

# Implication of Positive Psychology in Management Higher Education

Disharag Shetty\*

## Abstract

Education is aimed at 'positive thinking' in students, which means education must produce positive psychology. But it is observed that today's education has become marks and job oriented, neglecting the positive emotions and the feelings. It is hence necessary to implement the principles of positive psychology in education system. The goals of Positive Psychology mirror the goals of education. Positive education provides skills that strengthen the relationships, build positive emotions, enhance personal resilience and encourage healthy life style. In no area of application has positive psychology flourished more, however, than in higher education. Positive Psychology has application in all aspects of teaching and learning, from pre-school level to post graduate, for faculty and students alike. The concept of positive education seeks both higher academic achievement, increased character strengths, self awareness and emotional control, self efficacy, resilience, flexible and accurate thinking skills, strategies for positive relationships and learned optimism. By taking advantage of the best of Positive Psychology, strengths-based education could drive a transformation of colleges and universities. The main objectives of the paper are, to review the relevant literature on positive psychology, to analyze how positive psychology is applied in higher education. And to come out with practical implications of positive psychology in higher education. The paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. Secondary source of data is collected to analyze the effects of positive psychology in higher education.

**Keywords:** Positive education, Positive emotions, Character strengths

## Introduction

Education is aimed at 'positive thinking' in students, which means education must produce positive psychology. Positive education provides skills that strengthen the relationships, build positive emotions, enhance personal resilience and encourage healthy life style. But it is observed that today's education has become marks and job oriented, neglecting the positive emotions and the feelings. Over the last decade, the field of positive psychology has experienced rapid growth and expansion. We have seen significant theoretical advancements, have developed myriad techniques for increasing happiness, and have made major strides in the dissemination of both research and practice to the general public. In no area of application has positive psychology flourished more, however, than in higher education. More departments than ever are offering courses in positive psychology, and demand for these

courses are consistently high. Graduate programs offering concentrations in positive psychology have appeared both at the masters and doctoral level. Educational institutions have expressed interest in using principles of positive psychology to inform institutional structure, faculty development, and pedagogy. Positive psychology has been taught and applied in higher education for almost as long as it has existed as a field.

Positive psychology is the branch of psychology that uses scientific understanding and effective intervention to aid in the achievement of a satisfactory life, rather than merely treating mental illness. Positive psychology is defined as "the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels that include the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life." Topics of interest to researchers in the field are: states of pleasure or flow, values, strengths,

---

\*Lecturer, Dept of Psychology, St.Aloysius College (Autonomous), Mangalore

virtues, talents, as well as the ways that these can be promoted by social systems and institutions. Positive psychologists are concerned with four topics: (1) positive experiences, (2) enduring psychological traits, (3) positive relationships and (4) positive institutions. Research from this branch of psychology has seen various practical applications. The basic premise of positive psychology is that human beings are often, perhaps more often, drawn by the future than they are driven by the past.

Positive psychology is concerned with three issues: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Positive emotions are concerned with being content with one's past, being happy in the present and having hope for the future. Positive individual traits focus on one's strengths and virtues. Finally, positive institutions are based on strengths to better a community of people.

The paper analysis the objectives as given below,

### **Objectives**

The main objectives of the paper is as follows,

1. To review the relevant literature on positive psychology.
2. To analyze how positive psychology is applied in higher education.
3. To come out practical implications of positive psychology in higher education.

### **Methodology**

The paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. Secondary source of data is collected to analyze the effects of positive psychology in higher education.

### **Results and Discussion**

The goals of Positive Psychology mirror the goals of education. Most professionals enter the field of teaching in order to make a difference in the lives of students. What motivates teachers to continue is the reinforcement of seeing students thrive and perform at optimal levels. Positive Psychology seeks to do the same, promoting general well-being and life satisfaction across the broader spectrum of individuals and institutions.

Positive Psychology has application in all aspects of teaching and learning, from pre-school level to post graduate, for faculty and students alike. The concept of positive education seeks both higher academic achievement, increased character strengths, self awareness and emotional control, self efficacy, resilience, flexible and accurate thinking skills, strategies for positive relationships and learned optimism.

Researchers from top universities around the world have shown that students with these positive core qualities are academically more motivated, well-rounded and successful- both in and outside of the classroom. Importantly, all of these positive core qualities are malleable and can be fostered. They can be taught and learned through tested, proven approaches being published in the scientific literature. Incorporating the theories of Positive Psychology in the school curriculum provides an opportunity to expose students to the science of individual achievement and fulfillment, giving them insight into their own lives and making the actual lessons taught more meaningful.

