POSITIVE EDUCATION: INCORPORATING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTO THE CLASSROOM FOR STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in education towards a more holistic approach through incorporating positive psychology to support student's academic success and well-being. This piece thoroughly analyses the notion of positive education and how it can be used in the classroom to improve students' academic progress and general well-being. Positive education is an innovative teaching system that combines traditional academic instruction with positive psychological ideas. Within psychology, positive psychology is a subfield that specializes in improving positive emotions, character qualities, and overall psychological well-being. Positive education attempts to improve students' cognitive ability and emotional intelligence, character development, and resilience by bringing positive psychology into education. Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, as rudiments of positive psychology, are central to positive education. The cultural and contextual relevance of positive psychology principles were examined to ensure the application and success of positive education across varied student demographics. Findings revealed that students' morale was boosted, and interest in their studies was strengthened as teachers applied positive psychology principles to their teachings.

Keywords: Positive Education, Positive Psychology, Classroom, Students, Academic Success.

Introduction

Educators and researchers are always looking for creative methods to improve students' learning experiences and general well-being because academic success is more crucial today. As important as academic success is, supporting students' emotional and psychological growth is seen as an equally important educational objective. A potent and revolutionary strategy in this endeavor has

been incorporating positive psychology concepts into educational environments. The field of "positive education" combines concepts from positive psychology with standard educational methods. Its objective is to foster pupils' intellectual abilities, character traits, emotional fortitude, and overall well-being. As a science that depends on positive psychology, the phrase "education for both traditional skills and for happiness" describes good education. (Seligman et al, 2009, 293).

The core tenet of positive education is that when students receive a comprehensive education that supports their cognitive and emotional development, they not only gain academic benefits but also acquire the skills necessary to thrive in today's complicated environment. This article examined the ideas and methods of positive psychology along with how well they integrate into the classroom setting. Green et al, (2011) describe positive education as an "applied positive psychology in education." By adopting these values, educators enable children to achieve academic success as well as lead satisfying lives, capable of overcoming obstacles and seizing chances with hope and fortitude. Important elements

of positive education are addressed, along with their significant effects on academic success, including strength-based, mindfulness, character strength, gratitude journaling, and positive feedback. Additionally taken into consideration are doable tactics that educators may use to instill a love of learning, build a sense of community, and establish a pleasant learning environment in the classroom.

Positive education has the capacity to change lives outside of the classroom and into the very fabric of our society. It is an education that works on the development of well-being and happiness in students and other school staff (AbuShaheen 2015, 1). It is becoming more and more clear as we negotiate the challenges of the twenty-first century that supporting our students' holistic growth is an investment in a better future, one in which academic success is harmoniously combined with the concepts of happiness, resilience, and emotional intelligence.

Background to the Study

This study stemmed out of the researcher's observation and interaction with some secondary school students who are academically poor due to their backgrounds and lack of interest in their studies. They attended classes at will and left school before

the closing time. In some schools, such students are termed "9/11" meaning they go to school at 9 am and leave school at 11 am. All they do is roam about the streets till the normal closure of school. From the researcher's discovery, the classroom environment was not conducive due to some teachers' verbal abuse and severe flogging of the concerned students. Some of these students eventually dropped out of the school. Having studied Seligman's positive psychology which is based on how students could be motivated to learn by combining traditional classroom with positive psychology, the researcher proposed finding out the level of understanding of positive education by secondary school teachers in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Some students find it difficult to cope in schools due to frustrating experiences they encounter while learning in their classrooms. Some of them thought they could never make it in life because of the discouragements they encountered in the classrooms. This resulted from the failure of teachers' inability to apply positive psychology to the traditional mode of instruction. Classroom relationships were

formal, and if there was any encouragement, it is only with school guidance counsellors.

Objectives of the Study

The study examined incorporating positive psychology into the classroom for students' academic success. The objectives of the study are to:

1.   Find out whether teachers are aware of positive psychology intervention in classrooms

2.   Find out the influence of teachers' familiarity with positive psychology interventions

3.   Discover the extent to which teachers incorporate positive psychology principles into their daily teaching practices

4.   Determine whether a positive psychology intervention has an impact on students' academic success

Significance of the Study

The study is significant to secondary school teachers as they learn about the concept of positive psychology and how to combine it with their traditional teaching skills to produce positive education in their respective schools. It will also strengthen their teaching skills through which they see their students as humans with feelings who need to be encouraged to study and not tools through

which they earn their living. The study is hoped to promote self-confidence on the part of students and the desire to succeed in their academic pursuits.

