

Improving Student Communication Skills: A Trial of Group Counseling with Assertive Training Techniques

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Abstract This study aims to test whether students communication skills have improved before and after being given group counseling with assertive training techniques. The research sample amounted to 8 students of SMP Negeri 3 Palu based on purposive sampling technique. The research data collection used a scale of communication skills. The research data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential methods with the Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test. The results of descriptive analysis showed that before the provision of group counseling assertive training techniques there were 7 students with low communication skills classification and 1 student with very low communication skills classification. After being given group counseling assertive training techniques there were 3 students with very high communication skills classification and 5 students with high communication skills classification. The results of inferential analysis show that the significance value is ($Z=-2.524$; $p<0.05$) with an average value of pretest ($M=35.63$; $SD=6.457$) and posttest ($M=61.25$; $SD=8.548$). The findings of this study indicate that students communication skills improved significantly after being given group counseling with assertive training techniques.		
Keywords Assertive Training Techniques, Communication Skills, Group Counseling.		
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INTRODUCTION

Building quality human resources is very important to prepare for the challenges of the 5.0 era. One of the efforts that can be taken to achieve this is to realize quality education. Quality education not only focuses on mastering subject matter, but also optimizes the development of abilities that will help them to progress in a dynamic and changing environment. The abilities that are important for students to have include the ability to critical thinking, innovation, problem solving, collaboration and the ability to communicate effectively (Mashudi et al., 2020; Nastiti & Ni'mal'Abdu, 2020).

Communication is something that is needed by humans for their survival. This communication ability is scientific and instinctive, so that the ability to communicate appears by itself since the first human being was born. A person must have various abilities and skills, one of which is communication skills and high self-confidence. This skill is one of the skills that students need to have because it will be very influential in their lives (Khoriroh & Muhyadi, 2018). Communication skills are very important for every individual, especially for students because the activities carried out by students are dominated by the learning process which requires communication, communication can help in optimizing learning such as students are required to be skilled, provide responses, be able to express their ideas and opinions in the learning process (Amar, 2024; Putri et al., 2020).

As the results of observations at SMP Negeri 3 Palu that students still seem to have a lack of communication skills. This was indicated when students were asked to come forward to deliver presentations in front of their friends with less clarity, students looked afraid or not confident, some others seemed nervous, nervous and faltered when speaking in front of the class, as well as concerns felt about the assessment of classmates. In addition, the results of interviews with guidance and counseling teachers also show information that students' communication skills are diverse, however, many students still face challenges in developing their communication skills and also students still often complain if asked to speak in public.

Schools must be able to make their students develop optimally and create independent and creative learners. In a school environment, teachers become a very important element as a bridge for students to develop the potential that exists in themselves, in addition to subject teachers who teach specific subjects to students, there are also guidance and counseling teachers whose role is to help students to be able to develop their potential and overcome various problems that are being encountered (Fitriani et al., 2023; Kamil et al., 2018).

Group counseling is a part of guidance and counseling that involves counseling sessions conducted in group form, utilizing group dynamics, and is designed to address individual problems in their development, these problems include various areas such as personal, social, academic, and career guidance (Gaho et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2023). The goal is to provide direction and support to eliminate difficulties experienced by students (Hasan et al., 2019; Wulandari et al., 2024).

Assertive training is one of the techniques in the behavioristic approach that focuses on students who have difficulty in expressing their feelings, and helps increase confidence in conveying what they want, feeling, thinking, but still maintaining and being able to respect the rights and feelings of others (Pakpahan et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2020). The assertive training technique is also a technique that can train an assertive and courageous attitude to be able to convey his opinion without offending others and can say according to his heart (Noh & Kim, 2021; Sarimadana et al., 2022).

Rationale of Study

These communication skills can hinder individual development in socializing, as well as the learning process owned by students and if these communication skills are not trained and introduced from an early age or adolescence, it will have an impact on their future readiness. Through group counseling, assertive training techniques can be a forum in the process of providing assistance to students to develop communication and social skills so that students can be more effective in expressing opinions and also be more assertive. With this technique, students are trained to be able to express themselves, have the courage to speak, help students express ideas and create an active learning atmosphere.

Aims and Hypotheses

This study aims to test by improving student communication skills through the application of group counseling with assertive training techniques. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in this study is that student communication skills improve before and after group counseling with assertive training techniques.

METHOD

Research Design

This research uses a quantitative approach with a type of quasi experiment research. The research design used in this study was one group pretest-posttest design. This design uses a pretest then given treatment after which a posttest is carried out to determine the effect of the treatment or treatment provided.

Participants

The population in this study amounted to 32 students of class VIII.A SMP Negeri 3 Palu. In this study, the researcher's sample amounted to 8 students who had low communication aspects and the sampling technique used was purposive sampling for this reason because this technique is a sampling technique with certain considerations or by deliberately selecting members who best represent the criteria relevant to the objectives.

