

## Psychological Support in the Midst of VUCA Situations for Generation Z in the Finnish Education System

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This study aims to identify the forms of psychological support provided by the Finnish education system to Generation Z in facing VUCA situations and analyze the strategies applied within the Finnish education system to strengthen the psychological resilience and adaptability of Generation Z in the VUCA era.

**Design/method/approach** – The research uses a descriptive qualitative design to thoroughly describe the forms of psychological support and strategies applied within the Finnish education system. Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews with teachers, school counselors, and education policymakers to explore their perspectives on the forms of support and strategies in place; participatory observation involving direct observation in schools to understand how psychological support is implemented in real educational settings; and documentation by analyzing Finnish education policy documents related to psychological support, learning guidelines, and student development programs. Data analysis is carried out thematically by identifying key themes related to forms of support and strategies relevant to supporting Generation Z in the VUCA era.

**Findings** – The findings reveal that: 1) The psychological support provided includes: a) emotional support through an individualized approach to understand each student's emotional needs; b) social support in the form of collaborative group activities to help students overcome social isolation; and c) mental and health support through life skills programs to strengthen students' mental resilience. 2) The strategies used include a) proactive strategies with curriculum integration to train emotional-adaptation skills and the use of technology to create a flexible and personalized learning environment; b) responsive strategies through regular monitoring and evaluation of students' mental health via surveys and interviews; and c) holistic strategies involving a Finland-specific cultural approach emphasizing work-life balance and a national education policy prioritizing student well-being.

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## Introduction

In the era of globalization and the rapidly evolving Fourth Industrial Revolution, the world of education faces significant, complex challenges filled with uncertainties. The concept of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) illustrates the situation faced by many sectors, including education, which has become increasingly unpredictable and subject to rapid changes. This situation has a profound impact on students, particularly Generation Z, who grow up in an environment saturated with information, rapid technological advancements, and dynamic social and economic changes (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, tends to be more open to change but also faces significant challenges in adapting to conditions that are often unstable and ambiguous. Amid this uncertainty, their psychological well-being has become an issue requiring serious attention. As a generation more open to mental health issues, Generation Z is more vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and mental health disorders resulting from constantly changing situations. Therefore, appropriate psychological support is crucial to help them cope with the pressures emerging from the VUCA environment (Fletcher & Henson, 2020).

Finland's education system has long been recognized internationally as one of the most outstanding and student-welfare-oriented systems. The country emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment, where every student has equal access to develop both academically and emotionally. Education in Finland not only focuses on academic achievement but also on developing students' character and social skills. By balancing academic and psychological aspects, students in Finland can learn in an environment that supports their mental health, ultimately strengthening their resilience in facing the uncertainties of a rapidly changing world (Virtanen & Heikkinen, 2018).

One significant aspect of Finland's education system is its policies that prioritize students' psychological well-being. Counseling programs and psychological services in Finnish schools are available to all students, focusing on mental health prevention and emotional resilience enhancement. Furthermore, Finnish schools implement a holistic educational approach, integrating students' emotional and social aspects into the curriculum. This includes teaching stress management skills, coping with anxiety, and adapting to change, which are highly relevant for navigating the challenges of the increasingly complex VUCA world (Juntunen & Rautopuro, 2019).

The approaches implemented in Finland can serve as a model for other countries in enhancing students' psychological well-being, particularly amidst the uncertainties posed by VUCA conditions (Juntunen & Rautopuro, 2019). Considering that Generation Z lives in a world that is ever-changing and full of challenges, Finland's education system offers valuable lessons in creating a safe and supportive environment for students' emotional and social development. Through policies prioritizing mental health and innovative programs targeting various aspects of students' lives, Finland has built an education system that not only develops academic intelligence but also cultivates the mental resilience needed to face a future full of uncertainties (Laine & Alakärppä, 2019).

While Finland's education system is recognized as a successful model in supporting students' well-being, the challenges faced by Generation Z in a VUCA environment demand further attention (McKinsey & Company, 2020). The uncertainties caused by rapid technological changes, globalization, and shifting social values significantly impact students' psychological well-being. Although Finland has provided counseling services and policies supporting mental health, VUCA challenges require the education system to be more adaptive in responding to these swift changes. It is essential to evaluate whether existing policies are sufficient to address students' needs in the present, especially during increasingly complex and unpredictable uncertainties.

