

The Effectiveness of Behavior Modification-Based Group Counseling Using Social Skills Training Techniques to Prevent Phubbing Among Online Gamers

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	ABSTRACT
<p>ARTICLE INFO: Received March 13, 2026</p> <p>Revised April 03, 2026</p> <p>Accepted April 14, 2026</p> <p>KEYWORDS: Behavior Modification, Group Guidance, Social Skills Training, Phubbing, Online Game Students</p>	<p>This study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques in preventing phubbing behavior among students who play online games. This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group. The study sample consisted of 20 students divided into experimental and control groups. Data were collected using a phubbing scale and analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and the Mann–Whitney U Test. The results showed a significant decrease in phubbing behavior in the experimental group ($p < 0.05$), with the average score decreasing from 103.7 to 73.2 ($\Delta = 30.5$), while in the control group, the decrease was from 91.6 to 79.4 ($\Delta = 12.2$). The decrease in the experimental group was greater and more consistent compared to the control group. These findings indicate that group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques are effective in improving social skills and reducing smartphone dependence in social interactions.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Today, rapid advancements in information and communication technology have brought about significant changes in various aspects of life, including patterns of social interaction and recreational activities. Advances in computer and internet technology have made access to various digital services increasingly easy, whether for communication, information retrieval, or entertainment such as online gaming (Koo et al., 2011; Ardi & Sukmawati, 2017). *Online games, as one of the products of digital technology, have grown rapidly and become a popular activity among adolescents because they offer an interactive gaming experience* (Syahrani, 2015; Johan, 2019).

The high prevalence of online gaming is evident from various international studies. Hardanti, Nurhidayah & Fitri (2013) reported that approximately 40% of internet users worldwide actively play online games. In the United States, two-thirds of households with school-aged children have a computer at home, and some of these are used for playing online games (Gentile et al., 2004). In line with the findings above Griffiths (2008) also found that nearly one-third of adolescents play online games every day, with some playing more than 30 hours per week. This situation indicates that online gaming has become part of adolescents' digital lifestyle.

This phenomenon is also occurring in Indonesia. A 2025 survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) noted that the number of internet users in Indonesia reached approximately 229.43 million people, or 80.66% of the total population (Untari, 2025). Of this number, approximately 28.17% of internet users utilize the internet to play online games (Wafa, 2025). The high intensity of internet and online game usage among adolescents indicates that digital activities have become an integral part of the daily lives of the younger generation.

How to cite	Authors, M. W., & Authors, A. (2023). Behavioristic Counseling Techniques for Mitigating Sexual Addiction Among Michat Application Users. <i>Grief and Trauma</i> , 1(2), 69–77. https://doi.org/10.59388/gt.v1i2.655
Homepage	https://journal.scidacplus.com/index.php/gt/
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On the other hand, while online gaming offers entertainment benefits, it can have negative consequences if overused. Lee, Yu. and Lin (2007) explain that online gaming addiction can lower academic performance because students spend more time in front of screens. This aligns with the findings of Gentile et al., (2004) who stated that excessive gaming duration can disrupt concentration during study, and online game addiction can reduce motivation to learn and concern for the social environment (Angela, 2013).

As the use of smartphones and online games has increased, a social behavior known as “phubbing” has emerged the act of ignoring others in social situations because one is more focused on one’s smartphone (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). This behavior often occurs when individuals are more interested in digital activities such as playing games or using social media than in direct interaction (Afdal et al., 2019; Ariza et al., 2021). The phenomenon of phubbing is increasingly observed among adolescents with high smartphone usage (Kurniawan & Suryawati, 2024).

Phubbing behavior can have negative impacts on adolescents’ interpersonal relationships and social development. Saleh et al., (2022) explain that phubbing can hinder the development of social skills and reduce the quality of social interactions. If not addressed appropriately, this behavior has the potential to disrupt students’ learning processes and social relationships at school (Pratiwi & Widyastuti, 2021).

This phenomenon was also observed at Pertiwi 1 High School in Padang. Based on interviews with guidance and counseling teachers, some students frequently use smartphones and play online games during class, thereby neglecting interaction with teachers and classmates. Observations also revealed that during breaks, many students were more focused on their smartphones than on interacting with peers, indicating a tendency toward phubbing behavior among students who play online games.

