EFFECT OF RELAXATION TECHNIQUE IN REDUCING TEST ANXIETY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the effect of relaxation technique in reducing test anxiety among secondary school students in Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The design for this study was a quasi- experimental design. The population of students with test anxiety is 453. A sample of 70 students with test anxiety was selected for the study and purposive sampling technique was used in choosing two schools in the area of the study. Test Anxiety Inventory was used for data collection. Test Anxiety Inventory has both validity and reliability of 0.81. The study involved two groups; the experimental group I was given relaxation technique and the control group was given conventional counselling. All the groups were exposed to treatment for a period of eighth weeks. Pre-test and post-test were administered to both groups. Mean scores were used in answering the two research questions and ANCOVA was used in testing the two null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significant. The finding of the study shows that relaxation technique is effective in reducing the students' test anxiety based on their lost mean scores. Recommendations were made that: the use of relaxation technique should be commenced in full force in secondary schools irrespective of students' gender as a way of reducing students' test anxiety.

Keyword: Relaxation Technique, Test Anxiety, Secondary School Students.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Most times, students at the verge of entering for school tests or examination are seen to exhibit some forms of anxiety, such as restless, trembling, fidgeting or panicking. This experience of distress before, during or after tests or examination could be apsychological condition, which is a type of anxiety disorder. This should not be the case because examinations or tests are normal situations which one should not be afraid to participate in (Nwankwo, Obi & Obi, 2014). Nwankwo, Obi and Obi notes that it is common to see secondary school students meditating and expressing openly the type of distress they have during examination or test.

Anxiety, as an emotional component of human beings, manifests itself in life endeavours in form of worries and restlessness. People are beset by intense feelings every day because life continuously poses problems which every person strives to find solution to. Anxiety describes the subjective experience of unpleasant tension, uneasiness and distress that accompanies psychic trait or conflict (Spielbeger, 2012). According to Spielbeger, anxiety is a construct commonly associated with deterioration in the performance of most human activities but it is such a diffuse and general emotion that most people either have a problem in recognizing in themselves or others or they mistake it for other ailment like fear or general body weakness. A lot of physical, social and psychological problems in school aggravate anxiety among students. For instance, financial hardship at school, inability to buy basic needs, heavy academic loads, and fear of embarrassment from parents, teachers and friends in examination further aggravate anxiety. Ogbu, (2010) stated that anxiety can be normal or pathological, mild or severe, advantageous or disadvantageous to thinking, action, episodic or persistent due to physical disease, or psychogenic accompanying other features of mental disorder and may for the duration of the attack affect perception and memory. All anxiety is a reaction to anticipating something stressful. Hence, Oresanya (2015) affirmed that anxiety may also arise when there is frustration occurring in some major life problems related to vocational, educational or adjustment.

According to Olorunfemi-Olabisi (2014) test anxiety is the physiological state of mind of a candidate about a test as expressed by the level of worry, fear, uncertainty, concern and helplessness expressed before, during or even after a test or examination. When an individual becomes anxious, the physiological system becomes aroused, such as the heart beating faster or the sweat glands producing more perspiration. At the same time the person may experience a higher sense of inadequacy. Okatahi (2015) ascertained that students are often confronted with lots of mental tasks that cause anxiety especially during test or examination periods. Test anxiety as an emotional reaction of students in testing situation has been identified by psychologists as a determinant of academic performance. In the context of this study, test anxiety is define as the feeling of apprehension which impair the cognitive abilities of student to perform competently in any give task. Such emotional state is accompanied with feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, heightened somatic reaction, anticipation of punishment and loss of status.

Chukwu (2014) highlighted some factors that can create test anxiety are: parents, friends or teachers that may pass their biased ideas to the students to make them believe that there is a connection between grade and self-worth. The fear of alienation by

parents, family or friends due to poor grades induces, anxiety on the students making them feel that they are not in control. Excessive test anxiety may occur when the teachers threaten the students with a test. Other factors that contribute to the development of test anxiety, among which are; self concept, self- awareness, self-image, peer factors and so on. If an individual's experience is negative, then the test anxiety level will be higher leading to lower performance. Consequently, if an individual's experience is positive, then, the test anxiety level will be lower leading to higher performance.

