

Effectiveness of life skills training on self-efficacy and emotional intelligence among high school students in Urmia

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Abstract

Background: Life skills are the abilities to have adaptive and positive behaviors that enable human beings to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. The aim of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of teaching life skills on self-efficacy and emotional intelligence among high school students.

Methods: A quasi-experimental study was conducted on 462 male high school students of Silvana area in Urmia city, selected via multi-stage cluster sampling method. These students studied in two different schools. Three classes were selected randomly from each high school and all the students of these classes completed the self-efficacy and emotional intelligence inventory. Participants who scored low on effectiveness of life skills training were selected for the study; among them 30 students were selected randomly and assigned randomly into two experimental and control groups (15 students each). The experimental group received life skills education but the control group did not receive any education. Both groups completed the Sherer's Self-Efficacy Scale and Bar-On Emotional Intelligence-Inventory in baseline and follow up phases. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (the mean and standard of deviation) and Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0.

Results: The results of the study indicated that teaching life skills significantly increased mean±SD scores of self-efficacy (68.2±7.35, 55.4±9.96) and emotional intelligence (106.6±15.05, 94.8±11.33) in the experimental and control group, respectively ($P=0.001$). there were significant correlations between self-efficacy and academic achievement ($r=0.518$, $P=0.01$)

Conclusion: Teaching life skills can improve students' self-efficacy and emotional intelligence and the education officials should pay attention to teaching these life skills to the students.

Keywords: Life Skills Training; Self-Efficacy; Emotional Intelligence

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Introduction

The emotional intelligence means a set of skills including receiving and collecting information and managing one's own and others' feelings (1). Furthermore, it is regarded as the skill and ability of individuals for creating wise relationships with others and their ability to understand others which leads to facilitated decision making, managing the aroused emotions, improved relationships, and finally proper and thorough decision making (2). The results of the previous studies have shown the positive effect of emotional intelligence on the performance of individuals in organizations and its positive effect on increasing their efficiency (3, 4).

One of the variables related to emotional intelligence is self-efficacy (5, 6). Self-efficacy is defined as one's faith in his/her skill and ability to perform a particular activity or behavior (7). Generally, when someone does an activity which is in accordance to his/her desired standards, it will result in an increase in their self-efficacy and subsequently a decrease in failing to reach their goals. If someone suffers from low self-efficacy, he/she may believe that he/she does not have the ability to control his/her life events (8). The results of the previous studies show a positive relationship between high self-efficacy and the problem-solving ability (9-11).

Life skills are other variables which are associated with self-efficacy (12) and they are also effective in improving emotional intelligence (13). These skills include a set of educations which enable individuals to become more aware of their life and abilities. These educations help them to accept themselves and help them to have self-confidence. Furthermore, they help them to believe that they can improve and flourish in their lives (14). They also make individuals more responsible toward their health and cause them to make proper healthy decisions and in general they will

cause the individuals to choose healthy life styles in confronting the changes and needs of life (15, 16). As Smith showed, teaching life skills will cause a decrease in depression and anxiety and physical complaints, as well (17).

As adolescents are in a sensitive stage of psychological and physiological development and they are walking through the stage of personality crisis, educational plans could be useful in preventive programs and consolidation of the protective factors and neutralizing risk factors in adolescence period. According to the studies which have been conducted on the advantages and effects of teaching life skills on improving the behavior and health of individuals, the aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of teaching life skills on self-efficacy and emotional intelligence of adolescent students.

Methods

A quasi-experimental study was conducted on 462 male high school students of Silvana area in Urmia city using multi-stage cluster sampling method. These students studied in two different schools. Six classes were randomly selected from these two schools, three classes from each school, and all the students completed the self-efficacy and Emotional Intelligence inventory and those who scored low on this inventory were selected; among them 30 were randomly selected and were randomly assigned into two experiment and control groups (15 students in each group). The inclusion criteria were as follows: male high school students, those who scored low on self-efficacy and emotional Intelligence-Inventory. Exclusion criteria were having other diagnostic criteria on axis I and absence of more than three days in educational sessions. The main outcome measures were the self-efficacy and Emotional Intelligence scores.

Measures

The self-efficacy scale, The Sherer's Self-Efficacy Scale, has 17 items using a 5-point Likert Scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha for the General Self-Efficacy Scale was 88% (19-21). Cronbach's alphas for the Farsi version of the instrument were 78% and 83% in two previous studies (22-23).

Bar-on emotional quotient inventory

This questionnaire is the first valid cross-cultural assessment tool for the measurement of emotional intelligence, which was developed in 1997, by Bar-on (25). The questionnaire contains an overall score (Emotional Quotient), five composite scales, 15 subscales, one positive and one negative impression scale, and one inconsistency scale. The questionnaire is composed of 133 short items on a five-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and all the time); each item receives a score between 1 and 5 according to the respondent's choice. Some of the items are scored positively and some negatively. The raw scores are converted to balanced scores based on an average of 100 and standard deviation of 15. The score change range is almost always between 55 and 145 (± 3 standard deviations from the mean), and about two-thirds of the respondents obtain a score (balanced) between 85 and 115. Very high or low scores are almost rare and most people get a score of about 100. Based on the scores, the emotional intelligence can be classified into seven levels. In the present study, a high score (balanced score of above 100) represents emotionally intelligent people and those obtaining lower scores indicate a need for improved emotional skills in specific areas. The studies have shown that this questionnaire

and its subscales have high levels of internal consistency, validity, and reliability in different cultures. The average Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all subscales are high: From a low coefficient of 0.69 (social responsibility) to a high coefficient of 0.86 (self-respect), with an overall mean internal consistency coefficient of 0.76. The reliability and validity coefficients, in periods of one and four months, in two groups of people in South Africa, were reported as 0.85 and 0.75, respectively. The validity study of EQ-I, which compared this instrument with other valid instruments, report a high specific validity coefficient ($r=0.36$ to 0.58) (24). This questionnaire has also been evaluated in Iran regarding mental health issues. Dehshiri et al., reported a reliability coefficient of 0.753 for the test, and regarding the validity, he reported eight factors out of a 13-factor structure of the North America samples to be valid for the Persian participants (26).

