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## THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE THINKING ON SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SARDASHT

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was investigating the efficacy of positive thinking on social adjustment of high school students in Sardasht. This study is a semi- experimental (interventional) research with pre- test and post- test of control group. The statistical society includes all female high school students in Sardasht in academic year 2013- 2014. A sample of 40 female students was selected by multi stage random sampling. Before intervention (independent variable) two groups were pre- tested by using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (positive thinking) and social adjustment questionnaire. Then 40 of students which gained minimum grade in social adjustment test were randomly replaced in test group (20 females) and control group (20 females). Then the present group was trained for eight sessions (two 45 minutes sessions per week). The results of covariance analysis showed that the test group which positive thinking training was trained to them had more positive thinking than control group which positive thinking training has not been provided for them. In addition, the findings showed that the test group which positive thinking was trained to them, in comparison to control group which positive thinking was not trained to them had more social adjustment.

**Keywords:** Positive Thinking, Social Adjustment, Sardasht

### INTRODUCTION

Education of happy, healthy and morally good children and teenagers is one of important goals of parents and teachers. The importance of factors such as happiness, optimism and mental health for social welfare can be important and necessary as well as personal well- being. Each person passes his most important time at school and education determines a person's future life. Today, school programs are often focused on skills like reading, writing, accounting and creative thinking, but these goals cannot be achieved without components such as happiness, optimism and mental health (Alizadeh *et al.*, 2014). Positive thinking is a way of thinking that continually seeks to obtain the best results from the worst conditions. A positive thinker never recognizes negative issues, but deals with them. Positive thinking is a deliberate and of choice process. When we are looking for goodness, it is much more likely to find it (Tavanai and Salimzadeh, 2009). The results of previous studies show that the interventions which make a positive state influence a change in people's attitude and behavior. The results of the research of Dastgheib *et al.*, (2012) confirmed the impact of positive thinking skills training on student's creativity and each parts of it including fluidity, expansion, innovation and flexibility. The findings of Barkhordi *et al.*, (2009) showed that positive thinking skills had a significant effect on increasing achievement motivation scores ( $P < 0.001$ ) and happiness scores ( $P < 0.000$ ). Also, Seligman *et al.*, (2007), as Borence (2007) says, in a study with an approach of positive psychotherapy among clinically depressed populations found that identifying an individual's Special Forces and finding ways to use them help to reduce and control the depression. In other research, Seligman (2000) has shown that it is possible to train to children and youth necessary skills for optimism and positive thinking based on reality and save them psychologically when facing difficulties. Also, the results suggest that optimism is associated with job performance and academic performance (Moussavi and others, 2006). Positive and optimistic thoughts cause to encouragement, comfort, convenience, energy and passion and pessimistic and negative thoughts cause to nervousness, anger and fatigue (Mollakhalili and Ahmadi, 2014). In this regard, it seems that teaching positive thinking skills to people can be effective to control and change negative and incorrect thoughts

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(Barkhordi, 2010). Generally, the studies show that the optimistic people suffer less than pessimistic people in their life when solving problems. It seems that optimists do certain things when faced with a problem that causes to their better adaptation (Moussavi and others, 2006). The term of Term adaptation refers to an individual's effort to deal and survive in the physical and social environment (Champa and Kyalu, 2011). Compatibility has different fields, including social and emotional adjustment and adaptation in educational situations. Adjustment educational situations which is named as "academic adjustment" refers to the ability of learners in accordance with the conditions and requirements of learning and school and the roles which school as a social institution puts in front of them (Pitos, 2006). Emotional adjustment can be considered as good mental health, life satisfaction and coordination of the feelings, thoughts and actions. In other words, the emotional adjustment means mechanisms by which a person finds social stability and social adjustment includes a person's adjustment to his own social environment which this adjustment may be obtained by changing himself or environment (Safavi *et al.*, 2007).

