

The Effectiveness Of Positive Education On Students' Academic Well-Being, Self-Efficacy And Hope

Abbas Ramazani¹ , Sadegh Ahmadi^{2*}

1Assistant professor of Educational Management, Education Department, Farhangian University, Zanjan, Iran.

ORCID: 0000-0002-1634-3708 , A.ramezani@cfu.ac.ir

2B.A in Elementary Education, Education Department, Farhangian University, Zanjan, Iran.

ORCID: 0000-0000-6950-9321 , sadeghahmadi76@gmail.com

Abstract

Introduction & Objective: Positive psychology and positivist education have been considered in psychological research in recent decades as well as in various institutions such as schools and organizations and its beneficial effects have been confirmed. In this study, researchers sought to investigate the effectiveness of positive education on academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic Hope of students.

Method: The method of this research is quasi-experimental (pre-test, post-test and follow-up) with a control group. The statistical population of the study was all students of Zanjan Farhangian university in the academic year 2020-21 that 60 of them were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups (thirty people in each group). Research instruments included the Academic Well-Being Questionnaire (AWBQ), the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Academic Hope Scale. The experimental group received 8 sessions of 90-minute positive education (two sessions per week) for two months and the control group did not receive any intervention during this period. Data were analyzed using analysis of covariance and SPSS-23 software.

Results: The results showed that positive education had a positive and significant effect on academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic hope and these effects were maintained in two months after the intervention (in the follow-up phase) ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Based on the findings, it can be concluded that positive education by emphasizing constructs such as appreciation, meaning, purposefulness, hope, self-esteem, optimism, forgiveness and happiness can be effective in increasing positive psychological states and capital. Therefore, since one of the goals of positive psychology is to create capable institutions. It is recommended that universities play a role in increasing students' academic well-being by applying positive education approaches as well as strengthening their academic self-efficacy and academic hope.

Keywords: positive psychology, academic well-being, academic self-efficacy, academic hope

Introduction

During his tenure as president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, Martin

Seligman called on psychologists to return to their roots and focus on making people's lives more productive and satisfying, as well as identifying and nurturing their talents

(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, 2014). Thus, positive psychology was formed in the late 1990s with the aim of striking a balance in the field of research and study of psychopathology (Seligman, 2002, 2019).

Positive Psychology, with the assumption that health is more than the absence of disease and that strengthening individual and social resources can lead people, organizations, and societies to prosperity, called for emphasis on strengths and positive psychological states (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology considers four areas: (1) positive emotions (happiness, hope, appreciation, satisfaction), (2) positive personal characteristics (optimism, autonomy, resilience, self-control, personality strengths), (3) positive group relationships and (4) capable institutions (schools, universities and workplaces) that produce positive outcomes (Kobau et al., 2011).

Seligman argued that psychological well-being and happiness derive from the five main elements described in his model called "PERMA": positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and Accomplishments (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). From a positive psychological perspective, psychologists should not only focus on people's problems but also help them to live happier, richer, and fuller lives (Seligman, 2002). Thus, with the advent of positive psychology, researchers turned their attention to the study of human abilities and instead of focusing solely on negative experiences or perceptions of individuals, strengthened positive psychological capital and states (Snyder et al., 2002; Luthans et al., 2004). Positive psychological states are an example of human abilities that are the main subject of positive psychology. These states are: well-being, self-efficacy, hope, happiness, pleasure, flexibility, resilience, self-control, optimism, optimistic explanatory style, goal setting, meaning, wisdom, originality, mental ability, autonomy, generosity, compassion, empathy, altruism, humor and spirituality (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which in this study is discussed the effect of positive psychology education on three of these positive psychological states (ie academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic hope) among students.

