World Scientific News

The effectiveness of training life skills on happiness of students

Malihe Talebi Amrei[1],*, Ali Farahani[2]

[1]Department of Psychology, Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran

[2]Department of Children with Special Needs, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

*E-mail address: Farahani152000@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The current research was conducted with the aim of the effectiveness of training life skills on the students' happiness. The research population includes all the PNU students, Karaj branch who were studying in the educational year of 2013-2014. In this research 15 students were selected through random sampling method available as the research sample volume that participated in the educational workshop of life skill and 15 more students were selected as the control group. The method applied in this research is semi empirical with two groups of experimental and control. The experimental group was placed under 8, 120 minute sessions of training life skills. To collect data the Oxford happiness inventory was used. To analyze data, the descriptive statistics (average, standard deviation,…) as well as inferential statistics (covariance analysis) were applied. Results indicated that the average happiness scores in the experimental group's posttest are higher than that of the posttest in the control group. It is, thus, concluded that training life skills is influential in promoting the happiness of the students.

*Keywords***:** Training life skills; happiness; Oxford happiness

1. INTRODUCTION

With the start of the academic years, one of the most important life stages begins, because one can during the educational period prepare himself for the life after education. If

people look at the educational period at the University Simply for obtaining a degree for finding a suitable job, the possibility of the fact that this period will leave amazing effects on the peoples' lives will be weak. However, in case, this mentality is formed among them that a favorable life has various requirements and on top of them, mastering a set of skills is of high importance, the academic courses will become the most effective stage in the personal life.

Scientific evidence are indicative of the fact that mental health is among the most important human needs in today's life that in order it is fulfilled, man has to recognize himself exactly, comprehends others and hence establishes an effective relationship with the others. More importantly, he should identify his own negative emotions and daily stresses and bring them under his control and furthermore he should solve his problems, and adopt appropriate decisions .He should not have cliché thoughts and refuse information without processing. The necessity of meeting the above mentioned main needs is to master life skills. It should be noted, life skills are considered to be among the mental health promotional-preventive plans that have been introduced by the World Health Organization (Naseri, 2007).

Today, according to some socio-cultural changes, most people lack certain abilities to deal with life problems. Consequently, they will become vulnerable in facing life problems. Academic years are the most important and most valuable periods of life for each person. The term life skills refers to a larger group of social-mental and interpersonal skills that could aid people adopt their decisions consciously, communicate effectively, expand their coping skills as well as the personal management and have a healthy and fertile life. In accordance with the importance of life skills with various goals of prevention and promotion of mental health level, the necessity of training these skills to adolescents becomes clear for us. One of the preventive programs that draw attention at the global level is training life skills to the students. To increase the metal health level and to prevent social-mental problems, the World Health Organization (WHO) has prepared a program under the name of training life skills. Since then, this program has been studied in most countries.

Generally speaking, various research findings suggest one can through the path way of life skills attempt to increase happiness among the students. According to the definition by the WHO, life skills are a set of competencies whose application is highly effective in adjusting and improving interpersonal relations, accepting social responsibilities, appropriate decisions and solving conflicts. Achieving these goals is not practically possible, unless fundamental skills are taught to the students. If a part of academic curricula is devoted to teaching controlling negative emotions, process of problem solving, making decisions, thinking and establishing appropriate interpersonal relations, most disorders and deviancies are prevented.

In our society, a high number of people have not yet learned problem solving -specific manners and behaviors, handling stress and expressing their own feelings. As we know, most students in dealing with environmental threats and problems make use of avoidant and deterrent responses like disobedience, lawlessness, fraud an aggression. If we consider these behaviors as stemming from the impacts of the inappropriate education and accept families are unable to transfer essential skills to the children, the necessity and importance of comprehensive education planning of life skills will become clear for us. As a result, existing universities and counseling centers are of centers, where they can be encouraged upon the recommendations of the WHO regarding training life skills. In line with an expansion of social adjustment, life skills teach man how to remove friability from themselves and look at life issues like solvable puzzles. In fact, life skills teach man how to adjust with their own social context.

