

## **The Effect of Emotion-Focused Processing Strategies Training on Academic Adjustment of Female Students**

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### **Abstract**

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of emotion-focused processing strategies training on academic adjustment of female high school students in Kerman. This study was quasi-experimental with pretest, posttest, and control group. The population of this study includes all female students of secondary school in Kerman, who were studying in the school year 2017. Thirty female students were selected by multi-stage cluster random sampling and divided into two experimental and control groups. Both groups answered the academic adjustment questionnaire before and after the training process. The experimental group received emotion-focused processing strategies for eight sessions of 90 minutes while the control group received no training. The results showed that emotion-focused processing strategies training had a significant effect on academic adjustment of female high school students at  $p < 0.01$  level.

**Keywords:** academic adjustment, emotion-focused processing strategies, female students

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### **Introduction**

Without a doubt, adolescence is one of the most critical stages of human evolution and naturally the characteristics of this period change the teenager's adjustment (Steinberg, 2013). Such maladjustments are more observed in schools (Ezheyi et al, 2011). Girl behaviors are not adjusted to the opinions of parents, family members, and society. The behavior of female students creates very bad feelings in others, so that the students are affected by the adverse reaction of others (Danesh et al, 2013). Students' adjustment in school can be defined as follows: the set of reactions by which a student changes his behavior for a balanced response to new conditions (school) or the activities asked by the environment. Thus, any factor disrupting this accountability in the new environment will provide a context for maladjustment (Gordon, 2007).

Ratilen et al (2014) considered the characteristics of girl students at elementary and secondary schools as being restless, stinging, crying, fighting and at high schools as disagreeing with parents, teachers, fighting with friends (Kalan & Nirshavez, 2008), arguing, using defense mechanisms, disobeying the rules of society and family (Tarlan & Andarz, 2001). However, their maladjustment will have no accurate meaning without considering the person, social environment, family, and school. Any explanation of students' maladjustment in school without considering the totality of such factors will be an incomplete. Although the problems of female students are probably diverse, they can be classified in four groups of affect, cognitive, interpersonal, and behavioral. In the cognitive model, the beliefs and assumptions are considered and interpreting the events and forming emotional, behavioral reactions are considered as factors (Davidson, 2013). In the behavioral model, the most important problems of these students are the lack of adjustment to environment and school factors such as classmates, teachers, trainers, and employees

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(Ezheyi et al, 2011). On the other hand, adjustment refers to the coordination of behaviors for satisfying the environmental needs usually requiring the modification of impulses, emotions, or attitudes.

Adjustment has different aspects that three of them were mentioned in educational psychology studies: academic adjustment, emotional-affect adjustment, and social adjustment. Academic adjustment refers to the ability of people for dealing with academic demands and activities of school and emotional adjustment refers to the process of adjustment to emotions and feelings (Tani, 2011). The academic adjustment of students in school is a part of their affect-social adjustment including the set of reactions by which a student changes his behavioral structure. Thus, the criteria of academic adjustment of students should be searched in this environment and its activities. The student who can give a positive response to such criteria (implementing certain programs, accepting particular disciplines, observing the rules discussed in human and school relationships, etc.) is normal or adjusted. Adjustment simply refers to establishing a satisfactory relationship between the student and the environment he lives. Adjustment is the sign of awareness and ability of a person (Driwer, 2012).

The trainings and interventions were recently designed for improving the involvement, academic adjustment, and emotional self-efficacy with emotional problems. The findings indicated the effect of such trainings on coping with mental pressure, promoting the mental health, increasing emotional self-efficacy in students, and increasing the academic adjustment of gone girls (Sajjadi et al, 2015). Experimental processing approach is an emotion-focused approach referred to as emotion-focused processes training and is related to activation and re-organization of emotional schema. Emotion-focused processing training is deeply rooted in humanism (Akbari, 2013).

Emotion-focused processing training is based on the key principle that everything is moving. This approach emphasized that the experience process affects characteristics, interpersonal relations, and even the changes of reference (Macleod et al., 2011). On the other hand, these trainings were based on dialectic theory in its structure and change. The type of structuralism reflects an approach by which human is considered as a dynamic system with different components continuously producing, experimenting, and operating. The second theoretical basis of emotion-focused processing training is the biological theory of emotion based on dialectic structuralism approach from the concept of character. Training the

processing-experimental-emotion focused processes is a relational training combining Gestalt and reference-focused treatments. Such training considers the emotions as a focused issue in psychological function and malfunction (Akbari, 2013).

