



Rethinking Individual Characteristics in Positive Youth Development: Evidence from Secondary-School Adolescents in Kibra, Nairobi, Kenya

Catherine Wanjiru Naliaka Wafula^{ORCID}, Teresia Wamuyu Wachira^{ORCID}, Peter Koome^{ORCID}

Department of Development Studies, St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya

Email: pdslmr454117@spu.ac.ke, twachira@spu.ac.ke, pkoome@spu.ac.ke

How to cite this paper: Wafula, C.W.N., Wachira, T.W. and Koome, P. (2026) Rethinking Individual Characteristics in Positive Youth Development: Evidence from Secondary-School Adolescents in Kibra, Nairobi, Kenya. *Open Access Library Journal*, 13: e15465. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1115465>

Received: May 12, 2026

Accepted: July 18, 2026

Published: July 21, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Many young people in Kenya grow up in settings where motivation, goal focus, and school connectedness develop with uneven adult guidance and limited structured support, yet these characteristics remain central to Positive Youth Development (PYD). The study examined the link between these characteristics and PYD of secondary school adolescents within school-based mentorship programs in Kibra Sub-County, Nairobi County. It utilized a cross-sectional convergent parallel design involving sampling of 451 secondary school adolescents from ten mentorship initiatives. Out of these, 349 of these responded to the questionnaire and constituted the quantitative sample. Data was also collected through the use of 15 focus groups and 10 key informants. Data analysis procedures entailed use of descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation and multiple linear regression. Results of multiple linear regression indicate that school connectedness predicts PYD most strongly ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) followed by goal-directed behavior ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and collaboration ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.001$). Motivation ($\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.022$) and spirituality/faith ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.002$) predict PYD weakly. The model predicts 55.5% of the variance in PYD ($R^2 = 0.555$). The qualitative results follow the same trend showing that motivation and faith emerge through the processes happening in school. The study finds that PYD among secondary-school adolescents in Kibra is mainly driven by school connectedness, collaboration, and goal-oriented behaviour, with motivation and faith playing supportive roles.

Subject Areas

Educational Reform

Keywords

Individual Characteristics, Positive Youth Development, School-Based Mentorship, Secondary School Adolescents, Kibra, Kenya

1. Introduction

The lives of teenagers are still characterized by development that is uneven due to the presence of unemployment, poor connections between the education and job market, poverty, violence, substance abuse [1] [2]. It has been recognized that such circumstances have led to an increased interest in positive youth development (PYD). The perspective involves an understanding of the capacities of young individuals, their competencies, confidence, connection, character, caring and contribution to society [3] [4]. According to scientific literature, there exists a strong correlation between programs based on the PYD theory and good mental health, self-esteem, engagement in schooling, and decreased rates of risky behaviors among adolescents. However, the effects of applying such a framework are context-specific and depend on the organization of programs [5]. The present trends also include a general approach to adolescents that focuses on their strengths and opportunities in their surroundings rather than a deficit-oriented approach [6]. Nonetheless, empirical literature regarding the connection between individual attributes and positive youth development within difficult contexts characterized by inconsistent and unstable schooling and socialization processes is still lacking, which calls for more research in this area.

Under this general concern, research findings indicate that a large number of adolescents face issues of loneliness and poor social connectedness even though there has been massive financial commitment towards youth development systems. One-third of adolescents suffer from loneliness, whereas over 20 percent face frequent loneliness [7]. The emergence of this trend has attracted considerable attention towards personal qualities that can impact the overall welfare of teenagers, especially school attachment, cooperation, motivation, goal-directed action, and spirituality in PYD. Personal qualities relating to PYD include school attachment, goal-directedness, motivational proficiency, and cooperative attitude, all of which have been established from various academic papers, implying that adolescents will do fairly well in their educational settings and developmental process [8]. Nevertheless, there exists an element of disagreement among the academic community regarding the current literature. In some cases, researchers regard these factors as personal traits, whereas in other cases, they regard them as influenced by school, peer, and mentor interactions. Terms like school connection and motivation are also inconsistently defined in studies, and there are several conceptual gaps in this topic as well [7] [9].

However, the problems discussed above become even more pressing for adolescent youths in urban informal areas where educational services, social services,

and development opportunities tend to be volatile. In Sub-Saharan Africa, increasing urbanization, increasing inequality, and lack of youth opportunities still play a role in determining adolescents' lives within such an environment. About 53 million youths in the region have been found to be Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) in 2023. This translates to 21.9% of the total number of young people, while globally this ratio stands at 20.4% [10]. The region is not meeting the required benchmark for SDG Target 8.6 [11] [12].

Such conditions are evident in the urban informal settlements of Kibra in Kenya where adolescents mature amidst overcrowded schools, poverty, poor support from families, and different forms of social risks [13]. Although there exist mentoring programmes in schools, very few empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the relationships that may be drawn between individual characteristics and Positive Youth Development (PYD) in adolescents. Existing research in Kenya has largely dwelled on guidance programmes, learning achievement, and youth programmes [14] [15], but less on the relationship that adolescents can forge within mentorship programs regarding school connectedness, collaboration, and behavioral involvement.

This study therefore examines the role of individual characteristics in relation to Positive Youth Development among secondary-school adolescents participating in school-based mentorship programmes in Kibra, Nairobi County. In this regard, individual traits are defined as goal-oriented behavior, motivation, collaboration, school attachment, and faith. Collaboration and school connectedness are included because they reflect how adolescents interact with others and develop a sense of belonging within their school environment. Anchored on Positive Youth Development theory and Social Cognitive Theory, the study views adolescent development through the interaction between students, behaviour, and school environments. The article proceeds with the theoretical framework, empirical review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This section presents existing studies on individual characteristics and Positive Youth Development among secondary school students in urban informal settlements. It focuses on school connectedness, collaboration, motivation, goal-directed behaviour, and faith as well as they relate to development outcomes within school-based mentorship settings. It also brings together key theories and empirical findings, then ends with the conceptual framework that guides this study.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study anchors its analysis on Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) because each explains a different but necessary part of adolescent development in school settings. PYD describes the structure of positive development, while SCT explains how that development actually forms through interaction between students, their behaviour, and the school environ-

ment. PYD alone cannot explain why students exposed to the same mentorship programme show different developmental patterns. SCT alone does not define what “positive development” should look like in measurable terms. The study therefore uses PYD for outcomes and SCT for mechanisms.

