

The Effectiveness of Movie-Based Learning in Positive Psychology on Stress Management, Strengths Identification, and Self-Esteem Among Pre-university Students

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Abstract

In the 21st century, films have been increasingly utilized as educational tools to enhance learners' cognitive, emotional, and social skills. However, few studies have explored their potential in the field of positive psychology. This study examined the effectiveness of the Movie-Based Learning in Positive Psychology (MBL-PP) model on stress management, strengths identification, and self-esteem among 83 pre-university students. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design without a control group was employed. The intervention consisted of watching selected films, attending a lecture on positive psychology to promote fundamental knowledge, and analyzing main characters' behaviors based on positive psychology principles to recognize personal strengths. Students also participated in peer discussions using the Johari Window as a tool to explore and analyze their own strengths. Through these activities, they reflected on their personal strengths and recorded their experiences in the Best Possible Self journal. Pre- and post-intervention assessments were conducted to measure changes in stress management, strengths identification, and self-esteem. Results revealed statistically significant improvements in all three variables ($p < 0.05$). These findings demonstrate that MBL-PP is an effective pedagogical approach to promote psychological well-being and fosters the development of personal strengths among pre-university students.

Keywords: movie-based learning, positive psychology, stress management

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Introduction

Senior high school students often experience stress and pressure caused by academic workloads, competitive university entrance, and the developmental challenges of adolescence. According to these situations, they are expected to balance rigorous coursework, extracurricular commitments, and future-oriented decision-making. These pressures can contribute to high levels of anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and difficulty managing emotions effectively. Without appropriate stress management, it can develop into more serious mental health concerns, including depressive disorders.

Realizing one's own strengths can significantly improve self-esteem, because it helps students build a clearer and more positive sense in themselves. Owing to realizing their own competence, they could develop greater confidence and an internal belief in their own potential. According to the correlation between student's strength and self-esteem, there are effective methods to strengthen emotion and behavior. It's called Positive psychology theory, a well-known psychological approach that helps students identify strengths. Positive psychology emphasizes personal growth, resilience, and well-being, providing structured strategies such as, strengths assessments, reflective activities, and character-building exercises. These approaches not only enhance self-esteem but also equip students with healthier ways to manage stress and navigate the challenges of adolescence.

Positive psychology is recognized as a fundamental theory that focuses on understanding and promoting the factors that support human growth and a positive mindset. It aims to study not only what is wrong with people but also what helps them flourish. Movies are considered a convenient and engaging approach to support learning among adolescents. Positive psychology in films can help students manage stress and pressure by presenting uplifting narratives, resilient characters, and hopeful outcomes that model effective coping strategies, potentially sparking similar emotional responses and cognitive shifts in real life. Considering the high levels of stress and pressure experienced by senior high school students, the author designed a learning environment using positive psychology through movie-based learning to strengthen students' self-esteem and emotional management.

Related Studies

Stress and Pressure

Stress in high school students is commonly defined as a psychological and physiological response that occurs when academic or social demands exceed a student's perceived ability to cope. According to TK, stress is the body's nonspecific reaction to any demand placed upon it, which in adolescents often stems from school workload, exams, and performance expectations (Krishnaveni et al., 2021). Singh & Kumari described stress as arising from cognitive appraisal, when students evaluate school-related situations as threatening or overwhelming, stress responses are triggered (Singh & Kumari, 2022). In addition, stress frequently involves emotional strain caused by balancing academic responsibilities, peer relationships, and future planning, making it a significant factor influencing mental well-being (Hazen et al., 2008).

Over the decade, a rapid rate of stress and academic pressure have had serious negative effects on mental health and well-being. Longitudinal research demonstrated that greater academic burden was strongly linked to increase rate of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, large-scale studies reported that high academic stress correlates with

elevated levels of mental distress, decreased school engagement, and poorer self-disclosure to parents, highlighting how persistent pressure disrupts both psychological and social dimensions of students' lives (Chyu & Chen, 2022). A systematic review of school-based intervention programs confirmed these impacts, showing that cognitive-behavioral-therapy-based interventions are among the most effective at reducing academic stress and its harmful consequences (Jagiello et al., 2024).

