



## Identification of Culture Specific Values and Positive Emotions among School Children

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### ABSTRACT

*This research is an indigenous inquiry for identification of culture-specific values and positive emotions among school children. Cultural values and positive emotions are essential for promoting psychological well-being. They are significant for developing effective interventions to prevent developmental issues and promotion of positive institutional environment. In this qualitative survey responses of 150 school children (boys=80, girls=70) of aged 9-12 years ( $M=10.86$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ) and 50 primary school teachers (men=12, women=38) were recorded for the identification of culture specific values and positive emotions. The participants were recruited using purposive sampling from two public schools of Lahore. Questionnaire on Culture Specific Values and Positive Emotions (students' and teachers' version) with open-ended questions were used for data collection. The content analysis of data yielded significant positive self-traits including self-awareness, resilience, hard work, joyfulness and sharing of thoughts and physical objects. Gratitude, altruism and respect were identified as prominent moral values. Building relationships, social intelligence and self-regulation came out as major themes. The study implies for the policy makers that understanding culture-specific values and positive emotions is a vital step towards shaping a peaceful and tolerant society as well as for promoting global harmony and intercultural dialogue.*



### Introduction

Positive emotions and culture-specific values are important aspects of social and emotional development in children. It is also an essential element for children's well-being and health (Fredrickson, 2013). Seligman (2002) has identified positive emotions, positive traits (virtues, personal strengths and skills) and the positive institutions as pillars of positive psychology. The school as educational institution is the most significant element after family to learn and develop the skills and knowledge for adaptation to real life situations. Schools serve the role of primary prevention not only for individuals at risk but also preclude the developmental crisis in all students (Meyers & Meyers, 2003). The significance of academic environment and mentors has been widely studied. Empirical research has implied that educators' emotions, emotional skills, and their own emotional regulation, socio-emotional competencies, and emotional intelligence reinforce the quality of education and personal growth (Wang 2022).

Various studies have supported the hypotheses that positive psychology programs in schools have contributed to academic success, mental health, building relationships, authentic and secure relationship, and higher levels of childhood happiness (Alam, 2022). The role of emotions has become a significant area of

recent research interest. The focus of research has shifted from negative emotions to positive emotions over the past decade. However, limited empirical evidence found for positive emotions in the school milieu. Palomera (2017) studied the gender differences in positive emotions, well-being and life satisfaction. The study also examined the role of intervening strategies and mentors' training. It was postulated that inclusion of happiness as an educational objective and agenda of teaching methods is important to incorporate positive psychology in schools.

In an exploration of emotional intelligence and academic motivation in primary school children, Arias, et al. (2022) found considerable level of emotional intelligence in all factors including self-conscience, use of emotions, social skills, empathy and practice of self-control. There was no gender difference in high yielded academic achievement over all. However, girls appeared to have higher levels of emotional intelligence. The authors of the study emphasized the need of emotional competencies program for psychological development and academic motivation.

A culture friendly school environment enhances positive perceptions about self in children and facilitates educational and non-educational outcomes including social relationships with peers and teachers and society (Phan, et al., 2016). Cultural values act as guiding principles, providing a framework for understanding the world and determining what is considered desirable or appropriate within a particular society. At the core of these cultural values lie positive emotions, representing the universal human desire for happiness, fulfillment, and well-being. A qualitative survey was conducted to identify the positive emotions and culture-specific values in school children (Thomas, et al., 2023). The study aimed to see the expression and representation of positive emotions and values. The study revealed that children's social emotional competence is fundamental to their positive development, and cultural norms and values play a crucial role in shaping their emotional and behavioral development (Thomas, et al., 2023; Waheed et al., 2022).

The theoretical framework for present study draws on key theories and concepts of socialization, and positive psychology. Socialization theories explain the process of the individual development of a human personality within a social environment, with specific living conditions. It is postulated that individuals acquire language, knowledge, social skills, norms, values, and customs that are necessary for participating in and integrating into a group or community (Höppner, 2017). The theory of positive psychology draws attention to the role of positive institutions, positive individual traits and positive subjective experience for enhanced quality of life and absence of illnesses (Babar et al., 2022; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The present study is designed to bridge the research gap in the realm of positive emotions and culture specific values in primary school children in the indigenous context. This qualitative survey has investigated the research question that, what positive emotions and culture specific values exist in young children?

### **Objectives**

This study aimed at identification of culture specific values and positive emotions, considering the significance of culture in display of emotions and behaviors and investigating different cultural values and positive emotions among school children aged 9-12 years.

