

Intervention on Optimism of Junior High School Students: Positive Psychology Class Group Counseling

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of positive psychology class group counseling on the optimism of junior high school students, optimize class management, and prompt students to grow healthfully. The research adopted the quasi-experimental pre-and post-test design. In this study, the participants were the first-grade students from a middle school. They were divided into the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received the Optimism Group Counseling Program, in which they attended two classes weekly for ten consecutive weeks. The control group only had a routine class meeting activity course. The instruments involved the Life Orientation Test-Revised and Optimism-Pessimism Scale. The findings showed that positive psychology class group counseling can enhance the optimism of junior high school students. This study suggests that the Optimism Group Counseling Program can be adopted as a school educational reference.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Class Group Counseling, Optimism, Junior High School Students

Introduction

Optimism is one of the core concepts in positive psychology (Mavioğlu et al., 2015), and it has a significant impact on an individual's mental health and social adjustment (Wang et al., 2021). Optimism is an individual's overall expectation of positive future outcomes and can help people persevere and adopt effective coping strategies in the face of difficulties (Zhang et al., 2021. Richard et al., 2021).

Optimism can be viewed as a cognitive disposition in which individuals tend to anticipate positive outcomes and maintain a hopeful attitude even in the face of challenges or adversity. Research has shown that optimism not only benefits mental health but also has a positive

impact on physical health. Optimists are generally more resilient to stress and have a better quality of life and health (Conversano et al, 2010). Research has shown that optimistic people tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction and positive emotions, as well as lower levels of negative emotions and depression. In positive psychology research, optimism has been linked to an individual's subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and ability to cope with stress (Hanisya et al., 2023). Optimists often have positive expectations about the future, and this attitude helps them stay positive and resilient in the face of challenges (Cauley et al., 2017). Optimists tend to attribute success to internal factors, such as personal effort and ability, and failure to external factors, such as luck or environmental conditions (Millstein et al., 2019). This type of attribution helps them to remain positive when they experience setbacks and continue to pursue their goals. In addition, optimism is associated with academic achievement, career success, and better social adjustment, because optimists tend to be confident and persistent in the face of challenges (Olson et al., 2014).

Literature Review

Optimism is not only a personality trait, it is also considered a skill that can be improved through learning and practice. By developing an optimistic attitude, individuals can better cope with life's challenges and achieve a higher quality of life. Seligman also put forward Learned Optimism (Seligman, 1991). This theory illustrated that optimism may be acquired from learning, and ABCED Cognitive Therapy can intervene in the trend of pessimistic and cultivate optimistic belief.

At this stage, there are mainly two distinct theories on optimism among scholars at home and abroad (Xue, 2014), one viewpoint is that optimism is a personality trait. the other view is that optimism is an explanatory style. Scheier et al (1986), first proposed the concept of temperamental optimism, which is the overall expectation of a good future outcome, which not only refers to hopeful expectations in a specific situation, but also refers to the corresponding expectations with cross-time and cross-situational consistency in similar situations (Xiaoming, 2008). Definitions of temperamental optimism emphasize the personality trait attribute of optimism and therefore tend to view optimism as a more stable personality trait (Alan, 2004). Seligman (1998), on the other hand, argued that optimism is an explanatory style that attributes bad events to external, unstable, and specific causes, and good events to internal, stable, and general causes (Alan, 2004). Seligman explained optimism in terms of attribution, and proposed the theory of 'learned optimism'. theory, which suggests that optimism is a learned explanatory style and that cognitive therapy can be used to intervene in pessimistic tendencies and foster optimistic beliefs. This theory provides a theoretical basis for enhancing optimistic beliefs from a positive perspective. This study holds that optimism is both a personality trait and an explanatory style, not only is a positive expectation of future events, but also is an attitude of acceptance and endeavor. This attitude enables people to make a difference and keep things moving in the direction they desire (Ma Yan, 2011).

Interventions to foster optimism in clinical settings are an important area of research. Laranjeira and Querido (2022), discussed possible interventions on optimism. These interventions are designed to help individuals develop more positive thinking patterns and increase their expectations for positive future outcomes, thereby improving their mental health and quality of life. Based on the concept of positive psychology and the theory of

optimistic explanatory style, this study put forward the following hypothesis: Class group counseling from a positive psychology perspective can enhance the optimism level of junior high school students. And this research used the empirical form of positive psychology class group counseling activity courses to test the actual effectiveness of optimism in school education.