Farzaneh, Roonak and Hayeda (2016) in their studies on midwifery students showed that test anxiety occurs in female more than male students and this difference was significant. Michele (2016) noted that overall, females reported more test anxiety than males; and females experienced higher worry than emotionality, while males reported little difference between the two dimensions. Several researchers explored gender differences with respect to test anxiety and found that females have higher levels of overall test anxiety than males (Cassady & Johnson, 2013).

Test anxiety if not address among secondary school students, can persist for years, but appropriate counselling techniques can reduced test anxiety and enhance learning. Inthe field of psychology, there are numerous counselling therapies that enhance adaptive behaviour. These therapies are developed by psychologists and are geared towards the elimination of maladaptive behaviour such as fear anxiety, insecurity and depression among others. Relaxation technique is a helpful tool for coping with stress and promoting long term health by slowing down the body and quieting the mind. Relaxation technique generally entail refocusing attention to those areas of tension (Duirosaro, 2009).

According to Sarason (2011) relaxation training technique often helps people who are tense and generally anxious. The relation response is any technique or procedure that helps you to become relaxed and will take the place of an anxiety response. Explaining further, Zuercher, (2008) outline the various forms of relaxation training have been used to mitigate the deleterious effects of anxiety. Two particular techniques, deep breathing and muscle relaxation have been shown to effectively decrease anxiety levels in individuals who have difficulty relaxing in anxious situations. Nassau (2007) point out that refers to deep breathing can be defined as slow, diaphragmatic breathing that balances out the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the body. A number of researchers have investigated the effects and effectiveness of different psychological techniques in reducing test anxiety, yet the problem still remain a source of worry. Due to the increased rate of test anxiety, there is need to find a way to help students who experience test anxiety. It is against this backdrop that the study seek to determine the effect and relaxation technique on test anxiety among secondary school students in Anambra state, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

It is worrisome to observe that a large number of students consistently achieve below expectation even when it is obvious that they have the abilities. Many students however, experience test anxiety. Students with test anxiety experience high level of stress, nervousness, and apprehension during testing and evaluative situations that significantly interfere with their performance, emotional and behavioural well-being and attitudes toward school. The incidence of test anxiety has led some experts to redirect

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emphasis from poor academic performance to test anxiety. But surprisingly not much has been done to reduce this extreme level of anxiety towards test among students.

Hence test anxiety is a very serious threat to our educational system. Students need peace of mind, relax during test and be able to perform better during tests. Students with test anxiety need practical assistance through counselling processes. This study therefore, is interested in seeking possible solution for reducing test anxiety among secondary school students, in order to enhance excellence in academic performance and integrity among Nigeria students. In pursuit of this aim, the study seeks to investigate the effect of relaxation techniques on test anxiety among secondary school students.

Scope of the study

The study was delimited to the effect relaxation techniquein reducing test anxiety among secondary school students in Onitsha North local government area. The independent variables of this study was relaxation techniqueswhile test anxiety among secondary school students was the dependent variable. The scope was also limited to gender of students.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

- 1. What is the difference in the pretest and posttest test anxiety mean scores of students treated with relaxation technique and those in the conventional counselling?
- 2. What is the differences in the pretest and posttest test anxiety mean scores of male and female students treated with relaxation technique?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant.