### **Method**

#### **Design**

This was a qualitative survey where content analysis of open-ended questionnaires was carried out. The data was obtained from stakeholders including, school children and primary school teachers.

#### **Participants**

The sample comprised 150 school children aged 9-12 years and 50 primary school teachers. The sample was recruited from two public sector schools of Lahore after taking permission through proper channel from concerned authorities.

The sampled school children consisted of 80 boys and 70 girls ( $M=10.86$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ). Among these 150 participants, 74 were from grade 4 and 76 were from grade 5. The sample of school teachers consisted of 38 women and 12 men ( $n=50$ ) within an age range from 26 to 54 years ( $M=38.9$ ,  $SD=7.93$ ). All of the respondents were educated with 16 years of education; 10 participants had additional professional qualifications including diplomas in computer sciences, fine arts, elementary education, secondary education and/or business studies.

#### **Sampling Technique**

The purposive sampling strategy was used for this study. The target population of 9-12 years was approached by selecting participants from this specific group to gain insights into the positive emotions experienced by children within the school context. Purposive sampling technique was used to ensure true representation of primary school children.

#### **Instruments**

Two open-ended questionnaires were developed for the qualitative survey. Following Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (2014), both the questionnaires presented real-life situations to identify the display of emotions

and emotional reaction. It is assumed that display of mental health is represented by frequently occurring behaviors and emotional display in every-day life situations. The questionnaires were evaluated by experts to check their relevance to the identified constructs. Keeping in view the experts' recommendation the tools were finalized. The questionnaire was developed in Urdu and English language for better understanding and convenience of the participants. Urdu language is selected as it is national language. English language is selected having it as medium of instruction and widely understandable language.

**Questionnaire on Culture Specific Values and Positive Emotions (children's version)**

This open-ended questionnaire comprised 12 questions based on everyday experiences of young children 9-12 years. Some of the questions are as follows:

- Q. 3 What you do when study becomes hard?
- Q. 4 What is the most enjoyable part of your school day?

**Questionnaire on Culture Specific Values and Positive Emotions (Teachers' version)**

This open-ended questionnaire comprised 11 questions based on everyday experiences of young children 9-12 years. Some of the questions are as follows:

- Q. How does a child behave with fellow students?
- Q. What are the general feelings of children during breaks or in the playground?

**Procedure**

The qualitative survey attempted to look into culture specific values and positive emotions experienced by schoolchildren aged 9-12 years. Data collection was done after prior permission from the administration of schools. The respondents' identity was kept confidential and anonymity was maintained. As the respondents are children the permission from parents were taken during parent teacher meetings prior to data collection.

The questionnaires from 150 students were presented in groups within their classrooms. The researcher gave instructions to answer the questions and participants' queries were addressed instantly. The data from 50 teachers from primary education was collected individually.

Four stages of content analysis including coding, categorizing, comparing, and concluding was used (Cohen et.al, 2007). The text responses to open-ended questions were simplified by focusing on the specific features of text as per Dornyei (2007). The meaningful categories of the words, phrases, and sentences were developed to make connections between and amongst categories. The concluding stage involved inferring results from the content analysis. Concurrent triangulation design suggested by Creswell, Clark, and Gutmann (2003) was used to analyze responses. The central focus of the identified themes was the recognition and identification of positive emotions and culture specific values.

**Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was used for open ended-responses. Content analysis was opted as preferred approach because it examines the communicated text for specific purposes, provides insight into human thought and language use while affirming certain words, texts, concepts and themes used, focusing on the intention of a specific group and detects the disparities in selected content. It was selected considering its significance for curriculum designers, authors and decision-makers (Shahmohammadi, 2013).

**Results**

The detailed analysis of responses from open-ended inquiry yielded different sets of themes in both categories of respondents including school children and teachers. The responses of school children highlighted the prominence of positive emotions and values across various dimensions, such as positive self-traits, moral values, social intelligence, citizenship, self-regulation, relationship building, love for learning, and responses to unacceptable emotions or behaviors. Table 1 presents four major categories of themes extracted from responses of school children.

