

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impact of Life Coaching on Students' Well-being and Engagement Levels in Qatar

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of an evidence-based coaching intervention in a Qatari government preparatory (middle) school. The study sample consisted of 40 male students aged between 13 and 16 years (mean age 14.2). The sample was randomly selected and divided into two groups, namely the coaching group and the control group, to conduct a randomized controlled trial. The coaching program was part of a coaching club established for the purposes of this study. The coaching group took part in a 24-session evidence-based coaching program (teacher-facilitated) that included topics such as goal setting, leadership skills, coaching, and personality types. Pre- and post-measures were obtained for both groups. The measures consisted of the Big-Five personality traits survey and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. In addition to the quantitative measures, interviews were conducted with eight randomly selected students from the coaching group to increase the qualitative dimension of the results.

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Both groups showed a decrease in satisfaction with life as well as most of the personality traits over the period of the school year. However, the decrease was overall small among the coaching group. In addition, the coaching group showed a 40% higher rate of goal achievement compared with the control group. Moreover, the interviews strongly showcased both the students' interest in the coaching program and its contribution to their well-being and engagement with their academic and personal goals.

This study reveals the urgent need to pay attention to students' well-being in Qatari schools, and proposes life coaching as a promising intervention to fill that gap. Limitations of this study and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Qatar, Government school, Life coaching, Educational intervention, Student well-being

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the state of Qatar announced a national vision of becoming a knowledge-based economy by the year 2030 (General Secretariat for Development Planning 2008). The Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) has put the Gulf nation on a track of rapid transformation from a traditional society into a knowledge society: "A society of skilled, flexible and creative people" who will be able to build and sustain the knowledge economy for generations to come (Qatar Knowledge Economy Project 2007).

The QNV 2030 includes four pillars: economic, environmental, social, and human pillars (General Secretariat for Development Planning 2008). Among these pillars, the most vital one is the human pillar. The leadership in Qatar took on its shoulders to radically reform the country's educational system in order to deliver the required outcomes for building and developing the desired knowledge economy. However, many obstacles are encountered in such an endeavor.

In 2004, the RAND Corporation was invited to conduct a comprehensive study of the quality of education in the country. The report pushed for a major educational reform. The reform took place in 2004 under the slogan "Education for a New Era." It was successful in establishing a modern educational system with state-of-the-art buildings, advanced technological equipment, flexible curricula, and hiring highly qualified foreign teachers. However, the initiative did not deliver the desired outcomes (Alkhatir 2016). Challenges to reform the educational sector in Qatar are complicated and interconnected. One of the main challenges is the lack of motivation among students to learn. Students usually think that school is boring and learning is not useful for their future. Another challenge is the academic weakness, especially in STEM subjects as well as the Arabic language. Results of international exams such as PISA and TIMSS reveal worrying scores if the national vision is to be achieved (OECD 2018). This study proposes to respond to these aspects by coaching students to effectively set goals and pursue them by developing growth mindsets (Dweck 2006) in students and using recent positive psychology techniques, including evidence-based life coaching.

Coaching and Education

The relationship between children's learning and well-being has gained increasing attention in recent years, with "growing evidence from diverse fields" which supports the contribution of one to the other (Awartani and Looney 2015, 15). This trend holds that recognizing children as whole and multidimensional is essential for their well-being (Awartani and Looney 2015, 24–26). Children must be seen and treated as whole. This means that the psychological, physical, and spiritual dimensions of children should be taken into account in learning as much as the cognitive and mental dimensions. The flagship of this trend is the newly evolved branches of psychology, namely positive psychology and life coaching.

Life coaching is relatively a new field of practice that is even more novel to educational settings. Although it has been gradually taking over mentoring in schools since 2005 as a more preferred teacher professional development tool (Killion 2012; Fletcher 2012; Tolhurst 2006; Lofthouse, Leat, and Towler 2010), it is still a field of exploration when applied to students (Giant 2014, 11). Nevertheless, the concept has gained increasing international momentum in recent years with very promising initiatives in the UK, Australia, and the USA (Fletcher and Mullen 2012; van Nieuwerburgh 2012; van Nieuwerburgh and Green 2014; Strycharczyk and Clough 2015; Campbell 2016, 133). The idea is rooted in taking advantage of the successes of executive and life coaching with adults in order to apply to younger adults and children, with the aim of developing both their academic and personal skills.

This study takes advantage of the recently implemented concept of "educational clubs" in Qatari government schools to create a coaching club. The purpose is to investigate the effectiveness of life coaching practices on improving students' well-being in its broader meaning, including psychological well-being.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of life coaching on students' well-being;
2. To measure the impact of life coaching on students' personality traits and satisfaction with life;
3. To suggest policy recommendations to enhance students' well-being in Qatar.

