



Research on Enhancing Teachers' and Students' Sense of Gain Based on Strength-Based Development from the Perspective of Positive Education

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-8261

Volume: 04

Issue: 04

July - August 2025

Received: 01-07-2025

Accepted: 25-07-2025

Published: 11-08-2025

Page No: 120-125

Abstract

Guided by positive psychology, positive education emphasizes starting from individual strengths to cultivate participants' positive experiences and ultimately enhance teachers' and students' sense of gain. This means that positive education should not only elevate subjective well-being to make individuals "feel good," but also empower them to lead meaningful lives by strengthening their positive qualities or strengths. Positive education provides a value-driven pathway for educational optimization—toward positivity. It appropriately integrates three educational tasks, aiming to nurture students' strengths while attending to the positive experiences of every student (whether struggling, average, or high-achieving). This approach effectively complements and addresses the shortcomings of traditional education. Schools should establish a curriculum framework centered on "experiential courses, specialized courses, and practical courses," based on strength-based education and national curriculum standards.

Keywords: Positive Education, Sense of Gain, Strength-Based Development

1. Introduction

Whenever schools are mentioned, the common perception is that they are places for "imparting knowledge, addressing doubts, and guiding moral growth," where students come to learn and acquire information. However, since ancient times, there has been a saying about "the Three Ups" (bedside, saddle, and lavatory) – a reminder that learning can occur anytime and anywhere, suggesting that schools are not the sole venue for education.

Moreover, with rapid technological advancements, the proliferation of online schools, and the emergence of artificial intelligence, educational methods and mediums have become increasingly diversified. Access to knowledge and educational opportunities has grown more accessible, casting doubt on the irreplaceable value of schools.

Meanwhile, traditional Chinese culture has long advocated that "the path to scholarly mountains is paved with diligence, and the voyage across the sea of learning requires the raft of hardship." This has reinforced the stereotype of school education as a grueling, laborious process. For many students, the end of holidays marks the end of happiness. While diligence and perseverance in study are undoubtedly essential, why can education not carry a touch of warmth like sunlight? Why cannot students learn joyfully, experience happiness, and achieve a sense of gain through self-realization? Many can't help but ask: What is the true purpose of students coming to school? Positive education might offer a fresh avenue of thought for answering this question.

2 What is Positive Education

2.1 Definition

Positive education refers to an educational philosophy grounded in unleashing individual potential. It employs proactive educational approaches to guide and stimulate positive experiences among participants, ultimately enhancing their sense of gain.

The term "positive" can be easily misunderstood. In essence, it denotes a subjective feeling—relative in meaning rather than a fixed outcome or final destination. Positivity constitutes a behavioral process encompassing cognitive, emotional, and multidimensional experiences. It functions as a guiding concept rather than a strictly scientific construct. Consider two contrasting cases: an individual battling terminal illness and a writer immersed in creative flow. Though their life circumstances differ drastically, both may exhibit positivity through their sense of gain. The former gains courage through the struggle against disease, while the latter draws vitality from peak creative experiences. Thus, positivity relates to individual circumstances and can only be evaluated diachronically—it manifests when individuals optimally adapt to their environment and maximize their potential.

The "sense of gain" emphasized in positive education prioritizes the tangible impact of fair and equitable objective gains in education on self-actualization. This achieves a unification of subjective and objective evaluation, transcending the subjective bias prevalent in conventional educational quality assessments.

2.2 The theoretical foundation of positive education: Positive Psychology

The term "positive psychology" first appeared in 1954 in the work *Motivation and Personality* by the American humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow. Following World War II, psychology research focused predominantly on pathology—exploring how and why people struggle—to rapidly heal psychological trauma caused by the war. The vast majority of studies targeted "problem individuals," aiming to remedy negative human attributes rather than advance understanding of positive ones.

