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Investigating the Effectiveness of Story Therapy in Improving the Self-Perception of Male Students

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Abstract

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of story therapy in improving the self-perception of male students.
Method: The present study is in the field of applied research in terms of its purpose and is of a semi-experimental type based on the nature of its implementation. The statistical population of the study consists of all elementary school students in Gonbad-Kavoos in the academic year 2024-2025. Sampling was selected using the convenience sampling method. The sample under study was divided into two control and experimental groups, each of which consisted of fifteen people. In the present study, Harter's Self-Perception Scale (2015) was used to collect data. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.748, which indicates the desired reliability of the instrument. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistical methods and inferential statistics.
Findings: The findings showed that story therapy increases students' self-perception. Stories increase self-concept and problem-solving skills in children, and therefore, story therapy education is effective in increasing their self-perception.
Conclusion: Story therapy can convey many educational concepts in the fields of culture, ethics, health, or various sciences to the child without directly affecting his beliefs or creating negative resistance or feelings of stubbornness.

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Introduction

In recent years, the mental health and psychological development of children and adolescents has become one of the major concerns of society and educational systems. Especially during school, students face numerous challenges that can affect their self-knowledge, self-confidence, and self-perception (1). Self-perception, meaning an individual's attitude towards their own abilities, values, and capabilities, plays a key role in shaping personality and social behaviors. Students who have a positive self-perception are better able to cope with academic and social problems and experience greater motivation and satisfaction from their academic and personal lives (2). Therefore, finding effective methods and interventions to strengthen students' self-perception is of great importance and can pave the way for their academic and psychological success.

Self-perception or self-image is a psychological concept that includes a person's knowledge, evaluation, and feelings about themselves. This concept is multidimensional and includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects that influence how an individual interacts with the environment and others (3). In children and adolescents, self-perception is considered as the basis for the development of social skills, emotion management, and personal decision-making (4). Research has shown that students who have a positive

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and adaptive self-perception perform better in dealing with academic pressures, social anxiety, and interpersonal problems. For this reason, it is of great importance to develop psychological interventions that can improve self-perception in this age group (5). Story therapy is one of the new and creative methods in the field of child and adolescent psychology that, by utilizing stories and narratives, allows individuals to better identify and reflect on their feelings, experiences, and problems (6). In story therapy, stories act as cognitive and emotional tools and allow for symbolic analysis of personal issues. This method, relying on the power of imagination and the transfer of concepts through stories, increases self-awareness, strengthens problem-solving skills, and improves self-perception in children (7). Various studies have shown that story therapy can reduce anxiety, fears, and behavioral problems and help promote positive aspects of the child's personality (8).

Self-perception, as a set of beliefs, feelings, and attitudes of an individual towards themselves, is formed through cognitive and emotional activities. Story therapy, by providing a safe and creative space, encourages children to reflect on their personalities and experiences in the form of stories and to identify different aspects of themselves. This process allows the child to become aware of his strengths and weaknesses, strengthen his coping skills, and improve his perception through positive experiences and fictional successes (9). Therefore, story therapy has been considered not only as an educational tool, but also as an effective psychological intervention to improve the self-perception of children and adolescents. Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the effect of story therapy on improving the self-perception of male students.

Fily et al. (2021), the present study was conducted with storytelling on improving self-perception and reducing behavioral problems in third-grade elementary students in Shiraz Education District One. They concluded that storytelling is effective on self-perception in third-grade elementary students in Shiraz Education District One. The results also showed that there was a significant difference between the two dimensions of attention deficit and fear in the two groups in the post-test phase. According to the observed averages, it was determined that the experimental group's scores in these dimensions decreased in the post-test phase, and it can be said that story therapy reduced these dimensions of behavioral problems. According to other results, story therapy was effective in improving self-perception in third grade elementary school students in District one of Shiraz Education and Training (10).

Fattahi et al. (2020) presented a study aimed at the effectiveness of storytelling in reducing behavioral problems and improving students' self-perception. The results of data analysis showed that storytelling is effective on self-perception and leads to an increase in this component in students. Also, storytelling is effective on behavioral problems and their components (fear and attention deficit) and reduces these components in students. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that using storytelling reduces fear and problems related to attention deficit and ultimately improves the child's communication with others, and as a result, their self-perception increases (11). For this reason, researchers suggest using storytelling as an effective intervention method, because stories help children better understand and express their feelings, conflicts, and inner experiences by creating a safe and indirect space. This process can play an important role in reducing behavioral problems, strengthening coping skills, as well as increasing self-confidence and improving children's self-perception. By identifying with the characters in the story, the child has the opportunity to learn more constructive solutions to their problems and form a more positive image of their own capabilities and worth. (12, 13, 14).

