6th icCSBs 2017
The Annual International Conference on Cognitive - Social, and Behavioural Sciences

PREVENTION OF SCHOOL ANXIETY AMONG FIRST GRADERS THROUGH ART TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

Reform of school education increases the demands on primary schoolchildren. In Kazakhstan, there is a massive retraining of primary school teachers to enable them to teach within the new 12-year secondary education school curriculum. Parents impose high demands on the first-graders around successful academic performance under the newly designed curriculum, better performance, and adaptation to school, which causes the development of anxiety in children. This study aims to develop a school psychologist activity framework to prevent younger schoolchildren' anxiety through Art Technology. Art Technology is a system of methods, techniques and artistic tools that promote psychological treatment. In the study, the experimental and pedagogical work has been carried out on the basis of Gymnasium No 21 (a primary school) located in Almaty, Kazakhstan. 112 schoolchildren of the first grades participated in this study. To diagnose anxiety, the following methods were used: apparent anxiety scale for children (The Children's Form of Manifest Anxiety Scale - CMAS); anxiety test (Temmle, Dorky, Amen, 2002). The findings showed a high anxiety level in 36% of the first graders; average anxiety among 43% of the sample and the lowest anxiety among 16%, and high risk group was 5%. Upon implementation of the prevention framework of two blocks 'Emotions and Feelings', and 'Communication and Self-Esteem Improvement', a decrease in the percentage showing a high anxiety level was noted as it dropped to 20% of first graders, and the average and lowest levels increased to 68%, and 12% respectively of the sample. This proves the effectiveness of the designed framework of anxiety prevention using Art Technology. The prevention framework normalizes anxiety levels in junior schoolchildren.

Keywords: Art Technology in learning, anxiety.

1. Introduction

Since the academic year 2016-2017, a new curricula for Grade 1 has been introduced in all Kazakhstan schools; the introduction of a 12-year secondary education. The tri-lingual program is being introduced into schools. According to the Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, 73 thousand primary school teachers have undergone training according to the new methodology (Sagadiev, 2016). Courses for the development of professional skills in teachers have been developed jointly with Cambridge University. These changes, apart from positive strategic changes, have created tensions in classes both in terms of teacher's work load and impact on schoolchildren. Hence, the problem of increasing anxiety becomes acute for first-graders.

2. Problem Statement

First-graders have to adapt in the new conditions of school. A child needs to switch to a different daily routine, engage in educational activities, stay in a new environment and get used to teachers. Primary school teachers may also face difficulties in mastering new curricula and teaching methods pertaining to the primary education reform. Parents impose high demands on first-graders in terms of successful academic performance under the newly designed curriculum, better performance and adaptation to school. Many parents, teachers, pedagogical workers wonder how schoolchildren will handle the increased workload. There is a growing risk of anxiety developing in children. Anxiety affects not only physical and mental health, but also the schoolchildren' academic progress. School psychologists working at school can help schoolchildren handle the elevated anxiety levels based on modern scientific psychological and pedagogical advancements. In our opinion, it is possible to use new tools such as Art technologies to solve the problem of anxiety in schoolchildren.

3. Research Questions

The concerns of the researchers have led to several questions which are explored in this research;

Is it possible to design anxiety prevention framework in first-graders using Art Technology?

3.1 What components will it consist of?

3.2 What approaches can be applied?

3.3 What will be the anxiety level in first-graders after testing the model?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to alleviate anxiety levels of young children in schools through the application of a pedagogical tool, Art Technology, designed around the psychological framework for anxiety prevention in schoolchildren.

5. Research Methods

The program for the prevention and correction of anxiety in first-graders was developed by school psychologists. Practical methods were used, such as observation, including the use of scales and

interviewing. An experimental and pedagogical work, involving 112 first graders was carried out in Gymnasium No 21 in Almaty. To diagnose anxiety, the following methods were used: scale of apparent anxiety in children (The Children's Form of Manifest Anxiety Scale - CMAS); Anxiety test (Temmle, Dorky, & Amen 2002). The 'Individual map of first-grader observations' was developed, based on the map of observations (CN) by Stott (Gurova, 1992).

6. Literature Review

6.1. Definition of key research concepts

'Anxiety', 'preventive actions in the work of school psychologist' and 'Art Technology' are the basic concepts of research to be considered here. 'Anxiety' is understood as a prolonged state of alarm or fear of an undetermined threat. The notion of 'fear' is associated with the concept of anxiety. 'Fear' is a reaction to a specific danger.