**Table 1**

*Content Analysis of positive emotions and culture specific values among schoolchildren*

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Initial themes	Frequency	
Positive self-traits of children	Personal traits	Resilience	24	
		Optimism	10	
		Self-awareness	19	
		Joyful/happy	14	
		Fun loving	26	
		Inspiration/motivation	28	
		Religiosity	17	
		Hard work	45	
		Appreciation of beauty	14	
		Interest	15	
		Sharing (thoughts/emotion & Physical things)	23	
		Moral/ethical values	Honesty	10
			Gratitude	10

		Serenity/contentment	7
		Forgiveness	3
		Fairness	11
		Modesty	8
		Respect	18
		Truthfulness	12
		Altruism	50
	Social intelligence	Love	32
		Kindness	40
		Understanding situations	14
	Citizenship/ patriotism		46
	Self-regulation/ problem solving	Physical activity	18
		Relaxation	18
		Judgment	6
		Change in strategies	12
Building relationship	Communication	Positive communication	17
		Humor	14
		Empathy	4
	Establishing and maintaining relationship	Fulfilling needs	18
		Friendship	19
		Freedom	2
		Help seeking	11
		Caring & sharing	66
		Sense of security & protection	6
Love for learning perspective	Curiosity		22
		Creativity	7
Unacceptable emotions & behaviors of others	Negative Emotions	Anger	8
	Unacceptable behavior	Bad mannerism	21
		Being naughty	6

Positive self-traits of children can be seen as first identified group of themes with significant values in all sub themes. Sub themes include; personal trait, moral/ethical values, social intelligence, citizenship/patriotism and self-regulation/ problem solving.

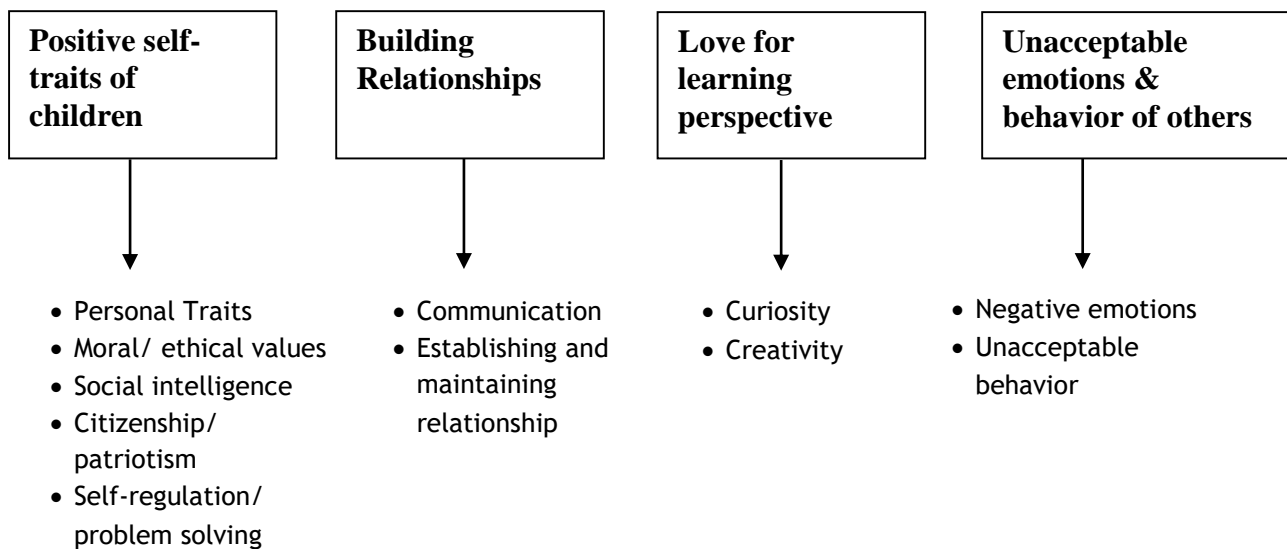
Hard work was highly reported by school children following inspiration/motivation. Love for fun, resilience and sharing thoughts and physical things was obtained as major self-traits. Self-awareness, religiosity, interest, optimism and appreciation of beauty are some other expressed traits.

The important sub-theme of moral and ethical values encompassed altruism, respect, truthfulness, fairness, honesty, and serenity/contentment. The obtained values are considered important in various contexts. The sub-theme of social intelligence can be seen with kindness, love and understanding situation which is a very positive approach among children.

Citizenship/patriotism and self-regulation and problem solving are the next category of sub-themes. Use of physical activity, relaxation and change in strategies can be seen as significant ways of self-regulation and problem solving.

**Figure 1**

*Categories of themes regarding positive emotions and values by schoolchildren*



The analysis reflected building relationship as next major theme. Sub-themes of caring & sharing, fulfilling needs, friendship, positive communication, humor and help seeking were identified as key elements that contribute to the formation and maintenance of healthy and fulfilling relationships. Interestingly empathy, freedom and sense of security were narrated less frequently within this category.