Additionally, while Finland is known for its holistic approach, there may be potential gaps in the implementation of psychological support across different regions. Not all Finnish schools have equal resources to provide adequate psychological services. Although educational programs integrating emotional and social aspects into the curriculum have been implemented, challenges remain in involving all stakeholders—teachers, parents, and the community. Further research is needed to explore how existing strategies can be further developed to ensure inclusivity, not only in well-resourced schools but also in more remote or underserved areas (Sahlberg, 2011).

Moreover, while Finland's education system has successfully created a learning environment that supports students' overall well-being, it is crucial to understand how this system can adapt to the dynamic social and technological changes affecting Generation Z. In facing VUCA situations, students require strategies more focused on long-term psychological resilience development, rather than just reactive responses to emerging stress or anxiety (Masten, 2014). Therefore, a more comprehensive approach in designing proactive and sustainable psychological support is necessary to prepare students to face greater challenges in the future.

## Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and describe various forms of psychological support provided by Finland's education system to Generation Z in facing the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) environment. It also analyzes strategies implemented to strengthen their psychological resilience and adaptability. A qualitative approach is chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of policies, programs, and educational practices in Finland, as well as the perspectives of various stakeholders.

The respondents in this study include: a) Generation Z students at secondary and higher education levels in Finland, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of the group directly receiving psychological support in schools. b) Teachers in Finland, who are involved in implementing psychological support policies and programs in schools. c) School principals, who are engaged in designing curricula, student welfare policies, and mental health-related educational programs. These respondents

provide rich insights into how Finland's education system supports students' psychological well-being and the strategies implemented to enhance their resilience in the VUCA era.

The data collection involves the following methods: a) In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with students, teachers, and school principals in schools affiliated with the University of Turku, Finland. These interviews aim to uncover their experiences and perspectives on the psychological support provided and strategies applied in the education system. b) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs will be conducted with groups of students and teachers to gain broader insights into their experiences in receiving and providing psychological support, as well as to discuss strategies perceived as effective in enhancing students' psychological resilience. c) Documentary study: This includes analyzing educational policy documents, student welfare program reports, and related curriculum materials to identify the forms of support and strategies implemented by Finland's education system to support students' psychological resilience.

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves the following steps: a) Coding: Data from interviews, FGDs, and document studies will be coded to identify key themes related to psychological support and resilience strategies. b) Categorization: Coded data will be grouped into categories based on recurring topics or issues in the interviews and discussions. Categories may include topics like psychological well-being policies, counseling programs, life skills taught, and resilience strategies. c) Theme Development: From the determined categories, main themes will be developed to describe the psychological support provided and the strategies implemented to strengthen students' resilience and adaptability in the VUCA era. d) Data Interpretation: The findings from the thematic analysis will be interpreted within the context of relevant theories, such as psychological well-being, resilience, and holistic education theories, to provide a deeper understanding of how Finland manages psychological support amid the VUCA environment.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study findings, the following steps will be undertaken: a) Data Triangulation: Using various data sources (interviews, FGDs, and document studies) to gain a more comprehensive view and ensure consistency in the findings. b) Member Checking: Confirming interview findings with respondents to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation. c) Audit Trail: Maintaining clear documentation of the data collection and analysis process to enable the research to be reviewed by others.

## **Result and Discussion**

The forms of psychological support provided include emotional support, social support, and mental health support. Emotional support is delivered through an individualized approach that allows each student to feel heard and understood. Teachers or counselors play a crucial role in evaluating each student's emotional needs and providing a safe space for them to express their feelings or challenges. This process fosters students' emotional development and helps them manage stress and anxiety that may arise amidst the challenges of the VUCA environment.

Group activities based on collaboration are highly effective in helping students overcome social isolation that may occur during ongoing uncertainty and change. These activities support the development of social skills and foster a sense of community among students. Examples include study groups, collaborative projects, or extracurricular activities that promote positive social interaction. Such efforts are essential for building social support networks that facilitate adaptation in high-pressure environments (Yuli & Eva, 2024).