Education

One of the most important processes in human development is education. While education encompasses the entire process of human learning through which knowledge is transferred, faculty members are trained, and various skills are cultivated, schooling is only one aspect of education delivery. A definition of education is the act of teaching, the application of discipline to the intellect, or the development of moral character (Adesemowo & Sotonade 2022, 1). This paper however deals with the schooling aspect of education since teachers' understanding of positive psychology being assessed is domiciled in the formal school setting.

Orwen Ergas (2020: 64) notes that metaphors borrowed from the agricultural sector have long been associated with "education." It has frequently been linked to cultivation and the "bringing out" (the Latin for *Educare*) of potential. However, even if it is less frequently employed, the metaphor of pruning still holds true, particularly when

one compares the mind and the brain. The society prunes the mind through education, either for better or worse. Education has to do with experience, and experience has to do with perception. Breaking down experience to its finer elements offers a way of inquiry that is unavailable to people through a day-to-day habitual sense of time. It allows people to access their minds, which we seek to 'educate', and to explore what it is like to experience 'education'. This might go a long way toward improving 'educational' practice (Orwen 2020, 45)

Positive Education is an approach to education through the application of positive psychology principles of focusing on learners' strengths which serves as the impetus for learning. In the school community, encouraging thriving or positive mental health is the primary objective of positive education. (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor & Robinson, 2013). The study of happiness and well-being utilizing Martin Seligman's PERMA model and the Value in Action (VIA) classification is combined with traditional educational ideas to create positive education (Moore, 2020). Corominas opines that teachers educate positively when they:

i)   Explain the actions that have been done ii) Consider sensitive periods iii) Motive

child's guiding instincts iv) Create positive cooperation v) Depend on subconscious vi) Motivate children to behave well because they want to vii) Can foresee behaviours that we should stop viii) Build the child's consciousness so he is happy and content ix) Have educational vision for each child x) Support the child's self–esteem. (Corominas 2003, 23-24).

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a method that is both scientific and practical. within the field of psychology that focuses on researching and highlighting the good facets of life and well-being. Unlike traditional psychology, which primarily examines psychological disorders and mental illnesses, positive psychology emphasizes understanding and enhancing human strengths, virtues, and optimal functioning on what steps can we take to improve our health, make us more positive people, and make our communities more prosperous? (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, 5).

Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the two founders of positive psychology, opine that "psychologists have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living," (2000, 5) hence the need for positive Seligman, (2011) argued that this new research-based methodology "could lead people to well-being, to a fulfilling life, and to a higher state of being." "Positive psychology" is an umbrella term for studies on strengths, virtues, excellence, thriving, flourishing, resilience, optimal functioning in general, and the like. Some have called it a fresh lens or a new way of focusing research on human and organizational behavior (Donaldson 2020, 4).

The key word on which the principles of positive psychology rests is "flourishing. To flourish, the individual must experience all the following (Seligman, 2011):

(i)   Optimism, an individual's degree of optimism about the future (ii) Resilience – our capacity to get back on track (or back on track) after something goes wrong. The study of resilience involves exploring how individuals can bounce back from adversity, cope effectively with challenges, and maintain their well-being even in difficult circumstances (iii) Vitality, that is, learners' or energy, whether physical or intellectual, as defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) (iv)Self-determination, which is the degree to which people feel in control of their lives and

the motivation to pursue goals in line with their values (Ryan & Deci, 2018). This produces character strength that manifests in courage, kindness, wisdom, and perseverance, to help individuals recognize and develop their best qualities. (v) Positive relationships carry the sense that there are people in our lives who care about us.

