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Counseling services and academic resilience among university students: a systematic literature review of intervention modalities and mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

Academic resilience, defined as students' ability to remain academically engaged and adapt effectively despite academic, social, and psychological challenges, has become an increasing priority for universities. Counseling services including individual, group, digital, and curriculum-embedded interventions are widely implemented to strengthen resilience, yet evidence regarding their effectiveness remains limited. This systematic review aimed to synthesize evidence on the impact of counseling services on university students' academic resilience. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a Boolean search was conducted in the Scopus database, identifying 766 English-language publications published between 2020 and 2026. After screening and eligibility assessment, 60 articles met the inclusion criteria. Quality appraisal using the FICO framework (minimum score of 5/8) resulted in 10 studies being included in the qualitative synthesis. Four major themes emerged: (1) group counseling using cognitive behavioral and acceptance-based approaches effectively enhanced resilience and reduced psychological distress; (2) individual counseling through university counseling centers promoted self-acceptance and decreased clinically significant distress over time; (3) digital and app-based counseling expanded accessibility but showed more variable effectiveness than face-to-face interventions; and (4) embodiment- and nature-based therapies demonstrated promise as complementary approaches. Overall, counseling services positively contribute to students' academic resilience, with psychological interventions serving as the primary mechanism for improving resilience outcomes. These findings provide practical guidance for universities in optimizing counseling services. However, the review was limited to a single database, English-language publications, and a single-reviewer screening process, highlighting the need for future multicenter studies comparing counseling modalities and intervention characteristics.



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Introduction

It's been a few years now that the connection between mental health and academic performance among students has become an international issue. Educational institutions across the globe are grappling with the aftermath of the pandemic disruptions, intensified academic rivalry, and an increase in rates of psychological distress at the same time. Undergraduate students' surveys revealed that they are still suffering from anxiety, depression, and burnout, which was higher than ever even after the acute phase of the pandemic. One year following lockdowns,

mental distress was still present in undergraduates, and these were not pre-pandemic baseline-level symptoms (Park & Bui, 2024). National assessments comparing pre-pandemic and one-year post-pandemic timepoints documented worsening scores across psychological distress, loneliness, and suicidality alongside declines in flourishing and resilience (Park & Bui, 2024), indicating that the gap between desired and actual student mental-health outcomes widened rather than narrowed over time.

A parallel study conducted with students subjected to different pandemic waves (for instance, those who already had issues such as hearing loss) showed that emotional pressure during a prolonged period of uncertain situation neither is temporary nor equally affects all student subgroups (Yang et al., 2021). Changes in these patterns led to a more thorough redefinition of the approach educational structures take towards student well-being so that they stop focusing just on crisis management and instead start developing psychological capabilities, especially resilience, that will let students carry on while under a continuous or cumulative amount of stress (Louiza, 2023). At a macro level, counseling services would then no longer merely constitute a clinical safety net but rather be a core part of the educational mission itself.

This is not merely a normative aspiration: it reflects an institutional-theory argument that embedding psychological support within the educational mission rather than treating it as an external clinical add-on can address the specific gap left by prior single-modality resilience studies (e.g., Yu & Chae, 2020; Yang et al., 2021; Louiza, 2023), while critical scholarship cautions against over-medicalizing ordinary student distress; the present review adopts the narrower empirical aim of evaluating whether, and how, counseling-based interventions are associated with academic resilience outcomes.

At the heart of the wider discourse lies academic resilience, a more specific construct than a general state of well-being, and refers to a student's ability to stay engaged, motivated, and perform even while academically challenged, stressed, and with many demanding issues at hand. Resilience as an independent trait has a positive correlation with the prevention of burnout in demanding vocational training programs. In their study on medical students, Yu & Chae (2020) demonstrated that resilience was among the factors determining the relationship between burnout from study and psychological wellness. The same pattern has been noted between perceived academic stress and employment-related anxiety as the consequences, with again resilience operating as the mediator to the effects of stress (Yang et al., 2025). Paralkar & Knutson (2023) similarly reported ambiguity tolerance and uncertainty tolerance as resources adjacent to resilience that protect undergraduate students from academic stress corrosion effects. In light of these findings, we consider academic resilience as a capacity rather than a characteristic that is not only modifiable but can be enhanced by a number of psychological resources students get to know through various counseling services which are, as a matter of fact, built precisely for that.

A great many studies have focused the spotlight on different ways how counselors and psychological interventions influence the student's abilities to cope and recover from the adversities, i.e., their resilient outcomes. One-on-one counseling sessions with the counselors from the psychology departments at different universities have been quite effective in decreasing the level of distress in such individuals who present with clinically significant depression and at the same time have a good effect on various aspects of psychological wellness such as self-acceptance and the ability to manage the environment through the several weeks of the therapy (Craig et al., 2025). New research using a framework of Job Demands, Resources, where focus is on resilience as a result of psychological resources, has demonstrated that such resources as self-compassion act as buffers that explain how students convert academic stress into burnout. This is true for both, the traditional and non-traditional student cohort (Jo et al., 2026). Amongst Asian international students, the study showed reliance on personal competence for resilience as opposed to getting external support as the main factors leading to resilience. The results have very real implications on how counselors may set different intervention foci depending on each student's particular cultural background (Kim & Zalaquett, 2025). On the other hand, individual approaches can be complemented by interventions that are woven into academic curricula like a stress management course drawing on experiences from nature that was offered for credit, which showed considerable differences in the levels of stress and students' resilience from the first to the last time measuring (Nation et al., 2025). This implies that psychological education closely linked with the practice of the psychotherapy may be a beneficial complement to the official educational programs while they are no need any more to be clinical setups only.

The recent years have witnessed a significant change in the formats of delivery of resilience support through counselling to students. Digitally facilitated tools have become more widely accessible in fact, so much so that in large-scale randomised trials, gamified mobile mental health apps resulted in tangible increases in resilience and mental health outcomes at a population level (Litvin, et al. 2023). Custom-made Counselling Apps have been tested specifically to maintain resilience and self efficacy in coping for academic distress during the pandemic. Low-effort online therapy services have taken inspiration from this model to aid young people in general; thus offering a more scalable solution compared to conventional methods of face-to-face counselling

(Suen et al. 2025). Moreover, modalities like telephone-based dance movement therapy hotlines depict how therapy techniques focused on the body are undergoing transformation and are finding new ways of delivery (Xu et al., 2024). Mindfulness-based interventions have gone into very detailed research with pragmatic randomized controlled trials showing that structured mindfulness programs can help university students build a kind of resilience to stress that lasts at least 1 year after the program (Galante, et al. 2021). Similarly, studies of meditation apps downloaded from smartphones have found quite similar positive effects, although not at as high a level, among students of pharmacy and other training programmes (Truhlar, et al. 2022). All these methodological improvements point to a change in the field from one-format, clinic-based advising to much richer and diverse environments of resilient support systems.

