

The Effects of Strength Note Program on the Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy of University Students: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract

In this study, a program for enhancing strengths of university students was longitudinally applied to 50 male and female university students in G area for 3 years. The same university students were asked to start writing the strengths notes at the beginning of the semester and submit at the end of the semester, and data were gathered for 3 years by measuring Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy at the end of the semester each year. For analysis of the collected data, frequency and percentage analysis and paired-t-test were conducted using SPSS WIN 20.0. As the result, the Strength Note Program had a significant effect on the continued increase in Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy of university students each year. Also, the first-year Strength Note Program had the biggest effect on the improvement in Self-Esteem and self-efficacy of university students, and it was followed by the second-year program and the third-year program. In conclusion, it was found that the Strength Note Program positively influenced the improvement in Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy of university students. Therefore, there is a need to provide a specific and systematic Strength Note Program to help university students get over diverse problems. It is considered that this will help mental health, academic achievement and career search of university students and contribute to the enhancement in happiness and the quality of life.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Self-esteem, Strengths Note

1. Purpose of Research

Now, Korean university students are worried about their career paths, prepare for employment and think about their identities in the competitive structure of society. Also, they consider their thoughts and views as important by looking into how to feel about various stimulus variables which they go through in university life, experiencing the period of transition between heteronomy in middle and high school and autonomy of the present time, and how to deal with them¹.

This self-perception can be linked to 'Self-Esteem' and 'Self-Efficacy'. Self-Esteem means how much individuals respect and value themselves², and Self-Efficacy refers to a personal belief in a successful performance of tasks or behaviors when individuals try to obtain some results³. There is a study saying that Self-Esteem is associated

with social adaptation or personal-emotional adaptation, and Self-Efficacy is associated with academic adaptation, particularly⁴.

On the other hand, according to Seligman⁵, a representative scholar in positive psychology, human can have diverse strengths. Strength means something important and positive that a client is doing, can do and wants to do⁶, and not only does this strength serve as a capacity to reach an excellent result and an accomplishment in some assignment but also motivates people.

Anyone has strengths, but only focusing on weaknesses makes you think "I am good at nothing," and leads to a fall of Self-Esteem, in the end. Knowing what you are good at and what your strengths are changes a point of view about yourself. If you train constantly to find your strengths, you can change weaknesses into strengths, the strengths

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boost an understanding of yourself and Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy improve.

According to a preceding study, diverse personal strengths positively influence personal happiness (Campbell, 1981; Myers, 2000; Wasten & Walker, 1996), and a strength-based intervention is effective in enhancing mental health⁷. Moreover, strengths of university students affect family health⁸, character strengths directly influence happiness in the relationship between character strengths and happiness and concern happiness by the medium of self-acceptance which is deeply related to self-esteem⁹.

Therefore, a program for enhancing strengths of university students was carried out for 3 years to see the effects of the Strength Note Program on their Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy. So far, there has been an extreme lack of studies on the use of the Strength Note, and especially, there are no studies from long-term perspectives. Thus, this study longitudinally compared and analyzed the effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy of the same university students for 3 years (from March 2012 to December 2014) to verify the Strength Note Program's effects.

Also, it is considered that the longitudinal analysis of the Strength Note Program results of university students will help in developing potential abilities and add reliability to the study findings. Based on these findings, this study aims to find ways of helping mental health, academic achievement, career search, and improving the quality of life.

For this study, research problems were set as follows:

First, what are the effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-Esteem of university students for 3 years?

Second, what are the effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-Efficacy of university students for 3 years?

Third, what are the effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy of university students each year?

2. Methods

2.1 Subjects and Data Collection Methods

This study targeted 50 male and female University students, who is studying at a University located in G area and decided to participate in the study under a voluntary agreement, after hearing a detailed explanation about the strength note program. After conducting an Orientation (OT) about the method of writing the strength note, the

contents and the procedures for an hour in the department on March 19th 2012, the students were asked to write the strength notes every week for nearly three years by December 5th 2014. The students wrote the strength notes simultaneously with the beginning of the semester and submitted them in the vacation after the end of the semester.

