

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELING SERVICES WITH CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC STRESS

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Creative Problem-Solving (CPS) technique in reducing academic stress levels among junior high school students. The background of this research is grounded in the high levels of academic pressure experienced by adolescents, including performance demands, social competition, and expectations from teachers and parents, all of which can trigger academic stress if not properly addressed. CPS, a technique previously widely applied in the development of creative learning, is adapted here as a psychopedagogical intervention strategy in the context of group counseling. This study employed a quasi-experimental approach with a pretest-posttest control group design. The sample consisted of 16 ninth-grade students from SMP Negeri 3 Percut Sei Tuan who were identified as having high levels of academic stress. They were selected using purposive sampling and divided into experimental and control groups. The instrument used was an academic stress scale based on four aspects: physiological, cognitive, affective, and conative. Validity and reliability tests showed that the instrument was both valid and reliable ( $r = 0.45-0.78$ ;  $\alpha = 0.86$ ). Data analysis was conducted using a paired samples t-test and an independent samples t-test. The results revealed a significant reduction in academic stress scores in the experimental group, from  $M = 76.69$  to  $M = 62.44$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), with a Cohen's  $d$  of 2.64, indicating a very large effect size. Meanwhile, the control group did not show a significant change ( $p > 0.05$ ). These findings demonstrate that the CPS technique in group counseling is effective both statistically and practically in reducing students' academic stress. This study offers a new contribution to the field of educational guidance and counseling by integrating a creative approach to help students manage academic pressures constructively and collaboratively.

**Keywords:** Academic Stress, Creative Problem Solving, Group Counseling

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji efektivitas layanan konseling kelompok dengan teknik Creative Problem-Solving (CPS) dalam menurunkan tingkat stres akademik pada siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP). Latar belakang penelitian didasarkan pada tingginya tekanan akademik yang dialami siswa remaja, seperti tuntutan prestasi, persaingan sosial, serta ekspektasi guru dan orang tua, yang dapat memicu stres akademik jika tidak ditangani secara tepat. Teknik CPS, yang sebelumnya banyak diterapkan dalam pengembangan kreativitas pembelajaran, diadaptasi sebagai strategi intervensi psikopedagogis dalam konteks konseling kelompok. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuasi eksperimen dengan desain pretest-posttest control group

*design. Sampel terdiri dari 16 siswa kelas IX SMP Negeri 3 Percut Sei Tuan yang memiliki tingkat stres akademik tinggi, dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling dan dibagi ke dalam kelompok eksperimen dan kelompok kontrol. Instrumen yang digunakan berupa skala stres akademik berdasarkan empat aspek: fisiologis, kognitif, afektif, dan konatif. Uji validitas dan reliabilitas menunjukkan bahwa instrumen yang digunakan valid dan reliabel ( $r = 0,45-0,78$ ;  $\alpha = 0,86$ ). Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan uji paired samples t-test dan independent samples t-test. Hasil menunjukkan adanya penurunan signifikan skor stres akademik pada kelompok eksperimen dari  $M = 76,69$  menjadi  $M = 62,44$  ( $p < 0,001$ ), dengan nilai Cohen's  $d$  sebesar 2,64 yang termasuk dalam kategori efek sangat besar. Sementara itu, kelompok kontrol tidak menunjukkan perubahan yang signifikan ( $p > 0,05$ ). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa teknik CPS dalam konseling kelompok efektif secara statistik dan praktis dalam mengurangi stres akademik siswa. Penelitian ini menawarkan kontribusi baru dalam praktik bimbingan dan konseling, dengan mengintegrasikan pendekatan kreatif untuk membantu siswa mengelola tekanan akademik secara konstruktif dan kolaboratif.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Creative Problem Solving, Konseling Kelompok, Stres Akademik*

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a challenging period of development, especially in the context of formal education. Junior high school students often face significant academic pressure, such as demands for achievement, exam pressure, peer competition, and expectations from parents and teachers. These pressures can cause academic stress, which is a psychological condition characterized by the appearance of tension, anxiety, mental fatigue, and decreased motivation to learn. If not handled appropriately, academic stress can negatively impact students' learning performance and psychological well-being. (Novyana, Busmayaril, & Defriyanto, 2025) (Lubis & Daulay, 2024)