Anxiety is a projection into the future, fear is an experience from the past that led to psychological trauma. According to Shcherbatykh (2007) while anxiety is always socially conditioned, fear is a consequence of the work of biological instincts. Shcherbatykh distinguishes the following differences between fear and anxiety (Table 01).

Table 01. Differences between fear and anxiety (Shcherbatykh, 2007)

Symptom	Anxiety	Fear
Relation to danger	Danger signal	Danger response
Time Features	Arises before the onset of danger	Occurs during the onset of danger
Influence on the psyche	Exciting	Inhibiting
The nature of the stimuli that cause emotion	Uncertain, abstract nature	Certain, specific character

Izard (2007) believes that fear is the primary emotion, while anxiety is a combination of several feelings: fear, sadness, shame or guilt. The state of anxiety, like any other mental state, finds its expression at different levels of human organization (Shcherbatykh, Nozdrachev, 2000):

- *at the physiological level* - anxiety manifests itself in increased heart rate, increased respiration, increased minute volume of blood circulation, increased blood pressure, increased overall excitability, lower sensitivity thresholds, dry mouth, weak legs, etc;

- *on the emotional-cognitive level* - it is characterized by the experience of helplessness, impotence, insecurity, ambivalence of feelings, generating difficulties in decision-making and goal-setting;

- *on a behavioral level* - it is characterized by aimlessly walking around the room, nail biting, rocking on a chair, tapping on the table, hair tearing, tearing different objects in hands, etc.

Most scientists agree that 'anxiety,' is worry (Freud, 1991; Petrovsky, 1998); psychic activity, temperament (Merlin, 1930), emotion (Izard, 2011), physiological reaction (Arakelov et al., 1997; Perls, 1995), acquired drive (Spen, Taylor, Mauren, Miller), the property of being human (Nemov, 2003).

We rely on the definition by Prikhozhan, "Anxiety is an emotional discomfort experience associated with waiting for trouble, with a premonition of imminent danger" (Prikhozhan, 2000). Anxiety is considered by us as an emotional-personal education, which, like any complex psychological education has cognitive, emotional and operational aspects.

Test anxiety was studied in Kazakhstan by Podlesaya (2009), Udartseva & et alia. Problems of the organization of psycho-education and prevention of test anxiety are considered in their works. The works of Zhumankulova (2005), Magel (2010) and others are devoted to the study of anxiety in the school-educational environment.

Taking into account the age specificities of junior schoolchildren, the use of Art Technology has been recommended as the most effective and safe method of anxiety prevention in junior schoolchildren. Art Technology is effective in working with children for several reasons. This method is effective for children who have limited vocabulary, for those who do not like or do not know how to share their fears or problems. Unlike many methods, Art Technology is based on art as a creative, fascinating process where children develop their creative abilities, and imperceptibly learn to handle their emotions.

Art Technology is a system of methods and techniques of artistic creativity, contributing to self-expression and the development of personality. Shkil (2013) defines Art technologies as methods that use the non-verbal language of art for the development of the personality and provide the opportunity to get in touch with the deep aspects of spiritual life; with the inner reality that develops from thoughts, feelings, perceptions and life experiences. Art technologies are based on the fact that artistic images can help a person understand him/herself and through creative self-expression make his/her life happier. Starikova gives the following definition of 'Art Technology as a combination of art and methods of artistic and creative activity to achieve educational goals' (Starikova, 2008).

Ilyin (2012) refers to Art technologies as visual aids (photographs, paintings, cartoons, diagrams, collages, slides); fairy tales; songs; rhyming and poem; games; cinema; computer creativity; theatrical productions; dancing; drawing.

'Prevention' (other - Greek *prophylaktikos* - precautionary) is a complex of various measures aimed at preventing any phenomenon or eliminating risk factors. Anxiety prevention is a complex of various methods and techniques aimed at preventing an unpleasant emotional experience of 'anxiety'.

6.2. Approaches to anxiety prevention

The study of literature made it possible to reveal psychodynamic, social, psychophysiological and functional approaches to the formation of anxiety and methods of prevention. Here, we present the most popular and frequently used methods and techniques in the prevention and correction of anxiety based on the analysis of international literature.

