Implementing Positive Education in a Preparatory School: A Case Study from Qatar

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Abstract—**Nowadays, one of the biggest challenges almost all teachers face is how to motivate students to be more eager, focused, and engaged in their learning process. Positive psychology is used in education as a framework for improving students' positive emotions like joy, contentment, and gratitude, which in turn increases both their wellbeing and learning performance. This study showcases a prototype of integrating positive psychology into a 9th grade English class, and examines how students' engagements flourish and thrive through specific learning experiences. Before the prototype lesson, the teacher was trained about how to use positive language and phrases with students, how to link the theoretical concepts to students' interest, and possible ways to motivate them to be more involved in the lesson. The prototype lesson plan was prepared by the researchers and conducted by the English teacher. Data were collected through class observations as well as interviews with the teacher and students before and after the prototype lesson. The results showed a noticed increase in students' participation, attention, creativity, and positive attitude.**

Index Terms—**Wellbeing, positive education, positive psychology, Qatar.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, nations' wealth is no longer measured merely by their Gross Domestic Products (GDPs). Rather, the aim of wealth has shifted from producing more wealth to producing wellbeing, and it is now quantitatively measured by positive emotions, engagement at work, and meaning in life as these wellbeing representations are what give GDPs a meaning [1] With that in mind, there is an increasing recognition that social development and economic prosperity are highly connected to human capital [2], and as education is the basis for the human capital development, evidence confirms that human growth, accomplishment, and happiness are all strongly associated with better educational opportunities [3].

Positive education, which is "education for both traditional skills and for happiness" [1], is a relatively new concept in educational context, developed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi. It forms the basis of the new form of prosperity that combines wellbeing to wealth, and aims to promote individuals' optimal functioning and flourishing in school settings [4]. In particular, positive education is the application of positive psychology into educational settings, and it focuses on the cultivation of positive traits and the

development of positive emotions, in addition to improving success in learning environments [5].

The concept of positive education was tested at the Geelong Grammar School (GGS) in Melbourne, Australia to check the validity of the theoretical assumptions. By adapting features from positive psychology, like resilience, gratitude, flow, positive relationships and positive emotion, Dr. Seligman and his team trained 100 members of GGS staff to be able to apply them in their personal lives and class settings. At the end of the training program, both the GGS staff and students' parents reported positive improvements in students' engagements at school such as curiosity, love of learning, creativity, as well as significant increases in their academic achievement and enjoyment of school. In addition, the program produced positive improvements in students' social skills such as empathy, cooperation, assertiveness and self-control [1].

Like GGS, there is a growing number of schools that acknowledge the need to develop students with a stronger focus on wellbeing [6]. They have a mission of two main objectives that are different than the traditional mission of education [7]. Particularly, the first mission is to create a learning climate that enables students to use their creative capabilities to take information and reconstruct them according to their own perspectives and personal capabilities [8]-[10]. The second mission is to create a positive learning climate that nurtures students' wellbeing intellectually, physically and emotionally, in order to prevent problems that might arise in the future [1], [11], [12].

Recent research findings clearly reveal that implementing positive education improves students' wellbeing, and in turn wellbeing produces significant increase in learning [13], [14]. Particularly, in a review of school-based positive psychology interventions, Waters indicated that after receiving positive education training, students reported less anger, less stress about exams and more enjoyment in learning, while teachers reported increased concentration in classroom, neater class work, and more co-operation among students [14]. Similarly, Awartani and Looney pointed out that positive teacher-student relationships contribute to a wide range of desirable outcomes such as higher levels of creativity, productivity and cognitive processing, as well as improved social relationships and strong resilience [13]. In this regard, Seligman et al., propose that wellbeing should be taught early in schools "on three grounds: as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking" [1].

Specifically, experiencing positive emotions, which is one of the wellbeing aspects Seligman referred to, is approved to affect the mindset positively by widening the scope of

attention, increasing intuition and creativity, and broadening behavioral ranges [15]. These effects of positive emotions were introduced by Fredrickson in 1998 in what she called the broaden-and-build theory [16]. Broaden and build theory states that unlike negative emotions, like fear and anxiety, which narrow people's behaviors and limit them to survival actions (e.g. fight and flight), positive emotions increase the array of thoughts and actions to facilitate optimism, creativity, and behavioral flexibility [15]. As these reactions to positive emotions are momentary, over time positive emotions build greater resilience to adversity for the people who experience them regularly [17], [18].

