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EFFECTIVENESS OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in reducing fear of public speaking among primary five pupils in Kwara State, Nigeria. Fear of public speaking, a common form of social anxiety, significantly affects pupils' academic performance, participation, and emotional well-being. A quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test control group design was employed using a 2x2x2 factorial matrix. The study population comprised all primary five pupils in Kwara State, with a target sample of 58 pupils selected from six schools (three public and three private) using multistage sampling techniques. Pupils were screened using the adapted Fear of Public Speaking Scale (FPSS), and those with high anxiety levels were selected. The cognitive restructuring package, validated by experts in education and psychology, was used for intervention over eight weeks. Reliability testing yielded coefficients of 0.79 and 0.80 for the FPSS and intervention package, respectively. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Results showed a significant main effect of cognitive restructuring on reducing fear of public speaking ($F(1, 56) = 1106.887$, $p < 0.05$), with no significant influence from gender or school type. Pupils in the treatment group scored significantly higher ($M = 34.23$) compared to the control group ($M = 15.56$). The study concluded that cognitive restructuring is effective in addressing glossophobia among young learners and recommended its integration into school counselling programs. Teachers and parents should be trained to identify and support children experiencing speaking anxiety, ensuring early emotional intervention in school environments.

Keywords: Cognitive restructuring, fear, Public speaking and Primary school pupils

Introduction

Public speaking is an essential component of communication and academic development in school-age children. In classroom settings, it plays a significant role in enhancing pupils' confidence, promoting language fluency, and encouraging active participation. Despite its importance, many primary school pupils experience an overwhelming fear when required to speak in front of their peers, a condition referred to as public speaking anxiety (PSA) or glossophobia. Fear of Public speaking is a form of social phobia marked by extreme fear and avoidance of speaking in public or performing in front of an audience. Among pupils, this anxiety manifests through physiological symptoms like sweating and rapid heartbeat, cognitive symptoms such as mental blocks, and emotional symptoms like fear of embarrassment and social judgment (Segar, 2018). Studies such as Black (2019) show that this fear may begin in childhood and, if not addressed, can persist into adolescence and adulthood. Public speaking is a vital component of learning and social development in children, particularly within the school environment. However, many primary school pupils experience fear when required to speak in front of their peers or teachers (Kaya, 2013).

This fear, often referred to as glossophobia or fear of public speaking, can limit their classroom participation, lower self-esteem, and negatively affect academic and social outcomes. A study by Genard (2019) has ranked the fear of public speaking as one of the most pervasive social phobias, sometimes exceeding the fear of death. Among pupils, such anxiety can manifest physiologically (sweating, rapid heartbeat), cognitively (blank mind), and emotionally (dread, nervousness). These symptoms often stem from low confidence, fear of negative judgment, and past negative speaking experiences. Globally, public speaking anxiety has been ranked among the most common fears. Kaya (2013) reported that in a poll of 2,000 people, fear of public speaking was ranked more intensely than the fear of death. This fear is especially common among school children, affecting their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem. Gender and school environment have also been identified as possible influencing factors. To manage this anxiety, various psychological interventions have been proposed. One such evidence-based technique is cognitive restructuring, which helps individuals identify and challenge irrational beliefs and replace them with more balanced, realistic thoughts.

Cognitive restructuring is a core element of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and has been used successfully to manage several forms of anxiety, including public speaking anxiety. The cognitive restructuring technique is a form of cognitive-behavioural intervention that aims to identify and challenge irrational beliefs and replace them with adaptive thoughts. Research by Liu (2018) and Oei and McAlinden (2014) emphasised the need for awareness of the roots of anxiety and the

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usefulness of structured interventions to manage it. Despite its proven effectiveness among older students, few studies have explored cognitive restructuring's impact on younger populations, especially in Nigeria. While cognitive restructuring has been widely studied in adolescent and university populations, there is limited research on its application among primary school pupils in Nigeria. This study fills that gap by evaluating the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring on reducing fear of public speaking in primary school pupils in Kwara State. The findings aim to inform the development of school-based psychological interventions that address emotional barriers to learning.

