On the Effect of Positive Curriculum on Distress and Attainment of Iranian Dorm-Living Students: Incorporating Religious Counseling

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Abstract

Purpose: Considering rich theoretical underpinnings of positive psychology (PP), the current study aimed to investigate the effects of an extra educational curriculum on the basis of PP on distress and attainment of Iranian high school students who are living in dormitories in boarding schools.

Methodology: This is an empirical study with a post-test only control group design in which a sample of 346 male students were selected through convenience sampling from two boarding schools in Qom city during 2018-2019. A translated and validated version of K10 distress questionnaire (Kessler et al, 2010) was administered to them and 67 students with high distress symptoms were identified and randomly allocated to a control group (N=23), experimental group one (N= 22) and experimental group two (N=22). First, the experimental group underwent 16 sessions (twice a week for 90 minutes) of PP curriculum integrated with religious counseling. Employing a post-test only control-group design, the group's performance on a distress scale (Goldberg, 1981) and their mean scores were compared after the intervention. Kruskal-Wallis and ANOVA tests were used to compare differences between the groups.

Findings: Findings revealed that positive curriculum alleviated distress symptoms of the experimental groups vis-à-vis the control ($\chi 2$ (2) = 52.851, $p \leq 0.001$). Also, to investigate the effect of the intervention on educational attainment, their semester mean scores were analyzed through ANOVA (F = $8.244_{(2,\ 66)}$, $p \leq 0.001$) where promising results were obtained.

Conclusion: It was concluded that both interventions exerted meaningful effects on the attainment and distress of dorm-living students. Also, follow-up studies added proof on the permanence of the effects.

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1. Introduction

The current research findings have documented that most dorm-living students usually encounter psychological problems, such as anxiety, the feeling of doubt, confusion and distress as soon as they leave the secure place of their homes (Saffarpoor, et al, 2013; Kim, Kim & Yang, 2015; Reynolds, 2020). Though Borys and Perlman (1985) maintain that many of these students are able to regain their psychological stability as they develop self-awareness and self-fulfillment in this stage, some of them are not psychologically afforded enough to pass this stage successfully. Therefore, this unresolved emotional state which is the direct outcome of separation from family and unfelt care, might result in severe psychological problems that bring about loss of interest, depressed mood, psychological and somatic anxiety, appetite and sleep symptoms, and acute distress (Tylee & Gandhi, 2005). Consequently, their educational and emotional performance suffers to a great extent because the symptoms affect their concentration during the learning process (Andrews & Weilding, 2004).

Given the fact that the students who reside in the dormitories in secondary schools are in the critical age of puberty and educational development, ignoring these symptoms in these students lays the groundwork for future emotional and social adverse consequences. Besides, the review of the literature shows that almost all studies conducted in the Iranian context and foreign context have mostly investigated more mature and more able higher education students living in the dormitory while leaving high school and secondary school students ignored (Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011; Saffarpoor, et al, 2013; Solatani & Keyvanara, 2013). Therefore, the current research is an attempt to investigate the issues of psychological distress and educational attainment in secondary school students who are living in public dormitories in the country. Taking into account the lack of clinical counselors in these educational contexts, on one side and the tremendous expenses of clinical interventions for distressed students on the other, the present study aims to employ a non-obtrusive and innovatory method for relieving the symptoms in the suffered students. Since PP enjoys deep theoretical underpinnings and a reasonable harmony with educational context, an embedded form of this psychology, through a supplementary curriculum, was utilized as intervention for relieving distress symptoms and promoting the attainment of the distressed students living in the dorm. As a new branch of psychology, PP helps individuals to identify their strengths and virtues to promote rather than solely identifying and repairing their weaknesses (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Unlike mainstream psychology which bases interventions on pathology and clinical interference, PP does not adhere to a disease-based model of psychology and tries to remove psychological symptoms of individuals through developing their potentials (Seligman, 2002).

