

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELING SERVICES WITH SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques in reducing public speaking anxiety in junior high school students. This study uses a quantitative approach with the quasi-experiment one-group pre-test post-test design method. The participants of this study were grade VIII students of Junior High School in Medan, with a sample of 7 students. The sample was recruited using a purposive sampling technique based on the criteria of students who experienced high speech anxiety. The intervention was carried out through 4 group counseling sessions adjusted to systematic desensitization techniques. Data analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test led to a decrease in the average score from 74.14 to 57.14 with an Asymp significance value. Sig (2-tailed) is 0.018. This proves that group counseling with systematic decentralization techniques can reduce public speaking anxiety in junior high school students.

Keywords: Speech Anxiety, Systematic Desensitization, Group Counseling, Experimental Quasi.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui efektivitas layanan konseling kelompok dengan teknik desentisasi sistematis dalam mengurangi kecemasan berbicara di depan umum pada siswa SMP. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode quasy experiment one group pre-test post-test design. Partisipan penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas VIII Sekolah Menengah Pertama di Medan dengan sampel berjumlah 7 siswa. Sampel direkrut menggunakan teknik purposive sampling berdasarkan kriteria siswa yang mengalami kecemasan berbicara tinggi. Intervensi dilakukan melalui 4 sesi konseling kelompok yang disesuaikan dengan teknik desentisasi sistematis. Analisis data menggunakan uji Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test menunjukkan penurunan skor rata-rata nilai 74,14 menjadi 57,14 dengan nilai signifikansi Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) sebesar 0,018. Hal tersebut membuktikan bahwa konseling kelompok dengan teknik desentisasi sistematis dapat mengurangi kecemasan berbicara di depan umum pada siswa SMP.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan Berbicara, Desentisasi Sistematis, Konseling Kelompok, Quasy Experimental.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety about public speaking is one of the factors that inhibit learning because it can interfere with students' cognitive function (Amali, 2020). Social anxiety is experienced by many adolescent students, especially at the First Menengan School (SMP) level. The condition is characterized by feelings of excessive nervousness, fear of negative scrutiny from others, and is often accompanied by physiological symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweaty hands, and trembling voices. This causes students to rarely speak or appear in public; this kind of anxiety not only hinders student participation in learning activities but also has an impact on their decreased confidence and academic achievement.

According to Prakosa and Partini (in Nur and Sutomo, 2022) wrote that public speaking anxiety is often experienced by students, namely, students are faced with assignments and students are required to speak in front of the class to explain the assignments that have been given. This is in line with what McCroskey (in Mustika et al., 2023) expressed, that anxiety about public speaking can occur due to an inability to compose messages called *reticence*. *Reticence* is an attitude of keeping up and being silent, which is done. The attitude of *reticence* is not included in the student's inability to convey the arrangement of words that have been prepared beforehand.

From the results of Setiawan's research (2021), there are 6 out of 31 students who have a low ability to speak in front of the class. Based on research, students admitted to having difficulty speaking in front of the class. The student feels embarrassed to be the center of attention when in front of the class with his friends and his teacher. Students also do not like lessons because they are not well packaged by the teacher. Students also do not dare to speak in front of the class in formal circumstances because students are used to using regional languages in daily life.

Based on the results of Fitri's research, (2017) said, the factors of individuals who experience anxiety of public speaking are: (a) biological factors, when facing a citation that makes them feel uncomfortable the physiological response that is seen, namely, the sympathetic nervous system produces and releases adrenaline, which is a hormone *fight* (facing) and *flight* (avoid) dangerous situations. (b) negative thought factors, based on cognitive theory, the way of thinking determines a person's feelings and emotions. (c) avoidant behavior factors, a person wants to avoid situations where he feels tense as quickly as possible, and does not want to return to the same situation. (d) emotional factors, where individuals tend to feel anxious, afraid, worry excessively, feel not young when facing social situations, tense, panic, and nervous about speaking in front of class and in public.

Julianto et al. (2018) provide the understanding that anxiety is a symptom of a psychological component that arises from anxiety, worrying that something unpleasant will happen. Public speaking anxiety is a feeling of threat, unpleasantness, and distress followed by physical and psychological reactions due to the worry of not being able to

adjust or deal with the situation when speaking in public for no specific reason, which arises before or during public speaking.

