



Effect of Group Counseling Combined with Role Play Techniques on Emotional Intelligence of First-Year Students at Shanxi in the Open University

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Amid the academic aspirations and personal transformations that define the first year of university, students often grapple with developing emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is an indispensable trait for thriving in a diverse and dynamic university environment. The purpose of this research is 1) compare the emotional intelligence of students before and after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques. 2) Compare the emotional intelligence of students with the determined criterion of 70%.

Materials and Methods: The sample of this study was 40 first-year students studying at Shanxi Open University, derived from the cluster random sampling method in the academic year 2023. The research tools are 1) Seven lesson plans using group counseling combined with role-play techniques. 2) an emotional intelligence test with a reliability of 0.84. The statistics used for data analysis were the mean, standard deviation, and paired sample t-test.

Results: After learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques, students' emotional intelligence achieved by 72%, surpassing the predetermined criteria of 70% and the difference is statistically significant at .05. After learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques by students' emotional intelligence is at a high level with ($M = 119.48$ S.D. = 9.44).

Conclusion: The study confirms that learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques significantly enhances students' emotional intelligence. It stimulates students' interest in learning, develops students' independent learning ability, and meets their personalized learning needs. It is a new trend in the future of education.

Keywords: Group Counseling; Role-play Techniques; Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

The overall goal of mental health education is to improve the psychological quality of all students, fully develop their potential, cultivate their optimistic and upward psychological qualities, and promote the healthy development of their personality. Developing emotional intelligence is essential for fostering holistic growth, lifelong learning, and successful social interactions. Rasri et al. (2024) emphasize the role of holistic learning in integrating cognitive, emotional, and social development through natural human learning processes, which supports students in becoming well-rounded individuals. Complementing this, Khongsankham et al. (2024) highlight the importance of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in cultivating emotional intelligence and social competence, which are critical for students' academic success, mental well-being, and positive interpersonal relationships. Together, these studies underscore that emotional intelligence is not just a supplementary skill but a foundational element in education that enhances self-awareness, empathy, decision-making, and lifelong personal and professional development.

The contemporary educational landscape is marked by a growing recognition of the intricate relationship between academic success and students' mental well-being. With this knowledge in mind, this research is anchored in the realm of mental health, a course that holds profound relevance and significance in today's educational context (Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020). This course, which is integral to





the first-year curriculum of the university, aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of mental health, its determinants, and its impact on overall well-being. Through a structured curriculum, it aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to navigate the complexities of university life, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment conducive to their growth.

While college is often painted as a carefree period of self-discovery, it can be surprisingly demanding. Many students face a relentless barrage of pressures, from academic anxieties and social expectations to navigating new relationships and uncertain futures. This demanding environment can trigger a range of psychological struggles, including overwhelming stress, social isolation, relationship uncertainties, and difficulty adapting to change. Additionally, the pressure to choose a career path and the lack of experience dealing with setbacks can leave some students feeling lost and overwhelmed.

The aim is to solve the problems of the course mentioned above, so the researchers study learning theories like interpersonal communication theory (Guo, 2012), Group dynamics theory (Liu, 2009)), social learning theory (Bandura, 1989), and Dewey's Educational Theory (Wang and Wang, 2008), Emotional Intelligence Theory (Mayer, 2000), and using group counseling combined with role play technique can helping to solve this kind of problems.

The contemporary educational landscape is marked by a growing recognition of the intricate relationship between academic success and students' mental well-being. With this knowledge in mind, this research is anchored in the realm of mental health, a course that holds profound relevance and significance in today's educational context This course, which is integral to the first-year curriculum of the university, aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of mental health, its determinants, and its impact on overall well-being. Through a structured curriculum, it aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to navigate the complexities of university life, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment conducive to their growth (Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020).

Throughout the teaching process, the researcher often encounters parents and students who do not attach importance and neglect the subject of psychology. People often only pay attention to it when they find themselves sick or experiencing psychological disorders. At the same time, students may also lose focus or do homework for other subjects during class. Or students may be unwilling to cooperate during activities.