The applied form of this psychology in education is known as positive education (Green, Oades, & Robinson, 2011). O'Shaughnessy and Larson (2014) define positive education from an educational perspective and stated that positive education is a paradigm shift in the educational approach in which education traditionally focuses on academic accomplishment only but on education and well-being of the learners as well. PPS intervention is any program, practice, activity and treatment method which is intended to enhance positive feeling, behavior and cognition and therefore is different from well-being initiatives which reduce or remove adverse effects because it engenders deep-seated cognitive changes in suffering individuals (Seligman, 2011). Similarly, Seligman et al. (2009) defined positive education as an approach to education which integrates skills of well-being and skills of academic development while giving due weight to both. To provide a clear picture of the scope of PP, it is quite essential to refer to two major theoretical paradigms that define the well-being. The first one is 'hedonic' which describes well-being in terms of pleasure maximization and pain avoidance (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Of particular note is that subjective well-being has been commonly referred to as the psychological construct affiliated to this conceptualization (Diener & Larsen, 1984). The second perspective is 'eudaimonic'. The underpinning assumption of this perspective is actualization of one's true inner potential and virtue as a pathway to experiencing a meaningful and fulfilling life (Vitters, 2016; Waterman, 1993). Under this premise, well-being is a relatively sustained experience that requires personal effort to be achieved

(Waterman, 1993) and involves how one functions in response to life's demands (psychological well-being) (Ryff, 1989, 1995) and to the larger society (social well-being) (Keyes, 1998).

Ample research has supported that the individual well-being of students and their academic success are mutually enhanced. For instance, Durlak et al. (2004) reported a positive correlation between emotional and social enhancement scores and those obtained in achievement tests. Similarly, many studies are conducted on the employment of PP as an intervention discipline in an educational context. Describing the positive education from a more instructional point of view, Alder (2017) reported that character traits and well-being are malleable and like any other skill they can be instructed through teaching and practice and embedded within the educational curriculum. Similarly, White and Kern (2018) postulate that the positive education is not an approach for mere educational mastery or mere psychological well-being but an innovative approach toward education which encapsulates both if applied correctly. Adopting such a viewpoint, Green et al. (2008) conducted an experimental study and found that positive psychology intervention in educational contexts ameliorates hope and hardiness while reducing negative constructs such as depression and anxiety. Marques et al. (2011) studied the effect of a hope-based positive intervention on middle-school students and found that the levels of hope, life satisfaction and educational achievement developed significantly. The follow-up findings showed the same significant difference between control and experimental groups. Käferböck (2019) conducted a study in an Australian context and applied positive education to language learning discipline and concluded that positive education is a viable strategy for foreign or second language teaching. Rather than practical studies, a good bulk of studies delved into theoretical dimensions of positive education and treated it as a new construct to be measured by practitioners (Duan et al., 2020; Tosten & Toprak, 2017).

On the effect of positive suggestions inside religious resources, a number of studies have submitted robust evidence on the efficacy of religious counseling on improving students' psychological status. For instance, Naeimi (2017) concluded that positive religious thinking improves the resilience of high-school students. Also, Shamshiri (2020) found that the main core of psychological and Islamic meaning of positivity are similar because the two approaches adopt a fair view toward positivity and positive thinking which embraces different dimensions of human existence. In spite of the integration of PP and education in the literature, the literature on this integration is poor in the country. Considering the reported benefits of the positive education, on the one hand and positive suggestion inherent in our religious resources, on the other, the current research was an attempt to shed light on the effects of positive education on distress and attainment of the Iranian dorm-living students with and without religious considerations.

2. Methodology

Design: The present study in terms of design was a quasi-experimental study because a post-test only control group design was employed (Mackey & Gass, 2005). However, in order to answer the research questions, a combination of both parametric and non-parametric data were collected and analyzed through appropriate measures.

Participants: The setting of the current study was two state-run high schools, named Shahed and Imam Sadehge. The participants of the current study included a sample of 346 male dorm-living secondary high school students who have been studying in two boarding schools in Qom, Iran. The participants aged from 15 to 18 and they were either first-grade, second-grade, or third-grade. It is interesting to note that the students had to attend to the class five days a week. The syllabuses of the high schools are determined by the ministry of education of Iran and the students who studies in these high schools received free education. To meet ethical requirements, the researchers described the study in detail to school principals and teachers. Having the permission to conduct the study in the school settings, the researchers attended the classes at appointed times and described the objectives of the present study to the students. Those students who were willing to participate in the research signed a written consent form. It should be noted that the consent was

written in Persian such that they the students know the exact meaning of the content. Importantly, the school principals, school teachers, and students were assured of confidentiality and the provision of final findings.

