

SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SENSE OF BELONGING BETWEEN PEER SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENT

Helmi Mahdiarafif¹, Asep Deni Gustiana^{2*}, Idat Muqodas³

^{1,2,3}Educational Psychology, School of Postgraduates Studies, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Bandung, Indonesia

Author's email:

¹helmi_48@upi.edu; ²asden@upi.edu; ³idatmuqodas@upi.edu

Corresponding author:

asden@upi.edu

Abstract. Universities have a social environment that differs from that of lower-level schools, where students come from diverse backgrounds; therefore, a sense of belonging is crucial for sustained learning, as college students interact with others on campus, and peer social support is essential for fostering a sense of belonging, since it enables college students to feel a sense of belonging. A college student's sense of belonging in the academic environment has the potential to influence academic resilience. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role of a sense of belonging in the relationship between peer social support and academic resilience, particularly as a mediator. This study employed a systematic literature review conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines; a total of nine articles were included in the review. The results indicate a significant relationship between peer social support and a sense of belonging, as well as between a sense of belonging (or school belonging) and academic resilience, however, the role of a sense of belonging as a mediator remains limited, as the research findings are still fragmented and do not present a unified picture regarding the relationships among peer social support, a sense of belonging, and academic resilience.

Keywords: Academic Resilience; College Student; Mediator; Peer social support; Sense of Belonging

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities have a social environment that differs from that of earlier levels of schooling, due to the diversity of students' backgrounds ranging from culture, region of origin, religion, and even country. Since every individual has a unique background, including their geographic origin, diversity within higher education institutions or universities is inevitable (Assefa, 2023). Furthermore, the expansion of universities' reach through internationalization has increased the cultural and ethnic diversity among college students at these institutions (Karacsony et al., 2022), an example of this is seen in countries with diverse cultures, where internationalization and multiculturalism are promoted by the government to be integrated into higher education (Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2022), as well as in Goal 4a of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), which emphasizes the need for inclusive educational facilities and effective learning environments (Kaplan & Bista, 2022). This suggests that universities, as educational institutions, serve as a gathering place for individuals from diverse backgrounds, making it important for college students to be able to mingle and engage in social interactions with fellow students from various backgrounds. This may indicate the importance of a sense of belonging among college students. A sense of belonging is defined as a feeling of acceptance, social support, or an individual's connection to the university whether through faculty members or peers as well as how college students connect with the university and the people within it (Strayhorn, 2018; Pedler et al., 2022), this indicates that a sense of belonging allows college students to feel that they are part of and accepted by the university community and the people within it, especially in a university environment with a diverse range of backgrounds. A sense of belonging is

important because it can potentially determine how college students will interact with others at the university and the success of their learning process there.

A sense of belonging among college students also implies the need to feel connected and accepted, therefore, peer social support is important for college students to develop a sense of belonging. Social interaction with fellow college students is indicated to potentially help students integrate into the university environment (Amin et al., 2025), and according to Strayhorn (2021), as cited in Amin et al. (2025), support from peers has the potential to strengthen students sense of belonging, and also in Drysdale et al. (2022) and McBeath et al. (2018), as cited in Jeyamohan et al. (2025), it is noted that enhancing a sense of belonging through peer support programs can help build connections among college students. Referring to the above citations from various sources, peer social support and peer support through social interaction can foster a sense of belonging, allowing students to feel accepted within the university environment particularly in educational settings with diverse student backgrounds.

A strong sense of belonging can indicate how students may potentially benefit from positive academic outcomes, in a study by Hasan & Channa (2021), it was found that there is a significant positive relationship between a sense of belonging and academic resilience, fulfilling this need for belonging will have a positive impact on academic resilience. The importance of a sense of belonging among college students, as indicated by the quote above, lies in the fact that it fosters a sense of belonging within an academic environment, which can help ensure that the educational process proceeds smoothly for college students, thereby encouraging them to continue learning and be more resilience.

The importance of a sense of belonging in educational institutions as a mediator from the fact that it acts as a mediator between peer social support and academic resilience. Based on previous research indicates that a high level of peer social support leads to a rather high level of academic resilience in the relationship between these two variables among migrant college undergraduate students (Putri & Nursanti, 2020). The literature reviewed in this study indicates that there are both relationships and influences between peer social support and academic resilience, suggesting that peer social support is a variable associated with academic resilience.