Under these government policies above, college students in recent years have not studied psychology courses in their primary and middle school. So the students the basic psychology knowledge. It will lead to a lack of self-awareness, a lack of self-regulation, an inability to control one's mood, and a lack of empathy for others. It will lead to self-seeking and not getting along with others. While college is often painted as a carefree period of self-discovery, it can be surprisingly demanding. Many students face a relentless barrage of pressures, from academic anxieties and social expectations to navigating new relationships and uncertain futures. This demanding environment can trigger a range of psychological struggles, including overwhelming stress, social isolation, relationship uncertainties, and difficulty adapting to change. Additionally, the pressure to choose a career path and the lack of experience dealing with setbacks can leave some students feeling lost and overwhelmed.

For these reasons, the researcher intends to research first-year university students as the sample. The discipline of psychological education has only been popularized as a necessary subject in China in the past five years. However, nowadays, college students have not been exposed to the subject of psychological education during their middle or primary school years, so they know very little about psychological education. Drawing upon extensive literature and insights from previous research, the proposed solution to address the challenge of enhancing emotional intelligence in first-year university students is the integration of "Group Counseling with Role Play Technique" (Odacı & Çelik, 2017)

In summary, this research is dedicated to addressing the critical issue of enhancing emotional intelligence among first-year university students, a challenge that profoundly influences their academic success and personal development. For improving Emotional Intelligence, there are many ways, like being more self-aware, recognizing how others feel, practicing active learning, communicating, staying positive, empathizing, being open-minded, listening to feedback, and staying calm under pressure. The chosen solution is the integration of "Group Counseling with Role Play Technique because it combines the benefits of group dynamics with the experiential learning offered by role-playing. This method leverages the support and feedback inherent in a group setting while providing a platform for individuals to actively engage in real-life scenarios. Role-playing allows



participants to practice new skills, explore different viewpoints, and experiment with behavioral changes in a safe environment. Through this approach, individuals can develop emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and coping strategies, leading to improved interpersonal interactions and personal growth. The group context also offers a sense of community, allowing for shared experiences and collective learning, which can be particularly powerful in reinforcing change and understanding. In research, group counseling is a dynamic process that allows individuals to receive support, feedback, and guidance from others. Wheeler's definition paints group counseling as a dynamic and interactive process. It can help a person improve emotional intelligence. In the forthcoming sections of this study, the researcher will delve deeper into the theoretical foundations, research methodology, findings, and implications of this approach.

The goal of this research is to enhance the emotional intelligence (EI) of university freshmen by employing innovative educational strategies. This study intends to develop and refine skills vital for academic and personal success in a collegiate environment. By integrating methods such as group counseling and role-play techniques, the research seeks to provide actionable insights that can be applied to improve educational practices and foster a supportive atmosphere that encourages the holistic development of students' abilities to manage emotions, relate to others, and navigate the complexities of university life.

Objectives

To compare the student's emotional intelligence before and after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques?

To compare the students' emotional intelligence after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques with the determined criterion of 70%.

Literature review

Reich et al, (2020) researched “What does “successful aging” mean to you?—systematic review and cross-cultural comparison of lay perspectives of older adults in 13 countries” and conducted a cross-cultural study in countries including the USA, South America, and Europe, and Asia to explore the widespread impact of role-playing in group counseling. The study found positive outcomes across different regions, suggesting the universal benefit of role-play techniques in enhancing academic performance and emotional intelligence.

Supriyanto et al (2020) researched “Counselling services with technology in Pandemic Covid-19.”, and explored how school counselors adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic, particularly in delivering group counseling services remotely. The article discusses the various problems faced by students during the pandemic, including mental health issues, misinformation, educational challenges, and the need for coping strategies. Online group counseling was crucial in addressing these issues.

Mohamad Yusop et al (2020) researched “THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELLING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW,” particularly emphasizing educational settings where group counseling aids in academic achievement, stress reduction, increasing positive self-esteem, and improving study skills. Techniques such as cognitive-behavioral approaches are commonly employed to reduce test anxiety and enhance self-awareness among university students. The articles reviewed are from countries like Turkey, Iran, Romania, Thailand, and Malaysia. The review also indicates that the process of counseling itself is vital, with trust and group cohesion being essential for motivating members to reach their goals. The group leader plays a crucial role in creating a safe atmosphere and possesses skills like active listening, supporting, and modeling.

Lim (2023) Conducted This approach allows participants to share feelings and experiences in a supportive and safe environment. Through group interactions, participants not only learn how to better understand and manage their own emotions but also observe and learn from the emotional responses and coping mechanisms of others. The group dynamics in counseling encourage individuals to express and explore emotions while learning from the feedback of others, which is particularly effective for improving emotional awareness and social interaction skills.

