

Research Article

Schools Are in the Future Business: Exploring Outcomes of a Positive Education Programme for Adolescents in Hong Kong

Judith Blaine* 

Department of Psychology, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

Abstract

In Hong Kong adolescent mental health is of great concern, with both the number of suicides and the suicide ideation figures doubling in recent years. As such there is an increasing need to implement positive education programmes in schools in order to equip students with skills to counteract mental health crises. This study evaluated a positive education (PosEd) programme for sixth-form students attending an international school in Hong Kong. Employing a mixed methods quasi-experimental design, a purposive sample of 102 sixth-form students was recruited for this study. Quantitative data was collected utilising three norm-referenced questionnaires pre and post intervention, while semi-structured interviews with two focus groups (N =15) formed the bulk of the qualitative data. Quantitative results demonstrated a slight decrease in all self-reported measures post-intervention, which was not the desired or expected outcome. Employing the acronym EQUIP, qualitative findings provided useful information as to possible reasons why the students felt the outcomes of the programme were not helpful, affirming or constructive. The importance of the contribution of this research to addressing how such programmes can be tailored to more effectively meet the needs of the students is discussed, with recommendations for future research.

Keywords

Positive Education, Adolescents, Mental Health, Youth Wellbeing

1. Introduction

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth wellbeing was a common leitmotif internationally, with Unicef reports indicating that one in seven adolescents experienced a mental health disorder, including depression, anxiety and behaviour disorders [1]. Adolescents are particularly at risk as they navigate an increasingly demanding academic workload while undergoing transformative biological and emotional changes, identity consolidation, emerging sexuality and social acceptance [2, 3]. The possibility of developing mental health

issues increases considerably in the final years of secondary school, with the prevalence of major depression increasing from 1.2% in 4-7 year olds to 4.6% in adolescents aged 12-17 years [4]. In Hong Kong (HK), the number of suicide events in school students has doubled in recent years [5]. In light of such a high prevalence of debilitating mental health disorders including death by suicide, it is imperative to foster wellbeing in adolescents by helping them to develop the necessary skills to build resilience and positive mental health [6]. To this end,

*Corresponding author: j.blaine@ru.ac.za (Judith Blaine)

Received: 11 July 2024; Accepted: 29 July 2024; Published: 15 August 2024



Copyright: © The Author (s), 2024. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

addressing calls for educational settings to adopt a more holistic approach to education, many schools are looking for new ways to support adolescent development, while preparing youth to cope and succeed in a rapidly changing and unpredictable future.

Promoting youth wellbeing has become an increasingly popular topic in the past few decades, with research and intervention programmes focusing on positive youth development [7]; resilience [8]; moral education [9-11], growth mindset [12], character strengths [13] and civic education [14] to name but a few. Similarly, positive education (PosEd) interventions have been developed in a number of forms. The most salient of which appear to be those based on Seligman's [15] *PERMA+ model of flourishing (i.e. Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment), theoretically underpinned by positive psychology [16]. Empirical evidence suggests that these programmes are effective not only with respect to mitigating problem behaviours e.g., deliberate self-harm, substance abuse and violence, bullying and school refusal, but also promoting social emotional competence (SEC) and even enhancing academic achievement (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [17]. Moreover, studies have shown that this model is pertinent to school and classroom settings [18-20].

**The '+' has been included in the PERMA model as wellbeing extends beyond these five elements to incorporate other important areas such as optimism, physical activity, sleep and nutrition [21].*

1.1. Literature Review

Since the implementation of PosEd in Geelong Grammar School (GGS) in 2008, a plethora of research has demonstrated how this whole school approach has effectively equipped students with positive mental health skills to foster resilience and the ability to cope with the stresses of everyday life [22-27]. This is corroborated by international studies on PosEd programmes which have shown these interventions to be effective in promoting overall student wellbeing [6, 28-31].

Research has also consistently shown that PosEd interventions are beneficial for students' mental health outcomes in terms of life satisfaction and reduced anxiety [32]. That said, there have been criticisms that Positive Psychology and PosEd over-emphasise positivity and individualism while overlooking moral, social and structural factors that affect an individual's sense of wellbeing and meaningfulness in life [11, 33-35]. Besides, many wellbeing programmes are implemented without much consideration of the existing values with their contextual communities [27]. Some researchers argue that these programmes are a waste of money and resources, while others suggest that PosEd interventions may divert students' energy and motivation away from mainstream subjects, thus lowering their academic achievement [18].

Moreover, despite an increase in PosEd research, assumptions have been made about what is best for student wellbeing

with little in the way of hearing the voices of the main stakeholders: the students themselves. Halliday et al [36] conducted participatory action research (PAR) to investigate the value of involving student voices in the development and implementation of a PosEd intervention. The researchers concluded that student involvement improved the effectiveness of the intervention; i.e. helped the school to better understand their students' wellbeing, while also encouraging the students' 'buy-in' to the programme.

Similarly, researchers argue the importance of assessing whether these interventions alter a student's understanding of the concept and language of wellbeing (i.e. wellbeing literacy). In an Australian study of students across grades 5-7, Waters and Higgins [32] examined whether student language and understanding of wellbeing changed following an 8-month PosEd intervention. Findings from thematic analysis of the data revealed that students' understanding of wellbeing evolved to becoming more detailed, strength-based, multi-dimensional and relational with post-intervention understanding revealing considerably more inclusion of aspects of emotional management, strengths, self-kindness, coping and mindfulness.

