



A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PROMOTING SELF REGULATION

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Abstract

Research done in Positive Psychology is suggestive of fostering positive qualities involving multiple exercises by ‘shot gun’ interventions will be more effective problem behaviour resulting in improved positive emotions and enhanced self-regulation. When we work with children and get them to understand ‘why they do what they do’, then they are better able to articulate the difficulties they experience, and deal with them effectively. Children should be encouraged to commit to meaningful goals, strive to benefit from educational experiences, monitor the progress, adapting to situations, and establish demanding goals as they accomplish earlier ones. As very little is known about self- regulation as strength, a study was undertaken with the primary objective to examine the impact of training in positive psychology, on self regulation. The results have shown that there is an increase in positive affect from the pre-test (38.6) to the post test (43.1). The results also show that there is a mere decrease in negative affect from pre-test (30.3) to post test (30.1). Also, an increase in self- regulation of the group as a whole, where the score of the pre-test, 64, and the post test, 74.6, was observed than remediation of.

Key Words: Self-Regulation, Positive Psychology Training, Positive Affect, Negative Affect

Introduction

The essential responsibility for educators today is to help students become motivated and self regulated learners. (Alderman, 1999; Ames, 1992; Brophy, 1998; Covington, 1992; Nicholls, 1989). It has been empirically found that the more children are made to understand at a young age about ‘why they do what they do’, the more they are able to develop autonomy, be intrinsically motivated, and have determination to achieve their aspirations. Hence, children should be encouraged to commit themselves to meaningful educational goals, strive to benefit from their educational experiences, monitor their progress towards their goals, make adjustments in their effort when necessary, and establish new, more demanding goals as they accomplish earlier ones. The opportunity for every child to succeed to the fullest potential may exist within the perspective of Positive Psychology.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions.” (Gable & Haidt, 2005). It is also defined as the scientific study of the capabilities that allows people to prosper. The subject is based on the conviction that people desire to live meaningful and fulfilling lives to foster their best selves, and improve their experiences of love, work, and play.

Affect: Affect is the experience of feeling or emotion. Affect is a key part of the process of an organism's interaction with stimuli. It comprises of both positive and negative dimensions.

Positive Affect; Positive affect (PA) refers to the extent to which an individual subjectively experiences positive moods such as joy, interest, and alertness. Positive affectivity is a trait that

reflects stable individual differences in positive emotional experience; high levels of the trait are marked by frequent feelings of cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and energy.

Negative Affect

Negative affect (NA) is a personality variable that involves the experience of negative emotions and poor self-concept. Negative affect subsumes a variety of negative emotions, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, and fear, and nervousness.

Self Regulation

Self-Regulation is one's capacity to monitor and modify behaviour, cognition, and affect in order to achieve a goal. (Efklides, Niemivirta, & Yamauchi, 2002).

Positive Psychology Training

Happiness levels could be increased by “shot gun” interventions involving multiple exercises (Fordyce M. W., 1977; Fordyce, 1983; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004)

Need and Justification

Self-regulated children can delay gratification and suppress their impulses long enough to think ahead of possible consequences of their actions and consider alternative action that would be appropriate. Self-discipline plays a more important role than IQ in predicting academic performances of adolescents (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Each act of volitional self-regulation is composed of an impulse, which has a certain amount of energy to it, and restraint over that impulse. Hence, each volitional act of self-regulation contains the result of struggle between a combination of urge strength and restraint strength. Self-regulated operations are costly in the sense that they consume a limited resource. People cannot regulate their own actions indefinitely because the energy required for such regulation is finite. Hence there is need to replenish this energy to build the lasting strength. The study “Self Regulation - How and Why People Reach (and Fail to Reach) to Their Goals” (Vohs & Schmeichel, 2003) posited the limited

nature of self-regulatory resources to underlie a broad array of self-regulatory failures. Even when people have clear goals and are fully aware of the work they need to do to accomplish them, they still must expend energy to achieve them, and this energy is in limited supply.

Research on self-focused attention of Self-Regulatory processes posited that, depression occurs after the loss of an important source of self-worth when an individual becomes stuck in a self-regulating cycle- which leads to a negative self-image, which may take on value by providing an explanation for the individual's plight will help the individual avoid further disappointments (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987)

Objective of the Study

1. To explore the role of positive psychology training on self regulation as a strength of high school students.
2. To assess the effect of positive psychology training on student's level of positive and negative affect

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant improvement in Self-Regulation after positive psychology training.
2. There will be a significant improvement in Positive Affect after training in Positive Psychology.
3. Positive Psychology Training will decrease the Negative Affect.

Research Design

A pre and post test design was used where participants are studied before and after the experimental manipulation.

