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Wellbeing Matters in Kuwait: The Alnowair's Bareec Education Initiative

L. Lambert¹ · H.-A. Passmore³ · N. Scull⁴ · I. Al Sabah² · R. Hussain⁵

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Abstract

Wellbeing is predictive of improved learning outcomes, better mental health, prosocial and civic behavior, higher work productivity, and enhanced life satisfaction. Given that literature in support of wellbeing is robust, it is incumbent on local communities to put this research into practice and develop culturally-competent programs that promote the skills to increase it. In collaboration with Alnowair, a non-profit organization committed to increasing wellbeing in Kuwait, a semester-long positive psychology program, called Bareec, was designed to generate positive emotions and increase levels of flourishing in university and secondary school students. The Bareec program consisted of 15-min weekly instructions in positive psychology and positive psychology interventions. To test the program's efficacy, Bareec was implemented in the national public university participants showed greater levels of flourishing (eudaimonic wellbeing; d=.32), while secondary school participants showed enhanced positive affect (hedonic wellbeing; d=.27) in addition to a small improvement in flourishing (d=.15).

Keywords Positive psychology \cdot Kuwait \cdot Positive psychology interventions \cdot Positive education \cdot School \cdot University

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In the years since the introduction of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), the need for greater wellbeing in workplaces, communities, and educational institutions has increasingly been recognized as fundamental to human growth and excellence (Allen and McCarthy 2016; Oades et al. 2011; Schueller 2009). In turn, this need has been met by a proliferation of research activity, organizational policies, and programs around the world as wellbeing has been identified as a significant contributor to better learning (Seligman et al. 2009; Suldo et al. 2011), employment and job satisfaction (Haase et al. 2012; Kansky et al. 2016; Luhmann et al. 2013), physical health (Blanchflower et al. 2012; Diener and Chan 2011; Grant et al. 2009), and a range of mental health outcomes (Garland et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2011; Schrank et al. 2014; Shin and Lyubomirsky 2016). Yet, the research literature on wellbeing and its benefits remains skewed towards, and reflective of, Western initiatives (Bolier et al. 2013; Lambert et al. 2015), despite growing interest across the Middle East (Rao et al. 2015). To help counter this imbalance, we highlight the Bareec positive psychology initiative being undertaken in Kuwaiti educational institutions by the Alnowair group, a socially progressive Kuwaiti non-profit organization exclusively focused on increasing wellbeing in Kuwaiti youth and adults alike.

1 Wellbeing in Education and Beyond

The topic of wellbeing in education remains either absent or at best a low priority in much of the world; indeed, a focus on enhancing wellbeing is often viewed as detracting from learning. Educational institutions remain almost entirely focused on offering academic knowledge and skills while largely ignoring student emotional and psychological wellbeing (Clonan et al. 2004; Oades et al. 2011). Yet, youth need strategies to flourish and thrive beyond a state of mediocrity not only in their personal lives, but also in their eventual workplaces, entrepreneurial activities, and relationships (Buck et al. 2008; Oades et al. 2011; Walsh et al. 2018).

Wellbeing—referring to both hedonia (i.e., life satisfaction and feeling good) and eudaimonia or flourishing (e.g., meaning in life, personal growth, transcending beyond one's self, positive relationships)—impacts diverse domains of our lives. For example, research shows that individuals with greater life satisfaction and positive affect are more likely to: obtain a college degree, have clarity about the type of work they want, search for work, be hired, promoted, and benefit from a higher income (Cote et al. 2006; DeNeve and Oswald 2012; Haase et al. 2012; Longhi et al. 2018; Turban et al. 2013). Greater satisfaction with life is related to more stable marriages and a lower likelihood of unemployment (Luhmann et al. 2013). Wellbeing serves as a protective factor against mental health issues and their negative sequelae by decreasing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions which leads to positive actions and thoughts resulting in greater success and functionality (Layous et al. 2014; Lonigan et al. 2003; Shin and Lyubomirsky 2016). Teens experiencing greater positive emotions exhibit higher levels of competence, more contact with family and friends, and greater engagement in social activities, in addition to experiencing less depression, loneliness, and anxiety even into their late twenties (Kansky et al. 2016; Richards and Huppert 2011). Moreover, such outcomes enhance individuals' "soft" skillsnon-cognitive, social-emotional learning that is vital for life success beyond IQ (Galla and Duckworth 2015; Jones et al. 2015; Spengler et al. 2018) and with relevance for the labour market (Deming 2015; Heckman and Kautz 2012; Jackson 2016).

Skills for enhancing wellbeing are offered in the form of positive psychology interventions (PPIs), behavioral or cognitive activities aimed at generating positive emotions, as well as actions and thoughts that lead to greater wellbeing (Sin and Lyubomirsky 2009). These strategies are non-stigmatizing, low-cost, easy to deliver, need no materials or equipment to deliver, and generally lack negative side effects (Layous et al. 2011, 2014; Shankland and Rosset 2017). Several reviews and meta-analyses (Bolier et al. 2013; Hone et al. 2015; Sin and Lyubomirsky 2009; Weiss et al. 2016) have established the efficacy of PPIs to reliably and sustainably improve wellbeing and reduce symptoms of depression in clinical and non-clinical populations.

PPIs take a variety of forms. Some are single interventions like acts of kindness (Nelson et al. 2016; Otake et al. 2006), best possible selves (Burton and King 2009), building hope (Feldman and Dreher 2012), identifying three good things (Chancellor et al. 2015), goal setting (Odou and Vella-Brodrick 2013), savoring (Hurley and Kwon 2012), and selfcompassion (Smeets et al. 2014). Many of these have been used within school contexts. For example, Froh et al. (2008) asked middle school students (N=76) to list each day for 2 weeks five things for which they were grateful the previous day. Three weeks later, compared to a 'hassles' (N=80) and control (N=65) group, students in the PPI group reported stronger optimism, overall life satisfaction, and satisfaction with their school experiences, along with lower negative affect (with small to medium effect sizes).

