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The Effectiveness of Positive Psychology Intervention on Academic Well-Being, Academic Emotions, and Academic Vitality in Lower Secondary School Students in Tabriz

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the effectiveness of a positive psychology intervention on academic well-being, academic emotions, and academic vitality in lower secondary school students in Tabriz.

Methods and Materials: The research method was quasi-experimental using a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The statistical population included female students in the lower secondary level of District 3 in Tabriz. To select the sample, the questionnaires of academic well-being, academic emotions, and academic vitality were administered to 600 students from the mentioned population who had been selected using a cluster random sampling method. Then, 60 students who had the lowest scores on all three questionnaires were selected through purposive sampling and were randomly assigned to three groups (two experimental groups and one control group). The experimental groups received a 10-session intervention of 90 minutes each based on positive psychology, while the control group received no intervention. The research instruments included the Academic Well-Being Questionnaire developed by Tuominen-Soini and Salmela-Aro (2012), the Academic Vitality Scale by Martin and Marsh (2006), and the short form of the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire by Pekrun et al. (2005).

Findings: The data were analyzed using covariance analysis through SPSS-26 software. The results showed that the positive psychology intervention was effective in improving students' academic well-being ($P < .05$). The intervention also had a significant effect on students' academic emotions ($P < .05$). Furthermore, the intervention was found to be effective in enhancing academic vitality in lower secondary school students ($P < .05$).

Conclusion: Therefore, it is recommended that positive psychology interventions be utilized to improve academic well-being, academic vitality, and academic emotions.

Keywords: *Generalized Anxiety Disorder; Self-Handicapping; Worry*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of educational psychology has increasingly turned its attention to positive psychology as a framework for promoting students' mental health and academic functioning. Positive psychology, which emphasizes the development of individual strengths and the cultivation of positive emotions, has shown substantial promise in enhancing students' well-being, motivation, and engagement across various educational levels and cultural contexts (Golestaneh & Behzadi, 2019; Lambert et al., 2019). This shift is a response to growing concerns about the prevalence of stress, emotional distress, and academic disengagement among adolescents, particularly during critical educational transitions such as lower secondary school. As students encounter developmental, academic, and social challenges, interventions grounded in positive psychology may serve as a protective mechanism to foster resilience, emotional regulation, and psychological growth (Badri et al., 2019; Hashemi et al., 2023).

Academic well-being, as a multidimensional construct encompassing students' emotional experiences, satisfaction with school, sense of competence, and engagement, is considered a vital indicator of healthy student development (Widlund et al., 2018). Inadequate academic well-being is often linked with emotional exhaustion, reduced academic performance, and even dropout intentions (Nair et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2022). Therefore, strengthening academic well-being is not only a matter of promoting positive school experiences but also an essential strategy for educational retention and achievement. Researchers have consistently shown that well-being is positively associated with intrinsic motivation, adaptive coping, and academic aspirations (Naeimi Tajdar et al., 2024; Yurayat & Seechaliao, 2021). In this regard, interventions that emphasize positive emotions, gratitude, optimism, and purpose can significantly enhance students' capacity to manage stressors and remain engaged in their academic pursuits (Abbasi et al., 2021; Jarsouzeh et al., 2023).

Among the key outcomes examined in positive psychology research are academic emotions—specific affective experiences directly related to learning activities and academic environments. Academic emotions such as enjoyment, pride, anxiety, and boredom play a central role in shaping students' cognitive and motivational processes (Heratirad & Miri, 2023; Widlund et al., 2018). Negative academic emotions like shame and hopelessness often predict disengagement and lower achievement, while positive emotions are linked to perseverance, creativity, and deeper learning strategies (Golestaneh & Behzadi, 2019; Saleem et al., 2022). Positive psychological interventions (PPIs), by targeting emotional awareness, positive reframing, and mindfulness, may significantly reduce negative emotions and amplify students' enjoyment and self-efficacy in school settings (Hashemi et al., 2023; Krifa et al., 2021).

