

Study on the Impact of Life Skills Training on Mental Health, Social Adjustment and Achievement Motivation of Female High School Students in the City of Shiraz

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Abstract: Life skills training may enhance achievement motivation of students. This study explores the impact of life skills training on mental health, social adjustment and achievement motivation of female high school students in district 4 Shiraz. This is a quasi-empirical research conducted by pretest-posttest method. The statistical population consists of female high school students of district 4 of Shiraz in school year 2014-2015. Sample size is 170 female students of second year of high school, selected by multistage random sampling method. Data collection tools were California personality questionnaire, achievement motivation questionnaire and mental health questionnaire, together with general point averages of students in the first and second semesters of school year 2014-2015. Life skills training was provided in twelve 90 min sessions on a weekly basis. The results indicated that a significant difference existed between the mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores of mental health and achievement motivation in test group ($p > 0.05$). There was also a significant difference between posttest scores of control and test groups in achievement motivation and mental health ($p < 0.01$). The intervention explained the variance of social adjustment, achievement motivation and mental health by 19.4 and 72, respectively. Life skills training improves achievement motivation, social adjustment and mental health of female high school students, so particular attention must be paid to life skills training in schools. It is recommended that schools provide students with life skills training and educational consultation services to improve their mental health.

Key words: Life skills training, social adjustment, educational performance, female students, Shiraz

INTRODUCTION

According to World Health Organization, adolescence refers to the age group of 10-19 (Sobhi-Gharamaleki and Rajabi, 2010). It is a critical stage of life during which individual undergoes major physical and mental changes. During this period, individual passes from childhood to adulthood. These changes prepare individual for entering other stages of life. Therefore, adolescence plays a determining role in the health of individual. This is particularly important when it comes to female students. The physical and mental changes and maturity-related needs of adolescent girls affect their entire life. Female students must be provided with the necessary resources and skills so that they can overcome the problems and difficulties of their social environment (Kelinike, 2002). Given that such problems exist all over the world, World Health Organization provided a series of programs under the title of life skills training in 1993 with a view to promoting mental health and preventing mental and social problems.

Life skills refer to a large group of mental, social and interpersonal skills which help individuals to make wise decisions, effectively communicate with others, promote their coping skills and personal management and enjoy a healthy and fertile life. Life skills training program was developed by Botvin *et al.* (1990). This program aimed to prevent drug and alcohol abuse and consisted of three parts:

- Management skills, including decision making, critical thinking, resistance against advertisements, stress and anger management, problem solving, setting goals, self-governance and self-empowerment
- Social skills, including verbal and non-verbal communication, promotion of qualifications, respecting others and expressing oneself
- Problem solving skills, including provision of information on drug use, short-term and long-term consequences of drug abuse and resistance against the pressure of others (Botvin and Kantor, 2000).

Learning life skills may prevent mental and social problems of students (Bowed, 1992; Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2012). World Health Organization defines life skills as a series of mental, social and interpersonal skills which help individuals to make wise decisions, effectively communicate with others and enjoy a healthy and fertile life. According to Skali and Hopson (Momeni, 2009), life skills enable individual to take the responsibility of his life. Self-empowerment is a dynamic process which entails knowledge, objectives, values and information.

Life skills training positively affects cognitive and emotional growth of students and enables them to make good decisions assume various responsibilities, effectively communicate with others, solve their problems and improve their self-regulation and self-sufficiency. Studies indicate that life skills training positively affects problem solving knowledge and self-awareness (Turner *et al.*, 2008), mental and social qualifications, achievement motivation and alcohol use reduction (Wenzel *et al.*, 2011). Life skills training also improves decision making power, responsibility, interpersonal skills, moral behaviors and social skills (Astroth, 1996; Foroughmand, 2008; Amini *et al.*, 2008). Life skills training has proved effective and helpful in various programs such as drug abuse prevention program (Botvin and Kantor, 2000; Wenzel *et al.*, 2011; Taremian and Mehryar, 2008), cigarette use reduction program (Gorman, 2002), sexual promiscuity prevention program (Pick *et al.*, 2003; Magnani *et al.*, 2005; Lou *et al.*, 2008), AIDS prevention program (Bova *et al.*, 2008), suicide prevention program (Khadivi *et al.*, 2005), mental health and self-esteem promotion program (Esmaeili, 2006; Aghajani, 2002; Haghighi *et al.*, 2006; Sobhi-Gharamaleki and Rajabi, 2010), domestic violence prevention program (Fatemi *et al.*, 2011), identity styles program (Piri, 2004) and depression reduction program (Amiri, 2009).

