

POSITIVE INTELLIGENCE AWARENESS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Positive Intelligence (PI) is a highly effective training methodology for enhancing individual strengths via the awareness of well-defined and quantifiable limiting habits that can negatively impact human potential for intellectual excellence and joyful living. However, PI has primarily been implemented by professional development coaches in corporate and leadership training, as well as by self-motivated adults seeking personal growth. More recently, efforts have been made to integrate PI into academic institutions, focusing mainly on undergraduate and graduate students. There is a significant need to apply PI principles to middle and high school students to enhance their mental well-being and academic potential. This paper presents the perceptions of high school students who were introduced to PI concepts through a research project. Students explored PI's framework, which distinguishes between the sage mode—a mental state that enables individuals to perform at their highest potential and experience fulfilment—and the saboteur mode—a state in which self-sabotaging tendencies hinder success and lead to wasted talent and missed opportunities. Participants, including student coauthors, evaluated the effectiveness of the quantitative saboteur test in identifying and interpreting negative limiting habit patterns. This paper documents students' reflections on their understanding of PI as a skill, as well as its strengths and limitations. Additionally, a quantitative analysis of the saboteur test results was conducted, including a case study tracking one student's PI test scores over six years, from elementary school through high school. The insights from this study provide valuable guidance for incorporating easily communicable quantitative psychological training into early education, particularly for students striving for academic excellence.

Keywords: Education, Emotional Intelligence, Positive Intelligence (PI), Joyfulness, K-12 Students.

1 INTRODUCTION

Positive Intelligence(PI) is a widely used method to understand psychological factors and strengths of individuals that have proven to negatively impact their intellectual growth and disrupt their path of peaceful and ebullient lifestyles [1]. Although PI is still unknown to many individuals, its usage is continuously evolving and being adopted by companies to promote positive leadership and communication among their employees' work ethics and ways of living [2]. Even though PI has been observed and implemented in adult work ethics and lifestyles, individuals tend to constantly overlook the impacts of PI on teens and high school students' [3] intellectual development. PI High school students (coauthors of this paper) analysed PI tests taken over a period of several years to understand the positive/negative impacts of PI usage in their current lifestyle. These students showcased their understanding of the importance of PI usage in teens' and high school students' evolution of emotional maturity. High school students' understanding of emotional Intelligence is tremendously limited and is mainly focused on academic Intelligence due to the constant pressure imposed on them by their parents, peers, and teachers [4]. This study emphasizes the uniqueness of a teenager's view on emotional Intelligence and provides a firsthand understanding of why implementing and observing PI in a student's day-to-day life is crucial.

2 METHODOLOGY

First, students were asked to understand the PI by watching the online videos and content on the PI website. They were engaged in a discussion about various characteristics and sources of saboteurs. To conduct this study, high school students took generic Positive Intelligence surveys available on PI website and provided their feedback about their views on the test and its effectiveness from their own perspective. Hence, the intention of this study is academic in nature, and it aims to evaluate whether PI is a useful tool for helping high schoolers. One of the authors took the PI test in 2019, 2024, and 2025.

Another high school student also took the PI test to corroborate the results with the analysis. These generic online surveys helped develop an understanding of the value of PI tests as students progress through different stages of intellectual development in school. High school students and their parents signed the consent form to participate in the academic study.

3 RESULTS

Positive Intelligence (PI) plays a significant role in the well-being and development of teenagers, as it encourages them to harness their inner strengths while managing the negative influences in their minds. By understanding and identifying the nine saboteurs, like the judge, who often criticizes their performance or decisions, and the victim, who leads to feelings of helplessness, they can learn to balance these harmful thoughts. Recognizing these saboteurs enables teenagers to develop a more optimistic mindset, encouraging resilience and adaptability in the face of life's challenges. For instance, if a teenager experiences social anxiety influenced by the "Pleaser" saboteur, they may go to extreme lengths to achieve approval from peers and/or parents, which could cause them to change their values. On the other hand, when they shift into "Sage" mode, teens learn to appreciate their unique qualities and develop natural connections without any fear of judgment from the people around them. This growth enhances their self-esteem and encourages real relationships, leading to a more fulfilling social and personal life experience. Embracing positive Intelligence allows teens to direct their potential and creativity more effectively. Instead of surrendering to the "Imposter" saboteur, which may cause them to doubt their abilities, they can access their Sage mindset to recognize their accomplishments and adopt growth. This understanding of positive Intelligence and the influence of saboteurs provides teenagers with the skills necessary for guiding the complications of youth, eventually promoting mental health and personal growth throughout their lives.

