

APPLICATION OF SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY TO REDUCE NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS TEACHERS

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Abstract

Students' negative perceptions of teachers are emotional responses arising from learning experiences that are perceived as authoritarian, unpleasant, or unfair. Such conditions may hinder the learning process, reduce motivation, and decrease academic engagement. One intervention commonly employed is Systematic Desensitization, a component of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), which is a psychological technique that trains students to face anxiety-provoking stimuli gradually while practicing relaxation. The research involved 48 tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 6 Samarinda, randomly selected from a population of 80 students and assigned to an experimental group (Class X Heavy Equipment Engineering 1) and a control group (Class X Mechanical Engineering 1). The study utilized a true experimental method with a pretest-posttest control group design. The instrument used was a Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire (TSRQ), with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.970$. Independent Sample T-Test analysis revealed a significant reduction in negative perceptions among the experimental group after six intervention sessions, whereas the control group did not show any meaningful change.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Systematic Desensitization, Negative Perception, teacher, student

Abstrak

Persepsi negatif siswa terhadap guru merupakan respon emosional akibat pengalaman belajar yang dianggap otoriter, tidak menyenangkan, atau kurang adil. Kondisi ini dapat menghambat pembelajaran, menurunkan motivasi, serta mengurangi keterlibatan akademik. Salah satu intervensi yang digunakan adalah Systematic Desensitization bagian dari Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), yaitu teknik psikologis yang melatih siswa menghadapi stimulus pemicu kecemasan secara bertahap dengan relaksasi. Subjek penelitian berjumlah 48 siswa kelas X SMK Negeri 6 Samarinda yang dipilih acak dari populasi 80 siswa, dengan pembagian kelompok eksperimen (X Teknik Alat Berat 1) dan kontrol (X Teknik Mesin 1). Penelitian menggunakan metode true experiment dengan rancangan pretest-posttest control group design. Instrumen berupa skala Likert yang diadaptasi dari Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire (TSRQ) dengan reliabilitas $\alpha = 0,970$. Analisis Independent Sample T-Test menunjukkan adanya penurunan signifikan persepsi negatif pada kelompok eksperimen setelah enam sesi intervensi, sedangkan kelompok kontrol tidak mengalami perubahan berarti.

Kata kunci: *Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Systematic Desensitization, Persepsi Negatif, Guru, Siswa*

INTRODUCTION

Students' negative perceptions of subject teachers are one of the psychological and pedagogical problems that are still commonly found in the world of education. Many students view teachers as authoritarian, lacking understanding of students' conditions and needs, or applying rigid and unpleasant learning methods (Zhou et al., 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2021). This view not only reflects students' discomfort with teaching methods, but also indicates a lack of harmonious interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. When these relationships are not positive, the learning process can be hampered, and students tend to become passive, unmotivated, and even experience a decline in academic achievement (Tarmiji et al., 2018).

Teaching methods that are too teacher-centered are often considered one of the factors that influence the emergence of students' negative perceptions of teachers, because this approach tends to weaken student engagement, limit learning autonomy, and reduce the effectiveness of interactions in the learning process (Masdi et al. 2018; Mohammed et al. 2020). Learning models in which teachers dominate the entire teaching process with one-way lectures and assignments without room for discussion often elicit negative responses from students, because the teacher-centered approach makes them passive and rarely gives them the opportunity to express their opinions (Ćirić et al., 2020; Halim, 2021). In addition to methodological factors, unfairness in teachers' treatment of students is also a major trigger for negative perceptions. Teachers often only praise students who have high achievements, while students with average or below-average abilities do not receive equal appreciation. This can have an impact on their low motivation and perception of the teacher (Flint et al., 2022; Zedan, 2021).

Referring to Ovbiagbonhia et al. (2019), negative perceptions of teachers are greatly influenced by the learning environment. This is because students who learn in a rigid environment with minimal participation and little support for self-development tend to view learning as a meaningless activity. Students feel they have no control over the learning process and do not have the opportunity to develop critical thinking, creativity, or real-life connections. As a result, students tend to be passive recipients rather than actively developing their critical thinking skills (Anggraeny, A., & Khongput, S. 2022).

