

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION WITH RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO SAFETY, MENTAL HEALTH AND SELF-ESTEEM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



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Abstract

This study is concerned with the effectiveness of religious life skills training, and its impact on the mental health and self-esteem of elementary school children. The statistical population of the study includes all the male students studying in fifth grade of elementary school in district 12 of Tehran in the educational year 2011-12. Method: Morgan Table was used for determining the size of the sample which was 60. The sixty students were randomly assigned to the experimental and the control groups. A pre-test was administered to both groups and then the experimental group received 16 sessions of religious life skills instruction in 16 weeks. The present study is quasi-experimental with a pretest-posttest design with a control group. Research Tools: Goldberg General Health Questionnaire GHQ-28, Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory (GCSE) and the Practical Guide to the Instruction of Religious Life Skills were the instruments used in this research. The reliability of Goldberg's General Health Questionnaire was reported to be 0.91 and the reliability of the scale of Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory with bisection method was 0.83 and with Cronbach's alpha was 0.84. To test the hypotheses, T- test for independent groups was used. Findings: Religious life skills training improves students' mental health. Religious life skills training improves students' self-esteem. The impact of life skills training on physical symptoms of anxiety and insomnia were significant, but the impact was insignificant on social dysfunction and severe depression in students. The effectiveness of life skills training on global self-esteem, social self-esteem and academic self-esteem was significant, but was insignificant on family self-esteem. The research method of the study is quasi-experimental.

Keywords: Life skills training, mental health, self-esteem, religious approach

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1. Introduction

The ever-increasing social changes and complexities and the expansion of social relations makes it necessary to prepare people to face difficult situations. To prevent psychological diseases and social dysfunctions, psychologists have engaged in life skills training throughout the world and in school. Life skills are the capabilities that pave the way for positive and useful behavior, and these capabilities enable the person to assume his/her social responsibilities, and cope with daily problems and interpersonal relations without hurting himself/herself and the others (Karimzadeh et al., 2009).

What has been known today as life skills is not only the product of contemporary researchers, but many of these skills can be found in divine teachings of the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Mohammad and Imams. The importance of life skills training becomes clear when we know that life skills training improve psychological- social capabilities. These capabilities help a person to cope effectively with conflicts and life situations and help him/her to act positively and in agreement with other people in the society, the social culture and the environment and promote mental health. As such, practicing life skills leads to reinforcement and change of attitudes, values and behaviors (Naseri, 2005). Therefore, helping children in developing and expanding necessary life skills seems necessary (Shoarinejd, 1992).

One of the preventive programs which has been noticed worldwide is teaching life skills to children. To improve mental health and to prevent psychological and social problems, World Health Organization prepared a program named “life skills training” which was conducted by UNICEF in 1993. Since then, this program has been studied in many countries. Different studies which were conducted after the implementation of life skills training programs in schools point to its impact on mental health and compatibility. Generally, life skills training and social skills training have the following positive impacts: Positive social behaviors on schools (positive social interactions between coworkers); promoting problem solving capabilities; reducing anger, depression, diffidence and criminal behaviors; developing inner control; social acceptability; confronting crisis; promoting courage; positive self-concept; appropriate social verbal and nonverbal skills (Naseri, 2005).

Research shows that life skills training promotes children’s and adolescents’ mental health in different ways and are one of the most fundamental preventive programs at the primary level. Health is the main part of a happy life, and schools have an important role in informing children and adolescents about hygiene and health issues and teaching life skills to them.

Studies conducted after the implementation of life skills program in schools demonstrate their impact on different dimensions of mental health such as significant reduction

of social anxiety (Botvin & Eng, 1982), improvement in self-concept (Kreuter, 1991), and improvement in self-esteem (Enet, 1994). Many other studies show improvement in children's self-confidence, improvement in teacher-student relations, reduction in school absenteeism, and reduction in misbehavior (Aniskeiwich & Wysong, 1990).

Haghighi et al. (2006) demonstrated that life skills training improves mental health and self-esteem of female students. Samari and Lalifaz (2005) demonstrated that life skills training improves mental health (family stress and social acceptability) of the participants. A research by Barlow et al. (1998) showed that life skills improve self-esteem, decision-making capability and resistance against peer pressure for drug use in schools, and is an effective program with important consequences in the health of children and adolescents (Vardi, 2004).

2. Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are:

- 1) Family life skills training improves students' mental health.
- 2) Life skills training improves students' self-esteem.
- 3) Life skills training reduces physical symptoms.
- 4) Life skills training reduces students' anxiety and insomnia.
- 5) Life skills training reduces students' social dysfunction.
- 6) Life skills training reduces students' severe depression.
- 7) Life skills training improves students' global self-esteem.
- 8) Life skills training improves students' social (peers) self-esteem.
- 9) Life skills training improves students' family (parents) self-esteem.
- 10) Life skills training improves students' academic (school) self-esteem.

3. Research Methods

This study is a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest study with an experimental group and a control group. The statistical population: The statistical population of the study includes all the male students studying in fifth grade of elementary school in district 12 of Tehran in the educational year 2011-12.

3.1. The sample and the sampling method

The sample selected for this study is composed of 60 students. The sixty students were randomly assigned to the experimental and the control groups.

3.2. Measurement instruments

Goldberg General Health Questionnaire GHQ-28, Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory (GCSE) and the Practical Guide to the Instruction of Religious Life Skills were the instruments used in this research. The reliability of Goldberg's General Health Questionnaire was reported to be 0.91 and the reliability of the scale of Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory with bisection method was 0.83 and with Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

4. Findings

To analyze the data according to the "pretest-posttest with control group", independent T-test was used to check the significance of the differences between mean values.

