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The Effectiveness of Life Skills Training on Students' Academic Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The main objective of the present study was to investigate the efficacy of life skills training in enhancing the academic performance of students.

Methods: In order to achieve this goal, a semi-experimental pretest-posttest design with a control group was employed. The target population for the research consisted of all female elementary students in the sixth grade residing in Baharestan city during the year 2022. From this population, a sample of 30 students was selected using convenience sampling and then randomly divided into two groups: an experimental group comprising of 15 students and a control group consisting of 15 students as well. The experimental group underwent the life skills training program, while the control group was placed on a waiting list, not receiving any specific intervention. To assess the academic progress of the participants, a researcher-made Questionnaire was utilized as the research instrument. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using the SPSS version 22 software, employing a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) as the statistical method.

Results: he findings of the study unequivocally demonstrated the effectiveness of the life skills training program, which resulted in a significant enhancement in the academic achievement of the students.

Conclusions: This research study significantly contributes to the advancement of our comprehension regarding the various facets and dimensions of life skills training, which ultimately exert a profound influence on the academic journey and overall educational outcomes of students.

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Introduction

Life skills refer to the abilities that assist individuals in navigating through life and maintaining their overall health, mental well-being, emotional stability, and competence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills encompass the capacity to adapt and exhibit positive behaviors, enabling individuals to effectively handle the various tasks and challenges encountered in their daily lives. These life skills can be categorized into five main dimensions, which include decision making and problem solving, creative and critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, self-awareness and empathy, as well as coping with emotions and stress (Mangrulkar et al., 2001).

Pierce et al. (2017) defines life skills as a diverse range of abilities that are essential for everyday life and beneficial for personal development. The transferability aspect required by individuals implies that they should be able to acquire skills in one area of life and apply them successfully in different domains. For instance, if an individual possesses teamwork skills in their professional life but fails to utilize these skills in other aspects of their life, teamwork cannot be considered a life skill for that particular individual. Conversely, if an individual learns skills from sports and applies them in one or more areas of life skills, it can be considered a life skill.

It is crucial for everyone to possess and comprehend life skills in order to exhibit positive behavior and adaptability, allowing individuals to effectively address their everyday needs and confront challenges. The essential skills that fall under the umbrella of life skills include problem solving, decision making, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, self-awareness, as well as coping with stress and emotions. These life skills can be further categorized into thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills (Alemayehu, 2018).

Furthermore, the WHO emphasizes that life skills can promote healthy behaviors, prevent health issues, and contribute to the enhancement of an individual's mental health. These outcomes are based on the existence of a psychological construct known as the dimension of life skills, which serves as a protective factor against the emergence of psychological symptoms, thereby ensuring optimal mental well-being (Askeland et al., 2020). Life skills encompass a broad range of psychosocial abilities that enable individuals to competently act and appropriately behave in various everyday situations and scenarios (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). According to Morales-

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Rodríguez et al. (2020), life skills can be classified into three main categories: social, cognitive, and affective. Social skills refer to specific capabilities that are necessary for effectively interacting with and relating to others in a respectful and mutually satisfactory manner. Cognitive skills serve as the basis for knowledge construction and organization, including abilities such as self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to handle diverse situations. Affective skills influence subjective well-being, which can be colloquially described as happiness, and consist of cognitive and emotional components. In order to achieve a high level of subjective well-being, individuals must experience a high level of personal satisfaction (cognitive component) and positive emotional balance (emotional component).

An educational approach that is grounded in life skills provides a strong theoretical framework for designing and implementing intervention programs aimed at enhancing adolescents' ability to confront life challenges. In fact, when emotional education, which encompasses cognition, emotions, and behavior, is integrated into these programs, there is an observed improvement in participants' social and affective competencies, as well as their academic performance. Specifically, fostering adolescents' sense of coherence and, consequently, their self-efficacy and coping mechanisms can enhance their ability to face difficulties and achieve a higher level of subjective well-being (Kendellen & Camiré, 2019).

Within the educational context, students have the opportunity to acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also develop attitudes, habits, and social skills. Establishing and maintaining a positive learning environment not only supports student learning but also provides avenues for social and emotional development (FitzPatrick et al., 2014). Health promoting schools embrace a participatory education model and integrate health-promoting interventions and activities into their curricula.

During adolescence, young people undergo numerous emotional changes that contribute to the development and formation of their personality. In this critical period of their lives, adolescents may require support in order to act competently and responsibly. Competent and responsible behavior is significant as it can impact both their personal lives and academic performance. There is a positive correlation between academic performance and life skills in the general population. However, interpreting the findings of previous studies in this field is challenging. Some authors have suggested a positive association between academic performance and social skills such as self-

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esteem and empathy. However, the level of empathy and assertiveness varies, ranging from good in some studies, to moderate-high and moderate-low in others. The relationship between academic performance and affective balance remains uncertain in the literature. Some studies propose a positive correlation, while others refute it. Additionally, according to Hayat and Hafeez (2021) academic performance is linked to self-efficacy and positive emotions.

Numerous studies offered insights into the effectiveness of life skills training and social-emotional learning programs in improving academic achievement and overall student development. Elias and Tobias (1996) explored the relationship between social-emotional learning, which includes life skills, and academic achievement. It provides insights into how these skills can positively impact students' performance in school. Botvin and Griffin (2004) discussed the Life Skills Training (LST) program, which focuses on preventing substance abuse but also has positive implications for academic outcomes. It highlights the program's effectiveness and its potential impact on students' academic achievement. Schinke et al. (1988) provided recommendations for implementing life skills programs in both school and community settings. It discusses the potential effects of these programs on students' academic performance.