A number of powerful Positive Psychology theories and techniques can be used to enhance the learning experience for both students and teachers. Successful education today requires:

**Strengths:** Focusing on character strengths offers an important step toward greater engagement, greater achievement, and greater well-being. Just naming the strengths of a teacher or a student is an uplifting experience. When we are able to use our strengths, we are satisfying our natural urges. We feel good about ourselves—we thrive and we feel invigorated. We perform better. We are more productive. We have greater contentment and satisfaction. There is a sense of accomplishment and meaning in our work and personal life. By contrast, a continual focus on trying to fix weaknesses leaves us frustrated—suppressing our natural tendencies. This can lead to anger and becoming psychologically and physically drained. Overtime, these negative emotions can lead to depression.

**Positive emotion:** A positive school climate predicts teacher and student satisfaction, lower stress levels

and better school results. Rational thinking is inhibited when emotions are negative and go unchecked. Conversely, when we are emotionally calm and thinking positively in a safe environment, we are more likely to be curious, creative and better able to problem solve. Seminal work by Dr. Barbara Fredrickson of The University of North Carolina identifies a number of positive emotions, all of which can be promoted in our schools with beneficial results: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love.

**Engagement and intrinsic motivation:** Research has shown that people pursue an activity if they enjoy doing it and that people tend to enjoy what they can do well. In a 1987 study conducted by B. Eugene Griessman among leading artists, scientists and other accomplished individuals, there was a consensus that "enjoyment of work" is the characteristic most responsible for their success—more important than 32 other traits including creativity, competence, and breadth of knowledge. The implication for schools and colleges is whether our educators enjoy teaching and whether our students enjoy learning. It's the difference between swimming with the current or struggling to swim upstream.

**Relationships:** Relationships between constituencies are a critical factor in the positive school environment. The role of teachers in the development of elementary students is of particular importance. Secure childhood relationships provide a safe haven from which children can feel comfortable venturing out into an unknown world. As a result, these children are more likely to explore their surroundings, acquiring greater knowledge and psychological resources along the way. Research demonstrates that these resources end up building a foundation of confidence, trust, and self-efficacy that will serve children over the course of a lifetime. In school, additional studies show that children who feel higher levels of relatedness to parents and teachers tend to perform better academically. Children with secure relationships tend to grow up to be more compassionate, altruistic, and attuned to the needs of others.

**Resilience:** More than just the ability to bounce back from adversity, resilience is also the capacity to bounce forward in the presence of opportunity. Research has shown that students need more than good grades, high college entrance exam scores, or even a college education to succeed.

Positive psychology is beneficial to schools and students because it encourages individuals to strive to do their best; whereas, scolding has the opposite effect. Clifton and Rath discussed research conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Hurlock in 1925, where fourth, fifth and sixth graders were either praised, criticized or ignored, based on their work on math problems. Praised students improved by 71%, those criticized improved by 19%, and students provided with no feedback improved a mere 5%. Praise seems an effective method of fostering improvement.

According to Clifton and Rath ninety nine out of one hundred people prefer the influence of positive people. The benefits include: increased productivity, and contagious positive emotions, which assists one in working to the best of her, or his, abilities. Even a single negative person can ruin the entire positive vibe in an environment. Clifton and Rath cited 'positive emotions as an essential daily requirement for survival'.

In 2008, in conjunction with the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, a whole-of-school implementation of Positive Psychology was undertaken by Geelong Grammar School (Victoria, Australia). This involved training of teaching staff in the principles and skills of positive psychology. Ongoing support was provided by The Positive Psychology Center staff, who remained in-residence for the entire year. Staats, Hupp and Hagley (2008) used positive psychology to explore academic honesty. They identified positive traits displayed by heroes, then determined if the presence of these traits in students predicted future intent to cheat. The results of their research: 'an effective working model of heroism in the context of the academic environment'

Positive psychology research and practice is currently conducted and developed in various countries throughout the world. To illustrate, in Canada,

Charles Hackney of Briercrest College applies positive psychology to the topic of personal growth through martial arts training; Paul Wong, president of the International Network on Personal Meaning, is developing an existential approach to positive psychology.

Cognitive and behavioral change, although sometimes slight and complex, can produce an 'intense affect'. The benefits argue for this focus becoming a legitimate area of study, specifically regarding links in cognition and motivational responses. Isen (2009) remarked, further progress requires suitable research methods, and appropriate theories on which to base contemporary research. Chang (2008) suggested researchers have a number of paths to pursue regarding the enhancement of emotional intelligence, even though emotional intelligence does not guarantee the development of positive affect; in short, more study is required to track the gradient of positive affect in psychology.

