Correlation between Positive Psychology and Student Outcomes in Selected Secondary Schools in Kasarani, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Positive psychology advocates for a shift in perspective, encouraging individuals to view the world as full of growth opportunities rather than being overwhelmed by problems. In Kenya, research on the impact of positive psychology on student outcomes is still limited, and the recognition of its role in education is relatively recent. This is reflected in the Ministry of Education's mentorship policy, which aims to empower learners to reach their full potential. The present study responded to the Ministry's call for more research on positive psychology in Kenya, specifically focusing on examining the impact of positive psychology dimensions on student outcomes in Kasarani Sub-County. The study was anchored on social cognitive theory and employed a correlational research design. The research was conducted in secondary schools within Kasarani Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. Together, the schools had a student population of approximately 17,224. A sample of 100 students was selected using stratified sampling to ensure proportional representation from both public and private schools. Data was collected using the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) and the Positive Personality Traits Questionnaire (PPTQ). Data was analyzed using correlation and regression techniques in SPSS version 23. Regression analysis revealed that positive psychology explained 34.9 % of the variance in student outcomes to a statistically significant degree; (R^2=.349, p<.01, F (1) =17.156), with positive individual traits accounting for the strongest effect size (B=.492, p<.05), followed by positive subjective experience (B=.203, p<.05), and lastly, positive organizational development (B=.160, p<.05). The results underscore the importance of promoting positive psychology in secondary schools. As such, positive psychology programs, especially those that focus on nurturing positive individual traits should form part and parcel of secondary school education system.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Secondary Schools, Student Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Positive psychology advocates for a shift in perspective, encouraging individuals to view the world as full of growth opportunities rather than being overwhelmed by problems (Kim et al., 2018). It includes concepts such as virtue, gratitude, positive emotions, resilience, and youth development (Kim et al., 2018), and focuses on human strengths and optimal functioning that foster effective learning, creativity, productivity, and pro-social behavior. The central idea is to replace a negative mindset with a positive one, focusing not on correcting people's flaws, but on cultivating their strengths (Brizhak et al., 2020). It is based on the belief that every person has unique strengths and potential that should be nurtured (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2019). While acknowledging the inevitability of negative emotions, positive psychology emphasizes managing them effectively, as some negative feelings contribute to balance and rationality (Marks & Wade, 2015). This framework is grounded in the belief that individuals are naturally equipped with both positive and negative emotions, which should be leveraged to enhance personal development (Mauri et al., 2021). Positive psychology does not ignore negative realities but promotes an inquiry into all aspects of human experience, whether fulfilling or distressing (Fulmer, 2015).

Positive psychology literature categorizes it into three main dimensions: positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive organizational development (Brizhak et al., 2020; Danzger, 2018). Positive subjective experiences involve emotions like happiness and resilience, aiming to foster holistic well-being and coping mechanisms for life's stresses (Dunn, 2019; Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2019). Positive individual traits

include virtues like love, forgiveness, and perseverance (Matthews et al., 2003), while positive organizational development focuses on creating an environment that promotes optimism and resilience within schools (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Fulmer (2015) further expands these dimensions to include positive emotions, engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment. Regardless of the number of dimensions, core elements of positive psychology include optimism, gratitude, hope, resilience, and determination (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2019). Danzger (2018) also outlines five actions central to positive psychology: developing healthy habits, embracing a growth mindset, fostering intrinsic motivation, building self-efficacy, and offering customization.

Chodkiewicz and Boyle (2019) highlight that factors like one's support system – including school, teachers, family, and community – along with mental capabilities and attitudes, play a crucial role in shaping life outcomes. This has led to an increased focus on integrating positive psychology programs in schools to promote holistic development. The application of positive psychology in education has become more prominent, given its potential to improve educational outcomes (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). It is seen as a preventive approach rather than a remedial one (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2019), aiming to foster positive self-concept, emotions, and behaviors (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2019). According to Brizhak et al. (2020), positive psychology programs in schools help foster effective decision-making, optimism, and confidence, leading to improved creativity and personal potential. Positive psychology thus focuses on activating students' abilities and attitudes to enhance academic and personal success, strengthening resilience against negative emotions and challenges. Chodkiewicz and Boyle (2019) note that most schools now aim to build resilience and well-being through positive psychology programs, uncovering personal potential. This aligns with Jankowski et al. (2020), who argue that positive psychology enhances personal virtues, which leads to better mental health and overall student outcomes.

