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THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY ON BLENDED LEARNING

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1. ABSTRACT

Positive psychology has a significant impact on blended learning teaching courses. According to the research conducted with 25 university students learning English as a second language, positive emotions in the classroom facilitated by the teacher-student contact have led to well-being and effective learning. Blended learning is the thoughtful combination of the face-to-face and online components, which aims to provide learners an engaging learning experience. The relationship between BL and emotion shows that learners' emotions in face-to-face classes are more intense than those in online learning, both positive and negative. Students go through various emotional experiences in online and offline learning environments that impact their academic performance and mental well-being. It is usually considered that the face-to-face (F2F) section of BL can meet students' emotional and social needs. However, the research proved that F2F learning helped improve students' cognitive engagement while having no significant effect on emotional engagement. Emotions explored in the BL context are still scarce. In conclusion, positive psychology can be brought into the classroom to teach happiness skills and enhance language learning, to make students more effective learners.

Key words: *positive psychology, blended learning, love for learning, self-esteem, self-actualization, benefits of positive education, critical thinking skills.*

1. THE ROLE OF POSITIVE EDUCATION

Positive education plays an important role in manifesting students' positive character traits, foster their minds and develop strengths andcompetencies that will help them progress in their fields of study. It is an inevitable fact that positive support network is a widespread movement that can initiate changes in educational policy. One of the most essential elements is the curriculum, which needs to be specifically designed to support students' needs. Positive psychology helps build self-affirmation, raising the sense of intellectual minds to meet not only the market needs but to recognize students' potential and increase their efficiency and enthusiasm in learning. Globally, the International Positive Education Network (IPEN) encourages and spearheads this kind of transformation in education. For the positive education movement to be successful, it must have widespread support. It is also necessary for us to have verifiable truths in philosophy and science.

Maslow's needs theory for motivation, 1943 (2022:29) is explained according to various levels of needs. The hierarchical order obtains the five needs starting from the basic to the more advanced. Students are motivated with psychological safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. The highest element that students need to reach is self-actualization, which shows that they can implement both material and spiritual needs as well as make progress in psychological structural organization.

Higher education establishments attempt to integrate a variety of instructional strategies that should have a good classroom influence and inspire students to learn more effectively. The Mixed model includes communicative and constructivist teaching method, genre and discourse analysis, and situational case studies. Utilizing situational theory to develop critical thinking skills, nurturing students' curiosities about learning, and fostering self-enthusiasm and self-realization. Constructivist methods enrich the curriculum and encourage students to voice their opinions and argue points of view in class. Communicative teaching can be used in both group and individual activities.

In this context, (Brunzell et al., 2016; Seligman et al., 2009) explain that when implementing positive psychology in teaching, character traits are key factors that encourage students with challenges and elevate their performance. Energizing authentic characteristics can motivate students to become more engaged and develop social skills that should stimulate their assessment and enjoyment at university (Seligman, 2019; Seligman et al., 2009). Positive characterister traits include: positive emotions that are experienced of what went well in the classroom, engagement, evaluating critical thinking skills and strengths in debating, practicing constructive interactions and accomplishment of goals through mind-set messages.

The role of positive education is to stimulate students to become more effective learners, assess their level of happiness when attending the courses as well as increase their mindset for love of learning. Students' character strengthens when they are exposed to discuss about certain cultural, religious, political topics and share different perspectives. In this aspect, positive psychology can teach them to accept and respect each other's opinions. Most students are sensitive to generosity and they value the kindness of the teachers. Furthermore, gratitude is a positive emotion that stimulates student's kindness. It helps students in demanding situations and increases collaboration, flexibility, enthusiasm, connectedness to others and well-being (Brunzell et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2016). Gratitude is specifically beneficial to vulnerable students. Positive feelings between students and teacher-students have the power to start good things happening. Students can use all their knowledge, flexibility, and problem-solving skills in this setting. They can also assist one another in producing potential solutions (Brunzell et al., 2016).

