

## **EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING ON EXAMINATION PHOBIA AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NSUKKA EDUCATION ZONE, ENUGU STATE**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone Enugu State. Two research questions were posed for the study and one hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.5 level of significance. The study adopted experimental research design. The population comprised 3,400SSII students in 62 secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone while the sample size was 80 students obtained multi-stage sampling procedure. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled Examination Phobia Questionnaire (EPQ) was used as the instrument for data collection. This was validated by experts and with a reliability index of 0.83 obtained through Cronbach Alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used for answering the research questions while ANCOVA was employed in testing the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that assertiveness training technique is effective modification therapy for reducing examination phobia amongst students. It was also found out that gender has significant influence on examination phobia among secondary school students in the area. The study among others recommended the need for teachers to adopt assertiveness training as a technique for helping students to reduce examination phobia in schools and also that agencies of state ministry of education should organize workshops and seminars to sensitize teachers on the potentials of assertiveness training in reducing examination phobia among students.

**Keywords:** Examination, phobia, assertiveness, assertiveness training, gender and reduction

### **Introduction**

For ages, examination has remained the part of educational system and a benchmark for measuring students' abilities. Examination plays a vital role in students' assessment and it is a measure tool for the evaluations of students' performance. Examination is the most common means of evaluating learning achievement among students in various institutions of learning. According to Onuka and Durowoju (2019) examination is a process of evaluating learning improvement to ascertain whether learners have mastered what they have been taught. The authors further stressed that for examination to effectively and accurately measure students' performance, it must essentially be reliable and valid. Reliability, according to them, refers to the consistency of a test in measuring what it intends to measure, while it is valid when it measures what it is purported to measure. Reliability and validity of an examination depends on the extent such an examination meets the criteria for its content and coverage of the area of knowledge being examined. On the other hand, Ejibola (2017) defines examination as the act or process of being examined. In other words, the main purpose of examination is to test achievement, provide goals or incentives for the students and for selection into jobs or higher

education (Akbar, 2016). Operationally, examination is a means of assessment for measuring students' learning outcome in a given subject area.

The basic objective of examination includes assessing students' achievement, providing goals or motivation for the students and selection into jobs or high education with its possible outcome being success or failure. It is noteworthy that the achievement of the laudable objectives of secondary education depends on effective and efficient conduct of examinations. Objective decisions concerning examination outcomes cannot be arrived at without valid and reliable students' results. This is to say that it is essential to ascertain if a student has actually understood what was taught before a decision can be taken on his/her promotion, advancement, graduation, placement or service. Literatures suggest that examination in Nigeria has degenerated to a level that its validity and reliability are being called to question because of the increasing incidence of malpractices at all levels of the nation's education system.

Basically, the secondary education level is geared towards catering for differences in talents, opportunities and providing trained manpower in the applied science, technology through knowledge and skill acquisition for the survival of the individual in the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, [FRN], 2014). The realization of the above objectives hinges on quality of teachers, infrastructure and learning environment, resources inputs, teaching process, classroom management, academic assessment method available in the education system at this level (Ayeni, 2016). The extent to which the above conditions are met goes a long way in determining the quality of the knowledge and skills acquired by the individual learners. Consequently, examination becomes one of the major obstacles facing students at all levels of education. The mere mention of examination creates fears in the minds of the students sometimes because of poor preparation by candidates, poor teaching by teachers or inability of the students to master knowledge of subjects taught (Babalola, 2014). As a result students develop phobia which may have negative effect in their performance in any examination.

Phobia is a concept explained differently by authors. It is seen as an irrational fear in response to a specific situation. Okereke (2014) defines phobia as a special form of fear which may be social or specific in this case, examination phobia. It is a disorder that interferes with normal activities of individuals especially with regards to examination. Examination phobia is one of the students' greatest enemies in the school system. Unachukwu and Onwuka (2015) explain examination phobia as one of the unpleasant events linked to examination. Some school of thought believes that examination phobia is also linked to parental expectations regarding the performance of their wards and the desire of the candidates to meet up with these expectations. However, a phobic student in a difficult state may try anything to survive and excel which includes malpractices or drugs.