At the end of the 20th century, under the advocacy of then-American Psychological Association president Martin Seligman, positive psychology emerged as a new psychological movement. It declared: "The aim of positive psychology is to catalyze a shift in psychology's focus—from preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities."

Positive psychology further emphasizes that human positive attributes are not merely tools to remedy negative ones; rather, cultivating individual strengths should be the fundamental goal of development. Every individual possesses a unique capacity to regulate, adapt, comprehend, and actively assimilate "strengths" within changing environments—an evolutionary adaptation mechanism essential for survival. Through such adaptation, humans achieve both physical and psychological well-being.

Education shares significant common ground with positive psychology, as both ultimately aim to promote holistic human development. This alignment manifests in three core tasks:

Correcting shortcomings: Helping individuals with issues analyze and resolve problems.

Enhancing productivity and morality: Facilitating self-

actualization from biological beings to socially actualized individuals.

Nurturing genius: Fully developing talents through identifying individual differences.

Thus, guided by the value orientation revealed by positive psychology, positive education naturally emerged.

2.3 Connections and differences between positive education and traditional education

Traditional education excessively emphasizes corrective functions, prioritizing the identification and resolution of problems as its core tasks. In contrast, positive education focuses on unleashing individual potential, taking enhancing participants' sense of gain as its central mission, and guiding them to proactively transcend their current selves. The two are not diametrically opposed but represent different perspectives on education. The author argues that traditional and positive education share mutual benefits and synergies in many aspects.

Both positive and traditional education aim to cultivate individuals who are physically and mentally healthy and adaptable to societal demands. However, their differing educational priorities lead to variations in content, methods, and outcomes. Essentially, they are interconnected: positive education complements traditional approaches while reorienting education through a deeper understanding of its foundations.

Thus, education should not only assist problematic individuals or resolve their issues but also help non-problematic individuals develop strengths, enhance their sense of gain, achieve self-actualization, and become their best selves.

However, traditional education adheres to external control theory, assuming that by referencing fixed standards, thoroughly identifying and resolving individual problems, learners will be externally motivated to improve. Consequently, traditional education prioritizes immediacy, visible efficacy, and instrumental value, employing pathological paradigms to correct issues for overall quality enhancement. While this may yield short-term results, its focus on external, non-essential, and uncontrollable factors—coupled with passive learner acceptance—fails to provide sustained developmental motivation.

Positive education, by contrast, emphasizes identifying students' strengths and creating conditions for strength-based development. It posits that merely resolving problems only temporarily compels compliance. As conscious beings, individuals cannot passively accept interventions indefinitely; self-regulation is essential. Only when education allows individuals to experience and satisfy intrinsic needs will they sustain proactive engagement—a dynamic driven by the sense of gain cultivated in positive education.

Traditional education often starts from students' problems, leading to concentrated focus on "the two ends" (underperforming and top students). Low achievers are labeled "problem students," while high achievers are monitored to prevent issues, neglecting average students.

Positive education, however, demands attention to all students and all aspects of their development. It transcends merely assisting problematic students or addressing their issues, advocating equal treatment for every student. Non-problematic students must also receive attention to nurture and develop their strengths.

3. The necessity and inevitability of positive education

Undeniably, problem-centered traditional education has played a significant role in enhancing the overall quality of the populace. However, as society rapidly advances, solely pursuing this as the ultimate value of education is insufficient. Overemphasizing its instrumental value in "correcting" individuals contradicts the original intent and ultimate purpose of education. The proposal of positive education, centered on fostering a sense of gain, effectively addresses this deficiency. Education should adopt a contemporary and forward-looking perspective, prioritizing human development to lay the foundation for lifelong growth and the pursuit of well-being.

