The effects of problem-solving skill on interpersonal compatibility and effective social relations

Seyed Abolghasem Seyedan
Lecturer in Psychology, University of Mazandaran and the universities of Torbat Heydarieh
Sa.seyedan@yahoo.com

Yeganehkafshbanishandiz
Clinical Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur branch
yeganeh.kafshbani@yahoo.com

Abstract : The present study aimed to investigate the effects of problem-solving skill on interpersonal compatibility and effective social relations among all junior high school students of Babolsar in 1395-6. A sample including 40 male students from among two junior high schools was selected through a single-stage cluster sampling technique. Having administered instruments like The Teenage Inventory of Social Skills (TISS; Inderbitzen& Foster, 1992) and Interpersonal Problems Inventory (Barkham et al.) to all students of the two schools, the researchers selected those testees who gained the lowest as well as the highest scores in social skills test and interpersonal problems questionnaire, respectively. The selected participants were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The study used a quasi-experimental design in which treatment involved 10-session (90 Mins) problem-solving instructions. The data obtained from pretest posttest were analyzed by using ANCOVA. Results of the study showed that problem-solving instruction could enhance interpersonal compatibility and effective social relations.

Keywords: problem-solving instruction, effective social relations, interpersonal compatibility

Statement of the problem

'*Development and Evolution*' involve a series of developmental changes found as a result of experience and maturity. As a psychologist believes development and evolution account for qualitative change, i.e. not only do they involve physical growth but a complicated process integrating several structures and actions. The aim of *evolutionary and developmental* changes is to help people be compatible with the social environment (Asharinezhad 1383), because they are social in nature. Many myths, movies, plays and poems indicate that one's happiness and despair and his/her feelings of misfortune are signified by their communication. Satisfaction with works, games, and family lives is mainly dependent upon quality of relations with others. An effective communication involves a process through which two or more individuals exchange their thoughts, beliefs and their desires and do this either verbally or through non-verbal symbols with common meanings for both parties. Therefore, thanks to their communication, people think of meeting their psychological and mental needs (Fathi 1384). People enjoying an appropriate level of personal and social compatibility will be provided with opportunities to express their wish and desire appropriately and conform to the acceptable norms of the society.

Compatibility, in general, means the ability of being efficiently compatible with the life experiences, and, in specific, *to enjoy* rewarding interpersonal relations and to work in such a manner to achieve personal goals (Azad 1387). Psychologists have taken *personal* versus *environmental* compatibility into account and have considered those personality traits as norms which help people match themselves to the environment, live together in peace, and reach high levels of social status. Meanwhile, social compatibility reflects one's interaction with others and his/her satisfaction with the roles and the ways they are performed that are most likely affected by personality, culture, and family expectations. Social compatibility has been usually conceptualized in terms of social roles, role performance, engagement with others and satisfaction with several roles. Medical, educational, hereditary, environmental and social factors as well as emotional disorders affect social compatibility (Hajabdollahi 1388). On a psychological basis, compatibility is *mush or less* a conscious process based on which one can conform to natural, social and/or cultural environment. Such compatibility requires one to change him/herself or make changes to the environment actively so that necessary coordination with the environment is achieved. Chaplin views compatibility as changes to one's activities so as to overcome obstacles and meet his/her own needs. According to Chaplin, compatibility is a kind of problem-solving in which some need of an organism or a person cannot be met by using previous methods (Zarei 1390). Several factors like *way of thinking* or *thinking style* can have effects on compatibility. Thinking is a mental process which happens once a person encounters a problem and tends to solve it. Now, a mental effort called

thinking begins to solve the problem. Process of problem solving is composed of stages starting with a clear, detailed and tangible definition of the problem, continuing with addressing the problem and ending with practical use of the best solution and finding the final answer.Ways of thinking are divided into five categories: analytical; critical; executive; strategic, and lateral. Indeed, every type of thinking can be considered as a method through which some part of problem-solving process can be successfully accomplished. Superior thinking is a mode of thought utilizing the most appropriate methods to solve the problem (Mojtahedi 1387). Problem-solving and creating are principal processes or currents of thought. Problem can be thought of as a situation against a learner to which s/he cannot respondinstantly through available information and skills. AsGagne (1970) believes problem-solving does not only involve application of previously acquired principles or rules; therefore, to solve the problem, not only does the learner need to be informed of concepts and principles but of a combination of previously acquired principles and information so that new solutions are found. Problem-solving process ends when there is no, or the lowest level of, stress in the situation. When encountering challenges, problem-solving skill teaches us that we should exert self-control, avoid any emotional responses, stop making quick decisions, think of all available solutions, choose and execute the right approach (SamimiArdestani 1386).