6.2.1. The medicinal method

An effective method of treatment on the basis of research is the medicinal method and sessions of psychotherapy or as it is commonly called in America 'conversation therapy.' Both approaches are used quite often; the choice depends on the patient, the client or psychotherapist, or the psychologist.

6.2.2. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)

A highly effective psychological method is cognitive-behavioral intervention; studies in this area have been conducted by Butler, Chapman, Forman & Beck (2006). Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is effective in treatment of panic disorder, phobia, social anxiety disorder and generalized anxiety disorder, among many other conditions. Cognitive therapy focuses on negative thoughts, or cognition that contribute to anxiety. Behavioral therapy considers how to behave and respond to troubling situations.

6.2.3. Solution - Focused Therapy (SFBT)

Solution - focused therapy is future-oriented and uses a focused approach that focuses on solutions, not problems. SFBT focuses on the final goal of the client, helping the client to realize what is important to him/her (Trepper, 2008). One of the methods used in SFBT is the Miracle Question (MQ). The question or question of 'no problem' is the interrogation method that a trainer, therapist or consultant can use to invite the client to imagine and describe in detail, his future where there will be no such problem. There are hard and fast rules on how to ask questions. Experience shows that this method is effective in dealing with various anxieties and phobias.

6.2.4. Programs for prevention and correction of anxiety

The most popular on the market in many foreign countries are electoral prevention frameworks. Most electoral prevention frameworks are aimed at working with individuals or groups affected by stressful life events, for example, divorce of parents (for example, Alpert-Gillis, Caroll and Cowan (1989)), transition from junior school level to middle level, which can be associated with a number of psychological difficulties, for example, class relationships, social roles and status, and so on. One of the programs for anxiety prevention among preschoolers is the Intervention Program developed by Macquarie University (Rapee, 2002), designed for children aged 3.5 to 4.5 years. The program Cool Kids is aimed at working with children aged 7-17 years. The program includes a package of documents; these are special books, methodological recommendations for the school psychologist, the parent and the child. Treatment with Cool Kids usually includes 10 sessions for 12 weeks (Rapee, 2006). Parents are an integral part of correctional work and are present at all sessions, but are less involved as compared to the children.

7. Findings

7.1. Designing a prevention framework using Art Technology

Art Technology is better structured than Art therapy and has a clear goal and outcome. Of course, Art Technology also embraces a therapeutic aspect, but it is more adapted within school educational environment.

A school psychologist cannot violate school regulations; he/she must stay aligned to the educational process. This causes some difficulties; firstly, a temporary restriction, as unfortunately, any elective or circle cannot last longer than 45 minutes. The children's busy schedule, since after classes many children attend extended day activities, sports sections, makes it difficult to assemble the entire

class at one time. These and many other factors made us consider the adaptation of many methods and techniques, so that they can be really applied in work with younger schoolchildren without interfering with the educational process.

Preventive work includes the following three interrelated directions:

1. Direct work with children on diagnostics, prevention and correction of anxiety.

2. Psychological education of teachers regarding anxiety as teachers tend to view anxiety rather as a positive feature that promotes the sense of responsibility, receptivity of a child, and so on.

3. Psychological education of parents. Teaching parents the specific ways on how to overcome the elevated anxiety level in children, as well as helping children learn the means to overcome anxiety.

The key aspect in prevention and overcoming anxiety is the removal of internal clamps, the acquisition of motor skills as well as freedom and smoothness of movements, which can be carried out with the help of teachers of relevant disciplines (rhythmics, physical education, dance-movement therapy, body-oriented therapies, etc.).