Coulombe et al., [28] critically examined existing literature on youth wellbeing and PosEd interventions in particular. The authors identified gaps in the programming and research, particularly a lack of consideration of cultural and ecological contexts and proposed a more person-centred, social ecological approach to promoting student wellbeing. The approach which they advocate, Personal Projects Analysis, considers the students' ecological contexts, supporting the agency of the students in terms of what matters for their wellbeing within their socioecological contexts.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Drawing upon the theoretical underpinnings from social, behavioural and biological sciences, PosEd has an underlying social constructivist epistemology advocating a more holistic approach to education. Within this structure, the theoretical framework chosen to underpin this research is Ryan & Deci's [37] self-determination theory (SDT). The premise being that when basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are supported, individuals are more likely to flourish. Conversely, thwarting these needs can result in demotivation and decreased mental wellbeing.

1.3. Context of the Study

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is a unique geopolitical system and although the government is now promoting a more holistic education, including strengthening students' social and emotional competence (SEC), to date there has been no explicit territory-wide policy on how this is to be implemented. International schools in HK generally operate independently of the local schools in terms of curriculum development, including PosEd, and often seek

models from other countries to address the need for positive youth development. Such programmes need to consider the validity and reliability of content and measures, as well as how valuable they are to those for whom it is designed. It was with this in mind that this research project was initiated, addressing the following research questions:

What effect does the Positively Kellett (PK) programme have on life effectiveness skills, emotional literacy and the resilience of sixth-form students?

What are the perceived benefits of PK for sixth-form students?

2. Methodology

Research design

Underpinned by a social constructivist framework, this study employed a mixed methods quasi-experimental design to investigate the psychosocial outcomes, as well as the social validity, of the revised Positively Kellett (PK) programme for sixth-form students.

Participants

Participants in this study were students from Year 12 and Year 13 at Kellett School in Hong Kong (N = 102, Mage = 17.7 years, SDage = 0.73). Participants reported their gender as female (51.8%) or male (48.2%), with 0% reporting their gender as non-binary. For the quantitative study, only participants who completed both surveys were included in the sample group (N = 67).

Ethical Considerations

Participant and parental information letters were provided to the students and their parents outlining the study. Student assent and parental consent was sought and given for those students who took part in the focus group interviews. Questionnaires: Full Ethical Approval was obtained from Rhodes University to conduct this study. The approval number is 2021-5260-6387, granted for one year and extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place in September/October 2022 and May 2023 when all students were asked to complete self-report measures (i.e. Life Effectiveness Questionnaire, Emotional

Literacy Checklist and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale). Focus group semi-structured interviews were conducted in late April/early May to fit in with the students' curriculum and study leave. Deidentified secondary data, in the form of an excel sheet, was made available by Kellett School. Using secondary data has many benefits, one of which is the ability to amass large amounts of data already collected from reliable primary sources [38]. Student numbers replaced student names in the spreadsheet and the excel files were imported into SPSS for statistical analysis. Focus Group interviews were conducted with Year 12 (3 female, 4 male) and Year 13 (4 female and 4 male) in late April/early May 2023, lasting 31 minutes and 38 minutes respectively. Quantitative data were statistically analysed using repeated measures t-tests, while thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data.

Reflexivity

As an inter-subjective reflection, reflexivity is an important factor in improving rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research. This refers to reflections on influences that may have affected the design, collection and interpretation of the data due to the researcher's personal background, beliefs, values and biases. The researcher remained cognisant of their own opinions, preconceived ideas and assumptions as well as recognising the role of their own reflections on the findings. As an educator and having conducted extensive research on the subject, the researcher attempted to bracket their own knowledge and experience of the subject and, whilst not ever fully possible, allowed the findings to emerge from the data.

Intervention Programme: Positively Kellett (PK)

Adapted from its original and revised form, and incorporating elements of Global Citizenship (GC), PK aims to provide students with a "Toolkit for Life". GC education aims to be transformative, building the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that students need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world. PK has now amalgamated with GC and is taught (to sixth-form) by one designated teacher in weekly 45-minute lessons. Initially PK was taught by form tutors, however for the past academic year there has been one designated teacher for each year group to ensure consistency (please see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Year 12 PK Programme.

Module	Topics covered
Future Literacy	University Introduction
	Setting up LinkedIn account
	Elevator pitches
	Work experience reflection
Dare to Lead	What makes an effective leader
	Vulnerability
	Living your Values
	Trust

Module	Topics covered
	Resilience
	Identity, Future Selves and Goals
Beliefs, Habits, Systems and Goals	Habits & Habit Changing
	Role Models
	Planning and implementing new habits, systems and goals
Study Skills	Planning Revision
Preparing for Year 12 mocks	Revision Techniques
	What are life's big questions?
*Awe and Wonder	How do philosophy, science and religion help provide answers to these questions?
	Why is it important to be curious and think deeply?

*this module was only introduced after the focus group interviews and survey responses.

Table 2. Year 13 PK Programme.