Life skills programs in Finland aim to strengthen students' mental resilience by teaching essential skills needed to face daily challenges, both in personal and academic contexts. These skills include stress management, decision-making skills, and methods for maintaining mental health through physical activities and relaxation techniques.

**Table 1.** Forms of Psychological Support Provided in Finland

Forms of Psychological Support	Description
Emotional Supports	A deep individual approach to understanding students' emotional needs, providing space for open conversation and attentive listening.
Social Supports	Collaborative group activities that reduce social isolation and strengthen relationships among students.
Mental Health and Wellness Support	Life skills programs that train students in stress management, decision-making, and maintaining mental health.

The strategies used in the Finnish education system include proactive, responsive, and holistic strategies. The proactive strategy in Finland involves integrating the curriculum not only with an academic focus but also with the development of emotional skills and adaptability. The goal is to teach students how to manage their emotions and adapt to rapid changes, using technology to create a more flexible and personalized learning environment.

The responsive strategy is implemented through regular monitoring and evaluation of students' mental health. This is done through mental health surveys and interviews with students to identify their needs and challenges. The results of this monitoring are used to design more precise and timely interventions.

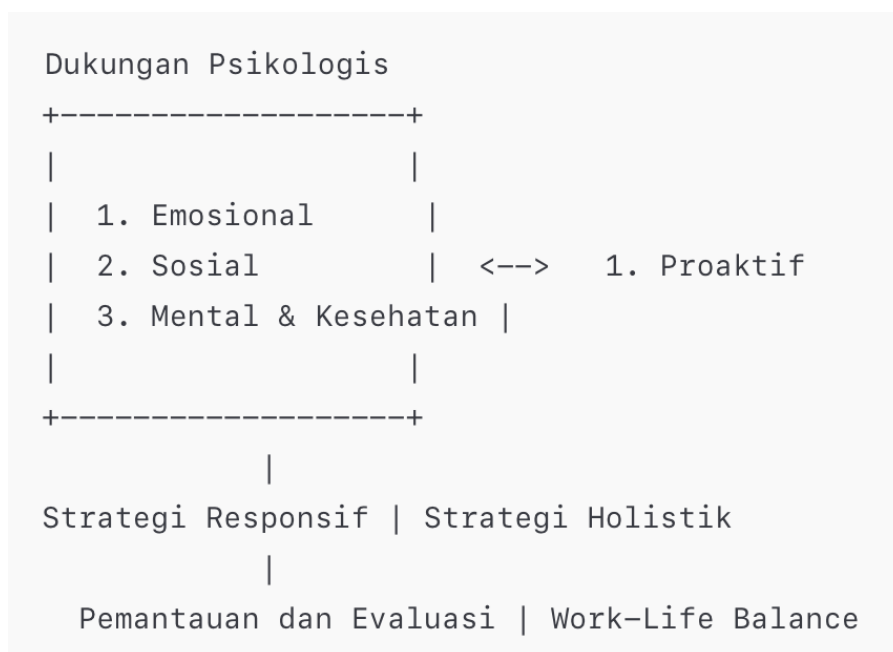
The holistic strategy emphasizes a culturally grounded approach, highlighting the balance between study and personal life (work-life balance). In this regard, Finland's national education policies also prioritize student well-being. For example, policies include ensuring sufficient break times and reducing academic burdens to prevent excessive stress for students.

**Table 2.** The Strategies Used in Finnish Education

Types of Strategies	Description
Proactive	Curriculum integration to train emotional skills and adaptation, as well as the use of technology to create a flexible learning environment.
Responsive	Regular monitoring and evaluation of students' mental health through surveys and interviews to respond to emerging issues quickly.
Holistic	A Finland-based cultural approach that emphasizes the balance between learning and personal life, as well as educational policies that support students' well-being.

### 1. The Relationship Between Types of Support and Strategies in Finnish Education

The following graph illustrates the relationship between three types of psychological support and the three strategies employed in Finnish education to enhance students' psychological resilience in the VUCA era.



