

University Support for International Student Wellbeing in

Australian Universities: A Scoping Review

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Background

- **Mental Health Definition:** (Allen et al., 2022)
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Cognitive wellbeing
 - Behavioural wellbeing
- **Wellbeing is multidimensional:** (WHO, n.d.).
 - Health
 - Education
 - Work
 - Social participation and connection
- **Student Wellbeing- PERMA Model** (Seligman, 2011)
 - Positive emotion (P),
 - Engagement (E),
 - Relationships(R) ,
 - Meaning (M) and
 - Accomplishment (A)

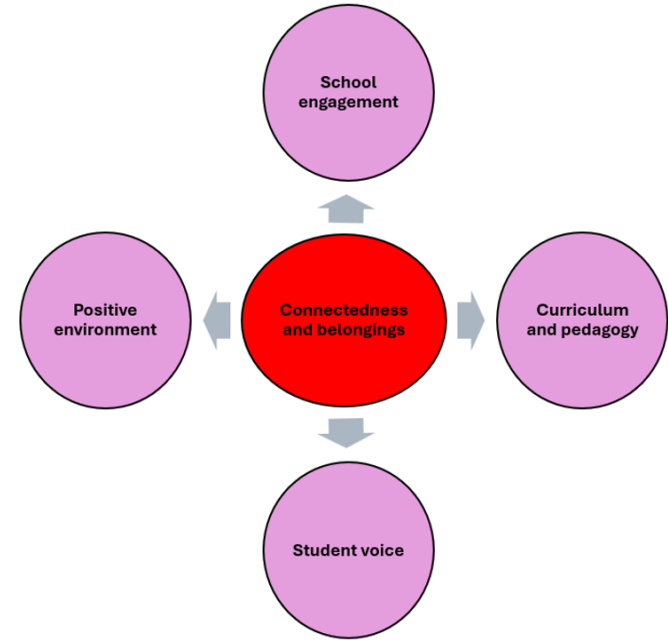


Figure 1. The interaction between connectedness & belongings and other components (Adapted from Bezzina, 2025, p.8)

Background

International student wellbeing in Australia

Challenges Faced by Students

- International students face different challenges, adversely affects both of their wellbeing and academic outcomes (Sakız & Jencius, 2024).
- International students' wellbeing lower than domestic peer (Dodd et al., 2021; Maharaj et al., 2024).
- Asian International students had a higher risk of developed suicidal ideation compared to the other ethnicities of international students if they face difficult situations in Australia (Low et al., 2023).

University Support Services

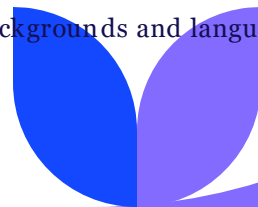
- Universities provide mental health service such as counselling to support international student wellbeing (Maharaj et al., 2024)

Barriers to Service Utilization

- Internationals student perspective identifies the barriers for students to seek mental health support comprising the barriers such as lack of social connections, cultural stigma and language barriers (Maharaj et al., 2024; Newton et al., 2021).

Impact of Crisis

- International student experienced extremely lower wellbeing, due to their cultural backgrounds and language barriers, both factors hinder their initiatives to seek support (Dodd et al., 2021)



Theoretical Framework

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** (Deci & Ryan, 2000)
 - Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness
- **PERMA Model** (Seligman, 2011)
 - Positive emotion (P), engagement (E) , relationships(R) , meaning (M) and accomplishment (A)

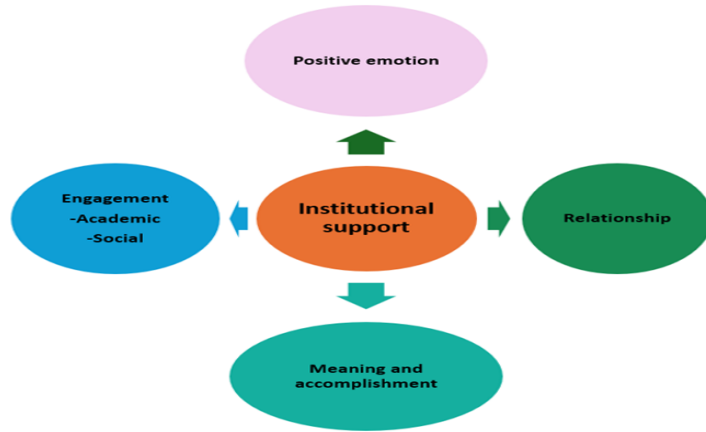


Figure 3. PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011)