However, there is still limited research on the role of a sense of belonging as a mediator linking these two variables. Studies by Amin et al. (2025) and Zhang et al. (2025) have examined a sense of belonging as a mediator among college students at universities, but this topic requires further in-depth analysis. The role of peer social support in sense of belonging as a mediator, the role of sense of belonging in academic resilience among college students, and the relationship among these three variables where sense of belonging acts as a mediator between the other two will be discussed through a literature review. Therefore, it is proposed as follows:

1. The role of Peer Social support to Sense of belonging in college student.
2. The role of Sense of belonging to Academic resilience in college student
3. The role Sense of belonging as mediator between Peer social support and academic resilience in college student.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher decided to conduct this study by compiling and searching for various articles relevant to the variables obtained from various types of sources including search engines and academic article publishers' websites from which the author collected and obtained these articles. This study employs a systematic literature review method also known as a Systematic Literature Review which was follow as closely as possible to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines, in accordance with the recommendations for systematic literature reviews using this method (Page et al., 2021).

The databases used during this study were the Scopus website (via Publish or Perish version 8.16), Sage Journals, Google Scholar (via Publish or Perish version 8.16), and PubMed. The article search was conducted from July 13th, 2026, to July 16th, 2026; however, the process of

screening articles according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria took until July 18th, and the final selection of articles and the writing of this paper were completed on July 18th. The keywords assigned to each variable were determined by the author based on the occurrence of appropriate and relevant keywords, as well as adjacent keywords with the same scope. See the table below:

Table 1. Searching Database Table.

Database	Time of Searching	Year	Keyword	Result
Scopus (Publish or Perish Version 8.16)	13 th - 16 th July 2026	2015- 2026	"Sense of belonging or School belonging"; "Peer Social Support" or "Peer Support"; "Academic resilience"; "College Student"	400 articles
Google Scholar (Publish or Perish Version 8.16)	13 th - 16 th July 2026	2015- 2026	"Sense of belonging or School belonging"; "Peer Social Support" or "Peer Support"; "Academic resilience"; "College Student"	1500 articles
Sage Journal	13 th - 16 th July 2026	2015- 2026	Advance Search ("Sense of belonging") AND ("Peer Support") AND ("Academic resilience") AND ("College Student") Filter: Education and Psychology & Counseling	1706 articles
PubMed	13 th - 16 th July 2026	2015- 2026	("Sense of belonging" or "School belonging") AND/OR ("Peer Social Support" or "Peer Support") AND ("Academic resilience") AND ("College Student")	115 articles

Based on the results of the search using each database, the author identified the article from four databases for the literature search, with a total of 3,721 articles collected from each database, where Scopus provided 400 articles after filtering, Google Scholar provided total 1,500 articles, Sage Journals provided total 1,706 articles, and PubMed provided total 115 articles. The researcher then screened these articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.