Instrumentation: To collect the data, Kessler's psychological distress scale (Kessler et al., 2002), also known as K10, was adopted. It is a 10-item questionnaire intended to yield a global measure of distress based on questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms that a person has experienced in the most recent four-week period. The respondents need to rate their distress based on a Likert range from never, rarely, sometimes, usually, and always. Prior to running the main study, the survey was translated into Persian by two well-experienced translators. Then, the accuracy of translation and face validity of the instrument were assessed through expert' judgment in which two university professors in psychology in Shahid Mahallati's higher education center in Qom were kindly asked to comment on it. Based on the comment of the university professors, some modifications were made on the items. However, in general, they both confirmed that the instrument enjoyed a high level of validity. Further, the reliability of the scale was estimated in a pilot study run with 46 dormitory students in another boarding school in Qom. The results yielded Cronbach alpha = 0.76which is acceptable for the purposes of the current study. Psychometric properties of this scale are investigated in the Iranian context by Yaghubi (2016). The second instrument employed in this study was General Health distress Questionnaire (GHQ) adopted from Goldberg (1981) which was a self-report measure in Likert-scale. It is used as a screening device for identifying minor psychiatric disorders in the general population and within community or non-psychiatric clinical settings such as school. It is suitable for all ages from adolescents upwards excluding children and it assesses the respondent's current state and asks if that differs from their usual state. It is therefore sensitive to short-term psychiatric disorders but not too long-standing attributes of the respondent. Available in different versions, the self-administered questionnaire focuses on two major areas: the inability to carry out normal functions and the appearance of new and distressing phenomena. However, in the present study, the researchers chose the version which is appropriate for the research studies. In the end, this scale was also translated and validated through appropriate measures discussed for the first questionnaire (Cronbach alpha= 0.79).

Procedure: In the diagnosis phase, before the intervention, the first instrument of the research was administered to the participants of the study. The score of the respondents ranged from 10 to 50. The scores above 22 represent high distress and the scores closer to 50 demonstrated more extreme distress. At the next stage, the survey was given to the participants to be filled. In doing so, as agreed, the researchers attended the schools and asked the participants to read the items carefully in case there was a vague item. Then, at the next stage, based on the students' responses, 67 students with scores higher than 22 were identified and screened out. These students, then, were randomly assigned into a control group (n=23), first experimental group (n=22) and second experimental group (n=22). The first experimental group (Positive only curriculum) underwent an intervention from the field of PP. However, the second experimental group (Positive psychology integrated with positive religious counseling) underwent an intervention adopted from PP integrated with some positive suggestions from the domain of religious counselling. These interventions lasted 16 sessions held in 90 minutes twice a week in the form of an extra educational program added to their regular curriculum. Yet, the control group was kept intact and underwent their regular school curriculum only. Having received the intervention, the three groups were administered the second instrument (GHQ) of the research and their level of distress was identified. Also, their mean scores on regular curriculum in the first semester were collected and used for screening the effect of intervention on their educational attainment. A follow-up study was carried out in the second semester and both sets of data were collected likewise.

Data Analysis: The data obtained from the Likert scale (GHQ) were changed into mean ranks through SPSS Version 23 and analyzed by Kruskal-Wallis test because as the normality assumption was not met. Yet, application of Kruskal-Wallis was guided and limited by its own assumptions. To identify where the difference lies, a multiple comparison was conducted and the related diagrams were extracted. In addition, to investigate the effect of the intervention on educational attainment of the participants, their mean scores on that educational semester were collected, entered into SPSS and analyzed through one-way analysis of variance

(ANOVA). The test was guided and limited by a number of assumptions, the most important of which were the continuity of the dependent variable (mean scores here), existence of two or more categorical groups (two experimental and one control groups), independence of observations during data collection and non-existence of outliers and normal distribution of the dependent variable. A post-hoc was conducted to detect the place of the difference between the groups. Finally, to trace changes, a follow-up experiment was conducted a semester later at the end of the educational year.

3. Findings

The current study, as pointed out above, aimed to investigate the effect of PP on distress and attainment of students living in dormitories of boarding high schools in the city of Qom. Also, this study focused on the difference between mere positive education and positive education integrated with religious counseling. To this aim, 67 male students aged between 16-17 years old were selected from fresh students. The positive curriculum that was used as an intervention for EX1 group was designed to promote students in three major criteria by Seligman et al (2009): *Pleasure* (positive reappraisal, positive emotion and humor, positive writing tasks, introducing optimism, and reflecting on grieving loss), *Engagement* (involvement in task or relationship, increasing character awareness, time control, behavioral activation) and *Meaning* (kindness intervention, good deed tasks, promoting pro-social actions, value-based activities, positive relationship). Probing every single criterion and associated components, the researcher either adopted an educational task from the literature or developed a local context-embedded task to achieve positive educational goals.

