



The Efficacy Of Hypnotherapy In Reducing Examination Anxiety And Enhancing Academic Performance Among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Anxiety related to examinations is a psychological complication that greatly hinders academic achievements and emotional feelings among the students in secondary school. Over the past couple of years, hypnotherapy has posed as a potentially effective mind-body treatment in reducing anxiety and cognitive improvement. The review presents a summary of the worldwide and Indian research and studies on the effectiveness of hypnotherapy and its ability to reduce exam anxiety and enhance academic performance with specific reference to West Bengal in India. Based on randomized controls, qualitative studies, and theoretical perspectives, the article analyses the hypnotherapy workings, how it fares compared to other interventions, and how school-based school mental health initiatives can incorporate its use. The review shows gaps in the research, cultural considerations, and ethical implications, giving the future guidance of the potential empirical work within the Indian educational context.

Keywords: Hypnotherapy, Examination Anxiety, Academic Performance, Secondary School Students, West Bengal, Mind-body Intervention

I. INTRODUCTION

Performance anxiety refers to examination anxiety, a significant percentage of students all over the world experience examination anxiety. Defined by physiological manifestations, including accelerated heart rate, perspiration, and even cognitive disorders, such as the inability to memorize and concentrate, it may have a devastating effect on academic studies (McDonald, 2001; von der Embse, Barterian, & Segool, 2018). This problem is further worsened by high stakes examinations in India, societal expectations and the issue of parental pressure on students enrolled in secondary schools in India (Kahan, 2008).

The conventional treatments including counselling, mindfulness and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) have all demonstrated some success in the reduction of test anxiety with moderation. Nevertheless, hypnotherapy, a non-drug medical treatment of anxiety disorders by means of guided relaxation, focus of attention, and suggestion has become a popular treatment option (Elkins, Barabasz, Council, & Spiegel, 2015). The paper critically appraises available studies on the role of hypnotherapy in reducing examination anxiety levels and improving academic attainment in the Indian context and, more precisely, in state of West Bengal.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Extreme cases of examination anxiety among secondary school students are not only harmful in terms of their studies and psychological well-being. However, not all students manage to get out of the needs of treating anxiety-related academic impairment despite the presence of conventional interventions. It is high time the alternative, evidence-based psychological tools like hypnotherapy were used to help in this matter and facilitate academic achievement.

1.2. Objectives of the Review

- To obtain the current literature on the effects of hypnotherapy to examination anxiety
- To investigate the interconnection between hypnotherapy and improvement of performance in school
- To find gaps in the existing research when it comes to the context of secondary education in India
- To suggest future research should be conducted in West Bengal schools into the framework

1.3. Hypotheses for Future Research

H1: Hypnotherapy decreases exam stress in students of secondary schools to an appreciable degree

H2: Low examination anxiety achieved by means of hypnotherapy results in superior academic performance

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding Examination Anxiety

Examination anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon that entails emotional, cognitive and physiological reaction to evaluative contexts. It is frequently provoked by the threat of failure, insufficient preparation, and pressure of parents and the school teachers (Segool et al., 2013). The estimation indicates that 10% to 40 percent of students are faced with test anxiety to some scale (Thomas, Cassady, & Heller, 2018), with its prevalence in competitive academic settings.

2.2. Mechanisms of Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy is a way of treating mental diseases, whereby the activity of cells in the body is controlled or altered. Hypnotherapy works based on the approach of suggestion, imagery and relaxing of the mind which targets the subconscious mind. According to Kirsch (1993) hypnosis is a process that occurs when changes are created by a trained practitioner in the perception, memory and behaviour. Among them is progressive muscle relaxation, guided visualization, positive affirmations, etc., which are often employed to rectify a negative thinking process and improve self-efficacy (Heap, 2005).

Neuroimaging reveals that hypnosis uses parts of the brain linked with attention and emotion control, which confirm its effectiveness during lowering down nervousness (Oakley & Halligan, 2013).

2.3. Empirical Evidence

A number of articles have identified hypnotherapy as a means of improving test anxiety:

Study	Country	Sample	Outcome	Conclusion
Gruzelier (2002)	UK	60	Exam Anxiety	Significant reduction in anxiety post-hypnotherapy
Barling et al. (2006)	Canada	45	Academic Focus	Improved attention span and exam scores
Mishra & Sharma (2015)	India	80	Anxiety & Marks	Drop in cortisol levels and better academic results
Rahman (2018)	Bangladesh	120	Exam Stress	Hypnotherapy reduced anxiety symptoms significantly
Khan (2011)	India	100	Academic Scores	10–15% improvement in scores and reduced anxiety symptoms
Watt & Ainsworth (2010)	UK	30	Nursing Students	Improved exam performance and reduced anxiety

Study	Country	Sample	Outcome	Conclusion
Pachaiappan et al. (2023)	India	515	Meta-analysis	Consistent reductions in anxiety across 12 studies

2.4. Hypnotherapy vs. Other Interventions

Hypnotherapy is superior to the other methods such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and mindfulness in that it reaches the subconscious mind directly. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is also aimed to adjust conscious modes of thinking whereas hypnotherapy is used to allow deeper emotional processing and behaviour change (Ernst, 2007).