Adjustment is affected by social, psychological and biological factors and negative emotions caused by social problems can interrupt this process by making psychological problems (Rigby, 2003; Graham, 2003) and physical problems (Liu-Wiesel and Notman, 2006). Some studies have been conducted on relationship between adjustment and its different types with other psychological variables. The results of these studies suggest that there is a positive relationship between adjustment with religious orientation, moral development, efficacy, flexibility, optimism and successful identity (Zarei *et al.*, 2012). Understanding adjustment styles can be effective for clinical treatment (especially consultation), educational planning, managing classrooms and understanding adolescent's growth age (Fraydenberg and Louis, 1993). All efforts of education specialists in different countries are focused on people's comprehensive development that their foundation is children and youth. Puberty due to large changes in the physical, psychological and social dimensions is the most difficult stage of adjustment and many social conflicts occur in adolescence (Mazaheri *et al.*, 2005). Among the challenges that students are facing when entering educational environment are their thoughts about the ability to deal with necessities that affect their adjustment (Zychovsky, 2007). The academic period is a stage in which occur rapid social and cognitive changes. Dealing with these changes needs individual's appropriate ability of adjustment (Speer, 2000). So, researchers' favorite adjustment is education and many efforts have done to identify the factors affecting it. Given the importance of adjustment among the students, in this study we seek to examine the effectiveness of positive thinking skills on the social adjustment of female high school students in Sardasht.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Methodology**

This research is a quasi-experimental study using pretest and posttest with control group. The project consists of two groups to test which both of them are measured twice. The first measurement after intervention is done by performing a pretest and the second measurement is done by performing a posttest. To form the groups, the researcher using a multistage random sampling replaces subject group in two groups, the first half ( $n = 20$ ) and the other half ( $n = 20$ ). Two groups are similar and the dependent variable for both of them is measured at the same time and under the same conditions. The statistical society includes all female high school students in Sardasht in academic year 2013- 2014. In this study, a multi-stage random sampling method was used. To this end, two schools of all girl high schools in Sardasht and then 100 students of these schools were randomly selected. Then, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and California social adjustment Questionnaire were implemented to carry out the pretest, then subject group was randomly replaced in two experimental and control groups. After considering the results in each school 40 female students which gained minimum score in social adjustment test were randomly replaced in two groups, test group (20 females) and control group (20 females). Also, the statistical method used in this study in addition to descriptive indexes (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation), to test research hypotheses the covariance analysis test (ANCOVA) was used to

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compare the means of two groups and maintain the effectiveness of the pre-test (as covariate) that was performed by SPSS statistical software.

**The Process of Conducting Research**

(Experimental and control) were tested at all subject groups before beginning the training program, the same time. In other words, the pre- test was performed at the same time condition for both groups. The subject group was trained for eight sessions (two 45 minutes sessions per week). Training of positive thinking skills was done by instructions of Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman (2000) and Karrer (2004). A summary of the content of the sessions is as follows: First session: Introducing members to each other and determining the nature and the objectives of the program, performing conditions and the duration for the group and forming two groups in four to start the second session:

Second session: Everyone, calm and focusing writes in a paper his own strengths;

Third session: Each individual thinks about a minimum of his five good experiences or memories and notes their titles;

Fourth session: The relative importance of strengths raised in the first and second stage will be determined in order of priority. Among the points raised, five to eight abilities named reliable strengths are selected and evidences and measurements are provided;

Fifth session: Each member in order tells his first positive memory or experience. This is repeated for all members and each member can tell all written memories. When one of the group members tells his positive experience or memory, others note carefully speaker's strengths in explanation of that experience and list them. Obviously, the members have eye contact when listening.

Sixth and seventh session: Continuation of telling memories;

Eighth session: Each speaker hears group members speaking about his strengths and thanks them. Each member takes list of his strengths and compares it with list of strengths which had done previously and finds common points. Finally, group members will have newer perception of themselves and they will rely more on their known points. At the end of eighth session, the test group was post- tested to compare their actual status and their status before training. This post- test was performed also about control group.

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**Findings**

The information in table 1 shows that in test group 20 students were pre- and post- tested to measure their social adjustment. Mean and standard deviation of social adjustment pre- test were 53.70 and 9.96 and mean and standard deviation of social adjustment post- test were 57.45 and 8.84. Also, the minimum and maximum score in social adjustment pre- test were 36 and 69 and the minimum and maximum score in social adjustment post- test were 40 and 74. Also, the information in table 1 shows that 20 students of control group were pre- and post- tested to measure their social adjustment. Mean and standard deviation of social adjustment pre- test were 55.45 and 8.74 and mean and standard deviation of social adjustment post- test were 55.40 and 9.64. In addition, the minimum and maximum score in social adjustment pre- test were 34 and 72 and the minimum and maximum score in social adjustment post- test were 32 and 70.

