

The Role of Life Skills in Explaining the Social Competence of Boarding School Students

¹Hosein Dowlati and ²Narges Parvestan

¹Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology,
University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabili, Iran

²Department of Educational Science, Islamic Azad University, Kashmar, Iran

Abstract: The purpose of this research is to explain social competence through life skills of boarding school students. The research method is a correlation method. Statistical population consists of all boarding school students in educational 94-93 Esfaraieen City governed by random sampling, 100 samples were selected. Gathering data was done using two questionnaires life skills and social competence scale. For the sake of data analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and regression analysis are used. The results show that there is a positive correlation between life skills and social competence. The regression results show that life skills are a predictor of social competence. As a result, the use of life skills training leads to better processing skill, cognitive, behavioral, emotional and motivation skills. Consequently an improvement in the skill levels of the students is expected. Social competence plays an important role in the social function and academic success of students and also in the prevention or inhibition of others' negative reactions.

Key words: Life skills, social competence, student hostels, analysis, regression

INTRODUCTION

Life skills are a complex of psychological abilities that provide the basis of positive adaptation and make the individuals accept their social responsibilities, so that they react to daily problems and expectations in an effective way without harming the self or the others. Life skills consist of a group of social psychological skills that help people in their individual decisions, effective verbal communication and self-management that helps them lead a healthy life. In other words, life skills are abilities that individuals learn so that they use them in leading a successful, efficient and satisfying life (Boyd *et al.*, 1992).

Social competence is the individual's ability to have personal independence and perform social responsibility. Felner believe that social competence has four elements. Cognitive skills that include information treasury, information acquiring and processing skills, efficient and inefficient beliefs and reasoning styles. Behavioral skills is another key element of social competence. When an individual choose a behavior to achieve a certain goal, the behavior should be at available. Negotiation, participation, expressing the self, colloquial skills for starting and continuing social interactions and skills that deal with learning to be friendly with others are among the key elements of behavioral skills. Emotional and sentimental skills are also necessary in order to make positive relations with others to make and spread trust and also supportive mutual relations to recognize and

respond to the emotional signs in social interactions or to control stress. Motivational skills include the valuable structure of the individual, moral grow level, sense of effectiveness, individual control and finally the sense of self-efficiency.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A grow in life skills through learning could be considered as a basis for preventing the social-psychological problems of the students (Bowed, 1992). World health organization defines life skills as a group of interpersonal social and psychological skills that help the individuals to make conscious decisions have efficient communicative, cognitive and emotional relations and lead a healthy and productive life. Scalli and Hopson and Momeni think that during this process the individual takes responsibility for himself and his life. They believe that the process of self-strengthening is a dynamic and growing process of becoming. To self-strengthen, one needs knowledge, certain goals, values and information. Teaching life skills leads to the students' sense of competence and their cognitive and emotional improvement.

Cronin (1996)'s study shows that teaching life skills to the homeless people suffering mental disorders caused the self-treatment skill, watching home, financial management, social participation and adequate nourishment to improve. These improvements could be

explained as the fact that learning and employing new skills make individuals strong and efficient in life. The school of teaching life skills is a response to the needs of the people of society in the process of growing, so that they learn the basic tasks of life (Zimmerman, 2000). This movement focuses on the social-psychological, sexual, professional, cognitive, moral and emotional improvements. Teaching life skills also emphasizes individuals' goals in life (Ginter, 1999). It also affects the judgment, social efficiency, thoughts and behavior. Studying (Ginter, 1999)'s teaching life skills four areas are recognized; communicative and interpersonal skill; problem-solving and decision-making skills; physical readiness and mental support. Recognizing the goals of life skills. Teaching life skills is an expression used for different interventions like expressing the self, managing stress, managing emotions, problem-solving skill, self-consciousness, self-treatment, time management, behavior management, critical skill, etc., selecting these interventions according to the approach and researches related to the human's improvement theories these skills are categorized as social, cognitive and emotional. The effects of teaching each category's related skills on each factor of mental health are studied in different forms. This research makes an effort to study the effects of teaching social skills (one category out of the four categories of life skills) in the form of a theoretical model (Felener's four-dimensional social competence model) on the students' social competence as an integral part of their mental health.

