

Growing Hope among Kenyan Emerging adults. A Study with Under-graduate University Students

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed at exploring the possibility to increase hope in Kenyan emerging adults; based on evidence of other empirical studies, it presumed that increased hope is a gateway to greater life competence for the recipients.

Design/Methodology: Pre- and post-intervention tests using the Adult Hope Scale (AHS) of Snyder and his companions were administered to sampled groups of students (N= 190) in two Universities in the Karen Ward of Nairobi. One of the groups was the control while the other was the intervention group. In the period between the tests, the researchers administered a six-session hope-building intervention to the Intervention group in the contexts of group counselling.

Results: A Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (R-MANOVA) was carried out on the pre-test and post-test data on hope for the two groups. Improvement on hope was observed in both the control (M=0.63) and the intervention groups (M=7.28), but the difference in the extent of change within the intervention group was statistically significant, with within-groups and between-groups contrasts of (F =27.72, p<.05) and (F = 10.13, p < .05) respectively. The implications of the findings are a call to rise to the opportunity presented by the potential of hope-building and other character strengths interventions in increasing the adjustment and purposeful engagement of emerging adults.

Key words: Hope; Character-strengths interventions, Emerging adults; Undergraduate university students.

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I. Introduction

The accompaniment of young people to responsible and competent adulthood is a perennial concern in all societies because their individual efficacy and the future of the societies themselves depend on that achievement. In Kenya, a lot of hope is placed on university students to contribute to the transformation necessary to make better futures in every facet of the society. Yet many challenges face the not-yet-competent adults, also referred to as 'emerging adults' (Arnett, 2000; 2014) who are in institutions of tertiary learning in Kenya, and their ability to navigate this is also a concern. In view of the foregoing, a quasi-experimental intervention study attempting to increase the levels of hope in the students was undertaken. The rationale of the intervention was derived from the many studies that have shown that higher levels of hope increase the competence of students in their everyday lives. However, the main question remained: can hope be increased among African university students using an intervention? As African societies and peoples are plagued by poverty, natural and human-instigated disasters, massive unemployment, among other social concerns, the possibilities of social transformation towards a viable African renaissance need to be based on evidence-based interventions that make a difference. If hope can be increased and sustained, then the transformation and renaissance have a concrete foundation to build on, namely, a people who can engage purposefully in the processes it will take to impact it. Evidence-based hope building can be targeted as one of the tools that can be used in apprehending challenges and creating different futures. The paper reports the attempt to build up hope in university students as a contribution to this larger project of social transformation and an African renaissance.

II. Under-graduate university students in Kenya

Most undergraduate university students in Kenya, as indeed elsewhere in the world, belong to the age group sometimes referred to as 'emerging adults'. These are young people at the commencement of personal independence. Even though they depend financially on their parents or other sponsors, they have the use of their time, besides formal class-time, under their own charge for the first time in their lives (Arnett 2000).

In the Kenyan educational setting, admission to university is already a mark of intelligence, at least of the cognitive kind. These students should normally be able to complete their studies successfully and in a timely fashion, and to deal with the challenges that come their way in the course of the university career. Yet a 38% attrition rate for students registered in private universities was reported by a 2016 study (Njoroge et al., 2016). Anderson et al. (2016) found psychological distress to be among the causes of attrition in university students' academic career. Nyutu et al., (2019) elaborate on numerous difficulties for university students in Kenya, which can affect their psychological wellbeing and become a factor of the completion of their studies. Their study demonstrated the impact that psycho education and counselling can have in alleviating the stressors and increasing their chances of completion. These findings indicate the validity of efforts to improve the psychological resilience of university students.

Studies show that at this developmental stage, young people are engaged in the construction of personal identity and purpose, and this takes ample psychological energy in a young person's life as they reconstruct the past and imagine the future into a purposeful project (McAdams, 2013). They therefore have an opportunity to propel their lives towards the choices they would like to characterise their futures. Given that there is very little ground research on the character strength of hope in African settings, a preliminary study is what this current study offers with a specific population. The study focused on emerging adults and therefore it is fitting to discuss in brief the characteristics that scholars have observed of people in this developmental stage.

