

The Role of Expressive Arts Therapy in Enhancing Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents

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The objective of the study is to determine the effectiveness of expressive arts therapy in improving emotional intelligence among learning disabled adolescents. Sixty-six adolescents with learning disability (age 11 to 15 years) were selected for the study based on a purposive sampling method. 35 adolescents from Saraswati Kendra Learning Centre for Children, Chennai, and 31 adolescents from Wisdomms Learning Centre, Chennai, were grouped into the experimental group and the waitlist control group, respectively. Emotional Intelligence was assessed using "The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test" by Schutte S et al., (1998). The research design used in the study was a before-and-after and a follow-up waitlist control group. Expressive Arts Therapy intervention was administered for a period of 8 weeks to the learning disabled adolescents to enhance emotional intelligence. Repeated Measures of ANOVA was computed using SPSS, and the results ($F(2, 66) = 4.835, p = .009$) showed significant improvement in Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents in the Experimental Group compared to the Waitlist Control Group. It can be concluded from the study that learning disabled adolescents were able to handle and express the emotions appropriately with a training in expressive arts therapy.

Keywords: Expressive Arts Therapy, Learning Disability, Emotional Intelligence, Repeated Measures of ANOVA, Adolescents

Studies have indicated that academic success is difficult and crucial for adolescents with learning disability (Waldron et al., 1987; Bulgren et al., 2013). However, a person needs more than just good academic performance to succeed in life. Feraco et al. (2023) confirmed the significance of extracurricular activities and the influence of soft skills that enhanced leadership, adaptability and social awareness beyond academics. These factors are few areas beyond academic performance that could determine the success of a learning disabled adolescent and at the top of the list is Emotional Intelligence. Moreover, the topic of the century is Emotional Intelligence, and a lot of study has been done to indicate that it may predominate in cognitive (Agnoli et al., 2023), social (Salavera et al., 2017;

Rodríguez et al., 2023) and interpersonal (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) realms.

Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as a skillful method contributing towards appraisal of emotions, expression of emotions, and regulation of emotions that incorporates feelings to motivate, plan and gain achievement in one's life. In other words, it is the ability to monitor one's feelings as well as other's feelings, the skill to differentiate the emotions. Emotional Intelligence is the art of presenting oneself calm and composed during stressful situations. Thus, Emotional intelligence has its roots in exhibiting social interaction (Lopes et al., 2004), motivation (Christie et al., 2007) and introspection (Hen & Sharabi, 2014).

Managing Emotional Intelligence

Earlier Emotional Intelligence was considered as a challenge to teach and train people (Humphrey et al., 2007). However, now there are plenty of studies that approves the training of Emotional Intelligence in Business Sectors (Rajpurohit et al., 2023), Law Firms (Huang, 2023) and Educational Institutions (Parinussa et al., 2023). It was believed that cognitive factors play a major role in managing Emotional Intelligence. Checa and Fernández-Berrocal (2015) studied the relationship between Intelligence Quotient and Emotional Intelligence and they were negatively correlated. It conveys that to manage emotions, cognitive factors are of less significance. In people with learning disability, interpersonal skills and emotional factors help a person to cope up effectively in a learning environment (Zysberg & Kasler, 2017).

Learning Disability

Learning Disability is a learning disorder surmised with difficulty to interpret what they see and hear. This difficulty challenges the ability to read and write in languages as well as computing math (National Association of Special Education Teachers: Introduction to Learning Disabilities, 2023). Emotional Intelligence manifests to be low in students with Learning Disability (Hen & Goroshit, 2014a) when compared with Non Learning Disabled students. Students with Learning Disability undergo trouble in emotional regulation, emotional management mainly due to their poor academic performance. These difficulties affect their self esteem and creates anxiety among Learning Disabled students demanding adjustments in their immediate environment (Malekar & Mohanty, 2009). Metsala et al (2017) emphasized on social cognition and revealed that deficits in social cognition leads to depression and isolation. Hence it is important that learning disabled students are provided with training

to regulate their emotions that strengthens their emotional intelligence.

