Research Paper:
The Effectiveness of Creative Drama on Mental Health and Self-esteem in Aggressive Gifted Students

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ABSTRACT

Background & Aims of the Study: Gifted students have unique characteristics and higher cognitive competencies than normal students. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of creative drama on aggressive gifted students' mental health and self-esteem.

Materials and Methods: To conduct the present applied research, 30 gifted female students in the ninth and tenth grades, after diagnosing aggression using the Buss and Perry questionnaires, were selected and randomly divided into experimental and control groups. Subjects then completed the Coopersmith Self-Esteem and General Health questionnaires (GHQ) in the pre-test. Subjects of the experimental group participated in the creative drama program for 12 sessions, and both groups completed the questionnaires again. Finally, the data were analyzed by Shapiro-Wilk and U Mann-Whitney tests.

Results: The results showed that the creative drama intervention increased self-esteem and decreased the overall mental health score in the subscales of social dysfunction, anxiety, and depression but had no significant effect on the subscale of physical symptoms.

Conclusion: The results confirm the effect of creative drama intervention on aggressive students' self-esteem and psychological health.

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1. Introduction

Mental health is one of the issues in today's world that have been considered by researchers and is one of the valuable factors of the global index [1]. According to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), health is the complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not just the absence of disease. According to this definition, the concept of mental health for the WHO is something beyond the absence of mental disorders, which includes mental well-being, perception of self-efficacy, independence, autonomy, self-efficacy, and self-fulfillment of potential intellectual and emotional abilities. According to this definition, how a person adapts to the environment is important in mental health. In other words, one must strike a balance between what one is doing or wanting to do and what the environment expects one to do. In other words, individual adaptation requires meeting personal needs in accordance with environmental realities [2]. In this regard, Zhang et al. reported that Asian students are at risk for depression, which may prevent them from attending school classrooms [3]. Also, according to the available statistics, the high prevalence of mental problems, especially depression, among adolescents is estimated at 16 to 30% [4]. Bruffaerts et al. reported that students' mental health problems are very common in the early years of adolescence and are significantly associated with poor academic performance [5]. Wyatt et al. also showed that the prevalence and severity of mental health problems have increased among students and these issues are a threat to their health and academic performance. Also, mental health impacts on 9.11% of children and adolescents are the same as mental health impacts on adults [6].

On the other hand, children and adolescents suffer from specific vulnerabilities than adults. Furthermore, children and adolescents depend on adults who can control exposure to stressful and problematic mental health risks [7]. In the meantime, adolescents, as one of the vulnerable groups, are usually exposed to various psychiatric disorders [8].

Another variable that plays an important role in life, especially in adolescents, is self-esteem, a psychological phenomenon that has a decisive impact on human beings' emotional and cognitive dimensions. Self-esteem plays a significant role in the emergence of mental disorders and social problems, such as depression, anxiety, violence, and risky behaviors [9]. Empirical research has shown that self-esteem is an important psychological factor for health and quality of life [10]. Research has shown that health and well-being are related to self-esteem, and self-esteem has a significant common variance with both well-being and happiness components. The impacts of negative self-esteem are often multifaceted. Poor self-esteem can lead to destructive attitudes, psychiatric vulnerability, social problems, and high-risk behaviors [11].

In the meantime, and among different ages, adolescence is one of the most sensitive periods of life, during which a person's life undergoes significant changes as psychologists have referred to adolescence with titles, such as critical period, long and stressful period, and period of conflict with family and society, which creates problems for adolescents. Adding the complexities of the industrial society to the developmental problems of this period endangers the health of the potential forces of the society. Conflict with physical changes, searching within existence to understand the meaning of self, evolution, and change of other personality dimensions (cognitive, emotional, social, etc.) form the general view of this period [12].

Gifted students, meanwhile, have unique emotional needs due to the fact that they are different from others. Many researchers have acknowledged that giftedness and the coincidence of adolescence lead to a set of problems that are so difficult to deal with that these challenges are often accompanied by increased emotional responses [13]. Therefore, researchers are always trying to find a method to minimize the negative impacts of adolescence and control the psychological state of adolescents, and gifted people are no exception. In this regard, various methods, such as group therapy, medication, and cognitive-behavioral therapy have been used, but it is not possible to use these methods in all situations. It seems that the use of methods, such as creative drama programs can play an influential role in promoting the health of this group of people. Also, because these therapies are designed based on the cultural conditions of different countries and their ecological issues, these programs cannot be used for Iranian adolescents. In addition, these programs are designed based on the cultural considerations of the same countries; therefore, since many therapies used for the problems of gifted students are not designed based on Iranian culture, and many therapies focus only on the child and adolescent and ignore the child's family and community. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness and sustainability of creative drama on mental health and self-esteem in aggressive gifted adolescents.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study is an applied and quasi-experimental study conducted with a pre-test post-test research design. In the present study, to observe ethical principles, the subjects were promised that the individual results of the research would remain confidential with the researcher, and the results would not be leaked anywhere other than the subject and her family. To conduct this research, of female students in ninth and tenth grades who were studying in the Gifted School of Tehran in the 2019-2020 academic year (90 people), who had the inclusion criteria (obtaining a cut-off point of 130 on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale using Bass and Perry Aggression Questionnaire (1992), 30 people were selected and randomly divided into the control (n=15) and experimental (n=15) groups. This scale includes 29 questions and four factors of physical, verbal, anger, and hostility aggression and is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale: from 1 (completely contrary to my characteristics) up to 5 (completely indicative of my characteristics) and its validity and reliability have been reported at a desirable level. The participants who were willing to participate in the research completed the intervention sessions. Also, those who did not get the required score on the Stanford-Binet IQ scale, their non-aggression was confirmed, did not complete the questionnaires, and were absent for two sessions in therapy sessions were excluded from the investigation.