Love for learning perspective and unacceptable emotions and behaviors of others are last two major themes identified. Curiosity represented key contributor of learning whereas bad mannerism and anger were frequently identified as unacceptable behavior and emotion of others.

The table 2 presents the themes that emerged from analysis of responses given by school teachers. Three groups of major themes were identified with ten categories of sub-themes.

**Table 2**

*Content Analysis of Positive Emotions among Teachers*

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Initial themes	Frequency
Positive self traits of children	Personal traits	Resilience	5
		Optimism	6
		Self-awareness	18
		Joyful/happy	31
		Fun loving/amusement	15
		Inspiration/motivation	17
		Religiosity	12
		Excitement	26
		Appreciation of beauty	5

		Alert or curiosity	8
		Interest	14
		Sharing (thoughts/emotion & physical things)	30
	Moral/ethical values	Honesty	
		Gratitude	20
		Modesty	2
		Respect	25
		Altruism	18
	Social intelligence	Love	11
		Kindness	11
		Understanding situations	17
	Citizenship/ patriotism		1
	Self-regulation/ problem solving	Physical activity	6
	Building relationship	Caring & sharing	29
		Positive communication	10
		Friendship	7
		Empathy	6
		Anger	6
Negative emotions & behaviors of children	Negative emotions	Disappointment/ dishearten	22
		Fearful	3
		Ashamed	8
	Negative behaviors	Not willing to help	5
		Shy/hesitant	17
		Being reserve	4
Sources of learning emotions	Nurture	Parental modeling	16
		Training from elders	19
	Nature	Nature of child	3

Firstly, in major theme of positive self-traits of children, six categories of sub-themes were identified including; personal traits, moral/ethical values, social intelligence, citizenship/patriotism, self-regulation/problem solving and building relationship. Sharing of thoughts/emotions/belongings was highly observed element in teachers' reported observation. Teachers as participants also highlighted being joyful, excited, self-aware and religious among personal traits of children.

Moral/ethical values emerged as the second sub-theme for children narrated by teachers. Gratitude, respect and altruism were significant observations reported. Social intelligence was the next category of sub-theme with central focus on understanding others, with love and kindness.

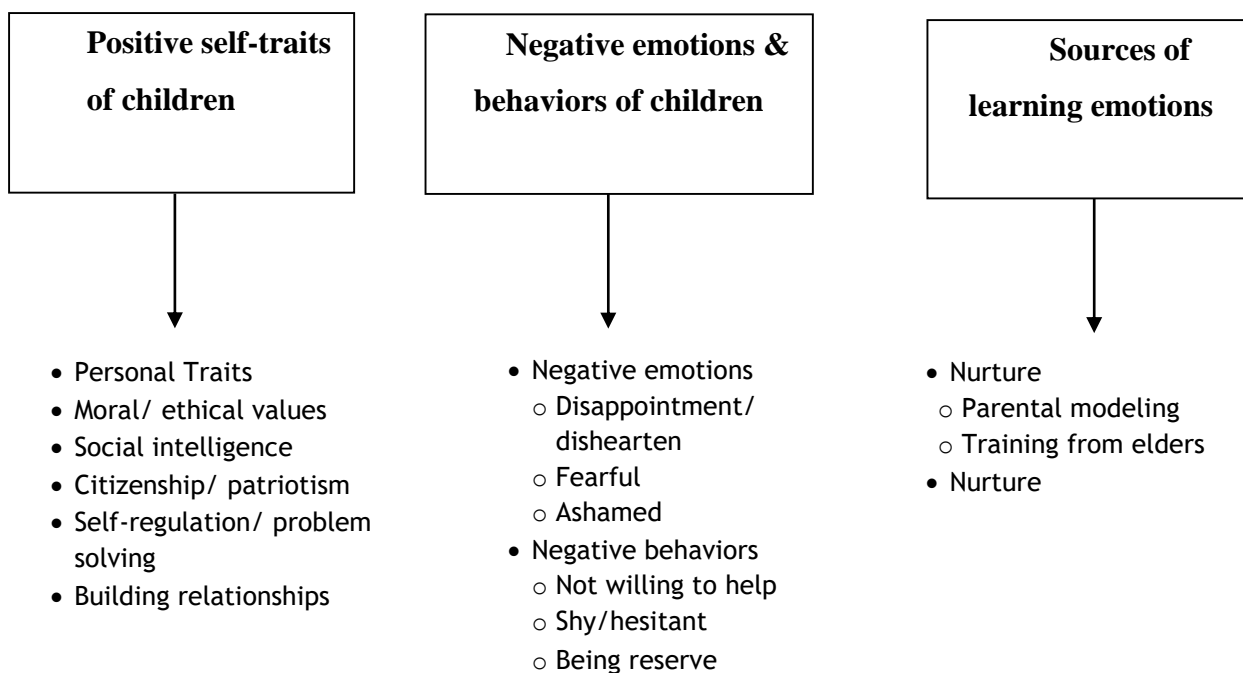
The elements of caring and sharing with others, followed by positive communication and friendship emerged as key element of next sub-theme titled as building relationships.

