INFLUENCE OF CLASS GROUP PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT. *A psychological counseling program of the class group was designed for the sixth-grade students in primary school based on the theory of emotional intelligence. The experimental group was performed with 11 times of counseling from 5 subjects. The emotional intelligence levels were pretested for the primary school students in the experimental group and the control group. After counseling, the total score of emotional intelligence and the dimensions of interpersonal relationship and stress management of the experimental group students were significantly higher than those before the counseling. There was no significant difference in the emotional intelligence of the control group before and after the test. In conclusion, the psychological counseling of the class group can improve the emotional intelligence for primary school students.*

KEYWORDS: emotional intelligence; group psychological counseling; primary school students

INTRODUCTION

Originated in the 1990s, the studies found that emotional intelligence helps individuals respond to negative psychological indicators of depression, anxiety, and stress (Ruizarand D *et al*, 2012). Meanwhile, the positive psychological indicators of satisfaction and well-being can be improved (Gallagher E N *et al*, 2008), affecting students' academic behavior and creativity. Emotional intelligence is an important influencing factor for the measurement of individual mental health (Miao *et al*,2016;Ranasinghe P *et al*, 2017). The students' capabilities of emotion recognition, expression, and management can be enhanced through training and education, while

curriculum teaching is the main method of emotional intervention in schools (Ma Zhenzhen, 2018). The pupils of Grade sixth are about to enter adolescence, with enhanced self-awareness and rich emotional experience. However, their ability to regulate emotion is immature, so the enhancement of emotional intelligence has critical impacts on physical and mental health. The work focuses on the development of the emotional intelligence of primary school students of Grade sixth. Courses of group psychological counseling were developed for educational intervention, and the effects of the intervention were examined. Exploring the localized, emotional intelligence evidence-based education programs for primary school students has positive significance for the development of students' emotional intelligence education.

Research design and methods

Research object

For convenient sampling, Classes 3 and 5 in a primary school in the High-tech Zone of Henan Province were selected as the research objects, where Class 3 was adopted as the experimental group, and Class 5 as the control group. There were 47 students in Class 3, including 25 males and 22 females. The maximum age and minimum age were 12 years old and 11 years old, respectively, and the average age was 11.5 years old. Class 5 had 48 students, including 26 males and 22 females. The maximum age and the minimum age were 12 years old and 10 years old, respectively, and the average age was 11 years old.

Research tools

The work used the *Baron Emotional Quotient Inventory*: *Youth Version* to assess the emotional intelligence of students. The scale was revised and compiled from *Baron Emotional Quotient Scale* based on the Baron EQ theory, specifically for the group of 7-18 years old. Chinese scholars have translated and revised the scale (Zhang Wen,2007). The scale has a total of 60 items, including 7 subscales of intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, overall emotional intelligence, general mood, and positive impression, with 6, 12, 10, 12, 40, 14, and 4 items, respectively. The overall emotional intelligence consists of the subscales of intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability and stress management. A 4-level scoring scale for self-assessment items were adopted, ranging from "rarely" to "frequently" with 1-4 points, respectively. The higher score indicates a higher level of overall emotional intelligence. The internal consistency coefficient of the total scale is 0.909, and the split-half reliability is 0.80, which has excellent reliability and validity.

Design of class psychological counseling program

Based on the emotional intelligence structure model of Zhang Jinfu and Xu Xiaoyan

(Zhang Jinfu *et al*,2004), a preliminary plan of the class group psychological counseling program was designed according to the previous survey results of emotional intelligence development for primary school students, existing literature and the experience of researchers. Then, 3 experts on mental health education and 2 teachers of mental health education in elementary school were invited for discussion, modification, and improvement on the preliminary plan to form a formal plan.

The structural model of emotional intelligence divides emotional intelligence into five main factors: emotional awareness ability, emotional evaluation ability, emotional adaptation ability, emotional regulation ability, and emotional performance ability. The formal program formed five subjects for these main factors, with two sections for each subject. Before the start of the formal course, a class of team building was performed for team formation, understanding of the course rules and agreement of a group contract. The final group plan includes 11 lessons, with 45 minutes per lesson. One lesson was implemented for per week.

Three principles were followed for the design of the course content: The first is to focus on operability. Different skills are decomposed into specific steps, highlighting skills learning, practice, application, feedback, and consolidation links. The second is to inspire the effectiveness of the group. Individual skills are shared within the members, and students can explore skills suitable for themselves to promote the internal generation of knowledge. The third is to integrate the force of family education. Homework will be arranged to invite students to interview parents, guiding families to create an excellent growth ecological environment with schools.

Table 1 Contents of class group counseling courses

Subjects	Goals	Main contents
Team building	1. Understand the course content and stimulate expectations. 2. Deepen the understanding of members and enhance cohesion strengths. 3. Form a group contract.	1. Introducing the main content and forms of the course. 2. Self-introduction through the name Solitaire game. 3. Randomly dividing them into four groups and discussing the group name and slogan. 4. Reaching a group agreement.

