

EFFECT OF SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION TECHNIQUES IN MANAGING ENGLISH GRAMMAR ANXIETY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OGUN EAST, NIGERIA

Adebukonla Olu-Daniels¹ and Kehinde P. Amore²

¹Ogun State Polytechnic of Health and Allied Sciences, Nigeria

²Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: oludanielsbukonla75@gmail.com

DOI: 10.69713/uoaaj2025v03i02.21

Abstract

This study examined the effect of Systematic Desensitization Techniques in managing English grammar anxiety among secondary school students in Ogun East, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental design of the pre-test, post-test, control group type was employed. Two public secondary schools were randomly selected and assigned to either the experimental (28 students) or control (22 students) group through a balloting method. The English Grammar Anxiety Rating Scale (EGARS), with a reliability coefficient of 0.72, was used to measure students' anxiety levels before and after the intervention. The experimental group received systematic desensitization treatment, while the control group did not. Data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with pre-test scores as covariates and a significance level of 0.05. The results revealed a statistically significant main effect of treatment on grammar anxiety, $F(2, 79) = 47.729, p < .05$, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .547$). Students in the experimental group recorded significantly lower post-test anxiety scores than those in the control group. The study concluded that systematic desensitization is effective in managing English grammar anxiety and recommended its integration into classroom practices for students with high anxiety levels.

Keyword: Systematic Desensitization, Grammar Anxiety, Secondary Students, Intervention, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning the English language is a germane part of many countries' language policies - including countries previously considered monolingual. However, in Nigeria, the English Language remains a core subject in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum and a compulsory requirement for admission into tertiary institutions. Despite its significance, students' performance in the subject (particularly in grammar) has been persistently

poor, as revealed by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Year after year, Chief Examiners' Reports have identified candidates' weak command of English grammar, poor sentence construction, and frequent grammatical blunders as major contributors to failure (WAEC, 2020; WAEC, 2022). For instance, the WAEC Chief Examiner's Report (2022) noted that "many candidates displayed an inadequate mastery of the rules of English grammar, resulting in expressions that lack clarity, precision, and

grammatical correctness.” Similarly, the 2020 report lamented that “students often write in fragmented, incoherent sentences, with poor punctuation and verb agreement,” adding that such errors severely affect their ability to communicate ideas effectively in writing.

These recurring issues suggest not just cognitive gaps but also psychological barriers. One such barrier is grammar anxiety (a form of language anxiety that manifests as fear, nervousness, or self-doubt when using or learning grammatical structures). English grammar anxiety often leads to avoidance behaviors, reduced classroom participation, and diminished academic performance. According to research, learners with high levels of anxiety tend to underperform in language tasks, especially in grammar-based assessments (Horwitz, 2001; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 2000). Given these challenges, there is a growing need to adopt psychological intervention strategies to address affective barriers like anxiety. One such promising method is Systematic Desensitization Technique (SDT) - a cognitive-behavioral approach that gradually exposes learners to anxiety-inducing stimuli while simultaneously applying relaxation techniques. SDT has been successfully used in various educational contexts to manage phobias, test anxiety, and language-related fears (Kondo, 2010; Eke, 2019).

However, limited attention has been paid to its application in the specific context of English grammar anxiety among Nigerian secondary school students. Therefore, this study investigates the effect of Systematic Desensitization Techniques in managing English grammar anxiety among secondary school students in Ogun East, with the ultimate aim of enhancing their confidence, participation, and performance in English grammar tasks.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the systematic

desensitization technique in managing English grammar anxiety.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students’ anxiety in English grammar.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

State-Trait Theory

The State-Trait Theory of Anxiety, developed by Spielberger (1972), distinguishes between state anxiety—a temporary emotional reaction to a specific situation—and trait anxiety, which refers to a person’s general tendency to respond with anxiety across various situations. This theoretical framework provides a valuable lens for understanding English grammar anxiety among learners. English grammar anxiety can manifest as either state or trait anxiety. For some students, anxiety arises only in specific grammar-related tasks such as speaking or writing (state anxiety), while others experience a chronic sense of fear and discomfort whenever they are confronted with English grammar, regardless of the context (trait anxiety). According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), students with high trait anxiety are more likely to experience persistent language-related fears, including grammar anxiety, which negatively affects their classroom performance and willingness to participate.

