

## Effect of activity-oriented group art therapy on the self-resilience and adaptation of school life maladjusted children to school life

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Activity-oriented group art therapy has been shown to effectively support children experiencing school maladjustment. Beginning with physical play activities, this approach reduces group members' tension, stimulates curiosity, and encourages creative expression through guided media exploration. The integrated process, which involves completing creative work, promotes positive emotions such as achievement and satisfaction, and facilitates emotional release, thereby enhancing vitality. This method positively affects school adaptation by strengthening components of self-resilience, such as forming peer intimacy and improving interpersonal relationships and adaptability.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to examine the effects of activity-oriented group art therapy on self-resilience and school life adaptation among children experiencing difficulties adapting to school.

**Methods:** We included six elementary school students in A city who demonstrated maladjustment to school life. The intervention consisted of eight weekly group art therapy sessions conducted from July 2025 to August 2025.

**Tools and Techniques:** We used student self-resilience and school life adaptation scales as research tools. Data collected before and after the program were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed rank test.

**Results:** The study showed that activity-oriented group art therapy led to statistically significant improvements in the overall self-resilience scores and all subdomains among children with school life maladjustment. Second, children who participated in activity-oriented group art therapy demonstrated improved adaptation to school life.

**Conclusion:** These findings suggest that activity-oriented group art therapy may serve as an effective intervention by enhancing self-resilience and positively affecting school life adaptation in children who are not adapted to school life.

**Keywords:** Activity-oriented group art therapy, school life maladjusted children, self-resilience

### 1. Introduction

Children who enter elementary school after infancy spend significant time in the school environment, which supports their psychological, physical, and social development (Park Eun-sun, 2005). Successful adaptation to school life enables children to develop into well-adjusted adults who follow rules and norms, meet their needs harmoniously, maintain positive interpersonal relationships within the school, improve academic performance, and form desirable behavioral characteristics, including healthy peer and teacher relationships (Kim Jung-hwa, Kim Eon-ju, 2006).

Conversely, maladjustment among students can lead to ongoing conflicts with teachers and peers because of negative behaviors that violate school rules, and may be a primary cause of disciplinary actions such as unauthorized early departure, unexcused absences, running away, and suspension. Continued maladjustment to school life can also result in accumulated hostility, fear, and a sense of failure in competition, which may lead to extreme outcomes, including school violence, emotional disorders, and, in severe cases, suicide (Lee Byung-hwan, Kang Dae-gu, 2014).

According to the recent results of the "2024 Basic Education Statistics Survey" by the Korea Education Development Institute (2024), there are 2,495,005 elementary school students in 2024, with 17,465 (0.7%) experiencing a rapid increase in school interruption. This trend indicates a need for active social measures.

However, self-resilience is emphasized as a key factor in interventions that support children experiencing school maladjustment in adapting to school life. Children with high self-resilience demonstrate confidence, actively engage in school and social activities, show curiosity and creativity, and express appropriate empathy in peer and interpersonal relationships. They also exhibit cognitive competence and display flexible, integrated responses in stressful situations (Lee Eun-mi, 2002). Recent evidence has shown that activity-oriented group art therapy is effective in enhancing self-resilience. Piaget argued that language-based cognitive programs are often unengaging and difficult for children to concentrate on because they do not find them enjoyable. He further noted that younger children are more comfortable and expressive with physical activities, and that their adaptation to such activities leads to improved natural self-resilience through play or other forms of engagement (Lee Jong-moon, 1999). Activity-oriented group art therapy, which incorporates accessible physical activities, provides children with enjoyment and interest, reduces tension, and promotes a sense of stability. Initial resistance to the art media often shifts to curiosity, allowing children to become absorbed in creative tasks. This immersion encourages a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, supports creative expression, and builds positive group dynamics, including trust and emotional safety. As a result, children are able to express their feelings more freely, develop closer peer relationships, improve emotional regulation, and increase adaptability. These

findings indicate that activity-oriented group art therapy programs are effective in supporting children who struggle to adapt to school life by improving their self-resilience.

Self-resilient children adapt well to various adverse environments, exhibit more stable personalities and lower anxiety levels, and demonstrate traits that facilitate environmental adaptation. They possess resources to restore and manage their internal strength, enabling them to address their needs in school and engage positively with teachers and peers (Lee Myung-sook, Lee Kyu-min, 2009). Self-resilience serves as a protective mechanism that supports successful adaptation when children encounter developmental risk factors. It is acquired and developed over time, and research shows that psychological interventions can improve self-resilience in children during self-development (Lee Sun-young, 2008).