Anxiety is also related to unpleasant feelings that have many causes, such as individual health, social relationships, when about to run school exams, work problems, internal relationships, and the surrounding environment (Wibawanti et al., 2018). McCroskey, Richmond, Dali, and Falcione (Wibawanti et al., 2018) state that individuals who have public speaking anxiety have a greater tendency to worry, are ineffective at interacting with audiences, and some even withdraw from other individuals. This study is beneficial for money students experiencing public speaking anxiety or social phobia by using group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques. According to Solikin, A et al. (2023), "The basic assumption of this technique is the fear response. Communication anxiety problems can be reduced by an educational process to change the cognitive of the counselor through a systematic desensitization technique by counter-conditioning *the* negative response built by the counselor and replacing it with opposite activities to change the brain's imagination into a positive one.

The implementation of public speaking anxiety decentralization techniques in students is an important process in helping them overcome their fear and anxiety when speaking in public. Here are some steps that can be taken in implementing this technique; (a) identification of needs, (b) understanding of anxiety, (c) regular exercise, (d) breathing techniques, (e) use of visualization, (f) real experience, (g) positive feedback, (h) use of technology, (i) psychological support, (j) special classes or clubs, (k) out-of-school opportunities, and (l) continuous evaluation (Damanik et al., 2023). Desensitization is carried out systematically through a hierarchy of anxiety from the mildest to the most challenging. This stage minimizes the risk of excessive anxiety, so that clients can feel safer in the process. Systematic desensitization not only helps reduce anxiety, but also trains clients in managing emotional responses independently Ariani & Supradewi, 2019).

The results of the research of Aryani et al (2014) show from the initial data obtained from 10 students who experienced anxiety in expressing opinions, with an average of 82.80% this research was carried out in 2 cycles. In cycle I, there was a decrease, with an average of 15.34% with the results of 6 students who were categorized as low, 1 student who was categorized as very low, and 3 students who had not reached the criteria below 65% in cycle I. In cycle II, 3 people who had not reached the criteria below 65% in cycle I experienced a decrease, with an average decrease of 13.32%, meaning that students were able to reduce anxiety in expressing their opinions. The data is strengthened from the results of observations of changes in student behavior filled in by the researcher in each cycle. So that the application of behavioral counseling with desensitization techniques to minimize students' anxiety in expressing opinions in grade VII 10 at SMP Negeri 2 Singaraja for the 2013/2014 school year is effective.

This study aims to measure the effectiveness of group counseling with systematic desensitization techniques to reduce public speaking anxiety in junior high school students. These results are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of more effective and applicable counseling methods, as well as become a reference for counseling guidance teachers in providing interventions to students who face similar problems.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a *quasi-experimental one-group pre-test post-test design method*. According to Siyoto & Sodik (2015), quantitative research is a type of research that is systematic, planned, and structured from the beginning of data collection, including the creation of the research design is included as well as the presentation of the results. The one-group *pre-test and post-test* design is a form of *quasi-experimental design*, where only one group of subjects is used without a control group (comparison). This group was given a *pre-test* before treatment, then given a *post-test* after treatment in the form of group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques (Kurniawan & Iryanti, 2021).

Participants in this study were grade VIII junior high school students in Medan who experienced anxiety of public speaking and were selected through *purposive sampling* techniques as a sample selection technique. In accordance with Sumargo's explanation, et al (2024) the type of *purposive sampling* method is a method by determining and recruiting samples from certain criteria by determining and recruiting samples from existing respondents. The researcher determined 7 students as a sample using *the purposive sampling technique* by considering inclusion criteria, namely willingness to participate in all counseling sessions, as well as the effectiveness of dynamics in small group counseling. The selection of this number is also adjusted to the limited time of the research implementation.

The instrument used in this study is a speech anxiety questionnaire adopted from Ramadani (2024), which has gone through a validity test, and the results of the feasibility test are consistent with the results of the test based on *Cronbach's alpha* of $\alpha = 0.745$. The questionnaire was used to measure the level of anxiety of speaking with aspects of reality anxiety, anxiety neurosis, and moral anxiety. The research instrument used a 5-point likert scale with a choice of answers strongly agree (1), agree (2), disagree (3), disagree(4), strongly disagree(5). The validity test results show that all statement items are valid, and the reliability test results are 0.745, which means they are reliable. The data collected in the analysis with *the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test* was used with the SPSS version 25 program to measure the effectiveness of the Systematic Desensitization Technique in reducing students' speech anxiety with group counseling services after being given an intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted on 7 female students who had a high level of public speaking anxiety based on the results of the initial questionnaire. Intervention in the form of group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques was provided for 4 counseling sessions.

