



Effectiveness of Cognitive Self-hypnosis Training on the Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being of School Principals

Shiva Mirzakhani Hafshejani¹, Afsaneh Farashbandi^{1*}

1. Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran

*Corresponding author:

Afsaneh Farashbandi, Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran
Tel: +98 (61) 33348420
Email: dr.farashbandi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background and Objective: The increasing recognition of the importance of emotional intelligence and psychological well-being for leaders, especially in education, has prompted increased research into the development of effective interventions to enhance these attributes. In this regard, the present study investigated the potential benefits of cognitive self-hypnosis training on the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of school principals.

Materials and Methods: This quasi-experimental study was performed with a pre-test/post-test design and a control group. The study population comprised all secondary school principals in Abadan County, Iran, during the 2023 academic year. A purposive sampling method was used to select 30 participants, who were randomly assigned to either the intervention group (n = 15) or the control group (n = 15). Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale. The intervention group received six 120-minute sessions of cognitive self-hypnosis training, while the control group received no intervention. Analysis of covariance was used to analyze the data.

Results: Post-test mean scores for both emotional intelligence and psychological well-being showed statistically significant increases in the intervention group ($p < 0.001$), whereas the scores in the control group remained relatively stable. These results suggest that cognitive self-hypnosis training had a positive impact on both the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of the intervention group, leading to significant improvements in both variables, compared to the control group.

Conclusion: Cognitive self-hypnosis training significantly improved the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of school principals, compared to the control group. These findings suggest that this intervention can be a valuable tool for enhancing leadership effectiveness in educational settings.

Keywords: Anxiety, Existential therapy, Infertility, Psychotherapy, Self-compassion

Background

Effective school performance and stakeholder well-being are not achieved by chance, but rather through highly motivated educational leaders with a deep understanding of pedagogy [1]. Such leaders must comprehend the complexities of teaching and learning processes, cultivate collaborative and participatory school environments, and empower teachers through professional development opportunities. A key aspect of this empowerment involves fostering the professional identity of teachers, defined as a positive psychological state associated with their work [2]. School administrators, as the primary leaders of educational institutions, are central to shaping the learning environment and ensuring the well-being of both students and staff [3]. However, the demanding and often stressful nature of their roles necessitates that school principals possess effective strategies for the management of their emotional states and

maintaining their psychological well-being [4].

Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in effective leadership, particularly in educational settings. It encompasses the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others, differentiate between emotions, and utilize this information to guide thought and action [5]. Emotional intelligence is not merely emotional learning [6], but rather the capacity to manage emotions and apply them to cognitive tasks, such as thinking and problem-solving. Even with extensive training, individuals lacking emotional intelligence may struggle to become outstanding and successful organizational leaders [7]. Indeed, emotional intelligence is now widely recognized as a key component of individual success [8].

Beyond emotional intelligence, the psychological well-being of school administrators is essential for the achievement of school goals. Psychological well-

being is a multifaceted construct encompassing subjective well-being, self-efficacy, autonomy, and the ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others [9, 10]. The heavy workload often experienced by administrators can jeopardize their psychological well-being. It is a combination of positive emotions (affective well-being) and positive functioning (social and psychological well-being) [11]. More specifically, psychological well-being can be defined as the inner experience of positive emotions, feelings of vitality and emotional health, the absence of psychological distress, overall life satisfaction, and the pursuit of self-actualization [12, 13]. It plays a critical role in the promotion of overall health and the improvement of psychosocial functioning.

Given the significant role of school principals in advancing national education system goals and considering the challenges they encounter, various training programs, including cognitive self-hypnosis training, can be implemented to enhance their emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Hypnosis itself can be defined as a heightened state of suggestibility induced by a hypnotist, essentially a state of focused attention [14]. Historically, hypnosis has been used for various purposes. Ancient civilizations, including some individuals in early medical practices, viewed trance as a divine attribute [15]. Examples include Iranian Magi and Indian Yogis who, through focused concentration, would induce a cataleptic state (a hypnotic or self-hypnotic phenomenon) and claim to have attained supernatural healing powers [16].

