Strong**

Note: Mean score interpretations follow the scale: 4.21–5.00 = Very Strong; 3.41–4.20 = Strong.

The visual representation comparing the mean scores across dimensions is presented in Figure 3.

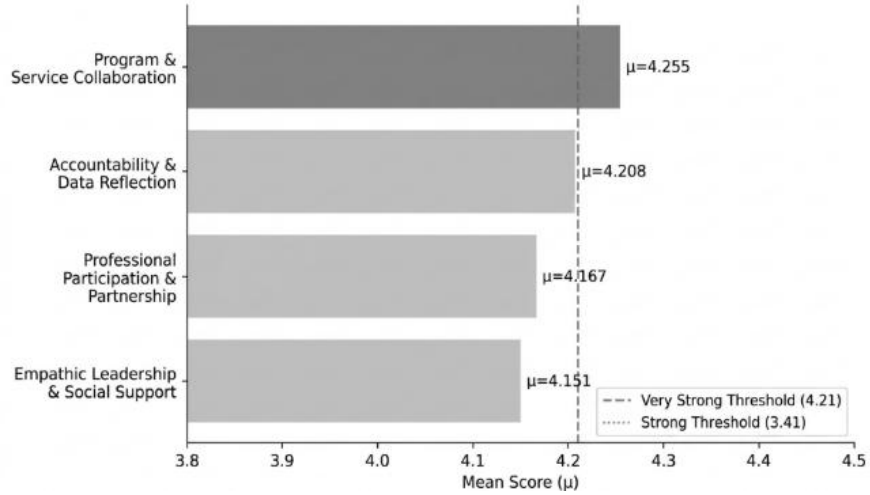

Figure 3. Comparison of Mean Scores Across Dimensions of Principal–Counselor Collaboration Based on Counselors' Perceptions

Figure 3 presents a horizontal bar chart comparing mean scores across the four dimensions of counselor-perceived collaboration. The color differentiation highlights Program & Service Collaboration (μ = 4.255) as the sole dimension reaching the "Very Strong" threshold (4.21), while the remaining three dimensions cluster within the "Strong" range (3.41–4.20). The Empathic Leadership & Social Support dimension (μ = 4.151) is notably the lowest-rated, suggesting a gap in emotional and relational support from school leadership. These results indicate that the primary strength of collaboration, from the counselors' perspective, lies in program and service collaboration (μ = 4.255). This score falls within the very strong category, suggesting that school counselors perceive themselves as effective in jointly designing programs with principals and implementing cross-functional activities (Nurmasari & Ramdhani, 2023; Saputra et al., 2021; Jumail et al., 2024). This finding aligns with principals' emphasis on data-driven accountability the highest-rated dimension from the principals' perspective (μ = 4.486) where systematic use of data naturally facilitates the development of structured and goal-oriented programs (Dahir & Stone, 2003; Bukhari, et al. 2024; Isrofin et al., 2024; Lowery et al., 2019).

However, the weakest dimension reported by school counselors concerns empathic leadership and social support (μ = 4.151). Although this dimension remains within the strong category, its comparatively lower score highlights vulnerabilities in interpersonal relations, emotional support, and the assurance of a positive school climate (Nakamura & Milner, 2023; Goetz et al., 2024). This gap is particularly critical because this dimension directly feeds into the affective component of student well-being Positive Emotion, which also represents the lowest-scoring dimension of the dependent variable (Turner et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2017; Crandall & Crandall, 2020). Consequently, efforts to strengthen collaboration should prioritize the enhancement of principals' empathic leadership, which would enable counselors to foster a more supportive school environment and ultimately improve the Positive Emotion dimension within the PERMA framework (Au & Kennedy, 2018; Chue et al., 2024; Pant & Shiwakoti, 2025).

PERMA Model of Student Well-Being

Students' responses regarding psychological well-being based on the PERMA model indicate that overall well-being falls within the strong category (μ = 3.856; σ = 0.431), confirming that students in the sampled schools experience a generally positive level of psychological quality of life. Detailed data across the five dimensions of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Mean Scores for Student Psychological Well-Being Dimensions (PERMA)

No.	PERMA Dimension	Mean Score (μ)	Std Dev (σ)	Interpretation
1.	Meaning (M)	4.039	0.575	Strong (Highest)
2.	Relationships (R)	3.845	0.509	Strong
3.	Engagement (E)	3.844	0.505	Strong
4.	Achievement (A)	3.826	0.498	Strong
5.	Positive Emotion (P)	3.727	0.508	Strong (Lowest)
Total		**3.856**	**0.431**	**Strong**

Note: Mean score interpretation follows this scale: 3.41–4.20 = Strong; 4.21–5.00 = Very Strong.

