The Impact of developing social skills in reducing bullying behavior among middle school students in Abu Dhabi

أثر تنمية المهارات الاجتماعية في خفض سلوك التنمر لدى طلبة المرحلة المتوسطة في أبوظبي

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ABSTRACT

A study aims to establish a program for counseling to tackle bullying in schools in the United Arab Emirates by engaging School principals, supervisors, social workers, teachers to evaluate its impact on improving abilities, among students involved in bullying behaviors with the aim of decreasing instances of bullying in middle schools across the country. The main focus of this study is to investigate how enhancing soial skills among middle school students, in the UAE can reduce the occurrence of bullying incidents. This research sheds light on the issue of bullying by introducing a counseling program that has proven effective in reducing incidents of bullying based on feedback from participants in the study group The program includes recommendations for improving skills through integration into existing programs and offering training to school administrators to enhance students social abilities Additional suggestions involve hosting events that promote these skills and conducting training sessions on managing behavior It also stresses the significance of students establishing goals and offers assistance, in achieving these goals through a reward system. In the United Arab Emirates—a country recognized for its multiculturalism and fast development—addressing bullying in schools presents an obstacle despite its longstanding presence, in the community. Therefore this research aims to explore the prevalence trends and repercussions of bullying within UAE educational institutions while considering how social and technological factors may impact the nature of such conduct. This study seeks to improve initiatives addressing bullying in schools in the UAE by exploring the complexities of the problem and

suggesting tailored solutions, for an more inclusive educational environment. This study utilizes a Quantitative Research Methodology that aligns with the methodology and theory development approach used in this research. Based on research findings that show improving skills can reduce bullying behaviors and have positive effects it is suggested to include skill building in middle school curriculum. This should focus on developing qualities like empathy for others feelings and recognizing the consequences of bullying on interactions and relationships to improve listening skills and teamwork abilities while fostering a culture of cooperation among students based on the successful results seen in counseling programs aimed at reducing incidents of bullying according to feedback, from participants. Educating individuals in leadership positions in education like principals and teachers, about developing abilities to encourage student behavior and handle bullying problems efficiently. Encourage pursuits such, as art clubs and sports teams to foster social skills and cultivate a welcoming environment for students to engage positively with one another.

Key words: Social Skills- bullying- Counselling Program- Middle schools

الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى إنشاء برنامج إرشادي لمعالجة التنمر في المدارس في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، من خلال إشراك مديري المدارس، والمشرفين، والأخصائيين الاجتماعيين، والمعلمين لتقييم تأثيره على تحسين القدرات لدى الطلاب الذين يتورطون في سلوكيات التنمر، بهدف تقليل حالات التنمر في المدارس المتوسطة على مستوى البلاد. التركيز الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة هو التحقيق في كيفية تعزيز المهارات الاجتماعية لدى طلاب المدارس المتوسطة في الإمارات العربية المتحدة، لتقليل حدوث حوادث التنمر. تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على مشكلة التنمر من خلال تقديم برنامج إرشادي ثبتت فعاليته في تقليل حوادث التنمر بناءً على آراء المشاركين في مجموعة الدراسة. يشمل البرنامج توصيات لتحسين المهارات من خلال دمجها في البرامج الحالية وتقديم تدريب للإداريين لتعزيز القدرات الاجتماعية للطلاب. تشمل الاقتراحات الأخرى تنظيم فعاليات

تعزز هذه المهارات وإجراء جلسات تدريبية لإدارة السلوك. كما يؤكد البرنامج على أهمية وضع الطلاب لأهداف وتقديم المساعدة لتحقيق هذه الأهداف من خلال نظام مكافآت.