In the context of this paper, examination phobia is fear of examination which negatively influences the students and their performance. It may be characterized by shortness of breaths, blank-lens, increased heartbeat, restlessness and sweat on the palm among others. When a student remembers that the society expects him to perform well in order to achieve success in life, he/she resorts to easy way, malpractice. This is because the possible outcome of any examination is success or failure. According to Ilogho (2018), success is positive because it brings joy, glory and praise from teachers and parents while failure brings sorrow, ill-feeling and shame. The scholar further observes that failure goes with unpleasant consequences like conflict between teachers and students, parents and teachers and as such, students try to avoid failure by all means (Oparanozie, 2016). Since examination phobia has negative effects on students, it becomes important to come up with intervention measures to reduce its ugly effect on the personality of students involved in it. Experience has shown that students who suffer from examination phobia end up not performing well in internal and external examination. This disturbing development can be minimized through behaviour intervention or modification some of which include assertiveness training.

Assertiveness training is explained in many ways by different authors. Michelle (2017) defines assertiveness training as a type of therapy that helps individuals learn better to communicate their needs and wants, especially those who tend to be passive when it comes to expressing their needs. Michelle further asserts that assertiveness training can be used in different fields, like medical, education, politics, this shows that assertiveness training enables an individual to express his right at all times without fear of opposition implying that assertiveness training can be seen as an advocate of behavioural change. Assertiveness training is a structural intervention which is used for social relationship improvement, anxiety disorder therapy and phobias in children, teenagers and adults. It is a multi-content method which includes guidance, role playing, feedback, modeling, practice and the review of trained behaviour (Keane, 2018). Assertiveness or disclosure is one of the most crucial social skills which are part of behavioural and interpersonal skills.

It appears therefore that low assertiveness and high anxiety creates educational imbalance, ability witness and decrease in aptitude among students. Alberti and Emmoss (2013) explain assertiveness as behaviour which enables a person to act in his own best interest, stand up for himself without undue anxiety and express his rights without destroying the rights of others. Contextually, assertiveness training is one of the behaviour modification techniques used to reduce or control examination phobia among students. Assertiveness involves general statements of advantageous patterns of human behaviour. Assertive behaviour is explained as socially acceptable statements of emotions and rights. Assertive behaviour is a skill to seek, maintain or enhance reinforcement in an interpersonal situation through an expression of feeling or wants. Assertiveness therefore is a quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive or submissive.

In the field of psychology assertiveness is a skill and a means of communication that can be learned. It is characterized by a confident declaration of a statement that affirms the person's right or point of view without threatening the right of another. Individuals who practice assertiveness live a happy life and less manipulative life as compared to aggressive and submissive individuals. It is a skill which if mastered at the right stage could bring about rich dividends in the future. Assertiveness training helps to increase in the awareness of personal rights. Besides, it also helps in differentiating between assertiveness, submissiveness and aggressiveness (Tannous, 2015). According to the authors, it deals with the teaching on how to set personal boundaries and how to avoid manipulation or abuse through fear. Hence, the best way to deal with the unassertive person is to let him realize his right by creating awareness of how to stand on his right. It is a practical model that teaches and encourages the outward expression of feeling and raising individual self-esteem if adequately applied (Anyamene, Chinyelu & Nneka, 2016).

The technique is based on the principle of social learning theory. Therefore, it cooperates social skill training method in line with the idea that social behaviour could be learned through practice. Assertiveness training could be appropriate intervention mechanisms for examination phobia amongst students irrespective of gender. Gender differences are recurrent issues in the field of research. Gender is related with how individuals perceive themselves in such a way that most people of the same sex identify themselves with certain attributes. These attributes according to Katrin and Marcus (2014) could affect students in their academic activities in schools. For example, males are more likely to describe themselves as independent, achievement oriented, financially oriented, and competitive than females. Females, on the other hand, describe themselves as sociable, moral, dependent, and less assertive. Although boys and girls report similar levels of assertiveness during childhood, a gender gap emerges by adolescence, in that adolescent boys have higher assertiveness than

adolescent girls whose low assertiveness appear to be more vulnerable to perceptions of the ideal body image perpetuated in western media (Katrin & Marcus, 2014).

