

THE ROLE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: ENHANCING HAPPINESS FOR ALL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or challenges. However, fostering an inclusive environment that supports both academic success and emotional well-being remains a critical challenge for educators. This study explores the role of positive psychology in creating inclusive classrooms, emphasizing its potential to enhance student happiness, engagement, and overall well-being. Drawing on key principles such as strength-based learning, growth mindset, resilience-building, and social-emotional learning, this paper examines how positive psychology interventions can promote a sense of belonging, reduce stress, and improve peer relationships in diverse educational settings. Through a review of existing literature and case studies, the study highlights successful strategies, including mindfulness practices, character strength development, gratitude exercises, and teacher-student positive interactions, that contribute to a more supportive and joyful learning environment. The research also addresses the role of teachers as facilitators of happiness and well-being, emphasizing the importance of teacher training in positive psychology principles. Findings suggest that integrating positive psychology into inclusive education not only benefits students with special educational needs but also enhances the overall classroom climate, fostering a culture of empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect. The study concludes that by prioritizing happiness and emotional well-being, schools can create more effective, inclusive, and psychologically safe learning environments for all learners.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Inclusive Education, Student Well-being, Happiness, Strength-Based Learning, Social-Emotional Learning, Growth Mindset

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of learners, not just academically but also emotionally and socially. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on creating inclusive classrooms—learning environments that accommodate diverse learners, including those with different abilities, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. However, ensuring that all students feel valued, supported, and happy in such settings remains a challenge. Positive psychology, a field pioneered by Martin Seligman, focuses on fostering strengths, well-being, and happiness rather than just addressing deficits. In the context of education, positive psychology offers a framework for promoting emotional resilience, motivation, and a sense of belonging among students. By integrating its principles into teaching strategies, educators can enhance student engagement, reduce stress, and create an inclusive atmosphere where all learners thrive.

Research suggests that when students experience positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, and optimism, their cognitive abilities and social interactions improve. Inclusive classrooms that incorporate positive psychology practices—such as mindfulness, strengths-based learning, and gratitude exercises—can foster a sense of belonging and happiness for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or challenges. Moreover, teachers who apply positive psychology techniques can develop a more supportive and empathetic teaching approach, further enhancing inclusivity.

This study explores the role of positive psychology in fostering inclusivity in classrooms and enhancing happiness for all learners. It seeks to identify strategies that educators can use to integrate positive psychology into their teaching practices, ultimately promoting student well-being and academic success. By examining the relationship between positive psychology and inclusive education, this research aims to contribute to the development of more equitable, emotionally supportive, and engaging learning environments.

1.2 Objectives of Positive Psychology in Education

- To examine the principles of positive psychology
- To explore the impact of positive psychology interventions

- To identify strategies for integrating positive psychology
- To assess the role of teacher attitudes and behaviors
- To evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness, gratitude, and resilience-building techniques
- To investigate how positive psychology fosters a sense of belonging
- To analyze the relationship between student happiness and academic performance
- To provide recommendations for educators and policymakers

1.3 Meaning of Positive Psychology in Education

Positive psychology in education revolves around applying principles that help students and teachers thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. It shifts the focus from traditional education models that prioritize performance and discipline to approaches that emphasize strengths, optimism, and well-being.

1.4 Definition of Positive Psychology in Education

Positive psychology in education is the application of psychological principles that focus on enhancing students' well-being, strengths, and overall happiness to create a more engaging and supportive learning environment. It emphasizes fostering positive emotions, resilience, motivation, and meaningful relationships to improve both academic success and personal development.

