
Self-improvement programs for children

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Summary:

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of a self-esteem enhancement program on self-esteem and peer attachment among elementary school children exhibiting problematic behaviors. **Methods:** This quasi-experimental study employed a nonequivalent control group pretest-post-test design. A total of 47 fourth-grade students participated, with the program delivered for 45 minutes once a week over 12 sessions in a classroom setting for the experimental group. The Child Problem-Behavior Screening Questionnaire assessed problematic behavior, Rosenberg's Self-esteem Questionnaire measured self-esteem, and the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment measured peer attachment. Assessments were conducted immediately after the program (post 1) and one month later (post 2). Differences in self-esteem and peer attachment between groups were analyzed using repeated measures analysis of variance. **Results:** Most experimental group participants were 10 years old (62.5%, aged 10-11), male (52.0%), and had a middle-grade point average (64.0%). The experimental group's self-esteem and peer attachment scores were significantly higher than those of the control group. **Conclusions:** The self-esteem improvement program in this study effectively enhanced self-esteem and peer attachment in elementary school children. The program facilitated peer recognition and strengthened connections. It should be implemented as a formal and consistent initiative.

Abstract:

The research emphasizes self-improvement strategies tailored to enhance the emotional well-being of elementary school children, particularly focusing on aspects like self-esteem and peer relationships. This initiative is particularly targeted at students from low-income backgrounds and those facing learning difficulties. The goal is to cultivate a positive sense of self-worth and facilitate meaningful connections with peers, both of which are foundational for healthy personal development and academic progress. The program recognizes the significance of positive self-esteem and strong peer attachments in fostering resilience and effective stress management among children. It acknowledges that children with a healthy self-esteem tend to navigate personal challenges more adeptly and exhibit better adaptation to school life. Moreover, fostering positive peer relationships contributes significantly to students' overall well-being and

academic performance. While various interventions, such as art therapy and bibliotherapy, have shown promise in bolstering self-esteem and peer relationships, previous research has primarily overlooked elementary school children exhibiting behavioral challenges. This study seeks to address this gap by specifically targeting such children and comparing the effectiveness of the program with a control group. By including both experimental and control groups, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact. This approach allows for a rigorous evaluation of the program's effectiveness in fostering positive self-esteem and peer relationships among elementary school children facing behavioral difficulties.

Keywords: Self-esteem program, Children, behavior, peer attachment, learning disabilities, positive self-esteem, improvement.

1. Introduction:

The numbers of families experiencing divorce, separation, or single parenthood have been on the rise, leading to a decrease in the school-aged population. These shifts in family structures and declining school enrollments are believed to contribute to an increase in negative developmental concerns, such as depression, neurosis, and learning disabilities. Additionally, there are worries about problematic behavioral patterns like lying, hyperactivity, and disruptive behaviors. Close to 60% of school children have been observed displaying various emotional and behavioral issues, while 33% have shown psychosomatic problems. Problematic behaviors in children are defined as inappropriate responses when personal needs are not met or accepted by others. Children exhibiting such behaviors often withdraw, appear helpless, and resist participating in school activities. They also tend to struggle with low self-esteem and have difficulty adjusting to social and academic aspects of school life. Research indicates that self-esteem tends to be lower in older elementary school students (around ages 11 to 12) compared to younger ones (grades 1 to 3), possibly due to increased stress and awareness at this age. Various interventions, including group art therapy, have shown positive outcomes in improving self-esteem and fostering peer relationships. In response to observed problematic behaviors, a program was implemented specifically for elementary school children. This program was designed to be easily accessible, conveniently provided right after school hours. Its effectiveness was evaluated by comparing outcomes with a control group, allowing for a thorough assessment of its impact on addressing the identified issues.

2. Objectives of the Research:

- To investigate the effects of a self-improvement program on self-esteem and peer attachment in elementary school children with observed problematic behavior.
- Determine which elements of self-improvement programs (e.g., mindfulness, goal-setting, time management) are most beneficial for children's growth.
- Investigate how self-improvement programs influence children's self-esteem, resilience, and overall mental health.
- Study the long-term effects of self-improvement programs on children's personal and academic trajectories.

- Investigate the correlation between self-esteem improvement programs and children's academic achievements and school engagement.
- Determine which specific elements or activities within these programs contribute most significantly to improvements in self-esteem.
- Assess the role and impact of parental involvement in the success of self-esteem improvement programs.
- Identify best practices for the implementation of self-esteem improvement programs in various settings (e.g., schools, community centers).
- Identify barriers to participation in self-improvement programs and propose strategies to overcome these obstacles.
- Evaluate how these programs influence children's social interactions and peer relationships.