At SMP Negeri 3 Percut Sei Tuan, based on the results of initial observations and interviews with guidance and counseling teachers, it is known that some students show symptoms of academic stress, such as difficulty concentrating, irritability, avoiding schoolwork, and decreased learning achievement. This shows the need for effective psychopedagogical interventions that are adaptive to the needs of students. One potential approach in this context is group counseling services with Creative Problem-Solving (CPS) techniques. Creative Problem-Solving is a counseling technique that emphasizes the development of creative thinking skills to solve problems faced by individuals. This technique aims to help students recognize the source of stress, creatively explore alternative solutions, and choose the most effective strategies to cope with the academic stress experienced. In the context of group counseling, this approach strengthens social support between members, broadens problem-solving horizons, and increases students' confidence in facing learning challenges. (Susanto & Hasibuan, 2025) (Wahyuni & Sulistiowati, 2024)

Group counseling is a process of psychological assistance carried out in a small group, led by a counselor, with the aim of helping group members understand and address personal, social, or emotional problems through mutual interaction, open discussion, and group dynamics. In this counseling, members support each other and learn from each

other's experiences, creating an environment conducive to growth and positive change. Various previous studies have proven that group counseling services are one of the effective interventions to overcome various psychological problems in students, including academic stress. Research shows that group counseling with a cognitive approach can help lower stress levels in high school students. Meanwhile, it was revealed that relaxation techniques in group counseling had a significant impact on reducing students' learning anxiety. However, most of the research is still focused on conventional techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), self-management, or emotional relaxation techniques. (Nasution & Siregar, 2023) (Kartika & Siregar, 2023) (Hasanah, Safitri, Muthmainah, & Makhmudah, 2022) (Fitriasiwi, Pradana, & Pramesthi, 2022)

However, there is a research gap in the use of Creative Problem-Solving (CPS) techniques, especially in the context of group counseling to overcome academic stress in junior high school students. CPS techniques are better known in the areas of innovative learning and creativity development, but have not been widely applied systematically in school counseling services, particularly as an intervention strategy for the academic stress management of early adolescent students. In addition, studies that use CPS as an intervention approach are conducted in the context of developing soft skills or increasing learning creativity, not in the context of reducing psychological burden due to academic pressure. This shows that there is room for further exploration of the effectiveness of CPS in the context of group counseling, especially in the junior secondary education environment. (Suraya & Soejanto, 2024) (Fauziya, 2021)

The novelty of this study lies in the combination of two approaches: group counseling services and Creative Problem-Solving techniques as a method of academic stress intervention for junior high school students. This study not only tests the effectiveness of intervention models that have not been widely researched in the realm of guidance and counseling, but also adapts them to the developmental characteristics of junior high school students who are in the phase of finding their identity and socio-academic problem-solving skills. Thus, this research is expected to make a conceptual and practical contribution to the development of guidance and counseling services in schools, as well as expand the use of CPS techniques in the context of education and adolescent developmental psychology.

## **METHOD**

This study is a quantitative research with a quasi-experimental approach using a pretest-posttest control group design. This design allows researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of treatment (group counseling services with *Creative Problem-Solving*) through a comparison of academic stress scores before and after treatment in two groups: experimental and control. According to, quasi-experimentation is a form of experiment that does not use random assignments but still involves treatments, effect measurements, and comparable experimental units. This pretest-posttest design was chosen to measure the changes that occurred after treatment was given and compared to the control group that did not receive the treatment. (Hasibuan, 2023)

This study involved two groups consisting of 8 grade IX students at SMP Negeri 3 Percut Sei Tuan, who were selected based on the criteria of high academic stress level. The sampling technique is carried out by purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of samples based on certain characteristics that are relevant to the purpose of the research. The characteristics of the respondents were students with high academic stress scores based on the results of the initial measurement (pretest). Out of a total of 64 students surveyed, 16 students were found to have high stress levels ( $\geq 74$ ), 27 students were moderately stressed (47–73), and 21 students were low-stress ( $< 47$ ), as summarized in Table 1 below: (Creswell, 2020)

**Table 1.** Categories of Student Academic Stress Level

LEVEL	VALUE RANGE	SUM	PERCENTAGE
TALL	$X \geq 74$	16	25%
KEEP	$47 \leq X < 74$	27	42,1%
LOW	$X < 47$	21	32,8%
TOTAL		64	100%

Of the 16 high-stress students, 8 were assigned to the experimental group and the other 8 students to the control group. The experimental group was given group counseling services with *the Creative Problem-Solving* technique, while the control group was not given any treatment.

The instrument used in this study is an academic stress questionnaire, which is compiled based on four aspects of stress according to physiological, cognitive, affective, and conative. The scale consists of 20 statement items, such as: Physiological aspects (example items: headache, difficulty sleeping); Cognitive aspects (e.g., difficulty focusing, distracted thoughts); Affective aspects (e.g., feeling depressed, bored); Conative aspects (e.g., lazy, unenthusiastic) (Sugiyono, 2022)

The scale uses a 5-point Likert model, namely:

- 1 = Never,
- 2 = Rare,
- 3 = Sometimes,
- 4 = Often,
- 5 = Always.