Emerging adulthood

Arnett (2000), who proposed the theory of emerging adulthood, defined the age range of this developmental stage as lying between 18 and mid or late 20s in industrial societies. Subsequent studies have debated the very theory of emerging adulthood and some of the characteristics that Arnett ascribed to this age-group. In spite and in the midst of these divergent discussions, there has been enough scholarship over the two decades since the proposal of the theory to justify the observation that this stage of lifespan development is worth paying particular attention to.

According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is a developmental stage which lies loosely between adolescence and adulthood. Together with other scholars, Arnett proposes the reasons for the rise of this new developmental stage as being the delay in the obligation to assume adult roles for most people of these ages in industrial societies (Arnett, 2014; McAdams, 2013b; Sussman & Arnett, 2014; Swanson, 2016). Some scholars further propose that the characteristics of emerging adults and indeed the very developmental stage of emerging adulthood is a consequence of cultural and social-economic development of the societies as the transition from industrial to technological ages, wherein a separation between the transition to psychological adulthood and that to practical adulthood has been effected (Shulman et al., 2009). Indeed some consider the developmental stage 'emerging adulthood' as purely a cultural construct (Nelson et al., 2004; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert & Luyckx, 2012). Arnett himself proffers the view that cultural-historical developments in Western societies have made this transition stage significantly longer and thus created its distinction (Arnett, 2000). This developmental stage is a social-cultural construct produced by lifestyles that post-pone the obligation to take on adult roles.

As a developmental experience, emerging adulthood is a crucial transitional stage that can impact the rest of the life of the young person in significant ways. Studies show that young people at this neither-child-nor-adult stage can be quite vulnerable because the various forces that keep them in this age compromise the development of adult mastery (Lieb & Auld, 2015). Lieb and Auld vouch for the critical importance of efforts to support the development of such mastery. For example, persons undergoing depression during emerging adulthood have been found to face a higher possibility of longer-term dissatisfaction with careers and even with other own life choices, even though other factors, including gender and intervention are also to be considered (Howard et al., 2010). By contrast, young people who are confident of their own capability to surpass such challenges may be in a better position to confront these in their later lives (Duan et al., 2014; Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2014; Zhang & Chen, 2018).

In the African setting, there are studies on emerging adults in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. Obidoo et al. (2019) researched the markers of adulthood in Ghanaian and Nigerian youth. Their findings were that the markers are eclectic—constituting the traditional indicators of adulthood such as physical and socio-spiritual characteristics as well as being influenced by the same international market and global cultural influences that delay adulthood in Western societies. A South African study by Ferguson and Adams (2016), focuses on the

Americanisation of emerging adults through acculturation. Scholars acknowledge that there are cultural influences to the characteristics of this age group, but the influence of global forces offers cannot be ignored.

An interesting study in relation to the current one is that by Frimpong-Manso (2020) which explores the preparation for adulthood that is available to young people in alternative care in Ghana. The study found that personal qualities, social support, preparation for adulthood and positive relationships were the four factors that facilitated successful transition to adult roles for these resilient young people. Among the personal qualities were especially self-belief, perseverance, and the determination to achieve their goals, as well as being optimistic. These clearly hope-related qualities are instrumental to resilience in difficult circumstances. Given the importance of hope for resilience and success, this study investigates the possibility to raise hope levels, and through it strengthening the personal qualities necessary to effective transition to adulthood. It can encourage stakeholders—be they parents or educators in other forums—to inculcate hope in youth as a measure of preparedness for adult roles.

Given that the emerging adults who are subject of this study are in a non-industrial society, they may already attain the adult characteristics; yet the fact of being set in the city and being products of a highly Westernised education system may be the experience that bears more strongly on them. Schwartz, et al. 2012 observed that increasingly in non-western societies, there is delay in embracing of adult roles due to longer education trajectories and the search for stable employment; both of these are largely regarded as required achievement ahead of taking on adult responsibilities. Many Kenyan youth, in particular those who are able to reach third cycle level of education, do not embrace adult roles, such as marriage and income-generation activities, until they are 25 years of age or older. At the same time, these young people of the ages between 18 and 25 no longer fit in the characteristics of adolescents.