3.Main Topic:

1.3 About the Study:

The self-esteem enhancement program spanned 12 weeks, comprising a total of 12 sessions lasting 45 minutes each, targeting schoolchildren exhibiting problematic behaviors. The aim of the study was to assess the impact of this program on participants' self-esteem and peer relationships. Designed with a preventive focus, the program comprised five key components: introduction, self-understanding, personal relationships, competence improvement, and conclusion. Notably, it was tailored for group settings, making it practical for elementary school settings. Unlike previous self-esteem programs that generally focused on overall self-esteem and body image, this program specifically emphasized self-understanding and interpersonal connections. Post-program evaluation revealed a significant increase in both self-esteem and peer attachment among participants, aligning with findings from prior studies to some extent. However, certain aspects of the program were subject to feedback. For instance, the initial two weeks, dedicated to self-introductions, were reported as insufficient by many students who expressed shyness and difficulty in fully engaging during the sessions. Consequently, it was suggested that a longer introductory period beyond two weeks could facilitate greater familiarity and comfort among students, especially in fourth-grade cohorts. Additionally, many students expressed a desire for consistent counseling opportunities upon completion of the program, as existing resources such as teacher or school nurse consultations were limited. This underscored the need for dedicated counseling spaces within schools to ensure ongoing support for

improving self-esteem among students. Based on these insights, future iterations of self-esteem programs should consider extending introductory periods and establishing dedicated counseling rooms to enhance their effectiveness in elementary school settings.

2.3 Hypothesis of the study:

Hypothesis 1: suggests that students engaging in the self-esteem enhancement program (experimental group) will demonstrate elevated levels of self-esteem in comparison to those who do not partake in the program (control group).

Hypothesis 2: posits that students involved in the experimental group will exhibit greater peer attachment levels compared to their counterparts in the control group.

4. Methodology:

1.4 Study design:

This research employs a quasi-experimental approach using a non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. Its objective is to examine the impact of a self-esteem enhancement initiative on self-esteem and peer attachment among fourth-grade elementary school students displaying behavioral challenges.

2.4 Setting and Samples:

A total of 25 students from school A were assigned to the experimental group, while 25 students from school B were designated as the control group through random selection using pitching pennies. The study's inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) students in fourth grade at an elementary school; (b) scoring above 13 points on the Child Problem-Behavior Screening Questionnaire (CPSQ); (c) capable of verbal communication; (d) no prior participation in a similar program. The decision to target fourth-grade students stemmed from their comparatively lower self-esteem levels within the elementary school population and the significance of this grade in peer group formation.

Initially, 50 students participated in the experimental group and 25 in the control group. However, three students from the control group withdrew from the study due to personal reasons such as vacation, resulting in 25 students completing the study in the experimental group and 22 in the control group. The CPSQ assessments were conducted by the principal investigator (PI) and a research assistant.

3.4 Ethical considerations:

The research received approval from the Institutional Review Board committee at D Hospital of K University (Approval No. 12e47). Data collection commenced following this approval. Participants were informed of their right to opt out of the study if they felt uncomfortable. All materials, including questionnaires and consent forms, were securely stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office to uphold participant confidentiality.

4.4 Measurements

The Child Problem-Behavior Screening Questionnaire (CPSQ) was employed to evaluate the extent of problematic behaviors in school children. This questionnaire consists of 26 questions across five categories: internalization problems (5 questions), externalization problems (10 questions), cognitive problems (3 questions), abuse problems (2 questions), and psychosomatic problems (6 questions). Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (none) to 3 (very serious). Higher scores indicate a greater level of problematic behaviors, with a cutoff score of 13 suggesting the need for a more thorough professional evaluation. The questionnaire's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of .85, consistent with the value obtained in this study.

5.4 Parts/stages of the Program:

In this study, the self-esteem improvement program was divided into five segments: introduction, self-understanding, personal relationships, sense of purpose/competence, and conclusion. The initial two weeks were specifically designed as an ice-breaker period for students to introduce themselves and get to know each other. However, many students reported feeling shy and found it challenging to engage in the sessions initially, expressing a desire for more than two weeks to build closer connections with their peers. Based on this feedback, it was determined that an introductory period longer than two weeks would be more effective for fourth-grade students to develop rapport and share experiences throughout the 12 sessions.

Additionally, many participants requested a consistent time and place for counseling after the program, highlighting the inadequacy of current counseling provisions by teachers or school nurses. To address this, it may be necessary to establish dedicated counseling rooms outside of school health offices to provide consistent support for improving self-esteem among students.

In this study, nearly half of the participants in both the experimental and control groups came from single-child families (44% and 41%, respectively), exhibited high levels of school-related stress (52% and 59%), and had limited daily conversation time with their parents (39 minutes and 40 minutes per day). The

participants, who scored over 13 points on the CPSQ, displayed problematic behaviors. These findings align with previous research indicating that high levels of school stress and poor parent-child relationships are linked to problematic behaviors, self-esteem issues, peer attachment difficulties, and school adjustment problems.