The following anxiety prevention framework for junior schoolchildren was developed by the researchers with a school psychologist (Figure 01).
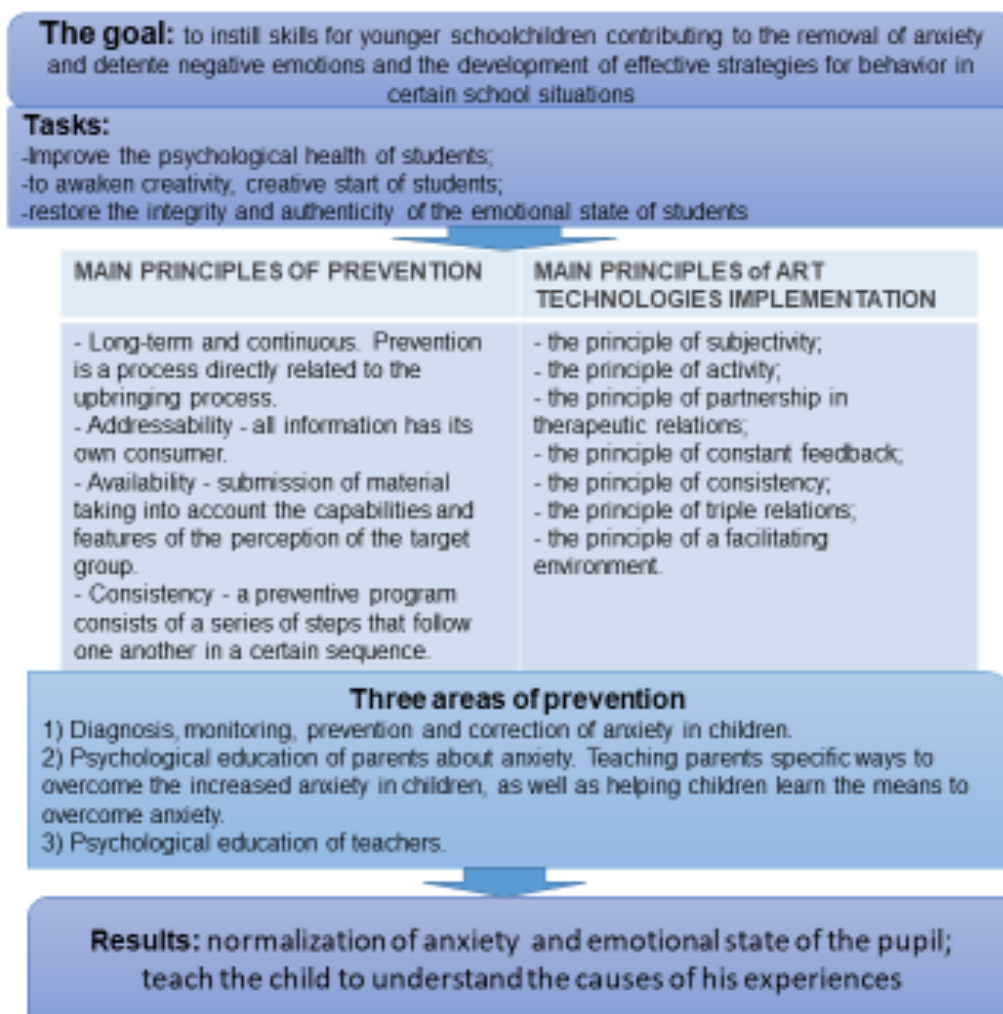

Figure 01. Anxiety prevention framework

The framework includes goals, objectives, principles, areas of prevention, and results.

7.2. Program Designing

The experimental work plan was designed according to the methodology of the pedagogical experiment by Isaeva and Taubayeva (2000). In order to study the influence of Art Technology on the anxiety level in junior schoolchildren, we conducted a psychological and pedagogical experiment at Gymnasium No. 21 in Almaty. A total of 112 schoolchildren of the first four classes (1 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' classes) participated in the experiment. The gender composition was 56% male and 44% female. The experiment was conducted in the school year during September 2016 - January 2017. The research process was as follows:

Stage 1 - ascertaining (September 2016) - selection of methods, organization of a primary survey, study of literature on the research topic;

Stage 2 - forming (October 2016 - April 2017) - implementation of preventive program through Art Technology;

Stage 3 - control (April 2017) - re-diagnosis, processing and analysis of findings.

At the ascertaining stage of the experiment, anxiety indicators for younger schoolchildren were determined. For the study, we chose the following methods:

1. Scale of apparent anxiety in children (The Children's Form of Manifest Anxiety Scale - CMAS). In the CIS countries, many people use the option adapted by Prikhozhan. Table 02 shows walls and characteristics of anxiety levels.

2. Anxiety test (Temmel, Dorky, Amen).

On the basis of the two methods, we designed a scale of anxiety levels to balance the indicators (Table 02).