Managing Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled

There are plenty of training modules prevailing to improve emotional intelligence in the corporate sector (Clarke, 2006) as well as in school sector. Training on emotional intelligence for learning disabled students through interventions enhanced the social skills, communication skills and adaptive behavior (Adibsereshki et al., 2016). Hence, it is imperative that providing interventions on Emotional Intelligence could benefit the learning disabled adolescents.

Expressive Arts Therapy

Through this study, the impact of Expressive Arts Therapy on Learning Disabled Adolescents was analyzed. The author aims to highlight the role of expressive art therapy in enhancing emotional intelligence among learning disabled adolescents.

Expressive arts therapy is a growing profession in the field of psychotherapy (Estrella, 2023). This therapy is identified to be successful for people with disability especially marginalized people and can be used for empowerment (Goldstein, 2023). According to Hall (2004) people with learning disability are classified under marginalized people facing challenges in the field of employment, education and poor health facilities.

Expressive Arts Therapy includes techniques like painting, writing, dance, movement and music to express the participant's responses, reactions and feelings through picture, letters, movement and sounds. The main aim of the therapy is not excelling at art but to enjoy the process of living in the present. Expressive Arts Therapy helps in bringing a change among

children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Developmental Disabilities, Stress, Anxiety and Depression. Expressive Arts Therapy also helps in improving social skills (Cherry, 2021).

Emotional Intelligence in Learning Disabled Adolescents

Cognitive challenges are associated with emotional difficulties but emotions and interpersonal abilities could help a person with learning disability overcome challenges in the learning environment. The study by Zysberg & Kasler (2017) examined the difference in emotional intelligence (EI) between young adults with and without SLD. They identified that people with specific learning disability (SLD) experience a lower level of self-esteem and emotional intelligence. The results of the study by Hen & Goroshit (2014a) showed that Learning Disability students scored lower on both EI and academic self-efficacy than non-LD students, and higher on academic procrastination.

Effectiveness of Intervention in Emotional Intelligence

Castillo et al (2013) investigated the impact of an emotional intelligence intervention on aggression and empathy among adolescents. A total of 590 adolescents participated and were randomly assigned to either the emotional intelligence intervention group or a control group. It was observed that Students in the EI training group reported lower physical and verbal aggression, anger, hostility, personal suffering, and fantasy than students in the control group. These results confirm the effectiveness of emotional intelligence intervention among adolescents. The study by Viguer et al (2017) emphasize on the effectiveness of emotional intelligence intervention in enhancing interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, managing stress and improving general mood.

Effectiveness of Expressive Arts Therapy

Expressive Arts Therapy has been studied to be effective in promoting pro-social behavior among autistic children (Schwager, 2021). It had also been impactful in the social emotional learning of students, hence, Expressive Arts Therapy was recommended to be included in the curriculum (Hathaway, 2023).

Need for the Study

Emotional Intelligence in education is highly vital in the current scenario that could predict a person's success in life. This prioritize schools to incorporate the 5 dimensions of emotional intelligence (ability to handle emotions, empathy and social skills, motivation and self-awareness,) in the curriculum (Pool, 1997). While learning disabled adolescents are troubled with academics leading to low self-esteem and self-efficacy, there is a demand for an intervention to enhance their socio-emotional learning to be successful in life. Expressive Arts Therapy has been successful in improving the social-emotional learning of students (Hathaway, 2023). Thus, through this study an intervention was designed to enhance emotional intelligence through expressive arts therapy among learning disabled students.

Objective:

- to enhance emotional intelligence through expressive arts therapy among learning disabled adolescents.

Hypotheses:

- There will not be a significant improvement in Emotional Intelligence Before, after, and Follow-up phases in the Experimental Group.

Method

Research Design

The research design used for this study is “Before, After and Follow-up Waitlist Control Group Design”. The participants in the Experimental group were assessed for Intelligence Quotient and Emotional Intelligence before the intervention, followed by an 8-week intervention in Expressive Arts Therapy. Emotional Intelligence was measured after intervention and yet again after a gap of one month. The participants in the waitlist control group were assessed for Intelligence Quotient and Emotional Intelligence. They were re-assessed for Emotional Intelligence after a week. Finally, after a month gap, Emotional Intelligence was measured again, followed by an 8-week intervention in Expressive Arts Therapy. The control group participants did not receive any intervention and were kept waiting till the completion of the study.