The concept of Academic Well-Being is a construct derived from positive psychology that

includes two dimensions of educational engagement and educational exhaustion. Damme et al. (2012) defined academic well-being as students' attitudes toward education. This attitude has meaning in four dimensions: general attitude towards academic life, attitude towards teacher, attitude towards peers and attitude towards place of study. Academic well-being is a sense of security that students have in their educational environment and refers to a lack of loneliness and academic burnout (Samdal et al., 2012). Other researchers also believe that students' perceptions of the educational environment, the structure of the educational environment and students' relationship with professors are indicators of academic well-being (Engels et al., 2004). Numerous studies have shown that students with high academic well-being experience positive emotions, while students with low academic well-being experience a higher risk of dropping out (Fall and Roberts, 2012) and evaluate their academic events as unfavorable and experience more negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger (Diner et al., 2003).

Self-efficacy (as another variable in this study) is the main construct of Bandura social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is based on the idea that one believes that one is able to organize phenomena and events in order to achieve the desired situation with appropriate behavior and actions. In other words, self-efficacy is related to a person's beliefs and mindsets in achieving their goals (Bandura, 1993). Academic self-efficacy is part of the belief in general self-efficacy, which is specifically defined as the ability to understand one's ability to perform tasks necessary to achieve educational goals and affects to task choice, effort, perseverance, sustainability and success (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

High levels of academic self-efficacy lead to higher average scores and consistency in completing assignments, so students with higher academic self-efficacy have better academic adaptation, use more useful learning strategies, and ultimately perform better (Torres & Solberg, 2001; Schunk, & DiBenedetto, 2014).

In this regard, several studies have shown a positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement (Artino et al., 2010). For example, Linnenbrink & Pintrich (2003) summarized various studies on self-efficacy

and stated that self-efficacy can lead to more engagement and thus better learning and academic achievement. Adesola & Li (2018) showed that academic self-efficacy affects the learning process in aspects such as goal selection, decision making, effort, perseverance and continuity in assignments. Foulstone & Kelly (2019) in their research on students concluded that there is a strong and significant relationship between success and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was also associated with the choice of activities, the effort expended, the perseverance in completing tasks, and the effective performance of students. Students with positive beliefs about their abilities have better academic performance and, conversely, students who have negative judgments about their abilities, in other words, have low self-efficacy, have poor motivation and poor academic performance (Reid et al., 2018). Also, has been observed a positive relationship between self-efficacy and hope in individuals (Feldman & Kubota, 2015).

Hope is the process by which people set goals, create strategies and motivation to achieve those goals and maintain them along the way (Snyder, 1994, 2005). According to Snyder, success in challenging tasks, especially in the field of education, often requires the ability to create multiple paths to achieve goals (Hansen et al., 2014). Similarly, academic hope theory as a motivational theory explains how students use educational pathways called Crossing thought and agent thinking to achieve educational goals (Snyder, 2002). Crossing thought includes some of the ways and methods of thinking that are used to achieve educational goals, and agent thinking shows the motivation of people to do difficult tasks. Hence, academic achievement in the field of homework refers to students' abilities and their success in the educational environment (Snyder, 1994). In this regard, Khamis (2013) research has shown that children who hope for the future will have higher academic achievement. Marques et al. (2009, 2011) also showed that hopeful thinking is positively associated with perceived competence, self-esteem, life satisfaction, mental health, well-being, and academic achievement.

So far, positive psychology has been used in various areas of life including therapy, marital life, parenting and education (Samavi, 2022) and various studies around the world have confirmed the effectiveness of positive

psychology in reducing psychological trauma (Schrank et al., 2014) and improving human capabilities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Therefore, in this study, the aim of researchers is to investigate the effect of positive education on students' academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic hope.

Method

The method of this research is quasi-experimental (pre-test, post-test and follow-up) with the control group. The statistical population of the study was all students at Farhangian University of Zanjan in the academic year 2020-2021 that 60 of them were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups (thirty people in each group). Criteria for entering the research sample were: obtaining a lower than average score in the questionnaires of academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic hope, having the satisfaction to participate in the research, the ability to coordinate the class schedule with the intervention schedule and the ability to communicate with other group members. Exclusion criteria included inability to communicate in a group, having a mental or physical disorder affecting the skills training process, attending at the same time in psychotherapy or counseling sessions elsewhere.