Negative emotions & behaviors of children emerged as second major theme. According to teachers' observation feeling disappointed and being shy and hesitant is most occurring negative behavior and emotions respectively among children.

Sources of learning emotions is third major theme with sub-theme of natural process and nurture. As per reported observations, parental modeling and training from others are element of nurture whereas nature of child is natural sources of learning emotions for school children.

**Figure 2**

*Categories of themes regarding positive emotions and values by school teachers*



## Discussion

The findings of the study provided indigenous insight regarding positive emotions and culture specific values. The outcome has revealed that positive emotions are important source of motivation, proactive engagement, positive emotional functioning, building relationships and positive self-traits; as reported in a study by Phan et al, 2019.

The study illustrated positive self-traits of children as significant finding; where joy, sharing (thoughts and emotions), excitement and self-awareness appeared as highly valued traits. Lavy (2020) has theorized positive traits as one of the building blocks of well-being in 21<sup>st</sup> century; it is further explained that positive self-traits can be grounded naturally but individuals' experiences and environment can broaden the prevalence and potential development of well-being. In present study hard work and inspiration have come up as important self-traits reported by children which can be attributed to school environment.

Culture specific positive emotions and values like altruism, respect and citizenship/patriotism are highly reported by school children; whereas respect, gratitude and altruism are observed values among children by teachers. In a study it was found that culture plays a significant role in shaping the experience and expression of positive emotions. Cultural values such as collectivism, respect for authority, and adherence to social norms were found to have a strong impact on the children's emotional experiences (Von Suchodoletz & Hepach, 2021).

The sources of learning positive emotions were identified indirectly by teachers' observation as it was not directly asked from the participants. Training from others and parental modeling and natural tendency of child was observable sources of learning. A meta-analysis by Cosso et al. (2022) has also shown parental involvement as having significant impact on academic and social-emotional outcomes of young children.

Anger, disappointment, being ashamed or hesitant were identified as negative emotions and behaviors of school children in this study. An earlier study found that school problems were associated with negative

emotions and externalizing symptoms in children (Bai & Repetti, 2018).

Triangulation of data revealed similar findings however discrepancies were also observed in children's narratives and teachers' observation about students. Resilience, hard work and self-regulation/problem solving was highly reported by school children whereas excitement was observable in children by teachers only. Witten et al. (2011) have also claimed that ubiquitous textual data bring new perspectives and great potential for researchers to explore how children adapt and develop. The current study has shown that text data can truly reflect an individual's conceptions, emotional attitudes, and feelings.

### **Limitations**

One primary limitation in studying culture-specific values and positive emotions lies in the inherent complexity and subjectivity of human experiences. Cultures shape our perceptions, influencing how we interpret and express emotions. Factors such as language, social norms, historical context, and religious beliefs all contribute to the intricate interplay between culture and emotions. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of culture-specific values and positive emotions requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates psychology, anthropology, sociology, and cross-cultural studies.

Small sample size is another limitation-of this study that can limit generalizability and reduced variation that may cause a lack of diversity necessary to capture a wide range of perspectives, experiences, or opinions.

### **Conclusion**

This research has discovered the fascinating realm of values and positive emotions indigenously. Considering social emotional competence as key to the positive development of children and youth and early education as facilitator in prevention of problems and promoting well-being (Jennifer, 2023) this study can help policy makers in creating environments that prioritize positive emotions and support the well-being and emotional development of primary school children.

By acknowledging and appreciating the unique ways in which various cultures conceptualize and prioritize positive emotions, we can develop a more inclusive and compassionate global society. Ultimately, understanding culture-specific values and positive emotions is a vital step towards promoting global harmony and intercultural dialogue.

This study can help schools as institution for positive emotions to incorporate curriculum and teaching methodologies for promoting positive emotions and well-being among children. It also provides bases for policy makers to identify and implement evidence-based programs that have a positive impact on children's emotional well-being.

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