

Effect Of Cognitive Restructuring Technique On Fear Tendency Among Secondary School Students In Owerri Municipal Council Of Imo State

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Abstract: This study investigated the Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Fear Tendency among Secondary School Students in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 guided this study. Quasi-experimental research design was adopted for this study. The population for this study was a total of 468 (SS2) students that have fear tendency from all public Secondary Schools in Owerri Municipal. Research sample consisted of 56 students with the highest pretest mean scores of fear tendency measuring instrument from the two co-educational schools selected through purposive sampling technique. The Fear Tendency Detecting Instrument (FTDI) was the instrument used for data collection. Data collected from the study were analysed using mean and ANCOVA. Results obtained from the study indicated that cognitive restructuring technique was significantly effective in reducing fear tendency among the students. The results equally showed that cognitive restructuring technique was more effective in reducing fear tendency among the female participants than their male counterpart. However, the difference in the reduction of students' fear tendency was not significant based on gender. The researchers recommended, among others, that cognitive restructuring technique should be adopted by school counsellors as an effective means of controlling fear tendency among their students.

Keywords: Cognitive Restructuring, Counsellor, Fear Tendency, Secondary School,

1. Introduction

Worldwide, education has been accepted as the necessary tool for effective human development and positive change in the society. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why every country including Nigeria would want to do everything possible to ensure that her citizens are educated. For instance, the main objective of education in Nigeria is to achievement full development of students through providing proper conditions for them to reach the highest level of academic achievement, so as to become productive members of the society. However, some students still exhibit maladaptive behaviours which hinder the achievement of this noble objective. One of the maladaptive behaviours that hinder the full development of students in Nigeria, and Imo state in particular is fear tendency. Fear may be defined as an unpleasant sensation caused by nearness of danger or pain. Anagbogu and Nwokolo [1] simply defined fear as the situation that frightens one and makes one to run away when there is danger. Bufka, Barlow and David [2] viewed fear as an emotional state in which individuals feel uneasy, apprehensive or anxious. Similarly, Ipem, Odeigah and Cooley [3] defined fear as a type of emotional problem which is a response to a threatening stimulus. Ekwe and Nwamuo [4] defined fear as a reaction to an object identifiable with specific danger. To them, fear may take the form of flight or fight to defend or preserve self.

Haber [5] explained that fear results to a feeling of impending threat in which the specific nature of the danger is often clearly perceived. Fear tendency leads to a painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an issue, event or object associated with danger [6]. However, in the context of this study, fear is defined as the feelings of apprehension about tangible and predominately realistic dangers while fear tendency is defined as the predisposition to the feelings of apprehension about tangible and predominately realistic dangers. It is the feeling of uneasiness, nervousness or worry that something bad will happen. Fear tendency provokes individuals to react rapidly, almost instinctively, in the face of perceived danger. It can be present in higher or lower degrees in different individuals. Though fear may sometimes be considered as a rational reaction to danger eliciting stimulus, that notwithstanding, when fear is present in excess, it becomes a problem and its consequences severely devastating. Furthermore, various studies have shown that students with fear tendency usually exhibit characteristics which make it difficult for them to adjust well both in school and in the society [7]. For instance, they are phlegmatic and as such are usually cold, aloof, calm, detached, emotional, quiet, withdrawn, and dependent [8]. Orubu [9] also observed that students with fear tendency are restrained, inhibited, secretive, self-conscious, afraid of people, and happiest in small enclosed areas. Fear causes heart palpitation, sweating,