Before being used in the main study, this instrument was first tested on students with similar characteristics outside the study sample. The test results showed that the validity of the items was in the range of 0.45 – 0.78, which means that all items were valid ( $r$  table = 0.361;  $n=25$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, the reliability of the instrument was measured using the Alpha Cronbach and obtained a value of 0.86, indicating a high level of reliability.

The research was carried out in three main stages. The first is that the researcher compiles an academic stress questionnaire instrument, submits a research permit to the school, and conducts instrument trials. Students who will be sampled are given an explanation regarding their goals, benefits, and rights while participating in the research. Furthermore, the research is carried out during free hours or outside of class hours so as not to interfere with learning activities. Students are asked to fill out a questionnaire of personal data and

an academic stress scale (pretest). The experimental group then participated in a group counseling session with *the Creative Problem-Solving* technique for 5 meetings. After treatment, the two groups again filled in the academic stress scale (posttest).

The data was analyzed using a t-test, i.e., Paired Sample t-Test, to compare pretest and posttest scores in each group (experiment and control). Independent Sample t-Test to compare the difference in posttest scores between the experimental group and the control group. This test was chosen because it is appropriate to test the difference in the mean of two groups on interval-scale and normally-distributed data. Before the analysis is carried out, the data is first tested for normality and homogeneity to ensure that the conditions for using the parametric test are met. (Hastjarjo, 2019)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Normality and Homogeneity Test Results

Before conducting a hypothesis test, it is necessary to test the basic assumptions in parametric statistical analysis, namely the assumption of normality and homogeneity of variance. The normality test is carried out to ensure that the distribution of the data is in a normal distribution pattern, while the homogeneity test aims to test the similarity of variance between groups.

#### Normality Test

Normality testing was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk method, which is recommended for small samples ( $n < 50$ ). Based on the results of the analysis, the significance value at the pretest stage was 0.047, and the posttest was 0.177. Although the significance value of the pretest was slightly below the threshold ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), it was still tolerable given the conservative nature of the Shapiro-Wilk test and the distribution of data that did not show extreme deviations. Therefore, overall, the data is considered to meet the normal distribution assumptions.

**Table 2.** Results of the Academic Stress Data Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

STAGES	STATISTICS SHAPIRO-WILK	DF	SIG. (P)	INTERPRETASI
PRETEST	0,820	8	0,047	Normal (close to the limit)
POSTTEST	0,877	8	0,177	Normal

#### Variance Homogeneity Test

Next, a homogeneity test was carried out using the Levene Test method, which evaluates the similarity of variance between the experimental and control groups. The test results showed that the entire calculation approach (mean, median, trimmed mean) produced a significance value above 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that the data come from a population with homogeneous variance, so that comparisons between the two groups can be made validly.

**Table 3. Results of the Academic Stress Data Variance Homogeneity Test (Levene's Test)**

BASIS OF CALCULATION	SIG. (P)	INTERPRETASI
BASED ON MEAN	0,211	Variansi Homogen
BASED ON MEDIAN	0,269	Variansi Homogen
BASED ON MEDIAN & ADJ. DF	0,274	Variansi Homogen
BASED ON TRIMMED MEAN	0,242	Variansi Homogen

The results of this assumption test support the continuation of the analysis using parametric statistical methods, such as the t-test, because the conditions of normal distribution and homogeneity of variance have been met. The validity of the hypothesis test results carried out afterwards can also be statistically accounted for.

### Results of Intervention Effectiveness Tests

Data analysis was carried out using the paired samples t-test to determine the difference in students' academic stress levels before and after being given group counseling services with *the Creative Problem-Solving* (CPS) technique. The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant decrease in academic stress scores after students participated in the service. Before the intervention (pretest), the average academic stress score of students was at  $M = 76.69$ , with a standard deviation of  $SD = 2.58$ , which was classified as high. After the treatment (posttest), the score decreased to  $M = 62.44$  with  $SD = 6.79$ , indicating a decrease to moderate levels. These differences indicate statistically and clinically significant changes.

**Table 4. Average and Standard Deviation of Academic Stress (Experimental Group)**

STAGES	MEAN (M)	STANDARD DEVIATION (SD)	STRESS LEVEL CATEGORIES
PRETEST	76,69	2,58	Tall
POSTTEST	62,44	6,79	Keep

The paired samples t-test yielded a t-value of 10.536 with a  $p < \text{significance of } 0.001$ , indicating that the difference between the pretest and posttest is statistically significant. This proves that group counseling services with CPS techniques are effective in lowering students' academic stress levels substantially.