Coopersmith self-esteem test was used to collect data in the pre-test stage, which has 58 items and four subscales of self-esteem, peer self-esteem, family self-esteem, and academic self-esteem, whose validity and reliability coefficients have been obtained abroad and in Iran in numerous studies and using various acceptable methods. The maximum score of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) is equal to 26 and that of the other three scales is equal to 8, and the maximum overall score of self-esteem is equal to 50. The GHQ, including 28 questions and four subscales of physical symptoms, anxiety, social dysfunction, and depression, was used to determine mental health. This questionnaire is scored in different methods; for example, the score is 3, 2, 1, 0, where the maximum score of the subject is 84. Usually, in this method, a score of 23 is considered the cut-off score. If the subject's score on the screening test is equal to or greater than 23, he or she will be screened as a suspect. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been studied and confirmed abroad in Iran. After completing the questionnaires, the subjects of the experimental group performed the intervention program in the following order:

Session 1: Familiarity with each other: Starting the relationship between the group leader (psychologist) and individuals, introduction, and explanation about the beginning and end of the process and the framework and rules of participation in the creative drama group (including participation and interaction in the performance and participation in the discussion).

Session 2: Storytelling: The short story is set as the core, and the overall theme is told, which is expanded by the actors in each session and takes on a complete form. We asked people to comment on the topic of the selected story and discuss it together. The psychologist is in charge of observing and moderating the discussions.

Session 3: Dividing the main plot of the story into scenes with the help of the participants so that all people can perform it, dealing with the content of the scenes selected for performance with each other, and paying attention to the subtleties of personality dimensions (for example, in this research, attention should be paid to the dimensions of fictional character perfectionism and how fictional characters behave based on perfectionist characteristics).

Session 4: Grouping teens, according to the number of roles, basically both monologues and scenes are selected, in which people dialogue with each other.

Session 5: Explaining concepts, such as imagination and focus on acting and its performance by participants, and other concepts as emotions, such as anger that cause aggression, its appearance, and its causes and deterrents, and in this regard, we talk and discuss with participants.

Session 6: Using mental imagery so that actors can use and express their emotions in the game by identifying fictional characters and immersing themselves in their roles. People with externalized problems, including aggression, choose maladaptive strategies (such as mental rumination, avoidance, etc.) to modify and eliminate it; the cognitive-emotion regulation training model of Gross was used in this training program, and creative drama with the improvisations of the participants while playing the role was used.

Session 7: Situation Modification: The purpose of this session is to weave scenes and change emotion-provoking situations, to avoid social isolation and avoidance, and people practice using their thoughts and experiences for improvisation and role-playing, and improvise the process of the story, continuing to comment until we get closer and closer to the main form of the story (psychologist plays the role of the facilitator).

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Session 8: Continuing to play the role of a fictional character by substituting a consistent strategy from the actor's point of view and discussing and concluding the rest of the group about it (with the management of a psychologist).

Session 9: If another person has a creative idea and a different kind of view of the same scene, she will perform it, and the group members will be asked to continue the scene they played with the compatible strategy of other friends and pretend to continue their role. Then, effective feedback is applied to increase consistency in the same scene.

Session 10: Individuals' play is evaluated (by the individuals themselves under the supervision of a psychologist), and the effect of cognition on their dominant thinking is discussed, and they are asked to play the opposite view.

Session 11: Teaching relaxation and emotional evacuation to use its effects on performing their role. During the show, they can take control of their emotions while acting to create a connection between the scenes, and finally, based on the main story, we conclude in the last scene and end the story.

Session 12: Evaluating the program and relating the story to concepts, such as social adjustment, cognitive-emotion regulation, perfectionism, and aggression that are directly or indirectly related.

Both groups completed the questionnaires again at the end of the intervention period. Finally, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and the Shapiro-Wilk test investigated the normal data distribution. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the effect of the intervention using SPSS software v. 24.

