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Design and Validation of a Curriculum Model Based on Positive Education Approach in Iran's Secondary Education

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A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

Purpose: One of the methods of curriculum design is based on the positive education approach. Therefore, the aim of this study was to design and validate a curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education.

Methodology: This study was applied and mixed-methods in terms of objective and implementation, respectively. The research population in both design and validation parts consisted of experts and scholars in the fields of educational studies, educational management, educational psychology, and research and planning experts for the compilation of secondary education textbooks. The sample of this study, based on the principle of theoretical saturation, included 22 individuals who were selected through purposive sampling and were subjected to semi-structured interviews and completion of a researcher-made questionnaire. The data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires were analyzed using coding methods based on grounded theory, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling.

Findings: Coding findings revealed that for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education, 50 components were identified in 4 categories: causal factors (16 components), contextual and intervening factors (18 components), strategies (8 components), and effects and outcomes (8 components). Validity was confirmed through triangulation method and peer review, and reliability was calculated at 77 percent using the inter-rater agreement method. Findings from the exploratory factor analysis showed that the factor loading of each of the 50 components was appropriate, and 11 components were able to explain 86.4 percent of the total variance of the curriculum based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education. Structural equation modeling findings indicated that the curriculum model had a suitable fit and significantly impacted all four categories: causal factors, contextual and intervening factors, strategies, and effects and outcomes.

Conclusion: Curriculum specialists and planners, based on the categories and components of this study, can take effective steps towards improving the curriculum based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education.

Keywords: Curriculum, Positive Education, Secondary Education, Education.

1. Introduction

Today, concurrent with the institutionalization of education's role in societal development, numerous efforts have begun to regulate this vital process, dividing education into various branches. Among these, the curriculum, in addition to various factors affecting education, has increasingly garnered attention as the heartbeat of the educational system and a tool for achieving educational goals, transforming the curriculum into a specialized yet controversial field in education. The term curriculum includes student learning objectives, content, sequence, students, teaching methods, educational activities, educational resources, evaluation, and coordination between teaching and learning processes based on experience (Meshkinfam et al., 2023). One of the primary and fundamental tasks of any educational system is to nurture effective, aware, and responsible citizens who stride towards their society's goals and aspirations for its excellence. In the past, individual and local needs were considered, but over time, human needs have transcended individual and local boundaries, creating common needs in connection with other individuals and societies, thereby broadening the educational systems' concerns in curriculum design (Gholtash et al., 2011). The curriculum is a crucial field in the education and upbringing of children and adolescents, encompassing essential educational elements and providing a framework for individuals' growth and perfection (Sherbine & Hara, 2022).

Curriculum design, serving as a conceptual map for curriculum producers, is one of the most fundamental topics in curriculum studies, focusing on resource identification, curriculum component recognition, and the type of decisions made regarding each. Despite various expert opinions on curriculum, this subject is not easily debated due to the lack of consensus among curriculum experts (Patton & Prince, 2018). Although there is no consensus among curriculum experts, what distinguishes an educational system and its curriculum from others are its goals and objectives. Undoubtedly, without clarifying and prioritizing objectives, it is impossible to policy-make and assign tasks to other curriculum components of the education system (Pinilla et al., 2021). Curriculum refers to a structured, planned series of educational opportunities at the classroom, school, neighborhood, regional, national, and international levels that position learners to acquire the necessary competencies to achieve and excel to an acceptable level (Chiu & Chai, 2020). As an interdisciplinary subject, curriculum signifies the integration and combination of curriculum content to merge learners' educational experiences (Gholamian et al., 2019). Curriculum experts have introduced three types of educational systems: centralized, semi-centralized, and decentralized. In a centralized curriculum, it is typically prepared by a central office. In a decentralized curriculum, responsibilities are transferred to subdivisions, local administrations, and lower levels, each with its own specific authorities. In a semi-centralized curriculum, policies and frameworks are designed by the central organization, which grants schools certain authorities for implementation but oversees their performance (Dadkani et al., 2021).