It seems that life skills training not only affects psychological variables such as self-esteem but also improves cognitive and educational variables such as educational performance. By educational performance is meant how much students achieve their educational objectives during learning process (Khayer and Seif, 2004; Fenner *et al.*, 2013; Fleig *et al.*, 2014).

Studies indicate that students with high achievement motivation tend to make more efforts in learning process. Compared with those with lower motivation such students tend to perform their exercises with more enthusiasm and make more effort to achieve their goals (Slavin, 2006; Hagger, 2014; Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2012; Hagger, 2014). Considering the great efficiency of life skills

training (both individual and social skills) in the prevention of psychological and social problems, executive managers and educational planner have incorporated life skills training in their educational programs. Given the significant role of schools in preparing students for entering the society and assuming various responsibilities, particular attention must be paid to life skills training.

The previous studies have mainly focused on the effect of life skills training on psychological variable, paying less attention to educational variables. Only few studies have explored the effect of life skills training on educational variables but they have focused on the impact of one or more distinct skills on a specific aspect of educational performance. Among such studies we can mention the impact of stress management training on achievement motivation (Keogh *et al.*, 2006), the effect of problem solving skills training on achievement motivation in the course of experimental sciences (Abdi, 2000), the effect of communication skills training on achievement motivation (Mahmoodi, 2007) and on educational performance (Arabgol *et al.*, 2005), the effect of communication skills training on problem solving methods (Babapour, 2008) and on school motivation (Wenzel *et al.*, 2011; Turner *et al.*, 2008; Wilburn and Smith, 2005; Forneris *et al.*, 2007).

According to results of the previous studies, adolescence is the best stage of life for learning life skills. Life skills training not only helps students to overcome their educational problems but also prepares them for social adjustment and entering other stages of their life (Wilburn and Smith, 2005; Botvin *et al.*, 2006). The present study aims to explore the impact of life skills training on the promotion of social and educational skills of female high school students in the city of Shiraz. The following represents the hypotheses of this study:

- Life skills training affect social adjustment of female high school students in the city of Shiraz
- Life skills training affect educational performance of female high school students in the city of Shiraz
- Life skills training affect achievement motivation of female high school students in the city of Shiraz
- Life skills training affect mental health of female high school students in the city of Shiraz

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a quasi-empirical research conducted by pretest-posttest method. The statistical population

consists of female high school students of district 4 of Shiraz in school year 2014-2015. Sample size is 170 female students of second year of high school, who were selected by multistage random sampling method. We first selected four schools in district 4 of Shiraz and then randomly selected four classes from among them. The performance of students in the first semester was set as educational performance index. For this purpose, the students with lower GPA and lower score in social adjustment scale were randomly selected. The intervention was made in test group, with control group receiving no intervention. Test group members received life skills training within twelve 90 min sessions. Next, we distributed California personality questionnaire among the participants as the posttest.

Research tools:

California personality questionnaire (1953): California personality questionnaire is a tool used to measure individual and social adjustment. This questionnaire was introduced by Thorpe, Clark and Tiegs in 1939 (quote from Khodayari Fard, Nesfat, Ghobari Bonab, Shokoohi Yekta and Behpajoo in 2002) and was revised in 1953. It consists of 180 questions each having two choices of Yes and No. In the present study, we used a California personality questionnaire consisting of 90 questions. This test has two parts of individual adjustment and social adjustment and is used to assess various aspects of adjustment in life. In this study, we only used social adjustment test. Social adjustment has six subscales each consisting of 15 questions. Six special scores relate to social templates, social skills, antisocial behaviors, school relations, family relations and social relations. Finally, the scores of subscales produce an overall social adjustment score.

The reliability coefficient is 0.89-0.91 in individual adjustment scale, 0.87-0.81 in social adjustment scale, 0.60-0.87 in subscales and 0.92-0.93 in the whole test (Sedighi, 2001). Akhondi (1997) reported the reliability coefficient to be 0.54 for 86 ordinary students of Tehran and 0.81 based on formula (20) of Kuder Richardson. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for 170 ordinary students was 0.69 in individual adjustment and 0.81 in social adjustment which confirmed the reliability of the test.

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Yarmohammadian *et al.* (2003) estimated the reliability to be 0.84. Educational performance of students was assessed using their scores in the first and second semesters.

Achievement motivation questionnaire: Achievement motivation questionnaire is a modification of Harter's Educational Motivation Scale by Lapper. This questionnaire has been translated by Mahmood Bohrani and its structural validity and reliability have been confirmed in the Persian version. The Cronbach's alpha and retest were 0.85 and 0.86 in individual motivation and 0.69 and 0.72 in social adjustment (28). In the present study, the validity of the questionnaire was 0.81 in individual motivation and 0.74 in social adjustment.