The field emphasizes the importance of positive social connections and examines how healthy relationships contribute to happiness and well-being. The premise of positive psychology was that it would use tools and methods that had previously been used to explain our vulnerabilities and treat diseases to "enhance our perception of strengths and promote well-being" (Snyder, 2021, 3). Though psychology has the potential to help people flourish, rather than fixing the damage "within a diseased model of human behavior," psychology should "encourage positive character traits that lead to better citizenship: accountability, nurture, charity, politeness, gentleness, forbearance, forbearance, conscientiousness, conscientiousness, and conscientiousness in work," (Seligman Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, 5).

The Key Concepts of Positive Psychology

Seligman (2011, 16) notes that in order for an element to be considered an element of wellbeing, it must have properties.in the course of defining positive psychology. These elements must contribute to well-being, be pursued for their own sake, and be capable of being considered independently of the other elements. The following five elements (or pillars) were identified by Seligman that make up his well-being theory and contribute to human flourishing. An acronym PERMA was formed out of the five elements (Seligman, 2011). PERMA comprises five main elements identified as critical for long-term well-being by the theorist.

P – Positive Emotions are a short-lived multicomponent response trend (Fredrickson 2001), mental experience that is intense and pleasurable (Cabanac, 2002), feelings of joy, gratitude, interest, satisfaction, hope, and an overall degree of happiness (Mandolini, 2020).

E – Engagement or Flow State corresponds to being fully absorbed in activities where skills are practiced and take on challenges while feeling energized, fully engaged, and fulfilled in the experience.

R – Positive Relationship refers to relationships that serve as a bridge in life's

dark times and a path to personal development, well-being, and joy in daily life. The way teachers respond to others can make a difference in creating positive relationships (Mandolini, 2020). The quality and quantity of relationships you have can have a huge impact on "well-being.

M – Meaning is finding significant value in something people believe in or something greater than themselves. For some, it may involve community service, religious or non-denominational causes, family or a business/creative endeavor.

A – Accomplishment accelerates the development and utilization of the individual's potential to achieve impactful results. SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Approximate, and Realistic Goals in a Time Period), maintaining motivation in the face of challenges, and being able to recognize your own accomplishments. (Mandolini, 2020). What is achieved or accomplished (purely for its own sake) can be rewarding and vital to well-being, even if not accompanied by meaning or positive emotions.

H –Health is an essential part of well-being, this includes sleep, physical activity, and diet, all of which are part of a comprehensive and positive educational approach (Norrish & Seligman, 2015).

Application of Positive Psychology to Education

Positive psychology has numerous practical applications in various domains, including education, therapy, healthcare, organizational management, and personal development. By focusing on the positive aspects of human experience and applying evidence-based interventions, positive psychology aims to enhance life satisfaction, happiness, and overall flourishing. Positive psychology has been extended into education by introducing positive education (Seligman et al. 2009). The theory of positive psychology speaks about positive abilities as virtues and strengths of character. Aristotelian philosophy also inspires scholars within this approach, for the role given to prudence, the notion of habit, a conception of happiness, and as an intellectual authority that endorses some of the virtues that stand out as positive character traits in positive education programmes. (Bernal 2020, 56-57).

Methodology

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire titled "Teachers' Understanding of Positive Psychology in Classrooms Questionnaire (TUPPSQ), designed to elicit

information from teachers on their understanding and practice of positive psychology intervention in their teachings. The findings are presented below.

