

Effect of Life Skill Training on Academic Anxiety, Adjustment and Self Esteem Levels in Early Adolescents

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The present research work has been designed to address the problems of academic anxiety, lack of adjustment and low self-esteem in early adolescents through a specially designed intervention and bring about a positive change in mental makeup and value system of students. The interventional processes include group meditation, breathing techniques, group discussions, outdoor activities and learning through fun and games. The pre and post study involved a sample of 252 students (mean age 14 years). Academic Anxiety Scale for children, Adjustment Inventory and Self-Esteem Inventory for students were administered. Findings reveal that there is a significant decrease in academic anxiety post intervention. Further, there is a significant improvement in self-esteem as well as adjustment level of the students.

Life skills are abilities for adaptation and positive behaviour that enable individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO,1999). In particular life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills to lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills include factors like making the person aware of potentially dangerous situations helping her build her self-confidence and teaching her to manage her time and improve her communication skills.

The degree of life skills imbibed by an individual determine his level of well being. Well-being is a dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or 'mental capital'. Because of this dynamic nature, the levels of well-being mean that we are able to respond to difficult circumstances, to innovate and constructively engage with other people and the world around us.

Although the term well-being is widely used, yet there does not seem to be a consistent and unified definition of the term. Yarcheski, Scoloveno, and Mahon (1994) used Columbo's conceptualization of adolescent well being which described well being as a multi dimensional construct incorporating mental/ psychological, physical, and social dimensions. A thorough review of literature by Pollard and Lee (2003) noted five distinct domains of well being: physical, psychological, cognitive, social and economic. Indicators for each domain are divided into deficit and positive clusters. Deficit indicators represent a one-dimensional negative state, such as anxiety or depression and positive indicators comprise elements of a one-dimensional positive state, such as self-esteem.

Considering these definitions in the literature which point towards multiple domains and influences on the term well being, in the present research it was decided to utilise measures of self esteem and adjustment to measure well being of adolescents. Well being also refers to the absence of negative states like anxiety.

Therefore in the present research it was decided to measure level of academic anxiety as an indicator of well being since examinations have such a pivotal existence in the lives of students

There are a myriad of problems that need to be tackled everyday for instance anxiety, depression, peer pressure, socio economic stresses, dropping out of school, low motivation for academics and general disinterest in sports and physical activities too. Keeping in mind the plethora of problems that these children and adolescents are grappling with, the present study was designed to scientifically explore the impact of an intervention programme to promote the well-being of adolescents by imparting them life skills. The generalizability of results of this programme to other sections of society is also mooted.

Objective:

To examine the effect of life skill training on academic anxiety, adjustment and self esteem levels in school children from economically challenged background.

Method

Sample:

A purposive sample of 252 students from different schools of grade 8th, 9th and 10th and ranging in age from 13-15 years of both genders were selected from different schools of Rohtak district, Haryana.

Tools:

Academic Anxiety Scale for Children (AASC) (Singh & Sen Gupta, 1986): It has been designed for use with school students of age range 13-16 years. It consists of 20 items which are of two types-positive and negative. Each item of the test is scored as +1 or -1. The split-half reliability of the test is .65 and validity with diff-criterion ranges from .31 to .57. High score indicates high academic anxiety.

Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) (Sinha & Singh, 1993): The inventory consists of 60 items, with 20 items in each area of adjustment. Subjects can be classified into 5 categories in accordance with the raw scores obtained by them on the inventory- Excellent, Good, Average, Unsatisfactory and Very Satisfactory.

Self-Esteem Inventory for Children (SEIC): It was developed by Kumar on Indian adaptation of Battle's Self Esteem Inventory for Children. It consists of 50 items and the following subscales: General SE, Social SE, Academic SE and Parental SE. Scores for the inventory are derived by totalling the number of items checked which indicate high self-esteem.

Procedure:

The first step towards achieving this is brought about by stress elimination and increasing inner confidence. This is achieved through some specially designed group processes which include group meditation, breathing techniques, group discussions, music and dance, outdoor activities and learning through fun and games. Focused breathing, sound relaxation and simple meditation teach students how to handle negative emotions like anger, regret and depression. By dealing with these emotions, there is a sense of peace and relaxation followed by mental clarity. The participants interacted for a duration of 3-4 hours everyday over a period of 6 days. After this above mentioned intervention, students were administered AASC, AISC and SEIC once again in post test condition.

Results and Discussion

Generally, the life skills focus on building up self-confidence in adolescents besides teaching them to manage their time and improve communication skills. Results obtained are very much in line with the hypotheses and prove that the intervention did provide a remarkable and measurable improvement along many dimensions.

Table 1 : Mean, SD and t values on AASC, AISC and SEIC in the pre and post-test conditions (n = 252).