trembling, dryness of throat, slip of tongue, blushing, urinary urgency and nausea. Fearful students are characterized with vocal restraint, hyper-attentionability, unpredictability of attitude, poor sleep habits, verbal mental cleavage, and introversion [10]. In fact, fear tendency is socially disturbing, subjectively distressing, academically distracting and psychologically handicapping. Students with fear tendency are often anxious, depressed, agitated and may suffer from insomnia, loss of appetite, head ach, and so on. Moreso, research has shown that fear causes poor academic achievements and performance among students [11]. For instance, students with fear may avoid self-presentation in the classroom whenever possible because of a fear of negative experiences. Martin and Marsh [12] noted that fear is often associated with anxiousness, underachievement, reduced resilience, and in some cases may lead students to learned helplessness. Williams, Jamieson and Hollingsworth [13] emphasized that fear tendency may result to procrastination, impossibility of high goals, and nonperformance. Students who exhibit fear tendency feel apprehensive over academic tasks. Consequently, many factors have been implicated as triggers of fear tendency among students. These include past failure, broken homes, bad treatment and rejection by significant others, disabilities and health challenges, low socio-economic status, sibling maltreatment, peer bullying and rejection. According to Ajileye [14] fear tendency may result from child abuse, unfavourable relationship with parents, siblings, peers and teachers, among others. For example, children from chaotic homes are more likely to develop fear. Such children may feel rejected and worthless. In the vein, sibling maltreatment, sexual abuse and bullying may also lead to fear tendency among students. Again, classroom climate has been found as a determinant of fear tendency among students. Gaurdino and Fullerton [15] observed that students feel secured if the classroom climate is open and democratic. If students are treated fairly and are free to express their opinions during class discussions, they will be less likely to develop fear. Bucholz and Sheffler [16] believed that a positive classroom climate, free from threat such as bullying discourages fears and encourages assertiveness and creative thinking among students. Negative experiences in relationships with teachers, classmates and peers may trigger fear and inhibit classroom engagement and participation in the classroom. Also, students may not be able to think well in a harsh, threatening situation or even in a subtly intimidating environment where group pressure makes independent thinking unlikely. Students with fear tendency may experience an array of emotions including; humiliation, alienation, frustration, boredom, depression, anxiety and dejection. These emotional experiences make academic success highly unattainable and could consequently jeopardize their educational pursuit. Njoku and Ikpeazu [17] emphasized that students with fear tendency tend to drop out of school because of low ambition and poor academic performance. Fear disturbs students physically, socially, psychologically and academically [18]. Since fear tendency results to serious problems, there is a great need to explore special treatment techniques that will help students build more self-enhancing personality so as to achieve adequate psychological adjustment both in school and the society. The present researchers therefore were motivated to determine the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on fear tendency among secondary school students. Cognitive restructuring technique (CRT) is a behaviour change technique that deals with the

potential effect of clients' attribution on the change and maintenance of behaviour. According to Abodike, Nkechi and Ebenebe [19] cognitive restructuring is a cognitive behaviour therapy that aims at modifying distorted thinking patterns. It is based on the assumption that certain maladaptive behaviours are caused by unrealistic expectations. Mujtaba [20] defined cognitive restructuring is a counselling process of learning to identify and dispute irrational or maladaptive thoughts. It is a useful technique for understanding what lies behind negative moods. Eneasator and Umezulike [21] viewed cognitive restructuring as a re-education of clients which involves changing the way clients think or adhere to certain maladaptive beliefs. Previous researches have shown that cognitive restructuring technique is an effective treatment technique for modifying some other maladaptive behaviours among students [22,23,20]. They also noted the gender difference in the effect of cognitive restructuring technique. For instance, Frojan, Calero & Montano [24] found that female participants benefited more from cognitive restructuring technique than the males, while in the contrary, Mujtaba [20] reported that cognitive restructuring technique treatment is significantly effective on males than females. Since cognitive restructuring technique have been found to be effective in treating some other maladaptive behaviours, it is important to determine its effects on fear tendency. During cognitive restructuring process, the primary objective of the therapist is to help clients to perceive environmental stimuli more accurately so that realistically dangerous situations are clearly differentiated from those where the source of harm is purely imaginary. By so doing, clients are placed in a better position to gain more understanding of themselves and their environment so as to turn around their maladaptive thinking pattern. Despite all efforts made by various stakeholders to curb fear among students, the problem still remains a source of worry and concern to students, parents, caregivers, counsellors, teachers and other stakeholders. Moreso, there is paucity in literature on the practical use of counselling techniques in handling students with fear tendency. This problem and dearth in literature therefore motivated the researchers to embark on this study so as to determine the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on fear tendency among students in Imo state. Moreso, previous researches have indicated that gender significantly correlates with fear. For instance, Mills [25] reported that girls are more likely to exhibit fear tendency than boys. In the same vein, female students have shown to be more fearful than their male counterpart [26,27]. In the contrary, Arrindell [28] found that male students indicated high level of fear than their female counterpart.