Qatar Educational Landscape

Qatar is a nation of approximately 2.6 million people as of 2017. Qatari citizens comprise 12% of the population with a total of 313,000 nationals (Snoj 2017). The country's per capita GDP of about \$68,940 ranks it fourth in the world. Education is compulsory up to grade 12, and schools are accessible to all citizens and residents working in the public sector of the country. Qatar's educational system has been subject to some reforms since the mid-1990s.

The nation's leadership had a vision for the Gulf emirate to become an "advanced" country by building a knowledge economy. The earliest project in this regard was the

establishment of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development in 1995. This vision of the leadership was declared as a national vision (QNV 2030) in 2008 (General Secretariat for Development Planning 2008).

By the early 2000s, it was evident that the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) school system was not in line with achieving the nation's vision. Graduates of K-12 public schools were unprepared for work and post-secondary studies, as complained by employers and post-secondary institutions, respectively (Brewer et al. 2007). The government took some initiatives to reform the system, but the results were not up to expectation (Alfadala 2015; Brewer et al. 2007). Thus, a radical and comprehensive educational reform, later named "Education for a New Era," was urgently required to make the expectation of a knowledge economy realistic.

A borrowed model of American charter schools was chosen by recommendation from a major international consultant. The RAND Corporation was invited in 2001 to examine and identify the problems with Qatar's K-12 school system, recommend a plan to improve the system, and monitor its implementation. The introduction of the "independent" (charter) school began in 2004 by gradually converting government schools under the Ministry of Education to independent schools under the Supreme Education Council (SEC). The SEC managed independent schools in parallel with the Ministry of Education until it completely took over all public schools with the new school model by 2011 (Alkhatir 2016, 108).

However, the SEC did not persist long enough. In 2016, it was transformed to become the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and independent schools were transferred back to the old system, which—according to some observers—marked the failure of the experiment. This was due to several problems that faced the system of independent schools, which are beyond the scope of this study.

Challenges in the K-12 Educational System in Qatar

The main challenge with Qatar's educational system lies in the gap between the remarkable spending on education and the academic outcomes of the system. Qatar spent 10.4% of its total public spending on education with a total sum of QAR 20.6 billion in 2017 (John 2016). Students in Qatar are, on average, three years behind OECD standards. Although Qatar's rank has improved slightly since the PISA test of 2006 (OECD 2007), it still ranks at the bottom quarter of the most recent list, PISA 2015 (OECD 2018). In addition, Qatar was ranked in the bottom 10 countries according to a 2015 OECD report titled "Universal Basic Skills." The weakness is apparent across the three tested subjects: mathematics, science, and reading.

The inverse correlation found between spending on education and quality of education led the report to conclude that "high-quality schooling and oil don't easily mix." The article describes how oil-rich countries failed to transform "their natural capital into the human capital" which represents the real wealth that will generate a strong economy for future generations (OECD 2015).

Previous observations reflect a poor level of learning in schools. A major part of the problem is due to low student motivation and interest in education. According to the 2012

report by Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) on education in Qatar, 50% of the students in independent schools stated that they felt bored "most of the time" at school. Another 41% of the students in independent schools either strongly or somewhat agreed that they did not put their maximum effort into studying. A count of four indicators representing poor student motivation—being bored in school, not putting maximum effort into studying, being absent from school, and being late for school—revealed that 36% of the students in independent schools showed chronic motivation problems (SESRI 2012).

Motivation is a very tricky challenge to deal with, especially from a policy-making point of view. It can be linked to a variety of factors ranging from family to school environment to quality of teaching all the way to various cultural nuances and subtleties. In other words, it is a problem that must be examined in a case-by-case manner. Every school and every student is different and unique. Therefore, the one-prescription-fits-all strategy will not be successful. An individualized support system within a framework that sees the student as a whole is what is needed. This is where a life coaching intervention can be helpful.

The Urgency of Paying Attention to Children's Well-being

It is becoming evident that putting efforts into improving children's well-being is of growing importance at all levels and in all countries, irrespective of rich or poor. "Affluent nations do not necessarily rate high when it comes to children well-being. Quite the contrary, there might be a negative correlation between wealth and children well-being" (Giant 2014).

The concept of educating the whole child has become a pressing need for schools around the world in recent years. With poor outcomes for children's well-being levels in many affluent and supposedly well-resourced countries such as the UK and the USA, schools have been increasingly tasked with developing children's social and emotional skills, and physical and mental health, as government and local policy-makers have realized that academic success alone does not necessarily translate into good well-being.

For some children, the environmental, social, and health factors that influence their well-being naturally translate into low school attainment and engagement. Without school-based efforts to monitor, support, and educate these children, they might fall in the gaps of society, becoming yet another statistic.

The question is: can life coaching be the answer?

