

## English major students' perceptions towards positive education

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### Abstract

*Positive education (PosEd) is considered the ideal model of the combination of the positive Psychology principle and well-being. However, the system of education in Vietnam has seldom applied this model in spite of facing a lot of problems in the school environment. The article aims to point out the positive changes in the environment of higher education in Vietnam as PosEd is implemented. The attitude of university learners is investigated to clarify how they accept this new model. Using the quantitative method with eighty-five students, Ho Chi Minh University Foreign Languages - Information Technology (Hufilit) and Hong Bang International University (HIU), were selected randomly, the study is taken from the connection between positive education and students' perception. The data collection through the survey expressed educators considers applying this to deal with many troubles in the school environment. The results demonstrate university students' views approach this new model because of a lot of practical support. Hence, lots of adjustment and implementation to educational curriculums always bring expected learning outcomes more effectively.*

**Keywords:** *English major, perception, positive education*

### 1. Introduction

Being public since 2000 by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, Positive Psychology has been impressive achievements in research and practice. It has been broadened in many fields like organizations and work, health, education, etc. Positive Education (PosEd) - an approach of Positive Psychology in education has been widely studied over recent years. After applying successfully, the first model of PosEd: PERMA-H at Geelong Grammar School since 2008 in Australia (Norrish et al., 2013; Seligman et al., 2009), PosEd has been taken off all levels of education (pre-school, primary, secondary, high school and higher education) on over the world (Seligman, 2011; McCallum and Price, 2015; Seligman and Adler, 2019). Pranjic (2018) stated that PosEd played an

important part in developing students' development in universities. The effects of PosEd on students in higher universities have been assured by a lot of studies around the world (Adler and Seligman, 2016; Seligman and Adler, 2019).

Tertiary educational reform in particular and all of the education system becomes a big deal in Vietnam. Besides mobilising resources, it requires close coordination of all educational institutions and relevant government authorities. It also faces inadequacies when applying a new model of education in practice. Moreover, in Vietnam, most curriculums still follow traditional education. As a result, students become passive learners who cannot exploit their potentials. The problems which are discussed in the study will be invaluable contributions for the next steps in

transforming the current educational system to PosEd in the future.

The paper aims to clarify basic knowledge of PosEd. Particularly, this proposed thesis provides its framework as well as evaluate the impacts of PosEd on perceptions at the Faculty of English Department in Huflit and HIU by using quantitative data analysis through the research questions: (1) Why is PosEd considered a new “model” that is applied in universities?; (2) How do students perceive as approaching the issues relating to PosEd?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The development of the positive education models**

PosEd was defined as traditional education focused on nurturing well-being and developing good mental health (Seligman et al., 2009; Seligman, 2011). Besides, in Bounce Back Wellbeing and Resilience program referred to PosEd as: “The integration of the core principles of positive psychology with evidence-inform structures, practices and programs that enhance both wellbeing and academic achievement” (Noble and McGrath, 2015). Also, White (2014) and Waters and White (2015) stated that the term “PosEd” is used to “describe empirically validated interventions and programs from positive psychology that have an impact on student wellbeing”. In general, we can realise that definitions of PosEd have several similarities. Despite illustrating by a lot of different ways, all of them are regarded to the common aim of PosEd: nurturing and strengthen the wellbeing of students through applying PosEd programs to practice.

Over the past two decades, PosEd had remarkable development in creating wellbeing frameworks. First of all, the PERMA model, which is considered the

pioneer model to motivate and contribute to wellbeing, consists of five elements which stand for five alphabets “PERMA”: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishments (Seligman, 2011). Many research has proved the PERMA components increase the wellbeing of students and prevent problems of psychology (Forgeard and Kern, 2011).

After successfully applying the PERMA model, many studies relating to improving the model of PosEd. Particularly, the PERMAH framework includes six elements instead of five elements like PERMA. “Health” played an important part to maintain PosEd through sleep, exercise and diet (Norrish et al., 2013; Norrish and Seligman, 2015). Geelong Grammar School is the first pioneer PosEd model (Norrish et al., 2013).

Moreover, to encourage students’ wellbeing and help to build a friendly environment at school, the PROSPER framework has been discovered with seven key elements: Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement and Resilience (Noble and McGrath, 2015).