في الإمارات العربية المتحدة، التي تُعرف بتنوعها الثقافي وتطورها السريع، يشكل التعامل مع التنمر في المدارس تحديًا على الرغم من وجوده منذ فترة طويلة في المجتمع. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مدى انتشار التنمر وآثاره في المؤسسات التعليمية الإماراتية، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار كيف يمكن للعوامل الاجتماعية والتكنولوجية أن تؤثر على طبيعة هذا السلوك. تسعى الدراسة إلى تحسين المبادرات التي تعالج التنمر في المدارس في الإمارات العربية المتحدة من خلال استكشاف تعقيدات المشكلة واقتراح حلول مخصصة لبيئة تعليمية أكثر شمولاً

وتستخدم هذه الدراسة منهجية البحث الكمي التي تتماشى مع منهجية وتطوير النظرية المستخدمة في هذا البحث. بناءً على النتائج التي تظهر أن تحسين المهارات يمكن أن يقلل من سلوكيات التنمر ويكون له تأثير إيجابي، يُقترح إدراج تنمية المهارات في مناهج المدارس المتوسطة. يجب أن يركز ذلك على تطوير صفات مثل التعاطف مع مشاعر الآخرين والتعرف على عواقب التنمر على التفاعلات والعلاقات، لتحسين مهارات الاستماع وقدرات العمل الجماعي، مع تعزيز ثقافة التعاون بين الطلاب استناداً إلى النتائج الناجحة التي أظهرتها برامج الإرشاد في تقليل حوادث التنمر وفقًا لتغذية المشاركين الراجعة.

كما تدعو الدراسة إلى توعية الأفراد في المناصب القيادية في التعليم، مثل مديري المدارس والمعلمين، بشأن تطوير القدرات لتشجيع سلوك الطلاب والتعامل مع مشكلات التنمر بكفاءة، وتشجع الأنشطة مثل الأندية الفنية والفرق الرياضية لتعزيز المهارات الاجتماعية وتهيئة بيئة ترحيبية للطلاب للتفاعل بشكل إيجابي مع بعضهم البعض.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

المهارات الاجتماعية – التنمر – البرنامج الإرشادي – المدارس المتوسطة

Introduction

The relationship between engaging in bullying and one's social status can differ not only across various aspects of social standing but also between incidents of bullying in elementary school compared to high school. Therefore, the main goal of this study was to suggest a program that focuses on enhancing social skills to help decrease bullying among middle school students. With bullying evolving into a complex issue involving harmful behaviours towards individuals or groups, including verbal and physical aggression as well as cyberbullying on numerous social media platforms, it results in negative impacts on the victim, ranging from psychological effects to long term societal consequences.

Study Objectives;

The main aim of this study is to develop a program designed to combat bullying in middle schools located in the United Arab Emirates. The success of this program will be assessed by school principals, teachers, counselors and social workers. The focus will be on improving social skills, among bullies to decrease instances of bullying. The objectives outlined for this study include;

1. Investigating how the enhancement of social skills can help reduce bullying among middle school students in the United Arab Emirates.

2. Implementing a proposed counseling program and evaluating its effectiveness in improving social skills among middle school students in the United Arab Emirates.

3. Assessing how improved social skills impact the reduction of bullying incidents within school settings among middle school students in the United Arab Emirates.

4. Exploring the connection between enhanced social skills and the overall social atmosphere within educational environments for middle school students in the United Arab Emirates.

Theories Used in the Current Study:

1- Psychoanalytic Theory:

In the research different theories are examined, including the Psychoanalytic Theory developed by Sigmund Freud, a known psychologist of the 20th century. This theory holds a position, in psychology as it dives into unraveling the complexities of psychology. It suggests that both conscious and unconscious elements play a role in shaping behavior and personality. The focus is on hidden motivations and psychological conflicts that impact how individuals act. By analyzing dreams, memories, emotions and everyday experiences of patients psychoanalysts aim to reveal their thoughts and emotional changes. Key concepts within theory such as the mind, repression, transference, displacement, adaptation, psychological complexes and defense mechanisms help in understanding human behavior and personality development. While psychoanalytic theory has set the foundation for psychology and influenced therapeutic approaches significantly it's important to acknowledge that certain aspects may stir up debate among psychologists and others, in the field.

The exploration of schools of thought has emerged to develop and enhance these concepts (Izzat, 2008). According to Freud the mind is driven by two instincts; the life instinct, also known as libido and the death instinct, which includes aggression and violence. In Freuds view acts of aggression and bullying are manifestations of the death instinct, where individuals express a desire, for destruction towards themselves or others (Saleh, 2020).

2- Biological Theory

Biological theory does not have a founding figure. Has evolved through advancements in biological sciences. This theory aims to explain phenomena and human behavior by examining their foundations and physiological processes. It suggests that human behavior and psychological functions are closely linked to factors such as the brain, nervous system, biochemical elements, hormones and genetics.