The art of establishing communication and speaking with others are primary skills, if a person is familiar with them, he or she can eliminate destructive emotions from himself or herself and enjoy happiness. Students account for a large part of the society population. The impacts of life skills in promoting social adjustment levels, interpersonal communications, increasing the skill of problem solution, and coping styles and increasing happiness have been confirmed. Hence, in accordance with the background of the existing research, training life skills not only support students educationally, but it also prepares him or her for facing adjustment problems with the society, increased happiness in this critical period of life. Meanwhile, the results of this research could be applicable to the mangers of the health system so that by using the experienced forces they can pay more attention to the case of life skills training, because students account for a large part of the society population.

Humans are always faced with various problems and events in life or he becomes aware of them, where each of them will bring about emotions and feelings thought effective in shaping behavior. Getting along with life pressures and acquiring coping skills have always been a part of reality. Thus, the necessity of training life skills at universities becomes clear. Also, it becomes imperative to avoid peoples' problems in other stages of life. As a result, with the appearance of positive and useful behaviors most health problems will be preventable. Based on the research conducted such factors as happiness, interpersonal skills, establishing favorable communication, goal setting, decision making, problem solving, and identifying personal values are effective in preventing or reducing types of behavioral abnormalities and mental disorders of the adolscents (Alimardani, 2006).

The term life skills refers to a larger group of social-mental and interpersonal skills that could assist people to adopt their decisions with awareness, to communicate effectively, to expand coping skills and their own persona management and to have a fertile and healthy life. Life skills could navigate personal conducts and those of others as well as those pertaining to the surrounding environment in such a way that would lead to more health and more health means more physical, mental and social comfort (Unicef, 2003). Life skills include a set of abilities that will increase the power of adjustment and efficient and positive behaviors.

As a result, the person will be able to accept his or her responsibilities relating to social roles without hurting himself and to encounter daily life challenges quite effectively. Life skills mean establishing effective and appropriate interpersonal relations, fulfilling social responsibilities, making proper decisions, solving conflicts and stand-offs without resorting to conducts hurting oneself and others (Emaminaeeni, 2004).

Today based on the social-learning theory by "Bandura", this affair has been considered by the world health organization and on the same basis, Botwin has formulated plans to educate and train life skills.

Although, we can discover numerous contents and subjects surrounding the title of life kills by searching the term "life skills" on the internet sites , different views on these skills with regards to definition and training these skills have made the readership be unable to have a proper summation of the skills and the way they are learnt. Adkins, head of the life skills center at the University of Columbia maintains; life skills are a type of counseling in the educational style for a larger number of people. According to the WHO, skills are abilities that could lead to establishing effective interpersonal relations, fulfilling social responsibilities, making proper decisions, solving problems and strives without resorting to conducts that could harm the person and others (Naseri & Nickparvar, 2004).

The program' training life skills' designed by the UNICEF are skills that teach recognition of one's characteristics and abilities, considering personal, familial and social values, utilizing proper ways of establishing communications, strictness, finding friends, goal setting and proper ways to reach it, appropriate decision making, avoiding violence as well as keeping health levels. The empirical activities of this plan includes the implementation of such techniques as video presentation, role play, group problem solving, work in small groups, art programs, guest's oration, scenarios of problem solving, questions and answers and homework at home. Training life skills, also, called coping skills or life are efforts to create an effective way or counseling or utilizing the existing resources to aid a higher number o f people and different target groups where are in need of necessary help. Usually, the process of counseling is in such a way that most of people can't take benefit from it while it is better, training life skills be used to improve the efficiency of counseling.

The purpose of life skills like counseling approaches is to help people identify feelings a values, facilitating decision making, and choices, solving conflicts, knowing God, identify opportunities, effective communication with others, and accepting the responsibility of behaviors. However, it is not like counseling interventions to be in the form of structures verbal communication between the counselor and the patient (Adkins, 1970, 2001). The life skills approach applies a predetermined, clear, designed and structured, program for helping people so that they deal effectually with social and psychological problems, crises and problems related with development period in their lives. Life skills is part of a planned approach for addressing and describing problems implemented as structured, empiricist , and as the parents' effective education , structured education related treatments, picture treatment, workshop of managing stress and professional education program. Life skills also, utilize the methods using counseling approaches (Quote from Khaledian & Hasanvand, 2014).

