




Research Article

Determining the Effectiveness of Social Skills Training-Based on a Cognitive-Behavioral Approach to Self-Efficacy in Orphaned Children

Keyhaneh Sadat Hosseinimaneh¹ , Leila Akbarian² 

1. Master's student in Educational Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran. **Email:** Reyhanehossein561@gmail.com

2. Master's student in Educational Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran **Email:** LeilaAkbarian@gmail.com

* **Corresponding Author:** Reyhanehossein561@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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Background and Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of social skills training based on a cognitive-behavioral approach on the self-efficacy of orphaned children.

Methodology: The research method was a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest design with a control group. The statistical population included all 9-12 year old unaccompanied children living in welfare centers in Mazandaran province in the academic year 1403-1404. From this population, 30 children were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly assigned to two groups of 15: experimental and control. Data were collected using standard self-efficacy questionnaires. The experimental group received a social skills educational intervention based on a cognitive-behavioral approach, while the control group did not receive any intervention. Data analysis was performed using SPSS-26 software and analysis of covariance method.

Results: It showed that after the intervention, there was a significant difference between the scores of the two groups in the dependent variables ($P < 0.05$). In other words, teaching the aforementioned social skills significantly increased self-efficacy in children in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Conclusion: Based on these results, it can be concluded that social skills training based on a cognitive-behavioral approach is an effective intervention for improving key psychological indicators in unaccompanied children, and its use is recommended in relevant centers.

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Introduction

Parentlessness has existed since the beginning of creation, and parentless children live in homes devoid of parental love and family members. Some of them experience deprivations, feelings of failure, and sometimes suffer from psychological injuries and traumas. These children feel an inner void and are dissatisfied and unhappy individuals who, in order to claim their rights, may resort to maladaptive and deviant behaviors (Borjali & Borhani, 2022). Another important variable in parentless children is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one of the most important components of achieving success and adjustment and falls within the realm of positive psychology (Lamis et al., 2020). From Bandura's (1997) perspective, self-efficacy is an individual's ability to perform a specific action and cope with a particular situation. In other words, self-efficacy refers to individuals' judgments about their capabilities to achieve designated levels of performance (Lanis & Afrāsīnī, 2022). Individuals with weak self-efficacy have lower social adjustment; instead of confronting obstacles, they avoid facing them, give up efforts, show no resistance or persistence, and do not deal with issues and problems realistically. In contrast, individuals with high self-efficacy are better able to adapt themselves to environmental conditions and are more successful in their interactions with others (Dadashzadeh Kalesar et al., 2021).

It seems that teaching social skills based on a cognitive-behavioral approach can play an effective role in reducing the loneliness of parentless children. Social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach is a structured and comprehensive educational and therapeutic approach that, by combining the principles and techniques of CBT with social skills training strategies, helps individuals improve their abilities in social interactions. The main goal of this approach is not only to teach appropriate social behaviors but, more importantly, to modify the thoughts, beliefs, and cognitive interpretations that may hinder the manifestation of these behaviors or lead to social anxiety (Ribeiro et al., 2018).

Studies show that institutionalized children have low mental health and high

levels of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, due to living in institutional conditions lacking social support, provision of basic needs, and absence of social skills and problem-solving training, these children face factors that can negatively impact their lives, leading to reduced psychological well-being, quality of life, and hope for the future (Zakizadeh Qaryeh Ali, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to address the psychological and behavioral problems of these children. The importance of properly nurturing children as the human capital of any society is undeniable.

Social skills are very important in human life. None of humanity's potential capabilities develop except through interpersonal relationships (Gokel & Dougli, 2017). Learning correct interpersonal relationships and social skills is of great importance for self-actualization, especially for children with neglectful or absent parents. Children with weaker social skills are less accepted by those around them and face numerous short-term and long-term problems. The needs of this group require further investigation and attention, as well as solutions to address this sensitive issue in society, which is explored in this research. Accordingly, considering the research gap regarding the effects of social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach on the self-efficacy of parentless children, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach on the self-efficacy of parentless children. In other words, the researcher seeks to answer this question: Does social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach affect the self-efficacy of parentless children?