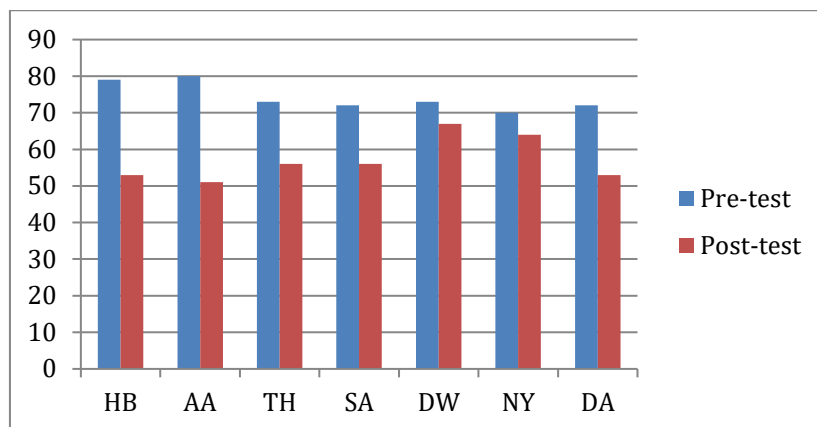
Table 1. Results of *Pre-test* Participant Research

CATEGORY	INTERV AL	FREQUENC Y	PERESENTASE
VERY HIGH	84-100	0	0
TALL	68-84	7	100
KEEP	52-68	0	0
LOW	36-52	0	0
VERY LOW	20-36	0	0
TOTAL		7	100

Based on the data in Table 1, the researcher continued by providing an intervention, namely, carrying out group counseling services with a systematic desensitization technique on 7 participants who had a high level of speech anxiety. Group counseling services were carried out in 4 meeting sessions, each lasting 45 minutes.

Table 2. Comparison of *Pre-test* and *Post-test* Scores

PARTICIPANTS	SKOR <i>PRE-TEST</i>	CATEGORY	POST- TEST <i>SCORE</i>	CATEGORY
HB	79	TALL	53	KEEP
AA	80	TALL	51	LOW
TH	73	TALL	56	KEEP
HIS	72	TALL	56	KEEP
DW	73	TALL	67	KEEP
THE	70	TALL	64	KEEP
ALSO	72	TALL	53	KEEP
AVERAGE	74,14	TALL	57,14	KEEP



In Table 2, the results of the comparison of *pre-test* and *post-test* scores in female students who are research participants are obtained. All students were in the high category with an average *pre-test* score of 74.14. The results obtained from *the post-test* scores of all students who experienced a decrease with a score of 57.14 were included in the medium category. The change showed that the interventions provided had a positive impact on students who experienced anxiety speaking in front of the class. Furthermore, to ensure a statistically significant difference in scores, the *Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test* was carried out, in which decision-making was based on significant values (*Asymp. Sig*). If the value of $p < 0.05$, then there is a significant difference between *the pre-test* and *post-test* results, and the hypothesis is accepted. If the value of $p > 0.05$, then there is no significant difference in the hypothesis being rejected.

Table 3. Uji *Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test*

		N	MEAN RANK	SUM OF RANKS
PRE-TEST – POST-TEST ANXIETY SPEAKING	Negative ranks	0a	.00	.00
	Positive ranks	7b	4.00	28.00
	Ties	0c		
	Total	7		

- a. Post-tests < Pre-test
- b. Post-test > Pre-test
- c. Post-test = Pre-test

Based on the results of Table 3, there are *negative ranks* between *pre-test* and *post-test*, are 0, both N value, *mean rank*, and *sum of ranks*. A value of 0 indicates no decrease in *pre-test* and *post-test* scores. Meanwhile, *positive ranks* (positive) between *pre-test* and *post-test*, 7 students experienced an increase in results with a mean rank value or average increase of 4.00, while the *sum of ranks* or the number of positive rankings was 28.00.

Ties are the similarity of *pre-test* and *post-test* values, namely N 0, i.e., no one has the same value in *the pre-test* and *post-test results*.

Table 4. *Statistic Table*

POST-TEST – PRE-TEST ANXIETY TALKING	
Z	-2.371b
ASYMP. SIG (2-TAILED)	.018

- a. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test
- b. Based on negative ranks

Based on Table 4, *the Asymp value is known. Sig (2-tailed)* is 0.018, because the value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis proposed in this study is acceptable, which means that there is a noticeable decrease in students' speech anxiety after being given group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques. This effectiveness is strengthened by the stages of intervention carried out during group counseling. In the early stages, students are trained to perform breathing relaxation to reduce physical tension and calm the mind before speaking. Next, students are introduced to public speaking situations gradually, ranging from the mildest scenarios to more complex ones, so that they can adjust without triggering excessive anxiety. In addition, positive feedback and verbal support are also given to each success achieved, which significantly increases student confidence. This combination of relaxation, gradual understanding, and positive reinforcement is what reinforces the success of the intervention in lowering speech anxiety.