One of the fundamental presumptions of life skills is that a high number of people face with similar life situations and thus, they accept to solve similar psychological and social problems. Although, the degree to which personal differences are as many as all the number of people and each person has specific conditions, a high number of people who in fact are similar, crises, situations and events, because of physical maturity and growth and social expectations, development duties will take place orderly and specifically from childhood; to juvenile, primary adulthood, adulthood and old ages. Development theorists like (Erikson, 1956; Poyer, 1957; Noels, 1970; Colebrock, 1966; Timy, 1974; Guller, 1972; Levinson et al, 1978) have presented the process of conceptualization and designing of different predictable stages of personal development duties, professional development, social development, verbal development, parental and managing paradigms (Quote from Kaplan & Sadocks, 2007).

The target group is designed by several different variables such as age, sex, economic and social status, race, geographic situation, and specific life conditions. By the target group it is meant, a group that face a special life situation. For example, concerning the age variable, the target group based on which age period they are in, they face with special life situations and based on sex, these situations will reveal some similarities at different ages and conditions in both sexes. Hence, differences and rest of variables determine and define the target group. Of course, a group in a clear age, and sex period and inn different socioeconomic, geographic and race situations, face with special life situations that demand different and clear life skills as well as definite educations. These variables, assist the determination of different problems, in turn, provide the prediction of special problems for

different people based on suitable development traits like crime commitment, home escape, love failure, job removal, or parents causing physical harms to the children.

New psychology seeks not to direct its attention on simple mental problems and instead focuses on positive aspects of life. For years, the subject of happiness has been neglected and such facts as unhappy aspects of human being like depression, anxiety and emotional disorder were emphasized. However, recently, this imbalance has been moderated and currently, immense studies titled subjective feeling of well-being have been focused attention (Furnheim, and Christoofawer, 2007). Happiness is a psychological object which has different definitions. In dictionaries, happiness has been associated with such terms as pleasures, cheerfulness and joyfulness. In psychology discussions, happiness has been categorized as one of the positive emotions which are experienced by man in his life. Happiness increases awareness, creativity and personal activities. A happy man is a healthy, educated and extrovert a d religious and optimistic person (Dine and Lucas, 2000). While analyzing the concept of happiness, theorists have refereed to two cognitive and emotional components. Cognitive components affirm life satisfaction and emotional components imply such states as laughing, humour, and also balance between positive and negative emotions. Regarding paradigms and theories offered about happiness, intrapersonal and interpersonal components have been raised. Sheldon and Lyubommirsky et al. have considered happiness as a balance between positive and negative emotional experiences during a time period. Empirical definition of happiness is referred to dominance of positive effects on the negative effects and life satisfaction in general; hence this entails effective and perceptual aspects (and Lyubommirsky et al. 2005). People enjoying the highest positive emotions, highest participation rate, and greatest meaning in life are the happiest and utilize higher level of lire satisfaction. The Well-being theory does not accept that fact that positivist psychology is a "real thing"; rather it states that such a matter is a concept called "Well-being" which has in its own several measurable elements where each of which is a real thin and each of which gives meaning to well-being (Seligman, 201; tr. by Kamkar and Hezbariaan, 2013).

Happiness is one of the most important positive emotions and pleasant feelings which affects physical and mental health of the society's members. Happiness is placed against negative emotions such as rage, anxiety and depression and is always accompanied with situation, optimism and hope. Happy people evaluate their own skills favorably and remember positive memories more than negative ones. These people are optimistic about the future, they just remember good affairs from the past and have positive views about others. In fact one can say that happy people are unlike depressed people who are anxious and view negative aspects of the affairs and remember negative memoires (Argyll, 2007: Karr, 2009). Pessimistic people consider failures as their own problems and easily get depressed. They are ignorant of their own capacities and fall ill psychically. Optimistic people become reactive by the time problems emerge and take fewer steps in one with social support and maintain social relations. One can think that optimistic descriptive styles are more useful for health (Seligman, 2010).