For the second experimental group (Ex2), in addition to the positive curriculum described above, religious counseling (positive suggestions adopted from religious sources) were integrated. These religious instructions were embedded in the curriculum revolved around four main axes 1) establishing the relationship with God as an endless source of blessing and mercy, 2) raising awareness on the limitless capacity of a human being for doing good, 3) criticizing despair and disappointment as a rejected attribute of a believer, and 4) pointing human attention to the purposeful creation of mankind and emphasizing forming schedules for reaching these targets. To investigate the effect of these interventions on groups, the adopted GHQ was administered. The Likert data obtained were changed into mean rank and analyzed through Kruskal-Wallis test. The findings are reported in table 1.

Table1. Test statistics[a,b] for distress

	Distress
Chi-Square	52.851
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

As can be seen in Table 1, the p-values for test distress is smaller 0.05 indicating that these three groups performed differently on the scale. In sum, a Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the experimental group 1, experimental group 2 and the control group ($\chi 2\ (2) = 52.851$, $p = 0.000$). Thus, the findings reported in Table 1 reveal statistically significant differences between the groups in distress scales. However, the obtained data cannot indicate where the between-group difference lies. To this aim, a pairwise comparison which serves as the post-hoc for non-parametric data was conducted, the results of which are reported in the following table.

Table2. Pair-wise comparison statistics of the groups

Samples	Test Statistics	Std. E	Std. Test Statistics	Sig	Adj. Sig
EXP2-EXP1	18.114	5.865	3.809	0.002	0.006
EXP2-CTRL	41.994	5.801	7.240	0.000	0.000
EXP1-CTRL	23.880	5.801	4.117	0.000	0.000

The data presented in this table also show that the difference between the experimental group1 and experimental group 2 is significant (P=0.006). Also, the differences between both experimental groups and control group are significant (P=0.000). This means that both forms of positive intervention (positive psychology and positive psychology integrated with religious counseling) decreased levels of distress among dormitory students while the second experimental group outperformed the first experimental group significantly. It was concluded that the PP through the agency of positive education alleviates symptoms of distress reinforced meaningfully when integrated with religious counseling.

The other sub-question of the study addressed the effect of the interventions on the participants' attainment. To this aim, the mean scores of these students at the end of the intervention semester were collected, entered into software, and analyzed through ANOVA. The results are shown in the following tables:

Table3. ANOVA output for mean differences between the groups on the attainment scale

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	59.662	2	29.831	8.244	.001
Within Groups	231.583	64	3.618		
Total	291.246	66			

As indicated in Table 4, the significance value for attainment is 0.001 (i.e., p = 0.001) which is lower than 0.05 and, therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of scores between the different groups. The results of the post-hoc in table 5 illustrate more detailed evidence of the difference.

Table4. Post-hoc multiple comparison for attainment

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Control Group	Experimental Group 1	-1.8069*	.5673	.006
	Experimental Group 2	-2.1296*	.5673	.001
Experimental Group 1	Control Group	1.8069*	.5673	.006
	Experimental Group 2	-.3227	.5735	.840
Experimental Group 2	Control Group	2.1296*	.5673	.001
	Experimental Group 1	.3227	.5735	.840

In sum, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups as determined by one-way ANOVA (F (2, 66) = 8.244, p = 0.00). In addition, a post-hoc Tukey test showed a significant difference between the control group and the experimental groups (P=0.006 and P= 0.001 respectively) while the difference between experimental groups was not significant (P=0.840).

A follow-up experiment was conducted at the end of the educational year (second semester) to investigate the permanence of the effects. The same GHQ was administered to them 112 days after the post-intervention phase. The data were collected, changed into mean rank, and analyzed through Kruskal-Wallis test.

Table5. Test Statistics[a,b] for distress in follow-up phase

	Distress
Chi-Square	51.913
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	**0.000**

As observed in Table 5, the findings of the Kruskal-Wallis H test in the follow-up phase indicated a statistically significant difference in mean scores between the experimental group 1, experimental group 2 and control group, ($\chi2$ (2) = 51.913, p = 0.000). Like the post-test phase, a multiple comparison test was

conducted in the follow-up session. The findings showed a statistically significant difference between the three groups, though to a lesser extent. These findings are presented in the following tables.

