

# The Effect of a Counseling Program on Acquiring Study Skills among Fourth-Year Middle School Pupils

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## Abstract

*The current study aimed to reveal the effect of a counseling program on acquiring study skills among fourth-year middle school pupils. The study included a sample of (10) male and female fourth-year middle school pupils, who were selected intentionally. The study relied on the quasi-experimental one-group approach. The study tools consisted of: the counseling program designed by the researcher, and the Study Skills Scale prepared by Hafiz Nabil Ibrahim et al. (2014). The statistical treatment of the study hypotheses was carried out using the statistical analysis program SPSS v20. The study reached the following results: there is an effective impact of the counseling program on acquiring study skills, as the results indicated the presence of statistically significant differences after exposure to the program sessions between the pre-measurement scores and the post-measurement scores among the members of the counseling group, in favor of the post-measurement scores, with no statistically significant differences between the post-measurement scores and the follow-up measurement scores, which confirms the effectiveness of the counseling program.*

**Keywords:** *Study Skills, Counseling Program.*

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## Introduction to the Problem

The educational system, with all the foundations and components on which it is based, represents an integrative process with unified objectives, aims, and tasks, reflecting society's desires, hopes, and aspirations within the framework of the human system and social normalization. In line with this framework, countries have sought to make the process of developing and improving education occupy a leading position and receive attention from all actors and those responsible for educational action in all its forms, since it is impossible to achieve goals without paying attention to the learner.

Study skills are considered among the most important variables affecting academic achievement. In psychology, skill refers to an organized behavior acquired by the individual as a result of learning, stimulated by specific situations, and through repetition in these situations, it gains a degree of relative stability. Effective study skills contribute to enabling the pupil to set his goals efficiently and strive to achieve them. They also help him rationalize the use of time and enable him to choose the most appropriate places that make him more focused and able to comprehend his study materials. They also improve his efficiency in writing and organizing reports, as well as recording notes related to lessons. This helps stimulate his motivation to learn and raise his effectiveness in situations of memorization and recall, leading to a positive impact on solving tests and improving the level of academic achievement (Al-Qasabi, 2010, 3). Many theorists in the psychological and educational fields have focused on the importance and role of mental processes related to learning, and they have also confirmed the existence of individual differences in the perception of information. Previous research has indicated that learners use different methods and strategies in learning, which leads to varying educational outcomes. Based on the fact that the act of learning requires clear effort on the part of the pupil, it is necessary to rationalize this effort in light of the goals to be achieved. Nada (2007) confirmed that studying is both a mental and functional state, characterized by special skills and habits that must be learned, which helps save time and effort for the pupil. Ruban (2000) pointed to the provision of additional support by the general law in the United States of America (Public

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94/Law142), aimed at including training in study skills and habits in the content of educational programs offered to learners (Fouad, 2021, 219). The results of Serene's study confirmed that low academic achievement is due to neglecting the planning and organization of the learning process, in addition to adopting wrong study habits during the study process. The study of Al-Qasabi (2010) confirmed the effectiveness of applying a group counseling program in improving study habits among low-achieving students. A study conducted by Apont, Burry, and Welch (2001) also indicated an improvement in the cumulative averages of a sample of students after receiving training in the use of effective study skills (Al-Sharif, 2014, 852).

Based on the above, the problem of the current study crystallized and is procedurally expressed by formulating the following question:

Does the proposed counseling program have an effect on acquiring study skills among fourth-year middle school pupils?

### *Study Hypotheses*

✍ There are statistically significant differences among the members of the experimental sample after exposure to the counseling program between the pre-measurement scores and the post-measurement scores on the Study Skills Scale in favor of the post-measurement scores.

✍ The proposed counseling program is effective in acquiring study skills among the members of the experimental group.

✍ There are no statistically significant differences among the members of the experimental sample between the mean scores of the post-measurement and the follow-up measurement scores on the Study Skills Scale after a period of time.

### **Study Objectives**

The current study aims to achieve the following:

- Designing a counseling program for acquiring study skills based on cognitive-behavioral counseling techniques directed at middle school pupils.
- Revealing the extent of the effectiveness of the proposed counseling program and the techniques and strategies it includes in acquiring study skills among the members of the experimental sample after exposure to the activities of the program.
- Revealing the differences between the pre-measurement scores and the post-measurement scores among the counselees on the Study Skills Scale after exposure to the counseling program sessions.
- Revealing the differences between the post-measurement scores and the follow-up measurement scores among the members of the experimental group on the Study Skills Scale after exposure to the counseling program sessions.