Stewart et al. (2010) state that happiness is one of the major areas underlined by positive psychology and is recently studied in this filed of children and adolescent population. They maintain that happiness and joyfulness is identification and development of capabilities and using them in love, child rearing and daily affairs and the same capabilities and privileges serve as a protection against miseries and psychological ills. They could be the key to teaching improvement. In relation to parts and components of happiness, it is believed that

happiness has three main components which are as follow:1. Degree of positive emotions, 2. Lack of negative feelings like depression and anxiety, 3. Medium level of satisfaction during a special era of life. In total, results indicate that happy and optimistic people will have a longer life and more healthy and compared to pessimistic people, they become less stressed and depressed (Schulz and Schulz, 2011). Results of a comprehensive survey by Windhaven indicate that relatively happy people live 7-10 more years compared to unhappy people in different countries (Bjornsky, 2008). Happiness as a result of a special and actual experience is something which each and every one of us know it and is constantly described by poets and film makers. Despite all this, happiness is exactly something more than stimulation and arousal of physical and mental emotions and is distinguished from sexual desire. Happiness is exactly the same life satisfaction which involves three components. Cognitive pereption, evaluation and positive feeling (Haller and Hadler, 2006).

Therefore, in accordance with the significance of life skills with various goals of prevention and promote of mental health level, the necessity of training such skills will be made clear to us. In line with expanded social adaptability, life skills teach man how to refrain from frailty and see life issues as resolvable puzzles. In fact, life skills teach humans how to get adapted with their own environments. The art of establishing communication and talks with others is among the initial skills that could provide humans with abilities to refrain from destructive emotions and enjoy more happiness. Impacts of training life skills has been affirmed in promoting social adaptability, interpersonal communications, increasing problem solution skills and coping skills and increasing happiness levels. Therefore, in accordance with the mentioned cases and importance of student life in happiness of students, this research aims to examine the effectiveness of training life skills among students.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research population includes all the PNU B.A. students, Karaj branch who were studying in the educational year of 2013-2014. The statistical sample of the experimental group includes 15 students who voluntarily participated in the life skills workshop and the statistical sample of the control group too includes 15 students who didn't participate in the life skills workshop (they were selected randomly in hand). The experimental group was placed under 8, 120 minute sessions of training life skills (Klinge, 2009) while the control group didn't receive any training. To analyze data, the descriptive statistics (average, standard deviation,…) as well as inferential statistics (covariance analysis) were applied.

Measurement tool

Oxford happiness questionnaire: This questionnaire has 29 items and each question in the test has four choices to which 0-3 is assigned. Thus, the maximum test score is 87 and the minimum score is 0. Argyle (2001) prepared the Oxford happiness questionnaire with the aim of measuring happiness. Alipoor and Noorbala (1999) translated it and standardized it for Iran. In the research, they by conducting a study on 101 B.A. students of Allame Tabatabaee and Shahed Universities measured the reliability and validity of it. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items indicated that all the 29 items were found to be highly correlated with the overall score and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha was 0/93 while the reliability by way of

split was 0/92. As many as 10 experts were asked about the face validity of the questionnaire and they all confirmed the ability of the test for measuring happiness (Hashemi et al, 2013).

Summary of sessions

First session: Preparation and goal setting, familiarity with the members of the group

Second session: Expressing problems, discussing the life skills, and talking on happiness

Third session: Training self- consciousness- empathy (with emphasizing on skills of enhancing self-esteem and confidence level)

Fourth session: Training communication-interpersonal relationship (with emphasizing on interpersonal skills and expressing oneself)

Fifth session: Training decision making-problem solving

Sixth session: Training creative thinking –critical thinking

Seventh session: Training containing emotions –coping with stress

Eighth session: Summary and summing up of the sessions and ending, speaking of what has been learned, reviewing the life skills training.

3. FINDINGS

Table 1. Descriptive information of happiness scores in the pretests and posttest of the control and experimental groups.

