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The Effectiveness of Life Skills Training on Academic Boredom and Compassion in High School Students of Zahedan

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of life skills training on academic boredom and compassion in high school students of Zahedan (Iran). This study was a quasi-experimental method that was performed with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of this research includes all high school students of Zahedan in 2022. Sixty students were selected by accessible sampling and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, the package of Life skills training was performed in nine sessions of 90 minutes. Participants completed the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) and Academic Boredom Scale (Pekrun et al., 2005). Univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used for analysis the data. The results indicated there is a significant difference between the two groups in terms of mean scores of academic boredom and compassion. According to the findings, the use of Life skills training increased the compassion and decreased the academic boredom. In general, the research findings support the role of life skills training in increasing emotional outputs such as compassion and reducing negative characteristics such as academic boredom in students.

Keywords: Academic Boredom, Compassion, Life skills training, High school students

Introduction

Adolescence is a time in life that simultaneously with the ever-increasing developments and challenges. In this period, there have been major and fundamental changes in the nature of human social life, which have caused the emergence of abnormalities and social harms and threaten the health of the individual and society. In the meantime, one of the vulnerable subgroups of the society is students. The crucial phase in human life is the period of adolescence which is the same time as the period of high school education (Eccleston et al., 2021). In fact, schools are social institutions and represent society's culture, worldview, customs, skills and knowledge transfer (Haimi Adnan & Smith, 2001). In this context, the training of life skills, which is considered an intervening factor, can be based on the principle that teenagers have the right to be empowered and need to be able to defend themselves and their interests in difficult life situations (Botvin & Griffin, 2004). These types of programs have a general view on the prevention of health risks and are not limited to training limited to one skill. According to the definition of the World Health Organization, life skills are psychosocial abilities for adaptive and effective behavior that enable people to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of daily life and improves their physical and mental health status (Ndetei et al., 2019).

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The World Health Organization considers life skills to include a person's ability to behave positively and adapt to others, which enables him to face daily challenges and needs effectively (Mohammadkhani & Hahtami, 2011). UNICEF (2012) also defines life skills as a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills that can help people make informed decisions, establish relationships effectively, coping skills, personal management and live a healthy and productive life (Nasheeda, Abdullah, Krauss, & Ahmed, 2019). Life skills can direct personal actions, actions related to others and actions related to the surrounding environment in a way that leads to greater health (Yankey & Biswas, 2012). More health here refers to more physical-psychological and social comfort (Yankey & Biswas, 2012). The most important life skills include problem solving skills, decision-making, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, self-awareness, dealing with unpleasant emotions and coping with stress (Goudas & Giannoudis, 2008). The World Health Organization (1997) divides life skills into three basic dimensions: cognitive skills, emotional skills, and communication and interpersonal skills (Hanbury & Malti, 2011). Studies have indicated that life skills effected on students outcomes in academic settings such as mental health, self-esteem, emotional intelligence and academic boredom (Jamali et al., 2016; Jie, Roslan, Muhamad, Khambari, & Zaremohzzabieh, 2021; Lolaty, Ghahari, Tirgari, & Fard, 2012; Sobhi-Gharamaleki & Rajabi, 2010). Academic boredom refers to the emergence of negative attitude, behavior and feeling in the face of intense psychological pressures related to work, and it mostly appears in people who spend long hours of the day in close contact with other people (Vogel-Walcutt, Fiorella, Carper, & Schatz, 2012). People with high boredom are worn out after some time and symptoms of exhaustion including emotional fatigue, depersonalization and loss of personal performance are observed in them (Goetz & Hall, 2014). Boredom is a negative and passive emotion that is induced by experiences such as having unpleasant feelings, low physiological arousal, perceived lack of cognitive stimulation, thoughts unrelated to the task, mental prolongation of time, and impulses to escape the situation (Tze, Daniels, & Klassen, 2016). Eastwood, Frischen, Fenske, and Smilek (2012) documented that boredom is a negative feeling whereby one cannot profoundly engage in a task, is incompetent to maintain required attention, and attributes an external factor as a reason of this aversive emotion. It seems that the chronic aspects of students' boredom have complex roots that depend on teachers' strategies to relieve boredom and increase their motivation level (Nett, Goetz, & Hall, 2011).