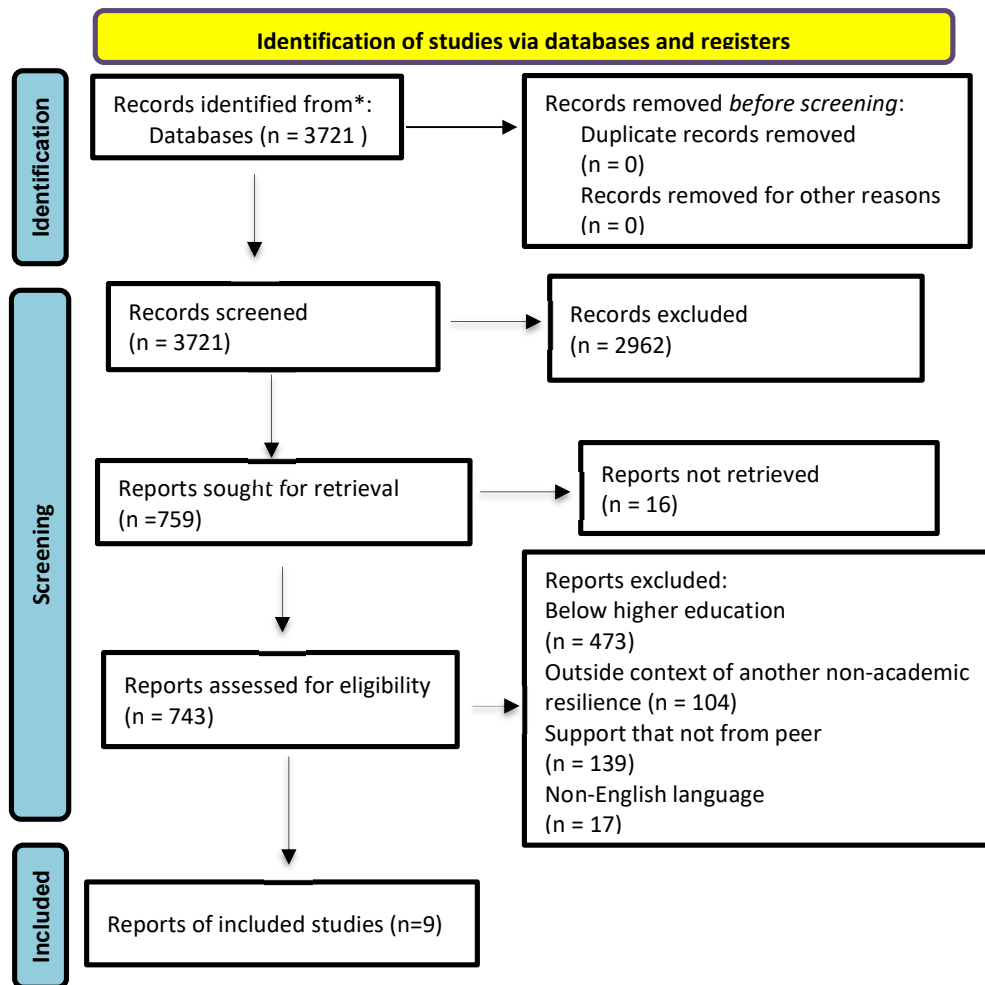
The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this systematic literature review are shown in the table below:

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion table of literature review.

Inclusion	Exclusion
Sense of belonging or school belonging	Focusing below or non-higher education (K-12/non-formal education)
Peer social support or peer support	Outside context of another non-academic resilience
Academic resilience	Peer support not based social
College student or Higher education student	Support that just not from peer
English based article language	Non-English language based article
Sense of belonging as mediator	

This study was conducted using the following inclusion criteria: English-language articles that discuss the sense of belonging or school belonging" also as a mediator, as well as "peer social support" or peer support as social way and academic resilience among college students or higher education students. The exclusion criteria focused on non-higher-education students specifically, those in kindergarten through 12th grade as well as articles that did not discuss forms of resilience not based on academics, peer support that did not have a social support context or the support did not come from peers, and articles written in languages other than English.

Picture 1. Prisma 2020 Diagram Flow (Page et al., 2021)



The total number of articles used in this study was identified through a database search, resulting in 3,721 articles, which of these, 2,962 records were excluded because their detailed discussions showed only minimal relevance to the sense of belonging, school belonging, social peer support, academic resilience, or were not even in the context of college students. This resulted in a total of 759 articles, after reviewing several of the relevant articles, it was found that 16 articles could not be accessed either due to paywalls or because the files were not readable leaving a total of 743 articles. After following the exclusion criteria that has been listed, the author selected the 9 most relevant articles to be discussed in this literature review.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the author will review nine articles, which will be review analyzed by writer, and step by step based on each variable identified as relevant to the predetermined topic. Therefore, the following table lists the articles to be analyzed by title, year, method, and the relevant results of the articles within the literature topic;

Table 3. Analyze Article Included Review

Title	Year	Method	Relevant result with literature topic
Seeking Peer Support and a Sense of Belonging: Impacts on Mental Health	2025	Mixed-Method	The importance of inclusivity, the removal of barriers, and flexible peer support in