The positive psychology approach shifts the school paradigm from the traditional focus on academic problems like interpersonal issues, academic decline, and dropout to a newer perspective emphasizing students' positive behavioral potentials, including capabilities, human virtues, happiness, moral qualities, and positive behaviors and thoughts (Sadat S, 2022; White, 2021). Positive psychologists deem it essential to establish a balance where individuals' strengths and weaknesses are considered. This approach values gathering information about how people function and the moderators that mitigate harms among people. Among positive institutions, schools hold a special place because they relate to their ultimate goal, and the final product or goal of schools is the students themselves. A good school, based on positive experiences and institutional virtues and capabilities, teaches students life, responsibility, and a sense of friendship and camaraderie (Sadat et al., 2020). Positive education, rooted in positive psychology, employs methods such as developing personal goals and motivation. Unlike the traditional model where teachers guide students towards progress with a focus on standardized tests, positive education leverages cooperative learning methods to foster mutual respect among students instead of promoting unhealthy competition among them (Sadat S, 2022).

Positive education is defined as teaching traditional school skills and skills that enhance well-being, aiming to support students in discovering their strengths, developing resilience, and creating a learning environment. Positive education utilizes principles of positive psychology and focuses on academic skill development, supplemented by approaches that nurture students' well-being and mental health. It emphasizes specific skills that help students strengthen relationships, generate positive emotions, enhance personal resilience, improve mindfulness, and promote a healthy lifestyle (White, 2021). Positive psychology has been adapted to an educational context as

positive education. Today's school focus is primarily on teaching skills that prepare students for future studies and career opportunities, with the goal of positive education being to integrate traditional school teaching skills and support students' well-being. This is socially significant, as students with higher well-being perform better, making it vital to create a positive environment that nurtures students' psychological quality. Such educational objectives can stimulate students' confidence, making them feel successful and satisfied while completing tasks, fostering a positive sense of self-efficacy and optimism in them (Wu & Kyungsun, 2022).

Rezaie, Maleki, Abbaspour, and Khosravi (2021) concluded in their research on the religious education curriculum model in primary education that this model's objectives include balanced attention to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, enhancing the religious awareness and insight of the audience, nurturing the divine nature and seeking God, realizing monotheism in thought and action, nurturing a religious person, developing the ability for critical thinking, inquisitive spirit, and criticism, elevating the value of human dignity and the self-esteem of students, strengthening the spirit of love, affection, and empathy, practical commitment to religious laws and commands, and enhancing the spirit of cooperation, responsibility, and participation in religious and social activities. The content includes aligning the content with the ultimate goals of Islamic education, religious foundations and values, attention to artistic and aesthetic aspects in all levels of religious education, content attractiveness and flexibility, content comprehensiveness and alignment with social realities and necessities, attention to individual differences, interests needs of the audience, relevance to the real life of students based on cultural and educational values and compatible with religious and Quranic teachings, content organization includes utilizing an integrated approach of religious and moral values in the primary education curriculum, horizontal organization (interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary organization) and vertical organization (using concrete to abstract methods and organization based on practical principles), the role of the teacher includes the competency of being an appropriate model and exemplar for religious education, personal, scientific, ethical, and religious competencies, adherence to religious and ethical values, adherence to manners, dignity, mutual respect, and consistency in words and actions, teaching methods include active methods for internalizing values, integrative methods, employing student-centered

strategies, community inquiry or service learning method, modeling and exemplification method, methods of love, respect, and honor, Socratic teaching method based on negotiation, discussion, and dialogue, storytelling method and utilizing stories and examples, role-playing method, teaching method based on play, problem-solving method and learning critical thinking, method of learning from examples, and methods of encouragement and reminder, and evaluation method includes continuous and formative assessment, performance-based evaluation of participants, social action projects and portfolios, employing integrated and qualitative descriptive evaluation, attention to evaluation during activities and actions, using self-assessment methods by learners and peer assessment, and using observational methods in natural situations (Rezaie M, 2021).

