

Designing a Vitality-Enhancing School Model for Iranian Girls' Schools

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to design and validate a vitality-enhancing school model for girls' schools in Iran. In this study, the school was not viewed merely as an educational institution, but as a multidimensional ecosystem in which leadership, organizational culture, human relationships, psychological and physical safety, meaningful learning, stakeholder participation, and cultural and social contexts play roles in shaping school vitality.

Methods and Materials: This study was applied in purpose and qualitative and exploratory in nature. The research strategy was grounded theory, using the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 participants, including 7 principals and teachers of girls' schools, 7 female students, and 7 experts in education, selected purposively until theoretical saturation was reached. Relevant documents and texts were also reviewed to supplement and compare the data. Data analysis was conducted through open, axial, and selective coding, based on the constant comparative method.

Findings: The analysis led to the extraction of 180 initial concepts, 30 major categories, and 10 core categories. The central phenomenon of the study was "an empowering and vitality-enhancing ecosystem for girls in school." The final paradigmatic model showed that positive leadership and professional autonomy were causal conditions; vitality-enhancing architecture and Iranian-Islamic culture were contextual conditions; supportive climate and stakeholder participation were intervening conditions; joyful learning and girls' safety were action/interaction strategies; and multidimensional health and student empowerment were the main outcomes of the model. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking, source triangulation, recoding, and agreement between two coders were used, and Cohen's kappa coefficient was obtained as 0.855.

Conclusion: The vitality-enhancing school model shows that sustainable vitality in girls' schools is the result of the coordinated interaction of managerial, educational, psychological, cultural, environmental, and social factors, and cannot be reduced to recreational or short-term activities. Accordingly, moving from a control-oriented school to a support-oriented school, from uniform teaching to vitality-enhancing learning, and from administrative management to human-centered educational leadership is essential for realizing an empowering and vibrant school.

Keywords: Designing, Girls' Schools, Iran, Model, Vitality-Enhancing School

1. Introduction

School is one of the most influential social institutions in children's and adolescents' lives. It is not merely a formal setting for transmitting curriculum content or evaluating academic performance; it is also a developmental environment in which students form identities, establish relationships, encounter authority and participation, acquire social-emotional competencies, and develop enduring attitudes toward learning, themselves, and society. Accordingly, educational quality cannot be adequately assessed through grades, examinations, attendance, or institutional efficiency alone. Contemporary educational thought increasingly recognizes psychological well-being, positive emotion, belonging, safety, participation, supportive relationships, and meaningful learning as integral dimensions of schooling. From a positive-psychology perspective, schools can deliberately cultivate happiness and flourishing rather than merely respond to distress after it appears (Suldo, 2016). Research on school happiness likewise conceptualizes the school as an environment whose organizational, relational, instructional, and emotional characteristics collectively shape students' daily experience (Sezer & Can, 2019, 2020). Thus, vitality should be regarded as a foundational educational condition rather than an optional recreational supplement.

Although the terms happy school, vibrant school, vitality-enhancing school, joyful school, inspiring school, and positive school climate overlap, they emphasize somewhat different aspects of a broader phenomenon. School happiness generally concerns students' affective and cognitive evaluations of school, whereas school vitality has a wider ecological meaning encompassing emotional energy, hope, creativity, active participation, social connectedness, organizational dynamism, and sustained opportunities for growth. The validation of the Vibrant School Scale reflects growing interest in assessing schools as living organizational communities rather than static instructional structures (Boos & Tschannen-Moran, 2025). Grounded-theory research similarly indicates that school happiness emerges through interactions among administrative, interpersonal, pedagogical, environmental, and cultural conditions (Sezer & Can, 2020). A vitality-enhancing school is therefore one whose structures and everyday practices enable members to feel safe, respected, capable, connected, and meaningfully engaged.

The multidimensional character of vitality becomes especially clear when stakeholder perspectives are

considered. Students describe happy schools in terms of friendship, supportive teachers, fairness, participation, success, safety, and an enjoyable atmosphere (Gramaxo, Seabra, et al., 2023). Parents similarly emphasize children's security, acceptance, well-being, positive relationships, and opportunities for academic and personal development (Gramaxo, Flores, et al., 2023). In Iran, students' perceptions indicate that relational, instructional, organizational, and physical factors jointly contribute to a happy school environment (Arbabi et al., 2025). A phenomenological investigation also showed that vitality is experienced through communication patterns, classroom climate, learning opportunities, participation, and the school's physical and psychosocial characteristics (Kamali Mohajer et al., 2022). Consequently, a contextually valid model must integrate students' lived experiences with the professional and institutional perspectives of teachers, principals, families, and educational experts.

School vitality is associated with important psychological and educational outcomes. Students who experience school positively report greater school satisfaction, more positive experiences, and stronger well-being (Telef, 2021). Happiness at school may mediate the relationship between school satisfaction and psychological well-being, suggesting that the emotional quality of school life connects institutional experience with broader functioning (Yam, 2022). Happy-school perceptions have also been related to general self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Dos, 2023), as well as student leadership, initiative, responsibility, and involvement in collective activities (Goktas & Akyurek, 2023). Iranian studies have similarly linked happiness and vitality with academic achievement and educational progress (Afrazi et al., 2023; Niazazari, 2014). These findings challenge the assumption that academic rigor and positive emotion are competing priorities; instead, vitality may provide motivational, relational, and psychological foundations for persistence and effective learning.

Vitality cannot, however, be conceptualized without attention to safety, exclusion, and relational harm. A school may provide celebrations or recreational programs while remaining psychologically unsafe or socially unjust. Bullying, humiliation, discrimination, fear of mistakes, and social rejection can weaken belonging and reduce school happiness. National survey evidence has demonstrated a negative association between bullying and happiness at school (Aunampai et al., 2022). Sustainable vitality therefore requires prevention of harm and the institutionalization of

dignity, fairness, mutual respect, and accessible support. Gender also matters because girls and boys may experience academic pressure, peer relationships, emotional support, safety, and belonging differently (Campbell, 2017). A model developed for girls' schools should consequently address psychological and physical safety, gender-responsive support, self-esteem, student voice, identity development, agency, and equitable opportunities for participation and leadership.

Leadership is a principal organizational mechanism through which vitality is enabled or constrained. Principals shape culture by defining priorities, modeling conduct, distributing authority, resolving conflict, allocating resources, and determining whether participation is genuine. Transformational leadership can promote a positive and happy culture through shared vision, collective commitment, recognition of individual needs, and support for innovation (Permana & Yuslimah, 2025). Adaptive leadership is also necessary because schools must respond flexibly to changing student needs and contextual pressures (Ali & Putra, 2026). Moreover, the relationship between school happiness and school effectiveness suggests that well-being-oriented leadership can strengthen, rather than weaken, institutional performance through improved trust, motivation, and coordination (Akyurek & Aypay, 2023). Vitality-enhancing leadership should therefore move beyond administrative control toward participatory, responsive, and development-oriented educational governance.

