A Conceptual Understanding of Contemporary Roles of School Psychology and Assessment Practices in Post-Pandemic Educational Contexts

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Abstract

School psychology has rapidly evolved in response to increasing academic, behavioral, and mental health needs of learners, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. This conceptual review synthesizes contemporary research related to school psychologists' roles and assessment practices, focusing on evidence-based assessment, student well-being, equity in discipline systems, collaborative mental health frameworks, threat assessment procedures, academic achievement assessment, and emerging constructs such as spiritual intelligence and motivation-based formative assessment. The reviewed evidence indicates a global shift from traditional psychometric testing toward integrated service delivery involving prevention, consultation, multidisciplinary collaboration, and equity-centered decision-making. The review proposes a conceptual framework that positions school psychologists as systemic agents who integrate mental health, assessment, intervention, and school-wide collaboration. Recommendations include policy-level role clarification, training reform emphasizing evidence-based and culturally responsive assessment, and strengthening universal and targeted support for learners and educators.

Keywords: *School psychology, assessment, evidence-based practices, threat assessment, student well-being, formative assessment, resilience, collaboration.*

1. Introduction

Educational settings increasingly serve as frontline systems for identifying and addressing student learning difficulties, behavioral challenges, and mental health concerns. As schools face complex demands including rising emotional distress among learners, teacher stress, concerns about safety, and inequities in discipline as school psychologists are expected to take on broader and more preventive roles beyond traditional assessment.

The post-pandemic era has also altered expectations from school mental health systems, highlighting the need for collaborative, responsive, and equitable assessment-driven services. Therefore, this conceptual review examines current evidence on school psychologists' roles, assessment approaches, and system-level frameworks that enhance student outcomes and school functioning.

2. Purpose and Research Questions

2.1 Purpose

To conceptually synthesize recent evidence on school psychology service roles and assessment practices, and to propose an integrated conceptual model aligned with contemporary school needs.

2.2 Guiding Questions

1. How have the roles and functions of school psychologists shifted in modern educational contexts?
2. What evidence supports the use of structured, equity-focused, and collaborative assessment systems?
3. How do psychological and educational assessment practices relate to student well-being and academic outcomes?
4. What actionable recommendations emerge for school psychology practice and training?

3. Method of Review

This is a conceptual review based on the literature provided with 13 studies. Studies include quantitative surveys, mixed-methods designs, randomized controlled trials, correlational studies, and assessment validation research across school and student populations. The literature is interpreted thematically to build an explanatory framework rather than conduct a statistical meta-analysis.

4. Thematic Synthesis of Literature

4.1 Expansion of School Psychologists' Roles Toward Prevention and Systems Work

A clear shift is observed from narrow test-based roles to wider systemic responsibilities.

Matteucci et al. (2025) provided national evidence from Italy showing school psychologists not only deliver services but also desire to invest more time in:

- Individual counseling
- Group counseling
- Teacher consultation
- Primary prevention

This reflects global trends: practitioners increasingly identify prevention and consultation as essential roles rather than optional additions. However, role ambiguity and regional variability were barriers to consistent delivery across schools.

Conceptual implication: Modern school psychology is becoming a public mental health service embedded within education, requiring role standardization and national policies.

4.2 Evidence-Based Assessment as a Core Professional Requirement

Assessment remains central, but its purpose is expanding toward decisions that support intervention planning, inclusion, and wellbeing.

Aiello et al. (2017) found that evidence-based assessment (EBA) for autism spectrum disorder depends strongly on:

- ASD-specific training
- professional experience
- access to tools/time/resources

Barriers include training gaps and limited feasibility in practice. This highlights the need for professional development as a structural requirement rather than individual choice.

Conceptual implication: Assessment quality depends on training and infrastructure, not only psychologist competence.

4.3 Threat Assessment and School Safety as Preventive Mental Health Practice

Cornell et al. (2018) identified school threat assessment (e.g., VSTAG implementation) as an effective standard safety practice associated with:

- Reduced long-term suspensions
- Improved counseling and problem-solving responses
- Reduced disparities in discipline outcomes

Threat assessment functions as a structured preventive framework rather than a punitive approach.

Conceptual implication: School psychologists play an important role in risk evaluation and structured decision-making, reducing exclusionary discipline.

4.4 Equity-Centered Discipline Systems and PBIS

McIntosh et al. (2021) demonstrated that an equity-focused PBIS model significantly reduced racial inequities in office discipline referrals, especially Black and White disparities.This supports the argument that psychologists must engage at the systems level to address structural inequity not just individual behavior.

Conceptual implication: Equity is not an "extra goal"; it should be embedded into intervention frameworks and assessment-based discipline decision systems.