Gandomkar, Gholtash, Hashemi, and Mashinchi (2019) concluded in their research on the moral education curriculum model for the secondary education level based on grounded theory that 9 factors were identified: macro-environmental policies, moral education curriculum content, curriculum objectives, teaching and learning processes, the use of information technology, continuous interaction with scientific and research centers, teacher participation in curriculum production, evaluation methods, and recipient characteristics. Accordingly, the design of the moral education curriculum model for the secondary level as the central category is realized based on causal conditions, i.e., policies and environmental objectives, through strategies of teacher participation in curriculum production and continuous interaction with scientific centers, considering the characteristics of recipients as contextual conditions, and educational and nurturing outcomes occur (Gandomkar D, 2019).

The secondary education stage is of great importance due to its fundamental role in shaping the personality and education of adolescents and its impact on their work and participation in society's progress. The fate of individuals in society is shaped during this period, and the fruitfulness of students stems from the quality of this phase. In fact, secondary education is the stage of transition from intense emotional, economic, political, social, and cultural dependencies towards achieving independence in these areas within the context of a larger community called society (Yavari et al., 2013). Much of the disarray and abnormalities of the secondary period are rooted in the weaknesses of the educational system and the socialization of students. As a result, one of the most significant problems of Iran's

secondary educational system is the lack of educational philosophy or curriculum aimed at positive education of students. One of the curriculum design methods is based on the positive education approach. Therefore, the aim of this study was to design and validate a curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education. Hence, the present research seeks to answer the following two main questions: What is the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education like? And does the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education have appropriate validity?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was applied and mixed-methods in terms of its objective and implementation, respectively. The research population in both the design and validation parts included experts and scholars in the fields of educational studies, educational management, educational psychology, and experts in research and planning for the development of secondary education textbooks. The sample for this study was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation to include 22 individuals selected through purposive sampling. This sampling method was chosen so

the researcher could select suitable individuals with appropriate and sufficient information from among the population members to ensure the designed model had high validity.

2.2. Measures

The samples of this study were subjected to semi-structured interviews and the completion of a researcher-made questionnaire. Each expert was individually interviewed in a semi-structured manner until theoretical saturation was achieved. Subsequently, based on the interviews, an open-ended researcher-made questionnaire for the validation of the curriculum model based on the positive education approach was designed, to which the experts of the current study responded. Therefore, the open-ended questions of the researcher-made questionnaire in the current study were presented in Table 1.

Generally, to respond to the two main research questions and to design and validate the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education, sampling from the statistical population until reaching theoretical saturation, conducting semi-structured interviews, and their analysis using grounded theory, developing a questionnaire and its implementation by experts to determine the model's validity were performed.

Table 1

Open-ended questions of the researcher-made questionnaire in the current study

No.	Question
1	Are the axes, principles, and characteristics mentioned regarding the positive education curriculum approach adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
2	Are the principles governing the design of goals and objectives of the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what principles and axes do you suggest?
3	Are the general and specific objectives proposed for the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what objectives do you suggest?
4	Are the principles and characteristics regarding the selection, organization, and presentation of content adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
5	Are the principles, approaches, and methods regarding teaching and learning activities adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
6	Are the axes proposed regarding the role of human resources in the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
7	Are the axes proposed regarding the role of evaluation in the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
8	Are the axes proposed regarding the position of the learning environment in the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
9	Are the axes proposed regarding the position of time in the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
10	Are the axes proposed regarding the position of materials and learning resources in the positive education curriculum adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what axes do you suggest?
11	Overall, is the proposed model in terms of its components and elements adequately comprehensive and sufficient? If not, what components do you suggest?

2.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the execution of interviews and questionnaires were analyzed using coding methods based on grounded theory, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. The reason for using the grounded theory method in the qualitative part is as follows. Despite the presence of relatively universal and potent opinions about curriculum models and the expression of the importance and necessity of addressing the positive education curriculum in both domestic and international research, including speculations and recommendations about the positive education curriculum, so far, a model suitable for the educational ecosystem of the country for the secondary education level has not been found. Therefore, given the absence of theory and efficient design regarding positive education and the situational orientation of the grounded theory approach and its potential capacity for generating a realistic and applicable theory within the Iranian ecosystem, this research attempted to utilize the grounded theory method in the qualitative part.

