



Conference Proceeding:

Positive Psychology Abstracts from the Middle East School Leaders Conference (MESLC)

Wilson, L. G.

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About the Author: Leisa Grace Wilson is currently the Editorial Director of *Teach Middle East Magazine*, a magazine destined to connect, develop and empower educators across the Middle East and beyond. Subscribe here: www.teachmiddleeastmag.com. She was previously an Academic Vice-Principal and Education Advisor in Abu Dhabi (UAE), and now a popular regional speaker and blogger on educational affairs in the UAE and beyond.

Address all correspondence about the MESLC to: Email: editor@teachuae.com or at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/leisagrace/>

The Middle East School Leadership Conference (MESLC2019) brings together middle and senior leaders from K-12 schools across the Middle East region and beyond. The MESLC is designed to offer school leaders a unique opportunity to come together to find practical solutions to the issues they face and learn from each other. The event focuses heavily on the sharing of good practice in school leadership and allows school leaders to network and grow. Our aim through this event is to form a strong network of school leaders, who will work collaboratively on improving education for all students. Every school has a story and it is only by sharing these stories, including the challenges, mistakes, lessons, and rewards that we learn from each other and achieve a state of educational and institutional excellence.

Gilda Scarfe, CEO and Founder of Positive Action (UK)

Transforming Schools: The Role of Positive Psychology and Mental Toughness in Education

Wellbeing and mental toughness are vital to developing effective problem-solving skills, building and maintaining successful interpersonal relationships and realistic goal setting, all of which greatly enhance an individual's ability to perform and contribute meaningfully in daily life. In the face of an increasingly volatile, uncertain complex and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether young people embrace the challenges they are confronted or whether they are defeated by them. Positive psychology and neuroscience research shows what many teachers have anecdotally known for a long time-learning is deeply affected by wellbeing. Positive education brings together the science of positive psychology with the best practice teaching



to encourage and support young people and communities to flourish. Research consistently shows that high wellbeing is linked to better physical health, happier relationships, greater resilience, and more effective brain functioning. Meta-analytic results show that students who complete social-emotional learning programs demonstrate an 11-percentile-point increase in academic achievement relative to students in control groups.

Dr. Louise Lambert, Editor of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology (UAE)

Feeling good is not enough: Character strengths and employability

There is an increasing focus on wellbeing in education, particularly in the GCC region; however, much of this attention lends itself to interventions to help youth feel more frequent positive emotion, be more engaged in school, deepen their relationships, and obtain greater satisfaction in life. While these are noble and needed aims, a sole focus on feeling good is not enough to function in life; in fact, this approach can overlook the development of important characteristics that also account for success. Character strengths are the dominant psychological traits by which individuals are best known, such as integrity, leadership, social intelligence, or bravery (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Increasingly, these are being used to lay the foundation for the development of 21st century skills (Lavy-Ovadia, 2019), routinely identified as missing in the regional employment landscape. The #iBringGCC program (Lambert, 2017) aims to develop such strengths in a bid to increase regional youth's workplace competitiveness and marketability, as well as engagement (Huber et al., 2019). This session will focus on the components of the #iBringGCC program and campaign, as well as the program's applicability in both nationalization and school-to-work transition settings.

Huber, A., Strecker, C., Hausler, M., Kachel, T., Höge, T., & Höfer, S. (2019). Possession and applicability of signature character strengths: What is essential for well-being, work engagement, and burnout? *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, doi:10.1007/s11482-018-9699-8

Lambert, L. (2017). *Developing character strengths at university (For a GCC audience). The facilitator's manual*. <http://a.co/2sxBX3M>

Lavy, S. (2019). A review of character strengths interventions in twenty-first-century schools: Their importance and how they can be fostered. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, doi:10.1007/s11482-018-9700-6

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press/Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.