**Table 5. Results of Paired Samples t-Test in the Experimental Group**

VARIABLE	MEAN DIFFERENCE	T	DF	SIG. (2- TAILED)
PRETEST – POSTTEST	14,25	10,54	7	< 0.001



## Effect Size

To measure the strength of the influence of the intervention, Cohen's *d*. The effect size is calculated by the formula:

$$d = \frac{M_{\text{pretest}} - M_{\text{posttest}}}{SD_{\text{pooled}}}$$
$$d = \frac{76,69 - 62,44}{5,41} \approx 2,64$$

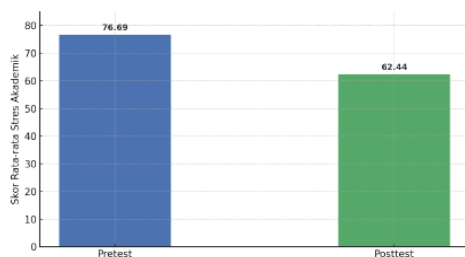
Cohen's value  $d = 2.64$ , which according to Cohen's (1988) interpretation, falls into the category of a *very large effect*. This shows that *the Creative Problem-Solving* technique is not only statistically effective, but also provides a strong practical influence in reducing students' academic stress.

These results indicate that a Creative Problem-Solving-based group counseling approach significantly lowers students' academic stress. The effectiveness of these interventions is not only evident from the reduction in scores, but is also demonstrated by the magnitude of the effect size that explains the power of change. Thus, the CPS technique can be used as a powerful intervention strategy in counseling guidance services in schools, especially to deal with stress problems faced by adolescent students.

## Visualization of Changes in Academic Stress

To support and clarify the results of quantitative findings obtained through the analysis of *paired samples t-test*, a visual presentation of data is important so that changes in students' academic stress levels can be more to understood. Data visualization in the form of graphs provides a more concrete picture of the effectiveness of group counseling services with *Creative Problem-Solving* (CPS) techniques on reducing students' academic stress. The following graph presents a comparison of the average academic stress scores of students in the experimental group before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention was carried out. A visually significant decrease in score showed a positive impact of the implementation of CPS techniques in group counseling sessions, which successfully helped students manage and meaningfully lower their academic stress levels. These graphs not only support statistical results but also reinforce practical interpretations that the interventions provided are effective and have a real impact on learners.

**Graph 1.** Comparison of Average Students' Academic Stress Scores Before and After Intervention in the Experimental Group



The graph above illustrates the comparison of students' average academic stress scores in the experimental group before and after the intervention in the form of group counseling services with *Creative Problem-Solving* (CPS) techniques. It can be seen that the average score at the pretest stage is 76.69, which indicates a high level of academic stress. After the intervention was administered, there was a significant decrease in the average score to 62.44, which falls into the category of moderate stress. This decrease indicates a positive and effective change from group counseling services with CPS techniques in reducing students' academic stress. This visualization reinforces the results of statistical analysis that show significant differences before and after the intervention.

### Comparison with the Control Group

Based on the results of the analysis of the *paired samples t-test* in the control group, it was found that there was no significant change in the level of academic stress of students who did not receive the intervention. The average academic stress score at the time of the pretest was  $M = 75.88$ , and at the posttest it was  $M = 74.50$ . A  $t$ -value of 0.97 with a significance level of  $p > 0.05$  indicates that the difference is not statistically significant. These results indicate that the absence of a significant reduction in the control group reinforces the suspicion that the reduction in academic stress that occurred in the experimental group was solely the result of group counseling services with *Creative Problem-Solving* (CPS) techniques. Thus, the interventions provided have a major role in lowering academic stress, not due to natural factors such as time adaptation or changing learning situations in general.

**Table 6.** Paired Samples t-Test Results in the Control Group

VARIABEL	M (PRETEST)	M (POSTTEST)	T	P	INFORMATION
ACADEMIC STRESS	75,88	74,50	0,97	> 0.05	Insignificant (ns)

Before testing the main hypothesis in this study, a basic assumption test in the form of a normality test and a variance homogeneity test has been carried out. The normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method showed that the distribution data was close to normal, although the significance value of the pretest was slightly below the 0.05 threshold. However, in experimental studies with a small sample count ( $n < 50$ ), this approach is still acceptable. Furthermore, the results of Levene's Test showed that the data from the experimental and control groups had homogeneous variance, which meant that the conditions for the use of parametric tests were met. (Erlangga, Susilowati, & Hanifah, 2023)

After the validation of the basic assumptions was met, a paired samples  $t$ -test was analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling interventions with *Creative Problem-Solving* (CPS) techniques. The results of the analysis showed a significant decrease in the level of academic stress in the experimental group, from an average pretest score of 76.69 (high category) to 62.44 in the posttest (medium category). The value of  $t$



= 10.54 with  $p < 0.001$  shows a very strong statistically significant significance. Meanwhile, in the control group, the decrease in scores was not statistically significant ( $t = 0.97$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that the changes that occurred in the experimental group were a direct result of the CPS intervention.