Pratiwi et al. (2022) Role-play activities enable participants to practice emotional expression and management techniques in simulated social scenarios. By taking on different roles, participants can safely explore and experiment with various ways of expressing emotions and resolving conflicts,

thereby enhancing their understanding of and empathy for their own emotions and those of others. Additionally, role play enhances adaptability to social situations and problem-solving abilities.

Group counseling and role-play are chosen as primary methods to enhance EI because they are both practical and interactive. They provide immediate feedback and deep emotional experiences. Such hands-on practice helps individuals more effectively integrate and apply theoretical knowledge, developing and honing EI skills within real or simulated interpersonal interactions.

Conceptual Framework

In this study: the independent variable is Group Counseling combined with Role Play Techniques on 1st university students learning approach which is based on interpersonal communication theory (Guo, 2012), Group dynamics theory (Liu, 2009), social learning theory (Bandura, 1989), and Dewey's Educational Theory (Wang and Wang, 2008). Based on these theories, the researcher integrated the principles and concepts of theories to form steps of teaching to improve students' learning abilities, which can enhance the students' emotional intelligence. On the other hand, the dependent variable is students' emotional intelligence learning based on Emotional Intelligence Theory (Mayer, 2000).

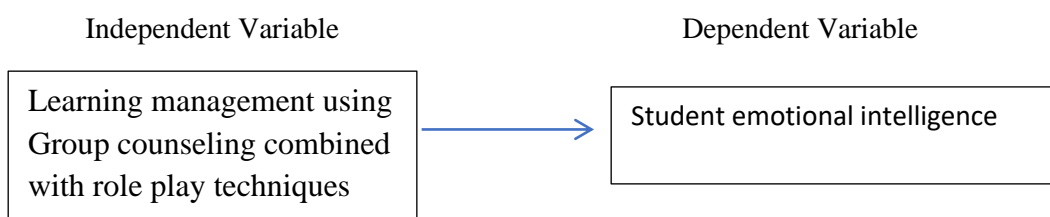


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Population and sample

1. The population of the study is 140 first-year students studying at Shanxi Open University, academic year 2023.
2. The sample of this study is 40 first-year students studying at Shanxi Open University of students derived from a cluster random sampling method, academic year 2023.

Research instruments

Research instruments were the tools for collecting data. The research instruments that were used in this study were:

Instruments for measuring Students' emotional intelligence

The researcher created the evaluation form for lesson plans.

An expert group composed of five experts evaluates the evaluation form. The experts were required to hold the title of professor or associate professor and have at least 10 years of research experience in the relevant field. The researcher selected 5 experts to form an expert group. Five experts consisted of 3 experts in the curriculum and instruction field, and 2 experts in instruction relevant to the psychology content field. After collecting data, analyze the collected data to determine the appropriateness and consistency of the lesson plans. If the average score of appropriateness and consistency assessed by a group of experts is higher than 3.51, it means that the components of the lesson plans have good appropriateness quality and internal consistency. After obtaining the expert evaluation results, the developed teaching model was revised and improved according to the expert's suggestions. The lesson plans to be assessed are specifically categorized into some areas (e.g., the teaching method is consistent with the teaching objectives; Learning outcomes can be applied to real-life situations).

It was found that the mean score of the lesson plan was 4.72 and the standard deviation was 0.42, which means the lesson plans had quality at a very high level. Therefore, applying the lesson plans of group counseling combined with role-play techniques to the teaching of first-year students at Shanxi Open University can improve students' emotional intelligence.

Instruments for collecting data

An instrument for measuring: Emotional Intelligence Scale.

Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)

The research instrument for data collection in this study was the emotional intelligence test of emotional intelligence, which is called EIS. This scale is a self-reported questionnaire for standard tests, consisting of 33 items, using a 5-point scale format. Emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately perceive, evaluate, and express emotions (emotional perception); The ability to approach or generate emotions that promote thinking (using emotions to promote thinking); The ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge (understanding emotions); The ability to regulate emotions and intellectual development (regulating emotions). Please carefully read each sentence below, and then mark a "√" on the corresponding number at the end of the sentence according to your actual situation. For you, numbers represent the degree to which this sentence conforms. Specifically, as follows: 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=unclear 4=agree 5=strongly agree

Chinese scholar Wang Caikang translated this questionnaire in 2002 and tested it to have good reliability (reliability value $\alpha=0.84$).