In this context, teachers should motivate students by communicating honestly with them, try to be flexible if there is a problem, negotiate and find a possible resolution. Moreover, a positive atmosphere in the classroom leads to the enjoyment of sessions

and stimulates students' collaboration developing advanced critical thinking skills. One of the most valuable characteristics is humor, students become more relaxed and enthusiastic about learning when the teacher's lectures are accompanied by humor. Students' lack of creativity and inspiration can also reflect on positive psychology. Interesting and engaging activities may increase the level of inspiration and stimulate students' creativity.

In addition, positive psychology can have an impact on students: motivation, creativity, expressions of happiness attending lectures as well as inspire students' mindset for love for learning. Positivity is also increased with daily expressions of kindness expressed by the teachers; teachers' use of humor and receptiveness to humor. As a conclusion, teachersshould be flexible and encourage students to express their critical thinking skills, discuss openly during lectures as well as encourage students to share, respect and accept different opinions about controversial or less controversial topics.

2. THE BENEFITS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY ON BLENDED LEARNING

The term "blended learning" refers to the combination of traditional classroom instruction and online learning. Blended or hybrid learning differs slightly from standard online learning (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). According to Wang et al. (2007), the blended learning technique is based on scheduled or unscheduled, in-person or online learning environments Numerous researchers have seen the effects of blended learning in various settings. In longitudinal studies, Henrie et al. (2015) discovered that students' satisfaction with the blended learning environment was primarily caused by the activities' relevance and clarity of instruction, rather than the medium of instruction.

More evidence-based and sustainable blended learning has become a social trend for the advancement of higher education in the future thanks to innovations and improvements in information technology (Liu et al., 2022). In the wake of the epidemic, blended learning has also gained popularity as a standard teaching strategy (Huang and Gong, 2023). It effectively realizes the complementary strengths of offline and online learning while mitigating the drawbacks of emotional communication barriers, weak sense of presence, and poor "screen-to-screen" monitoring that are inherent in single-line education (Liu et al., 2022).

As more and more courses nowadays implement blended learning approaches, the body of research on blended learning is expanding quickly. Researchers have suggested that students in blended learning value interaction with the instructor on the one hand (Al Mamun et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023), but peer collaboration is thought to be the most effective setting for blended learning (Sun et al., 2017; Al-Samarraie and Saeed, 2018; López-Pellisa et al., 2021). These two perspectives are combined in the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al., 1999), which

offers theoretical conceptualizations of how social presence and teaching presence in blended learning affect student learning. The framework emphasizes the influence of external environmental factors on student learning in blended communities. However, it falls short in its exploration and conceptualization of the individual learner factors (Shea and Bidjerano, 2010; Lan et al., 2018b). Furthermore, in actual practice, researchers have discovered that the biggest obstacles to college students' success in blended learning are issues with personal psychological factors such as a lack of desire to learn, a lack of willpower, and an inability to overcome obstacles in the classroom (Li, 2022; Podsiadlik, 2023). Thus, is the psychological makeup of each learner a key component of what motivates students to learn in a blended learning community?

The impact of instructors in blended learning environments—which includes curriculum design, facilitated dialogue, and direct instruction—is conceptually anchored by their teaching presence. The prior research indicates that teaching presence in blended learning is positively and significantly correlated with cognitive presence (Law et al., 2019). Students' knowledge acquisition is constructed through direct instruction; facilitated dialogue; and instructional design and organization (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2005). In addition, students' engagement in learning can be improved through immediate feedback from teachers (Meech and Koehler, 2023). Social presence moderates teaching presence and cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 2010). Students are encouraged to communicate openlyand foster cohesion in the learning environment (Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich, 2006; Garrison and Arbaugh, 2007). (Bai et al., 2020; Sun and Yang, 2023).