If an emotion is based on the interests of students, it can have a positive effect on learning and academic efficiency but if the created emotion based on individual differences is not welcomed by the person, it will show its negative effect. Sometimes the emotions are oriented in such a way affecting an acceptable result (Rio et al, 2008). Thus, based on the status of adjustment and emotion in mental health and its sustainable effect on academic advancement and reduction of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral problems and since the individuals with low academic adjustment have behavioral problems more than their peers, this study sought to answer the question that: does the emotional processing strategies training affect the academic adjustment of girl high school students in Kerman?

## Method

The study design was quasi-experimental with pretest, posttest, and control group.

## Participants

In the present study, 30 people were present in both the experimental and control groups. As regards the experimental group, most participants aged 9 and least ones aged between 7 and 11 (13.3% each). And as for the control group, most participants aged 9 and least ones aged between 8 and 11. Moreover, both boys and girls participated in the study.

## Instruments

The statistical population of this study includes all female students of secondary school in Kerman, who are studying in the school year 2017. Thirty students were selected by multi-stage cluster random sampling and were divided into two experimental and control groups. The criterion for sample selection as 15 subjects per group was based on the fact that most researchers considered the number of 8 to 15 subjects appropriate for the treatment and educational groups (Caplan & Sadok, 2001). The students were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control and both groups answered to the research questionnaire before and after the training process. The experimental group received emotion-focused processing strategies for eight sessions of 90 minutes

while the control group received no training. The inclusion criteria of the sample subjects were:

1. The subjects should study in high school;
2. They should not use other psychological services while they participate in the study;
3. They had gained a score lower than the cut point in the Adjustment Inventory for School Students.

### Instruments

In this study, Clark et al academic adjustment scale was used. The academic adjustment scale was devised by Clark, Torp, and Tiz in 1976 to measure the academic adjustment of students. It was reviewed by Clark et al in 1998 and the final scale was analyzed by the factor analysis. This scale included 15 questions and its scoring method was adjusted based on 4-point Likert scale including totally agree (score 4), agree (score 3), disagree (score 2), and totally disagree (score 1). The score range of this scale was from 15 to 60. The higher total score showed the higher adjustment of students. In addition, questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, and 15 were scored by reverse method. In the study of Clark et al, the content validity of this scale was reported to be very desirable and its reliability was reported 0.83 by using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

### Procedure

The summary of emotion-focused processing strategies training sessions was as follows:

The first session: the familiarity of members with each other and rules of session and description of mental, physical, or emotional symptoms.

The second session: the familiarity of basic emotions in subjects and physical, mental, and emotional review methods.

The third session: the description of the role of language in emotional expression and introduction of memorable flashlight technique through representing one of the exciting scenes of students.

The fourth session: the description of the relationship between emotional, cognitive, and physical processes and empty chair technique exercises through having the aspect of adjustment and emotion sit on the empty chair and fulfilling the tasks given to the students on being adjusted to school, friends, and teachers.

The fifth session: helping the emotional words selection, language correction, and speech for approaching the internal and external experiences.

The sixth session: the review of emotions, thoughts, and physical symptoms before attending the school, at the time of presence in school and after that.

The seventh session: the exercises of playing the role and remaking the exciting subjects and dialogues on symptoms of adjustment and adjustment skills on academic development of some members and expression of their incomplete feelings, implementation of posttest (Eliot, 2004).

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics methods such as frequency, percent, mean, and standard deviation as well as inferential statistics methods including the analysis of covariance were used for data analysis. Data were analyzed by using spss-22 software.

### Findings

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the academic adjustment score in two groups of experimental and control in pretest and posttest.

**Table 1.**

*Describing the Academic Adjustment Score of the Experimental and Control Groups*

Variables	Stage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Adjustment Of The Experimental Group	PRETEST	55.51	74.4
	POST-TEST	82.79	13.5
Academic Adjustment Of The Control Group	PRE-TEST	87.49	48.4
	POST-TEST	34.50	51.4

As Table 1 displays, the academic adjustment score of the participants in the experimental group had the mean of 23.48 in the pre-test and the standard deviation of 4.11 while in the posttest, the mean was 51.22 and the standard deviation was 5.68. The academic adjustment score of the participants in the

control group at pretest had the mean of 24.31 and standard deviation of 4.51 while in the posttest, the mean and the standard deviation were 23.75 and 5.12 respectively.