### *Operational Definitions of the Study Terms*

Definition of Study Skills: Arafat defines them as the skills that the learner seeks to acquire in order to carry out educational activities with the aim of obtaining specific academic requirements. These skills include the mechanism of preparation for studying, time management, reliance on different types of reading, the use of critical thinking, attempting to comprehend and understand the terms included in lessons, organizing information, preparing for exams, recording notes from lectures, the method of writing a summary of the presented content, and recording evaluations. (Hamadneh, 2017, 120)

**Operational Definition:** The researcher defines study skills as the set of methods and mechanisms adopted by fourth-year middle school pupils during the process of studying their educational subjects. The current study includes the following skills: setting goals, organizing time, organizing the place, preparing for the exam, and using modern technologies. They are inferred through the score obtained by the examinee on the Study Skills Scale adopted in this study, which was developed by Hafiz Nabil Ibrahim et al. (2014), and its scores range between (40) degrees as a minimum and (120) degrees as a maximum.

**Definition of the Counseling Program:** The researcher defines the counseling program as planned and organized steps based on scientific foundations, including a set of activities and events presented in the form of counseling services, based on the principles and techniques of cognitive-behavioral counseling. In this study, it includes: dialogue and discussion, reinforcement, modeling, role-playing, self-monitoring, and homework. It was developed by the researcher and includes eight counseling sessions determined in terms of time and place, seeking to achieve the objectives of the counseling program, starting from bringing about the required changes in the behavior and thinking of pupils in middle school, by enabling them to acquire correct study skills.

## Previous Studies

The study of Khawla Abdel Rahim Ghneimat and Abeer Rashid Alimat (2011): The study aimed to prepare a group counseling program for training in appropriate study skills, as well as to investigate the effectiveness of this program in improving study skills among a sample consisting of (28) female first-year students at Princess Rahma University College. The study included the following tools: the motivation scale by Omar Al-Farouk Al-Sanousi Atiya (2002), and the study habits scale by Hani Abdel Hadi Mustafa (1995). The researcher also relied on the academic achievement results (averages) of the female students for the first and second semesters. The results indicated statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on the study skills scale. The study also confirmed the effectiveness of the training program in improving both the level of study skills and the level of academic achievement.

The study of Shaker Mohammed Ahmed Al-Bashrawi (2020): The study aimed to reveal study habits and skills and work on developing them correctly among middle school pupils in the city of Baghdad. The study sample consisted of (40) middle school pupils who were selected intentionally. The study tools consisted of the Study Habits Scale and the educational program for developing study habits, both designed by the researcher. The results of the research revealed the development and improvement of study habits among the members of the experimental group, and the presence of statistically significant differences in study habits among the members of the experimental group between the pre-measurement and post-measurement in favor of the post-measurement.

The study of Semra (2012): The study aimed to identify the effect of developing study skills in curricula on learners' acquisition of study skills and their achievements. It included a sample of (320) seventh-grade pupils at Rafika Primary School. The experimental group underwent lessons that included eight units from the developed curriculum, while the second group (the control group) used the curriculum before its development. The results confirmed the presence of development and improvement in the acquisition of study skills among the study sample, which was reflected in their academic achievement. (Ihfaf, 2018, 277)

The study of Hilgard (2010): The study aimed to investigate the effect of applying a group counseling program for training in study skills and its effect on academic achievement, anxiety, and adjustment. The study sample consisted of (30) male and female first-year university students. The results indicated the following: the presence of differences between the members of the first and second experimental groups in the level of academic achievement and reduced anxiety in favor of females, while the study did not show differences in adjustment between the sexes in the two experimental groups. (Al-Sharif, 2014, 854)

*Procedures of the Applied Study:**\_Study Method:*

Based on the fact that the current research aims to investigate the effect of an independent variable (a counseling program) on a dependent variable (study skills), the researcher relied on the quasi-experimental one-group approach.

*Study Tools:**Study Skills Scale:*

The study relied on the Study Skills Scale developed by Hafiz Nabil Ibrahim et al. (2014). The scale includes (40) items measuring four dimensions of study skills, namely: classroom behavior skills, home learning skills, skills for avoiding delay, and exam preparation and handling skills. The items were placed on a three-point scale: applies sometimes, does not apply at all, applies completely.

Scoring Method: Each response is given a weight as follows: often (3) degrees, sometimes (2), rarely (1).

