

Impact of defining ikigai in developing future-ready university graduates with self-leadership skills: A whole university mixed-methods study during Covid-19

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BACKGROUND

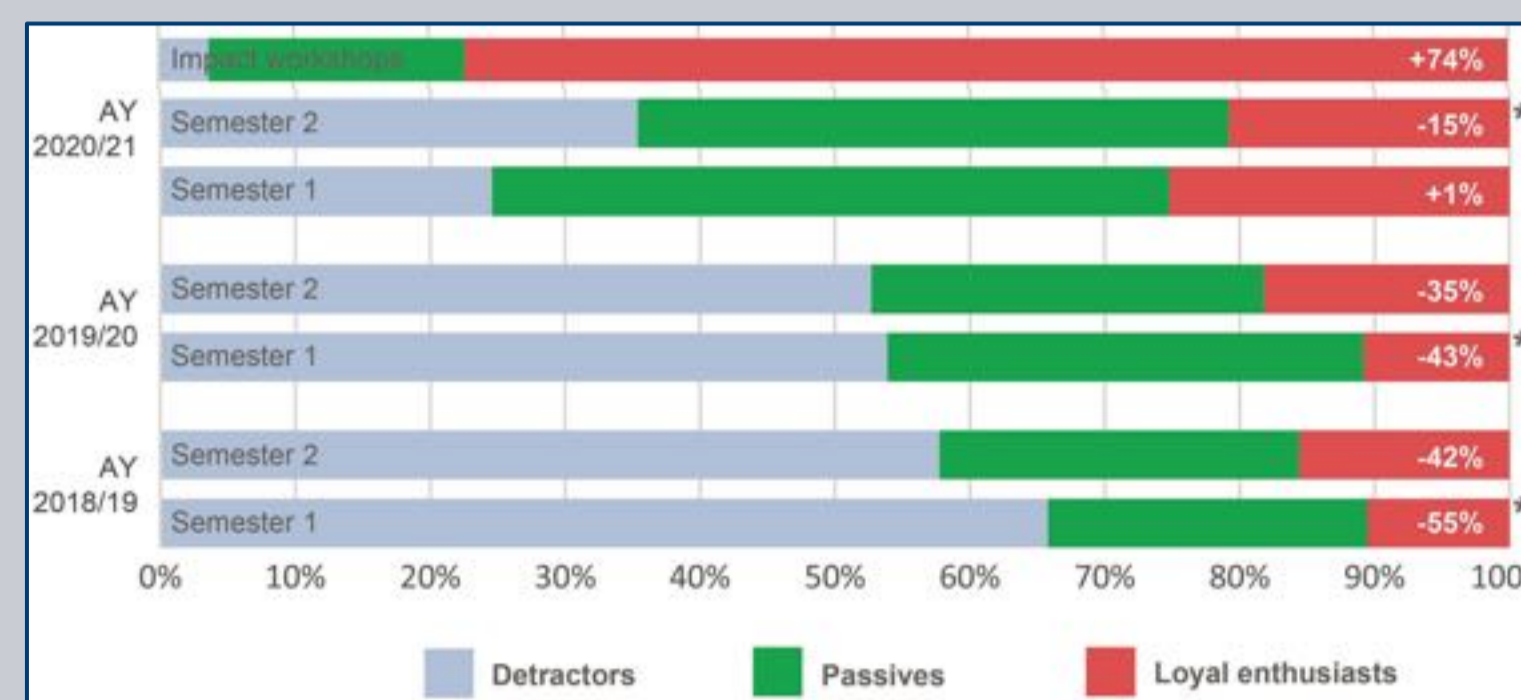
- It is not possible to predict what kind of jobs will be available in future decades, and so tomorrow's workforce needs to be adaptable in this uncertain, fast changing world.
- Self-leadership refers to the process of influencing one's self.
- This skill ranks among the top predictors for employment, high income and job satisfaction, yet is weakly associated with education-based curricula (Dondi *et al.*, 2021).
- We have recently demonstrated the effectiveness of a self-leadership skills course "Self-empowerment and social responsibility" whose curriculum is informed by the principles of Seligman's (2011) Wellbeing Theory (Gan *et al.*, 2022).
- A key feature includes cultivating a sense of purpose (Damon *et al.*, 2003) using the ikigai concept.

The aim of this mixed-methods study was to evaluate student and staff coaches' perceptions of the effectiveness of web-based delivery of future skills training on self-leadership.

