

Intervention for Nigerian preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism

Implications for history lecturers

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Abstract

Background: Individuals enrolled in a university program that will lead to a degree in history are considered preservice historians in the context of this study. Their goal is to become professional historians after graduating from the university. The purpose of this study was to determine whether cognitive behavioral coaching (CBC) had an effect on maladaptive academic perfectionism in Nigerian preservice historians.

Method: The study included a randomized sample of 98 preservice historians from Nigerian public universities in the country's Southeast zone [49 preservice historians were assigned to the cognitive behavioral coaching group—CBC Group, while 49 preservice historians were assigned to the waitlist control group—Waitlist control Group].

Results: The finding indicate that preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism decreased significantly following cognitive behavioral coaching. There was also a significant interaction effect of time and group on the reduction of preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism.

Conclusion: This study suggests that cognitive behavioral coaching is an effective intervention for preservice historians who struggle with maladaptive academic perfectionism. The study's implications for history lecturers were discussed. Future study could investigate how maladaptive academic perfectionism affects postgraduate history students and how CBC can help them.

Abbreviations: CBC = cognitive-behavioral coaching, WC = waitlist control.

Keywords: academic perfectionism, cognitive-behavioral coaching, maladaptive perfectionism, preservice historians

1. Introduction

1.1. Maladaptive academic perfectionism

Perfectionism is a personality trait characterized by striving for perfection and setting excessively high performance standards, as well as tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's own

behavior.^[1] Perfectionism is perceived as having a negative impact on the learning process.^[2] Maladaptive academic perfectionism is one of the most significant issues confronting preservice individuals.^[2] Preservice individuals frequently become entangled in the process of establishing excessively high academic standards.^[3] While some perfectionistic behaviors can be beneficial academically and socially,^[4,5] there is growing concern about the negative impact of maladaptive perfectionism, a type of perfectionism that develops a pathological or unhealthy personality trait in individuals, resulting in severe negative consequences.^[6] According to research, maladaptive academic perfectionism can harm preservice individuals' mental health by causing anxiety, self-criticism, and persistent feelings of dissatisfaction.^[7] Maladaptive perfectionism is associated with lower self-esteem and depression.^[8] Maladaptive perfectionism has long been thought to be linked to psychological distress, with evidence that it can act as a risk or sustaining factor in a variety of psychological difficulties.^[9]

1.2. Cognitive-behavioral coaching

Cognitive-behavioral coaching (CBC) models have been shown to be effective in a variety of coaching contexts, including the reduction of maladaptive perfectionism.^[10,11] Evidence suggests that a cognitive behavior coaching intervention that targets unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviors associated with perfectionism can be beneficial.^[12,13] Cognitive-behavioral coaching is one of the most widely used coaching models in coaching psychology.^[14,15] It is motivated by cognitive-behavioral therapy