The roots of positive psychology can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy, particularly the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, who emphasized that good outcomes stem from virtuous character, in harmony with human nature (Jorgensen & Nafstad, 2005). However, as a formal movement, positive psychology emerged in the late 1990s in the United States (Doiron et al., 2018), partly in response to the traditional psychology field's focus on treating mental illness rather than fostering what is good (Danzger, 2018). The concept has since spread globally, including to China, where a variant known as Chinese positive psychology is gaining popularity (Wong, 2016).

In Africa, positive psychology has been integrated into the educational sector, though often implicitly, such as in the form of motivational talks or positive reinforcement (Eloff et al., 2014). South Africa is a notable exception, where positive psychology became central to national discourse starting in the 2000s (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007). Studies in South Africa have demonstrated the success of positive psychology principles in educational contexts (Gush & Greeff, 2018; Mason, 2019). In Kenya, while positive psychology's influence has been more subtle, with applications such as motivational speeches and teacher praise (Kinyanjui et al., 2015), there have been studies showing its effectiveness in improving student discipline and well-being. However, a lack of expertise and clarity regarding how stakeholders can collaborate to implement positive psychology effectively has been noted.

Fulmer (2015) stresses the importance of continually generating evidence to support the benefits of positive psychology. Chodkiewicz and Boyle (2016) reviewed school-based positive psychology interventions and found a gap between research and practice. In Kenya, research on the impact of positive psychology on student outcomes is still limited, and the recognition of its role in education is relatively recent. This is reflected in the Ministry of Education's mentorship policy, which aims to empower learners to reach their full potential. The policy encourages the integration of inspirational programs in collaboration with various stakeholders, including school leadership and the community. This study aims to explore the perspectives of secondary school heads in Kasarani Sub-County, Nairobi, on the relationship between positive psychology and student outcomes.

Secondary school students face numerous challenges during adolescence, including hormonal changes, peer pressure, and academic demands, which can negatively affect their psychological well-being (Bono et al., 2020). If unaddressed, these issues can lead to behavioral problems and poor academic performance (Carmona-Halty et al., 2021). Studies have shown that poor student-teacher relationships and peer pressure are key factors contributing to delinquency (Mwaniki, 2018). These issues highlight the need for positive psychology in Kenyan schools, as recognized in the Ministry of Education's report (2019), which notes the lack of sufficient depth in

existing positive psychology interventions. Without adequate support, students often lack the self-confidence and motivation needed to succeed academically. The present study responded to the Ministry's call for more research on positive psychology in Kenya, specifically focusing on examining the impact of positive psychology dimensions on student outcomes in Kasarani Sub-County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on the social cognitive theory. The theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1960 and it proposes that learning takes place in a social context facilitated by the collaboration between the individual, their behavior, and their environment (Bandura, 2002). Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) postulated human functioning is contingent on three interrelating factors including behavioral, environmental, and personal cognitions. They further averred that behavioral influences are the choices that learners make to achieve their academic goals; environmental influences incorporate how we interact with others within our social cycles and how this motivates us; and personal influence encompasses elements such as cognitions, personal beliefs, individual perceptions, and emotional state.