In the two decades since Arnett's ground-breaking work, there has been an increase in research on this developmental stage. Most of this research is focused on college students (Gibbons & Ashdown, 2006). In the African context, however, little research has been done in this area and its specific concerns.

Possibility and Benefits of Hope-building interventions

Character-strengths building interventions have become a well-appreciated approach to wellbeing and coping support in many contexts, especially since the emergence of the study of positive psychology, wherein character strengths are understood as ingredients of wellbeing. Most strength-building interventions have tended to target a number of strengths together. Leontopoulou (2015) carried out one such intervention with 40 men and women aged 18 to 30. The intervention was on a battery of positive psychology interventions and resulted in an increase in a variety of strengths, including hope.

As the understanding of specific character strengths as distinct from others has developed, literature specifically dealing with hope, and discussing if it can be cultivated is steadily increasing. Most of this literature affirms the possibility to increase hope through intervention (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). A great advocate of the cultivation of hope is the late Shane Lopez, a leading positive psychology scholar and trainer. Lopez trained young people for hope underscoring that it is very different from wishful thinking. Accordingly he believed in a clear plan of work to grow and sustain hope (Levitt, 2013). In a 2015 book chapter co-authored with J. L. Magyar-Moe, Lopez proposes very concrete strategies for growing hope (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). In this publication, Magyar-Moe and Lopez distinguish between goals, pathways and agency, underscoring that each of these is important and all are mutually reinforcing, but they are not synonymous. Accordingly, interventions for building hope must consider all three components. Our study intervention took this into account and proposed a three-week process during which all three aspects of hope were taken on board.

Magyar-Moe & Lopez, (2015) go further to underscore that hope is not only itself malleable, but it also impacts other changes in the life of the person, enabling change. When that change is positive, encouraged by a boost in hope, the change in turn builds up hope even further, becoming infectious. Because, in their view hope is innate to humanity, naming and nurturing this strength in the context of positive and supportive relationships can be very productive. A hope-filled therapist, creating a hope-filled therapeutic relationship can already be the support needed to lead a client to a break-through, finding their own hope. Hope is held among the high potential single-strengths intervention (Proyer et al., 2013).

The late Charles Snyder is one of the leading scholars in the study and research on Hope. He and his companions conceptualized hope as a two dimensional strength, entailing the thinking about one's goals in terms of being able to be the agent and seeking as well as finding pathways to achieve the goal (Snyder, et al., 1991). In other words, hope includes the perceived capacity to achieve one's goals or goal-directed energy (agency), and the ability to conceive ways and means towards such achievement (pathways). It is clearly in the realm of cognition. Hope, for Snyder, is a very active strength. In pathway thinking, the individual sustains the confidence to achieve the set goals, and therefore plans how to get it done (Snyder, 2000; Yalçın & Malkoç, 2015). In agency thinking, the individual is motivated to achieve defined goals or to accomplish desired outcomes. The person experiences and views themselves as able to both set goals and sustain the strife till accomplished. In his later work Snyder acknowledges that the hope theory is in fact constitutive of a trilogy

comprising goals, pathways and agency (Snyder, 2002). While Snyder considers goals to be the cognitive element in hope, Rand and Cheavens (2009) underscore that all three components of hope are cognitive abilities that can be learned. Their position was an encouragement to the intervention for this study. Studies summarised by Leontopoulou (2020), among others to be discussed below in the empirical literature review section show that hope can be measured and learned. The recommendation of Leontopoulou (2020), is that there should be more application studies and interventions towards understanding how hope influences young people in educational settings as it is perceived to influence them in other settings.

Zhang and Chen (2018) show that the development and use of strengths has a positive correlation with increase of strengths and ultimately to subjective well-being. While hope is seen to be a fairly constant trait and strength in most individuals, recent studies have tended to favour the thinking that hope can be elevated in individuals through intervention (Yotsidi et al., 2018). Yotsidi et al. recommend that academic institutions should endeavour to build up students' hope levels as a measure of promoting their academic and life success. Prolific hope researcher, Leontopoulou (2020) in her conceptual article advocates for more targeted hope research with specific application settings. The benefits of hope interventions for multiple facets of wellbeing are documented by Snyder (2006). Baggio et al. (2017), Hausler et al., (2017), Huber, Webb, & Höfer, 2017 agree with Snyder's findings, as they observed that hope is a predictor of psychological well-being in emerging adults. Studies also show that hope is one of the character strengths, along with zest, curiosity, humour and gratitude, that correlate positively with life satisfaction (Proyer et al., 2015).