Teachers' professional conditions are equally important because students encounter the school primarily through classroom relationships. Teachers who experience trust, autonomy, support, and freedom to adapt instruction are better able to create responsive and emotionally positive learning environments. School happiness has been significantly associated with teacher autonomy (Al-Bataineh et al., 2021) and identified as a predictor of teachers' organizational trust (Basaran & Cakir, 2023). These relationships suggest a reciprocal process: professional trust and discretion encourage instructional initiative, while a positive climate strengthens commitment and collaboration. Conversely, rigid control, chronic overload, distrust, and burnout undermine the capacity to sustain student vitality. A comprehensive model must therefore include professional authority, teacher agency, organizational justice, supportive supervision, and collaborative learning among staff.

The pedagogical expression of vitality is joyful, meaningful, and participatory learning. Joyful learning does not remove intellectual challenge or replace education with

entertainment; rather, it combines cognitive demand with curiosity, relevance, interaction, choice, discovery, and a sense of progress. A systematic review of joyful learning in elementary mathematics highlighted its value for engagement, understanding, and effective teaching (Putra et al., 2026), while another review found that joyful learning supported by instructional media can improve mathematics outcomes through more interactive and accessible experiences (Cahyani et al., 2026). Integrating joyful learning with problem-based learning can strengthen creative thinking by positioning students as active problem solvers (Henukh et al., 2026). The integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning can likewise improve classroom participation (Asih & Rohman, 2026), and joyful learning has been shown to support higher-order thinking when students inquire, collaborate, interpret, and apply knowledge (Zahro et al., 2025). Vitality is thus generated through learning itself when students experience competence, autonomy, relevance, and intellectual agency.

School vitality also extends beyond formal lessons. Extracurricular activities, arts-based practices, and school–community partnerships allow students to discover interests, express identity, develop talents, and build relationships that may remain invisible in conventional classrooms. Extracurricular participation can empower students by providing structured opportunities for interest and talent development (Angga et al., 2026). Creative arts can catalyze school change by disrupting routine pedagogies and opening new forms of participation and expression (Hall & Thomson, 2017). School–community music collaborations likewise demonstrate how shared artistic work can connect students, educators, families, and local communities (Bartleet, 2012). Such experiences broaden the meaning of achievement and generate belonging, collaboration, visibility, and self-expression. The physical environment contributes as well: lighting, greenery, aesthetic quality, flexible seating, and accessible communal spaces can support or inhibit movement, concentration, interaction, comfort, and attachment to school.

In Iran, a vitality-enhancing school must be understood in relation to indigenous educational values, policy frameworks, cultural expectations, and religious conceptions of development. Research on the objectives of a happy-school curriculum based on Islamic teachings has connected joy with ethical development, purposeful learning, dignity, balanced growth, and spirituality rather than momentary pleasure (Dehghani et al., 2018). A model aligned with the Fundamental Reform Document likewise indicates that

happiness and vitality are compatible with Iranian educational aims when embedded in coherent cultural and developmental processes (Hashemi-Nekou et al., 2019). The conceptualization of the standard school in national transformation documents further highlights the necessity of aligning school quality with indigenous understandings of desirable education and human flourishing (Namdari Pejman, 2024). International happy-school frameworks therefore cannot simply be transferred to Iranian girls' schools without examining cultural fit, institutional feasibility, family participation, spirituality, identity, and gender-responsive education.

Iranian scholarship has advanced the conceptualization, measurement, and implementation of school happiness, but it also reveals a need for theoretical integration. The psychometric development of a happy-school scale has supported systematic assessment of the construct (Gharibzadeh et al., 2023b), while a three-layer feasibility and implementation model has shown that happy-school management depends on coordinated structural, managerial, and contextual conditions (Gharibzadeh et al., 2023a). The design and validation of a more recent happy-school instrument further demonstrates that the phenomenon can be represented through measurable dimensions (Ahmadi Siahbouni et al., 2025). Nevertheless, measurement tools identify indicators but do not necessarily explain how leadership, professional autonomy, culture, architecture, relationships, participation, learning strategies, and safety interact as a dynamic process. General implementation frameworks may also fail to capture the distinctive needs and experiences of female students in Iranian schools.

Several gaps consequently justify a context-specific model. Much of the literature treats happiness as an individual perception or outcome, although sustainable vitality is also an ecological and organizational quality. Leadership, teacher autonomy, joyful learning, safety, physical space, stakeholder participation, and cultural values are often examined separately, leaving their interrelationships insufficiently explained. Many studies also concern elementary or mixed-gender populations, limiting their direct applicability to girls' schools and adolescent developmental contexts. Moreover, reducing vitality to ceremonies, entertainment, or occasional extracurricular activities obscures the systemic transformation required in governance, pedagogy, relationships, and school environments. What is needed is an explanatory framework that shows how causal and contextual conditions are translated through supportive

processes and practical strategies into health, agency, participation, and empowerment.

A comprehensive model should therefore conceptualize the girls' school as an interconnected ecosystem. Within such an ecosystem, leadership establishes direction and distributes power; professional autonomy enables responsive teaching; organizational culture shapes trust and belonging; architecture influences comfort and interaction; Iranian-Islamic values provide ethical and cultural orientation; families and communities contribute social resources; joyful learning makes students active meaning-makers; and gender-responsive safety protects dignity and participation. Its outcomes should extend beyond immediate enjoyment to multidimensional health, academic self-belief, responsibility, resilience, active participation, and empowerment. Developing such a model through the perspectives of principals, teachers, female students, and experts can generate a locally grounded explanation of how school vitality is created, sustained, and translated into educational practice.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to design and validate a context-sensitive vitality-enhancing school model for Iranian girls' schools by identifying the causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome-related components that collectively shape an empowering and sustainable school ecosystem.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of its purpose and qualitative and exploratory in terms of data collection and analysis. It aimed to design and validate a vitality-enhancing school model appropriate to the cultural, social, and educational conditions of girls' schools in Iran. Because identifying the model's components and explaining the relationships among them required an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of stakeholders and experts, the study employed grounded theory based on the systematic approach developed by Strauss and Corbin. Within this approach, theory emerges from the data, while data collection and analysis proceed concurrently and in continuous interaction. Accordingly, data collection and analysis were conducted through an ongoing and iterative process to identify and explain the concepts and categories constituting the model and the relationships among them through open, axial, and selective coding.