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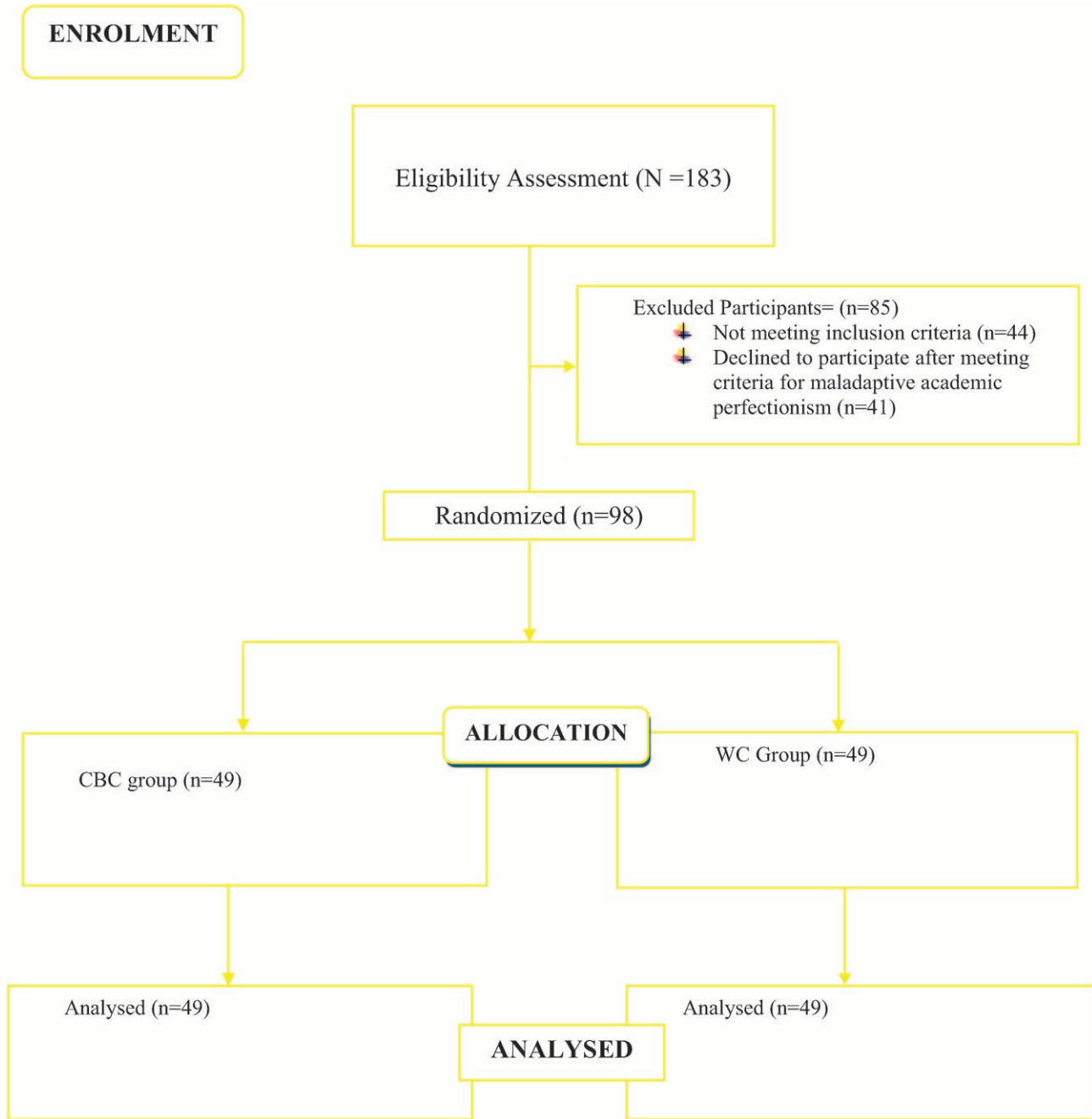


Figure 1. Participant flowchart.

(CBT) principles, which state that emotions are a result of how people perceive situations, not the situations themselves,^[16] and that the ultimate goal of therapy (or coaching, in the case of CBC) is to assist the client in developing autonomy and becoming their own therapist (or coach).^[17] The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of cognitive-behavioral coaching on maladaptive academic perfectionism in Nigerian preservice historians.

1.3. Preservice historians

Individuals and/or students enrolled in a university program that will lead to a degree in history are considered preservice historians

in the context of this research. Their goal is to become professional historians after graduating from the university. In other words, preservice historians are candidates accepted into a university history program, but who are not yet qualified for certification as historians. Due to the abstract nature of the subject, the teaching and learning of history can be a difficult experience.^[18] As a result, Ghansah^[19] observes that the teaching and learning of history necessitates more ingenuity from teachers and students as the subject requires conscientious teachers and students. According to the researchers' observations, most preservice historians may exhibit maladaptive academic perfectionism as a result of the intensive course-work schedule and critical thinking demands

Table 1
The preservice historians' demographic characteristics.

