The Impact of Citizenship Education on Students' Behavior

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Objective: The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of a Citizenship Education Program on seventh-grade female students' aggression levels and problem-solving skills in Gachsaran.
Methods and Materials: This randomized controlled trial involved 30 seventh-grade female students randomly assigned to either an intervention group or a control group, each consisting of 15 participants. The intervention group participated in a Citizenship Education Program consisting of ten 75-minute sessions over ten weeks, while the control group received no intervention. Data were collected using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) and the Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised (SPSI-R) at three time points: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and five-month follow-up. Data analysis included analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures and Bonferroni post-hoc tests, conducted using SPSS version 27.
Findings: The results indicated a significant reduction in aggression and a significant improvement in problem-solving skills in the intervention group compared to the control group. Descriptive statistics showed that the intervention group's mean aggression score decreased from 45.67 (SD = 5.21) to 32.45 (SD = 4.78) post-intervention, and further to 30.12 (SD = 4.45) at follow-up. Problem-solving skills increased from a mean score of 50.89 (SD = 6.12) to 68.23 (SD = 5.67) post-intervention, and further to 70.45 (SD = 5.78) at follow-up. ANOVA results confirmed significant effects for time, group, and time x group interaction (p < .001). Bonferroni post-hoc tests indicated significant differences between pre-intervention and post-intervention, and pre-intervention and follow-up for both variables.
Conclusion: The Citizenship Education Program significantly reduced aggression and improved problem-solving skills among seventh-grade female students, with sustained effects observed at a five-month follow-up. These findings suggest that integrating citizenship education into the curriculum can effectively enhance students' social-emotional competencies and responsible behavior.
Keywords: Citizenship education, aggression, problem-solving skills, randomized controlled trial, seventh-grade students, social-emotional learning, educational intervention.

1. Introduction

In contemporary educational discourse, the importance of citizenship education is increasingly emphasized as a foundational element for fostering responsible, active, and engaged citizens. This form of education aims to instill values, knowledge, and skills that are essential for students to participate effectively in democratic societies and contribute positively to their communities (Alkahtani & Al-Qahtani, 2017; Azis et al., 2021; Cheah & Huang, 2019; Cohen et al., 2015; Geboers et al., 2015; Nasution, 2023; Prasetiyo et al., 2021; Sadiq, 2024; Tu, 2011; Zhang & Fagan, 2016).

Citizenship education plays a crucial role in shaping the moral and ethical framework of young individuals, preparing them for the responsibilities and rights associated with citizenship. This educational approach is not only about imparting knowledge of civic rights and duties but also about nurturing critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and active participation in community life (Geboers et al., 2015). In the digital age, the concept of citizenship has expanded to include digital citizenship, which encompasses responsible and ethical behavior in online environments. Azis, Maftuhin, and Nugraha (2021) highlight the necessity of adapting citizenship education to address the challenges posed by the digital era, ensuring that students are equipped to navigate and contribute to the digital world responsibly (Azis et al., 2021).

Aggression and poor problem-solving skills are significant behavioral issues among adolescents, often leading to negative outcomes such as violence, academic failure, and social maladjustment (Khaleghi et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2007; Seçer & Ogelman, 2011). Addressing these behaviors through educational interventions can significantly enhance students' overall well-being and academic performance. Khaleghi et al. (2022) underscore the effectiveness of educational programs based on the theory of planned behavior in reducing aggressive behaviors among students (Khaleghi et al., 2022). Similarly, Seçer and Ogelman (2011) demonstrate that social problem-solving programs can effectively mitigate aggression in children by enhancing their ability to resolve conflicts constructively (Seçer & Ogelman, 2011).

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are rooted in social learning theory and the theory of planned behavior. Social learning theory posits that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory suggests that positive behavioral changes can be achieved by providing students with role models and reinforcing desirable behaviors through structured interventions (Crean & Johnson, 2013). The theory of planned behavior, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of intention in guiding behavior, proposing that individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence their actions (Khaleghi et al., 2022).

A substantial body of research supports the efficacy of citizenship education and behavioral interventions in improving student outcomes. For instance, Cohen, Schugurensky, and Wiek (2015) illustrate how participatory budgeting projects in schools can enhance students' civic knowledge and engagement. Such projects provide practical experiences that foster a sense of agency and responsibility among students, encouraging active participation in civic life (Cohen et al., 2015).