These findings are in line with the results of research by, which shows that a systematic problem-solving approach can help students in structuring academic problems, thereby reducing psychological distress. CPS techniques designed in group counseling sessions facilitate students to identify key problems, explore alternative solutions, and develop concrete action plans. This approach not only improves decision-making skills but also reinforces the individual's perception of control over academic stressors. (Yahşi, 2022)

According to, problem-solving-based interventions in the context of education can increase students' self-efficacy and mental resilience in facing academic challenges. In the context of this study, the success of CPS techniques can be attributed to the method's ability to change the mindset of (Varo, Aires-González, & García-Jiménez, 2023) *problem-focused* becomes *solution-focused*, which has been shown to lower stress levels and improve academic adaptation. The effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.64$ ) showed a very large effect of the intervention. This not only shows that the changes that occur are statistically significant, but also have important practical meanings. In line with the theory of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), the CPS technique approaches the principles of CBT, which involves helping students replace their non-adaptive mindset with a more rational and solution-oriented way of thinking.

Data visualization in the form of graphs clarifies the impact of interventions. The graph shows a marked decrease in academic stress scores after the intervention was performed. This visual presentation not only reinforces the quantitative results but also provides an intuitive understanding that CPS's strategy is successful in reducing the academic pressure experienced by students. These results are also in line with studies that confirm that group counseling services combined with a cognitive-emotional approach are able to lower academic stress and improve stress management skills in high school students. In this context, group counseling services act as a forum for social and emotional reflection, where students feel heard and supported in formulating effective solutions to their academic problems. (Rahmawati, Wibowo, & Habibullah, 2022)

No less important, the results in the control group that showed no significant changes confirmed that the stress reduction in the experimental group was not the result of natural processes or time, but rather a direct result of the intervention. This provides internal validity to the findings and confirms that the CPS technique is effective independently in lowering academic stress. Overall, the findings of this study make an important contribution to the field of educational guidance and counseling, particularly in the development of problem-solving skills-based interventions to address academic stress. The Creative Problem-Solving technique can be recommended as an effective approach

in group tutoring services in schools, especially in dealing with the complexity of academic pressure in the increasingly competitive era of modern education.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis, both from assumption tests and hypothesis tests, it can be concluded that group counseling services with *Creative Problem-Solving* (CPS) techniques have proven to be effective in reducing academic stress levels in SMP Negeri 3 Percut Sei Tuan students. A significant decrease in academic stress scores occurred in the experimental group, from the high to medium category, with a value of  $t = 10.54$  and  $p < 0.001$ , as well as an *effect size* value of 2.64, which was classified as very large. In contrast, the control group that did not receive the intervention showed no significant changes. The practical implications of these findings are very important for the world of education, particularly in guidance and counselling services in schools. CPS techniques have been proven to improve students' ability to identify academic problems, explore alternative solutions, and form concrete action plans. This helps students develop stress management skills, improve self-efficacy, and strengthen psychological resilience in the face of academic pressure. Therefore, BK (Guidance and Counseling) teachers are advised to integrate the CPS approach into the psychopedagogical intervention program in schools. However, this research has several limitations that need to be examined. First, the relatively small sample size ( $n = 16$  per group) may limit the generalization of the findings to a broader population. Second, the short intervention time has not been able to describe the long-term impact of the use of CPS techniques on academic stress. In addition, other variables such as social support, learning style, or family conditions of students are not analyzed in depth, even though they can also affect academic stress levels. Based on these limitations, it is recommended that further research be conducted involving a larger number of subjects and coming from various schools to increase external validity. Further research may also adopt a *longitudinal design* to assess the long-term effectiveness of CPS techniques. In addition, it would be more comprehensive if CPS interventions were combined with other approaches, such as mindfulness or cognitive behavioral therapy, to assess the combined effectiveness of managing students' academic stress. Thus, this research not only adds to the scientific treasure in the field of educational counseling but also opens up opportunities for the development of more effective and contextual psychological interventions in overcoming students' academic challenges in the modern era.

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