This approach shifts the traditional focus of education from merely correcting weaknesses and academic achievement to developing students' strengths, promoting well-being, and encouraging a growth mindset. It helps students to cultivate self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to a more inclusive and effective learning experience.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Positive psychology has emerged as a crucial field in education, focusing on strengths, well-being, and fostering an environment that enhances happiness among learners. In inclusive classrooms, where students come from diverse backgrounds and abilities, the application of positive psychology can play a vital role in creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. This literature review examines existing research on the impact of positive psychology in inclusive education and its role in enhancing student happiness

Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation: Studies shows that mindfulness practices improve students' attention, emotional regulation, and stress management, leading to a more positive classroom environment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Strength-Based Learning: Research by Peterson & Seligman (2004) indicates that focusing on students' strengths rather than deficits enhances self-efficacy and engagement in learning.

Growth Mindset and Resilience: Dweck's (2006) theory of a growth mindset suggests that fostering resilience and perseverance helps all students, particularly those facing learning difficulties.

Happiness Curriculum in India: The Delhi Government introduced the "Happiness Curriculum" in 2018, emphasizing mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and well-being among school children (Government of Delhi, 2018). Initial studies indicate that students who participate in such programs show improved emotional stability and classroom participation.

Teacher behavior significantly influences student well-being and inclusion. According to Hattie (2009), positive teacher-student relationships contribute to a sense of belonging and increase academic motivation. When teachers practice gratitude, kindness, and empathy, they create an emotionally safe environment that benefits all learners, particularly those with special educational needs (Fredrickson, 2004).

1.5 Importance of Inclusivity in Classrooms

Inclusive classrooms create a learning environment where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or learning styles, feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed. Inclusivity goes beyond physical integration; it ensures that every student has equal opportunities to participate, learn, and thrive in a respectful and diverse educational setting.

1.5.1 Why Inclusivity is Important in Classrooms:

1. Promotes Equal Learning Opportunities

Ensures that all students, including those with disabilities, different cultural backgrounds, or learning difficulties, receive the support they need. Helps bridge educational gaps by providing tailored teaching methods that accommodate diverse learners.

2. Enhances Academic Performance

Research shows that students in inclusive classrooms perform better due to a supportive and collaborative learning environment. Differentiated instruction meets individual learning needs, allowing students to reach their full potential.

3. Fosters Social and Emotional Growth

Encourages students to develop empathy, respect, and understanding toward others from different backgrounds. Strengthens social skills by promoting teamwork, communication, and positive peer relationships.

4. Prepares Students for a Diverse Society

Exposure to diverse perspectives helps students become open-minded and adaptable to real-world challenges. Encourages acceptance and reduces prejudice, creating a more tolerant and inclusive society.

5. Boosts Self-Confidence and Well-Being

When students feel included and valued, their self-esteem and motivation increase. Reduces feelings of isolation, anxiety, and discrimination among marginalized students.

6. Encourages a Growth Mindset

Helps students see differences as strengths rather than barriers. Promotes resilience and perseverance by teaching that all students can succeed with the right support.

7. Supports Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Inclusive classrooms foster strong relationships between teachers and students by recognizing individual strengths and challenges. Teachers adopt flexible teaching strategies, making education more engaging and meaningful for all.

1.6 Key Concepts of Positive Psychology in Education:

Well-being and Happiness in Learning:

Schools should promote not just academic success but also emotional and psychological well-being. A happy and emotionally balanced student is more engaged, motivated, and likely to succeed.

The PERMA Model (Seligman's Framework for Well-Being):

Positive psychology in education is often guided by Seligman's PERMA model, which consists of five key elements of well-being: P – Positive Emotions: Encouraging joy, gratitude, and optimism in learning.

E – Engagement: Helping students find interest and immersion in their studies.

R – Relationships: Building strong peer and teacher relationships that foster a sense of belonging.

M – Meaning: Connecting learning to a sense of purpose and real-life applications.

A – Accomplishment: Setting and achieving goals to build confidence and motivation.

Growth Mindset and Strength-Based Learning:

Encouraging students to see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than failures.

Identifying and developing students' strengths instead of focusing only on weaknesses.

Resilience and Grit:

Teaching students how to bounce back from failures and develop perseverance.