*Psychometric Properties of the Scale:*

**1- Validity of the Scale:** Extreme-group comparison validity: Through calculating the differences in each dimension separately and in the total scores of the individuals on the scale as a whole, the researcher concluded that the scale is valid.

**2- Reliability of the Scale:** Cronbach's Alpha Method: The researcher relied on Cronbach's alpha method to calculate the reliability of the scale.

0.883	Cronbach's Alpha
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The results indicated that the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient was high, which confirms the reliability of the scale.

*Split-Half Method:*

The following table shows the results of calculating reliability based on the split-half method:

0.741	Total score of the scale
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From the results, we conclude that the scale is reliable and therefore suitable for use in a similar environment.

*The Counseling Program:*

**Table (1) Represents the Sessions of the Counseling Program for Acquiring Study Skills.**

Session Title	Session Objectives	Techniques Used
Getting to Know One Another	Introducing the researcher to the members of the counseling program, and introducing the members to one another. Clarifying the nature of the program and its objectives, presenting the mechanism for conducting the sessions, agreeing on their dates and venue, and emphasizing the need for commitment,	Lecture; discussion and dialogue; fun-based method; reinforcement; cooperative learning.

Session Title	Session Objectives	Techniques Used
	attendance, and completion of homework assignments.	
I Set My Goals... I Succeed.	Training in goal setting. Enabling pupils to define their goals (short-term, medium-term, and long-term). Introducing the mind-map strategy and training pupils to use it by designing a mind map for their own goals.	Lecture; dialogue and discussion; reinforcement; self-talk; homework; cooperative learning.
How Do I Study Well? Time Is Like a Sword.	Training in effective study/review skills. Training in time-management skills to improve academic achievement and life in general. Preparing a personal weekly program to organize study/review times.	Lecture; dialogue and discussion; reinforcement; modeling; reinforcement; homework; cooperative learning.
How Do I Study Well? I Organize My Place.	Training in organizing the study/review place and tools. Identifying the most important characteristics of a suitable place for study/review and helping pupils choose and prepare their study/review place, as well as the physical conditions that should be available in it. Clarifying the importance of choosing the appropriate place inside the classroom.	Simple lecture; dialogue and discussion; reinforcement; modeling; reinforcement; homework; feedback.
How Do I Study Well? Memorization and Recall.	Training in the most important mechanisms and strategies that can improve memorization and memory functioning and help pupils overcome forgetfulness, while applying these skills to examples from the pupils' own lessons.	Lecture and discussion; reinforcement; modeling; homework; feedback.
How Do I Study Well? The Enjoyment of Learning Through Technology.	Introducing the various modern technological tools that can be relied upon to develop study/review skills, with training in the correct ways of dealing with them, and training in the use of useful modern technologies, applications, and programs.	Simple lecture; dialogue and discussion; reinforcement; homework; feedback; modeling.
How Do I Study Well? Whoever Strives Succeeds.	Identifying and training in the most important examination-preparation skills. Modifying negative attitudes toward examinations into positive ones by developing self-confidence and the ability to succeed. Training in relaxation.	Lecture and discussion; reinforcement; homework; self-motivation; self-monitoring; relaxation.
Conclusion of the Counseling Program	Discussing with the members of the counseling group the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the extent to which they benefited from it. Providing the program evaluation form. Administering the study scales (post-measurement).	Simple lecture; dialogue and discussion; reinforcement; feedback.

#### *Presentation and Analysis of the Results:*

Presentation and analysis of the results of the first hypothesis: Hypothesis statement: There are statistically significant differences among the members of the experimental sample after exposure to the counseling program between the pre-measurement scores and the post-measurement scores on the study skills scale, in favor of the post-measurement scores.

Since the study sample size is  $n \leq 50$ , the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to verify the normality of the data distribution. Its value was equal to (0.040), which is less than (0.05), confirming that the data do not follow a normal distribution. Based on this, the researcher relied on the Wilcoxon test to calculate the significance of the differences between the mean ranks of the scores of the experimental group members in the pre and post-measurement of study skills.