Another psychological construct that was related to life skills domain is self-compassion. Self-compassion refers to caring and empathic understanding of oneself instead of adopting a harsh and critical view of oneself (Neff & Germer, 2013). This concept is a new approach to psychological well-being and is rooted in the beliefs of Buddhism (Germer & Neff, 2013). The concept of self-compassion simply means compassion turned inward and refers to how we relate to ourselves in instances of perceived failure, insufficiency, or personal suffering (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion is related to feelings of self-love and concern and care for others, but it does not mean self-centeredness or preferring one's needs to others (Neff, 2003). This psychological construct is conceptualized as containing three core components: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus

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isolation, and mindfulness versus over identification (Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008). Researches have shown that teaching life skills can have an effect on the self-compassion of students (Egan, O'hara, Cook, & Mantzios, 2022; Smeets, Neff, Alberts, & Peters, 2014).

Bahramian, Sami, and Hajkhodadadi (2020) found in a research that the treatment based on self-compassion was effective on the resilience and happiness of students. Haghdoost (2019) has shown that the most important factors affecting high school students' boredom are: physical problems and discomforts, lack of information about university courses, lack of experienced teachers, and problems and conflicts of parents. The results of Amirianzadeh and Besharati (2018) indicated that life skills training had a significant effect on the social skills and academic performance of female students. Ghafarian and Khayatan (2018) found that compassion-based therapy training did not have a significant effect on the self-concept of female students, but it had a significant effect on the self-expression of female students. Yazdani, Esmaeili, and Namdari (2018) in a research showed that positive mindfulness training was effective on self-compassion in male adolescents with symptoms of depression. Porzour (2018) in a research showed that it is possible to benefit from mindfulness training based on the Islamic approach as a suitable training program to improve well-being and reduce negative emotions. In a research, Irannezhad (2017) came to the conclusion that teaching life skills improves the mental health of students and is effective in the formation of their identity. Esmaeilinasab, Malek Mohamadi, and Ghiasvand (2011) investigate effectiveness of training life skills on adolescents' students and indicated that life skills training lead to significant increase of self-esteem in experimental group in contrast to control group subjects.

Due to the importance of teaching the necessary life skills for children and teenagers, this has always been one of the high goals of the official education system, because growth and development have been achieved via teaching these skills, and it has led to adaptation and communication. Since the critical years of social development of children and adolescents are comparable to the school years in elementary and high school, and students spend these crucial years in school, it is inevitable that the school should provide suitable opportunities for the development of their life skills. With regard to learning life skills to increase mental and social health, as well as the critical conditions of adolescence, especially for the vulnerable group of high school teenagers, it is necessary to conduct research in this regard. Accordingly, the present research has investigated the effect of teaching life skills on academic boredom and self-compassion among high school students in Zahedan city.

Material and Methods

The research design is a semi-experimental pre-test-post-test with a control group. The statistical population of this research included all female high school students in Zahedan city (Iran) in 2022. Participants were 60 female high school students were purposefully selected and then randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The participants answered academic boredom and self-compassion questionnaires in the pre-test and post-test. In the experimental group, life skills training package was carried out for two months in ten 90-minute sessions while the control group did not

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receive any training during this period. The summary of training sessions is presented in Table 1. Two questionnaires were used to collect data:

Academic Boredom Scale (Pekrun et al., 2002): This questionnaire was designed by Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, and Perry (2002) which has 22 items and its purpose is to evaluate the level of academic boredom and its dimensions (class boredom, learning boredom). Respondents should indicate their answer on a five-point Likert scale (from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree). This questionnaire has two dimensions of class boredom (including questions 1 to 11) and learning boredom (including questions 12 to 22). In the research of Delavarpour and Hosseinchari (2016) to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient and confirmatory factor analysis were used and its validity and reliability were confirmed. The results of Pekrun et al. (2002) showed that the questionnaire has an acceptable internal consistency and its Cronbach's alpha is 0.92. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was 0.78.

Self-Compassion Questionnaire (Neff; 2003): This questionnaire was designed by Neff (2003) and has 26 items. Respondents should indicate their answer on a five-point Likert scale (never, 1, to always, 5). In order to obtain the total score of the questionnaire, items 1, 8, 11, 16, 21, 4, 13, 18, 25, 2, 6 ,20 and 24 are reversed to obtain a total score of self-compassion. The minimum score is 26 and the maximum is 130. Neff (2003) has reported its test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.93 and its internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha of 0.92. In the study of In the present study, Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was 0.78.