Various studies have attempted to address phubbing behavior through several intervention approaches. However, the results have not yet demonstrated optimal effectiveness. Saputri et al., (2020) found that group counseling services using self-management techniques did not show a significant difference in reducing phubbing behavior. Other studies also indicate that self-control does not always have a significant effect on phubbing behavior (Kurnia et al., 2020; Kahlil et al., (2025). This highlights the need for more effective intervention approaches.

One approach that can be used is behavior modification based on learning theory. This approach emphasizes that behavior can be changed through a learning process by reinforcing adaptive behaviors and reducing maladaptive behaviors (Wolpe, 1973; Sitoresmi, 2022). In guidance and counseling services, this approach can help students develop more positive social behaviors.

The behavior modification approach can be implemented through various techniques, one of which is social skills training (SST). Social skills training aims to improve an individual’s social skills so they can interact effectively in various social situations (Spence, 2003). Research indicates that this technique is effective in improving communication, cooperation, and social relationships among adolescents (LeCroy, 2008; Amran & Widayat, 2020), and is capable of significantly enhancing social skills (Sariyatun et al., 2021).

Based on the literature review above, most previous studies have focused primarily on the relationship between smartphone use, online gaming addiction, and phubbing behavior. Research examining behavior modification-based counseling interventions using social skills training techniques to prevent phubbing among students who play online games remains limited. Therefore, this study represents a state-of-the-art approach in the development of behavior modification-based group counseling services using social skills training techniques as a preventive strategy to reduce phubbing behavior in schools.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of a behavior modification approach with social skills training techniques in group counseling services to prevent phubbing behavior among students

who play online games. This approach is expected to improve students' social skills while reducing the tendency toward excessive smartphone use in social situations.

Research Objectives

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of behavior modification-based group counseling services using social skills training techniques in preventing phubbing behavior among online gamers at Pertiwi 1 High School in Padang. The specific objectives of this study are as follows: 1) To analyze and describe differences in phubbing among the experimental group before and after receiving behavior modification-based group counseling using social skills training techniques. 2) To analyze and describe differences in phubbing among the control group before and after receiving behavior modification-based group counseling using social skills training techniques. 3) To analyze and describe differences in phubbing between the experimental group, which received behavior modification-based group counseling using social skills training techniques, and the control group, which received specialized group counseling.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach using an experimental method to determine the effect of a specific treatment on the research variables under controlled conditions (Sugiyono, 2016; Firman, 2018). Experimental research aims to test cause-and-effect relationships by applying a treatment to a specific group and comparing it with another group (Yusuf, 2014).

The research design used is a quasi-experiment with a pretest–posttest control group design. In this design, there are two research groups: the experimental group and the control group. This research design can be described as follows.

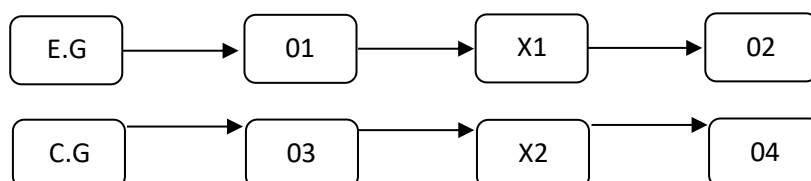


Figure 1. Quasi-Experimental Design

In the context of this study, the quantitative method was used to determine the differences in changes between the pre-intervention and post-intervention periods. After the intervention was completed, both groups took a posttest to assess the changes that had occurred.

Participant and Procedure

The participants in this study consisted of 20 eleventh-grade students from SMA Pertiwi 1 Padang, selected from a total population of 288 students in the 2024/2025 academic year. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria (Sugiyono, 2012), namely, students who play online games, use smartphones for more than 7 hours a day, exhibit high levels of phubbing based on pretest results, and are willing to participate in the entire series of activities. This selection was based on the characteristics of 11th-grade students who are in the middle adolescence phase, characterized by the developmental task of identity versus role confusion (Saul McLeod, 2018). Namely, students who play online games, use smartphones for more than 7 hours a day, exhibit high levels of phubbing based on pretest results, and are willing to participate in the entire series of activities. This selection was based on the characteristics of 11th-grade students who are in the middle adolescence phase, characterized by the developmental task of identity versus role confusion (Prayitno & Amti, 2004; Ramdhani, 2007).

