

Effectiveness Of EI Training on Anxiety and Aggression of Fifth/Sixth-Grade Female Students

Abstract

The present study investigated the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training on anxiety and aggression among fifth and sixth-grade female students in Khomeinishahr in 2020-2021. This research was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of data collection with pre-test, post-test and control groups. Using the available sampling method, the revised children's manifest anxiety questionnaire and Nelson (2000) aggression severity standard questionnaire were taken from two fifth and sixth-grade classes. Among these students, 30 whose anxiety and aggression scores were at the medium, or high level were selected. In addition, 15 students were randomly assigned to each experimental and control group. Then, they were subjected to the intervention for eight sessions derived from Bradberry and Graves' (2009) emotional intelligence training package and Wilding's (2010) emotional intelligence training book. They finally completed the post-test questionnaires. Given the data analysis results using SPSS software, emotional intelligence training effectively reduced the anxiety and aggression of fifth and sixth-grade female students in Khomeinishahr ($P < 0.01$). Among the subscale of anxiety, it was effective on "The Worry/Oversensitivity factor" ($P < 0.01$), but had no statistically significant effect on the "physiological factors" and "concentration anxiety factor" ($P > 0.05$). In addition, Also, at the error level of 0.05 on the subscale of aggression, ie "Frustration", "physical aggression", "Peer Relationships" ($P < 0.05$) and at the error level of 0.01 were effective on "Authority Relations" ($P < 0.01$).

Keywords: *emotional intelligence, anxiety, aggression, female students, fifth and sixth grades*

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Introduction

It is estimated that about 8% of the general population of children suffer from anxiety. Girls are more exposed to anxiety disorders or problems than boys (Gorji, 2017). Anxiety disorders are known as common mental health disorders in childhood and youth. These disorders in childhood have a significant negative impact on educational, social and health functioning. In addition, these disorders cause the risk of persistent anxiety and other mental health disorders in adulthood and a significant economic cost. Therefore, the recent increase in the prevalence of anxiety disorders seems very distressing and demands effective early intervention (Creswell, Waite and Hudson, 2020). Compared with research in the adult realm that tends to split disorders very specifically, within the child and adolescent fields, there is a more common tendency to examine anxiety relatively broadly and, in many cases, to examine internalising disorders as a whole (Rapee, 2018). After all, a low rate of spontaneous recovery of anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents continues throughout the growth period. The chronic course of anxiety disorders, their continuation in the course of development, coexistence with other disorders and the background of the occurrence of other disorders in adulthood (depression, drug use, anxiety in adulthood, major depression and suicide attempts) show the prominent importance of diagnosing and treating them in childhood. (Shahni et al., 2016).

In addition, high anxiety is related to aggression (Chung et al., 2019). Adolescent aggression is a global public health issue with long-term and costly emotional, social, and economic

consequences. Identifying variables that can reduce these behaviors in this population is necessary. Therefore, there is a need to determine protective factors of adolescent aggressive behavior (Vega et al., 2021). Aggression is a major concern due to its potential for physical harm and many reasons. In addition, aggressive behaviors negatively affect teacher instructional efforts and reduce the opportunity to learn various skills, even in the presence of instruction and other interventions (Kanne & Mazurek, 2011). Aggression has many forms, including intentional physical harm, verbal aggression, and relational or indirect aggression that involves harming another person's social relationships (Krahe, 2020). Children and adolescents commonly visit psychiatric clinics due to their aggressive behavior. Clinical levels of aggression in children are associated with significant economic, personal, family, and social issues, which increase with the aggressive child's age (Connor et al., 2019). In addition to individual dimensions and consequences in school, aggression has extensive social and economic costs (Salimi et al., 2019). Aggressive children face mental disorders. A history of aggression in childhood is dangerous for the child's psychological development. In addition, these children have behavioral problems that increase in severity over time. In adulthood, these problems lead to behavioral disorders and sometimes criminal behavior (Masud et al., 2019).