Table 02. Scale of anxiety levels

Scale of apparent anxiety CMAS (adapted by Prihozhan)			Anxiety test (Temmel, Dorky, Amen)	Scale of anxiety levels
Walls	Characteristic	Note	Characteristic	Characteristic
1-2	The state of anxiety is not characteristic of the subject	Such 'excessive peace of mind' may or may not have a protective nature	Low anxiety level (IT from 0 to 20%).	Low anxiety level (IT from 0 to 20%). Walls 1-2
3-6	Normal anxiety level	Needed for adaptation and productive activities	Average anxiety level (IT from 20% to 50%);	Average anxiety level (IT from 20% to 50%); Walls 3-6
7-8	Somewhat elevated anxiety	It is often connected with a limited range of situations, a certain sphere of life	High anxiety level (IT above 50%);	High anxiety level (IT from 50% to 80%); Walls 7-8
9	Obviously elevated level	Usually it is 'spilled', generalized in nature		Risk group (IT from 80% to 100%); Walls 9-10
10	Very high anxiety	Risk group		

3. 'Individual Map of First-Grader Observations' was developed based on the observation map (CN) by Stott (Gurova, 1992).

At the forming stage of the experiment, a comprehensive program for anxiety prevention through Art Technology was tested (Table 03).

Table 03. Program for anxiety prevention in junior schoolchildren through Art Technology

No	Theme	Purpose	Forms of work
Module 1 - Emotions and Feelings			
1	Fear - what is it?	Creation of conditions for the realization of one's fears	Conversation. Discussion: what is fear. Pronouncing situations in which schoolchildren. What situations at school cause me anxiety, fear.
2	Fear and we	Awareness of the problems associated with school anxiety	Exercises: 'New, good ...', 'Walk through the fairy forest'. Discussion: what are the schoolchildren, parents, teachers afraid of.
3	School Fears	Learn to understand and regulate your fears	Exercises: 'Swap places those who ...', A story about school fear, Drawing school fears
4	In order not to be afraid, one must laugh	Learn to understand and regulate your fears	Exercises: 'New, good ...', Role-playing game 'The Nightmare Teacher', 'Favorite Teacher'. Discussion of what hinders us in training, and what helps. Meditation 'The Ray of the Sun' The game 'The Magic Store of Fears'
5	How to manage emotions? Managing your own emotions	Awareness of why emotions should be controlled To acquaint children with the methods of regulating their emotions, practicing the techniques of self-control of the emotional state	Discussion; Playing situations; The 'Unfinished Proposal'; Methods of regulating strong negative emotions
Module 2 - Communication and self-esteem improvement			
6	Let's talk ... drawings!	Practical use of knowledge obtained in previous studies	Drawing warm-up 'Completing the composition'; Group Collage
7	Friendship. Portrait of an ideal friend	Friendship as a confrontation of anxiety and fears	Conversation
8	My Dignity	Self-esteem improvement through self-analysis of merits	Exercise 'Ladoshka', 'Mayak'
9	Conflict-free communication	It is aimed at developing effective communication skills	Task 'Application'
10	Help and Mutual Assistance	The main task is to integrate the experience gained in the classroom	Exercise 'Help a friend'
11	My favourite school	Aimed at reinforcing positive attitude towards school	The game 'School for people', the game 'School for animals'
12	Summarizing	Creation of conditions for schoolchildren to reflect their achievements in class.	Discussion; Exercises 'I wish for myself', 'Complement' and 'Suitcase'

In developing the program, factors such as respondents' age, lesson length, etc. were taken into account. The program includes 12 lessons; each lesson is detailed and it is possible to make various

adjustments in the work process as these classes are creative. It is interesting that in the Art technologies sessions children became involved in the kinds, techniques and ways of creative activity experienced in the classroom.

Two classes of first-graders (1 'B' and 1 'D') numbering 55 were chosen to form the experimental groups based on the results of the diagnosis and a school psychologist. The psychologist also conducted training sessions on the program (Table 03).

Two other classes (1 'A' and 1 'C') numbering 57 were selected as control groups for the experiment. Repeated diagnostics was performed on them at the end of the experiment (as comparison against the sample for whom trainings were conducted).

At the control stage of the experiment, using the above methods, first-grader testing was conducted. Questionnaires were used as they are convenient for practical use, do not require special equipment and do not take much time to fill in. The results of the diagnosis according to the 'Scale of obvious anxiety in children' are illustrated in Table 04 and in Figure 03.