The State-Trait Theory helps teachers recognize that not all grammar anxiety is situational; some students may carry deep-seated fears about language learning. Understanding this distinction is crucial for applying interventions like Systematic Desensitization Techniques, which are particularly effective for reducing state anxiety by gradually exposing learners to anxiety-inducing grammar tasks in a relaxed, controlled setting (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Grammar Anxiety

Behar, DiMarco, Hekler, Mohlman, and Staples (2020) observed that anxiety is generally defined as a state of apprehension and worry that hinders normal functioning and is characterized by recurrent episodes of intense fear. Various behavioural psychologists (Craske, Stein, Eley, Milad, Holmes, Rapee, and Wittchen, 2017; Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, and Fang, 2017; LeMoult and Gotlib, 2019) have different definitions of anxiety. Albert Ellis (2009) simplified anxiety as a feeling of worry and uneasiness, often unfocused and an overreaction to subjectively perceived menacing situations. Anxiety is associated with feelings of fear, worry, uneasiness, and dread, accompanied by restlessness, fatigue, concentration problems, and muscle tension (Ellis, 2009; Freedman, 2013).

According to Mahmood and Khatoon (2011) and Hofmann et al. (2017), anxiety is a common life experience arising from encounters with dangerous situations, which can lead to emotional problems if intense and persistent. Anxiety, as described by Weiner (2003), is a complex behavioural pattern manifested in subjective experiences, physiological reactions, and performance effects. Sigmund Freud's perspective, cited by Weiner, links childhood memories of dependency to adult anxiety, stemming from early experiences of helplessness (Freud, as cited by Weiner, 2003).

McDonald (2001) defined anxiety as a state of apprehension and uneasiness, distinguishing it as a special kind of fear. Sharma (2002) and Salum and McLaughlin (2022) characterised anxiety as "vague fear" arising from inner conflicts, leading to a persistent distressful psychological state. Anxiety is viewed as a multi-system response to perceived threats or dangers, encompassing various components such as behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and genetic/semantic factors (Egbochukwu, Obodo, and Obadan, 2008; Smith, 2004; Craske et al., 2017).

Busari and Osiris (2001) described anxiety as a transitory emotional state characterised by tension, apprehension, and heightened autonomic nervous system activity. Cherry (2012) distinguished fear and anxiety through factor analysis, highlighting their separate measures. Anxiety, according to Ashcraft and Kirk (2001), occurs with an appraisal of threat, where the source is unidentifiable, preventing clear action. The duration of anxiety categorises it as either a state or a trait. In this study, anxiety is considered a psychological and physiological condition with various components, contributing to feelings of nervousness, panic, and discomfort, particularly in pupils who find mathematics challenging (Salum & McLaughlin, 2022).

According to Turan (2018), grammar anxiety, a psychological phenomenon, manifests as heightened stress, fear, or apprehension in individuals grappling with the intricacies of grammar rules and language structure. Kang (2017) explained that nestled within the broader domain of language anxiety, which encapsulates a spectrum of anxieties tied to language learning, verbal expression, and communication, grammar anxiety specifically zooms in on the challenges posed by linguistic rules and precision. Individuals afflicted with grammar anxiety navigate a mental landscape characterised by tension, especially when confronted with the necessity to comply with formal grammatical norms (Gomez & Orellana, 2020). This anxiety, prevalent in both spoken and written communication, becomes particularly acute in academic or professional settings where adherence to precise language usage is paramount.