The study underscores the need for self-esteem improvement programs and consistent personal counseling to manage students' stress and enhance their relationships with their parents by fostering inclusive family engagement. Generally, 12-27% of schoolchildren exhibit psycho-health issues, yet only a fraction receive appropriate healthcare management. Problematic behaviors in children often go unnoticed and can persist, becoming more pronounced over time and leading to significant school and social maladjustments if not addressed. Therefore, it is crucial to proactively prevent and manage such behaviors. Furthermore, self-esteem levels in fourth and fifth graders are typically the lowest in elementary schools, emphasizing the need for developing and implementing self-esteem improvement programs.

5. Results of study:

- While previous self-esteem programs primarily focused on infants, low-income school children, and students with learning disabilities, their findings align with the current study in terms of enhancing participants' self-esteem. This study suggests that the self-esteem program is effective in boosting self-esteem and fostering positive peer attachments by promoting desirable friendships. The results demonstrated a significant increase in both self-esteem and peer attachment after completing the program, consistent with previous research, despite differences in program content.
- In this study, nearly half of the participants in both the experimental and control groups were only children (44% and 41%, respectively), experienced high levels of school-related stress (52% and 59%), and had less than an hour of daily conversation time with their parents (39 minutes and 40 minutes). The participants, who scored over 13 points on the CPSQ, exhibited problematic behaviors. These findings are consistent with previous research, highlighting the connection between high school stress, poor parent-child relationships, problematic behaviors, self-esteem, peer attachment, and school adjustment.

Thus, there is a clear need for self-esteem improvement programs and consistent personal counseling to manage students' stress and enhance their relationships with their parents by fostering inclusive family engagement

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- Generally, 27% of school children exhibit psycho-health problems, but only a portion of these cases are addressed by the healthcare system. Problematic behaviors in children are challenging to resolve and persist throughout development in 60% of affected students. These behaviors often go unnoticed initially and become more pronounced over time, leading to significant school and social maladjustments if not properly managed. Therefore, it is crucial to prevent and manage these behaviors early on. Notably, self-esteem levels are lowest among fifth-grade students in elementary schools, emphasizing the need for active involvement in developing and managing self-esteem improvement programs.
 - In this study, although it was desired to measure behavioral changes before and after treatment and between groups, many participants declined to be assessed on problematic behaviors. Additionally, questions related to family types (such as single-parent, grandparent-grandchild families, and divorced families) were often left unanswered due to participants' sensitivity to these topics. Understanding the changing family dynamics is important for school nurses and teachers in elementary schools, especially considering the prevalence of single-parent, divorced, and grandparent-grandchild families .

One limitation of this study was its restricted scope, as it was conducted in only two elementary schools within one city, making it difficult to generalize the results to other locations. Therefore, there is a need to develop and test self-esteem programs for school children in various settings and cities in future studies.

- The findings of the study highlighted the importance of identifying factors related to problematic behaviors and understanding the home environment, such as family type and school life, to maximize the effectiveness of self-esteem programs on self-esteem and peer attachment in school children. The study was significant as it provided a self-esteem program to elementary school children with problematic behaviors and demonstrated improvements in their self-esteem and peer attachment.

For future studies, it is suggested to offer the program to school children in different environments, such as regular schools, institutions, and special education schools, and to examine the effects on self-esteem and peer attachment. Additionally, the development of student-oriented self-esteem programs should take into account the students' home environment and school life to maximize the program's effectiveness.

6. Conclusion:

The self-esteem enhancement program in this study boosted self-esteem and peer attachment in elementary school children. It enabled participants to recognize their

peers, understand their own desires, and form stronger connections. However, the findings are limited in their generalizability since the study was conducted in only two schools within one city. To further improve self-esteem and peer attachment, this program should be implemented as a formal and consistent initiative in elementary schools. Moreover, the success of these programs depends heavily on parental involvement and educator support. Collaboration between home and school environments is essential to ensure consistency and reinforce the lessons learned through self-improvement activities.

In conclusion, investing in self-improvement programs for children offers long-term benefits that go beyond academic success. By equipping children with essential life skills and a positive mindset, these programs lay the groundwork for a healthier and more successful future. Ongoing research and adaptation of these programs will be necessary to address the evolving needs of children in a changing world.

Recommendations:

Some Implementation Tips:

- **Parental and Educator Involvement:** Engage parents and educators to create a supportive environment that reinforces the principles taught in these programs.
- **Regular Assessment:** Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the programs through feedback and performance metrics to ensure they meet the evolving needs of children.
- **Customization:** Tailor programs to address the unique needs and developmental stages of each child to maximize their impact.
- **Integration into Daily Routines:** Incorporate self-improvement activities into daily routines to create consistency and reinforce learning.

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