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EFFECTS OF OPTIMISM SKILLS ON UPPER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION IN THE CITY OF ASHKEZAR

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to investigate the effects of optimism skills on the emotional exhaustion of upper high school students in the Iranian city of Ashkezar. This study fell under quasi-experimental research and employed an experimental and a control group. The study also had an applied goal, and data was collected descriptively using the library method and a questionnaire. The statistical population of the study consisted of 472 students (380 girls and 92 boys) studying at the upper high schools of Ashkezar City in the academic year 2023 to 2024. The sampling method was the random cluster method, and two schools were selected, each involving 50 people (a total of 100 people). The Emotional Exhaustion Questionnaire was also administered to them. Out of the 100 people, 40 people who had scored less in class behavior management were selected as the sample. The experimental group received optimism skills training but the control group did not. Findings showed that there was no significant difference in the two groups of students' emotional exhaustion in the pre-test stage; however, the post-test intervention noted that administering optimism skills to the experimental group had effectively reduced their emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: Optimism skills, emotional exhaustion, upper high school students, Ashkezar City

INTRODUCTION

Emotional burnout, or what is commonly known as emotional exhaustion is a critical subject with significant implications for both students and instructors. When experiencing emotional burnout, teachers' occupational satisfaction will decline and they encounter occupational burnout, which will finally leave adverse impacts on the quality of the education they provide students with; in the same way, when students experience emotional exhaustion, they may no longer be willing to take part in the educational process, experience weak academic performance, and even suffer from mental health issues. Emotional burnout in the class is

associated with the way it affects the overall learning setting. When teachers are emotionally exhausted, they may face problems in effectively managing their classrooms, fail to provide significant feedback to students, or even create a positive and supportive environment. This will compound disciplinary affairs, reduce students' motives, and degrade the overall educational quality. Moreover, emotional burnout could also have negative impacts on teacher-student relations (Omid Kohan-Shur, 2023).

When teachers are emotionally exhausted, they may experience difficulties in establishing communication with their students on a personal scale, which would cause a lack of trust and communication in general. This will affect the learning process negatively and make it more difficult for students to find teacher assistance and consultation (Mani Ab-Nili, 2023). Regarding students, emotional exhaustion may be characterized by increased stress, anxiety, and indifference to educational responsibilities, among others. As staged, emotional exhaustion could reduce students' participation in class, undermine their academic achievement, and disrupt their relationship with the learning process (Mir Arab-Razi et al., 2019). On the other hand, emotional exhaustion could cause some mental problems such as depression and anxiety, and influence the student's overall well-being. Another major problem associated with failure to deal with emotional exhaustion in class is its potential long-term impact on teachers and students (Borzuei, 2023). For teachers, emotional exhaustion could lead to occupational burnout, occupational dissatisfaction, and finally exhaustion from the profession. Emotional exhaustion could also have negative implications for personal well-being and the continuation of the educational system (Pur-Rajab, Panahi-Darcheh, Sadeghi & Baba-Ahmadi-Milani, 2020). Similarly, for students, emotional exhaustion could leave lasting impacts on their academic achievement, mental health, and general well-being. If students are not provided with sufficient support and resources, they will experience difficulties with their future academic achievement (Rasouli, 2023).

To deal with emotional exhaustion-related problems in the classroom, educational organizations must focus on the well-being of teachers and students. This includes strategies to support teachers with their workloads, build a positive school culture that values well-being, and provide resources for teachers to meet their emotional problems. Moreover, schools must focus more on social-emotional learning and support students' mental health (Dehvari & Ali Sufi, 2018). Schools can establish a supportive and nurturing setting to recognize students' emotional needs and reduce emotional exhaustion-related negative impacts, and finally promote a supportive learning experience for all. As a consequence, the significance of dealing with emotional exhaustion in the class cannot be overestimated. Failure to pay attention to teachers' and students' emotional well-being could lead to several problems, which would eventually affect the quality of education and people's overall well-being. Educational organizations can establish positive and more effective learning environments for students by prioritizing emotional exhaustion and implementing strategies that would help support teachers and students, alike (Shariat-Bagheri & Shamsaei, 2019).