**Table 1: Descriptive indexes of pre- and post- test scores in test and control groups**

Indexes		Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	Minimum score	Maximum score
Test	Pre-test	20	53.70	9.96	99.37	36	69
	Post- test	20	57.45	8.84	78.26	40	74
Control	Pre-test	20	55.45	8.74	76.47	34	72
	Post- test	20	55.40	9.64	93.95	32	70

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**Hypothesis 1:** Training positive thinking skills enhances students' positive thinking.

To test research hypotheses, covariance analysis was used. To use covariance analysis there should be a linear relationship between pre- test as auxiliary variable and post- test as dependent variable and regression slopes should be homogenous. Also, the other condition is equality of groups' variance. According to previous investigations, the default is respected. To determine the equality of variances, F test was used which its results as follows:

**Table 2: Lon test: homogeneous or non- homogeneous variances**

F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Significance level
0.353	1	38	0.556

The information in table 2 with significance level more than 0.05, demonstrates that data has not questioned the assumption of equality of variances' errors.

**Table 3: The descriptive indexes of test and control groups with teaching positive thinking**

Teaching positive thinking	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
positive thinking training	20	45.40	10.30
Lack of positive thinking training	20	42.80	9.75
Total	40	44.10	9.99

The descriptive indexes in table 3 show that 20 students as sample in test group were trained using positive thinking training program. Mean and standard deviation of those students' scores in positive thinking test were obtained 45.40 and 10.30. Also, 20 students in control group as sample were not trained using positive thinking training program. Mean and standard deviation of scores of the control group students in positive thinking test were reported 42.80 and 9.75. Later, to test first hypothesis of research, covariance analysis results are presented in table 4. In covariance analysis maintaining the effect of pre- test as auxiliary variable, means of scores of sample students in test and control groups which were trained using positive thinking programs or not, are compared in positive thinking scores after performing post- test as dependent variable.

**Table 4: Covariance analysis of positive thinking scores**

Reference	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of squares	F	Significance level
Corrected model	3484.114	2	1742.057	156.642	0.001
Width of origin	173.656	1	173.656	15.615	0.001
positive thinking training	249.70	1	1249.70	22.453	0.001
positive thinking pre- test	3416.514	1	3416.514	307.206	0.001
Error	411.486	37	11.121		
Total	81688.000	40			
Total corrected	3895.600	39			

**Table 5: Positive thinking adjusted means**

Teaching thinking training	Mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval %95	
			Lower division	Higher division
Positive thinking training	46.619	0.762	45.073	48.164
Lack of positive thinking training	41.578	0.763	40.031	43.126

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In line with testing first hypothesis of the research, information in table 4 states that after adjustment of the scores of positive thinking pre- test, there is significant effect of testable factor of Positive thinking training and Lack of positive thinking training in test and control groups with  $F(1,37) = 22.453$ ,  $P < 0/001$ . Adjusted average scores of positive thinking shows that the test group which was trained using positive thinking program has more positive thinking than control group which was not trained using positive thinking program. In other words, there is a difference between positive thinking average scores of male and female students in test and control groups and the advantage is in favor of the test group. Table 5 shows positive thinking adjusted means. This means that the effect of auxiliary variable of pre- test was eliminated statistically. Adjusted mean of test group with Positive thinking training is 46.619 and adjusted mean of control group without Positive thinking training is 41.578.

Later, to analyze data the covariance analysis was used to test second research hypothesis. As noted previously, to use covariance analysis there should be a linear relationship between pre- test as auxiliary variable and post- test as dependent variable. Also, the other condition is equality of groups' variance and regression slopes should be homogenous.

**Table 6: Lon test: homogeneous or non- homogeneous variances**

F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 1	Significance level
0.074	1	38	0.787

The information in table 6 with significance level more than 0.05, demonstrates that data has not questioned the assumption of equality of variances' errors

**Hypothesis 2:** Training positive thinking skills enhances students' social adjustment.

Firstly, descriptive indexes of test and control groups which were trained using positive thinking program or not, are written.