Findings

Years of Teaching Experience

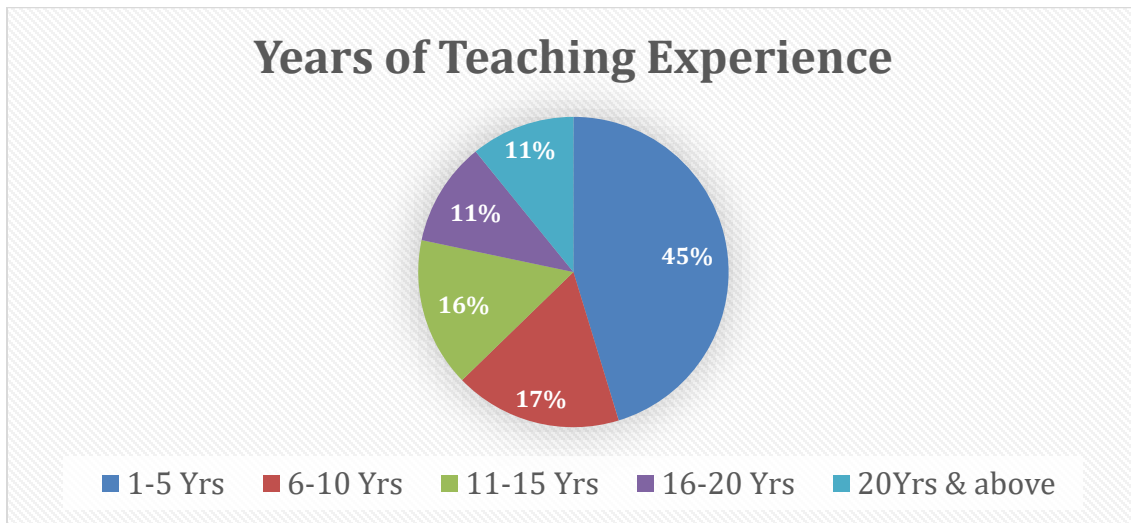The surveyed teachers' years of teaching experience are presented below:

Figure 1, Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The majority of teachers (approximately 45%) have 1-5 years of teaching experience, making it the most common category.

Research Question 4: Do you have any formal training in positive psychology or related fields?
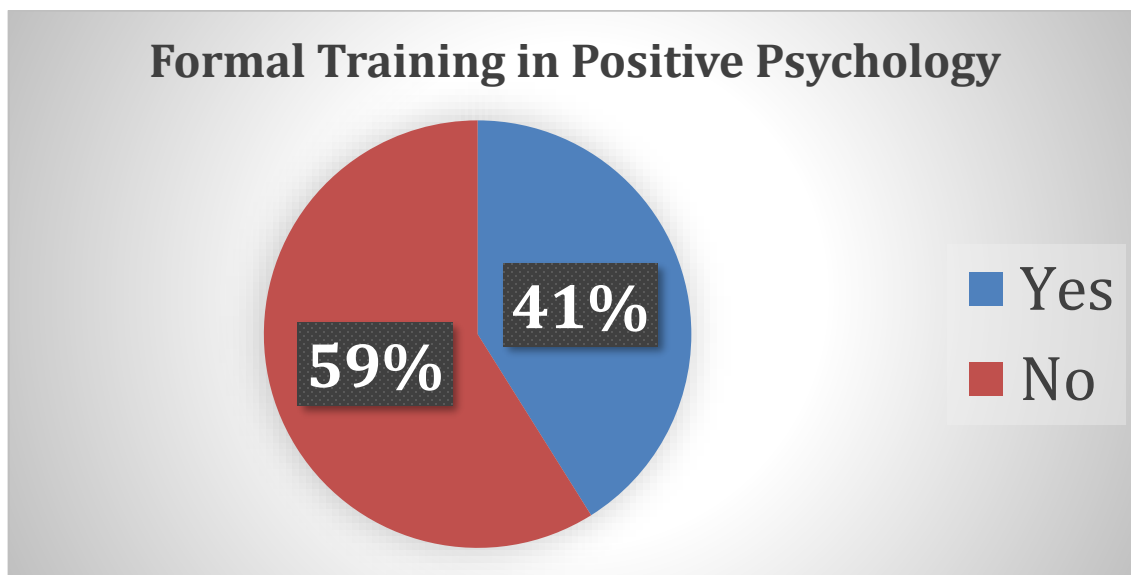

Figure 2, Source: Fieldwork, 2023

There are 83 (41%) teachers who hold formal training in positive psychology or related disciplines. This means that a significant percentage of teachers have made the effort to obtain specialized expertise in positive psychology, which may enable them to effectively implement positive psychology concepts in their instruction. No formal training in positive psychology or similar subjects has been received by 119 (59%) teachers who responded to the questionnaire. Teachers who are unfamiliar with the topic of positive psychology or who have learned about it informally or via self-

study may be included in this group. Teachers who have undergone formal training in positive psychology are probably more knowledgeable about the theories and methods of positive psychology, which can help to improve student results. Individuals with formal training may possess more specific knowledge, it is still vital to take into account possibilities for professional growth and training for those without formal training to improve their ability to use positive psychology concepts in the classroom.