Data collection

The procedures of data collection were as follows:

The sample was given the pretest by measuring student emotional intelligence with the standard test EIS.

The sample was taught by using group counseling combined with role-play techniques. The overall experiment lasted for one month, which included teaching time (14 hours), one week of 2 lessons, each lesson having 2 hours. His teaching part was subdivided into 3 parts: before class, in class, and after class. Group counseling combined with role play was used in class.

After finishing the instruction, the sample received the posttest by using the same instrument that was used in the pretest.

Data analysis

This study's data must meet the following requirements: Continuous Dependent variable (i.e., interval or ratio scales). The paired measurements must be recorded in two separate variables. In related samples, the subjects in each sample are the same. This means that the subjects in the first group are also in the second group. Random sample of data from the population normal distribution (approximately) of the difference between the paired values no outliers in the difference between the two related groups. There are two hypotheses they are the null hypothesis $= \mu_{\text{posttest}}$ is $H_1: \mu_{\text{pretest}} < \mu_{\text{posttest}}$. If the sample mean is equal to the population mean, the one-sample T-test can be expressed as $H_0: \mu = X$. If the sample mean is not equal to the population mean, the one sample t-test can be expressed as $H_{01}: \mu \neq X$.

Compare student emotional intelligence achievements before and after receiving group counseling with role-play techniques by using t-tests for dependent samples.

Compare student emotional intelligence achievements with the determined criteria set at 70% by using a t-test for one sample.

Results

The results were presented according to the research objectives as follows:

The result of comparing the mean score of students' emotional intelligence before and after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques.

Table 1 Results of pre-test and post-test of EIS

Group	n	Pretest scores		Post-test scores		t	p
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
Experimental group	40	105.48	5.56	119.48	9.44	9.01**	.001*

** $p < 0.01$



As presented in Table 1 The mean scores of the pre-test of students' emotional intelligence were (M=105.48, S=5.56) and the post-test of students' emotional intelligence was (M=119.48, SD=9.44). The findings of the first research objective, after comparing the students' emotional intelligence before and after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques show that the emotional intelligence of the students was higher than before.

Table 2 Results of pretest and posttest of student's emotional intelligence

Group	n	Full score	Criterion score	M	S.D.	t	p
Experimental group	40	165	115.5	119.48	9.44	2.66**	.006

**p < 0.01

From the table above, it was discovered that the criterion score of emotional intelligence was 115.5. The mean score of emotional intelligence was 119.48 with a standard deviation of 9.44, which was higher than the criterion of 70%. The findings of the analysis were determined to be a t-value of 2.66 and a corresponding p-value of .011. Research objective 2 was to compare the emotional intelligence of the students with the determined criterion of 70%.

Discussion

The findings revealed that the average score of the student's emotional intelligence before learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques was 105.48, with a standard deviation of 5.56. The average score of the student's emotional intelligence after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques was 119.48, and the standard deviation was 9.44. The findings of the analysis were determined to be a t-value of 9.01 and a corresponding p-value of .001. The scores of the student's emotional intelligence are higher than before, which is because learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques as a teaching method to improve students' emotional intelligence. There are 5 teaching steps which are shown below: step 1: assessing student readiness. Step 2: Provide an overview of the lesson. Step 3: role-playing and discussion. Step 4: brainstorming and feedback. Step 5: Reflect and wrap up the lesson. Especially step 3: role-playing and discussion involve the practical application of the lesson content. The teacher assigns specific roles for role-play scenarios and provides any necessary materials or instructions. Students are actively engaged in this step as they familiarize themselves with the roles assigned to them and actively participate in the role-play scenarios. This step encourages students to put theoretical knowledge into practice and engage in discussions related to the scenarios. Helping teachers to improve the student's emotional intelligence ability. The youngsters were allowed to practice skills that are crucial to emotional intelligence that was offered to them through the deployment of role-play games. The ability to effectively communicate, solve problems, and resolve conflicts are all vital components of emotional intelligence. These qualities include effective communication. These findings were corresponded to Miller & Willig, 2012. This study explores how to culturally tailor role-playing and group counseling to be more accessible to Chinese students. It found that students were more actively involved and improved their emotional intelligence and academic performance when exposed to culturally relevant settings and communication styles. Corresponds to Sun et al (2022)