On the other hand, optimism is man's positive cognitive and emotional attention to God, the world, people, thoughts, behaviors, and events by which the individual will positively interpret events and expect to meet his desired results by his struggle toward achieving his goals. Optimism is a generalized decision by which the individual feels that some desired outcomes will occur when facing problems. Intrinsic optimism or the tendency that good experiences will occur in life is defined as a relatively stable personal trait that determines the type of the individual's behaviors (Scheire & Corver, 2001). This structure affects how people deal with stressful experiences and they may succeed in events in life. An individual with an optimistic tendency toward the future will approach stressful situations positively and measure his abilities to overcome problems well. Seligman defines optimism as an explanatory style rather than a broad personal trait. According to his viewpoint, optimistic people explain negative events and experiences by attributing their causes to external, temporary, and specific factors.

In a review and library study, Malekshahi (2017) investigated the role of scientific optimism

in teachers' competence. He found that scientific optimism as a property featuring collective self-efficacy, and trust in parents, and students was directly associated with controlling the socioeconomic level, previous achievement, demographic characteristics, students' achievement, teachers' individual and dispositional optimism, the humanistic management of the classroom, and the student-centered teaching. This study demonstrated that if schools were to be empowered, they could build a scientific optimism culture, as this empowering structure will be associated with the hierarchy of school management, rules and regulations, and procedures. The empowering structure will also increase innovation, participation, and trust between individuals. Findings showed that the school should focus more on teachers' options and thinking about schools, and managers should employ these viewpoints to adopt higher educational standards.

In a study, Hejazi and Aminipour (2014) investigated the relationship between teachers' educational optimism and their self-management strategies with students' academic achievement. Using a stepwise regression, they concluded that teachers' self-management strategies and educational optimism were positively and significantly associated with students' academic achievement, as these strategies were capable of predicting their academic achievement. No significant difference was noted between male and female teachers' academic optimism and management strategies. In sum, findings showed that students of the teachers who were more optimistic and applied higher self-management strategies enjoyed a higher academic achievement rate.

Molla Khalili and Ahmadi (2014) investigated the relationship between optimism and pessimism in high school students and teachers' mental health. Findings showed a significantly positive relationship between optimism and mental health and a significantly negative relationship between pessimism and mental health. Speaking of dimensions of mental health, optimism was significantly associated with depression, but pessimism was significantly associated with all dimensions of mental health dimensions. There was only a significant difference between teachers and students in the relationship between optimism and a single dimension of mental health, i.e., depression, whereas there was a significant difference between teachers and students in the relationship between pessimism and two dimensions of mental health, i.e., anxiety and depression. In sum, findings showed that optimism helps improve mental health, while pessimism reduces it.

Fabella & Paz-Aler (2023) investigated optimism as a mitigator of occupational burnout, examining the relationship between optimism and occupational burnout among teachers. They found that teachers had their occupation burnout increased due to their encounter with the Coronavirus pandemic. This study investigated the relationship between optimism and occupational burnout among 31 volunteer teachers in the Philippines. They also used Campbell's 20-item questionnaire on a five-value Likert scale to measure teachers' occupational burnout, while applying a 10-item questionnaire on a five-value Likert scale to measure optimism. While most respondents demonstrated moderate optimism, they experienced lower occupational burnout. Meanwhile, there was a significantly inverse relationship between optimism and occupational burnout scores, suggesting that for respondents, an optimistic viewpoint would reduce occupational burnout.

İvgin & Demirtaş (2022) investigated the relationship between schools' academic optimism and principals' management styles based on teachers' perceptions. Online data were collected from 353 teachers working in 51 public schools in the city center of Adyaman, Turkey. Findings showed that there was a significant difference between teachers' viewpoints of academic optimism and perceived management styles. There was also a positive relationship between the interactive management style and academic optimism and a negative relationship between the authoritarian management style and optimism.