The visual representation comparing the mean scores across dimensions is presented in Figure 4. The trend across PERMA dimensions is further illustrated in Figure 5.

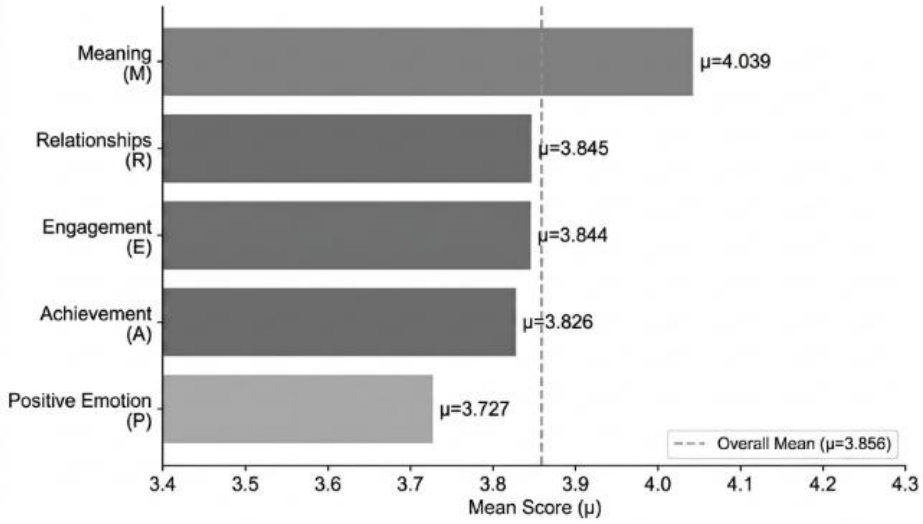

Figure 4. Comparison of Mean Scores Across PERMA Dimensions of Students' Psychological Well-Being

Figure 4 presents a horizontal bar chart comparing mean scores across the five PERMA dimensions. Meaning (M) emerges as the highest-rated dimension (μ = 4.039), while Positive Emotion (P) is the lowest (μ = 3.727), marked in a distinctive color to highlight the affective gap. The overall mean line (μ = 3.856) serves as a reference to contextualize the relative positioning of each dimension. The bar chart clearly visualizes that Relationships (R), Engagement (E), and Achievement (A) cluster closely together in the mid-range, suggesting relatively balanced development across the cognitive and relational components of well-being.

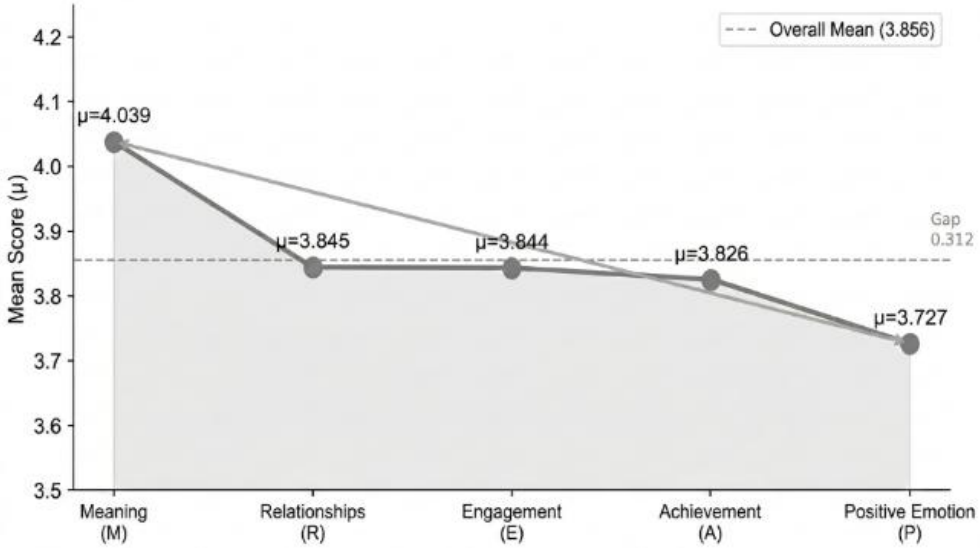

Figure 5. Trend of Mean Scores Across PERMA Dimensions—Affective Gap Between Meaning and Positive Emotion