According to Garrison and Arbaugh (2007), building meaningful personal relationships is important for fostering high-quality emotional communication and interpersonal interactions. A student's buoyancy level directly correlates with their behavioral engagement and emotional involvement in the learning process (Martin et al., 2017; Datu and Yang, 2018). This, in turn, leads to a higher level of social presence within the learning community, which positively correlates with increased community engagement and success-focused mindset. According to Martin et al. (2017), students with elevated levels of buoyancy and resilience will encounter higher degrees of social presence in blended learning contexts.

Since students are social creatures who learn best by experience, application, open discussion, and engagement, it is imperative to provide them with the tools they need to participate in social learning environments (Bryer and Seigler, 2012; Thomas and Allen, 2021). We consider academic buoyancy to be a tool for enhancing both student learning and the learning environment. As a result, academically buoyant students are potentially better prepared to handle the demands of blended learning courses (Ursin et al., 2021).

3. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This analysis provides a clear overview of the students' perceptions across different areas, helping to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement. Positive psychology plays an important part in everyday relationship between students and teachers.. It is a branch of psychology that studies what makes us happy, resilient and fulfilled.

The research was conducted with 25 Albanian students from South East European University who were studying Public administration, International communication, Political sciences enrolled in ESP 1 Social Sciences course. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire about positive psychology and need for character strengths in education. They were asked various questions related to positive attitude when attending lectures, their love and passion for learning, the teacher's kindness, as well as the effectiveness of implementing positive psychology in the classroom.

In order to analyze the research results based on the Likert data scale, I will summarize the key findings across the various items from the survey, categorized by frequency or agreement levels, typically ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The detailed analysis of the research results includes the percentage of students who selected each option (1-5) for each survey question.

1. Expressions of Happiness When Coming to Class

Most students (60%) feel happy to very happy (scores of 4 and 5) when coming to class, while a smaller group (20%) is neutral, and 20% are less happy (scores of 1 and 2).

2. Awareness of Character Strengths

This item shows a consistent high scoring, mostly at 4 and 5, indicating strong awareness among students regarding their character strengths and virtues. All students are aware of their character strengths, with 100% of them scoring either a 4 or 5.

3. Curriculum Fostering Love of Learning

The scores range between 1 and 5, with a mix of responses. Some students feel incredibly positive about the curriculum's role in promoting a loveof learning, while others are less convinced. Responses are varied, with 50% of students (5 out of 10) feeling that the curriculum fosters a love of learning (scores of 4 and 5), while 50% are neutral or disagree (scores of 1 to 3).

4. Mindset for Love of Learning

Responses indicate a generally positive mindset with scores mostly between 3 and 5, showing that students have a decent to strong love of learning mindset. Most students (80%) exhibit a strong mindset for loving learning, as evidenced by scores of 4 and 5, while 20% are more neutral.

5. Reluctance to Join Extracurricular Activities

The responses range widely, with some students often reluctant (scores of 4) and others rarely feeling this reluctance (scores of 1 or 2). This indicates a varied

perspective on the value of extracurricular activities. Opinions on extracurricular activities are split, with 50% of students showing reluctance (scores of 4 and 5) and 40% less so (scores of 1 and 2).

6. Frequency of Daily Expressions of Kindness by Teachers
Responses generally fall between 3 and 5, suggesting that students perceive a moderate to high frequency of kind behaviors from their teachers. Most students (80%) perceive teachers as frequently expressing kindness, with most ratings at 4 and 5.

7. Failure and Academic Challenges
Most responses fall in the middle of the scale (3 to 4), indicating that while students do face academic challenges, they are not overwhelmingly frequent or severe. Half of the students (50%) feel they experience a moderate level of academic challenges (score of 3), with some experiencing fewer challenges (scores of 2) and others more frequently (scores of 4).

8. Willingness to Accept Different Perspectives
Scores are generally high (4 to 5), showing that students are quite open to accepting differing opinions. All students show a strong willingness to accept different perspectives, with 100% responses at 4 and 5.

9. Respect for Different Opinions
This follows the same trend as willingness to accept different perspectives, with students showing a high level of respect for others' views. Students are evenly split between scores of 4 and 5, indicating a universally high level of respect for differing opinions.