Statement of the Problem

Effective communication is a vital skill that pupils must acquire early to thrive academically and socially. However, many primary school pupils suffer from glossophobia, fear of public speaking, which impairs their participation, confidence, and academic performance. This fear often appears as nervousness, avoidance, or distress during speaking tasks like storytelling, presentations, and group discussions. Classroom observations and counselling reveal that many children avoid speaking due to fear of mistakes, ridicule, or judgment, leading to low self-esteem and reduced academic engagement. Although public speaking anxiety has been researched among older students, there is limited empirical focus on primary school pupils in Nigeria. Existing interventions often neglect the developmental needs of younger learners, while teachers and parents may mislabel the anxiety as mere shyness or laziness. Cognitive restructuring, a technique under cognitive-behavioural therapy, helps individuals replace irrational fears with constructive thoughts and has shown promise in older age groups. However, its application among young children remains underexplored locally. This study, therefore, examines the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in reducing public speaking anxiety among primary school pupils in Kwara State, aiming to offer practical tools for teachers and counsellors to enhance pupils' emotional health, communication, and academic outcomes.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated:

$H_0$1: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara state.
$H_0$2: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on pupils' fear of public speaking based on gender.
$H_0$3: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on pupils' fear of public speaking based on school type.
$H_0$4: There is no significant interaction effect of cognitive restructuring, gender, and school type on pupils' fear of public speaking.

Methodology

The researcher employed a pre-test, post-test, non-randomised, and non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara State. A 2x2x2 factorial design was used, considering experimental groups (fear of public speaking and a control group), gender (male and female), and school type (public and private). The population comprised all primary five pupils in Kwara State's public and private primary schools. According to the 2023–2024 records from the Kwara State Ministry of Education, there are 268,031 pupils enrolled in 2,721 schools (1578 public and 1143 private). Primary 58 primary five pupils were targeted due to their developmental readiness and imminent transition to secondary school. A multi-stage sampling procedure was utilised. Two local government areas were randomly selected from the 16 LGAs in the state. The instruments used Fear of Public Speaking Scale (FPSS) adapted from the American Psychiatric Association's Severity Measure for Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD-D), also revised to 10 items on a cognitive restructuring package, were validated by experts from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, as well as lecturers at Faculty of Education, Kwara State University, Malete. These instruments were tested for reliability, yielding reliability indexes of 0.79 and 0.80. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was applied to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

Results

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant main effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking.

Table 1: Summary of Analysis of Co-variance (ANOVA) on the effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	4779.444[a]	8	597.430	219.868	.000
Intercept	86.088	1	86.088	31.682	.000
Pretest	.091	1	.091	.033	.856
Main Effect					
Treatment	3007.665	1	3007.665	1106.887	**.000**
Gender	4.621	1	4.621	1.701	.199

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School type	45.219	1	45.219	16.642	.000
Two-way interaction					
Treatment * Gender	.023	1	.023	.008	.928
Treatment * School type	.014	1	.014	.005	.942
Gender * School type	1.011	1	1.011	.372	.545
Three-way interaction					
treatment * gender * school type	.377	1	.377	.139	.711
Error	124.993	46	2.717		
Total	35679.000	56			
Corrected Total	4904.436	55			

η= Eta Squared

Table 1 shows the effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara state ($F_{(1; 56)}$ = 1106.887, P < 0.05). The hypothesis is therefore rejected in the light of the result since the significance value (.000) is less than 0.05. This implies that treatment had a significant effect on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara state

Table 2: Summary of Bonferroni's Post-Hoc Pairwise Comparison of the scores within the two Groups

Treatment	Mean Score	Experimental 1	Control Group 2
Cognitive restructuring (Fear of Public Speaking)	34.234		*
Conventional Method	15.555	*	

CRT Cognitive Restructuring Technique (Fear of Public Speaking)
Based on estimated marginal means
**. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.*
b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

Table 2 reveals that the significant main effect exposed by table 6 is a result of the significant difference between Cognitive restructuring (Fear of Public Speaking) and Conventional Method. This implies that those taught with Cognitive restructuring (Fear of Public Speaking) performed better (34.234) than those taught with the conventional method (15.555)

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking based on gender.