3.1 Necessity

3.1.1 From the perspective of student development

This excessive focus on problem correction—characteristic of a "pathological" approach in traditional education—severely restricts many positive forces and functions essential for individual development, such as self-improvement and self-motivation. It may even lead to learned helplessness. These positive factors hold profound significance for the individual. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions demonstrates that individuals in positive emotional states expand their behavioral repertoires in specific situations, facilitating the construction of lasting personal resources and fostering greater creativity. In contrast, positive education adopts a strength-based development approach, actively cultivating positive experiences within individuals, thereby promoting the formation of an optimistic explanatory style. Furthermore, its emphasis on a sense of gain helps individuals further affirm their capabilities, enabling them to adopt a more rational perspective towards challenges and develop a clearer understanding of themselves.

3.1.2 From the perspective of teacher development

Under the traditional educational model centered on "error correction" and "remediation," teachers primarily focus on identifying student problems and devising mechanisms or methods to address them. When teachers perceive students solely through the lens of deficiencies, students naturally respond with resistance and detachment, precluding any possibility of emotional resonance. Consequently, teachers cannot derive a sense of mission or value from the teaching process, leading over time to diminished interest in teaching and professional burnout.

Conversely, positive education advocates focusing on individuals' strengths, transforming the learning process into an active and self-driven endeavor. The sense of gain experienced by students during education provides continuous motivation for self-actualization. This, in turn, empowers educators to believe that teaching is a vocation for realizing their own value, allowing them to appreciate the profound significance and responsibility of their role.

Furthermore, positive education views teaching as a collaborative process where both teachers and students engage to attain positive experiences. This approach naturally fosters closer relationships. It not only helps teachers alleviate work- and life-related stress but also enhances their physical and mental well-being, contributing to their professional growth.

3.1.3 From the perspective of societal development

Firstly, when education was accessible only to a privileged minority, the problems requiring educational solutions were extensive and universal. Problem-centered traditional education proved highly effective in rapidly improving the overall quality and socialization of the population. Today, however, the socialization function of education has achieved remarkable success, and education has entered a stage of massification or even universalization. We must now prioritize human-centric approaches, emphasizing education's role in promoting individual self-actualization. Secondly, the rapid advancement of various disciplines has led to an exponential increase in knowledge volume. Coupled with the diversification of educational methods and delivery media, knowledge acquisition and educational delivery have become significantly more accessible. With the overall educational ecosystem vastly improved, school education can no longer focus solely on basic knowledge transmission. Instead, it must emphasize individuals' sense of participation in educational activities and the resulting sense of gain—not as a uniform collective experience, but as diverse, individualized senses of gain.

Finally, societal development exhibits a clear trend: once a society reaches a relatively affluent, civilized, and prosperous state of stability, individuals and the collective inevitably shift their focus beyond basic needs toward positive dimensions. Compared to earlier eras, the current educational environment for humanity has vastly improved. The purpose of education is no longer merely mastering basic survival skills but achieving a sense of gain through self-actualization. Consequently, greater attention must be paid to the positive elements of education. In such a relatively prosperous civilizational state, problem-elimination-centered traditional education appears incongruous. The emergence of positive education effectively addresses this gap and aligns with societal development trends.

3.2 Inevitability

3.2.1 The Detrimental effects of a unidimensional value system in traditional education

For an extended period, traditional education appeared to reduce its mission solely to problem correction. Educators habitually adopted a deficit-oriented lens, using criticism to make students aware of their shortcomings, with the ultimate goal of rectifying both overt and latent deficiencies. This unidimensional educational value system allows educators to comfortably assist struggling students in achieving positive change and well-being. However, when faced with students already thriving under favorable conditions, educators become disoriented, lacking strategies to enable them to achieve greater excellence. This results in an inherent imbalance within education itself.

Educators' singular focus on correction skills leads them to see only problems, not students. In essence, this traditional education represents a pathological education, exhibiting typical dehumanizing characteristics. Under such conditions, students' learning consequently becomes a passive adaptation driven by external pressure.