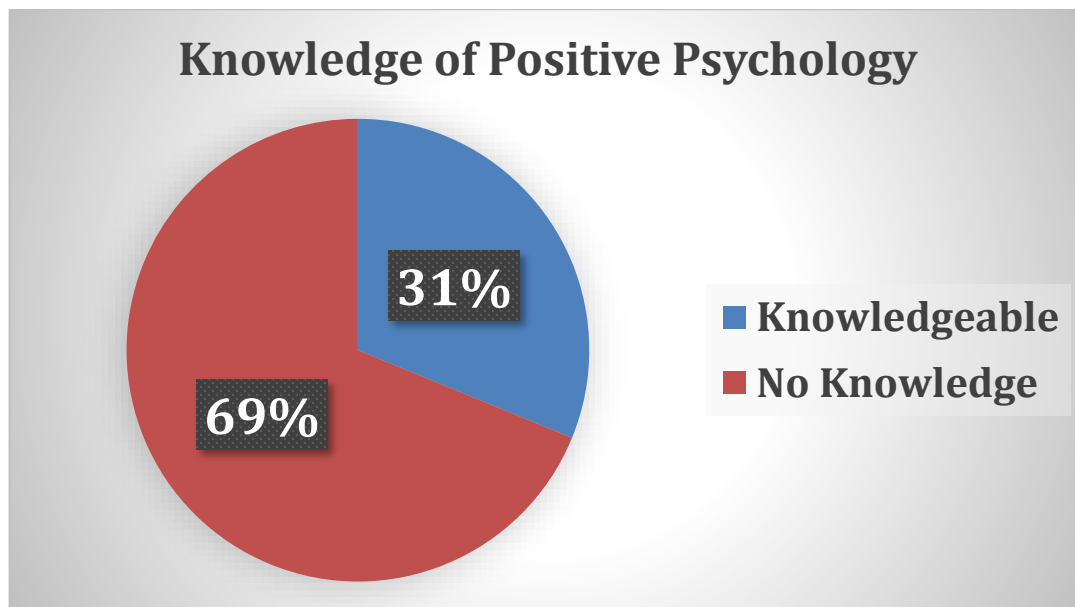**Research Question 6**: How would you define positive psychology in your own words?

Figure 3, Source: Fieldwork, 2023

In this set of teachers, 63 (31%) have a better understanding of positive psychology, whereas the remaining 139 (69%) have no

idea what the concept entails. With 63 teachers, the number of teachers who comprehend positive psychology more

thoroughly is comparatively less. These teachers might be better at teaching and interacting with students because of their greater familiarity with the ideas and applications of positive psychology. The 139 teachers who make up the bigger group are not familiar with the idea of positive psychology.

Research Question 7: Have you ever incorporated positive psychology principles into your teaching methods?
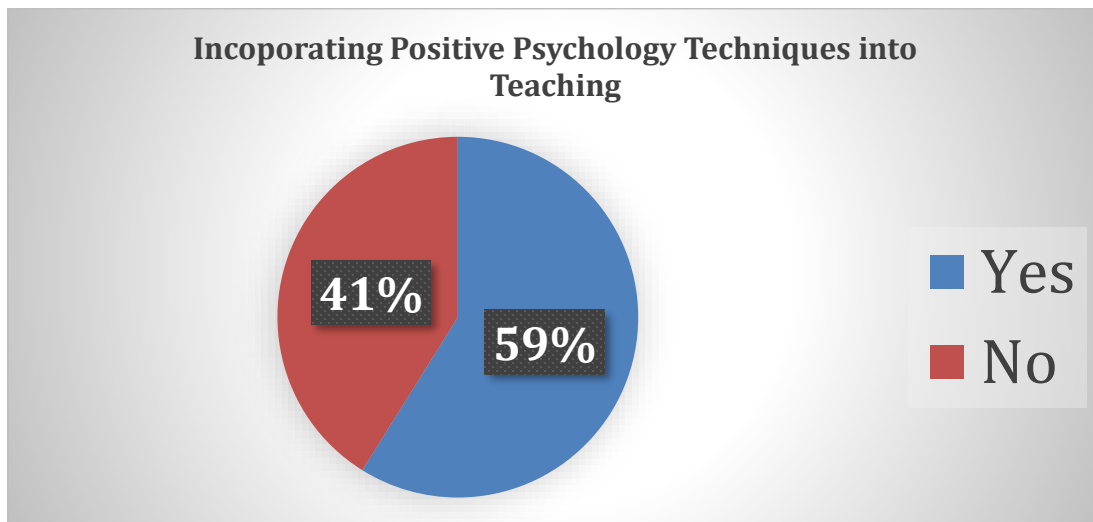