Table 1. Summary of life skills training sessions (World Health Organization, 1993)

Session	Content
First session	Introduction, teaching self-awareness skills, through self-awareness, students will be able to deal with many of their characteristics, including material self, active self, social self, positive and negative characteristics, desires, needs, limitations, talents.
Second session	The skill of empathy, the skill of empathizing in schools is very important for better communication of students with each other and teachers, and all students by learning this skill can put themselves in the place of their classmate and his conditions including physical, mental, appearance disorders and better understand behavior.
Third session	Effective communication skill, in this skill, students learns how to communicate correctly and effectively with their classmates and teachers. They also learn to follow a certain pattern in the type of speech or writing they use.
Fourth Session	Interpersonal skills, students should be able to communicate with each other and maintain these relationships.
Fifth meeting	Decision-making skills, in this skill, students get to know a variety of decision-making methods, including emotional, emergency, avoidance, reactive, obedient, logical, etc., and learn what actions to take when faced with different decisions.
Sixth session	Problem solving skills, students at every age face different problems in school and outside. But they don't have the ability to solve these problems, but if they learn problem solving skills, they will remove the obstacles in their way without any problems.
Seventh session	Creative thinking skills, in this skill, students learn to change their usual way of thinking, think in a different way, go beyond their conventional experiences and create solutions that are special to them.
Eighth session	Critical thinking skills, if students learn this skill, they can ask appropriate questions instead of being neutral in class and have a more effective presence in class.
Ninth session	Emotion coping skills, this skill means knowing emotions and their impact on behavior, as well as learning how to manage intense and problematic emotions such as anger.
Tenth session	Stress coping skills, in this skill, students learn how to deal with pressures and tensions caused by everyday life as well as other stresses.

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Results

The mean and standard deviation of the research variables in the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the research variables in the experimental and control groups

Group	Variable	Pretest		Posttest	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Experimental	Class boredom	21.60	5.76	12.27	2.91
	Learning boredom	20.87	3.61	11.30	1.91
	Total academic boredom	42.46	7.50	23.56	3.04
Control	Class boredom	20.37	6.13	18.67	5.14
	Learning boredom	20.50	7.91	16.93	5.60
	Total academic boredom	40.86	11.95	35.60	9.06
Experimental	Self-Kindness	16.60	1.77	21.06	2.49
	Self-Judgment	13.86	1	17.73	1.59
	Mindfulness	18.53	2.63	21.96	1.56
	Over-Identification	13.10	2.09	16.86	2.08
	Common Humanity	12.86	2.96	17.13	1.52
	Isolation	12.90	2.94	17.20	1.56
	Total self-compassion	87.66	7.53	111.96	5.33
Control	Self-Kindness	15.60	2.72	17.53	2.89
	Self-Judgment	14.73	1.61	15.80	1.76
	Mindfulness	17.66	2.21	18	2.19
	Over-Identification	13.03	1.35	14	1.85
	Common Humanity	13	1.96	14.06	1.55
	Isolation	13	1.96	14.20	1.47
	Total self-compassion	87.03	7.61	93.60	8.28

The first hypothesis states that teaching life skills is significantly effective on the academic boredom in high school students. For this purpose, the data were analyzed with ANCOVA test (Table 3). Before running ANCOVA, its assumptions such as normality of data and homogeneity of variance (Levin's test) were examined and confirmed.

Table 3. Results of ANCOVA analysis to compare academic burnout in experimental group and control group

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Pretest	1676.919	1	1676.919	97.97	.01	.326
Academic boredom	2477.889	1	2477.889	144.76	.01	.717
Error	975.648	57	17.11			
Total	57335	60				

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Table (3) shows the results of ANCOVA analysis to compare the academic boredom scores of students in the experimental and control groups. The obtained F value is equal to 144.76, which is significant at the 99% confidence level (P< .01). Also, the effect size was 71.7%. Based on this and considering the lower average scores of the experimental group in the post-test, it can be concluded that life skills training had a significant effect on academic boredom and reduced students' academic boredom.

The second hypothesis of the research states that a life skill training has an effect on the academic boredom components in high school students. For this purpose, the data was analyzed by MANCOVA test (Table 4). Before performing MANCOVA, its assumptions such as normality of data, homogeneity of variance (Levin's test), M-box test (Box's Test for Equivalence of Covariance Matrices) and homogeneity of regression slope were examined and confirmed.