Tools used

1. Self Regulation Scale – Adolescent Self-Regulatory Inventory (ASRI)
2. Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales for Children – (PANAS-C)

Description of the tools

1. The 27-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), developed with a sample of undergraduate students and validated with adult populations, comprises two mood scales, one measuring positive affect and the other measuring negative effect. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = very slightly or not at all to 5 = extremely to indicate the extent to which the respondent has felt this way in the indicated time frame. The authors have used the scale to measure affect at this moment, today, the past few days, the past week, the past few weeks, the past year, and generally (on average).
2. The Adolescent Self- Regulatory Inventory (ASRI)(Moilanen, 2007) is a 27- item instrument designed to measure two temporal components of self- regulation (i.e., short-term and long- term). Self- regulation is defined as the ability to flexibly activate, monitor and/ or adapt one’s behaviour, attention, emotions and cognitive strategies in response to internal and/ or external cues (Moilanen, 2007). For adolescents, self- regulation is important to one’s ability to retain personally relevant goals (Barkley, 1997;Demetriou, Monique, Pintrich, & Moshe, 2000;Novak & Clayton, 2001). Respondents rate how well each item describes them, ranging from 1 (“not at all true for me”) to 5 (“really true for me”).

The short- term and long- term subscales are calculated by adding participants’ responses to the included items. Total scores give overall self-regulation.

Procedure

The study was conducted in a government aided school on class nine students. Thirteen of these students were selected as participants, based on the teacher’s recommendation that they were distracted bright students, with low academic performance. The tools of PANAS and ASRI were individually administered before and after Positive Psychology Training

The Positive Psychology Training was conducted for duration of one month where each session was for ninety minutes. All the thirteen participants took training, but four were not able to take the post test. As such results are based on nine participants out of thirteen.

Positive Psychology Training Sessions

The Positive Psychology Training Program was designed based on mindful awareness, acceptance, and action of what they are doing and why. The sessions were based on the concept of Flow involving activities like role plays and circle time. The theoretical underpinnings of positive psychology stem from the work of Seligman (2002), who has proposed that happiness consists of the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life. The pleasant life is achieved when people are able to experience positive emotions about their past, present and future lives. The engaged life is felt when one is deeply involved and absorbed in what one is doing in multiple life roles, including love, work, and play. The meaningful and flourishing life is defined as using one’s strengths in the service of something larger than oneself (Seligman, 2002). The alignment is from a pleasant life to an engaged life to a flourishing life. As the research has been conducted on grade nine students, the engaged and flourishing life is in relation to academics and peers

Results

Results : Results were analyzed by computing means of pre and post test scores.

Figure 1-showing increase in positive affect of 7.7 from the pre-test 38.6 to the post-test 43.1.

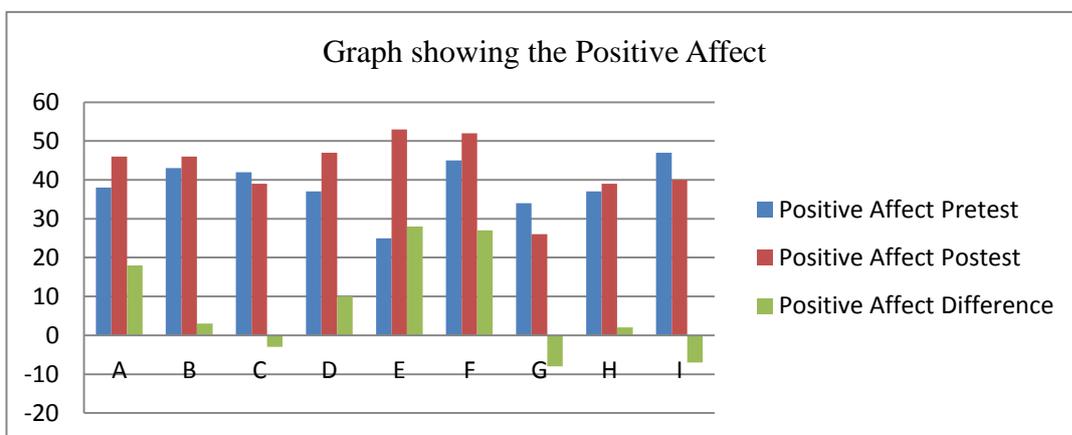


Figure 2-

showing decrease in negative affect of 0.2 from the pre-test 30.3 to post-test 30.1.