Chag and Chan (2000) investigated optimistic proactive coping and occupational burnout in nurses, concluding that higher levels of optimism were associated with lower levels of

occupational burnout. Optimism was determined to be strongly associated with dropping individual success and occupational burnout. The findings of this study underscored the significance of optimism and proactive coping in preventing symptoms of occupational burnout.

Chang, Rand, and Strunk (2001) investigated the relationship between optimism and the risk of occupational burnout among working college students and the mediating role of stress. They found that optimism and stress were significantly associated with the risk of occupational burnout. Moreover, path analysis results showed that optimism is a strong predictor of occupational burnout.

Positive and negative expectations about the future are critical for understanding mental vulnerabilities, such as disorders, especially mood disorders. Recently, the literature has shown an inverse correlation between optimism and symptoms of depression (Chang & Sanna, 2001), and between optimism and suicidal ideation (Hirsch, Connor, & Duberstein, 2007). Hence, optimism appears to play a critical moderating role in the relationship between feelings, such as despair and suicidal ideation (Hirsch & Connor, 2007). In this connection, Van der Velden et al.¹ (2007) recently examined the relationship between dispositional optimism and depression among victims of a natural disaster, concluding that compared to optimists, pessimists were less hopeful of the future and were subject to depression and anxiety disorders, as well as social dysfunctions and decreased quality of life. Meanwhile, optimism played a determining role in the quality of life and depression disorders in patients with somatic ills (e.g., acute coronary syndromes) where there is an inverse correlation between dispositional optimism and the level of satisfaction with life, on the one hand, and depression symptoms following a cardio-vascular disease, on the other hand.

Giltay et al.² (2006) demonstrated whether or not psychotherapy would help promote an optimistic tendency among pessimistic people by developing an effective strategy to deal with depression. Evidence suggests that research on victims of naturally catastrophic disasters has indicated that even a single session of cognitive-behavioral therapy will strengthen the sense of control and coping with debilitating disorders following a disaster while improving the individual's well-being (Basoglu, Salcioglu, Livanou, Kalender & Acar, 2005).

There are some theories about optimism; the first theory concerns dispositional optimism, suggesting that optimistic people expect good events to happen, but pessimistic people expect bad things to occur for them. This viewpoint attributes optimistic peoples' mental health, somatic health, and compatibility to their coping styles. This perspective takes its roots from the traditional Expectancy-Value Theory of motivations (Scheier, Carver, Bridges, 2001).

The second major theory, the Hope Theory, underscores Bandura's views of the relationship between three concepts of target selection, expectations, and self-efficacy. Therefore, people with a valuable goal are competent enough to find various ways to meet that goal, trust their problem-solving abilities, and thus experience higher levels of hope (Sun, 2022).

The third major theory is the "Perceptual Error" stating that optimistic people use their self-deceptive processes to imagine themselves in an increased quality of life.

Apart from the effects of optimism on reducing students' classroom problems and improving their academic achievement, this component, one would note, could effectively reduce students' emotional exhaustion. As shown by As'adi, Razavi, and Tajrobekar (2021), optimism skills reduce students' problems, increase their academic achievement, and enhance somatic and mental well-being. In sum, optimism skills are said to reduce stress, particularly academic stressors, and affect emotional exhaustion. As stated, the objective of this study was to

¹ Kleber, Fournier, Grievink, Drogendijk, Gersons

² Kamphuis, Kalmijn, Zitman & Kromhout

investigate the impacts of optimism skills on upper high-school students' emotional exhaustion in the Yazd city of Ashkezar, Iran.

Methodology

This study fell under quasi-experimental research and employed an experimental and a control group. The study also had an applied goal, and data was collected descriptively using the library method and a questionnaire. The statistical population of the study consisted of 472 students (380 girls and 92 boys) studying at the upper high schools of Ashkezar City in the academic year 2023 to 2024. The sampling method was the random cluster method, involving an experimental and a control group, each representing 20 students.