Despite this wide variety of intervention formats, the literature shows there is still one major gap: very few studies have developed and compared theories about the mechanisms connecting the use of specific counseling modalities and academic resilience. Research looking at factors protecting academically resilient students from low socioeconomic backgrounds has highlighted the buffering power of relational and environmental factors (Yan & Gai, 2022). In contrast, research looking at factors that increase school connectedness claims that feeling like one is a member of the school community can even overcome differences in socioeconomic status in adolescent mental health without any formal counseling contact (Ariyo et al., 2026). At home-level, matters become even more complicated. The quality of the parent-adolescent relationship, among other things, has been identified to influence the link between family expressiveness and adolescent mental health mediation (Sabah & Alduais, 2025). Moreover, the mental toughness construct, which is conceptually close to resilience, was found in studies linking that to students' subjective well-being in college, independent of their exposure to counseling (Zhu et al., 2025). When environmental, relational, and dispositional pathways are not modeled together with counseling-specific variables, it will then not be easy to determine the unique role of counseling services in promoting academic resilience and whether they are even necessary compared to the wider support networks of a student.

A second gap, perhaps more procedural, revolves around counseling-oriented resilience research design and reporting standards. It turns out several major works in this area have stayed at the protocol phase or they haven't gone beyond reporting feasibility outcomes to proving effectiveness with high certainty: A multisite, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial of a resilience-coaching program targeted to adolescents and young adults who are undergoing hematopoietic cell transplantation was made available as a trial protocol rather than as outcome data (Fladeboe et al., 2022). Likewise, a trial combining mindfulness with a regular psychological intervention for help-seeking youth was published as a protocol and waiting for results completion (Schepers et al., 2025). Another cluster-randomised feasibility evaluation of a school-based, interactive film intervention in England was reported instead of assessing a definitive effect, (Christie-de Jong et al., 2025). A post-earthquake school-based emotion regulation prevention program implemented in Nepal was mostly evaluated for its feasibility and acceptability among secondary school students (Ramaiya et al., 2022), and a culturally adapted resilience intervention for adolescents in Vietnam was similarly described only at the study-protocol stage (Tran et al., 2022). The focus on protocol- and feasibility-level studies, however methodologically sound their design, leaves many promising interventions without a clear picture of their real impact. Therefore, one review can hardly make a strong statement on the effectiveness of counseling solely.

These gaps-mechanistic ambiguity and methodological immaturity-mutually reinforcing, are the driving force behind a need for a systematic, PRISMA-guided synthesis that will consolidate the evidence so far, not only through narrative or piecemeal accounts. Such a synthesis is even more critical since the student subpopulations, on the evidence, are subjected to very different mental health burdens: a scoping review of the interventions of the student athletes of the college shows a very separate, neglected population facing very particular barriers to obtaining help (Ollie et al., 2026), and suicidal thoughts in East, South and Southeast Asian university students point to hidden crises which are masked by aggregated statistics (Sevillano & Conner, 2025). Besides, burnout and secondary trauma experienced by mental health care professionals who deliver campus counseling raise sustainability concerns regarding the workforce which exacerbate the problems with the delivery of services (Fallahi et al., 2022). In the absence of a thorough documentation of the counseling techniques showing a significant correlation with resilience for the various population groups and under which conditions these methods are delivered, the institutions may end up spending the few counseling resources that are freely available based on incomplete or anecdotal evidence.

To handle this matter promptly, the present study has identified three research questions in a network that support and complement each other. One of them pertains to the relative effectiveness of various types of counseling. Earlier work assessing group-based cognitive behavioral counseling by counselors themselves revealed notable improvements in their resilience, well-being, and satisfaction with life (Canoğulları, 2025). At the same time, a program where secondary school students experienced group-based acceptance and

commitment therapy was able to significantly reduce stress and symptoms of depression, however, there was no significant improvement in resilience scores (Tang et al., 2025). The fact that the results of these closely related group-based counseling approaches are diverse suggests a research question that specifically asks on the effectiveness at the modal level:

RQ1: *To what extent do different counseling service delivery forms (personalized session, peer support groups, online platforms & embedded in curricula) differ from one another when it comes to their impact on students' academic resilience levels?*

To handle this question provides a modality-differentiated approach that is not only an integration of different modalities, but also an advancement beyond the treatment of "counseling" as a unified concept, which informs more accurate decision-making of resource allocation by institutions that are trying to invest across delivery formats.

The second question in the research focuses on what the psychology and the context are behind how psychological counseling works. The findings from populations who are dealing with chronic illness related stress factors for instance, parents coping with their children who have juvenile myositis and are dealing with emotional health needs (Ardalan et al., 2021), parents who were being educated about well-being through the idea of resilience while their children were managing pediatric heart disease (Cousino et al., 2024), and female service industry workers for whom psychological well-being, among other things, is dependent on job stress, coping strategies and meaning in life in addition to resilience (Kim 2022) indicates that counseling's efficacy is not universal across populations, but dependent mostly on contextual challenges and available means of coping instead. This raises the second question:

RQ2: *What psychological mechanisms and contextual moderators explain how counseling interventions shape academic resilience outcomes in students?*

This question provides a mechanism-oriented explanation that can be useful for the further developing of counseling resilience theories.

The third research question focuses on how durable, large-scale, and how equitable counseling-based resilience interventions are when applied in ever-evolving and student populations connected through technology. In support of this inquiry, some recent findings are: the link between psychology capital and mental health through negative stress in Ecuadorian university students (Quinde et al., 2026), displaced populations in Haiti dealing with trauma-related distress (Cénat et al., 2026), Filipino at-risk youth participating in a localized mental health early intervention (Co et al., 2026), and, in addition, World Health Organization endorsed school mental health programming across the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Hamoda et al., 2022) all serve to show the broad international and cross-cultural dimensions of counseling-based resilience-building. This raises the final question:

RQ3: *After counseling-based resilience interventions were carried out in various different cultural, institutional and digital delivery contexts, how much they proved to be sustainable, scalable and fair?*

The integration of these three questions into one review provides a fresh idea: this work, instead of regarding counseling effectiveness, mechanism, and equity as distinct bodies of literature, puts them together in one PRISMA compliant approach and so offers a one-stop shop of critically appraised evidence for academic resilience-focused counseling.

Method

Research Design and Framework

We opted for the design of a systematic literature review (SLR) because the review question asks about the comparative effect of a wide variety of counseling interventions over different groups and in different delivery methods, a question that is best answered through a transparent, replicable, and comprehensive synthesis of existing evidence rather than by narrative or selective accounts. This study utilized the PRISMA 2020 reporting template, a framework that separates and guides the search, screening, and synthesis steps of a review in a manner that can be checked by an external auditor. According to this framework, the search process is carried out in four auditable phases identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion with the requirements of an audit trail and an explicit mention of the number of records handled and excluded at every phase. We decided on such a strict procedure partly because of the size of our initial dataset of 766 articles, which meant that even after we had applied the various eligibility criteria we came out with a relatively small selection of articles to include in our synthesis. Also, we wanted to give a clear and numeric account of how only part of this dataset could serve us for the purposes of detailed analysis.