Helping learners develop emotional intelligence and coping strategies

Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation:

Incorporating mindfulness techniques to reduce stress and increase focus.

Teaching students emotional self-regulation to improve behavior and concentration.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships:

A supportive and caring teacher fosters a safe and inclusive environment.

Teachers using positive reinforcement and encouragement boost student confidence and motivation.

Inclusivity and Diversity:

Recognizing and valuing students' diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities.

Creating a classroom culture where all learners feel respected, valued, and included.

Impact of Positive Psychology in Education:

Enhanced student motivation and engagement.

Improved academic performance and problem-solving skills.

Better mental health and reduced stress among students.

Stronger social skills and peer relationships:

A more inclusive, supportive, and empathetic classroom environment.

Definition of Positive Psychology in Education

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This approach shifts the traditional focus of education from merely correcting weaknesses and academic achievement to developing students' strengths, promoting well-being, and encouraging a growth mindset. It helps students cultivate self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to a more inclusive and effective learning experience.

1.7 How Positive Psychology Supports Diverse Learners

Positive psychology provides a strengths-based approach that fosters well-being, resilience, and motivation, helping diverse learners feel valued and empowered in the classroom. By focusing on students' strengths rather than deficits, positive psychology creates an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all learners, regardless of background, ability, or learning style, can thrive.

How Positive Psychology Supports Diverse Learners

1. Enhances Self-Confidence and Strengths Development

Encourages students to recognize and build on their unique strengths and abilities. Promotes a growth mindset, helping students view challenges as opportunities for learning rather than failures. Strengths-based learning boosts self-esteem and motivates students to reach their full potential.

2. Promotes Emotional Resilience and Well-Being

Teaches coping strategies like mindfulness and self-reflection to help students manage stress and anxiety. Encourages emotional regulation techniques, such as gratitude exercises and positive self-talk, which improve mental health. Helps students develop resilience, allowing them to bounce back from setbacks and maintain a positive attitude toward learning.

3. Supports Inclusive and Collaborative Learning Environments

Encourages positive teacher-student relationships, fostering a sense of belonging. Promotes peer support and teamwork, ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds feel included. Helps create a classroom culture that values empathy, kindness, and mutual respect.

4. Increases Student Engagement and Motivation

Incorporates intrinsic motivation techniques, such as goal-setting and celebrating small achievements. Uses engaging, student-centered activities that make learning meaningful and enjoyable. Helps students find personal relevance in their studies, increasing interest and long-term commitment to learning.

5. Addresses Individual Learning Needs

Encourages personalized learning approaches that accommodate different learning styles. Uses differentiated instruction, ensuring that all students receive the support they need. Provides opportunities for self-directed learning, helping students take ownership of their education.

6. Reduces Stress and Anxiety in the Classroom

Practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and gratitude exercises help students develop emotional balance. Encourages the use of positive affirmations and encouragement, creating a low-stress learning environment. Supports students with anxiety or learning difficulties by focusing on progress rather than perfection.

7. Encourages a Positive and Inclusive Mindset Among Teachers

Helps educators adopt a strengths-based perspective rather than a deficit-focused approach. Equips teachers with tools to create supportive and emotionally safe classrooms. Encourages culturally responsive teaching, ensuring that all students feel seen and respected.

1.8 Key Roles of Teachers in Promoting a Positive and Inclusive Classroom

1. Creating a Supportive and Respectful Classroom Culture: Establish clear expectations for respect, kindness, and collaboration. Encourage open communication, allowing students to express themselves without fear of judgment. Foster a sense of belonging by celebrating diversity and ensuring all voices are heard.

2. Encouraging a Growth Mindset Teach students that intelligence and abilities can grow through effort and persistence. Praise effort and improvement rather than just results. Use positive language to reframe mistakes as learning opportunities.

3. Building Strong Teacher-Student Relationships Show genuine interest in students' lives, backgrounds, and challenges. Provide emotional support to help students navigate difficulties in and outside of school. Act as a mentor and role model, demonstrating empathy, patience, and respect.