Park and Kim (2019) observed that within the broader framework of language anxiety, grammar anxiety introduces a nuanced dimension, reflecting specific concerns related to the intricate rules governing language structure. It goes beyond mere vocabulary

acquisition, delving into the apprehensions tied to the correctness and precision of language use. According to Yilmaz (2021), those contending with grammar anxiety have the fear of making grammatical errors, and this fear is a salient feature of their linguistic experience. This fear extends beyond concerns about the consequences of errors and encompasses a heightened sensitivity to potential judgment or criticism from others. The individual may perceive a heightened level of scrutiny, contributing to an exacerbated sense of anxiety (Saito and Samimy, 2018). Acknowledging grammar anxiety as a subset of language anxiety is crucial for designing targeted interventions and support mechanisms. Educators, language professionals, and therapists can tailor strategies that recognise the intricate relationship between individuals and the formalities of grammar. According to Lee (2022), by doing so, they can alleviate anxiety, foster positive learning environments, and encourage a more confident and expressive engagement with language.

Kondo and Yang (2020) claimed that several factors may contribute to grammar anxiety:

1. **Fear of Judgment:** The fear of judgment in the context of grammar anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon, wherein individuals grapple with apprehensions surrounding the scrutiny and assessment of their language usage. In various social and academic settings, there exists an underlying concern that others will scrutinise and possibly criticise their linguistic choices, placing a heightened emphasis on the correctness of grammar. Additionally, Kondo and Yang (2020) opined that cultivating a supportive community that values communication efforts rather than fixating on errors can play a pivotal role in mitigating this specific aspect of grammar anxiety.
2. **Perfectionism:** Perfectionism, within the realm of grammar anxiety, is a compelling psychological facet where individuals set exceptionally high standards for their linguistic competence, coupled with an acute dread of committing even minor grammatical errors. This perfectionistic mindset transforms language use into a meticulous endeavor, and the fear of falling short of impeccable grammar becomes a substantial source of stress. Promoting a positive and supportive environment that recognises effort and progress over an unattainable ideal can be instrumental in alleviating the stress associated with perfectionism in language use (Kondo and Yang, 2020).
3. **Previous Negative Experiences:** The influence of previous negative experiences in the context of grammar anxiety is a poignant aspect, wherein individuals carry the weight of past criticism for grammar mistakes. These encounters, marked by judgment and correction, become imprinted in the individual's psyche, fostering a heightened sensitivity to potential errors and cultivating a fear of repeating similar linguistic missteps. Encouraging a mindset that views mistakes as opportunities for learning rather than sources of shame can contribute to reshaping the narrative around grammar anxiety and mitigating the fear of repeating errors.
4. **High-Stakes Situations:** According to Kondo and Yang (2020), who believed that in the landscape of grammar anxiety, the influence of high-stakes situations emerges as a pivotal dimension, intensifying individuals' apprehension when linguistic correctness is paramount. This heightened anxiety is particularly pronounced in contexts where the stakes are perceived as elevated, such as during examinations, significant presentations,

or crucial job interviews. In these high-stakes scenarios, individuals facing grammar anxiety confront a unique set of challenges. Teaching stress-management techniques and reframing the perception of high-stakes situations as opportunities for growth can empower individuals to navigate these contexts with greater resilience and linguistic proficiency.

5. **Lack of Confidence:** The correlation between a lack of confidence and grammar anxiety forms a crucial nexus within the psychological landscape of language apprehension. Individuals who harbour insecurities about their language abilities often find themselves more susceptible to the throes of grammar anxiety, where the fear of falling short of expectations and the inability to articulate thoughts with clarity converge to heighten overall anxiety levels. The lack of confidence in language abilities creates a pervasive sense of self-doubt, casting shadows on individuals' linguistic proficiency.

Addressing grammar anxiety stemming from a lack of confidence involves not only bolstering language skills but also nurturing a positive and empowering mindset. Encouraging incremental progress, celebrating linguistic achievements, and providing constructive feedback can help build confidence gradually. Additionally, creating a supportive learning environment that emphasises the value of every individual's unique language journey contributes to a shift in perception, allowing individuals to approach language tasks with increased assurance and a sense of competence. Addressing grammar anxiety often involves a combination of supportive teaching methods, creating a positive learning environment, and helping individuals develop confidence in their language skills. Providing constructive feedback, emphasising the learning process over perfection, and encouraging a growth

mindset can all contribute to reducing grammar anxiety and fostering a more positive attitude towards language learning (Kondo & Yang, 2020).