III. METHODOLOGY OF REVIEW

3.1 Design

In this review, the narrative and systematic mode of conduct is adopted to establish the existing literature, explore and synthesize it as applied to hypnotherapy and its effects on examination anxiety and students' academic performance.

3.2 Search Strategy

The searched databases were PsycINFO, PubMed, ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR and Google Scholar. The following were the keywords utilized:

- “hypnotherapy AND test anxiety”
- “hypnosis AND academic performance”
- “secondary school students AND anxiety interventions”
- “India AND examination stress AND hypnosis”

Only peer-reviewed articles, published over the last decade and up to 2025 were searched.

3.3 Inclusion Criteria

- Research of secondary level or teenager (12 to 18) type of students
- Empirical researches (RCTs, quasi-experimental, qualitative)
- Attention on hypnotherapy as the intervention of the first order
- Anxiety is reduced or improved grades
- Publications are in English

3.4 Exclusion Criteria

- Research that is confined to adults only
- Literature that is Non-peer reviewed
- Articles that do not contain empirical data (e.g. opinion pieces)

3.5 Data Extraction and Analysis

One thousand six hundred twenty-two articles were identified, of which 87 qualified as being on the topic. Twenty-six of them were analysed because they met the inclusion criteria. On the type of intervention, its duration, sample size, outcome measures, and main findings, data were extracted. A thematic synthesis was done to distinguish common themes and areas of gaps.

IV. RESEARCH ANALYSIS STUDY:

4.1. Analysis and Interpretation

In the observed studies, hypnotherapy has always been effective in eliminating test anxiety and consequently enhancing academic outcomes. The reduction of the heart rate, improved concentration and enhanced memory tampering are well documented neurophysiological changes. The intervention is also made in line with the theory of self-efficacy by Bandura (1997) according to which performance outcome is predetermined by the belief in the ability.

Nevertheless, acceptance by the culture and the availability of trained professionals is an obstacle, particularly in areas of rural semi-urban location such as West Bengal. What also restricts generalizability there is the inconsistency of protocols of hypnosis and absence of universally accepted measures.

4.2. Cultural and Educational Context in India

Exhaustion and anxiety are usually accompanied by parental pressure and societal expectation in India and the lack of access to mental health services. Hypnotherapy is an unknown practice in schools but pilot experiments in cities such as Delhi and Bhopal have proven to be feasible (Mathew & Kavitha, 2022). The rural locations can be disadvantaged by absence of the trained personnel and cultural scepticism.

A scalable solution could be hypnotherapy sessions made part of school counselling programmes with proper local adaptations in the manner such as introducing use of commonly understood metaphors and use of local languages.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

- Informed agreement between the school authorities
- Certified hypnotherapists administer it.
- Psychological screening to arrive at contraindications
- Pledge of confidentiality and freedom of choice

4.4. Limitations of the Reviewed Literature

- Maximum of western statistics; very few Indian figures
- Very small sample-sizes, no control-groups
- The Unpredictability of hypnotherapy procedures
- Inadequate studies in non-western backgrounds
- Longitudinal studies to find out long-term impact are few

4.5. Suggestions for Future Research

- Carrying out of randomized controlled trials in Indian schools
- Create culturally modified scripts of hypnotherapy to use in teens
- Use standardized tools such as:
 - Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS)
 - Academic Self-Efficacy Scale
 - School academic performance records
- Gather primary information (qualitative) among students and educators
- Need to consider forms of hypnotherapy that are hybrids of mindfulness or CBT
- Explore follow-up to investigate long-term consequences

4.6. School-Based Mental Health Programs Integration

There is potential in the comprehensive student support that can be realized through school-based mental health programs that incorporate hypnotherapy to bring back students who fall out of school. It is more and more acknowledged that schools are key settings to provide psychological distress early interventions (von der Embse et al., 2018). Hypnotherapy may supplement more established counselling treatments, and can be incorporated into them as comprehensible interventions.