As a teenager, one student took the time to compare and analyze their saboteur results from when they were eight years old with those they received recently at the age of fourteen. As evident from their positive intelligence chart, the results from the PI test have changed either drastically, minimally, or not at all over the three times it was taken. The student then reflected upon the results. Regarding their hyper-achiever saboteur, many characteristics that have been developed over the years are reflected in their actions and personality. Some traits associated with hyper-achievers include competitiveness, consciousness about image and status, the ability to cover up insecurities while presenting a positive front, adapting one's personality to impress others, being goal-oriented, and having a workaholic streak. Hyper-achievers often focus more on perfecting their public image than on self-improvement and are skilled at self-promotion. Throughout three years of middle school, the student has noticed an increasingly growing tendency to become a hyper-achiever. While some may view hyper-achievers as egotistical, student believes this perception depends on one's perspective of how a hyper-achiever impacts others. They personally believe that with a score of 8-10, the student has achieved many valuable goals set for themselves and learned more about themselves than they had in previous years. Rather than rejecting this saboteur, they claimed to have embraced it, resulting in significant self-growth with minimal negative effects. The student has learned to operate in a Sage and independent mode while still pursuing their hyper-achieving tendencies. They understand that some peers may become jealous, annoyed, or even upset when they encounter a hyper-achiever. This reaction often highlights how some individuals allow their saboteurs to overpower them rather than finding ways to overcome their flaws and adopt a Sage mindset. The student has been dedicated to community service, pursuing the highest titles and awards, and consistently earning straight A's, which underscores their identity as a hyper-achiever. Being a hyper-achiever has equipped them to enhance their self-improvement, achieve their goals, and build connections with others.

In relation to the hyper-achiever saboteur, the student has also seen an increase in their "Stickler" score compared to their previous results. Characteristics of a stickler include being somewhat of a perfectionist, being opinionated and/or sarcastic, compensating for others' sloppiness or laziness, and being highly critical of oneself or others. While others may perceive students with high stickler scores as opinionated and critical, they believe these traits can help both teens and adults grow and improve. As advocate for various topics in their community, they feel it is essential to share their opinions based on the circumstances at hand. Their tendency to be critical of themselves has taught them how to handle

others' criticism, even if it is not constructive. They strive to perfect most of what they do because they believe that making good first impressions and being seen as professional can lead to a positive and prosperous future. In the "Pleaser" saboteur section, the student noticed that the change is the most unique compared to the other saboteur sections. The average score increased from below 5 in 2019 to above 7 in 2024, and then decreased to below 6 in 2025. This fluctuating score suggests that their tendency to be a pleaser has changed over the past few years. A "Pleaser" seeks acceptance and affection by helping, pleasing, rescuing, or flattering others. However, Pleasers can lose sight of their own needs, often becoming resentful due to self-neglect.

As a middle schooler in 2024, the main goal was to fit in with their peers, appear perfect in front of teachers, and always help others—even when it negatively impacted them. The student has made progress in overcoming these negative habits as a pleaser because this student now recognizes that self-growth should always be their top priority. The student has started to focus less on how they appear to others and more on how they can thrive independently, rather than being dependent on pleasing others. While they have adapted to being a pleaser, they have also learned not to let it negatively affect them. They understand that they will always need to exhibit some pleasing characteristics, as the real world often requires impressing or assisting others in return for kindness and support. It is essential to have a balance between pleaser traits and prioritizing self-growth and independence.