Figure 5 illustrates the trend of mean scores across PERMA dimensions as a line graph, revealing a consistent downward trajectory from Meaning (μ = 4.039) to Positive Emotion (μ = 3.727). The shaded area beneath the line emphasizes the cumulative gap, while the double-headed arrow between Meaning and Positive Emotion (Δ = 0.312) quantifies the affective deficit. These results indicate that the strongest dimension of students' well-being is meaning (μ = 4.039), which occupies the upper range of the "strong" category. The high score

underscores the effectiveness of the school environment in communicating educational goals and values, thereby facilitating students' sense of purpose and life satisfaction (Kovich et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023; Sedeh & Aghaei, 2024). In contrast, the weakest dimension is positive emotion ($\mu = 3.727$), indicating a notable affective gap in students' lived experiences at school. This contrast between high meaning and lower positive emotion suggests that school programs may be overly oriented toward goal attainment while providing insufficient space for direct emotional support (Leng & Zhang, 2025; Chu, 2022). This pattern is further reinforced by school counselors' perceptions, which identify empathic leadership as the weakest aspect of collaboration (Goetz et al., 2024; McConnell et al., 2020).

The Influence of Principal–School Counselor Collaboration on Students' Psychological Well-Being

The results of the structural model testing indicate that, overall, the research hypothesis is supported by very strong empirical evidence. The standardized path coefficient (β) between the exogenous variable of principal–school counselor collaboration and the endogenous variable of students' psychological well-being is 0.82, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, indicating a very strong, positive, and statistically significant effect. The structural model demonstrates an excellent level of model fit (CFI > 0.95; RMSEA < 0.08). Results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Summary of Structural Path Coefficients and Model Fit Assessment

No.	Structural Path Hypothesis	Standardized β	p-value	Interpretation
1	Collaboration → Student Well-Being	**0.82**	< 0.001	Very strong positive and significant effect
	Model Fit		CFI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.08	

Note: The empirical findings demonstrate that collaboration between principals and school counselors has a very strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on students' psychological well-being.

This relationship is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

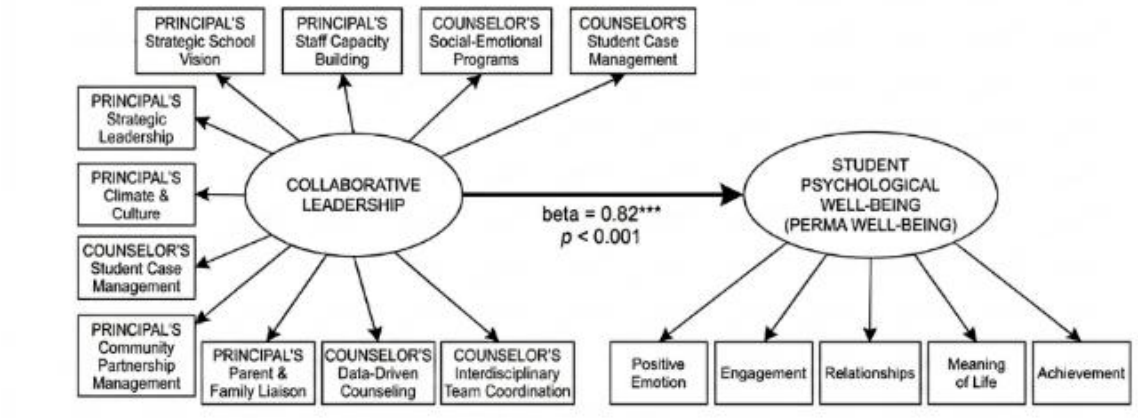

Figure 6. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Showing the Critical Path Coefficients Between Collaborative Leadership and Student Well-Being