In psychology biological theory is a component in understanding behaviors and psychological occurrences such, as emotions, memory processes, learning mechanisms, psychological disorders and individual differences.

Exploring findings, from studies in areas such as neuroscience, molecular biology, genetics and hormonal influences sheds light on how these biological processes impact behavior and mental functions. It's important to note that while biological theory holds significance in psychology for its perspective rooted in biology driven explanations of behavior it is not the viewpoint within the field. Alternative theories like theory or psychodynamic theory offer ways to interpret human behavior.

Throughout history influential scientists and thinkers have shaped the development of theory in psychology. Some notable individuals include;

William James (1842 1910); a philosopher and psychologist known for his theories on how sensations and bodily reactions influence mental processes.

Stanley Hall (1904 2009); An American psychologist who introduced the concept of biological equilibrium in human behavior emphasizing the importance of balance in both biological functioning and behavior.

The origins of theory can be traced back to the century and have provided insights into behaviors like bullying linking them to specific internal and physiological factors. Of interest is the lobe of the brain recognized for its role, in triggering aggressive behaviors among children.

3- Frustration Aggression Theory

This theory, in psychology connects feelings of frustration with violent behavior. It suggests that when a person faces obstacles or barriers that prevent them from reaching their goals or fulfilling their desires they may react with aggression or violence. According to this theory encountering frustration creates a sense of tension that individuals seek to release. One way they may do this is by resorting to violent actions as a means of expressing the anger or stress brought on by the frustration. As a result aggression can intensify as an attempt to regain a sense of control or equilibrium. The theory seeks to explore the factors that contribute to increased tendencies for aggression and violence. Emphasizes the importance of managing frustration while encouraging alternative constructive responses to stress and frustration.

John Dollard, Neal E. Miller and Richard Sears perceive frustration as generating an urge towards aggression a phenomenon referred to as "catharsis" or "discharge." The Frustration Aggression Theory was formulated in 1939 by John Dollard, Neal E. Miller and Richard Sears. This theory posits that encountering obstacles that impede the attainment of desired goals can trigger feelings of aggression or lead to behaviors. In line, with this theory when individuals face impediments hindering goal achievement or desire fulfillment it gives rise to feelings of frustration.

When someone feels frustrated it can lead to tension. Sometimes trigger an aggressive reaction. This aggression is often viewed as a way of dealing with the frustration, where a person acts out aggressively to try and release that built up tension (Saleh, 2020).

Rational Emotive Behavior Theory (REBT) is a concept that suggests our emotions stem from how we interpret events and situations, in our lives. The theory argues that emotions are not just reactions to events but also involve our own thoughts and interpretations.

4- Rational Emotive Behavior Theory (REBT)

According to REBT our minds play a role in shaping our emotions by interpreting events and assessing them based on the information. This process involves thinking about the situation considering causes and outcomes anticipating scenarios and evaluating the resources we have to handle the situation. Based on these evaluations appropriate emotional responses are triggered.

REBT doesn't have a founder since it draws insights from psychological perspectives. Notable figures, like Richard Lazarus have contributed significantly by exploring how emotions are tied to evaluating events and circumstances as triggers of responses.

Paul Ekman is well known for his studies, on expressions and the emotions they convey contributing significantly to our understanding of facial expressions and how they relate to different emotions.

Joseph LeDoux, a researcher in neuroscience and psychology has made contributions to our knowledge of how emotions are formed from a brain perspective.

The theory discussed here focuses on students irrational beliefs that lead them to engage in bullying behaviors. It stresses the importance of

recognizing and challenging these beliefs replacing them with logical and rational thoughts.

5- Humanistic Theory

Humanistic psychology explores growth and human development emphasizing the role of emotions and interpersonal connections in shaping ones self-perception. Key figures like Carl Rogers have played a role in advancing this theory through approaches that prioritize empathy and unconditional positive regard, to foster growth.

Abraham Maslow is renowned for his concept of the Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that humans are motivated by a range of needs culminating in self-actualization.

According to his theory people must first satisfy their needs before progressing to ones.

Viktor Frankl, a psychologist known for developing logo therapy is most famous, for his book "Mans Search for Meaning " inspired by his experiences in Nazi concentration camps. His teachings stress the importance of finding purpose and meaning for growth and mental well-being.