3. Findings and Results

For the design of a curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education, the coding method based on grounded theory was used. Consequently, the results of the grounded theory-based coding for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in this study were presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of coding based on grounded theory for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in the current study

Row	Category	Component
1	Causal Factors	Teacher Training
2		Teacher Attitudes
3		Teacher Beliefs
4		Teacher Support
5		Teacher Protection
6		Teacher Collaboration
7		Student Participation and Motivation
8		Students' Social and Emotional Growth
9		Students' Well-being
10		School Support
11		School Policy
12		School Culture
13		School Physical Environment
14		Sense of Security in School
15		Integration of Positive Education Principles
16		Flexibility
17	Contextual and Intervening Factors	Teacher Skills
18		Opportunities for Professional Development of Teachers
19		General Perception of Positive Education Curriculum
20		Support for the Implementation of Positive Education Curriculum
21		Strengthening Positive Relationships
22		Sufficient Financial Resources
23		Sufficient Opportunities for Professional Development
24		Teaching Materials
25		Regular Assessment
26		Collaboration and Communication
27		Stakeholder Feedback
28		Insufficient Budget
29		Challenges
30		Insufficient Support
31		Limited Awareness and Understanding
32		Ongoing Research

33		Evaluation and Feedback Loops
34		Emerging Technologies
35	Strategies	Empathy
36		Promoting Growth Mindset
37		Building Resilience
38		Creating Positive Relationships
39		Supportive Environment
40		Strengthening Character Education
41		Ethical Decision-Making
42		Evaluation
43	Consequences	Enhancing Well-being
44		Improving Academic Performance
45		Sense of Participation
46		Increasing Resilience
47		Improving Social Relationships
48		Positive Atmosphere
49		Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships
50		Job Satisfaction

The coding findings revealed that for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education, 50 components in 4 categories were identified: causal factors (16 components), contextual and intervening factors (18 components), strategies (8 components), and effects and outcomes (8 components).

Table 3

Results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Bartlett's test in the current study

KMO		0.83
Bartlett's Test	1674.80	1371.70
	91	780
	0.001	0.001

It should be noted that validity was confirmed through triangulation and peer review methods, and reliability was calculated at 77 percent using the inter-rater agreement method. Before analyzing the data with the exploratory factor analysis method, its assumptions were checked, and the results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Bartlett's test in this study were presented in Table 3.

Table 4

Results of the exploratory factor analysis for the components of the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in the current study

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Sum of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Variance Percentage	Cumulative Percentage	Total	Variance Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	18.9	37.8	37.8	18.9	37.8	37.8
2	5.4	10.8	48.6	5.4	10.8	48.6
3	4.3	8.6	57.2	4.3	8.6	57.2
4	3.1	6.1	63.4	3.1	6.1	63.4
5	2.5	5.0	68.3	2.5	5.0	68.3
6	2.1	4.2	72.5	2.1	4.2	72.5
7	1.9	3.8	76.3	1.9	3.8	76.3
8	1.4	2.9	79.2	1.4	2.9	79.2
9	1.3	2.6	81.8	1.3	2.6	81.8
10	1.2	2.5	84.3	1.2	2.5	84.3
11	1.1	2.1	86.4	1.1	2.1	86.4
12	0.9	1.8	88.2			
13	0.8	1.5	89.8			