Shokrara and Moghaddas (2023) in a study titled "The Effect of Social Skills Training on Increasing Social Competence and Reducing Aggressive Behaviors: A Case Study," which was conducted in a quasi-experimental manner, showed that social skills training has a significant impact on increasing social competence and reducing aggressive behaviors at the age of 8.

Khorshidi et al. (2023) examined a study titled "The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy on the Adjustment of Elementary School Students." The

research method was quasi-experimental. The results indicated that using cognitive-behavioral play therapy training is effective on the adjustment of elementary school students.

Agh Atabay and Iri (2022) conducted a study titled "The Effectiveness of Social Skills Training on Social Adjustment and Anxiety Among Students in Gorgan During the COVID-19 Pandemic." The present research was a quasi-experimental study with a pre-test and post-test design with a control group, using the selection of participants in experimental and control groups. It was concluded that social skills training led to increased social adjustment and reduced anxiety among female students in Gorgan.

Rashtiyani (2021) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Social Skills Training on Improving the Social Adjustment of Students with Special Needs in Sar-e Pol-e Zahab County." The results of the conducted research indicate that there is a significant positive correlation and relationship between the components of social skills and the social adjustment of male and female students with special needs (exceptional). The findings of the research suggest that social skills training impacts the improvement of social adjustment in students with special needs (exceptional).

Badia-Aguarón et al. (2025), in a study titled "Combining mindfulness and cognitive training in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: study protocol of a pilot randomized controlled trial (the NeuroMind study)" showed that, ultimately, stable change indicators for children indicated that the parent training workshop improved in more than half of the participants across all analyzed variables.

Gul et al. (2023) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Social Skills on Academic Competencies Among Undergraduate Students." This research was conducted among adult students in Pakistan. Using two different questionnaires, data from a sample of 100 students were collected. The results showed that students' perceptions regarding social skills and academic competencies are similar, and correlation values also predict that social skills have a significant

positive impact on students' academic competencies.

Leifler et al. (2022), in an article titled "social skills group training for students with neurodevelopmental disabilities in senior high school—a qualitative multi-perspective study of social validity," aimed to explore the lived experiences of students with autism or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and those showing subclinical social problems. The findings indicate that social activities are largely feasible and socially valid, and broader implementation of social activities in meaningful school environments seems warranted.

Methodology

Given the subject and objectives of the research, the present study is an applied research type with a quasi-experimental method using a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. This design consists of two groups of subjects (experimental and control), both of which were measured twice. To form the groups, the researcher randomly assigned half of the subjects to the experimental group and the other half to the control group. The measurement of the dependent variable was conducted at one time and under the same conditions. In this study, the experimental group was exposed to the independent variable, which is social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach, while the control group continued with their usual routine.

The first measurement was taken before the interventions by administering a pre-test to both groups to assess their baseline levels of emotion regulation, feelings of loneliness, and self-efficacy. The second measurement was taken by administering a post-test after the social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach. Figure (3-1) illustrates the pre-test and post-test design with the control group.

The statistical population of this study included all parentless children aged 9 to 12 years residing in welfare centers in Mazandaran province during the academic year 2024-2025. According to statistics obtained from the General Welfare Office of the province, the number of these children was reported to be 103.

The sample size was determined based on statistical formulas to have sufficient power to determine the intervention's effectiveness in the test and control groups. Based on the formula, the number of participants in each group was calculated to provide up to 90% detection power with a value of $P < 0.05$ for significance. Considering $\alpha = 0.05$ and $\beta = 0.95$, the sample size for each group was 15 individuals. Accordingly, 30 parentless children aged 9 to 12 years were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria through non-random purposive sampling and were then randomly assigned into two groups of 15 each (experimental and control).

Data collection methods included library and internet research. The necessary data for this research were collected through field methods. Specifically, after obtaining the required permits from the provincial welfare center, centers in Behshahr, Sari, and Neka were selected. After necessary coordination, explanations regarding the research objectives and implementation method were provided. Following the review of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 30 individuals were selected as the sample and were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. Social skills training based on the cognitive-behavioral approach was provided to the experimental group, while no intervention was conducted for the control group.