Research Tools

Chen et al.'s Emotional Exhaustion Questionnaire (2019)

The Emotional Exhaustion questionnaire contains 21 items and 3 components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal inadequacy. Using the Likert scale, this questionnaire applies such items as *When I wake up in the morning, I feel emotionally exhausted and I have to work one more day* to measure emotional exhaustion. The estimated Cronbach's alpha of the tool is over 0.7

The statistical sample is divided between two groups of experimental and control students, who were provided with the emotional exhaustion (the dependent variable) questionnaire. The experimental group received 7-8 one-hour sessions of optimism skills (the independent variable), as the said questionnaires were again provided to the groups to measure their efficacy (Table 1).

Table 1: Sessions

Sessions	Description
First session	Defining optimism, the power to control the mind, evaluating events and situations properly, familiarizing people with their different feelings
Second session	Ways of collecting positive occurrence, ways of being optimistic
Third session	The skill of increasing self-esteem, the importance of happiness and positive-thinking in life
Fourth session	The skill of controlling stress and automatic negative thoughts
Fifth session	The skill of changing oneself and positive view of the environment
Sixth session	Introducing the technique and creating intimate relations in life
Seventh session	Presenting appropriate solutions to increase positive social relations
Eighth session	The skill of maintenance and continuation

The Covariance Test and SPSS software were used to examine study hypotheses.

Findings

Findings showed that the average age of the experimental and control groups were 17.60 and 17.26 years, respectively, with the former group's age being a bit higher than the latter group's age. The minimum and maximum ages were 16 and 18, respectively, with the 18-year-old age group having the highest frequency in both groups.

The minimum and maximum education levels of the two groups were the tenth and twelfth grades, respectively. The majority of the subjects in the experimental group were in the twelfth grade (60%), followed by the eleventh and tenth grades, respectively. In the control group, the majority of the subjects were in the twelfth grade (46.7%), also followed by the eleventh and tenth grades, respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive indexes of the study variables in the experimental and control groups

Groups	Scales	Means	SD	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Emotional exhaustion	83.93	6.39	76.00	100.00	0.99	1.34
	Emotional exhaustion	83.87	6.52	76.00	95.00	0.46	-1.25
	Emotional exhaustion	52.80	6.10	38.00	62.00	-0.83	1.17
	Emotional exhaustion	80.93	4.65	75.00	90.00	0.64	-0.60

As noted, the average pre-test scores of emotional exhaustions in the experimental group were higher than those of the post-test, as the average pre-test scores of this component in the control group did not differ much. This means that after the intervention was administered, the average post-test scores saw marked changes compared to those of the pre-test. Also, optimism skills reduced students' emotional exhaustion scores (Table 2).

Table 3: Levene's Test and the Test for Homogeneity of Variances results for control and experimental groups

Index Variable	F	First freedom degree	Second freedom degree	Sig.
Emotional exhaustion	0.025	1	28	0.876

Levene's test results showed that the study variable values were not significant; therefore, the non-significance of this test shows that the assumption of the homogeneity of variances about the study variables was met (Sig. >0.05). In other words, the assumption of the equality of variance of emotional exhaustion scores in the two groups was confirmed. Thus, the sample does not offer evidence to reject the null hypothesis (equality of variances), suggesting the assumption is confirmed (Table 3).

Table 4: Equality of regression coefficients in study variables

Index Variable	Freedom degree	F	Sig.
Emotional exhaustion group*	2	3.577	0.074

As shown by F coefficients in the interaction between the group and the pre-test, none of the variables was significant (Sig.>0.05). Therefore, no significant difference in regression coefficient was noted between dependent and covariate variables, with the assumption of the homogeneity of regression coefficients in the control and experimental groups being met for all scales. According to the assumptions, the study data can enter the covariance analysis, and the two groups' differences can be examined by the study variables (Table 4).