Then, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used for analyzing the normality of the data. The Kolmogorov-

Smirnov test value was obtained as 0.65 for academic adjustment. This value was not significant at  $p < 0.01$  indicating the normal distribution of pretest variables.

The results of analysis of covariance of the experimental and control groups for the variable of academic adjustment were shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Comparing the Inferential Data of the Experimental and the Control Groups by Using the Analysis of Covariance in Academic Adjustment Variable*

Sources of Changes	Total	Degrees Of Freedom	Average Squares	F Ratio	Significance Level
Pre-Test	45.61	1	45/61	36.1	0.17
Groups	19.851	1	19/851	84.18	0.10
Error	96.1219	27	18/45		

As Table 2 shows, the significant difference between the mean scores of academic adjustment at the post test for both groups of experimental and control was tested after considering the initial differences between the two groups at the pretest. The results showed that the two groups were significantly different at the posttest with ratio of  $F_{1, 27} = 18.84$ , at  $p < 0.01$ . In other words, the experimental group significantly outperformed in the academic adjustment questionnaire comparing to the control group. Thus, the hypothesis that emotion-focused processing strategies training affects the academic adjustment of female students in Kerman was confirmed at  $p < 0.01$  significance level.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating the effect of emotion-focused processing strategies training on academic adjustment of female high school students in Kerman. The results indicated that the experimental group answered the academic adjustment questionnaire much better than the control group. Thus, the study hypothesis that the training affects the academic adjustment of female students in Kerman was confirmed at  $p < 0.01$  significance level. This finding was consistent with the results of Brown and Rayan (2009). It can be said that since emotion-focused processing strategies introduce the basic emotions and physical, mental, and emotional review techniques in these students, it helps them accept the physical emotions and phenomena and even the emotional problems of these students. Accepting these emotions reduce the excessive sensitivity to the report of such academic problems in them and improve their academic adjustment.

Also, the results of this study are consistent with the findings indicating that emotional inhibition as a negative strategy in emotion-focused processing strategies leads to some problems in aspects of adjustment to find the relationship between emotional,

cognitive, and physical processes as a positive strategy for emotion-focused processing strategies leading to the improvement of adjustment (Difendorf, Richard & Young, 2008). Emotional emotion-focused processing strategies, especially the strategy of awareness on the relationship between physical, cognitive, and emotional processes reduce the negative emotions and increase the positive emotions and adjusted behaviors in girl students. Thus, emotion-focused processing strategies training in students with adjustment problems to school, teacher, and classmates makes them use and accept their emotions appropriately and express their emotions especially the positive ones in life situations to reduce their negative feelings. As a result, their adjustment in social, emotional, and academic aspects will improve. In other words, female students may be unaware of their positive and negative emotions due to physical and mental problems or may evaluate their academic status negatively. Thus, the negative effects may appear as some problems in social, emotional, and academic adjustment. Emotion-focused processing strategies training makes them aware of the negative emotions and their negative effect in an attempt to keep their emotional life healthy and reduce their mental and academic problems and increase their academic adjustment.

Based on the findings of this study, showing the effectiveness of emotion-focused processing strategies training on the improvement of academic adjustment and effectiveness of this treatment technique on improvement of academic adjustment in female students, it can be stated that since emotion plays an important role in the academic life of teenagers, emotion-focused processing strategies can be considered as an educational method for modulating emotions associated with self-esteem and positive social interactions. They effectively care about maladaptive situations in the school environment, and increase the activity in response to adaptive situations. Hence, teaching emotion-focused processing strategies

by informing students about the problems of adaptation of positive and negative emotions, their acceptance and timely expression can improve their compatibility in social, emotional and educational dimensions, and guidance counselors, educational issues and therapists improve the educational compatibility of these students. One of the limitations of this study was the control of the gender variable and the limited number of treatment sessions. Therefore, considering these constraints, the findings of this study have important and significant implications regarding the effectiveness of teaching emotion-focused processing strategies on improving educational adaptability of students. Since the use of emotion-focused processing strategies in our country has recently become commonplace in the field of educational psychology and education, it is suggested to study the effectiveness of these strategies on other important variables in the field of educational psychology such as academic engagement, academic failure, academic performance, and so on in future research.

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