METHODS

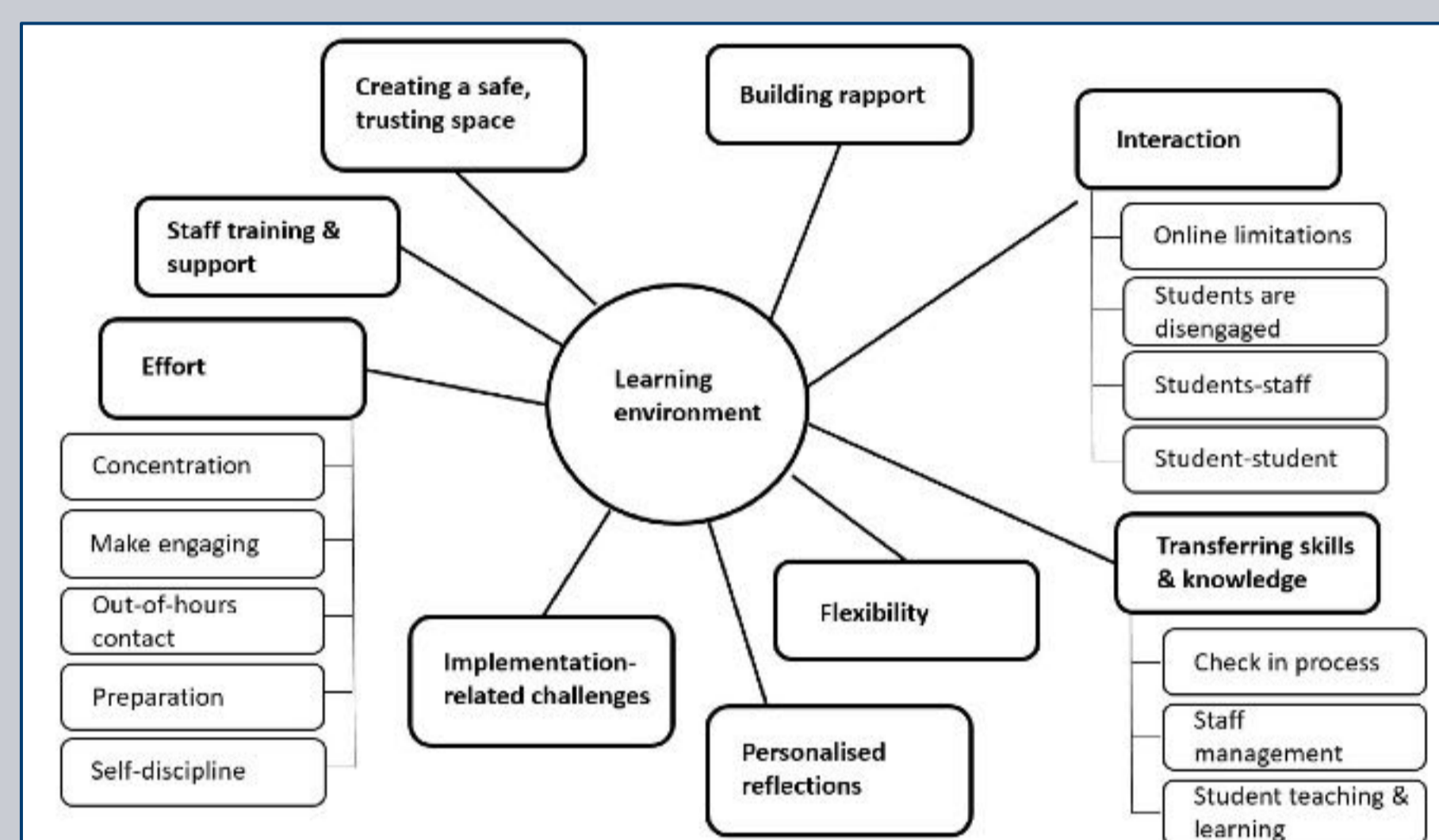
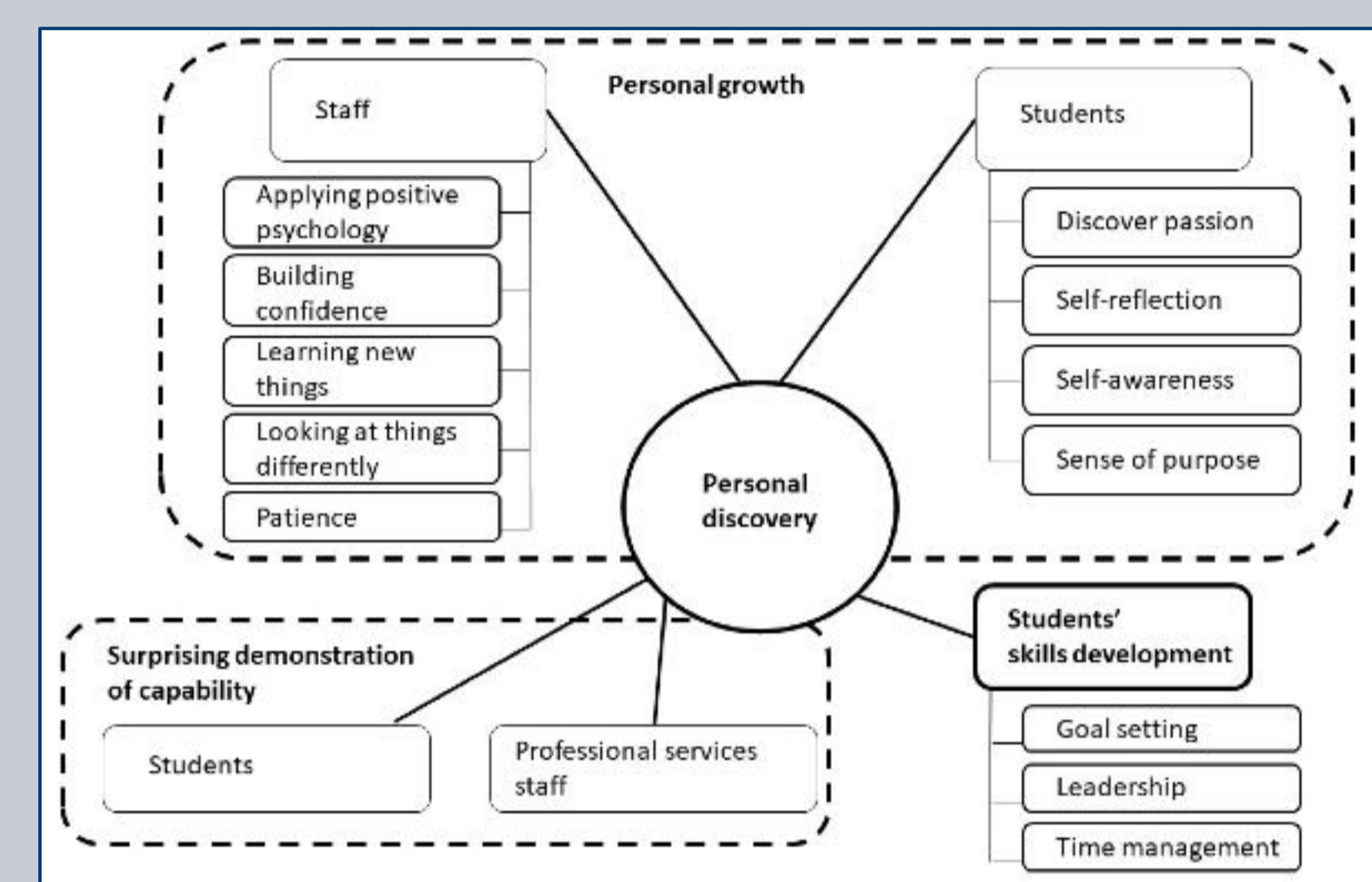
- 510 year 1 students enrolled in undergraduate programmes at Heriot-Watt University Malaysia in the academic year 2020/21 and 37 coaches (academic & professional services staff).
- School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee (ref: 2021-1056-4206).
- A major part of this course is a series of workshops in which students are guided to create a personal impact statement comprising three sentences "I am a My purpose is I will".
- At the heart of the personal impact statement is the Japanese concept of ikigai. Ikigai focuses on meaning and self-realisation. Achieving a sense of ikigai involves pursuing things one enjoys and that make one feel accomplished, and being aware of the purpose of one's life (Kumano, 2018). It is future oriented, goal seeking and strongly linked with self-leadership.
- Workshops were conducted over Microsoft Teams. One dedicated coach led small group discussions (n=6-12).
- Overall satisfaction was a single item asking the likelihood of recommending the workshops to a friend or colleague (0-10). Ratings were used to calculate overall Net Promoter Score.
- 8 students and 11 coaches took part in a semi-structured interview (30 mins). Topics covered how the workshops were beneficial and how the experience changed their attitude to being a student/staff or changed the way they thought about the university.