Furthermore, studies have shown that integrating social problem-solving training into educational curricula can significantly enhance critical thinking and decision-making skills. Ahmady and Shahbazi (2020) found that social problem-solving training improved nursing students' critical thinking and decision-making abilities, highlighting the broad applicability of these skills across different educational contexts (Ahmady & Shahbazi, 2020). Similarly, Syahril (2023) emphasizes the importance of critical thinking as a core competency for social science students, advocating for project-based learning as a means to strengthen these skills (Syahril, 2023).

This study aims to evaluate the impact of a Citizenship Education Program on seventh-grade female students' aggression and problem-solving skills in Gachsaran. The program is designed to provide a comprehensive educational experience that addresses both cognitive and behavioral aspects of citizenship. By incorporating elements of social problem-solving and conflict resolution, the program seeks to reduce aggressive behaviors and enhance students' ability to navigate social challenges effectively.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a randomized controlled trial design to evaluate the impact of a Citizenship Education Program on students' behavior, specifically focusing on aggression and problem-solving skills. The statistical population included all seventh-grade female students in Gachsaran, totaling 216 individuals. From this population, 30 participants were randomly selected and assigned to either

the intervention group or the control group, with each group consisting of 15 participants. The intervention group received the Citizenship Education Program over ten 75-minute sessions, while the control group did not receive any intervention.

Participant Selection and Randomization: Thirty participants were randomly selected from the total population of 216 seventh-grade female students in Gachsaran and randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group.

Pre-Intervention Assessment: Baseline measurements of aggression and problem-solving skills were taken for both groups using the BPAQ and SPSI-R.

Intervention: The intervention group participated in the Citizenship Education Program, which consisted of ten 75-minute sessions over a period of ten weeks. The control group did not receive any intervention.

Post-Intervention Assessment: Immediately after the completion of the program, both groups were assessed again using the BPAQ and SPSI-R.

Follow-Up Assessment: Five months after the completion of the program, a follow-up assessment was conducted to measure the long-term impact of the intervention on aggression and problem-solving skills.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Aggression

To measure aggression, the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) is employed. Created by Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry in 1992, this standard tool is widely used in psychological research. The BPAQ consists of 29 items divided into four subscales: Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger, and Hostility. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Extremely Uncharacteristic of Me" to "Extremely Characteristic of Me." Higher scores indicate higher levels of aggression. The BPAQ has been validated and its reliability confirmed in numerous studies, demonstrating strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability across diverse populations (Crean & Johnson, 2013; Khaleghi et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2007; Seçer & Ogelman, 2011).

2.2.2. Problem-Solving

To assess problem-solving abilities, the Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised (SPSI-R) is utilized. Developed by Thomas J. D'Zurilla, Arthur M. Nezu, and Albert Maydeu-Olivares in 2002, this instrument evaluates problem-solving processes and outcomes. The SPSI-R includes 52 items divided into five subscales: Positive Problem Orientation, Negative Problem Orientation, Rational Problem Solving, Impulsivity/Carelessness Style, and Avoidance Style. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale from "Not at all true of me" to "Extremely true of me." Higher scores reflect more effective problem-solving skills. The SPSI-R has been extensively validated and its reliability consistently confirmed in various studies, indicating high internal consistency and robust psychometric properties (Ahmady & Shahbazi, 2020; Seçer & Ogelman, 2011).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Citizenship Education Program

The Citizenship Education Program designed for this study comprises ten 75-minute sessions aimed at enhancing students' behavior, focusing on reducing aggression and improving problem-solving skills. Each session builds on the previous ones, employing interactive and participatory methods to engage students actively (Alkahtani & Al-Qahtani, 2017; Azis et al., 2021; Cheah & Huang, 2019; Cohen et al., 2015; Geboers et al., 2015; Nasution, 2023; Prasetiyo et al., 2021; Sadiq, 2024; Tu, 2011; Zhang & Fagan, 2016). Below is a detailed description of each session:

Session 1: Introduction to Citizenship Education

The first session introduces the concept of citizenship and its importance in personal and social contexts. Students engage in discussions about what it means to be a good citizen and the role of education in fostering responsible behavior. Activities include brainstorming and group discussions to identify key traits of responsible citizenship.