Table 5: Covariance test results

Index Variable	Sum of squares	Freedom degree	Mean squares	F	Sig.	Effect size
Corrected model	6139.62	2	3069.81	133.29	0.001	0.91
Intercept	167.55	1	167.55	7.27	0.012	0.21
Pre-test	203.49	1	203.49	3.83	0.006	0.25
Group	5947.71	1	5947.71	258.24	0.001	0.91
Error	621.83	27	23.03			
Total	140896.00	30				

Table 5 shows that the F-test statistic was 258.24 at the significance level of 0.001 (Sig. <0.05). Therefore, this value is statistically significant, suggesting there is a significant difference between average emotional exhaustion scores in the control and experimental groups. Also, the eta squared (η^2) or size effect index shows that the grouping can explain 91% of the emotional exhaustion variance. In other words, 91% of the difference in the two groups relates to the intervention. The difference in the efficacy of optimism skills can be examined by calculating the means of the two groups by considering emotional exhaustion as the dependent variable, as listed below in the table.

Table 6: Estimated means in the two groups

Groups	Means	SD
Experimental	52.80	6.10
Control	80.93	4.65

As noted, because the mean of the experimental group is smaller than that of the control group, training optimism skills is said to have been effective, at the confidence level of 95%, with the mean emotional exhaustion scores dropping after the intervention was administered to the experimental group. In other words, the intervention helped reduce the emotional exhaustion of the upper high school students of Ashkezar City, suggesting its efficacy was confirmed (Table 6).

Discussion

Findings showed no significant difference between the mean emotional exhaustion scores of the students in the experimental and control groups; however, after the intervention, the optimism skills, provided to the experimental group, reduced emotional exhaustion effectively.

In other words, the emotional exhaustion scores of the students who had received optimism skills and those of the students who had not received such skills showed significant differences in the post-test stage. Hence, at the confidence level of 95%, the null hypothesis was rejected and the study hypothesis was confirmed, indicating that optimism skills were effective in reducing the emotional exhaustion of the upper high school students of the city of Ashkezar.

Previous research findings by Rastegar and Valizadeh (2023), Hosseini Adl and Khosh Lahjeh-Sedgh (2023), Mohammadi (2023), Ziyaei and Mohammadi (2021), Mohseni et al. (2016), Molla Khalili and Ahmadi (2014), Babapour Fakh al-Din (2010), Wong et al. (2024), Fabella Paz-Aler (2023), Marcionetti and Castelli (2023), Özdemir and Kerse (2020), Chang and Chan (2015), and Chang et al. (2000) were directly and indirectly associated with those of the present study. Findings showed that optimism skills reduced students' occupational burnout and emotional exhaustion while increasing their mental well-being. The findings also indicated the significance of optimism skills and proactive coping to prevent symptoms of emotional exhaustion.

It was found that optimism results from an optimistic tendency about oneself, people, objects, events, and generally the whole world. Optimism, meanwhile, provides promising results. An optimistic approach increases positive emotions such as hopefulness after success and prevents negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and stress. Optimism and hope predict mental and somatic well-being characterized by self-reporting health, the positive response to medical interventions, mental well-being, positive moods, effective coping, health-promoting behavior, and optimistic people as healthier and happier. Optimism serves as a shield against threatening situations while increasing successful coping and compatibility with challenging and stressful situations. In other words, optimism increases peoples' capacity and talent to cope with stress, events, and catastrophes, thereby strengthening peoples' successful compatibility with dealing with various living situations and preventing aggression.

Therefore, optimism is said to play a significant role in people's lives, especially in their academic careers, mitigate implications of emotional exhaustion, and prevent aggression, stress, and anxiety. In other words, optimism refers to a category of non-cognitive abilities and skills that would increase the individual's success and coping skills to deal with environmental pressures, especially emotional exhaustion. This indicates that optimism helps reduce the risk of students' emotional exhaustion among students.

CONCLUSION

Findings showed that there was no significant difference between the control and experimental groups in the students' mean scores of emotional exhaustions in the pretest stage; however, after the intervention in the post-test stage, optimism skills were provided to the experimental group which effectively reduced emotional exhaustion.

This study aimed to provide optimism skills training only to upper high school students of Ashkezar City in Iran. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized, as other educational levels warrant more research. It is thus suggested that optimism skill efficacy be compared and evaluated along with other educational styles and interventions. Prospective research is suggested to control for other intervening factors such as pessimism, perceived competency, stress, households' economic situation, etc.

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