Wright & Dunsmuir (2019) examined the effect of storytelling in school on children's oral and written language abilities and self-perception. Results showed that the group that was told stories told stories told stories for significantly longer and used a wider range of vocabulary than the group that was read the same stories and the comparison group, both at post-test and at three-month follow-up. Also, the group that was read the stories scored significantly higher than the comparison group on the oral vocabulary test at the three-month follow-up (9). These results suggest that storytelling is an effective approach for enhancing language development in children, as it helps improve vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and expressive skills. In addition, storytelling appears to support positive self-perception by encouraging children to express their thoughts and emotions, build confidence in communication, and develop a stronger sense of self. (15,16,17)

The Method of Research: The present study is in the field of applied research in terms of its purpose and is of a semi-experimental type based on the nature of its implementation. The statistical population of the study consists of all elementary school students in Gonbad-Kavoos city in the academic year 2024-2025. Sampling was selected using the convenience sampling method. The sample under study was divided into two control and experimental groups, each consisting of fifteen people. In the present study, the following standard questionnaire was used to collect data:

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1. General questions: In general questions, an attempt has been made to collect general and demographic information about the respondents.

2. Specialized questions: In the questionnaire, questions have been raised according to the research variables. To measure this entire sub-section, a 5-point Likert scale from none to very much (1: none, 2: very little, 3: little, 4: much, 5: very much) has been used.

Self-Perception Scale: This scale was developed by Harter in 2015 to identify an individual's perception of their own adequacy and competence in various areas, as well as general feelings about their own worth, in children aged 1 to 34. It has 41 items and is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

In order to determine the face and content validity of the developed questionnaire, several copies of it were provided to several professors, faculty members, and experts and were approved. The reliability of the questionnaire was obtained based on Cronbach's alpha method for the entire questionnaire on a sample of 30 people using SPSS software and was finally implemented on the main population. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.748, which indicates the desired reliability of the tool.

Inferential statistics were used to analyze the data, in which the covariance method was used to find the relationship between the studied variables. In this study, descriptive statistical methods such as central indices (mean), dispersion indices (standard deviation) and inferential tests were used to analyze the data obtained. First, the K-S test was used to determine the normality of the data, and the covariance test was used for the hypotheses.

Findings

This section includes Kolmogorov-Smirnov and covariates tests, which were performed using SPSS 16 software with a confidence level of 95%. In this study, this (two-sided) test was used to examine the normality of the variables.

H_0: The variable in question has a normal distribution.

H_1: The variable in question does not have a normal distribution.

Considering the P value and comparing it with the significance level ($p<0.05$), it is concluded that the assumption of normality of most variables is confirmed.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for testing the normality of research variables

Number		Behavioral problems		Adaptability and family cohesion	
		12	12	12	12
		Experimental group	Control group	Experimental group	Control group
Normal distribution parameters	Mean	3 . 0015	3 . 5721	3 . 2257	3 . 1975
	Standard Deviation	0 . 69743	0 . 79743	0 . 70863	0 . 87469
Differences	Absolute Value of Difference	0 . 108	0 . 208	0 . 140	0 . 222
	Positive Value	0 . 093	0 . 1033	0 . 140	0 . 124
	Negative value	-0 . 108	-0 . 208	-0 . 113	-0 . 222
Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic		1 . 378	2 . 145	1 . 378	2 . 821
P value		0 . 078	0 . 178	0 . 078	0 . 2

Table 2. Descriptive indices of research variables by experimental and control groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Standard deviation	mean	Standard deviation	mean
Self-perception	Experimental	9 . 20	68 . 75	11 . 75	75 . 50
	Control	8 . 18	78 . 75	4 . 68	84 . 08

Table 3. Results of the Shapiro and Wilks test for the self-perception variable

Variable	Test statistic	Significance level
Self-perception	0 . 890	0 . 712

Result: If the significance level in the Shapiro and Wilks test is greater than 5%, then it can be said that the data are normal.

Result: If the significance level in the Levine test is greater than 5%, it can be said that the variance of the groups is homogeneous. Considering that the significance level in the research variables is greater than 5%, we conclude that the variance is homogeneous.