The research tools were:

Academic Well-Being Questionnaire (AWBQ):

Tuominen-Soini et al. (2012) developed the Academic Well-Being Questionnaire by modeling positive psychological characteristics related to school context. This questionnaire is a kind of self-report that questions the degree of agreement or disagreement of the respondent with 31 items that are about his / her opinions in the Likert scale. The questionnaire included the dimensions of school value (9 items, the answer based on the seven-point range of not at all true = 1 to completely correct = 7), school burnout (9 items, the answer based on the seven-point range of strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7), academic satisfaction (4 items, answer based on a five-point range of none = 1 to very high = 5) and integration with homework (9 items, answer based on a seven-point range of never = 1 is always = 7).

Tuominen-Soini et al. (2012) calculated Cronbach's alpha for the four dimensions of school value, school burnout, academic satisfaction, and homework, 0.64, 0.77, 0.91, and 0.94, respectively.

Academic Self-Efficacy Scale: The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Midgley et al. (2000). This scale has 5 questions with a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 5 to strongly disagree = 1). The minimum score is 5 and the maximum is 25. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.82 in the study of Abasi et al. (2020). Seif (2018) reported the reliability of the Cronbach's alpha questionnaire as 0.86.

Academic Hope Scale: Sohrabi and Samani (2011) based on Snyder's theory of hope, prepared the scale of academic hope and adapted it for the Iranian society. This scale consists of 9 items that are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 for completely false to 5 for completely true). The Academic Hope

Scale measures the two components of agency and pathways. Sample items of these two components are "I have many educational goals", "I am looking for different ways to get good grades", respectively. Sohrabi and Samani (2011) extracted the factor structure of this tool using factor analysis. Also, by calculating the correlation of the hope scale with the instruments close to it, its simultaneous validity was achieved. Cronbach's alpha of the two subscales of agency and pathways was 0.73 and 0.75, respectively.

Procedure

For the experimental group, 8 sessions of 90-minute positive education (two sessions per week) were performed for two months and the control group did not receive any intervention during this period. After the training sessions a post-test was performed and follow-up were performed two months later. The content of positive psychology training sessions was designed based on the sources of Van Zyl & Rothmann (2019) and Magyar-Moe (2015). Table (1) summarizes the training sessions:

Table 1. The content of positivity training sessions

| Session | topic | objectives and session summary |
|---------|--|--|
| First | introduction and acquaintance with positive psychology | Acquaintance with members, group goals and rules, explanation of meetings, description of positive psychology, task of identifying strengths, etc. |
| Second | teaching happiness skills | Reviewing tasks related to identifying strengths - discussing the concept and scope of happiness - reviewing happiness techniques (healthy eating, exercise, changing attitudes and lifestyles - altruistic behavior - developing social relationships, etc.) - talk about obstacles to the development of social relations -apply skills related to increasing happiness until the next session -practice and develop social relationships. |
| Third | introduce the forgiveness process model | Review of exercises and assignments related to previous sessions, discuss with the members about forgiveness, its process, and practice writing a forgiveness letter. Instructions for writing a forgiveness letter for the next session. |
| Fourth | introduce the concept of gratitude | review the exercises of the previous sessions - explain the concept, benefits and methods of expressing gratitude - write 5 things that are appreciated - give homework, including writing a letter of thanks and |
| Fifth | explanation of optimism (source of control of people) | Reviewing the assignments of previous sessions (including letters of thanks and) - discussion about the concept and benefits of optimism - Introduction of ABCDE model - presentation of assignments - discussion about the meaning and concept of the source of control - provide an example of how to identify the style of documents |