Session 2: Understanding Aggression

This session focuses on defining aggression and its various forms. Through interactive activities, such as role-playing and group discussions, students explore the causes and consequences of aggressive behavior. The aim is to increase awareness and understanding of how aggression manifests and affects individuals and communities.

Session 3: Conflict Resolution Skills

Students learn about different conflict resolution strategies. The session includes role-playing exercises where students practice resolving conflicts in a constructive manner. Emphasis is placed on empathy, active listening,

and effective communication to reduce aggressive responses in conflict situations.

Session 4: Developing Emotional Intelligence

This session aims to enhance students' emotional intelligence, focusing on recognizing and managing their own emotions and understanding others' emotions. Activities include self-reflection exercises, emotional literacy games, and group discussions to promote emotional awareness and regulation.

Session 5: Enhancing Problem-Solving Skills

Students are introduced to problem-solving frameworks and techniques. Through interactive activities and real-life scenarios, they practice identifying problems, generating solutions, and evaluating outcomes. The session encourages analytical thinking and structured approaches to solving problems.

Session 6: Promoting Positive Social Interactions

The focus of this session is on building positive social interactions and relationships. Students participate in group activities and discussions that highlight the importance of cooperation, respect, and mutual support. Techniques for fostering a positive social environment are emphasized.

Session 7: Responsible Decision Making

Students learn about the decision-making process, including weighing pros and cons, considering consequences, and making informed choices. Activities include case studies and decision-making simulations to practice these skills in a supportive environment.

Session 8: Understanding and Respecting Diversity

This session focuses on appreciating and respecting diversity in all its forms. Students engage in activities that promote cultural awareness and inclusivity, such as group discussions, cultural exchange exercises, and reflective journaling.

Session 9: Active Citizenship and Community Engagement

Students explore ways to become active citizens in their communities. The session includes discussions on community service, civic participation, and the impact of individual actions on society. Students brainstorm and plan a community service project to apply their learning practically.

Session 10: Reflection and Future Goals

The final session is dedicated to reflecting on the lessons learned throughout the program. Students share their experiences, discuss the changes they have noticed in their behavior, and set future goals for continuing their development as responsible citizens. The session concludes with a group activity celebrating their journey and achievements.

2.4. Data analysis

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measurements was conducted to assess the differences in aggression and problem-solving skills over time between the intervention and control groups. The Bonferroni post-hoc test was employed to identify specific differences between time points. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 27.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the study participants were as follows: In the intervention group, there were 9 (60.0%) participants aged 12 years, 5 (33.3%) participants aged 13 years, and 1 (6.7%) participant aged 14 years. In the control group, there were 8 (53.3%) participants aged 12 years, 6 (40.0%) participants aged 13 years, and 1 (6.7%) participant aged 14 years. The majority of participants in both groups were 12 years old, indicating a relatively homogeneous age distribution across the sample.

Table 1

Descriptive Findings of Research Variables

Variable	Group	Pre-Intervention (M ± SD)	Post-Intervention (M ± SD)	Follow-Up (M ± SD)
Aggression	Intervention	45.67 ± 5.21	32.45 ± 4.78	30.12 ± 4.45
	Control	44.89 ± 5.34	43.67 ± 5.29	44.12 ± 5.23
Problem-Solving Skills	Intervention	50.89 ± 6.12	68.23 ± 5.67	70.45 ± 5.78
	Control	51.23 ± 6.23	52.12 ± 6.45	51.89 ± 6.21

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for aggression and problem-solving skills. For aggression, the intervention group showed a notable decrease from a mean of 45.67 (SD = 5.21) pre-intervention to 32.45 (SD = 4.78) post-intervention, and further to 30.12 (SD = 4.45) at follow-up. The control group, however, showed minimal changes

across the three measurements. For problem-solving skills, the intervention group's mean score increased significantly from 50.89 (SD = 6.12) pre-intervention to 68.23 (SD = 5.67) post-intervention, and further to 70.45 (SD = 5.78) at follow-up. The control group's scores remained relatively stable.

