

## ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BOOK CO-READING PROCESS ON THE FEMALE STUDENTS' ASSERTIVENESS

Mahya Rahimzadeh<sup>1\*</sup>, Shirin Kooshki<sup>2</sup>, Fariba Aghdami<sup>3</sup>, Mohammad Jafar Javadi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M.A in Educational Psychology, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding author). Email: Mahya.rahimzadeh@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: shi.koshki@iauctb.ac.ir

<sup>3</sup> BSc in Persian Language and Literature. Shahid Beheshti University, Founder of the Non Governmental Organization "Jahak" and Chief Executive Officer of the "Azta" Book Club, Tehran, Iran. Email: aztaclub@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational science, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: mj.javadi@yahoo.com

\* Mahya Rahimzadeh, M.A in Educational Psychology, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding author). Email: Mahya.rahimzadeh@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the book co-reading process, which is really close to Bibliotherapy method on the assertiveness of female junior high school students. The statistical population consisted of 971 students participating in the book co-reading marathon project of the 2016-2017 academic year in the city of Tehran, of which 50 students (25 people for the experimental group and 25 for the control group) were selected via the convenience sampling as the research sample. This applied study included a pre-test and a post-test, along with an assessment in the follow-up stage using an experimental and control group. Data were collected and analyzed using Gambrill and Richey Assertion Inventory and applying statistical methods, e.g., single-factor analysis of covariance and repeated measurements variance analysis. The results of the research indicated that the book co-reading process had an effect on the ninth-grade female students in the junior high school course and also these changes were found to be stable after one month.

### Keywords

book co-reading process, Bibliotherapy, assertiveness, students, high school students

### Introduction

Adolescence is mainly a period of exploration, selection, and the incremental process of moving toward coherent self-concept. Also, to best describe this period, one can refer to the process of progress, which is characterized by increased ability to master the complex challenges of academic, interpersonal and emotional tasks while at the same time exploring for new talents, social identities and interests (Zadok et al., 2016; translated by Rezaei, 2018). As one of the social groups that play an important role in building the

future of the society, students are more exposed to psychological strains than other groups because adolescence is viewed a critical period due to major physiological, cognitive and psychological changes. On the one hand, by changing the social role of adolescents in society, they take on some responsibilities. On the other hand, the expectations others regard for them lead to the formation of new roles in them, possibly creating stressful conditions for them; therefore, they are more vulnerable than other groups in the society (Kia et al., 2016).

Lack of assertiveness among adolescents is associated with a set of negative social, psychological and academic consequences. These skills are so important that failure to expand them can be associated with feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and job and academic failure (Patterson, Williams and Zaidi 2018; translated by Niloufari, 2018). Cox et al. (2005) reported in a report from the National Institute of American Epidemiology that out of 5,877 subjects, 26% of women and 19% of men considered themselves extremely shy during puberty and had a low estimate of their ability to express themselves. While treating shyness and improving during the most challenging issues facing psychologists, especially school psychologists.

Assertiveness is a skill that can strengthen adolescents' self-efficacy and influence their interactions with others to expand their self-esteem and confidence. Incompetency in this skill can lead to many problems for young people.

Assertiveness in adolescents is important because of the age and pressure exerted by the peer groups. Besides, it can protect them from factors that threaten their health (Sitota, 2018).

The term assertiveness was first coined by Wolpe and then expanded. He believed that there was a contradiction between assertiveness responses and anxiety (Hashemian et al., 2017). Assertiveness skills are needed, whether in discussing deep-rooted differences, formal and informal negotiations, or even in everyday disputes.

However, when we lay too much pressure on interpersonal relationships, or behave in an ineffective way, our peers may not understand completely what we mean (Amis et al., 2017).

Assertiveness is an individual ability to express oneself and to raise viewpoints honestly, without violating the rights of others (Goltkin, 2018).

Assertiveness is referred to as an assertive rejection, an assertive statement, and an assertive request. Failure to have the necessary assertiveness or decisiveness in social relations, could influence different behaviors in individuals (Pasha, 2018).

People who are able to assert themselves clearly state what they want to say, these people have the

ability to empathize and respect others and easily say no (Tarla et al., 2016).

Many studies suggest that training, strengthening and improving assertiveness skills yield many positive consequences. Borjali (2017) in his research found that culture-based assertiveness training is a suitable intervention procedure to improve self-esteem among adolescents of divorce. Naami, Shams Alizadeh and Abdi (2016) concluded in their research that training assertiveness skills had a positive effect on reducing shyness and improving the self-concept of adolescent female students. Also, the findings of Pasha's research (2018) suggested that assertiveness training is effective on increasing self-esteem, reducing social anxiety and also increasing students' decisiveness.