4. Using Strengths-Based Teaching Approaches Identify students' unique strengths and talents and integrate them into lessons. Offer personalized learning opportunities to cater to different abilities and learning styles. Encourage students to use their strengths to overcome challenges.

5. Implementing Positive Psychology Strategies Use the PERMA model (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) to enhance student well-being. Introduce mindfulness practices like deep breathing and gratitude exercises to reduce stress.

Incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) to help students develop self-awareness, empathy, and relationship skills.

6. Promoting Collaboration and Peer Support Organize group activities that encourage teamwork and cooperation. Pair students of different abilities and backgrounds to foster peer learning and inclusion. Teach conflict resolution skills to help students handle disagreements constructively.

7. Differentiating Instruction to Meet Diverse Learning Needs Use varied teaching strategies to accommodate different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Provide scaffolding and support for struggling students while offering challenges for advanced learners. Adapt assessments to ensure fair opportunities for all students to demonstrate their learning.

8. Encouraging Positive Reinforcement and Motivation Use praise and encouragement to reinforce good behavior and achievements. Set achievable goals and celebrate students' progress, no matter how small. Offer intrinsic motivation by making learning meaningful and personally relevant.

9. Creating an Emotionally Safe Environment Address bullying and discrimination immediately to ensure a safe space for all learners. Encourage self-expression and active participation by making students feel valued. Teach students coping strategies for handling stress and setbacks.

10. Leading by Example

Demonstrate kindness, patience, and respect in daily interactions. Show enthusiasm for learning and a positive attitude toward challenges. Be open to continuous learning and self-improvement, modeling a growth mindset for students.

1.9 Role of Peer Relationships and Classroom Culture in Enhancing Happiness

A positive and inclusive classroom environment, shaped by strong peer relationships and a supportive classroom culture, plays a crucial role in fostering student happiness. When students feel connected to their peers and comfortable in their learning environment, they experience greater well-being, motivation, and academic success.

1. Role of Peer Relationships in Enhancing Happiness

a) Promotes a Sense of Belonging: Strong peer relationships create a supportive social network, reducing feelings of isolation. When students feel accepted and valued by their classmates, their overall well-being improves.

b) Encourages Collaboration and Teamwork: Working with peers on group projects and discussions fosters teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills. Collaborative learning helps students gain new perspectives and develop empathy.

c) Provides Emotional Support : Peer relationships act as a buffer against stress, as students can share their challenges and seek support. Positive friendships contribute to higher self-esteem and emotional resilience.

d) Reduces Bullying and Promotes Inclusivity: A strong peer support system discourages bullying and encourages kindness and respect. When students advocate for each other, the classroom becomes a safe and welcoming space for all.

e) Increases Engagement and Motivation: Friendships make learning more enjoyable, leading to higher participation and enthusiasm. Positive peer influence encourages students to stay motivated and strive for success.

2. Role of Classroom Culture in Enhancing Happiness

a) Creates a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment: A culture of respect, empathy, and acceptance allows students to express themselves freely. When students feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to engage in learning and take creative risks.

b) Reinforces Positive Behavior and Emotional Well-Being: Classroom norms that promote kindness, gratitude, and encouragement contribute to student happiness. Daily practices like gratitude journaling, affirmations, and mindfulness exercises support emotional well-being.

c) Encourages Student Autonomy and Voice: Allowing students to contribute ideas and make decisions fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment. When students feel heard, they develop a stronger connection to their learning environment.

d) Supports Growth Mindset and Resilience: A positive classroom culture promotes learning from mistakes rather than fearing failure. Encouraging a growth mindset helps students stay optimistic and persistent in their efforts.

e) Strengthens Teacher-Student Relationships: A classroom culture that values open communication and mutual respect enhances students' trust in their teachers. Positive teacher-student interactions contribute to greater academic engagement and overall happiness.