According to different studies, high emotional intelligence is related to well-being, life satisfaction, and mental health (Moeller, seehuus, and Peisch, 2020). Emotional intelligence is mostly defined as skills or abilities that positively affect a

person's performance in their role by knowing their own and other's emotional states and the capacity to regulate or use emotions. Since Goleman introduced the concept of emotional intelligence in the popular media, it has attracted much attention (Mattingly and Kariger, 2019). Adolescence is an ideal time to encourage people to improve emotional capacities (Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019). Adolescents with high emotional intelligence report better coping with stress and more positive relationships. Lower levels of emotion regulation are associated with more social anxiety and stress symptoms (Chamizo Nieto, Rey, & Pellitteri, 2020).

An effective step can be taken to reduce emotional problems according to the acquired nature of this intelligence and the research backgrounds that indicate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence in controlling and managing emotions (Sadeghi, 2016). Research claims that learning emotional intelligence in childhood has undoubtedly the greatest impact. It is also proved that learning many skills in childhood is better and easier (Wilding, 2010). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training on anxiety and aggression of fifth and sixth-grade female students in Khomeinishahr.

Research Methods

The current research was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of data collection with pre-test, post-test and control groups. This study's statistical population includes all fifth and sixth-grade female students of Khomeinishahr who studied in 2019-2020. One of the second primary schools of Khomeinishahr was selected using the available sampling method. After coordinating with the center's director, the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Questionnaire (RCMAS) and Nelson & Finch's (2000) Aggression Severity Standard Questionnaire were taken from two fifth and sixth-grade classes. Among these students, 30 whose anxiety and aggression scores were at a medium or high level were selected. In addition, 15 students were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 15 to the control group.

Research tools

Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale-Revised

This scale was designed and validated by Last (1985). This scale is designed to evaluate the presence or absence of anxiety-related symptoms. Yusefvand (2012) validated this questionnaire in Iran which was called the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS) or "What I think and feel." The RCMAS scale includes 37 items (28 about anxiety and 9 lie detector items). Each item has a "yes" or "no" answer. This questionnaire components include physiological (9 items), worry/oversensitivity (10 items) and concentration anxiety (9 items). There have been many studies on the validity of the RCMAS scale. In addition, different studies have confirmed

this scale's concurrent construct validity, content and prediction (for example, refer to Reynolds-Richmond, 1970 and 1981 and Parin and Lest, 1992; Quoted from Youssef Vand, 2013). In Iran, the reliability and validity of this scale have been investigated by Taghavi (2005). In addition, the study results indicated that all scale items have a satisfactory scale with the total score. Therefore, according to the study, the RCMAS scale was recognized to have appropriate psychometric conditions and qualified to be used in Iran (Yosefvand, 2012).

Nelson Aggression Severity Standard Questionnaire

Nelson & Finch (2000) designed this questionnaire. This scale has 39 items that measure the aggression severity with a four-point Likert scale. In this research, the aggression severity means the score the respondents give to 39-item questions of aggression severity. The components of this questionnaire include failure (11 questions), physical aggression (9 questions), relationships with peers (9 questions) and relationships with authority figures (10 questions). A score between 39 and 52 shows a low-level aggression severity. A score between 52 and 104 also shows an average level of aggression severity, and a score higher than 104 means that the aggression severity is high. In the research (Zibayi et al., 2012), professors and experts in this field confirmed the questionnaire's validity. In addition, the reliability of the questionnaire was obtained using Cronbach's alpha above 0.70. The intervention was conducted as virtual training in groups during 8 sessions. Each session's content and activities are based on the emotional intelligence training package derived from the Bradberry and Graves program (2009) and Christian Wilding's book on developing emotional intelligence (2010), which corresponds to Goleman's model of emotional intelligence. The first session discussed the definition of emotion and identifying its types in life. The second session was dedicated to identifying facial expressions and thoughts, and various emotions. The third session investigated the relationship between automatic thoughts, emotions and behavior through practical examples. The fourth session explained and practiced how to identify emotions in others. The fifth session was devoted to teaching different ways of expressing emotions and the need to manage them in life. The 6th session discussed emotion control (predicting emotions, knowing one's emotional priorities). The 7th and 8th sessions were respectively devoted to emotion control through changing the position and relaxation, emotional keywords, and teaching ways to solve emotional problems and appropriate and controlled expression of emotions.