The problem-centric value orientation of traditional education has also led to a proliferation of educational issues. Students' perceived shortcomings are artificially amplified

for utilitarian purposes, fostering an unwarranted dread of school. Students come to view schools as hospitals where they themselves are merely collections of problems, passively awaiting correction. This severely diminishes the happiness and sense of gain derived from self-actualization. Consequently, an insurmountable gap arises between students and teachers, causing teachers' professional identity to steadily erode and ultimately leading to professional burnout.

3.2.2 Requirements during china's current period of social transformation

Currently, China is undergoing social transformation. The principal challenges faced during different phases of reform vary, development priorities shift, and evaluation criteria must evolve with the times, continually embracing new dimensions. As socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era, the principal contradiction in Chinese society has transformed into the contradiction between the people's ever-growing needs for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development. The focus of national development must expand beyond meeting people's material needs to fulfilling their diverse, personalized, spiritual, and rights-based aspirations.

Consequently, for education, the transition from a phase of rapid expansion to a stage of high-quality development is imperative while sustaining progress. Since the launch of reform and opening-up, China's education sector has achieved remarkable advancements but has simultaneously accumulated significant imbalances and inadequacies. To address these multifaceted challenges, the state advocates the philosophy of shared development, leveraging collective strengths with the fundamental goal of enhancing the people's sense of gain.

Positive education, centered on amplifying the sense of gain among teachers and students, aligns with China's commitment to a people-centered development orientation. As a state under the people's democratic dictatorship, the support and endorsement of the people constitute the very source of strength and foundation for success. Therefore, the people's sense of gain is not only the objective of reform but also the benchmark for evaluating its effectiveness. Hence, "enabling individuals to attain a greater sense of gain" represents not only a requirement for the new round of deepening educational reforms but also the most earnest aspiration deeply held by the masses.

3.3 The Development of positive education worldwide

In the late 20th century, a widespread positive psychology movement emerged in Western academia, yielding remarkable achievements. Building on this foundation, many positive psychologists began applying these theories to practical education and teaching. Consequently, the concept of positive education evolved into a highly influential new educational trend across developed nations in Europe and America, experiencing rapid momentum.

The United States, in particular, has become a driving force and leader in positive education. American education has long championed freedom, democracy, and human-centric values. The philosophy of positive education—grounded in the fundamental principle of strength-based development—continuously stimulates reforms in educational systems, content, and methodologies. This has rendered education more personalized, flexible, and open-ended, permeating

virtually all domains horizontally and extending through all educational stages vertically.

4. Positive education: Centered on enhancing the sense of gain among teachers and students

As Kant stated, humans are ends in themselves. School education, a complex system formed by people, must regard individuals as ends—prioritizing teachers and students to enable them to become their best selves.

Influenced by utilitarian orientations, the explicit efficacy of the pathological paradigm of education in individual socialization has been deliberately exaggerated. Consequently, the problem-finding and problem-solving-centered educational philosophy has dominated, rendering the modern educational process as impersonal as clearing roadblocks. Students remain passive and disengaged in schooling, naturally lacking a sense of gain. This has led to internal and external imbalances and a narrowing of educational functions, distorting and alienating its human-centered purpose.

4.1 Positive education clearly defines two functions of education: problem elimination and strength development—the "cool" and "warm" functions

Positive education asserts that education must not focus solely on analyzing individuals' negative outcomes but should instead emphasize their positive resources. This redefines education's dual functions: the "cool function" of eliminating problems, and more critically, the "warm function" of fostering strengths. Education should balance both—equally prioritizing problem resolution and strength-based development.

Problems and strengths are independent variables. Therefore, traditional education's excessive focus on problem-solving is profoundly insufficient. While some correlation exists between them, it is not deterministic. Strengths are not mere byproducts of problem resolution; eliminating problems does not inherently generate strengths. Individual growth primarily stems from the accumulation of strengths, not the removal of problems. Problem-solving is temporary and non-essential, whereas the formation of positive qualities through sustained strength accumulation is enduring, essential, and decisive.