The experimental group received 12 sessions of life skills education (each session 45 minutes) and the control group received no intervention. Both groups completed the Sherer's Self-Efficacy Scale and Bar-On Emotional Intelligence-Inventory in baseline and follow up phases. For teaching the life skills, educational materials were adapted from the book "*The Positive Discipline in The Classroom*" (27). The contents of the educational sessions are illustrated in Table 1.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (the mean and standard deviation) Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0.

Table 1. Content of educational package for the study participants

Session	Content of educational package
Session 1	Teaching communication skills: At first, the members introduced themselves. Then, the goal of the session was explained and then the listening skill was explained briefly. Being an active listener: the skill of being a good listener was taught to them practically and verbally and role playing was used for teaching this skill practically and two students were asked to talk to each other.
Session 2	Using solution instead of criticizing: In this session, the students were asked to find a solution when a problem occurs instead of criticizing others (problem-solving skill).
Session 3	Teaching respecting others: In this session, the importance of respecting others was emphasized and the students were asked to put down the names of those students who respect others the most and encourage them. Teaching sympathy: In this session, the students were asked to put themselves into others' shoes in different situations and understand their conditions. The students were taught to say and use sentences like "I understand", "I see" and so on.
Session 4	Teaching accountability: Accepting the responsibility of one's own mistakes, decisions and feelings was one of the skills, which was taught to the students.
Session 5	Teaching controlling anger: The distraction techniques (including counting, leaving the situation and so on), breathing from diaphragm (in which the individuals inhale while counting to the number 3 in their minds and then exhale slowly through mouth counting to the number 5), and relaxation were taught to the students.
Session 6	Teaching expressing emotions: The students were taught to express their anger and other emotions using the sentence "I feel angered" and so on.
Session 7	Teaching the skill of being decisive: This session worked on expressing one's feelings and emotions decisively and saying 'no' to others when it is necessary.
Session 8	Teaching creative thinking: This session attempted to improve the creativity of the students using the uncompleted stories and asking the students to complete them using their own words.
Session 9	Teaching creative thinking and using imagination when problems occurs: The students were asked to define their problems first when they occur and then imagine the solutions and finally employ them.
Session 10	Teaching creative thinking: The students were taught to innovate new solutions and take advantage of brainstorming.
Session 11	The skill of requesting: In this session, the students learned to use dialogue and negotiation for solving their disagreement.
Session 12	We had a review of skills and topics which were taught to the students and asking the viewpoints of them.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the participants are illustrated in table 2. Most

of the participants had diploma or higher education level.

Table 2. Participants' demographic characteristics

Variable	N	
Level of education	Illiterate	3
	Diploma	12
	Bachelor's	12
	Master's	3
Parents occupations (father's job preferred)	Unemployed	3
	Laborer	6
	Farmer	9
	Stock man	9
	Officer	3

Table 3. Person's Correlation coefficient between self-efficacy and emotional intelligence

Factors	Self-efficacy	Academic achievement
Self-efficacy	-	0.518
	<i>P</i>	0.01

Table 4. The comparison between the mean (SD) for self-efficacy and emotional intelligence in experiment and control groups

Variables	Experiment Group	Control Group	F	ETA	<i>P</i>
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)			
Self-efficacy	68.2 (7.35)	55.4 (9.96)	1.26	0.809	0.001
Emotional intelligence	106.6 (15.05)	94.8 (11.33)		0.816	0.001

The results indicated that there were significant correlations between self-efficacy and academic achievement (table 3).

Experiment group had significantly higher self-efficacy and emotional intelligence scores in compare with the control group (Table 4).

Discussion

Teaching life skills to students increased their self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with the results found by Phuphaibul et al. who showed that teaching life skills will result in an increase in self-efficacy and assertiveness of couples (28). It is also in consistency with the results obtained by Lou and et.al (29) stating that teaching life skills is effective on increasing self-efficacy and decreasing risky behaviors of the students in experimental group. Also, previous studies showed that teaching life skills has an effect on improving self-efficacy and the family performance in female-headed households (31).

The present study demonstrated the effect of teaching life skills on students' emotional intelligence. This finding is in accordance with those reported by Bidabadi et al. (13) who showed that teaching life skills with an emphasis on communication skills has been effective in the over-all scores of emotional intelligences. Botvin et al. showed that The authors of the present study would like to greatly appreciate all the teachers and the

teaching life skills helps in controlling anger and reducing violent behaviors (33). Another study by Wenzel et al. showed that teaching life skills has a positive effect on increasing school connections and reducing alcohol consumption (34). Also, Stegeret et al. showed that teaching life skills is effective on reducing anxiety and aggressiveness (35).

Life skills increase the level of psychological and physical health and prevent individuals from psychological, physical, and social harms. Moreover, life skills training will increase the individual's ability in having an effective approach in the stressful situations of life and they are considered as a primary preventive factor (36). They also help people to learn the abilities, knowledge, and skills necessary for having a successful, healthy, and stress-free life (37).

Teaching life skills could result in an improvement in students' self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. So, teachers and Education Department Officials can increase and improve the level of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence among students by teaching them the life skills as part of their educational programs.

Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

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