Figure 4, Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Out of 202 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 116 (59%) actively incorporate techniques and concepts from positive psychology into their lessons. It appears from this that a sizable segment of teachers has realized the possible advantages of incorporating positive psychology concepts into their teaching methods. Positive psychology is still not used in the instruction of 81 (41%) teachers. There could be a number of reasons for this, such as their teaching style convictions, lack of experience with positive psychology, or ambiguity about how to apply it.

Research Question 8: Are you familiar with the following positive psychology interventions? Please indicate your level of familiarity with each on a scale of one to five, where 1 is = Not Familiar at All and 5 = Very Familiar.

Table 1: Familiarity with Positive Psychology Interventions

Opinions	Very Familiar	Familiar	Not Familiar

Gratitude Journaling	28	25	116
Strengths-Based Teaching	41	40	119
Mindfulness Exercises	48	43	87
Character Strengths Assessment	54	51	77
Positive Feedback and Encouragement	59	63	66

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The table describes the level of familiarity among teachers with various aspects of Positive Psychology interventions. It covers five components, each with three categories of familiarity: "Very Familiar," "Familiar," and "Not Familiar." The majority of teachers (116 out of 202) are not familiar with gratitude journaling, indicating that this specific practice is relatively unknown among the surveyed teachers. A smaller portion of teachers (25 out of 202) are familiar with the concept, and a smaller group (28 out of 202) is very familiar with it.

Relatedly, a significant number of teachers (119 out of 202) are not familiar with strengths-based teaching. A relatively smaller group (40 out of 202) is familiar with the concept, and an even smaller group (41 out of 202) is very familiar with strengths-based teaching. Promoting awareness and providing training in strengths-based teaching could be beneficial,

as it is a recognized positive psychology approach.

Furthermore, mindfulness exercises appear to be relatively better known among the surveyed teachers, as 91 out of 202 teachers (combining "Very Familiar" and "Familiar") have some level of familiarity with them. Among these, 48 teachers are very familiar with mindfulness exercises. The group of teachers not familiar with mindfulness exercises (83 out of 202) is smaller than those not familiar with other practices.

Similar to mindfulness exercises, character strengths assessments are relatively well-known among the surveyed teachers. A total of 105 teachers (combining "Very Familiar" and "Familiar") are familiar with this concept. The group of teachers not familiar with character strengths assessments is 77 out of 202. The data suggests that character strengths assessments are more widely recognized than some other positive psychology concepts. Finally, positive

feedback and encouragement are relatively familiar to the surveyed teachers, with a total of 122 teachers (combining "Very Familiar" and "Familiar") having some level of familiarity. The group of teachers not familiar with this concept is 66 out of 202 respondents.

Research Question 9: To what extent do you incorporate positive psychology principles into your daily teaching practices? (Not at all), (Rarely), (Occasionally), (Often), (Always)

Table 2: Extent of Incorporating Positive Psychology Principles

Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Always
34	22	73	46	53

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The table reveals a diverse range of adoption levels among teachers when it comes to incorporating positive psychology principles into their teaching practices. This suggests that not all teachers approach teaching with the same degree of emphasis on positive psychology. A significant number of teachers, comprising the "Occasionally," "Often," and "Always" categories (a total of 172 teachers), do incorporate positive psychology principles to some extent. This indicates a positive trend towards recognizing the value of these principles in education.

The 34 teachers who responded "Not at all" and the 22 teachers who said they do so "Rarely" represent a group where there might be an opportunity for growth in terms of raising awareness and providing training in positive psychology principles. The fact that 99 out of 202 teachers indicated that they "Often" or "Always" incorporate positive psychology principles suggests a substantial recognition of the benefits of these principles in improving students' well-being and performance.