1.1 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions and null hypotheses:

- What are the differences in the Pre-test and Post-test fear tendency mean scores of students treated with cognitive restructuring technique (CRT) and those in the control group?
- What are the differences in the Pre-test and Post-test fear tendency mean scores of male and female students treated with cognitive restructuring technique?

1.2 Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference in the Pre-test and Post-test fear tendency mean scores of students treated with CRT and those in the conventional counselling group.
- There is no significant difference in the Pre-test and Post-test fear tendency mean scores of male and female students treated with CRT.

2. Method

This adopted the pretest-posttest quasi experimental research design. Nworgu [29] described quasi experiment as an experiment where random assignment of subjects to experimental and control groups is not possible. The population of the study comprised four hundred and sixty-eight (468) SS2 students that have fear tendency in all public secondary schools in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State, who were identified by the school counsellors, class prefects and form teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select 56 students from the two co-educational secondary schools that had the highest number of students with fear tendency. Thus,

30 (13 males and 17 females) students formed the experimental group, while 26 (11 males and 15 females) students formed the control group. The instrument used for data collection in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire titled Fear Tendency Detecting Instrument (FTDI). The FTDI comprised an introductory part "section A" that solicited the bio-data of the respondents such as gender, while the "section B" was designed to detect students with fear tendency. The instrument contains a total of 20 items with both direct and reverse scoring pattern (for instance items 2, 6, 11, 12, 17 and 19 are reversed). The face validity of the instrument was established by three experts in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri. A pilot study was carried out using 20 participants with an interval of two weeks. Data collected using the test-retest method were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation method which yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.83$. The data collected were analysed using mean scores to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 significant level.

3. Results

Table 1: Pretest and Posttest fear tendency mean scores of students treated with cognitive restructuring technique and those in the control group (Norm = 34.50)

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Lost Mean	Remark
Cognitive restructuring	30	63.83	27.93	35.90	Effective
Control group	26	61.69	59.73	1.96	

Table 1 reveals that the students treated with cognitive restructuring technique had pretest mean score of 63.83 and posttest mean score of 27.93 with lost mean of 35.90 in their fear tendency, while those in the control group had pretest mean score of 61.69 and posttest mean score of 59.73 with lost mean of 1.96. With posttest mean score of 27.93 which is below the norm of 34.50, cognitive restructuring technique is effective on fear tendency among the students.

Table 2: Pretest and Posttest fear tendency mean scores of male and female students treated with cognitive restructuring technique (Norm = 34.50)

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Lost Mean	Remark
Male	13	61.00	29.62	31.38	Difference
Female	17	66.00	26.65	39.35	

Table 2 indicates that male students treated with cognitive restructuring technique had pretest mean score of 61.00 and posttest mean score of 29.62 with a lost mean of 31.38, while female students in the group had pretest mean score of 66.00 and posttest mean score of 26.65 with lost mean of 39.35. This shows that cognitive restructuring technique was more effective in reducing fear tendency among the female students than their male counterpart.

Table 3: ANCOVA on the pretest and posttest fear tendency mean scores of students treated with cognitive restructuring technique and those in the control group.

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	P value	P ≤ 0.05
Corrected Model	14086.070	2	7043.035			
Intercept	1778.777	1	1778.777			
Pretest	3.213	1	3.213			
Treatment model	13765.912	1	13765.912	129.458	0.00	S
Error	5635.769	53	106.335			
Total	121809.000	56				
Corrected Total	19721.839	55				

Table 3 shows that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 55df denominator, the calculated F is 129.46 with Pvalue of 0.00 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on the fear tendency scores of secondary school students is significant.