The participants comprised three groups: principals and teachers from girls' schools, female students in lower and upper secondary education, and experts in the field of education. These groups were selected to develop a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the concept of a vitality-enhancing school within the context of Iranian girls' schools. Based on their respective positions, experiences, and knowledge, each group could reveal different dimensions of the factors, conditions, strategies, and consequences associated with school vitality. Furthermore, the diversity of the participants' roles and experiences facilitated data comparison and the identification of different dimensions of the research categories. The first group consisted of principals and teachers from girls' schools. Given their direct experience with the teaching-learning process, continuous interaction with students, and familiarity with students' educational, developmental, and psychosocial concerns, the teachers provided valuable information about the factors influencing vitality in classrooms and school environments. As those responsible for implementing school policies and programs, the principals also expressed their views regarding the capacities, limitations, implementation barriers, and managerial requirements associated with creating vitality-enhancing schools. The second group consisted of female students enrolled in lower and upper secondary education. As the primary stakeholders in educational environments, the students were the main source of information concerning lived experiences, needs, perceptions, and expectations related to vitality, academic motivation, sense of school belonging, social relationships, and the quality of the educational environment. Their participation enabled a direct and unmediated representation of their experiences of attending girls' schools. The third group comprised experts in the field of education, including university faculty members, educational researchers, and specialists and practitioners with experience in educational policymaking, curriculum planning, educational management, educational psychology, sociology of education, and school transformation. Their specialized and broader perspectives were used to identify the theoretical foundations, structural requirements, and principal components of the vitality-enhancing school model. A total of 21 individuals participated in the study, including seven principals and teachers from girls' schools, seven female students, and seven experts in the field of education.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience, knowledge, and access

to information relevant to the research topic. Accordingly, individuals capable of providing in-depth, rich, and relevant information concerning the concept of a vitality-enhancing school were recruited. Participant selection was based on the direct relevance of their professional, educational, or specialized experiences to girls' school environments and the topic of school vitality. The number of participants was not determined in advance using a statistical formula. Instead, sampling and interviewing continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation was considered to have occurred when subsequent interviews yielded no new concepts, properties, dimensions, or relationships and merely repeated the data and categories identified in previous interviews. In the present study, theoretical saturation was reached by the twenty-first interview; therefore, further sampling and interviewing were deemed unnecessary. The final sample consisted of seven principals and teachers from girls' schools, seven female students enrolled in lower and upper secondary education, and seven experts in the field of education. The diversity of the participants in terms of occupational position, area of specialization, grade level, professional experience, and experience within girls' schools facilitated the collection of rich and multidimensional data.

The inclusion criteria were determined according to the characteristics of each participant group. Principals and teachers were required to have educational, developmental, or administrative experience in girls' schools and sufficient familiarity with the educational and psychosocial concerns of female students. Student participants were required to be female, enrolled in lower or upper secondary education, and experienced in attending a girls' school. Experts were required to possess academic, research, or professional expertise in education, educational management, educational policymaking, curriculum planning, educational psychology, sociology of education, or another field relevant to the research topic. The general inclusion criteria included an informed willingness to participate, consent to the interview and its audio recording, the ability to clearly articulate views and experiences, and availability for an interview with the researcher. For students younger than 18 years, informed consent from a parent or legal guardian, together with the student's informed assent, was required. The exclusion criteria included withdrawal at any stage of the study, inability to provide clear information relevant to the research objectives, subsequent identification of a failure to meet the inclusion criteria, an incomplete interview due to insufficient cooperation or inadequate responses, and any

circumstances preventing an individual from continuing participation. In addition, participant recruitment was discontinued once theoretical saturation had been reached and subsequent interviews no longer generated new concepts, properties, or categories.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews and the analysis of relevant documents and records. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to maintain the primary framework of the discussion while examining in depth the participants' perspectives, lived experiences, and perceptions of the factors and requirements involved in creating a vitality-enhancing school. Document analysis was also employed as a complementary method to enrich the data, compare information obtained from different sources, and enhance the credibility of the findings. To ensure consistency in conducting the interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical foundations, research literature, and primary objective of the study. The protocol included the main topics of discussion, opening questions, follow-up questions, and procedures for conducting the interviews. Developing this protocol ensured that all essential dimensions related to vitality-enhancing schools were examined while maintaining sufficient flexibility to explore new and meaningful topics raised by the participants. A combination of open-ended, follow-up, and probing questions was employed during the interviews. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to freely express their views and experiences. Follow-up questions were used to clarify responses, resolve ambiguities, and elicit concrete examples, while probing questions were posed to explore deeper layers of the participants' experiences, beliefs, and values. The order of the questions could be modified according to the progression of each interview, and additional questions were asked whenever relevant topics emerged. The interviews were conducted after the research objectives had been explained and informed consent had been obtained from the participants. With their permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were checked against the audio recordings several times to ensure data accuracy and authenticity. Data collection and preliminary analysis were conducted concurrently, and the findings from each interview were used to guide subsequent interviews, refine follow-up questions, and elaborate the emerging concepts. In addition

to the interviews, documents and records concerning school vitality, educational and developmental policies and programs, and studies related to vitality-enhancing schools were reviewed. Integrating the data obtained from interviews and documents made it possible to compare and triangulate the evidence and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the proposed model's components.

2.3. Data Analysis

The four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied to evaluate the scientific rigor and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance credibility, member checking, expert review, and data-source triangulation were employed. Following the initial coding, selected codes, interpretations, and extracted findings were presented to several participants to assess the extent to which the researcher's interpretations corresponded with their experiences and perspectives. In addition, several professors and specialists in educational management and qualitative research methodology reviewed the coding and categorization processes. Incorporating the perspectives of principals, teachers, students, and experts, together with data derived from interviews and document analysis, enabled the comparison of evidence obtained from different sources. To enhance transferability, participants with extensive experience and in-depth knowledge of girls' school environments or specialized fields relevant to the research topic were selected. Furthermore, the participants' characteristics, research context, sampling process, and data collection and analysis procedures were described in sufficient detail to enable readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar settings and contexts. To ensure dependability, the initial codes and categories were reviewed and recoded in several stages. The research procedures, analytical decisions, code revisions, and processes through which the categories were developed were also documented to create an auditable account of the research process and the derivation of the findings. To enhance confirmability, the researcher comprehensively documented the research procedures and reflexively recorded and monitored personal interpretations, assumptions, and analytical decisions. The use of multiple sources of information and the independent review of the analyses also reduced the potential influence of the researcher's personal biases on the findings and made it

possible to trace the analytical progression from raw data to concepts, categories, and final findings.

To objectively assess coding stability, an intercoder agreement procedure involving two coders was used. Accordingly, a subset of the interviews was coded by the researcher and an independent coder, and the level of agreement between their coding results was calculated using Cohen's kappa coefficient. This coefficient indicates the degree of observed agreement between coders while accounting for the agreement expected by chance (Cohen, 1960). The calculations were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 29, based on 180 valid cases. Cohen's kappa coefficient was 0.855, with an approximate standard error of 0.071, a test statistic of 11.465, and a significance level of less than 0.001. These findings indicated that the obtained kappa coefficient was statistically significant and different from zero; therefore, the observed agreement between the two coders could not be attributed solely to chance. The coefficient of 0.855 also indicated a high level of agreement between the two coders, thereby supporting the stability and consistency of the data-coding process.