Although a lot of teachers are already using the principles of positive psychology in their teachings, there is still room for improvement in terms of encouraging instructors to include these ideas in their everyday duties and offering more resources and assistance to those who do not. The research indicates that there exists a variation in the degree to which educators have incorporated positive psychology principles into their instructional techniques.

Research Question 10: What specific positive psychology strategies or interventions have you found most effective in enhancing the well-being and performance of your students?

Table 3: Specific Positive Psychology Interventions found most Effective by Teachers

Gratitude Journaling	Strength-based teaching	Mindfulness exercises	Character strengths assessment	Positive Feedback & encouragement	Nil
2	15	17	32	37	100

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The data indicates that there is a variety of positive psychology interventions being used by teachers. These interventions include strength-based approaches, mindfulness, character strength development, and positive feedback. This diversity suggests that teachers are exploring different strategies to enhance the well-being and performance of their students.

The most commonly mentioned interventions are positive feedback (37 teachers) and character strengths (32 teachers). This may indicate that these two interventions are well-received and widely used by teachers. Positive feedback can boost students' self-esteem and motivation, while character strength development can contribute to personal growth and well-being. Gratitude journaling is mentioned by only 2 teachers. This suggests that this specific intervention is less commonly used among the surveyed teachers.

A sizable percentage do not employ any specific interventions. Remarkably, 100 instructors out of 202 reported that they used none of the interventions on the list. This could suggest that providing instructors with training and resources on positive psychology interventions could help them better support the academic and overall well-being of their students. The data reveals that there is a range of positive psychology interventions being used by teachers, with positive feedback and character strengths being the most commonly mentioned. Some interventions, such as gratitude journaling, are used less frequently, and a substantial number of teachers have not reported using any of the listed interventions, indicating room for potential growth in the

implementation of positive psychology strategies in education.

Research Question 11: Have you observed any changes in your student's behavior, attitude, or academic performance as a result of implementing positive psychology principles?
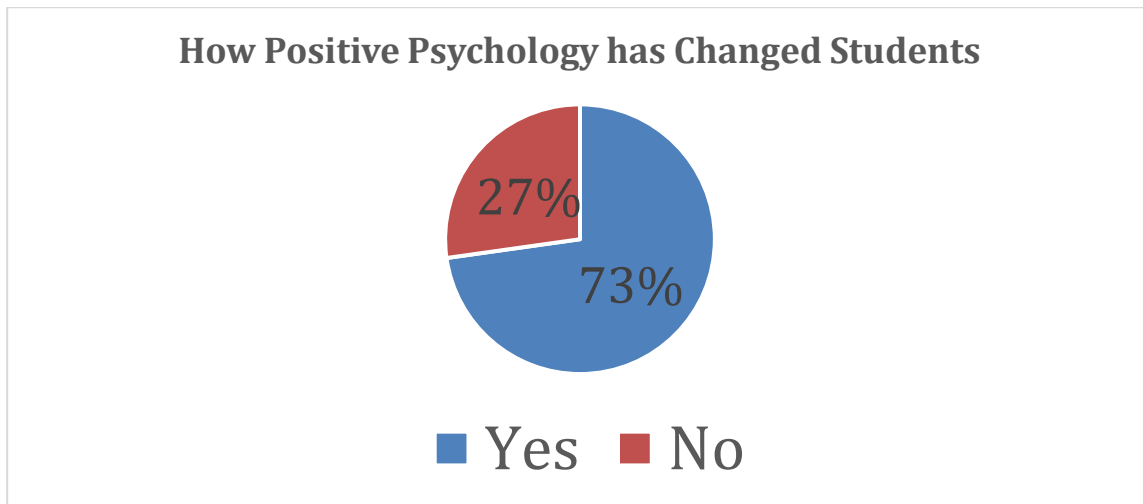

Figure 5, Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Teachers' perspectives on how using positive psychology principles have changed students' attitudes, behaviors, or academic achievement applying the ideas of positive psychology, reveals that 147 (73%) teachers have seen improvements in their students. Many teachers argue that the use of positive psychology concepts in the classroom has improved students' learning outcomes after applying positive psychology concepts. 55 (27%) teachers have not noticed any appreciable improvements in the attitudes, behaviors, or academic achievement of their pupils. There could be a number of reasons for this, such as variations in how they are implemented, external circumstances, or the requirement for more time for changes to become noticeable.