Group	Stage	happiness	
		Average	Standard deviation
Experimental	Pretest	41/67	1/84
	Posttest	46/01	2/45
Control	Pretest	42/26	3/2
	Posttest	41/74	1/8

The content of the Table (1) shows the descriptive information in the pretest and posttest with regards to happiness among the control and experiment groups. The average happiness of the people in the experimental group in the pretest is 41/67 and 46/01 in the posttest while the same number for the students' happiness in the other group are 42/26 and 41/74 respectively.

Table 2. The results of the homogeneity of slopes assumption test

Variables	Sum of Squares	d.f	Mean Square	F	Sig	Eta square
Group	6.924	1	6.924	2.664	.115	.093
Pretest	60.820	1	60.820	23.399	.000	.474
Pretest* group	10.808	1	10.808	4.158	.052	.138
Error	67.580	26	2.599			

Findings of Table (2) indicate that the homogeneity of slopes with the value of $F(1,26)$ = 4/16 for happiness has not been significant, hence, the homogeneity assumption of the regression slopes has been fulfilled for the variable of happiness. Given the above data, to examine the hypothesis in question the covariance was used whose results have been provided in the following Table (3).

Table 3. Results of the covariance analysis on the average pretest and posttest averages in the control and experimental groups with regards to happiness.

Variables	Changes sources	Sum of Squares	d.f	Mean Square	F	Sig	Eta square
happiness	Pretest	50.545	1	50.545	17.410	.000	.392
	Group	154.845	1	154.845	53.335	.000	.664
	Error	78.388	27	2.903			

The content of Table (3) indicates that the F value (F = 53/34) and significance level of (0/001) in the variable of group shows that there is difference between the two groups in the posttest. Based on the results, training life skills are effective on the happiness of the students.

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of the current research was to determine the effectiveness of training life skills on the happiness level of students. In accordance with the findings of the research, we can conclude that using life skills could be effective in promoting students' happiness. To explain the finding we can say that dominance over life skills could engender the person to know him

better, comprehend others, establish effective relations with than identify his own negative and positive emptions and bringing them under his own control. H can also base on life skills resolve his problems and not to think cliché forms (Naseri, 2008). To explain the findings e can also say that life skills refers to a large group of social and mental skills as well a interpersonal relations which can help people adopt their decisions more rationally, establish relations effectively and expand their own coping styles and manage their own personal affairs that his life leads to ore happiness and happiness means more physical, mental and social comfort. Again to explain the findings we can say that life skills refers to a large group of social and mental skills as well as interpersonal relations which can help people adopt their decisions more rationally, establish relations effectively and expand their own coping styles and manage their own personal affairs that his life leads to ore happiness and happiness.

Scholars of this theory maintains that people get depressed because their social environment does not allow for the smaller positive enhancement; most events which cause depression like death of a beloved one, failure in profession and lacking health will reduce the possibility of ordinary enhancements. Of course, personal factors could have roles in emergence of both of these states. For example, in depression, the affected person might lose the desire in everything and life in whole and to lack any desire in the whole (Even most of the time these people have no tendency to reaching silence and mobility and have desire for death). On the other hand, due to kind of attitude and depressed thinking, they see themselves and the world so negatively where this would prevent them from perceiving their own wants. This kind of thinking (negative look at one, world and future) which is a kind of a product of depression and could be depressing.

This will increase personal depression. In other words, the depressed person due to his depression has a negative look and therefore, he field depressed. On the other hand, this negative look at himself, the world and the future and feeling of hopelessness will lead to more depression in the person. This faulty cycle will repeat itself continuously and generates depression.

This despair could become so prevalence tin the person that no hope for treatment is ever thought of and he sees the only option in finishing the life. As a result of training life skills, this negative situation will be removed. Due to the fact that life skills are trainable and acquirable, it is hoped that given accomplishments and results of this research. One can recommend ways through which humans can enjoy happiness and organize obstacles intelligently so that students are led to a more healthy life. It is evident, that in accordance with the significance or role of life skills on developing talents a d educating effective student force for constructing a clear life, training life skills will assume a special importance.

5. CONCLUSION

Training life skills is effective on students' happiness. Thus, it is possible low happiness is one of the individual factors affecting mental disorders as well as educational drought, thus ways for increasing happiness among studies will be significant. In fact, life skills will boost planning for meeting goals and increase happiness.