Emotion recognition	1. Learn to name different emotions. 2. Master skills of emotion recognition. 3. Learn to recognize emotional changes in complex situations, and initially understand the impact of emotions on life and learning.	1. Learning to recognize emotions through games such as "Guess Game". 2. Classifying emotions through learning activities of "Emotion Box". 3. Sharing emotion recognition clues through "Emotion mushrooms". 4. Sharing "My Emotional Diary" to learn more about emotional feelings, changing characteristics, manifestations and influences. 5. Homework: "My Emotional Diary".
Emotion acceptance	1. Learn to evaluate emotions fully. 2. Learn multiple methods to express emotions. 3. Learn to master emotional regulation skills.	1. Guiding students to understand the impact of emotions through scene drama. 2. Sharing homework and learning multiple ways to express emotions. 3. Experiencing the effect of regulating emotions through the "Mind Car Game". 4. Sharing and learning emotional adjustment skills through the "Emotional Turntable". 5. Discussing the specific adjustment methods of the four universal emotions in groups. 6. Homework: Interview family members in terms of emotional adjusting skills.
Self-motivation	1. Recognize frustration and its impact. 2. Master the anti-frustration skills. 3. Guide students to set growth goals. 4. Learn self-motivation methods.	1. Experiencing frustration and its impact through "Chair Grab Games". 2. Learning anti-frustration skills through team sharing, etc.. 3. Guiding students to know themselves through "Plaid Stories". 4. Sharing "My Growth Story" to learn self-motivation methods. 5. Homework: "My Mom and Dad": Interview with parents in skills of overcoming challenges.
Empathy	1. Understand the importance of empathy; 2. Master the empathic thinking skills; 3. Learn to apply empathy.	1. Guiding students to understand empathy through case analysis. 2. Further analyzing the case to introduce how to think empathically. 3. Practicing empathic thinking skills through "Heart Language" training. 4. Performing scene drama performances to show

		empathy in life. 5. Homework: "Changing the chair", empathic thinking with parents.
Emotional expression	1. Recognize the importance of emotional expression; 2. Practice to master listening feedback skills; 3. Practice to master emotional expression skills; 4. Learn other interpersonal skills.	1. Experiencing the importance of listening through the game of "Count Frog". 2. Sharing stories to guide students to listen and feedback. 3. Introducing the skills and procedures of emotional expression. 4. Practicing how to express emotions through the "Big Bang". 5. Sharing interpersonal skills within the group. 6. Homework: "Me and my friends", interviewing parents in interpersonal skills.

Implementation process

The classic paradigm of intervention research was adopted. The class teacher introduced the relevant situation after determining the experimental group and the control group. The students in Class 3 were informed that a mental health education course would be set up, while Class 5 was informed to participate in a psychological survey. Both were unaware of the research details, and all the students participated in the whole study. All the samples received the assessment of emotional intelligence before and after the project. The difference in the level of emotional intelligence between the two groups of students was verified by comparing the pretest results. The effect of group psychological counseling on emotional intelligence was tested by comparing the post-test results. The experimental group received 45 minutes of group counseling once a week, lasting for 11 consecutive weeks. The control group did not receive such counseling during this period. The counseling activities of the experimental group were conducted in the time of class meetings. A master student of mental health education is responsible for the specific implementation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Comparison of emotional intelligence between the experimental group and the control group before counseling

Before implementing the project, the emotional intelligence of the experimental group and the control group was evaluated to compare the differences between the two groups.

Table 2 shows the results, indicating that there is no statistically-significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in the total emotional intelligence scores as well as the dimensions of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and stress management and adaptability.

Comparison of emotional intelligence between the experimental group before and after counseling

The differences in emotional intelligence levels of the experimental group before and after group psychological counseling were compared. Table 3 shows the results that the total emotional intelligence scores of students in the experimental group after the implementation of class group psychological counseling were significantly higher than those before counseling. Besides, the differences are significant before and after the test in dimensions of interpersonal and stress management, but not significant in dimensions of intrapersonal and adaptability.

Table 2 Comparison of emotional intelligence between experimental group and control group before group psychological counseling (M±SD)

Variables	Experimental group （N=48）	Control group （N=48）	t	*P*
Total score of emotional intelligence	173.43±14.86	172.45±11.77	-0.36	.720
Intrapersonal	15.96±3.98	15.89±3.74	-0.08	.935
Interpersonal	37.00±4.87	36.98±3.91	-0.02	.981
Stress management	32.88±4.36	32.51±4.33	-0.41	.684
Adaptability	28.90 ±4.21	29.00 ±3.2	0.14	.893

Note: [*]P<0.05, [**]P<0.01, the same below.