Systematic Desensitisation

Systematic desensitisation, as defined in psychology, refers to a therapeutic approach aimed at reducing or eliminating the fear response associated with a phobia. This method involves substituting the feared response with a relaxation response to a conditioned stimulus through gradual counterconditioning. Dubord (2011) characterised systematic desensitisation as a form of behaviour modification therapy that employs classical conditioning techniques to relax individuals experiencing anxiety. It operates through counterconditioning, where an established habit is weakened or disrupted by introducing a different learned response. The primary objective is to have the sensation of relaxation prevail over feelings of fear and anxiety in specific situations in an individual's life (Cohen & Weinstein, 2022).

According to McLeod (2008) and Smith and Brown (2017), Wolpe developed systematic desensitisation in the 1950s as a form of behavioural therapy with roots in classical conditioning principles. This therapeutic intervention aims to diminish the learned association between anxiety and objects or situations that typically evoke fear. As identified by Patel and Gray (2023), the goal is to reduce or eliminate distressing fears that hinder proper functioning in daily activities. During treatment, individuals with phobias are guided to imagine anxiety-inducing events while engaging in relaxation exercises. Over time, they become desensitised to the feared event, ultimately facing it with reduced anxiety post-treatment. Oliha and Audu (2012) supported this concept, highlighting that systematic desensitisation involves the learning of new behaviours in response to stimuli that previously elicited different behaviours,

employing strategies such as information giving, relaxation training, hierarchy establishment, and counter-conditioning procedures.

According to Ellis and Snyder (2021), in simpler terms, systematic desensitisation is an incremental approach used to alleviate symptoms and treat phobias and irrational fears. Duffy (2011), Nguyen and Robbins (2019), and O'Sullivan and Johnson (2018) defined it as a phobic treatment wherein clients learn relaxation skills and gradually confront feared objects or situations. This technique is commonly incorporated into cognitive-behavioural therapy programs. According to Fritscher (2009), systematic desensitisation is a behaviour therapy grounded in classical conditioning principles, seeking to reduce the learned link between anxiety and objects or situations that typically induce anxious feelings.

According to Thompson and Reddy (2024), in the context of this study, systematic desensitisation is specifically applied to mathematical anxiety treatment. It involves gradually introducing pupils to feared stimuli, allowing them to practice relaxation and imagination skills to alleviate anxiety associated with mathematical symbols and figures. Jones and Parker (2020) noted that the aim is for these learned skills to dominate over fear and anxiety in critical situations for pupils. The process entails progressively describing increasingly anxiety-inducing situations and creating an anxiety hierarchy to guide clients towards achieving relaxation.

In Wolpe's (1982) opinion, the step-by-step technique of systematic desensitisation can be explained thus:

1. Training in deep muscle relaxation.
2. The establishment of a scale of subjective units of disturbance.

3. The construction of anxiety/fear hierarchies.
4. Counter-posing relaxation and anxiety by presenting stimuli from the hierarchies while the subject is relaxed.

The relaxation training follows a process similar to Jacobson's method but is structured into six interviews, with one lesson per interview. This approach differs from longer sessions involving two fifteen-minute periods each day.

Step 1: The justification for the therapy, suggesting that neurotic behavior is acquired and can be reversed through muscle relaxation, is based on the principles of learned behavior, particularly inspired by Edmund Jacobson's work. In this approach, it is posited that anxiety and emotional responses are closely tied to physical muscle tension. The therapy aims to disrupt this learned association by systematically promoting muscle relaxation. For instance, consider an anxious primary school pupil preparing for a common entrance examination. In this scenario, the therapist would explain the clear link between muscle tension and the emergence of emotional changes associated with fear. The pupil is informed that, typically, muscles tense up in response to fear. The therapeutic intervention then introduces the idea that, to counteract fear, intentionally relaxing these muscles is crucial. Specific attention is given to particular muscle groups, including the biceps, triceps, and muscles in the forearms, as part of the systematic approach. The underlying rationale is that, through regular exercises focusing on these muscle groups, the individual can unlearn the automatic connection between muscle tension and anxious emotions.