Behavioral skills as the second main category of social competence, states that when an individual selects a behavior to achieve a certain goal it should be available, however, efficient behavioral skills are not limited and there are several spectra of behaviors that provide a systematic framework. Negotiation, expressing the self or having a courageous perspective, gaining support and information, colloquial skills, beginning and continuing social interactions, knowledge acquirement skills and affectionate behavior toward others are among the main elements of behavioral skills. Emotional capacity to make fixed relationships with others, making and spreading trust and supportive mutual relationships, appropriate recognition of and response to emotional signs in social interactions or stress management are considered to be the main elements of motivational skills. Motivational skills, regarded as the fourth aspect of social competence, include the individual's structure of values, moral improvement level, sense of effectiveness, individual control and finally, self-efficiency.

Haqiqi and Colleagues indicated that teaching life skills to the group of female students under study, compared to the other group, led to an increase in their mental health and also their self-respect. Shohadaei did a research on the students with mathematical disorders in

order to study the effect of teaching life skills on social competence and observed that teaching life skills improve the social competence of students with mathematical disorders in a significant way. These results have great implications for teaching these students and providing them with consulting services as stages in their treatment. The results of Beck *et al.* (2009)'s research on the needs of athletes based on the life skills, showed that individual skills such as social skills, respect, leadership, familial interactions and also personal skills and relations like self-organizing, discipline, self-confidence, determining the goal, managing the results of the functions, and motivation are among the main life skills they need. A research done by Clingman on the effect of teaching life skills on preventing drug abuse showed that they have a positive effect on decreasing drugs and alcohol abuse in students. In a research done by Agalotis and Kalyva (2008) on the communicational skills needed for postgraduate students, the results were that these skills greatly increase self-confidence, relationships with others and also their flexibility. Furthermore, in a research done by Weist (2001) he got to the conclusion that the life skills approach increases self-respect, the power of decision-making and a resistance to drug abuse on the insistence of friends which is an effective program that leads to healthy kids and teenagers. Therefore, according to the above mentioned studies and the fact that kids and teenagers are exposed to dangers of different kind and are also equipped with decision-making skills and self-control approaches to decrease stress in early adolescence, the principal solution to decrease mental health problems in kids and teenagers is to prepare them for using these kinds of skills and abilities to deal with the problems of their age. Using these skills, the competence and efficiency of the kids and teenagers are increased and consequently, their mental health is guaranteed. Different researches indicate that this fact could be achieved through teaching mental skills.

Methodology: The method of this research is a correlational one. The statistical population of this research consists of the dormitory students of 1st and 2nd grade high school in Esfaraian city during the 93-94 educational year. The sample is randomly selected from the statistical population. The final sample includes 100 students of 1st and 2nd grade high school that are half male and half female. In order to choose the sample, after gaining the trust of the bureau of education of the city, the list of high schools was achieved and by receiving the list of the students from the high schools the questionnaires were distributed by the researcher.

Research tools

Felener's social competence scale: Felener's social competence questionnaire is based on Felener's

theory that consists of 47 elements and measures four dimensions of emotional competence, behavioral skills, motivational factors and cognitive skills. The reliability of the content of the test is confirmed by experts in psychology and psychometrics. The internal similarity of the elements of the test is 0.88 according to Cranbach's alpha coefficient and the coefficient of reevaluation credibility is measured to be 0.89.

Life skills questionnaire: Life skills questionnaire includes 144 questions and 19 sub-scales. These sub-scales are:

- Self-consciousness
- Possessing skills in life
- Skills related to human relationships
- Interpersonal relationships
- Decision-making
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Problem-solving skills
- Contribution and cooperation skills
- Creativity
- Critical view
- Showing personal responsibilities
- Perceiving and improving the principles of freedom, justice and equality
- Cooperation in tasks that improve the interests
- Showing social behaviors
- Becoming a global citizen
- Professional skills
- Skills related to obeying and applying security rules
- Skills related to the usage of information technology

In order to test the reliability of the questionnaire, 10 experts in educational programming approved the external reliability (the reliability of the form) and internal reliability (the reliability of the content), after the questions were written.