The applicability of social cognitive theory for making sense of student outcomes has been implied in extant literature (Masovic, 2018; Siddiqui, 2015). At the intersection of positive psychology are social cognitive facets such as favorable behavior which results from a positive mindset which is in turn fuelled by positive emotions (Dunn, 2019). Since the theory holds that learning is a function of collaboration between the individual and his or her environment, positive individual traits such as perseverance, self-knowledge, courage, fairness, reciprocity, sociability, and interpersonal skills are central to the realization of desirable outcomes (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). These positive individual traits facilitate self-regulation that has been linked to academic performance (Landrum, 2020). The environmental facet of social cognitive theory underscores the role of positive organizational development: a school environment characterized by praise /recognition, rewards/awards, motivational talks, guidance/counseling and mentorship have implications on student outcomes (Masovis, 2018).

This study utilized social cognitive theory as a lens through which to make sense of positive psychology in relation to the outcomes of students of secondary schools in Kasarani Sub-County of Nairobi, Kenya. The theory's basic tenets provided a framework for understanding how psychological processes, social interactions, and environmental factors collectively contribute to student success. For instance, self-efficacy, a key concept in social cognitive theory, refers to an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish tasks. This explained the effect of positive subjective experience on student outcomes through the examination of psychology traits like self-esteem and self-confidence and their effect on self-efficacy beliefs. Higher levels of self-efficacy leads to increased motivation, effort, and persistence, thereby influencing positive academic outcomes.

Social cognitive theory also emphasizes learning through observation and modelling. The study explored how exposure to positive role models such as motivational speakers and the demonstration of successful learning strategies can influence students' adoption of positive psychology principles. On the same token, social cognitive theory acknowledges the role of the environment in shaping behavior. The study examined how educational institutions can create environments that promote positive psychology principles, such as by incorporating guidance/counseling, motivational talks, praise /recognition, rewards/awards, and mentorship. These initiatives enhanced students' emotional well-being, engagement, and ultimately, their academic success. This could lead to improved study habits and adaptive coping mechanisms, subsequently affecting student outcomes. Hence, the theory informed the investigation of positive organisational development's effect on student outcomes.

Thirdly, social cognitive theory recognizes the importance of self-regulation, which involves setting goals, monitoring progress, and adapting strategies based on feedback. The study examined how students' positive individual traits like optimism and resilience, contributed to their ability to effectively regulate their learning behaviors. Positive psychological traits facilitate better goal-setting, time management, and metacognitive skills, leading to improved academic performance.

Empirical Review

Existing literature highlights the crucial role of positive psychology in shaping students' academic and personal well-being. Haugan et al. (2021) and De Beer et al. (2022) emphasize the significance of subjective experiences in education, albeit from different perspectives. Haugan et al. (2021) found that social support plays a pivotal role in reducing academic stress and enhancing resilience, particularly among female students in Norwegian secondary schools. Similarly, De Beer et al. (2022) underscore the importance of institutional and peer support for South African university students with invisible disabilities, suggesting that a lack of recognition can negatively impact motivation and self-efficacy. While these studies align in their assertion that psychological and social support foster student well-being, they underscore the need for further research in diverse cultural and economic contexts, such as Kenya, to develop inclusive and effective interventions.

Beyond academic settings, research has explored how positive psychology influences well-being and performance in other domains. Belkhir et al. (2020) examine how engagement with music and spirituality, respectively, contribute to subjective well-being, fostering hope and resilience. Likewise, Payne et al. (2020) and James and Walters (2020) argue that positive psychology interventions, such as mindfulness and gratitude, enhance mental health and productivity. However, workplace-oriented studies, such as Peretz (2020) and Higashida (2021), reveal challenges in applying positive psychology principles within structured institutions, where bureaucratic constraints and cultural misalignment may limit their effectiveness. These insights highlight the need for adaptive approaches when integrating positive psychology into different environments, including schools and universities.

A critical gap emerges in the debate over the direct impact of positive psychology on academic performance. While James and Walters (2020) assert that psychological well-being translates into improved cognitive function and learning outcomes, Fulmer (2015) reports that while positive psychology enhances happiness and social relationships, its influence on academic performance remains inconclusive. This contradiction underscores the need for further empirical research to clarify the mechanisms through which positive psychology can optimize academic achievement. Additionally, studies by Kinyanjui et al. (2015) and Rakiro et al. (2021) suggest that reinforcement strategies, such as positive feedback and goal-setting, enhance discipline and motivation among students. However, their effectiveness varies depending on contextual factors such as school environment and cultural norms. These findings reinforce the importance of context-specific applications of positive psychology in fostering student development and academic success, particularly in African educational settings.