Particular Relevance of Hope for Emerging Adults

Studies also show that the characteristics of emerging adults can be moderated by character strengths in important ways in an individual (Seligman, 2001). It is building on these findings that the study undertook to explore the possibility of cultivating hope in the university students as a support for their developmental, social and educational challenges. Arnett (2000) presents emerging adulthood as marked by five characteristics—identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and experiencing a range of possibilities. Further research on these characteristics show that they lead to excessive risk-taking behaviour in emerging adults (Arnett, 2000, 2010; Luyckx et al., 2013; Negru, 2012; Norona et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2013; Sussman & Arnett, 2014; Swanson, 2016). These characteristics can be liabilities and/or opportunities (Baggio et al., 2017; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005; Seiter et al., 2013).

Having largely completed the process of development of secondary sexual characteristics, emerging adults have new found ease with their bodies. In addition, they are in the prime of their health and immunity is strong. In addition, sexual drive is high in emerging adulthood and with accompanying liberties comes the desire for experimentation which the emerging adults indulge (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013). Not surprising many emerging adults indulge in physical sexual activity that is not related to commitment or future choices (Knight, 2014). Purposeful hope-building which enters into the dimensions of goals, pathways and agency is bound to mitigate against such risk-taking behaviour as it makes clear that behaviour in the moment impacts direction towards the desired future.

Brain development continues during emerging adulthood with cognition capacities increasing in complexity. Since the formation of the prefrontal brain lobes is only completed at about the age of 25, and yet there is marked brain development during this stage, it is not surprising that emerging adults can seem to be shifting from one focus to another in terms of their goals and ideals. A study carried out to assess the prognosis of such shifting of goals for the future well-being of the emerging adult shows a positive correlation (Hill, et al., 2011). Piaget's idea that cognitive development is complete by the end of adolescence with the attainment of the formal thinking stage is disputed by subsequent research. In his research, Arnett (2014) reports that post-formal thinking, characterised by pragmatism or dialectic thought and reflective judgement is a particular quality of emerging adults. As cognitive qualities the goals, pathways and agency facets of can ride to more successful cultivation on the wave of this optimised brain development.

It is normal for emerging adults to challenge family and other norms. Their cognitive developmental stage is about viewing issues from different perspectives, deconstructing views and reconstructing others. This also impacts their sense of identity as they seek to reconstruct the narratives of their past and revision their future in ways that are different from their family narratives (McAdams, 2013). Personal narratives are important for the character strength of hope that this study endeavours to cultivate.

III. Methodology

The study used a quasi-experimental research design, involving a pre-test and a post-test with a hope-enhancing intervention administered to the intervention group in the period between the two tests. This design was chosen because, with the help of the pre-test and the control group, the impact of the intervention could still be estimated along pre-determined parameters.

Research location

The research was carried out in the Karen Ward of Nairobi County, which boasts of a number of University and Higher Education Institutions. Excluding Tangaza University where the lead researcher works, a random selection from the other institutions was carried out by placing their names in a hat and two names were picked out, which were thus selected for the study. The determination of which of the two would be the control and which the intervention group was also done randomly.

Sampling Frame and Sample size.

By cross-checking shared disciplines, all the undergraduate students in the sampled institutions studying Business Studies were considered to be the sampling frame, totalling 102 and 120 in the control and the intervention institutions respectively. A random assignment of heads and tails on a coin toss was used to determine the control and the intervention group. The sample size was determined using the formula of Krejcie and Morgan (1970); this suggested 86 for the control group and 92 for the intervention group. Mindful of the possible attrition rate in experimental studies, the researcher invited all the members of the sampling frame, ending up with 84 and 106 at the pre-test for the control and intervention groups respectively. The numbers dropped to 64 and 66 at the post-test. The data presented in this paper is on the 130 who participated in the pre-test and post-test, as well as at least four of the intervention sessions for the intervention group.