Possible Benefits of Life Coaching

To answer the question posed above, it is undoubtedly important to explore all possible tools and solutions out there; however, life coaching's success with adults makes it a prime candidate to be employed in improving children and young people. As a practice, life coaching has several characteristics that make it very beneficial for children and young adults.

As a client-centered approach, life coaching helps children and young people understand themselves better. This means understanding triggers to negative emotion and

identifying positive and negative influences which help them build and improve relationships with peers and others.

The power of life coaching lies in the fact that “the life coach working with the child is not going to dominate coaching sessions with her presence as does a teacher in her classroom for instance (even in a student-centered learning environment)” (Giant 2014).

The coach sees the child as naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. Hence, he or she makes no judgment on the child’s behavior, emotions, or opinions. In addition, no advice should be given to the child. The coach practices active listening, rephrasing, and reflecting what he or she hears (giving feedback), then allows the child to think about his or her convictions and identify whether any limiting beliefs are holding them back from achieving their goals (Abdulla 2018). In this case, the coach “is completely out of the game” during the coaching session; therefore, it is completely a child-led process (Giant 2014).

This approach is powerful because, unlike many other adults in a child’s life, telling children what they should do with their life such as (but not necessarily) a parent, teacher, or school counselor, a coach will always use indirect techniques (such as active listening and effective communication) to help students “place their own finger” on where the problem lies (Giant 2014, 14). The students then set their own goals that are often unspecific, wide-ranging, and sometimes even unrealistic. With the help of their coach, goals are refined and put into a time frame. The coach will then help facilitate the change to occur through sharing and teaching the use of practical tools, continuous support, motivation, and informed optimism.

Another important characteristic of life coaching is that it trains children to set goals and obtain them, which reflects an improved self-esteem and self-confidence, eventually enhancing resilience and coping mechanisms. A coach may share insights with his or her students into what could be holding them back, and how they may move forward towards their goals. However, these insights are never in the form of instructions that are obligatory to follow. Therefore, a key to the success of the coaching journey is the coaching relationship. “This approach may be somewhat alien to some teachers and parents who are more accustomed to setting goals and targets for children, rather than encouraging the children to do so for themselves” (Giant 2014, 14). This is exactly where the power of coaching lies. It is the relationship that a coach builds with their young clients that makes the difference. As students learn these necessary life skills, they will be able to identify similar future situations and make life changes independently.

In addition, life coaching can help a school meet its students’ well-being targets, develop a school’s ethos of positivity and safety, contribute to students’ academic skills and attainment, and improve school attendance.

With respect to the above point, students are used to adults in positions of authority to them (whether they are parents, teachers, counselors, school principals, etc.). Therefore, it might be challenging and unnatural to the child to open up about their problems to an adult stranger such as a school counselor. Coaching provides an effective alternative as children will feel safer and untargeted in a group coaching program, allowing the development of

the coaching relationship. Children will eventually feel more comfortable and have the courage to explore deeper goals (i.e. face bigger challenges).

Previous Studies

Research in the field of life coaching is still in its infancy. Although key elements of coaching (i.e. goal-setting, reality-checking, action-planning, and feedbacking) have been widely researched in various fields of academia (especially in leadership literature and psychology studies) and proven effective (Abdulla 2018, 21), we will present here research focused on coaching as a whole process.

The First Evidence-Based Coaching Conference of 2003 organized by the Coaching Psychology Unit (CPU) of the University of Sydney, Australia (the world's first coaching psychology unit), can be considered the first attempt to establish a scientific "evidence-based" practice of coaching. The conference presented many papers that discussed coaching as a practice and its evolution and included some empirical studies on the effectiveness of coaching.

Anthony Grant and his colleagues at the CPU are among the leading researchers to conduct studies that adopted randomized controlled trials, which are considered the "gold standard" for testing the effectiveness of an intervention (Abdulla 2018). For example, one such study was conducted on 56 female students in Australia (Green, Oades, and Grant 2005; Green, Grant, and Rynsaardt 2007). The sample was randomly divided into two equal size groups, each comprising 28 participants. One of the two groups was randomly assigned to a 10-week coaching program, while the other group served as a control group.

The study used the Emmons (1986) procedure to assess striving for personal goals, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985) and the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988) to measure subjective well-being of participants, Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff 1989) to measure psychological well-being, and the Hope Trait Scale (Snyder et al. 1991), and the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond and Lovibond 1995) to measure psychopathology.

The study results showed that "a cognitive-behavioural, solution-focused life-coaching group program can enhance goal-striving, well-being and hope" (Green et al. 2005).

Challenges to Conducting Research into Coaching

Coaching is an emerging profession that faces several challenges in order to survive (Stober and Parry 2005). To effectively distinguish itself from other similar fields and forms of support (such as counseling, therapy, mentoring, and training), coaching needs to develop its concepts and models using an evidence-based research and practice (Stober and Parry 2005; also see Cavanagh, Grant, and Kemp 2005).