Table 4. Results of MANCOVA analysis to compare academic boredom components in experimental and control groups

Effect	Test	Value	F	Effect DF	Error DF	p	Eta
Group	Pillai's trace	.735	76.19	2	55	.001	.735
	Wilks' Lambda	.265	76.19	2	55	.001	.735

According to table 4, the value of Pillai's trace (0.735) and the value of Wilks's lambda (0.265) are significant at the 99% confidence level (P< .01). Also, the effect size was 73.5%. In this way, there is a significant difference in the components of academic boredom of the students of the the experimental and control groups in the post-test. In order to investigate more precisely the difference between the two groups, an ANCOVA embedded in MANCOVA was performed. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The results of ANCOVA embedded in MANCOVA to compare the academic boredom components of experimental and control groups

Variable	Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Class boredom	Between group	735.463	1	735.463	106.78	.001	.656
	Within group	385.685	56	6.887			
	Total	15980	60				
Learning boredoms	Between group	498.354	1	498.354	48.02	.001	.462
	Within group	581.117	56	10.377			
	Total	13449	60				

According to Table 5, the F value obtained for the class boredom component (106.78) and for the learning boredom component (48.02) is significant at the 99% confidence level (P< .01). Also, the effect size of life skills training on class boredom component was equal to (.656) and the effect size of life skills training on learning boredom component was equal to (.462). Considering the lower average scores of the experimental group in the post-test phase and the size of the effect of life skills training on the components of academic boredom, it can be concluded that life skills training has a significant

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effect on the components of academic boredom and has reduced the boredom of the class and the boredom of the students' learning.

The third hypothesis of the study states that teaching life skills has been significantly effective on students' self-compassion. For this purpose, the data were analyzed with ANCOVA test (Table 6). Before running ANCOVA, its assumptions such as normality of data and homogeneity of variance (Levin's test) were examined and confirmed.

Table 6. The results of ANCOVA analysis to compare self-compassion in the experimental group and the control group

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Pretest	284.373	1	284.373	6.40	.01	.10
Self-compassion	4949.603	1	4949.603	111.43	.001	.662
Error	2531.793	57	44.417			
Total	641741	60				

According to Table 6, the obtained F value is equal to 111.43, which is significant at the 99% confidence level (P< .01). Also, the effect size was 66.2%. Based on this and considering the higher average scores of the experimental group in the post-test, it can be concluded that teaching life skills has had a significant effect on the self-compassion in high school students.

According to the fourth hypothesis of the research, life skill training has been significantly effective on the self-compassion components in high school students. For this purpose, the data was analyzed by MANCOVA test (Table 7). Before performing MANCOVA, its assumptions such as normality of data, homogeneity of variance (Levin's test), M-box test (Box's Test for Equivalence of Covariance Matrices) and homogeneity of regression slope were examined and confirmed.

Table 7. The results of MANCOVA analysis to compare the components of self-compassion in the experimental and control groups

Effect	Test	Value	F	Effect DF	Error DF	p	Eta
Group	Pillai's trace	.656	14.90	6	47	.001	.656
	Wilks' Lambda	.344	14.90	6	47	.001	.656

According to Table 7, the value of the Pillai's trace (0.656) and the value of the Wilks' Lambda (0.344) are significant at the 99% confidence level (P<0.01). Also, the effect size was 65.6%. Based on this, there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the components of students' self-compassion in the post-test. In order to investigate more precisely the difference between the two groups, an ANCOVA embedded in MANCOVA was performed. The results are presented in Table 8.

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Table 8. The results of ANCOVA embedded in MANCOVA to compare the components of self-compassion in the experimental and control groups.

