

Efficacy of Life skills Training in Improving Emotional Intelligence among Adolescents in Selected Private Secondary Schools in Athi-River Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

People with skills in emotional intelligence cope better with challenges of life and effectively manage their emotions. The aim of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of life skills training in improving emotional intelligence among the adolescents in selected private secondary schools in Athi-river sub-county, Kenya. This study employed quasi-experimental design. The study targeted the adolescent students with the age bracket of 13-18 years. Purposive sampling technique was used to select four private secondary schools and 120 participants. Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version (EQ-i:YV) and demographic data questionnaire were used as data collection instruments. The results showed a significant increase ($p < 0.01$) in emotional intelligence in the experimental group unlike the control group. As such, life skills training was efficacious in improving emotional intelligence ($p < 0.01$) and eta-squared values indicated a medium effect size at midline ($F = 4.842$ $d = .047$) and endline assessments ($F = 4.925$ $d = .048$). Based on the findings, it was recommended that life skills should be taught regularly and continuously in secondary schools. This will influence students' interpersonal skills such as communication, team work, decision making and problem-solving.

Keywords: *Life Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Life skills training, Adolescents emotional intelligence, life skills efficacy, emotional intelligence improvement*

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotions play a critical role in decision-making, thought, and individuals' success, than does intelligence quotient (IQ). Success in life is not only determined by IQ, but largely by emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). The concept of Emotional intelligence (EI) was defined and conceptualized by Salovey & Mayer (1990) as: "the ability to monitor one's own feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p.189).

According to Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2012), skills in emotional intelligence are important in improving effective communication, coping with negative life experiences, developing emotional health, and facilitating healthy relationships. On the contrary, lack of psychological, emotional and social skills exposes people to the risk of social, behavioral, and

mental disorders when faced with psychosocial stressors (Mustaffa, Nasir, Aziz, & Mahmood, 2013).

Skills in emotional intelligence can be learned and enhanced over time (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013). Bar-On & Parker (2000) observed that emotional intelligence could be improved through training. This perspective forms the basis of numerous programs that train on emotional intelligence including life skills training. Therefore, there is need to educate people on how to manage their own emotions, innate psychological resources in order to acquire social intelligence and develop positive relationships.

Life skills refers to abilities that enhance competence and psychological well-being among people in the face of challenges in life (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009). According to World Health Organization, (WHO), (2003) “life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in healthy and productive manner” (pg. 8). Life skills are categorized into three components: 1) Critical thinking skills consisting of decision-making, and problem solving, critical thinking and creative thinking, 2) Interpersonal/communication skills consisting of empathy, interpersonal skills and effective communication, 3) self-Management and coping skills like self-awareness, coping with emotions coping with stress (WHO, 1996).

Life skills represent psychosocial abilities that regulate positive behavior. “Positive behavior” refers to individual’s ability to be optimistic and flexible to learn new ways of addressing challenges in life (WHO, 1996). In fact, life skills enable an individual to translate knowledge, values and attitudes into positive behavior that fosters efficiency in addressing challenges in life (Nair, 2010).

Life skills training/education is a comprehensive psychosocial interventional approach for improving positive social life and mental health among adolescents. This facilitates the development of self-confidence, emotional intelligence and improvement in problem-solving, coping strategies, critical thinking and decision-making skills (Ravindra, Bosky, & Dharmendra, 2017). Moreover, Life skills embraces concepts such as emotional intelligence, social skills, and social competence. These concepts are synonymous, they all reflect life skills, and there is an overlap in these constructs. With reference to emotional intelligence, life skills lays emphasis on intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness in identify and understanding emotions, management of emotions, controlling emotions, and empathy; and interpersonal skills which include being self-motivated and taking responsibility (Vranda & Rao, 2011).

Enhancement of emotional intelligence through training is a systematic process. The first task is self-awareness, anger management, stress management, problem-solving and interpersonal skills. Self-awareness is a critical component in emotional intelligence training since it enables an individual to be aware of his/her emotions and causes of such emotions. In addition, skills in self-awareness could enhance other skills resulting to high emotional intelligence (Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009).

Kaur (2011) explored the impact of life skills training on emotional intelligence among adolescents with low scores on test norms. The study results indicated a significant increase in emotional intelligence scores after three months of life skills training. In the same vein, a study by Lolaty, Ghahari, Targari, and Fard (2012) revealed that life skills training significantly improved emotional intelligence scores among adolescents in the experimental group ($t=11.703$ $df=19$ $p=0.001$) while there was no significant difference in the control group ($t=0.683$ $df=18$ $p=0.503$).

Findings of a study conducted by Joseph (2014) showed that life skills training had significantly enhanced emotional intelligence among adolescents. The study further indicated that, life skills had a significant impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence and psychological well being. Further, Crombie, Carl, and Noakes (2011) observed that emotional intelligence is significantly improved through emotional intelligence training.