The data were analyzed using grounded theory based on the systematic approach developed by Strauss and Corbin. Data analysis began concurrently with data collection and continued as an ongoing, interactive, and iterative process. After transcription, each interview was read several times and compared with the preceding interviews. The constant comparative method was applied throughout the analytical process, meaning that the data, codes, concepts, and categories were continuously compared to identify their similarities, differences, and potential relationships. The analysis was conducted through the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding, the interview transcripts were divided into meaning units, and initial concepts related to the factors and requirements of a vitality-enhancing school were extracted. The initial codes were continuously compared with one another and with the raw data. Semantically similar codes were then merged and organized into preliminary concepts and categories. At this stage, the properties and dimensions of each concept were also identified through repeated reference to the data. During axial coding, the relationships among categories and subcategories were examined. The properties, dimensions, and relationships among the categories were identified, and the data were organized according to the logic of the paradigmatic model. At this stage, the causal conditions, core phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and

consequences associated with the development of a vitality-enhancing school were identified and explained. Thus, the concepts distinguished during open coding were integrated within a coherent conceptual structure. During selective coding, the core category was identified and its relationships with the other categories were integrated. The study's theoretical narrative was subsequently developed, and the internal coherence of the relationships among the categories was examined through repeated reference to the raw data and constant comparison. At this stage, the categories were organized around the core category, and the relationships among the model's components were reviewed and consolidated. This process resulted in the development of a paradigmatic model of a vitality-enhancing school appropriate to the cultural, social, and educational context of girls' schools in Iran.

3. Findings and Results

The qualitative data were analyzed with the aim of identifying the dimensions and components of a joyful school and developing a model consistent with the characteristics of Iranian girls' schools. To this end, data obtained from 21 semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, students, and experts in education were analyzed based on the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin. Data analysis was conducted through a continuous, iterative process involving open, axial, and selective coding, which ultimately led to the identification of 180 initial concepts, 30 major categories, 10 core categories, and one central phenomenon.

The analysis of the data showed that joy-building in girls' schools cannot be limited to a single factor, such as management style, instructional programs, human relations, or the physical environment of the school. Rather, this phenomenon results from the coordinated and systematic interaction of a set of managerial, educational, psychological, social, cultural, pedagogical, and physical factors. Accordingly, the central phenomenon of the study was conceptualized as "an empowering and joyful girls' ecosystem in the school"; a concept that represents the joyful school as a dynamic, multidimensional, and interconnected environment for promoting joy, health, participation, and empowerment among female students.

At the outset of the analysis process, the interview texts were examined carefully and line by line, and meaningful propositions related to the features, requirements, processes, and outcomes of a joyful school were identified. The

extraction of initial concepts was carried out with emphasis on the participants' experiences and perceptions, without imposing predetermined theoretical classifications. As the analysis progressed, the extracted concepts were continuously compared with one another in order to identify similarities, differences, and semantic connections among them.

At this stage, 180 initial concepts were obtained. After repeated review of the data, similar or synonymous concepts were merged, redundant items were removed, and the conceptual boundaries of the codes were defined more precisely. The result of this process was the formation of 30 major categories that covered the various dimensions of the joyful school. These categories encompassed areas such as school leadership patterns, the quality of human relationships, psychological and gender-based safety, teaching and learning methods, the features of the physical environment, student health, family and community

participation, cultural and religious values, teachers' professional autonomy, and students' individual and academic capacities.

Accordingly, the identified criteria for a joyful school in Iranian girls' schools included transformational leadership, contingent leadership, participatory leadership, psychological safety, school belonging, intimate relationships, active learning, educational gamification, meaningful learning, safe space, girls' self-esteem, gender-responsive support, appropriate lighting, green space, flexible seating arrangement, psychological health, physical health, social health, parental cooperation, school synergy, community linkage, religious identity, cultural norms, educational spirituality, professional authority, organizational trust, teacher agency, academic self-belief, active participation, and individual responsibility. The major categories and their related concepts are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Major Categories and Extracted Concepts from Open Coding

No.	Major Category	Extracted Concepts
1	Transformational leadership	Inspiring vision, intrinsic motivation, developmental support, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration
2	Contingent leadership	Managerial flexibility, situational decision-making, behavioral adaptation, contextual responsiveness, strategic adjustment, situational diagnosis
3	Participatory leadership	Collective decision-making, professional consultation, responsibility distribution, active listening, organizational consensus, collective ownership
4	Psychological safety	Freedom of expression, acceptance of mistakes, mutual trust, relational respect, emotional support, classroom calmness
5	School belonging	School identity, emotional attachment, collective acceptance, meaningful membership, positive dependence, enthusiastic presence
6	Intimate relationships	Warm communication, mutual empathy, teacher accessibility, constructive dialogue, educational friendship, respectful interaction
7	Active learning	Classroom participation, cognitive engagement, practical experience, problem-solving, active inquiry, immediate feedback
8	Educational gamification	Competitive motivation, educational reward, gradual challenge, voluntary participation, game-based feedback, step-by-step progression
9	Meaningful learning	Connection to real life, deep understanding, knowledge application, conceptual coherence, connection with prior knowledge, personal interpretation
10	Safe space	Protective clothing, clear boundaries, behavioral care, physical protection, supportive supervision, prevention of abuse
11	Girls' self-esteem	Self-worth, positive self-image, self-acceptance, personal confidence, respectful assertiveness, sense of competence
12	Gender-responsive support	Sensitive responsiveness, educational justice, girls' needs assessment, identity support, specialized care, equal opportunity
13	Appropriate lighting	Natural light, balanced illumination, visual comfort, reduced glare, visual focus, energizing space
14	Green space	Nature connectedness, environmental calm, visual freshness, presence of plants, interaction with nature, environmental vitality
15	Flexible seating arrangement	Seating variety, easy mobility, spatial adaptability, group learning, location choice, classroom movement
16	Psychological health	Emotional regulation, inner calm, psychological resilience, academic hope, reduced anxiety, emotional self-regulation
17	Physical health	Daily movement, healthy nutrition, sufficient sleep, personal hygiene, physical fitness, disease prevention
18	Social health	Communication skills, group cooperation, mutual respect, conflict resolution, social responsibility, collective adjustment

19	Parental cooperation	Home-school communication, parental presence, academic support, educational dialogue, academic follow-up, mutual trust
20	School synergy	Intra-organizational cooperation, professional coordination, shared goals, aligned action, collective learning, mutual support
21	Community linkage	Local interaction, use of capacities, institutional participation, local responsibility, social support, social integration
22	Religious identity	Religious self-awareness, devotional commitment, monotheistic belief, divine orientation, value commitment, religious self-control
23	Cultural norms	Social courtesy, respect for elders, conventional behavior, behavioral modesty, cultural responsibility, collective commitment
24	Educational spirituality	Mindful presence, divine intention, inner self-monitoring, spiritual growth, inner purity, sacred education
25	Professional authority	Instructional decision-making, method selection, teaching initiative, program adjustment, professional judgment, executive autonomy
26	Organizational trust	Institutional confidence, managerial support, organizational honesty, reliability, administrative fairness, job security
27	Teacher agency	Professional influence, purposeful action, initiative, professional reflection, decision-making capacity, agentic responsibility
28	Academic self-belief	Academic confidence, expectation of success, perceived competence, persistence in learning, overcoming difficulty, achievement motivation
29	Active participation	Voluntary presence, expression of opinion, behavioral engagement, involvement in decision-making, task follow-through, learning action
30	Individual responsibility	Self-regulation, personal accountability, commitment, task management, continuous follow-up, ownership of learning

In the next stage of the analysis, the relationships among the 30 major categories were examined, and categories with conceptual convergence and semantic proximity were integrated at a more abstract level. This process led to the organization of the major categories into 10 core categories. The identified core categories were positive leadership,

supportive climate, joyful learning, girls' safety, joyful architecture, multidimensional health, stakeholder participation, Iranian-Islamic culture, professional autonomy, and student empowerment. The relationships between the major categories and the core categories are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Core Categories and Their Constituent Major Categories