Mental health questionnaire: Rosenberg mental health questionnaire has 10 items with four-choice Likert spectrum. Alizadeh and coworkers confirmed the validity and reliability of this questionnaire using individual consistency coefficient, retest and content validity methods and reported its reliability to be 0.74. In the present study, the reliability was estimated to be 0.73.

We investigated achievement motivation of the students using the scores before and after intervention. In doing so, we obtained the consent of the participants and observed the confidentiality of information. After executing the educational package and completion of the research, the package was provided to control group as well.

Execution and analysis method: After setting the research goals and defining the statistical population, we distributed California social adjustment questionnaire among the students. From among the completed questionnaires, we selected the students with lowest scores and general point averages. Next, we randomly divided the students into test and control groups. Training each skill consisted of two parts:

- Introduction, definition and explanation of the skill
- Provision of exercises and examples to help students understand each skill. Life skills training consisted of twelve 90 min sessions, each being allocated to one skill (Table 1)

Table 1: Contents of the course

Description	Session
An introduction to life skills training	1
Decision making skill: This skill enables individual to choose one or more solutions by evaluating the existing solutions	2
Problem solving skill: This skill enables individual to solve the problem by subdividing it into smaller components	3
Creative thinking skill: This skill enables individual to understand the problem through direct experience	4
Critical thinking skill: This skill enables individual to ask questions about the problem and accept or reject it	5
Interpersonal and group skill: This skill enables individual to express his views, demands, needs and emotions and seek assistance and guidance when needed.	6
Self-awareness skill: This skill enables individual to identify his weaknesses and strengths and answer to the question of "who am I?"	7
Emotion management skill: This skill enables individual to identify his positive and negative emotions and to express each in the right time and by efficient method	8
Empathy: This skill enables individual to like others and to be liked by others through the improvement of social relations.	9
Stress management skill: This skill enables individual to identify the sources of stress and their impacts and to reduce stress and mental pressure by correct behavior.	10
Conflict management skill: This skill enables individual to manage conflicts in the right time and place by expressing ideas, information and expectations, summarizing explanations, and providing solutions	11
Sum-up and executing posttest: Data was analyzed by SPSS19	12

Table 2: Frequency distribution of the participants in residence conditions, educational level of parents and family income level in test and control groups

Characteristics	Status	Test group (%)	Control group (%)	Result
Residence conditions	Native	82.3	80.1	$\chi^2 = 0.90$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.31$
	Non-Native	17.7	19.9	
Marital status	Single	94.7	92.4	$\chi^2 = 0.04$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.79$
	Married	5.3	7.6	
Educational level of father	Illiterate	15	13	$\chi^2 = 2.17$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.29$
	Below secondary studies	63	64	
	Academic studies	22	23	
Educational level of mother	Illiterate	22	18	$\chi^2 = 6.11$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.04$
	Below secondary studies	47	49	
	Academic studies	31	33	
Family income level	Low	17	18	$\chi^2 = 1.12$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.50$
	Medium	65	67	
	High	18	15	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics: Table 2 illustrates the frequency distribution of the participants in terms of residence conditions, educational level of parents and family income level in test and control groups. The results indicated that no significant difference existed between test and control groups in terms of personal characteristics. This study was carried out using Fisher test.

The results of hypotheses: Independent t-test results indicated that a significant difference existed between the mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores of achievement motivation and mental health in test group ($p > 0.05$). There was an increase in the mean scores of achievement motivation and mental health in posttest (Table 3). We used covariance analysis to control the impact of pretest on posttest results. There was also a significant difference between posttest scores of achievement motivation and mental health in test and control groups ($p < 0.01$) (Table 4). The results indicated that life skills training affected social adjustment, achievement motivation and mental health of the participants.

The intervention explained the variance of personal motivation, social adjustment, achievement motivation and mental health by 19, 4, 12 and 72%, respectively. This study explored the impact of life skills training on achievement motivation, social adjustment, educational performance and mental health of female high school students in the city of Shiraz. The results indicated that life skills training enhanced achievement motivation, social adjustment, educational performance and mental health of the students (Table 2). The results of this study are in line with the findings of Mohammadi (2011), Rahimi *et al.* (2010), Sobhi-Gharamaleki and Rajabi (2010), Wenzel *et al.* (2009), Botvin *et al.* (2006), Wilburn and Smith (2005), Foroughmand (2008), Amini *et al.* (2008), Mahmoodi (2007) and Arabgol *et al.* (2005), Hagger (2014), Hodge *et al.* (2013).

