



*Research Paper*

## Comparing the Effectiveness of Metacognitive Therapy and Assertiveness Training on Psychological Profile of Students with Foreign Language Anxiety

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study aimed to compare the effectiveness of metacognitive therapy and assertiveness training on the psychological profile of students with foreign language anxiety. The research method was quasi-intervention with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population of the study comprised all students with foreign language anxiety in junior high schools in Urmia, Iran. Of these, 60 were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling method and randomly divided into two intervention groups (n=40) and a control (n=20) group. Data were collected by Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz, et al., 1986) and the Depression and Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). The results showed that both treatments had a significant effect on improving depression, anxiety, and stress in students with foreign language anxiety in the post-test and follow-up stages.

**Keywords:** *Psychological profile, Metacognitive therapy, Assertiveness training, Foreign language anxiety*

### Introduction

One of the emotional components that have played a major role in psychological studies related to foreign language learning is Foreign

Language Anxiety (FLA) (Jin, Zhang & MacIntyre, 2020). Students with FLA face many problems and stresses, and the psychological profile, comprising three disorders of depression, anxiety, and stress (Bujang, Musa, Liu, et al., 2015), is the most common disorder among these students (Castillejo, 2019).

Metacognitive therapy (MT) is a new approach for treating psychological problems, but it is rarely observed for group therapy in research. It appears necessary to conduct research on metacognitive group therapy in students with FLA and compare its effectiveness with assertiveness training (AT) that plays a key role in improving people's quality of life so that we can help them find a more effective way to improve and treat psychological problems of students with FLA and enjoy a better mental health. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the final question of whether metacognitive therapy and assertiveness training are significantly different with regard to their effect on the psychological profile of students with FLA.

## Methodology

The research design was quasi-intervention with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population of the study comprised all students with FLA in junior high schools in Urmia, Iran. Of these, 60 individuals were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling method and randomly divided into two intervention groups (n=40) and a control group (n=20). During the treatment phase, five individuals in the intervention groups left the treatment before the end of the study. Finally, 55 individuals remained until the end of the intervention and evaluation. Data were collected by Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz, et al., 1986) and the Depression and Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). The questionnaires were first completed by all three groups. Then one of the intervention groups underwent metacognitive therapy for anxiety disorders (Wells, 2011) and the other intervention group received assertiveness training (Lin, Shiah, Chang, et al., 2004), but the control group did not receive any intervention.

## Results

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of research variables by groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Depression	MT	10.35	1.83	4.76	2.01	4.52	1.55
	AT	9.83	1.88	5.05	1.25	5.39	1.29
	Control	9.70	1.62	9.05	2.01	8.65	1.79
Anxiety	MT	10.41	1.90	5.00	1.90	5.17	1.74
	AT	10.22	2.12	5.66	1.71	6.22	1.73

	Control	10.30	1.68	9.45	1.82	9.30	1.83
Stress	MT	10.47	1.73	5.00	1.80	5.05	1.88
	AT	9.83	1.65	5.66	2.14	5.50	2.17
	Control	10.25	1.88	9.25	2.29	8.95	2.35

The mean scores of pre-tests, post-test, and follow-up reveal that the mean scores of psychological profile components of the students in the intervention groups decreased in post-test and follow-up. Meanwhile, the control group did not show significant changes among the three time points. To analyze the data, repeated measures ANOVA was used.

**Table 2:** Repeated measures ANOVA to compare pre-test, post-test and follow-up test of research variables

Variable	Source of changes	SS	df	MS	F	P	Eta
Depression	Group	235.27	2	117.63	16.83	0.01	0.39
	Error	363.43	52	6.98			
Anxiety	Group	256.89	2	128.44	19.70	0.01	0.43
	Error	338.94	52	6.51			
Stress	Group	259.63	2	129.81	13.86	0.01	0.35
	Error	486.93	52	9.36			

Table (2) shows that with the significance of F obtained in the between-groups source in depression (F = 16.83, P = 0.01), anxiety (P = 19.70, P = 0.01), and stress (F = 13.86, P = 0.01). There is a significant difference among the three measurement stages for depression, anxiety, and stress in the intervention and control groups (P <0.05).

**Table 3:** Results of Bonferroni *post hoc* test to compare three groups in research variables

Variable	Groups		Mean Difference	P
Depression	MT	AT	-0.21	0.685
	MT	Control	-2.58	0.01
	AT	Control	-2.37	0.01
Anxiety	MT	AT	-0.50	0.31
	MT	Control	-2.82	0.01
	AT	Control	-2.31	0.01
Stress	MT	AT	-0.06	0.91
	MT	Control	-2.64	0.01
	AT	Control	-2.57	0.01

The *post hoc* test showed that there was no significant difference between metacognition and assertiveness groups in the components of psychological profile ( $P > 0.05$ ) and both interventions reduced the psychological profile of students with FLA, but the two interventions were not significantly different in terms of effectiveness.

## Discussion and conclusion

The results showed that both types of interventions reduced the psychological profile of students with FLA by almost the same amount. The similarities between the two treatments can justify the similar treatment outcomes. Metacognitive therapy can alleviate anxiety and stress by improving people's metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experiences, and providing them with more accurate assessments and judgments of a person's cognitive status. A combination of these factors makes people feel they can better control their living conditions. As a result of this metacognitive feeling and experience, cognitive control, challenge, and tolerance are strengthened, which in turn improve metacognitive control strategies and coping styles in the individual. They also help individuals to challenge and control negative thoughts by coping and controlling problems and urge them to actively participate and not to avoid stressful and anxiety-inducing situations. (Torfayeh, Esmaeili & Yazdani, 2020). On the other hand, assertiveness training includes training behavioral skills that, in addition to empowering through focusing on skill deficiencies, cognitive reconstruction, changes in experiences, and sharing emotions, it minimizes negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, and frustration (Fuspita, Susanti & Putri, 2018). This approach usually focuses on facilitating cognitive mediators that play a role in inhibiting anxiety (for example, influencing people's fear and feeling of guilt for expressing their own and others' needs and desires) (Eslami, et al., 2016).

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