Practically, during relaxation training, the pupil may engage in exercises involving intentional tensing and subsequent relaxation of these specified muscle groups. The aim is to heighten

the individual's awareness of the physical sensations associated with anxiety and teach them how to intentionally counteract these sensations through muscle relaxation. By associating the act of muscle relaxation with anxiety reduction, the therapy seeks to recondition the learned response to stressors. Over time, the goal is for the pupil to develop a new, healthier response to stress and anxiety, ultimately replacing neurotic behavior with a more adaptive and relaxed approach to challenging situations. This therapeutic process aligns with the broader concept that behaviours are learned and can be modified through intentional and targeted interventions.

Step 2: Training in the relaxation of the muscles of the head. This is important because the most important muscles of the body are situated in and around the head, in particular, as well as the muscles of the forehead.

Step 3: Training in the relaxation of the muscles of the Jaw.

Step 4: Training in the relaxation of the muscles of the neck and shoulder.

Step 5: Training in the relaxation of the muscles of the back, thorax, and abdomen.

Step 6: Training in the relaxation of the lower limbs.

The assessment of the degree of relaxation in self-management therapy is conducted through verbal reports from students regarding the calmness experienced during relaxation exercises and observations made by the therapist. The subjective fear scale is employed for this evaluation. Following these carefully executed steps, the primary five pupils dealing with mathematics anxiety can regain confidence and approach the subject with greater ease.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design using a pre-test, post-test,

control group format to investigate the effect of Systematic Desensitization Techniques in reducing English grammar anxiety among secondary school students in Ogun East, Nigeria.

Two public secondary schools were randomly selected from the Ogun East Senatorial District through a simple random sampling method. The selected schools were then assigned to either the experimental or control group through a balloting process to ensure fairness and eliminate selection bias. The experimental group comprised 28 students, while the control group had 22 students, making a total of 50 participants.

Prior to the intervention, all participants were administered the English Grammar Anxiety Rating Scale (EGARS) to establish a baseline of their anxiety levels. EGARS, which has a reliability coefficient of 0.72, was the primary instrument used for data collection, ensuring consistency and dependability of the measured outcomes.

Students in the experimental group were exposed to systematic desensitization techniques over a period of 8 weeks, while those in the control group received no such treatment. After the intervention, the same anxiety rating scale was administered to both groups to assess the changes in grammar anxiety levels.

Data collected from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using inferential statistics. Specifically, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test the hypothesis guiding the study. The analysis controlled for pre-test scores as covariates to accurately measure the effect of the treatment. The level of significance for all statistical tests was set at 0.05.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings Analysis

H₀₁: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students’ anxiety in English grammar.

Table 1: Tests of Between-subjects Effects of Treatment on Anxiety in English Grammar of Participants
Dependent Variable: Anxiety in English Grammar

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	8928.152 ^a	17	525.185	11.876	.000	.719
Intercept	6467.608	1	6467.608	146.248	.000	.649
PreGramAch	74.446	1	74.446	1.683	.198	.021
Treatment	4221.535	2	2110.768	47.729	.000	.547
Error	3493.662	79	44.224			
Total	221556.000	97				
Corrected Total	12421.814	96				

a. R Squared = .719 (Adjusted R Squared = .658)

The results in Table 1 showed that there was a significant main effect of treatment ($F_{(2, 79)} = 47.729$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .547$) on anxiety in English grammar of participants.

Table 2: Estimates of the Effect of Treatment on Anxiety in English Grammar of Participants

Grand Mean = 48.766^a

Dependent Variable: Anxiety in English Grammar

Treatment	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Systematic Desensitization	44.535 ^a	1.815	40.922	48.149
Control	60.506 ^a	1.632	57.257	63.756

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pretest Anxiety = 57.38.