| | | |
|---------|--|--|
| Sixth | Introduction of the concept of hope and purposefulness | Review of assignments related to previous sessions (including optimism exercises and attribution style) -discussion about the concept and importance of hope -helping members to divide life into different areas and- Giving Assign members to set goals for each area of life (goal structuring) - help members identify barriers to achieving goals and how to overcome barriers |
| Seventh | self-esteem self-worth and self-efficacy | Review of previous sessions exercises (structuring goals, setting future goals) - explain the concept and benefits of self-esteem and self-efficacy - explain strategies to promote self-esteem and self-efficacy and positive coping strategies (e.g. problem solving, social support, re-acquisition of skills) - paying attention to people's strengths and developing abilities |
| Eighth | Meaningfulness of life | Review of strategies to increase self-esteem and self-efficacy-presenting examples of self-efficacy behavior in people while studying - explaining the concept and benefits of meaningful life - the role of goals in meaningful life - encouraging people to find meaning in life, education and social behavior - summary |

Findings

This study was performed on 60 students, 30 students in the experimental group (15 women and 15 men) with a mean age of 24.26 and standard deviation of 5.63 and 30 standard in the control group (15 women and 15 men) with a mean age of 26.27 and standard deviation 8.41. According to the design of the present study, which was pre-test, post-test and follow-up, multivariate analysis of covariance was used to analyze the data and to control the effect of pre-test and post-test. First, the assumptions of multivariate analysis of covariance were examined (assumptions of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, homogeneity of variance of two groups and homogeneity of regression coefficients in the post-test and

follow-up stages), which showed the confirmation of the assumptions.

The relevant multivariate statistic is Wilks Lambda at the level of ($p = 0.01$) in the post-test stage [$P < 0.001$ and $F_{(6 \text{ and } 30)} = 17.25$] and follow-up [$P < 0.001$ and $F_{(6 \text{ and } 30)} = 5.31$] is significant, so it was concluded that multivariate analysis of covariance is generally significant. Finally, using univariate analysis of covariance, the effect of the independent variable on each of the dependent variables in the post-test and follow-up stages has been investigated. Table (2) shows the results of the effectiveness of positive education on academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic hope of students in the post-test phase and Table (3) shows the results of the stability of positive education in the follow-up phase.

Table 2. Results of analysis of covariance to investigate the effect of positive education on academic well-being, self-efficacy and hope of students in the post-test stage

| Research variables | Sources of changes | Sum of squares | Degree of freedom | Mean squares | F | P | Eta | Group | Modified mean |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|--------|------|------|------------|---------------|
| Academic well-being | pre-test | 139.14 | 1 | 62.31 | 75.18 | 0.21 | 0.08 | experiment | 47.01 |
| | group | 438.35 | 1 | 215.63 | 135.24 | 0.00 | 0.27 | Control | 82.53 |
| Academic self-efficacy | pre-test | 53.31 | 1 | 24.76 | 56.95 | 0.32 | 0.09 | experiment | 12.03 |
| | group | 142.67 | 1 | 82.36 | 69.48 | 0.00 | 0.48 | Control | 21.34 |
| Academic hope | pre-test | 92.53 | 1 | 42.68 | 46.39 | 0.11 | 0.11 | experiment | 16.41 |
| | group | 168.59 | 1 | 86.54 | 71.13 | 0.00 | 0.23 | Control | 29.34 |

Based on the findings of Table (2), the results of analysis of covariance in the post-test stage showed that by controlling the pre-test scores, positive training increased academic achievement by 27%, academic self-efficacy by 48% and academic hope by 23%. Accordingly, is confirmed the effectiveness

of positive training in increasing all these positive psychological variables in the post-test stage ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Results of analysis of covariance to investigate the effect of positive education on academic well-being, self-efficacy and hope of students in the follow-up stage