Stress and pressure among high school levels remain significantly high in the present, driven by competitive academic environments, digital-era distractions, and post-pandemic learning demands. Iqra opined that adolescents frequently report academic overload, fear of failure, and concerns about future education or career pathways as primary stressors (Iqra, 2024). International assessments echoed these trends: the OECD result revealed that more than half of 15 to 17 year olds regularly experience school-related stress, with workload and performance (Win Bo, 2023). In addition, a global survey published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* highlights that the transition back to normal schooling after COVID-19 disruptions intensified emotional strain (Hards et al., 2022).

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is broadly defined as the scientific study of human strengths, well-being, and the factors that enable individuals and communities to grow up. Described it as a shift from a deficit-based model of psychology toward understanding positive emotions, engagement (Ben Buzguța, 2024). According to Banicki, positive psychology emphasizes cultivating virtues and character strengths that enhance resilience and overall life satisfaction (Banicki, 2014). Nevertheless, some researchers concluded that applying positive psychology methods-such as gratitude exercises, strength identification, and positive emotion regulation can improve mental health, reduce stress, and promote long-term well-being (Helwig et al., 2020).

Throughout this decade, positive psychology theory continuously develops along. Antony explained that positive emotions broaden cognitive and behavioral responses, enabling more flexible problem-solving and resilience during stressful situations (Anbarasu & Bhuvaneswari, 2024). Naseem & Khalid found that positive psychology interventions- such as, fostering optimism, gratitude, and meaning contribute to reducing stress levels and improving emotional regulation (Naseem & Khalid, 2010). In addition, a meta-analysis by Rastogi revealed that positive psychology practices were associated with decreasing depressive and stress symptoms, highlighting their effectiveness in enhance psychological well-being and strengthening adaptive coping resources (Rastogi Asso et al., 2017).

Movie-Based Learning

Movie-based learning has gained increasing attention for its ability to enhance engagement, contextualize complex concepts, and support comprehension. Merita opined that films can create emotionally rich and authentic learning environments that improve motivation and promote deeper cognitive processing (Ismaili, 2013). Visual narratives also helped learners connect abstract theories to real-world situations, making content more memorable and accessible (Marzuq et al., 2024). Additionally, movie-based instruction facilitated critical thinking and discussion by exposing students to diverse perspectives and cultural contexts, thereby enriching classroom interaction and reflection (Host'ovecký & Štubňa, 2015).

In the present, movie-based learning consistently highlights its effectiveness in promoting deeper understanding, learner engagement, and critical reflection across educational contexts. Russel integrated historical films supported students' contextual understanding and stimulate inquiry-based discussions (ICEN & TUNCEL, 2019). Similarly, research in EFL settings found that using movies as instructional materials can improve learners' listening competence and cultural awareness through exposure to authentic language use (Ismaili, 2013). In higher education, a case study involving business students demonstrated that movie-based scenarios enhance analytical thinking and facilitate the application of theoretical concepts to real-world organizational behavior (Altameemi & Al-Tamimi, 2025).

