

Extended Abstract

Journal of Behavior Modification Studies (JBMS), 1(2), 2024



Vol.1, No.2, Autumn 2024

Submitted Date: 09 June 2024 Accepted Date: 14 August 2024

https://jbms.guilan.ac.ir/article_8362.html?lang=en

Research paper

Comparing the effectiveness of play therapy and story therapy on improving the behavioral problems of children with mental retardation

Ghazal Sadat Pournasai

Assistant Professor of Psychology Department. Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran.

Corresponding Author: ghazal.pournesaei@ymail.com

Masoume Maleki Pirbazari

Assistant Professor of Psychology Department. Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran

Milad SabzehAra Langaroudi

Assistant Professor of Psychology Department. Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran

Introduction

According to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, mental retardation is a subset of neurodevelopmental disorders that begin during development and include deficits in intellectual functions (such as reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, and learning through experience) and adaptive functions (such as meeting sociocultural and developmental standards for individual independence and social responsibility) in practical, social, and conceptual aspects ([American Psychiatric Association, 2022](#)). In recent decades, children's behavioral problems have been one of the important topics in psychology, psychiatry, and education. These problems have been reported to be much more common in children with intellectual disabilities than in normal children ([Hulsmans et al., 2021](#)). Considering the above-mentioned issues and problems, children with intellectual disabilities are among the groups that have numerous problems in the fields of education, learning, social relationships, and behavior. Educational justice is one of the great goals of the education system, and to achieve it, educational facilities must be provided for all students; therefore, it is necessary to make plans to solve their problems. Therefore, ignoring the effectiveness of these treatments on behavioral problems in students with intellectual disabilities can be considered a serious gap in schools with special needs ([Mehrafza et al., 2022](#)), which the aim of the present study is to fill in part of the gap. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to compare the effectiveness of play therapy and storytelling on improving behavioral problems in students with intellectual disabilities.

Method

This study was an applied study based on its purpose and the research method was a quasi-experimental study in which a pre-test-post-test design with a control group was used. The statistical population of this study included all male and female students in the first to sixth grade

of elementary school who, according to a qualified psychiatrist, were diagnosed with intellectual disability and were enrolled in special schools in Bandar Anzali in the 2024-2025 academic year. The statistical sample included 45 students who were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for the study were: obtaining high scores on the Achenbach Child Behavior Inventory Scale ([CBCL, , 2001](#)) age range between 7 and 12 years, parental consent to participate in the study, and not receiving counseling and treatment services. The exclusion criteria were: not having other neurodevelopmental disorders such as communication disorders, developmental coordination disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and bipolar disorders (using interviews with parents, clinical evaluation, and diagnostic tests performed by the child or parents). Receiving other concurrent treatments, missing more than three sessions, and having another neurodevelopmental disorder. The first experimental group received eight forty-five-minute play therapy sessions, the second experimental group received ten forty-five-minute story therapy sessions, and the third group did not receive any training. After the treatment sessions, the Achenbach questionnaire was answered again by the supervisor or guardian of all three groups. The parents of the students were assured that the results would remain confidential, and informed consent was obtained from them to participate in the study.

Results

Based on the figures obtained from the table, after adjusting the pre-test scores, there is a significant effect on the between-group factor, so that the scores show that the average behavioral problems, internalizing problems, and externalizing problems of the experimental group that were exposed to training have decreased significantly.

Table 1. The results of covariance analysis on the pre-test and post-test scores of behavioral problems variable

Source of changes	SS	DF	MS	F	P	η^2	OP
Internalized Behavior Problems	1381.15	2	690.57	34.31	0.001	0.578	1
externalizing Behavior Problems	1299.39	2	649.69	32.52	0.001	0.569	1
Behavioral problems	1266.39	2	678.63	37.91	0.001	0.581	1

Based on Table 1, play therapy and story therapy are effective in improving Internalized problems ($F=34.31$, $P<0.01$) and externalized problems ($F=32.52$, $P<0.01$) and behavioral problems ($F=37.91$, $P<0.01$). Students with intellectual disabilities. The eta square shows that 57.8%, 56.9% and 58.1% of these components (internalized problems, externalized problems and behavioral problems,) are due to the experimental effect, respectively.

Discussion and conclusion

Play therapy teaches children the power of decision-making, motivation, taking responsibility, and positive relationships with others. This therapy helps children increase their self-esteem, face their problems, and manage themselves better. One of the benefits of play therapy is that it helps children control their emotions through role-playing ([Barimani, 2018](#)). On the other hand, story therapy gives children the opportunity to find problem-solving strategies themselves, and these strategies are also effective for developing social skills, controlling emotions, and learning correct behaviors. This type of intervention can be an appropriate and useful program for students with intellectual disabilities who are trainable and improve their life performance. In teaching using the story therapy method, the effort is to make children more aware of their feelings and thoughts and acquire problem-solving methods and learning skills ([Barimani, 2018](#)). It can also be stated that

children often cannot understand and express their problems well. For this reason, direct methods of education and conventional psychotherapy may not be very effective for them. Here, story therapy and play therapy can be proposed as a useful alternative method. These methods can create conditions for the child by providing opportunities for him to vent his emotions, identify with the characters of the story and gain a better understanding of his problems ([Mehrafza et al., 2022](#)). One of the limitations of the above research was the lack of control over the influential environmental, family, and social variables on the behavioral problems of these children.

Ethical Considerations

This research was registered with the Vice-Chancellor of Education and Postgraduate Studies of Rahman Ramsar Institute of Higher Education on 2024/06/24.

Financial support

This study did not receive any financial support

Authors' contributions

Ghazal Sadat Pournsaie (first author): Research process management, editing and revision of the article; Masoumeh Maleki Pirbazari (second author): Data collection, training, statistical analysis and preparation of the main draft of the article; Milad Sabzeh Ara Langaroudi (third author): Editing and reviewing the article's amendments.

Conflict of interest

The authors of the article declare that there are no conflicts of interest in conducting this research.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank the parents and students with intellectual disabilities, the administrators and officials of the schools for children with special needs, and the psychological clinic of Bandar Anzali city.

References

- Achenbach, T. M., Dumenci, L., & Rescorla, L. A. (2001). *Ratings of Relations Between DSM- IV Diagnostic Categories and Items of the CBCL/6-18, TRF, and YSR*. Online. [\[link\]](#)
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition Text Revision—DSM-5-TR*. American Psychiatric Association: Washington, DC, USA. [\[link\]](#)
- Barimani S, Asadi J, Khajevand A. (2018). The Effectiveness of Play Therapy on Deaf Children's Social Adaptation and Communication Skills. *jrehab*; 19 (3) :250-261 [\[link\]](#)
- Bettelhim, B. (1975). *The Charm of Legends*. Translated by Akhtar Shariatzadeh (2010). Tehran, Hermes Publications
- Erickson, M. (2019). *The role of story in changing life and personality (story therapy)*. (Translated by Mehdi Qaracheh Daghi). Tehran: Circle. [\[link\]](#)
- Hulsmans, D. H., Otten, R., Schijven, E. P., & Poelen, E. A. (2021). Exploring the role of emotional and behavioral problems in a personality-targeted prevention program for substance use in adolescents and young adults with intellectual disability. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 109, 103832. [\[link\]](#)
- Mehrafza, M. , Nakhostin Goldoost, A. and Kiamarsi, A. (2022). The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy on the Aggression and Anxiety of Mentally Retarded Students. *Journal of Applied Family Therapy*, 3(3), 192-210. [\[link\]](#)