From the results, it was discovered that the criterion score (70%) of emotional intelligence was 115.5. The mean score of emotional intelligence was 119.48 with a standard deviation of 9.44, which was higher than the criterion of 70%. The findings of the analysis were determined to be a t-value of 2.66 and a corresponding p-value of .006. This is because learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques as a teaching method to improve students' emotional intelligence. There are 5 teaching steps which are shown below: step 1: assessing student readiness. Step 2: Provide an overview of the lesson. Step 3: role-playing and discussion. Step 4: brainstorming and feedback. Step 5: Reflect and wrap up the lesson. In Step 4, the teacher takes on a facilitating role in guiding discussions and encouraging feedback among the students. This step involves brainstorming, sharing insights, and providing constructive feedback. Students are expected to actively participate in these discussions, sharing their thoughts, ideas, and observations related to the lesson content. They also play a crucial role in providing feedback to their peers, which fosters a collaborative learning environment.



Conclusion

Through comparative analysis of the students' learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques pretest and post-test, after the intervention of learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques, the impact of the learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques on students' emotional intelligence is obtained. The conclusion is as follows: Students' emotional intelligence after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques was higher than before at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

Students' emotional intelligence after learning through group counseling combined with role-play techniques was higher than the standard of 70% at the 0.05 statistical significance level ($M = 119.48$ S.D. = 9.44).

Therefore, this research is dedicated to addressing the critical issue of enhancing emotional intelligence among first-year university students, a challenge that profoundly influences their academic success and personal development. This study intends to develop and refine skills vital for academic and personal success in a collegiate environment. By integrating methods such as group counseling and role-play techniques, the research seeks to provide actionable insights that can be applied to improve educational practices and foster a supportive atmosphere that encourages the holistic development of student's abilities to manage emotions, relate to others, and navigate the complexities of university life.

Recommendation

Recommendation for implication

As a foundation for these recommendations, the findings that were obtained from the investigation into the impact that group counseling paired with role play techniques had on the emotional intelligence of students as well as their capacity to meet preset criteria serve as the basis for the recommendations.

1. For teaching steps of group counseling combined with role play technique, the teachers need to explain the details of teaching steps clearly and carefully, to let all students know and understand the task they need to do in the lesson and get better results.

2. the teaching process of group counseling combined with the role play technique, focuses on students' activities as the main body and the teachers as the guides in the teaching process. Though the teacher is the guide, the teacher cannot leave students alone, because the teacher has to give suggestions and encourage students to learn actively, so the students become the owners of learning.

3. When using group counseling combined with role-play techniques, the teachers should study 5 steps of teaching carefully, because each step of teaching can effectively improve students' emotional intelligence. Especially step 4, gives more opportunities for students to practice and use role play on emotional intelligence. That can help the students have higher scores on emotional intelligence tests.

Recommendation for further research

The insights that were gathered through the evaluation of the influence of group counseling combined with role-play techniques on the emotional intelligence of students and their capacity to satisfy preset criteria are the basis upon which these suggestions are produced. To determine the long-term impacts of emotional intelligence treatments on the academic outcomes, mental health outcomes, and life outcomes of students, it is recommended that additional research be carried out.

1. It is suggested that future studies should investigate the long-term benefits of emotional intelligence learning interventions on the academic and personal outcomes of high school students. To determine the immediate effects that group counseling mixed with role-play techniques had on emotional intelligence, this research was carried out to discover exactly what those effects were. On the other hand, longitudinal studies can provide information regarding the impacts that such therapies have over time and the length of their duration.

2. For future researchers, it is strongly suggested that educational institutions make the incorporation of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs into their curriculum a key priority if they want to be successful. This is because SEL programs are effective in helping students develop their social and emotional skills. The findings of this research shed light on the relevance of this influence, which is significant because it sheds light on the huge positive influence that concentrated therapies, such as group therapy paired with techniques of role play, have on the enhancement of students' emotional intelligence. Consequently, the introduction of social and emotional learning (SEL)



initiatives that concentrate on the development of emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills can contribute to the general well-being of both instructors and students, as well as to the academic accomplishments of both students and teachers. Through the implementation of these programs, which can be carried out through specialized classrooms, workshops, or voluntary extracurricular activities, it is possible to foster the social and emotional development of pupils. The execution of these programs is a means by which this objective can be attained. (group counseling with new technique or other methods)

3. For future studies, the researchers can more concentrate on improving self-adaptation, responsibilities, and self-management by using group counseling combined with role-play techniques.

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