**Table 7: The descriptive indexes of test and control groups with teaching positive thinking**

Teaching positive thinking	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
positive thinking training	20	57.45	8.84
Lack of positive thinking training	20	55.40	9.64
Total	40	56.42	9.19

**Table 8: Covariance analysis of social adjustment scores**

Reference	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Significance level
Corrected model	2662.761	2	1331.381	77.575	0.001
Width of origin	71.424	1	71.424	4.162	0.49
positive thinking training	128.415	1	128.415	7.482	0.01
Social adjustment pre- test	2620.736	1	2620.736	152.701	0.001
Error	635.014	37	17.163		
Total	130649.000	40			
Total corrected	3297.775	39			

The descriptive indexes in table 7 show that 20 students as sample in test group have been trained using positive thinking teaching program. Mean and standard deviation of these students' scores in social adjustment test were obtained 57.45 and 8.84. Also, in control group 20 students as sample, positive thinking teaching program has not been provided for them. Mean and standard deviation of scores of

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control group samples in social adjustment test were reported 55.40 and 9.64. Later, to test the second research hypothesis, covariance analysis results are shown in table 8. In covariance analysis maintaining the effect of pre- test as auxiliary variable, means of scores of sample students in test and control groups which were trained using positive thinking programs or not, are compared in social adjustment scores after performing post- test as dependent variable.

**Table 9: Social adjustment adjusted means**

Teaching thinking training	Mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval %95	
			Lower division	Higher division
Positive thinking training	58.132	0.905	56.295	59.968
Lack of positive thinking training	54.504	0.907	52.665	56.342

To test the second research hypothesis, the information in table 8 states that after adjustment of the scores of social adjustment pre- test, there is significant effect of testable factor of Positive thinking training and Lack of positive thinking training in test and control groups with  $F(1,37) = 7.482, P < 0/01$ . Adjusted average scores of social adjustment shows that the test group which was trained using positive thinking program has more social adjustment than control group which was not trained using positive thinking program. In other words, there is a difference between social adjustment average scores of male and female students in test and control groups and the advantage is in favor of the test group. Table 9 shows social adjustment adjusted means. This means that the effect of auxiliary variable of pre- test was eliminated statistically. Adjusted mean of test group with Positive thinking training is 58.132 and adjusted mean of control group without Positive thinking training is 54.504.

**Conclusion**

Students are encouraged to learn happiness and positive thinking in order to recognize their good and positive experiences and to find their role in promoting self - respect and self - esteem and at the same time to have the ability to recognize the positive aspects of the others. They also learn to take an active stance in the world and to form their own life and not to accept everything that comes to them as passively (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive thinking includes spree, joy and happiness, the positive mood, positive emotions, hope and gratification, the factors which make people show patterns of relations that make people have high social harmony and adjustment. The purpose of this study was investigating the efficacy of positive thinking skills training program among high school students in Sardasht. In line with testing the first research hypothesis, the results show that after adjustment of the scores of positive thinking pre- test, there is significant effect of testable factor of Positive thinking training and Lack of positive thinking training in test and control groups with  $F(1,37) = 22.453, P < 0/001$ . Adjusted average scores of positive thinking shows that the test group which was trained using positive thinking program has more positive thinking than control group which was not trained using positive thinking program. In other words, there is a difference between positive thinking average scores of male and female students in test and control groups and the advantage is in favor of the test group.

The results of the second hypothesis analysis suggest that after adjustment of the scores of social adjustment pre- test, there is significant effect of testable factor of Positive thinking training and Lack of positive thinking training in test and control groups with  $F(1,37) = 7.482, P < 0/01$ . Adjusted average scores of social adjustment shows that the test group which was trained using positive thinking program has more social adjustment than control group which was not trained using positive thinking program. In other words, there is a difference between social adjustment average scores of male and female students in test and control groups and the advantage is in favor of the test group. This means that positive thinking training increases social adjustment.

According to the findings, it can be claimed that training of positive thinking skills affects students' social adjustment and the applied method in this study can be an appropriate way to psychological, consulting

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and medical intervention in children and teenagers who have low social harmony. It should be noted that according to the results of the present study, it is necessary for custodians of Iranian education system to consider positive thinking skills training as an important issue in schools in order to strengthen students' social adjustment.

One of the limitations of this study is that the research is done only in Sardasht and obviously given the impact of cultural factors on research variables with less sure the results can be generalized. In addition, the use of questionnaire and self-report method to assess students' social adjustment variable is a limitation. Also, the length of social adjustment questionnaire and some unintelligible questions to students are other research limitations. It is recommended to do a similar study with a larger sample size on other students in schools. Also, in conducting the present study using other measurement tools including Vineland Social Adjustment Scale and given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of factors like social adjustment, it is better to use other measurement tools like observation in natural situations, semi-structured individual and clinical interviews in order to achieve more accurate and reliable results. Finally, it will be offered to carry out similar research on boys and girls in future studies.

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