PYD theory conceptualises development through six interconnected domains: competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution [4] [16]. The areas act as a connected unit whereby the development in one field has impacts on the others. In this case, PYD acts as the guiding theory in analyzing developmental outcomes of the students like engagement, cooperation, motivation, and goal-setting. Nevertheless, the PYD theory fails to account for differences among students with regards to the above-mentioned outcomes in the same learning environment where there is unequal access to support systems, for example, Kibra.

In this regard, the distinction arises from SCT theory [17] [18], whereby the development is viewed as interactions between the person, behavior, and environment. Under this theory, behaviors are constructed by individuals rather than being impacted by them. Self-efficacy is used to explain differences in motivation, goal-setting, and persistence, while observational learning can account for the adoption of collaboration and communication skills learned through mentors, peers, and teachers. In that case, SCT directly explains the process through which school experience contributes to differences in motivation, connectivity, and behaviors.

Here, SCT elements correspond to the variables of the study. Goal-directed behavior and motivation can be explained by self-efficacy, while collaboration and school connection derive from modeling. Even faith reflects cognitive interpretation of experience and coping within context. However, SCT also assumes relatively consistent access to stable models of behaviour, which is not always the case in informal settlement school environments where mentorship exposure, school resources, and home support vary significantly [19]. This limits uniform behavioural learning across students.

The two theories provide an integrated model to explain occurrences. The PYD theory accounts for the explanation of positive development traits, while the SCT theory explains how to apply the outcomes. There is an overlap component in the two theories as both theories consider the background of the events. Nevertheless, the two theories are different in terms of their function since PYD considers the outcomes while SCT focuses on the process. In a setting like Kibra, where environmental conditions are uneven, this combined framework explains why students following similar programmes still experience different developmental trajectories.

2.2. Empirical Review: Individual Characteristics and Positive Youth Development

Most studies on Positive Youth Development (PYD) group adolescent character-

istics into a wide set that includes goal-oriented behaviour, motivation, collaboration, school connectedness, faith, self-esteem, self-regulation, confidence, and academic performance. These are usually discussed as “internal assets,” but the way they are defined is not consistent. Other terminology is used to describe the same concept, but different studies employ different tools to measure similar constructs. As such, it becomes somewhat difficult to distinguish between the concepts since they have something in common. This explains why the existing literature on the issue seems to be coherent but inconsistent at the same time.

The focus of the various studies is not identical. In others, the emphasis is placed on the importance of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-control as ways towards better psychological adaptation for adolescents. In other cases, researchers focus on the importance of cooperation and school attachment, which are linked to a sense of belongingness and school behavior. There have been fewer studies that discuss religion, yet when they do occur, religion is associated with prosocial behavior and reduced risk behavior. At the same time, there is a clear contradiction in how these characteristics are understood. In some studies, they have been considered personality traits, whereas, in other researches, they have been regarded as products of interactions within educational settings. Both views are not always consistent, and there is no resolution in the existing literature regarding this conflict.

Findings related to goal-directed behavior and motivation exhibit some consistency. Findings related to goal-directed behavior and motivation exhibit some consistency. The works of Wawersik *et al.* [20], Linver *et al.* [21], and Mertens *et al.* [22] emphasize the relationship between social and institutional influences, purpose, persistence, and self-regulation in promoting engagement and positive developmental adjustment. It is generally believed that when an individual has established goals for him/herself and retains his/her concentration, he/she will face more positive experiences in development. There are some weaknesses in this domain of psychology. Firstly, while researching short-term psychological effects, scholars do not take into account real challenges that can affect the development of an individual like poverty, negative family background, or lack of balance of encouragement in educational institution. Secondly, there is a paradox inherent in the discussed field of studies. Although self-regulation has positive results, it does not guarantee the effectiveness of other cognitive processes related to it.

Collaboration within schools and associations has also been discussed in PYD research literature. It would be relevant to mention that one can learn about the contributions of Page *et al.* [23] and McCabe *et al.* [24], as they have established that belonging, collaboration, and socialization are positively correlated with positive emotions and low levels of deviant behavior. Engaging in the environment results in engagement. Nonetheless, it seems impossible to agree on the meaning of school connectedness. On the one hand, it is possible to speak of school connectedness as something that is subjective, on the other hand, it can be interpreted as an attribute of the institution as a whole.

Faith is yet another component featured in the PYD literature, linked with pro-social behavior and lower rates of substance abuse. Evidence also points to existing relationship between religious engagement and better behavioral results [25] [26]. Notably, the body of literature does not exhibit consistency in regard to the handling of faith as a construct. It tends to oversimplify its role, treating it as a mere protective factor, ignoring the components of belief, religiosity, and culture altogether. Moreover, the empirical approach used in most of these studies lack reliability, given that self-reporting is the most common method applied.

Across the literature, there is general agreement that individual characteristics relate to Positive Youth Development outcomes. However, the explanations remain uneven. However, most research considers these traits to be internal motivators but does not explore how they interplay with school contexts and mentoring schemes. This leads to inconsistency between observation and explanation. The fundamental contradiction in the field is the following one: do these characteristics function independently of other factors inside a person or can they be understood only in context? While the second opinion wins increasingly more support, it is often not put to the test.

