

An Examination of the Effectiveness of the Manadoob Program

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The concept of self-esteem has been widely researched over the past several decades and has been linked to a variety of concepts, including psychological adjustment (Sowislo & Orth, 2013) and academic achievement (Choi, 2005, Marsh & Craven, 2005). Self esteem is defined as “an individual’s positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality” (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995, p.141) and is an important factor in the well-being of middle school students. Huang (2010) states that self-esteem can be affected during transitional periods in individuals lives, and students in middle school are at heightened risk given the number of physical, social and emotional changes taking place during this time period. Research indicates that adolescents with low self-esteem are more likely to engage in drug use, early sexual activity, delinquency and violence (Flannery, Singer, & Wester, 2001; Morton & Montgomery, 2013). Adolescence, however, is also an opportunity for individuals to develop their strengths, which can provide protection from some of the risks related to this developmental period. The development of healthy self-esteem is one of the strengths associated with more positive outcomes during adolescence (Morton & Montgomery, 2013). One way to build self-esteem is through the implementation of programs designed to target self-esteem and other related concepts during a time (early adolescence) when students are most vulnerable.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of participation in a self-esteem program, The Manadoob program (www.manadoob.com), in 6th grade students. The Manadoob program was designed to increase levels of self-esteem in children ages 7-12 years. The program seeks to enable participants to believe in themselves, to embrace diversity, feel empowered, practice kindness, and connect with themselves and the world around them. The Manadoob program has been offered to children in schools or other child-related organizations (i.e. YMCAs or Boys and Girls Clubs) across the United States, and anecdotal evidence (testimonies from students and their parents) suggests that children who participate in the program demonstrate higher levels of self-worth, lower levels of anxiety, and increased academic performance upon completion of the program. This program, however, had yet to be empirically tested, and the purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of participation in the

Manadoob program. It was hypothesized that children who participated in the Manadoob program would demonstrate elevated levels of self-esteem, self-competence and decreased levels of anxiety compared to students in the control group.

Methods

The researcher obtained approval from the institutional Review Board prior to recruiting participants. Participants consisted of forty students (both male and female) enrolled in 6th grade at a middle school in Southern California. Twenty students were recruited for the experimental condition (the Manadoob Program), and a matched control group of 20 students was also obtained. After receiving consent from parents and assent from the students, all students completed measures targeting self-esteem, self-competence and anxiety. Upon completion of the Manadoob program, all students completed the measures again. The measures were as follows:

1. *Demographic questionnaire*. The demographic questionnaire was used to obtain information about the participant's gender, age, year in school, and ethnicity. Participants completed the demographics questionnaire only at pre-test.
2. *Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1979)-The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale was used to measure global self-esteem. It consists of 10 items that are measured on a 4-point likert scale with answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Total scores range from 10-40 with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem. This scale has been validated for use in children as young as 10 years and demonstrates a high reliability with a Cronbach alpha of 0.88 (Greenberger, Chen, Dimitrieva, & Farruggia, 2003).
3. *Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale* (Reynolds and Richmond, 1985) was designed to measure anxiety symptoms in children as young as 6-years. The items are assessed with either "yes" or "no" responses, and participants receive scores on the following subscales: physiological anxiety, worry/oversensitivity and social concerns/concentration (Cronbach alphas are all over .80).

4. *The Perceived Competence Scale for Children* (Harter, 1985) was designed to measure scores of global self-worth in children as young as 8-years. Participants receive a total score and scores on the following subscales: cognitive competence, social competence, and physical competence (Cronbach alphas range from .75-.89).

Students assigned to the Manadoob program participated in 11 weekly sessions that lasted approximately 1 ½ hours each. The sessions took place at the child's school during non-school hours (immediately following their regular school day). Each session was led by a trained facilitator who followed the manual provided to them by the creators of the Manadoob program. The program and supplemental materials were provided at no cost to the participants. Students assigned to the control group participated in their normal after school activities.

Results

Participants included 40 students (18 male and 22 female) enrolled in 6th grade with a mean age of 11.58 (SD=.50) years. The ethnicity of the sample was 62.5% Caucasian, 15% Asian, 5% Hispanic, and 17.5% other. A series of t-tests found no significant differences in gender, ethnicity or age between the experimental and the control groups. Statistical analyses indicated that significant differences existed between the control group and the experimental group from pre-test to post test in perceived social competence and perceived physical competence, indicating that those who participated in the Manadoob program experienced significant increases in these areas, while those assigned to the control group did not. An examination of mean trends for the additional factors demonstrated that individuals in the experimental group reported increases in self-esteem, overall perceived competence, and perceived cognitive competence and decreases in physiological anxiety, worry/oversensitivity, and social concerns/concentration. Additionally, individuals in the control group reported an increase in physiological anxiety, worry/oversensitivity and social concerns/concentration and a decrease in overall perceived competence and perceived cognitive competence.

Discussion

As hypothesized, participants in the experimental condition reported increases in self-esteem and perceived competence and decreases in levels of anxiety. These results support the testimonies from previous students and suggest that participation in the Manadoob program does indeed target the areas intended by the creators. Qualitative data collected from the participants after the program augments the empirical data. Students report “Manadoob was fun and educational,” “I picture myself as a leader and not a follower,” and “I feel more confident.”

Surprisingly, participants in the control group reported decreases in self-esteem, perceived competence and increases in anxiety. While it was hypothesized that individuals participating in the Manadoob program would demonstrate increases in self-esteem and perceived competence and decreases in levels of anxiety, the researcher did not anticipate the negative changes reported by the control group. Future research should examine this age group and additional factors that may affect self-esteem.

Originally, the researcher planned to collect data from the student’s teachers in order to determine whether participation in the Manadoob program impacted academic achievement. The teachers, however, felt that there was not enough time from pre- to post-test to adequately assess for changes in academic performance. Given that anecdotal evidence from students and parents indicates that students did perform better in school after participation in the program and that research has demonstrated a link between self-esteem and academic performance (Choi, 2005, Marsh & Craven, 2005), it would be important to conduct a longitudinal study to assess for changes in academic performance after participation in the Manadoob program.

This study was not without its limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small. Many of the findings reported were mean trends; however, it is likely that a larger sample would have yielded more significant results. The sample was also largely Caucasian, and therefore the results may not be generalizable to ethnic minorities. Given the Manadoob program’s focus on multi-cultural and diverse backgrounds, however, it is likely that minority participants would benefit equally (perhaps more so) from participation in the program, and a future study examining a more diverse group of students would be beneficial. Although this program was primarily designed to increase self-esteem, participants in the

current study reported average levels of self-esteem prior to participation in the program. While they did report an increase in self-esteem, it is possible that larger increases would be found in participants who report low levels of self-esteem or from a clinical sample of children suffering from anxiety or depression. Finally, the study was not longitudinal in design, and future research examining whether the gains students reported were maintained over 3-, 6- or 12-months would be advantageous.

In conclusion, this pilot study demonstrated that the Manadoob program is effective in increasing self-esteem and perceived competence and decreasing levels of anxiety in middle school students. This program is unique in its approach by incorporating multi-cultural and diverse characters and its emphasis on diversity throughout the sessions. While future research incorporating a larger sample and a longitudinal design is essential, the program appears quite promising for both clinical and non-clinical samples.

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