Problem-solving skill is thought of as an effective instrument used to deal with situational challenges. The terms has been defined on behavioral basis and, behaviorally or cognitively, provides some types of potential responses to the problematic situation and increases the possibility of choosing the most effective one from among a variety of solutions (Hagga et al. 2005).

Problem-solving instruction, in many ways, can be thought of as a helpful means in order to create a *learningset* thus increasing the probability of coping with a wide spectrum of situations effectively. Accordingly, problem-solving instruction can be viewed as a mode of instructions on how to enhance *self-control* or *autonomy*. In problem-solving skill, when compared to the usual mode of self-control, fundamental aspects of the technique (problem-solving methods) are performed without any previous knowledge about the most effective solution, while in the latter approach the answer to be controlled has been previously selected (Goldfried&Merbaum 2008). The main objective of problem-solving skill is to find the most effective **alternative** through which one can benefit from the rest of self-control operation. Accordingly, problem-solving skill reaches a primary vital step of a more general self-control process that is known as autonomy,competence, and self-reliance (Davison&Goldfried 2001/ 1391). Over the last 30 years, Jehoda (2005, as cited in Dubson 2009), argued that the ability of problem-solving has been thought of as a criterion in defining mental health. Jehoda et al., also, claimed that deficits in problem-solving ability may result in incompatibility and mental impairment. This hypothesis has been recently further developed, and has been supported in correlational and experimental research (d.Zorila 1986; Philipper 197; Spivak et al. 1976; Mechanic 1974, 1970; as cited in Dubson 2006).

How to cope with situations or events throughout the life is a dimension of problem-solving. Coping is a kind of attempt to relieve or eliminate emotion and tension or to solve a problem. Coping strategies are divided into two categories:

1. Emotion-focused coping: as the name implies, it is a type of emotion management when facing problems. Here, one makes no logical attempt to solve the problem. Rather s/he tries to get relaxed emotionally.
2. Problem-focused coping: In such strategy one thinks of resolving the problem, schedules, takes benefits from others' counseling and experiences, reads books and magazines to learn more; all of these are included in this type of coping strategy and solve the problem.

As daily problems, generally, have some emotional load, simultaneous use of both coping strategies (emotion-focused& problem-focused) is required. In other words, in general ongoing problems, emotion-focused coping strategy helps people control disruptive and destructive emotions to solve the problem through utilization of problem-focused strategy and its logical principles. Basically, attainment of life skills, in general, and problem-solving skill, in particular, increases compatibility between the individual and the society. One, involved in daily issues, who does not examine them appropriately and makes quick decisions may fail and face a crisis at the beginning. Such people make use of inappropriate and inefficient solutions and, doubtlessly, have problems communicating with others. Lots of our problems originate from our communication with others and lack of relevant skills (Ardestani 1386). Any person faces several troubles and problems in his/her individual and social life and, in fact, life is nothing but a sequence of challenges people encounter and try to solve. Therefore, problems exist naturally in our lives, and everyone faces some of them. Rather than tending to act passively and hoping for a life without problems, therefore, people need to learn how to cope with the problems.

The possession of the abilities required for successfully solving the problems increases one's self-confidence and self-worth. However, if one lacks skills and qualifications necessary to solve the problem, or makes use of inappropriate and defective solutions, s/he may face problems in compatibility with the environment. In addition, one's mental health would be at risk.

Learning problem-solving skill enables us to cope effectively with the problems. Problem-solving is a learnable as well as an applicable skill. To solve a problem some activities are involved:

- Define the problem precisely
- Propose and examine a variety of solutions
- Decide on the most effective and the most appropriate solution
- Implement the solution

Based on what mentioned above stressing on the important role problem-solving plays in one's life and the enhancement of interpersonal compatibility as well as enjoyment of an effective social relationships concerning the family, peers, community and …, the researcher has sought to address the following research question:

Q: Does problem-solving instruction have any significant effects on the improvement of adolescents' interpersonal compatibility as well as their effective social relationships?

Research Methodology

Study Design

The present quasi-experimental study used a two-group (experimental/control) pretest–posttest design. Throughout the study, the experimental group was exposed to the independent variable (problem-solving instruction), while control group did not receive any treatment.

Population

Population included all students of Babolsar junior high schools during 95-96.

Sampling Procedure

The sample of the study (N=40) was selected from among male students of two junior high schools through a single-stage cluster sampling technique. Having administered relevant tests, the researcher selected those with the lowest and the highest scores in the social skills inventory and the interpersonal problems questionnaire, respectively. The selected participants were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups.