In order to evaluate the credibility of the questionnaire, after a primary execution on 30 people of the sample and by using Cronbach's alpha methods, the coefficient 0.97 was measured as the credibility coefficient. Furthermore, this questionnaire is studied by Babadi in 1381 and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93 is reported. These coefficients indicate that the questionnaire possesses desirable psychometric features.

RESULTS

In Table 1, the descriptive findings like the mean and standard deviation of both male and female students groups in the research's variables are shown.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation of the scores of male and female students in the research's variables

| Variables | Mean | | SD | |
|----------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Social competence | 10/14 | 19/85 | 4/04 | 8/77 |
| Cognitive skills | 11/85 | 17/90 | 10/20 | 3/10 |
| Motivational factors | 27/80 | 24/23 | 6/81 | 6/45 |
| Behavioral skills | 122/74 | 160/89 | 25/33 | 18/93 |
| Life skills | 85/03 | 123/32 | 22/14 | 17/34 |

Table 2: The results of correlation between life skills and social competence sub-scales

| Life skills | Emotional competence | Cognitive skill | Motivational factor | Behavioral skill | Social competence |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| R | 0/55 | 0/39 | -0/24 | 0/65 | 0/65 |
| Sig. | 0/01 | 0/01 | 0/05 | 0/01 | 0/01 |

Table 3: The results of simultaneous regression analysis of social competence based on predictor variables

| Model | Total squares | df | Mean of squares | F-value | R | R ² | R ² Adj. | Sig. |
|---------|---------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------|----------------|---------------------|------|
| | Regression | 11/35775 | 2 | 55/17887 | 40/53 | 0/66 | 0/43 | 0/42 |
| Remains | 14/45893 | 104 | 28/441 | | | | | |
| Total | 26/81668 | 106 | | | | | | |

Table 4: The results of regression analysis and predictor coefficients of social competence based on predictor variables

| Model | B | Beta | SE | t-values | Sig. |
|------------------------|------|-------|------|----------|------|
| Invariable coefficient | 9/97 | 10/61 | - | 0/94 | 0/35 |
| Social competence | 0/46 | 0/05 | 0/65 | 8/83 | 0/01 |
| Social acceptance | 0/08 | 0/09 | 0/06 | 0/89 | 0/37 |

The results of Pearson's correlation test in Table 2 shows that life skills have a positive and significant relationship with social competence sub-scales (emotional competence, cognitive skill and behavioral skill) in p<0.01 level and a negative and significant relationship with motivational factors.

The results of regression analysis of life skills sub-scales for predicting the variable of social competence in Table 3 shows that the general regression model is significant and life skills sub-scales with a signification coefficient of R² = 0.43 can predict social competence. Furthermore to predict the criterion variable (social competence) the predictor sub-scales were simultaneously inserted into the regression equation that according to Table 4, life skills variable with a Beta coefficient of 0.65 could predict the criterion variable.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the research, the main hypothesis of the research that is the fact that there is a significant relationship between life skills and social competence is confirmed. The value of Pearson's correlation coefficient that is 0.65, shows that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Since, the value is positive it can be said that the correlation