As mentioned, applying methods to increase the power of assertiveness in adolescence, when the person's personality is being formed and before adulthood, seems necessary as it is regarded as one of the effective ways to improve social interactions with one's peers and to maintain mental health and a positive self-concept.

In 1961, Webster's International Dictionary interpreted Bibliotherapy as "the use of purposeful study as adjunctive therapy in medicine and psychiatry and as a guide to solving personal problems through direct study." Later, other researchers came up with different definitions and considered bibliotherapy as a process of change. A process of dynamic interaction between the reader's personality and the literature that may be applicable to personality assessment, adaptation and development.

Thus, the "book co-reading process" which is really close to Bibliotherapy method, was performed by the researcher for the first time in Iran, being an independent variable of the present study, is a suitable tool for dynamic group activities.

Book Co-reading Process is an activity aimed at developing the culture of participation and increasing social awareness through the expansion of the reading culture. As the need to improve assertiveness skills was emphasized, participation in book co-reading sessions, which are held in groups, was selected as a group activity with a relationship-oriented approach for the present

study. The group activity provides an environment in which members discover their emotional and mental state and acquire an exceptional opportunity to express their status and experiences. In book co-reading sessions, people who have not learned social skills will find the opportunity to improve their social skills.

Book co-reading process releases restrained or repressed emotions and conflicts in a safe environment, and the main goals of this method are to increase the level of communication among people, to gain some direct confrontation with one's own emotions and those of others, to reduce self-centeredness, and finally to gain self-discovery. Book co-reading process helps one to discover his/her psychological dimensions; hence, one not only reconsiders his/her thoughts through dialogue, but in reality, s/he paves the way for the integration of processes related to thinking, emotions and visualization through developing spontaneity and creativity. This is while the individual, focusing on a particular situation based on the books studied, gains some insights into his/her personal behavioral responses, belief system about him/herself, others and the world in which s/he lives, as well as about the situation and the consequences of his/her behavioral and emotional responses; the individual, by acquiring such insights, will find the opportunity to consider more effective options and experience them in a very practical way.

International data suggests that book co-reading process in book clubs are "important sites" for reading. Hartley claims that there are about 50,000 book co-reading clubs in the UK and about 500,000 such clubs in North America. In Australia, study groups are also among the largest community collaborative institutions. In the United States, Australia, and in developing countries, book co-reading clubs positively influence the activity and expansion of book reading. Despite the fact some book co-reading clubs are run by government entities, many book co-reading clubs are not supported by official programs, and this statistic does not reflect the overall number of active clubs at any given point in time. Many reading clubs are unwilling to join formal programs or are dependent on their own

reading lists or television or radio programs (Clarke et al., 2017).

Some research indicated that the book co-reading process in the family has an effect on children's academic and math achievement. (Purpura et al., 2017; Susperreguy and Keane, 2016)

As well, home activities such as book co-reading play an important role in promoting the culture of reading and increasing the child's vocabulary.

(Beschorner and Hutchinson, 2016; Towson et al., 2017)

In Iran, the "Book Co-reading Process" is a non-governmental organization "Jahak" established in 2012 by a high-profile literature teacher in Tehran's Education Department and continued its work in the "Azta " book Club. Book Co-reading Process seeks to develop a culture of participation and to increase social awareness, striving to encourage people to participate in new and diverse book-reading projects with the help of young volunteers. The primary goal of such a group was simply to promote reading, to discuss about a book, to express opinions, and to co-think on issues. In this way, the said process succeeded by gaining the trust and welcoming of universities, cultural centers, publishing entities and famous writers of the country, as in 2014, it was hailed by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for its role in promoting reading books.

With the passage of time and the expansion of the group's work, this organization found its way into the schools of Tehran at all grades and presented the "Book Co-reading Marathon" project. Shortly after the marathon and book co-reading process was administered, some significant changes were noted in students according to a report by the facilitators of the project: for example, the changes were significant improvement in students' reading and comprehension skills, especially in elementary school, increased spelling lessons' scores, increased power of fluency and expression of views, increased power of self-assertion, especially among students who were isolated and quiet, increased power of empathy and co-thinking and group working, and increased power of openness, especially in the area of criticism, etc. In general, the changes made to the ability of students who participated in the marathon compared with the ones not participating in the

project encouraged the principals and parents of the students to be more interested in the project. So that at the end of the 2016-2017 academic year, 971 students in different educational levels of Tehran participated in this project.