Table7. Pair-wise comparison statistics of groups in the follow-up phase

Samples	Test Statistics	Std. E	Std. Test Statistics	Sig	Adj. Sig
EXP2-EXP1	18.591	5.864	3.171	0.002	0.005
EXP2-CTRL	41.670	5.799	7.185	0.000	0.000
EXP1-CTRL	23.079	5.799	3.980	0.000	0.000

Also, a follow-up experiment was conducted to investigate the lasting effect of the positive curriculum on educational attainment of the participants. Similarly, their mean score in their next educational semester was collected and analyzed through ANOVA which revealed a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA (F(2,66) = 8.410, p =.001). In addition, a post-hoc Tukey test showed a significant difference between the control group and the experimental groups (P=0.005 and P= 0.001 respectively) while the difference between the experimental groups was not significant (P=0.858)

4. Discussion

This study was intended to inquire into the effect of two versions of positive curriculum (with and without religious considerations) on two major variables of psychological distress and educational attainment. The results provided evidence on the significant effect of both versions of positive intervention on both variables. According to White (2016), despite the rich literature on the positive effects of the positive education on many psychological variables related to educational context, scanty attention has been paid to this kind of intervention in the Iranian educational contexts tackling problems associated with the educational psychology. The present study examined the effects of positive education on two critical variables, namely distress and attainment on a group of students living in the dormitories in a boarding school in the city of Qom. As reported above, the findings revealed that the positive curriculum alleviated distress symptoms of the experimental group's vis-à-vis the control. Additionally, the results documented that due to the intervention presented based on the positive curriculum, the educational attainment of the students significantly increased.

The findings of the current study lend support to those of Fergusson and Woodward (2000) which reported positive curriculum leading to lower distress and more educational achievement among students. By the same token, the findings of the current research accord with that found by Shahar, et al (2006). They concluded that the depressive symptoms resulted from distress reduces the educational achievement of students. Besides, the findings of the current study provide proof for Biederman, et al (2004) who found that distress affects educational behavior and performance of the affected students. Likewise, the findings of the current study support Wilkins, Boman, and Mergler (2015). There, it was found that the combined influence of the four positive character traits, namely gratitude, optimism, zest and persistence can predict relatively higher levels of school engagement and pro-social behaviour. Furthermore, the results obtained in this research are in line with Zhao et al. (2019) who reported that positive education intervention reduces depression among learners. They reported that after one period of intervention, the level of depression of students in the experiment group and control group showed a statistically significant difference in favor of the former group. Their results also indicated that adolescent depression can be prevented or ameliorated by positive emotion interventions. Finally, the study's findings provide support to the words of Power and Manor (1992) arguing that these negative consequences are mutually enhanced in a way that meager educational performance strengthens psychological problems associated with education. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to uncover stressors and distress factors for students living in dormitories and adopt an efficient intervention strategy to promote their well-being and their educational performance.

The study's findings can be explained from this perspective that as the boarding school demands a major part of the students' time, this environment has a prominent role in shaping their social, emotional, and psychological status (Waters, 2011). Therefore, if this environment is not constructive and positive, it may

not help the psychological distress to disappear. Rather, it can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression symptoms (Paus, Keshavan, & Giedd, 2008), which are the later predictors of stress levels (Shapero, Hankin, & Barrocas, 2013). Furthermore, in line with Bernard and Walton (2011), the results of the current study show that positive curriculum leads to the development of positive emotions, positive relationships, and character strengths, as well as the cultivation of skills for happiness and well-being among the students. To consolidate the findings, it can be argued that the presented intervention compliant with the tenets of positive curriculum equipped the students with the required skills of well-being and the skills of achievement (Seligman et al. 2009).

The superiority of the experimental groups compared to the control group can be ascribed to the positive effects of the intervention under the approach of positive curriculum practices. In line with Noble and McGrath (2008), it can be argued that the positive curriculum intervention was effective since it is built on five enabling factors, including social and emotional competency, positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement, and sense of meaning and purpose. Hence, it is argued that the students had less stress and more achievement by promoting the social and emotional competency of the students, helping the students to have positive emotions, creating positive relationships with teachers and peers, increasing engagement with their academic context and lessons, adding the students to construct positive meaning and purposes in their educational life.