### **2.2. Positive education in higher education**

The term “Positive University” was first defined as a positive institution that includes activities built by positive characters to serve the collective and several goals (Oades et al., 2011). Later, Tecmilenio University - the first place applied PosEd to university claimed Positive University as “a learning community that cultivates the best self in each person, allowing them to flourish, to discover their purpose in life, and to benefit society” (Seligman and Adler, 2019). Taking inspiration from the PERMA

model, Teamilenio created the “Wellbeing and Happiness Ecosystem” for their university. This program brings considerable benefits for students at Tecmilenio University, Mexico. Particularly, Adler (2017) mentioned that PosEd could expand the job opportunities and build the well-being of students at this university with a “learning-by-doing” approach when they graduate.

Moreover, the positive effects of PosEd on learners in university have been proved by some research papers. van Nieuwerburgh (2017) stated PosEd brought lots of advantages in improving mental health of students in the Universities UK by introducing a mental health program in higher education. Seligman and Adler (2019) focused on the effects of PosEd with a conclusion that PosEd enhanced the rate of passing the entrance exam of students. Furthermore, PosEd plays an important part in supporting students to return to school after COVID-19. Arslan and Burke (2021) pointed out more students who approached PosEd programs tend to become happier and easily adapt to come back to school after COVID-19 closure.

In brief, across these studies, PosEd brings significant effects on university students around the world. Nonetheless, PosEd is still a quite novel concept in Vietnam. PosEd programs that do exist seem to operate rather sporadically in universities. There is a lack of research on the effects of PosEd on college students in Vietnam. This makes Vietnam’s education system have difficulties in gathering data that are served for reforming education in the future.

To clarify the process of perceptions, the term “perception” has been seen in many studies. Rahmat (2016) discover that perception is the experimentation about

objects, events and relationships by synthesizing bits of information and interpreting the message. Besides, many researchers have proved that the process of perception also is ingesting information to the sensory store. In psychology, perception (perceptio or Percipio in the Latin language) is the process to organize, identify and interpret information from the senses (Schacter, 2011). Based on the evaluation of experts, the researcher concludes that the perception of students is using five senses to observe an object, receive and interpret the information. Entwistle et al. (2001) discovered that perception of teaching has more affection for students’ learning than the teaching method. Weil et al. (2001) stated that perceptions help students develop key business skills and find a positive effect in accounting. Besides, students’ perceptions affected their academic performance. In particular, students’ perceptions affected their motivation to study (Greene et al., 2004). For example, studying students is the process of observing and receiving information. When they have a good preparation to take cognizance of the importance of studying, students’ ability of comprehension will be better more than others.

To sum up, this chapter provides evidence which proves that PosEd brings many benefits for university students and the importance of perceptions’ students to study in higher universities. From that, the researcher discovers that PosEd and perceptions’ students have close attachments in higher educational environment. To put PosEd programs into universities, the first step we need to provide convincing evidence about the benefits of PosEd and evaluate the necessity of perception’ students in the university.

### 3. Research methodology

The study involved fifty students from the Faculty of English Department, HUFLIT, and thirty-five students from HIU. Even more strikingly, the Foreign Language Department is one of the proudest achievements at university, especially the English Department. With its experience and professionalism, both have turned out most students who have majored in English and soft skills. PosEd was introduced since the writer was in charge of Module 1 - Principles and Teaching English as a Second Language as both a specialized and optional subject. With an obvious belief, exception of standards teaching methods, universities students with deep visions can apply this frame in the future.

To enhance the knowledge and assist learners realise the value of PosEd. The questionnaire was designed with typical opened-questions. Five of them were investigated with appropriate contents like (1) the activities of the model PosEd, (2) the subjects taking the PosEd, (3) the subjects benefiting from the PosEd, (4) reactions of the students when facing problems in their school time, (5) students' opinion about organizing PosEd programs at universities. All the questions are constructed in Google Form.