The research procedure was conducted over seven sessions, consisting of one pretest, five

treatment sessions, and one posttest. The experimental group received group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques, while the control group received group counseling services without any specific intervention. The counseling content was tailored based on pretest results and covered social interaction, digital well-being, social responsibility, time management, and improving focus during face-to-face interactions. The study was conducted over one month (January–February 2025). In the experimental group, the techniques used included modeling, role-playing, feedback, and application exercises, while the control group used discussion and question-and-answer methods. All activities were carried out through the stages of formation, transition, core activities, and conclusion.

Research Instruments

The research instrument used was a phubbing behavior scale developed based on the phubbing theory by (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016) and the scale developed by (Karadağ et al., 2015). The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The initial instrument consisted of 40 items, which were then tested for validity and reliability. The results of the validity test using the Product-Moment correlation indicated that 29 items were deemed valid and were used in the study. The reliability test using Cronbach’s Alpha yielded a value of 0.655, the instrument was deemed reliable and suitable for use as a data collection tool.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study utilized non-parametric statistics due to the relatively small sample size and the non-normal distribution of the data, with the assistance of SPSS version 22.00. The analysis process involved calculating pretest and posttest scores as well as the mean scores for each group, followed by classifying phubbing levels into five categories: very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test to determine differences in pretest and posttest scores within each group, as well as the Mann–Whitney U test to examine differences between the experimental and control groups following the intervention. This analysis aimed to assess the effectiveness of group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques in preventing phubbing behavior among online gamers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study was conducted among 11th-grade students at SMA Pertiwi 1 Padang, Indonesia during the 2024/2025 academic year, with a total population of 288 students. Based on the results of the phubbing scale instrument distribution, 20 students were identified as having a very high level of phubbing. These 20 students were then selected as research subjects and divided into two groups: 10 students in the experimental group and 10 students in the control group.

This study aims to analyze differences in phubbing behavior among students who play online games by comparing conditions before and after the intervention in both the experimental and control groups, as well as to examine differences in phubbing behavior between the two groups after the intervention to determine the effectiveness of the treatment provided.

Differences in Phubbing Among the Experimental Group (Pretest–Posttest)

A pretest was conducted to determine the initial state of students’ phubbing behavior before the intervention. Subsequently, the experimental group received an intervention consisting of group counseling based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques. After the intervention was completed, a posttest was conducted to observe changes in student behavior. The

following table shows the comparison of pretest and posttest scores for the experimental group.

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Category	Posttest Mean	Category	Change
Experimental Group	10	103.7	ST	73.2	R	Decrease

Table 1 shows that the average phubbing score for the experimental group decreased from 103.7 (very high category) to 73.2 (low category). The table for the experimental group shows a decrease in phubbing scores among all students after they received group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques. In the pretest phase, all students fell into the very high category, with scores ranging from 99 to 111. After the intervention, posttest scores decreased to 69–80, falling into the low to moderate categories, and no students remained in the very high category. This decrease indicates that group counseling services using social skills training techniques have an effect on reducing phubbing behavior among students who play online games.

Differences in Phubbing Behavior in the Control Group (Pretest–Posttest)

The control group was also administered a pretest and a posttest to assess changes in phubbing behavior. However, this group received only group counseling without any specific techniques.

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest Scores for the Control Group

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Category	Posttest Mean	Category	Change
Control Group	10	91.6	VH	79.4	H	Decrease

The table shows that the average phubbing score for the control group decreased from 91.6 (very high) to 79.4 (moderate). Although there was a decrease, the change was not as significant as that observed in the experimental group. Based on the control group's table, it is evident that there were changes in scores between the pretest and posttest for some students. Some students experienced a decrease in scores, moving from the very high category to the moderate category. However, this decline was not uniform, and there were still students in the high category; in fact, one student (FDA) saw an increase in scores and remained in the very high category.

Overall, the difference between the pretest and posttest scores in the control group was not particularly large and was inconsistent across all students. This is consistent with the average score, which decreased only from 91.6 (very high) to 79.4 (moderate). Thus, without group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques, the reduction in phubbing in the control group has not yet been fully achieved.