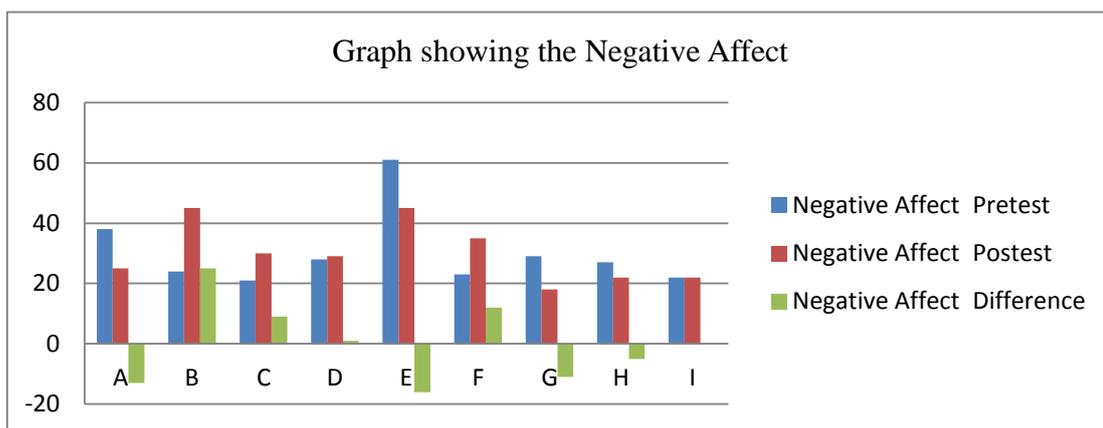
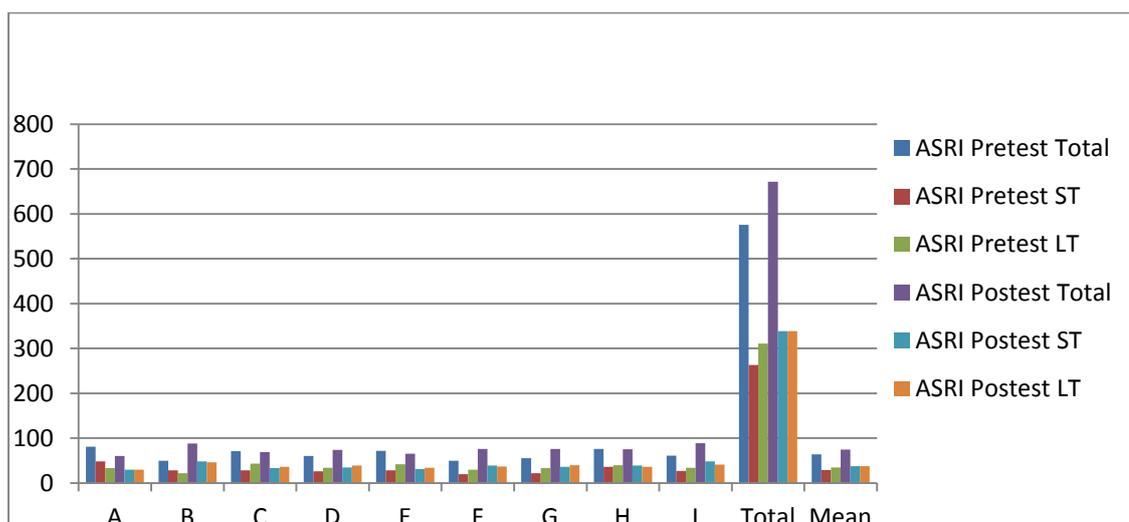


Figure 3-showing an increase in overall self- regulation of 10.6 from the pre-test 64 to post-test 74.6.



Students demonstrated significant impact in positive emotion and decrease in negative emotions resulting in increased short term, long term and overall self-regulation. The results are encouraging towards a longitudinal study with a control group. To compare its effect on academics, longer duration training can be planned.

Discussion

Subsequent to the interventions on being authentic and mindful of what they were doing and why the students realized a disparity between their wants (goals) and actions which helped them align the two to prevent negative emotions. The intervention on ‘self- talk’ created awareness in them of the prevailing negativity towards their own selves, parents, and teachers. The feeling of being insufficient or always being told what to do, transformed to realisation of importance of working hard towards one’s goals. The intervention helped them align their thoughts, feelings and actions leading to less confusion and increased positive emotions. Gratitude journal assignments lead them to understand how they could create a positive cycle in their life by being grateful to self and others.

These sessions brought about in them the motivation to be positive towards self and others by thinking, feeling and doing what is in their interest towards their growth. They were less distracted and more attentive in class by taking notes while teacher was teaching and also started giving in their homework assignments in time was reported by teachers. The teachers and students were suggestive of more such sessions for lasting effect. This suggests that students can be trained in positive psychology that augments positive affects leading to higher self regulation and satisfaction with life.

Limitations

The limitation of this study is that the sample selection was limited to one school only. Study did not use control group and did not look into other factors which could have been responsible for this increment in positive emotions. The duration of the intervention was short for it to be conclusive for long- lasting effects.

Conclusion

Although the present results are preliminary, they do suggest an antidote for negative mental state: a dose of positive affect seems to have remarkable power to restore the self's capacity and willingness to exert control and volition. This may well prove to be one of the most important, adaptive, and far-reaching benefits of positive affect. The results are encouraging towards a longitudinal study with a control group and more participants.

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