Ma et al. (2020) and Ljubin-Golub et al. (2019) converge in their focus on personality traits and positive psychology in education, particularly in terms of self-regulation, resilience, and emotional adaptation. Ma et al. (2020) found that savoring and positive rumination contribute to a positive outlook, aligning with Ljubin-Golub et al.'s (2019) assertion that self-regulation and personality traits influence academic progress and procrastination. However, while Ma et al. (2020) highlight the emotional aspect of positive psychology, Ljubin-Golub et al. (2019) extend the discussion to the behavioral regulation of academic tasks. Additionally, Trajkovik et al. (2018) emphasize the role of engagement learning in enhancing positive psychology among students, an aspect not fully explored by the other studies. A key divergence is that while Ma et al. (2020) focus on individual-level emotional regulation, Trajkovik et al. (2018) examine collaborative learning methods, suggesting different mechanisms for fostering positive educational outcomes.

In contrast, studies such as Donaldson et al. (2019) shift the focus from educational settings to workplace environments, exploring how positive psychology influences productivity and well-being. Donaldson et al. (2019) found that positive organizational psychology interventions reduced negative workplace behaviors and improved work engagement, which aligns with Çetin and Askun's (2017) finding that occupational self-efficacy contributes to workplace motivation and performance. This agreement underscores the role of intrinsic motivation in fostering positive workplace outcomes, paralleling the educational context where self-determined learning drives academic success. However, while Donaldson et al. (2019) emphasize group interventions, Çetin and Askun (2017) focus on individual occupational self-efficacy, highlighting a divergence in their approaches. Similarly, Athota et al. (2020) and Prentice et al. (2020) explore personality traits in different contexts— workplace performance and coping with stress, respectively—both finding that traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness promote positive outcomes, but differ in their emphasis on well-being versus performance.

Despite these contributions, several gaps exist in the literature. First, while studies such as Bono et al. (2020) and Smith et al. (2021) focus on student well-being, they do not directly link positive psychology to academic achievement, leaving an open question on the extent to which interventions improve educational performance. Second, Ndofirepi (2020) discusses psychological traits in entrepreneurship education but does not assess whether the learned skills translate into actual entrepreneurial success.

The literature sphere also present varying perspectives on organizational development, highlighting its impact on learning environments. Dorosuk (2019) focused on organizational development as a tool for transformation and resilience, particularly within multinational corporations. This study outlined a structured approach to organizational growth, identifying lifecycle stages and their implications. While both studies acknowledge the importance of organizational adaptability, Lau et al. (2019) prioritize modern learning methodologies, whereas Dorosuk (2019) examines a broader framework of organizational evolution, including values and change management strategies. Their common ground lies in recognizing the need for structured transitions, but they diverge in their focus – one emphasizing learning flexibility and the other on corporate sustainability.

Similarly, Weston et al. (2017) and Kalygina et al. (2019) explored organizational development from distinct yet interrelated angles. Weston et al. (2017) examined its role in reshaping educational institutions through collaborative learning models, placing students at the center of academic programs. Kalygina et al. (2019), on the other hand, argued that external factors significantly influence organizational performance, proposing an integrated development model that accounts for both internal and external forces. While Weston et al. (2017) highlight organizational development as an internal transformation process, Kalygina et al. (2019) extend this view by considering external influences such as market conditions and societal demands. Both studies agree on the importance of adaptability but differ in scope – Weston et al. (2017) focus on classroom redesign as a micro-level intervention, whereas Kalygina et al. (2019) provide a macro-level perspective on organizational growth and performance.