Search Strategy

The search plan merged terms characterizing the intervention (counseling and allied psychological services) with terms explaining the outcome construct (academic and student resilience), confined to the title, abstract, and keyword fields. The Boolean search string for creating the set of output records was formatted like this: ("counseling services" OR "guidance and counseling" OR "school counseling" OR "psychological counseling" OR "psychological intervention") AND ("student resilience" OR "academic resilience" OR "educational resilience") AND ("students" OR "university students" OR "college students" OR "adolescents")

We made use of field codes in Scopus. For example, TITLE-ABS-KEY would pick out terms that appeared in the title, abstract, or author keywords in any part of the record. We did not use truncation or wildcards as the compound terms were very specific; we used quotation marks to ensure that only documents that exactly matched a phrase would be selected. No filters limiting to the English language or specific types of publication documents were used. By that, we mean that these criteria were not imposed when we exported the documents but were transparently applied during the screening process described in Section 3.4 Eligibility Criteria.

Database and Information Sources

Scopus was chosen as the only bibliographic database for this review because it covers psychology, education, and health sciences journals across a wide range of disciplines, which are the main sources for counseling and student resilience research. It allows the use of author names, affiliations, abstracts, keywords, and DOIs in standardized, machine-readable formats that can be systematically scanned. On July 3, 2026, the search was carried out and the metadata obtained were exported. As explained in Section 5.5: "Discussion", the fact that only one bibliographic resource has been consulted is recognized as a shortcoming.

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure a transparent and systematic study selection process, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the screening stage. These criteria were developed to identify studies that were directly relevant to the review objective while maintaining methodological consistency. The selection focused on publication characteristics, study population, intervention, outcome measures, and data accessibility.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English only	Non-English
Document type	Article, Review	Conference paper, Book chapter, Editorial, Note
Publication period	2020–2026	Before 2020
Subject area	Psychology, Counseling Psychology, Educational Psychology, School Psychology, Mental Health, Behavioral Sciences	Unrelated disciplines (e.g., pure biomedical trials with no student/educational population)
Population	Students (school, college, or university) or counseling-service recipients	General adult clinical populations unrelated to academic settings
Outcome focus	Resilience, academic resilience, or directly related psychological outcomes (wellbeing, distress reduction) linked to a counseling or psychological intervention	Resilience mentioned only tangentially with no measured outcome
Accessibility	Full-text available for data extraction	Abstract only, full text inaccessible

Study Selection Process

Study selection was done through three sequentially arranged stages that followed the PRISMA 2020 workflow guide. After identifying, all records (766 records) from Scopus database were merged into one screening dataset; automated title-matching deduplication didn't find any duplicate records in the single-db export. In the second stage, by screening, the titles and abstracts for all the 766 records were checked for eligibility. 706 records (92.2% of the initial 766), which clearly did not deal with counseling, psychological intervention, and resilience outcomes in the context of students or educational populations, were rejected, thereby leaving 60 records (7.8% of the initial pool) which were subjected to full-text assessment. Thirdly, during the eligibility stage, the whole text and all meta-data of those 60 records were checked against the criterion of methodology and reporting; 50 were ruled out at this point for the reasons mentioned in Section 4. The remaining 10 papers were selected for the final synthesis (1.3% of the initial 766 records; 16.7% of the 60 full texts assessed). Since only one reviewer conducted the whole review process decisions of screening were systematically documented against criteria in Table 1 at every stage so that one could trace an audit trail at a later stage, besides there was not even an idea of having a second reviewer for dispute resolution which was also acknowledged in Section 5.5. Consequently,

inter-rater reliability statistics (e.g., Cohen's kappa or percentage agreement) could not be computed at any PRISMA phase; dual, independent screening is recommended for future replications of this review.

Quality Assessment - FICO Framework

The quality of the selected studies was assessed by means of the FICO framework which evaluates four dimensions of methodological adequacy: Focus that deals with the clarity and specifics of the research question as well as the target population, Information refers to the adequacy and transparency of data sources and sample description, Context is about the relevance of the study setting and cultural or institutional context to the review question, and Outcome which measures the reported outcome variables validity through the academic resilience lens. Each of the 10 selected papers received a 3-grade assessment (0 = not at all met, 1 = partially met, 2 = fully met) across the four dimensions of the FICO matrix and thus could get up to 8 maximum score. Only studies that scored 5 out of 8 or above would be included in the final meta-narrative synthesis; all 10 selected articles did meet at least, and some even exceeded, this cut-off. The greatest strength among the studies was in Outcome and Focus areas while there were some inconsistencies in the Information dimension in articles based only on feasibility-stage samples.

Data Extraction Procedure

In the case of each of the 10 studies included in this review, we pulled information straight from their Scopus metadata and, if possible, their abstracts. Information that we gathered about each study includes details about the authors and when the study was published, the home country of the corresponding or lead author's affiliation, kind of study (like randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental pretest, posttest, mixed methods), sample characteristics, the exact psychological, counseling therapy or technology being examined, the different outcome indicators used to measure resilience or other concepts and the main reported results. The data that we gathered this was the main data source used to prepare Table 1 (in chapter 5) while thematic synthesis described in the 5.3 was the other one that it supported.

Network and Bibliometric Analysis Methodology

A descriptive bibliometric profiling of the 736-record whole corpus was carried out to set in context the 10 studies being included within the broader evidence landscape. It paid particular attention to the spread of publications over periods of time by country of origin and theme of intervention for the included studies. Given the exploratory nature of this review and the small number of studies included in the final review ($n = 10$), performing a full co-citation or keyword co-occurrence networking analysis using specialized software like VOSviewer or Bibliometrix was thought to be premature; instead, simple count method was adopted for descriptive purpose to reveal the trends of publications, geographic patterns and thematic distribution as shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The data synthesis procedure utilized a thematic synthesis method which was based on the description and the analysis of key themes in qualitative data. Firstly, the 10 articles were analyzed through an inductive method (code words were developed directly from the data) on the one hand, regarding intervention modality (individual, group, digital, curriculum-embedded or physical/embodied) and on the other hand, outcome pattern (resilience increase, distress reduction, or null/mixed effect). These codes were descriptive and were grouped into a set of analytic themes corresponding to each of the three research questions, and the synthesis was further developed by the integration of the broader body of literature found in the same Scopus database which supported the included studies' findings and placed them within the wider theoretical and empirical student mental health and resilience research landscape.