- 1. There is no significant difference in the effect of relaxation technique in reducing secondary school students' test anxiety when compared with those in the control group who received conventional counselling using their mean scores.
- 2. There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing secondary school students' test anxiety of male and female students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Related Empirical Studies on Relaxation

A study by Zondi (2013) investigated the effect of relaxation techniques on test anxiety among students at the University of Zulu land (main campus. Data as collected on a sample of one hundred (=100) full time students aged between eighteen (18) and thirty to (32). The study consisted of the intervention group (N =60) and the control group (40). Results of the study indicated that participants in the intervention group obtained different results after the intervention of relaxation technique. There was a small discrepancy between the control and the intervention group in the post-test phase. This verified the hypothesis that breathing techniques had a positive effect on students with test anxiety. The results were however not statistically probably because of a shorter period of breathing intervention. On the whole, the intervention suggests that Johnson,

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Colleen, Sung and Washburn (2010) in their studies look at test anxiety in third grade students, as well as relaxation training as a treatment modality to deal with that anxiety. The study tested three hypotheses; 1) the pre-test and post test differences for the experimental group will show a significant decrease in anxiety level, 2) the pre and post-test differences for the control group will show no significant decrease in anxiety level, and 3) there will be a significant post-test difference in anxiety levels between the experimental and control groups. Those students that received relaxation training experienced less test anxiety after the treatment. Students in the control group showed no changes in test anxiety. The use of relaxation training among third grade students may be a beneficial method for teachers to reduce anxiety in their students.

Adeoti and Durosaro (2007) investigated the effectiveness of relaxation technique in reducing test anxiety among secondary school student in Nigeria: The study as guided by the research hypothesis. A pre-test, post test control group design was used in the study. Twenty-four SS IV students within Osogbo metropolis participated in the study. They were purposively assigned to two groups: the treatment and control group. a validated instrument titled "Test of anxiety inventory" was administered to the two groups before and after the experiment programme Analysis of covariance and Duncan multiply Range Test were used to analyze the data. Based on the findings, in training education curriculum and that school counsellor should employ Relaxation technique in assisting students to cope with test anxiety.

Heidi, Mera, Lincoln, and Amanda (2013), study was to reduce the negative effects of self perceived levels of test anxiety have on third grade students. The participants in this study consisted of 177 third-grade students at the Midwestern public elementary schools. Students at one school were taught relaxation techniques which students at the second school served as the control group, receive no training. The Westside test anxiety scale (Driscoll 2007), elevator breathing and guided relaxation were utilized to measure and manage levels of anxiety. The results indicated that the relaxation intervention had a significant effect in reducing test anxiety in the experimental group, in contrast, no significant decrease in test anxiety was found among the control group, the study highlights the implications for counselors, parents and teachers working with elementary students facing high stakes testing.

METHOD

Research Design

The research design for this present study was quasi-experimental. Akuezuilo and Agu (2004), pointed out that quasi experimental research design could be used in school setting where it is not always possible to use pure experimental design which they consider as disruption of school activities. It utilized the non randomized pretest- post test control group design comprising of 3 main groups (Experimental group I, and Control group) using two treatment groups [Relaxation Techniques (RT)].

Table 1: Diagrammatic representation of the experimental design

A non-randomised pre test and post-test control group design

Group	Pre-test	Research condition	Post-test	
Experimental	T_1	X ₁ (treatment)	T_2	
Control	T_1	X ₀ (Neutral interaction	T_2	

 T_1 stands for the pre-test that was given to all the students

 X_1 stands for the treatment (relaxation techniques) which was given to the experimental group

 X_0 stands for treatment that was given to the control group.

T₂ stands for the post-test was given to both the experimental and control groups.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was 453 students. Theses comprised of all the senior secondary school students (SS I & SS II) from all the co-educational secondary schools in Onitsha Urban Area with high test Anxiety. The students population were identified through pre-test administration of test anxiety inventory (TAI). The students found with high in test anxiety constituted the population. They was considered appropriate for this study because they are usually the one's experiencing test anxiety. There are 21 secondary schools in Ontisha Urban area (9 co-educational secondary schools) with a total population of 1,463. In addition to measuring individual difference in anxiety in test situation, the TAI sub scales assess worry and emotionality as major component of test anxiety. Students that 40 and above was included in the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample group of the research was 70 students. This comprise of senior secondary school (SS 1 & SS II) students that were identified with test anxiety from two selected co-educational secondary schools. Three schools with the highest number of students with highest level of test anxiety were the ones selected for this study from the secondary schools in Onitsha Urban Areas. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting two secondary schools because they have the highest number of students with test anxiety. The instrument, test Anxiety inventory was used for the identification of students with test anxiety problem. The two schools with the highest number of students with test anxiety served as the experimental groups I, and II (control group) respectively. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 35 students with test anxiety each for the three schools by balloting method without replacement.