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Education and Engineering (ICoISSEE-6)**
Bandung, Indonesia, July 25, 2026

and Well-Being (Jeyamohan et.al)			order to foster a strong sense of belonging (Jeyamohan et al., 2025)
Relationship between college students' sense of belonging and academic resilience (Hasan & Channa)	2021	Quantitative	An indication that a strong sense of belonging (school belonging) can lead to high academic resilience, meaning there is a positive correlation between the two (Hasan & Channa, 2021)
Understanding Sense of Belonging Among Undergraduate Marketing Majors (Amin et.al)	2025	Quantitative	The data indicate that a strong sense of belonging (school belonging) can lead to high academic resilience, meaning there is a positive correlation between the two (Hasan & Channa, 2021)
Social interaction, sense of belonging, and psychological wellbeing: a study of Chinese international students in UK higher education (Zhang, et al)	2025	Quantitative	Interaction through a sense of belonging, as one of the mediating variables among Chinese international college students in the United Kingdom, shows indications of a significant positive relationship between social interaction among peers and well-being (Zhang et al., 2025).
The role of psychological flexibility and sense of belonging in mitigating digital fatigue and enhancing academic resilience in higher education students (Li et al.)	2026	Quantitative	A sense of belonging, which becomes part of the mediating mechanism alongside psychological flexibility and which, in turn, acts as a mediator of digital fatigue suggests that there is a significant but indirect effect on the academic resilience of doctoral students (Li et al., 2026)
The Relationship between Bicultural Identity Integration, Self-Esteem, Academic Resilience, Interaction Anxiousness, and School Belonging among University Students with Vocational Qualifications (Chen et al.)	2022	Quantitative	This study indicates that academic resilience on school belonging when considered separately from bicultural identity, anxiety during social interactions, and self-esteem can positively predict school belonging among college students (Chen et al., 2022)
Peer Social Support and Academic Resilience For Students From 3T Regions At SWCU (Gunawan & Huwae)	2022	Quantitative	A college student from a disadvantaged, frontier and remote area included in this study indicated a positive correlation, whereby there's indication on strong peer social support is associated with strong academic resilience (Gunawan & Huwae, 2022)
Academic Resilience among Indonesian College Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Future Orientation and Peer Support (Kumalasari, 2023)	2023	Quantitative	Peer support, in collaboration with future orientation among Indonesian college students, is more strongly correlated with academic resilience, each factor is also slightly more significantly positively correlated with academic resilience as an internal factor (Kumalasari, 2023)

Academic resilience in medical students: exploring students' perception of social support provided by peers and teachers to help at-risk students for the successful academic journey (Saad & Ali)	2025	Mixed Method	Social support from peers is indicating a dominant factor for college medical students, where availability is a key reason, and the crucial role of support from fellow college students in academic resilience especially when college students have experienced academic failure (Saad & Ali, 2025)
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The discussion in this article will be organized according to the points listed in the introduction chapter, with each article have been included in this literature review divided into three sections that will be discussed sequentially throughout the review;

3.1 The role of Peer Social support to Sense of belonging in college student

College students, in the basic sense need to interact with everyone involved at the university as part of their academic activities especially given their academic workload and therefore need support, starting with those closest to them, such as peers and seniors. A mixed-methods study by Jeyamohan et al. (2025) suggests that college students pursuit of peer support remains limited, with only 45 out of 111 students seeking it, however, the study indicates that college students engage in various types of activities or ways to experience peer support, such as clubs, organizations, and university-related services. This study has indicated that college students also have several options for finding various ways to find support for themselves. However, the same study found that college students also experience perceived barriers, especially those taking online courses, social anxieties and time constraints, therefore, it is necessary to remove these barriers and provide flexible peer support to enhance their sense of belonging (Jeyamohan et al., 2025). The barriers encountered by this college student indicate the need to provide more attention on more accessible peer support, which has the potential to further enhance the sense of belonging. Peer support has also been studied as a separate variable, which indicates a positive influence on the sense of belonging and acts as a mediator (Amin et al., 2025). This study has been examined how peer support in the form of social interaction among peers at China International College serves as a positive predictor of a sense of belonging, which acts as a mediator (Zhang et al., 2025). This study has been shown to indicate that positive interactions have the potential to improve the sense of belonging among college students.