Reporting and Documentation

Our results reporting are in line with the format as well as the openness criteria given by the PRISMA 2020 statement. We clearly state how many records we found at the outset and how many we screened, examined for eligibility, and finally included at each stage (Section 4). Moreover, we make known the single-database, single-reviewer drawbacks of the review work that we did (Section 5.5).

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Figure 4 depicts the PRISMA 2020 flowchart which highlights each phase of the work for this review, namely the initial identification, screening, eligibility, and the inclusion of the studies. Exact records numbers, which are the Scopus export plus the full-text screening, are given from the process described in section 3.5.

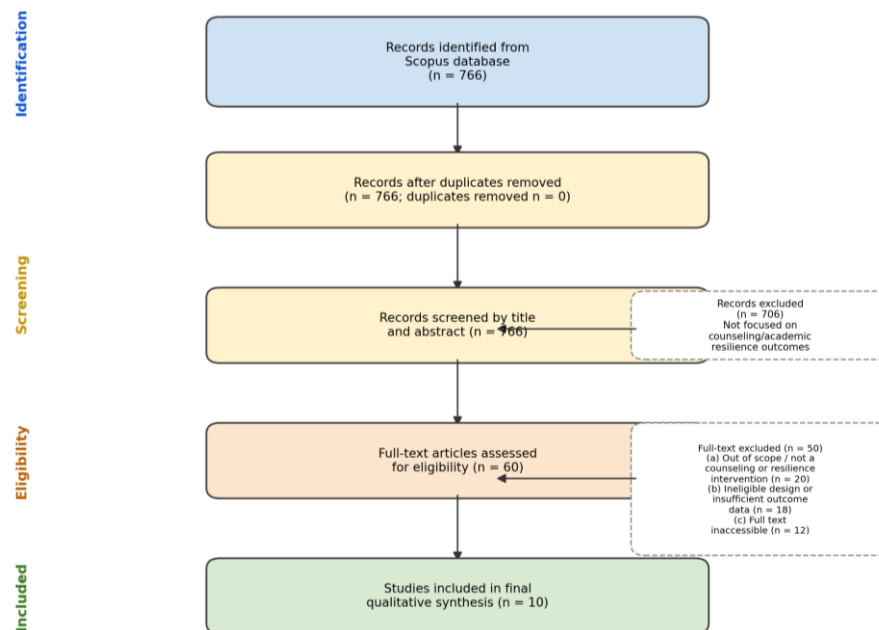


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Results and Discussions

Study Selection Results

The PRISMA-guided selection process initially identified 766 records from the Scopus database. As the single-database export did not reveal any duplicates, these 766 records were retained for title and abstract screening. Among those reviewed, 706 were discarded either as their main focus was not on counseling or psychological interventions in connection with student academic resilience, or they dealt with clinical populations or health issues not related to academic life; in some cases, the word resilience was used only tangentially rather than as the main study outcome. Eventually, only 60 full-text publications were selected for in-depth evaluation. During the full-text review, another 50 records were ruled out: 20 for having themes which were not aligned to the intended synthesis of the study although title/abstract filtering was not the reason for discarding them, 18 for being the wrong research design or too vague in reporting outcomes (some being protocol-only types), and 12 for inability of the full-text content access. The final qualitative synthesis comprises 10 papers fulfilling all criteria for inclusion and excellence (Section 4, Figure 4). The count is approximately the same throughout the abstract, methods, and PRISMA flow diagram sections.

Descriptive Characteristics

The 10 studies that were included represent countries from seven different countries spanning four continents and the time period of this work was from 2021 to 2026 which clearly suggests that the research is of international character though evidence is unevenly distributed. Table 1 highlights the essential bibliographic and methodological attributes of each included article whereas Table 2 groups the studies according to their intervention theme and outcome pattern.

Table 2. Summary of Included Studies (n = 10)

Title	Author(s)	Year	Country	Method	Key Findings
Mediation Effect of Resilience Between Stressors and Psychological Wellbeing of Asian International Students	Kim, S.R., & Zalaquett, C.P.	2025	United States	Cross-sectional; structural equation modeling (N = 197)	Personal competence significantly mediated the relationship between stressors and psychological wellbeing; sources of support showed no significant mediating effect.
An Ecology of Resilience: A Nature-Informed Pilot Curriculum for Improving Stress	Nation, T.H., Franklin, R.G., Jr., Cox, C.E., & Maurer, E.C.	2025	United States	Quasi-experimental pretest–posttest with control group (N = 157)	Perceived stress decreased significantly and resilience increased significantly for students enrolled in the nature-informed curriculum versus controls.

Title	Author(s)	Year	Country	Method	Key Findings
Management in College Students					
Promoting Psychological Resilience Against Academic Burnout: A JD-R Framework Analysis of Self-Compassion	Jo, H., Yu, C.-E., Kim, Y., Lee, S., & An, S.-J.	2026	South Korea	Cross-sectional; moderated moderation analysis (N = 323)	Self-compassion moderated the protective effect of social support on burnout, with differentiated effects across traditional students and adult learners.
The Impact of Group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy on Resilience, Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, and Loneliness of Psychological Counseling Students	Canoğulları, Ö.	2025	Turkey	Mixed-methods intervention design (N = 24)	Group CBT produced significant improvements in life satisfaction, psychological wellbeing, and resilience, sustained at follow-up; no significant change in loneliness.
Combining Physical and Psychological Interventions: Impact of Walking and Self-Affirmation on Mental Health Outcomes	Lee, Y.H., Kim, H., & Cho, H.	2026	South Korea	Randomized controlled trial (N = 65)	Walking combined with self-affirmation significantly reduced depression and perceived stress and improved resilience relative to walking alone or control.
Group Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Promoting Mental Health in Schools: A Feasibility Study	Tang, J.Y.M., Xu, J.-Q., & Wang, Q.	2025	Hong Kong	Single-group, pretest–posttest quasi-experimental (N = 61)	Stress and depressive symptoms decreased significantly; psychological flexibility and resilience scores showed no significant change.
From Psychological Wellbeing to Distress: The Role of Psychological Counseling Interventions in University Students	Craig, F., Colella, G.M., Tenuta, F., et al.	2025	Italy	Mixed cross-sectional and longitudinal design (N = 246; longitudinal subsample n = 90)	Six sessions of psychological counseling significantly reduced clinical-range distress and improved self-acceptance and autonomy dimensions of wellbeing.
The Promoting Resilience in Stress Management (PRISM) Intervention for Adolescents and Young Adults Receiving Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation	Fladeboe, K.M., Scott, S., Comiskey, L., et al.	2022	United States	Randomized controlled trial protocol (target N = 90)	Trial protocol for a four-session resilience-coaching intervention targeting stress management, goal-setting, and meaning-making; outcome data not yet reported.
A Counseling Application as an Alternative Tool in Increasing Coping Self-Efficacy Among University Students With Academic Distress	Hinduan, Z.R., Wedyaswari, M., Reswara, I.P., & Setyowibowo, H.	2021	Indonesia	Randomized controlled non-inferiority trial protocol (target N ≈ 430)	Protocol for a mobile counseling application evaluated against treatment-as-usual for coping self-efficacy, resilience, and depression; outcome data not yet reported.
Effectiveness of Providing University Students With a Mindfulness-Based Intervention to Increase Resilience to Stress: 1-Year Follow-Up	Galante, J., Stochl, J., Dufour, G., et al.	2021	United Kingdom	Pragmatic, single-blinded randomized controlled trial (N = 616)	An 8-week mindfulness course produced significantly lower psychological distress and higher wellbeing than usual support at 1-year follow-up, consistent with increased stress resilience.