Figure 6 presents the SEM path diagram illustrating the structural relationships between collaborative leadership (exogenous latent variable) and students' PERMA well-being (endogenous latent variable). The central path coefficient ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$) is displayed prominently, confirming the strong predictive role of principal–counselor collaboration. The diagram also displays the measurement indicators of each latent construct and the model fit statistics (CFI > 0.95; RMSEA < 0.08), validating the adequacy of the structural model. The

path coefficient β = 0.82 represents a key finding, indicating that improvements in the effectiveness of collaboration between principals and school counselors contribute substantially to enhanced student well-being (Lowery et al., 2019). This finding strongly supports the perspective of Dahir & Stone (2015), who position school counselors as collaborative leaders working alongside principals in designing school systems focused on student outcomes (Dahir & Stone, 2003; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Effective collaboration establishes essential systemic conditions such as a strong emphasis on accountability and data-driven decision making that enable school counselors to shift from predominantly reactive roles to proactive, data-informed program planning (Beasley & Ieva, 2022; Mean, Schwartz, et al., 2019; Yıldız, 2021; Geesa et al., 2024).

Although the overall effect was very strong (β = 0.82), a more detailed examination reveals a critical gap warranting future qualitative investigation. First, students reported meaning as the highest dimension of psychological well-being (μ = 4.039), reflecting the positive impact of strong collaboration in program planning. Second, students identified positive emotion as the weakest dimension (μ = 3.727). Third, school counselors reported empathetic leadership and social support as the weakest dimension of collaboration (μ = 4.151). These patterns indicate an implicit relationship between psychological well-being and collaborative practices: collaboration focused primarily on structure and program implementation appears effective in predicting students' sense of meaning but remains insufficient in fostering an affective climate (Seligman, 2011; Paolini, 2019; Nichols et al., 2017). To optimize well-being outcomes, the qualitative focus of collaboration must be expanded, requiring school principals to place greater emphasis on empathetic leadership and social support toward school counselors (Kilag et al., 2023; Geesa et al., 2024; Farley, 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study require interpretation within the intersection of collaborative leadership theory and positive psychology, particularly the integration of the framework proposed by Dahir and Stone (2015) with the PERMA model of well-being (Seligman, 2011). The statistically strong path coefficient (β = 0.82, $p < 0.001$) indicates a robust structural association between principal counselor collaboration and students' psychological well-being, suggesting that leadership configuration operates not merely as a contextual variable but as a central predictive mechanism shaping student flourishing. However, this inference rests on an implicit assumption that the observed covariance reflects directional influence rather than reciprocal or omitted-variable relationships; given the cross-sectional survey design, causal language should be treated cautiously.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results reinforce the argument that school counselors function as systemic change agents when embedded within collaborative leadership structures (Dahir & Stone, 2015; Beasley & Ieva, 2022). The high mean scores on accountability and data-driven decision-making (μ = 4.486) indicate that collaboration is operationalized primarily through technocratic mechanisms data utilization, program evaluation, and evidence-based planning. This aligns with literature emphasizing that data-informed cultures enhance program coherence and institutional effectiveness (Lowery et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2024). However, an underlying assumption emerges: that data-driven practices are inherently beneficial for student well-being. This assumption is only partially supported, as the PERMA results demonstrate uneven outcomes across dimensions, particularly the persistent deficit in Positive Emotion (μ = 3.727), indicating that technocratic collaboration may privilege cognitive–instrumental outcomes over affective ones.

A critical discrepancy appears between principals' and counselors' perceptions of collaboration (μ = 4.335 vs. μ = 4.193). This gap suggests the presence of perceptual asymmetry, which may indicate latent organizational misalignment. Prior research has shown that differences in role expectations and communication patterns can weaken the functional

impact of collaboration despite high reported levels (Geesa et al., 2022; Gonzales et al., 2022). The present findings are consistent with this interpretation: while programmatic collaboration is rated highly ($\mu = 4.255$), empathic leadership and social support remain the weakest dimension ($\mu = 4.151$). This internal inconsistency challenges the implicit claim that "strong collaboration" is homogeneous; instead, collaboration appears multidimensional, with structural and relational components operating at different levels of effectiveness.

When interpreted through the PERMA framework, the dominance of Meaning ($\mu = 4.039$) over Positive Emotion suggests a structural imbalance in how well-being is produced within the school system. The data indicate that students perceive their educational experience as purposeful and goal-oriented, which aligns with findings that structured, value-driven environments enhance meaning-making processes (Kovich et al., 2023; Sedeh & Aghaei, 2024; Al-Hendawi et al., 2024). However, the relatively lower score in Positive Emotion implies that affective experiences such as joy, comfort, and emotional safety are not equivalently cultivated. This pattern supports the argument by Chu (2022) and Leng & Zhang (2025) that educational systems often overemphasize achievement and meaning at the expense of emotional engagement.