The aim of this work is an attempt to bring the practice of coaching to the light of theory and rigorous research.

The challenges include "developing appropriate measures, evaluating the effectiveness of coaching, developing theories of the coaching process and identifying the characteristics of effective coaching, and of clients and coaches" (Stober and Parry 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This study was based on a randomized controlled experimental design. The aim was to measure the impact of the life coaching intervention on the student sample by comparing it with a similar group that did not receive the coaching. The impact was measured using a set of questionnaires and interviews.

Experimental Design

A sample of 40 students was randomly selected from a pool of 270 students. Overall, 20 students ($n=20$) were assigned to the intervention (experiment) group that would receive coaching, and the other 20 ($n=20$) to a waitlist control group from the same pool of students. The pool was composed of 9th grade male students from a public (government) preparatory school in Qatar. In terms of nationalities, the sample was composed of 5% Gulf Cooperation Council nationals, 20% Qataris, and 80% other Arab nationalities. The age of students ranged between 13 and 16 years (mean 14.2 years). Both groups underwent the same pre-intervention assessment (time 1) and post-intervention assessment (time 2).

The Intervention

The students were asked to set two goals to work on throughout the school year: one was academic and the other was personal. Group coaching meetings took place weekly to support their learning and follow-up on their progress towards their goals. The program was composed of 24 group coaching sessions (50 minutes per session) conducted by two teachers in the school (including the author).

The coaching session included an icebreaker activity in the beginning, an introduction to specific life and leadership skills, group coaching on challenges they faced in achieving their goals, followed by a closing activity where students shared their key “takeaways” from the session (Table 1).

The coaching conversation was the core component of the session. It began by a question from the coach for students about any challenges they had been facing and would like to discuss. Usually a student picked the question to provide an answer and the coaching conversation moved from there to other questions. The other students observed while the student being coached (coachee) was engaged with the teacher. The coach asked powerful open-ended questions for the student to open new ways of thinking about the challenge. When a significant realization occurred on part of the student, the coach opened the conversation to other students to share what they thought or felt. The coach ensured that the conversation followed a coaching framework such as the GROW, OSKAR, and Ershad models (see Abdulla 2018).

A motivational card was sent to the members of the experimental group during the weekend to remind them to reflect on their performance and keep in touch with their goals.

Table 1. A typical structure of a coaching session conducted during the experiment.

Time	Activity
5 min	Icebreaker
10 min	Leadership skills*
30 min	Group coaching conversation
5 min	Takeaways

*This includes setting “SMART” goals, time management techniques, prioritization techniques, effective communication, persistence and perseverance, responsibility, creating third alternative solutions, and The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens.

Measures

The assessment included both qualitative and quantitative measures. The qualitative part comprised (1) a 55-item questionnaire about students’ mindsets, including a part where students chose an academic and a personal goal to achieve by the end of the school year; and (2) interviews after the intervention with a random sample from the coaching group.

Questionnaires

The survey was composed of the following:

- 1- An Arabic translation of the SWLS by Diener et al. (1985), which is a five-item questionnaire that measures participants’ satisfaction with their life on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely disagree) to 7 (extremely agree).
- 2- The IPIP representation of the Goldberg (1992) markers for the Big-Five factor structure. This is a 50-item questionnaire translated into Arabic by Almaghbashy (2017), which measures the Big-Five personality traits according to the renowned work by Lewis Goldberg, which are (1) extraversion (E), (2) agreeableness (A), (3) conscientiousness (C), (4) emotional stability (ES), and (5) intellect/imagination (I). The participants measured their endorsement of the questionnaire items on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight random students from the coaching group. The aim was to enhance the understanding of the quantitative data collected and to get a deeper insight into how the coaching affected the students. In addition, it was a way of receiving feedback on the quality of the intervention that should be expanded in the future.

Table 2. List of interview questions.

1. Was this program useful/helpful to you?
2. What part did you find most interesting?
3. What part you think should have been given more attention?
4. Did you need something like this?
5. Do you feel you have changed?
6. Would you recommend coaching to your friends and colleagues?

Data Analysis

The Big-Five survey contained 50 items, which were both direct and reverse (Almaghbashy 2017). Each student's response was given a score on a five-point scale, where 1 represented the least favorable response and 5 represented the most favorable response. The mean was first calculated for each personality trait for each student and then for both the coaching and control groups (Figures 1–4). The same process was applied to the results of the SWLS. The SWLS contained five items that were rated on a seven-point scale, where 1 represented the least favorable response and 7 represented the most favorable response (Diener et al. 1985). The mean was calculated for every student and then for both the coaching and control groups.