The majority of teachers reported positive effects, which are consistent with research showing positive psychology concepts can enhance students' academic achievement, well-being, and engagement. According to the data, the majority of the teachers have noted improvements in their students as a consequence of applying positive psychology concepts. This bolsters the notion that using positive psychology to improve students' attitudes, behaviors, and academic achievement might be beneficial.

Research Question 12: Do you believe that more professional development opportunities related to positive psychology in education would benefit teachers?
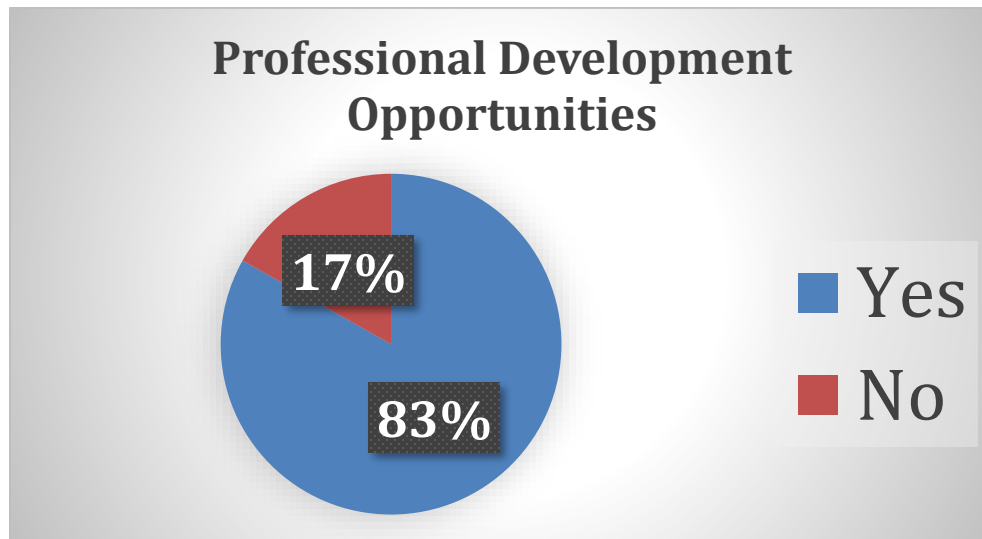

Figure 6, Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Teachers were asked if they thought there should be more possibilities for professional development connected to positive psychology in education. A total of 168 (83%) teachers answered in the affirmative. This suggests that these teachers are quite aware of the potential advantages of using positive psychology concepts in their instruction, and they are also very interested in doing so. A smaller subset of teachers (34 out of 202) disagrees that more professional development in positive psychology is necessary. Their motivations could be many and could include issues like their conviction that their present methods of instruction are effective or their ignorance of the possible advantages of positive psychology in the classroom.

The overwhelming majority of teachers' strong support indicates that there is a sense of importance in understanding positive psychology and how it applies to teaching. Offering a variety of professional development alternatives that teachers can select from in accordance with their values and interests could help educational institutions or organizations meet the demands of both groups. Understanding the specific worries or misconceptions that the group holding the opposite view of more training has regarding positive psychology may be facilitated by ongoing feedback and discussion with them.

Conclusion

Classroom experiences can influence students' behavior. They may react emotionally, physically, or socially to stimuli, which can sometimes differ from their reactions in their homes. Positive Education stands as a promising approach to revolutionizing traditional educational paradigms. By incorporating positive psychology principles into the classroom, Educators can set up a learning environment that not only fosters academic excellence but also promotes the holistic development of students. The integration of positive emotions, character strengths, and resilience-building strategies enhances students' overall well-being, ultimately leading to improved academic performance. While challenges exist, the potential benefits make a compelling case for educational institutions to embrace Positive Education and contribute to the flourishing of the next generation. This article calls for further research into the nuanced implementation of Positive Education across various educational contexts and underscores its role in shaping the future of education for enhanced student academic success and well-being.

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