No.	Core Category	Constituent Major Categories
1	Positive leadership	Transformational leadership, contingent leadership, participatory leadership
2	Supportive climate	Psychological safety, school belonging, intimate relationships
3	Joyful learning	Active learning, educational gamification, meaningful learning
4	Girls' safety	Safe space, girls' self-esteem, gender-responsive support
5	Joyful architecture	Appropriate lighting, green space, flexible seating arrangement
6	Multidimensional health	Psychological health, physical health, social health
7	Stakeholder participation	Parental cooperation, school synergy, community linkage
8	Iranian-Islamic culture	Religious identity, cultural norms, educational spirituality
9	Professional autonomy	Professional authority, organizational trust, teacher agency
10	Student empowerment	Academic self-belief, active participation, individual responsibility

Table 2 indicates that the category of positive leadership consists of three dimensions—transformational, contingent, and participatory leadership—and reflects the role of school management in creating a shared vision, adapting decisions to the situation, and engaging school members in decision-making. Supportive climate likewise refers to the quality of relational and emotional experiences of individuals within the school environment and is realized through psychological safety, a sense of belonging, and the formation of intimate relationships. The category of joyful learning represents a process in which students, through active learning, gamified elements, and meaningful content,

experience conscious and enjoyable participation in educational activities.

Girls' safety refers to the set of conditions and actions that, by ensuring a safe space, strengthening self-esteem, and providing support tailored to the needs of female students, increase their sense of dignity, calmness, and security. Joyful architecture emphasizes the direct effect of the school's physical environment on emotions, interactions, and the quality of learning, and is shaped through appropriate lighting, green space, and flexible seating arrangements. The category of multidimensional health includes the psychological, physical, and social dimensions of health and

underscores the need to attend simultaneously to all aspects of student development.

Stakeholder participation refers to purposeful interaction among parents, school staff, and the surrounding community, indicating that the sustainable realization of school joy requires the cooperation and synergy of multiple actors. Iranian-Islamic culture constitutes the value framework of the model and encompasses religious identity, cultural norms, and educational spirituality. Professional autonomy refers to the extent of teachers' authority, trust, and agency in decision-making and educational activities. Finally, student empowerment is manifested in increased academic self-belief, active participation, and acceptance of individual responsibility.

In the final stage of analysis, the core categories were organized into a coherent theoretical structure around a central concept. In selecting the central phenomenon, the extent of each category's relationship to the others, its explanatory power, and its ability to reflect the participants' overall experience were considered. Based on these considerations, "an empowering and joyful girls' ecosystem in the school" was selected as the central phenomenon of the study.

In this model, the concept of an ecosystem refers to the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of the various

dimensions of the school. From this perspective, school joy is not the product of isolated and fragmented activities, but rather the result of the coordinated functioning of different components of the school. In such an ecosystem, school leadership, teachers' professional capacity, the cultural and physical environment, human relationships, teaching and learning methods, and the participation of families and the community interact with one another. The result of this interaction is the creation of conditions in which female students can develop their individual, academic, and social abilities while experiencing safety, belonging, and positive emotions.

To explain the relationships among the core categories, these categories were organized in accordance with the paradigmatic model of grounded theory into five sections: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. In this arrangement, positive leadership and professional autonomy were identified as causal conditions; joyful architecture and Iranian-Islamic culture as contextual conditions; supportive climate and stakeholder participation as intervening conditions; joyful learning and girls' safety as action/interaction strategies; and multidimensional health and student empowerment as the outcomes of the model. The final organization of the categories is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Organization of Core Categories in the Paradigmatic Model of the Study

No.	Core Category	Major Categories	Position in the Paradigmatic Model	Rationale
1	Positive leadership	Transformational leadership, contingent leadership, participatory leadership	Causal conditions	School leadership initiates change and directs the processes related to creating joy in the school.
2	Professional autonomy	Professional authority, organizational trust, teacher agency	Causal conditions	Professional autonomy provides the necessary capacity for teachers' decision-making, initiative, and effective agency.
3	Joyful architecture	Appropriate lighting, green space, flexible seating arrangement	Contextual conditions	The physical characteristics of the environment create the necessary basis for calmness, interaction, and joyful learning.
4	Iranian-Islamic culture	Religious identity, cultural norms, educational spirituality	Contextual conditions	Iranian-Islamic culture forms the value-based and normative foundations governing the school's educational processes.
5	Supportive climate	Psychological safety, school belonging, intimate relationships	Intervening conditions	The quality of the school climate can facilitate or limit the implementation and effectiveness of joyful strategies.
6	Stakeholder participation	Parental cooperation, school synergy, community linkage	Intervening conditions	Participation of families, school staff, and the community affects the quality, scope, and sustainability of strategy implementation.
7	Joyful learning	Active learning, educational gamification, meaningful learning	Action/interaction strategies	Joyful learning is the main implementation process for increasing students' motivation, participation, and positive experience.
8	Girls' safety	Safe space, girls' self-esteem, gender-responsive support	Action/interaction strategies	This category represents the school's targeted actions to ensure safety, dignity, and the special needs of female students.

9	Multidimensional health	Psychological health, physical health, social health	Consequences	Multidimensional health is one of the main results of the coherent implementation of joyful strategies in the school.
10	Student empowerment	Academic self-belief, active participation, individual responsibility	Consequences	Student empowerment is the ultimate outcome of the model in individual, academic, and social dimensions.

Within the resulting paradigmatic structure, positive leadership and professional autonomy were placed in the position of causal conditions because these two categories provide the initiating and sustaining force for the school's movement toward joy-building. Positive leadership creates the necessary basis for change by drawing an inspiring vision, selecting management styles appropriate to the situation, and involving school members in decision-making. In such a model, the principal is not merely responsible for implementing administrative regulations, but as an educational and pedagogical leader, guides the process of change and mobilizes the school's human and organizational capacities to achieve joyful goals.

Professional autonomy also provides a basis for innovation and flexibility in educational and pedagogical activities by creating authority, organizational trust, and room for teacher agency. When teachers have the authority to choose instructional methods, organize educational programs, and align their decisions with students' needs, the conditions for creative, responsive, and joyful teaching are strengthened. In contrast, excessive restrictions on professional decision-making may reduce teachers' motivation and their capacity to create positive learning experiences.

Joyful architecture and Iranian-Islamic culture were placed in the category of contextual conditions because these two categories form the physical and value-based context for realizing the central phenomenon. The physical environment of the school is not merely a place for arranging classrooms and implementing formal programs, but an active part of students' educational experience. The use of natural light and balanced illumination, the presence of green space, and the possibility of flexible classroom arrangements can increase students' calmness, movement, concentration, interaction, and sense of belonging. Therefore, the quality of school architecture is associated with emotional states, the quality of social relationships, and the extent of student participation.