A number of studies have been conducted on both social peer support and peer social support, which play a significant role in college students sense of belonging in support from peers, ranging from social interactions to social support that has the potential to foster a better sense of belonging among college students.

3.2 The role of Sense of belonging to Academic resilience in college student

A sense of belonging is also important for academic resilience because it refers to a feeling of belonging in the place where college students study, as well as to the people with whom they interact within the university environment. A sense of belonging is crucial because college students who struggle to adapt will have difficulty integrating into the university environment and may lose their sense of belonging (school belonging), this is positively and significantly correlated with academic resilience (Hasan & Channa, 2021).

This study has indicated the importance of a sense of belonging specifically, school belonging as a foundation for adapting to the university environment, where this sense of belonging makes college students feel accepted in the setting where their education takes place. Furthermore, the study has revealed a strong correlation and regression, suggesting that a high sense of belonging indicates high academic resilience and serves as a positive predictor (Hasan & Channa, 2021). Research has also been conducted by Li et al. (2026), in which a sense of belonging as one of the mediators through digital fatigue, along with psychological flexibility indirectly influences

academic resilience in the context of doctoral students. This study has shown, although indirectly, that a sense of belonging among college students has an effect on academic resilience. The supporting evidence but reverse finding is that academic resilience, along with other variables, has a positive correlation with school belonging (Chen et al., 2022).

The research conducted indicates a strong sense of belonging, which in turn fosters strong academic resilience, particularly given the positive correlation between the two variables. A role of sense of belonging helps college students feel that they have a place where they can be accepted and a place to return to, which can make them want to remain in the university environment, continue their educational activities, and remain resilient, thereby potentially enhancing their academic resilience.

3.3 The role Sense of belonging as mediator between Peer social support and academic resilience in college student.

It is important to first review previous studies that demonstrate the impact of peer social support and peer support in a social context on academic resilience. Research on college students from underdeveloped, outermost, and frontier regions (near national borders) indicates a positive correlation (Gunawan & Huwae, 2022), and in a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic among college students, peer support and academic resilience were significantly correlated as internal factors, although weak; however, when combined with future orientation, the correlation is quite strong, and academic resilience can develop well where the help-seeking dimension of resilience is present (Kumalasari, 2023), in addition, the availability of social support from peer college students is important for academic resilience, which has the potential to improve it (Saad & Ali, 2025). A number of studies that have been conducted indicate a justification for the role of peer social support or peer support in the social context in relation to academic resilience.

There is a limited amount of prior research in which a sense of belonging serves as a mediator, specifically examining peer support as a predictor, a sense of belonging as a mediator, and academic resilience as the outcome, however, there are separate studies in which a sense of belonging serves as a mediator and the independent and dependent variables are separated in each study. Where peer support strengthens the sense of belonging which serves as a mediating factor that provides emotional and social connections as well as affirmation for college students (Amin et al., 2025), and where the sense of belonging acts as one of the mediators even in the context of digital fatigue whose effects are not directly significant on academic resilience, which serves as a substantial mediator in this study (Li et al., 2026). Previous research has shown that a sense of belonging acts as a mediator through which peer social support or peer support brings connectivity to the sense of belonging, which in another study has been influence resilience, however, these findings were not presented as a single integrated concept but were reported separately in different studies.

Therefore, previous research on the sense of belonging as a mediator remains quite limited because, as a mediator, it is still divided between peer support or peer social support and academic resilience however, there are indications that it could function as a single entity, which is why field testing is necessary.

This literature review carries a risk of bias, as the articles were reviewed and read by the author and then selected from various sources that aligned with the predetermined scope, however, the results is divided and limited by the sources available to the author, as well as by the various sources, demographics, types of methods, and even the origins of each theory's proponents. This implies that, despite the diversity of the reviewed sources that have been synthesized, field testing is necessary to evaluate them as a unified whole.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this literature review conclude that there are still distinct roles played by peer

social support or peer support in social context within the sense of belonging, as well as the role of the sense of belonging in academic resilience, although the sense of belonging has been identified as a mediator in some studies, its role remains limited and isolated across different studies, and further research is needed.

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**The Sixth International Conference on Innovation in Social Sciences
Education and Engineering (IColSSEE-6)**
Bandung, Indonesia, July 25, 2026

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