Characteristics	Subgroup	CBC Group M ± SD	WC Group M ± SD	Test value	P value
Age	Mean age	24.12 ± 1.17	24.49 ± 1.19	-1.54	.13
Gender		n (%)	n (%)	χ^2	
	Male	26 (53.1)	17 (34.7)	3.36	.07
	Female	23 (46.9)	32 (65.3)		

CBC = cognitive behavior coaching, *t*=*t*-test, WC = waitlist Control, χ^2 = Chi-square.

associated with their course program. In essence, all of the pressures placed on preservice historians may predispose them to maladaptive academic perfectionism.^[20] Given these considerations, the current study hypothesizes that CBC will have a significant effect on the reduction of preservice historians' maladaptive perfectionism from pre to-postcoaching in comparison to a waitlist control group.

2. Method

The researchers obtained ethics approval for this study from Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nigeria. Following the Helsinki Declaration, the research procedures were carried out. The study included a randomized sample of 98 preservice historians from selected Nigerian public universities in the country's Southeast zone [49 preservice historians were assigned to the cognitive behavioral coaching group—CBC Group, while 49 preservice historians were assigned to the waitlist control group—Waitlist control (WC) Group] (see Fig. 1). Each preservice historian who agreed to participate in this study did so after reading and signing an informed consent form. It was decided to use a simple random list generated by Random Allocation Software^[21] for the purpose of assigning participants to the study. The Gpower program^[22] was used to calculate and justify the sample size for the study (effect size *f* = 0.25; *f*-crit = 3.94; actual power = 80%; err: .05).

In this study, an open-label, randomized controlled trial approach was used. Eligibility criteria was demonstrating high level of maladaptive academic perfectionism and providing written informed consent to participate. During the eligibility assessment, 183 preservice historians were given the Academic Perfectionism Questionnaire (APQ).^[23,24] The APQ contains 37 items that were used to gather information on students' perfectionistic behaviors.^[23] The APQ includes negative and positive skewed items that ask subjects to describe their level of perfectionism and how they manage their schoolwork. For positively skewed items, the APQ items were rated on a four-point scale of Always (4), Often (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1). The scores for the negatively skewed items were reversed (1, 2, 3, and 4). Participants with mean scores greater than 2.50 were considered to have a high level of academic perfectionism and to be maladaptive, whereas those with mean scores less than 2.50 were considered to have a low level of academic perfectionism and to be adaptive.^[23,24] The APQ can be completed within 20 minutes. Sample items include, "I usually let people know when their work is not up to my standards" and "I don't think through my options carefully before making a decision about academic responsibilities". The APQ's internal consistency reliability was 0.81 Cronbach's alpha.^[23,24]

The preservice historians received cognitive behavioral coaching using a cognitive behavior coaching manual for treating

maladaptive academic perfectionism.^[24] This cognitive behavioral coaching intervention was offered for a period of 6 weeks. Each coaching plan was created with the intention of being used in coaching for 45 minutes at a time.^[24] The coaching plan was based on the cognitive behavioral coaching intervention's problem-solving model.^[25] The waitlist control group's preservice historians were scheduled to receive their coaching intervention one month after the last follow-up meeting. The data was collected twice (precoaching and postcoaching). In addition, data analysis was carried out in the JASP program using repeated measures analysis of variance at a significance level of 0.05. Omega squared (ω^2) was used to calculate the size of the treatment effect.

3. Results

In Table 1, the demographic characteristics of preservice historians are shown by group, with the mean age of the CBC group being 24.12 ± 1.17 and the mean age of the WC group being 24.49 ± 1.19. There were 26 (53.1%) male and 23 (46.7%) female preservice historians in the CBC group. In the WC group, there were 17 male (34.7%) and 32 female (65.3%) preservice historians.

The descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of preservice historians' APQ scores by study group can be found in Table 2. A precoaching APQ score of 3.10 ± 0.12 was obtained for the CBC group and 3.11 ± 0.11 was obtained for the WC group. Participants' precoaching academic perfectionism scores exceeded 2.50, which indicates a high level of maladaptive academic perfectionism. Conversely, postcoaching APQ scores for participants in the CBC group were less than 2.50, which indicates a substantial decrease in maladaptive academic perfectionism.

A comparison of the pre to-postcoaching scores of preservice historians in the CBC group and waitlist control group shows that CBC substantially reduced pre-service historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism (*F* [196] = 501.08, *P* < .001, ω^2 = 0.72) (see Table 3).