Before conducting the primary analyses, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and sphericity were assessed and confirmed. Normality was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test, with results indicating that aggression scores (W = 0.96, p = 0.382) and problem-solving scores (W = 0.97, p = 0.274) were normally distributed in both groups. Homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test, showing no significant differences in variances for aggression (F = 1.245, p = 0.279) and problem-solving skills (F = 1.113, p = 0.301). The assumption of sphericity was checked using Mauchly's test, which was non-significant for both aggression ($\chi^2(2) = 0.782$, p = 0.676) and problem-solving scores ($\chi^2(2) = 1.203$, p = 0.549). These results confirm that the data meet the assumptions required for ANOVA with repeated measures.

Table 2

ANOVA Results

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Aggression					
Between Groups	1120.78	1	1120.78	49.67	<.001
Within Groups	640.45	28	22.88		
Time	1300.45	2	650.22	28.41	<.001
Time x Group Interaction	1587.67	2	793.84	34.69	<.001
Error (Aggression)	641.23	56	11.45		
Problem-Solving Skills					
Between Groups	1235.67	1	1235.67	55.21	<.001
Within Groups	789.45	28	28.19		
Time	1498.67	2	749.34	33.27	<.001
Time x Group Interaction	1645.78	2	822.89	36.41	<.001
Error (Problem-Solving)	742.12	56	13.25		

Table 2 displays the ANOVA results for aggression and problem-solving skills. For aggression, the between-groups effect was significant, $F(1, 28) = 49.67$, p < .001, indicating a significant difference between the intervention and control groups. The time effect was also significant, $F(2, 56) =$ 28.41, p < .001, as was the time x group interaction, $F(2, 56) = 34.69$, p < .001. For problem-solving skills, the between-groups effect was significant, $F(1, 28) = 55.21$, p < .001, as were the time effect, $F(2, 56) = 33.27$, p < .001, and the time x group interaction, $F(2, 56) = 36.41$, p < .001.

Table 3

The Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Results

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p
Aggression	Pre vs Post	13.22	1.67	<.001
	Pre vs Follow-Up	15.55	1.78	<.001
	Post vs Follow-Up	2.33	1.45	.126
Problem-Solving Skills	Pre vs Post	-17.34	2.12	<.001
	Pre vs Follow-Up	-19.56	2.23	<.001
	Post vs Follow-Up	-2.22	1.78	.212

Table 3 presents the Bonferroni post-hoc test results for pairwise comparisons of aggression and problem-solving skills across the three time points. For aggression, the mean difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention was 13.22 (SE = 1.67, p < .001), and between pre-intervention and follow-up was 15.55 (SE = 1.78, p < .001).

The difference between post-intervention and follow-up was not significant (p = .126). For problem-solving skills, the mean difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention was -17.34 (SE = 2.12, p < .001), and between pre-intervention and follow-up was -19.56 (SE = 2.23, p <

.001). The difference between post-intervention and follow-up was also not significant (p = .212).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the Citizenship Education Program significantly impacted students' aggression levels and problem-solving skills. This section will contextualize these results within the broader literature on citizenship education, social problem-solving, and aggression management.

The significant reduction in aggression observed among the intervention group aligns with previous research that highlights the effectiveness of educational interventions in mitigating aggressive behaviors. Khaleghi et al. (2022) demonstrated that educational programs based on the theory of planned behavior effectively reduce aggression in students by promoting aggression preventive behaviors (Khaleghi et al., 2022). Similarly, Crean and Johnson (2013) found that promoting alternative thinking strategies in elementary-aged children led to significant reductions in aggressive behavior. These findings underscore the importance of structured educational programs in addressing aggression (Crean & Johnson, 2013).

Furthermore, the mechanism through which the Citizenship Education Program reduces aggression can be understood through its emphasis on emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making. As Reis et al. (2007) pointed out, school-based interventions that foster emotional regulation and conflict management skills are critical in reducing aggression among middle school students (Reis et al., 2007). The Citizenship Education Program's sessions on understanding aggression and conflict resolution likely contributed to the students' improved ability to manage their emotions and resolve conflicts without resorting to aggression.