Descriptive statistical methods such as standard deviation, mean, etc., were used to analyze the data. Then, these variables

were analyzed with inferential statistics, including multivariate covariance analysis using SPSS software.

Findings:

In the research, the participants were all girls in terms of gender. The minimum and maximum age in the samples of both groups were 11 and 12 years, respectively. The average age in the experimental group samples was 11.33±0.49, and the control group was 11.20±0.41. Among the 15 experimental

group participants, ten participants (66.67%) were in the fifth grade, and 5 (33.33%) were in the sixth grade. Among the 15 control group participants, 12 (80%) were in the fifth grade, and 3 (20%) were studying in the sixth grade.

Table (1) shows the descriptive findings (mean and standard deviation) of the research variables in the experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test stages.

Table 1: Descriptive findings of aggression and anxiety variables

Variable	group	pre-test		post-test		Number
		Average	standard deviation	Average	standard deviation	
Aggression total score	Experiment	105.20	17.45	93	10.95	15
	Control	96.20	22.90	99.13	13.23	15
Total anxiety score	Experiment	16.13	6.74	11.33	7.50	15
	Control	7.07	5.11	8.60	6.34	15

Table 2: The results of the equality test of the aggression slope in the research variables

Research variables	Degrees of freedom	F value	Significance level
anxiety	2	1.516	0.125
aggression	2	1.008	0.188

As observed in table (2), the interaction between the experimental conditions and the covariate variable is not significant in any of the variables of anxiety and aggression (P<0.05). Therefore, it is assumed that the same slope of the

regression line for all variables is observed, and there is no prohibition on using the covariance analysis method.

Table 3: The results of multivariate covariance analysis (MANCOVA) of the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training on student's anxiety and aggression

Effect	Effect	Value	F	Significance level	Eta squared	Statistical power
	Pillai's trace	0.0346	6.352	0.006	0.364	0.858
Group	Wilks's Lambda	0.654	6.352	0.006	0.346	0.858
	Hotelling's Trace	0.529	6.352	0.006	0.346	0.858
	Roy's Largest Root	0.529	6.352	0.006	0.346	0.858

According to table (3), the values of Pillai's trace, Wilks's lambda, Hotelling's effect and Roy's largest root show a significant difference in the variables of anxiety and aggression in students between the two experimental and control groups in terms of the dependent variables. (F=6.352 and P>0.01). In addition, the table above shows that nearly 35% of the differences created in the dependent variables (anxiety and

aggression) are related to the independent variable (emotional intelligence training). The statistical power of 0.858 also indicates the adequacy of the sample size and the low type 2 error. Therefore, it is concluded that emotional intelligence training has effectively affected the anxiety and aggression of fifth and sixth-grade female students in Khomeini Shahr.

Table 4: The results of ANCOVA analysis in the MANCOVA text on the average post-test scores of each anxiety and aggression variable.

	Statistical index	sum of squares	Freedom degrees	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta squared	power
post-test	anxiety	690.459	1	690.459	32.342	0.0001	0.564	0.999
	aggression	5820.952	1	5820.952	40.202	0.0001	0.617	0.999

Group	anxiety	144.243	1	144.243	6.756	0.015	0.213	0.705
	aggression	1169.101	1	1169.101	8.074	0.009	0.244	0.780
Error	anxiety	533.724	25	21.349				
	aggression	3619.794	25	144.792				
Total	anxiety	4387.000	29					
	aggression	274840.000	29					