RESULTS



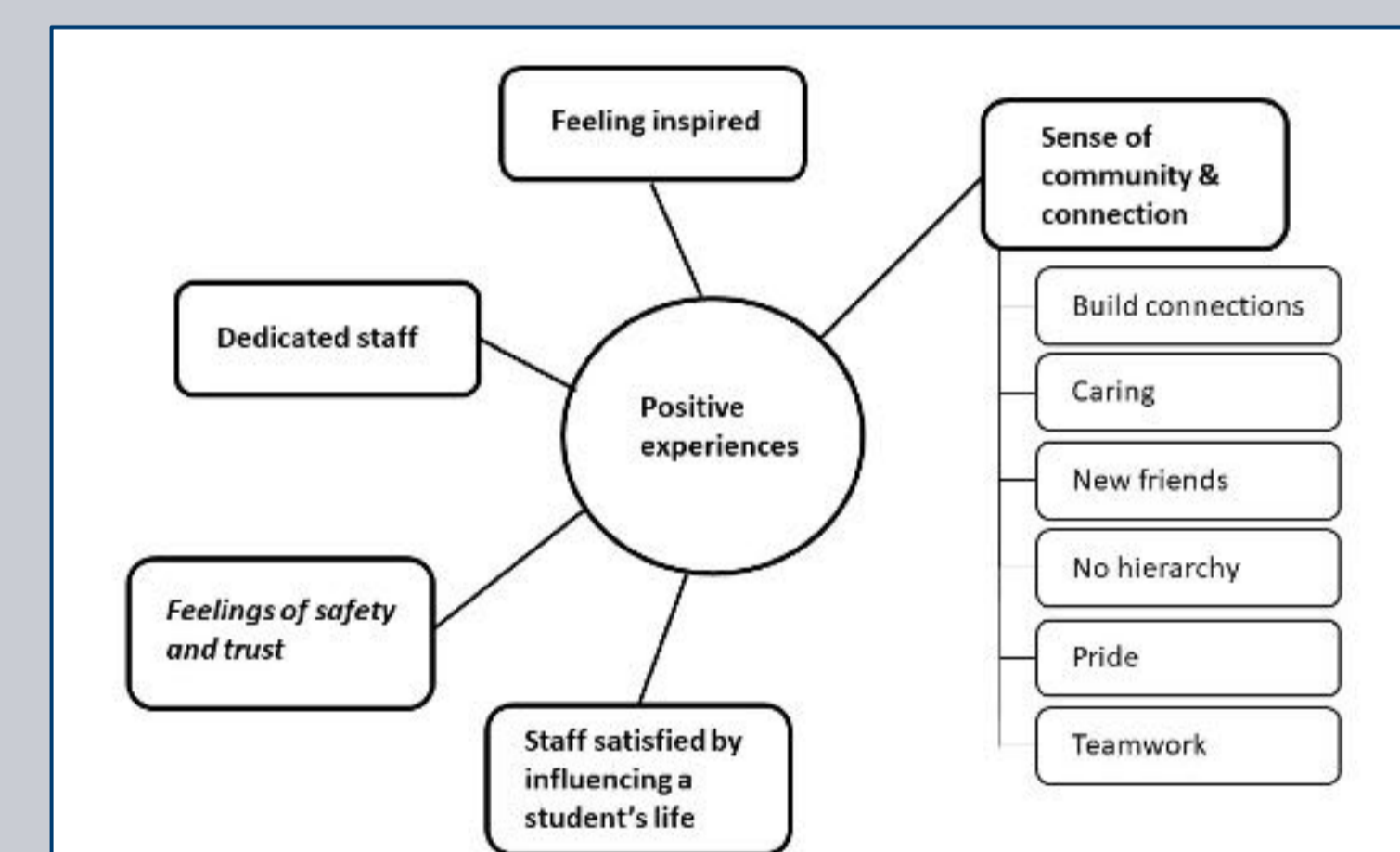
- Students' Net Promoter Scores indicate high degree of satisfaction (red) with the online future skills training course in AY2020/21.

- Thematic analysis highlights how the shift to a web-based coaching format positively influenced the journey of discovery for students and staff coaches.



- Thematic analysis highlights how the shift to a web-based coaching format influenced the learning environment for students and staff coaches.

- Thematic analysis highlights how the shift to a web-based coaching format generated positive experiences for students and staff coaches.



TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- Students were enabled to discover personal strengths and core values, clarify sense of purpose and plan activities to mobilise purpose into impact. These outcomes, scaffolded by the ikigai process, are linked to self-leadership skills (Dondi *et al.* 2021).
- Key to achieving the learning outcomes were the interpersonal relationships in the virtual classroom.
- Interviews highlighted building rapport and creating a safe trusting space, which in turn promoted interactive conversations and facilitated meaningful personalised reflections.

The full article has been accepted for publication in the Asia Pacific Journal of Education.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Funding was provided through the QAA Enhancement Fund, Heriot-Watt University.