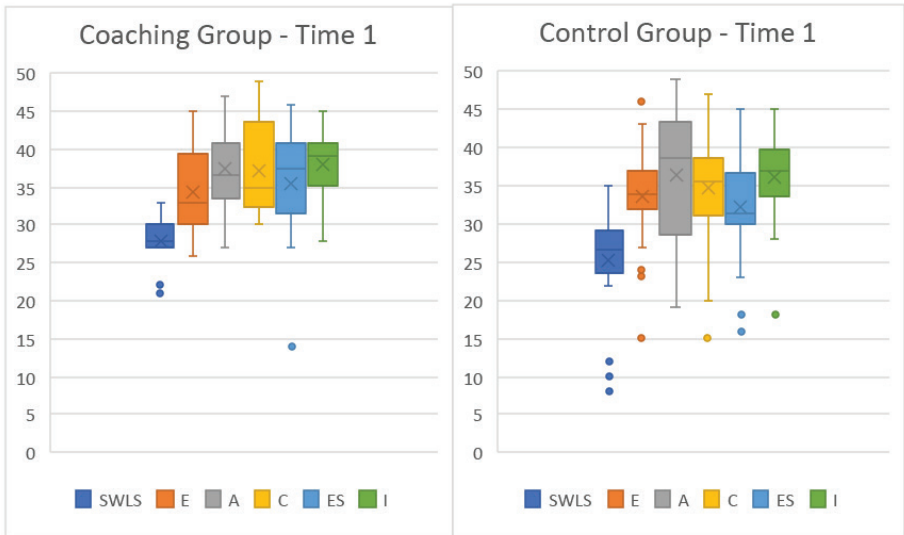


Figure 1. Data results before the experiment (time 1) for the SWLS and the Big-Five Scale (E: Extraversion, A: Agreeableness, C: Conscientiousness, ES: Emotional Stability, I: Intellect) for both the coaching and control groups.

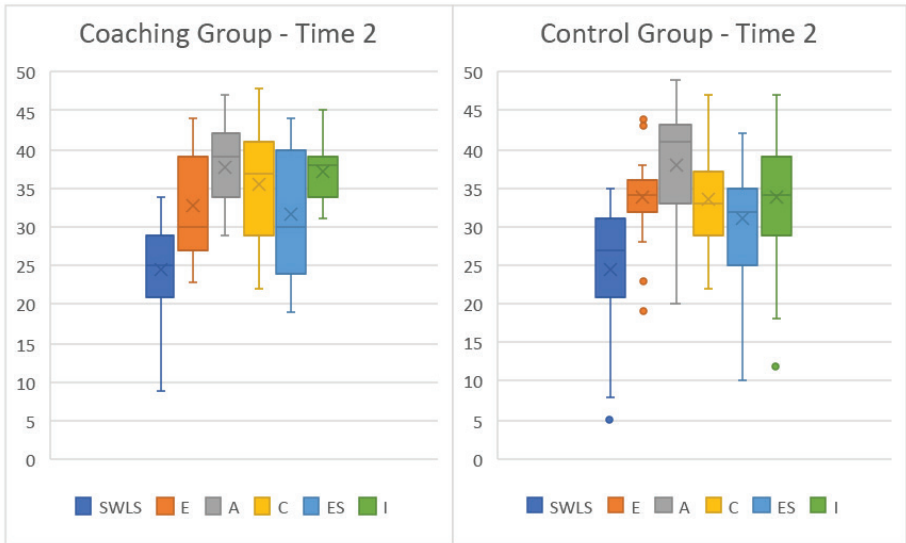


Figure 2. Data results after the experiment (time 2) for the SWLS and the Big-Five Scale (E: Extraversion, A: Agreeableness, C: Conscientiousness, ES: Emotional Stability, I: Intellect) for both the coaching and control groups.

Standard deviation was calculated for both time 1 and time 2 assessments. The values ranged from 5.42 to 7.77 for time 1, and from 5.98 to 7.91 for time 2. The high standard deviation values statistically imply that the experimental group is a sample of a larger population of students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Big-Five Scale and the SWLS

The most ironic result was that all students showed a decline ($\Delta < 0$) in all the traits, except for the trait of agreeableness. The coaching group showed similar but overall better results compared with the control group in the Big-Five Scale (i.e. intellect, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion), except for the trait of emotional stability and the SWLS (Figure 3). The comparable results in personality traits between the coaching and control groups logically affirm the random nature of the sample.

The decline in the results of the control group was higher in the personality trait of intellectual ability where a decrease of -0.5 was recorded for the coaching group and -2.56 for the control group. Similarly, the decline in conscientiousness was small for the coaching group ($\Delta = -0.37$) compared with the control group ($\Delta = -2.06$). Moreover, the decline in extraversion was only -0.12 for the coaching group, while it was -0.7 for the control group.

The only trait that showed an improvement from the beginning of the school year was

agreeableness. The control group showed an improvement of 0.75. However, the coaching group showed an improvement of 1.4 in their results for agreeableness.