Instrument for Data Collection

Test Anxiety inventory was adapted by this researcher from Spiel Berger (1980), but was further revalidated in Nigeria by Oladimeji (2005). The Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) is a self–report psychometric scale which was developed to measure individual difference in test Anxiety as situation – specific trait. The instrument comprises 20 statements describing different form of test anxiety on–four point scales, ranging from

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almost never (1), sometimes (2), often (3)and almost always (4). The highest possible score on the instrument is 80 (4 x 20), while the lowest possible score is 20 (20 x 1). Based on a modified 4-point scale, the respondents would be required to report frequently if they experience specific symptoms of anxiety before, during and after examinations. In addition to measuring individuals differences in anxiety in test situations, the TAI subscale assess worry and emotionality as a major component of test anxiety. Students that score .34.37 for males and 34.37 for females and above will be included in the study.

Validation of the Instrument

The Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) that was used has been validated. Oladimeji (2005), said that different form of validation such as (on current discriminate constraint and convergent validity were determined when it was used on Nigeria students.

Reliability of the Instrument

Oladimeji (2005) noted that the Pearson product moment statistical technique was used to correlate the test and retest scores under the non- examination condition. The co-efficient of reliability obtained were: 0.75, 0.79 and 0.56. forTwWA, W, TAI-E and TAI-T respectively. The worry and emotionality sub-scale scores have a good and excellent internal consistency reliability among sample of secondary school and university students. For male and females, median co-efficient alpha of 0.88 and 0.90 respectively, have been reported. Test scores stability over 2-4 weeks test –retest interval ranged from 0.80 to 0.81 for TAI (Spielberger, 1980).

Method of Data Collection

All the senior secondary school students from selected schools were given equal opportunity to participate in the study, the entry anxiety level of students was considered, using the pretest. All participants were given the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) and a general information questionnaire to complete. The researcher and three (3) well trained research assistants go round the selected secondary schools to distribute copies of questionnaire. The researcher gave an introductory instruction to the students on how to respond to the questionnaire according to the instruction. Each respondent was given the instrument (WTAS) to respond to the items. This enabled the researcher identify test anxious students with high level of anxiety.

The Treatment Programme is:-

1. Relaxation group

Students with higher score rating are considered to be test anxious students was assigned proportion. Based on the result of the non random sampling for assigning treatment models, students in experimental group were exposed to relaxation technique(for group I), while those in control group received no treatment but was conventional counselling by their school counsellor using other ways, different from the technique.

The researcher obtained the consent of the school principal before carrying on with the research. Experimental training took place at the schools. On the training days, the participants stayed in a conducive classrooms for relaxation technique. The control group received their counseling from their school counsellor (research assistant). After the six weeks treatment, the questionnaire was re-administered on all the students in both the experimental and control groups and was regarded the post test.

Experimental Procedures

This was the procedure the researcher adopted to ensure a successful implementation of the programme of relaxation technique. The researcher visited the schools, solicited for the cooperation of the school principals so as to build in the programme in the schools' activities. The researcher explained the purposes and benefits to be derivable from the treatment to the principals of the schools. After obtaining the permission, the researcher also got two guidance counsellors in the schools to assist in the study. The guidance counsellor introduced the researcher to the group as a guest counsellor during the period of the treatment.

Prior to the commencement of the treatment, Test Anxiety Inventory I (TAI) questionnaire were administered on the students in the experimental groups and control group. The tests were administered by the researcher assistants with the researcher monitoring the exercise, making sure that the test was taken under the same conditions and then collected the entire completed questionnaire. The treatment was designed to last for eight weeks using the normal school timetable that allocated 80 minutes for guidance and counselling. A total of eight sessions was ran. The control group were exposed to conventional counselling with the school counsellors providing the services to the students with test anxiety . This also continued for eight weeks, and then the students were post-tested.