Module	Topics covered
	Exploring different university options
University prep and personal statements	Applying to UCAS and other institutions for university/college with predicted grades
	Preparing personal statements
Habits, systems and goals (completion of this module which was disrupted in Yr12)	Habits & Habit Changing
	Planning and implementing new habits, systems and goals
	Introduce students to:
Nutrition	Understanding around health related eating.
	Make choices that fit their goals.
	Creating balanced and nutritional meal plans
	Managing Money
Preparing for life after school	To explain what a budget is and why it is important at university
	To identify the different income and expenses that you will have at university
	To research the average living costs at your university location of choice
	Defining consent
Consent and relationships	Consent and the law
	Consent and legal consequences
	Effective communication

3. Quantitative Results

Overall, the results were unexpected and disappointing. As evident from Figures 1-3, there were decreases in Emotional Learning (EL) and Resilience for Year 12, although there was a slight increase in Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ) for this year group. Pre and post-PK scores for Year 13 remained the same for Resilience and EL, with a marginal decrease for LEQ. The possible explanations of this will be

addressed in the qualitative findings and discussion. Please note that the significant differences illustrated in the repeated measures t-test may be reported as significant, but this variance is in an unexpected direction.

3.1. Results for Emotional Literacy

Repeated measures t-test results show a significant difference between the overall average total EL pre-and post-PK scores ($p = .35$). There is a significant difference in the EL

average total scores for the Year 12 ($p = .03$) group, whereas there is no significant difference in the EL average total scores for the Year 13 ($p = .33$) group. The differences are also indicative of a significant Year-to-Year effect on the PK programme, as shown in Figure 1.

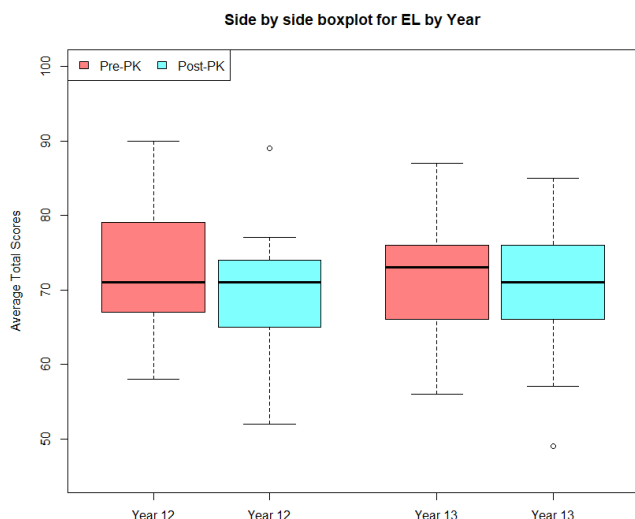


Figure 1. Side by side boxplots showing average total pre- and post-PK EL scores by Year.

3.2. Resilience

Overall pre-PK average total score for resilience was 64.9 and this dropped to 63.57 post-PK. Figure 2 below gives the side by side boxplots which illustrates the pre- to post-PK scores by year group. Repeated measures t-test shows no significant difference in the resilience between pre-PK and post-PK scores ($p = .49$).

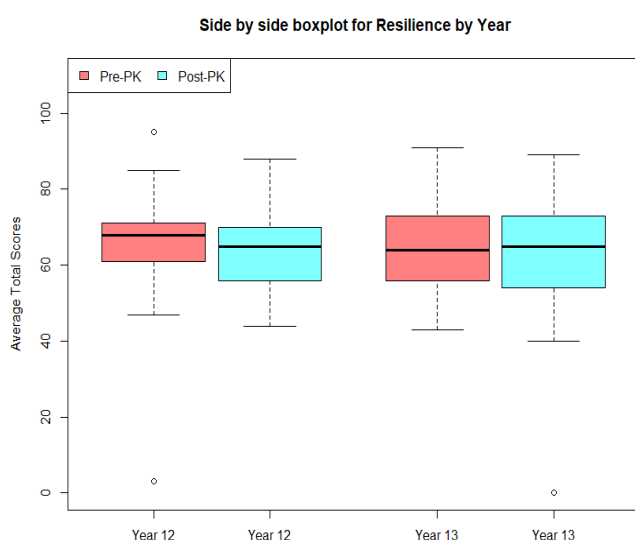


Figure 2. Boxplots showing average total pre- and post-PK resilience scores by Year.

3.3. Life Effectiveness

Repeated measures t-test shows no significant effect ($p = .22$) on total scores for pre- and post-PK Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ), grouped by year. Figure 3 below shows the side by side boxplots for LEQ, illustrating a slight decline. Additionally worth noting are the outliers in both pre- and post-PK in Year 12 and in post-PK in Year 13.

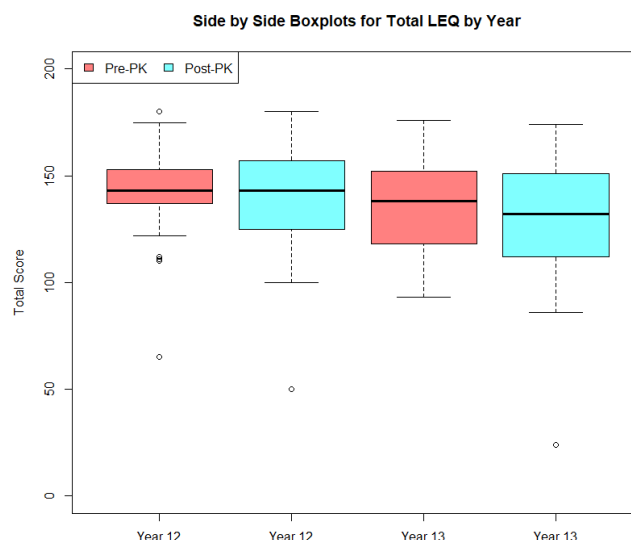


Figure 3. Side by Side Boxplots for Life Effectiveness Questionnaire by Year.