Table (4) shows the effect of emotional intelligence training on anxiety and aggression variables. The results showed that the above intervention is effective in reducing anxiety ($F=6.756$) ($P<0.05$) at the error level of 0.05. It is also effective in reducing aggression ($F=8.074$) ($P<0.01$) in students at the error level of 0.01. This effect is statistically significant, and emotional intelligence training has reduced anxiety and aggression in students. The effect of the pre-test has been controlled in this analysis. In addition, the results indicated that the difference between the remaining mean scores of anxiety and aggression variables after controlling the

effect of the pre-test is significant, and the amount of this effect is 0.213 and 0.244, respectively. In other words, 21.3% and 24.4% of the differences in anxiety and aggression variables are related to the influence of the independent variable (emotional intelligence training). The high statistical power of 0.705 indicates the adequacy of the sample size and the low type II error. Therefore, it is concluded that the research's main hypothesis has been confirmed, and emotional intelligence training effectively reduces the anxiety and aggression of fifth and sixth-grade female students in Khomeini Shahr.

Table 5: The results of multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) of the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training on students' anxiety and aggression components.

Effect	Effect	Value	F	Significance level	Eta squared	Statistical power
Group	Pillai's trace	0.280	2.851	0.041	0.280	0.701
	Wilks's Lambda	0.720	2.851	0.041	0.280	0.701
	Hotelling's Trace	0.389	2.851	0.041	0.280	0.701
	Roy's Largest Root	0.389	2.851	0.041	0.280	0.701
Group	Pillai's trace	0.318	2.452	0.048	0.318	0.596
	Wilks's Lambda	0.682	2.452	0.048	0.318	0.596
	Hotelling's Trace	0.467	2.452	0.048	0.318	0.596
	Roy's Largest Root	0.467	2.452	0.048	0.318	0.596

According to the table (5), the values of Pillai's effect, Wilks's lambda, Hotelling's effect and Roy's largest root showed a significant difference in the components of anxiety (physiological factors, worry/oversensitivity and concentration anxiety) in students between the two experimental and control groups of the dependent variables ($F=2.851$ and $P<0.05$). In addition, the above table results show that nearly 28% of the differences created in the dependent variables (physiological factors, worry/oversensitivity and concentration anxiety) are related to the influence of the independent variable (emotional intelligence training). The statistical power of 0.701 also indicates the adequacy of the sample size and the low type II error.

Also the values of Pillai's effect, Wilks's lambda, Hotelling's effect and Roy's largest root showed a significant difference between the control and at least one of the dependent variables in the components of aggression (failure, physical aggression, relationships with peers and relationships with authority figures) in students between the two experimental groups ($F=2.452$ and $P<0.05$). The results also show that nearly 32% of the differences created in the dependent variables (failure, physical aggression, relationships with peers and relationships with authority figures) are related to the influence of the independent variable (emotional intelligence training). The statistical power of 0.596 also indicates the adequacy of the sample size and the low type II error. Therefore, it is concluded that emotional intelligence training has effectively affected the

anxiety and aggression components of fifth and sixth-grade female students in Khomeini Shahr.

Table 6: The results of the ANCOVA analysis in the MANCOVA text on the average post-test scores of each of the components of anxiety.

	Statistical index	Sum of squares	Freedom degree	mean square	F	Significance level	Eta squared	Power
pre-exam	Physiological factors	7.912	1	7.912	2.554	0.123	0.096	0.335
	Excessive worry/sensitivity	0.299	1	0.299	0.073	0.789	0.003	0.058
	Concentration anxiety	29.030	1	29.030	7.0478	0.012	0.238	0.747
group	Physiological factors	5.881	1	5.881	1.898	0.181	0.073	0.263
	Excessive worry/sensitivity	37.507	1	37.507	9.141	0.006	0.276	0.827
	Concentration anxiety	9.402	1	9.402	2.422	0.133	0.092	0.321
error	Physiological factors	74.349	24	3.098				
	Excessive worry/sensitivity	98.473	24	4.103				
	Concentration anxiety	3.164	24	3.882				
Total	Physiological factors	448.000	30					
	Excessive worry/sensitivity	781.000	30					
	Concentration anxiety	392.000	30					