Variable	Source	SS	DF	MS	F	p	Eta
Self-Kindness	Between group	195.042	1	195.42	27.25	.001	.344
	Within group	372.097	52	7.156			
	Total	22960	60				
Self-Judgment	Between group	62.119	1	62.119	24.22	.001	.318
	Within group	133.335	52	2.564			
	Total	17088	60				
Mindfulness	Between group	174.191	1	174.191	54.03	.001	.510
	Within group	167.623	52	3.224			
	Total	24407	60				
Over-Identification	Between group	67.027	1	67.027	23.22	.001	.309
	Within group	150.49	52	2.886			
	Total	14640	60				
Common Humanity	Between group	103.536	1	103.536	69.37	.001	.572
	Within group	77.603	52	1.492			
	Total	14880	60				
Isolation	Between group	98.169	1	98.169	63.31	.001	.549
	Within group	80.628	52	1.551			
	Total	15058	60				

According to the table 8, the F value obtained for the self-kindness component (27.25), self-judgment component (24.22), mindfulness component (54.03), over identification component (22.23), common humanity component (69.37) and isolation component (63.31) is significant at 99% confidence level (P< .01). Also, the size of the effect of life skills training on the component of self-kindness is equal to (0.344), the size of the effect of life skills training on the component of self-judgment is equal to (0.318), the size of the effect of life skills training on the component Mindfulness is equal to (0.510), the size of the effect of life skills training on the component of over identification is equal to (0.309), the size of the effect of life skills training on the component of common humanity is equal to (0.572) and the effect size of life skills training on the isolation component was equal to (0.549). Considering the higher average scores of the experimental group in the post-test stage and the size of the effect of life skills training on self-compassion components, it can be concluded that life skills training has a significant effect on self-compassion components and has increased the components of students' self-compassion.

Discussion

This research was conducted with the aim of determining the effect of life skills training on academic boredom and self-compassion in high school students. The examining of the first and second hypothesis revealed that life skills training had a significant effect on students' academic boredom and its components and reduced students' academic boredom with an effect size of 71%. These findings are in line with the researches of Irannezhad (2017), Sobhi-Gharamaleki and Rajabi (2010) and Haghdoost (2019).

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In explaining the findings of the research, it can be said that psychologists believe that life skills including self-awareness, communication, decision-making, cooperation, interpersonal relationships, coping with stress, empathy and critical thinking are examples of daily life skills and this skills are a continuous process during which a person changes his behavior with the aim of creating an effective relationship with the environment, other people and himself. The basis of life skills is to create a balance between one's own desires and society's expectations, which can affect all aspects of a person's life. On the other hand, the basic goal of any educational system is to teach people the necessary skills in daily life so that they can play a useful role in society as an efficient member. The findings about the second hypothesis showed that the effect size of life skills training on class boredom component was equal to (0.656) and the effect size of life skills training on learning boredom component was equal to (0.462). Therefore, teaching life skills has also had an impact on the components of academic boredom among high school students and has reduced the boredom of class and learning among students. In explaining these results, it can be said that since life skills training has a positive effect on academic performance and can improve various dimensions of performance and academic progress, life skills training includes emotional, cognitive, physiological and behavioral components through providing methods such as repetition and practice strategy, semantic expansion strategy and organization strategy help students to show a higher level of memory performance, attention, completing academic assignments and progress in education.

The examining of the third and fourth hypothesis showed that the effect size of life skills training on students' self-compassion was 66%. Therefore, teaching life skills has an effect on the self-compassion and its components in high school students and has increased the self-compassion in students. These findings are in line with the researches of Amirianzadeh and Besharati (2018), Bahramian et al. (2020), Lolaty et al. (2012) and Jamali et al. (2016).

In explaining the findings of the research, it can be said that self-compassion as a form of communication with oneself increases the effort of a person and people with high self-compassion work efficiently in different and challenging situations. By being kind to themselves, they recognize their merits and overcome problems. Also, these people have positive focus, regular planning, and self-acceptance, which can be improved through life skills training.

Teaching life skills for teenagers has been used both as a way to improve mental health and as a tool to prevent psycho-social harms such as preventing drug use, violence, risky behaviors, etc. In general, teaching life skills is a powerful tool in the hands of school mental health administrators to empower students in psycho-social dimensions. These skills help people to act positively, protect themselves and their society from psycho-social harm, and improve the level of mental health of themselves and society. On the other hand, compassion requires having a positive attitude towards oneself and others in response to difficulties and fears. Self-compassion has a strong relationship with positive psychological factors such as psychological well-being, optimism and happiness.

The use of self-report questionnaires and conducting the study on female high school students were the most important limitations of this study. According to the results of the research, it is suggested that

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the effect of life skills training on other motivational and emotional variables such as empathy and self-awareness, should be investigated in future researches. Also, the sample studied in the current research was limited to female high school students in Zahedan city, for this reason, it is suggested to conduct a similar study on male students in other educational levels.

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