Instrumentations

The Teenage Inventory of Social Skills (TISS; Inderbitzen& Foster, 1992)

Developed by Inderbitzen and Foster (1992) the questionnaire includes 29 items rated on a **6-point continuum** from 'not at all" to "totally". Scoring: the items of the questionnaire are divided into two sub-scales; positive behaviors and negative behaviors. Each item has 6 alternatives. Concerning positive options the scoring is as below:

- 'does not describe me at all' (0)
- 'describes me totally' (5)

Concerning negative items a reverse scoring is used. The score higher than the mean (M=98) indicates one's high level of social skills; one's score lower than the mean indicates his/her low level of social skills. Reliability coefficient reported in Inderbitzen and Foster (1992) was .9.

Interpersonal Problems Inventory (Barkham et al.)

Composed of six components (e.g. Assertiveness & Sociability, Openness, Caring, Aggression, Supportiveness & Involvement, Dependency), the questionnaire includes 22 items aiming to assess interpersonal relationships.

components	Grouping questions
Assertiveness & Sociability	1 , 2 , 3 , 4 , 7 , 9 , 11
Openness	10 , 17 , 24 , 29
Caring	18 , 25 , 26 , 31 , 32
Aggression	20 , 21 , 28 , 30
Supportiveness & Involvement	5 , 8 , 12 , 13 , 14 , 15 , 16
Dependency	6 , 19 , 22 , 23 , 29

Fath et al. (1392) confirmed the validity of the instrument. In addition, such factors as assertiveness & sociability, openness, caring, aggression, supportiveness & involvement, and dependency enjoyed a relatively high reliability index (Cronbach's Alpha= .8, .7, .61, .88, .77, .61, respectively).

Data Analysis Procedures

Having collected the pretest – posttest data, the researcher used SPSS to analyze them. Frequency tables and charts display demographic information; covariance test was run to help the researcher make inferences about data.

Results

Descriptive Data

The section provides descriptive data obtained from instruments administered to the participants. The data include frequency, mean, standard deviation.

Mean and standard deviation of interpersonal compatibility variable in research groups

Group		Number	Mean	The standard deviation
Experimental	Pre-test	20	76.50	4.63
	Post-test	20	84.83	3.94
Control	Pre-test	20	78.25	5.67
	Post-test	20	77.92	4.73
Total	Pre-test	40	77.37	4.79
	Post-test	40	81.30	4.78

Based on the data in Table 1, the mean of the interpersonal compatibility of the experimental group in the post-test versus that of the pre-test indicates a significant increase; while, the difference (post- versus pretest) is not statistically significant with respect to the control group.

Mean and standard deviation of effective social relations variables in research groups

Group		Number	Mean	The standard deviation
Experimental	Pre-test	20	76.08	6.56
	Post-test	20	131.83	7.48
Control	Pre-test	20	79.92	5.76
	Post-test	20	81.12	5.25

Total	Pre-test	40	78.35	6.22
	Post-test	40	106.47	6.55

As displayed in Table 2, the experimental group's mean in the effective social relationships posttest is significantly higher than that of the pretest; results of control group, on the other hand, indicate no significant difference.

Mean and standard deviation of interpersonal compatibility

Variable	Group	Number	Weighted Mean	The standard deviation
interpersonal compatibility	Experimental	20	81.14	4.65
	Control	20	76.28	4.65

As Table 3 shows, weighted mean of the experimental group compared to that of the other group in the interpersonal compatibility is higher.

Mean and standard deviation of social relationships

Variable	Group	Number	Weighted Mean	The standard deviation
social relationships	Experimental	20	101.81	6.56
	Control	20	77.69	7.48

As Table 4 displays, participants in the experimental group compared to those in the control one gained a higher mean in social relationships.

Statistical Inference
This section is concerned with inferential analyses of the data obtained from the instruments. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used for its goodness-of-fit. When performing the covariance test, four assumptions were taken into account.

First: Use of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test for testing normality of data distribution

		Z	P
Interpersonal compatibility	Pre-test	0.902	0.390
	Post-test	0.514	0.954
Effective social relationships	Pre-test	1.028	0.241

Post-test	0.644	0.802

Results of K-S test indicate a normal data distribution for all variables [interpersonal compatibility pretest (Z=.0902, P=.390); interpersonal compatibility posttest (Z=.514, P=.954); effective social relationships pretest (Z=1.028, P= .241); effective social relationships posttest (Z=.644, P= .802).

Second: Homogeneity of variance test
This section examines the equality of variance for all groups. Results in Table 5 indicate the equality of variances.

Levin test related to the assumption of equality of variance of research-dependent variables in the experimental and control groups

Variable	F	The first degree of freedom	Second degree of freedom	Significance level
interpersonal compatibility	0.040	1	22	0.843
social relationships	0.001	1	22	0.973

Third: The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes
This section investigates if there is a linear correlation between the pretest and the posttest of the variables under discussion. As a result of a liner correlation (Table 6) ANCOVA can be performed.