**Table (2) Shows the Significance of the Differences Between the Scores of the Experimental Group Members in the Pre-Measurement and Post-Measurement on the Study Skills Scale.**

Variable	Measurement	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Z Value	Significance Value	Significance Level	Decision
Study Skills	Pre-measurement	1.41	0.08	-2.809	0.005	0.05	Statistically significant
	Post-measurement	2.69	0.29				

Based on the results of the table, we note that the significance value was (0.005), which is less than (0.05). This confirms the existence of statistically significant differences between the pre-measurement scores and the post-measurement scores of the experimental group in study skills, in favor of the post-measurement. This is shown through the comparison of the measurement scores in the arithmetic mean of the pre-measurement, which was lower than that of the post-measurement. The Z value was also equal to (-2.809), which is statistically significant at the significance level (0.05), meaning that the hypothesis was confirmed.

*The results of measuring the effect of the counseling program on the pupils in the post-measurement were also as follows:*

Variable	Sample Size	Ranks	Sum Ranks of	Mean Rank	Effect
Study Skills	10	06	55.00	5.50	Positive Effect
		04	00.00	00.00	Negative Effect
		00	00.00	00.00	No Effect

Table (3) shows the effect of the counseling program on pupils' study skills in the post-measurement.

The results of the table show that the scores of all pupils participating in the counseling program after its implementation were better than their scores before implementation, which confirms its effectiveness and positive impact on their acquisition of study skills.

✍ **Presentation and analysis of the results of the second hypothesis:** Hypothesis statement: The proposed counseling program is effective in helping the members of the experimental group acquire study skills.

In order to verify the validity of the hypothesis, several statistical methods were used, and the results can be summarized in the following table:

**Table (4) Summarizes the Results of Calculating the Effectiveness Size of the Counseling Program on the Study Skills Scale.**

Measure	Value	Effectiveness Size Judgment
Cohen's coefficient for two related samples (D)	03.08	Very large

Eta squared $\eta^2$	0.86	Very large
Effect size formula for Wilcoxon scale $r$	0.89	Good

Through the analysis of the table results, we note that Cohen's coefficient (D) is equal to (03.08). Based on Cohen's criterion, the effect size is very large, which confirms the effectiveness. The eta-squared value  $\eta^2$  also indicated a rate of (0.86), which expresses a very large effect size. This confirms that the counseling program contributed to the acquisition of study skills among the counselees. Meanwhile, the effect size value  $r$  reached (0.89), which is a good rate according to Cohen, confirming the effectiveness of the counseling program.

✍ **Presentation and analysis of the results of the third hypothesis:** Hypothesis statement: There are no statistically significant differences among the members of the experimental sample between the mean scores of the post-measurement and the follow-up measurement scores on the study skills scale after a period of time. The results are shown in the following table:

**Table (5) Shows the Significance of the Differences Between the Scores of the Experimental Group Members in the Post-Measurement and the Follow-Up Measurement on the Study Skills Scale.**

Variable	Measurement	Arithmetic Mean	Z Value	Significance Value	Significance Level	Decision
Study Skills	Post-follow-up	10.08	-1.14	0.25	0.05	No differences, and continued effectiveness of the counseling program
		10.22				

Through the results of the table, we note that the significance value is equal to (0.25), which is greater than (0.05). This indicates that there are no differences between the post-measurement and follow-up measurement scores on the study skills scale among the members of the experimental group. The arithmetic mean score of the post-measurement is equal to (10.08), which is close to the arithmetic mean score in the follow-up measurement (10.22). This confirms the absence of differences between the two measurements and the stability of the scale results after a period of time following the implementation of the counseling program. It also indicates the continued effectiveness and impact of the counseling sessions on the counselees, which means that the hypothesis was confirmed.

## Discussion of the Results

The results of the current study indicated the existence of statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurement scores of the counselees on the study skills scale, in favor of the post-measurement. The researcher attributes the development of study skills among the members of the experimental study sample to the effectiveness of the proposed counseling program and the activities, events, and practices it included, which were implemented in an effective educational-learning environment. This provided pupils with the opportunity to learn study skills appropriate to their chronological and mental age, and to train in and practice them as basic behaviors during their study of lessons and in their daily lives. By acquiring these skills, they contributed to the development of their academic achievement level and the attainment of success.

Most previous studies agree with the results of the current study regarding their effectiveness in developing study skills among counselees, despite the differences in their environments and educational stages, such as the study of Ghunaymat and Alimat (2011), the study of Anas Al-Dala'in (2015), the study of Al-Bashrawi (2020), the study of Semra (2012), and the study of Hilgard (2010).