Modern hypnosis, along with scientifically developed relaxation techniques, represents a specialized therapeutic approach with a broader range of applications than in the past [17]. Hypnosis involves a state of heightened focus on a specific stimulus, while other stimuli (environmental or bodily) are disregarded [18]. As a psychotherapeutic method, hypnosis alters the state of consciousness and utilizes three core components, namely concentration (or attraction), dissociation, and suggestibility. These components facilitate a state in which hypnotic treatment can be effectively applied. In this altered state of consciousness, suggestions from the therapist can penetrate both the conscious and subconscious minds, leading to a deeper and more lasting impact—the basis of hypnotherapy. Individuals with higher hypnotizability tend to respond more readily to such suggestions [19].

Considering the critical role of administrators in achieving educational objectives, examination of their emotional intelligence and psychological well-being is of paramount importance. Cognitive self-hypnosis training offers a promising avenue for

enhancing these crucial attributes. Managers with high emotional intelligence and the necessary technical expertise are better equipped to navigate conflicts and address organizational weaknesses. Emotionally intelligent managers are also effective leaders who achieve goals with maximum efficiency, employee satisfaction, and commitment. Therefore, cognitive self-hypnosis training holds potential for improving health indicators, such as emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, in school administrators.

Objectives

This study investigated the effectiveness of cognitive self-hypnosis training on the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of secondary school administrators.

Materials and Methods

This quasi-experimental study employed a pre-test–post-test control group design. The study population consisted of all secondary school principals in Abadan County, Iran, in the 2023 academic year. A purposive sample of 30 principals was selected and randomly assigned to either an intervention group ($n = 15$) or a control group ($n = 15$). Inclusion criteria were (a) providing informed consent to participate in the study, (b) completing all pre-test and post-test questionnaires (Emotional Intelligence Scale [EIS] and Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale), (c) scoring below the mean on either the EIS or the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale at pre-test, and (d) not participating in concurrent courses or treatments that could influence emotional intelligence or psychological well-being. Exclusion criteria were (a) missing more than one of the six training sessions, and (b) withdrawing from the study at any point.

Study tools

1. The Emotional Intelligence Scale

The EIS was developed by Bradberry et al. [20] in 28 items and aims to assess emotional intelligence across four domains, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1–6), with the total score representing overall emotional intelligence. Scores below 60, between 60 and 80, and above 80 indicate low, moderate, and high levels of emotional intelligence, respectively [20]. The EIS has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency in previous Iranian research ($\alpha = 0.81$) [21]. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.79.

2. Psychological Well-being Scale

The Psychological Well-being Scale, developed by

Ryff [22], consists of 18 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). This instrument measures six dimensions of psychological well-being, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The total score, calculated by summing the scores across all six dimensions, ranges from 18 to 108. Bayani et al. [23] reported a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.82 for the Psychological Well-being Scale. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.85.

Intervention

Cognitive Self-hypnosis Training

The cognitive self-hypnosis training intervention consisted of six 60-minute sessions which were conducted twice weekly. This training was administered to the intervention group as follows: Session 1: Introduction to hypnosis and self-hypnosis, including their properties; introduction to aggression, its causes, and coping strategies; practical application of progressive muscle relaxation using hypnosis (Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique); and guided dialogue to enhance emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.

Session 2: Instruction in self-hypnosis techniques and assignment of self-hypnosis relaxation exercises for practice.

Session 3: Review of the assigned exercises of the previous session, muscle relaxation with hypnosis, guided dialogue focused on strengthening the ego and enhancing self-esteem, reinforcement of self-hypnosis techniques, and assignment of self-hypnosis exercises.

Session 4: Review of the assigned exercises of the previous session; muscle relaxation with hypnosis; guided dialogue focused on inner awareness, self-respect, and gratitude for bodily functions; reinforcement of self-hypnosis techniques; and assignment of self-hypnosis exercises.

Session 5: Review of the assigned exercises of the previous session, application of the eye-fixation technique and guided dialogue focused on existential themes and drawing energy from nature, reinforcement of self-hypnosis techniques, and assignment of self-hypnosis exercises.

Session 6: Review of the assigned exercises of the previous session, application of a nature-based technique and guided dialogue incorporating a "forgiveness room" metaphor for releasing anger and resentment, and administration of the post-test.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using analysis of

covariance (ANCOVA) in SPSS-27 statistical software.