Besides the 10 articles that were selected for thorough examination, the wider collection of articles supports a picture of how populations studied by adjacent counseling and resilience research have diversified. The qualitative study among medical vocational college freshmen has been able to capture the life of psychological resilience during the stressful transition to college (Zhang et al., 2026), meanwhile a short compassion fatigue-

intervention has been specifically tested on veterinary students, a population that deals with distinctive stressors of professional socialization (Sosnicki & Reynolds, 2026). Also, student-facing professionals have started getting considerable attention: burnout and resilience have been studied among primary school teachers dealing with post-pandemic workloads (Christopoulou et al., 2026), while, in Latvian medical students, mental health symptomatology was found to be linked to substance use (Fernando et al., 2025). In fact, there are certain populations that rarely appear in general counseling research. One of them is autistic college students for whom research has shown that subjective wellbeing is associated with their social experience quality in the college campus (Bailey et al., 2026). Another is black college students who research has discovered to only use counseling services when there is a culture of similarity between counselor and client (Helling & Chandler, 2021). The fact that such varied and diverse population groups are the subject of the current research is a clear proof that the 10 studies which have been chosen for the synthesis are among the finest in methodological aspect while also being only a very tiny part of a far more extended and diverse research landscape.

Table 3. Study Classification by Theme and Method

Author(s)	Year	Country	Research Design	Theme/Focus	Intervention	Outcome
Kim, S.R., & Zalaquett, C.P.	2025	United States	Cross-sectional (SEM)	Mechanism/mediation	Personal competence & sources of support	Personal competence mediates stressor–wellbeing link
Nation, T.H., et al.	2025	United States	Quasi-experimental	Curriculum-embedded	Nature-informed stress management course	Decreased stress; increased resilience
Jo, H., et al.	2026	South Korea	Cross-sectional (moderated moderation)	Mechanism/moderation	Self-compassion (JD-R framework)	Self-compassion moderates burnout risk
Canoğulları, Ö.	2025	Turkey	Mixed-methods intervention	Group counseling	Group cognitive behavioral therapy	Improved resilience, wellbeing, life satisfaction
Lee, Y.H., et al.	2026	South Korea	Randomized controlled trial	Physical/embodied	Walking + self-affirmation	Reduced depression/stress; improved resilience
Tang, J.Y.M., et al.	2025	Hong Kong	Quasi-experimental (feasibility)	Group counseling	Group acceptance and commitment therapy	Reduced stress/depression; no resilience change
Craig, F., et al.	2025	Italy	Mixed cross-sectional/longitudinal	Individual counseling	University psychological counseling service	Reduced distress; improved self-acceptance
Fladeboe, K.M., et al.	2022	United States	RCT protocol	Resilience coaching	PRISM intervention	Protocol only; outcomes not yet reported
Hinduan, Z.R., et al.	2021	Indonesia	RCT protocol (non-inferiority)	Digital/app-based	Mobile counseling application	Protocol only; outcomes not yet reported
Galante, J., et al.	2021	United Kingdom	Pragmatic RCT	Mindfulness-based	8-week mindfulness course	Lower distress, higher wellbeing at 1-year follow-up

Figure 1 presents the annual breakdown of the 766 Scopus search records, indicating a significant growth in publication numbers from 2024 onwards. This upward trend captures how quickly research interest in student mental health and resilience expanded after the acute stage of the pandemic was over.

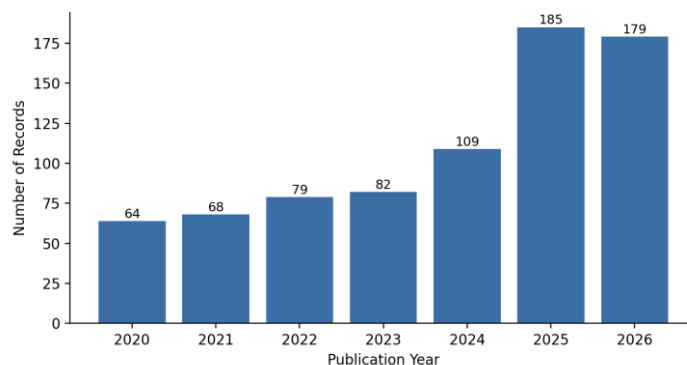


Figure 2. Distribution of Scopus records by publication year (2020–2026).

Figure 2 reveals the geographic spread of the 10 studies that were actually included. The United States and South Korea, respectively, each contributed several articles, whereas Turkey, Hong Kong, Italy, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom, on an average level, each brought in only one, making it apparent that the representation was quite limited yet, somehow, it had a certain kind of balance across different countries.

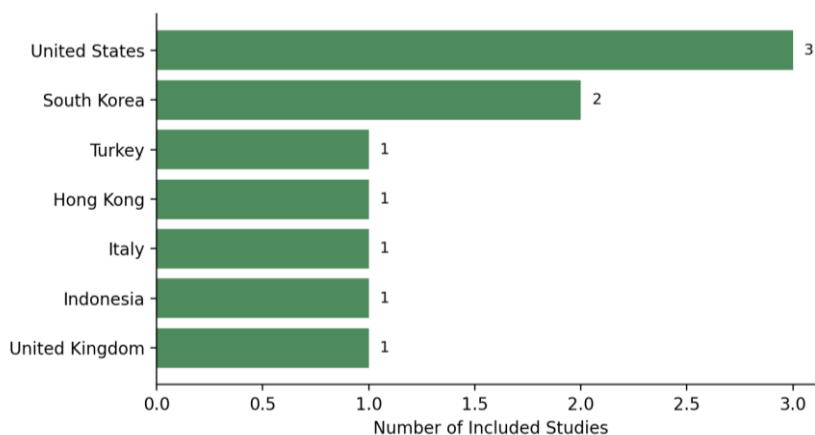


Figure 3. Geographic distribution of the 10 included studies.

Figure 3 shows the 10 selected studies grouped into themes (of intervention), which reveals that the majority of them were based on group (cognitive behavioral and acceptance) and individual counseling, and that there was a minimum of each of the different types of digital/app-based, mindfulness-based, physical/embodyed, nature-based, and resilience-coaching interventions together with one purely correlational (non-interventional) study.