Solanky et al. (2019) and Watare et al. (2020) further linked organizational development to leadership, strategy, and technology, with the latter emphasizing performance outcomes in a corporate context. A notable gap across these studies is the limited exploration of organizational development in nonprofit and educational settings. While some studies, such as Weston et al. (2017), address education, the majority focus on corporate environments, leaving room for further research on how these principles apply in different institutional contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a correlational research design, a quantitative approach in which numerical data is collected and analyzed statistically to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Cook & Cook, 2016). This design was appropriate for examining the relationship between three independent variables – positive individual traits, positive subjective experiences, and positive organizational development – and the dependent variable, student outcomes (Akhtar, 2016; Asenahabi, 2017). By using this design, the study aimed to establish how these aspects of positive psychology interact to influence students' overall well-being and academic success.

The research was conducted in secondary schools within Kasarani Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. According to records from the Kasarani Sub-County Education Office, the area comprises 14 public and 43 private secondary schools, with a total student population of approximately 17,224. Public schools account for 5,388 boys and 6,383 girls, while private schools have 1,614 boys and 3,839 girls. This diverse population allowed for a comparative analysis of the implementation of positive psychology practices in both public and private institutions. By including students from different school types, the study ensured a comprehensive understanding of the educational environment's impact on positive psychological development.

A sample of 100 students was selected using stratified sampling to ensure proportional representation from both public and private schools (Taherdoost, 2016). Whereas this is a modest sample in light of the population size, Fraenkel et al. (2012) suggest that at least 50 participants are necessary for a correlational study. Similarly, Jenkins and Quintana-Ascencio (2020) advise that studies employing regression analysis should have a sample size exceeding 25. Based on these guidelines, a sample size of 100 was considered adequate for this study.

Form three students were targeted as they had spent sufficient time in school to provide informed responses regarding positive psychology practices. However, Form 4 students were excluded to prevent any disruption in their preparation for national examinations. Within each school, proportionate sampling was applied to ensure that the sample reflected the overall student population distribution (Denscombe, 2017). Furthermore, gender representation was balanced by selecting an equal number of male and female participants. A simple random sampling method was then used, where students were assigned numbers, mixed thoroughly, and selected randomly until the required 100 participants were chosen (Ahmad & Halim, 2017).

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, divided into five sections corresponding to different study variables. The first section captured demographic details such as age and gender. The second section measured positive subjective experience using the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), where students rated their emotional experiences on a 5-point scale, generating a net score ranging from -24 to +24. The third section assessed positive individual traits using the Positive Personality Traits Questionnaire (PPTQ) developed by Singh and Jha (2010), which measured optimism, self-reliance, and other traits on a 5-point Likert scale. The fourth section focused on positive organizational development, evaluating psychological interventions such as counseling, motivational talks, and mentorship. The final section examined five key aspects – caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection – on a 5-point scale. Data was analyzed using correlation and regression techniques in SPSS version 23, ensuring a comprehensive statistical examination of the relationships between study variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Student outcomes was regressed on the different constructs of positive psychology to determine the explanatory power positive psychology and its variances on the student outcomes among the students who school in secondary schools in Kasarani Sub-County. Table 1 presents the output.

Table 1 Regression of Student Outcomes on Positive Psychology Dimensions

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.591[a]	.349	.329	.51004
a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Development Composite, Individual Traits Composite Score , Positive Subjective Experience Composite Score				

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.389	3	4.463	17.156	.000[b]
	Residual	24.974	96	.260		
	Total	38.363	99			
a. Dependent Variable: Student Outcomes Composite Score						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Development Composite, Individual Traits Composite Score , Positive Subjective Experience Composite Score						
Coefficients[a]						

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.699	.449		1.557	.123
	Positive Subjective Experience Composite Score	.203	.072	.242	2.807	.006
	Individual Traits Composite Score	.492	.111	.382	4.451	.000
	Organizational Development Composite	.160	.067	.208	2.370	.020
a. Dependent Variable: Student Outcomes Composite Score						