In order to analyze the effect of the Strength Note Program on Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy, also, pre-test was conducted before writing the strength notes and for gathering data, post-test was conducted when the students submitted the strength notes. In this study, data from a total of 50 students excepting 8 ones, who dropped out of the Strength Note Program, were used for the final analysis.

2.2 Research Instruments

2.2.1 Strength Note

The Strength Note was to find and record one of strengths of individual students including positive characteristics once a week. This time, the students were asked to write their own strengths to avoid an overlap of the same contents. Also, they were asked to find and record positive characteristics or strengths of other people in the strength notes every week.

2.2.2 Self-esteem

This study applied the scale used in the study of Jin Young Jung¹⁰ and Chung Bae Park¹¹ after Crandall (1973) converted the self-esteem Guttman scale developed by Rosenberg². into the Likert-type and Byung Je Jung (1974) translated it into Korean. It consists of the Likert scale with 10 questions and higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. The reliability was Cronbach $\alpha = .83$, in this research.

2.2.3 Self-efficacy

The scale, developed by Tipton and Worthington (1984) and translated by Yang, Sook-mi¹² was used. This is based on the Likert scale which consists of 24 questions, and the higher score means the higher self-efficacy. The reliability is Cronbach $\alpha = .85$, in this research.

2.3 Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS/WIN 20.0. Frequency analysis and reliability verification were carried

out to understand general characteristics of the subjects, and pre-and post-verification was conducted through Paired-t-test to see the effects of the Strength Note.

3. Results

3.1 The effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-esteem of University Students throughout 3 years

To verify the effect of the Strength Note Program on Self-Esteem of the university students, normality test was carried out. Self-Esteem's minimum and maximum score was one and five out of five points. The first-year, second-year and third-year Strength Note Programs all significantly influenced Self-Esteem of university students.

This finding shows that Self-Esteem of the university students increased each year after the program rather than before the program. This means the Strength Note Program had a significant effect on Self-Esteem of the university students for 3 years and the result is shown in (Table 1) and (Figure 1).

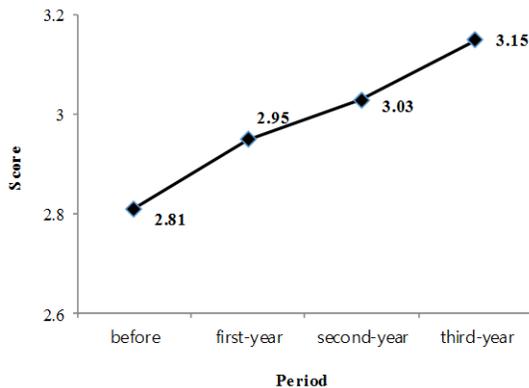


Figure 1. Changes in Self-Esteem.

Table 1. The effects of the strength note program on self-esteem of university students throughout 3 years

| | M | SD | t |
|-------------|------|------|----------|
| Before | 2.81 | 0.41 | -2.75** |
| first-year | 2.95 | 0.44 | |
| Before | 2.81 | 0.41 | -4.04*** |
| second-year | 3.03 | 0.42 | |
| Before | 2.81 | 0.41 | -6.39*** |
| third-year | 3.15 | 0.41 | |

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

3.2 The effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-efficacy of University Students throughout 3 years

To verify the effect of the Strength Note Program on Self-Efficacy of the university students, normality test was carried out. Self-Efficacy's minimum and maximum score was one and five out of five points. The first-year, second-year and third-year Strength Note Programs all significantly influenced Self-Efficacy of university students.

This finding shows that Self-Efficacy of the university students increased each year after the program rather than before the program. This means the Strength Note Program had a significant effect on Self-Efficacy of the university students for 3 years and the result is shown in (Table 2) and (Figure 2).