Zins et al. (2007) offered guidelines for educators to promote social and emotional learning, including life skills, in schools. It discusses how these skills can contribute to students' overall development and, subsequently, their academic achievement. Durlak et al. (2011) examined the impact of school-based social and emotional learning programs, including life skills training, on various outcomes, including academic achievement. It provides evidence of the positive effects of such programs.

Greenberg et al. (2003) discussed the benefits of coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning (SEAL) in schools. It emphasizes the potential for improved academic performance when life skills and emotional intelligence are integrated into the educational curriculum. Conner et al. (2014) provided a broader perspective on the purpose of education and how character education, which often includes life skills training, can positively affect students' academic achievements.

Thus, the objective of this study is to determine the effectiveness of life skills training in improving the academic achievement of a group of 6th grade students attending elementary schools in Iran.

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Materials and Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group, where two groups were randomly chosen. A pre-test was administered to determine the starting point of both the experimental and control groups in terms of academic achievement, using a test created by the researcher. Following manipulation, the dependent variable was re-evaluated in both groups using the same measuring instrument under two distinct conditions. the participants in this research were elementary school students residing in Baharestan city, Iran. These participants were eager to take part in the program and their parents provided informed consent by signing the necessary documents. The total number of participants was 30 students, which were split into two separate groups: 15 students in the experimental group and 15 students in the control group. After conducting a pre-test in both groups, the experimental group received a 10-session implementation of the World Health Organization's life skills training package. On the other hand, the control group did not undergo any training during this period. However, at the conclusion of the study, the life skills training package was also implemented for the control group.

A test created by a researcher was employed to assess the academic advancement of the participants. This particular test consisted of 20 questions that were formulated based on life skills. The validity of its content was determined through the evaluation of experts, while its reliability was measured using the Kuder-Richardson method, yielding a value of 0.85. The research hypothesis was checked using analysis of covariance. Prior to analyzing the data, the assumptions of variance analysis, which include homogeneity of variance and normality of the data, were carefully examined and verified.

Results

Table (1) presents the Descriptive Statistics, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Normality Assessment of the investigated variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and normality assessment of research variable

Group	Pretest		Posttest		Skewness	Kurtosis
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Control	8.75	2.14	10.24	2.18	0.98	1.22
Experimental	9.24	3.11	16.25	3.87	1.02	0.98

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According to table 1, the normality indices serve as an indicator of the normality of the data. Additionally, it is evident that there was a significant change in the scores of the experimental group between the pre-test and the post-test, whereas no such change was noted in the control group.

To examine the research hypothesis, a univariate covariance analysis was conducted, and the findings are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. ANCOVA test result

Source	Variable	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Group	academic performance	36.24	1	36.24	8.65	0.001	0.71

Table 2 presented the results of a univariate covariance analysis of post-test scores for academic performance. The table shows that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The outcomes of the ANCOVA indicate a noteworthy enhancement in academic performance as a result of life skills training. Consequently, the hypothesis is affirmed.

Discussion

The topic of increasing interest and importance in education is the effectiveness of life skills training on students' academic achievement. This training is specifically designed to provide students with a set of essential skills that go beyond traditional academic knowledge, ultimately having a profound impact on their overall development. These skills encompass a wide range of competencies, including problem-solving, decision-making, communication, critical thinking, stress management, and emotional intelligence, among others. The underlying principle here is that by enhancing these life skills, students will not only excel academically but also lead more successful and fulfilling lives.

Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between life skills training and academic achievement, and the findings have been predominantly positive (Botvin & Griffin, 2004; Elias & Tobias, 1996; Lolaty et al., 2012; Sánchez-Hernando et al., 2021). The focus of life skills training programs often revolves around enhancing students' social and emotional competence, which, in turn, can result in improved academic outcomes. In this discussion, we will

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explore the effectiveness of life skills training on students' academic achievement, drawing upon relevant research.

One crucial aspect of life skills training is its impact on emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence encompasses an individual's ability to recognize and manage their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Past research has demonstrated a positive correlation between higher emotional intelligence and better academic performance (Swanepoel & Britz, 2017). By undergoing life skills training, students can enhance their emotional intelligence, thereby gaining the ability to regulate their emotions and subsequently improve their concentration, problem-solving abilities, and interpersonal skills – all of which are vital for academic success.

Moreover, life skills training often incorporates components that focus on stress management and resilience. Students who possess effective stress management and resilience skills are better equipped to handle the challenges they face in school and during the learning process. These skills can have a positive impact on their academic performance, as stress and anxiety can impede cognitive functioning (Zimmerman, 2002). Life skills training equips students with the tools to cope with stress, stay focused, and maintain a positive attitude, all of which are associated with improved academic outcomes.

In addition to emotional intelligence and stress management, life skills training programs often target other crucial areas such as communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. Effective communication is essential for collaboration and understanding complex concepts, while strong problem-solving and decision-making skills are invaluable for academic tasks and everyday life.

It is worth noting that the effectiveness of life skills training may vary depending on factors such as the specific program, the age of the students, and the duration of the intervention. However, numerous studies have reported significant improvements in academic achievement following life skills training (Botvin & Griffin, 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2004; Zins et al., 2007). These improvements extend beyond academic performance and also positively impact students' overall well-being, behavior, and future success.

In conclusion, life skills training can serve as a highly effective tool for enhancing students' academic achievement. By focusing on developing emotional intelligence, stress management, communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, these programs equip students with the necessary tools to thrive in a learning environment. The positive impact on academic

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performance has been extensively documented, solidifying the value of life skills training as an integral component of modern education.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

MZ contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. The author contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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