Several early psychologists and thinkers paved the way for the incorporation of positive psychology techniques, though they may not have yet been labeled as such, in the classroom. John Dewey was among the earliest advocates to impact the field of positive schooling. John Dewey recognized schools as primary institutions for the development of democracy. He opposed the repressive atmosphere of schools, especially elementary and secondary schools, and emphasized the importance of promoting learners' ability to absorb and recreate information in their minds. He put forth the idea of constructivism, which argues that individual learners should take information and creatively construct it according to their own personal capacities and views. This approach opposes the traditional view of education in which teachers pass down knowledge to the students through direct communication. In summary, Dewey's view of education, similar to progressive education implies that people learn best in environments that are applicable to the real world and that allow them to learn through activities and practical problem solving.

Elizabeth Hurlock was one of the first psychologists to actually carry out experiments with positive psychology techniques to measure the effects of

positive schooling in the field of education. Hurlock studied the effectiveness of praise and reproach in the classroom, arguing that praise was a more effective long-term incentive. Her studies found that praise was more effective for children regardless of age, ability and gender.

Jeniffer Henderlong and Mark Lepper echo Hurlock's arguments that praise is beneficial to enhancing children's intrinsic motivation. Although some research doubts the effectiveness of praise, appropriate use of praise is proven to be positively correlated with confidence and better academic performance results. They support that praise increases the personal beliefs about one's ability to perform given tasks. Also, cognitive evaluation theory supports that praise enhances individuals' perception about performance outcomes and that positive moods induced by praise may contribute to effective outcomes.

Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson focus on the pedagogy, the teacher's "how," rather than content and subject matter being taught, which is partly due to the scarce empirical research that has been done on college curriculum. Chickering and Gamson give seven research-supported principles regarding education and learning in the undergraduate environment for teachers to follow:

1. Teachers are to encourage contact between students and faculty. Chickering and Gamson explain that student-faculty relationships give students motivation to keep working hard to strive for future goals and also provide support and resources.
2. To develop reciprocity and cooperation among students, promoting a collaborative learning environment, rather than a competitive one. This gives students opportunities to work together and learn from one another, which has been shown to strengthen understanding.
3. Teachers are to use active learning techniques, relating material to topics that students already have an interest in and getting students to ask, "What does this concept look like in my own life?"
4. Teachers are to give prompt feedback. Balancing assessment and feedback results in efficient learning, as students realize what they do and do not know and learn to assess themselves.

5. Emphasizing time on task, or sharing effective time management strategies to give students an understanding for their time expectations.
6. Communicating high expectations has shown to be very successful. Expectations that teachers implement give students a gauge for how much potential they think that they have.
7. Respecting students' diverse talents and ways of learning accounts for all learning styles and allows students to figure out how they learn best.

Eliot Aronson has pioneered the jigsaw classroom, a theoretical approach for 3rd-12th grade classes which emphasizes the individual academic strengths of children and seeks to make them peer-teachers in a cooperative learning setting. In this approach, students are divided into competency groups of four to six students; individual group members then break off and work with "experts" on their topic from the other groups, researching together that specific section of material. These students then return to their groups and present on their part of the material. This approach encourages group engagement, listening, and cooperation among peers, as well as incorporates aspects of play into learning. It has shown positive effects on academic performance and liking for school and peers. This may be because increased liking leads to self-esteem, which if absent, can affect academic performance. It is also possible that jigsaw methods help to increase participation while reducing anxiety, lead to increases empathy, and result in changes in attributions of success and failures. The Jigsaw method has been proposed as a strategy to improve race relations since it meets the criteria posed by contact theory for reducing racial prejudice. Intergroup contact theory states that interracial contact will only improve race relations if ethnic groups are of equal status, pursue a common goal of mutual interest for groups, and are sanctioned by institutions.

Another model that utilizes positive education in school is the response to intervention model. Response to intervention is a preventative model that works to provide tailored assistance to at-risk students who are exhibiting insufficient academic achievement, though its principles have been used to address behavioral issues as well. The central components of this model include a core curriculum based on scientific evidence,

universal screening, progress monitoring, and decisions about acceptable progress in subsequent tiers. RTI utilizes a multi-tiered structure: at each tier, students are screened and then monitored. The model was originally created to help identify learning disabilities, so that the adoption of a core curriculum ensures that inadequate teaching is not the cause for poor performance. Those who struggle even when adhering to a research-supported curriculum are given more intense instruction at a higher tier. When behavior is being considered, school or local norms for behavior rates are used when screening.