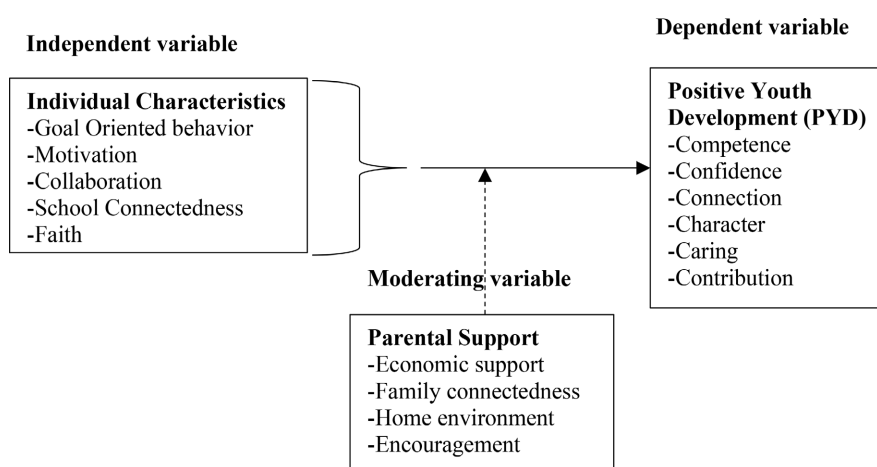
This study narrows the focus to five dimensions: goal-oriented behaviour, motivation, collaboration, school connectedness, and faith. These were selected because they appear most consistently in PYD literature and reflect how students engage in school and mentorship settings. Other commonly used constructs such as self-esteem, confidence, and self-regulation are excluded to avoid overlap and repeated measurement of similar ideas. The aim is to work with a clearer set of dimensions that can be observed directly in school environments without conceptual duplication.

All this notwithstanding, a gap exists in this field of study. The existing body of knowledge about this topic addresses this issue either independently or in clusters where other related dimensions exist. There is inadequate evidence of how these dimensions relate to each other in practice. This study fills this gap by investigating the relationship between these five dimensions and Positive Youth Development in mentoring programs within secondary schools.

2.3. Conceptual Framework for Mentor Support and Positive Youth Development

The conceptual model shows how individual characteristics related with Positive Youth Development in among secondary schools adolescents in Kibra. The individual factors considered in this study are goal orientation, motivation, cooperation, school attachment, and spirituality. These are treated as the main internal and social drivers that influence how students engage with school life and how they develop within structured learning and mentorship environments. PYD is conceptualised as the outcome variable and is measured through six interrelated domains: competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution, which together reflect holistic youth development rather than isolated traits.

This model is also guided by principles from Social Cognitive Theory, which clarifies how these personal characteristics are created and maintained through interaction among personal belief systems, actions, and the school context. Collaboration and school connectedness occur via observation and interactions at school. Faith is understood as part of cognitive interpretation and coping in response to lived experiences. Parental support is included as a background contextual factor rather than a direct predictor. It is reflected in variations in family conditions such as economic pressure and family stability, which shape how adolescents perceive and engage with mentoring relationships. In Kibra, these family and environmental conditions exist alongside school-based mentorship programmes and form part of the broader context within which individual characteristics influence PYD outcomes. **Figure 1** outlines the conceptual framework used in the study.



Source: Conceptualized by author (2024).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

3. Methodology

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used to examine how individual characteristics relate to Positive Youth Development (PYD) among secondary-school adolescents taking part in school-based mentorship programs in Kibra Sub-County, Nairobi County. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time, analysed separately, then compared side by side using a joint display. The aim was simple: see where the numbers line up with what adolescents actually say about their experiences in school-based mentorship programs, and where they don't [27].

The population for this study consisted of adolescents attending secondary schools in Kibra Sub-County, who were undertaking mentorship programs. The sampling frame was based on a list of secondary schools offering mentorship programs, which was provided by the Sub-County Education office and the program coordinators. All ten mentorship programs listed in the sampling frame were involved in the study. In each of these schools, adolescents in Form 1 to Form 4, who have undergone mentorship programs for more than one year were sampled

using systematic sampling procedure. Registers of these mentorship programs were used as a sampling frame. A random starting point was selected and every *k*th adolescent selected into the sample until the required number per school is achieved. The adolescents who had undergone the program for less than one year were excluded. On the other hand, in qualitative part of the research, participants for focus group discussion were purposefully selected while the ten key informants were purposefully selected among the mentorship facilitators and managers due to the fact that they were directly involved in the management of the program. Participation was voluntary and consent from parents/guardians was sought in line with the provisions of the Children Act (2022).

The individual characteristics were determined using a self-report questionnaire based on Positive Youth Development measures. The independent variable was constructed out of five components: goal-directed behavior (8 items), motivation (8 items), cooperation (8 items), school connectedness (9 items), and faith (8 items). The measurement scale was a five-point Likert scale, where 1 stood for “Strongly Disagree” and 5 stood for “Strongly Agree”. The composite score for each component was obtained by averaging the answers to the corresponding items. To ensure that all positively stated components scored high for the high level of school connectedness, the negatively worded items on teacher discrimination, punishment, going to school because of pressure, and teachers’ attention being drawn to students only if they do something wrong were reverse-coded. The questionnaire was modified for the study purposes and piloted.