Therefore, this study aims to empirically examine how activity-oriented group art therapy affects self-resilience and school life adaptation in children who have not adapted to school life. The study seeks to identify effective intervention measures for the psychological development and positive school adaptation of these children, and to provide foundational data for developing future support programs for school life-maladjusted children within educational settings.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Subject of Study

This study included first-year elementary school children in A-si, Korea, who experienced maladjustment to school life. The participants initially exhibited lethargy at school, and 12 children recommended for group counseling by their homeroom teachers due to issues such as rule violations, academic difficulties, and challenges in teacher-peer relationships were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. Selection criteria required that participants had no resistance to activity-oriented group art therapy and agreed to participate. The group art therapy program was conducted once or twice per week, for a total of eight sessions, each lasting 1–2 minutes, from July 2025 to August 2025. Table 1 presents the general characteristics of the study participants.

[Table 1] General Information of the Participants

Subject of study	Age (Gender)	Grade	General characteristic
A	8 (Female)	1	Dismissal in class, violation of school rules, and difficulties in peer relationships
B	8 (Female)	1	Frequent tardiness and absence, poor academic performance, and difficulties in peer relationships
C	8 (Female)	1	Out of office in class, violating school rules, and frequently arguing with peers
D	8 (Male)	1	Frequently lying down in class, poor academic performance, and difficulties in peer relationships
E	8 (Male)	1	Frequent absences, inability to concentrate on classes, difficulties in peer relationships
F	8 (Male)	1	A teacher's scolding, school rules violation, and poor academic performance

### 2.2 Research Tool

#### 2.2.1 Self-resilience

In this study, we used 40 questions developed for elementary school students by Park Eun-hee (1997), based on the research of O'connell-Higgins (1983) and Block and Kremen (1996), to assess self-resilience. The scale comprises 40 items: 8 on interpersonal relationships, 8 on emotional control, 8 on curiosity, and 8 on optimism. Each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "not at all" to "very much." The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the self-resilience scale in this study was .718.

#### 2.2.2 Life Satisfaction

In this study, we used a questionnaire originally developed by Lim Jeong-soon (1993) and later revised by Kim Kyung-sook (2005). The questionnaire consists of 16 items: 4 on teacher relations, 4 on companionship, 4 on school classes, and 4 on school rules, designed to assess adaptation to school life. The school life adaptation scale uses a four-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much." The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the school life adaptation scale in this study was .719.

**2.3 Research Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of talc-centered group art therapy on self-resilience and school life adaptation among children with school maladjustment. First-year students at A elementary school were informed about the program’s purpose and procedures, and six children who volunteered were selected as participants. These children participated in an activity-oriented group art therapy program consisting of eight sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, held once or twice weekly from July 2025 to August 2025. To assess the effects of the therapy, we administered self-resilience and school life adaptation tests before and after the program to examine changes.

**2.4 Activity-oriented group art therapy**

**2.4.1 Program Configuration**

The program implemented in this study was adapted from the self-resilience program developed by Jegal Sun-ah (2016, 2020), as well as Jegal Sun-ah and Han Jin-deok (2025). The initial stage (sessions 1–2) included activities such as creating aliases, making name tags, introducing oneself to group members, and sharing in the first session to promote intimacy and stimulate curiosity. In the second session, participants engaged in a group drawing activity on a large electronic painting paper to support emotional stability and encourage free self-expression by releasing negative emotions. The mid-term stage (sessions 3–4) focused on emotional relief and communication training to enhance vitality and positive energy. In the third session, participants identified and expressed their internal feelings, then used a game involving rock, paper, scissors to determine the order for expressing both negative and positive words on the blackboard, with the goal of recognizing and articulating a range of emotions. The fourth session involved drawing a target on a blackboard and throwing ceramic clay at it to stimulate interest, address emotions, and facilitate exploring the properties of the clay. After the game, participants practiced emotional regulation by shaping the clay into a spoon and chopsticks, preparing the pieces for the initial firing, and connecting this process to the completion of their work through self-control. In the fifth and sixth sessions, we aimed to support emotional regulation and enhance interpersonal relationships. The fifth session focused on training participants to express desires and emotions freely by drawing a mandala on a paper plate. In the sixth session, participants engaged in activities designed to promote self-understanding and positive self-esteem, painting the initial spoon and chopsticks with ceramic paint as part of a group project. The closing stage, comprising the seventh and eighth sessions, focused on optimism and achievement. In the seventh session, participants drew a wish tree, collaborating to complete the artwork, express creativity, support positive energy, and write wish letters to attach as tree fruits. The eighth session aimed to conclude the program with a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and positive support for self-growth by displaying all works produced throughout the sessions. The structure of the activity-oriented group art therapy program is presented in Table 2.

