**Integrating Positive Psychology in Primary Education to Foster Well-being: A Case for Positive Education**

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While traditional education has been centred towards academic performance, the current dynamic world requires more than academics to give students a healthy future to deal with life. The high expectations of students when combined with the growing mental health concerns have become rampant among learners and makes it very essential for schools to embrace the total development of the learners (Benoit & Gabola, 2021). Positive psychology and social-emotional learning (SEL) are beginning to gain prominence as two factors necessary for human beings to maintain and enhance individual and group well-being and to create a positive school climate, and more pronounced in the field of primary education (Cole et al., 2022). This is expressed through the approaches, which focuses not only on the student’s cognition but also on building the skills of an emotionally intelligent and self-aware person along with social skills that would enable them to succeed in life.

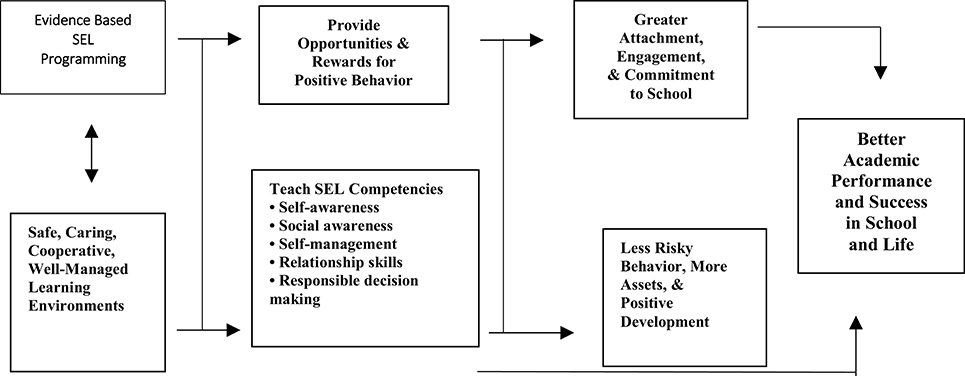
Many of the contemporary issues that define the educational settings are identifying the need for the schools’ holistic development, like using the technology to manage the student’s behavior, the academic pressure experienced by learners, and the policies on integration of the learners with special needs (Coulombe et al., 2020). As such, schools must embrace new approaches that enhance human and academic aspect of the learners. The studies undertaken by various scholars have establishing that students with good Social and Emotional Learning skills score better academically, have better interpersonal relations, and are in a better position to manage stress and other related challenges that they might face in their day to day lives. Such reasons make the incorporation of positive psychology and SEL a critical component of today’s learning.

The purpose of this paper is to maintain that introducing positive psychology, social and emotional learning, and strengths-based perspective to primary curricula can dramatically impact young students’ quality and approaches to learning. Giving schools focus for character development, self-control and management as well as positive interaction with other students help them succeed both in school and social life.

**Contemporary Theories of Positive Psychology in Education**

**Definition and Key Principles**

The relatively new field of "positive psychology" is concerned with cultivating positive traits like resilience, happiness, and optimism as well as promoting well-being. In contrast to general psychology that focuses on identifying and curing mental disorders, positive psychology aims at promoting people’s capacity for living a meaningful life. As defined by one of the pioneers of this field, positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of happiness, of the conditions that lead to happiness, of the factors that allow us to live long, productive lives filled with joy (Goldberg et al., 2021). Positive psychology in the context of education focuses on fostering school climate that is positive and productive in terms of students’ emotional health and academic achievement by strengthening their positive assets, including coping and self-confidence.



**Strengths-Based Education: Building on Students' Assets**

The major concepts in positive psychology is the concept of strengths use where instead of emphasizing on the students’ deficits, their strengths are being built upon (Park & Peterson, 2006). This approach changes the paradigm of education from fixing the problems to identifying and building on students’ assets (White & Kern, 2018). This has been said to lead to motivation, meaningful engagement and well-being as the students are encouraged to build on their strengths in different domains. Strengths based education emphasizes the fact that every learner has strengths that if discovered and developed can greatly improve performance and psychological well-being.

**Character Strengths Education and Fosters Perseverance in Learning**

One of the best examples of the application of strengths-based education is the Character Strengths Education that has been practiced in some schools. Wagner et al. (2020) showed that these schools observed positive changes in the students’ health and academic achievement. Positive psychological assets like gratitude, kindness, and perseverance when taught in class have a positive impact on the school climate as well as on the students’ achievement. Those students who identify and use their character assets in the daily tasks are likely to be more interested in learning and perform better.

Positive psychology concepts are most effective in primary school since they meet the social and emotional development of young learners at the most crucial age (Wagner et al., 2020). The most common use of positive psychology in the primary schools is in building up the coping and emotional self-regulation of the learners. Resilience is the capacity to recover from stress or to ‘snap back’ while emotional regulation entails the ability to display appropriate feelings in any given context. These attributes can be fostered by the educators to design a positive learning environment where the students feel comfortable in order to share their ideas and learn through experimentation. For example, the class practices such as communication, group work and problem solving enables the students to develop coping mechanisms by handling academic and social difficulties.

Another useful instrument from positive psychology that has been applied in primary education is Carol Dweck’s growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006). This theory postulates that students who think that the abilities can be changed through hard work and practice will persevere, be more engaged, and succeed in the face of adversity. A growth mindset is the opposite of a fixed mindset in which people have the mentality that their intelligence and talents are fixed. There are several ways that teachers can promote a growth mindset including; Noting effort as opposed to intelligence, helping students to embrace errors as chances to learn, and feedback. Research has revealed that positive attitude towards achievement in young children not only increases their achievement but also increases their ability to cope with challenges (Dweck, 2006).