3.4. Qualitative Findings

Focus Group interviews were conducted with Year 12 (3 female, 4 male) and Year 13 (4 female and 4 male). These semi-structured interviews lasted 38 minutes and 31 minutes respectively. Please see appendix 1 for semi-structured interview questions.

Unfortunately, the recording for the Year 12's Focus Group interview malfunctioned, and thus only key points were solicited from this interview. The Year 13 focus group semi-structured interview was transcribed verbatim. All students were asked to complete a post-programme survey with similar questions to those posed in the interviews, however the response rate was extremely poor, with only 5 students returning the survey. These data were also included for analysis. Thematic analysis, employing the Braun & Clark [39] six steps 1) familiarize oneself with the data, 2) generate initial codes, 3) search for themes, 4) review themes, 5) define and name themes and 6) produce the report, was applied.

After familiarising myself with the qualitative data, the acronym EQUIP was constructed as a useful framework from which to report the findings. These results are outlined under the following groupings: Edification; (big) Questions; University and beyond; Inter and intra-personal skills; Peers and perspective.

EQUIP was felt to be an apt acronym as essentially this is

what the PK programme aims to do: “to make ready, PRE-PARE” the students for the future. This also fits in well with the components of SDT theoretical framework i.e. autonomy, competence and relatedness. In what follows, each of the elements of the acronym will be explored with references to the evidence in the data.

3.5. Edification

Edification refers to the moral or intellectual instruction or improvement of someone. If one uses a compass as a metaphor, edification can be seen as helping students calibrate their compass. Attending to their ‘moral compass’ empowers students to act authentically, with integrity and in a way that is true to their ideal selves. In order to calibrate their compasses, students learn to align their values, goals and actions with over-arching ethical principles. Moral education, the process of maintenance, development and transformation of moral and social norms, is important to ensure the sustainability of human morality [10], substantiating the relatedness aspect SDT.

PK did cover some important aspects of moral elevation such as: Living your Values, Identity, Future Selves and Goals, Planning and Implementing new habits, systems and goals, and Relationships and Consent. However, many felt that it would be useful to focus more on values and morals and readdress basic social emotional skills (e.g. topics like sex education and drugs) at a more appropriate level as seen below:

More uncomfortable topics such as consent being brought up slightly earlier as well as sex education being talked about more often... to help students be more aware of things such as unplanned pregnancy instead of simply STDs.

I think, I think there needs to be those harder-hitting topics to instil it in you because you can't, you can't just have one lesson on drugs and then be like, 'Oh, yeah, I know everything about drugs.'

Our modern society does not always seem to value integrity, and our youth receive a lot of mixed messages about the merit of having good principles. Certainly, mass and social media shows more than enough adults acting unethically for our youth to believe that ethics and morals are not that important. There are many adolescents who want to do good deeds, but perhaps struggle to find the courage to “do the right thing” at times. Whilst it is not entirely the responsibility of schools to instil these ethical and moral values, schools are well placed to support this edification.

I think the whole thing about Positively Kellett that they kind of say is forming these healthy relationships, and like helping out your fellow man. Something like that. But we like, that isn't the message they try and instil. Since like, COVID did start, we've not really looked outside very much because we've been focused on ourselves.'

When asked what they felt the purpose of PK was, the re-

sponses suggested that it was more of a ‘time away from the typical curriculum to explore more relevant topics in the world’, where they were able to have ‘open discussions to hear other students’ points of view’. There were aspects of the modified PK and GC curriculum that the students found beneficial, particularly the preparation for university which will be discussed further in the next section.

... we used to have a thing called Global Citizenship, which kind of gave us a broader outlook on life, in general, or in our outlook, our future. For what we could do. And so Positively Kellett, I guess, provides us with options or skills.

However, for many students, they felt that lessons would be improved if information covered was “more similar to critical perspectives where different unique views are presented and helpful information is presented”. Students mentioned that they would enjoy having discussions around life’s ‘big questions’ and suggested that perhaps “other adults coming in to discuss topics that are beyond the realm of the teachers” would be beneficial.

3.6. Questions (Big)

Humans have grappled with ‘big’ questions since time immemorial. They are often questions that require us to look deeply within and outside of ourselves for answers. Although often there are no right or wrong answers, these questions help us to make sense of our time here, while also informing the way we choose to behave and live. Discussing life’s big questions provides a foundation for the students’ own lives, it grounds their thinking, steering them towards making decisions towards the kind of lives that they would like to have. These big questions guide students to living a life of purpose, with an awareness and appreciation that they are not isolated beings but are interconnected with other humans and the more-than-human world. Tackling these big questions about humanity, our world and our universe, forces us to address social issues such as racism, gender inequality, poverty, climate crisis and sustainable development to name but a few.

When students have the chance to offer their views, they have much to teach us all [40]. Moreover, the benefits of these conversations for students are enormous. Firstly, they feel heard. They learn that adults do not always have the answers and that it is okay to disagree. There is an expectation that students provide evidence for their opinions which develops reasoning skills and critical thinking [41]. Addressing aspects of SDT, students start to feel more autonomous and competent in their own ability to tackle these big questions. They also hear and learn the perspectives of others and come to realise that their views are of value too.

This aspect of PK was appreciated by the students and indeed, for many, this was what they understood/assumed the purpose of PK to be:

I think, I think even just like five minutes to discuss current affairs before a lesson, because that could, I don't know,

spark an interest or make someone angry at something. And then they themselves will have that passion to look into it.