TABLE I: A COMPARISON TABLE TO ASSESS STUDENTS' BEHAVIOUR INSIDE THE CLASS ROOM DURING THE TWO OBSERVATION CLASSES AND THE PROTOTYPE-CLASS

Behaviour	Observations		Prototype class
	1st	2nd	
Focused, % (of the class time)	55%	75%	98%
Participation, % (of no. of students)	60-70%	40%	95%
Suggestions given by students, (no./class)	No	1	2
Volunteering to do anything, (no./class)	2	2	2

TABLE II: ASSESSMENT SHEET FOR EVALUATING TEACHER'S LANGUAGE, ATTITUDE AND REACTION INSIDE THE CLASS ROOM

Variable to be measured (times/class)	Observations		Prototype class
	1st	2nd	
Number of activities during the class	5	6	7
Connecting concepts to real-life application	No	1	3
Positive feedback on overall performance (right answers), (no./class time)	7	5	7
Negative feedback on overall performance (wrong answers), (no./class time)	2	2	-
Using encouraging words and *positive* expressions	2	4	7
Using discouraging words and *negative* expressions	2	1	1
Instant reaction to unexpected situation	-	Manageable	Manageable
Accommodating teaching methods according to different students learning styles & personalities	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+++)

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While interest in positive education continues to grow in line with increasing recognition of the important roles it plays in students' functioning and flourishing [19], the implementation of the concept in school settings still remains complex since only few examples have been done to showcase how it can be applied at practical level [4]. Specifically, the positive education literature in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is still in its infancy [20], and to date no study has been disseminated from Qatar that examines the nature, extent and characteristics of such research. Therefore, this study is a first initiative in its kind to apply the principles of positive education to a Qatari school context, and showcase how students' engagements could thrive through specific learning experiences.

III. METHOD

This study showcases a prototype of integrating positive psychology into a 9th grade English class, and examines how students' engagements flourish through specific learning experiences. Before the prototype class, the teacher was trained about how to use positive language and phrases with students, how to link the theoretical concepts to students' interest, and possible ways to motivate them to be more involved in the lesson. The prototype class design was prepared by the researchers and conducted by the English teacher. Data were collected through class observations as well as interviews with the teacher and students before and after the prototype class.

A medium size preparatory independent school for girls was chosen for this experiment. Grades from 7 to 9 have 4-5 classes with 23-26 student in each. The school consists of 56 teacher and an overall number of 100 staff. . English was chosen as the subject to conduct the experiment based on the feedback received from the interviews done prior to the study with different stakeholders including school staff and students. Compared to the other subjects, English was considered as challenging and rigid and the students felt de-motivated since they were facing difficulties learning and expressing themselves in a foreign language. The selection of the class was made voluntary for teachers who were willing to participate in this experiment after the researchers have met with the English department and explained the concept of positive education for them. The preparation and the execution processes of this study are divided into five stages as the following;

Stage one: after selecting the subject, the researchers went for observation with assessment sheets that included quantitative and qualitative evaluating parameters. This assessment was for two purposes; psychological and practical, and was conducted on the students and the teacher. The students' evaluation sheet was to assess their behavior and interaction during the class time (see Table I in the appendix), while the teacher's assessment was to evaluate her language, attitude and reactions when dealing with students (see Table II). The in-class assessment was followed by outside class interviews with ten students to evaluate the English class and

the teacher from their perspectives. Table III shows the questions asked during the interviews.

Stage two: The researchers analyzed the results of the assessments and the interviews, which are summarized in the results and discussion section. These information were used to interrogate what was the missing factor the students needed to be more motivated and interactive. Different components were checked starting from the class setting and content, to the teacher-student and student-student relationships. The findings of this step guided the researchers throughout the process of designing the prototype class.

Stage three: The researchers designed a prototype class and trained the teacher. The goal of this step was to design a frame work for the teacher to follow inside the classroom with a theme that fulfills the four main concepts of; reinforcing positive emotions, linking education to students' interest, setting and showing higher expectation for the students (appreciation and self-worth), and engaging the students in the process of how to be motivated such as autonomy and communication. The four concepts were the result of research, weighing and ranking the concepts based on stakeholders' feedbacks and needs. The prototype class components and tools are discussed in details in the "prototype class" section.

Stage four: The teacher conducted the prototype class and the researchers made comparison between a traditional -class versus positive education class, using the assessment Tables I and II An additional assessment was added to capture the teacher's impressions after conducting the positive education class. The interview questions and teacher's responses are shown in Table IV.

Stage five: The researchers evaluated the changes in the teacher's style of teaching and the students' reactions in the class during the period of post-prototype class. A visit to the school was arranged three weeks after conducting the prototype class to survey the students and the teacher. The survey questions are listed in Tables V and VI.