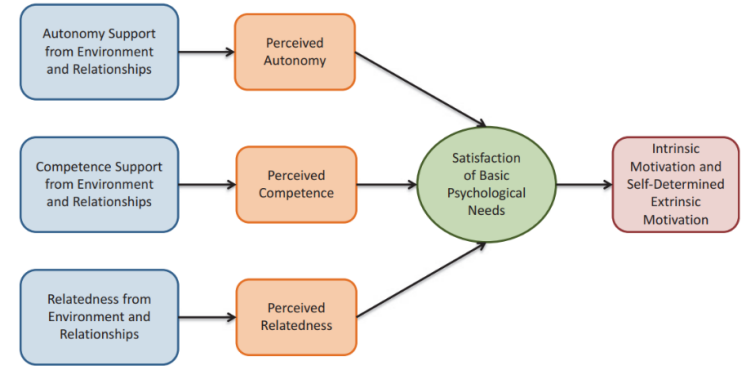


Figure 2. The role of need according to self-determination theory (Adapted from Legault, 2020, p.7)

Aims

Purpose

- Explore wellbeing support international students' wellbeing in Australian universities
- Identify key intervention characteristics and trends
- Inform future research and practice in higher education
- Examine role of university stakeholders in supporting student wellbeing

Aim

- To map, categorise, and analyse the evidence on wellbeing support for international students in Australian universities

Research Questions

- RQ1: What evidence exists on wellbeing support provided by Australian universities for international students?
- RQ2: What are the characteristics of interventions that support international student wellbeing?
- RQ3: How do these interventions improve international students' wellbeing?

Methodology

- **Framework:** Arksey & O'Malley (2005)
- Guided by PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018)
- **Eligibility: PCC framework** JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis (Aromataris et al., 2024)
- **Population:** International students
- **Concept:** Wellbeing intervention
- **Context:** Australia universities

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population	-International students enrolled in Australian universities - International students enrolled in full time study either undergraduate or postgraduate programs	-Exchange students in temporary study
Concept	-Studies focusing on international students' wellbeing	-Studies focusing on health behaviours without an explicit link to wellbeing.
Context	-Higher education including all universities -Geographic focus is Australia	-Non-higher education settings
Types of sources	-Primary research	- Grey literature - Secondary research studies (e.g. systematic reviews)

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Methodology

- **Search strategy**
- **Databases:** Scopus, ERIC, PsycINFO
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Published between 2000–2025
 - Peer-reviewed studies
 - English language
 - Australia

Category	Keywords / Search Terms
Population	"international student*" OR "overseas student"
Concept	wellbeing OR "mental health"
Context	university OR universities AND Australia* OR Australian
Intervention	support OR program* OR service* OR intervention* OR counselling

Table 2. Keywords search strategy

Screening & Data Extraction

- Screening process involved two stages managed in Covidence (Covidence, 2023).

Screening:

- 1) Title & abstract
- 2) Full-text review

Discrepancies : Resolved with supervisor

Data extraction:

- 1) Demographics
- 2) Methodology
- 3) Study objectives

Synthesis: Thematic analysis

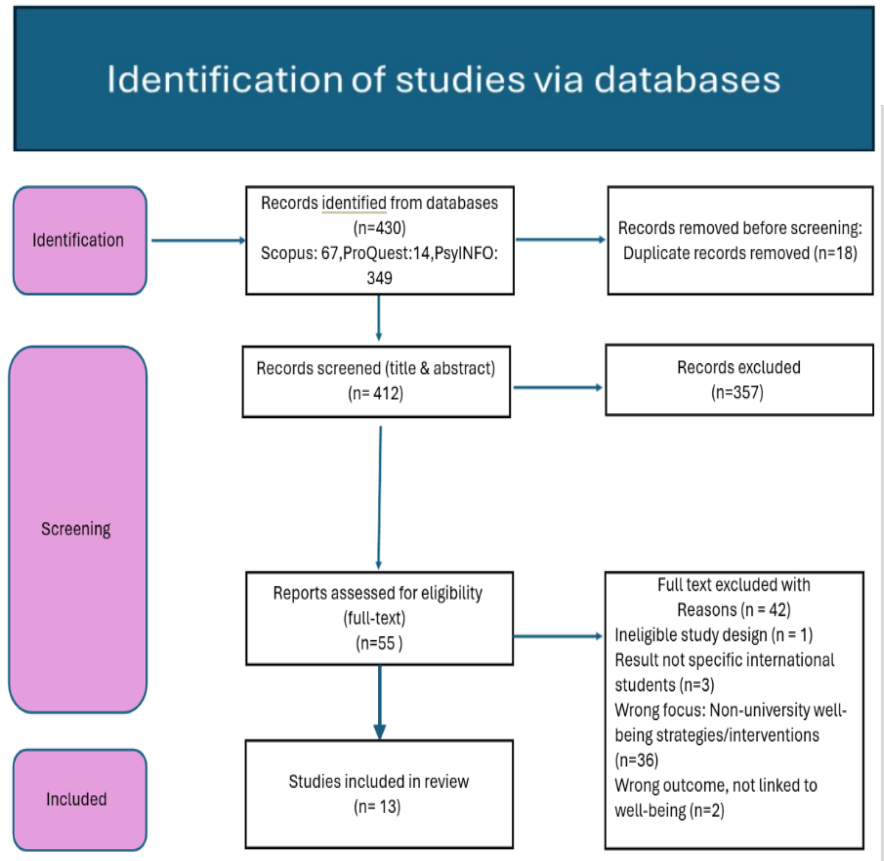


Figure 4. PRISMA diagram demonstrating search strategy

Results

Year	Author	Title	Journal
2018	Stallman and Kavanagh	Development of an Internet Intervention to Promote Wellbeing in College Students	Australian Psychologist
2020	Daddow et al.	Hopeful Cross-Cultural Encounters to Support Student Well-Being and Graduate Attributes in Higher Education	Journal of Studies in International Education
2020	Clough et al.	Making the grade: a pilot investigation of an e-intervention to increase mental health literacy and help-seeking intentions among international university students	British Journal of Guidance & Counselling
2020	Viskovich and; Pakenham	Randomized controlled trial of a web-based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) program to promote mental health in university students	J Clin Psychol
2021	Fronek et al.	Australian Social Work Academics Respond to International Students in Crisis During COVID-19	Frontiers in Education
2021	Penman et al.	Empowering International Students to Succeed	Journal of International Students
2023	Devezy et al.	International Café: A Collaborative Approach to International Student Wellbeing and Support	Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association
2023	Jeftic et al.	The Stride program: Feasibility and pre-to-post program change of an exercise service for university students experiencing mental distress	Psychol Sport Exerc
2024	McKay et al.	Participatory Design in Suicide Prevention: A Qualitative Study of International Students' Experiences of Adapting the LivingWorks safeTALK Programme	Health Expect
2024	Tom et al.	Canine Support Program: Student perceptions and preferences at a regional university and implications for health, well-being, and student support enhancements	Health Promot J Austr
2025	Bould et al.	Pilot of an animal-assisted activity program to support intergenerational and intercultural community connections to reduce loneliness and social isolation	Complement Ther Clin Pract
2025	Hardacre et al.	The Hunger to Belong: Student Identity and Belonging Mediate the Relationship Between Social Class and Food Insecurity Among University Students	Journal of Applied Social Psychology
2025	Parmar et al.	The Impact of a Peer Support Program on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Postgraduate Health Students During COVID-19: A Qualitative Study	Education Sciences