The PYD construct was assessed through Lerner’s Six Cs model consisting of competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution [4]. Competence construct was evaluated using four components that include social competence (7 items), cognitive competence (8 items), academic competence (8 items), and four measures of academic achievement. The constructs of confidence were measured using 5 items, connection using 8 items, character using 8 items, caring using 8 items, and contribution using 13 items, which were made up of 7 community leadership items and 6 community volunteerism items. A total of 69 indicators were used to assess PYD. All attitudes were assessed using 5-point Likert Scale, whereas academic achievement was measured using the examination score, class rank and class size. The composite score was calculated for each of the Six Cs by averaging the relevant item scores. After averaging the six domain scores, an overall PYD score was calculated, which was used as the dependent variable in correlation and multiple regression analyses. The survey was modified to fit the setting of secondary school youth engaged in school-based mentoring program.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis with regard to individual-level variables in relation to PYD. Before running the model, checks were done for normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and multicollinearity [28]. The relationship between the five independent characteristics and PYD was analyzed using correlation analysis. This method

was chosen since the characteristics were measured on an interval scale score, thus making correlation the best measure to be used for examining the nature of the relationships rather than grouping data into broad categories that were to be subjected to cross-tabulation. Cross-tabulation would have led to a loss of data details and thus made it difficult to interpret the direction of changes in the characteristics. Themes were extracted from qualitative data collected from the discussion among 15 focus groups and ten key informants according to the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke [29]. The lead researcher repeatedly read through the transcriptions, generated codes, refined the codes into themes, and defined themes. Codes and themes that were developed during the analysis process were reviewed by the supervisor team for interpretative consistency. Findings obtained from both strands of research were then integrated using joint displays, where themes were matched to the survey data. The process enabled direct comparison of the datasets and revealed similarities and differences between the two. Furthermore, the process clarified some of the statistical trends in relation to adolescents' perception of their motivational and faith-based experiences, collaboration, goal setting and connection to school in mentorship programs.

Ethical approval was obtained from St. Paul's Ethics Review Committee and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). All data were anonymised, stored securely, and accessed only by the research team. Field assistants were trained on working with adolescents in school settings. Attendance records and program logs were used only as background checks, not as direct proof of experience, since they do not fully capture how adolescents engage in school-based mentorship programs.

The use of both approaches made it easy to understand how individual factors influenced PYD among adolescent students attending secondary schools in Kibra Sub-county due to the mentorship programs. The incorporation of both approaches was useful in distinguishing numbers from the real scenarios encountered by teenagers at school [30]. This aligns with existing work on youth development in school-based mentorship settings in low-income urban contexts.

4. Study Findings and Discussion

This study looked at how individual characteristics relate to Positive Youth Development among secondary-school adolescents taking part in school-based mentorship programs in Kibra Sub-County, Nairobi County. The study mainly used survey research and qualitative methods including focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Survey results were analyzed through descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and regressions, whereas qualitative results were organized into themes. The focus was on five characteristics: school connectedness, collaboration, goal-oriented behaviour, motivation, and faith, alongside PYD measured through the Six Cs framework. The result of this process yielded a rather complex portrait of the way these phenomena are experienced by second school adolescents within school-based mentoring programs, particularly when dealing with issues

of schools, peers and individual motivation. The use of tables in the research helps organize and compare the findings.

Findings from descriptive analysis on goal-directed behavior among students engaged in the mentorship programs are provided in **Table 1** below.

From the data provided, it can be observed that the majority of students had high agreement on the indicators relating to goal-setting and orientation towards the future. More specifically, more than nine out of ten respondents believed that the program helped them set life goals (95.1%), concentrate in class (97.4%), and resist peer pressure (92.8%). Likewise, in terms of educational commitment, 95.1% of the respondents confirmed that the program motivated them to finish school. The mean scores ranged from 4.09 to 4.53, indicating that there were high degrees of direction and concentration within the respondents. However, the follow-ups done by mentors about the realization of their objectives were low, with only 79.4% conducting talks about their objectives.

Results regarding motivation are presented in **Table 2** below. Motivation has

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on goal oriented behaviour.

Statement (shortened)	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean	SD
I have developed clear life goals through the programme	2 (0.6)	6 (1.7)	9 (2.6)	140 (40.1)	192 (55.0)	4.5	0.67
The programme supports completion of my education	1 (0.3)	3 (0.9)	13 (3.7)	133 (38.1)	199 (57.0)	4.52	0.63
Goal setting helps me stay focused in school	1 (0.3)	3 (0.9)	5 (1.4)	145 (41.5)	195 (55.9)	4.53	0.64
My goals help me resist peer pressure	3 (0.9)	4 (1.1)	18 (5.2)	148 (42.4)	176 (50.4)	4.41	0.7
My mentor revisits my goals during meetings	5 (1.4)	39 (11.2)	28 (8.0)	142 (40.7)	135 (38.7)	4.09	1.12
I can track my progress towards my goals	8 (2.3)	20 (5.7)	25 (7.2)	171 (49.0)	125 (35.8)	4.15	1.02
I identify barriers to achieving my goals	1 (0.3)	6 (1.7)	19 (5.4)	182 (52.1)	141 (40.4)	4.32	0.72
I generate solutions aligned to my goals when deciding	4 (1.1)	13 (3.7)	19 (5.4)	161 (46.1)	152 (43.6)	4.3	0.79

Source: field data (2024).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on motivation.

Statement (shortened)	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean	SD
I keep trying until I succeed	0 (0.0)	4 (1.1)	17 (4.9)	134 (38.4)	194 (55.6)	4.49	0.61
Education is important for my future	4 (1.1)	10 (2.6)	15 (4.0)	130 (37.2)	192 (55.0)	4.45	0.65
I take responsibility for my goals	3 (0.9)	14 (4.0)	20 (5.7)	126 (36.1)	186 (53.3)	4.41	0.68
I am motivated to learn new skills	4 (1.1)	2 (0.6)	6 (1.7)	116 (33.2)	221 (63.3)	4.58	0.63
I expect to perform well in exams	2 (0.6)	2 (0.6)	2 (0.6)	130 (37.2)	212 (60.5)	4.59	0.61
My mentor motivates me	5 (1.4)	5 (1.4)	10 (2.6)	145 (41.5)	185 (53.0)	4.49	0.66
Mentorship broadens my outlook and motivation	2 (0.6)	2 (0.6)	4 (1.1)	104 (29.8)	237 (67.9)	4.68	0.63
I want to perform well to show my ability	8 (2.3)	5 (1.4)	4 (1.1)	126 (35.0)	216 (60.2)	4.57	0.67

Source: field data (2024).

been revealed in high motivational orientation on all of the items under study. Over 90 percent of the sample were found to have high persistence towards goal achievement, value of education and achievement of educational success. Motivation related to broadened outlook and learning need received the greatest percentage agreement, that is 96 percent. Scores of mean varied between 4.41 and 4.68.