In school contexts, other variations include measuring the effects of multiple PPIs staggered over a period of time wherein students engage in classroom activities, discussion, and homework to boost their wellbeing. For example, Suldo et al. (2014) developed a 10-week PPI program with 55 grade 6 students (27 of which were controls). This program included a gratitude letter and visit, acts of kindness, savoring, use of character strengths, and activities on hope and optimism. Six-month post-treatment follow-up showed that, relative to controls, the treatment group scored higher in life satisfaction (with modest effects); no difference was found on other indicators of mental health or on psychopathology. Marques et al. (2011) developed a five-week PPI program delivered to 62 Portuguese students. This program focused on enhancing hope, self-worth, life satisfaction, mental health, and academic achievement. Relative to a control group (N=31) and at post-intervention 18 months later, increases in hope, self-worth, and life satisfaction were evident; academic achievement and mental health scores remained unchanged. Proctor and colleagues (2011) similarly developed a character strengths program in the UK. Teachers could implement up to 24 lesson plans over a six-month period involving in-class activities, discussion questions, and homework for each character strength. Results for the treatment-group students (N=218) showed greater life satisfaction, positive affect, and self-esteem relative to a control group. Finally, in the United Arab Emirates, Lambert et al. (2018) conducted a 14-week university program which included instruction in positive psychology and PPIs such as savoring, gratitude letter, relationship capitalization, and good deeds. Three months post-intervention, study participants (n=159) reported higher levels of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, along with less fear of happiness and a reduced belief that happiness was fragile relative to controls (n = 108). There are many such beneficial PPI programs (e.g., Leontopoulou 2015; Roth et al. 2017) that allow students to turn the practice of wellbeing interventions into life habits (Duckworth et al. 2015).

Other programs take a broader systemic approach where entire grade levels are the focus of PPIs. For example, Shoshani and Steinmetz (2014) compared the use of PPIs in an entire Israeli middle school of 537 students (grades 7 through 9), in which students engaged in exercises, class discussion, homework, and self-reflection on gratitude, optimism, positive emotions, improving relationships, and the use of character strengths. Compared to wait

list controls (n=589), a year later the PPI group showed decreases in distress, anxiety, and depression (while the control group increased) and improvements to self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy (with controls showing decreases). Shoshani and Sloane (2017) also investigated the delivery of eight positive psychology modules across 12 pre-school classrooms (treatment group: n = 160; control group: n = 155). Given their young age, children were given some measures directly, while teachers and parents completed others. Lessons delivered over 32 weeks focused on positive emotion, engagement (i.e., character strengths), achievement (focus/persistence), and positive relationships. The treatment group showed greater subjective well-being, empathy, prosocial behavior, and approaches to learning, but no changes in mental health difficulties. Other whole-school programs focus on teachers. Green et al. (2012) used a coaching approach wherein over 200 teachers participated in a three-year program to learn more about character strengths, positive psychology, PPIs, and coaching in order to work with boarding school students and develop a positive school culture. Taking a whole-school approach moves away from the singular use of specific interventions focused on individuals in the classroom to establishing a positive institutional culture whereby changes are wide-ranging and even include parents.

Boosting positive emotions, amplifying relationships, and promoting other types of wellbeing has also been found to boost academic achievement test results in both secondary and university level students (Bernard and Walton 2011; Davidson et al. 2012; Durlak et al. 2011; Suldo et al. 2011). Of note is Durlak and colleagues' (2011) meta-analysis of 213 studies with over 270,000 students showing that those taking part in social/emotional learning skill programs, such as PPI programs, scored a full 11 percentage points higher on academic scores. Waters' (2011) review of 12 school-based positive psychology intervention programs conducted on students between the ages of 5 and 19 years also demonstrated that such teacher-led programs improve anxiety, depression, hopelessness, the ability to deal with stress, and academic performance. In short, efforts to generate greater wellbeing appear well-poised to offer youth not only immediate benefits, but a satisfying, functional, and successful life into adulthood as well.

2 Kuwait: Snapshot of a Nation

The nation of Kuwait, bordered by Iraq and Saudi Arabia, is located on the coast of the Arabian Gulf. Its total population was last recorded in 2014 and totaled about 3.3 million. Kuwaiti citizens, the majority of whom are Muslim, amount to only one-third of the total population, while the remaining inhabitants are foreign workers. Due to its large oil reserves, Kuwait is considered the fourth richest country in the world (World Bank 2015). After the discovery of oil in 1937, Kuwait entered what is known as the Golden Era (1946–1982), where, driven by oil revenues, it experienced massive growth and the country quickly modernized. By the 1970s, Kuwait was considered the most developed and socially progressive country in the region. Yet, in the 1980s and 1990s, Kuwait was rocked by the crash of its stock market and the Iraqi invasion. In the past few decades, Kuwaiti citizens have become frustrated with the quality of public services, upset by energy reforms and loss of generous subsidies (up to 80% on fuel alone), and disheartened with downsizing in the public sector (the largest state employer) and resultant lack of employment guarantees (Arampatzi et al. 2015). This situation, coupled with low oil prices and the declaration of Kuwait's first documented budget deficit after a record 16 year surplus, has contributed to the nation's fourth straight decline in life satisfaction since the start of the World Happiness rankings. Kuwait finished in 39th position in 2017, down from 31st in 2012 and 32nd in 2013 (Helliwell et al. 2017). A Gallup (2010) report on subjective wellbeing in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations further noted that 53% of Kuwaiti nationals interviewed were classified as 'struggling', reporting daily stress, financial worry, double the number of sick days, along with evidencing greater likelihood of smoking; 44% of Kuwaiti nationals were classified as 'thriving,' characterized by feeling hopeful for the future and satisfied with the present.