TABLE III: QUESTIONS FOR OUTSIDE CLASS INTERVIEWS WITH THE STUDENTS

Teacher evaluation
Friendly and caring treats
Encouragment and continous support
Feedback
Honesty
Authenticity
Openess
Integrity *(how much she's trusted)*
Class overview
Do you find the class interesting? (measuring students' curiousity)
Would you like the idea of leading the class?
Are you feeling good about yourself? *Satisfaction of understanding & gain from the class*
Do you feel confident in understanding the material taught in the classroom?
Did the class bring you happiness? Satisfaction?
Was it related to something you like? Like what? If not, what would you like the class to be related to?
What would inspire you in the class?

IV. PROTOTYPE CLASS

A. Preparation and Guidelines

As a preparation for designing the prototype class, the researchers met with the English teacher days before her next lesson. The researchers took copies from the English textbook for the new topic, which was called "cash in hands," They discussed the main guidelines to be followed in the class with the teacher. The general guidelines included preferred seating arrangements, positive language usage, engagement and connection to bigger vision, i.e. the school's vision and Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030. Having a shared vision usually fosters collaboration, engagement, and develops the dialogue of discussion between the students and their teachers [21]. The teacher was advised to organize the class seating to be in pairs to allow better control during the class time and to permit controlled interactions between students in specific exercises. Previous observations showed that bigger groups were noisy and clustery, and individual seating was very rigid and inflexible. In addition, the teacher was advised to use positive language and encourage the students to do so when talking to each other. Negative expressions were prohibited during the class time. Hearing positive motivating words approved to induce positive emotions, which increase the level of dopamine in the brain causing better cognitive performance of creativity, flexibility and unusual thinking [22]. Laughing and sharing personal stories were also encouraged to build stronger relationships between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves. The safe and caring climate is another strong contributor to an optimum learning and development environment [21].

B. Prototype Class Components

The researchers prepared a presentation for the teacher to use as a guidance to run the entire class. In the guide, the class was divided into three segments which were; introduction, body, and conclusion. The main objective of the introduction was to induce positive emotions. The researchers suggested two methods for achieving this goal. The first method was a small gift given to the students, and the second method was watching a funny video. Both methods approved their effect

in widening the scope of attention in Fredrickson and Branigan experiment in 2005. The theory of broaden and build states that "experiencing positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought action ranges which in turn serves to build lasting personal physical, intellectual, and social resources" [16], [23]. Moreover, experiencing positive emotions helps individuals to be more open to information [24], which leads to more successes [21]. The body in the guide program was to conduct the exercises in the book. An additional warm-up activity was added to relate the topic of the day to the students' personal experiences. A set of questions was given to the teacher to use for this segment. They were designed to encourage the students to express their personal opinions and share personal experiences in relation to the lesson. In the conclusion, the students were asked to choose an object and originate a scenario of a shop assistant and a buyer. In this exercise, the students were asked to use a minimum of two vocabularies or phrases learnt in the same lecture.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the day of conducting the prototype class, the researchers brought a basket with fresh strawberries on sticks for the 23 students. As they enter the room, each student was asked to get one. The feeling was overwhelming and some were surprised since it was not a reward for a number of students while excluding others. Considering the time constrains, the teacher did not show the video during this class, but she did in another class that she described as tough and least favored by the students. She reported the success of this technique in motivating the students and altering the overall mood of the classroom from boredom to excitement and high interaction.

Overall, the prototype-class had seven different activities, in which three were connecting concepts to real-life application which was lacking in previous classes. In the warm-up exercise, the students were asked about their perspectives in shopping and payments methodology and they were amenably sharing their preferences. The friendly atmosphere was full of joy and laughter when sharing funny stories with each others. The energetic positive start boosted the overall performance of the class and the focus of the students increased from 55 and 75% in the two observation classes, to 98% in the prototype class. Less side talks were observed and more questions were asked by the students which showed focus and interest. In addition, the participation which ranged from 40 - 70% in the observation classes increased to 95% in the prototype class. The high participation was not limited to participating in solving exercises, but included volunteering to help others. The participation included all levels of students and was not limited to higher academic achievers. In the last segment of the class, the creativity of the students was remarkably shown when competed for the best play. The winner group, based on voting, added a handmade object to the required task of writing and performing. They created a simple object from simple material in a very short time to be used as a multitasking object. The shop assistant claimed that it can be

used as hair band, bracelet, bottle opener and decoration for the room. To bargain on the price, she claimed that it was estimated for one million QR in a famous auction. This approved the wider range of thoughts that Fredrickson and Branigan stated as the effect of positive emotions triggered by amusements and happiness [25]. Another improvement was the number of encouraging feedback which increased from 2 and 5 to more than 7. The negative feedback and discouraging words decreased from two to none or one which was considered as negligible. At the end, the class management in terms of teacher's instant reaction to unexpected situations and different learning styles and personalities was rated as excellent from all researchers.