Results

The participants in this study comprised 30 school principals with a mean age of 48.65 ± 7.39 years. Regarding gender, 18 (60%) participants were female. Moreover, 10 (33.33%) participants were single. In terms of educational level, 5 (16.67%), 20 (66.66%), and 5 (16.67%) had bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees, respectively. The means and standard deviations for the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the study variables

Variables	Groups	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Emotional intelligence	Intervention group	78.86	18.03	103.20	17.01
	Control group	77.53	20.46	82.06	20.07
Psychological well-being	Intervention group	50.40	11.12	69.00	16.07
	Control group	53.13	13.27	51.26	12.31

As shown in Table 1, the intervention group demonstrated significant changes in mean scores for the study variables from the pre-test to post-test stage, whereas the control group showed no such significant changes. Therefore, ANCOVA was employed to examine the significance of the differences between the two groups. Prior to conducting the ANCOVA, its assumptions were assessed. First, the absence of influential outliers in the study variables was confirmed using skewness and kurtosis indices. The results indicated that skewness and kurtosis values fell within the acceptable range of -2 to 2, suggesting a normal distribution of the data.

Afterward, Levene's test was used to examine the assumption of homogeneity of variances for both emotional intelligence ($F = 0.06$, $p = 0.811$) and psychological well-being ($F = 1.98$, $P = 0.170$), confirming equal variances between the experimental and control groups. The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was also examined for emotional intelligence ($F = 2.99$, $p = 0.068$) and psychological well-being ($F = 0.44$, $p = 0.651$). These results supported the use of ANCOVA. Subsequently, ANCOVA was used to compare the experimental and control groups on post-test scores, controlling for the effect of pre-test scores, to determine the impact of the cognitive self-hypnosis training intervention on emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of covariance results for post-test scores of emotional intelligence and psychological well-being

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>	η^2
Emotional intelligence	92.13	1	92.13	69.73	0.001	0.72
Psychological well-being	21.35	1	21.35	51.36	0.001	0.66

As shown in Table 2, the analysis of covariance revealed the significant effect of the intervention on emotional intelligence ($F = 69.73$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that cognitive self-hypnosis training significantly improved emotional intelligence in the intervention group, compared to the control group at the post-test. Similarly, a significant effect was found for psychological well-being ($F = 51.36$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that cognitive self-hypnosis training significantly improved psychological well-being in the intervention group, compared to the control group at the post-test stage.

Discussion

This study evaluated the efficacy of cognitive self-hypnosis training in enhancing the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of school principals. The results indicated that cognitive self-hypnosis training was effective in improving the emotional intelligence of principals. These findings are consistent with those of prior research, such as the works of Zaraineh et al. [24], Piri and Saeidi [25], and Lin Latt et al. [26]. For instance, Piri and Saeidi [25] demonstrated that cognitive-behavioral hypnotherapy significantly improved communication and problem-solving skills in adolescents. This highlights the potential of hypnotherapeutic approaches to enhance interpersonal skills, which are crucial components of emotional intelligence.

Similarly, Lin Latt et al. [26] found that mindful self-hypnosis training reduced perceived stress and enhanced emotional intelligence and other psychological factors. This suggests that self-hypnosis interventions can positively impact stress management and emotional regulation, both of which are closely linked to emotional intelligence. These convergent findings across studies employing various hypnotherapeutic techniques reinforce the argument for the positive impact of such interventions on emotional intelligence.

The observed improvements in emotional intelligence among school principals can be understood within the context of their demanding roles. Administrators are crucial assets within educational organizations and play a vital role in shaping the learning environment. Competent and knowledgeable administrators effectively utilize

their internal capabilities, specialized knowledge, and professional experience to optimize organizational goal attainment with minimal resources. It can be said that emotional intelligence is a key factor contributing to administrative success.

A substantial body of research suggests that emotional intelligence significantly influences various cognitive functions, including memory, cognitive abilities, meaning-making, judgment, and decision-making, as well as psychosocial development. Individuals with high emotional intelligence demonstrate a greater capacity to adapt to daily challenges and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. Furthermore, high emotional intelligence is significantly correlated with extraversion, flexibility, the ability to recognize diverse emotions, and the coordination of emotions and their impact on the brain and behavior [25]. Through the enhancement of emotional intelligence, cognitive self-hypnosis training may empower principals to better manage their own emotions, understand and respond empathetically to the emotions of others, and build stronger relationships within their school communities. This, in turn, can lead to improved leadership effectiveness, a more positive school climate, and enhanced teacher and student well-being.