| Research variables | Sources of changes | Sum of squares | Degree of freedom | Mean squares | F | P | Eta | Group | Modified mean |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|-------|------|------|------------|---------------|
| Academic well-being | pre-test | 124.96 | 1 | 68.47 | 63.47 | 0.11 | 0.13 | experiment | 36.97 |
| | group | 375.82 | 1 | 113.79 | 89.30 | 0.03 | 0.36 | Control | 78.48 |
| Academic self-efficacy | pre-test | 67.24 | 1 | 33.81 | 34.11 | 0.16 | 0.07 | experiment | 11.40 |
| | group | 152.64 | 1 | 80.21 | 71.24 | 0.00 | 0.23 | Control | 19.04 |
| Academic hope | pre-test | 87.72 | 1 | 41.08 | 31.75 | 0.06 | 0.10 | experiment | 18.69 |
| | group | 175.41 | 1 | 76.42 | 76.54 | 0.00 | 0.34 | Control | 26.85 |

According to Table (3), which shows the components of positive psychological states of the subjects in the follow-up stage, it can be seen that the intervention could make a significant change in the scores of academic well-being, academic self-efficacy and academic hope at the level ($p < 0.05$). Thus, the intervention increased the scores in all components in the experimental group compared to the control group, which indicates the stability of the effectiveness of this training in the follow-up phase. On the other hand, Table (3) shows that the adjusted mean of the experimental group was significantly higher than the control group, which indicates the effect of intervention in increasing these positive psychological variables.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of positive education on students' academic well-being, self-efficacy and hope. The results showed that positive training had a positive and significant effect on these variables and these effects were maintained in two months after the intervention (in the follow-up phase). This finding is consistent with studies (Hakimi et al., 2018; Golestaneh & Behzadi, 2019; Hashemi et al., 2019; Beiranvand et al., 2019; Coulombe et al., 2020; Abasi et al., 2020; Teodorczuk, et al., 2019).

Hashemi et al. (2019) with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of positive thinking training on academic well-being of high school students showed that in the experimental group, the score of academic well-being before and after the intervention

increased significantly. The results of Reiter & Wilz (2015) study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of positive memory writing intervention in preventing depressive symptoms and increasing mental well-being indicated that this intervention has reduced depressed mood and increased well-being in adolescents. Meta-analysis by Bolier et al. (2013) also showed that positive interventions are effective in increasing psychological well-being. Abasi et al. (2020) showed that positive psychology education has a positive effect on academic self-efficacy of high school students. However, in the study of Teodorczuk et al. (2019), no significant difference was observed between adolescents in the experimental and control groups in the variables of hope and well-being.

Positive education has been able to be effective in research variables due to its emphasis on their strengths and development and its attention to positive concepts such as hope, self-efficacy, gratitude, forgiveness, spirituality and positive emotions. Ernst et al. (2009) define positive education as an approach that seeks to strengthen happiness and well-being skills. Foret et al. (2012) also found in a study that positive school psychology interventions in adolescents help improve mental health and foster mental well-being and increase health-related behaviors. It also reduces stress and anxiety.

Various positive psychology training sessions emphasize the strengthening of concepts that will lead to increased well-being of individuals. For example, in one of the sessions, the concept of gratitude is discussed, which means "a feeling of gratitude and joy in response to

receiving a gift, whether it is a tangible benefit from a particular person or a moment of happiness and aspiration resulting from natural beauty." A study by Froh et al. (2008) showed that the "counting of blessings" intervention led to increased optimism and satisfaction with life and satisfaction with academic experiences among students. Or meaning is another structure that is emphasized in positive psychology sessions. In this regard, Ho et al. (2010) in their study entitled the role of meaning in life and optimism in promoting well-being concluded that optimism and meaning have a positive relationship with satisfaction with certain aspects of life and a negative relationship with psychological problems of adolescents.

Considering the positive effects of positivism education on the well-being, self-efficacy and academic hope of students that were observed in the study and since one of the goals of positive psychology is to create capable institutions. It is recommended that universities play a role in increasing students' academic well-being by applying positive education approaches as well as strengthening their academic self-efficacy and academic hope. Such positive psychology-based interventions can lead to increased student achievement and academic achievement.

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