For the experimental group, relaxation techniques was designed to last for eight weeks. Each session started with the counsellor's introduction to the issues to be addressed in the session and samples questions to elicit students' participation in the session. After the treatment, the Test Anxiety Inventory questionnaire was readministered to the experimental and control groups. The instrument were disguised by reshuffling before they were be re-administered. This was done the eight week treatment. The researcher monitored the exercise and make sure the students were under the same conditions and then, collected all completed questionnaire. The students' responses were scored and data generated was collected for statistical analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The completed instrument were scored following the scoring instruction provided in the TAI manual. Score that are above the Nigeria mean (34.37 for males and 34.37 for females) indicate the presence of test anxiety and score below this show no problem with test anxiety. The data relating to the research questions were analyzed using mean and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the difference in the pretest and posttest test anxiety mean scores of students treated with self- instruction and those in the conventional counselling?

Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Test Anxiety Mean Scores of Students Treated With Self-Instruction and Those in The Control Group

Source of Variation Remark	N	Pretest Mean	Postte	Lost Mean		
Relaxation Tech Effective	35	57.14	28.89	28.25		
Control	35	56.18	49.83	6.35		

Table 1 shows that the students treated with relaxation techniques had pretest mean score of 57.14 and posttest mean score of 28.89 with lost mean 28.25 in their test anxiety, while the students in the control group who received conventional counselling had pretest mean score of 56.18 and posttest mean score of 49.83 with lost mean 6.35. Therefore relaxation technique is effective in reducing the students' test anxiety.

Research Question 2

What is the differences in the pretest and posttest test anxiety mean scores of male and female students treated with relaxation technique?

Table 2: Pretest and Posttest Test Anxiety Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Treated With Relaxation Technique

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Lost Mean Remark
Male	17	58.12	28.65	29.47 slightly
difference				
Female	18	56.22	29.17	27.05

Table 2 reveals that the male students treated with relaxation technique had pretest mean score of 58.12 and posttest mean score of 28.65 with lost mean 29.47 in their test anxiety , while the female students in the group had pretest mean score of 56.22 and posttest mean score of 29.17 with lost mean 27.05. Therefore relaxation techniques is more effective in reducing the male students' test anxiety than female students .

Testing of Null Hypotheses Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the effect of relaxation technique in reducing secondary school students' test anxiety when compared with those in the control group who received conventional counselling using their mean scores.

Table 3: ANCOVA on the Test Anxiety Mean Scores of Students Treated With Relaxation Technique and Those who Received Conventional Counselling

Source of variation 0.05	SS	(df	MS	Cal. F	Crit. F	P
Corrected Model	8589.433	2		4294.716			
Intercept	596.986	1		596.986			
Pretest Scores	913.876	1		913.876			
Treatment Models	7928.941	1		7928.941	324.99		3.99
S							
Error	1634.639	67		24.389			
Total	118653.000		70				
Corrected Total	10224.071	69					

Table 3shows that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 69df denominator, the calculated F 324.99 is greater than the critical F 3.99. Therefore, the second null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of relaxation technique in reducing secondary school students' test anxiety is significant when compared with those in the control group.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing secondary school students' test anxiety of male and female students.

Table 4: ANCOVA on The Test Anxiety Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Treated With Relaxation Technique

Source of variation	SS	df		MS	Cal. F	Crit. F	P	0.05
Corrected Model	4.712	2		2.356				
Intercept	767.877	1		767.877				
Pretest Scores	2.829	1		2.829				
Gender	2.326	1		2.326	0.21	4.13		N S
Error	356.831	32		11.151				
Total	29565.000		35					
Corrected Total	361.543	34						

Table 4, indicates that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 34df denominator, the calculated F 0.21 is less than the critical F 4.13. Therefore, the fifth null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of relaxation technique in reducing test anxiety of male and female students.