According to the results in **Table 3** regarding collaborative aspects, there was evidence of high team spirit orientation and interpersonal skills improvement among the respondents. Over 90 percent of them indicated that mentoring enhanced team spirit, communication, and peer support. The mean scores were from 4.14 to 4.50.

Findings from the analysis of school connection results (**Table 4**) reveal positive trends in all variables, except for negative statements. For instance, the majority of students (66.8%) agreed to participate actively in school programs, with a mean score of 4.59 and standard deviation of 0.69. Moreover, there was a high level of

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on collaboration.

Statement (shortened)	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean	SD
Mentorship has built teamwork spirit	8 (2.3)	7 (2.0)	14 (4.0)	116 (33.2)	204 (58.5)	4.5	0.74
Collaboration requires compromise	9 (2.6)	15 (4.3)	17 (4.9)	182 (52.1)	126 (36.1)	4.19	0.82
I learned importance of helping others	2 (0.6)	3 (0.9)	3 (0.9)	149 (42.7)	192 (55.0)	4.5	0.63
Teamwork helps complete tasks faster	13 (3.7)	14 (4.0)	31 (8.9)	167 (47.9)	124 (35.5)	4.14	0.9
Collaboration improves communication	9 (2.6)	5 (1.4)	17 (4.9)	159 (45.6)	159 (45.6)	4.33	0.78
I feel confident working in a team	9 (2.6)	12 (3.4)	9 (2.6)	121 (34.7)	198 (56.7)	4.44	0.84
I give team feedback respectfully	2 (0.6)	11 (3.2)	13 (3.7)	141 (40.4)	182 (52.1)	4.44	0.7
I value team members' contribution	6 (1.7)	8 (2.3)	14 (4.0)	141 (40.4)	180 (51.6)	4.42	0.73

Source: field data (2024).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on school connectedness.

Statement (shortened)	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean	SD
I love my school	13 (3.7)	8 (2.3)	22 (6.3)	104 (29.8)	202 (57.9)	4.36	0.86
I am involved in school activities	6 (1.7)	3 (0.9)	3 (0.9)	104 (29.8)	233 (66.8)	4.59	0.69
My teachers care about me	23 (6.6)	32 (9.2)	25 (7.2)	122 (35.0)	147 (42.1)	4.07	1.09
My teachers give me extra help	20 (5.7)	33 (9.5)	17 (4.9)	148 (42.4)	131 (37.5)	4.01	1.06
Students help each other	12 (3.4)	9 (2.6)	27 (7.7)	133 (38.1)	168 (48.1)	4.25	0.89
Teachers are unfair to students	19 (5.4)	12 (3.4)	31 (8.9)	156 (44.7)	131 (37.5)	4.05	1.02
Teachers focus more on punishment	201 (57.6)	90 (25.8)	9 (2.6)	27 (7.7)	22 (6.3)	1.77	1.12
I only go to school because I have to	32 (9.2)	18 (5.2)	31 (8.9)	147 (42.1)	121 (34.7)	3.87	1.1
Teachers only notice me when I do wrong	15 (4.3)	14 (4.0)	18 (5.2)	138 (39.5)	164 (47.0)	4.19	0.97

Source: field data (2024).

agreement among the students (57.9%) who had positive feelings towards schools, having a mean score of 4.36 and standard deviation of 0.86. Similarly, peer support showed a strong trend, where 48.1% agreed that they helped each other, with a mean score of 4.25 and standard deviation of 0.89. On the contrary, the perception about teachers revealed a mixed but moderate trend. For example, 42.1% of students agreed that their teachers were concerned about them, and 37.5% agreed that they received additional help whenever required, with mean scores of 4.07 and 4.01, respectively.

Faith indicators (**Table 5**) show consistently high agreement across all items, with strong endorsement of spiritual beliefs as a source of meaning, coping, and goal support. Mean scores range from 3.95 to 4.68, indicating generally strong but slightly variable spiritual interpretation across respondents.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on faith.

Statement (shortened)	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean	SD
Spiritual beliefs define my worldview	3 (0.9)	5 (1.4)	11 (3.2)	116 (33.2)	214 (61.3)	4.53	0.71
I follow teachings of the Bible	1 (0.3)	2 (0.6)	3 (0.9)	98 (28.1)	245 (70.2)	4.68	0.57
I cope through belief in God's plan	9 (2.6)	11 (3.2)	37 (10.6)	144 (41.3)	148 (42.4)	4.19	0.96
God gives meaning to my life	24 (6.9)	25 (7.2)	39 (11.2)	148 (42.4)	113 (32.4)	3.95	1.15
God helps solve my problems	11 (3.2)	16 (4.6)	31 (8.9)	158 (45.3)	133 (38.1)	4.16	1.03
I feel connected with God	5 (1.4)	15 (4.3)	17 (4.9)	159 (45.6)	153 (43.8)	4.31	0.95
Faith helps me achieve goals	5 (1.4)	9 (2.6)	13 (3.7)	152 (43.6)	170 (48.7)	4.39	0.89
My faith is strong	9 (2.6)	9 (2.6)	16 (4.6)	139 (39.8)	176 (50.4)	4.32	0.95

Source: field data (2024).