When asked what they would like to address in these lessons, most students replied that they would enjoy addressing these big questions and social issues:

Big questions – address social issues e.g. racism, anorexia, mental health.

poverty and wealth inequality.

trans rights and what they feel like, cos I know there's like a lot of debates and issues around sport, and what's going on there.

I think gender inequality or poverty is a good one.

Much of the discussion centred around the structure of the lessons as well as the content. As one student suggested:

It doesn't have to be a whole lesson, but you talk about something going on in the world, and that you get some truth.

Another student mentioned that it would be interesting to have some discussion about current politics:

...we're reaching the sort of age where we have like, voting rights, and things like that. And like people have opinions. But I don't know, it'd be interesting to see, like, sort of an all-round view of like, different people's perspective, I think.'

Several students mentioned how interesting it would be to hear the opinions of their colleagues, and how much more they enjoyed the discussion lessons where they hear the input of others as opposed to the presentations given by teachers (we will delve into more thoroughly into this aspect under the peers and perspectives section).

3.7. University and Beyond

Accepting the primacy of home and family, school experiences have the potential to be key developmental contexts in the lives of young people, to prepare adolescents to cope and succeed in a rapidly changing and unpredictable future [42] and to help students feel competent in addressing the challenges of this phase of their lives. Programmes like PK are well placed to provide this functional knowledge to students. And indeed for many students, they appreciated the modules that focused on the information about going to university, life at university and how it differs from high school.

... like living in university rather than just like, what you want to do at university. So like budgeting, and like, I guess nutrition kind of falls into that too. And also making friends at university.

...material that will help the transition to university i.e. budgeting, living independently.

Educator, A.J. Juliani states: "Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything." For many students, there was a real concern of what they will be doing post-university and students felt woefully unprepared for what comes after univer-

sity.

I think it was very uni-focus, which obviously, is very important... I do personally wish it would branch off a bit more.

We haven't really done much about post-uni actually, which is, I think, what I'm more stressed about. I have no idea what I want to do.

Both Year 12 and Year 13 students spoke about getting more advice/information on "post-uni" aspects such as financial advice on investments, saving and managing finances, taxes, interview skills, understanding the norms, laws and consequences from countries where they will be attending university as the following statements suggest:

Learning about tax and life after university.

Jobs – the negatives as well as the positives.

Understanding the norms, laws and consequences from countries to which they will go to university.

How to ace an interview.

What was particularly interesting was how the budgeting module gave the students pause for thought and many of them mentioned how this aspect of the course made them aware of their privilege.

... I just feel like learning about the finance on the other side, kind of helped me realize my privilege here as well.

3.8. Inter - and Intrapersonal Development

In the past two decades positive psychology coaches and researchers have suggested that providing students with a greater understanding of themselves including the influence of their character strengths, values, priorities, friendships and relationships with others, is more likely to foster the growth and development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills than more traditional teaching methods [15, 16]. These skills are especially important for adolescents who are having to navigate an increasingly demanding academic workload while also undergoing transformative biological and emotional changes [43]. Specifically, research has demonstrated that positive education programmes such as PK, can support inter- and intrapersonal development [44-48].

Interestingly, Year 13 students felt that, at this stage of their school career, they had developed these social emotional skills through life experiences, sport and school interactions and did not necessarily require social emotional learning in the PK curriculum.

To be honest, because now that we've matured, we're ... not know-it-all, but we have learned our own ways, and obviously, we can obviously learn more. We can... We are handling the best we can.

The Year 13 students felt that rather than focus on mindfulness and having a positive mindset, it would be useful to develop strategies in dealing a negative mindset, dealing with stress, anxiety and depression. Students expressed an interest in discussing and learning more about mental health (if executed professionally).

Like negative mindset, depression, anxiety, stress. How to deal with all those.

They do a lot of mindfulness in the younger years. And they also talk about, like, having a positive mindset, right? But they don't necessarily talk about, 'Okay, how to stop having this negative mindset,' or 'How to get out of the negative mindset.' They just say how to prevent it. And once you're in it, you're like, 'Okay, now, I don't have the tools.'

As with all qualitative research, there are individual differences in opinion and for many respondents topics on leadership and habits were of no use or interest. However, quite a few students in both year groups, did benefit as seen by these comments:

I have found a lot of use in some of the things we have been taught, for example the leadership skills and changing habits.

The habit forming activities we did have been particularly useful and have improved my life.

...taught us these skills for the future, but I'm sure all of us have used the skill in the past year that we would have picked up, like the habits.

3.9. Peers and Perspectives

Ryan & Deci's SDT propounds relatedness as a basic psychological need. Relationships with their peers are particularly important for young people as they navigate the uncertainties of adolescence. For the most part, whilst these are positive relationships, adolescents are prone to peer pressure which could have a negative influence. Positive social relationships with peers have the ability to strengthen and support an adolescent's development and understanding of self [49, 50]. At times the desire to fit in becomes more important than 'doing the right thing.' Indeed, adolescents make tough decisions every day, and peer pressure often makes it more difficult for them to choose the right path or make the right decisions. This was alluded to particularly with regard to drugs:

I remember doing peer pressure one year, which was good.'
'Yeah, drugs and peer pressure were intertwined...

Research suggest that school can empower students by using methods that increase their autonomy and responsibility, offering students a more equal relationship and including their voices in governance and teaching [4]. When students are active in shaping their lessons, they are more likely to participate, have challenging and open discussions and express opposing viewpoints [51].