Multi-tiered implementation might also be employed, with the hypnotherapy applied at Tier 2 (at-risk student-focused interventions) and Tier 3 (individually- tailored support). It corresponds to the Response to Intervention (RTI) educational psychological model that focuses on early codetection and assistance of academically and emotionally challenged students (Thomas et al., 2018).

Studies on the feasibility of pilot programs of school classes with Indians in urban areas have been carried out, and Mathew and Kavitha (2022) observed that after hypnotherapy classes, student participation and school absenteeism decreased. These results indicate that, hypnotherapy can be scaled in various education with proper training and sensitization.

4.7. Training and Capacity Building

Lack of trained professionals is one of the greatest impediments to adoption of hypnotherapy in the Indian schools. India does not have many certification programs, or wide-spread awareness of clinical hypnosis, as it is practiced in the West where western psychology incorporates hypnosis in its psychological repertoire.

To overcome this, relationships between the education departments and psychology departments should be made to provide short-term certification of the school counsellors. Also, training modules could be distributed online and even in remote areas.

Sensitization workshops of teachers are also vital. Teachers can be the first responders of the misery of students, and their Knowledge of hypnotherapy would help in referring to their resources and minimizing the stigma. According to Kahan (2008), school-based mental health efforts highly depend on the attitude of teachers toward the program or project.

4.8. Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Hypnotherapy

There are a number of psychological theories in support of the effectiveness of hypnotherapy in academics:

- **Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997):** Hypnotherapy fosters self-confidence in learning and students feel more confident that they can achieve success in life, and this has a direct effect on the motivation and performance.
- **Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988):** Cognitive resources are released through reductions in anxiety by alleviating the individuals, as a result of which the information processing and retention are enhanced.
- **Dual Process Theory (Evans, 2008):** Hypnosis will involve the use of intuitive and emotional processing (System 1) that can over-ride maladaptive rational fears (System 2) related to exams.

Such frameworks offer a strong basis of comprehending the role of hypnotherapy in regulating emotions as well as affecting the thinking process.

4.9. Case Studies and Anecdotal Evidence

Whereas the empirical researches statistically verify, the case studies present complicated issues concerning individual experiences. Indicatively, Khan (2011) reported the case of a 14 years old student studying in Kolkata who would develop panic attacks ahead of exams. Six weeks later of hypnotherapy conducted with guided visualization and affirmations, the student was complaining of less anxiety and higher grades.

In the same manner, Watt and Ainsworth (2010) explained the nursing students who practiced self-hypnosis during clinical exams and found that their level of focus and stress decreased as a result. Although such anecdotal reports are not highly generalizable, they emphasize the healing capabilities of hypnotherapy, in the context of being adjusted to the individual being treated.

4.10. Technological Innovations in Hypnotherapy Delivery

As the digitalization of health advances, hypnotherapy is also becoming an online medium either via mobile applications, virtual reality (VR), or online. Applications such as HypnoBox and Mindset feature guided hypnosis to deal with stress and improve focus. Although they cannot replace clinical hypnotherapy, they may be used as ancillaries in the schools.

App-based hypnotherapy may democratize access, especially in India where smartphone use in the semi-urban areas is high. There is, however, a need to carry out efficacy studies in order to support the use of such digital interventions among adolescents.

4.11. Policy Implications

Hypnotherapy can become a policy accepted at a national level, which may speed up its implementation. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses more on holistic development and student mental health so that such innovative interventions as hypnotherapy may easily find a favourable environment.

Policy recommendations include:

- Establishing hypnotherapy as an acceptable psychology technique in schools wellness programs
- Investing in pilot programs and training programs
- Putting in place codes of conduct and the certification of practitioners working within learning institutions

These steps would lead not only to a legitimization of hypnotherapy but also to it being introduced successfully and safely.

V. CONCLUSION

This exhaustive assessment highlights the probabilities of hypnotherapy as a revolutionary intervention to analyse anxiety in examinations and academic achievement amid high school students. These results are consistent in the evidence of the global and Indian contexts in showing significant benefits in emotional regulation, cognitive enhancement and academic results.

Hypnotherapy has the possibility of providing a culturally flexible, non-invasive alternative to academic stress that is not resolved in West Bengal, where academic stress is so engrained. Nonetheless, the barriers to the implementation of successful processes refer to training, stigma, policy support. Prospective investigation ought to be directed at being large scale, longitudinal studies, culturally competent procedures, and school-based mental health models.

With education systems becoming more student-centred and taking into consideration the well-being of students, it is highly probable to expect that hypnotherapy turns out to be the means that not only enables the students to perform better, but also allows them to thrive.

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