Differences in Phubbing Between the Experimental and Control

A comparison between the two groups shows that the experimental group experienced a greater decline in scores than the control group.

Table 3. Comparison of Mean Phubbing Scores

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Category	Posttest Mean	Category	Improvement
Experimental Group	10	103.7	VH	73.2	L	Decrease
Control Group	10	91.6	VH	79.4	H	Decrease

Based on the comparison table, group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques were more effective in reducing phubbing behavior compared to the control group. This is evident from the decrease in the experimental group's average score from 103.7 (very high) to 73.2 (low). Meanwhile, in the control group, the decrease was only from

91.6 (very high) to 79.4 (moderate), and there were still students in the high and very high categories. Thus, the service provided was more effective in reducing phubbing among students who play online games.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using SPSS version 22.00. Data analysis employed the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to determine differences in pretest–posttest scores within the same group, while the Mann–Whitney U Test was used to determine differences between the experimental and control groups (Happ et al., 2019). The decision criterion was that H_0 was rejected if the Sig. value was < 0.05 .

Testing the First Hypothesis

The data for the experimental group were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The results of the analysis showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.005 < 0.05$ with a Z-score of -2.809 .

Table 4. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Test Comparison	Z Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Conclusion
Post-Test – Pre-Test	-2.809	0.005	Significant

Thus, H_0 is rejected, and H_1 is accepted, which means there is a significant difference in the level of phubbing before and after participating in behavior modification-based group counseling using social skills training techniques. Furthermore, the rank results are presented below.

Table 5. Differences in Phubbing Between the Pretest and Posttest in the Experimental Group

Comparison	Category	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttest – Pretest	Negative Ranks	10	5.50	55.00
	Positive Ranks	0	0.00	0.00
	Ties	0	–	–
	Total	10		

The rank results above show that all respondents (10 students) had negative ranks, which means that all students experienced a decrease in phubbing scores after the intervention was administered.

Testing the Second Hypothesis

The test on the control group also used the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The analysis results show an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.007 < 0.05$ with $Z = -2.705$

Table 6. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Posttest for the Control Group

Test Comparison	Z Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Conclusion
Post-Test – Pre-Test	-2.705	0.007	Significant

Thus, H_0 is rejected, and H_1 is accepted, which means there is a difference in phubbing scores before and after the group counseling session. The rank results are presented below.

Table 7. Differences in Phubbing Scores Between the Pretest and Posttest for the Control Group

Comparison	Category	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttest – Pretest	Negative Ranks	9	6.00	54.00
	Positive Ranks	1	1.00	1.00
	Ties	0	–	–
	Total	10		

The ranking results show that 9 students saw their scores decline and 1 student saw their score increase, so the changes observed were not as significant as those in the experimental group.

Testing the Third Hypothesis

The differences between the experimental group and the control group were analyzed using the Mann–Whitney test. The results of the analysis showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.005 < 0.05$ with a Z-score of -2.814 .

Table 8. Test Of Significance for Differences in Scores Between the Experimental Group and the Control Group

Variable	Mann–Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Conclusion
Phubbing Behavior	13.000	68.000	-2.814	0.005	Significant Difference

This indicates that there is a significant difference between the two groups. This difference is also evident in the mean ranks shown below.

Table 9. Difference in Mean Rank

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Experimental Group	10	6.80	68.00
Control Group	10	14.20	142.00
Total	20		

In this case, the experimental group had a mean rank of 6.80, while the control group had a mean rank of 14.20. This indicates that the experimental group’s phubbing scores were lower than those of the control group, suggesting that group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques are more effective in reducing phubbing behavior among online gamers.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that there is a significant difference in phubbing behavior among online gamers between the experimental group and the control group. In the experimental group, there was a significant reduction in phubbing behavior following the provision of group counseling based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques. Descriptively, the average score decreased from the “very high” category to the “low” category, and all group members showed a consistent reduction.