1.10 Potential Challenges in Implementing Positive Psychology in Diverse Classrooms

While positive psychology can significantly enhance inclusivity and well-being in classrooms, implementing it in diverse educational settings comes with several challenges. These challenges may arise due to differences in student needs, cultural backgrounds, resource limitations, and teacher preparedness. Below are some key obstacles and ways to address them:

1. Diverse Learning Needs and Abilities

Challenge: Students have varying cognitive, emotional, and social needs, making it difficult to apply a one-size-fits-all approach. Some students may require individualized support that goes beyond general positive psychology interventions.

Solution: Use differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities. Implement personalized positive psychology strategies, such as goal-setting and strengths-based learning tailored to each student.

2. Cultural Differences and Beliefs

Challenge: Concepts like mindfulness, gratitude, and self-affirmation may not align with all students' cultural or religious backgrounds. Some students may not be familiar with or receptive to positive psychology principles due to different cultural perceptions of success and well-being.

Solution: Adapt positive psychology strategies to be culturally responsive and inclusive of all backgrounds. Encourage open discussions about well-being that respect different values and traditions.

3. Resistance from Students and Parents

Challenge: Some students may be skeptical about the benefits of positive psychology or feel uncomfortable discussing emotions. Parents may prioritize academic achievement over well-being-focused interventions.

Solution: Gradually introduce positive psychology through small, engaging activities (e.g., gratitude journaling, peer support). Educate parents about the long-term benefits of well-being on academic success and personal development.

4. Lack of Teacher Training and Awareness

Challenge: Many teachers may not have formal training in positive psychology or social-emotional learning (SEL). Educators might struggle to balance well-being practices with academic demands.

Solution: Provide professional development workshops to help teachers integrate positive psychology into their teaching practices. Encourage collaboration between teachers, psychologists, and counselors to develop effective well-being programs.

5. Limited Time and Curriculum Pressure

Challenge: Teachers already have packed schedules and may struggle to incorporate positive psychology without disrupting academic goals. Standardized testing and curriculum demands often take precedence over well-being initiatives.

Solution: Integrate positive psychology into existing lessons rather than treating it as an extra task (e.g., using growth mindset language in feedback). Incorporate brief well-being exercises (e.g., mindfulness breaks, student check-ins) that do not take up significant class time.

6. Measuring the Impact of Positive Psychology Interventions

Challenge: Unlike test scores, well-being and happiness are difficult to measure quantitatively. Schools may struggle to assess whether positive psychology strategies are truly benefiting students.

Solution: Use qualitative methods, such as student self-reflections, feedback surveys, and teacher observations, to gauge impact. Implement long-term studies that track student engagement, emotional resilience, and motivation over time.

7. Addressing Mental Health Challenges in a Classroom Setting

Challenge: Some students may have mental health conditions that require professional intervention beyond classroom strategies. Teachers are not trained psychologists and may not be equipped to handle complex emotional needs.

Solution: Work closely with school counselors, psychologists, and support staff to ensure students receive appropriate help. Create an emotionally safe environment where students feel comfortable seeking help when needed.

1.11 Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Inclusion and Happiness in Classrooms

Creating an inclusive and happy classroom requires an understanding of how cultural and socio-economic factors influence students' experiences, well-being, and participation. These factors shape students' perspectives, learning styles, and emotional well-being, impacting how they engage in the classrooms.

1. Cultural Factors Affecting Inclusion and Happiness

a) **Language Barriers:** Students from non-native language backgrounds may struggle to communicate, participate, and connect with peers. Language difficulties can lead to isolation, frustration, and lower self-esteem. Teachers may also face challenges in assessing students' true abilities due to language gaps. Use multilingual resources and visual aids to support understanding. So, teachers should encourage peer support programs where

multilingual students can help each other. Foster a classroom culture that values linguistic diversity through bilingual activities.

b) Different Cultural Values and Norms : Some students come from cultures that emphasize collectivism (group harmony) rather than individualism (personal achievement). Norms around expressing emotions, questioning authority, or participating in discussions may vary. Certain students may feel excluded if classroom expectations do not align with their cultural background.

c) Religious and Traditional Beliefs: Some students' religious beliefs may impact their participation in certain activities, celebrations, or discussions. Religious dietary restrictions, dress codes, or prayer times may affect students' daily routines.

