

Introduction

The latter half of the 20th century saw great progress in a pathology-focussed approach to psychology. While these developments yielded many benefits in the treatment of psychological distress (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) they neglected areas of strength and competence among such individuals (Climie & Henley, 2016).

Positive Psychology Interventions

- Positive Relationships
- Strengths
- Gratitude
- Mindfulness

(Shankland & Rosset, 2017)

Strengths-based approaches have been implemented the workplace and clinical settings (Jones-Smith, 2011) and have been shown to improve **self-determination, self-efficacy, self-control and academic achievement** (Elder et al., 2018; Jones-Smith, 2011).

Gap between Research and Practice:

SBA are widely implemented in schools and are widely accepted as being effective, however, there is a lack of empirical evidence emerging from a school context (Galloway et al., 2020). Furthermore, the processes underpinning SBA have been overlooked in the research (Elder et al., 2018).

Irish Education System: Deficits Model?

The NCSE (2013) suggest that some pupils received a diagnosis of a SEN in order to receive additional teaching support. The introduction of Special Education Teaching Allocation Model (DES, 2017) marks a move towards a more inclusive school environment. However, a deficits-approach remains, as children are identified and differentiated from other pupils based on a need or difficulty they experience.



What are strengths?

Character Strengths:

Psychological processes which are present in an individual (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Signature strengths:

The most prominent strengths in an individual (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Contextual Strengths

Ecological factors which may facilitate the use of an individual's strengths (Bozic, 2018).

Strengths arising in other domains:

Home, school, employment and community or personal domains e.g. personality, recreation, spiritual and cultural development (Rawana & Brownlee, 2010)



Research Question:

"What methodologies are implemented in Strengths-Based Education in a classroom setting?"



Search Strategy

Databases:

A comprehensive literature search was conducted on 20th of February 2020, using four databases; **ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES and Medline.**

Search terms:

"Strength* based education" OR "strength* based assessment" OR "strength* based approaches" OR "strength* based teaching" AND Approaches OR methodologies OR classroom



Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:

Included Studies:

1. Were published in a peer-reviewed journal.
2. Included participants who were aged 6-12 years or teachers involved in strengths-based education.
3. Were carried out in a school setting.
4. Involved pupils participating in strengths-based activities or a strengths-based programme.
5. Were published between 2010-2021.
6. Available in English.
7. Followed a qualitative research design, to enable the reviewer to elicit methodologies.

ConQual Approach

The ConQual approach was used to establish confidence in the 5 studies included in this research (Munn et al., 2014). This involves giving a rating for the dependability and credibility of the findings.

Dependability:

The JBI Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument (JBI-QARI) (Aromataris & Munn, 2017).

Credibility:

Each of the 53 individual findings were given a credibility rating of unequivocal, equivocal or unsupported (Munn et al., 2014)

Findings:

Upon analysis of individual findings, three distinct synthesised findings emerged; **strength-identification, strength-application and strength-development**

Sample Lists: What are my strengths?

Creating Strengths-Shields

3eMe Join the Dots I excel in.. I enjoy... I am good at...

1. Identification of Strengths

Classroom Displays

Teacher-Modelling

Formal Scales e.g. VIA Youth Survey



Strengths-Spotting

Curricular Areas

Learning contracts

2. Application of Strengths

Strengths Detectives

Peer teaching

Offering Elective/Optional Classes

SMART Goal-Setting

Reflective Statements

Letter from the Future

Findings Contd.

Developing pre-existing strengths e.g. sport

Peer Teaching

Monitor Progress

Sharing & Celebrating Strength Use

3. Development of Strengths

Using strengths in new ways

Action Plans

Strengths-Based learning time



Discussion & Conclusion

A **meta-aggregation** was deemed the most appropriate for this review. According to Munn et al. (2014) a meta-aggregation aims to generate findings that will inform policy or practice, while following similar procedures to a quantitative systematic review (Munn et al., 2014).

The **ConQual** approach was chosen for this study as it allowed the researcher to identify methodologies used within the studies. However, this approach may lack the critical, in depth analysis required when carrying out a qualitative systematic review aimed at eliciting thematic findings.

Cultural Context:

The majority of research pertaining to positive psychological interventions in schools has taken place in the USA, Canada, Australia and England (Shankland & Rosset, 2017), which is reflected in the articles included in this review. The implementation of positive psychological interventions is often a result of emphasis on the development of emotional and social well-being in their curricula (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) proposes the inclusion of "fostering wellbeing" as one of seven key competencies which aim to enhance both learning and the holistic development of the child, suggesting room for the implementation of SBA in the Irish classroom.

Character Strengths vs. Contextual/Ecological strengths

All studies reported the identification of inner strengths, such as character strengths, only one study reported the identification of contextual strengths (Bozic, 2013). When considering SBA from a resilience theory perspective, character strengths may be considered internal protective factors, and contextual factors as external protective factors (Bozic et al., 2018).

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