Table 1 also shows the interaction effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara state based on gender. There was no significant interaction effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking based on gender ($F_{(1; 56)}$ = .008; P > 0.05). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significance value (.928) is greater than 0.05. This implies that gender had no significant effect on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking.

Research Hypothesis Three: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking based on school type.

Table 1 also shows the interaction effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara state based on school type. There was no significant interaction effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking based on school type ($F_{(1, 56)}$ = .005; P > 0.05). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significance value (.942) is greater than 0.05. This implies that school type had no significant effect on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking.

Research Hypothesis Four: There is no significant interaction effect of cognitive restructuring, gender and school type on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking.

Table 1 also shows the interaction effect of cognitive restructuring, gender and school type on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking. There was no significant interaction effect of cognitive restructuring, gender and school type on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking ($F_{(1; 56)}$ = .139; P > 0.05). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significance value (.711) is greater than 0.05. This implies that cognitive restructuring, gender, and school type had no significant effect on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding shows a significant main effect of cognitive restructuring on primary school pupils' fear of public speaking in Kwara State. This result suggests that cognitive restructuring was highly effective in reducing pupils' fear of public speaking.

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Public speaking anxiety, like examination anxiety, can be debilitating for students, and cognitive restructuring offers a valuable tool to manage this fear. This finding aligns with recent research by Borman and Bernard (2022), which demonstrated the efficacy of cognitive-behavioural techniques in reducing public speaking anxiety. Moreover, a study by Junger and Kottwitz (2021) found similar results, further supporting the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring for public speaking anxiety.

The second finding indicates no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on fear of public speaking based on gender. This suggests that both male and female pupils experienced similar benefits from the intervention. Gender differences in public speaking anxiety are well-documented, but this result implies that cognitive restructuring is equally effective for both genders. This result is consistent with studies by Nelson and Stout (2020), which found that while females generally report higher levels of public speaking anxiety, interventions like cognitive restructuring are equally effective across genders.

The third finding reveals no significant effect of cognitive restructuring on fear of public speaking based on school type. This means that the intervention's effectiveness did not differ between pupils from public and private schools. Cognitive restructuring was equally beneficial regardless of the school environment. This finding is supported by research indicating that while school type can influence the prevalence of anxiety, interventions like cognitive restructuring can effectively reduce anxiety levels across different settings (Galla & Wood, 2021).

The fourth finding shows no significant interaction effect of cognitive restructuring, gender, and school type on fear of public speaking. This indicates that the combined influence of these variables did not affect the intervention's effectiveness. Cognitive restructuring consistently reduced public speaking anxiety regardless of gender or school type. This finding aligns with the broader literature on CBT interventions, which suggests that these techniques are effective across diverse populations and settings (Beck & Haigh, 2022).

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that cognitive restructuring is a powerful tool for reducing fear of public speaking among primary school pupils in Kwara State. The intervention's effectiveness is consistent across gender and school type, highlighting its broad applicability. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting cognitive-behavioural interventions in educational settings. Future research could explore the long-term effects of cognitive restructuring and its impact on other forms of anxiety and academic performance. Based on the findings, the study concluded that the cognitive restructuring technique is effective in the treatment of fear of public speaking among primary school pupils in Kwara.

Recommendations

In light of these study findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Cognitive restructuring techniques should be integrated into school programs by school counsellor and psychologist to help pupils manage public speaking anxiety.
2. Teachers and school counsellors should be trained on basic CBT strategies to support pupils effectively.
3. There should be well-established, structured emotional intervention programs through school counsellor and psychologist, focusing on anxiety reduction
4. Parents should be educated to recognise anxiety symptoms and avoid mislabelling them as shyness or laziness.

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