Some individuals lack the necessary social skills and interpersonal communication techniques, potentially due to a lack of appropriate training. Consequently, they may experience uncertainty in social situations, which leads to anxiety when establishing professional or interpersonal relationships. Their difficulty in forming intimate and satisfying relationships can result in distress, anxiety, and sadness, particularly when faced with social realities and the perceived risk of negative evaluation [24]. These individuals may also avoid meeting new people or entering unfamiliar social settings and experience distress even when interacting with friends and acquaintances. Indeed, deficient communication skills can be associated with, or even contribute to, social anxiety [26].

Furthermore, the findings indicated that cognitive self-hypnosis training significantly improved the psychological well-being of school administrators. This result aligns with those of previous research conducted by Talaeizadeh et al. [16], Caron-Trahan et al. [27], and Elkins et al. [28], which have demonstrated the positive impact of hypnotherapeutic interventions on psychological well-being in various populations. For example, Caron-Trahan et al. [27] demonstrated the effectiveness of self-hypnosis in the reduction of chronic pain and enhancement of psychological

well-being in pregnant women. This suggests that self-hypnosis can be a valuable tool for managing both physical and psychological stressors, contributing to an overall sense of well-being. Likewise, Elkins et al. [28] showed that mental self-hypnosis positively impacts self-care and psychological well-being among employees. This highlights the potential of self-hypnosis to empower individuals to take a more active role in managing their own well-being, both within and outside of the workplace.

These findings can be explained by the underlying mechanisms of cognitive-behavioral hypnotherapy, which shares its core principles with cognitive-behavioral therapy. A central tenet of this approach is that much psychological distress originates from negative self-hypnosis, where negative thoughts and beliefs are accepted without critical evaluation or even conscious awareness. These ingrained negative cognitions can contribute to a range of psychological difficulties, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Cognitive-behavioral hypnotherapy seeks to address these issues by combining the power of hypnosis with the techniques of cognitive-behavioral therapy. Therapists utilize hypnotic techniques to facilitate access to the subconscious mind, allowing for the identification and modification of maladaptive thought patterns. Combined with cognitive-behavioral methods, this approach aims to replace negative cognitions with more constructive and adaptive ones, create positive imagery, and importantly, suspend critical thinking during the hypnotic state to enhance receptivity to therapeutic suggestions [27]. By reducing the influence of negative self-hypnosis and promoting positive self-talk and imagery, cognitive self-hypnosis training can empower individuals to develop a more positive and resilient mindset, contributing to enhanced psychological well-being.

Cognitive self-hypnosis training offers the potential to enhance psychological well-being across various domains. This training involves learning to harness the power of the mind to manage psychological stress, alleviate unpleasant physical symptoms, and facilitate changes in specific habits and behaviors. A key characteristic of this method is the involuntary nature of the suggested movements and sensations. Cognitive self-hypnosis training is based on the premise that much psychological distress arises from negative self-hypnosis, where negative thoughts are accepted without critical evaluation or even conscious awareness. Therapists utilize hypnotic techniques combined with cognitive-behavioral methods to reduce pathological fear [16]. As with any research, this study has certain

limitations. Since the study sample consisted of secondary school principals in Abadan County, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to other employees and managers in different organizational settings. The reliance solely on self-reported data, without incorporating interviews, also limits the generalizability of the results. Finally, the absence of a follow-up assessment precludes the ability to evaluate the long-term effects of the training.

Conclusion

Findings of this study demonstrate the efficacy of cognitive self-hypnosis training in enhancing the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of school principals. The intervention group showed significant improvements in both emotional intelligence and psychological well-being following the intervention, compared to the control group. These results suggest that cognitive self-hypnosis may be a valuable tool for promoting the overall well-being and effectiveness of educational leaders. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of this intervention and its potential generalizability to other populations.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Branch, Ahvaz, Iran (code: IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1403.108).

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the drafting and revision of the manuscript and are accountable for its accuracy.

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Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of the current research.

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