Table 2. The effects of the strength note program on self-efficacy of university students throughout 3 years

| | M | SD | t |
|-------------|------|------|-----------|
| before | 2.89 | 0.42 | -3.29*** |
| first-year | 3.11 | 0.36 | |
| before | 2.89 | 0.42 | -7.915*** |
| second-year | 3.21 | 0.34 | |
| before | 2.89 | 0.42 | -9.971*** |
| third-year | 3.38 | 0.34 | |

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

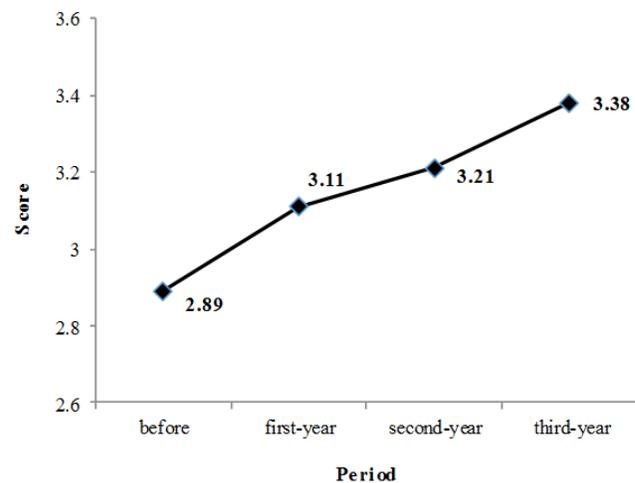


Figure 2. Changes in Self-Efficacy.

3.3 The effects of the Strength Note Program on Self-esteem and Self-efficacy of University Students Each Year

The effects of the Strength Note Program on self-esteem and Self-efficacy of university students for 3 years are as below. Self-esteem showed significant differences between the first-year program and the second-year program, between the second-year program and the third-year program, and between the first-year program and the third-year program. This means the Strength Note Program continuously had significant effects on Self-esteem throughout 3 years. Self-efficacy also showed significant differences between the first-year program and the second-year program, between the second-year program and the third-year program, and between the first-year program and the third-year program. This means the Strength Note Program continuously had significant effects on Self-efficacy throughout 3 years (Table 3).

Table 3. The effects of the strength note program on self-esteem and self-efficacy of university students each year

| | Each year | M | SD | t |
|---------------|-------------|------|------|-----------|
| self-esteem | first-year | 2.95 | 0.44 | -2.03* |
| | second-year | 3.03 | 0.44 | |
| | first-year | 2.95 | 0.44 | -4.09*** |
| | third-year | 3.15 | 0.41 | |
| | second-year | 3.03 | 0.42 | -3.21*** |
| | third-year | 3.15 | 0.41 | |
| self-efficacy | first-year | 3.11 | 0.36 | -1.869** |
| | second-year | 3.21 | 0.34 | |
| | first-year | 3.11 | 0.36 | -4.942*** |
| | third-year | 3.38 | 0.34 | |
| | second-year | 3.21 | 0.34 | -4.087*** |
| | third-year | 3.38 | 0.34 | |

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the positive effects of the strength note program which was longitudinally conducted for 3 years, on self-esteem and self-efficacy of university students by comparing and analyzing the effects. As the result, self-esteem and self-efficacy of university students improved more every year than when the program wasn't implemented. This demonstrates that the strength note program had significant effects on the improvement in self-esteem and self-efficacy of university students throughout 3 years.

Besides, the strength note program was highly effective in improving self-esteem and self-efficacy, continuously for 3 years, and the significant effects continued each year. In conclusion, the strength note program had continued influences on the yearly improvement in self-esteem and self-efficacy of university students.

Most preceding studies^{1,9,13,14} revealed that views or perceptions on the positive parts of university students improved self-acceptance, and this self-acceptance had a positive correlation with self-esteem and life satisfaction. In addition, students with higher self-esteem and self-efficacy adapted to university life better and it supported the study findings. Even the study by Gang, Gyeong-hee et al.¹⁵, supports this finding by revealing that self-esteem influenced depression and stress of collage students.

As stated above, these study results emphasize the necessity of the strength note program for improving self-esteem and self-efficacy of university students and a specific and active intervention for this is required. Therefore, there is a need to provide a systematic strength note program to help in getting over diverse problems of university students, such as negative thoughts about themselves, maladaptation to university life, a lack of confidence about studies, skeptical thoughts about personal relationships and lives, psychological depression and anxiety which result from a shortage of self-esteem and self-efficacy. It is considered that this will help mental health, academic achievement and career search of university students and contribute to the enhancement in happiness and the quality of life.

5. Acknowledgment

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