**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Schools**

SEL is a very significant factor that aims at improving the students’ emotional and social competencies that are vital for their growth as well as in their academic achievements. Zins et al. (2004) described that SEL assists students in increasing their awareness of feelings, developing concern for others and forming positive interpersonal connections. This in turn enhances their social relationships as well as their academic achievements (Cristóvão et al., 2017). SEL assists students in the ways of handling social issues, handling stress and making right choices, which are very crucial in school and in life.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework outlines five key competencies that form the foundation of SEL programs: These are the five general competencies namely; self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible choices (CASEL, 2020).



The first component of the social and emotional learning is self-awareness and it enables the students to know their emotions and how they influence behaviour. Self-regulation refers to the ability of an individual to regulate his or her emotions and behaviours to achieve personal and academic goals. Social awareness helps students to develop an appreciation of the views of others while relationship skills deal with interpersonal relationships with fellow students (White & Kern, 2018). Finally, responsible decision-making leads to ethical and constructive decisions in different areas. Altogether, these competencies are to prepare a comprehensively thinking person ready for the challenges of the contemporary world.

In addition, SEL has a very positive effect on the students’ well-being. According to Durlak et al (2011) SEL programs enhance students’ participation and decrease problematic behaviors in class. For instance, a study done on a New Zealand primary school revealed that there was a reduction of thirty-five percent in behavioural incidents after the adoption of SEL program. This shows how SEL has helped in improving the school climate and order by reducing cases of misbehaviour among the learners. SEL can be implemented as a part of the curriculum to help schools create a positive environment that will contribute to the students’ achievement as well as their well-being.

**Strengths-Based Approaches to Educational Practice**

The strengths-based approach in education deals with the potential of the student and strengths of the student as opposed to dealing with weaknesses. It enables the teachers to discover and develop the talents of each learner to enable them to excel academically and socially (Anderson et al., 2024). There are many advantages of the strengths-based approach. First, it is motivating to students as it puts emphasis on areas in which the students can excel. According to Linley et al. (2006), this approach enhances a positive school climate because the students’ contributions are appreciated individually. Furthermore, Proctor et al. (2011)’s study shows that strengths-based intervention results in increased student engagement and academic performance. This is because when students are encouraged to capitalize on their strengths they are likely to be more engaged in the class and take charge of their learning process.

In the classroom, strengths-based education can be applied in project based assignments where each student is given a task that will build his or her strengths. For instance, a creative student may perform well in designing of posters or presentation while a student who is good in research may be assigned the task of research. This approach also involves the use of positive incentives including encouragement of the students for their efforts and achievements (Cameron et al., 2004). In this manner, the teacher is in a position to motivate the students by appreciating their work and therefore, students will be in a position to excel. Therefore, strengths-based education helps students to succeed by emphasizing the students’ strengths and the positive learning climate.

**Critical Assessment of Theories and Research**

There are some challenges that are associated with positive psychology and SEL. One of the issues that can be identified is the lack of the professional development of teachers in positive education frameworks (Sandholm et al., 2022). However, a majority of the educators lack the skills or knowledge on how to apply the principles of positive psychology in their teaching. This gap can result in the variation in the implementation of SEL and strengths-based interventions which is disadvantageous. However, there is a challenge of how schools are able to integrate well-being programs with academic goals. It may also be noted that there are some educators who may be forced to concentrate on the performance of students and thus there is little emphasis on well-being programs.

It is also noteworthy that some of the criticisms made to the SEL programs also indicate potential disadvantages. Some people have criticised that SEL programs are very specific and therefore they fail to take into account the cultural and socio-economic differences of the learners (Humphrey et al., 2010). In multicultural classrooms, such an approach may not be effective because it does not address the needs of the student. For example, learners facing economic challenges or trauma may require one-on-one assistance that cannot be solved by SEL programs. This suggests the need to have more developmentally and culturally sensitive SEL programs that could effectively meet the needs of the students in their various settings.

However, the strengths-based approach also has its fair share of criticism as well. There are some scholars who warn against focusing on the students’ strengths only, because, in this case, the weaknesses can be ignored. Sandholm et al. (2022) have noted that although emphasis on strengths is appropriate, it should not be done at the cost of ignoring learning problems. Students still require assistance in areas that they are not as strong in and an overemphasis on strengths will lead to an unbalanced education where important skills are not addressed.

In response to these difficulties, it is suggested that schools ensure that teachers are well equipped with SEL and strengths-based practices. Teachers require the necessary resources and materials to help them incorporate positive psychology in their teaching. In addition, SEL programs in schools should be adaptable in order to meet the needs of all students (Lavy, 2019). This way, the educators will be able to help all students, including those from diverse cultural background, to achieve academic success and have positive emotional well-being.

**Conclusion**

Conclusively, it is crucial to incorporate positive psychology, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and strengths perspective into the school curricula to facilitate students’ academic achievement and emotional thriving. These frameworks equip students with ways of understanding and regulating emotions, coping with stress, and building on strengths that results in more motivated students. It is essential for schools to achieve students’ welfare as well as their academic achievements in order to foster the welfare of students. With the help of positive education principles, schools also get ready students for academic success and the good life. Finally, positive education fosters balanced learning process and prepares students for success in and out of classroom.

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