The decline in emotional stability for the coaching group was almost double (-2.87) compared with the control group (-1.56). The other scale on which the coaching group showed a negative change was the SWLS.

The control group seemed to be more satisfied with their lives than their peers in the coaching group. They made a very small decline in satisfaction with life at -0.06, while their peers in the coaching group showed a decrease of -0.37.

Although the above results are not statistically representative (in terms of total number of respondents), this decline in overall well-being of students raises many questions. First, it increases genuine concerns about students' well-being during the school year. If students start the school year more satisfied with their lives than when they approach the end of it, school might be regarded as a deteriorating factor in students' well-being rather than a builder of it. It also raises the question over the length of the school year and its implications on students' well-being. More specifically, a significant decline was observed in the traits of intellectual ability (I) and conscientiousness (C) for the control group.

On the contrary, we observed an increase in the degree of agreeableness (A) in students. This could be interpreted as an increase in facets of trust and altruism in students. However, this is unlikely as we observe a decline in the trait of extraversion (E) which is connected to the facets of positive emotion and warmth (Herringer 1998). Therefore, it could be an increase in the agreeableness facet of compliance as a result of disciplinary measures taken by the school.

From these results, the least conclusion we can draw is that more attention should be given to students' well-being in schools.

In terms of goal achievement, 40% of the coaching group responded with "Yes I achieved my goal," compared with 20% of the control group. Another 50% of the coaching group said that they somewhat achieved their goals, and 37% of the control group responded with the same answer. Only 10% of the coaching group ticked the "No" box asking whether they are achieving their goals, compared with 17% of the control group.

To increase the contrast of the results, the same question was rephrased in the following negative form: "Did you fail to achieve your goals this year?"

Interestingly, none from the coaching group said they failed, although 10% stated that they did not achieve their goals in the first section. For the same question, 12% of the control group responded with "Yes I failed." This shows a 5% decrease from the 17% of the students who said that they did not achieve their goals.

The percentages were even more dispersed when it came to the second question "I have somewhat succeeded" and "I have somewhat failed" (Figure 4). Nevertheless, the coaching group showed a greater decline compared with the control group (30% and 22%, respectively).

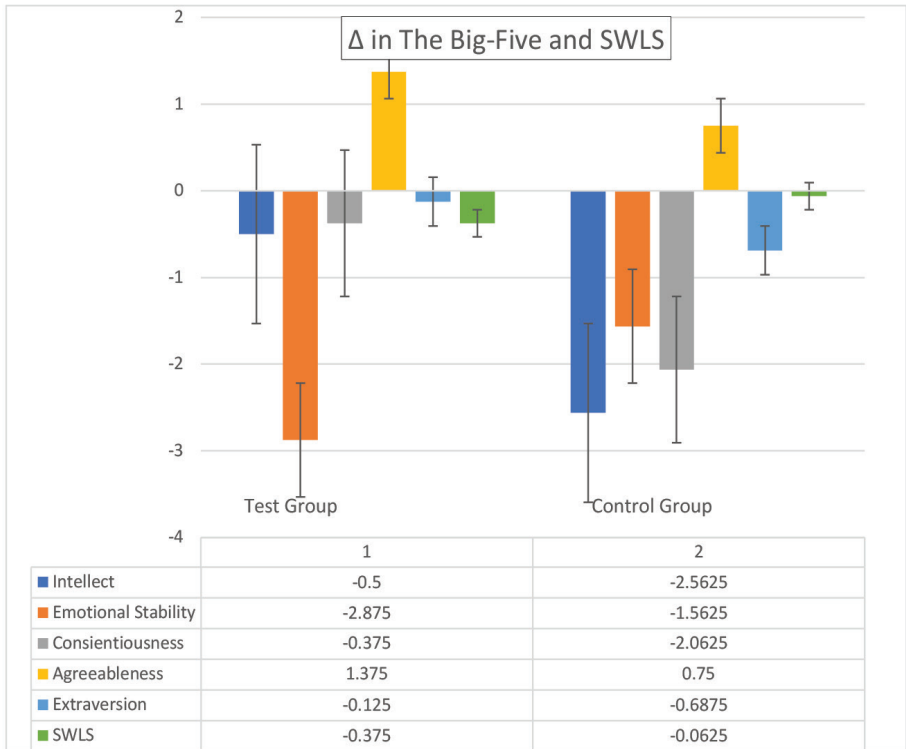


Figure 3. Change in the mean values of the Big-Five Scale and the SWLS.

The last question also showed a great disparity between the positive and negative forms of phrasing the question. The intervention group showed a 40% difference between responses to “I did not fail” and “I have achieved my goal.” The control group showed a difference of 35% between the same questions.