Training assertiveness makes people aware of their right to defend themselves against the aggressive behaviors of others, while also acquainting them with social, interpersonal and conflict resolution skills (Khawar and Malik, 2016). Training assertiveness is also associated with increased self-esteem (Elma Pagadun, 2017; Valliammal S. and Kathyayini 2017; and Thelma R-M, Maria A. A, Maria A. H and Torchiva, M, 2017).

Accordingly, given the need to improve assertiveness skills, which has a special position in adolescence, the present study sought to answer the question; Does book co-reading process affect the assertiveness of female junior high school students?

#### Methodology

The present study was a method-based quasi-experimental study. It is a pre-test and post-test with a control group. The statistical population consisted of 971 students in Tehran who took part in the BCrP marathon in elementary, junior and high schools in the 2016-2017 academic year.

In the present study, based on the available sampling (convenience sampling), 50 ninth-grade female students of the junior high school in District 4 of the Education Department were selected from among 971 students who had participated in the book co-reading marathon. 25 students each were placed in the experimental and control groups after the pre-test was administered. The dependent variable was assertiveness and the independent variable was book co-reading process which is included 12 section and to measure the dependent variable, Gambrill and Richey's Assertion Inventory (1975) was used.

After the independent variable was applied (running the book co-reading process) by experimental group, the dependent variable was repeatedly measured and after the passage of one month, a follow-up test was run for re-assessment. While the control group went through the usual process of their classes at school without attending each session. They participated only in pre-test

and post-test for comparison with the experimental group.

The data was then entered into a computer and 21-SPSS statistical software was used to statistically analyze the data. Common descriptive statistics of frequency distribution, central tendency indices and dispersion indices were used to determine the characteristics of the group, while repeated measures analysis of variance test was used to test the research hypotheses.

#### Materials and Methods

In the present study, the dependent variable was assertiveness and Gambrill and Richey's Assertion Inventory (1975) was used. The inventory was used to assess students' level of assertiveness and has 40 items in two sections. Each of the items indicates a situation that requires an assertive behavior, and the subject should be able to specify his or her concerns as the items also involve the likelihood of answering each question. For example the question number 11 is :“ I am able to reject the request of others to borrow money. “ or number 19 which is : “If I do not understand the question, I can ask it again.” and the answer is to choose between too much to too little, The degree of discomfort refers to the extremity of the anxiety and distress of the subject in the face of these situations, and the rate at which such behaviors occur refers to the likelihood of such behaviors. The inventory was designed based on a Likert scale that includes such options as very high, high, moderate, low and very low, being scored from 1-5 respectively. The score received by each subject is obtained from the total score of the questions. Gambrill and Richey reported the reliability coefficient of this test to be 0.87 for the degree of discomfort (the amount and severity of the person's discomfort when facing these situations) and 0.86 for the probability of answering (the probability of the situation occurring for the person). In Iran, Hekmati (2001, quoted by Ashouri et al., 2008) reported the internal consistency of this inventory based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient to be 0.76 for discomfort and 0.83 for probability of answering, respectively. This scale was translated and used by Bahrami in 1996.



The independent variable (book co-reading process) is applied in 12 sessions as follows:

Session 1: Mental preparation and explanation of the necessity to read books: In this session, "reading experiences" are discussed with the participants in the session and issues are raised for debate. The book reading marathon plan is also explained to the attendees and the possibility of participating in the marathon freely is placed under discussion.

Session 2: In this session, the short story "Child of the People" by Jalal Al-Ahmad is read out in accordance with the age and concerns of the students in the class, and the members of the group begin to talk about it.

Session 3: In collaboration with the school officials, the book "Waiting for Normal" by Leslie Connor suitable for the age groups of students is purchased for all students and a profile for each class is provided to the facilitating teachers, to easily record the extent to which students study it. This profile has three registers:

- A. The first register records the amount of studying on a table;
- B. The second register enters the amount of studying on a board.
- C. a person in the class is charged with preparing a special notebook for each student to write in it the name of the book, the author, and the publisher after reading a book, and to give a score of one to five stars to the book s/he has read.

Session 4: Students are asked in the classroom to read a book each day, and to specify a certain number of pages set for next week's session, which may range from 100 to 400 pages depending on the difficulty of the book.

Session 5: A meeting on book discussion takes place one week after the co-reading begins. This meeting can be scheduled from 20 to 80 minutes, depending on the authority, restrictions and time available to the teacher. Students are then interviewed about the various elements of the story.