The class was followed by outside interviews with ten students who gave very similar answers when asked about the teacher's caring and friendly treats. This was evident during the class time when she praised the students for their correct and creative answers, reinforced them by repeating, and acclaimed the students by their first names repeatedly. It is worth mentioning here that having a teacher with such characteristics helped accomplishing this experiment with minimum training needed, which should be considered in future applications.

The post prototype class interview with the teacher was designed to capture her experience in terms of preparation time and personal gains. She expressed her delighted feeling of receiving constructive feedback and enjoyed having a resource for creative ideas. Her biggest gain, as she stated, was the instant positive reaction of her students. They were interacting with joy and asked her to repeat the videos in future lessons. The teacher stated that running the prototype class was not time demanding. Besides reading the material provided by the researchers to select what was more applicable, it was a mental preparation mostly.

Three weeks later, the researchers visited the school, to follow up with the continuity of the project. The purpose was to verify if positive education was easy to adapt as a natural way of teaching, and whether the students would keep the positive reaction to it. The survey designed to measure these parameters is shown in Tables V and VI). The follow up survey showed more than 80% of the students thought the English class became more interesting and 70% felt happier during the class. This was reinforced by the fact that 60% of the class felt the class time was running faster than before. 90% of the students felt more appreciated by the teacher, and 96% of the class felt confidant to get higher grades in the coming English exam. Moreover; 83% expressed their admiration for their teacher as being an inspiration. On the other hand, only 30% were asking more questions during the lecture and were looking into further relative information outside the class time. The percentage of the students who started practicing English outside the classroom was only 22%. These percentages gave an indication that the class might have been more exciting and raised the students' confidence levels, however; liking the language and being more motivated for extra gains might require longer times and/or different techniques. The teacher's survey revealed similar results. She reported increased interest from the students and better achievements in assessments and quizzes. She added that the class is running much smoother than before.

Both, the teacher and the students gave neutral for improved speed in completing assignments. Overall, the teacher was very optimistic and gave positive results of agreement. When the researches discussed the results with her, she expressed her delightful experience with positive education as a new method of teaching. The teacher notified the researches of the possibility of another contributing factor to students' improved performance. As the exams period was approaching, the 9th grade students were anxious about getting good grades for high school, which should be considered as another possible motivation.

TABLE IV: TEACHER'S SURVEY AND FEEDBACK AFTER CONDUCTING THE PROTOTYPE-CLASS

What difficulties you face, usually, while teaching?	time constrains, work load and requirements, which lead to lack of creativity in teaching
Any personal gains using positive education method?	It's good to have a constructive feedback, and a source of creative ideas!
How was the "positive education" experience? did it have a positive impact?	Yes, the girls got enthusiastic about the class and were eager to continue the lesson.
If yes/ in what way?	I saw the reaction immediately from the students. They were interacting with joy.
Can you give examples?	(1)The funny video was a good idea to motivate the students at the begging of the class. They laughed and were eager to see more and asked me to repeat it in the next lessons! (2) The fruits (gift): gave a good first impression specially that it wasn't a reward, it was for all.
If you are willing to do it... what would you add to it? (teacher's suggestions)	I'll introduce the video in a rigid class like grammar and writing (which the students least prefer) It inspired me to do other exercises that I have learnt during training
Any pre-preparation done to be able to conduct the these techniques?? (emotional or tangible sense)	Yes, I prepared myself to give more energy and run it properly
"What did it take you to be able to implement this?"	I read the suggestions, I select some and search for other ideas. I prepared myself to run the class in a modified way, which is a little different than usual.