Moreover, problem resolution involves appropriateness. All phenomena possess duality—not all problems can or should be solved. Resolving some problems may inadvertently erase associated strengths. Indeed, certain "negative" traits serve specific functions; for instance, while jealousy may diminish personal joy, it can also fuel human ambition. Positive education maintains that preserving certain student "shortcomings" can sometimes hold far greater importance than overcoming them.

4.2 Positive education and the sense of gain

4.2.1 Connotation and characteristics of the sense of gain

First, literally, the sense of gain is the subjective feeling about "gains," grounded in objective attainments. Within positive education, this sense must be based on tangible achievements—not merely knowledge acquisition or problem-solving, but also rights to classroom participation, self-expression, content selection, and self-determination over developmental trajectories.

Second, the sense of gain in positive education must embody

fairness and justice. It extends beyond individual experience to encompass a collective sense, ensuring every member of the educational community equitably shares in self-actualization and self-development. Thus, this sense is shaped not only by "absolute attainment" but also by "comparative perception" within the group.

4.2.2 Significance of proposing the sense of gain

First, articulating the sense of gain clarifies the goals, direction, and breakthrough points for educational development and reform. The ultimate purpose of education is to promote self-development and self-actualization. Passively solving problems offers only temporary, external motivation; unleashing individual strengths and generating a continuous sense of gain constitutes the fundamental driving force for growth.

Second, proposing the sense of gain establishes criteria for evaluating the quality of educational development and the success of reforms. It cannot be simplistically equated with "happiness" (subjective well-being). While both assess educational outcomes, the latter's reliance on subjective perception lacks rigor for objectively evaluating reform efficacy. In contrast, the sense of gain can be operationalized into concrete, instruction-related indicators—such as knowledge volume and participation rates.

Using the enhancement of teachers' and students' sense of gain as the ultimate metric for educational quality clarifies that:

the evaluators are all participants; the content is "objective attainment"; the criterion is "subjective perception." This approach avoids adversarial dynamics between teachers and students, accommodates individual differences, and provides a more scientific and effective compass for educational reform.

5. Key considerations in implementing positive education

First, positive education does not negate traditional education centered on overcoming or correcting student shortcomings. Rather, it represents a shift in educational emphasis—serving as both a supplement and an elevation of traditional approaches. Students must address their weaknesses while simultaneously cultivating their strengths and talents.

Second, positive education transcends the outdated notion of "promoting strengths and overcoming weaknesses." It prioritizes the "warm function" of education, committing to the discovery, nurturing, and accumulation of individual strengths to foster genuine growth. Overcoming deficiencies offers only temporary, symptomatic relief for individual development—much like antibiotics treat illness but cannot build physical resilience. Moreover, promoting strengths is merely one tactic within positive education, which encompasses educational methods, pathways, content, evaluation systems, and more.

Third, positive education extends beyond merely caring about the well-being of teachers and students; it is fundamentally education for attainment. Well-being ("happiness") is a subjective experience based on personal standards for evaluating educational quality, often becoming nebulous due to its reliance on individual perception. In contrast, the sense of gain cannot exist detached from its foundation of objective attainment—making it more concrete and pragmatically meaningful. Thus, when evaluating developmental changes brought about by education, the

metric of sense of gain yields tangible and perceptible insights. Simultaneously, positive education centered on amplifying this sense allows us to witness the fruits of educational reform through increased attainment and to unlock individual motivation for self-actualization.

Finally, positive education is a scientific practice aligned with the laws of human brain activity and psychological principles. Therefore, we must integrate research findings from positive psychology with positive education. Guided by these discoveries, we can deeply understand the physiological and psychological dynamics of individual growth, clarify developmental goals at each stage of positive education, and provide psychological underpinnings for selecting educational content and methodologies.