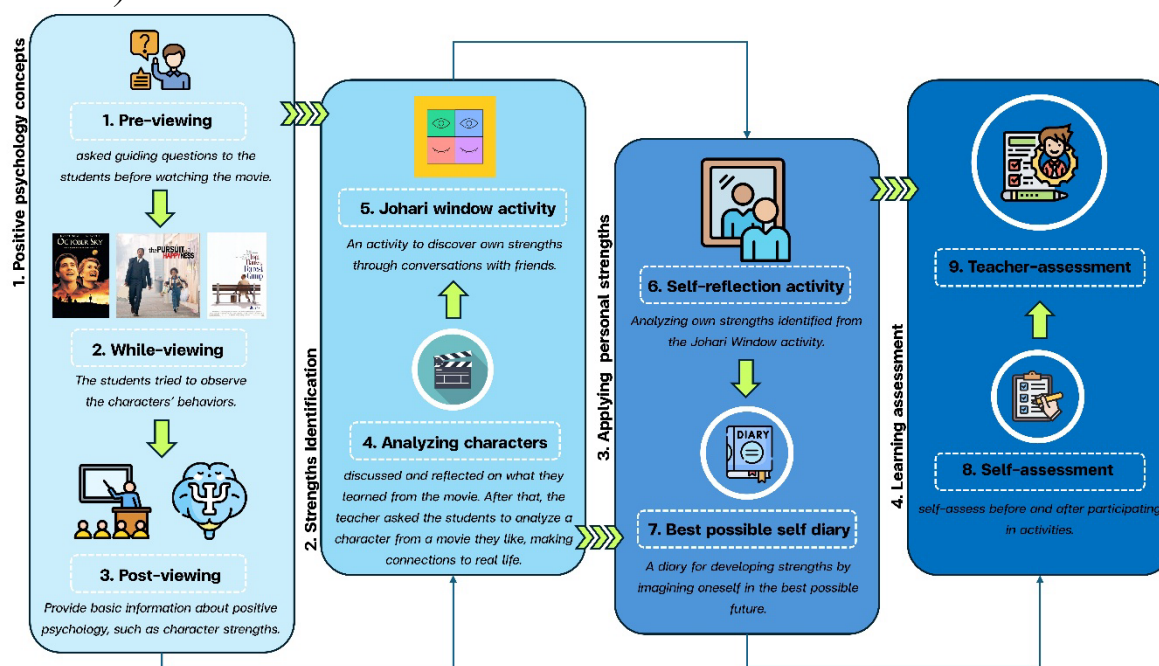
Description of Movie-Based Learning in Positive Psychology on Stress Management, Strengths Identification, and Self-Esteem Among Pre-university Students

Background and Overall Structure

Positive psychology is one of the main topics for Grade 12th students in the course ESC624 The Mentalist, which is part of the story-based learning curriculum at the College of Engineering and Science, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok. The course integrates biology and art. Its purpose is to help Grade 12th (pre-university) students, who often experience high levels of stress and pressure, understand the structure and function of the nervous system and how its development is reflected in good mental health. This knowledge is used as an artistic tool to support daily well-being, improve personality development, strengthen identity formation, and help students manage problems, stress, and pressure more effectively.

Figure 1

The Overall Structure of Movie-Based Learning in Positive Psychology on Stress Management, Strengths Identification, and Self-Esteem Among Pre-university Students (MBL-PP)



The learning process of MBL-PP can be divided into 4 main parts. First, students are introduced to the concept of positive psychology through watching a movie. This part includes three parts: before watching the movie (pre-viewing), the teacher asks guiding questions to prepare students for the key ideas; during the movie (while-viewing), students observe how the characters behave and respond to different situations; and after the movie ends (post-viewing), the teacher leads a discussion and reflection to help students identify the principles of positive psychology shown through the actions of the main characters. Then, as homework, each student analyzes a character from a movie they personally like and connects the character's behavior to real life. This helps students practice recognizing positive behaviors in familiar contexts. The second part focuses on helping students analyze their own strengths. They complete the Johari Window activity with classmates and use the results to understand their personal strengths more clearly. The next part encourages students to apply these strengths in their daily lives and record their experiences in a journal called *Best Possible Self*. The final part involves assessing the students' learning outcomes. The teacher evaluates their understanding of the basic principles of positive psychology and their self-assessment before and after the activities, including changes in stress management, strengths identification, and self-esteem. (Figure 1)

Design of Learning Activity Process

In designing this learning sequence, the four main activities are scheduled across four class sessions, with each session lasting two hours. The plan aims to help students learn the principles and contexts as much as possible through watching movies or using movie-based learning. The details of all activities, from the first to the last, are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Learning Process Designed for MBL-PP