VI. CONCLUSION

The real challenge within schools is to move from the culture that teaches to pass exams [26], to a culture of learning and fostering well-being. In this study, the researchers observed, surveyed and analyzed the situation within grade nine English class room in an attempt to understand the barriers that deprive the teachers and the students from achieving their goals of teaching, learning and enjoying. The designed prototype class embraced a more holistic goal that goes beyond academic achievements, which is to nurture the wellbeing of the students. Tools like inducing positive emotions, increasing students' engagement, making the teaching more effective and introducing more opportunities to show students' creative skills were used in the prototype class to achieve this goal. After the design was prepared, the teacher was trained to conduct it within the class before conducting the prototype class, a typical class room was moderate in participation and evolved around the topic of the day. After conducting the prototype class, the environment altered to more friendly, joyous, and energetic atmosphere. The participation increased and the creativity increased all to prove the importance of the psychological status of the students in the learning process. The momentary advantage of being in a positive mood was shown in the staggering engagement and participation that included all of the students. the students' showed more creativity in writing and performing the scripts, were more open to new information and willing to share information and personal experiences. As these effects were momentary, the long-term gain of experiencing positive emotions repetitively extends to having more resilience, flexibility and overall flourishing of human functioning capabilities [15]. In the follow-up visit, the survey revealed that the students were enjoying the lecture more and expecting higher grades in the exams. Building higher resilience and flourishing are what the researchers hoping for when the concept of positive emotions is to be embraced by all teachers and applied within their teaching techniques.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools are primary developmental contexts in individuals' lives [4]. Hence, they can be excellent locations for implementing positive psychology, and providing sustainable wellbeing initiatives for thriving individuals, communities, and societies. In order to promote a positive school culture, the education system needs to focus on developing social and emotional competency, facilitating positive peer relationships and teacher-student relationships, nurturing character strengths, and supporting students to develop a sense of meaning at school and in life [26]. For this purpose, the school administration, teachers, staff, students, and parents need to be well-trained and the core principles of positive psychology should be embedded within the curriculum units, implicitly linking to the academic objectives [5]. In particular, teachers can perform a number of positive behaviors to contribute to students' wellbeing, such as greeting them with their name and smile, building positive emotions through the use of humor, emphasizing respect, cooperation, and acceptance of differences, ensuring that no one feels socially isolated, and giving positive feedback by focusing on the importance of effort and persistence rather than ability [19]. For the teachers to be able to apply these techniques and others, two main actions should be taken into consideration. The first is to give teachers greater flexibility within classrooms to encourage creative teaching [26]. The second is to decrease administrative work required from the teachers to reinvest this time into building creative learning culture that focuses on recognizing and acknowledging student's potentials and different talents rather than merely preparing them for exams.

TABLE V: POST PROTOTYPE-CLASS SURVEY (STUDENTS VERSION)

	Please reflect your opinions for the following statements	Agree أوافق %	Neutral محايد %	Disagree لاأوافق %
1	The class is becoming more interesting to you حصة اللغة الانجليزية أصبحت أكثر إمتاعا	83	17	0
2	You are asking more questions during the class time تطرحين أسئلة أكثر خلال حصة اللغة الانجليزية	30	61	9
3	You search about things learnt in the class, outside the class room خارج الصف, تبحثين عن الأشياء التي تعلمتها في حصة اللغة الانجليزية	30	26	43
4	You believe that you can achieve better results during the exams (than you used to be before) تعتقدين أنه يمكنك تحقيق نتائج أفضل خلال الامتحانات القادمة تبحثين عن	96	4	0
5	You feel the class is running faster than before تشعرين بأن حصة اللغة الانجليزية تنتهي أسرع من ذي قبل	57	30	9
6	You feel more appreciated by the teacher تشعرين بتقدير أكثر من معلمة اللغة الانجليزية عن ذي قبل	91	4	4
7	The teacher inspired you to be a better student معلمة اللغة الانجليزية تلهمك بأن تكوني طالبة أفضل	83	9	0
8	You happier in the class تشعرين بسعادة أكبر في حصة اللغة الانجليزية	70	22	0
9	You talk more English outside the class room تمارسين اللغة الانجليزية أكثر خارج الصف	22	35	43
10	You finish your sentences writing faster تنتهين من تدريب كتابة الجمل أسرع من ذي قبل	39	57	0

TABLE VI: POST PROTOTYPE-CLASS SURVEY (TEACHER VERSION)

	Please reflect your opinions for the following statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	The student are becoming more interested in the class	✓		
2	The students are asking more questions during the class time	✓		
3	The students achieve better results during the assessments	✓		
4	The class is running smoother than before	✓		
5	The students are more open with you than before	✓		
6	The students are better expressing their thoughts in English than before	✓		
7	The students finish their activities faster than before		✓	
8	You take similar preparation time for this class as before		✓	
9	You expect better results from the students in the exams	✓		
10	You express your positive reaction to students differently (than simply stating good, excellent, thank you)	✓		

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