14	0.7	1.5	91.2
15	0.6	1.2	92.4
16	0.5	1.0	93.4
17	0.5	0.9	94.3
18	0.4	0.9	95.2
19	0.4	0.7	95.9
20	0.3	0.7	96.6
21	0.3	0.6	97.2
22	0.2	0.4	97.6
23	0.2	0.4	98.0
24	0.2	0.4	98.4
25	0.2	0.3	98.7
26	0.1	0.3	99.0
27	0.1	0.2	99.2
28	0.1	0.2	99.4
29	0.1	0.2	99.6
30	0.1	0.1	99.7
31	0.1	0.1	99.8
32	0.0	0.1	99.9
33	0.0	0.0	99.9
34	0.0	0.0	100.0
35	0.0	0.0	100.0
36	0.0	0.0	100.0
37	0.0	0.0	100.0
38	0.0	0.0	100.0
39	0.0	0.0	100.0
40	0.0	0.0	100.0
41	0.0	0.0	100.0
42	0.0	0.0	100.0
43	0.0	0.0	100.0
44	0.0	0.0	100.0
45	0.0	0.0	100.0
46	0.0	0.0	100.0
47	0.0	0.0	100.0
48	0.0	0.0	100.0
49	0.0	0.0	100.0
50	0.0	0.0	100.0

The exploratory factor analysis assumptions showed that the conditions for using this analysis method were met. Therefore, the results of the exploratory factor analysis for the components of the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in this study were presented in Table 4.

Table 5

Results of the fit indices for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in the current study

| Index	Value	Acceptable fit
X^2/df	1.4	< 3
RMSEA	0.02	< 0.10
CFI	0.96	> 0.90
NFI	0.94	> 0.90
GFI	0.98	> 0.90
AGFI	0.93	> 0.90

The findings of the exploratory factor analysis demonstrated that the factor loading of each of the 50 components was appropriate, and 11 components could explain 86.4 percent of the total variance of the curriculum

based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education. Structural equation modeling was used for the validation of the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education.

Consequently, the results of the fit indices for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in this study were presented in Table 5.

Figure 1

Results of structural equation modeling for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in the current study
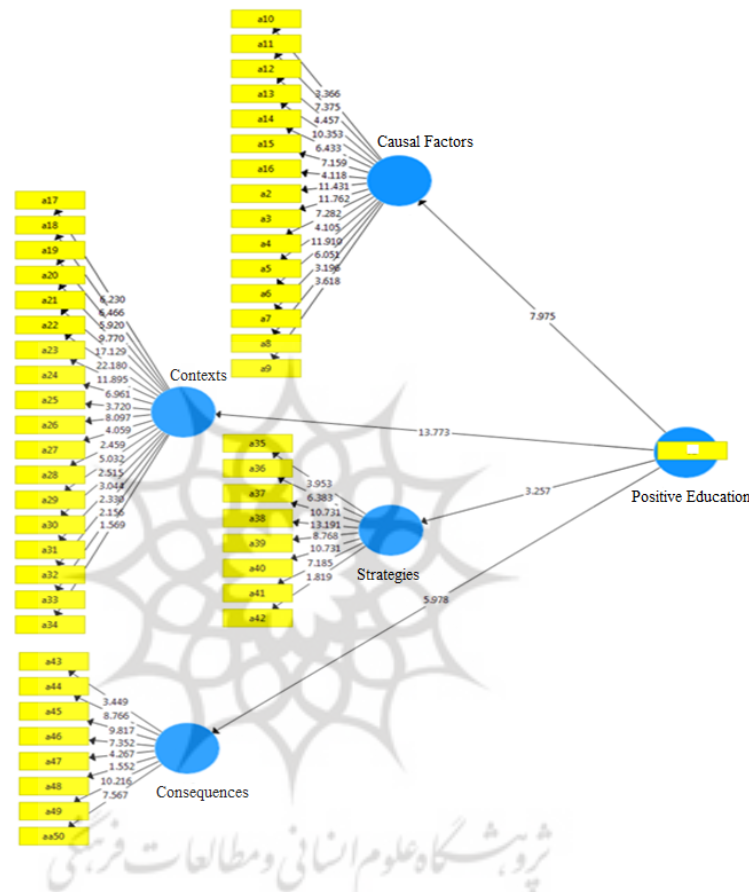
The fit indices findings showed that the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education had an appropriate fit. The structural equation modeling results for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education in this study were presented in Figure 1.

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

Given the importance of the curriculum and since one of the methods of curriculum design is based on the positive education approach, the aim of this study was to design and validate a curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education.