Table 3. Publication details of 13 included studies (n=13)

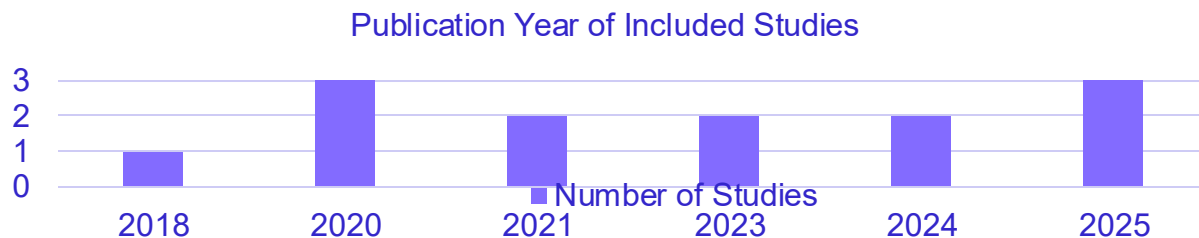


Figure 5. Distribution of publication year of included studies

Results

- **Study characteristics of Included Studies (N = 13)**
- **Study Designs**
- Qualitative (6)
- Quantitative (5)
- Mixed methods (2)
- **Geographic Distribution- State (Number of studies)**
- VIC (4)
- QLD (4)
- WA (2)
- NSW (1)
- Multi-site (NSW, QLD, VIC, ACT) (1)
- Location not specified (1)

Location Type	Number of Studies	Included Studies
Single-site	11	Bould et al. (2025); Daddow et al. (2020); Devezy et al. (2023); Fronek et al. (2021); Jeftic et al. (2023); McKay et al. (2024); Parmar et al. (2025); Penman et al. (2021); Stallman & Kavanagh (2018); Tom et al. (2024); Viskovich & Pakenham (2020)
Multi-site	1	Hardacre et al. (2025)
Location not specified	1	Clough et al. (2020)

Table 4. Distribution of Included Studies by Study Location Type (N = 13)