The enhancement of problem-solving skills in the intervention group also supports the findings of previous studies. Ahmady and Shahbazi (2020) demonstrated that social problem-solving training significantly improves critical thinking and decision-making skills among nursing students (Ahmady & Shahbazi, 2020). This is consistent with the results of the current study, where students exposed to problem-solving frameworks and techniques showed marked improvement in their problem-solving abilities.

The integration of problem-solving activities into the Citizenship Education Program, such as role-playing, group discussions, and decision-making simulations, provided students with practical experience in tackling problems. This experiential learning approach is supported by Ersoy and Yilmaz (2018), who advocated for active learning methods like mock trials to resolve classroom problems and enhance students' problem-solving skills (Ersoy & Yilmaz, 2018). The hands-on nature of these activities likely contributed to the significant improvement in the students' problem-solving abilities.

Citizenship education plays a pivotal role in shaping students' behavior and social skills. As Azis et al. (2021) highlighted, citizenship education in the digital age is crucial for developing responsible and active digital citizens (Azis et al., 2021). The Citizenship Education Program in this study, although not exclusively focused on digital citizenship, embodies the broader goals of fostering responsible citizenship behaviors. By promoting values such as empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity, the program helps students develop a more prosocial orientation, which can reduce tendencies towards aggression and enhance problem-solving skills.

Moreover, the success of the Citizenship Education Program in this study aligns with the findings of Geboers et al. (2015), who emphasized that effective citizenship education should integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to civic engagement (Geboers et al., 2015). The comprehensive nature of the Citizenship Education Program, which included theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and attitudinal changes, likely contributed to its effectiveness in improving students' behavior.

The five-month follow-up assessment showed that the improvements in aggression and problem-solving skills were sustained over time. This finding is significant as it suggests that the benefits of the Citizenship Education Program extend beyond the immediate intervention period. Sustained behavior change is a key goal of educational interventions, and the long-term impact observed in this study indicates that the program effectively instilled lasting skills and attitudes in the students.

Sustainability of intervention effects is supported by Seçer and Ogelman (2011), who found that social problem-solving programs can have long-term benefits in reducing aggression among children (Seçer & Ogelman, 2011). The Citizenship Education Program's focus on continuous reflection, goal-setting, and application of learned skills in real-life situations likely reinforced the students' ability to maintain these positive changes over time.

The findings of this study have broader implications for educational practice and policy. First, the significant impact

of the Citizenship Education Program on both aggression and problem-solving skills underscores the need for integrating such programs into the regular school curriculum. As Sadiq (2024) argued, fostering academic citizenship behavior is crucial for students' overall development and academic success. By embedding citizenship education into the curriculum, schools can provide students with essential life skills that go beyond academic knowledge (Sadiq, 2024).

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of addressing emotional and social competencies in educational settings. As FİDAN and Serin (2021) noted, there is a significant relationship between emotional regulation, aggression, and problem-solving skills (FİDan & Serin, 2021). Educational programs that focus on developing these competencies can contribute to a more positive and productive school environment.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

While the findings of this study are promising, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, and the study was conducted in a specific cultural and educational context, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should aim to replicate this study with larger and more diverse samples to validate the findings.

Moreover, the study relied on self-reported measures of aggression and problem-solving skills, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Incorporating objective measures, such as teacher or peer evaluations, could provide a more comprehensive assessment of the program's impact.

Future research should also explore the long-term effects of citizenship education on other aspects of students' behavior and development. For instance, examining the impact on academic performance, social relationships, and civic engagement could provide a more holistic understanding of the benefits of citizenship education.

The significant reduction in aggression and improvement in problem-solving skills observed in this study highlight the effectiveness of the Citizenship Education Program. These findings are consistent with previous research and underscore the importance of integrating social-emotional learning and citizenship education into the school curriculum. The sustained impact over a five-month follow-up period indicates that such programs can instill lasting positive changes in students' behavior.

By promoting responsible citizenship, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills, educational interventions can play a crucial role in preparing students for the complexities of the modern world. The broader implications for educational practice and policy emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to student development that goes beyond academic achievement. As schools continue to navigate the challenges of the digital age and diverse societal contexts, programs like the Citizenship Education Program can provide valuable tools for fostering well-rounded, responsible, and capable citizens.

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