This suggests that the coaching group was either more reluctant to admit failure compared with the control group, or more resilient and persistent in pursuing their goals. On the one hand, the first conclusion is consistent with the result that there was a greater decline in emotional stability on the Big-Five personality traits scale. A reason for this could be that coaching had a side effect of putting more pressure on the students to reject failure and be more positive. Nevertheless, this is unlikely because coaching never entailed giving advice or convincing students that they should be anything (for an example of a coaching conversation, see Abdulla 2018). However, even if it is true, this might suggest that the school system has conditioned the students so much to be always the expected “good student,” especially with the increase in agreeableness. This might mean that they are more inclined to report what is expected of them.

On the other hand, the second conclusion suggests that the coaching group has become more resilient and persistent, which is supported by the improved score in the conscientiousness personality trait (Figure 3).

Nevertheless, coaching has undoubtedly increased the rate of goal achievement from 20 to 40% and decreased the rate of self-admitted failure from 12 to 0% (Figure 4).

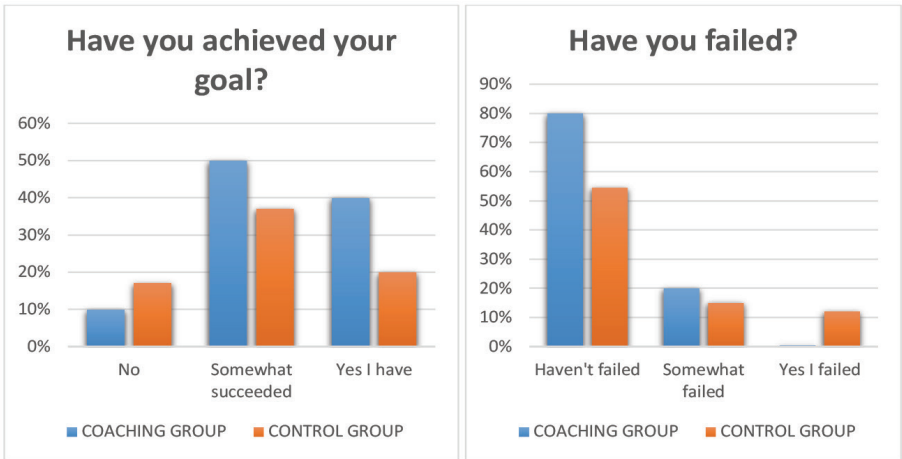


Figure 4. Students’ response to the goal achievement questions.

Interview Results

All the students who were interviewed found coaching useful to them as they responded with “yes” when asked whether the program was useful to them (Table 2). They also unanimously said that they would recommend the program to other colleagues and friends at school if it was offered again. Their overall impression of the coaching program varied between very good and excellent. Two students gave the program a rating of 10 out of 10, while the rest gave it a rating of 9 out of 10. Verbally, six students said that the program was “excellent” and two said it was “very good.”

When asked what part of the program was the most interesting for them, the answers varied from the little icebreaker activities that were conducted at the beginning of each session to the deeper self-discovery journeys and the process of pursuing their goals. Two students liked working with visiting coaches, and another two enjoyed the questionnaires and surveys.

In all cases, what seemed most important to the students was the actual process of setting and pursuing their goals, as reported by five interviewees.

The improvements they wished to see in the future included more competition games, more activities, more outside visitors, more fun, and more practical applications of what they had learned. However, their unanimous desire was to have more time for the coaching sessions. Some of them suggested two periods a week, while some others suggested dedicating two successive periods to the program per week.

On the other hand, there were two comments worth investigating: “to improve information delivery” and “to give students more freedom to contribute.” These two comments can be explained by considering the previous call for dedicating more time to the program. The shortage of time might have been the reason for the unconscious tendency of the coaches to rush through the program. Another reason could be the unawareness of the probable desire expressed by a student to contribute more. This is a drawback that is very difficult to overcome in group coaching with time constraints.

The most important question asked in the interview was: “Do you feel you have changed?” The majority of students (7 out of 8) answered “yes.” One example was Abdel-Khaliq who said he had changed positively. He gave an example where he became more accepting of opinions from people with whom he disagreed. Rather than being stubborn (which he said he used to be), now he gave ear to others, thanks to the coaching program he had at school.

When asked whether he would recommend the program to his friends and colleagues, Abdel-Khaliq responded by saying “if it [the coaching program] was a core subject it would have been much better!” When asked what the program helped him to discover, he said “responsibility and leadership.”

His colleague, Yousuf, said he benefited from the program to achieve his goal. He stated that his high grade of 95% at the final exams was possible because of the coaching program he underwent. The part he liked the most in the program was the process of setting goals and the icebreakers. He also strongly recommended it to his colleagues and wished to find a similar program in high school.

Bilal, a third student, believed that the program was beneficial in terms of helping him set personal goals and discover ways to achieve them. He wished there was more time for coaching in order to enable each student to discover more. He felt that the time dedicated to the sessions was short. In terms of learning, he gave an example of using goal-setting techniques for focusing in class and reviewing for his exams.