between the two is a positive one. The results of this research corresponds to Samari, Ali Akbar and Ahmad Laali Faza's research in which during eight sessions in a month they found out that teaching life skills improve social competence and its elements in students with mathematical disorders. The results of this research do not correspond to Adabi's research in which the results of the analysis of multi-variables variance showed that teaching life skills has a significant effect on hearing-impaired students' social competence. Moreover, teaching life skills could improve the social competence of hearing-impaired students. Therefore, planning for teaching life skills to hearing-impaired students is of great importance. The results of a research done by Beck *et al.* (2009) on the life skills needed for athletes, showed that individual skills such as social skills, respect, leadership, familial interactions and relations and also personal skills like self-organizing, discipline, self-confidence, determining the goal, managing the results and motivation are among the most important life skills they need. A research done by Clingman on the effect of teaching life skills on preventing drug abuse showed that they have a positive effect on decreasing drugs and alcohol abuse in students. In a research done by Agalotis and Kalyva (2008) on the communicational skills needed for postgraduate students, the results were that these skills greatly increase self-confidence, relationships with others and also flexibility. Furthermore, in a research done by Weist (2001) he got to the conclusion that the life skills approach increases self-respect, the power of decision-making and a resistance to drug abuse on the insistence of friends which is an effective program that leads to healthy kids and teenagers. Thus, according to the above mentioned things and the fact that kids and teenagers are not only prone to different dangers but are also equipped with self-controlling and decision-making skills in early adolescence in order to reduce stress it in turn indicates high social competence.

According to Table 3 and 4, the sub-scales of life skills can predict social competence. Furthermore, the sub-scales of life skills have a relationship with social competence. The results of the research done by Momeni show that teaching life skills (self-consciousness, interpersonal relations, confronting emotions and decision-making) caused an improvement in social competence and its element in students with mathematical disorders. Moreover, the researches done by Argile indicate that social competence and also possessing abilities and life skills cause the individuals to be able to make desirable relations in social

interactions. A research done by Monajemzadeh show that there is a significant relationship between family functions and social competence. There is also a significant relationship between sentimental cooperation in a family and social competence. A research done by Pezeshk indicates that showing pedagogical films that are about optimism results in an increase in the mean of scores related to cognitive skills (information treasury, information acquiring and processing skills, efficient and inefficient beliefs and reasoning styles) and behavioral skills. Teaching optimism, using social competence factors, influences different aspects of their lives and also improves their interpersonal and social relations.

CONCLUSION

The current research is done based on the importance of the effects of teaching life skills on social competence and its different aspects with an eye on strengthening students by teaching them the life skills. Life skills make the individuals able to change their knowledge, perspective and internal values to objective and real abilities, so that they could use them to handle their powers more efficiently and lead a more positive and happier life. Life skills are abilities that cause the individual to have healthy motivation and behavior and also to provide the conditions of doing them. Learning and using these life skills, not only affect the individual's perception of his competence but also others' understanding of him/her. Life skills affect the individual's understanding of his competence his self-confidence and also his self-respect that consequently lead to mental health. The program for teaching life skills is an educational program that is applicable to every organized group work and improves practical skills necessary for daily life. Therefore, it is necessary that the group members take an active part in learning these skills, since the life skills method is an experimental one in which one learns not only through his/her activities but also by observing other participants and their feedbacks. As a result, the content of life skills, instead of being a teacher-based kind of learning is a practical-experimental one whose basic mechanism is changing individuals' behavior in a way that these learnings could also be transferred to a situation outside the group. In fact, the effectiveness of life skills method is due to its emphasis on objective aspects like involvement and active participation of the individuals, observable activities and objective performance of the beliefs. Evidences show that these programs have desirable results and outcomes in

increasing educational efficiency and reducing dangerous behaviors in students. Therefore, the role and importance of life skills program is undeniable according to its progressive aims in different aspects of the life of teenagers and young.

Finally, based on the results of this study it is concluded that firstly, students need situational signs, understanding the goals and involvement in social interactions. The students can combine new skills with the previous ones, after learning the new skills and get to higher levels of cognitive, behavioral, emotional and motivational skills. Secondly, applying the teaching of life skills results in a better processing of cognitive skills, behavioral skills, social competence and motivational factors and consequently there would be an improvement in the levels of these skills in the students. Social competence is important in social efficiency and educational success of the students and also plays an important role in preventing others' negative reactions. Furthermore, social behaviors and educational behaviors are interdependent in a way that improving educational activities without improving those social behaviors that make them possible is a difficult task.

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