Session 6: Based on the conversations of the previous meeting, students are asked to design a personality chart in their class or during their leisure time.

Session 7: The discussion meeting is held based on three-quarters of the book. Students become

more familiar with the characters and talk more easily about the events of the story.

Session 8: Students are asked to perform an activity related to the book they had read (e.g., collecting information pertaining to the author's life, providing PowerPoint, finding an interview with the author, etc.)

Session 9: The main points of the story are summarized and takeaways are noted, and such issues as the effects of reading the book on the students, and whether or not the family problem of the main character in the story is tangible and believable for us are also discussed.

Session 10: Groups that sought to search for movies, books, reviews, and songs related to the theme of the book in the eighth session present their search findings to the class and discuss them.

Session 11: The book and related activities are finished and students are asked to read a book of their interest appropriate to their interests. In this step, it is better for the teacher to post a list of books suitable for the age group of students on the classroom wall and this list should have at least 20 titles.

Session 12: Students are encouraged to introduce the books they have read to other students and to choose the next book for the book co-reading process.

It is worth noting that before applying the independent variable, the researcher has received the necessary training in the BCrP organization to administer the "Book Co-reading Process" project. The project holds four workshops for teachers and facilitators during the year, in which the following are taught:

Workshop 1: Teaching the developmental stages and growth needs of the age group appropriate to them and familiarity with various literary genres of children's and adolescents' books. This workshop is often held in the summer;

Workshop 2: Familiarity with different ways of promoting reading, where this workshop is often held in October or November;

Workshop 3: Familiarity with facilitation procedures to manage book conversation sessions and activity design methods pertaining to each book;

Workshop 4: Explaining the necessities of documenting and reporting to document the work process.

Besides these workshops, the facilitator should take seven specialized steps to prepare the project:

- 1) Preparation of mental capacity;
- 2) Familiarization of teachers and facilitators with the developmental stages and needs of students of different ages;
- 3) Familiarization with different literary types suitable for any age group;
- 4) Familiarization with different ways of promoting reading;
- 5) Familiarization with the way a book reading activity is designed collectively and individually;

6) Training facilitation;

7) Familiarization with the needs of documenting, reporting and recording the book reading process and work results.

### Research Findings

The table 1 presents descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) on the dependent variable, for the levels of the independent variable. As can be seen, in the experimental group, the mean of assertiveness was 135.48, 158.88, and 154.12 in pretest, posttest and follow-up respectively. Also, in the control group, the mean of assertiveness was 134.04, and 136.32 in pretest and posttest.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of Assertiveness Scores regarding groups

Groups	Statistical indices	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-up
Experimental	Mean	135.48	158.88	154.12
	SD	19.52	19.07	17.72
Control	Mean	134.04	136.32	
	SD	19.81	19.11	

Since the assertiveness of subjects in this study has been measured in three times (pretest, posttest, and follow-up), a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was selected to analyze the data. Before using this analysis, its eight assumptions including the scale of variables, independence of

observations, no significant outliers, approximately normal distributed residuals, homogeneity of variances, homoscedasticity and Mauchly's test of sphericity has been checked. Based on table 2, the results show that the is not statistically significant .

**Table 2:** Mauchly's Test of Sphericity

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
factor1	.78	0.55	1	.584

Mauchly's Test of Sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the variances of the differences are equal. Thus, if Mauchly's Test of Sphericity is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative

hypothesis that the variances of the differences are not equal (i.e., sphericity has been violated). Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated,  $\chi^2(2) = 0.78$ ,  $p = .000$

**Table 3:** Homogeneity of Levene's test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df 1	df 2	Sig.
8.90	1	48	.891

Tests the null hypothesis that the error covariance matrix of the orthonormalized transformed

dependent variables is proportional to an identity matrix.

**Table 4:** Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
factor1	Sphericity Assumed	283.22	1	283.22	19.97	.000	0.45
	Greenhouse-Geisser	283.22	1	283.22	19.97	.000	0.45
	Huynh-Feldt	283.22	1	283.22	19.97	.000	0.45
	Lower-bound	283.22	1	283.22	19.97	.000	0.45
Error (factor1)	Sphericity Assumed	340.28	24	14.17			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	340.28	24	14.17			
	Huynh-Feldt	340.28	24	14.17			
	Lower-bound	340.28	24	14.17			

Table 4 shows the tests of within-subjects effects. Based on this result there is a significant difference between two groups ( $F=19.97$ , 1 and 24,  $p>0.001$ ). It is worth mentioning that 45% of dependent variables is explained by independent variables.