Methodology

Research Object and Process

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pre - and post-test design. The objects of this research are first-year students in junior high school in two classes (60 students per class) in Anhui province. They were divided into the experimental group and control group by class. The participants in those two groups stay the same in the perspective of the male-female ratio, family condition and academic record. Students in the experimental group received ten-week curriculum instruction of psychology class group counseling and matched the relevant situation teaching and interaction teaching. Students in the control group did not have any experimental treatment. They only have routine class meeting activity courses. Before and after the experiment, students in both the experimental and control groups were given the tests of the Life Orientation Test-Revised and the Optimism-pessimism Scale.

Research Tools

Scheier et al (1986,1992) revised the *Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)*, which included ten self-rating items, three positive description items, three reverse description items and four insert irrelevant items. Besides, this research utilized a five-point Likert Scale to record scores. Lixin Yuan and Lin Na (2007), wrote the *Optimism-pessimism Scale*. Based on the LOT-R, they used exploratory factor analysis to acquire 15 items and 4 latitudes (self-efficacy, failure, optimism and pessimism) in the optimism questionnaire, utilizing a five-point Likert Scale to record scores.

Research Methods

The Optimism Group Counseling Program

The optimism group counseling program in this research was based on Seligman's optimistic explanatory style. And the mental activity course which adapts to junior school students in China is designed according to the points of positive psychology. The contents include personal advantages, emotional adjustment, gratitude, forgiveness, satisfaction, hope, positive coping style and some themes of positive psychology. The mental activity course is the form of course that facilitates student's inspiration and development through activities (Wu Zengzhong & Jiang Weimei, 2007). In terms of teaching methods, there are many activities such as songs, games, opera performances, group discussions, experiencing activities, practical activities and so on. Therefore, students are allowed to learn by doing, and the optimism consciousness of students is also promoted by the immersion teaching environment. As for the methods of classroom intervention, the three-dimensional model of the course teaching, interactive teaching and situational teaching were utilized to train and create more abundant optimism scenarios. Also, according to the edification and experience, the teaching objective of the level of optimism is enhanced. The specific program is as follows (in Table 1).

Table 1

The Optimism Group Counseling Program

Title	Purpose of activity	Activity content
1. Creating an optimistic spiritual home	1. Clarifying goals. 2. Acquaintance, establish a contract.	1. Dividing groups by playing cards. 2. Blind Trip: Trip of the trust.
2. There must be a use for my talent	1. Knowing and accepting yourself. 2. Appreciating the traits.	1. Advantages. 2. Advantages of bombing in others.
3. My emotions	1. Knowing my emotions. 2. ABC theory of emotion.	1. Emotional kaleidoscope. 2. Happy click and happy strategy.
4. Thank you	1. Finding beautiful and touching. 2. Learning to express gratitude.	1. Sharing stories. Apple tree. 2. Letter of thanks.
5. I love happy life	1. Understanding satisfies. 2. Creating happiness.	1. Sharing each other's favorite. 2. Three wonderful things in each day.
6. Forgiveness makes me relaxed	1. Knowing negative emotions. 2. Learning how to forgive others.	1. Role-play---conflicts. 2. Using REACH 5 steps to forgive.
7. My happy family	1. Finding merits of families. 2. Changing and creating love.	1. Guarding angel of love. 2. The AB play of the life: positive response.
8. Learning makes me confident	1. Cognitive style. 2. Reasonable attribution.	1. Relaxing meditation. 2. Cultivating great learning quality.
9. The rainbow always comes after the rain	1. Knowing the setbacks. 2. Dealing with the setbacks correctly.	1. Using the setbacks to warm up. 2. Setbacks consultation.
10. Optimistic train takes me out	1. Reviewing and concluding. 2. Keeping optimistic.	1. Sharing changes. 2. Taking the optimism to start.

Data Processing and Analysis

Before and after the experiment, the questionnaire data of the Life Orientation Test-Revised and the Optimism-pessimism Scale for students in both the experimental and control groups were collected. This research used the SPSS 2.0 statistical package to analyze the before and after measurement data. For data analysis, an independent t-test and paired sample t-test were used for difference tests (significance level <0.005).

Results and Discussion

Results

The Students' Pre-test Scores in the Experimental and Control Groups

According to Table 2, the t-test of the students' pretest score of LOT-R (Scale 1) in the experiments group and control group is that $t(118) = 0.195$, $p > 0.05$, the difference is not significant. The t-test of the students' retest score of the *Optimism-pessimism Scale* (Scale 2) in the experiments group and control group is that $t(118) = 0.842$, $p > 0.05$. Similarly, the difference is not significant. Therefore, before the experimental treatment, there is no significant difference in students' optimism levels between the experimental and the control groups.