In line with the desire to increase the variety of those who participate to the intervention, maximum variation sampling was employed, whereby, all the 18 to 25-year-old students who participated in the baseline test in the tails-attaining institution were invited to participate in the intervention irrespective of their levels of hope at the pre-test.

Research tool: The Adult Hope Scale (AHS)

The study used the Adult Hope Scale (AHS) developed by Snyder. The psychometric properties of the AHS are well established through multiple studies, sustaining an internal reliability of alpha .74 - .88 and a test retest validity of .83 over three weeks and .86 over ten weeks (Snyder, 2002). The scale gives the respondents an eight level Likert scale to respond to on each item, ranging from 1 – signifying ‘Definitely False’ to 8 – signifying ‘Definitely True’, all put in the positive, making the higher scores the higher levels of hope. The items are statements of the two pillars of hope in Snyder’s Hope theory—agency and pathways—which comprise four statements each. The remaining four statements are fillers and are therefore not scored in the findings of the test.

The intervention

The intervention used a mindfulness approach. Because mindfulness provides greater exposure to the internal environment (Niemic&Lissing, 2016), it promoted the awareness of individuals’ own hope-state and the ability to dispose self to growth. Synergy between mindfulness and the prescribed hope-cultivating exercises produced positive effects since both collaborate in raising awareness of the positive in a person and in using the positive to overcome the challenging (Niemic&Lissing, 2016). Throughout the intervention, the context of the hope-building intervention exercises in a mindfulness set up was appraised positively by the participants as being helpful for accentuating the experiences of the intervention. In fact, Ivztan (2016) offers the view that mindfulness might be the ultimate tool that would consistently increase individual well-being and all the values of positive psychology.

The intervention, besides being delivered in a mindfulness approach, was crafted to cover the three elements of hope, namely desired goals (affirming and clarifying of intentions), pathway thinking (capacity to generate clear ways to achieve the goals) and agency (perceived self-ability to sustain movement along pathways) (Rand & Cheavens 2009).

Table 1 is a scheme of the intervention programme organised on a semi-weekly, 30-minute group sessions.

Hope component	Theory input	Mindfulness exercise	Daily practice
Session 1 Agency	Self-awareness, self-agency as power	Reliving a major success in recent years.	List down achievements and cherish them, both past and on-going. Note how you feel.
Session 2 Goals	Goals are important. They should be specific and time-bound. They should be a clear. We	Mindfulness on future self-vision, living one’s best possible legacy (Ivtzan, 2016, p.9).	Write your own mission statement. Review what goals are in your mission statement

	can use imagination to visualise and 'sensibilise' them. Drawing and narrative construction are also useful.	What are the values in this vision?	Revise your mission statement to ensure you have your values in it Re-read your mission statement in a quiet session. How does it make you feel? Take note.
Session 3 Pathways	True hope inspires action, and meaningful action strengthens hope.	Begin to develop a personal development plan	Write a movie that features one of your goals. Picture yourself overcoming all the obstacles on the path to achieving this goal, developing pathways around and through challenges, and reaching your goal.
Session 4 Agency	Personal SWOT analysis: Focus on Strengths and Weaknesses	Stillness, personal memory of moments of strengths, moment of weakness. Note if they relate.	Update a list of your strengths each day. Survey what strengths you are using on a day-to-day basis and celebrate them as you go to sleep Review a time when you failed. Recognise what weakness may have been out of management. Notice that it was a failure in strategy. Strategist me: How might you have approached it?
Session 5 Pathways	Personal SWOT analysis – focus on Opportunities and Threats	Stillness Scanning our significant environment Noting opportunities and threats to own goal achievement	Stepping: Break down your goal achievement into small steps Do something that reaches out to someone else in need and provide some help or support. Watch your own sense of pathways grow.
Session 6 Agency and Pathways	Character strengths – working from our signature strengths. VIA Test on line – doing the test (given as homework the day before)	Share your signature strengths and how you might use them for your opportunities	Take note of your signature strengths and how you use them every day – document how you use one of them each day Make a daily habit of studying how you are using your signature strengths. Consciously employ your signature strength to overcome your threats and weaknesses. Note how you feel.