Students from both Focus Groups mention that having open discussions with their peers not only provided them all an opportunity to speak, many of them felt that they were able to do so without judgement:

Being able to talk and not being judged.

You can't really be dominant. ... Even if you're a shy person, who sits at the back of the class, you can always have an opinion.

Many students found the openness of the discussions reassuring realising that others were feeling as stressed and anxious as they were:

... openness of the discussions has reassured me because I felt quite stressed and anxious about starting uni. But when you have these open discussions, and you realize that other people were sort of feeling the same way, it's definitely reassuring.

Studies suggest that schools should offer opportunities for students to direct their own learning rather than presenting teacher-led instruction [52, 26]. There was a general consensus that altering the structure of the PK programme and having it more student-led would be more beneficial to the students as they felt that they would learn more from their peers than teachers, particularly when addressing a topic that a student was passionate about. The idea being that teachers would facilitate rather than merely present material to the students and that teachers would have different topics on offer, so that the students could select which would be of interest to them (granted this may not be possible due to timetable constraints).

More interactive with peers presenting material on subjects they are passionate about – this will allow students to understand the perspectives of others.

I think one way that they could do it was present or arrange, and also give the option to, if you already have a passion for one, research yourself and present it, because to see a teacher get up and talk about racism, I don't know, I feel like one of my best friends if he got up and then [inaudible] evoked like significant emotion about something, I would feel more connected to it. If it was my peer talking about racism or gender inequality, than if it was a teacher...

3.10. Perspective

As Barrack Obama once said: "Learning to stand in somebody else's shoes, to see through their eyes, that's how peace begins. And it is up to you to make that happen. Empathy is a quality of character that can change the world." Perspective taking is the cognitive side of empathy. It refers to a person's ability to consider a situation from a different point of view, to consider other beliefs and experiences. It requires you to put yourself in the other person's position and imagine what you would feel, think, or do if you were in that situation. In our increasingly global world, understanding the perspectives of others helps to reduce bias, judgement and conflict.

How we see things around us depends on our own experience, schematic knowledge, culture, society and background. The way we are brought up shapes our perspective on things, unless we change it. PK has the potential to promote intellectual flexibility, to listen to (and hear) the perspectives of others. For many of the students, the open discussions were valuable in appreciating the points of view of their peers.

...the open discussion thing was a lot. Because we haven't

done it in previous years. But this year, I mean, almost half of the lesson, it was just going back and forth between each other. And I think that just gave me... It just let me be more open to different point of views. Let me learn from other people rather than just a teacher. Yeah, just opened up my mind a little bit more.

So like it'd be interesting to hear people's opinions. Like I enjoy the discussion lessons where we like hear everyone's input rather than the presentations, and that feels more like relaxed and just like...'

4. Discussion

Without a doubt, COVID-19 (and the 2019 protests before that) altered the whole landscape for PK and thus caution should be taken when interpreting the findings of this research. It is with this in mind that my suggestion would be to focus more on the qualitative findings than the quantitative results. It is worth noting that in this study, qualitative data were collected to understand what PK meant for the learners and the value that they perceived from participating in the programme. The intention was not to prove or disprove the efficacy of PK. The addition of qualitative data was therefore useful to gain more nuanced views which would lead to deepening the meanings attached in such difficult-to-measure constructs as life effectiveness, resilience and emotional literacy.

Adults do not always have adequate insight into the lives of young people, often making assumptions and decisions about what is best for student wellbeing without input from the students themselves [36]. As the main stakeholders of PK, it is imperative that student voices are heard. When students have the chance to offer their views, they have much to teach us all. As we have seen from the qualitative findings, students have found that the open discussions are possibly the most useful way of accessing and digesting the content of the PK programme. It is imperative that, in order for students to be intrinsically motivated to participate, they feel a sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence [37] which in turn improves the effectiveness and efficacy of the programme [27].

5. Limitations

This research was undertaken in a real-world setting and as such, we were unable to control mitigating circumstances such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on school closures in HK. Moreover, the intervention took place within a specific school context and may not be generalisable to other schools, cultures and year levels. Participants were asked the same question at two points in time and we cannot be sure that changes are real or due to repeated testing. Self-report measures could be unreliable as these measures are perhaps not able to measure concepts that require a certain degree of self-awareness to provide more accurate answers;

thus the reader is encouraged to consider these factors when interpreting the data [53]. This research does not consider the possibility of sleeper effects (i.e. beneficial effects that show up later in early adulthood). Whether these quantitative measures adequately assess students' wellbeing remains uncertain, future research could consider other measures related to students' subjective wellbeing. Assessment could be conducted following a longer period of PK implementation to ensure substantial data analysis. Including other stakeholders (e.g. parents and teachers) would be beneficial to understanding the effectiveness of the programme. Despite the above, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge, with the qualitative component adding valuable insight into the perceived benefits of the PK programme for sixth-form students.

6. Conclusion

Youth wellbeing is a pressing international concern and, considering the amount of time spent in educational settings, the effect that schools have on student wellbeing is irrefutable. Given the rapid advances in technology and social media in today's globalised world, we cannot deny that the nature of the life experiences that young people are encountering has changed considerably in recent decades. Education systems need to seek new paradigms, policies and processes to prepare today's youth to flourish within this unpredictable future. Educating happy, healthy learners for life and ensuring that each one reaches their full potential is the ultimate goal not only of schools, but also of society.