To confirm the results of the current study, we can refer to the main concepts of positive psychology which are the theoretical foundations of well-being. The first concept is 'hedonic' which considers well-being with the aspect of pleasure maximization and pain avoidance (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In this respect, it can be said that the positive curriculum intervention set the environment for the students such that they tried to achieve more pleasure and less pain in their dormitories. The other key concept is eudaimonic which underscores the realization of one's true inner potential and virtue as a pathway to experiencing a meaningful and fulfilling life (Vitters, 2016; Waterman, 1993). Under this premise, well-being is a relatively sustained experience that requires personal effort (Waterman, 1993) and involves how one is functioning in response to life's demands (Ryff, 1989, 1995) and to the larger society (Keyes, 1998). In this regard, it can be argued that under the effects of the positive curriculum intervention, the students might experience that to achieve their aims; they need to make greater effort. By putting more effort and energy into their educational duties, they might conclude that individual well-being and social well-being are achievable. To rephrase, given the fact that the secondary high school students are inclined to seek many small and momentary pleasures along with keeping their educational objectives in mind (González-Carrasco, et al., 2019) can explain why the positive curriculum intervention resulted in more promising gains for the experimental groups.

Finally, it was revealed in this study that positive curriculum intervention might contribute to lower stress and more educational achievement through the empowerment of the students. In other words, in alignment with Gillespie, Chaboyer, and Wallis (2007), it can be argued that the intervention might be useful to improve students' individual features most of which significantly function as resilience factors, such as self-efficacy, internal locus of control, optimistic world view, positive emotions, and social support. These personal assets, ranging from psychological to societal resources might act as mechanisms that could be drawn later by the students to improve the odds of efficacious coping with adversities and hardships (Fredrickson, 2004). Thus, the intervention could form a platform of resilience that allow the students to thrive to achieve more promising educational results.

In sum, as pointed out above, there is a growing body of work that suggests that secondary school students who are living in dormitories in boarding schools struggle with some psychological problems with which they can hardly cope. Among these problems is educational distress which is negatively correlated with the educational attainment of the suffering students. Considering its weight in the well-being and educational success of students, many clinical and education interventional strategies are suggested. With reference to rich theoretical underpinnings of PP, this study aimed at exploring possible effects of an extra educational curriculum on the basis of PP on distress and attainment of Iranian high school students. In sum, it was found

that the positive curriculum intervention could lower the distress symptoms of the experimental groups compared to the control group. Moreover, the educational achievement of the students significantly improved as a result of the intervention.

The study's findings are in line with an increasing body of research that proposes that PP and positive curriculum interventions (Froh, et al., 2009; Seligman et al., 2009; Williams, 2011) and positive psychological health interventions within school contexts (Hawkins et al., 1999; Solomon et al., 2000) are highly effective to the mental health and well-being. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the inclusion of PP elements in school syllabuses can create a positive change in the role of school "from an academic institution that focuses on imparting knowledge and skills to a holistic institution that meets a wide range of children's and adolescents' needs in various areas of life through coordinated socio-emotional and academic learning" (Tejada-Gallardo, et al. 2020).

Accordingly, it is suggested that educationalists should raise the issue of the PP in the ministry of education of Iran. To do this, for example, they can call for the modifications of the school syllabuses in line with the tenets of PP. Furthermore, the results of the present study recommend that the school principals, most especially in the boarding schools, incorporate the positive curriculum interventions to promote their students' mental health by decreasing the level of stress and optimal development. Likewise, the school teachers in the boarding schools are called to play a more central role in the implementation of positive practices that, in turn, might facilitate the student learning and boost academic performance.

In light of the limitations imposed on the present study, a number of suggestions for further research are presented. Since the current study was a cross-section study, further research is required to investigate these phenomena longitudinally. In this way, it can be demonstrated how positive curriculum leads to more promising results in the long run. Additionally, as the present study used a quantitative approach, future researchers are suggested to adopt a mixed-methods approach for studying this phenomenon, aimed at incorporating qualitative methods for acquiring a more profound picture. In addition, considering the fact that the participants of the present study were male students, to generalize the findings, female students can be included in future studies. Likewise, as the current study was run in high school settings, further research can probe into the effectiveness of the positive curriculum on students' distress and academic achievements in the university contexts where most university students live in dormitories for a long time.

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