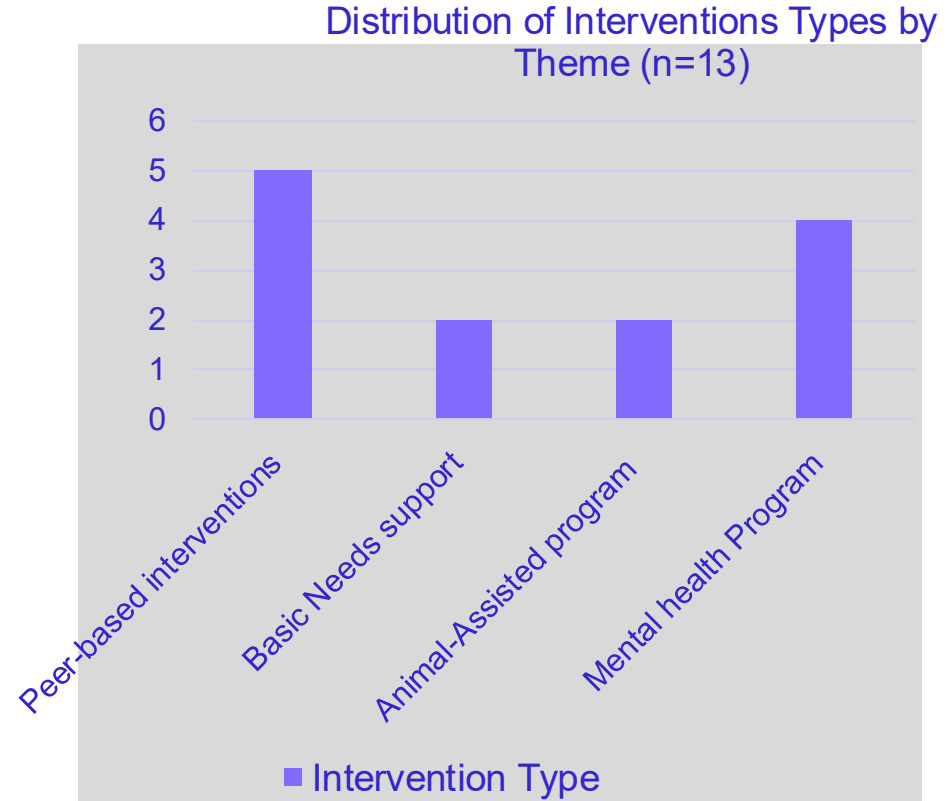
Results

- Table 5. Distribution of Included Studies by COVID-19 Period and Intervention Type (N = 13)

COVID-19 Period	Number of Studies	Intervention	Included Studies
Pre-COVID (Before 2019)	5	• Online Mental health literacy program • Extracurricular program • Transition program • Internet-based mental health program (theDesk) • Web-based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)	Clough et al. (2020) Daddow et al. (2020) Penman et al. (2021) Stallman & Kavanagh (2018) Viskovich & Pakenham (2020)
During COVID (2019–2023)	5	• Food support and case management • Food support services • Exercise program (STRIDE) • Peer support program • Canine Support Program (CSP)	Fronek et al. (2021) Hardacre et al. (2025) Jeftic et al. (2023) Parmar et al. (2025) Tom et al. (2024)
Post-COVID (2023 onwards)	3	• Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) • International Café and Virtual International Student Hub (VISH) • Suicide prevention training (safeTALK)	Bould et al. (2025) Devezy et al. (2023) McKay et al. (2024)

Results: Types of interventions

- **Peer-based Interventions**
 - Peer support program
 - Physical exercise program
 - Extra-curricular program
 - Cultural transition program
- **Basic Needs Support Interventions**
 - Food support program
- **Animal-Assisted Program**
- **Mental Health Interventions**
 - Internet-based program-The desk
 - Online Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Program
 - Online Mental health literacy educational intervention
 - Co-design Safe TALK program



Discussion

- **Impact of COVID-19 pandemic**
 - Online wellbeing program interventions
- **Collaborative approach**
- **Cultural consideration**
- **Academics involvement**
 - Academic staff participation
- **Sense of Belonging and connection**
 - Peer-support programs enhance international students' social connection and sense of belonging (Daddow et al., 2020; Devezy et al., 2023; Parmar et al., 2025; Penman et al., 2021).
- **Inclusion**
 - Interaction between domestic students facilitate cultural sharing and international students feel being part of inclusive community

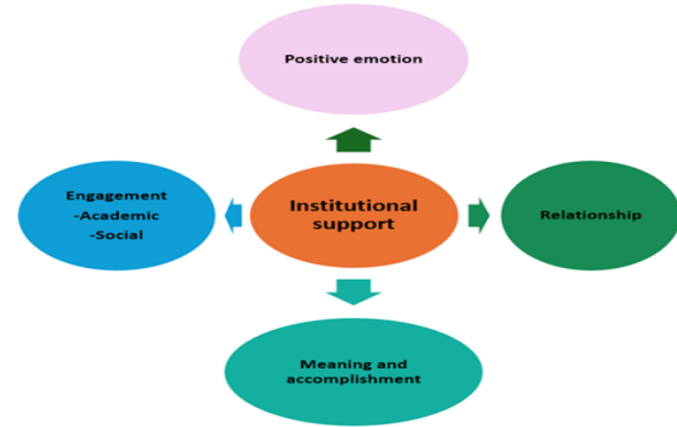


Figure 7. PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011)



Figure 8. Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (ESA 2018) (Adapted from AITSL, 2022)

Conclusion

- **University wellbeing intervention**
 - Social connection
 - Basic needs support
 - Animal-assisted programs
 - Mental health interventions
- Social connection is core aspect of international students' wellbeing
- **Intervention ground with Self-Determination Theory**
 - Autonomy, Competence, and relatedness
- **Future Implications**
 - Australian universities should adopt inclusive wellbeing strategies to support international students' wellbeing.

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Questions?
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