The results indicated that life skills training was significantly associated with achievement motivation and educational performance of students. The factors of interpersonal relations, ability to solve social problems having goal in life, problem solving skill and decision making skill affected achievement motivation. The results indicated that

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the scores of achievement motivation, personal motivation, social adjustment and mental health and statistical analysis results for comparing the mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores in test and control groups

Scores	Test group (n = 85) mean and SD	Control group (n = 85) mean and SD	Mean changes in pretest and posttest scores	Independent t-test results
Educational achievement motivation (average)				
Pretest	1.55±16.05	1.45±18.01	-1.2 (-1.59- -50.)	P<0.001
Posttest	1.55±17.75	1.29±18.91	-0.25 (-0.75-0.19)	p = 0.19
Dependent t-test result	p<0.001	p = 0.19		
Individual motivation				
Pretest	2.42±0.59	2.95±0.39	0.34 (0.2-0.54)	p<0.001
Posttest	2.52±0.46	2.94±0.3	0.45 (0.32-0.64)	p<0.001
Statistical t-test result	p = 0.1	p = 0.31		
Social adjustment				
Pretest	3.94±0.41	2.28±0.44	-0.31 (-0.46- -0.18)	p = 0.72
Posttest	3.96±0.45	2.26±0.44	-0.2 (-0.44 -0.17)	p<0.001
Statistical t-test result	p = 0.43			
Mental health				
Pretest	2.62±0.59	2.94±0.4	-0.32 (-0.22-0.12)	p<0.001
Posttest	3.11±0.35	2.84±0.50	0.22 (0.06 -0.37)	p<0.001
Statistical t-test result	p = 0.004	p = 0.51		
Confidence level: 95%				

Table 4: Covariance analysis result of the impact of life skills training on achievement motivation, social adjustment and mental health in test and control groups

Research scale variables	df	Mean square	F-values	Sig. (p)	Amount of impact	Statistical power
Individual motivation						
Posttest	1	5.46	31.15	<0.001	0.19	0.95
Pretest	1	1.15	6.84	0.007	0.044	0.73
Social adjustment						
Posttest	1	1.73	7.17	0.007	0.04	0.74
Pretest	1	0.86	3.72	0.05	0.02	0.47
Educational achievement motivation						
Posttest	1	9.17	14.34	<0.001	0.11	0.92
Pretest	1	2.12	9.11	0.002	0.72	0.84
Mental health						
Posttest	1	0.31	1.52	0.01	0.01	0.22

life skills training not only prevents risky behaviors but also helps parents and school personnel to participate in education process improve educational performance of students and create a good environment for them. In general, life skills training enables students to overcome the problems which they might face in their life. In the present study, female high school students of Shiraz had lower pretest scores in social adjustment questionnaire as well as lower educational performance. But they showed better educational performance and social adjustment in posttest. Life skills training also improved the mental health of participants and helped them identify their weaknesses and strengths.

Generally speaking, life skills training enables individual to solve the problems and challenges of everyday life. Life skills include decision making skill, problem solving skill, creative thinking, critical thinking, interpersonal relations, self-awareness, conflict management skill, empathy, stress management skill and emotion management skill (Wilburn and Smith, 2005). Each life skill significantly enhances achievement motivation. Individuals would have more achievement motivation if

they identify their strengths and take advantage of their opportunities. Since life skills positively affect achievement motivation, life skills training can help students identify their opportunities which in turn improves achievement motivation (Wenzel *et al.*, 2011).

Given the failure and negligence of parents and educational systems in training life skills such as communication, stress management and problem solving skills, female high school students of Shiraz are facing many problems in everyday life (Foroughmand, 2008). What schools provide to their students to face the challenges of everyday life will form expectations of the new age. Schools should provide students with an effective educational environment so that they can face the ever-increasing transformations and expectations.

Life skills training positively affects social adjustment because adolescence is the most important step of social growth and evolution. Adolescents are much concerned about their environment and attempt to separate from their families and step into the outside world. This may change their relations with their family members and develop a conflict between parents and children.

As mentioned earlier, life skills training may prevent such conflicts and improve family relations. Individuals who enjoy social adjustment are able to control their environment, manage their problems, plan their life and keep moderation in all aspects of their life. Life skills enhance mental and social capabilities of individuals and enable them to materialize their talents and attitudes. These skills prepare individual for various situations in life and enhance his motivation for doing better activities.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that life skills training enables students to overcome their problems, so the findings can be implemented in the fields of psychology, consultation and education. It should be noted that the participants were in a sensitive stage of their life, so there is a limitation for generalizing the results to lower ages. As indicated in most researches, cultural and ethnic conditions significantly affect life skills training and it is difficult to generalize the results to other ethnic groups in other regions and cultures. It should also be noted that the present study was limited to female students and a specific educational level, so one cannot generalize the results to other educational levels. While the present research emphasized the effectiveness of group execution, it is recommended to compare individual and group execution of life skills training.

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