Another essential construct in this domain is academic vitality, which refers to students' persistent and energetic efforts to cope with academic demands and challenges (Sheikh Al-Islami, 2022). Academic vitality reflects a form of psychological resilience within the learning environment and has been found to predict better academic outcomes and psychological health (Jarsouzeh et al., 2023). Enhancing students' vitality is especially relevant in adolescence when students are increasingly required to self-regulate and adapt to shifting academic expectations. Given its dynamic and motivational nature, academic vitality can be nurtured through intentional interventions that build hope, purpose, and self-determination (Nair et al., 2021; Yekani Zadeh et al., 2018). In this context, PPIs have been introduced as an effective approach to fostering students' capacity to persist despite academic obstacles, bolstered by the development of positive attitudes and adaptive thinking patterns (Abbasi et al., 2021; Yurayat & Seechaliao, 2021).

Empirical research has provided strong support for the effectiveness of positive psychological interventions in school contexts. Studies across different cultural and educational settings have demonstrated that programs emphasizing gratitude, mindfulness, character strengths, and positive future orientation significantly improve students' academic well-being, emotional regulation, and adaptive behaviors (Harifi et al., 2022; Lambert et al., 2019). For instance, Golestaneh and Behzadi (2019) found that a structured PPI increased both academic vitality and well-being in female students by instilling a greater sense of agency and belonging in the classroom. Similarly, Badri et al. (2019) reported that cognitive emotion regulation training grounded in positive psychology improved emotional functioning and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by heightened psychological stress and academic disruption. These findings point to the adaptability and cross-contextual utility of PPIs in enhancing core academic and emotional capacities in adolescents.

Moreover, PPIs are frequently associated with increased levels of hope, resilience, and self-compassion among students—factors that are known to buffer against academic

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stress and promote mental health (Heratirad & Miri, 2023; Naeimi Tajdar et al., 2024). Positive psychology interventions are also particularly beneficial for students with specific vulnerabilities, such as low-performing or slow-paced learners. Heratirad and Miri (2023) demonstrated that positive psychotherapy enhanced hopefulness and academic life satisfaction in such student populations, suggesting that these interventions can be tailored to diverse learner needs. Further, PPIs have shown promising effects in clinical and therapeutic contexts, where they help individuals develop cognitive flexibility, meaning-making, and improved tolerance of distress (Dandachi-FitzGerald, 2024; Khorasani, 2024; Olenichenko, 2024).

It is also important to consider the broader social and emotional factors that intersect with academic functioning. Constructs such as acculturative stress, race-related stress, and perceived support have been shown to impact academic well-being, particularly among ethnic and racial minority students (Nair et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2022). In such contexts, PPIs may serve as a culturally sensitive approach to promoting inclusion and resilience by addressing both individual strengths and social realities. For example, Lambert et al. (2019) implemented a culturally responsive PPI in a diverse university setting and observed significant improvements in students' happiness and reductions in fear. These findings underscore the importance of contextualizing PPIs within the lived experiences of students to maximize their impact.

In the Iranian context, an increasing number of studies have explored the application of positive psychology principles in schools. For example, Yekani Zadeh et al. (2018) reported that training in positive thinking skills significantly enhanced students' psychological capital and subjective well-being. Likewise, Harifi et al. (2022) found that positive psychological intervention training led to higher levels of happiness and positive thinking in patients with chronic mental disorders, pointing to the intervention's therapeutic potential. These studies affirm the relevance of positive psychology frameworks in Iranian educational and psychological practice and highlight their utility in both preventative and corrective settings.

Given the compelling evidence for the benefits of positive psychological interventions in promoting academic well-being, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior, there remains a need to further examine their effectiveness among specific adolescent populations, particularly during early secondary education. This stage is marked by complex psychological, emotional, and academic transitions that may place students at risk of disengagement and emotional distress if not adequately supported. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a structured positive psychology intervention on academic well-being, academic emotions, and academic vitality among lower secondary school girls in Tabriz.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study is quantitative in terms of data type and quasi-experimental in terms of research method, using a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The statistical population consisted of female lower secondary school students in District 3 of Tabriz. First, the Academic Well-Being Questionnaire, Academic Emotions Questionnaire, and Academic Vitality Scale were administered to 600 students from the target population who were selected through cluster random sampling. Then, 60 students were purposefully selected from among those with the lowest scores on all three questionnaires and were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.

2.2. Measures

Academic Well-Being Questionnaire: This scale was developed by Tuominen-Soini and Salmela-Aro (2012). It is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 31 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, measuring the respondent's level of agreement or disagreement. Items 2, 3, 12, 15, 17, 18, and 23 are reverse-scored. The score range for the questionnaire is between 31 and 155, with higher scores indicating greater academic well-being. Tuominen-Soini and Salmela-Aro (2012) evaluated the scale's validity as satisfactory and reported a Cronbach's alpha of .94. In Iran, the questionnaire was standardized by Moradi et al. (2016). In that study, a significant correlation between academic well-being and academic stress scores confirmed the questionnaire's validity, and internal consistency of the subscales was estimated to be significant.