**[Table 2] Program Details**

Phase	Goal	Session	Subject	Content and Method	Material
Early	Forming intimacy and exploring curiosity	1	Creating a name tag with aliases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Orientation</li> <li>- Aliasing</li> <li>- Decorate the name with a pen and draw a picture frame</li> <li>- Introduce yourself</li> <li>- Setting the rules for group activities</li> </ul>	Name tags, color tools, paper, canvas frames, etc.
		2	Drawing doodles on batteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Putting up a desk and putting a battery on it and doodling on it</li> <li>- Share your feelings about the work after the work is completed</li> <li>- Stress relief, emotional stability, and free self-expression</li> </ul>	Battery, crayons, scotch tape
Mid-term	Vitality Positive Energy	3	Finding the emotions in me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expressing emotions on a blackboard</li> <li>- Expressing good/bad emotions in a picture</li> <li>- Share your feelings about the work after the work is completed</li> <li>- Relieve tension, induce interest, express empathy, and freely express yourself</li> </ul>	Blackboard, macapen
		4	Making a spoon holder with ceramic soil and bake it in the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A game of hitting the target with ceramic clay on the blackboard</li> <li>- Making cutlery saucers with ceramic clay and baking them in the beginning</li> <li>- Share your feelings about the work after</li> </ul>	Blackboard, ceramic clay, ceramic paint, brushes, etc

Finish	Emotional control and interpersonal relationships	5	beginning	the work is completed - Emotional relief, empathetic self-expression, communication training	
			Drawing mandala	- Making a mandala drawing on a paper plate - Share your feelings about the work after the work is completed - Free expression of desire, training on how to express one's emotions	Ceramic brushes, bottles paints, water
	Optimism and Sense of accomplishment	6	Four-time ceramic cutlery support primary work Coloring	- In the 4th session, I used ceramic paint on the first base - Draw a picture and become a conglomerate - Share your feelings about the work after the work is completed - Self-understanding, positive self-esteem	Ceramic cutlery support, ceramic paint, brush, pallet, water bottle
			Shaking wish tree	- Drawing a tree on an all-terrain painting - writing a wish letter on a fruit drawing - Promote satisfaction, positivity, and sense of accomplishment in the work	Battery canvas, paint, crayons, etc.
8	an exhibition of works	- Exhibiting exhibition works in the central corridor - Promote satisfaction, positivity, and sense of accomplishment in the work - Wrap it up	A previous work		

**2.5 Data Analysis**

This study aimed to investigate the effect of activity-oriented group art therapy on self-resilience and school life adaptation among children who are maladapted to school life. We analyzed the data using SPSS 24.0. Because the sample size did not meet the assumptions required for parametric statistics, we used a nonparametric test that does not assume a normal distribution. The specific data analysis methods used for each research question are described below.

First, we conducted self-resilience assessments before and after the activity-oriented group art therapy to examine its effectiveness, analyzing the results using the Wilcoxon signed rank test. Second, we administered school life assessments before and after the program to evaluate its effectiveness, with results also analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed rank test.

**3. Results**

**The Effect of Activity-oriented Group Art Therapy on Self-Resilience of Children Adapted to School Life**

To examine the effect of activity-oriented group art therapy on the self-resilience of school maladjusted children, we administered a self-resilience test before and after the program. The results are presented in Table 3.