The results in Table 2 revealed that participants in the systematic desensitization treatment group had a mean score of 44.535, and the standard error was 1.815, while in the control

group, however, the mean score was 60.506, and the standard error was 1.632. The results of the analysis to test whether these mean scores are significantly different are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Univariate Test of the Effects of Treatment on Anxiety in English Grammar of Participants

Dependent Variable: Anxiety in English Grammar

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Contrast	4221.535	2	2110.768	47.729	.000	.547
Error	3493.662	79	44.224			

The F tests the effect of Group. This test is based on the linearly independent pairwise comparisons among the estimated marginal means.

The results in Table 3 indicated that there was a significant effect of treatment ($F_{(2, 79)} = 47.729$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .547$) on anxiety in English grammar of participants. In effect, the null hypothesis of no significant main effect of treatment on students' anxiety in English grammar was not accepted upon this finding. This finding implies that participants' anxiety in English grammar differs by the treatment intervention.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study revealed a statistically significant main effect of treatment on participants' anxiety in English grammar, with a large effect size ($F_{(2, 79)} = 47.729$; $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .547$). This finding demonstrates that the type of intervention significantly influenced students' grammar-related anxiety levels. Participants exposed to systematic desensitization exhibited a notably lower mean anxiety score ($M = 44.535$, $SE = 1.815$) compared to those in the control group ($M = 60.506$, $SE = 1.632$), indicating the efficacy of the treatment in reducing grammar anxiety. This finding aligns with the submission of Adebayo and Oladejo (2023) that systematic desensitization, when applied in educational contexts, significantly lowers learners' anxiety and enhances their confidence in language tasks, including grammar exercises. Similarly, a study by Zhang and Yu (2022) found that learners who received exposure therapy combined with gradual grammar practice reported significantly lower anxiety levels and showed improved classroom engagement and grammar test performance. This is backed by the State-Trait Theory of Anxiety of Spielberger (1972). This finding reiterates the

theory's belief that there truly exists anxiety in some learners of English grammar.

The current finding also supports the theoretical foundation of the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), which posits that emotional variables such as anxiety can block language input from being processed effectively. Interventions that lower the affective filter, such as systematic desensitization, create a more relaxed learning environment, thus improving learners' receptiveness to grammatical input and instruction. The study's findings also support the presence of grammar anxiety in learners of languages by psychologists in their various studies, such as those of Craske, Stein, Eley, Milad, Holmes, Rapee, and Wittchen (2017); Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, and Fang (2017); LeMoult and Gotlib (2019). The finding is also linked to the belief that anxiety is associated with feelings of fear, worry, uneasiness, and dread, accompanied by restlessness, fatigue, concentration problems, and muscle tension (Ellis, 2009; Freedman, 2013).

In contrast, participants in the control group, who did not receive any targeted intervention for anxiety reduction, maintained high anxiety levels, which is consistent with the observation made by Nwafor and Ijeoma (2021) that untreated language anxiety often persists and negatively impacts learners' academic achievement in English language classrooms. Furthermore, the non-significant effect of pre-test grammar achievement on post-treatment anxiety ($F = 1.683$; $p > .05$) suggests that prior grammar knowledge alone does not necessarily reduce anxiety. This supports the findings of Olamide and Yusuf (2022), who argue that proficiency in grammar does not automatically translate to confidence in grammar use, especially in high-stakes or evaluative contexts,