Kuwait has some of the highest youth unemployment in the world at nearly 20% (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2015), attributable to the over-saturated public sector relative to private, which relies heavily on expatriate labour. The well-paid but over-supplied capacity in the public sector and available capacity but lower-paying and lower-status private sector creates a situation in which many youth prefer to wait for the perfect government job despite these becoming scarcer over time (ILO 2013). It is estimated that by 2020, the region will need 85 million new jobs, as well as parallel developments in education, post-secondary training, and employability, in addition to enhancing life skills across schools, universities and workplaces to ensure that the needs of growing economies like Kuwait are met (International Finance Corporation 2011; Schwalje 2013). Yet, with 40% of Kuwait's population under the age of 24 (Central Intelligence Agency 2016), meeting these and other challenges like education is already proving difficult. The national university is full and was recently forced to delay and stagger admissions to accommodate increasingly high numbers of students enrolling.

Managing youth's future participation in a democratic Kuwait will require careful attention as, for the first time in the region's history, youth are more educated than their parents and have high expectations, but reduced chances, of obtaining a well-paying state job (Campante and Chor 2012). This situation could quickly become a social and economic liability, but if well-managed, high rates of educated youth could prove to be a blessing. Studies suggest that Kuwaiti university students are highly satisfied with life, have higher rates of religiosity, and make positive choices for themselves, while also being highly desirous of a better life (Abdel-Khalek and El Nayal 2015; Abdel-Khalek and Lester 2015). Indeed a majority (82%) of youth maintain that a better future is yet to come, one of the highest scores in the region reported in an annual Arab youth survey (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller 2018).

Of concern however, are findings in positive psychology research which show that greater income in high income societies is not necessarily associated with greater happiness (Kushlev et al. 2015; Oishi and Kesebir 2015), as what becomes important over a certain income threshold are things which cannot be bought such as trust, positive relationships, respect, interesting and challenging work, and meaning and love (Diener and Seligman 2004). Given the transition period in which Kuwait is entering, that is, moving from an oil-dependent society to a post-oil nation relying on its young human capital in particular, there is perhaps no better time in Kuwait's history than now to begin promoting wellbeing, not only for its immediate benefits, but for its corollary benefits too, like greater achievement scores, health, and sociability—assets that can serve youth well.

Given that mental health services and help-seeking are highly stigmatized in Kuwait, with services either under-utilized or not widely available (Almazeedi and Alsuwaidi 2014; Kaladchibachi and Al-Dhafiri 2018; Scull et al. 2014), the offer of positive psychology interventions, which do not require a diagnosis nor admission of a problem, may be a further boon in increasing wellbeing and alleviating symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression that would likely otherwise go unnoticed (Dawood 2013). Thus, as wellbeing is, to a degree, malleable (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005), especially by engaging in activities

purposefully geared towards that end, we chose to implement a positive psychology intervention study to see what changes could be produced in a sample of Kuwaiti youth, with the factors identified serving to highlight the social context in which the program was delivered.

3 The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether positive psychology interventions could increase satisfaction with life, as well as levels of both eudaimonic wellbeing (also referred to as flourishing, encompassing competence, engagement, meaning/purpose, optimism, self-acceptance and having rewarding relationships), and hedonic wellbeing (the frequency of positive emotions; Kashdan et al. 2008) in a sample of Kuwaiti university students and secondary school students. To our knowledge, our study is the first of its kind in this region. The first author developed the Bareec program in collaboration with the Alnowair group (authors Al Sabah and Hussain), a Kuwaiti non-profit organization committed to increasing wellbeing through the science of positive psychology.

4 Method

4.1 Participants

In the present study, the Bareec program was trialed in two groups: University and High School students.

University Sample Students from across four different colleges (engineering, social science, life social science, and computer science) of the national Kuwait University participated in the program. Participants were from six different governorates of Kuwait: Muhafazah: Al Asimah (Capital), Hawalli, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Farwniya, Jahra, and Ahmadi). Our initial sample size was 357. Of these, 58 were removed from analysis due to incomplete data; a further 89 were removed because they did not complete the post-assessment;¹ thus, the final sample size for data analysis was 210 (Control: n=77, Treatment: n=133; $M_{age}=20.99$, $SD_{age}=2.64$; range: 18–42 years; 94% female). There were no significant differences in demographics (age, gender, governorate, or college) between the control and treatment groups (see Table 1 for detailed demographics and statistics).

High Schools Sample Students from 10 different high schools participated in the program. The schools were selected based on teachers from these schools expressing prior interest. Participants were from two different governorates: Al Asimah (Capital) and Hawalli. Our initial sample size was 1347. Of these, 188 were removed from analysis due to incomplete data; a further 89 were removed because they did not complete the post-assessment;² thus, the final sample size for data analysis was 1070 (Control: n = 237, Treatment: n = 83; $M_{age} = 16.73$, $SD_{age} = .74$; range: 15–21 years; 57.3% female). Although

¹ Well-being pre-assessment scores were not significantly different between participants who completed post-assessments and those who did not, .057 .

² Well-being pre-assessment scores were not significantly different between participants who completed post-assessments and those who did not, .139 .