The Humanistic Theory aims to help individuals reach their potential. Explains how risk factors for bullying can stem from unmet biological needs such, as nutrition, safety and emotional support (Saleh, 2020).

6- Social Cognitive Theory (Social Learning Theory)

Social Cognitive Theory is a sociological concept that delves into how social elements impact our thoughts and actions. This theory suggests that a combination of cognitive factors work together to mold behavior. It highlights the processes individuals employ to interpret

social occurrences assign meanings and make choices. These processes encompass categorizing information comprehending it retaining it giving it attention and making decisions based on it. Social Cognitive Theory posits that the social environment, encompassing culture and societal norms shapes our thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. Our understanding of knowledge beliefs and expectations plays a role, in guiding our interactions with others in society. Originated by Albert Bandura in the 1970s this theory is a framework that addresses influences on behavior from both societal and personal standpoints. It elucidates how aggressive behaviors develop through determinism – where interactions with others via observation and social connectionsre influential factors. Swearer (2009) also highlights bullying as a recurring behavior rooted in power imbalances, between the aggressor and the targeted victim who endures harassment.

Study Method

Participants, in the survey were asked to complete a questionnaire, where they were encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used for research purposes. The participants in the current study were selected from employees working in the following job positions: managers, teachers, educational supervisors, and social workers. The following table shows that there are 283 participants in the current study, of whom 250 are teachers, representing 88.3% of the total. There are 8 social workers, representing 2.8%, 22 managers with a participation rate of 7.8%, and finally, 3 educational supervisors, making up 1.1% of the participants.

The survey was created using Google Forms. Distributed by sharing the link via email and platforms like WhatsApp. Data collection involved

sending out the survey through Google Forms followed by analysis using tools. The next step, in the research process includes analyzing the findings and testing hypotheses to verify their alignment with the research.

Testing the Validity of the Study Tool

The survey was given to educators and experts in counseling to assess and validate it. There were 11 reviewers, for the study tool. The proposed counseling curriculum includes topics that focus on enhancing social skills, the reviewers had expertise in fields such as psychology, psychological counseling, consultations, human resource development and educational statistics. Their feedback was considered, leading to improvements in the counseling program based on their suggestions. Following that a pilot sample was used to conduct a reliability test, on the program as described in the section.

Reliability Test of the Study Instrument

variable	Number of paragraphs	Minimum Reliability Standard	Cronbach's Alpha Value	Test Result
Development of Social Skills	17	Must be greater than 0.7 in social research	0,957	Very high

Analyzing the Study Results:

High Approval: The study participants (principals, teachers, educational supervisors, and social specialists) overwhelmingly

approved of the proposed guidance program items designed to develop social skills and reduce bullying behavior.

Arithmetic Mean: The average approval rating for the program items related to developing Social Skills was significantly high (exceeding 4.20), suggesting a strong consensus among participants.

Positive Impact: The proposed guidance program is believed to have a positive influence on reducing bullying behavior in middle schools within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Data Presentation:

The table mentioned in the prompt would likely provide a more detailed breakdown of the data, including:

Variable: The specific guidance program items or dimensions being evaluated. Arithmetic Mean: The average rating for each item or dimension.

Standard Deviation: A measure of how spread out the responses were, indicating the level of agreement or disagreement among participants.

Interpretation and Implications:

Based on these findings, the study suggests that:

Social Skills Development: Programs focused on enhancing social skills are seen as effective tools in addressing bullying behavior.

Positive Impact on Schools: Implementing the proposed guidance program could lead to a reduction in bullying incidents within Abu Dhabi's middle schools.

Consensus among Stakeholders: The high approval ratings from various educational roles indicate a shared belief in the program's potential effectiveness.

Further Analysis:

To gain a deeper understanding of the results, additional analyses could be conducted, such as:

Correlations: Examining the relationship between approval ratings for different guidance program items.

Comparisons: Comparing the approval ratings of different participant groups (e.g., principals vs. teachers).

Qualitative Data: Incorporating qualitative data (e.g., open-ended responses) to explore the reasons behind the approval ratings.

By conducting these analyses, researchers can provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the study's findings and their implications for educational practices.

Descriptive analysis of the dimensions of the study scales according to arithmetic means.