The data collection tool was a questionnaire developed by Garnefski and Kraaij (2006). One week after the training for the experimental group ended, the questionnaires were redistributed among participants in both groups. After collecting the completed questionnaires, the research results were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

To respect the children's rights and ethical considerations of the research, necessary coordination was conducted in the initial session with the officials and caregivers of the centers. Their recommendations regarding collaboration and adapting the intervention program to the caregiving process and the children's daily routines, such as rest schedules and caregivers' attentions, were considered to minimize interference with the children's care and daily activities. Furthermore, to protect the children's identity rights, no photography or videography of the

intervention sessions or the children was conducted. Throughout the program implementation, caregivers and relevant officials had access to and could attend to the children. The tests were conducted with complete confidentiality of the participants' information. In this research, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used for data analysis, employing the SPSS software package version 26.

Results

This section presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted to examine the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral-based social skills training on the research variables among parentless children. The data analysis began by testing the underlying assumptions of the statistical tests. Subsequently, the main analyses were performed to compare the experimental and control groups. The following tables and explanations detail these results.

Table 1

Results of Box's Test for Homogeneity of Covariance Matrices (Variance-Covariance Matrix) Assumption

Statistical Index	Box's Statistic	F Statistic	df1	df2	Significance Level (p-value)
Groups	37.79	1.93	10	3748.20	0.11

According to the obtained values ($p = 0.11$, $F(10, 3748.20) = 1.93$), the test for homogeneity of covariance matrices is not significant. This indicates that the observed covariance matrices for the quantitative research variables (i.e., self-efficacy, parentless children) are equal across the control and experimental groups.

Table 2

Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for Research Variables in Experimental and Control Groups (Testing the Interaction Effect)

Effect	Source of Variation	Test Statistic Value	F Value	Error df	Hypothesis df	Significance Level (p-value)
Group Effect	Pillai's Trace	0.741	15.01	4	21	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.259	15.01	4	21	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	2.86	15.01	4	21	0.000
	Roy's Largest Root	2.86	15.01	4	21	0.000

Based on the data in Table 1-2, specifically the Wilks' Lambda test value ($p = 0.000$, $F(4, 21) = 15.01$, $\Lambda = 0.259$), we conclude that the hypothesis of equal means between the two groups based on the dependent variables (self-efficacy, parentless children) is rejected. In other words, there is a significant difference in at least one of the examined variables between the studied groups. Subsequently, a comparison and assessment of the impact of cognitive-behavioral based social skills training on the research variables using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) are presented.

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the key and most important aspects of this approach is teaching emotion regulation skills. Orphaned children often face significant difficulties in regulating their emotions due to past traumatic experiences, lack of secure attachments, and unstable family environments. These difficulties may manifest as uncontrolled anger, severe anxiety, deep sadness, or emotional withdrawal. The cognitive-behavioral approach helps improve their emotion regulation abilities in several ways:

This approach helps children identify and label their emotions. Many of these

children may not be able to accurately recognize their emotions, instead experiencing only a vague sense of distress or agitation. By teaching emotional vocabulary and helping the child describe what is happening inside them (e.g., "Does this feeling resemble anger or is it more like frustration?"), the therapist takes the first step toward emotion regulation. Once a child can recognize their emotions, they can better manage them, much like having a roadmap for their feelings.

Additionally, CBT teaches children to understand the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is the core of the cognitive-behavioral approach. When a child realizes how negative and unrealistic thoughts (e.g., "Everyone hates me") can lead to intense emotions (such as anger or sadness) and how these emotions, in turn, affect their behaviors (such as aggression or withdrawal), they gain a powerful insight for intervention.

In summary, the cognitive-behavioral approach equips orphaned children with cognitive and behavioral tools, enabling them not only to better understand their emotions but also to actively and constructively manage them and interact effectively with the world around them. This ability to regulate emotions will serve as a foundation for their mental health and success in all aspects of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no financial, scientific, or personal conflicts of interest in relation to this research.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for scientific research. Participation was voluntary and informed, all data were kept confidential, and results are reported anonymously solely for the purpose of fulfilling the research objectives.

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