	Descriptives $M(SD)$ or % o	f group	<i>t</i> -test/ χ^2 test
	Control $n=77$	Treatment $n=133$	
University sam	ple		
Age	20.86 (1.63)	21.06 (3.08)	t(207) = 0.54, p = .592, d = 0.16
Gender	Male: 2.6%	Male: 7.5%	$\chi^2(1) = 2.19, p = .217, V = .10$
	Female: 97.4%	Female: 92.5%	
Governorate	Capital: 26.0%	Capital: 30.5%	$\chi^2(5) = 4.19, p = .529, V = .14$
	Hawalli: 15.6%	Hawalli: 21.4%	
	Mubark Al Kabeer: 18.2%	Mubark Al Kabeer: 9.9%	
	Farwanya: 19.5%	Farwanya: 17.6%	
	Jahra: 10.4%	Jahra: 8.4%	
	Ahmadi: 10.4%	Ahmadi: 12.2%	
College	Engineering: 28.6%	Engineering: 29.3%	$\chi^2(3) = 2.12, p = .565, V = .10$
	Social science: 24.7%	Social science: 30.1%	
	Life social science: 26.0%	Life social science: 27.1%	
	Computer science: 20.8%	Computer science: 13.5%	
	Descriptives M (SD) or % o	f group	$t \operatorname{test}/\chi^2 \operatorname{test}$
	Control $n = 237$	Treatment $n = 833$	
High School sa	mple		
Age	16.90 (0.75)	16.68 (0.74)	t(1067) = 3.95, p < .001, d = 0.30
Gender	Male: 49.8%	Male: 40.7%	$\chi^2(1) = 6.23, p = .014, V = .08$
	Female: 50.2%	Female: 59.3%	
Governorate	Capital: 46.8%	Capital: 34.3%	$\chi^2(1) = 12.36, p < .001, V = .11$
	Hawalli: 53.2%	Hawalli: 65.7%	
School	1: 6.8%	1: 7.7%	$\chi^2(9) = 31.22, p < .001, V = .17$
	2: 13.9%	2: 6.4%	
	3: 3.8%	3: 3.8%	
	4: 11.8%	4: 8.5%	
	5: 10.5%	5: 7.9%	
	6: 8.4%	6: 13.1%	
	7: 6.3%	7.11.0%	
	8: 11.0%	8: 17.3%	
	9: 13.1%	9: 13.6%	
	10: 14.3%	10: 10.7%	

Table 1	Demographics	and statistical	tests for	control and	treatment g	roups—both sa	mples

results of a *t* test indicated a significant different in age between the control and treatment groups, the mean age difference was negligible at .38 years (control: M = 16.90, SD = .75; treatment: M = 16.68, SD = .74). Results of Chi square analyses revealed significant differences between the control and treatment groups in gender, governorates, and schools;

however, these differences evidenced only weak effect sizes (V=.08, .11, 17 respectively; see Table 1 for detailed demographics and statistics).

4.2 Procedure

The Bareec initiative is a two-year positive psychology intervention program, of which only the first semester was trialed in order to assess its efficacy and long-term feasibility across Kuwait national educational institutions. The program consisted of 15-min weekly interventions delivered during regular class time by teachers. Interventions used in the Bareec program were selected from the positive psychology literature and modified through the use of appropriate examples concerning culture and/or gender considerations as necessary, as well as age and context differences between the high school and university groups. It was felt that the PPIs corresponded well to the life of Kuwaiti students, who, like students everywhere, need more physical activity, spend much time on their mobile phones, have education as their main goal to complete, and, particularly being part of a collective society, put importance on connections to family and group identity (Lambert D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi 2014), as well as friends. Table 2 describes the interventions more fully, with the themes noted reflected in the PPIs used.

Purposive sampling was used whereby teachers who had received the training and were keen to use the program were enrolled along with their pupils and constituted the treatment groups, whereas the remaining non-participating classes formed the control group. As initial interest in the program emerged from relationships with directors of the female campus and schools, a large proportion of study's participants were female as education is gender-separate in Kuwait. Like the Australian Geelong positive psychology school program (Seligman et al. 2009), teachers delivering the material were given prior instruction in the use of PPIs by the Alnowair team and program developer, with each teacher receiving a short lesson plan which included a proposed script for each week, as well as a suggested article for their reading interest and background knowledge.

The study was approved by the Kuwait University's Ethics Review Board and participants gave informed consent accordingly and were able to withdraw from the study at any time. The study was conducted between January 2017 and June 2017.

4.3 Measures

To achieve consistency and improve the ability to make comparisons with the research literature in wellbeing, three common empirically validated scales were used, all of which were already translated in Arabic. Students completed the measures in class before the first week and after the last week of the program.

Flourishing Scale (FS-Arabic translation) (Diener et al. 2009). The FS is an 8-item measure of social psychological prosperity and includes having a sense of competence, feeling engaged and interested, reporting meaning and purpose, feeling a sense of optimism, accepting the self, having supportive and rewarding relationships, contributing to the well-being of others, and being respected by others. Items (e.g., "I am engaged and interested in my daily activities", "I am optimistic about my future") are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. The FS has shown high reliability and validity in college student samples (Diener et al. 2010). The construct validity of the FS was acceptable, based on its moderate to high correlations with scores on several