No	The axis	Mean	Std.Deviation	Degree of acceptance
1	Social Skills Development	4,20	0,823	High

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS analysis results

Discussion of the Study Results:

The current study aims to develop a counseling program to reduce the phenomenon of bullying in middle schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, by reviewing previous studies and relevant research, a counseling program was designed to enhance social skills among bullying students, to test the effectiveness of this program, it was presented to a group of educators working in middle schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. This sample included teachers, educational supervisors, social workers, and principals who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon of bullying and ways to address it (the sample size was 283 participants). Accordingly, the counseling program, which included 17 social skills, was tested, leading to the main research question: What is the role of social skills development in reducing bullying behavior in middle schools in Abu Dhabi from the perspective of teachers, educational supervisors, social workers, and principals? This question was divided into three sub-questions, each measuring the role of these skills in reducing bullying behavior among middle school students. In light of the research findings, each research question was discussed separately to provide a deeper understanding of the proposed skills for the counseling program.

The research question was formulated as follows: What is the role of social skills development in reducing bullying behaviour among middle school students in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates? This question was addressed through a field study involving 283 participants, including teachers, principals, social workers, and counsellors from middle schools in Abu Dhabi. The data were analysed using a One-Sample T-Test. The results indicated that the development of social skills contributes to reducing bullying behaviour among middle school students in the

Emirate of Abu Dhabi, according to the study participants' perspectives. The mean score for these skills was 4.20 compared to the hypothetical mean of 3.40. The difference between the two means was statistically significant (p-value .001), highlighting the importance of social skills in reducing bullying behavior in middle schools.

It's important to mention that the agreement level, on the 17 skills linked to reducing bullying behavior among middle school students was divided into two categories. The initial set of skills got a "agree" rating from participants in the study, including teachers, principals, social workers and counselors. Eleven skills received this rating, such as helping bullies understand their peers feelings like sadness, anger and happiness (with a score of 4.39) grasping the consequences of bullying actions (4.32) managing relationships (4.30) comprehending why victims feel distressed (4.30) possessing good listening abilities (4.27) fostering positive relationships (4.27) handling anxiety issues (4.24) teamwork capabilities (4.22) willingness to share with others (4.21) confidence in social settings (4.20) and victims self-defense skills (4.20).

Furthermore the study revealed that the second set of skills received an "rating from educators and professionals, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

In the ranking of skills students are rated based on their ability to adjust to social settings (4.19) speak in public (4.18) assist their peers (4.17) evaluate situations effectively (4.13) handle criticism well (4.05) and feel at ease in large gatherings (3.84).

The study findings show a consensus, among participants with 11 skills receiving a "agree" rating and 6 skills receiving an "agree" rating regarding the impact of these social skills on reducing bullying behavior. This highlights the significance of integrating these skills into the

proposed counseling program aimed at curbing bullying, among schoolers.

The findings of this study are consistent, with research that investigated how social skills relate to bullying behaviors. Studies by Claire & Michael (2005) and Dukhan (2015) have explored this connection well. The current research results also support a study conducted by Shaimaa Amer in 2022 which emphasized the link between social traits and the occurrence of bullying among children. Amers research revealed an association between characteristics, social traits and bullying behaviors. Moreover the outcomes align with a study by Mariana López de Souza, Maria Manuela Peixoto and Sara Cruz in 2021 showing that teenagers, with skills and more internalizing and externalizing issues tend to engage in aggressive bullying behaviors.

Research Recommendations:

Based on the research findings related to the first research question, which examined the role and effectiveness of social skills development in reducing bullying behavior and found significant positive effects, the current study recommends the following:

1- Incorporating Social Skills into the Middle School Curriculum: Social skills should be integrated into the middle school curriculum, with a focus on developing skills such as awareness of others' feelings, understanding the consequences of bullying, fostering social relationships, listening skills, teamwork, sharing with others, and other social skills that the counseling program has proven effective in reducing bullying behavior, as viewed by the study participants.

2- Training Educational Management: School administrators, teachers, educational supervisors, and social workers should be trained on how to

develop social skills that collectively aim to encourage positive behavior among students and manage bullying behaviors.

3- Encouraging Extracurricular Activities: Extracurricular and non-classroom activities such as arts, sports, and social activities should be encouraged, as they can enhance social skills and provide a supportive environment for positive interactions among students.

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