Procedure

This research was carried out including three stages, namely the preparation, implementation and final stages. At the implementation stage, this research follows the procedure for implementing group counseling with assertive training techniques shown in table 1.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study is a communication skills scale. This scale is used to measure how the level of communication skills possessed by students who are subjects in the study, which refers to various aspects of communication related to indicators about communication skills which contain statements about verbal communication skills with indicators: skills in discussion, expressing opinions, using good grammar, communicating briefly, clearly and easily understood, and for nonverbal aspects with indicators, namely using hand gestures that support verbal messages, paying attention to eye contact and listening to the interlocutor. This scale has 20 items that have been tested for validity and reliability. The validity and reliability test results show that this scale is declared valid with a value of 0.312 and reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.803.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this research is descriptive analysis and statistical inferential analysis with the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test formula which is assisted by IBM SPSS version 26.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of descriptive analysis on students' communication skills level before being given group counseling treatment with assertive training techniques can be seen in table 2 with the classification of communication skills level scale results. Based on the results of table 2 which shows the classification of the level of communication skills in 8 students who are research subjects, students with the initials TNQ, have a percentage of 48%, students with the initials BSA have a percentage of 49%, and students with the initials GW, have a percentage of 48%, students with the initials RMN, have a percentage of 49%, students with the initials MR, have a percentage of 49%, then students with the initials FA with a percentage of 44%, students with the initials FPR, have a percentage of 46% with the same classification, namely low, and students with the initials FRA have a percentage of 25% with a very low classification.

The level of communication skills from descriptive analysis after being given group counseling services assertive training techniques, can be seen in table 3. Based on table 3, it shows that the classification of the level of communication skills of 8 students who are research subjects. Students with the initials TNQ have a percentage of 83% with a very high classification, students with the initials BSA have a percentage of 70% with a high classification, students with the initials GW have a percentage of 94% with a very high classification, students with the initials RMN have a percentage of 68% with a high classification, students with the initials MR have a percentage of 90% with a very high classification and students with the initials FA have a percentage of 71% with a high classification, students with the initials FPR have a percentage of 66% with a high classification, students with the initials FRA have a percentage of 71% with the same classification, namely high.

Table 1. Procedure for implementing group counseling with assertive training techniques

Session	Description
1st Session	<p>Previously, a Pretest sheet was distributed and an introduction process between the group leader and members, interspersed with games or ice breaking to create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. As a result, the group leader succeeded in creating good group dynamics with active participation from members. In addition, this session includes an explanation of the meaning, purpose of group counseling with assertive training techniques, as well as the establishment of rules and agreements during the counseling process.</p>
2nd session	<p>Each student expressed his or her lack of confidence when speaking in public, difficulty in controlling his or her voice intonation and body expression, as well as finding it difficult to convey his or her opinion when speaking with his or her peers, difficulty in focusing his or her attention when interacting with others, and a tendency to use local language in communication. Problems expressed by other students also revolved around difficulties in expressing opinions without offending others, feelings of nervousness and lack of control over body expressions and tone of voice, to a tendency to be indifferent to the opinions of others. In addition, at this meeting, the group leader gave an explanation of the assertive training techniques that would be done together. Together, they prioritized the problems they wanted to solve, especially related to how to express their opinions well, overcome nervousness, and improve their ability to listen and interact with others. During the meeting, each group member gives their opinion and shares tips, creating an environment that supports mutual growth and understanding.</p>
3rd session	<p>The group leader reintroduces the problem faced by each student. They are asked to act out roles according to the problems faced and learn to improve themselves. In this activity students are expected to be able to perform a presentation, followed by feedback from group members. Then students talk to each other about their daily lives, learning to listen and respond to each other. Next, one of the students leads a discussion on overcoming disagreement by communicating in a healthy way. The group leader summarizes the roles performed and gives feedback on appropriate behavior. After receiving feedback, group members were asked to demonstrate attitude changes in everyday situations. The group leader confirmed that he would follow up on the implementation of training at the next meeting.</p>
4th session	<p>The group leader asked about how the members were doing and how they applied the learning in their daily lives. Group members felt helped by the previous training, such as being able to control their tone and understand other people's situations, being able to see other people and being considered fun to talk to by their friends. Each member also conveyed their actions at home and at school, they feel more brave and free to express their opinions after participating in the service. The group leader then distributed worksheets for students to fill out as part of the implementation of group counseling assertive training techniques. The conclusion of this meeting is that students are able to express their own opinions, are ready to improve themselves, and the atmosphere and group dynamics are getting better every meeting. One of the students, as a representative, stated that he was happy to be able to participate in this activity because he felt more familiar with friends and was more courageous in expressing his opinion. And in this meeting the posttest scale was also distributed.</p>

The improvement of students' communication skills before and after being given group counseling services with assertive training techniques can be seen in table 4. Based on table 4. it can be concluded that all research subjects consisting of 8 students, experienced an increase in communication skills after they participated in group counseling services with assertive training techniques. There are 3 students with the initials (TNQ, GW, MR) who experienced an increase from

the classification "low" to "very high". In addition, 4 students with the initials (BSA, RMN, FA, FPR) also experienced an increase from the classification "low" to "high" and a student with the initials FRA who experienced an increase from the classification "very low" to "high". This shows that providing group counseling with assertive training techniques can improve communication skills in students.