The findings of this study showed that for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's

secondary education, 50 components in 4 categories were identified: causal factors (16 components), contextual and intervening factors (18 components), strategies (8 components), and effects and outcomes (8 components). Validity was confirmed through triangulation and peer review, and reliability was calculated at 77 percent using the inter-rater agreement method. Other findings of this study showed that the factor loading of each of the 50 components was appropriate, and 11 components could explain 86.4 percent of the total variance of the curriculum based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education. Further findings of this study showed that the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education had an appropriate fit and significantly impacted all four categories: causal factors, contextual and

intervening factors, strategies, and effects and outcomes. No research was found regarding the design and validation of a curriculum model based on the positive education approach in secondary education, but in some aspects, the findings were consistent with previous studies (Gandomkar D, 2019; Malaki & Alipour Moghaddam, 2022; Rezaie M, 2021).

The curriculum based on the positive education approach is of great importance for several reasons. First, positive education can help prevent negative psychological characteristics such as anxiety and depression in adolescents. Second, positive education provides a useful tool for schools to develop personality and enhance student well-being, fostering qualities such as autonomy, social competence, and a sense of meaning, and can be used to build inner strength for dealing with adversities. Furthermore, the positive education curriculum can increase life satisfaction, enhance learning and creativity, and ultimately, the skills in the curriculum based on the positive education approach that promote positive feelings, character strengths, and positive relationships improve and elevate students' academic success. In fact, there is substantial research evidence showing that students' well-being is directly related to their academic performance, and positive education provides students with a framework for learning cognitive, social, and emotional skills and helps them make meaningful connections with their environment. Well-being skills can be explicitly taught to students and assessed over time. Moreover, in many cases, the curriculum based on the positive education approach teaches school teachers, who in turn integrate that curriculum into their work in schools. Utilizing interventions based on the positive education approach leads to positive impacts such as life satisfaction, happiness, optimism, hope, self-esteem, and an increase in positive affect and a reduction or absence of negative affect.

The curriculum based on the positive education approach is derived from the prevalent positive psychology approach, allowing researchers to distinguish between positive psychological interventions and other conventional psychological interventions. In the educational context, students exhibit a more positive attitude towards school, learning, education, and academics after participating in positive psychological interventions, and perform better academically. Positive education uses principles of positive psychology and, in addition to this, focuses on the development of academic skills. This is complemented by approaches that nurture students' well-being and enhance their mental health. The curriculum based on the positive education approach focuses on specific skills that help students strengthen their relationships, create positive feelings, focus on mindset and how to improve it, increase their flexibility, enhance mindfulness, and lead a healthy lifestyle.

This study was conducted on 22 experts and scholars in the fields of educational studies, educational management, educational psychology, and experts in research and planning for the compilation of secondary education textbooks in Iran's secondary education, selected through purposive sampling. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the above limitations in generalizing the findings of this study. Another limitation is the lack of research background on the curriculum model based on the positive education approach, which did not provide a good basis for comparing the results of the present study with other research. The results of this study showed that for the curriculum model based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education, 50 components in 4 categories were identified, which in addition to suitable validity and reliability, the model had an appropriate fit and significantly impacted all four categories: causal factors, contextual and intervening factors, strategies, and effects and outcomes. Therefore, curriculum specialists and planners, based on the categories and components of this study, can take effective steps towards improving the curriculum based on the positive education approach in Iran's secondary education. Given that the components of the curriculum based on the positive education approach can have beneficial effects on students, it is recommended that the authorities use the knowledge, capability, and experience of academic experts in identifying and continuously introducing positive psychology to improve the educational and learning situation so that beneficial effects can be observed in schools. Since positive education has an undeniable impact on students' lives and even their mental health, continuous and ongoing education of it is more than ever necessary for teachers, educators, and even the operational staff of the country's schools to be prioritized by the Ministry of Education.

Authors' Contributions

The first author was responsible for data collection, analysis, and writing the article, while the other authors had supervisory responsibilities and contributed to the final writing of the article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Interest

Funding

Ethical Considerations

In the interview with the experts and the completion of the questionnaire by them, ethical standards were described and observed.

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