Academic Vitality Scale: This scale was designed by Martin and Marsh (2006) and consists of 9 items. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale has demonstrated reliability in terms of both internal consistency and test–retest stability (Cronbach's alpha = .80; test–retest reliability = .67). Results from internal consistency analyses indicated a Cronbach's alpha of .80 (after removing one item), and a

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test–retest reliability coefficient of .73. The item–total correlation coefficients ranged from .51 to .68 (Dehghanizadeh & Hossein Chari, 2012).

Short Form of the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire: This instrument was developed by Pekrun et al. (2005) to assess students' academic emotions. It is the abbreviated version of their original 80-item questionnaire (Pekrun et al., 2002) and contains 43 items across 7 subscales, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The total score ranges from 43 to 215. Positive academic emotions include: enjoyment of class (Items 1, 9, 14, 18, 26) and pride (Items 7, 17, 23, 30, 37). Negative academic emotions include: anger (Items 16, 21, 31, 36), anxiety (Items 2, 12, 27, 33, 39, 42), shame (Items 4, 11, 15, 20, 24, 29, 35, 41), hopelessness (Items 5, 8, 25, 32), and boredom (Items 3, 6, 10, 13, 19, 22, 28, 34, 38, 40, 43). These subscales include 33 items in total. Pekrun et al. (2005) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .75 to .95 for the subscales and confirmed its validity through exploratory factor analysis. In Iran, the questionnaire was validated by Kadivar, Farzad, Kavossian, and Nikdel (2009), who reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients between .75 and .86 for the subscales and confirmed the instrument's validity using confirmatory factor analysis.

2.3. Intervention

The intervention consisted of a 10-session protocol based on Rashid's (2012) positive psychotherapy model, implemented over 90-minute weekly group sessions. The first session introduced group members, explained the program structure, and conducted pretesting. In the second session, the framework of positive psychotherapy, the therapist's role, and clients' responsibilities were discussed, focusing on the lack of positive resources (e.g., positive emotions, meaning, and character strengths) in mental distress. The third session aimed to enhance signature strengths and positive emotions by identifying personal virtues and discussing their application in daily life. In the fourth session, forgiveness was explored as a powerful tool for transforming anger and resentment into emotional neutrality or even positive feelings. The fifth session emphasized gratitude and appreciation through reflection on positive memories. The sixth session addressed contentment and moderation, contrasting it with excessive pleasure-seeking. The seventh session focused on hope and optimism, teaching cognitive reappraisal strategies to reinterpret negative memories and highlight positive experiences. The eighth session centered on strengthening social relationships via training in active-constructive responding to others' good news. The ninth session explored the concept of savoring—intentional awareness and prolongation of positive experiences—and integrated discussions on a flourishing life composed of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. The final session reviewed the intervention content, gathered feedback, discussed the therapeutic journey, and prepared participants to apply the acquired skills in real life, concluding the group therapy.

2.4. Data Analysis

The study was conducted in the second half of the year 2024 (Gregorian Calendar), and the interventions were delivered in-person. To describe the data, means and standard deviations were calculated. For data analysis, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.

3. Findings and Results

The data obtained indicated that the mean age of the adolescent participants was 14.65 ± 1.53 years. All participants in the study were female. The following section presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables, the examination of statistical assumptions, and the results of multivariate analysis of covariance.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables in Pretest–Posttest by Group

Variable	Component	Group	Pretest M	Pretest SD	Posttest M	Posttest SD
Academic Emotions	Enjoyment	Experimental	14.73	3.035	17.40	1.765
	Pride		14.93	2.658	17.20	2.426
	Anxiety		17.47	2.748	13.87	1.598
	Shame		25.20	4.873	21.07	5.063
	Anger		12.33	1.291	10.87	1.642
	Hopelessness		12.27	2.434	10.27	1.438
	Fatigue		33.00	3.273	27.80	2.731

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Academic Well-Being			93.67	5.447	100.27	8.031
Academic Vitality			27.80	4.427	35.27	3.751
Academic Emotions	Enjoyment	Control	15.20	3.342	15.53	1.767
	Pride		15.07	2.764	15.47	2.264
	Anxiety		17.53	3.021	16.80	3.688
	Shame		23.93	3.305	23.27	2.963
	Anger		12.93	1.335	12.20	1.521
	Hopelessness		12.33	2.380	12.00	2.726
	Fatigue		33.87	2.722	31.80	4.828
Academic Well-Being			93.80	8.629	93.73	7.245
Academic Vitality			27.53	5.027	27.80	4.229

As shown in Table 1, the intervention group exhibited changes in all research variables; however, the significance of these changes is determined through subsequent statistical analyses.