The results of Table 4 indicate a significant effect of time (pre to-postcoaching) on the reduction of preservice historians'

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism.

	Group	Mean	SD
Precoaching	CBC Group	3.10	0.12
	WC Group	3.11	0.11
Postcoaching	CBC Group	1.54	0.09
	WC Group	2.97	0.35

SD = standard deviation.

Table 3**A repeated measures analysis of variance (between-subjects effect) of preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism.**

Cases	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P	ω^2
Group	25.29	1	25.29	501.08	<.001	0.72
Residuals	4.85	96	0.05			

Table 4**A repeated measures analysis of variance (within-subjects effect) of preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism.**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P	ω^2
Time	35.79	1	35.79	1265.24	<.001	0.82
Time* Group	24.71	1	24.71	873.54	<.001	0.76
Residuals	2.72	96	0.03			

maladaptive academic perfectionism ($F [196]=1265.24$, $P <.001$, $\omega^2=0.82$). The interaction effect between time and group on preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism was also significant ($F [196]=873.54$, $P <.001$, $\omega^2=0.76$).

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether cognitive behavioral coaching had an effect on maladaptive academic perfectionism in Nigerian preservice historians. The findings indicate that the preservice historians' maladaptive perfectionism decreased significantly following cognitive behavioral coaching. There was also a significant interaction effect of time and group on the reduction of preservice historians' maladaptive academic perfectionism. The findings are consistent with Victor-Aigbodion et al^[24] work, which reported a significant decrease in participants' academic perfectionism following a CBC intervention. The current findings corroborate previous research demonstrating the efficacy of a cognitive behavioral model in addressing perfectionism issues.^[26,27] Additionally, the findings corroborate those of Kothari et al, who reported a significant decrease in maladaptive perfectionism among their subjects.^[28]

Additionally, the findings of this study corroborate those of Shafran et al,^[29] who discovered that a cognitive behavioral treatment model was effective in reducing participants' maladaptive perfectionism in a randomized controlled trial. Other studies that used a cognitive behavioral coaching approach to address maladaptive perfectionism discovered statistically significant results among study participants.^[11,30] Egan et al.^[12] provided compelling evidence for a cognitive behavioral model of perfectionism. Lowndes et al^[31] also discovered that participants who received cognitive behavioral treatment for perfectionism experienced significant reductions in perfectionism and symptoms from pre to post-treatment. Additionally, Kearns et al found that a cognitive behavioral coaching approach effectively reduced perfectionism in school-aged participants.^[11] This suggests that cognitive behavioral coaching is an effective intervention for preservice historians who struggle with academic perfectionism.

4.1. Limitations

It is necessary to mention some of the difficulties encountered in this study, such as the inability of preservice teachers to

participate in field activities. The majority of participants experienced interruptions during the intervention as a result of the study's schedule. Due to the fact that this study involved preservice historians from selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria, its application is also limited to these settings, limiting its generalizability to other groups that may exhibit a similar level of maladaptive perfectionism.

4.2. Implications for history lecturers

One of this study's implications is that history lecturers in collaboration with psychological coaches can use this CBC approach to help preservice historians overcome maladaptive academic perfectionism. Thus, in future research, history lecturers can examine the efficacy of CBC with a larger sample of preservice historians in Nigerian universities. Online assessment of perfectionism may help history lecturers in future studies to recruit more participants. In future research, history lecturers are encouraged to adopt and implement CBC for the treatment of maladaptive perfectionism in postgraduate history students and in-service history teachers. Additionally, in future studies, they may consider utilizing incentives to increase study participant numbers. Additionally, future studies should employ a qualitative approach in order to ascertain another dimension of the discourse.

5. Conclusion

The study suggests that cognitive behavioral coaching can help Nigerian preservice historians deal with maladaptive academic perfectionism. The use of CBC could be beneficial in helping preservice historians identify and address triggers for maladaptive academic perfectionism that compromises their academic, emotional, and general well-being. Further research could investigate how academic perfectionism and other psychological factors affect postgraduate history students and how CBC works with this population.

Author contributions

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