		Pre		Post		't' value
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
AASC		12.04	3.36	9.81	3.48	12.98***
SEIC	General	13.51	3.36	14.81	2.96	8.49***
	Social	5.80	2.06	6.30	1.65	3.76***
	Academic	7.96	1.98	8.33	1.58	3.59***
	Parental	7.65	1.76	8.11	1.72	4.14***
	Total	34.75	6.86	37.61	6.15	8.89***
AISC	Emotional	4.09	3.34	2.97	2.94	6.93***
	Social	7.42	2.33	6.38	2.40	7.87***
	Educational	4.75	3.37	3.75	3.14	6.85***
	Total	16.25	6.86	13.10	6.46	10.55***

*** p<.001.

Academic Anxiety

It was hypothesized that there would be an overall decrease in anxiety levels after the intervention which focuses on providing an encouraging and non-evaluative environment where the children are allowed to freely interact and express themselves. A highly significant t-value ($t=12.98, p<.001$) between the pre and post intervention results does indeed validate this hypothesis.

As salient as examinations are in the life of students, test anxiety seems to have been ignored. Researchers exploring the development of test anxiety have found that children's total anxiety scores increase over the elementary and secondary school years (Hill, 1972). Anxiety interferes more with academic performance during adolescence than during childhood. Further, the negative correlation between anxiety and achievement tests scores increases from almost 0 at Grades 1 and 2 to -.44 in Grades 5 and 6 (Hill, 1972). Wigfield and Eccles (1989) suggest that children become anxious in evaluative situations when they experience failure and critical reactions from adults.

It has been observed that children coming from socially and economically challenged segments face some unique vulnerabilities. Anxiety and depression are

very commonly observed in students and more so in such groups as that in the present study where there is a lack of positive role models. Under such circumstances not only do the feelings of anxiety proliferate but very often it becomes debilitating as well.

Therefore, there is a profound need of such intervention measures where such negative instances are dealt with in a positive and supportive manner. The results of the present study are also in line with similar researches utilising other relaxation procedures. (Gonzales, 1995; Kennedy & Doepke, 1999; Proeger & Myrick, 1980). These researches provide data to support the effectiveness of relaxation training for secondary and college-age students.

Self-Esteem

The scores on SEIC indicate very clearly that there is a substantial improvement in all the dimensions of self-esteem viz. general, social, academic, parental as well as total self-esteem scores after the intervention. A highly significant 't' value ($t=8.89, p<.001$) validates the second hypothesis. Research has shown that those individuals who have more friends display higher levels of self-esteem than those who have fewer friends

(Dalgas - Pelish, 2006). The core activities of the interventional programme focus on teaching the participants how to make new friends, learn the value of cooperation and teamwork, build self-esteem and learn important lessons of love and compassion. The intervention sessions also focused on practical applications of spirituality like Anger management, Fear management, Peer pressure, Time management, Confidence building and Perseverance.

The very tangible result of participating in such positive activities was that there was considerable rise in the self-esteem of participants. Similar results have been obtained by authors Wachelka & Katz (1999) who administered cognitive behaviour therapy over 8-weeks period and reported significant reductions in test anxiety and improvement in academic self-esteem in students with learning disabilities.

Adjustment

Adjustment scores indicate that there is a significant improvement in the levels of adjustment across all the subscales of adjustment inventory. Here also the t-value is highly significant ($t=10.55$, $p<.001$), thus verifying the third hypothesis as well. A very remarkable fact has emerged from these results. In his work on low self-esteem people, Rosenberg (2001) found that low self-esteem people are more likely to feel awkward, shy, conspicuous and unable to express themselves with confidence during interpersonal behaviour. There was an improvement in self-esteem levels and as the participants showed improved general total self-esteem levels, their social inhibitions also declined and their social adjustment improved dramatically.

In addition to this, the higher levels of self-esteem had an impact on emotional and educational adjustment levels as well. The connection between self-esteem and educational adjustment has been well documented. Saracoglu et. al. (1989) found

poor academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and poor self-esteem in students with learning disabilities. Friedlander et. al. (2007) reported that increased global, academic and social self-esteem will be predictor of increased academic adjustment. Moreover, it was found that when students have a better perceived support system i.e. friends and family, they have higher self-esteem and lower stress.

During the intervention, the participants were encouraged to dance and sing collectively. There is evidence to suggest that incorporating music techniques provides additional support to adjustment enhancement procedures along with an element of fun (Hobson, 1996; Thomas, 1987). Research of Thomas (1987) indicated that adolescents often use music as one of their main stress-management strategies.

Conclusion

The present study has thrown up such results which are worth cogitating upon. Although the present study focused on the effect of such intervention on adolescents only, yet it would not be out of place to claim that other groups which are constantly in high stress conditions e.g. soldiers, policemen, employees in corporate world etc. would also profit enormously from such programmes.

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