References

[1] Adkins, W. R,. (2001). Journey to success/Employment master class: The Adkins Life skills program (show No.208); Your Life skills will enhance your job skills (show No. 210); The true meaning of self-esteem (show No. 212). Trenton, NJ: JOBCAST, New Jersey Workplace Literacy Programs, New Jersey Public Television (NJN). www.njn.net/workforce/jobcasttv20014.   htmlhttp://www.adkinslifeskills.org/ index.shtml.

[2] Adkins, W. R. (1970). Life skills : structural counseling for the disadvantaged. *Personal and Guidance Journal* 49(2); 108-110 .

[3] Alimardani, M. (2006). The impact of training social skills on the students' mental health in save city, Research deputy ship at Islamic Azad University, Save branch.

[4] Alipoor, A., & Noorbala, A. (1999). A preliminary evaluation of the validity and reliability of the oxford happiness questionnaire in students in the universities of Tehran. *IJPCP*; 5 (1and 2): 55-66.

[5] Argyle, M. (2001). The psychology of happiness. 2nd ed. London: Rutledge Press, Taylor & Francis Group; 18-22.

[6] Argyll, M. (2007). Psychology of happiness, Tr. Masoud Anaraki, Hamid Taher Neshat Doost, Hasan Palahang, Fateme Bahrami, Jihad Daneshgahi publication, Isfahan Unit.

[7] Bjornskov, C. (2008). Social Capital and Happiness in the United States", *Applied research quality life* 3: 43-62.

[8] Diener E., Lucas E.R. (2000). Subjective emotional well being. Handbook of emotion. New York : Guilford, 324-337.

[9] Emaminaeeni N. (2004). Stress. National rehabilitation organization: deputyship for the cultural and prevention affairs.

[10] Haller, M., & Markus, H. (2006). How Social Relations and Structures Can Produce Happiness and Unhappiness: An international comparative analysis. *Social indicators Research* 75: 169-216.

[11] Hashemi F., Ali Pour A., Fili A. (2013). Affectiveness of treatment of stress management (cognitive behavioral), on happiness of infertile women. Journal of Armaghane Danesh, *Scientific and research journal at the university of Yasouj Medical Sciences,* 18(9): 678-686.

[12] Kaplan H., Sadocks B. (2007). Synopsis of psychiatry. Baltimor: Williams & Wikins.

[13] Karr, A. (2008). Positive psychology: science of happiness sand strength of humans, Tr. by Hasan Pasha Sharifi, Jafar Najafi Zand in cooperation with Bagher Sanaee. Tehran: Sokhan publication.

[14] Klinge, C. (2009). Life skills. Tehran: Specialized media publications.

[15] Lyubomersky S., Sheldon K.M., Schkade D. (2005). Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture Of Sustainable Change, *Review Of General Psychology,* 2; 111-113.

[16] Lucas, M.ioshi A., Diener E. (2003). Personality culture and subjective well − being. *Annual Review of Personality,* 54, 403-425.

[17] Naseri, H. (2007). Life skills. Tehran: Deputyship for cultural and prevention affairs , National rehabilitation organization.

[18] Naseri, H., & Nickparvar, R. (2004). Investigating the life skills on the mental health of the students. The second general seminar of the mental health of the students, Tehran: Tarbyat Modares University.

[19] Schultz, D. P., Schultz, S. E. (2011). Theories of Personality. Tehran: Publication Nashre Viraysh.

[20] Seligman, M. (2010). From pessimism to optimism: how to evolve our own life and mind, Tr. by Mehdi Gharache Daghi. Tehran: Peikan publication.

[21] Seligman, M. A. P. (2013). Development of positivism psychology, (new perception of happiness san psychology theory), Tr. by Amir Kamkar and Sekline Hezbarian, Tehran: Ravan publication.

[22] Stewart, M. E., Watson, R., Clark, A., Ebmeier, K. P., & Deary, I. J. (2010). A hierarchy of happiness? Mokken scaling analysis of the Oxford Happiness Inventory. *Pers Individ Dif.* 48(7): 845-8.

[23] UNICEF (2003). Which skills are life skills? www.life skills based education (Jun 2007).