Table 2 Interventic	ons used in the Bareec program	
Week	Title	Description and PPI used
_	Introduction	Students consider what happiness means. They decide what they need to be happy in the future (often extrinsic markers of success) and contrast with what has made them happy in the past (often intrinsic activity like family time, hobbies) to show that we do not always make the best happiness choices (affective forecasting; Wilson and Gilbert 2003). Upcoming activities offer guidance
2	What makes me happy?	Students focus on the positives and reconsider what they have in their lives that lead to happiness, but that is overlooked due to habituation. They notice the positive via mindful photography using their mobiles phones (Kurtz and Lyubomirsky 2012)
3	Three good deeds	Students engage in good deeds towards others (Nelson et al. 2016; Steger et al. 2008) and use their character strength of kindness. At least 3 good deeds are expected over the course of the week
4	Ask your family	To generate positive emotional bonds, students connect with family over a purposeful activity (Fischer et al. 2010) designed to elicit collective character strengths through storytelling, and positive emotions like pride in family, reinforcing one's identity
5	Plan a great day	Instead of waiting for happiness, students set about to create it (Dunn et al. 2011) by considering with whom they would spend time, doing what, in what way, where, and other details that would serve to elicit positive emotion. They set a date for their great day
6	Cool glasses; are they right?	Positivity can be undermined by how we think about ourselves, situations, and abilities. Students check their beliefs and how they limit their experiences by holding fixed mindsets (Dweck 2006)
7	Get moving!	Physical activity can boost positivity, especially when situations or thinking patterns are not conducive. Students plan where and how they can increase activity in the week (Hogan et al. 2015)
∞	Good news, please	Students spend much time online and are vulnerable to the effects of social media and negative news. To protect themselves against negativity and social media comparisons, they find good news and otherwise limit their exposure (Szabo and Hopkinson 2007)

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other well-being measures (.78 and .73). Cronbach's alphas in the current study for the University sample (pre and post assessment) were $\alpha = .72$, .76, and $\alpha = .67$, .74 (pre and post assessment) for the School sample.

Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE-Arabic translation) (Diener et al. 2009, 2010). The 12-item SPANE measures positive feelings (SPANE-P), negative feelings (SPANE-N), and the balance between the two (SPANE-B). It is appropriate to use in culturally diverse settings as it does not include lists of emotions that might be problematic for non-English speakers, rather it uses terms like "good", "bad", "positive" and so forth. The SPANE was shown to have good reliability and validity (Diener et al. 2010), as well as high factor loadings for the SPANE-P and SPANE-N. The construct validity of the overall SPANE is also good, with moderate to very high correlations with other emotion and well-being measures. Cronbach's alphas in the current study for the University sample (pre and post assessment) were SPANE-P: $\alpha = .76$, .79 and SPANE-N: $\alpha = .73$, .74. Cronbach's alphas for the School sample (Pre and post assessment) were SPANE-P: $\alpha = .70$, .75.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS-Arabic translation) (Diener et al. 1985). The 5-item SWLS assesses an individual's judgment of satisfaction with their life as a whole versus specific life domains (Pavot and Diener 1993). Items (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life", "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing") are rated on a 7-point scale with end points of 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The scores range from 5 to 35, with the neutral point at 20. The SWLS does not appear to be affected by gender or age; it has been shown to have very high internal consistency (.79 and higher), while test–retest reliability and convergent validity is also high (Pavot and Diener 1993). Cronbach's alphas in the current study for the University sample (pre and post assessment) were $\alpha = .81$, .85, and $\alpha = .78$, .79 (pre and post assessment) for the School sample.

5 Results

5.1 University Sample

In order to examine if post-intervention levels of flourishing, satisfaction with life, positive affect, and negative affect differed between the university treatment and control groups, we conducted a series of ANCOVAs using the respective pre-intervention score as a covariable (as per Lambert et al. 2018). ANCOVA evidences large gains in power over difference-in-differences analysis (or its near equivalent, repeated measures ANOVA) (Dimitrov and Rumrill 2003; Huitema 2011; Knapp and Schafer 2009; McKenzie 2012). For example, in a sample size of 500, difference-in-differences analysis yields a power of .353, but ANCOVA yields a power of .447 (see McKenzie p. 38). For studies using single measurement points at pre- and post-intervention, the power differential between ANCOVA and difference-in-differences can be approximately calculated as: 2/(1 + autocorrelation). In the current study autocorrelations for our dependent variables assessing well-being are between r = .57 and .62; thus one would need a sample size approximately 23% larger using difference-in-differences compared to ANCOVA (see McKenzie p. 7). Moreover, in the current study, our focus was on the effect of treatment post-intervention that was not predicted from pre-intervention scores (as opposed to focusing on the mean change in outcome from pre to post).

	Descriptives M (S	SD)	t test and effect size
	Control $n = 77$	Treatment $n = 133$	
Flourishing	46.87 (4.99)	47.00 (4.52)	t(208) = 0.19, p = .847, d = 0.03
Satisfaction with life	26.49 (5.12)	26.55 (4.95)	t(208) = 0.08, p = .939, d = 0.01
Positive affect	24.03 (3.23)	24.36 (2.83)	t(208) = 0.78, p = .434, d = 0.10
Negative affect	15.81 (3.59)	14.42 (3.67)	t(208) = 2.65, p = .009, d = 0.38

 Table 3 University sample: between group differences (pre-assessments)

Analyses revealed that at the end of the 8-week intervention program, flourishing was significantly higher (d=0.32) in the treatment group. Levels of satisfaction with life, positive affect, and negative affect were not significantly different between the groups at post-intervention (ds=0.18, 0.13, 0.21 respectively). It is possible that part of the effect that our intervention had on well-being could be attributable to demographic characteristics. In order to control for such effects, we ran a second set of ANCOVAs using age, gender, governorate, and college, in addition to the respective pre-intervention score as covariates (as per Lambert et al. 2018). Effect sizes and significance levels remained, for the most part, virtually unchanged. Demographics of age, governorate, and college did not emerge as significant predictors of well-being. (See Tables 3 and 4 for detailed descriptive analyses). Gender did emerge as a significant predictor of flourishing, but we note caution in interpreting this gender finding given that only a very small percentage of participants were males. Moreover, a subsequent factorial ANCOVA did not reveal a significant interaction between condition and gender p=.642.