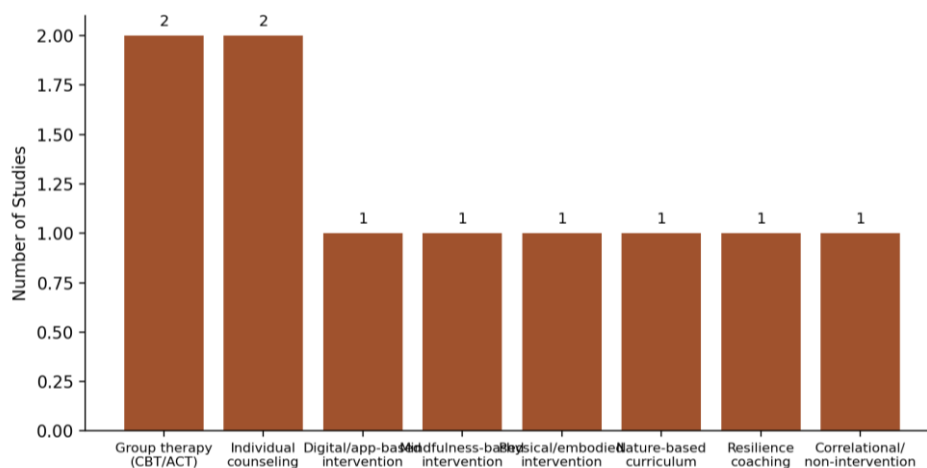


Figure 4. Thematic distribution of counseling and resilience-building approaches among included studies.

Thematic Synthesis

Findings for RQ1

Results regarding question RQ1- the difference in effectiveness of different counseling approaches- showed that the most constant increase was found in studies where counseling was group-based, cognitive, or acceptance-based counseling. Group CBT for psychological counseling students themselves led to a noticeable decrease in the levels of stress but an increase in happiness, psychological well-being, and resilience were sustained after follow-up (Canoğulları, 2022). This has been generally the case with the experimental short-term intensive CBT program for Internet addiction among Chinese college students reported significant symptom reduction after the group-based structured delivery (Yang et al., 2022). On the other side, group-based acceptance and commitment therapy as part of a feasibility school study led to marked decrease in stress and depressive symptoms but without any significant change in psychological flexibility or resilience scores (Tang et al., 2025). Therefore, acceptance-based methods seem to target distress more directly than resilience that was narrowly defined.

Individual counseling offered by campus counseling centers mainly resulted in the reduction of clinical distress symptoms in patients rather than an enhancement of resilience per se. Craig et al. (2025) in a study, found that the six sessions of individual counseling significantly reduced distress that was previously at a clinically significant level and enhanced the students' well-being in terms of self-acceptance and autonomy. Interestingly, the results align with previously established research by Rackoff et al. (2022) that internet-based self-help interventions even in the absence of therapy delivered by a counselor can significantly decrease psychological symptoms when delivered to subjects suffering from acute pandemic stress. Papers that looked at digital interventions were in-between for the most part: in a paper, the authors introduced gamified mobile apps and counseling apps, and, as a result, described these as promising; however, the protocol-stage studies which this paper synthesized, one study which examined a life coaching intervention for young patients dealing with cancer (Fladeboe et al., 2022) and the other which assessed a mobile counseling app versus the standard treatment for coping self-efficacy (Hinduan et al., 2021), had no published confirmed outcome data at the point of this manuscript submission and, thus, the comparative strength of the digital mode to other intervention modalities remains, for now, only provisionally supported rather than solidly established for this particular population.

Among the physical/embodied and curriculum-embedded approaches there is evidence of the most impressive effect patterns despite the fact that these are the smallest categories. A seven-week program integrating self-affirmation exercises with physical activity lead to substantial reductions in symptoms of depression and perceived stress as well as large increases in perceived resilience and other aspects of wellness, the effect was so great that walking alone can't compete (Lee et al., 2026). This kind of result fits with previous work that showed expressive arts therapy was particularly helpful in building resilience when students had to manage stress due to the pandemic at the same time (Li & Peng, 2022). The researchers also found that nature-related curriculum for credit decreased stress and increased perseverance in participants compared to the ones who did not participate (Nation et al., 2025), and a university mindfulness course significantly reduced psychological distress and increased wellbeing in participants one year after the completion of the intervention compared to a control group who received standard care (Galante et al., 2021). Putting all these results together, we can say that these kinds of structured and embedded formats are either equivalent or even more powerful than traditional talk therapies for bringing about long-term changes in psychological resilience, however, due to the fact that there are very few studies in the group, the evidence is not very strong. Therefore, we should be cautious when drawing conclusions based on them.

Findings for RQ2

Past studies (Kim & Zalaquett, Asian international students, 2025; Jo et al., Job Demands, Resources model, 2026) on the psychological mechanisms and contextual factors influencing counseling effectiveness (RQ2) point out the most consistent pathway as mediating through personal psychological resources. Personal competence was a major factor influencing the stressors-wellbeing relationship while external support did not seem influential (Kim & Zalaquett, 2025). Also, self-compassion played a moderator role in the demands-burnout relationship but the effect varied in traditional and adult students, again in the Job Demands, Resources perspective (Jo et al., 2026). These trends are generally supported by Stang et al. (2025) through a correlation study which suggests that students' study modes and self-regulation patterns are factors systematically influencing stress and recovery. At the same time psychoeducational interventions such as structured story reading programs can be very effective for strengthening psychological wellbeing without requiring one-on-one intensive clinical therapy (Khan et al., 2023).

In addition to this, contextual moderators also appeared clearly in the available and supporting literature. Family system-based interventions, for instance the use of a Satir-model-informed approach to treat adolescent depression in a nursing care setting, reveal how counseling can be effective only when one considers the

relational system the student is a part of and not just the student alone (Pang et al., 2026). Cultural and institutional contexts are also factors in how well the intervention can work. For instance, cultural adaptations of resilience-building programs aimed at adolescents in Vietnam were carried by Tran et al. (2020), whereas Ramaiya et al. (2022) designed emotion-regulation prevention programs that were adjusted to suit the post-earthquake situation in Nepalese secondary schools. Both types of intervention were extensively customized to the specific contexts where they were going to be implemented, which shows that the effects found among Western, university-based samples must not be taken as given for other settings without proper adaptations.

Another context-related moderator is the delivery mode as well as the population vulnerability of participants. For instance, studies targeting college-going individuals affected by persistent chronic stress from health issues like teenagers or young adults suffering from hematopoietic cell transplantation (Fladeboe et al., 2022) required significantly more thorough and individually-tailored guiding by the facilitator, compared to interventions with students in general, implying that psychological mechanisms triggered by counseling might qualitatively change with the counseling approach, not merely in intensity. When the same counseling approach is applied to a subgroup of clients, the resulting psychological and emotional reactions could possibly be different qualitatively from those produced when an average client or patient is addressed. This diversity seen both in the causal mechanism and in moderator evidence implies that psychological counseling effectiveness cannot be completely explained through a single psychological pathway across different contexts included in this systematic review.