IV. Findings

Of the 130 participants ranging from 18 to 25 years of age, 51 Male and 79 Women met the criteria for this analysis. Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (RMANOVA) was used to compare the mean scores of hope at pre-test between the control and the intervention groups, and again at the post-test. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics summary procured.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Hope totals for both groups (N=130)

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre-test Hope Totals	Intervention	46.7273	6.99350	66
	Control	52.7969	6.46401	64
Post-test Hope Totals	Intervention	54.0000	3.60768	66
	Control	53.4219	6.72547	64

Table 2 shows that while the intervention group had a hope average of 46.72 at the pre-test, it achieved a 54.00 average by the time of the post-test, a 7.28 Mean difference. The corresponding variance for the control group is much smaller, with a pre-test mean at 52.79 and a post-test one at 53.42, reflecting a 0.63 mean difference. This rise in level of hope in the control group though small, is a confirmation of studies that show that even appraisal is a kind of intervention; the very fact of participating in the test can alerts participants to the importance of these qualities and makes them begin to cultivate them even inadvertently (Churu&Selvam, 2018). The considerably bigger improvement of the level of hope for the intervention group over the control group affirms the positive impact of the hope-building intervention on the hope levels. Figure 1 shows the comparative rise of hope in the two groups.

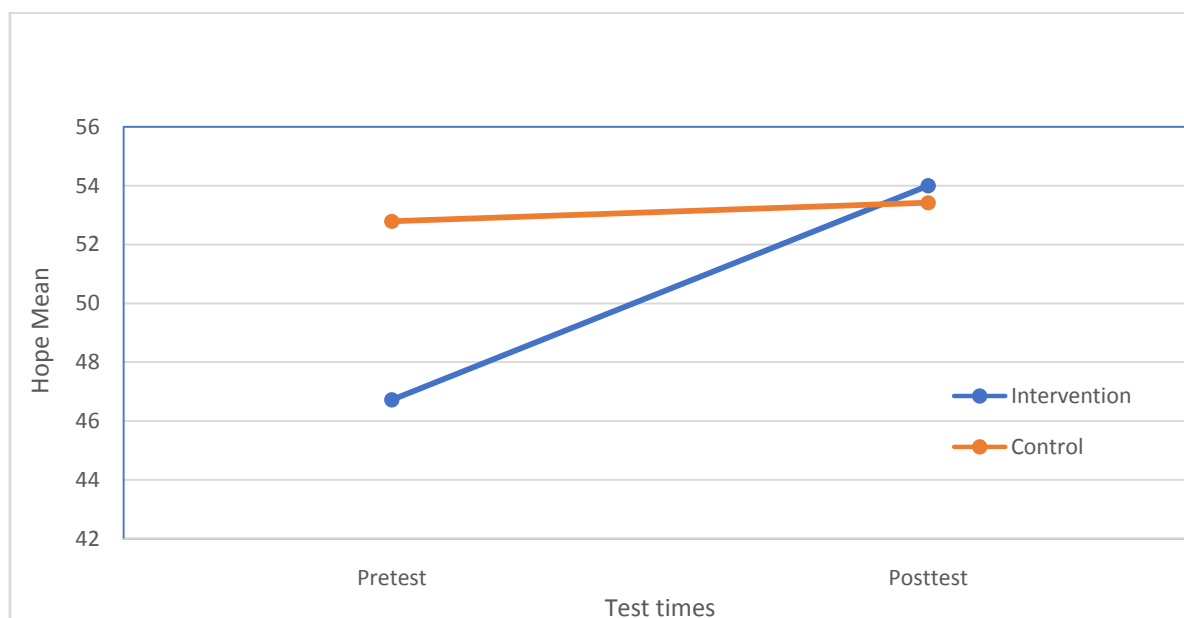


Figure 1

Plot of Hope Mean Scores for Control and Intervention Groups

It is noteworthy that the control group had already a higher hope level at pre-test than the intervention group. By the end of the intervention, the level of hope in the intervention group had bypassed that of the control group, as shown in Figure 1.