Research has illustrated that students benefit from fostering wellbeing in schools. In order to encompass the desires and diverse needs of students, future PosEd programmes should be developed in conjunction with the youth, concentrating on the experiences of the students within their particular contexts. Moreover, bearing in mind that most PosEd programmes are based on Western positive psychology, where the emphasis is primarily on individual development, cultural considerations need to be taken into account as collectivist societies may differ in their focus [28].

What we do today matters for the world our youth will enter tomorrow. Schools are well placed to assist students in calibrating their compasses to live a flourishing life, true to their values, goals and ethical principles. As such, it is imperative that educators find empirically validated and theoretically sound methods to promote students' health and wellbeing [20].

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the participants who joined this study. The author acknowledges the ethical approval from Rhodes University.

Funding

Partial financial support was received from Kellett School, British International School in Hong Kong.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Appendix

Discussions were loosely based on the following questions:

1. Did the programme meet your expectations? If so, why/why not?
2. Which elements of the PK programme did you enjoy the most?
3. What, if anything, did you dislike about the programme?
4. What other topics would you like to see included in the programme?
5. What personal benefits do you see this programme having on you?
6. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the programme?
7. Any other suggestions or feedback you would like to share?
8. Could you tell me three things that you wish you had been taught at school?

References

- [1] UNICEF (2021). Mental Health: Ensuring mental health and well-being in an adolescent's formative years can foster a better transition from childhood to adulthood. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/mental-health/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20it%20was%20estimated,per%20cent%20of%20mental%20disorders>
- [2] Dahl, R., Allen, N., Wilbrecht, L. et al. (2018). Importance of investing in adolescence from a developmental science perspective. *Nature* 554, 441–450. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature25770>
- [3] Sawyer, S. M., Azzopardi, P. S., Wickremarathne, D., & Patton, G. C. (2018). The age of adolescence. *The Lancet. Child & adolescent health*, 2(3), 223–228. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(18\)30022-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(18)30022-1)
- [4] Rickard, N., Chin, T.-C., Cross, D., Hattie, J. & Vella-Brodrick, D.A (2023). Effects of a positive education programme on secondary school students' mental health and wellbeing; challenges of the school context, *Oxford Review of Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2211254>
- [5] Chang, Q., Xing, J., Ho, R. T. H., & Yip, P. S. F. (2019). Cyberbullying and suicide ideation among Hong Kong adolescents: The mitigating effects of life satisfaction with family, classmates and academic results. *Psychiatry research*, 274, 269–273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.02.054>
- [6] Waters, L., & Loton, D. (2021). Tracing the Growth, Gaps, and Characteristics in Positive Education Science: A Long-Term, Large-Scale Review of the Field. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 774967. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.774967>
- [7] Catalano, R. F., Berglund M. L., Ryan, J. A. M., Lonczak, H. S., & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 98–124. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4127638>
- [8] Cohen, J. (2013). Creating a Positive School Climate: A Foundation for Resilience. In: Goldstein, S., Brooks, R. (eds) *Handbook of Resilience in Children*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3661-4_24
- [9] Chan, G. H., Lee, G. K. W., Kong, C. Y., W. & Lo, T. W. (2022). An Innovative Model of Positive Education with Traditional Chinese Moral Values: An Evaluation of Project Bridge. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 3797. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19073797>
- [10] Chen, J., Liu, Y., Dai, J., & Wang, C. (2023). Development and status of moral education research: Visual analysis based on knowledge graph. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 1079955. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1079955>
- [11] Kristjánsson K. (2012). Positive psychology and positive education: Old wine in new bottles? *Educ. Psychol.* 47: 86–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2011.610678>
- [12] Dweck, C. S. (2015). Growth [Editorial]. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(2), 242–245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12072>
- [13] Niemiec, R. M., & Pearce, R. (2021). The practice of character strengths: Unifying definitions, principles, and exploration of what's soaring, emerging, and ripe with potential in science and in practice. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 590220. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.590220>
- [14] Au, C. W. C., & Chow, J. K. F. (2012). The role of Hong Kong schools in promoting students' civic engagement: A qualitative study of focus group interviews with Hong Kong secondary students. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 15(1), 82–95.
- [15] Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York, NY, US: Free Press.
- [16] Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive Psychology: An Introduction*. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.
- [17] CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning Guide (2013). *Effective social and emotional learning programs – Preschool and elementary school edition*. Chicago, IL:
- [18] Au, W. C. C., & Kennedy, K. J. (2018). A positive education program to promote wellbeing in schools: A case study from a Hong Kong school. *Higher Education Studies*, 8(4), 9–22.