In order to explore possible variations in the effect of our intervention across colleges and across governorates, we ran a series of factorial ANCOVAs testing for an interaction between condition and college, and an interaction between condition and governorate, in the prediction of each of our well-being variables. Age, gender, and the respective preintervention well-being score were included as covariates in each analysis. No significant interactions emerged (.322 < p < .979).

5.2 High School Sample

In order to examine if post-intervention levels of flourishing, satisfaction with life, positive affect, and negative affect differed between the secondary schools treatment and control group, we conducted a series of ANCOVAs. Respective pre-intervention scores were used as a covariate in all analyses. Analyses revealed that at the end of the 8-week intervention program, flourishing was significantly higher in the treatment group (d=0.15), as was positive affect (d=0.27). Levels of satisfaction with life and negative affect were not significantly different between the groups at post-intervention (ds=0.05, 0.05). As we did for the university sample, we ran a second set of ANCOVAs using age, gender, governorate, and college, in addition to the respective pre-intervention score as covariates to control

Table 4 Unive	rsity sample: betw	een group differences (p	oost-assessments)						
Descriptives <i>M</i> trolling for pre-	((SD) post con- -scores	ANCOVA controlling	for pre-scores	Descriptives <i>M</i> controlling for graphics	(<i>SD</i>) post pre and demo-	ANCOVA controlling	for pre scores and	demographics	
Control	Treatment			Control	Treatment				
Flourishing n = 77 46.83 (3.90)	n=133 48.08 (3.90)	F(1, 207) = 5.03 p = .026 d = 0.32, [0.04, 0.60]	Pre-score: $p < .001$	n = 77 46.74 (3.85)	n=130 48.25 (3.89)	F(1, 200) = 7.41 p = .007 d = 0.39, [0.11, 0.67]	Pre-score Age Gender Governorate: College	p < .001 p = .082 p = .009 p = .564 p = .564	
Satisfaction wi n=77 27.27 (3.93)	<i>th life</i> <i>n</i> =133 27.97 (3.93)	F(1, 207) = 1.55 p = .215 d = 0.18, [-0.10, 0.46]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	<i>n=77</i> 27.24 (3.76)	<i>n</i> =130 28.11 (3.79)	F(1, 200) = 2.57 p = .110 d = 0.23, [-0.05, 0.51]	Pre-score: Age: Gender: Governorate: College:	p < .001 p = .495 p = .453 p = .148 p = .296	
Positive affect n=77 24.15 (2.47)	n = 133 24.46 (2.46)	F(1, 207) = 0.78 p = .380 d = 0.13, [-0.16, 0.41]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	<i>n</i> = 77 24.14 (2.41)	<i>n</i> = 130 24.55 (2.43)	F(1, 200) = 1.40 p = .238 d = 0.17, [-0.11, 0.45]	Pre-score: age: gender: governorate: college:	p < .001 p = .790 p = .627 p = .975 p = .112	
<i>Negative affect</i> <i>n=77</i> 15.19 (3.12)	n = 133 14.55 (3.10)	F(1, 207) = 1.99 p = .160 d = 0.21, [-0.08, 0.49]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	n=77 15.15 (3.11)	n = 130 14.47 (3.13)	F(1, 200) = 2.29 p = .132 d = 0.22, [-0.06, 0.50]	Pre-score Age Gender Governorate College	p < .001 p = .349 p = .344 p = .746 p = .544	2. 24.1.0 01

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	Descriptives M (SD)		<i>t</i> -test and effect size
	Control	Treatment	
Flourishing	n=228, 46.94 (4.76)	<i>n</i> =818, 46.96 (5.02)	t(1044) = 0.04, p = .965, d = 0.00
Satisfaction with Life	<i>n</i> =233, 26.21 (5.71)	n = 824, 26.96 (5.24)	t(1055) = 1.90, p = .058, d = 0.14
Positive affect	n=223, 24.25 (3.19)	<i>n</i> =779, 24.52 (3.27)	t(1000) = 1.09, p = .275, d = 0.08
Negative affect	n = 215, 15.51 (3.81)	n = 775, 14.98 (3.98)	t(988) = 1.74, p = .082, d = 0.13

 Table 5
 High school sample: between group differences (pre-assessments)

for possible effects of demographic characteristics. (See Tables 5 and 6 for detailed statistics.) Effect sizes and significance levels remained virtually unchanged. Gender emerged as a significant predictor of positive affect (with females reporting higher levels of positive affect than males, d=0.20); however a subsequent factorial ANCOVA did not reveal a significant interaction between condition and gender p=.620.

As we did for the university sample, in order to explore possible variations in the effect of our intervention across colleges and across governorates, we ran a series of factorial ANCOVAs testing for an interaction between condition and school, and an interaction between condition and governorate, in the prediction of our well-being variables. Age, gender, and the respective pre-intervention well-being score were included as covariates in each analysis. There was not a significant interaction between condition and governorate (.210). The interaction between condition and school was not significant inthe prediction of flourishing (<math>p = .773), satisfaction with life (p = .468), or negative affect (p = .463). However, when predicting positive affect, the interaction between condition and school did emerge as significant (p = .014). A simple main effects analysis probing this interaction revealed that for half of the ten schools there was not a significant difference in post-levels of positive affect between the control and treatment groups (.318 p < .882). In the remaining five schools, post-levels of positive affect were significantly higher in the treatment compared to the control groups (.000) (see Fig. 1).