Discussion of Result

Findings from the data analyzed in this study showed that relaxation skill is effective in reducing test anxiety among secondary school students when compared to those in the control group. Specifically, the finding indicated that students in both experimental group II and control group possessed test anxiety before the commencement of the study as measured by their score on the pre-test. The finding also indicated that the magnitude of the mean difference between the experimental and control group was significant in the post-test.

More so, the experimental group I (Relaxation Technique) reported a significant decrease in their test anxiety than the control group. This indicate that secondary school students in the treatment group gained a better understanding of their test anxiety as a result of receiving relaxation technique. This finding is consistent with Zondi (2013), who investigated the effect of relaxation techniques on test anxiety among students. Adeoti and Durosaro (2007), also supported that relaxation technique is effective in the treatment of test anxiety among secondary school students in Nigeria. One reason for decrease in students' test anxiety in the experimental group II over and above those in the control group might be due to the nerve relaxation process in relaxation technique. Since student might have been amazed how their thought effects their feelings and actions and as such it affected their test anxiety so much within the few weeks. This result supports the findings by Heidi, Mera, Lincoln, and Amanda (2009), which portrays the differential effects of relaxation technique in the reduction of test anxiety of secondary school students.

Furthermore, Relaxation techniques is slightly more effective in reducing the male students' test anxiety than in female students and there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of relaxation technique in reducing test anxiety of male and female students. This finding is supported by to Zondi (2013), who posits that research on gender difference on aggressive tendency reports that male students have lower aggressive tendency than female students. The might be because the male students who were treated with the relaxation technique where more willing to relax their tense nerve than their female counterpart.

It is important to note that the observed difference in the effects of treatment due to gender was not significant in this study. This is because the test of null hypothesis two showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students that relaxation technique. This indicated that although the present study found a difference in the mean post-test score of male and female students, this difference was only marginal and not significant. The difference male and female student in the experimental group was not due to gender per se. The difference may be due to chance. Being male or female is not a determinant of the effectiveness of relaxation technique, rather both male and female students actually benefitted equally from the technique.

One possibility that might help explain why students' test anxiety was reduced almost equally for both male and female was that relaxation techniques activities were equally enriching and intense for both gender types. In this study, both male and female students in the experimental group were prompted and given space to discuss the causes of test anxiety aggression, and ways to reduced test anxiety.

Conclusions

The study investigated the effect of relaxation technique on reducing test anxiety among secondary school students in Anambra State. The following conclusions have been drawn from the study:

- 1. Relaxation technique is effective in the treatment of secondary school students with test anxiety. As such, its usage should be encouraged.
- 2. Relaxation is slightly more effective in reducing the students' test anxiety than self-instruction technique based on their lost mean scores.

3. Relaxation techniques is slightly more effective in reducing the male students' test anxiety than in female students.

Implications of the Study

The study shows that relaxation technique is effective on test anxiety of secondary school students. In the light of this, there is need for guidance counsellors who are working to reduce students' test anxiety to familiarize themselves with relaxation technique used in this study. Since the techniques border on thought and behavioural changes and role play of behaviour , secondary school students can be taught on how to use them naturally and in therapeutic settings in solving their day to day life problems in and outside their classrooms. When the students (who are mostly adolescents) are equipped with appropriate behavioural techniques, they will be in a position to adapt to realistic and appropriate behaviour so that their transition from school to work will be hitch-free. The result obtained from this study showed that the intervention technique was effective when used to treat students with test anxiety.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- 1. As the use of relaxation technique have been shown to be effective in reducing secondary school students' test anxiety. It should be encouraged, practising school guidance and counsellor should learn to use the both techniques to assist students develop a less or zero test anxiety.
- 2. The use of elaxation technique techniques should be commenced in full force in secondary schools irrespective of students' gender as a way of reducing students' test anxiety.
- 3. The Anambra State Post Primary schools Service Commission should provide on –the-job training to practising school guidance and counsellor on the use of relaxation technique in treating test anxiety through seminar, symposia and conference.

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