The "Controller" saboteur score has increased since 2019, but it remains the same between 5 and 6 from 2024 to 2025. Controllers typically exhibit a strong energy and a desire to take charge, connect with others through competition and conflict, and can be wilful and confrontational. While student recognize some of these traits, they also value being in charge while ensuring that they share an equal workload with others in their group. The student enjoys the competition but doesn't blame others for mistakes. The student believes everyone can improve on various aspects to become better. Furthermore, the students' scores for the hyper-vigilant and avoider saboteurs have also increased over the years. Avoiders and hyper-vigilant individuals often experience anxiety, overthink situations, look for signs of danger, avoid conflict and difficult conversations, procrastinate, and struggle to say no. While the student does sometimes feel anxious, it is usually in situations where there is a valid reason to be concerned. The student also admitted to having a tendency to procrastinate occasionally, but has made efforts to improve habits by creating a schedule and prioritizing important tasks.

In the "Restless" saboteur category, the student's score is relatively low. Characteristics of a restless individual include being easily distracted, staying busy, juggling multiple tasks and plans, seeking excitement and variety rather than comfort or safety, and quickly escaping from unpleasant feelings. This student has set many complicated and challenging personal goals, often juggling various tasks. For example, the student has been attending multiple clubs, striving for perfect grades, participating in numerous extracurricular activities, and engaging in fun social events to balance their social life. However, all these activities can lead to burnout, which is why the student has started prioritizing the most important tasks to focus on. Teens of their age often stress about having an impressive roster of activities because they want to stand out in high school for college admissions. While they also wish to distinguish themselves, they choose to engage in unique activities that contribute to their personal development and help them become their best self, while letting go of those that do not serve that purpose.

The student's scores for the hyper-rational and victim categories are both low, indicating significant improvement over the past few years. Some characteristics of these saboteurs include intellectual arrogance, a constant rush of new ideas, sulking, a tendency to give up at the slightest challenge, and various emotional issues. This student recalls experiencing urges to give up in 2019 and during seventh grade, primarily because the student believed they were not prepared to face their challenges. Through their experiences, this student has learned that they can achieve anything they set their mind to. The student realized that sulking over negative results is pointless; instead, they can always find something to improve on for next time. This growth mindset has helped the student reduce the victim saboteur score to a minimal level. Additionally, the student has learned to collaborate with others, share their

feelings, and show compassion, which has significantly decreased the student's hyper-rational tendencies.

To corroborate this theory of the importance of PI in a teenager's life, Student 2 took the Positive Intelligence test and answered reflection questions based on the test results. They believe that the second student's most dominant saboteur is Hyper-Achiever, as this student often connects their self-worth to accomplishments and the need to be successful. The Positive Intelligence test was able to portray the student's saboteur correctly because the test utilizes questions that are designed to bring habits to light, allowing realization of the behaviors they might not have known they had before. They personally believe that the saboteur's "restlessness" is least evident in their daily life. The second student feels that the test clearly depicts the restless saboteur, as it was shown as one of their least evident saboteurs. Additionally, this second student does not juggle many tasks and doesn't tend to escape from unpleasant feelings. The second student believes that teenagers should participate in the positive intelligence test because these tests can often build awareness, especially since they can accurately recognize patterns in behaviors and self-growth in all individuals. These tests can even improve one's academic and personal capabilities by how they approach challenges. The second student hypothesized that the prominence of a couple of saboteurs in the PI test should be evident among teenagers; however, the intensities of limiting habits differ among teenagers because everyone lives in different environments and has a different upbringing, but tend to have similar thought processes and reactions regarding academic goals.