This study shows that group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques can have an impact on reducing students' speech anxiety levels. All students who were in the high category in the *pre-test* experienced a significant decrease in *post-test results*, namely, on average, in the medium category, with an average score of 74.14 to 57.14. This is also proven by the results of the Wilcoxon test, showing the results of *Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)* is 0.018. In the student learning process, speech anxiety is one of the inhibiting factors because it can interfere with students' cognitive function. Anxiety is characterized by students who experience reactions that cannot be controlled when speaking in public, such as heart palpitations, cold hands, running out of words, feeling uncomfortable, having difficulty concentrating, and even to the point of shortness of breath (Al-Bukhori: 2016). To get better learning outcomes in school, students also need the ability to communicate well. With the ability to communicate well, students can more easily communicate, express opinions and ideas in class, and share knowledge with each other (Rahmawati & Nuryono, 2014).

The success of this hypothesis test can be influenced by several other factors, the suitability of services and techniques for student problems, the suitability of service materials for student needs. This counseling service is systematically designed in four meetings, each of which has a clear purpose and focus on the material. In the first topic, students are invited to identify forms of anxiety based on their level of intensity. Second, students are directed to reduce anxiety through gradual exposure techniques, where students begin to face situations that trigger anxiety slowly and controllably. Third, the practice of decentralization of sites and the preparation of follow-up plans to strengthen the skills trained. Fourth, focus on positive reinforcement and repetition to form new habits. The enthusiasm and willingness of students to participate in service activities, the dynamics formed in the group counseling process, and the existence of support between students in the group.

In addition, the success of group counseling services also depends heavily on the enthusiasm, motivation, and willingness of greeting students to actively participate in each counseling session. The group dynamics that are built during the counseling process also play an important role, including mutual trust, empathy, and emotional support between group members. A group environment that allows students to feel safe in expressing themselves so that the counseling process runs more effectively. Therefore, a combination of careful service planning and active participation of students is the main key to achieving the goals of this counseling intervention.

This is supported by research conducted by Listyani et al. (2023), which revealed that each phase of the systematic desensitization technique implementation procedure greatly affects success, but there are 3 most important phases in the procedure for implementing this technique, namely the phase of compiling an anxiety hierarchy, the relaxation practice phase, and the imagining phase of the anxiety hierarchy. In addition, research by Sabbangan and Moesarofah (2020) shows that there is a significant change in the level of anxiety in students' speech. Each respondent experienced a decrease in anxiety from the high category to the low category. This change occurred due to the effectiveness of strategies in systematic desensitization techniques applied in group counseling dynamics.

The process of reducing anxiety in public speaking with systematic decentization techniques is gradual. The initial stage begins by inviting students to be aware of the form of anxiety experienced and its impact on themselves and the learning process, then identify situations that trigger anxiety to be arranged into a hierarchy, from the mildest to the most challenging. Subsequently, students are trained in relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation to achieve a state of relaxation before facing a triggering situation.

In the core stage, students make the exposure gradually according to the hierarchy, while monitoring their reactions to keep anxiety levels under control. If anxiety increases, relaxation is carried out again to replace the anxious response with calm. Through repetition, a new association is formed between the situation of public speaking with a

feeling of calm, so that the negative emotional response gradually decreases. The final stage is in the form of follow-up planning, where students develop strategies to maintain skills, such as independent relaxation exercises, speaking practice in a safe environment, and applying communication skills in the classroom.

Group dynamics during the intervention process are very important supporting factors. Each member of the group is not only in an individual desensitization stage, but also gets a boost from the social interaction that occurs in the session. The emotional support provided between members makes students feel safer to try to deal with anxiety-triggering situations. Positive feedback given directly by facilitators and peers strengthens students' confidence in every small success achieved. This combination of support, positive reinforcement, and learning through observation accelerates the process of lowering anxiety and helps students form new, more adaptive habits.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that group counseling services with systematic desensitization techniques are effective in reducing public speaking anxiety in junior high school students in Medan. All students who are in the high category in the *pre-test* experience a significant decrease in *post-test results*, which is the average in the medium category, with an *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* is 0.018. In the student learning process, speech anxiety is one of the inhibiting factors because it can interfere with students' cognitive function. The success of this intervention is influenced by several important factors, such as the suitability of the technique with the student's problems, the active involvement of participants in the counseling session, and the dynamics of the supportive group. Systematic desensitization techniques can reduce physiological and psychological responses to anxiety, such as heart palpitations, nervousness, and difficulty speaking. Thus, this service can be an alternative intervention that is applicable for BK teachers in helping students who experience anxiety speak in public, as well as supporting the improvement of students' communication skills in the context of learning.

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