Process	Activity	Particular
Part 1: <u>Positive psychology concept</u>	Pre-viewing	The teacher introduces the activity by asking guiding questions related to students' personal strengths or positive psychology to capture their attention. For example, "Do you know what kind of person you are?" or "Have you ever heard others describe what kind of person you are?" These questions are designed to encourage students to reflect on themselves.
	While-viewing	The teacher plays the movie for the students. In this study, the movie " <i>The Pursuit of Happyness</i> " was selected. Students are asked to observe the characters' behaviors in response to different situations, as well as their thinking processes and problem-solving approaches.
	Post-viewing	After the movie ends, the teacher guides students to discuss and reflect on what they learned from the movie, summarizing the principles of positive psychology shown through the main characters' behaviors. Then, the teacher assigns homework in which each student analyzes one character from a movie they like and connects the character's behavior to real life.

Part 2: <u>Strength's</u> <u>identification</u>	Analyzing characters	After completing the homework, in which students watch a movie of their choice, they analyze their favorite character to identify the character's strengths. This activity serves as a review and repetition of the in-class movie-watching process, helping students practice and improve the accuracy of their behavior analysis.
	Johari window	Students sit in a circle and discuss with their classmates to share perspectives about themselves. For example, they talk about how they see themselves, their skills, and how their friends see them, including their strengths and weaknesses. Students record the feedback they receive from their friends to use in the next activity for further analysis.
Part 3: <u>Applying</u> <u>personality</u> <u>Strength</u>	Self-reflection	Students use the information from the Johari Window activity to analyze whether their self-perceived strengths match the strengths seen by their friends. This helps students identify their true strengths. However, students have the right to question or do not fully accept feedback from friends if they are confident in their own understanding of their strengths.
	Best possible self-daily	Students applied their identified strengths to their daily lives by writing about their "best possible future self" and setting daily goals that aligned with the person they wanted to become. They then reflected each day on how they used their strengths and how these actions helped them move closer to their expected version of themselves. For example, a student might plan to exercise for 20 minutes and finish one pending task in order to become a more organized person.
Part 4: <u>Learning</u> <u>assessment</u>	Teacher assessment	The instructor assessed students' learning outcomes in various dimensions, such as their understanding of basic concepts in positive psychology, by evaluating their <i>Best Possible Self</i> assignments using a rubric.
	Student-self assessment	Students conducted self-assessments on changes in their skills and desirable characteristics before and after participating in the activity. These included aspects such as recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses, reflecting on their personal thoughts, managing stress, self-esteem, planning, and developing a more positive outlook on life.

Research Design

Participant

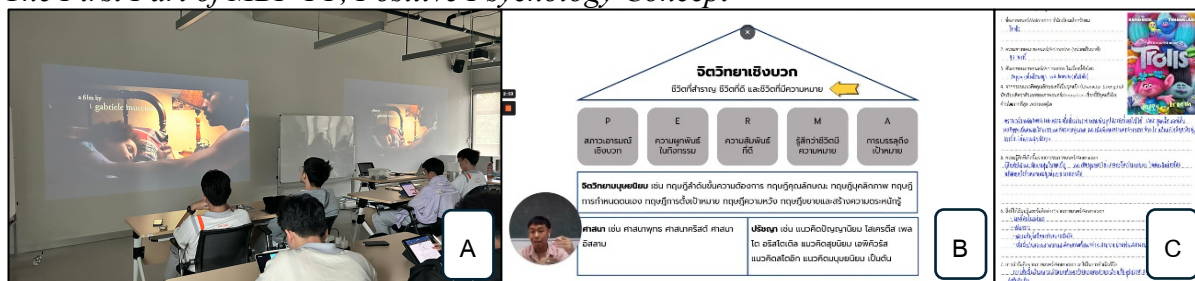
The participants in this study were 83 Grade 12 students from the College of Engineering and Science, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. They were pre-university students preparing for university entrance examinations and were enrolled in the course ESC624 The Mentalist.

Procedure

The Movie-Based Learning in Positive Psychology on Stress Management, Strengths Identification, and Self-Esteem among Pre-university Students (MBL-PP) consisted of 4 parts which were presented in Figures 2–5.