3. Results

The results showed that the self-esteem score of children in the experimental group increased after the end of the creative drama sessions due to the post-test changes compared to the pre-test ($P<0.01$). Also, the results of comparing the mean difference of pre-test post-test scores of mental health in the experimental and control groups showed that the overall score of mental health and the score of subscales of social dysfunction, anxiety, and depression in the experimental group decreased compared to the pre-test after the end of the creative drama sessions due to the post-test changes, ($P<0.05$). However, there was no significant difference in the post-test changes compared to the pre-test subscale of physical symptoms (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of the difference in pretest-posttest scores of research variables in the two groups

Variables	Groups	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U Test	Z	Sig.
Self-esteem	Experimental	-1.9	1.2	15.83	10.50	-3.13	0.002
	Control	-7.11	2.4	7.38			
Mental health	Experimental	5.62	3.96	13.06	11.50	-3.13	0.02
	Control	-0.4	4.59	6.65			
Anxiety	Experimental	4.13	4.05	12.25	18	-2.54	0.04
	Control	-0.6	4.45	7.30			
Depression	Experimental	0.62	0.91	11.94	20	-1.97	0.04
	Control	-0.2	0.63	7.55			
Social dysfunction	Experimental	2	1.3	12.31	17.50	-2.06	0.03
	Control	0.5	1.43	7.25			
Physical symptoms	Experimental	-1.12	4.67	7.81	26.50	-1.43	0.15
	Control	-0.1	0.31	10.85			

4. Discussion

The results showed that the creative drama intervention increased the level of self-esteem in aggressive gifted students. In our knowledge and reviewing research conducted abroad and inside the country, no research has been found that has examined the effect of creative drama on the soul of creative, gifted students. Self-esteem is one of the basic human needs in all scientific and moral classes and degrees [14]. Establishing and maintaining social relationships has a deterrent effect on adolescents' efficiency and prevents the healthy formation of identity and the flourishing of their talents and intellectual and emotional powers. Assertiveness training, or in other words, teaching this social skill, is a behavioral approach that has become very popular today and is helpful for people who have problems expressing themselves in interpersonal situations [15]. In explaining this research finding, considering the positive effects of creative drama, especially in the field of developing the power of creativity and the growth of children's creative power, looking at the history of education in the world, we see that the history of using creative drama in the world of education dates back to the last hundred years.

Furthermore, today we witness laws in advanced countries where all teachers must teach children through drama [16]. The reason for such attention is due to the fact that the educational authorities of these countries realized that the use of creative drama as an educational method is a subject, through which the child is a creator and the educator leads. In this educational method, the educator plays her actual role as a midwife of science and helps to give birth to new thoughts and ideas [17]. The entry of activities, such as drama into the field of education indicates the emergence of a new era in thought and is based on new theoretical foundations. It is a new model and a new look at education that Rousseau took the first step in this field and opened the chapter of the first new discourse, namely, the play in the service of education [18]. Thus, it seems that creative drama has increased students' self-esteem in this way.

The results showed that the creative drama intervention affects the overall score of mental health and subcomponents of social dysfunction, anxiety, and depression and reduces them. This finding is somewhat in line with the results of Askari Nejad, Qaedi et al., and Rasulzadu and Dachert [19-21]. Regarding the effect of creative drama on social function, we can point to the group nature of creative drama because no art form is as creative as teamwork [22]. It is impossible to imagine a creative drama without a group. Thus, in creative drama, children

spontaneously engage in many social learning activities, such as participating in group work, cooperation, adhering to customs, communication skills, taking turns, being aware of, using emotions, and following rules. Also, creative drama allows the child to play an active role in different situations. In the process of this drama, the child develops the concept of her own role. This issue enables her to get to know herself and others better and increase her sensitivity to others. By creating an intimate atmosphere in creative drama, the child can better collaborate with others and develop her communication skills [23].

On the other hand, creative drama helps children express their feelings and thoughts easily and in a safe drama environment, leading to increased insight into negative thoughts, thereby regulating one's emotions [24]. The problem-solving approach also teaches children to learn problem-solving techniques and use them to control their emotions well in various situations. Creative drama allows the child to learn many daily life issues by acting and managing her emotions. During her roles, the child can express her emotions directly [25, 26].

However, the lack of complete control over the subjects' mental characteristics during the exercises, the lack of control over their possible bias when completing the questionnaires, the lack of control over their family status and economic status are some of the limitations of the present study that may affect the research results. On the other hand, the present study has, for the first time, examined the effectiveness of creative drama on mental health and self-esteem among gifted female students as the elites. Also, controlling giftedness and the presence of aggression before entering the research is one of the strengths of the present research. Finally, it is suggested that a study similar to the present study be performed on male aggressive gifted students and another study be performed on normal aggressive students and that the results be compared with the present study. A study should be conducted to control the mental state of the subjects in order to eliminate this disruptive factor.

5. Conclusion

Our results confirm the effect of creative drama intervention on self-esteem and psychological health of aggressive gifted students. Therefore, using this intervention to reduce these students' psychological symptoms and consequently, aggression is recommended.

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Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles are considered in this article. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were free to leave the study whenever they wished, and if desired, the research results would be available to them. A written consent has been obtained from the subjects. principles of the Helsinki Convention was also observed.

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Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interests.

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