Table 1. Demographic information

Group	Gender	Age	Education	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Frequency
Experimental				30	%50	%50
Control	Male	12	Fifth grade	30	%50	%100
Total				60	%100	...

Hypothesis 1: Family life skills training improves students' mental health.

Table 2. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of mental health

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	22.60	16.73	5.86	1.88	2.37	58	0.021
Control	30	19.53	22.40	-2.86	3.16			

As can be seen in Table 2, the posttest mean of the experimental group has decreased in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = 2.37$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely "Family life skills training improves students' mental health." is supported.

Hypothesis 2: Life skills training improves students' self-esteem.

Table 3. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of self-esteem

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	37.33	41.80	-4.46	0.91	2.89	58	0.005
Control	30	37.13	36.13	1.00	1.64			

As can be seen in Table 3, the posttest mean of the experimental group has increased considerably in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.01$ is $t_{ob}(58) = -2.89$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.01$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.66$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely "Life skills training improves students' self-esteem." is supported.

Hypothesis 3: Life skills training reduces physical symptoms.

Table 4. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of physical symptoms

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	5.40	3.66	1.73	0.78	2.25	58	0.028
Control	30	4.86	6.33	-1.46	1.17			

As can be seen in Table 4, the posttest mean of the experimental group has decreased considerably in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = 2.25$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely "Life skills training reduces physical symptoms." is supported.

Hypothesis 4: Life skills training reduces students’ anxiety and insomnia.

Table 5. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of anxiety and insomnia

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	5.53	3.10	2.43	0.60	2.09	58	0.041
Control	30	4.36	4.76	-0.40	1.20			

As can be seen in Table 5, the posttest mean of the experimental group has decreased considerably in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = 2.09$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training reduces students’ anxiety and insomnia.” is supported.

Hypothesis 5: Life skills training reduces students’ social dysfunction.

Table 6. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of social dysfunction

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	5.53	4.26	1.06	0.67	1.47	58	0.16
Control	30	4.36	4.90	-0.26	0.60			

As can be seen in Table 6, the posttest mean of the experimental group has decreased in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = 1.47$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is smaller than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} < t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is supported and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training reduces students’ social dysfunction.” is rejected.

Hypothesis 6: Life skills training reduces students’ severe depression.

Table 7. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of severe depression

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	5.53	4.26	1.06	0.67	1.47	58	0.16
Control	30	4.36	4.90	-0.26	0.60			

As can be seen in Table 7, the posttest mean of the experimental group has decreased in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = 1.30$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is smaller than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} < t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is supported and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training reduces students’ severe depression.” is rejected.

Hypothesis 7: Life skills training improves students’ global self-esteem.

Table 8. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of global self-esteem

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	21.03	4.26	-2.56	0.68	-2.17	58	0.03
Control	30	20.66	20.76	-0.10	0.90			

As can be seen in Table 8, the posttest mean of the experimental group has increased considerably in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = -2.17$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training improves students’ global self-esteem.” is supported.

Hypothesis 8: Life skills training improves students’ social (peers) self- esteem.

Table 9. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of social self- esteem

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	6.10	6.96	-0.86	0.23	-2.41	58	0.019
Control	30	6.10	5.73	0.36	0.45			

As can be seen in Table 9, the posttest mean of the experimental group has increased in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = -2.41$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training improves students’ social (peers) self-esteem.” is supported.

Hypothesis 9: Life skills training improves students’ family (parents) self-esteem.

Table 10. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of family self-esteem

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	5.76	6.36	-0.60	0.25	-0.84	58	0.40
Control	30	5.70	5.93	-0.23	0.34			

As can be seen in Table 10, the posttest mean of the experimental group has increased in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{ob}(58) = -0.84$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.00$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} < t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is supported and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training improves students’ family (parents) self-esteem.” is rejected.

Hypothesis 10: Life skills training improves students’ academic (school) self- esteem.

Table 11. The results of T-test for comparison of the means of the two groups for the variable of academic self- esteem

Group	Frequency	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	Difference between the mean	Standard Deviation of mean	T-test for the comparison of two means		
						t	df	p
Experimental	30	4.40	5.03	-0.63	0.92	-3.04	58	0.003
Control	30	4.66	4.33	0.33	1.47			

As can be seen in Table 11, the posttest mean of the experimental group has increased in comparison with that of the pretest mean. The value of t observed with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.01$ is $t_{ob}(58) = -3.04$ and the critical value of t for a two-way test with a degree of freedom of 58 at the alpha level of $p < 0.01$ is $t_{cr}(58) = 2.60$. As t_{ob} is greater than t_{cr} ($t_{ob} > t_{cr}$), the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, namely “Life skills training improves students’ academic (school) self-esteem.” is supported.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate:

- 1) Family life skills training improves students’ mental health.
- 2) Life skills training improves students’ self-esteem.
- 3) Life skills training reduces physical symptoms.
- 4) Life skills training reduces students’ anxiety and insomnia.
- 5) Life skills training does not reduce students’ social dysfunction.
- 6) Life skills training does not reduce students’ severe depression.
- 7) Life skills training improves students’ global self-esteem.
- 8) Life skills training improves students’ social (peers) self-esteem.
- 9) Life skills training does not improve students’ family (parents) self-esteem.
- 10) Life skills training improves students’ academic (school) self-esteem.

Life skills training has proved to be a useful program and its usefulness is demonstrated in many studies. The findings of this study point to the idea that through religious life skills training children and adolescents’ mental health, compatibility and self-esteem can be improved.

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