**[Table 3] Pre- and post-test results for self-resilience**

Sub-factor	Group	N	Pre M	SD	Post M	SD	- RANK(n)	+ RANK(n)	Ties	Z	p
interpersonal relationship	Experiment	8	2.50	.36	3.50	.45	.00(0)	4.50(8)	0	-2.527*	.012
	Control	8	2.27	.14	2.33	.13	1.50(1)	2.83(3)	4	-1.300	.194
Vitality	Experiment	8	2.48	.36	3.41	.41	.00(0)	4.50(8)	0	-2.549*	.011
	Control	8	2.36	.39	2.27	.37	4.00(5)	4.00(2)	1	-1.023	.306
Emotional control	Experiment	8	2.38	.31	3.34	.88	.00(0)	4.50(8)	0	-2.375*	.018
	Control	8	2.41	.26	2.41	.28	3.50(3)	3.50(3)	2	.000	1.000
Curiosity	Experiment	8	2.52	.29	3.61	.52	.00(0)	4.50(8)	0	-2.521*	.012
	Control	8	2.42	.15	2.39	.21	3.60(5)	5.00(2)	1	-.702	.483
optimism	Experiment	8	2.23	.16	3.19	.19	.00(0)	4.50(8)	0	-2.530*	.011
	Control	8	2.31	.27	2.47	.37	3.25(2)	4.30(5)	1	-1.279	.201
the entire	Experiment	8	2.41	.24	3.41	.41	.00(0)	4.50(8)	0	-2.524*	.012
	Control	8	2.33	.13	2.37	.14	3.17(3)	5.30(5)	0	-1.198	.231

\*p < .05

Analysis of college life adaptation sub-factors showed statistically significant differences in pre- and post-test scores for social adaptation ( $Z = -2.047, p < .05$ ), emotional adaptation ( $Z = -2.692, p < .01$ ), and physical adaptation ( $Z = -2.003, p < .05$ ). Overall college life adaptation also showed a statistically significant difference ( $Z = -2.670, p < .01$ ). In contrast, academic adaptation ( $Z = -0.957, p > .05$ ) and college attachment ( $Z = -1.053, p > .05$ ) showed no statistically significant differences between pre- and post-test scores among students with disabilities.

As described above, collage-oriented group art therapy positively affects social, emotional, physical, and college life adaptation among college students with disabilities.

**The Effect of Activity-oriented Group Art Values on School Life of Children Adapted to School Life**

To examine the effect of activity-oriented group art therapy on the school life of children with school maladjustment, we conducted a school life test before and after the program. The results are presented in Table 4.

**[Table 4] Pre- and post-mean and standard deviation for school life adaptation test**

Sub-factor	Group	N	Pre		Post		- RANK (n)	+ RANK (n)	Ties	Z	p
			M	SD	M	SD					
teacher relationship	Experiment	6	1.71	.40	3.13	.26	.00(0)	3.50(6)	0	-2.214*	.027
	Control	6	2.17	.34	2.08	.30	3.33(3)	2.50(2)	1	-.707	.480
friendship	Experiment	6	2.50	.47	3.29	.19	.00(0)	3.50(6)	0	-2.214*	.027
	Control	6	2.04	.29	2.17	.26	4.50(1)	2.63(4)	1	-.828	.408
a school class	Experiment	6	1.83	.30	3.17	.20	.00(0)	3.50(6)	0	-2.214*	.027
	Control	6	2.13	.44	2.04	.19	2.17(3)	3.50(1)	2	-.557	.557
school rules	Experiment	6	2.33	.41	3.50	.45	.00(0)	3.50(6)	0	-2.214*	.027
	Control	6	2.29	.33	2.33	.34	4.00(1)	2.00(3)	2	-.378	.705
the entire	Experiment	6	2.09	.22	3.27	.13	.00(0)	3.50(6)	0	-2.207*	.027
	Control	6	2.16	.20	2.16	.20	2.33(3)	4.00(2)	1	-.138	.890

\* $p < .05$

Analysis of school life adaptation sub-factors showed statistically significant differences between pre- and post-tests in the experimental group for teacher relationships ( $Z = -2.214, p < .05$ ), companionship ( $Z = -2.214, p < .05$ ), school classes ( $Z = -2.214, p < .05$ ), and school rules ( $Z = -2.214, p < .05$ ). Additionally, overall school life adaptation showed a statistically significant difference in the experimental group between pre- and post-tests ( $Z = -2.207, p < .05$ ).

**4. Discussion**

This study aimed to investigate the effect of activity-oriented group art therapy on self-resilience and school life adaptation among children who were maladapted to school life. We conducted eight weekly 90-minute sessions from July to August 2025 with six children identified as maladapted to school life. We compared results using a student self-resilience test and a school life adaptation test administered before and after the intervention. The following discussion and conclusions are based on these results.

First, the overall self-resilience score of children with school life maladjustment who participated in activity-oriented group art therapy significantly improved. These results are consistent with those of Jegal Sun-ah and Han Jin-deok (2025), who found that self-resilience increased after implementing a self-resilience program for children with school life maladjustment, and that subjective self-resilience significantly improved among children at local children's centers following the program.