6. Optimizing educational curriculum and pedagogy under the positive shift: Transformation toward "strength-based education"

As the primary vehicle for school-based nurturing, traditional curriculum and pedagogy operate on a "deficit-focused education" model, treating deficiency correction as the sole goal and mission of education. Prolonged guidance under this "problem-centric" approach fosters learned helplessness and negative learning experiences in students, while teachers develop professional burnout under high-pressure, monotonous work. Schools should embrace the ethos of positive education, adhere to human-centered principles, advocate for inherent goodness, mitigate the shortcomings of "deficit-focused education," and advance curriculum reform research to promote strength identification within positive education.

The core of educational reform lies in curriculum reform—the type of individuals to be cultivated dictates the type of curriculum to be provided. To identify and cultivate students' strengths, students must first experience broadly, discovering and nurturing strengths through diverse engagements. Local schools should build curriculum frameworks centered on strength-based education, extending beyond the national curriculum to encompass "Exposure Curricula, Specialized Curricula, and Experiential Curricula."

6.1 Exposure curriculum: constructing strengths

Schools should establish a curriculum framework categorized into "Language & Culture, Science & Thinking, Arts & Life, and Sports & Vitality," implemented through a model of "universal access in school, advancement in extension, specialization in institutes." This enables students to explore, discover, orient, sustain, and develop their character strengths within rich, well-structured curricular practices.

To cultivate holistic competencies for students' future well-being, a "Five Competencies Development Plan" can be proposed, including: One proficient sport (Physical & Mental Health—Positive Self); One beloved art form (Personal Cultivation—Positive Emotion); Fluent verbal expression (Language Skills—Positive Self); Aesthetic penmanship (Perseverance—Positive Engagement); Collaborative competence (Communication & Cooperation—Positive Relationships), aiming to nurture "Dynamic New-Generation Talents" (Future Competencies—Positive Meaning & Positive Achievement)

6.2 Specialized curriculum: Cultivating strengths

Drawing on positive psychology's classification of strengths

and techniques, and aligning with students' characteristics, strength-based education implementation is structured into four interrelated stages: Identification, Construction, Practice, and Application. Local schools should develop corresponding school-based activities around these stages. On the one hand, this helps students become aware of their significant strengths, engage in proper debate and express themselves freely. On the other hand, it helps students learn how to acquire new strengths, encourages them to practice using their strengths and refine and shape them by sharing with others.

6.3 Experiential curriculum: Practicing strengths

Leveraging regional cultural resources, a "Three-Colors Experiential Curriculum" provides platforms for students to apply personal strengths in authentic contexts, serve society, and deepen understanding—allowing strengths to be demonstrated, refined, and elevated.

6.3.1 Heritage curriculum: Thematic inquiry into local history & culture

Centered on regional historical context, cultural traditions, and local customs, this curriculum guides inquiry-based learning and practice (e.g., studying local historical changes, intangible cultural heritage, folk activities). Students apply strengths in communication, research, analysis, and cultural interpretation to deepen cultural identity and preservation responsibility.

6.3.2 Spirit curriculum: Thematic inquiry into revolutionary tradition & contemporary values

Focusing on regional revolutionary history, heroic deeds, pioneering spirit, and modern role models, this involves immersive activities (e.g., visiting revolutionary sites, interviewing veterans, studying local heroes, volunteering). Students exercise strengths in empathy, responsibility, resilience, and leadership to forge moral character and draw spiritual strength.

6.3.3 Future curriculum: Thematic inquiry into regional development & future challenges

Addressing contemporary issues like economic growth, technological innovation, ecological conservation, urban planning, and rural revitalization through project-based learning (e.g., researching local industries, environmental initiatives, community redesign, emerging technologies). Students employ strengths in innovation, problem-solving, scientific inquiry, and teamwork to cultivate foresight and social responsibility.

7. Acknowledgements

The work is supported by 2025 China Tao Xingzhi Research Association "14th Five-Year Plan" Special Project on "Reading and Teacher Development" —Research on Cultivation Paths for Psychological Resilience of College Freshmen from the Perspective of "Reading Therapy" (CTRA 202513173ZJ)

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