Gheitarani, Imani, Sadeghi, and Ghahari (2017) conducted a study examining the effectiveness of life skills training on emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among 462 high school students in Urmia. This study used quasi-experimental design of which the experimental group received twelve sessions of life skills training. Results showed a significant improvement in emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in the experimental group.

Students in secondary schools are in the developmental stage of adolescence. This is period of transition from childhood to adulthood that is characterized by rapid psychological maturation and physiological changes. This is a period of risk taking, peer pressure, coping with stress, independence in solving personal problems and decision-making (Vranda & Rao, 2011). Despite the wide spread knowledge on the rapid changes, the emotional development of adolescents is generally ignored and only becomes relevant when they engage in maladaptive behavior. These behavior include substance abuse, school violence, school dropout, bullying, risky sexual behavior, lack of motivation, absenteeism, psycho-educational problems (Nwadinigwe & Azuka-Obieke, 2012).

There is need to educate adolescents on emotional development in order to mitigate against their engagement in maladaptive behavior. Numerous interventional studies on emotional intelligence have been done in western countries. However, there is paucity of literature on interventional studies focusing on emotional intelligence among secondary school students in Kenya. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the efficacy of life skills training in improving emotional intelligence among secondary school students in Athi-River Sub County, Machakos, Kenya.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used a quasi-experimental design among adolescents from four private single gender secondary schools in Athi-River Sub-County. (Explanation) The sample consisted of 120 participants within the age group of 13-18. Sixty (60) females and 60 males in form 1-3 classes with equal representation from the four schools were purposively selected since they displayed the characteristics of interest for the study. After the selection, adolescents were divided into two groups comprising 60 students each (control and experimental group).

Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version (EQ-i:YV) and demographic data questionnaire were used. BarOn EQ-i:YV is a self-administered validated assessment tool for measuring emotional intelligence among young people aged 7 to 18 years. The tool consists of 60 items and responses are in a four Likert-scale that range from 1 denoting “not true of me or very seldom” to 4 denoting “true of me or very true often true of me”. The questionnaire was developed by Bar-On and Parker (2000) and consist of an overall score (emotional quotient), five composite scales namely interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, stress management, general mood, adaptability and 15 subscales.

This research was conducted in two phases comprising of three assessments (pre-posttest). In the preliminary phase, the EI of 365 secondary school students in Athi-river sub-county was determined (baseline assessment). In the second phase, the study was conducted using quasi-experimental design. 120 students were purposively allocated into two groups of experimental (n=60) and control group (60). They were selected for the study basing on characteristics such as sex and class of study. The experimental group received life skills training for three months after which a mid-line assessment of EI was conducted on both groups. Finally, an endline assessment was conducted on both groups three months after the training. Post testing (midline & endline assessment) of both groups on EI was done to ascertain the efficacy of life skills training. Principal component analysis and Cohen’s d test were used to measure the effect size.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

When asked about the age bracket, a majority (65%) of the participants were aged 16-18 years followed by 13-15 years at 35%. Gender distribution was equal at 50%. The distribution of participants by class indicated that form two class was higher at 34.2% than form three class at 33.3% and form one class at 32.5%. Concerning the number of siblings, participants with three and more siblings was 69.2%, those with 1 to 2 siblings was 23.3% and those without siblings 7.7%. Additionally, the distribution of participants by birth order showed equal proportion at 35.8% among second-born and third-born and above while first-borns were 28.3%.

3.2 Efficacy of Life skills Training in Improving Emotional Intelligence among Adolescents

3.2.1 Level of Emotional Intelligence

The study sought to examine the level of emotional intelligence the respondents that took part in the study had. Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents by the level of emotional intelligence at the baseline.

Table 1
Levels of Emotional Intelligence among Participants at Baseline

Levels of Emotional Intelligence	Frequency	Percent (%)
High	4	3.3
Average	69	57.5
Low	32	26.7
Very low	11	9.2
Markedly low	4	3.3
Total	120	100.0

Results of participants' frequency on levels of EI indicated that most of them 57.5% had average level of EI, 26.7% had low, and 9.2% had very low. In addition, an equal percentage of participants at 3.3% recorded high and markedly low level of EI. This implies that most participants had average and low levels of EI.

Table 2
Mean Scores on Different Dimensions of EI at Baseline

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence	Mean	SD
Intrapersonal	94.67	10.558
Interpersonal	93.29	15.767
Stress management	85.64	11.776
Adaptability	99.65	15.724
General mood	100.67	12.193

Table 2 presents the mean scores on different dimensions of emotional intelligence among the participants. Findings indicated that general mood had a higher mean (100.7) in comparison to adaptability skill (99.65), intrapersonal skill (94.67), interpersonal skill (93.4), and stress management skill (85.64).

3.2.2 Efficacy of Life skills Training in Improving Emotional Intelligence

The study sought to evaluate the efficacy of life skills training on improving EI. Table 3 shows the distribution of the respondents by the changes in the mean emotional intelligence from baseline to end line across the research groups.