Sample and Procedure

A total of 80 adolescent students were selected from 2 schools – Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre for Children, Alwarpet, Chennai and Wisdomms Special School and Learning Centre, Annanagar, Chennai. Purposive sampling technique was used. The students were screened for identification of learning disability using Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices (1938). The inclusion criteria included low to high IQ level (as per the norms of Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices) and adolescent age group (11 – 15 years). The exclusion criteria included non trainable IQ level and non adolescents (below 11 years and above 15 years). Out of the 80 adolescents, 70 met the inclusion criteria (35 adolescents from Sarawathi Kendra Learning Centre, Chennai and 35 adolescents from Wisdomms Learning Centre, Chennai).

The chosen participants were classified into two groups: Experimental Group (Participants (N=35) from Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre, Chennai) and Waitlist Control group (Participants (N=35) from Wisdomms Learning Centre, Chennai). The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (1998) was administered to measure Emotional Intelligence before, after intervention and follow-up phases. The participants (N=35) in the experimental group attended the Expressive Arts Therapy for a period of 8 weeks (20 sessions). The participants in the control group (N=31) received the intervention for a period of 8 weeks (20 sessions) after follow-up phase.

Measures

Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices: It is a non verbal intelligence test that consists of 5 sub tests. Each sub test begins with an easy task and progresses in difficult way. Each task in all the 5 sub tests comprises of a logic based task. The tasks are presented as a matrix pattern and the subject has to complete the pattern by finding the missing piece from the given options (Raven, 1938).

Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test: It is a self report scale that includes 33 items (Schutte et al., 1998). It is a likert scale with each item scored from 1 to 5 with 1 being “does not describe me” and 5 being “does describe me”. The subscales includes topics such as 1) Regulation of emotions, 2) Expression of emotions and 3) Utilization of emotions (Hen & Goroshit, 2014b).

Intervention

Expressive Arts Therapy

The package used in this study towards Expressive Arts Therapy was developed by Sivewright (2021). The conduction of the intervention happened for 3 days in a week for 24 days spread over 8 weeks among the Experimental group for 1 hour per day. The

participants were provided with the essential art materials to express their current emotions. They were provided with tasks related to expressing their emotions in varied circumstances. Music and movement technique also were included in the intervention apart from drawing and coloring to express emotions. They were provided assistance with a template of situation-based

emotion drawn on the blackboard and were provided with an option of choosing the emotion that matches the situation. The feedback from the participants communicates their involvement and enjoyment towards the intervention. The learning disabled adolescents were able to express their creativity and imagination reflecting their subjective emotions.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Emotional Intelligence among Experimental and Waitlist Control Group

Emotional Intelligence	Intervention	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Before Intervention	Waitlist Control	31	114.52	16.21
	Experimental	35	126.43	16.46
	Total	66	120.83	17.29
After Intervention	Waitlist Control	31	119.10	15.28
	Experimental	35	136.91	19.30
	Total	66	128.55	19.57
Follow-up	Waitlist Control	31	112.45	14.20
	Experimental	35	124.71	17.02
	Total	66	118.95	16.81

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of Emotional Intelligence among experimental and waitlist control group. In the experimental group, before intervention the mean score was 126.43 and in waitlist control group it was 114.52.

After Intervention the mean score increased slightly in the control group

(119.10) and declined slightly in follow-up phase (112.45). The increase in score highlights the impact of Expressive Arts Therapy on the Emotional Intelligence of the Learning Disabled Adolescents. The scores from the Experimental Group clearly indicate that the intervention was effective in improving Emotional Intelligence among the participants.