Iranian-Islamic culture also provides the value and normative reference for the model. Religious identity, cultural norms, and educational spirituality determine the direction and content of the school's educational and moral activities. Within this framework, joy does not mean mere

entertainment or transient excitement, but is linked to human dignity, moral growth, spirituality, responsibility, and balanced flourishing among students. Accordingly, joyful programs will be culturally appropriate only when, while responding to students' psychological and social needs, they are also aligned with the cultural and religious values of society.

Supportive climate and stakeholder participation were classified as intervening conditions because of their effect on the quality and effectiveness of the strategies. A supportive climate creates psychological safety, strengthens a sense of belonging, and expands intimate relationships, thereby enabling more active participation by students and teachers in school processes. In an environment where expressing views is not accompanied by fear of humiliation or punishment, mistakes are accepted as a natural part of learning, and school members receive emotional support and mutual respect, the conditions for more effective joyful strategies are established.

Stakeholder participation also increases the school's capacity to design and implement sustainable programs. Purposeful communication between home and school, parental involvement in educational processes, coordinated cooperation among staff, and the use of local community capacities provide the school with greater human and social resources. The more coherent the relationships among these groups, the greater the possibility of implementing joyful programs with quality, breadth, and continuity. Conversely, weak connections among family, school, and community may lead to fragmented activities and reduced effectiveness.

Joyful learning and girls' safety were identified as action/interaction strategies within the model. Joyful learning is realized by creating opportunities for active participation, practical experience, problem-solving, gamification of the learning process, and connecting curriculum content to students' real life. In such a process, the student shifts from being a passive recipient of information to an active agent in meaning-making. This shift can increase cognitive engagement, academic motivation, social interaction, and the enjoyment derived from learning.

Girls' safety includes a set of measures aimed at ensuring physical and psychological safety, preserving dignity, strengthening self-esteem, and responding to the specific

needs of female students. Creating a safe space, observing behavioral and relational boundaries, providing gender-sensitive support, and offering equal opportunities for expression and participation are among the requirements of this strategy. Realizing such conditions helps students develop a greater sense of worth and competence and participate in school educational and social activities with greater confidence and assertiveness.

Multidimensional health and student empowerment were also identified as the main consequences of implementing the model. Multidimensional health simultaneously includes psychological, physical, and social dimensions. Reduced anxiety, increased calmness and hope, improved emotional regulation, enhanced resilience, attention to physical activity and hygiene, strengthened communication skills, and improved conflict resolution are among the manifestations of this consequence. This finding indicates that the joyful

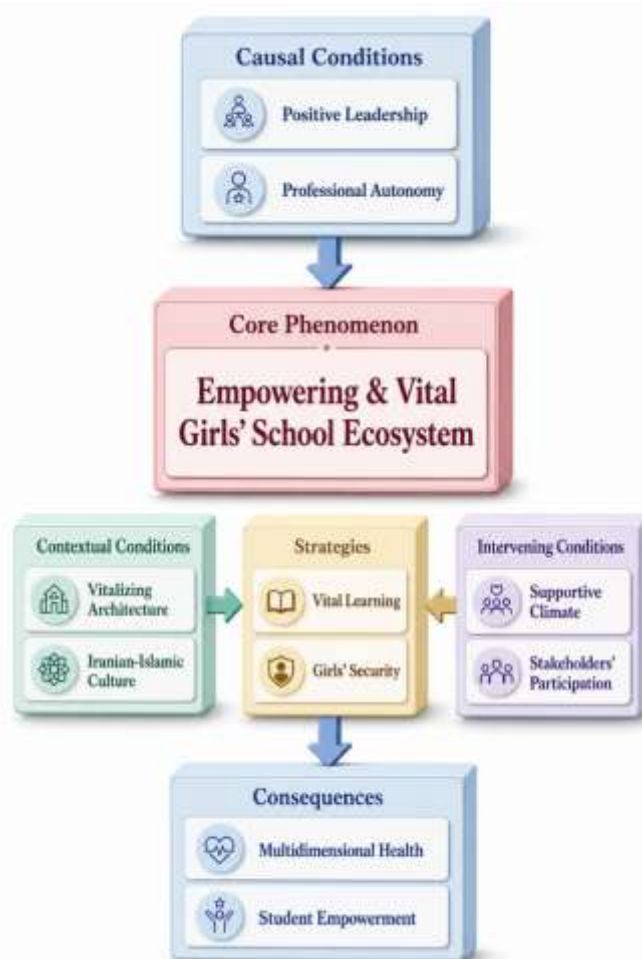
school should address student health in an integrated manner and should avoid reducing it to a temporary sense of happiness or short-term satisfaction.

Student empowerment is reflected in increased academic self-belief, active participation, and individual responsibility. In such a school, students develop a more positive understanding of their own abilities, show greater persistence in dealing with academic difficulties, participate in school activities and decisions, and more consciously accept responsibility for their learning and behavior. Therefore, empowerment can be considered one of the final and sustainable outcomes of the joyful school model at the individual, educational, and social levels.

The relationships among causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and the outcomes of the model are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The paradigmatic model of a joyful school for Iranian girls' schools as an empowering and joyful girls' ecosystem in the school



As shown in Figure 1, positive leadership and professional autonomy provide the causal forces necessary for the formation and development of an empowering and joyful ecosystem. Joyful architecture and Iranian-Islamic culture also shape the physical, value-based, and normative foundations for implementing the model. In this context, supportive climate and stakeholder participation influence how strategies are implemented, their effectiveness, and their sustainability. Within such a context, the strategies of joyful learning and girls' safety are enacted, ultimately leading to the enhancement of multidimensional health and the empowerment of students.

Overall, the data analysis was conducted at three conceptual levels. At the first level, 180 initial concepts were extracted from the interview data. At the second level, the initial concepts were compared, reviewed, and merged into 30 major categories and then organized into 10 core categories. At the third level, the core categories were integrated into a unified theoretical structure using the paradigmatic logic of grounded theory, resulting in the central phenomenon of "an empowering and joyful girls' ecosystem in the school."

The final results showed that the realization of a joyful school for female students depends on the interaction of five groups of factors: causal conditions consisting of positive leadership and professional autonomy; contextual conditions including joyful architecture and Iranian-Islamic culture; intervening conditions including supportive climate and stakeholder participation; action/interaction strategies including joyful learning and girls' safety; and consequences including multidimensional health and student empowerment.

On this basis, joy-building cannot be reduced to the implementation of a few ceremonial, recreational, or extracurricular activities. A joyful school is the outcome of a continuous, systematic, and multi-level process in which school management, teachers' professional agency, human relationships, the physical environment, cultural values, teaching and learning methods, and the participation of families and the community function in coordination with one another. The result of this synergy is the formation of an educational ecosystem in which female students, in addition to experiencing safety, belonging, and positive emotions, gain opportunities to improve psychological, physical, and social health, strengthen self-belief, increase participation, and accept responsibility.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study designed and validated a vitality-enhancing school model for Iranian girls' schools by drawing on the perspectives of principals, teachers, female students, and educational experts. The grounded-theory analysis yielded 180 initial concepts, 30 major categories, and 10 core categories organized around the central phenomenon of "an empowering and vitality-enhancing school ecosystem for girls." Positive leadership and professional autonomy were identified as causal conditions; vitality-enhancing architecture and Iranian-Islamic culture as contextual conditions; supportive climate and stakeholder participation as intervening conditions; joyful learning and girls' safety as action and interaction strategies; and multidimensional health and student empowerment as the principal consequences. The findings therefore indicate that school vitality is neither a transient emotional state nor the product of isolated recreational activities. Instead, it is generated through the coordinated interaction of managerial, professional, pedagogical, relational, physical, cultural, and social dimensions within the school ecosystem. This systemic interpretation is consistent with the view that school happiness is a multidimensional phenomenon emerging from the interaction of individual experiences and institutional conditions (Sezer & Can, 2020). It also corresponds with the conceptualization of vibrant schools as organizational environments characterized by positive relationships, engagement, collective energy, and opportunities for flourishing (Boos & Tschannen-Moran, 2025).