Various approaches have been used to address students' negative perceptions, ranging from improving teachers' pedagogical competence, strengthening interpersonal communication, to guidance and counseling programs in schools. One of them is the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) approach, which is a psychological approach that aims to identify and change negative mindsets to be more rational and adaptive, thus gaining more attention in the field of education. CBT has been proven effective in helping students manage stress, overcome anxiety, and improve motivation and mental well-being

(Cahyadi, 2018; Fadilla et al., 2025). However, the application of CBT specifically to address negative perceptions of teachers has rarely been studied.

One technique in CBT that is relevant to apply in this context is Systematic Desensitization. This technique was originally developed to treat phobias or anxiety by gradually introducing the stimulus that causes fear while training individuals to remain relaxed and control their emotional responses (Apriani et al., 2022). Several studies, such as Heiriyah et al. (2022) and Zahro & Zuhdi (2022), show that the *Systematic Desensitization* technique is effective in reducing academic anxiety, such as fear of taking exams. This technique works by replacing negative responses to certain situations with calmer and more positive responses through gradual imagination and relaxation exercises.

Although it has not been widely applied to address negative perceptions of teachers, theoretically, the Systematic Desensitization technique has great potential. Negative perceptions of teachers can be considered a form of negative emotional response that arises from repeated unpleasant experiences. Through a systematic desensitization approach, students can be guided to change these emotional responses by imagining positive interactions with teachers, accompanied by relaxation techniques, so that over time they feel more comfortable and are able to build better relationships with teachers (Sugiantoro, 2018; Apriani et al., 2022).

Positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students have been proven to have a significant impact on student engagement in learning and academic outcomes. Pianta et al. (2012) and Nurvianti et al. (2025) emphasize that when students feel appreciated, understood, and emotionally connected to their teachers, they show higher motivation to learn and are more actively engaged in the learning process. Conversely, the emergence of tension or emotional distance between educators and students often becomes a significant barrier to achieving effective learning experiences. Therefore, schools and educators have a great responsibility to recognize and address students' negative perceptions in a targeted and systematic manner.

Based on this understanding, this study aims to implement the Systematic Desensitization technique within the framework of Cognitive Behavior Therapy to reduce students' negative perceptions of subject teachers. Through this effort, it is hoped that psychological intervention strategies can be formulated that are not only effective but also applicable and relevant to the needs of education in Indonesia. This research is expected to make a real contribution to the development of guidance and counseling services in schools, as well as to reinforce the role of teachers as facilitators who are able to build a conducive, harmonious, and responsive learning environment for students' emotional needs, so that learning outcomes can be achieved optimally.

METHOD

This study used a *true experiment pretest–posttest control group* design conducted on 48 tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 6 Samarinda, randomly selected from a population of 80 students. Grade X Heavy Equipment Engineering 1 became the experimental group

and X Mechanical Engineering 1 became the control group. The instrument was a 30-item Likert scale adapted from the *Teacher–Student Relationship Questionnaire (TSRQ)*, which had met Pearson's validity and Cronbach's Alpha reliability (0.970). The experimental group received six sessions of *Systematic Desensitization* within the CBT framework, including problem identification, relaxation training, imaginative exposure, and direct exposure. Data analysis included normality, homogeneity, and Independent Sample T-Test to test the difference in negative perception changes between groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at SMK Negeri 6 Samarinda, involving students from class X TAB 1 as the experimental group and class X TM1 as the control group. The number of research participants was 80 students who were selected through a random process. The initial stage of the research began with a pre-test for both groups using a Likert scale developed from the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire (TSRQ), which has been proven to be valid and reliable. The pre-test was administered to obtain an overview of the students' initial negative perceptions of teachers before the intervention was given.

The pre-test results showed that students in the experimental class had a higher level of negative perception than those in the control class. However, the results of the normality test using *Shapiro-Wilk* and the homogeneity test using *Levene's Test* showed that the data from both groups were normally distributed and had homogeneous variance. This proves that the initial conditions of the two groups were equivalent and suitable for use as research subjects with an experimental approach. Therefore, the subsequent intervention could be given to the experimental group without compromising the validity of the study.