In assessing the assumptions of multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed that the distribution of variables in both pretest and posttest was normal (P > .05).

The Levene's test for homogeneity of error variances indicated that the assumption of equal variances between the two groups was met (P > .05). To test the equality of variance–covariance matrices, Box's M test was used, which confirmed the assumption was valid (M = 88.35; F = 1.27; P = .108).

Table 2

Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance Between Positive Psychology Intervention Group and Control Group

Source of Variation	Wilks' Lambda	F	p	Eta²
Group Membership	0.057	20.17	.001	.943

According to Table 2, there was a statistically significant difference between the positive psychology intervention group and the control group in academic well-being, academic emotions, and academic vitality (p = .001). The following presents the effect of the positive psychology intervention on each variable.

Table 3

ANCOVA Results of Posttest Scores After Adjusting for Pretest Scores

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Eta²
Group	Enjoyment	24.073	1	24.073	6.337	.021	.250
	Pride	22.475	1	22.475	5.005	.037	.208
	Anxiety	27.279	1	27.279	6.600	.019	.258
	Shame	91.855	1	91.855	22.562	.000	.543
	Anger	3.728	1	3.728	1.363	.258	.067
	Hopelessness	14.019	1	14.019	2.938	.103	.134
	Fatigue	88.232	1	88.232	10.471	.004	.355
	Academic Well-Being	314.836	1	314.836	9.155	.007	.325
	Academic Vitality	419.589	1	419.589	65.625	.000	.775

Based on the results in Table 3, the difference between the intervention group and the control group was statistically significant for all variables except the academic emotions of anger and hopelessness (p < .05). Therefore, the positive psychology intervention was effective in improving academic well-being, academic emotions, and academic vitality in lower secondary school students.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a positive psychology intervention on academic well-being, academic emotions, and academic vitality in lower secondary school students. The findings of the study revealed that the intervention had a statistically significant impact on improving students' academic well-being, increasing positive academic emotions (e.g., enjoyment and pride), reducing negative academic emotions (e.g., anxiety,

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shame, and fatigue), and enhancing academic vitality. These results provide compelling evidence that structured interventions based on the principles of positive psychology can serve as effective tools in supporting adolescents' psychological and educational development during a formative stage of schooling.

The results from multivariate and univariate analyses confirmed that participants in the intervention group showed significant improvement in their academic well-being scores compared to the control group. This finding aligns with prior studies emphasizing the utility of positive psychological training in fostering students' sense of competence, school satisfaction, and emotional engagement with academic tasks. For example, (Abbasi et al., 2021) demonstrated that a positive psychological educational program led to increased coping abilities and academic well-being in students, while (Hashemi et al., 2023) found that positive psychology training, in comparison to resilience and mindfulness approaches, significantly improved students' academic well-being. Moreover, the results of the current study resonate with the findings of (Golestaneh & Behzadi, 2019), who reported enhanced well-being and academic vitality following the implementation of a school-based PPI. These consistent outcomes underscore the robustness of positive psychological approaches in educational interventions aimed at promoting well-being among adolescents.

With regard to academic emotions, the intervention produced notable changes. Specifically, students in the experimental group reported higher levels of enjoyment and pride and lower levels of anxiety, shame, and fatigue in comparison to their peers in the control group. These results are in line with the findings of (Badri et al., 2019), who reported that cognitive emotion regulation training, as part of a positive psychological framework, contributed to the reduction of negative academic emotions among high school students. Additionally, the findings of (Krifa et al., 2021) support this outcome, where an online PPI effectively improved mental health and study engagement by fostering positive emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current results also reflect the conclusions of (Yurayat & Seechaliao, 2021), who noted that positive psychology interventions improved psychological well-being, including emotional states, among undergraduate students. These collective findings reinforce the view that targeting emotional experiences through strength-based interventions can play a critical role in improving students' affective functioning in academic contexts.