One of the principal findings was that positive leadership functions as a causal condition for creating and sustaining a vitality-enhancing school. In the proposed model, positive leadership incorporated transformational, contingent, and participatory dimensions. Transformational leadership enables principals to communicate an inspiring vision, motivate school members, support professional development, and promote innovation. Contingent leadership allows school leaders to adjust decisions to the needs of students, teachers, and the educational context, while participatory leadership distributes responsibility and creates opportunities for collective decision-making. This finding aligns with research showing that transformational school leadership can contribute to the development of a positive and happy organizational culture through shared goals, staff empowerment, and supportive relationships (Permana & Yuslimah, 2025). It is also consistent with

evidence that adaptive principals can shape positive school culture and climate by responding flexibly to change and mobilizing organizational capacities (Ali & Putra, 2026). Furthermore, the identified relationship between school happiness and school effectiveness suggests that positive emotional and organizational conditions can strengthen institutional performance rather than conflict with academic goals (Akyurek & Aypay, 2023). Therefore, vitality-enhancing leadership should be understood as educational leadership that integrates organizational effectiveness with human development, emotional support, and meaningful participation.

Professional autonomy was identified as the second causal condition and included professional authority, organizational trust, and teacher agency. This finding indicates that teachers require sufficient discretion to select instructional methods, modify learning activities, respond to students' needs, and exercise professional judgment. In schools where teachers experience excessive control, limited decision-making authority, and low organizational trust, their ability to create flexible and joyful learning environments is restricted. Conversely, professional autonomy can increase initiative, creativity, responsibility, and responsiveness to students. This result is supported by evidence of a positive relationship between school happiness and teacher autonomy (Al-Bataineh et al., 2021). It also corresponds with findings indicating that school happiness predicts teachers' organizational trust (Basaran & Cakir, 2023). These relationships may be reciprocal: organizational trust strengthens teachers' willingness to take initiative, while professionally empowered teachers contribute to a more supportive and positive school climate. The present findings therefore extend previous research by positioning professional autonomy not merely as a teacher-level occupational variable but as a foundational mechanism through which school vitality can be produced and sustained.

A supportive school climate emerged as an important intervening condition comprising psychological safety, school belonging, and intimate relationships. Participants' accounts indicated that students are more likely to experience vitality when they can express their opinions without fear, make mistakes without humiliation, receive emotional support, and establish respectful relationships with teachers and peers. This finding is consistent with students' descriptions of happy schools as environments characterized by friendship, fairness, teacher support, acceptance, participation, and a sense of belonging (Gramaxo, Seabra, et al., 2023). Parents also associate happy

schools with safety, positive relationships, supportive teachers, and opportunities for children's growth (Gramaxo, Flores, et al., 2023). Iranian students similarly identify relational, organizational, instructional, and environmental factors as essential to a happy school experience (Arbabi et al., 2025). The phenomenological findings of Kamali Mohajer et al. also demonstrate that supportive communication, positive interactions, and favorable emotional experiences constitute central symptoms of a happy school (Kamali Mohajer et al., 2022). Accordingly, vitality is not simply an individual characteristic of students; it is relationally constructed through everyday interactions and the degree to which the school communicates respect, acceptance, and emotional security.

The significance of supportive climate can also be interpreted in relation to school satisfaction and psychological well-being. Students who experience positive emotions and favorable interpersonal relationships at school generally report greater school satisfaction and more positive school experiences (Telef, 2021). Happiness at school may also mediate the association between school satisfaction and psychological well-being, indicating that the emotional quality of school life helps translate positive institutional experiences into broader psychological outcomes (Yam, 2022). Similarly, happy-school perceptions are associated with general self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Dos, 2023). These findings support the present model's placement of multidimensional health and student empowerment as consequences of vitality-enhancing conditions. When students feel accepted, supported, and connected, they are more likely to develop confidence, persistence, emotional stability, and positive attitudes toward learning.

Girls' safety was identified as a central action and interaction strategy and included safe space, girls' self-esteem, and gender-responsive support. The participants emphasized that vitality cannot be achieved in the absence of physical, psychological, and relational safety. For female students, safety involved not only protection from physical harm but also freedom from humiliation, bullying, discrimination, inappropriate conduct, and the fear of expressing personal needs. This finding is supported by evidence showing that bullying is negatively associated with happiness at school (Aunampai et al., 2022). Exposure to bullying can weaken students' sense of belonging, reduce trust, and transform the school into a threatening environment. The gender-responsive dimension of the model is also consistent with research suggesting that girls

and boys may experience school well-being, peer relationships, academic pressure, and emotional support differently (Campbell, 2017). Therefore, girls' safety should not be reduced to surveillance or restriction. It should involve dignity, accessible emotional support, respectful boundaries, equal opportunities, self-esteem development, and meaningful student voice.

Joyful learning was identified as the second principal strategy and encompassed active learning, educational gamification, and meaningful learning. This finding indicates that vitality should be embedded within the teaching-learning process rather than confined to extracurricular occasions. Students experience learning as joyful when they actively participate, solve problems, connect content to real life, collaborate with peers, receive constructive feedback, and perceive progress in their abilities. This result aligns with systematic evidence showing that joyful learning in mathematics can improve student engagement and facilitate more effective elementary teaching and learning (Putra et al., 2026). The use of instructional media within joyful learning can also improve mathematics learning outcomes by making educational experiences more interactive, accessible, and motivating (Cahyani et al., 2026). Moreover, integrating joyful learning with problem-based learning has been shown to enhance creative thinking skills (Henukh et al., 2026), while combining mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning can increase classroom participation (Asih & Rohman, 2026). Joyful learning has also been associated with improved higher-order thinking skills through active inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and knowledge application (Zahro et al., 2025). The current findings therefore reinforce the argument that enjoyment and academic seriousness are not contradictory. Joy may arise from intellectual challenge, meaningful effort, competence, discovery, and successful participation.

The model also highlighted the role of extracurricular activities, creative experiences, and opportunities for talent development. Although these components were embedded across joyful learning, stakeholder participation, and student empowerment, they represent significant pathways through which students can experience competence, identity, and belonging. Extracurricular activities can provide opportunities for students to identify and develop interests and talents that may not be recognized through conventional classroom assessment (Angga et al., 2026). Creative arts can contribute to school transformation by enabling new forms of expression, participation, and relationship-building (Hall

& Thomson, 2017). School-community music collaborations similarly show that artistic engagement can connect schools with families and communities and create vibrant educational experiences beyond formal instruction (Bartleet, 2012). These findings support the present model's ecological orientation, because vitality is strengthened when students can participate in diverse academic, artistic, social, cultural, and physical activities.