Table 3 Comparison of emotional intelligence in the experimental group before and after the group psychological counseling (M±SD)

Variables	Before counseling （N=48）	After counseling （N=48）	t	P
Total score of emotional intelligence	173.43±14.86	182.98±17.61	-2.87**	.005
Intrapersonal	15.96±3.98	15.81±4.12	0.18	.860
Interpersonal	37.00±4.87	39.85±4.36	-3.03**	.003
Stress management	32.88±4.36	35.60±4.59	-2.99**	.004
Adaptability	28.90 ±4.21	29.88±4.81	-1.06	.291

Comparison of emotional intelligence in the control group before and after psychological counseling

Table 4 shows the comparison results between the emotional intelligence of the control group before and after the counseling. There is no statistically significant difference before and after the control group in the total scores of emotional intelligence, as well as the various dimensions.

Comparison of the pre- and post-test differences between the experimental group and the control group

The pre- and post-test change of each student in the experimental group and the control group was calculated to compare the difference between the pre- and post-test change of the experimental group and the control group. Table 5 shows the results that the changes in the total emotional intelligence scores and Interpersonal dimension of the experimental group are significantly higher than those in the control group. The differences in the pre- and post-test changes between the experimental group and the control group are not statistically significant in the dimensions of intrapersonal, stress management, and adaptability.

Table 4 Comparison of pre- and post-test emotional intelligence of the control group (M±SD)

Variables	Pre-test（N=48）	Post-test （N=48）	t	*P*
Total score of emotional intelligence	172.45±11.77	170.10±16.17	0.80	.424
Intrapersonal	15.89±3.74	16.66±4.50	0.90	.372
Interpersonal	36.98±3.91	35.04±4.38	1.10	.272
Stress management	32.51±4.33	34.09±4.04	-1.82	.072
Adaptability	29.00 ±3.26	28.13±3.78	1.20	.234

Table 5 Comparison of the differences of pre- and post-test change between the experimental group and the control group (M±SD)

Variables	Experimental group	Control group	t	P
Total score of emotional intelligence	9.54±21.45	-2.45±21.45	2.67[**]	.009
Intrapersonal	-0.15±6.21	-0.79±6.03	-0.74	.459
Interpersonal	2.85±6.31	-2.09±6.21	3.84[**]	.000
Stress management	2.73±6.29	1.60±5.96	0.90	.370
Adaptability	0.98±6.05	-0.96±5.32	1.65	.101

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the structural model of emotional intelligence, a class group psychological counseling program was designed for the students in primary schools of Grade Six, evaluating the effect of class group psychological counseling on the emotional intelligence of primary school students.

Class psychological counseling can effectively improve the emotional intelligence of primary school students

Emotional intelligence has an impact on students' mental health, academic performance,

and leadership (Sang Qingsong *et al,2012;* Nelis D *et al,*2009).This work further confirms that class psychological counseling can improve the emotional intelligence of primary school students. Different from subject teaching, emotional intelligence education needs to emphasize attitude change and skill learning besides knowledge lecturing. The counseling program focuses on skill-based training to refine the skills into specific steps. The laws of learning, practice, feedback, and consolidation were followed in the training process, effectively improving the learning effect. It indicates that class group psychological counseling is one of the essential ways to train emotional intelligence, which provides beneficial exploration for localized, emotional intelligence education.

Effect of class group psychological counseling is inseparable from the rational design of the program

First of all, a baseline survey on the emotional intelligence of primary school students was performed before the design of the group psychological counseling program. The program design was based on the theory of emotional intelligence, with an interlocked structure. Moreover, an expert group familiar with the psychological development status and characteristics of primary school students was invited to revise the program to ensure the scientificity of the content. The design process follows the three principles to ensure the professionalism of the program. Then, the implementation of the program adopts methods of discussion, experience, and interviews are used to mobilize the initiative of student' learning and exploration fully. The student-centered concept ensures that each student can obtain personalized skills and methods. Based on the ecosystem theory, the program changes the classroom atmosphere through teaching. Meanwhile, the participation of families was mobilized to change the family atmosphere, thus generating positive influences on the systems of school and family for students. Such initiatives provide useful attempts for the development of localized, emotional intelligence education projects.

Class psychological counseling has different effects on different dimensions of emotional intelligence

The study found that the effect of group psychological counseling is significant in improving Interpersonal and Stress management of primary school students, while that on the improvement of Intrapersonal and Adaptability is limited. The reason may be related to the following aspects. The first is the characteristics of different dimensions of emotional intelligence. Intrapersonal reflects self-evaluations of emotional self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence, which are closely related to personality characteristics. They are stable, with influencing factors. Their changes may take a longer time. The second is the group psychological counseling program, which focuses

on emotional management and expression. Self-motivation, empathy, and emotional expression are closely related to interpersonal and stress management, with higher pertinence of education, leading to more obvious intervention effects. Therefore, future research needs to have a deep understanding of the development level of students' emotional intelligence. A clear intervention plan aimed at students' needs can improve the intervention effect, thus providing more scientific and reasonable theoretical support as well as a practical basis for the development of primary school students' emotional intelligence.

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