Table 04. Findings on anxiety level indicator before and after the experiment derived from the comparison of experimental and control groups

Walls	Levels	Control group		Experimental group	
		Before	After	Before	After
1-2	Low level	1%	0%	0%	0%
3-6	Normal	23%	52%	20%	57%
7-8	Likely elevated	37%	29%	43%	22%
9	High level	37%	19%	35%	20%
10	Risk group	2%	0%	2%	1%

The analysis of the table shows that in the experimental group the number of children with the index 'normal' increased noticeably.
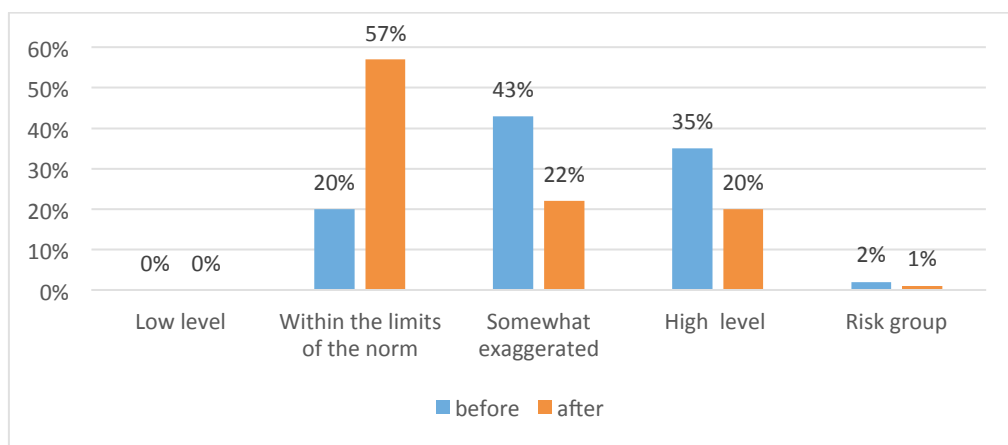

Figure 02. Results of anxiety level indicator before and after the experiment in the experimental group

According to Figure 03, the anxiety rate rose within the norm after the experiment, due to the drop in the high anxiety level.

The results were combined in two methods based on the developed anxiety level (Table 02). Table 05 shows the results of the experimental and control group before and after the experiment.

Table 05. Indicators of anxiety level in experimental and control groups

Group		Experimental group		Control group	
Levels	**%**	**Before**	**After**	**Before**	**After**
Low level	0-20%	16%	12%	17%	16%
Average level	20-50%	43%	68%	43%	45%
High level	50-80%	36%	20%	37%	36%
Risk group	80-100%	5%	0%	3%	3%

As can be seen from Table 05, the indicators of the average anxiety level in the experimental group elevated significantly, where low anxiety level in some participants elevated to average, which is also a good result. As for the control group, improvements are also evident (as the process of adaptation of first-graders at school was in progress), but not significant.
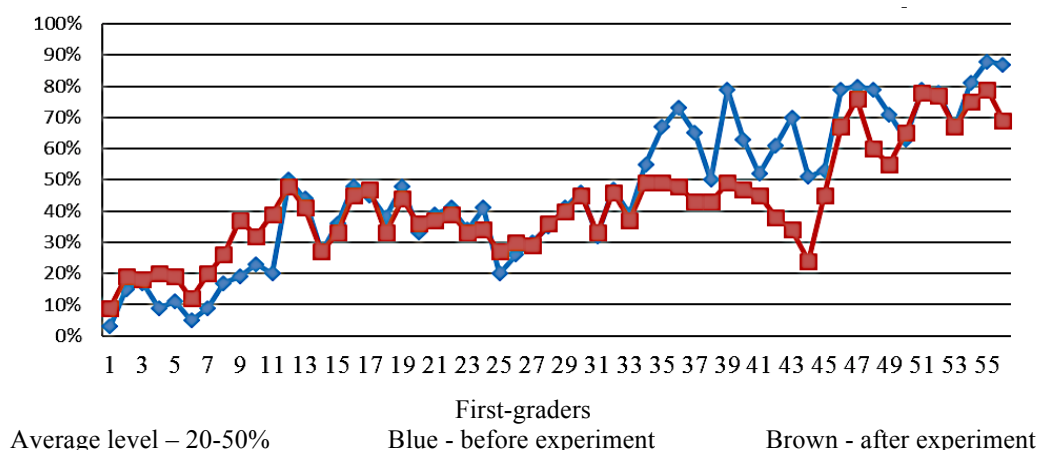

Average level – 20-50%   Blue - before experiment   Brown - after experiment

Figure 03. Individual Anxiety Level Indicators

As can be seen from Table 05, the indicators of average anxiety level in the experimental group elevated significantly, where low anxiety level in some participants elevated to average, which is also a good result. Low anxiety level indicates that the state of anxiety is not peculiar for children. Such children 'are not adapted to the competitive environment, not demonstrating perseverance when facing difficulties, and not pursuing high goals', 'they perceive the world around them as much more friendly, and do not see threats from other people' (Smirnov, 2007).