Overall, in all domains of individual characteristics, findings indicate that secondary school youth have maintained high levels of positive orientation in mentorship programs at schools within Kibra Sub-County. Goal clarity, motivation, collaboration, school connectedness, and faith maintain high mean values, implying consistent developmental trends for the population under study. There seem to be differences only in the consistency of mentorship interactions and in personal understanding in terms of faith.

Pearson correlation was used to explore the associations between personal traits and Positive Youth Development among secondary-school students enrolled in mentorship programmes at schools within Kibra Sub-County. For all variables, including Positive Youth Development, the constructs were considered as continuous composite measures in order to remain consistent with the regression analysis. The results are presented in **Table 6** below.

It was observed that there is a strong correlation between all the individual traits and PYD. The most significant positive correlation is seen between school attachment and PYD ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). The second most significant positive correlation is seen between goal orientation and PYD ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). It is also

Table 6. Pearson correlation matrix for individual characteristics and positive youth development (PYD).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. School connectedness	1					
2. Collaboration	0.48**	1				
3. Goal-oriented behaviour	0.52**	0.46**	1			
4. Motivation	0.39*	0.34*	0.41*	1		
5. Faith	0.28*	0.22*	0.25*	0.31*	1	
6. PYD (composite index)	0.56**	0.41**	0.47**	0.33*	0.29*	1

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Source: field data (2024).

interesting to observe that there is a positive correlation between cooperation and PYD ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$).

In summary, the results reveal that school connectedness, goal-setting behaviour, and collaborative skills are a tightly linked set that is highly correlated with PYD, pointing to the significance of shared school-based experiences in youth development among the sampled population. The role of motivation seems more supportive in nature, whereas faith has a more peripheral role in relation to PYD. The qualitative responses are consistent with this framework, whereby one participant states that “*With a mentor in my life now, I have been able to gain a lot of skills. I am a team player and I have developed greatly* (FM #7, FGD 1-1, Project #00A),” revealing the interplay between relationships and behavior. Another participant added that “*As soon as school ends we come to this project. We engage in many activities such as sport, drama, cooking, mending phones, sewing clothes, stitching shoes, and also hairdressing. This has helped me be able to communicate well with others, to work with them and even make friends*” (MR #3, FGD 1-1, Project #00I). This corroborates the quantitative findings on the fact that goal setting, relational support, and behavioral adjustment work concurrently in mentoring contexts, indicating the enhanced importance of structured social settings in influencing PYD compared to personal belief systems in isolation.

Before performing the regression analysis, preliminary analysis was conducted order to check the appropriateness of the statistical model used. For instance, the existence of multicollinearity was detected using the variance inflation factors and tolerances. The result showed that the collinearity level between the independent variables is adequate, meaning that each predictor variable has its own effect on the regression equation. The other assumption, including the normality assumption, linear relationship, homogeneity of variances, and independence of residuals, was examined too. However, there were no breaches of those assumptions noted. It can be concluded that the above findings allow us to apply the regression model in our research. Regression analysis results are provided in **Table 7**.

The model fits very well, where individual characteristics collectively account for 55.5% of variance in PYD ($R^2 = 0.555$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.548$). This suggests that

Table 7. Multiple regression predicting positive youth development from individual characteristics.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.76	0.186	—	4.09	<0.001
School connectedness	0.231	0.039	0.32	7.15	<0.001
Goal-oriented behaviour	0.202	0.047	0.21	4.33	<0.001
Collaboration	0.151	0.039	0.184	3.85	<0.001
Faith	0.101	0.033	0.136	3.1	0.002
Motivation	0.106	0.046	0.113	2.31	0.022

Model summary: $R = 0.745$, $R^2 = 0.555$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.548$, $SEE = 0.288$, $F(5, 343) = 85.74$, $p < 0.001$. Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; SEE = standard error of the estimate.

the predictors used in this study offer considerable explanatory power based on the current sample population of secondary-school adolescents who engage in mentorship programs at schools. School connectedness is the most significant predictor ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) followed by goal-oriented behaviour ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and collaboration ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.001$). Faith ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.002$) and motivation ($\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.022$) are other statistically significant but less influential factors. The model simple implies that relational and behavioral factors hold greater explanatory power compared to motivational and ideological factors in the current sample.

In general, it is observed that the PYD construct is more linked with the students' involvement in the process of schooling and the organization-related behaviors like goal-setting and collaboration than the internal elements like attitudes and emotions. School attachment is identified as a core determinant. This means that PYD depends on the level of attachment, supportive relationships, and involvement in school processes. Organized behavior and goal setting further support this notion by confirming that PYD is linked to organized activities and peer interaction in an organized environment. The role of faith and motivation is still significant; however, the two factors play a secondary role by enhancing the development process.

The above findings is supported by the qualitative narratives which further emphasizing the role of mentoring in building skills and changing behaviors through guided interactions. One interviewee stated, "*Since I have had a mentor, I have gained many skills. I am a team player and I have improved a lot. My mentor gives me responsibilities in the project*" (MG-#4FDG1-1#4 PJ#00A). This illustrates the connection between structured interaction and the development of teamwork skills. Another participant revealed, "*My mentor has taught me how to work with people, solve problems with others, and become a respectful person*" (FR-#6FDG1-1 #2 PJ#00F)". This exemplifies how guided relational interactions lead to interpersonal competencies. The results of this analysis are consistent with the

regression outcomes in the sense that PYD is mainly achieved through structured relationships, behavioral engagement, and skill-building processes within mentorship interactions.

The patterns for individual characteristics are highly positive across the results. Specifically, school connectedness and collaboration are the most pronounced dimensions in their positivity. Following them, goal-directed behavior is identified as the next most prominent feature. Motivation and faith maintain a positive trend but represent weaker dimensions. Similarly, PYD outcomes display clustering mostly around behavioral and relational components instead of belief-based ones. The general pattern implies a clear hierarchy with school connectedness and organized behavioral involvement being key features of adolescent development outcomes in the sample. The qualitative accounts further confirm the pattern of outcomes and describe how such features are demonstrated within the framework of social relations in schools. Rather than introducing new patterns, the qualitative findings explain how structured mentoring relationships and participation in school activities translate into positive youth development outcomes.