The third high school student also gave a reflection on positive Intelligence. The third student believes Positive Intelligence serves as a metacognitive model of reflection and self-development. Positive Intelligence, as such, offers the opportunity to learn about one's destructive tendencies in order to cultivate growth. Personally, defining the "sage" and "saboteur" has allowed the third student to see their own sabotaging behaviour patterns, and the student is now able to better manage said saboteurs. This frame of mind subsequently boosts long-term stress resilience and self-efficacy. Still, Positive Intelligence itself does not completely conquer these "saboteurs." Aside from self-knowledge, awareness of one's internal saboteurs can also provide insight into interpersonal conflict patterns, such as why others may react negatively or keep their distance. Thus, Positive Intelligence contributes to personal and professional development, particularly in the areas of social connections and leadership. However, the implementation of Positive Intelligence for teenagers is not that simple. The third student has noticed that a significant majority of teenagers have a "doom mentality"—a mental propensity for expecting the worst outcomes when faced with adversity. This frequently leads to pessimism and the perception that personal effort is ineffective and that change is impossible. With this perspective, saboteurs may appear to be fixed traits rather than behaviours that may be analysed and changed. Furthermore, if Positive Intelligence training is presented in a prescriptive manner, teenagers may perceive it as an additional chore rather than a valuable tool for self-improvement. Without openness and involvement, Positive Intelligence's potential to generate long-term self-knowledge and progress may be severely constrained.

In addition to three students, >20 high school students who participated in a college-level summer course were exposed to the core principle of positive Intelligence via a self-paced assignment. As a part of homework, students were asked to define positive Intelligence, sage mode, and different types of saboteurs and make a presentation in class. Evaluation of student presentation and direct questions regarding different forms of saboteures and their views about the application of this skills provided the following results: (1) Majority of high school students were able to understand and articulate the difference in sage and saboteure mode, (2) a majority of students mentioned that they evaluated the PI saboteure test and found it reasobaly close to their observations about them selves, (3) most of the students find the PI knowledge useful for working in groups and becoming more emphatheic in enabling each other, (4) Many highschool students, who did not fully understand PI, tend to consder saboteures as their strengths.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In summary, we found that exposure to PI is very useful for school students. PI is a quantifiable and expressable tool that dissects the complex and extensive domain of human behavior science into tangible terms with understandable definitions. Providing this psychological framework for the

middle and high school students can make them understand the unique habits influenced by the nine saboteurs and how they can result in a future filled with joyfulness and satisfaction. After the introduction of PI, students were asked to reflect on their understanding of mitigating saboteur habits and strengthening their sage mode. Students clearly identified from the online materials and website that adapting to and managing saboteurs requires self-awareness, mindfulness, and intentional practice. Individuals can start by recognizing the specific saboteurs influencing their thoughts and behaviours, which can be tracked through journaling. Practicing mindfulness and meditation can help create a mental space to monitor these saboteurs without letting them control your reactions. While saboteurs like the "Hyper-Achiever" can give motivation and the "Stickler" can enhance attention to detail, they can also lead to self-doubt, anxiety, and perfectionism. To oppose these negative impacts, individuals can wait and reflect when a saboteur appears, considering how a more balanced perspective (Sage mindset) would respond in the same situation. Setting boundaries is essential for protecting your energy, especially to get rid of tendencies produced by the "Pleaser." Additionally, developing gratitude can help move your focus from negativity to appreciation of your journey. Celebrating progress, regardless of perfection, strengthens resilience and self-growth while reducing the influence of saboteurs. Promoting these mindful practices enables individuals of all ages to lead a more fulfilling and mindful life. It is fully normal for teens to experience the influence of these nine saboteurs, particularly during the time of puberty when hormonal changes are at their peak. While some of these saboteurs can have a positive impact, others serve as valuable lessons in personal growth and resilience. Embracing these traits can ultimately help teens navigate their journey toward self-discovery and maturity, guiding them into a more enlightened state of being. Recognizing and understanding these traits can empower young individuals to learn their strengths and overcome challenges as they transition into adulthood.

This study is neither exhaustive. Further research is needed on an effective way of teaching PI to middle and high school students. Self-awareness and awareness of the process of human behavior development are the foundational knowledge to make the best out of a student's potential.

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