4.5 Post-COVID Mental Health and Wellbeing Needs in Students and Teachers

Student mental health

Schwartz et al. (2021) showed elevated stress and mental health concerns in students returning to school, with predictors including:

- COVID-related worry
- Perceived unsafe or unpredictable environments
- Academic uncertainty

Teacher stress and coping

Herman et al. (2021) found teacher stress levels decreased initially during early pandemic school closures compared to pre-pandemic baselines, but the study lacked long-term tracking. Key predictors included:

- Leadership quality
- School discipline fairness
- Self-efficacy

Student internal strengths

Genç and Arslan (2021) and Yıldırım and Tanrıverdi (2021) emphasized:

- Optimism and hope predicting subjective well-being
- Social support and resilience linked to well-being

Conceptual implication: Assessment and intervention must include protective factors (resilience, hope, support) as not only deficits.

4.6 Academic Assessment: Writing and Reading Outcomes

Parkin et al. (2020) used WIAT-III writing measures to operationalize the Simple View of Writing, showing strong intercorrelations among subtests and support for theoretical writing components.

Bellido-García et al. (2026) emphasized formative assessment as significantly improving reading comprehension outcomes among primary students.

Conceptual implication: Academic assessment should integrate psychometric measurement with instructional assessment systems (formative assessment) to improve learning.

4.7 Collaboration and Role Clarity in School Mental Health Systems

Bohnenkamp et al. (2023) found that structured collaboration tools and professional development improved:

- Coordination
- Communication
- Role clarity
- Team organization

This supports multi-tiered school mental health systems where school psychologists act as facilitators and integrators of service systems.

Conceptual implication: Effective assessment is not only an individual task; it is produced through team-based coordination systems.

4.8 Emerging Assessment Constructs of Motivation and Spiritual Intelligence

Vos et al. (2026) showed students' motivation profiles influence how they perceive formative assessment practices and relate to self-regulated learning.

Ntumi et al. (2026) developed and validated a Spiritual Intelligence Assessment Tool (SIAT) for faith-based school contexts, showing cross-country and gender patterns.

Conceptual implication: School psychology assessment is expanding into values-based and motivation-based constructs, requiring cultural validation and ethical caution.

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5. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed studies, school psychology assessment and service delivery may be conceptualized through an Integrated School Psychological Assessment and Support Model (ISPASM), consisting of five interacting domains:

1. **Evidence-Based Assessment (EBA) -** ASD assessment tools, academic tests, standardized measures
2. **Preventive and Tiered Support Systems -** PBIS, MTSS, early identification, prevention counseling
3. **Equity and Ethics -** reducing discipline disparities, culturally responsive assessment
4. **Wellbeing and Resilience Promotion -** hope, optimism, resilience, social support programs
5. **Collaborative Mental Health Systems -** multidisciplinary coordination, structured role clarity

This model positions school psychologists as systemic change agents, not merely test administrators.

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6. Implications

1. Assessment must be intervention-linked, ensuring results guide concrete plans.
2. Role clarity is essential for consistent service delivery.
3. Equity-focused frameworks should guide discipline and safety practices.
4. Psychological services should address both risk and protective factors.
5. Team-based mental health frameworks improve effectiveness.

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7. Recommendations

7.1 Policy Recommendations

- Establish national/standard guidelines defining school psychologist roles and time allocation.
- Create school psychology staffing norms (student-to-psychologist ratios).
- Mandate equity auditing in discipline systems.

7.2 Professional Training Recommendations

- Strengthen training in:
  - evidence-based ASD assessment tools
  - threat assessment frameworks
  - culturally responsive assessment
  - consultation and school-wide intervention
- Require structured internships focused on systems-level practice (PBIS, MTSS).

7.3 School-Level Implementation Recommendations

- Integrate school psychologists into:
  - school leadership teams
  - PBIS/MTSS committees
  - threat assessment teams
- Provide routine mental health screening and targeted support during major transitions (e.g., return-to-school phases).

7.4 Research Recommendations

- Conduct longitudinal studies on:
  - teacher burnout/attrition post-pandemic
  - sustainability of collaboration models
  - long-term effects of equity-focused PBIS

- Expand validation studies for emerging constructs like:
  - spiritual intelligence
  - motivation-based formative assessment perceptions

8. Conclusion

The conceptual evidence suggests school psychology is transitioning into a broader discipline emphasizing preventive mental health, equity-centered decision-making, and collaborative systems of support. Contemporary assessment practices are no longer limited to diagnosis and eligibility determination; instead, they are increasingly linked to intervention planning, resilience-building, and systemic reform in schools. Strengthening training, policy, and school-level collaboration will be essential to align school psychology practice with modern educational realities.

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