The results of the within subjects’ contrast drawn from the RMANOVA test carried out with the Groups (Intervention and Control) as the independent variable and hope at post-test as the dependent variable are reported Table 3.

Table 3
Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts on Hope (N=130)

Source	Hope	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Hope	Linear	1013.339	1	1013.339	39.127	.000
Hope * Group	Linear	717.955	1	717.955	27.722	.000
Error (Hope)	Linear	3315.045	128	25.899		

Table 3 shows statistically significant results for within subject contrast on hope at post-test (F =27.72, p<.05). Table 4 presents the between-subjects analysis of the data of the control and the intervention group.

Table 4

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (N=130)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	695768.447	1	695768.447	14382.777	.000
Group	489.924	1	489.924	10.128	.002
Error	6192.014	128	48.375		

The data shows that the intervention had a statistically significant impact on the level of hope of intervention group as compared to the control group with the between-subjects effects ($F = 10.13, p < .05$).

V. Discussion

Impact of Hope Intervention on Level of Hope

The findings resoundingly add to evidence accrued elsewhere that levels of hope in individuals can be raised through intervention (Synder, 2006; Leontopoulou, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In addition, the Mean for pathways ($M=23.46$), agency ($M=24.26$) and cumulative hope ($M=47.72$) for the combined group of participants at pre-test corroborate the averages for adults of similar age in other cultures as reported in the work of Snyder for college and non-college adults ($M=24$) (Edwards et al., 2007). These comparisons are affirmative for our findings, and for the assumed shared understanding of the items in the AHS across these cultures.

Three aspects of hope, namely goal articulation, pathways identification and agency cultivation were addressed as prescribed by Rang and Cheavens (2009) and Magyar-Moe and Lopez, (2015). However, only two aspects are subjected to assessment. In these two aspects marked growth was observed in the intervention participants. The intervention encouraged the exercise of the qualities of hope, and its marked rise in the participants confirms that the use of a strength grows it (Zhang & Chen, 2018). Magyar-Moe and Lopez (2015) explain the impact of any effort to build hope, even slight, given that, in their view, hope is a highly malleable quality. This possibly explains why even the control group having been sensitised through testing to the importance of its attributes, registered an improvement albeit slight, by the post-test.

Having proved that hope can be increased through intervention, the study can recommend such efforts in favour of emerging adults, especially in the African context, which presents many challenges for young people. Since Africa is a society made predominantly of young (Gyimah-Brempong, 2013), cultivating hope among them can be a socially critical intervention; its multiple benefits can accrue to many sectors. First, hope building is not only effective in the individual, but a hope-filled individual easily helps to grow the quality and strengths in others in his/her vicinity (Magyar-Moe and Lopez, 2015). Though this claim has to be subjected to further study, the very possibility makes for a very interesting investment of resources for the transformation of African society to a collectively more confident agent of better lives on the continent. In addition, hope-building intervention is a very promising therapy tool in face of rampant mental health challenges in Kenyan society (Tamburrino, et al. 2020). Yotsidi et al. (2018) recommended developing hope in students in order to improve their academic performance. For students, academic performance or a sense of efficacy in academic work is a central part of their sense of general efficacy which can then be transferred to other aspects of their lives. The positive results of the study point to the possibility of enabling the students to cope better with the challenges and demands of university life.

The findings also add considerably to the notion that strengths and their use are correlated (Zhang & Chen, 2018), by showing that even persons who are low on a strength can improve on it by intentional training. Studies in ways in which character strengths may help young adults in Kenya, especially those in the university settings, to adapt more positively to their experience and so reap more from it are important, especially in view of a rampant tendency to disregard the value of character strengths (Churu & Selvam, 2018). As they tentatively begin to test the freedoms that come with emerging adulthood and yet realise the challenges imposed and precautions advised by the limitations in their development, youth need to be offered evidence-based guidance for self-management.