An alternative interpretation must be considered: the observed relationship between collaboration and well-being may be mediated by unmeasured variables such as school climate, teacher support, or student socioeconomic background. The current model treats collaboration as a direct predictor, yet theoretical frameworks (e.g., ecological systems theory) would suggest a more complex, mediated structure. Without testing competing models (e.g., partial mediation or moderated effects), the conclusion that collaboration directly predicts well-being remains provisional.

The contextual specificity of wetland-based schools introduces an additional layer of complexity. Geographic and infrastructural constraints (Aziz et al., 2022; Kasumaningrum et al., 2024; Aquino & Reyes, 2024) likely shape both the form and effectiveness of collaboration. The relatively lower score in coordination and resource support ($\mu = 4.194$) can be interpreted as an indicator of structural limitations rather than leadership deficiency. This distinction is analytically important: attributing weaker dimensions solely to leadership quality risks overlooking systemic constraints that are exogenous to school actors.

The alignment between collaborative leadership and PERMA outcomes appears partial rather than comprehensive. While collaboration strongly predicts overall well-being, its qualitative orientation currently dominated by accountability and program structure does not fully translate into affective well-being gains. This suggests that the mechanism linking leadership to student outcomes is not purely structural but also relational and emotional. The literature on empathic and inclusive leadership (Boulden & Schimmel, 2021; Nakamura & Milner, 2023; Goetz et al., 2024) provides a plausible explanatory extension: without deliberate cultivation of emotional support within leadership practices, the PERMA dimension of Positive Emotion is unlikely to improve substantially.

The empirical model demonstrates high explanatory power but reveals internal asymmetries between structural effectiveness and affective outcomes, between perceived and experienced collaboration, and between different dimensions of well-being. These asymmetries indicate that collaborative leadership, as currently operationalized, functions as a necessary but insufficient condition for holistic student flourishing

Implications

The findings provide empirical support that efforts to enhance student well-being in wetland-based schools should prioritize structural reforms and policy initiatives that ensure systematic collaboration between principals and school counselors, alongside sustained investment in developing empathetic leadership. Policymakers are encouraged to clarify

collaboration mandates, allocate adequate resources for guidance and counseling services, and deliberately strengthen empathic leadership capacities within schools.

Limitations and future directions

The primary limitation of this study is the relatively small number of schools (clusters) included (N = 12), which constrains the application of multilevel modeling approaches such as Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling (MSEM). In addition, reliance on self-reported data represents a further limitation. Future research is recommended to adopt qualitative approaches particularly multisite collaborative case studies focusing on the development of students' psychological well-being in senior high schools, employing in-depth interviews and systematic observations to explore effective practices of empathy and social support within collaborative leadership.

Conclusion

Research on student well-being in wetland-based educational contexts has remained limited, particularly regarding the structural and leadership determinants that shape students' flourishing. This study demonstrates that collaborative leadership between principals and school counselors is a central determinant of students' psychological well-being in wetland-based senior high schools in Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$). When principals and counselors operate through structured coordination, shared data practices, and open professional communication, schools are better positioned to cultivate learning environments that are safe, supportive, and meaningful. Within the PERMA framework, such collaboration aligns with higher levels of students' sense of meaning ($\mu = 4.039$), social relationships, engagement, and achievement, although the positive emotion dimension ($\mu = 3.727$) still presents room for improvement. Theoretically, these findings extend the application of collaborative leadership and the PERMA model into the context of wetland-based schools an educational setting largely overlooked in existing literature. Practically, the results signal to principals, school counselors, and policymakers that enhancing students' psychological well-being must be approached as an institutional strategy. Accordingly, this study opens pathways for future qualitative and multilevel research to explore how collaborative practices and emotional climates in schools can be transformed into educational ecosystems that sustainably foster students' psychological well-being.

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Author Contribution Statement

MAS conceptualized the research, designed the methodological framework, and led the data collection process. MM developed the research instruments, conducted data processing and analysis, and formulated the interpretation of findings. AS and MAS jointly drafted the manuscript, performed substantive revisions, and approved the final version of the article for publication.

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