The intervention also had a significant effect on academic vitality, defined as the student's ability to maintain energy and persistence in coping with academic challenges. Students in the intervention group demonstrated higher levels of vitality following the 10-session training compared to the control group. This result echoes the work of (Jarsouzeh et al., 2023), which showed that an academic well-being-focused educational program significantly increased students' academic vitality and emotional intelligence. The findings also converge with (Sheikh Al-Islami, 2022), who emphasized the predictive role of academic support and self-concept in academic vitality. Through the lens of positive psychology, vitality can be seen as a function of strengthened internal resources and belief systems—elements that were directly addressed in this study's intervention sessions. Further support for this result comes from (Widlund et al., 2018), who documented significant within-year changes in academic vitality and well-being among lower secondary students, highlighting the modifiable nature of these constructs.

Taken together, the findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research emphasizing the role of positive psychology in educational settings. Studies such as those by (Lambert et al., 2019) and (Naeimi Tajdar et al., 2024) highlight the ability of PPIs to foster happiness, reduce fear, and promote character strengths and self-compassion in diverse cultural and academic environments. These psychological resources are integral to the development of academic resilience, motivation, and a positive identity as a learner. Similarly, (Saleem et al., 2022) found that school-based positive practices played a mediating role in buffering the effects of race-related stress on academic well-being among minority students, underscoring the social-emotional relevance of such interventions. The findings of the current study expand upon these observations by illustrating the practical value of PPIs in the Iranian context, with particular emphasis on adolescent girls in early secondary education.

Moreover, the results reinforce the significance of hope, optimism, and adaptive emotional processing as critical mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of positive psychology-based strategies. Interventions designed around these principles, such as those used in the present study and similar to protocols implemented by (Harifi et al., 2022) and (Heratirad & Miri, 2023), have consistently shown that focusing on strengths rather than deficits can yield substantial improvements in students' emotional and academic outcomes. This perspective aligns with findings from clinical and therapeutic domains, such as the studies by

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(Dandachi-FitzGerald, 2024) and (Olenichenko, 2024), which provide further validation for the broader applicability of positive psychology tools in improving psychological well-being and flexibility across various populations and problem types.

In addition to validating existing models, this study offers an important cultural contribution. While most positive psychology literature has been generated in Western contexts, recent Iranian studies such as (Yekani Zadeh et al., 2018) and (Khorasani, 2024) provide growing support for the adaptability and relevance of such frameworks in local educational and clinical practices. The present study's findings not only confirm the effectiveness of PPIs in the Iranian educational context but also underscore their potential to promote equity and inclusion in mental health programming within schools. By focusing on strengths, engagement, and emotional regulation, PPIs offer a culturally flexible and evidence-based method for addressing the rising psychological needs of students in today's complex educational landscape.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite the valuable insights gained from this research, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted exclusively of female students from a single district in Tabriz, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other gender groups, regions, and cultural contexts. Second, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias or limitations in self-awareness among adolescents. Third, while the quasi-experimental design enhances internal validity, the absence of a long-term follow-up restricts our ability to determine the durability of the observed effects over time. Finally, although random assignment was applied at the group level, the purposive sampling method used to select participants based on low baseline scores may have introduced selection bias.

To address these limitations and expand upon the current findings, future research could incorporate larger and more diverse samples, including male students and students from different geographic and socio-economic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies that track the sustained effects of PPIs across academic years would provide a richer understanding of their long-term impact. In addition, incorporating teacher and parent reports, observational data, or performance-based assessments would enhance the methodological rigor and provide a multi-informant perspective. Future studies might also compare the effectiveness of different positive psychology components (e.g., gratitude, strengths identification, mindfulness) to identify the most impactful elements for specific age groups or psychological profiles.

Given the demonstrated effectiveness of the intervention, it is recommended that schools incorporate structured positive psychology programs into their regular curriculum as part of a broader effort to support students' mental and academic health. Training teachers and school counselors to deliver such interventions can ensure consistency and sustainability. It is also advisable to embed elements of positive psychology in classroom activities, such as promoting positive peer interactions, practicing gratitude exercises, or facilitating goal-setting discussions. Additionally, educational policymakers should consider developing national guidelines that encourage evidence-based positive mental health initiatives tailored to the cultural and developmental needs of students.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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