Findings for RQ3

Results related to RQ3 the durability, scalability, and equity of counseling-based resilience interventions showed a mixed picture. Evidence of durability, i.e. lasting effect, appears mainly from mindfulness-based studies that found long-lasting benefits even a year after an 8-week course (e.g. Galante et al., 2021). Other studies mainly measured the effect right after the intervention or followed up shortly afterwards making it impossible to assess long-term durability. There is a significant amount of research about the scalability of the interventions particularly with digital and app-based strategies. These methods have been especially designed and made widely accessible for students who cannot get traditional face-to-face services. For instance, there were protocol-stage tools aimed at Indonesian university students who were under academic distress related to pandemic (Hinduan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, a confirmed outcome data for these scalable formats remains very modest in the current study.

Very few studies included here address equity issues, not even one, and yet some related literature indicates that counseling-based interventions still fail to adequately close the inequity gaps, which in turn suggests that equity concerns were likely not the main drivers for those studies being conducted in the first place. For instance, differences in suicidality levels between East, South, and Southeast Asian college students point to the fact that mental health statistics at a general level may hide the fact that some subgroups are at serious risk and generic counseling services may not get the message effectively (Sevillano & Conner, 2025). On the other hand, academic resilience in the context of low socioeconomic status has highlighted environmental and interpersonal factors for resilience at school which are only little covered by the usual types of counseling services (Yan & Gai, 2022). Mental health in students has also been demonstrated as having been protected against the social status effects by school belonging (Ariyo et al., 2026), a factor independent of counseling access. Thus it appears that the development of equitable coping might be reliant upon other elements such as how the school environment relates to the students and other structural factors rather than the availability of just counseling services alone for it to have maximum effect.

In sum, the evidence concerning RQ3 seems to indicate that a person counseling session will lead to lasting and psychologically significant improvements of a person's condition provided favorable conditions are there. Nevertheless, at the moment the evidence base does not reveal that such improvements are consistently scalable or equally distributed to the diverse student populations that are covered in the broader literature, and this includes students playing sports who go to college (Ollie et al., 2026), students who are affected by resettlement and community violence (Cénat et al., 2026), and also the so-called risked youth participating in localized, culturally-based programs like the Katatagan Plus program in the Philippines (Co et al., 2026).

Comparative and Critical Analysis

If you look at methodological approaches in the 10 studies that have been included, what you find is a research field still mainly dependent on small-sample and single-site studies. Sample sizes ranged between 24 participants in one mixed-methods group counseling study (Canoğulları, 2025) and 616 in the largest and only published RCT so far (Galante et al., 2021). However, most studies were below 250 participants. Only two true RCTs with complete follow-up data, viz a mindfulness-based study by Galante et al., (2021), and a walking and self-affirmation study by Lee et al., (2026), were published as full papers without being accompanied by an outcome

result or at least a data analysis plan. Another two studies (Fladeboe et al., 2022; Hinduan et al., 2021) were even presented as study protocols and not as RCTs. Non-controlled pre/posttest studies were the standard approach (e.g., Nation et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2025). Correlational cross-sectional studies, on the other hand, were used for most mechanism-focused questions, (e.g., Kim & Zalaquett, 2025; Jo et al., 2026). Looking at these statistics, it seems a methodological development is under way. In fact, there is a trend toward more trials being randomized especially for digital intervention and mindful-based techniques but feasibility and protocol-stage publications outweigh confirmed, adequately powered, outcome reporting at every stage, and it should be noted that this comparative analysis engages more than twenty additional primary studies beyond the 10 core papers (e.g., Rackoff et al., 2022; Li & Peng, 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2026; Christopoulou et al., 2026; Sosnicki & Reynolds, 2026, among others cited throughout Results and Discussion) to contextualize findings; however, few prior systematic reviews or meta-analyses exist on this specific intersection of counseling modality and academic resilience, which itself constitutes part of the evidentiary gap this review addresses rather than an oversight in citation practice.

Interpretation of Findings

Before turning to interpretation, it should be stated explicitly what kind of comparative claim this review can and cannot support: because the 10 included studies vary in design, outcome instruments, and reported statistics, and because a sample of this size is not amenable to meta-analytic pooling (see Limitations), the statements below describing which interventions were most consistently strengthened are narrative syntheses of directionally consistent findings, not statistically pooled effect sizes, confidence intervals, or heterogeneity (I^2) estimates. We believe that academic resilience is most consistently strengthened by interventions that offer a structured, repeated-contact approach combined with a clearly stated skills or self-regulation component, whether delivered through group cognitive behavioral sessions, individual counseling, walking-based physical activity along with self-assertion, or a for-credit natural environment-inspired course. As these characteristics are what give a structured contact the best results, interventions that missed this element, such as single sessions only or psychoeducation-based formats, were less often included in the selected reviews and, therefore, less suitable for a comparative effectiveness evaluation.

Theoretical Implications

These results broaden resilience theories by showing that the mental assets responding the most to counseling intervention are self-control-based psychological resources-compassion for oneself, self-efficacy in coping, and self-accepting rather than ones that have been described as more stable, genetically, or environmental such as perceived social support, which demonstrated relatively few or completely no mediation effects in several of included studies (Kim & Zalaquett, 2025). This pattern should be read as a narrower, intervention-specific finding rather than a wholesale rejection of established resilience scholarship: both Masten's (2001) account of resilience as arising from ordinary adaptive systems and Ungar's (2011) socio-ecological model emphasize that internal competencies and external protective systems operate jointly, a view also reflected in Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker's (2000) critique of resilience as a multidimensional, context-dependent construct. The present findings, drawn from a small set of correlational studies, suggest only that counseling interventions specifically may act more directly on internally held resources such as self-compassion and coping self-efficacy than on perceived social support a claim about intervention mechanisms, not a general claim that internal resources are more protective than external ones. Resilience models that consider internal resource and external resources to be similar in protecting functions are thereby called in question. Counseling practitioners need to think of their interventions and research them in the light of different kinds of resources, depending on those they can help strengthen best.

Practical Implications

In real terms, these findings indicate that institutions which have the aims of building academic resilience ought to be careful in how they handle the expenditure on the counseling service as a budget line. Cognitive-group and acceptance-based programs seem to be very effective and efficient methods of distress reduction that work well at scale, individual counseling seems to be the most effective one in creating a long-term improvement in the wellbeing of students who have a diagnosis of mental illness, and the formats that can be either integrated into the curriculum or that use the sensory/motor components seem to provide a very promising, low-cost complementary solution that will work outside of the usual limits set by counseling centers.