Table 2: Repeated Measures ANOVA for Before, After and Follow-up phases in Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents in Experimental and Control Group

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Emotional Intelligence	Sphericity Assumed	3268.232	2	1634.116	43.789**
	Greenhouse-Geisser	3268.232	1.776	1840.324	43.789**
	Huynh-Feldt	3268.232	1.852	1765.157	43.789**
	Lower-bound	3268.232	1.000	3268.232	43.789**
Emotional Intelligence X Intervention	Sphericity Assumed	360.838	2	180.419	4.835**
	Greenhouse-Geisser	360.838	1.776	203.186	4.835**
	Huynh-Feldt	360.838	1.852	194.887	4.835**
	Lower-bound	360.838	1.000	360.838	4.835*

** = Significant at 0.01 level

* = Significant at 0.05 level

Table 2 illustrate the results of Repeated Measures ANOVA for Before, After and Follow-up phases in Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents. The result ($F(2, 66) = 4.835, p = .009; p < 0.05$) shows a significant improvement in Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents in the Experimental Group after the intervention compared to Waitlist Control Group. Similarly, there was a significant difference between the three phases of the intervention. The results shows that the experimental group outperformed the waitlist control group in emotional intelligence. The

Null Hypothesis “There will not be significant improvement in Emotional Intelligence Before, After and Follow-up phases in the Experimental Group” is rejected. Ford (2021) posits on the efficacy of Expressive Arts Therapy in enhancing Emotional Intelligence among school aged children. Considering the beneficial effects of the intervention, the current study recommends the use of Expressive Arts Therapy to promote Emotional Intelligence. However, the limitations of the intervention as discussed previously should be considered in the future.

Table 3: Pairwise Comparison for Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents in Experimental and Control Group

(Experimental Group) Emotional Intelligence	(Control Group) Emotional Intelligence	Mean Difference (Experimental – Control Group)	Standard Error
Before Intervention	After Intervention	-7.53*	0.95
	Follow-up Phase	1.89	0.98
After Intervention	Before Intervention	7.53*	0.95
	Follow-up Phase	9.42*	1.24
Follow-up Phase	Before Intervention	-1.89	0.98
	After Intervention	-9.42*	1.24

* = Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 shows the pairwise comparison of Before, After and Follow-up phase in Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents. It features three unique comparisons between the means of Before, After and Follow-up Phases in Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents. The Expressive Arts Therapy had an impact on the Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents in the Experimental Group.

Discussion

Yilmaz (2021) examined the integration of Expressive Arts Therapy into the curriculum and found that it significantly improved the Social Emotional Learning skills of Syrian

refugee students in Turkey.. Hence, implementing Expressive Arts Therapy module in the curriculum will promote the Social Emotional Learning Skills. The aim of the current study was to evaluate the role of Expressive Arts Therapy in enhancing Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled Adolescents.

The 8 weeks intervention program on Expressive Arts Therapy among Learning Disabled Adolescents made an impact in enhancing the Emotional Intelligence. The adolescents were trained to handle and express appropriate emotions, introspect self and focus in the present. Prior to the program, the learning disabled adolescents were lacking knowledge over the concept of

emotions (anger, disgust, joy, sad, fear and surprise) as well as the skill to manage these emotions. During the Expressive Arts Therapy, the module included training activities to manage emotions and express them assertively. The learning disabled adolescents were able to follow the instructions and engage in the activities throughout the intervention. After the intervention, the learning disabled adolescents were reassessed for emotional intelligence and they showed a remarkable improvement in it.

Computing the results statistically proves the efficacy of using Expressive Arts Therapy in enhancing the Emotional Intelligence among Learning Disabled. The result shows that the 8 weeks intervention program on Expressive Arts Therapy was effective.

Considering the contemporary challenges to express emotions verbally and narrate the feelings experienced, it is imperative to consider psychological interventions such as Expressive Arts Therapy to help a learning disabled adolescent regulate his/her emotions. The intervention provides strategies to handle negative emotions such as anger, fear, sad, disgust and experience positive emotions such as joy and surprise.

Limitations and Suggestions

The Emotional Intelligence measure is a self report questionnaire which could give biased answers depending on the mood of the participants. Conduction of the test on a larger population is recommended to provide robust result. Hence future studies can aim to eliminate these limitations.

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