6 Discussion

University students from four colleges of Kuwait University and high school students from 10 secondary schools in the region received 15-min weekly positive psychology interventions during regular class time over an 8 weeks period. Results indicated that levels of flourishing were higher in both the university and high school students who received the intervention compared to respective control groups in both samples. These enhanced levels of flourishing were not dependent on college within the University, high school, or governorate that participants were from. Additionally, higher levels of positive affect were evidenced in high school students who received the program compared to their respective control group. This boost in positive affect was also not dependent upon governorates. However, a moderating effect of school did emerge such that five of the ten schools students who received the intervention reported higher levels of positive affect than those who did not, while in the remaining five schools, no apparent difference in positive affect was

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	Descriptives <i>i</i> controlling for	M (SD) post rr pre-scores	ANCOVA controllin	ig for pre-scores	Descriptives <i>h</i> controlling for demographics	1 (SD) post pre and	ANCOVA controllin demographics	ig for pre scores	and
	Control	Treatment			Control	Treatment			
Flourishing	<i>n</i> = 222 46.44 (4.62)	<i>n</i> =809 47.15 (4.53)	F(1, 1028) = 4.38 p = .037 d = 0.15, [0.01, 0.30]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	n = 222 46.45 (4.68)	<i>n</i> =808 47.16 (4.56)	F(1, 1023) = 4.27 p = .039 d = 0.15, [0.01, 0.30] 0.30]	Pre-score Age Gender Governorate School	p < .001 p = .659 p = .740 p = .346 p = .311
Satisfaction with life	n = 227 27.00 (4.02)	<i>n</i> =813 27.20 (3.98)	F(1, 1037) = 0.44 p = .510 d = 0.05, [-0.09, 0.19]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	n = 227 27.06 (4.06)	n=812 27.18 (3.98)	F(1, 1032) = 0.17 p = .678 d = 0.03, [-0.11, 0.17]	Pre-score Age Gender Governorate School:	p < .001 p = .804 p = .897 p = .297 p = .355
Positive affect	n=213 24.33 (2.85)	n = 730 25.11 (2.89)	F(1, 940) = 13.37 p < .001 d = 0.27, [0.13, 0.42]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	<i>n</i> =213 24.31 (2.86)	<i>n</i> =730 25.11 (2.86)	F(1, 936) = 14.10 p < .001 d = 0.28, [0.13, 0.43]	Pre-score Age Gender Governorate School	p < .001 p = .145 p = .025 p = .324 p = .556
Negative affect	n = 200 15.27 (3.74)	n = 721 15.07 (3.69)	F(1, 918) = 0.53 p = .468 d = 0.05, [-0.09, 0.20]	Pre-score: <i>p</i> < .001	n=200 15.33 (3.80)	n = 721 15.05 (3.69)	F(1, 914) = 0.97 p = .325 d = 0.08, [-0.07, 0.22]	Pre-score Age Gender Governorate School:	p < .001 p = .906 p = .362 p = .855 p = .719

 Table 6
 High school sample: between group differences (post-assessments)

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Fig. 1 High school sample: Simple main effects of school on condition for post-assessment positive affect

evidenced between those who took part in the program and those who did not. The effect on flourishing in the university sample (d=0.32) and on positive affect in high schools (d=0.27) was on par with the average effect size reported in meta-analyses of positive psychology interventions (ds from 0.20 to 0.34; Bolier et al. 2013).

That greater levels of flourishing (known an eudaimonic wellbeing) was achieved is noteworthy as it is often more difficult to improve than mere positive affect, requiring reflection, knowledge of one's values, self-acceptance, and a focus on others and their wellbeing versus a narrower and more exclusive interest in how one's own self feels. This increase in eudaimonic well-being should allay fears that the Bareec program is only concerned with improving individual wellbeing. Rather, the Bareec program is an attempt to deepen a respect for the wellbeing of others, and enhance a desire to live life well, effectively, and in a manner that is meaningful and consistent with who one is. The resultant increase in eudaimonic wellbeing is consistent with findings from previous studies (Abdel-Khalek and Lester 2015; Lambert D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi 2014, 2015) which suggest that in contrast to Western notions of wellbeing that prioritize a focus on the self and one's emotions, an 'other-focused' view that involves connections to others, the prioritization of meaning and purpose through the Islamic faith, as well as how one is reflected in the eyes of others, is common in university students in the region and Kuwait.

While the high school sample did, like the university sample, experience significantly greater levels of flourishing compared to their respective control groups, the difference for the high school sample was minimal. The developmental stage at which university students, females in particular, find themselves may account for the larger increase in eudaimonic wellbeing in the university group. It might be that as women begin to focus on their careers, as well as future marriage and family, their concerns change from an individual hedonic focus to a broader, eudaimonic focus. The larger increase in eudaimonic wellbeing

in the university group may, thus, partially reflect the fact that the university group was overwhelmingly female and be a function of their socialization relative to younger females.

Unlike the university sample, the high school sample did, however, report significantly greater positive affect post-intervention compared to their respective control group, and this difference was comparable to the university sample's boost in flourishing. Although the Bareec program used the same content for the university and secondary schools, content was modified for age appropriateness in the high schools. It may be the case that doing so inadvertently put more emphasis on 'fun and games' as a means to engage school students and this accounted for their greater hedonic wellbeing. These gains, in contrast to university students, might reflect high school students' main preoccupations in life, such as school, friends, outings, and the enjoyment of few responsibilities. Indeed, the number of participants agreeing with 'living for today' has been reported as almost double in high school students compared to college graduates (Oreopoulos and Salvanes 2011). Further, although Nikolaev (2018) found that relative to individuals with lower levels of education, individuals with more education reported both eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing although they were also more likely to be dissatisfied with their immediate amount of free time to spend with others. As higher education affords the future possibility of better careers and goal-oriented life choices (Oreopoulous and Salvanes 2011), as well as a sense of control over one's life (Verme 2009), it may come at the cost of present life satisfaction and dampen positive affect to an extent. Thus, the higher eudaimonic scores evidenced in our university sample may be a function of higher education which prompts a long-term view of life and its possibilities in a way that secondary school does not.