These results indicate that the intervention was effective in reducing phubbing behavior. This finding aligns with behaviorist theory, which emphasizes behavioral change through reinforcement and habituation (Martin & Joseph, 2019), and is supported by research showing that social skills training is effective in improving social skills through direct practice, modeling, role-playing, and feedback (McGinnis-Smith, E., Goldstein, 1984). Furthermore, these results are also consistent with the research by Gresham et al., (2011) and Spence (2003), which found that social skills training can improve social interaction and reduce problematic behavior, and are reinforced by Corey (2012) assertion that a behavioral approach in a group setting is effective in changing behavior through practice and reinforcement.

In the control group, a reduction in phubbing behavior was also observed, though it was not as significant or consistent as in the experimental group. Although the test results indicated significant changes, some students remained in the high-risk category, and others even saw an increase in their scores. This suggests that group counseling services without specific techniques have limited influence. Conceptually, behavioral changes such as phubbing require direct social skills training and systematic reinforcement to achieve optimal results (Pratama et al., 2025).

This finding is supported by the research of Wang & Wang, (2007), which showed that systematic social skills training can significantly reduce various problematic behaviors. Furthermore, Vugt et al., (2013) emphasize that the success of training is highly influenced by the presence of modeling, direct practice, and consistent reinforcement, a point reinforced by the research of Suryaningsih et al., (2024), which indicates that general training without sustained reinforcement has not yet been able to produce consistent changes.

A comparison between the experimental and control groups revealed significant differences, with the experimental group experiencing a greater reduction in phubbing behavior. This confirms that group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques are more effective than services without specialized techniques. Theoretically, phubbing is a maladaptive social behavior resulting from excessive smartphone use and low-quality social interactions (Roberts & David, 2016).

Additionally, Karadağ et al., (2015) explain that phubbing is associated with digital addiction and weak self-control, making interventions involving active practice and behavioral reinforcement more effective. These findings are also supported by studies by Lane et al., (2014) and Cook et al., (2008), which state that behavior-based social skills training is effective in reducing problematic behaviors when conducted through direct practice and reinforcement. Thus, the results of this study reinforce that a behavior modification approach using social skills training techniques is an appropriate strategy for reducing phubbing behavior among students who play online games.

Implication

The results of this study indicate that phubbing behavior among students who play online games can be significantly reduced through group counseling services based on behavior modification using social skills training techniques. Phubbing behavior, as a disruption of social interaction resulting from excessive smartphone use, leads to a decline in students' communication skills, empathy, and social relationships. Therefore, interventions involving hands-on practices such as simulations, modeling, and reinforcement of adaptive behaviors are necessary. This approach helps students develop self-regulation, impulse control, and more effective interpersonal communication. Additionally, this study offers practical implications for school guidance and counseling services. Social skills training techniques can be implemented as an effective strategy for addressing adolescent social issues in the digital age. Guidance counselors can integrate these techniques through practical activities, role-playing, and behavioral reinforcement. Thus, this study can serve as a reference for designing more effective, student-centered services to foster a conducive school environment.

Limitation

This study has several limitations. First, the study focused solely on testing the effectiveness of behavior-modification-based group counseling services using social skills training techniques to prevent phubbing behavior among online gamers, with a limited sample size; therefore, the results cannot yet be widely generalized. Second, the use of a group counseling design limits the number of participants involved, so the conclusions drawn apply only to the group studied. Third, the topics and materials of the service were tailored to the current phenomenon of phubbing, so they would require adaptation if applied to different contexts. Fourth, the implementation of the intervention still focuses on the general conditions of the students and has not specifically examined aspects of social skills in specific areas, such as academic or other psychosocial issues.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of behavior modification-based group counseling services incorporating social skills training techniques in preventing phubbing behavior

among students who play online games. The results showed significant differences before and after the intervention in the experimental group, with a greater and more consistent reduction compared to the control group. All students in the experimental group exhibited a reduction in phubbing behavior, whereas in the control group, a reduction occurred but was not uniform. Statistical test results using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and the Mann–Whitney U Test reinforced these findings, with all hypotheses accepted ($p < 0.05$). This effectiveness stems from the behavior modification approach, which emphasizes reinforcement and habituation, and is supported by social skills training through modeling, role-playing, and feedback. This combination helps students improve their social skills and self-control and reduces their dependence on smartphones. Thus, this service is effective and can be recommended as a strategy for addressing phubbing behavior in schools.

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