Lessons Learnt

This study revealed the urgent need of students for genuine attention. Today’s generation is like no other generation. With an unprecedented access to the sum of human knowledge at their fingertips, today’s children and young adults are no longer in need for more information. They feel confused and a sense of being lost. The cure to this situation is dialogue: that is, genuine conversation with adults who care. Caring can be manifested in different forms, but one of the easiest ways is to simply listen. The power of active, effective listening, life coaching style, combined with powerful short questions enable and support our children and young adults to be critical, brave, able to form opinions based on well-thought ideas, and recognize their emotions, among many other benefits.

The following points summarize the benefits of coaching in this experiment:

- Students of government schools in Qatar need attention for their overall well-being.
- Students showed remarkable interest in life coaching. They even gave up their break time to make the session longer. In addition, many more students showed strong interest in joining the coaching group throughout the experimental period.

- Students seemed to have a fairly good idea about coaching as a practice.
- Life coaching is a very promising, low-cost intervention that can be used to enhance students' well-being at schools.
- Personality trait surveys did not represent the best tools to measure and demonstrate the power of life coaching.
- Interviews proved to be far more effective in assessing students' experience with the life coaching intervention.
- Although the coaching sample came from two different classrooms only, meaning that students must have known each other for a long time (up to two years), they seemed to only connect on a superficial level. The icebreakers and team-building activities that took place before the coaching session proved to be of great importance to them.
- Students showed surprising acceptance for visualization activities.
- The random nature of the coaching sample ensured that students were at various academic levels, and proved that the intervention effectiveness was not dependent on high or low academic achievements.

Challenges

The major shortcoming of this study is the long duration of the study period. This means that there could be a wide range of contributing factors to the present results. In addition, the personality trait scales used in this study did not prove to be the most effective tool in measuring the nuanced impact of life coaching in school. This is possibly because coaching does not really attempt to alter or modify personalities, but rather facilitates a change in mindsets.

Other challenges included the following:

- Students frequently did not complete surveys, leading to cancel the entirety of their responses.
- Some students were moved by the school's administration to other classes during the school year for internal reasons. This led us to exclude them from the experiment.
- Sudden changes in the school year calendar led to a muddle in the order of coaching sessions, especially towards the end of the school year.
- School club periods were occasionally canceled for various reasons by the school administration and sometimes without prior notice.

Recommendations and Future Direction

This study recommends the following:

- To equip teachers with life coaching skills through professional development plans.
- To conduct more research in order to examine best practices and effective approaches in providing evidence-based coaching for students in Qatar.
- To develop a unique coaching model suitable for the context of Qatar.
- To establish coaching clubs in government schools in Qatar to support students' well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of life coaching on students' well-being. Today's children and young adults are in dire need for attention to their well-being. Studies have shown increasing levels of psychological challenges faced by children and young adults in school environments—Qatar is no exception. However, with the national aim of becoming a leading knowledge economy by 2030, Qatar must give more attention to its students' well-being. Recent global trends in perceptions about the synergy of learning and well-being reveal the necessity of viewing children in a holistic way. That is, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of the child should be included along with the cognitive and intellectual dimensions when designing learning experiences.

One way of achieving the specified aspiration, as this study suggests, is by taking advantage of the recently evolved field of life coaching. The benefits of life coaching include the ease with which it can be learned and applied; the simple techniques that it uses such as active listening, questioning, goal-setting, feedbacking, and reflecting; and its non-interfering nature based on the premise that no advice should be given and that every human is the expert of his or her own life.

This study followed a randomized controlled trial methodology. It used pre-intervention and post-intervention measures to quantify the impact of coaching. To enhance the qualitative nature of the results, interviews were conducted with the coaching group.

The results were promising and suggest that life coaching is a powerful tool that can be used to enhance students' well-being in schools.

Other shortcomings of the study include the low quality of quantitative data due to a long period of time between pre-intervention and post-intervention measures, the bureaucratic challenges in the school that affect students' results, and the use of personality trait scales which do not appear to be the best scale in reflecting the impact of life coaching.

This study suggests more research into testing the efficacy and power of life coaching for supporting students' well-being in school. We especially recommend the use of the hope and mindset scales, along with the SWLS, for future studies in order to reflect the depth of the life coaching intervention.

As for policy recommendations, it is imperative for policy-makers in Qatar to genuinely consider the level of students' well-being in school. Undertaking studies in which holistic well-being of children is upheld will allow for a deeper understanding of how this area can be cared for effectively. For the purposes of this study, we recommend that basic life coaching skills and techniques should be included in teacher professional development programs, establishing voluntary life coaching clubs in schools, and reviewing curricula and disciplinary codes of schools to accommodate broader dimensions of the child's well-being (including psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects).

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