Table 2

The t-test of students' pretest scores in the experimental and control groups

		N	M	SD	t	sig(双峰)
Scale 1	Experimental group	60	22.72	3.61	.195	.845
	Control group	60	22.58	3.86		
Scale 2	Experimental group	60	33.92	4.63	.842	.401
	Control group	60	33.27	3.78		

* $p < 0.05$

The Students' Post-test Scores between the Experimental and Control Groups

In Table 3, the t-test of students' post-test score of LOT-R (Scale 1) in the experimental group and control group is that $t(118) = 2.719$, $p < 0.05$, and the difference is significant. The t-test of students' post-test score of the *Optimism-pessimism Scale* (Scale 2) in the experiments group and control group is $t(118) = 2.458$, $p < 0.05$. The difference is also significant. Therefore, after the experimental treatment, students' optimism levels in the experimental group improved significantly.

Table 3

The t-tests of students' post-test scores of the optimism scale between the experimental and control groups

		N	M	SD	t	sig(双峰)
Scale 1	Experimental group	60	24.19	2.93	2.719	.008
	Control group	60	22.38	4.15		
Scale 2	Experiment group	60	36.05	3.34	2.458	.015
	Control group	60	33.77	6.37		

* $p < 0.05$

The Level of the Students' Optimism Scales in the Experimental Group

In Table 4, as the t-test of students' pre-test and post-test scores of *LOT-R* (Scale 1) in the experiments group, $t(59) = -2.325$, $p < 0.05$, the difference is significant. Similarly, the t-test of students' pre-test and post-test scores of *the Optimism-pessimism Scale* (Scale 2) in the experimental group, $t(59) = -3.014$, $p < 0.05$, the difference is significant. Therefore, the t values in those two scales are negative. It could be understood that students' post-test scores on the optimistic scale were higher than the pre-test scale. It means that students' optimism has enhanced after the positive psychology group activity course.

Table 4

The t-test and description of students' pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group (N=60).

		N	M	SD	t	sig(双峰)
Scale1	Pretest	60	22.72	3.61	-2.325	.024
	Post-test	60	24.19	2.93		
Scale2	Pretest	60	33.92	4.63	-3.014	.004
	Post-test	60	36.05	3.34		

* $p < 0.05$

The Students' Pre and Post-test Scores in the Control Group

Table 5 shows the t-test of students' pre-test and post-test scores of *LOT-R* (Scale 1) in the control group. $T(59) = 0.365$, $p > 0.05$, the difference is insignificant. Similarly, the t-test of students' pre-test and post-test scores of *the Optimism-pessimism Scale* (Scale 2) in the control group, $t(59) = -0.562$, $p > 0.05$, the difference is also not significant. Thus, participants' post-test scores on the optimistic scales are not higher than their pretest scores. It explained that students' optimism levels do not improve obviously after ten weeks.

Table 5

The t-test and description of students' pretest and post-test scores in the control group (N=60)

		N	M	SD	t	sig(双峰)
Scale 1	Pretest	60	22.58	3.86	0.365	.717
	Post-test	60	22.38	4.15		
Scale 2	Pretest	60	33.27	3.78	-0.562	.576
	Post-test	60	33.76	6.37		

* $p < 0.05$

Discussion

The study evaluated the impact of positive psychology class group counseling on the optimism of elementary school students by quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design. The results of the study found that after ten weeks of optimistic training, the experimental group students showed a greater increase in optimism before to after the test compared with the active control group. It can be concluded that the positive psychological class group counseling optimism training course has an obvious effect on improving students' optimism.

This result supported the hypothesis of the researcher of this study and is consistent with the conclusion of Seligman's idealized positive psychological group program (Seligman et al., 2006). Seligman et al. developed a counseling model, the Idealised Positive Psychology Group Program (IPPGP), which advocated the provision of positive concepts and optimistic attitudes in the counseling process to help people discover and make use of their own inner resources, thereby enhance their quality of life. This idealized program has become a template for many scholars to design optimistic programs. The present study referred to the procedures of this program to construct an optimistic curriculum framework. This finding also supports the findings of the Penn Optimism Program (Jaycox et al., 1994), which was based on the optimistic explanatory style theory, with the Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire, or CASQ, as the primary instrument. The study was based on the ABC theory of personality developed by Ellis, who put forward a set of ABCDE rules for changing negative thinking habits. In the study, which was designed as a 12-unit, 24-hour program, 69 children participated in the treatment group and were compared with 73 children in the control group. The results showed that depression symptoms were significantly reduced in the treatment group compared to the control group. Six months of follow-up showed a sustained reduction in depressive symptoms and a significant reduction in behavioral problems in the treatment group compared to the control group. According to the Pennsylvania Optimism Project, optimism can be taught, and the results are long-lasting. It can be seen that the findings of this study and the Pennsylvania Optimism Program corroborated each other.