10. Creativity When Lacking Inspiration
Responses are varied but lean towards the higher end, with most students rating their creativity between 3 and 5. The results are balanced, with most students rating their creativity when lacking inspiration as moderate to high (scores of 3 to 5).

11. Critical Thinking Skills
This category generally received high scores, indicating that students feel competent in their critical thinking abilities. All students feel confident in their critical thinking skills, with equal numbers giving scores of 4 and 5.

12. Enjoyment of Sessions
Scores are predominantly high (4 to 5), showing that students enjoy the sessions and are satisfied with how lectures are presented. A large majority (70%) of students highly enjoy the sessions, with a significant number (30%) also enjoying them moderately.

13. Reflection on Positive Things
Most students frequently reflect on positive aspects, with scores mostly at 4 and 5, 20% two students, 80%, 8 students. Moreover, students frequently reflect on positive things, with 80% rating this behavior very highly (score of 5).

14. Teacher's Use of Humor

The frequency of humor use is rated quite high, with most responses between 3 and 5. The use of humor by teachers is rated highly by all students, with equal scores of 4 and 5 (50%) each.

15. Teacher's Receptiveness to Humor

Responses are consistently high, indicating that students find their teachers very receptive to humor. The majority of students (80%) find their teachers very receptive to humor.

16. Self-Regulation in Cases of Losing Temper

There is a mix of responses, but most students rate their self-regulation ability between 3 and 5, showing moderate to strong self-control. Half of the students (50%) rate their self-regulation ability as good (score of 4), with some needing improvement (10% at score 2).

This detailed percentage breakdown provides a clearer picture of the students' responses, reflecting their general sentiments and areas where attitudes may vary more widely. According to the general observations, the majority of the Likert-scale responses skew towards the higher end, indicating positive feedback and overall satisfaction in several areas,such as awareness of character strengths, enjoyment of sessions, and critical thinking skills. In addition, the areas of improvement include some lower scores that suggest areas where students feel less confident or satisfied, such as their expressions of happiness when coming to class or the value they find in extracurricular activities.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, positive education definitely helps in developing students' positive character traits and fosters their intellectual growth as they progress in their fields of study. Moreover, positive support network also stimulates students as well as initiates changes in educational policy. One aspect is that the curriculum needs to be designed to support students' needs. Positive psychology raises the sense for intellectual and critical thinking, increases students' efficiency and enthusiasm in learning.

One of the theories that supports positive education is Maslow's needs theory for motivation, which guides students toward love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. The highest element that students need to reach is self-actualization. According to the conducted study about positive psychology and need for character strengths in education, students should be motivated to explore curiosities about learning that will help them through the process of self-realization. Positive emotions play an important role, and 60% of the students expressed positive attitude when attending lectures.

The role of positive education is to stimulate students to both team and individual activities: interactive engagement in debating, practicing constructive

interactions through goal-oriented mind-set messages. The results showed 100% strong awareness among students regarding their character strengths and virtues when they are to discuss certain cultural, religious, political topics and share different perspectives. Most students (80%) exhibit a strong mindset for loving learning, and positive psychology teaches them to accept and respect each other's opinions, and exchange opinions about various discussion topics.

Moreover, students value the kind and truthful communication with the teacher, as well as looking for a meaningful solution to the problem. Most students (80%) perceive teachers as frequently expressing kindness. All students feel confident in their critical thinking skills, with equal numbers giving scores of 4 and 5. Nevertheless, a positive and enjoyable atmosphere during the sessions stimulates students' team-work collaboration developing advanced critical thinking skills. Students become more relaxed and enthusiastic about learning when teacher is humorous. The results indicate that students find teachers (85 %) very receptive to humor.

In conclusion, positive psychology can have a huge impact on students' motivation, stimulate their creativity for collaboration, inspire their mindset for love of learning. It can motivate them to exchange different opinions and show respect, accepting different psychological and cultural perspectives. Higher educational institutions should implement various training programs in order to encourage students to discuss controversial topics openly in a positive, tension -ree environment.

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