## Conclusion

The main finding of the present study indicated that the book co-reading process had an effect on the assertiveness of ninth-grade female students in junior high schools and also these changes were found to be significantly stable. This finding corresponded with the findings of Adib Parsa (2016) and Hemmati (2012). Findings of Hemmati (2012) showed that cognitive-behavioral group therapy was effective in reducing aggression and increasing assertiveness in comparison with lack of which in the control group and this effect was also stable in the follow-up stage.

Also, the findings of Adib Parsa (2016) suggested that cognitive-behavioral group therapy based on Albano and Di Bartolo's model led to a significant increase in the assertiveness of the experimental group both in the post-test and follow-up stages. What can be reiterated in this line of research is that although the book co-reading process is not clearly viewed a type of group therapy due to the

short history it has found in the field of school cultural activities, the results of the book co-reading process as an intervention are in line with the exchange approach.

Eric Burn also posits that group therapy provides more information about an individual's personal life plans than individual therapies, paving the way for an opportunity for members to review and challenge past decisions and to experience new ones. However, during the book-centered co-reading sessions, an opportunity is made for students to first prepare for the problems of life, and second, to review logical and effective solutions and to consider themselves more responsible for the problems of others with whom they have the power to influence. Also, a safe setting provided by co-reading sessions allows for the revelation of self-disclosure and openness to criticism as they pave the way for an exchange of views while ethical principles are taken into account.

A review of the theoretical foundations indicates that assertiveness is defined in a simple classification into assertive rejection, assertive statement, and assertive request. Research findings relating to the inferential statistics section also confirm the changes made to students' abilities in increasing their assertion and achieving a higher level of this skill. Also, according to

Bandura's theory, which explains the achievement of self-efficacy hinging on the individual's assertive conduct, most students participating in the book co-reading marathon plan acquired the ability to hold and guide the said process even without the facilitator, in addition to gaining assertiveness or increasing power. Although the book co-reading facilitator has always assumed a guiding role and handled the meetings in some way, from Bandura's point of view, s/he is also entrusted with gaining assertive behavior, self-efficacy and responsibility taking as clinical observations on the book co-reading marathon process confirm the hypothesis that after holding a course on co-reading sessions driven by the facilitator, it is the students who will continue with the project and this suggests that they can achieve a considerable level of self-efficacy and responsibility taking.

In the end, according to the research findings and educational experiences of the researcher, it is recommended that: 1) Given the effects of the co-reading sessions on assertiveness, the significance of implementing such sessions will be determined. This intervention is recommended as a low-cost, easy and applicable intervention for different grades in all schools. This is because promoting assertiveness during book-based conversations allows people to express their ideas, feelings, needs, and requests easily and without stress. As a result, by expressing one's thoughts and feelings properly, the individual will institute some more effective interpersonal relationships with others, and interpersonal self-efficacy, sense of sufficiency, self-confidence, and consequently mental health will also rise. 2) The book co-reading process marathon plan emphasizes the continuity of the reading process, and since the reading process has not been internalized in the culture of our country today, ceasing the process for various reasons such as exams, holidays, etc. leads to reduced skills as set in the general project goal. This is while students who have participated in the marathon program continuously and for several consecutive years report more stable changes in their cognitive level and expression, but these reports are yet to be accurately determined with scientific measurements. This requires further research in this area. 3) It is

suggested to have in place multi-stage measure of the variable intended with specific time intervals to determine the stability of the changes in students who participate in the marathon for the first time, and to make some groupings appropriate to the responsibilities of students participating in the project when exams are held in the sense that they are to be assessed in 3 time periods and before the course ends. 4) It is recommended to measure and to compare the students who have responsibilities such as recording the number of pages read in class or preparing a list of students' favorite books with other students in such variables as responsibility and the moral thinking development. 5) Similar research are suggested to be done for a sample of adolescent boys. 6) The book co-reading marathon plan is being implemented in different educational milieus and new scholarly researches can be designed by entering variables appropriate to age, gender and academic and social status. 7) In addition to the effectiveness of book co-reading sessions on cognitive skills in particular, the main topic of each book read has the ability to design a psychological questionnaire appropriate to the topic of the book and to measure the desired variable. 8) In each course of the book co-reading process, a number of very active and capable students as well as some students who are weaker in various psychological fields than others are identified, where the project enables the implementation of more specific grouping aimed at empowerment and improvement. 9) It is suggested to control for students' life records and family backgrounds and individual differences in other studies and finally 10) It is suggested that other researchers use random sampling method in their research.

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