With regard to being emerging adults, the findings that hope can be increased has other implications of to their welfare. Emerging adulthood is a stage of instability and uncertainty. It is conceivable that with reinforcement of both agency and pathways, greater stability can be achieved; this hypothesis can be subjected to research. As adulthood emerges within the young people, the researchers hopes that the choices for well-being become more personalised. Herein lies the value of the brief investment in the intervention and the mindfulness context, which enables the greater awareness of self-agency.

The mindfulness and community context for intervention

It can be argued that, with the use of the mindfulness setting for the exercises of the intervention the possibility of more reflective and therefore more sustainable learning is increased. The mindfulness setting maximised the students' awareness of the path they were making, the benefits and challenges that accrued. With sustained learning on how to keep their sense of agency and pathways strong, the emerging adults can strengthen their self-reliance, which in turn can give them greater self-confidence for the steps into adulthood that are at their doorstep (Lamborn & Groh, 2009).

The participants in the intervention for the current study benefitted greatly from walking together as was evident in the minimum oral feedback procured in the intervention sessions. This finding is confirmation of similar ones in a study done in Ghana where a group intervention was undertaken and the cohort approach brought out the benefit of group intervention (Appiah et al., 2021).

Other Potential benefits of elevating hope in emerging adults

In their review of empirical studies on the hope construct and measurement validity, Edwards et al (2007) show that among the benefits of a strong character of hope for individuals are some which are encouraging for building up hope among university students in the Kenyan and other settings. High levels of hope are correlated to better academic outcomes, irrespective of intelligence, which was not significantly related to hope. Seirup et al, (2011) demonstrated in their study that high hope correlates with high academic performance. This makes a case for hope-building interventions in institutions of higher learning in Kenya where we find students plagued by many challenges, compromising not only completion rates but also quality of life.

Given the high potential demonstrated by the intervention, it is plausible to consider that the introduction of character development in the education settings as a mainstream activity can be beneficial to the formal education project at large. As observed by Seligman and Adler (2018) positive education is a much needed revolution in most parts of the world, and in most educational sectors. His sentiments regarding education at basic levels are resonated by Oades et al. in their proposal for creating positive educational and organisational experiences in multiple university settings, be they the classroom, student social settings or working environment for faculty and staff, as well as the interaction with the local community (Oades et al. (2011). Besides positive organisational practices, the authors recommend the use of mindfulness, strengths spotting in the university community and the promotion of specific strengths, such as kindness. In such strategy, mainstreaming the promotion of hope, given its high potential as demonstrated by our study, would not be out of place in African university settings.

Finally, it emerged that the hope-building intervention was a particularly suitable way of cultivating purposefulness and meaning in life in emerging adults. This became evident from the conversations that individuals raised in the sessions and subsequent to the intervention sessions, specifically because it rallies along the characteristics of this life stage. At this stage, seeking to be clear on one's goals can be very helpful for the on-going identity search that is characteristic of this age. It is, as McAdams has stated, the stage of crafting the story of one's life, creating the self-defining life-story (McAdams, 2013a). The exercises elaborated in the intervention, especially the goals-defining support, play well into this great need of the developmental stage. With the pathways exercises, the young adult becomes able to manage the run-away games of unlimited possibilities which bedevil some emerging adults, by working on these to create workable realities.

Other characteristics of emerging adults were also found to be resources for leveraging the engagement of the young people in the intervention (Arnett, 2000). Instability, for example, is both legitimised and leveraged-on in the challenge to think through strategies for achieving goals. Most of the exercises of agency accompany the in-between experience of the emerging adult. Without adequate meaningful accompaniment, young adults, feeling not sure of competence to be adult, yet also desirous of reaching out of childhood, are bound to overstretch themselves and sometimes endanger their lives and resources. A process of strengthening their sense of agency in the context of building hope can both support growing independence and mitigate against the dangers of over indulgence, which can arise from excessive self-absorption. The findings then agree with Eloff et al. (2008) that positive psychology interventions are a rich entry point to the enhancement of human resources for the African renaissance. It is the contention of this study that intervention to build up hope in emerging adults helps them mitigate against some of the pitfalls that plague them and also enriches their lives with increased wellbeing and its accompanying benefits. Further research in this line can pursue how these specific benefits are accrued through hope and other positive psychology interventions.

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