Research studies have revealed remarkable evidence of the effectiveness and positive outcomes of some behavioural techniques like assertiveness training technique in reducing maladaptive behaviour and developing acceptable behaviours such as self-esteem, conflict resolution, realistic goal setting, self-determination, stress management, (Anyamene, Nwokolo & Ezeani, 2015; Vatankhah, Daryabari, Ghadami & Naderifar, 2013). It becomes very imperative for the researcher as a school guidance counsellor to involve scientifically tested behavioural and cognitive strategies to modify deficiency in behaviour as may be associated with examination phobia. It is against this backdrop that this study determined the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone
2. influence of gender on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

- What is the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone?
- What is the influence of gender on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students exposed to assertiveness training and those are exposed.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant gender difference between on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted quasi-experimental design. Specifically, the non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design was used. This was considered appropriate because intact classes were used which enabled the researcher to avoid disruption of school normal classes. The study was carried out in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State. The population comprised all the 3, 400 senior secondary class two students in all the 62 public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone. The choice of the area for the study was based on the fact that there had been persistent poor reports of students' poor performances in internal and external examination due to examination phobia. A sample of 80 SSII students was drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure. Two schools in Nsukka urban were selected purposively out of the core educational schools in the zone. Each school formed an intact class. The intact classes were further assigned randomly to experimental and control groups respectively.

The validated Examination Phobia Questionnaire (EPQ) was used for data collection. This was a researcher-designed. The questionnaire was divided into two sections namely I and II. Section I elicited information on the demographic data of the respondents while Section II contained 20 structured item statements designed to measure students' examination phobia. It is based on a four-point rating scale of Always-4, Often-3, Sometimes-2 and Never-1 respectively. A reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained for the instrument using Cronbach Alpha method.

The- experimental procedure was carried out thus: To avoid difficulties, the researcher visited six schools that were selected for the study to seek for approval. She met the school authority and the form teachers and counsellors to select the students that would be involved in the study. She explained to the principal the purpose of the study and solicited for approval.

**Phase 1:** The researcher grouped the students into six groups; the control group and the treatment group. Subsequently, she randomly assigned the students into males and females. Specific time for the programme, possible reinforcers for students and preferred snacks was determined also. A code number was assigned to the subjects before the administration of the instrument EPIQ. The code was used for both the pre-test and post-test to avoid altering their individual results.

**Treatment phase:** The behaviour modification training programmes on assertiveness training which lasted for 6 weeks was used for the treatment. Treatment group received counselling using assertiveness training and the programmes of activities was as follows:

1. Week 1 – Orientation
2. Week 2 – What assertiveness training is all about?
3. Week 3 – The use of assertiveness training
4. Week 4 – Assertiveness training, exercise
5. Week 5 – Continuation of week 4
6. Week 6 – Evaluation and termination

**Post-Treatment phase:** The post-treatment phase was carried out after the last session with each of the experimental group. The Examination Phobia Exbition Scale (EPES) was given to the subjects to respond to but was rearranged. Their responses were scored and the results were compared with the pre-test scores of the subjects. From the results, effect of the treatment on the subject was inferred when subjected to statistical analysis. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

The results are presented according to the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study. The results are presented in table below:

**Research Question 1:** What is the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone?

**Table1: Mean and standard deviation of students' scores on the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia of secondary schools students in Nsukka Education Zone**

Method	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Gain
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
Experimental group	40	52.00	2.39	35.00	2.35	17.00
Control group	40	40.40	8.30	40.05	8.76	0.35

Table one shows that the experimental group had a pretest mean score of 52.00 with standard deviation 2.39 and a posttest means score of 35.00 with a standard deviation of 2.35. For the control group, the pretest mean score is 40.40 with standard deviation of 8.30 and a post test mean scores of 40.05 with a stand deviation of 8.76. The experimental group is lower than those of the control group as there was a higher decrease in the posttest means score of the experimental group than those of the control group. This might be as a result of the treatment.

**Research Question 2:** What is the influence of gender on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training?

**Table2: Mean and standard deviation examination phobia scores of male and female students exposed to assertiveness training**

Gender	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Gain
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
Male	22	2.44	0.36	3.20	0.31	0.76
Female	18	2.50	0.35	3.15	0.32	0.65

Result in Table 2 shows that both male and female students in the experimental group had the pretest examination phobia mean scores of 2.44 and 2.50 with standard deviation of 0.36 and 0.35 respectively. Thus, indicating that both and female students in the treatment group were at the same examination phobia level before treatment. However, results in the table shows that the posttest examination phobia means scores of both male and female students in the treatment group were 3.20 and 3.15 with standard deviation of 0.31 and 0.32 respectively. The higher examination phobia means gain score of 0.76 for the male over that of the female group of 0.65 indicates that male students had lightly improved examination phobia for than their female counterparts.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students exposed to assertiveness training and those are exposed.