Vitality-enhancing architecture was identified as a contextual condition and comprised appropriate lighting, green space, and flexible seating arrangements. This finding demonstrates that the school's physical environment is not a neutral container for educational activities. Natural light, visual comfort, access to greenery, aesthetic quality, mobility, and adaptable classroom arrangements can influence concentration, calmness, social interaction, and engagement. The physical environment also communicates symbolic messages concerning whether students are valued and whether their needs have been considered. This result is compatible with multidimensional models and measurement instruments that treat the physical environment as an integral component of a happy or vibrant school (Ahmadi Siahbouni et al., 2025; Gharibzadeh et al., 2023b). It also complements implementation-oriented research showing that happy-school management requires coordinated attention to structural, managerial, and environmental factors (Gharibzadeh et al., 2023a). Thus, modifying physical space should not be considered a cosmetic intervention; it can support interaction, flexibility, safety, and emotional well-being when aligned with pedagogical and organizational changes.

Iranian-Islamic culture was also identified as a contextual condition comprising religious identity, cultural norms, and educational spirituality. This finding indicates that a vitality-enhancing school model cannot be imported without adaptation from other cultural contexts. Within the Iranian educational setting, vitality should be integrated with dignity, ethical conduct, spirituality, responsibility, balanced development, and culturally meaningful forms of participation. The result is consistent with research clarifying the objectives of a happy-school curriculum based on Islamic teachings, in which happiness is connected with meaningful living, moral development, constructive relationships, and spiritual growth (Dehghani et al., 2018). It also aligns with efforts to design happiness- and vitality-based educational models consistent with Iran's Fundamental Reform Document (Hashemi-Nekou et al., 2019). The characteristics of a standard school described in

national transformation documents likewise emphasize the integration of educational quality with indigenous cultural and developmental ideals (Namdari Pejman, 2024). Therefore, cultural adaptation does not require rejecting universal principles of well-being; instead, it requires translating them into an ethical and social framework that is meaningful within Iranian girls' schools.

Stakeholder participation emerged as another intervening condition and included parental cooperation, school synergy, and community linkage. The findings showed that the sustainable implementation of vitality-enhancing practices depends on coordinated relationships among teachers, principals, families, and community institutions. Parents can support students' academic and emotional development, while local institutions can provide educational, cultural, artistic, and social resources. Within the school, synergy among staff prevents fragmented programming and strengthens the consistency of messages communicated to students. The importance of stakeholder participation is consistent with parental perspectives indicating that a happy school is created through cooperation among families, teachers, and school leaders (Gramaxo, Flores, et al., 2023). Students' perspectives similarly show that happiness is influenced by the quality of relationships across the school community rather than by classroom experiences alone (Gramaxo, Seabra, et al., 2023). School-community artistic collaborations further demonstrate how external partnerships can enrich school culture and create shared educational experiences (Bartleet, 2012). Thus, a vitality-enhancing school should be regarded as an open system embedded in a network of family and community relationships.

The main consequences of the model were multidimensional health and student empowerment. Multidimensional health included psychological, physical, and social health, whereas empowerment comprised academic self-belief, active participation, and individual responsibility. These outcomes indicate that school vitality extends beyond temporary enjoyment and contributes to broader developmental functioning. Previous studies have linked happiness and vitality with academic achievement and educational progress (Afrazi et al., 2023; Niazazari, 2014). Happiness at school has also been associated with self-efficacy and life satisfaction (Dos, 2023), while school happiness may strengthen student leadership and willingness to assume responsibility (Goktas & Akyurek, 2023). The present findings integrate these outcomes within a single ecological model. When leadership, professional autonomy,

supportive relationships, safe conditions, meaningful learning, appropriate spaces, and stakeholder participation operate coherently, students are more likely to experience psychological calmness, social competence, physical well-being, academic confidence, participation, and responsibility.

Overall, the findings advance the literature by conceptualizing school vitality as an organizational and ecological phenomenon rather than solely as an individual emotional variable. Previous studies have contributed valuable scales, dimensions, and implementation frameworks (Ahmadi Siahboumi et al., 2025; Boos & Tschannen-Moran, 2025; Gharibzadeh et al., 2023a; Sezer & Can, 2019); however, the present model explains how different categories interact within the specific context of Iranian girls' schools. The model suggests that positive leadership and professional autonomy initiate change, cultural and architectural conditions provide the setting in which change occurs, supportive climate and stakeholder participation facilitate or constrain implementation, and joyful learning and girls' safety constitute the primary operational strategies. These processes ultimately produce multidimensional health and empowerment. Accordingly, the vitality-enhancing school should be understood as a coherent ecosystem in which administrative, pedagogical, relational, cultural, environmental, and developmental components mutually reinforce one another.

This study had several limitations. Because the research employed a qualitative grounded-theory design and purposive sampling, the findings reflect the experiences and interpretations of the participating principals, teachers, students, and experts and should not be statistically generalized to all Iranian schools. The study focused specifically on girls' schools, and the resulting model may not fully represent the conditions of boys' schools, mixed educational settings, rural schools, or schools in culturally and socioeconomically different regions. Although theoretical saturation was reached, the number of participants within each stakeholder group was limited. The findings were also based mainly on interviews and document analysis; direct classroom observations, longitudinal data, and objective indicators of school functioning were not incorporated. Finally, some participants may have presented socially desirable accounts of school vitality, particularly when discussing leadership, cultural expectations, safety, and institutional practices.

Future studies should quantitatively test the proposed model using large and diverse samples and methods such as

confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. Researchers should develop a context-sensitive instrument based on the identified core and major categories and examine its reliability, validity, and measurement invariance across educational levels and geographical regions. Comparative studies could explore similarities and differences between girls' and boys' schools, public and private schools, urban and rural schools, and schools with different socioeconomic profiles. Longitudinal research is also needed to determine whether changes in leadership, professional autonomy, supportive climate, and joyful learning predict sustained improvements in student health and empowerment. Intervention studies could experimentally evaluate individual components of the model, while mixed-method research could combine surveys, observations, interviews, and school-performance indicators to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of implementation processes and outcomes.

Educational policymakers should treat vitality as a core criterion of school quality and incorporate it into school evaluation, leadership development, curriculum planning, teacher professional development, and facility design. Principals should adopt participatory and supportive leadership practices, increase teachers' professional authority, and establish mechanisms through which students can safely express their views and contribute to school decisions. Schools should replace predominantly passive and standardized instruction with active, meaningful, collaborative, creative, and appropriately gamified learning experiences. Clear procedures should be established for preventing bullying, protecting students' dignity, and providing gender-responsive psychological support. School spaces should be improved through appropriate lighting, greenery, flexible classroom arrangements, and safe communal areas. Families and community organizations should be engaged as educational partners, and vitality-enhancing initiatives should be implemented as coordinated, continuous, and evidence-informed programs rather than as occasional celebrations or short-term recreational activities.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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