Table (6) studied the effect of emotional intelligence training on students' anxiety components. The results showed that the above intervention effectively reduced the "worry/oversensitivity" component ($F=9.141$) in students at the error level of 0.01. and this effect is statistically significant ($P<0.01$). The results also showed that the above intervention did not have a statistically significant effect on the components of "physiological factors" ($F=1.898$) and "concentration anxiety" ($F=2.422$) in students. The pre-test effect has been controlled in this analysis. According to the table results, the difference between the remaining average scores of the "anxiety/oversensitivity" component is significant after

controlling the pre-test effect, and the amount of this effect is 0.276. On the other hand, 27.6% of the differences created in the worry/oversensitivity component are related to the influence of the independent variable (emotional intelligence training). In addition, the statistical power of 0.827 indicates the adequacy of the sample size and the low type II error. Therefore, it is concluded that emotional intelligence training effectively reduces the worry/oversensitivity component in fifth and sixth-grade female students of Khomeini Shahr. But, it is ineffective on the components of physiological factors and anxiety.

Table 7: The results of the ANOVA analysis in the MANCOVA text on the average post-test scores of each aggression component.

	Statistical index	sum of squares	Freedom degree	Mean square	F	Significance level	Eta squared	power
pre-exam	failure	38.578	1	38.578	2.290	0.143	0.087	0.306
	Physical aggression	44.632	1	44.632	3.618	0.069	0.131	0.447
	Peer relationships	18.603	1	18.603	1.358	0.255	0.054	0.201
	Relations with authorities	81.771	1	81.771	5.656	0.026	0.191	0.626
group	failure	94.410	1	94.410	5.604	0.026	0.189	0.622
	Physical aggression	84.799	1	84.799	6.875	0.015	0.223	0.711
	Peer relationships	54.221	1	54.221	3.958	0.049	0.142	0.580
	Relations with authorities	129.476	1	129.476	8.956	0.006	0.272	0.819
error	failure	404.305	24	16.846				
	Physical aggression	296.035	24	12.335				

	Peer relationships	328.743	24	13.698
	Relations with authorities	346.964	24	14.457
	failure	19329.000	30	
Total	Physical aggression	22312.000	30	
pre-exam	Peer relationships	13433.000	30	
	Relations with authorities	17906.000		

Table (7) studied the effect of emotional intelligence training on the components of students' aggression. The results showed that the above intervention at the error level of 0.05 is effective in reducing the components of "failure" ($F=5.604$), "physical aggression" ($F=6.875$) and "relationships with peers" ($F=3.958$) ($P<0.05$). Emotional intelligence is also effective at the error level of 0.01 on the component of "Relationships with authorities" ($F=8.956$) ($P<0.01$) in students, and this effect is statistically significant. Therefore, emotional intelligence training has reduced failure and physical aggression and improved relationships with peers and authority figures in students. The effect of the pre-test has been controlled in this analysis. In addition, the table results showed that the difference between the remaining average scores of aggression components variables is significant after controlling the effect of the pre-test, and the amount of this effect is 0.189, 0.223, 0.142, and 0.272, respectively. On the other hand, 18.9%, 22.3%, 14.2% and 27.2% of the differences created in aggression components are related to the influence of the independent variable (emotional intelligence training). The high statistical power of 0.580 also indicates the adequacy of the sample size and the low type II error. Therefore, it is concluded that emotional intelligence training effectively reduces the components of aggression, i.e., reducing the components of failure, physical aggression, relationships with peers and relationships with authority figures in fifth and sixth-grade female students of Khomeinishahr.

Discussion

The research findings confirm the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training on students' anxiety and aggression. Therefore, the research results are consistent with the research of Fathi et al. (2019), Pasha and Golshkoh (2016), Vega et al. (2021), Chamizano, Ray, and Pelitri (2020), Bibi et al. (2020), Trigueros et al. (2020), Moeller et al. (2020), Chamizo et al. (2020), Estévez, Jiménez, and Segura (2019).