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Table 4. Results of the Levine Self-Perception Test

Variable	Test statistic	df1	df2	Significance level
Self-perception	3/962	1	28	0/056

Table 5. Results obtained using the covariance test

Sources of change	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F	Meaningfulness	Eta squared
Group	644/572	1	644/572	9/627	0/004	0/263
Error	1807/709	27	66/952			
Amount	142730/000	30	-	-	-	-
Residual error	2648/667	29	-	-	-	-

As can be seen, considering the value of F = 9.62 and the significance level of the test (0.004) is less than 5 percent, the null hypothesis is rejected and the first hypothesis is confirmed. The eta coefficient is equal to 0.263, which means that approximately 26 percent of self-perception is explained.

Before examining the effect of storytelling and self-perception using one-way multivariate analysis of covariance, examining the assumption of homogeneity of the pre-test and post-test regression slopes of these components in the experimental and control groups showed that their pre-test and post-test regression slopes were equal in the two groups (P=0.23, F=1.48). Also, the results of the M-Box test to examine the equality of the covariance matrix of the dependent variables between the experimental and control groups showed that the F-statistic of this test is significant (P≤0.01, F = 4.24). Given the high sensitivity of this test, its significance level is considered to be 0.001. Therefore, considering that this statistic was significant at the 0.01 level in the present study, it was concluded that the covariance matrix of the dependent variables in the two groups was equal. The results of the Chi-square and Bartlett test to examine the sphericity or significance of the correlation between self-perception also showed that there is a significant relationship between these components (P≤0.007, df=2) and the multivariate analysis of covariance test can be used.

According to the results of this test, the F statistic examining the difference between the experimental and control groups in self-perception was significant (P≤0.001, F=14.12, Wilks' Lambda=0.40). Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of self-perception in the post-test after controlling for pre-test scores and the interaction between the components.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of story therapy in improving the self-perception of male students, and the findings showed that story therapy increases students' self-perception. This finding is consistent with the results of studies (9) and (11).

Given the value of F = 9.62 and the significance level of the test (0.004) is less than 5 percent, the null hypothesis is rejected and the first hypothesis is confirmed. The eta coefficient is 0.263, which means that approximately 26 percent of self-perception is explained. These findings indicate that story therapy can be used as an effective psychological and educational tool to promote self-awareness and improve children's self-perception. Children's identification with the characters in the story and analysis of their conflicts creates a process that strengthens children's problem-solving and decision-making skills (18). In addition, the interactive relationship established between the storyteller and the listener during storytelling sessions creates a supportive and emotionally safe environment for children. Within this context, children are encouraged to actively engage with the narrative, ask questions, and share personal reflections related to the story. This process allows them to express their inner feelings, thoughts, and lived experiences more freely, fostering emotional awareness and meaningful communication. As a result, storytelling becomes not only a linguistic activity but also an interpersonal experience that strengthens the emotional bond between the child and the storyteller (19, 20).

Furthermore, this expressive interaction plays a significant role in enhancing children's self-esteem and emotional regulation. By having their voices heard and their emotions acknowledged, children develop a sense of validation and self-worth. Storytelling also provides a constructive outlet for the release of both positive and negative emotions, enabling children to process feelings such as joy, fear, or frustration in a safe and imaginative way. Over time, these experiences contribute to greater emotional resilience, confidence in self-expression, and a more positive self-perception (20).

Conclusion

According to the results of this study, storytelling is significantly effective in improving male students' self-perception. Using storytelling allows children to

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strengthen their problem-solving and creative thinking skills through identification with the characters in the story, and increase their positive feelings about themselves and their personal capabilities. Story therapy, in addition to strengthening self-perception, provides an opportunity to express emotions, reflect on personal experiences, and increase self-esteem, leading to the formation of a more coherent and positive self in children.

In this process, children link their emotional and cognitive experiences with stories and learn to identify with the positive characteristics of the characters in the story, which helps to form a positive self-perception and increase self-concept in various dimensions (11). In addition, story therapy can provide appropriate behavioral and value models for a healthier life and more effective social relationships, and prepare children to face real challenges. Overall, story therapy education was shown to be effective in increasing male students' self-perception and can be used as an effective psychological intervention in schools and educational centers.

In general, based on the results of this study, story therapy education is effective in increasing their self-perception. Every study, in addition to being original and having strengths, also has some methodological limitations, and the findings of the present study should be interpreted in the context of its limitations. Due to implementation limitations, it was not possible to follow up on the results obtained in this study, and it is not possible to comment on the sustainability of its results in the long term.

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The author contributed to the data analysis. Drafting, revising and approving the article, responsible for all aspects of this work.

Ethical Consideration:

The research data and literature have not been copied from any worksauthor upon reasonable request.

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