**Table 3: Analysis of covariance of the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia**

Source	Type III sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	71.30.370 <sup>a</sup>	4	1782.595	245.048	.000
Intercept	19.300	1	19.300	2.664	.108
Pretest	735.663	1	735.661	102.922	.000
Method	5313.633	1	5313.633	733.429	.000
Gender	65.174	1	65.174	8.996	.004
Group * gender	1.643	1	1.643	.227	.636
Error	398.470	75	7.245		
Total	48245.000	80			
Corrected Total	7528.850	79			

The result in Table 3 above shows that the probability associated with the calculated value of (7.33.42) for the effect of assertiveness training on examination phobia among students is .000. Since the probability value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of students due to assertiveness training effect on examination phobia.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant gender difference on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training.

**Table 4: t-test analysis of no significant gender difference on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training**

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	df	t-cal	P	Remark
Male	32	3.25	0.71	38	1.05	0.09	No significant
Female	48	2.60					

The result in table 4 shows that t-cal value is 1.05 and p-value is 0.09. Since the p-value of 0.09 is greater is 0.05 level of significance, this implies that there is no gender significant difference on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training. Therefore, the second null hypothesis of the study is accepted.

## Discussion of Findings

The result of the study indicated differences in the pretest result of the treatment and control groups. These differences in the pretest results provided basis on which it could be assumed reasonably that both the treatment and control groups had an equivalent entry examination phobia at the beginning of the treatment. The overall result indicated that students exposed to treatment using assertiveness training had significant improvement on their examination phobia reduction than those who were not exposed to treatment (control group). This is evidenced by the students' reduction in manifestation of examination phobia. Thus, the students adopted more rational behaviour pattern after being exposed to the treatment using assertiveness training. The above finding is in line with the findings of Anagbogu and Ahiaogu (2019) and Nwadiobi (2011) who in their respective studies reported that assertiveness training is effective in reducing students' examination phobia as a therapy.

The result of the hypothesis of the study as presented in Table 3 revealed that the level of significance was .000 and was less than 0.05 level of significance at which the hypothesis was tested. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result indicated that students exposed to assertiveness training has significant reduction in the examination phobia than those not exposed hence, there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of students due to assertiveness training effect on examination phobia.

The influence of gender on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training was examined in this study. A close look at the result of the post test mean scores for male and female respondents showed that the female students had lower posttest mean score than their male counterparts. However, further analysis revealed no significant gender influence on students' examination phobia when exposed to assertiveness training. This implies that there is no gender difference in the manifestation of examination phobia. The finding above is in consonance with the result of Saha (2012) who reported in his study that examination phobia is caused by different factors of which gender is one. However, the result of this study is contrary with the findings of Okereke (2014) who reported that gender was not a factor in reducing examination phobia among secondary school students using assertiveness training. However, the result shows that all secondary schools students may require counseling using assertiveness training employed in this study.

### **Educational Implications of the Findings**

The result of this study has educational and counseling implication. The study revealed an empirical evidence of the efficacy of assertiveness training in reducing examination phobia among students. This is because, the students exposed to the therapy or treatment improves on their behaviour implying that there was a remarkable reduction in examination phobia by students. The reduction of which was attested by both at pretest and posttest levels. This implies that secondary school students should be provided with detailed information on the behaviour modification technique so as to improve on their examination performances and health in the society. As a result, the technique could be used in schools with a high degree of confidence to reduce examination phobia among students so as to improve low academic performance associated with examination phobia.

### **Conclusion**

From the result and discussion, it was found out that assertiveness training was an effective modification technique for reducing examination phobia among secondary school students. It was also revealed that there was a significant gender difference between male and female students in examination phobia. Thus, the treatment variable (assertiveness training) was found to be responsible for the significant improvement in examination phobia reduction among secondary school students.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and implications of this study, the following recommendations emerged:

1. Teachers should adopt assertiveness training technique so as to help reduce examination phobia among secondary school students in the area.
2. Policy makers and the curriculum planners may consider a review of the curriculum so as to integrate assertiveness training technique into guidance and counseling in schools, agencies of the state ministry of education could sponsor training, workshops and seminars to expose the teachers on the potentials of assertiveness technique in examination phobia reduction among students in schools.

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