5. Discussion

What emerges from the results is a trend evident among the personal characteristics analyzed. School connection, cooperation, and orientation towards goals prove to be the most correlated personal characteristic with PYD, while motivation and religiosity are somewhat less so, but still significant. Thus, one can say that in this situation, positive development is much more associated with the school experience rather than the individual personality itself. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) helps explain this pattern by viewing development as something shaped through ongoing interaction between learners, behaviour, and the surrounding environment [17] [18]. PYD theory outlines the developmental outcomes, while SCT offers a clearer explanation for why relationship-based and school-based experiences appear more prominent in the findings.

The current results share some similarities with earlier studies that associate purpose, persistence, and self-regulation with stronger developmental outcomes among adolescents [21] [22]. However, much of that literature is drawn from settings with relatively stable support systems and more predictable learning conditions. The present findings reflect a different context, where access to mentorship, school support, and stable guidance is uneven. In such environments, internal characteristics do not appear to operate in isolation. Instead, their expression seems closely tied to the consistency of interaction within schools and mentoring spaces. This observation is also consistent with studies that describe individual characteristics as shaped through wider social and institutional relationships rather than as fixed personal traits [20].

The strong position of collaboration and school connectedness in the findings also reflects patterns reported in earlier studies linking belonging, participation, and peer interaction with better wellbeing and behavioural adjustment [7] [9] [23]

[24]. Contrarily, however, the results indicate an existing gap in literature as well. Connectedness at school is considered to be an aspect that remains constant; however, as evident from the recent findings, connectedness at school can differ among students depending upon their connection with teachers, fellow students, and mentors at schools. Therefore, connectedness at schools is made to appear much more dynamic as compared to static.

Faith shows a weaker but still positive association with PYD, which generally aligns with studies linking religious involvement with prosocial behaviour and lower engagement in risky behaviour [25] [26]. Even so, much of the literature gives limited attention to how faith connects with developmental outcomes in practice. In the present findings, faith appears more as a personal frame of meaning and support rather than a central characteristic linked to school engagement or participation. Compared with collaboration and connectedness, its role appears less visible within day-to-day school interaction.

In summary, the results indicate the presence of tension that is common in PYD literature between theories of positive youth development based on individual characteristics and those based on contextual factors. While PYD theory is useful in understanding the characteristics of positive youth development, it is SCT that can explain the difference in perception of the students who have gone through the same mentorship programs. This is due to the interrelation of the individual and the context in which the individual operates, especially in schools that operate under resource scarcity.

6. Conclusions

This study focused on how individual characteristics relate to Positive Youth Development (PYD) among secondary-school adolescents taking part in school-based mentorship programs in Kibra, Nairobi's informal settlement. Findings indicate that connection with school, cooperation, and orientation towards goal achievement are the main factors of PYD. Motivation and faith are important, but play more of a supporting role. Most secondary school adolescents exhibit high values for all the aforementioned components. However, the distinctive features between PYD lie in the degree of their connection with the school environment, their ability to cooperate with peers, and their ability to set goals. In other words, it is more crucial for PYD whether adolescents have good social skills than whether they believe in something or are motivated.

The study adds something important to what we already know. Among secondary-school adolescents, it is the everyday school relationships and routines that shape development most strongly. The feeling of being a part of school, peer interaction, and goal orientation are responsible for most of PYD rather than motivation and religious beliefs. These are individual characteristics that cannot function in a vacuum but require certain contextual support, such as involvement in school activities, guidance, and mentoring. Even when motivation and faith are strong, they do not translate into stronger development unless they are reinforced

through real interaction and structure in school life.

Nevertheless, the study has some limitation. For instance, because the study makes use of self-reporting by the secondary school adolescents, it means that the responses may not necessarily reflect what the participants actually are but rather how they see themselves or how they wish to be seen. The other issue is that research design only evaluates one dimension of time and hence it is not able to capture the changes in the traits as a result of mentoring programs over time. Last is that the findings are drawn from the case of Kibra, which implies that study will not apply in other secondary schools where the level of resources and support is different.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Kiss, L., Fotheringham, D. and Quinlan-Davidson, M. (2022) Latin American Young Neets: Brazil as a Case Study for Systemic Risks of Youth Social Exclusion. *Journal of Youth Studies*, **25**, 1386-1410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1965107>
- [2] Miranda, A., Arancibia, M. and Fainstein, C. (2024) Sexual Division of Labor, Unemployment, and Drug Use in Buenos Aires Underprivileged Youths. *Journal of Youth Studies*, **27**, 195-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2118034>
- [3] Haritha, Y.D. and Bilquis, (2022) Positive Youth Development: Levels of Positivity in Youth Development. *Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology*, **40**, 202-207. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajaees/2022/v40i121783>
- [4] Lerner, R.M., Chase, P.A., Dowling, E.M., Tirrell, J.M., Buckingham, M.H., Yu, D., *et al.* (2023) Resilience and Positive Youth Development: A Dynamic, Relational Developmental Systems-Based Perspective. In: *Handbook of Resilience in Children*, Springer, 337-349. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14728-9_18
- [5] Buenconsejo, J.U. and Datu, J.A.D. (2022) Positive Youth Development: A Brief Review of Literature with Implications for School-Based Psychological Interventions. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, **32**, 275-282. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2021.25>
- [6] Qi, S., Hua, F., Zhou, Z. and Shek, D.T.L. (2022) Trends of Positive Youth Development Publications (1995–2020): A Scientometric Review. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, **17**, 421-446. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-020-09878-3>
- [7] Attri, S.A., Springer, A.E. and Kelder, S.H. (2025) A Scoping Review of School Connectedness Interventions for Adolescents. *Journal of School Health*, **95**, 880-899. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.70036>
- [8] Martin-Barrado, A.D. and Gomez-Baya, D. (2024) A Scoping Review of the Evidence of the 5cs Model of Positive Youth Development in Europe. *Youth*, **4**, 56-79. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth4010005>
- [9] Kim, H., Carney, J.V. and Hazler, R.J. (2022) Promoting School Connectedness: A Critical Review of Definitions and Theoretical Models for School-Based Interventions. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, **67**, 256-264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988x.2022.2119359>
- [10] Cieslik, K., Barford, A. and Vira, B. (2022) Young People Not in Employment, Edu-