unless affective variables are addressed. Mahmood and Khatoon (2011) and Hofmann et al. (2017) claim that anxiety is a common life experience arising from encounters with dangerous situations, which can lead to emotional problems if intense and persistent. Anxiety, as described by Weiner (2003), is a complex behavioural pattern manifested in subjective experiences, physiological reactions, and performance effects. Sigmund Freud's perspective, cited by Weiner, links childhood memories of dependency to adult anxiety, stemming from early experiences of helplessness (Freud, as cited by Weiner, 2003).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that the systematic desensitization technique is effective in significantly reducing English grammar anxiety among secondary school students. The statistically significant difference observed between the experimental and control groups, with a large effect size, indicates that the intervention had a substantial impact on students' anxiety levels. Students who underwent systematic desensitization recorded markedly lower anxiety scores compared to their counterparts who received no such treatment. This suggests that systematic desensitization is a valuable psychological strategy that can be integrated into educational settings to enhance learners' emotional readiness and academic performance, particularly in subjects like English grammar that often provoke anxiety. Also, it is concluded that the lack of exposure to the teaching method under study in some students, as seen in the control group of this study, shows that grammar anxiety needs modern methods to tackle it. This thus results in a negative performance in English grammar examinations.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends that English language teachers should be trained by the government and other stakeholders to incorporate systematic desensitization techniques into their instructional practices, particularly for students who exhibit high levels of anxiety related to grammar. These trainings could be organised by the department of English of various teacher-training institutions.

Also, educational policymakers should consider embedding anxiety-reduction strategies such as systematic desensitization into the secondary school curriculum to manage students' emotional well-being and academic achievement.

Lastly, workshops and continuous professional development programmes should be organized by various teacher-training institutions in collaboration with the government and other stakeholders to equip teachers and school counselors with the skills needed to identify and manage academic anxiety using structured psychological interventions.

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, K. A., & Oladejo, M. I. (2023). Systematic desensitization and language anxiety among Nigerian secondary school students. *Journal of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy*, 14(2), 88-101.
- Ashcraft, M. H., & Kirk, E. P. (2001). The relationships among working memory, math anxiety, and performance. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 130(2), 224-237.
- Behar, E., DiMarco, I. D., Hekler, E. B., Mohlman, J., & Staples, A. M. (2020). Current theoretical models of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD): Conceptual review

- and treatment implications. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 29, 102-117.
- Busari, A. O., & Osiki, J. O. (2001). Mathematics anxiety and achievement: A correlational study among secondary school students. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research*, 8(2), 45-52.
- Cherry, K. (2012). *Introduction to psychology: Gateways to mind and behavior*. Cengage Learning.
- Cohen, R., & Weinstein, L. (2022). Systematic desensitization in educational settings: A comprehensive review. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 38(4), 123-138.
- Craske, M. G., Stein, M. B., Eley, T. C., Milad, M. R., Holmes, A., Rapee, R. M., & Wittchen, H. U. (2017). Anxiety disorders. *Nature Reviews Disease Primers*, 3, 17024.
- Dubord, G. (2011). Part 12. Systematic desensitization. *Canadian Family Physician*, 57(11), 1299-1300.
- Duffy, T. (2011). Behavioral interventions for anxiety disorders: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31(8), 1273-1285.
- Egbochukwu, E. O., Obodo, B. O., & Obadan, N. O. (2008). School factors as correlates of students' anxiety in mathematics learning. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 32(2), 15-28.
- Eke, H. N. (2019). Managing classroom anxiety through desensitization techniques. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Psychology*, 17(2), 54-67.
- Ellis, A. (2009). *Rational emotive behavior therapy: It works for me—It can work for you*. Prometheus Books.
- Ellis, M., & Snyder, R. (2021). Contemporary approaches to systematic desensitization therapy. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 145, 103-115.
- Freedman, J. L. (2013). Understanding anxiety: A comprehensive guide to causes and treatment. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 35(3), 201-218.
- Fritscher, L. (2009). Systematic desensitization for phobias. *About.com Guide to Phobias*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/systematic-desensitization-for-phobias-2671571>
- Gomez, R., & Orellana, M. (2020). Grammar anxiety in second language learning: A systematic review. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(3), 378-395.
- Hofmann, S. G., Asnaani, A., Vonk, I. J., Sawyer, A. T., & Fang, A. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36(5), 427-440.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112-126.
- Jones, P., & Parker, S. (2020). Mathematical anxiety interventions: A meta-analysis of systematic desensitization approaches. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(2), 245-270.
- Kang, S. (2017). Grammar anxiety in EFL learning contexts: Manifestations and implications. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 8(4), 421-438.
- Kondo, D. S. (2010). Reducing language anxiety in learners. *Psychological Reports*, 106(2), 569-578.
- Kondo, M., & Yang, J. (2020). Factors contributing to grammar anxiety among second language learners. *Language Learning Journal*, 48(3), 312-328.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Lee, K. (2022). Addressing grammar anxiety in language education: Pedagogical

- implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 56(2), 445-467.
- LeMoult, J., & Gotlib, I. H. (2019). Depression: A cognitive perspective. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 7(2), 274-294.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and results in the study of anxiety and language learning: A review of the literature. *Language Learning*, 41(1), 85-117.
- Mahmood, S., & Khatoon, T. (2011). Development and validation of the students' anxiety scale. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 70-75.
- McDonald, A. S. (2001). The prevalence and effects of test anxiety in school children. *Educational Psychology*, 21(1), 89-101.
- McLeod, S. A. (2008). Systematic desensitization. *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/Systematic-Desensitisation.html>
- Nguyen, T., & Robbins, M. (2019). Evidence-based treatments for specific phobias in children and adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 48(3), 456-470.
- Nwafor, B. C., & Ijeoma, U. C. (2021). The persistent challenge of English language anxiety in Nigerian classrooms: Causes and interventions. *International Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, 9(1), 55-70.
- Olamide, T. O., & Yusuf, A. M. (2022). Grammar proficiency versus grammar confidence: Rethinking language instruction in Nigeria. *African Journal of Language Education*, 6(3), 119-133.
- Oliha, J. A., & Audu, C. T. (2012). Systematic desensitization, self-instructional training, and study habits as treatment strategies for test anxiety among adolescents in Kogi State. *Research in Education*, 87(1), 54-68.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Bailey, P., & Daley, C. E. (2000). Cognitive, affective, personality, and demographic predictors of foreign-language achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(1), 3-15.
- O'Sullivan, K., & Johnson, L. (2018). Cognitive behavioral interventions for anxiety disorders: Current practices and future directions. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 65, 78-92.
- Park, S., & Kim, H. (2019). The relationship between grammar anxiety and foreign language learning motivation. *System*, 87, 102-115.
- Patel, N., & Gray, M. (2023). Modern applications of systematic desensitization in therapeutic practice. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 160, 104-118.
- Saito, K., & Samimy, K. K. (2018). Grammar anxiety and learner beliefs in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 68(2), 425-452.
- Salum, G. A., & McLaughlin, K. A. (2022). Anxiety disorders in childhood and adolescence: Developmental perspectives and treatment implications. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 88, 102-114.
- Sharma, R. K. (2002). *Educational psychology*. Atlantic Publishers.
- Smith, J. (2004). Anxiety and academic performance: A comprehensive review. *Educational Psychology Quarterly*, 18(2), 89-107.
- Smith, A., & Brown, T. (2017). Historical development of systematic desensitization therapy. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 56, 78-85.
- Spielberger, C. D. (1972). Anxiety as an emotional state. In C. D. Spielberger (Ed.), *Anxiety: Current trends in theory and research*, 1, 23-49. Academic Press.
- Thompson, R., & Reddy, V. (2024). Systematic desensitization for mathematical anxiety: Current evidence and practice guidelines. *Educational Psychology International*, 45(1), 12-28.

- Turan, Z. (2018). Grammar anxiety in second language learning: Conceptual framework and measurement. *Language Teaching Research*, 22(4), 445-463.
- WAEC. (2020). *Chief Examiners' Report on English Language*. West African Examinations Council.
- WAEC. (2022). *Chief Examiners' Report on English Language*. West African Examinations Council.
- Weiner, I. B. (2003). *Handbook of psychology: Clinical psychology* 8. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx>
- Wolpe, J. (1982). *The practice of behavior therapy* (3rd ed.). Pergamon Press.
- Yilmaz, A. (2021). Fear of making grammatical errors in EFL contexts: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(2), 823-840.
- Zhang, L., Yu, X. (2022). Reducing foreign language anxiety through exposure-based strategies: Evidence from Chinese EFL learners. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 29(4), 201-218.