One major empirical finding in support for positive learning techniques has been the positive effect of praise-based discipline techniques in classrooms. Elizabeth Hurlock studied the day-to-day improvement of students who were praised, reproached, and ignored. Students were divided into these groups in addition to a control group after they had been administered an arithmetic test, and were subsequently tested each day over an additional period of four days. After the first testing session, the control group was tested in a separate room from the other groups. In the treatment room, the "praise" group of students were invited to the front of the room and praised for their work as well as encouraged to do better. The "reproach" group was called up and reproved for their poor performance, while the ignored group received no recognition. Some significant findings include the fact that the praised group experienced the most initial improvement, followed by the reproach group and then the ignored group, while no improvement was seen in the control group. The ignored and control group also showed a decrease in accuracy towards the end of the testing period. When children were grouped according to academic achievement into the categories "superior", "average" and "inferior" after the first test, praise was the most influential incentive for all students, though it was most effective for the "inferior" group. As a whole, the results suggested that praise was the most accurate incentive regardless of age, sex, initial ability, or accuracy.

The Circle of Courage curriculum is, yet, another practical attempt for implementing positive learning techniques. Deborah Espiner and Diane Guild monitor the

progress and success of Mt. Richmond Special School after implementing the Circle of Courage curriculum and Response Ability Pathways (RAP) program. The Circle of Courage is an educational philosophy based on Native American values. Belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity are four core values that are intended to integrate Western and indigenous cultures. The school managers established a positive learning environment based on these two programs, which were designed for dynamic interaction between teachers and students. Before launching the actual classroom environment, five months were taken to introduce new learning methods to school staff and students. In general, participants acknowledged that new modules brought positive impact in the school. One recognizable outcome was that RAP training facilitated the connection between teachers and challenging students. Additionally, new positive education methods also led teachers to discover the potentials of their pupils.

The effects of positive learning were examined in the context of medical school and first-year physicians. Often, medical students and young physicians get exhausted and burnt out from the stressful conditions they operate under. Medical students at Karolinska Institute were evaluated in their final year of school and again in their first year as a physician. After controlling for baseline exhaustion, a positive learning climate in the clinic that the students were working in was found to have a negative correlation with exhaustion. In this case, positive learning was found to predict the exhaustion of students and new doctors. Although only a correlation, positive learning environments could benefit the well-being of people with various other careers and job conditions.

Positive Psychology and Higher Education By Shane J. Lopez, Ph.D., Senior Scientist in Residence, Gallup  
Over the last two decades, it has become increasingly clear that intelligence and ability are not the only determinants of students' and schools' academic successes. Indeed, if students' cognitive capacity were the only predictor of academic achievement and retention, efforts to enhance knowledge and skills (i.e., what colleges and universities are charged to do) would result in far less "lost talent". That is, if cognitive ability solely predicted academ-

ic outcome, 4 out of 10 of the students most likely to succeed each year (i.e., those students beginning their college career as full-time freshmen in four year colleges and universities) would not become disengaged from higher learning. As institutions of higher learning grapple with enhancing the knowledge, talent, and contributions of their students and engage their students from freshman year to graduation, the burgeoning social science initiative of Positive Psychology studies and promotes human strengths and the conditions that lead people to function optimally

### Conclusion

Positive psychology has been taught and applied in higher education for almost as long as it has existed as a field. Positive Psychology has application in all aspects of teaching and learning, from pre-school level to post graduate, for faculty and students alike. The concept of positive education seeks both higher academic achievement, increased character strengths, self awareness and emotional control, self efficacy, resilience, flexible and accurate thinking skills, strategies for positive relationships and learned optimism. A number of powerful Positive Psychology theories and techniques can be used to enhance the learning experience for both students and teachers. These practices identify and marshal the academic and positive psychological resources of each student. By building on historical educational principles and by taking advantage of the best of Positive Psychology, strengths-based education could drive a transformation of colleges and universities. Imagine an educational system that develops the individual strengths of our young people so they may realize their personal potential and fulfill a loftier goal — that of creating a thriving community of civically responsible and productive members; it may very well be attainable.

### References

1. Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (Eds.). (2009). *The Oxford handbook of positive psychology*. Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
2. Chen, J., & Mcnamee, G. (2011). Positive approaches to learning in the context of preschool classroom activities. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39(1), 71–78.
3. Walker, I., & Crogan, M. (1998). Academic performance, prejudice, and the jigsaw classroom: New pieces to

- the puzzle. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 8(6), 381–393.
4. Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. Macmillan.
  5. The Montessori Method. *Maria Montessori*. pp. 79–81, Publ. Random House, 1988. Retrieved from <http://www.randomhouse.com>
  6. Hurlock, E. (1925). An evaluation of certain incentives used in school work. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 16, 145–159.
  7. Henderlong, J., & Lepper, M. (2002). The effects of praise on children's intrinsic motivation: A review and synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(5), 774–795.
  8. Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 3.
  9. Hughes, C., & Dexter, D. (2011). Response to Intervention: A Research-Based Summary. *Theory into Practice*, 50(1), 4–11.