Figure 2

The First Part of MBP-PP, Positive Psychology Concept



In Figure 2 showed the first part, positive psychology concepts, which introduced students to basic ideas in positive psychology through a movie-based learning activity. This step consisted of three sub-stages: pre-viewing, while-viewing (2A), and post-viewing (2B). Students were also assigned a take-home task (2C) in which they analyzed a main character from the movie they liked. This activity was designed to help them practice identifying positive psychology concepts embedded in the film.

Figure 3

The Second Part of MBP-PP, Strength's Identification

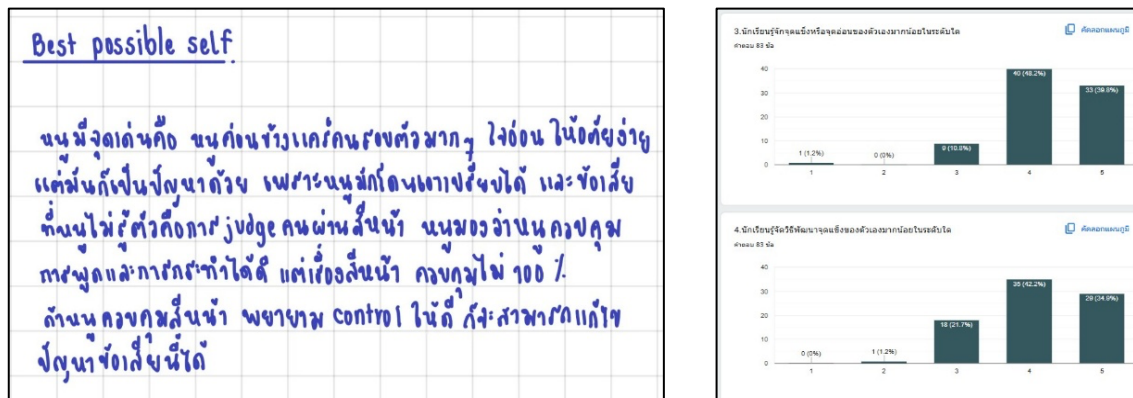


Figure 3 shows Step 2, strengths identification, in which students identified their strengths by completing the Johari Window activity with their classmates. After that, in the next part, students analyzed the strengths identified from the previous activity to see whether they agreed with them. They then practiced applying positive psychology concepts learned from the movie-based learning activity by completing the Best Possible Self Daily task (4A). In the final part (4B), students were assessed by the instructor on their understanding of positive psychology

theory, as well as their self-assessment of various skills before and after participating in the activity.

Figure 4

The Third and Final Part of MBP-PP, Applying Personality Strength and Learning Assessment