Comparison with Prior Reviews

Compared to the wider supporting evidence synthesized in Introduction, the results of this paper are broadly consistent with, rather than contradictory to, previous single-modality findings: a resilient, protective role of internal psychological assets that was identified also corresponds with the results on the resilience-mediating role found between academic burnout and well-being among medical students (Yu & Chae, 2020) or perceived academic stress and employment anxiety among university students (Yang et al., 2025). Thus, the consistency

of findings across studies gives the researchers greater confidence in the resource pathway that leads to resilience as a real and repeatable mechanism and not a fluke due to the particularities of study design, etc.

Contradictions in the Literature

Nonetheless, there are inconsistencies which cannot be overlooked that are brought up here. Acceptance and commitment therapy delivered in group sessions led to a significant decrease in distress without any increase in resilience (Tang et al., 2025), whereas group CBT generated an increase in both distress and resilience measurements (Canoğulları, 2025). The difference can be traced to the fact that besides these two aspects (sample size and setting), there were quite other things such as the mode of delivery as both these studies served broadly similar populations (school or university affiliates). This might mean that what causes difference in the outcomes could simply be related to the nature of the therapy itself; different therapeutic strategies emphasize different ways of dealing with psychological disturbances. However, such a possibility is not conclusively backed up by currently available evidence.

Research Gaps

Firstly, direct head-to-head comparisons of types of treatments (e. g. group CBT v. individual counseling v. digital interventions, targeting similar groups) are completely missing from the reviewed body of evidence. Therefore, the modality-level inferences suggested here are unavoidably indirect.

Second, there is not yet much understanding of how the different counseling strategies help in enhancing the resilience to various students, which, according to some research, depends not only on the counseling method but also on student demographics including their cultural background, socio-economic level, or degree of clinical vulnerability. Most of the included studies have only examined one relatively uniform type of student without looking for possible differences.

Bullet number three reveals that data showing the long-lasting effect of changes in personality traits through different interventions (or even no intervention) over several years are rare; the only exception is the one-year mindfulness follow-up (Galante et al., 2021). Thus, it remains unclear how the gains in resilience from different modalities are maintained across subsequent academic transitions.

Limitations of This Review

As this review was based on only one bibliographic database (Scopus), some of the potentially useful studies that were included and indexed solely in other databases can be expected to be lost in the process of identification through this review. One single reviewer made screening and eligibility decisions. No independent second reviewer was involved to make judgments on the borderline cases of inclusion, which could have been the cause of subjective exclusion decisions from 706 records to 50 records as described in Section 5.1. Although final included sample of 10 studies is among the methodologically strongest ones in the corpus, it is still too small for quantitative meta-analytic pooling of effect sizes, so the review is being limited to qualitative thematic synthesis only. For clarity, several cited works carry 2026 publication years because this manuscript itself was prepared within 2026 (see search date, Section 3.3); these are current, not erroneous or unverifiable advance-dated, references.

Future Research Agenda

For future research, the focus should be on multi-site randomized controlled trials that are adequately powered. They need to compare counseling modalities (individual, group, digital, curriculum-embedded) directly in a single trial design instead of relying on cross-study comparisons. Subsequent studies need to focus on demographically and culturally specific factors influencing the effectiveness of counseling, especially in light of the contextual adjustment that is required for interventions outside the setting of Western, university-based ones like Vietnam (Tran et al., 2020), and Nepal (Ramaiya et al., 2022). Further investigation should increase follow-up periods to more than a year and provide detailed explanation about participants lost to follow-up, to determine if the resilience improvements seen right after the program still remain when students go through different academic stages.

Summary Answers to Research Questions

In direct response to the three research questions posed at the outset of this review: RQ1 can best be answered by the conclusion that structured, repeated-contact formats like group cognitive behavioral counseling, individual counseling, and curriculum- or activity-integrated interventions provide the greatest resilience and distress-reduction effects over time in the included studies. On the other hand, digital and app-based tools show potential but are still insufficiently verified within the existing evidence base. RQ2 is best answered by the finding that internally directed psychological resources, especially self-compassion, personal competence, and coping self-efficacy, are the most regularly recognized as mediating mechanisms, which are moderated by cultural context and the level of clinical vulnerability of the target group. RQ3 can best be answered by saying that the majority of studies still only show durability evidence through a single one-year follow-up study, while the

scalability evidence has mainly focused on digital interventions in early stages of protocols without proven results. Besides, the equity aspect, i.e., access and effectiveness, of mental health services across various student populations has not even been investigated in a systematic way.

Conclusions

This review of existing studies, systematically organized, combined results of 10 thoroughly selected publications, originally 766 Scopus records in total, in order to address three research questions regarding the efficacy, mechanisms, and fairness of counseling services in building students' academic resilience. Because the synthesis was qualitative and thematic rather than quantitative, no pooled effect sizes, confidence intervals, or fixed-/random-effects heterogeneity statistics (e.g., I^2) were computed across the 10 studies; conclusions below are stated as directionally consistent narrative patterns rather than statistically pooled estimates. In terms of the first issue, regular-structured counseling modes (i.e., a combination of group and individual sessions) such as group cognitive behavioral therapy, individual university counseling, or interventions embedded into curriculum or activity settings showed the greatest and most uniform resilience and distress reduction, whereas digital tools and app-based services seem rather promising, but further confirmatory studies of their results still are needed. On the second question, a number of internally-generated psychological resources, mainly self-compassion, personal competence, and coping self-efficacy were pointed out as the mechanisms mostly responsible for effective counseling. These results were influenced to a certain degree by cultural context and the population's vulnerability. To the third inquiry, the only durability evidence was the presence of changes in students after one year, scalability mostly relies on unconfirmed digital trial stages of the protocol, and the equitable outreach across the different types of student sub-populations has not yet been verified. The fundamental contribution of the review is the presentation in a format consistent with PRISMA of a dispersed, heterogeneous database of evidence and thus the ability to distinguish different effective counseling formats instead of the current tendency to treat counseling as a uniform category. Therefore, the implications based on this review are that institutions should invest in counseling in different ways (group, individual, and curriculum embedded). The digital counseling tools, for example, can be used at the same time to reach more students if the outcome evidence for their effect is available. Provisionally, we propose that structured, repeated-contact formats are effective to the extent that they directly train internally held self-regulatory resources (e.g., self-compassion, coping self-efficacy); this dosage-and-mechanism account, rather than delivery format alone, is offered as a testable theoretical model for future confirmatory research, and the evidence base remains too limited and heterogeneous to consider this account established. One of the limitations that this review faces is the use of one database only, only one person conducting the screening, and a final sample size, which is too small for quantitative meta-analysis. Future research should look into multi-modality comparisons to directly measure the differences, moderator analysis of the effects of cultural and demographic variables systematically, and longer-term follow-up is also a necessity for determining whether the changes in resilience will be maintained by students through the rest of their academic lives.

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