### 4. Results and Discussions

#### 4.1. The effects of PosEd

The activities of PosEd were up to the choices of the respondents. The data revealed that most of the answers were chosen by respondents. However, the option "Teachers and staff always work with a positive spirit and are willing to share difficulties with students such as feelings, health, etc" was considered the best answer with 70 options. Conversely, the option "The extra classes are opened to support

and motivate the potential students" was voted the lowest answer with 26 options. Besides that, the option "Students are encouraged to raise their hands to participate in their lesson during class" and "Students are taught both subjects and life skills" received 43 and 59 votes, respectively.

The survey's result revealed that all populations like students, parents, teachers and others had to take this model. However, with the highest votes, 74 options, students in all levels from pre-school to higher education were the priority target group who needed to participate in PosEd courses. Receiving 58 choices, teachers and others in the education field were the second most important group who needed to take this model in order to behave correctly with their students. Moreover, parents who were got 33 polls also needed to study this model to learn how to have good behaviour with their children. With 17 choices, the factor "only objects are learners who have demands to study" got the lowest vote.

#### 4.2. The subjects benefiting from the PosEd

"Students" received the highest option from 70 student-respondents. The second to the highest number with the answer "Teachers and staff at school" got 61 choices. "Educational institutions" and "Businesses" were chosen by 52 and 28 respondents, respectively. On the other hand, "Investors" got the lowest number with 14 options.

#### 4.3. The benefits of PosEd

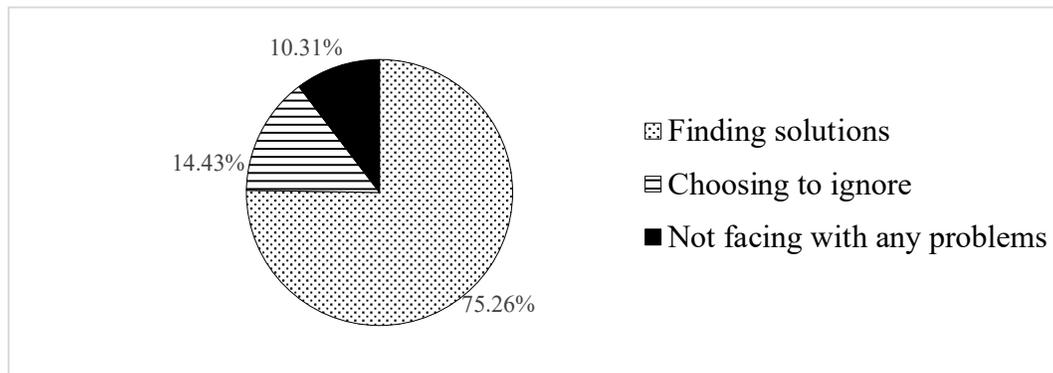
A frequency of 62 students revealed that "Students can get both physical and mental development" may be the best advantage of PosEd in their respondents. The second to highest answer was "The relationship between teachers and their students is getting better" which got 56 student-respondents. There were 55

respondents think that school culture is based on positive aspects such as truth, sharing and sympathy. Conversely, the lowest number was 43 votes with an interpretation “Everyone is supported to learn and develop as good citizens”.

**4.4. Reactions of students when facing problems in their school time**

The reactions of the students when they

faced their problems in their school time were shown in Figure 1. There were 73 students or 75% of the 97 selected students answered that they were willing to find solutions to solve them. Besides, 14 of them or 15% said that they decided to ignore their problem. Surprisingly, the rest of them who accounted for 10% were lucky because of not facing these problems