Regression homogeneity test of dependent variables of research in experimental and control groups

Variable	Source	Total squares	degree of freedom	F	Significance level
interpersonal compatibility	Group pretest	3.688	2	1.620	0.227
Effective social relationships	Interpersonal compatibility	9.547	2	1.20	0.382

Fourth: Test of equality of covariance matrices
To test equality of covariance matrices, Box's test was used.

Box test related to the default equality of the covariance matrix in the experimental and control groups

Test name	Box	F	The first degree of freedom	Second degree of freedom	Significance level

Box	9.170	1.300	6	3506.72	0.253

As displayed in Table 7, Box's test is not significant (F=1.300, P=.253), thus indicating the equality ofcovariancematrices. As a consequence, MANCOVA can be performed.

H1: Problem-solving instruction is effective in improvement of interpersonal compatibility.

Results of multivariate analysis of covariance for interpersonal compatibility dependent variable

Variable	Source	Total squares	Df	Mean of squares	value of F	Significance level	Impact coefficient
interpersonal compatibility	Group	120.864	1	120.864	99.694	0.000	0.840

Having compared means of the two groups in interpersonal compatibility posttest (Table 8), the researcher found that the experimental group (receiving instructions on problem-solving skill) significantly outperformed the other group (0.000, F=28.462). As a result, problem-solving instruction was effective in enhancing students' interpersonal compatibility.

H2: Problem-solving instruction effectively enhances effective social relationships.

Results of multivariate analysis of covariance for the dependent variable of effective social relations

Variable	Source	Total squares	Df	Mean of squares	value of F	Significance level	Impact coefficient
effective social relations	Group	133.481	1	133.481	28.462	0.000	0.600

As Table 9 shows, results of comparing means of the two groups in the social relationships posttest, indicate a significant difference (P=.000, F=28.462). Accordingly, instructions on problem-solving skill could enhance students' effective social relationships.

Discussion
The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of problem-solving instruction in enhancement of interpersonal compatibility as well as effective social relationships.
Based on the present findings, the first hypothesis "**Problem-solving instruction is effective in improvement of interpersonal compatibility**" is supported. That is, problem-solving instruction could significantly enhance the participants' interpersonal compatibility.
The present findings lend support to those found by Bahramgiri (1382), Jafari (1382), Soltani (1389), Derakhshanpour (1388), Azadmehr (1391), Ahmadpour (1387), Fooladchang (1392), Jhoda (2009, cited in Plegeri 2013)….
The second hypothesis "**Problem-solving instruction effectively enhances effective social relationships**" is, also, supported by the present findings. Accordingly, problem-solving instruction significantly enhanced the students' effective social relationships.
The present findings are in agreement with those of research by Bazl (1382), Abbasi (1383), JabbariMohammadabadi (1390), Dastjerdi (1392), JafarzadeSarvestani (1389), Eliot et al. (1992, as cited in Papiri), ….

Conclusion

Finally, with regard to problem-solving steps, the study arrives at the finding that there is consensus among different theorists and researchers on its operation, regardless of a disagreement over how to solve the problem. Once a person faces a situation or a task to which s/he cannot respond quickly through his/her information or skills, it is believed that there is a problem. Therefore, the primary feature of a problem emphasizes that it is not easily solved by using the first mental responses, but requires use of a new compound of previously acquired knowledge and principles. Based on the present study, the problem-solving skill can be viewed as an instrument helping an individual cope with situational problems; it can, also, provide a variety of responses being potentially effective in problematic situations, and can increase the probability of selecting the most effective alternative. Problem-solving skill considered as the highest level of mental activity should not be confused with ordinary issues students learn at schools as educational materials and exercises. Such materials are used in form of tasks and exercises the learners need to perform as their assignments. Students need to be asked questions to which they cannot respond by using their prior knowledge or understanding, i.e. questions that activate and ignite thinking.

Students should be provided with opportunities, and be encouraged to express their ideas and thoughts freely. Unfortunately, students spend a great deal of time thinking about teacher's expectations. Usually, as they find out, teachers emphasize on students' order and discipline expecting them to carry out the tasks regularly and on time. When the student's energy is spent this way, there is naturally, not much time left for learning problem-solving skill. Based on the present findings and the existing literature, it can be concluded that problem-solving skills instruction is a severe need student-generation has at academic settings, since due to hormonal changes and physical – mental growth, they regularly change their roles to reach their preferred role and identity. Communicational problems, due to a lack of problem-solving instruction, not only disturb the students but negatively affect their performances and social relationships with parents, family members, and teachers.

As shown by the study, problem-solving instruction can help students change situations they encounter due to lack of such trainings. It is, also, deduced from the present findings that students' communication problems (e.g. with parents, peers, sisters, brothers, teachers) can be solved by instructing problem-solving skills.

In addition, the study shows that problem-solving instruction can significantly enhance interpersonal compatibility as well as effective social relationships.

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