**Figure 1.** The Relationship Between Types of Support and Strategies in Finnish Education

Explanation of the Chart:

- (1) Emotional Support is linked to the proactive strategy that emphasizes individual approaches and the use of technology to create learning experiences tailored to students' needs.
- (2) Social Support is associated with the responsive strategy, where group interaction and social collaboration help detect social or emotional issues early and provide appropriate solutions.
- (3) Mental and Health Support is integrated with the holistic strategy, where Finland's national education policy, focusing on student well-being, allows students to maintain a balanced life between academics and personal well-being.



The Finnish education system has successfully integrated various forms of psychological support tailored to the needs of Generation Z in facing the challenges of a world full of uncertainty and complexity. This support is accompanied by proactive, responsive, and holistic strategies that create a learning environment that not only supports academic development but also mental health and students' social well-being. With this approach, Finland serves as a relevant example for other countries in creating an education system that supports psychological resilience in the midst of a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) environment.

Research findings show that Finland's education system has successfully integrated comprehensive psychological support within their curriculum, tailored to the needs of Generation Z in facing the challenges of a world filled with uncertainty and complexity. These findings are highly relevant in the context of the VUCA situation, where uncertainty and rapid change dominate many sectors of life, including education.

#### (1) Integration of Psychological Support

This study found that the Finnish education system successfully provides the emotional, social, and mental support necessary for supporting the development of Generation Z students. Emotional support is provided through an individual approach that allows each student to feel valued and heard, which is crucial in maintaining their emotional well-being (Eva, 2022). This approach provides space for students to express their feelings, which in turn supports healthier emotional development (Hopid et al., 2023). On the other hand, social support through group-based collaborative activities is essential in reducing social isolation often experienced by the younger generation in this digital age. Generation Z, often trapped in the pressures of social media and social anxiety, greatly benefits from healthier and more positive social interactions within the educational environment.

In addition, mental and health support in Finland also focuses heavily on developing students' psychological resilience. Through life skills programs implemented in schools, students are not only provided with skills to manage stress but are also trained to face the challenges of daily life. This program plays a vital role in preparing students to face a world full of uncertainty and complexity, which is a significant challenge in today's age. Thus, the Finnish education system provides a balanced support system between emotional, social, and mental aspects, which are crucial for Generation Z students to thrive optimally in a constantly changing world.

#### (2) Proactive, Responsive, and Holistic Strategies

Finland's education system implements three main strategies to support Generation Z students: proactive, responsive, and holistic. The proactive strategy ensures that emotional and adaptation skills are integrated into the curriculum. In this approach, life skills, emotional management, and the use of technology are introduced as part of students' learning. By teaching these skills early on, students are prepared to face challenges in a rapidly changing world, which becomes increasingly relevant in the VUCA situation (Eva et al., 2023). Learning that

integrates these elements helps students manage change and uncertainty while preparing them to be more flexible and adaptive individuals.

Furthermore, the use of technology to create a more personalized and flexible learning environment provides an added advantage for Generation Z students, who are very familiar with technology (Eva, 2021). This proactive strategy supports the development of skills that are useful not only in academic contexts but also in their everyday lives. In facing the VUCA situation, the ability to adapt quickly and manage emotions becomes an essential skill. Therefore, the proactive approach implemented by Finland's education system is vital because it not only teaches academic knowledge but also prepares students to face life's challenges with better emotional and adaptation skills.

The responsive strategy in Finland's education system focuses on how schools or educational institutions quickly respond to emerging changes and issues, particularly those related to students' mental health. In this approach, regular monitoring through surveys and interviews is conducted to identify students' needs earlier. With this highly reactive approach, schools can immediately recognize if a student faces emotional or psychological challenges that require additional attention. This allows the school to take appropriate actions, such as providing mental support or referring students to professional services, reducing the risk of more serious mental health issues later on.

This responsive system also ensures that students who need intensive support receive immediate attention without long waiting times. With regular monitoring, the school can respond promptly to individual students' needs, whether in psychological counseling or other interventions. Thus, the responsive strategy helps create a safer and more supportive environment for students, ensuring their well-being, especially in the face of mental health challenges that may arise from academic or social pressures. This approach proves that attention to students' mental health needs can reduce stress and anxiety, while also enhancing their ability to cope with changes and uncertainty in an increasingly complex world (Eva et al., 2023).