Table 3

Changes in the Mean Emotional Intelligence from Baseline to Endline across the Research Groups

Group	Time	Mean	Std.Dev	Std. Error of Mean	KMO and Bartlett's Test		
					Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Experimental	Baseline	91.02	9.999	1.384	52.833	2	.000
	Midline	97.44	10.467	1.435			
	Endline	95.72	11.582	1.582			
Control	Baseline	91.18	10.817	1.444	28.677	2	.701
	Midline	92.38	12.442	1.726			
	Endline	90.70	11.436	1.617			

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to evaluate the efficacy of life skills training on improving EI. As indicated in Table 2, results on the experimental group show an increase in EI mean from baseline $91.02 \pm (SD: 9.999)$ to midline $97.44 \pm (SD: 10.467)$ and a slight drop from midline to endline $95.72 \pm (SD: 11.183)$. Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure indicate that the increase in EI scores was significant ($p < 0.01$). Conversely, results on the control group shows that the mean EI at baseline $91.18 \pm (SD: 10.817)$ increased to $92.38 \pm (SD: 12.442)$ at midline and then dropped to $90.70 \pm (SD: 11.436)$ at endline. KMO results shows that the increase in EI scores was insignificant ($p = 0.701$). Therefore, the results of the study indicated that life skills training was efficacious in improving emotional intelligence in the experimental group.

Effect Size

Table 4

Cohen's d Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Sizes on Emotional Intelligence

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Baseline EI	.640 ^a	1	.640	.006	.939	.000
	Midline EI	640.090 ^b	1	640.090	4.842	.030	.047
	Endline EI	630.010 ^c	1	630.010	4.925	.029	.048
Intercept	Baseline EI	829921.000	1	829921.000	7649.502	.000	.987
	Midline EI	900790.810	1	900790.810	6814.638	.000	.986
	Endline EI	868810.410	1	868810.410	6791.599	.000	.986
study_grp	Baseline EI	.640	1	.640	.006	.939	.000
	Midline EI	640.090	1	640.090	4.842	.030	.047
	Endline EI	630.010	1	630.010	4.925	.029	.048

a. R Squared = .000 (Adjusted R Squared = -.010)
b. R Squared = .047 (Adjusted R Squared = .037)
c. R Squared = .048 (Adjusted R Squared = .038)

Table 4 presents the Partial Eta Squared analysis of effect size using Cohen's d test. Results indicate a medium effect from baseline to midline $F= 4.842$, $d = .047$. In addition, a medium effect size was noticed between midline and end line at $F= 4.925$, $d = .048$.

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of the research study was to evaluate the efficacy of life skills training in improving emotional intelligence. Results indicated a significant improvement ($p<0.01$) in mean emotional intelligence score in the experimental group. This finding affirms a study conducted by Lolaty, Ghahari, Tirgari, and Fard (2012) on effects of life skills training on EI. Results revealed that life skills training significantly improved emotional intelligence scores among adolescents in the experimental group ($t=11.703$ $df=19$ $p=0.001$) while there was no significant difference in the control group ($t=0.683$ $df=18$ $p=0.503$). Moreover, a study by Gheitarani et al. (2017) on effect of life skills training on emotional intelligence and self-efficacy showed a significant improvement in EI ($p<0.01$) and self-efficacy ($p<0.01$) in the experimental group after twelve training sessions in life skills.

These findings affirm the logic underlying life skills training. According to Bidabadi, Nili, Manani, and Khalili (2016), the logical assumption underlying life skills training, is that the training improves the capacity of psychological subjects. This results to improvement in individual's general and specific competencies and capabilities in dealing with stress and difficult situations in life. The creation and strengthening of life skills helps individuals to adopt and ultimately improve their emotional intelligence and quality of life.

Improvement in emotional intelligence implies that students have enhanced their interpersonal skills such as being more self-aware in identifying and understanding their own emotions, controlling, managing emotions and empathy. In addition, they have acquired better interpersonal skills such as being self-motivated and taking responsibility.

Life skills training entails active participation of children in a dynamic teaching and learning process. The active participation is achieved through role play, working in small groups and pairs, games and debates, and brainstorming (Shwetha, 2015). Improvement in EI among the students in this study is attributed to the fact that life skills training program used experiential approach and it was skill-based. This enabled the students to acquire individualized skills on how to identify, understand and manage their own and other people's emotions hence improvement in their mean emotional intelligence score.

There exists a strong association between high levels of experiential processing style and EI in contrast to a moderate association between high levels of rational processing and EI (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013). According to Epstein (2016) experiential processing style functions in a manner that is imagistic, holistic, very rapid, effortless, intrinsically highly

compelling, and intimately associated with emotions. On the other hand, rational processing style is characterized by logic and lacks emotional experience.

5. CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussion and study findings, it is evident that life skills training can improve emotional intelligence among secondary school students. It is therefore recommended that educational stakeholders should pay more attention on life skills training as a major component of the educational programs. Moreover, there is need to integrate life skills education into the regular school curriculum and to be taught by a life skills trainer/counselor/teacher in order to enhance emotional intelligence among secondary school students.

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