In explaining this issue, an important part of the emotional intelligence training program is identifying and managing one's and others' emotions. Fernandezbrokal et al. (2006) believe that people with the ability to recognize emotions and more power in repairing their emotional states report higher self-esteem, which is one of the important indicators of mental

health. In addition, emotional restoration is accompanied by controlling intrusive thoughts and mind rumination that are associated with stressful situations. Siu (2009) states that the weak use of emotion causes higher behavioral problems such as aggression. Meanwhile, a higher degree of self-regulation may lead to lower anxiety. Emotion management is an important step toward reducing problematic behavior. Emotion management skills play a significant protective factor in reducing negative emotions (such as anxiety). In addition, internalized and externalized problems can be reduced by the positive use of emotions. Teenagers can adapt more positively when their emotional intelligence is strengthened by positively understanding their reactions to different situations. The emotional intelligence training program helps students to learn emotion management through predicting emotions and recognizing their emotional priorities. Through body relaxation, they also learn to control their emotions, including anxiety and anger.

According to the findings, emotional intelligence training was effective on the "anxiety/oversensitivity" component, but it did not have a significant effect on "physiological factors" and "concentration anxiety." Therefore, the research result is consistent with Kilgore, Sounis, Russo and Rach's (2016) research. It is also inconsistent with the results of Shams, Riahi Farsani and Sangari (2018) talking about the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training on concentration and the research of Santesso et al. (2006) talking about the relationship between emotional intelligence and external behaviors (such as physical aggression).

To explain this issue, it is stated that emotional intelligence with a low level can play a role in a wide range of psychopathological symptoms, including anxiety. The definition indicates that low emotional intelligence is related to a weak ability to correctly understand others' emotions and intentions, understand their emotions and their true history, and limited ability to autonomously regulate mood and emotional reactions. In this conceptualization, any mild daily worries and stressors can lead to exaggerated reactions in individuals with low emotional intelligence (Kilgore, Sounis, Russo, & Rach, 2016). The emotional intelligence training program can reduce worry and over-sensitivity by identifying cognitive errors, including catastrophizing. This program includes training to

recognize and accept emotions. Hayes and Feldman (2004) states that emotional acceptance can help those who are emotionally vulnerable to be in the present time and place. As a result, instead of showing an excessive reaction and anxiety, such as catastrophizing, they understand the extent of the threat more realistically and objectively. When it comes to the lack of effect of emotional intelligence training on the physiological factors of anxiety, it is stated that a longer period is needed to make a positive change in this component so that the correct emotional states in a person become more stable and this stabilization can affect physiological factors as well.

According to the research findings, the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training is confirmed in the components of aggression, including failure, physical aggression, relationships with peers and relationships with authority figures. Therefore, this result is consistent with the research of Soleimani et al. (2015), and Bibi et al (2020).

Berk (2007) states that children with poor social skills have a lot of trouble visualizing their thoughts and feelings, especially those who are angry and aggressive. Due to being aware of others' perspectives, they often misbehave with adults and peers without guilt and regret. Gorji (2017) states in his book "Child and Adolescent Psychopathology" that aggressive teenagers do not know how to manage their interpersonal problems in a non-violent way. As a result, they have no choice except to be aggressive in a conflict situation. Wilding (2010) states that compared to those with less sufficient emotional intelligence, people with sufficient emotional intelligence can control their emotions and feelings and do not allow them to determine their behavior. The emotions are in their control, and they guide their emotions instead of being guided by their emotions. In teaching emotional intelligence, students have learned the situations that may cause them to show aggression and the thoughts that lead them to aggression. This awareness can increase the ability to predict and control their emotions and behavior. As a result, it can help them to reduce aggression in various situations, such as facing failure and conflict in relationships with peers and adults.

This research was conducted in 2020-2021 in Khomeinishahr among fifth and sixth-grade female students; therefore, it should focus on generalizing its results to other societies. Based on the results of holding workshops to develop parents' emotional intelligence and empowering them to develop it in their children, it is suggested to hold emotional intelligence courses for school staff and teachers and how to teach it to students and consider time for practical training of emotional intelligence in school programs.

Conclusion

This research shows that emotional intelligence training has reduced student's anxiety and aggression. As a result, it is

recommended to develop a practical program for teaching emotional intelligence to students in schools, as well as to conduct long-term research in this case to evaluate the continuity of effectiveness.

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