Positive psychology group counseling has demonstrated significant potential for enhancing individual optimism. Perhaps the following reasons can explain the effectiveness mechanism. Strategies such as hope therapy in positive psychology are widely used to enhance optimism and include a range of interventions designed to lead individuals to develop hopeful perceptions that can help them feel less distressed in the face of life's challenges. These strategies not only help to boost optimism but also enhance individuals' coping skills ((Robert & Elena, 2011). Another study highlighted that hope-oriented group counseling significantly reduced stress and depression scores while improving quality of life, further demonstrating the effectiveness of group counseling in enhancing optimism (Roya et al., 2021). Research has also shown that group counseling promotes students' psychological growth and enhances overall levels of optimism by fostering positive emotions such as gratitude and optimism, and increasing empathy and supportive relationships among members (Laranjeira & Querido, 2022). Group counseling enables participants to share experiences, support each other, and explore themselves with professional guidance by providing a supportive environment. Participants can gain new perspectives and understandings through communication and interaction in the group, which can enhance optimism. Dafei et al. conducted an intervention study of cognitive-behavioral group counseling on optimism, where optimism scores averaged 150.47 pre-intervention and increased to 169.33 post-intervention, and then further increased to 171.8 on a follow-up assessment, which suggests that cognitive-behavioral counseling has a significant positive effect on optimism (Dafei et al., 2021). In addition, group counseling, through a variety of psychological intervention strategies, can help participants develop positive cognitive patterns and enhance their ability to cope with challenges. Group counseling is not only effective for treating psychological disorders, but also promotes optimism in individuals (Jenny et al., 2021).

The findings of current research indicated that the level of optimism of students in the experimental group was significantly improved and that the Optimism Group Counseling Program could enhance the optimism of junior high school students. This study is an empirical study to detect the effect of positive psychology class group counseling in enhancing the level of individual optimism, which provides practical cases and references for optimism intervention research, and also enriches the theory of optimism intervention research in positive psychology, which can be used as a reference for research and practice in the field of optimism. The study utilized positive psychological group counseling intervention to enhance students' optimism, offering practical implications for intervention in the field of education. The goal of the group intervention was to improve students' optimism and increase positive experiences. Simultaneously, the intervention is equally applicable to promoting students' mental health and may be beneficial for classroom management in educational settings. First, optimistic training courses can be incorporated into school education. Group counseling in positive psychological classes helps to cultivate an optimistic mentality, improve the level of optimism, enhance the ability of psychological immunity, enable students to view life more positively and optimistically and promote the healthy growth of students' physical and mental health. Therefore, if the positive psychology class counseling and optimism curriculum are incorporated into the school education, it will certainly improve the students' mental health level as a whole. Second, the concept of positive psychology can be introduced into class management. Positive psychological class group counseling is an effective way of class management. It has changed the thinking mode of the teacher's eyes fixed on the problem in the past, focusing on cultivating positive qualities from the perspective of positive guidance, which will make the problem easy to solve. In addition, positive psychological class group counseling promotes the formation of class cohesion and the full development of a good class atmosphere. Finally, the optimism training course should be extended to teachers. Schools should cultivate the optimistic beliefs of ordinary students, and promote teachers' optimistic tendencies. To extend the optimism training course to teachers of other subjects, deeds are better than words, if teachers improve their optimism level and master optimistic skills and strategies, they will apply them to their teaching, which is conducive to creating a positive and optimistic campus environment.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of interventions may vary depending on the individual, how the intervention is delivered, and how it is evaluated. Therefore, future research needs to further explore how interventions can be tailored to the specific needs of individuals, and how the long-term effects of these interventions can be assessed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, for the changes in students' level of optimism after positive psychological class counseling intervention, the results found that positive psychological class counseling can improve the optimism of junior high school students. Positive psychological class counseling has shown remarkable potential for increasing individual optimism, which helps participants establish positive cognitive patterns and enhance their ability to cope with challenges through a variety of psychological intervention strategies. In the current campus mental health services, the class positive psychological group counseling as a routine intervention means, not only helps to improve individual optimism, but also provides a new perspective and method to promote the overall mental health of students.

This study focuses on curriculum teaching, emphasizing the combination of interactive teaching and situated teaching, especially situated teaching, the teaching content can be extended from classroom to extracurricular through the construction of an optimistic class culture. In addition to the design and teaching of course teachers, optimistic class groups need to cooperate with headteachers. If it can be combined with moral education in schools, they will play a greater role.

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