- [19] Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2015). A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(3), 262–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.936962>
- [20] Pulimeno, M., Piscitelli, P., Colazzo, S., Colao, A., & Miani, A. (2020). School as ideal setting to promote health and wellbeing among young people. *Health promotion perspectives*, 10(4), 316–324. <https://doi.org/10.34172/hpp.2020.50>
- [21] Madeson, M. (2017, February 24). Seligman's PERMA+ Model Explained: A Theory of Wellbeing. *Positive Psychology*. <https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/>
- [22] Mukhopadhyay, S., & Panda, B. (2022). Positive Education: Insights from the Geelong Grammar School (pp. 94–103). <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000201>
- [23] Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An Applied Framework for Positive Education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3.
- [24] Norrish, J. M., & Seligman, M. E. (2015). Positive Education: The Geelong Grammar School journey. *Oxford Positive Psychology Series*.
- [25] Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980902934563>
- [26] Vella-Brodrick, D. A., Chin, T.-C., & Rickard, N. S. (2020). Examining the processes and effects of an exemplar school-based wellbeing approach on student competency, autonomy and relatedness. *Health Promotion International*, 35(5), 1190–1198. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz115>
- [27] White, M. A. (2016). Why won't it Stick? Positive Psychology and Positive Education. *Psychology of well-being*, 6, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-016-0039-1>
- [28] Coulombe, S., Hardy, K., & Goldfarb, R. (2020). Promoting wellbeing through positive education: A critical review and proposed social ecological approach. *Theory and Research in Education*, 18(3), 295–321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878520988432>
- [29] Romo-González, T., Ehrenzweig, Y., Sánchez-Gracida, O. D., Enríquez-Hernández, C. B López-Mora, G., Martínez, A. J., & Larralde, C. (2013). Promotion of individual happiness and wellbeing of students by a positive education intervention. *J. behav. health soc. ISSUES* [online]. 5(2). 79–102. <https://doi.org/10.5460/jbhshi.v5.2.42302>
- [30] Lou, J., & Xu, Q. (2022). The development of positive education combined with online learning: Based on theories and practices. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 952784. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.952784>
- [31] Vella-Brodrick, D. A., Richard, N. S., Hattie, J., Cross, D., Chin, T.-C., & Ng, A. (2017). Enhancing adolescent mental health through positive education. A longitudinal evaluation of Year 10 Positive Education: Findings from 2014–2016. The University of Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- [32] Waters, L., & Charles Higgins, M. (2022). The impact of a teacher-based positive education intervention on student wellbeing literacy. *Journal of School and Educational Psychology*, 2(1), 22–43. <https://doi.org/10.47602/josep.v2i1.12>
- [33] Lazarus, R. S. (2003). Does the Positive Psychology Movement Have Legs? *Psychological Inquiry*, 14(2), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1402_02
- [34] Miller, A. (2008). A Critique of Positive Psychology—or 'The New Science of Happiness'. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 42: 591–608. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2008.00646.x>
- [35] Robson-Kelly, L. (2018). 'Is positive education too positive for the UK? Do we require a more nuanced approach to positive education in the UK?', *European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 2, 4, 1–5. Retrieved from: <https://www.nationalwellbeingsservice.org/volumes/volume-2-2018/volume-2-article-4/>
- [36] Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2019). The student voice in well-being: A case study of participatory action research in positive education. *Educational Action Research*, 27(2), 173–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1436079>
- [37] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- [38] Andersen, J. P., Prause, J., & Silver, R. C. (2011). A step-by-step guide to using secondary data for psychological research. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(1), 56–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00329.x>
- [39] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- [40] Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2020). Understanding factors affecting positive education in practice: An Australian case study. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 24(2), 128–145. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00229-0>
- [41] Lind, C. (2007). The power of adolescent voices: co-researchers in mental health promotion. *Educational Action Research*, 15(3), 317–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790701514309>
- [42] Rodkin, P. C., & Ryan, A. M. (2012). Child and adolescent peer relations in educational context. In K. R. Harris, S. Graham, T. Urdan, S. Graham, J. M. Royer, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *APA handbooks in psychology. APA educational psychology handbook*, Vol. 2. Individual differences and cultural and contextual factors (pp. 363–389). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- [43] Lamboy, B., Beck, F., Tessier, D., Williamson, M. O., Fréy, N., Turgon, R., Tassie, J. M., Barrois, J., Bessa, Z., & Shankland, R. (2022). The Key Role of Psychosocial Competencies in Evidence-Based Youth Mental Health Promotion: Academic Support in Consolidating a National Strategy in France. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(24), 16641. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416641>

- [44] Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science*, 16, 939-944.
- [45] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymniki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- [46] Laakso, M., Fagerlund, Å., Pesonen, AK. et al. (2021). Flourishing Students: The Efficacy of an Extensive Positive Education Program on Adolescents' Positive and Negative Affect. *Int J Appl Posit Psychol* 6, 253–276. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-020-00048-2>
- [47] Park, T., Reilly-Spong, M., & Gross, C. R. (2013). Mindfulness: a systematic review of instruments to measure an emergent patient-reported outcome (PRO). *Quality of life research: an international journal of quality of life aspects of treatment, care and rehabilitation*, 22(10), 2639–2659. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-013-0395-8>
- [48] Seligman, M. (2018): PERMA and the building blocks of well-being, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1437466>
- [49] Ragelienė T. (2016). Links of Adolescents Identity Development and Relationship with Peers: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry = Journal de l'Académie canadienne de psychiatrie de l'enfant et de l'adolescent*, 25(2), 97–105.
- [50] Tomé G., Matos, M., Simões, C., Diniz, J. A., & Camacho, I. (2012). How can peer group influence the behavior of adolescents: explanatory model. *Global journal of health science*, 4(2), 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.5539/gjhs.v4n2p26>
- [51] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019). *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf
- [52] Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Chipuer, H. M., Hanisch, M., Creed, P. A., & McGregor, L. (2006). Relationships at school and stage-environment fit as resources for adolescent engagement and achievement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29(6), 911–933. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.04.008>
- [53] McDonald, J. D. (2008). Measuring Personality Constructs: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Self-Reports, Informant Reports and Behavioural Assessments. *Enquire*, 1(1), 75-94.