Data Collection and Analysis

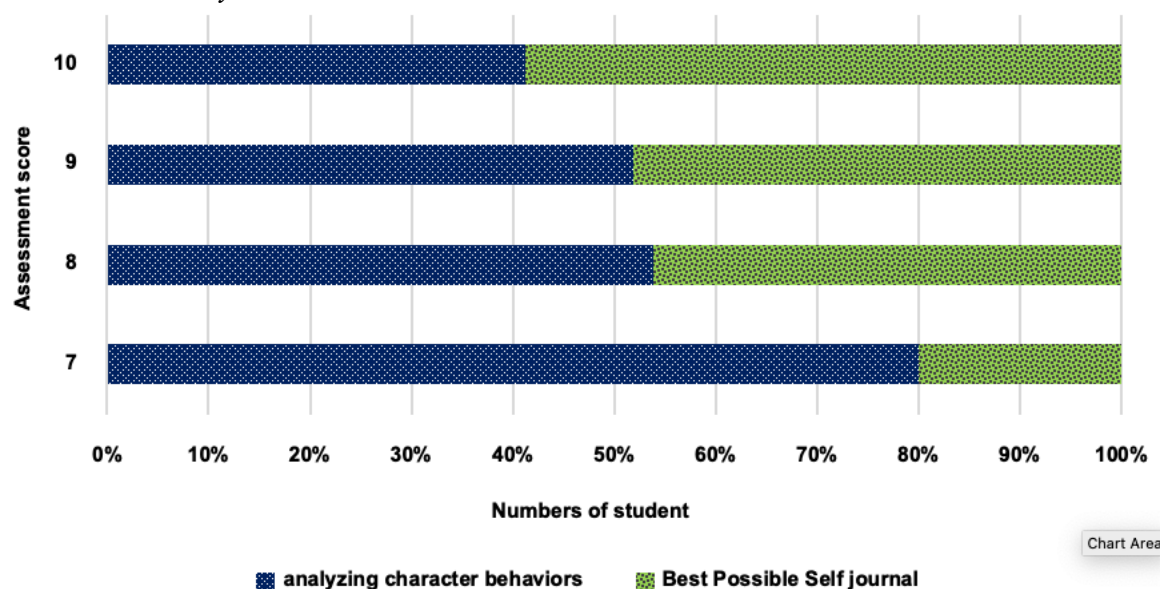
Data collection in this study was conducted using two main methods. First, the instructor assessed students' understanding of positive psychology concepts learned through movie-based learning and related activities. This included evaluating their character analysis, strengths development, and Best Possible Self reflections using a rubric score. Second, students completed self-assessments before and after the activity on various skills, such as stress management, self-esteem, awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, applying strengths for self-development, positive thinking, and planning. The questionnaire items were adapted from previous research (Cohen et al., 1983; Govindji & Linley, 2007). All data were then analyzed statistically using SPSS with a paired t-test.

Results and Discussion

Learning Achievement

Based on the teacher evaluated the students' work, including the character analysis from their chosen movies and their Best Possible Self daily journals after completing the MBL-PP activities, it was found that the students were able to apply positive psychology concepts correctly in analyzing character behaviors, with an average score of 8.87 ± 0.97 out of 10. Similarly, by using their personal strengths to develop themselves through the Best Possible Self journal, students achieved an average score of 9.81 ± 0.85 out of 10 (Figure 5). These results show that the students understood the principles of positive psychology and were able to apply them effectively in their daily lives.

Figure 5
Score Assessed by the Teacher



Student Self-Assessment Score

Based on the students' self-assessment after completing the MBL-PP activities, their scores were higher in all learning achievements compared to before the activities. The results, shown in Table 2, indicate that students improved their ability to identify their own strengths and apply them in daily life to manage stress and pressure. They also showed increased confidence, a more positive outlook, and a genuine sense of hope (Figure 6).

Table 2
Students' Self-Assessment Scores Before and After Learning Through MBL-PP

Skills	Experiment	<i>n</i>	Mean±SD	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Stress management	Before	83	3.24±0.79	6.79	< 0.001
	After		4.47±0.73		
Reflecting own self	Before	83	2.91±0.96	11.27	< 0.001
	After		4.57±0.32		
Strength's analysis	Before	83	3.31±0.87	6.03	< 0.001
	After		4.25±0.55		
Strength's development	Before	83	3.04±0.65	10.53	< 0.001
	After		4.43±0.57		
Positive thinking	Before	83	3.29±0.53	8.47	< 0.001
	After		4.47±0.48		
Self-esteem	Before	83	3.29±0.79	6.79	< 0.001
	After		4.45±0.54		
Belief in hope	Before	83	2.89±0.49	7.67	< 0.001
	After		4.41±0.56		

Figure 6*Students' Self-Assessment Scores Before and After Learning Through MBL-PP*

Conclusions

In this study, a movie was used as an instructional medium to teach positive psychology. The evaluation focused on students' ability to understand the content and apply positive psychology concepts in their daily lives, such as managing stress, recognizing their own strengths, and maintaining a positive outlook. The results showed that the teachers' assessment scores were very high, and the students' self-assessment scores improved in every skill after completing the activities.

Overall, this study demonstrates that movies can serve as an effective learning tool to help students achieve the intended learning outcomes. It also suggests that teachers should select films that are suitable and aligned with the concepts they want students to learn. In addition, using movies can inspire students to learn from alternative instructional media beyond traditional classroom lectures in the future.

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