

Research Article

THE SHORT-TERM EFFECT OF INTERACTIVE DRAMA AND REFLECTIVE WRITING ON ADOLESCENTS' SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING CORE COMPETENCIES: A FIVE-WEEK INTERVENTION

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Abstract

Acting on stage can boost adolescents' confidence and compassion towards their peers. When an adolescent plays different roles in a performance, they can develop empathy and gain insight into their lives and the lives of others. Understanding the role of theatre at schools can support promoting social change through knowledge generated from students' experiences. In this study, interactive theatre and reflective writing were used as an intervention to promote Social Emotional Learning (SEL) core competencies. Seven adolescents between the ages of 11 and 15 participated in the study over five weeks at a language school in Yerevan, Armenia. The findings show that the intervention helped develop the participants' SEL competencies of self-awareness, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness, while Self-management and Responsible Decision-Making remained almost unchanged. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 25 (6) July, 2024; 1-5.*

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); Interactive Theatre; Participatory Research; Narrative Capability; Anxiety

Introduction

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as a process to “developing healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decision” [1]. SEL includes five core competencies: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Acquiring these competencies helps adolescents become more aware of their/others' emotions and have more control over impulsive behavior [2]. Different SEL interventions have been linked to positive emotional skills, self-actualization, resilience, core social competencies, and positive social-academic outcomes [3-6].

Aiming for similar outcomes, this interventional mixed-method study integrated SEL through interactive value-based drama and reflective writing. Seven adolescents from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Yerevan, Armenia participated in the study, and results were presented

before, during, and after the intervention.

ZIPoPo interactive theatre

The Zaachny Institut Pozitivnogo Povedeniya (ZIPoPo); means “Long-Distance Learning Institute for Positive Behavior” show is an interactive approach where young people examine real-life problems through dramatizing ethical and moral dilemmas and conflicts. The performers perform a social problem, and the audience takes part during pauses and facilitates discussions for constructive solutions related to the live performance. ZIPoPo play scripts were adapted and practiced as an interactive drama intervention.

Theoretical framework

Reflective writing, capability approach, and narrative capability are interconnected concepts that explore personal growth, agency, and the shaping of identity through narrative expression.

Reflective writing, capability approach, and narrative capability: The current study

draws on Sen's capability approach and Watts' Narrative Capability, which suggests that well-being, is achieved by giving the participants their full capabilities, rather than giving them their basic freedom or rights [7-9]. In this study, the participants were active subjects expressing themselves and contributing to social meaning-making through acting on stage. By doing the reflective writing tasks, they were capable of "narrating themselves" and reflecting on each step in the intervention. The intervention allowed them to give and receive epistemic resources and recognition in a self-dialogical process [9,10].

Materials and Methods

The current study aims to research an intervention that promotes social justice and well-being in education through SEL. It answers the following question:

To what extent does the intervention of the interactive theatre approach, ZIPoPo, and reflective writing affect EFL adolescents' perception of their five social-emotional learning core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) in the short term?

Participatory action research and participant observation

Through reflective writing and interactive drama, the study was based on the collaboration and cooperation between the researcher, who is the class teacher, and the participants, who are the students. The researcher used the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, where the participants were active contributors in all the phases of the process, rather than subjects in the research [11]. They worked together with the researcher/teacher to understand a problem and investigate an SEL-related change [10]. Participant observation was also employed in the study as the researcher became a participant-observer engaged in all the writing and acting activities as their class teacher [12].

Participants

The participants are seven Armenian male and female students between the ages of 11 and 15 who attended EFL classes at a language school in Yerevan, Armenia in one class. The group had two 90-minute classes with the teacher/researcher a week for more than five months before the study.

The English language proficiency level of the group is lower intermediate (A2) [13].

Study design

The study was designed following these stages over five weeks:

Pre-intervention: The participants complete a pre-intervention SEL questionnaire. The participants take a reflective writing task. Themes are identified from the task and the questionnaire, and value-based interactive drama plays are chosen and adapted.

Mid-intervention: The participants do five reflective writing tasks and practice six value-based interactive dramas. The participants complete a mid-intervention SEL questionnaire.

Post-intervention: The participants complete a post-intervention SEL questionnaire.

Instruments

The study used SEL questionnaires, supported by value-based drama and reflective writing tasks, to collect data. The five writing tasks were integrated to encourage the participants to reflect on how they understand themselves and their perceptions of their SEL competencies. They included prompts on what makes them angry, what they like about themselves, and how they perceive others.

Pre-intervention

The pre-intervention Likert Scale questionnaire (Appendix A) was borrowed from a ZiPoPo report. It was first used in secondary schools to investigate how the ZiPoPo program promoted their values including relationships within the class. In this study, the questionnaire and one reflective writing task (Appendix B) helped identify recurring themes related to the participant's SEL competencies. The responses helped the researcher choose responsive topics for the plays.

Mid and post-intervention

The mid-intervention Likert Scale questionnaire is the Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ) developed and validated by Zych et al., [14]. The questionnaire is implemented to get insight into students' perceptions of their five SEL core competencies during the intervention. The questionnaire is short and matches the students' language proficiency level. The same

questionnaire was used in the post-intervention stage. Four writing tasks were completed by the participants at this stage as well (Appendix C).

Six adapted ZIPoPo play scripts (Appendixes D-I) were chosen based on the values they present, and the recurring themes from the pre-intervention stage. The plays tackled the problems of judging people based on ethnicity, unity, the well-being of mankind, prejudice, bullying, violence, and racism.