Thus, in most of the children in the experimental group, anxiety level is normalized. In the experimental group, 68% of the children showed average anxiety level after the training and high anxiety level was revealed in 20% of the children, although before the experiment it was 36% in the same children. There were no risk group children in the experimental group.

As for the control group, improvements can also be noticed (as adaptation process for first-graders has been launched in schools), but it is not significant. For comparison, in the control group, where no

training was conducted, low anxiety level at the output was shown in 16% of the children, medium anxiety level at 45%, and high anxiety level at 36%. Almost the same indicators were shown as a result of input diagnostics.

Two blocks of 'Emotions and Feelings' and 'Communication and Self-Esteem Improvement' were used in the above mentioned program.

A statistical method, the t-test was used to determine the reliability of the experimental results. It was found that differences in anxiety levels before and after the program are statistically significant (temp = 2.798, p <0.05).

8.   Discussion

The aim of this study was to develop an anxiety prevention framework in junior schoolchildren for school psychologists using Art Technology. A prevention model was developed that includes the goal, objectives, principles, capturing three areas of prevention and deliverables. The first area on diagnostics and correction of anxiety in first-graders is reflected in the received research findings (Figure 01). The main problems of excessive anxiety are manifested, as a rule, in a high level of personal anxiety, aggressive reactions, in personal or social barriers, and attitudes. A high anxiety level is observed in schoolchildren, on whom parents put high demands and in children of dysfunctional families. Reported violations were diagnosed using a set of methods.

The prevention framework was developed based on the model clarified above. As part of the program, we have included first-grade lessons using Art Technology. Trainings for the children were conducted by the school psychologist and the program developer. As a result, anxiety indices were normalised in children. The issue under discussion is the possibility of using the program by primary school teachers which would require him/her to be trained accordingly. At the same time, Stallard and Skryabina (2014) found that the successful treatment of school anxiety using the classroom-based cognitive behavior therapy method was characterized by the effective implementation of the methods by professional psychologists rather than by trained teachers.

Partial consultations were held with parents and primary school teachers during the implementation of this program. The issue of active interaction with primary school teachers, which can also be in the stage of increasing anxiety, requires further study. Anxiety in teachers is associated with reforms, the effective implementation of the new curriculum and changing teaching methods. Teachers should use more group teaching methods and more active and stimulating forms of assessment. Teachers have noted that group teaching methods promote indiscipline during classes, especially for first-graders and this creates anxiety in teachers which can have a negative influence on schoolchildren and the learning environment.

More studies can be conducted regarding the influence of and interaction with parents on children to relieve anxiety. Morgan (2016) showed how consultations with parents on the removal of anxiety in junior schoolchildren were conducted online.

9. Conclusion

As a result of the research, a successful anxiety prevention framework to use with first-graders by a school psychologist and a program for anxiety prevention in junior schoolchildren through Art Technology have been developed. The prevention framework includes goals, objectives, principles of prevention, use of Art technologies, areas of prevention and deliverables. Framework testing included the development of a training program for first-graders was based on Art technologies. Accordingly, out of the approaches considered, we chose the fourth approach *Programs for prevention, correction of anxiety* where the art-pedagogical approach was used. The prevention framework which was covered by a training included two blocks 'Emotions and Feelings' and 'Communication and Self-Esteem Improvement'. The training consisted of 12 lessons which were held weekly during extra time or class hours.

The program proved to be successful in alleviating the anxiety levels of the children in the study and it is evident that Art Technology and the designed framework can be used to prevent anxiety in first-graders. As part of the Art Technology program, the pictorial activity was shown to play a crucial role in restoring the emotional balance of the child's psyche through individual and group expression in creativity. This proves that creative activities are pivotal in helping children to deal successfully with the transition issues when they attend school and with teachers and parental expectations.

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