The holistic strategy in Finnish education is a more comprehensive approach that combines local culture with a focus on students' social and academic well-being. This approach acknowledges that students' well-being depends not only on academic aspects but also on their social and emotional lives. In this strategy, balance between personal life and academic life is prioritized, helping students manage stress and minimize pressure from academic demands. By integrating broader aspects of students' lives, Finnish education creates an environment that supports students' holistic growth, mentally, socially, and academically.

Furthermore, this holistic strategy demonstrates how Finland's national education policy supports student well-being by making it a primary focus of the education system. The government and schools in Finland do not only focus on academic achievements but also ensure that students have the space to develop healthy life skills, positive social relationships, and stable emotional well-being. This approach shows Finland's commitment to creating a generation of youth who are not only academically smart but also resilient and balanced in facing life's challenges. Therefore, this holistic strategy serves as a model



for other countries that aim to create an education system that is more concerned with the overall well-being of students..

(1) Learning Environment that Supports Mental Health

Finland not only creates an academic environment that supports students' intellectual development but also places great emphasis on their mental and social well-being. In the context of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity), where students are faced with various uncertainties and challenges that may impact their mental health, Finland's educational approach is highly relevant. Finland understands that students' mental well-being is a crucial factor influencing their ability to learn and grow optimally. Therefore, Finland's education system integrates policies that support mental health, such as counseling programs, life skills training, and stress management, to help students cope with the pressures they face in daily life.

By creating an education system that focuses more on balancing learning with personal life, Finland provides a model for other countries to strike a balance between academic demands and students' mental well-being. This holistic education teaches students skills to adapt to change and manage life challenges, which is increasingly important in this fast-changing world. Through this approach, Finland not only prepares students with academic knowledge and skills but also with the mental resilience they need to face an uncertain future. Therefore, Finland's education system can inspire other countries to develop policies that care more about the social and mental well-being of students, especially in the face of increasingly complex challenges.

(2) Finland as a Model for Other Countries

The application of Finland's educational model can serve as a relevant example for other countries, particularly in creating an education system that not only focuses on academic achievement but also considers students' psychological and social aspects. In a world that is becoming more complex and uncertain, an education system that is solely achievement-oriented is no longer sufficient. Therefore, Finland adopts a more holistic educational approach that integrates students' mental and emotional aspects while creating a learning environment that supports their well-being. This approach can help other countries create a more balanced and adaptive education system in response to changing times.

In a world full of uncertainty, applying a holistic approach that emphasizes students' mental well-being and adaptability is crucial (Hanif et al., 2022). Finland has succeeded in creating a system that not only prepares students to face academic exams and challenges but also equips them with essential life skills to manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. By giving serious attention to psychological and social aspects, Finland ensures that students are not only successful in formal education but also ready to face greater life challenges.

Education that prioritizes proactive, responsive, and holistic approaches provides students with the necessary skills to face challenges in a world full of uncertainty and

complexity. The proactive strategies implemented in Finland ensure that students are equipped with emotional management and social skills from the outset, enabling them to face challenges as they arise over time. On the other hand, the responsive approach allows the education system to quickly address emerging issues, such as mental health problems, by providing appropriate support for students in need.

In this regard, Finland not only prepares students academically but also emotionally and mentally, helping them adapt to various changes happening in the global society. The balance between academic education and mental well-being development serves as a strong foundation for the younger generation to thrive in a world full of uncertainty. Through this model, Finland provides a tangible example that successful education is not only measured by how high academic achievements are but also by how the education system supports students' mental and emotional well-being, ultimately preparing them to be resilient individuals ready to face the future.

## Conclusion

This study highlights how Finland's education system, with integrated psychological support and comprehensive strategies, creates an environment that supports students' mental health and psychological resilience in facing VUCA situations. With a holistic, proactive, and responsive approach, Finland has successfully prepared the younger generation to face a future filled with uncertainty and global challenges. This approach serves as a model for other countries that wish to develop an education system that not only focuses on academic achievement but also on students' mental well-being.

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