The researcher explains the effectiveness of the counseling program by the pupils' urgent need for training and for acquiring effective study skills. The pupil's lack of knowledge of how to organize his time, choose the appropriate place for studying, lack of memorization mechanisms and memory enhancement, poor use of modern technologies and their employment in the learning process, and inability to adapt to the examination period and deal with it all contribute to the decline in his academic achievement. This, in turn, creates in him a feeling of failure and inability to keep pace with his peers, leading to the emergence of behaviors that indicate poor psychological and academic adjustment, such as aggression, anger, shyness and withdrawal, depression, physical violence toward classmates or material violence toward the educational institution, and the resulting school dropout and academic failure, which have negative repercussions on the pupil, society, and the educational system.

The researcher attributes these results to the acquisition by the pupils participating in the counseling program of the study skills included in its sessions, which were identified and practiced during the activities of the counseling program. The researcher was keen for these skills to serve as practices adopted by the pupil in his daily life as automatic habits and practices.

The researcher explains the results by the pupils' ability to set their own goals. The results of the current study agreed with many studies and research works that proved the effectiveness of their counseling programs in developing study skills, whose sessions included the skill of goal setting, such as the study of Hayajneh and Al-Shukairi (2013), and the study of Yassin (2011).

The researcher attributes the current results to the effectiveness and usefulness of the techniques and strategies that contributed to the participating pupils' acquisition of time management skills. Many studies and research works have confirmed the effectiveness of counseling programs in developing learners' time management skills, such as the study of Frederick (1998), and the study of Ebrahimian & Carlene (1994) (Al-Qasabi, 2010, 70).

The results are also attributed to the scientific material included in the counseling program, which enabled pupils to acquire the skill of choosing and organizing the study place. In the same context, the study of Sispan confirmed the effectiveness of counseling sessions for training in study skills, as pupils' practices moved away from randomness and disorder, and they became able to control the time, place, methods, and techniques of effective studying. Main (1980) also reported that the performance of learners who are organized in their related tasks is better than others, and that the learner who sets a schedule to organize his time and determines a place to review his educational materials is characterized by effective activity, is difficult to distract, allocates periods for rest, performs his duties without neglect, and does not wait for examinations to become a motive for studying. (Sispan, 2017, 224).

The researcher attributes the results to the fact that the counseling program transferred the members of the experimental group from incorrect practices and uses of modern technological means to effective positive behaviors. The results of the current study agreed with the study of Schargel and Smink (2001), and the study of Hong et al. (2016). (Nofal, 2018, 7)

The researcher explains the results on the basis of pupils' acquisition of the skill of dealing with examinations, and in light of the pupils' urgent need to receive psycho-pedagogical guidance based on realistic scientific foundations and principles that help them overcome the difficulties and problems that occur during the examination period, such as feelings of anxiety, tension, and pressure. It also contributes to their acquisition of skills specific to examination periods. The results of the study agreed with the study of Frederick (1998) (Ahfaf, 2018, 269), as well as Hilgard (2010) and the study of Magdy Al-Shahat (2011).

The results of the current study also confirmed the absence of statistically significant differences between the post-measurement scores and the follow-up measurement scores among the members of the experimental group on the study skills scale. These results are attributed to the continued effectiveness of the counseling program after the period following its implementation. This confirms the acquisition and use by the members of the experimental group of the techniques and strategies that were identified and practiced in the situations and circumstances they face, which cause their lack of study skills, and which

were largely similar to what was included in the program sessions. The results are also due to the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral techniques.

The continuity of the effectiveness of the counseling program in the follow-up measurement is also attributed to the principles of psychological counseling, which emphasize the flexibility of human behavior and its capacity for change and modification, and the impact of this on the construction and design of counseling programs based on sound scientific foundations and their effectiveness. The results can also be interpreted on the basis that cognitive-behavioral counseling interventions are among the mechanisms least likely to allow relapse to occur, and that their effectiveness lasts longer after the period following their implementation.

## Conclusion

The results of the study confirmed the effectiveness of the counseling program in developing study skills among middle school pupils, through improving learning strategies and developing time management, concentration, and retrieval skills, which was positively reflected in academic achievement and academic self-efficacy. The cognitive-behavioral counseling techniques also contributed to modifying negative study habits and enhancing motivation for learning and school adjustment. These results confirm the importance of psychological and educational counseling as a developmental approach to improving academic performance and developing self-learning skills among learners.

### *Study Suggestions:*

- Activating psychological and educational counseling services to develop study skills and self-regulated learning.
- Training teachers and parents in effective learning strategies and sound study habits.
- Employing digital media and educational applications in developing study skills.
- Encouraging empirical studies related to study skills and academic self-efficacy.

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