Table 20 shows that positive psychology explained 34.9 % of the variance in student outcomes to a statistically significant degree; (R^2=.349, $p<.01$, F (1) =17.156). The finding agrees with the findings by Kalygina et al. (2019) who posited that the positive psychology can be used for the improvement of the performance in schools. An examination of the coefficients of the specific variables of the positive psychology revealed that the variables positive subjective experience (B=.203, $p<.05$), individual traits (B=.492, $p<.05$) and positive organizational development (B=.160, $p<.05$) all of which had positive significant influences on the student outcomes among the secondary school students in Kasarani Sub-County. The findings all support the holdings the previous findings that positive psychology increase the student outcomes. The findings also support the findings by Askun (2017) held that the positive psychology can be used for improvement of the performance in the different institutions. Positive individual traits was found to be crucial for student success, aligning with Ma et al. (2020), who linked these traits to personal growth.

The findings contribute to theoretical frameworks by reinforcing the importance of positive emotions, optimal experiences, and personal traits in education. By integrating these insights into existing theories such as self-determination and social-cognitive motivation, the study expands the understanding of student success factors. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of positive organizational development in enhancing student outcomes, supporting existing research by Lau et al. (2019) and Dorosuk (2019), which emphasize the impact of school leadership and organizational behavior in fostering supportive learning environments. The concept of positive organizational development can be integrated into theories such as transformational leadership and positive organizational scholarship to provide deeper insights into how school leadership can cultivate environments that support student growth and well-being.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has contributed to the existing knowledge by exploring the relationship between positive psychology and student outcomes from the perspectives of secondary school heads in Kasarani Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. The findings emphasize the importance of fostering positive subjective experiences among students. Those who reported feeling positive, happy, and content showed higher academic achievement and well-being, highlighting the need to cultivate a positive school environment that encourages such emotions. Meaningful interactions between teachers, parents, and students were identified as essential for nurturing positivity within the school community. The study also reveals that positive individual traits, such as resilience, self-esteem, motivation, and self-discipline, significantly influence student success. Creating an environment that connects students with key individuals in their educational journey is crucial for developing these traits. Peer counseling and mentorship programs were noted as effective tools for supporting students in building and maintaining positive individual traits In addition, the research highlights the role of positive organizational development in student outcomes. A supportive organizational culture that fosters collaboration, professional growth, and positive relationships

among staff, students, and administrators was linked to improved student performance. The study found that positive reinforcement and counseling services were crucial for recognizing achievements and providing comprehensive student support.

Ultimately, the study underscores the value of positive psychology in enhancing student outcomes and suggests that fostering positive experiences, traits, and organizational practices can create an environment that promotes academic success and well-being. The practical implications of these findings can help inform educational practices and further advance positive psychology in education. The study highlights the positive correlation between positive psychology and student outcomes, suggesting that schools should integrate programs focused on enhancing positive subjective experiences, such as mindfulness and gratitude exercises, to foster student well-being. It emphasizes the importance of providing holistic support through guidance and counseling services that nurture positive individual traits like resilience and self-esteem. Schools should also prioritize creating a positive organizational culture by promoting collaboration, professional development for teachers, and recognition of student achievements. Regular evaluation of the effectiveness of these interventions through feedback and performance analysis is essential for ensuring they meet students' needs and contribute to improved outcomes.

The findings provide useful insights for educational institutions and policymakers, but certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study's focus on a specific region restricts the generalizability of its results, and reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias. Secondly, in hindsight, the use of a modest sample size raises concerns about its representativeness and the generalizability of findings. With such a limited sample, results may lack precision, risk having high margin of error, and signal the need to treat the findings and conclusions of the study with caution due to the likelihood of insufficient statistical power. Therefore, a future study should utilize a larger sample to enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings. Thirdly, expanding studies to other sub-counties and counties in Kenya would offer a broader perspective on positive psychology's impact. Additionally, further research should explore the link between peer counseling and student outcomes and develop frameworks for meaningful engagement among students, teachers, and parents to foster student success.

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