One additional play script (Appendix J) was written for the group by the researcher based on SEL competencies that the researcher believed the participants needed and topics they like. The play tackles the problem of blaming others and idleness and how blaming, as opposed to collaboration, can lead to failure.

Data collection

Parental and school consent was obtained, and the participants were informed about the study during the class. Over five weeks, the participants filled out three SEL Likert Scale questionnaires on paper. One questionnaire was completed before the drama and writing intervention started, one was completed during it, and one was completed after it. Data from the questionnaire was recorded on the researcher's personal computer. After the first questionnaire and writing task, the participants practiced six ZIPoPo interactive dramas and completed six anonymous reflective writing tasks on different topics.

Data analysis

Questionnaire responses were entered into excel and a comparison was made between the participants' responses before, during, and after the intervention. Data from the writing tasks was not observed, since the role of the tasks was to have the participants' thoughts and feelings projected as an SEL practice and identify recurring themes for choosing the plays.

Results and Discussion

Pre-intervention

The participant took Questionnaire 1 before the writing and drama intervention. The participants scored high on items related to the SEL competency of relationship skills and low on items related to the SEL competency of self-management.

Mid-intervention

The participant took Questionnaire 2 during the writing and drama intervention. The participants scored high on items related to the SEL competencies of relationship skills, and low on an item related to the SEL competency of responsible decision-making.

Post-intervention

The participant took Questionnaire 3 after the writing and drama intervention. The participants scored high on items related to the SEL competencies of self-awareness and relationship skills and low on items related to the SEL competencies of self-management and responsible decision-making.

Figure 1 summarized the participant's responses to the three questionnaires pre, mid, and post-intervention, showing how they identified their own SEL competencies over the five weeks of the intervention on a scale of 1 to 5; 1 meaning that the participant does not think they have the SEL competency and 5 meaning that the participant believed they have a high degree of this competency.

The respondents' evaluation of their self-awareness, relationship skills, and social awareness competencies went up by the end of the intervention. Self-management had a slight increase, while responsible decision-making went down.

Implementing the SEL intervention of interactive drama, supported by reflective writing, helped the participants improve their perceptions of most SEL core competencies over five weeks. The intervention helped the participants identify as more self and socially aware and having more social awareness. Responsible decision-making seemed to be affected negatively by the intervention and no noticeable self-management improvements were identified. The study proves that reflective writing tasks and plays about social issues helped adolescents identify themselves as having higher SEL competencies. The results show the need for similar SEL interventions to promote and pursue educational well-being and justice. By developing SEL competencies, adolescents can communicate more effectively, negotiate conflict more constructively, demonstrate empathy and compassion, and respect others' perspectives [15]. (Figure 1).

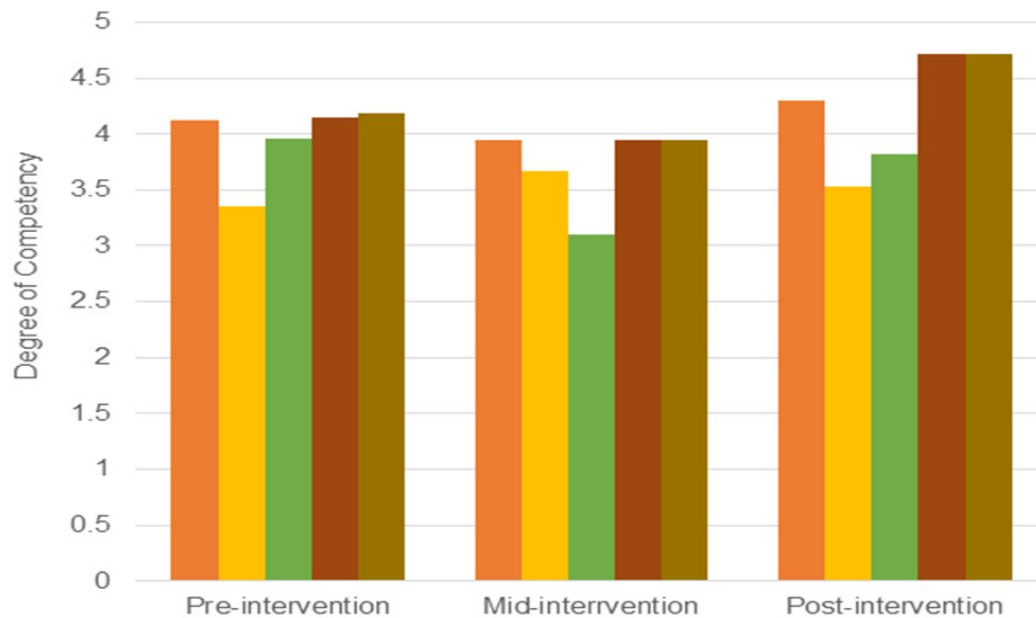


Figure 1. Participant's reflection on their SEL competencies before, during, and after the intervention based on the questionnaires. Note: (■) Self-awareness; (■) Self-management; (■) Responsible decision-making; (■) Relationship skills; (■) Social awareness.

Conclusion

Interactive value-based drama proved to impact students' perception of their social and emotional core learning competencies in the short term. As a result of the intervention, students' perceptions of their self-awareness, relationship skills, and social awareness improved, while they identified themselves as less competent when it comes to self-management and responsible decision-making. By testing the effect of value-based drama intervention, this study suggests the importance of integrating interactive value-based drama in school curricula as a social and emotional learning practice to improve students' perceptions of their self-awareness, relationship skills, and social awareness. Further studies can test the short-term impact of interactive value-based drama in a different context and investigate its long-term effects.

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