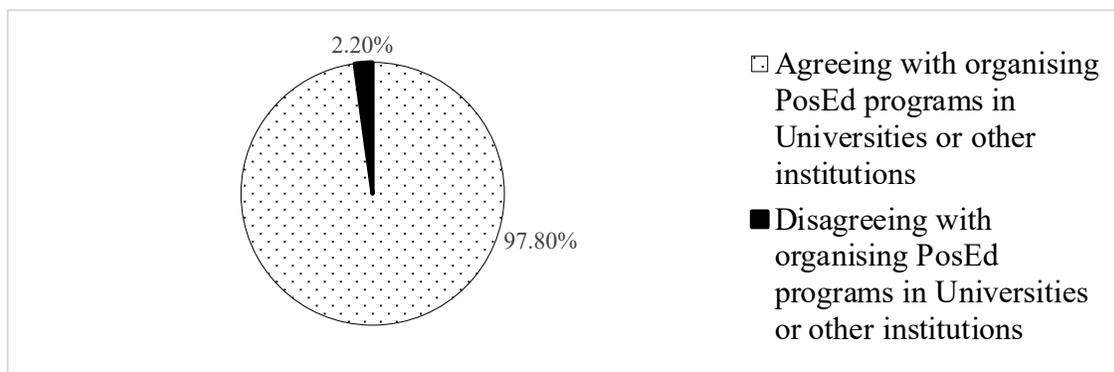


**Figure 1.** Reactions of students when facing problems in their school time

**4.5. Students’ opinion about organizing PosEd programs at universities**

There was 98% of the 85 selected students agreed with organising PosEd programs in

universities or other institutions. It proved that most students realised how effects of PosEd on students in particular and the system of education in general (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Students’ opinions about organizing PosEd programs in Universities

The study claims why educators should apply PosEd in universities and prove the positive effects of PosEd on students’ perception through providing evidence in the Literature Review and the useful suggestions that expressed in the answers of

survey. In particular, some detailed information is given about PosEd to respondents that make them feel easier when facing a new topic. Moreover, the research also helps students have different visions of the new model in education. That

can increase their knowledge and get positive perceptions when accessing the new model like PosEd. Particularly, real and effective positive perceptions of respondents are shown by the ways they answer or respond to two open-ended questions. For example, in the first open-ended questions, they gave some convincing explanations to demonstrate why PosEd has more remarkable advantages than traditional education. A senior said: "The remarkable advantages of PosEd that students get more than the traditional education is the student have more knowledge in their life, they can interact with the case will meet in the real-life and know how to deal with it. They can be flexible when they face a tough situation and be more creative in ideas". Besides, a freshman has his perception of this situation: "From my perception, the biggest change PosEd can make is improve student mental health. In Vietnam, people don't care much about their mental health but as society develops more and more mental health problems come up regularly. In the school environment, students have to deal with a lot of stress may be a bit too much for their age leading to anxiety, depression or in some worst-case suicide". Furthermore, in the second one, reasonable perceptions of respondents are also provided by their answers for organising PosEd programs in universities or institutions. Therefore, the effects of PosEd will change their mind and lead them to understand the importance of PosEd to education in general and to themselves in particular.

Additionally, the findings of the study paved the way for an approach of the new model to education in Vietnam that has advantages for various stakeholders. This encourages students to study and find their

true value. And, most importantly, educators in the system of education in Vietnam take a different view about building up education on a new positive foundation and put into practice. However, some limitations still exist to improve for the application to make positive effects on future researches. Firstly, the sample size was limited to the group of students and distributed unequally. This affects the results which reflect perceptions of the target group instead of the students at tertiary level in general. That is not enough to generalize the results for the students at higher education in general. Besides, it depends on the answers of the questionnaire without interviewing individuals directly or using quantitative methods to evaluate students' perceptions about the issue.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

While the applications of PosEd are by now common in higher education on over the world, a country like Vietnam still considers it is an unfamiliar topic. In this research, the effects of PosEd on students' perceptions were examined by quantitative data analysis. The respondents who took part in this survey demonstrated positive changes in their perceptions through their responses in the questionnaire. Besides having a new view about the model of education, they also realise what makes them live meaningfully and happily. Moreover, this contributes to finding a sound line in the education system in Vietnam. In addition, PosEd is an ideal model and individuals to groups get positive effects when realise the value of PosEd. Overall, it would represent a significant step towards better education.

The paper suggests a new vision about PosEd and encourages it to apply in universities in particular and all levels of education in general. It emphasizes positive

effects on learners and others. Besides engaging the potentials of learners, PosEd can be used to encourage educators to determine what the ultimate aim and true meaning of education are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nevertheless, the more optimistic results need to be studied on a large scale for students, lecturers and educators to obtain common views and agreements towards a new model. This influences changes, adjustments, implements to educational curriculums to get expected learning outcomes better and more effectively. Hence, the writer believes concentrating on data with the participants from different universities and institutions as well as the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods are to attain objective and beneficial effects.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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