Solution: Be mindful of religious diversity when planning activities and classroom discussions.

Provide accommodations (e.g., prayer space, alternative assignments) when needed.

Encourage open conversations about different beliefs to foster mutual respect.

d) Discrimination and Bias: Stereotypes, racism, and unconscious biases can make students feel excluded or undervalued. Bullying and microaggressions may lead to stress, low self-esteem, and disengagement from learning.

Solution:

Implement anti-bias training for teachers and students. Encourage inclusivity through classroom discussions, books, and media that represent diverse cultures. Address discrimination promptly and create a zero-tolerance policy for bias and exclusion.

2. Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Inclusion and Happiness

a) Access to Resources and Technology

Students from lower-income families may lack access to books, internet, school supplies, or private tutoring.

Digital divide: Limited access to technology can make it difficult for students to keep up with assignments and online learning.

Solution: Provide free or subsidized learning materials for students in need.

Create school-based programs that offer technology access (e.g., computer labs, loaner devices).

Use low-cost, offline learning methods to ensure accessibility.

b) Financial Stress and Family Responsibilities:

Some students may experience financial insecurity, food shortages, or unstable housing, leading to stress and difficulty focusing in school.

Older students may have work responsibilities or need to care for siblings, affecting their academic performance.

Solution: Connect families with school social workers or community support programs.

Offer flexible learning opportunities (e.g., extended deadlines, online learning options).

Create a compassionate learning environment where students feel supported rather than pressured.

c) Parental Education and Involvement

Parents with limited education or language barriers may struggle to support their child's learning at home. Some families prioritize work over school involvement due to economic demands.

Solution:

Offer parent workshops to help families understand how to support their children academically.

Provide translated materials and community liaisons to improve communication with non-native speakers.

Encourage flexible parent involvement, such as virtual meetings or weekend school events.

d) Nutritional and Health Disparities: Malnutrition or lack of access to healthcare can lead to fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and frequent absences. Mental health struggles may go unaddressed due to financial barriers.

Solution:

Implement school meal programs to support students facing food insecurity. Provide mental health resources and school counseling services. Encourage physical well-being through exercise, mindfulness, and wellness programs.

CONCLUSION

Positive psychology empowers diverse learners by fostering self-confidence, emotional resilience, engagement, and inclusivity. By integrating these principles, educators can create classrooms where every student feels valued, supported, and capable of achieving their best. By integrating strategies, educators can create a positive, inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued, supported, and motivated to learn. Positive psychology not only enhances academic achievement but also nurtures well-being, emotional resilience, and social skills, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable for diverse learners. Teachers are the foundation of a positive and inclusive learning environment. By fostering strong relationships, encouraging strengths-based learning, and promoting psychology. well-being, they help all students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Through their actions, teachers can empower diverse learners, build confidence, and create a classroom culture where every student feels valued and supported. Peer relationships and classroom culture are

fundamental to student happiness and well-being. When students feel supported by their peers and surrounded by a positive learning environment, they are more likely to be engaged, confident, and emotionally resilient. By fostering strong social connections and a culture of inclusion, respect, and positivity, educators can create a happy, thriving learning community for all learners. While implementing positive psychology in diverse classrooms presents challenges, these obstacles can be overcome through culturally responsive practices, teacher training, and adaptable strategies. By addressing these challenges proactively, educators can create a more inclusive, supportive, and engaging learning environment that enhances happiness for all learners. Cultural and socio-economic factors significantly impact students' happiness, sense of belonging, and ability to learn. By understanding these challenges and proactively addressing them, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment where all students feel valued and empowered to succeed.

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