First, we found statistically significant results in the interpersonal relationship area. During the activity, one group member played a dart game by throwing ceramic clay at a target. When the clay slipped and fell outside the target, the member screamed, and the group laughed together as they watched the member receive zero points. This positive change in the interpersonal area reflects increased cohesion, as group members experienced fellowship and stability and promoted communication through the game activity. These findings are consistent with the results of Jegal Sun-ah and Han Jin-deok (2025).

In the area of vitality, children who initially worked without words, interacted with the media, and appeared awkward at the beginning of the session reported that sharing the media and playing with friends was enjoyable. This observation aligns with Choi Hye-mi (2015), who found that discussing school experiences and personal stories led to increased vitality, as evidenced by more frequent language expressions and brighter facial expressions.

During the ceramic-making session focused on emotional control, I initially felt uncomfortable because the clay stuck to my hands and felt cold. However, consistent with the findings of Jegal Sun-ah and Han Jin-deok (2025), engaging in activities such as applying and cutting ceramic clay relieved stress and reduced negative emotions. The flexibility of the

clay allowed for free deformation, and participants reported feeling comfortable and excited while creating their works. In the process of curiosity, the use of game activities to explore media aligns with Yasuhiro Yamanaka (2005), who found that positive interactions with media stimulate curiosity and that the process of creating a work can be both therapeutic and engaging, encouraging immersion in production.

This finding aligns with those of Choi Young-hee and Lee Mi-ok (2004), who reported that art therapy programs using accessible and enjoyable media provided emotional stability by offering comfort, encouraging positive expectations for self-expression, and promoting optimism, which enabled participants to fully express their creativity and complete their works.

These results indicate that activity-oriented group art therapy incorporating play promoted positive engagement. Participants created artworks driven by curiosity about the media, experienced comfortable emotions through group play, communicated with others while discussing their work, and expressed emotions freely. As group cohesion increased, participants developed optimistic expectations for their work, which was associated with a significant change in self-resilience.

Second, in the area of teacher relations—a sub-area of school life adaptation for children who have participated in activity-oriented group art therapy programs—counselors contributed to the development of reliable relationships by supporting cooperation among group members and helping change negative perceptions of teachers. This finding aligns with the results of Jegal Sun-ah (2020), which indicate that positive relationships formed during group counseling activities were naturally transferred to and influenced communication with teachers.

At the start of the program, group members reported reluctance to attend because they felt awkward and uncomfortable. This observation aligns with the findings of Jegal Sun-ah (2020), who reported that engaging in games and creating art with group members was enjoyable and contributed to the development of friendships, which in turn affected the expansion of interpersonal relationships.

In the school class setting, our findings align with those of Lee Geum-hwa (2017), who reported that negative emotions and attitudes in class, as well as negative perceptions of teachers, shifted to positive perceptions. This change positively affected students' adaptation to school life through group experiences of producing and completing media works.

In the initial session of the program in the school rule area, children meeting for the first time appeared awkward, showed little interest in work activities due to tension and resistance, delayed starting tasks, and were passive during activities. However, after the activities, they reported having a good time. We also observed that, following the activities, the children organized the media tools they had used and returned them to their original places, demonstrating increased order. These observations align with the findings of Jegal Sun-ah (2016), who reported that group cohesion increased, order was internalized, and children became more attentive to and supportive of others' emotions, which positively affected adaptation to school life in the school rule area.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, activity-oriented group art therapy positively affected self-resilience and school adaptation among children who had difficulty adjusting to school life. These results align with Koo Ja-eun (2000), who found that individuals with higher self-resilience positively affect school adaptation.

This study has several limitations and offers suggestions for future research. First, group art therapy programs should be further developed to help children who struggle to adjust to school life participate more actively and develop into capable members of society. In addition to art therapy, diverse and systematic group counseling programs should be created to support self-growth and enhance adaptability in school settings. Future research should include empirical quantitative and qualitative studies to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions.

Second, this study empirically verified the effectiveness of the activity-oriented group art therapy program in enhancing self-resilience and school life adaptation among children who have difficulty adapting to school. However, a limitation is that the study was conducted only with elementary school children in A city. Therefore, to further verify the program's effectiveness, additional research is needed on intervention methods that support adaptation in various regions and schools.

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