- cation or Training (NEET) in Sub-Saharan Africa: Sustainable Development Target 8.6 Missed and Reset. *Journal of Youth Studies*, **25**, 1126-1147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1939287>
- [11] Afful-Dadzie, E., Afful-Dadzie, A., Ofori-Amanfo, J. and Arwaa, E.K. (2023) Sustainable Development Goals Reporting Metric for Developing Economies. In: *Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals—Regional Perspectives*, Springer, 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91260-4_1-1
- [12] Muswere, A. (2020) Is Africa Capable of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the 2020-2030 Decade of Programming? *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, **10**, 53-72. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v10i4.17209>
- [13] Karuga, R., Kabaria, C., Chumo, I., Okoth, L., Njoroge, I., Otiso, L., et al. (2023) Voices and Challenges of Marginalized and Vulnerable Groups in Urban Informal Settlements in Nairobi, Kenya: Building on a Spectrum of Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches. *Frontiers in Public Health*, **11**, Article 1175326. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1175326>
- [14] Abuya, B.A., Muhia, N., Kiroro, F. and Karisa, A. (2025) Testing the Impact of an Education After-School Support Program on Adolescents' Literacy and Numeracy Achievement in Urban Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Development*, **119**, Article 103422. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103422>
- [15] Chilewa, E.A. and Osaki, K. (2022) The Effectiveness of Guidance and Counseling Practices on Students' Career Development in Secondary Schools in Temeke Municipality. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, **4**, 160-181. <https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.4.1.17>
- [16] Lei, S., Yunrui, Z., Ning, C. and Wei, L. (2024) The Evolution and Implications of Positive Youth Development. *Journal of Psychological Science*, **47**, 1016-1023. (in Chinese) <https://doi.org/10.16719/j.cnki.1671-6981.20240431>
- [17] Bandura, A. (2001) Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, **52**, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- [18] Cervone, D. (2023) Theory and Application in Personality Science: The Case of Social-Cognitive Theory. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, **35**, 220-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09713336231178366>
- [19] Ewulu, A.R., Singh, R., Roberson, K.B., Masicampo, E.J. and Feldman, S.R. (2024) Toward a Better Understanding of Treatment Adherence: Incorporating Accountability Explicitly into the Social Cognitive Theory of Adherence Behavior. *Journal of Dermatological Treatment*, **35**, Article 2351493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546634.2024.2351493>
- [20] Wawersik, D.M., Boutin, E.R., Gore, T. and Palaganas, J.C. (2023) Individual Characteristics That Promote or Prevent Psychological Safety and Error Reporting in Healthcare: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership*, **15**, 59-70. <https://doi.org/10.2147/jhl.s369242>
- [21] Linver, M.R., Urban, J.B., Chen, W., Gama, L. and Swomley, V.I. (2021) Predicting Positive Youth Development from Self-Regulation and Purpose in Early Adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, **32**, 1312-1327. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12621>
- [22] Mertens, E.C.A., Deković, M., van Londen, M. and Reitz, E. (2022) Parallel Changes in Positive Youth Development and Self-Awareness: The Role of Emotional Self-Regulation, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reflection. *Prevention Science*, **23**, 502-512. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-022-01345-9>
- [23] Page, A., Charteris, J., Anderson, J. and Boyle, C. (2021) Fostering School Connect-

- edness Online for Students with Diverse Learning Needs: Inclusive Education in Australia during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, **36**, 142-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872842>
- [24] McCabe, E.M., Davis, C., Mandy, L. and Wong, C. (2022) The Role of School Connectedness in Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Youth: Recommendations for School Nurses. *NASN School Nurse*, **37**, 42-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942602x211048481>
- [25] Li, S.D., Lu, J. and Chen, Y. (2022) The Relationship between Christian Religiosity and Adolescent Substance Use in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, **19**, Article 11233. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191811233>
- [26] Vaingankar, J.A., Choudhary, N., Chong, S.A., Kumar, F.D.S., Abidin, E., Shafie, S., *et al.* (2021) Religious Affiliation in Relation to Positive Mental Health and Mental Disorders in a Multi-Ethnic Asian Population. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, **18**, Article 3368. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073368>
- [27] Putera, P.B., Suryanto, S., Ningrum, S., Widianingsih, I. and Rianto, Y. (2022) Using Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods and Datasets for Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy Dynamics Research in Indonesia. *ASEAN Journal on Science and Technology for Development*, **39**, 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.29037/ajstd.845>
- [28] Alabi, O.O., Ayinde, K., Babalola, O.E., Bello, H.A. and Okon, E.C. (2020) Effects of Multicollinearity on Type I Error of Some Methods of Detecting Heteroscedasticity in Linear Regression Model. *Open Journal of Statistics*, **10**, 664-677. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojs.2020.104041>
- [29] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2023) Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Becoming a Knowing Researcher. **24**, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>
- [30] Dawadi, S., Shrestha, S. and Giri, R.A. (2021) Mixed-Methods Research: A Discussion on Its Types, Challenges, and Criticisms. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, **2**, 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.46809/jpse.v2i2.20>