Furthermore, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results in table 5 show that the significance value is ($Z=-2.524$; $p<0.05$) with an average value of pretest ($M=35.63$; $SD=6.457$) and posttest ($M=61.25$; $SD=8.548$). The magnitude of the p value <0.05 means that students' communication skills have increased significantly before and after being given group counseling with assertive training techniques. So this study proves that group counseling with assertive training techniques is improving student communication skills.

Table 2. Level of communication skills before treatment

Initials	Score	(%)	Classification
TNQ	38	48%	Low
BSA	39	49%	Low
GW	38	48%	Low
RMN	39	49%	Low
MR	39	49%	Low
FA	35	44%	Low
FPR	37	46%	Low
FRA	20	25%	Very Low

Table 3. Level of communication skills after treatment

Initials	Score	(%)	Classification
TNQ	66	83%	Very High
BSA	56	70%	High
GW	75	94%	Very High
RMN	54	68%	High
MR	72	90%	Very High
FA	57	71%	High
FPR	53	66%	High
FRA	57	71%	High

Table 4. The level of students communication skills before and after treatment

Initials	Before		After		Description
	(%)	Classification	(%)	Classification	
TNQ	48%	Low	83%	Very High	Increased
BSA	49%	Low	70%	High	Increased
GW	48%	Low	94%	Very High	Increased
RMN	49%	Low	68%	High	Increased
MR	49%	Low	90%	Very High	Increased
FA	44%	Low	71%	High	Increased
FPR	46%	Low	66%	High	Increased
FRA	25%	Very Low	71%	High	Increased

Table 5. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results

Results	N	Mean	SD
Pretest	8	35.63	6.457
Posttest	8	61.25	8.548
Z		-2.524	
p		.012	

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that assertive training techniques through group counseling are effective in improving students' communication skills. This is shown by the improvement of students' skills to express their thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear and assertive manner without harming others. The findings underscore that assertive techniques provide students with concrete tools to communicate effectively in diverse situations, which may have previously caused anxiety or conflict.

This study showed results consistent with previous research that group counseling with assertive training techniques can improve students' communication skills (Wahyuningrum et al., 2021; Zulhadi et al., 2023). Furthermore, research conducted by Pasaribu & Mayasari (2019) showed that group counseling can be used as a solution to improve students' communication skills because there are group dynamics which are a forum that makes students always active and can help help each other independently and together through role playing and students can express themselves appropriately.

Moreover, the findings of this study are also in line with the results of research conducted by Putri & Wahyuningrum (2021) which states that after the provision of services using assertive training techniques can improve students' communication skills, such as when students are asked to make presentations. In the context of this study, the improvement in students' communication skills after being given assertive training techniques looks more significant because it is focused on students who have severe communication problems. This finding strengthens the argument that group counseling with assertive training techniques is an effective approach to overcome various communication problems among students.

Furthermore, the process of implementation of group counseling with assertive training techniques in this study showed that students were able to internalize the importance of conveying their thoughts and feelings clearly and assertively, and began to realize how assertive communication can affect their interactions with others. This understanding can be seen from the way students actively participated in the counseling sessions, where they tried to apply assertive techniques in various simulations and group discussions held. In addition, they also felt happy that their opinions were valued in the counseling process, which created a supportive environment for change. This shows that assertive training techniques not only help students in improving their communication skills, but also contribute to their personal development in a more positive direction.

Implications

The findings have important implications for educational practice, particularly in the development of students' communication skills. Teachers and school counselors can utilize assertive training techniques as part of learning or guidance and counseling programs to help students develop better communication skills.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

Despite the effectiveness of the results, this study has some limitations that need to be considered. For example, the limited sample size and relatively short duration of the training may have affected the generalizability of the results. We recommend that further research with a more

robust design, such as using a larger sample and a longer intervention period, to test the effectiveness of assertive training techniques in different settings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that group counseling with assertive training techniques significantly improves students' communication skills. This technique helps students develop the ability and skills to express themselves clearly and assertively, which in turn improves the quality of communication in their social interactions. The results showed that students who participated in this group counseling experienced improvements in self-confidence and the ability to communicate assertively, which can have a positive impact on other aspects of their lives, including academic achievement and relationship communication skills.

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