The intervention was given to the experimental group using the *Systematic Desensitization* technique in six sessions. In the first session, students were asked to identify the forms of negative perceptions they felt towards teachers and compile a hierarchy of fears from the mildest to the most severe. The second session focused on relaxation technique training, where students were taught to perform diaphragmatic breathing and progressive muscle relaxation to reduce emotional tension. Furthermore, the third to fifth sessions focused on the gradual exposure process. Students were invited to imagine, discuss, and finally directly face situations that were previously considered uncomfortable when interacting with teachers. In the sixth session, students began to be exposed to real situations, such as answering questions in class, speaking directly with teachers, and receiving direct feedback from teachers. This process was carried out systematically to help students develop emotional resilience to stimuli that previously triggered anxiety.

Meanwhile, the control group did not receive psychological intervention and continued to learn through lectures and discussions. After all sessions were completed, a post-test was administered to both groups. The post-test results showed a significant decrease in the negative perceptions of students in the experimental group. In contrast, the control

group did not show any significant changes. Further analysis with an Independent Sample t-Test showed a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest T-Test Results

Stage	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean difference	Description
Pretest	0.002	-15.892	There is a significant difference
Posttest	0.000	15.306	There is a very significant difference

The success shows that psychological approaches are very important in education, especially in building healthy interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. Changing negative perceptions to positive ones not only impacts social relationships but also increases student participation in the teaching and learning process. Overall, this study has proven that the application of the Systematic Desensitization technique in Cognitive Behavior Therapy has a significant effect on reducing students' negative perceptions of teachers. Through the achievement of these results, the objectives of the study have been successfully achieved. These findings not only enrich the theory of CBT application in school environments but also provide practical recommendations for teachers and counselors to address student-teacher relationship issues. The approach used in this study can be used as an intervention strategy in guidance and counseling services, especially in forming healthier, more positive, and supportive relationships between teachers and students in educational environments.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that the application of Systematic Desensitization within the framework of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) was effective in reducing students' negative perceptions of teachers at SMK Negeri 6 Samarinda. This effectiveness was evident from the difference in pretest and posttest scores between the experimental group and the control group, where the experimental group showed a significant decrease in the level of negative perceptions. The t-test analysis produced a significance value of < 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the two groups after the intervention. Therefore, these findings confirm that CBT-based psychological interventions, particularly through the Systematic Desensitization technique, can be an appropriate strategy to help students change their negative mindset towards teachers in a more positive direction.

These findings are in line with the results of studies by Heiriyah & Aminah (2022), Zahro & Zuhdi (2022), and Ni'mah et al. (2024), which show that *Systematic Desensitization Cognitive Behavior Therapy* is effective in reducing students' negative perceptions of teachers. This occurs because the mechanism used implements a gradual habituation and self-control process, so that academic anxiety decreases and negative perceptions of teachers are reduced as students become more controlled during the learning process.

Negative perceptions often arise due to teaching methods that are too teacher-centered (Halim, 2021).

Through CBT-based Systematic Desensitization intervention, students are able to restructure their cognition and assess their interactions with teachers more rationally. Theoretically, the significance of the research results occurs in accordance with the basic concept of CBT, which emphasizes that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors influence each other (Mawadah & Irsyadunnas, 2025).

Students' negative perceptions of teachers can be understood as cognitive distortions that give rise to maladaptive emotional responses, such as anxiety, discomfort, and even rejection of learning interactions (Sofiannisa et al., 2025). Through the application of Systematic Desensitization, students are trained to relax and gradually face stimuli that cause tension, so that negative emotional responses are gradually replaced by calmer and more adaptive responses (Purnomo, 2021).

Based on the description of the research results, the Systematic Desensitization technique can be used as an intervention strategy to help students who have difficulty establishing positive relationships with teachers. School counselors can adapt the stages of this intervention in a structured guidance program, starting from identifying negative perceptions, relaxation training, gradual imaginative exposure, to real exposure. The effectiveness of the intervention will be even stronger if it is balanced with an increase in teachers' pedagogical and interpersonal communication competencies, so that teacher-student interactions are more harmonious and support the creation of a healthy learning environment (Hafnidar, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study proves that the Systematic Desensitization technique in the Cognitive Behavior Therapy approach is effective in reducing students' negative perceptions of teachers. Through six intervention sessions that included fear identification, relaxation exercises, and gradual exposure to real situations, students showed a significant decrease in posttest scores compared to the control group. These findings confirm that CBT strategies can help students change their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, thereby creating more positive interpersonal relationships with teachers and a more conducive learning environment.

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