It is also the case that half of the schools did not realize these gains compared to their controls. As is the case in many studies, (e.g., the Penn Resiliency Program: Gillham et al. 2007; Seligman et al. 2009), not all programs achieve equal success across implementations at different schools. In our study, the lack of gains in positive affect in five of the ten schools could be due to differences in the schools' socioeconomic status, student attendance, or quality of the program's delivery. Future studies should assess such variables and conduct analyses for possible moderating effects.

The lack of change in scores of life satisfaction was surprising; yet this result was also reported by Shoshani and Steinmetz (2014), who stated, "Contrary to our expectations, there was no significant difference between the intervention and control groups in changes over time in self-report judgments about their overall life satisfaction. It is difficult to explain this outcome, in light of the improvement in the other mental health indicators" (p. 1306). They surmised this may have been related to the abstractness of the questionnaire itself, which focused on generalities versus daily specifics. Suldo and colleagues (2014) also found that participants improved on some indicators of wellbeing, but not at all on others. While positive psychology research is growing in the domain of education, these contradictions show that additional work is needed to further explore these questions.

6.1 Limitations and Future Directions

The relative dearth of studies examining the efficacy of PPI-based wellbeing programs in various academic institutions around the world means that comparisons with our study are difficult. It is not known if the lack of impact on positive emotion in university students or life satisfaction in either group is due to a cultural artifact, participant response bias, favorable life conditions as a result of Kuwait's high GDP, or a real reflection of the Bareec program. Further, we cannot overlook the possibility that our results were obtained

merely because students received greater attention or due to a placebo effect (Ciarrochi et al. 2016). It is also possible that students in the control groups were affected by spillover effects from the treatment groups. Replication studies are needed in the region and elsewhere. More sophisticated designs are needed in future studies that include attention to teacher training and ongoing supervision in the delivery of future PPI programs. Such programs take time and effort on the part of teachers who already carry a stressful, time-constrained workload with a variety of performance expectations. PPI programs in academic settings risk being undermined if teachers are not supported (Dawood 2013; Shankland and Rosset 2017; Shoshani and Steinmetz 2014).

Additional follow-up post-test measures are recommended to determine whether the changes observed can be maintained over time. Analysis of indicators such as grade point average, student absences, university completion rates, and university student retention may prove fruitful in demonstrating a return on this type of investment for youth in Kuwait's universities and schools. We also advocate that future developments in programming be expanded to take a whole-school approach aimed at entire university and school populations, with a focus on faculty/teachers, administration, and parents (Dubroja et al. 2016; Shoshani and Steinmetz 2014) equal to the focus on students in order to more effectively boost wellbeing and strengthen contexts in which all individuals can flourish (Ciarrochi et al. 2016; Hoare et al. 2017; Oades et al. 2011).

7 Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, no prior positive psychology intervention program that we are aware of has been conducted in Kuwait. The current study is a promising first step in documenting the effects of PPIs on student wellbeing and establishing the groundwork for future programs. These results are important in demonstrating the effectiveness of PPIs in a non-Western context. Further, that the same program was used with both university and secondary school students yet achieved different gains in types of wellbeing suggests that the delivery of PPIs may result in different outcomes for different groups as a possible function of its presentation and/or the developmental life stages of participants themselves. This represents a unique aspect of our study, as previous investigations have generally focused on one level of schooling at a time (i.e., post-secondary, secondary, or primary) and differential effects were thus not possible to see.

PPI programs are relatively inexpensive to deliver, easily scalable, and more cost-effective than traditional psychological approaches that treat one individual at a time and only if there is a problem. Teachers may also become more open to the adoption of PPIs when they are brief in duration and easily embedded into current classroom curricula (Shankland and Rosset 2017). While the current study represents only the first step in a comprehensive evaluation of the Bareec program, we hope that learnings from the initiative thus far can inspire innovations on existing PPIs as well as spawn new ones that are culturally relevant for a Kuwaiti context. For the field of positive psychology to become globally relevant, as well as locally useful, such accommodations and innovations are imperative (Wong 2013), with the results of such actions being far-reaching, not only contributing to the pool of wellbeing data currently needed in Kuwait, but also to the enhancement of the effectiveness of PPIs currently being tested in educational institutions everywhere (Oades et al. 2011).

Finally, while the program was not designed to necessarily build youth capacity in the face of Kuwait's future challenges, building a true state of flourishing—having a sense of

competence, feeling engaged and interested, enjoying a sense of optimism, self-acceptance, positive relationships, and an orientation towards the wellbeing of others—can be a way for schools to effectively harness Kuwait's human capital towards current and future employment and civic aims, a move seen by governments and organizations elsewhere (Longhi et al. 2018). Like other researchers and policy developers (Adler and Seligman 2016; Seligman and Adler 2018), we propose that such programs be adopted by Kuwait's Ministry of Education as well as by other regional governments struggling with the same demographic and youth employment issues, in order to fulfill their aims of contributing to the wellbeing and preparedness of its youth, while taking a leadership role in the development of its national schools and universities as positive institutions (Oades et al. 2011). These programs can complement career preparation programs, guidance programs, and counselling services already operating within academic institutions. Prioritizing wellbeing and explicitly providing wellbeing-enhancement knowledge will enable the nation's youth to flourish and thrive beyond a state of mediocrity in their friendships, marriages, workplaces, and entrepreneurial endeavors, thus boosting citizens' personal and civic lives-the goal of all good, responsible governments everywhere.

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