Table 4: ANCOVA on the posttest fear tendency mean scores of male and female students treated with cognitive restructuring technique

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	P value	P ≤ 0.05
Corrected Model	116.979	2	58.489			
Intercept	119.679	1	119.679			
Pretest	52.071	1	52.071			
Treatment model	98.227	1	98.227	2.29	0.14	NS
Error	1158.888	27	42.922			
Total	24684.000	30				
Corrected Total	24684.000	29				

Table 4 reveals that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 29df denominator, the calculated F is 2.29 with Pvalue of 0.14 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the second null hypothesis is accepted. So, the difference in the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on male and female secondary school students' fear tendency is not significant.

4. Discussion

Effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Secondary School Students' Fear Tendency

The findings of this study revealed that cognitive restructuring technique was significantly effective in reducing fear tendency among secondary school students in the experimental group as compared to those in the control group, in contrast with the first null hypotheses. Particularly, the finding revealed that students in both cognitive restructuring technique and control groups exhibited high level of fear tendency before the commencement of the study as measured by their scores on the pretest. The findings also indicated that the magnitude of the mean difference between the cognitive restructuring technique and control groups was significant in the posttest. This finding is consistent with prior researches that reported that cognitive restructuring technique is an effective treatment technique for modifying some other maladaptive behaviours among students [19,20]. One likely reason for the decrease in fear tendency among students in the cognitive restructuring treatment group than those in the control group might be due to the fear counter conditioning training in which the students were exposed to during the experiment. It important to recall that during the cognitive restructuring treatment, the students were helped to perceive environmental stimuli more accurately so that realistically dangerous situations are clearly differentiated from those where the source of harm is purely imaginary. Perhaps, by so doing, the students gained more understanding of themselves and their environment so as to turn around their maladaptive thinking pattern and overcome their tendency to fear. This may therefore signify that the students' feelings of fear have been gradually replaced with relaxation and self assurance during the cognitive restructuring technique treatment.

Effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Male and Female Secondary School Students' Fear Tendency

Another finding of this study is that cognitive restructuring technique is more effective in reducing fear tendency among the female students than the males. This suggests that although the students were given equal opportunities to participate in the experimental activities and were also given equal attention, the female students still benefited more from cognitive restructuring technique than their male counterpart. This finding supports the previous finding by Abodike, Nkechi, & Ebenebe,[22]; Deacon, Fawzy, Lickel, & Wolitzky-Taylor [23]; Frojan, Calero & Montano [24] who reported that cognitive restructuring technique benefited females than

males. However, this result contradicts previous finding by Mujtaba [20] who reported that cognitive restructuring technique treatment is significantly effective on males than females. Moreso, it is important to note that the gender difference found in this study was not significant. This is because the test of null hypotheses two shows no significant difference in the pretest-posttest fear tendency mean scores of students treated with cognitive restructuring technique based on gender.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that cognitive restructuring technique is an effective therapeutic technique for reducing fear tendency among secondary school students. Therefore, cognitive restructuring technique should be adopted by school counsellors to reduce fear tendency among students. Moreso, cognitive restructuring technique should be used on students' fear tendency irrespective of gender since the difference in the effect of cognitive restructuring technique in reducing students' fear tendency was not significant.

6. Recommendation

Inline with the findings of this study, it was recommended that cognitive restructuring technique should be adopted by school counsellors as a means of controlling fear tendency among their students. Also, that education authorities should be provide school counsellors with an on-the-job training program on cognitive restructuring technique so that they will be more equipped to help students with fear tendency. Moreso, teachers and school counsellors should be more observant so as to be able to dictate students with fear tendency and refer them immediately for counselling. Finally, there should be an established counselling centre manned by professional counsellors so as to take proper care of the psychological wellbeing of students in every school.

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