

Social Skills Training and Its Contribution to the Realization of Child-Friendly Schools: An Analysis of the Impact of Group Guidance

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Abstrak. Sekolah Ramah Anak merupakan pendekatan strategis dalam mewujudkan lingkungan belajar yang aman, inklusif, dan bebas kekerasan. Salah satu pondasi utamanya adalah keterampilan sosial siswa yang mendukung interaksi positif antarindividu. Namun, keterampilan ini tidak berkembang secara merata dan dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor personal dan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman siswa setelah mengikuti bimbingan kelompok keterampilan sosial serta kontribusinya terhadap perwujudan Sekolah Ramah Anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologi dengan mengumpulkan data dari 16 siswa sekolah menengah pertama yang telah mengikuti sesi bimbingan kelompok melalui observasi, lembar kerja, catatan lapangan, dan refleksi. Analisis dilakukan dengan pendekatan tematik van Manen. Hasil penelitian mengungkap empat tema utama: kesadaran berkomunikasi positif, refleksi proses pelaksanaan bimbingan kelompok, pertumbuhan empati dan perspektif sosial, dan penerapan keterampilan sosial di sekolah. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa bimbingan kelompok menciptakan ruang reflektif yang aman, mendorong perubahan perilaku, menumbuhkan nilai-nilai empati, toleransi, dan penghargaan terhadap perbedaan. Penelitian ini memberikan gambaran mendalam tentang transformasi sosial-emosional siswa melalui dinamika kelompok yang terstruktur dan bernuansa humanistik.

Abstract. *Child-Friendly Schools are a strategic approach to creating a safe, inclusive, and violence-free learning environment. One of its main foundations is students' social skills that support positive individual interactions. However, these skills do not develop evenly and are influenced by various personal and social factors. This study explores students' experiences after participating in social skills group counseling and its contribution to the realization of Child-Friendly Schools. This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, collecting data from 16 junior high school students who have participated in group counseling sessions through observation, worksheets, field notes, and reflections. Analysis was conducted using van Manen's thematic approach. The findings reveal four main themes: awareness of positive communication, reflection on the implementation process of group counseling, growth in empathy and social perspective, and the application of social skills at school. The findings indicate that group counseling creates a safe reflective space, promotes behavioral change, and fosters values of empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity. This study provides an in-depth understanding of students' social-emotional transformation through structured group dynamics with a humanistic approach.*

Key word: Social Skills; Group Guidance; Child-Friendly Schools; Impact.

INTRODUCTION

Child-friendly schools, a national strategic policy, are designed to foster a safe and nurturing educational environment. This concept is rooted in protecting and fulfilling children's rights in all learning activities, free from discrimination, violence, or unfair treatment (KemenPPPA, 2015). As Fauziati (2016) affirms, a Child-Friendly School is a clean, healthy, safe, and inclusive place, respecting children's rights irrespective of their social, economic, cultural, religious, or physical backgrounds. While there are instances of intolerance, such as bullying and discrimination, among students in practice (Ekaningtyas, 2020; Fauziah & Suwandi, 2021). , the overarching goal of Child-Friendly Schools is to equip students with the necessary skills to interact in a healthy and empathetic manner, thereby fostering strong social skills (Ulum, 2018; Yolanda & Yuniarti, 2024).

Social skills include communicating, collaborating, participating in society, and demonstrating social sensitivity (Bali, 2017). These skills are important for building healthy interpersonal relationships (Zubaedah et al., 2024). Students with good social skills can resolve conflicts peacefully, respect differences, improve social relationships, and enhance academic performance (Wole et al., 2025). Social skills are key to achieving a Child-Friendly School because they support positive interactions, prevent violent behavior, and increase student participation in learning.

However, social skills do not develop uniformly across individuals. Differences in gender, family background, and social environment influence how students express emotions, resolve conflicts, and build social relationships (Kring & Gordon, 1998; Saripah & Mulyani, 2015). Therefore, a structured and contextual social skills development strategies are needed. One form of service supporting this development is group counseling designed to develop social skills through group dynamics, role-playing, and reflective discussions. This aligns with the findings of Kravets & Lubyanitska (2023), who emphasize that applying innovative methods such as role-playing and storytelling is practical in enhancing students' social skills.

Group guidance is one of the services in guidance and counseling carried out in a group setting, aimed at developing self-potential and social skills through group

dynamics (Simanjuntak & Lubis, 2018; Yuliana, 2019). In the process, students learn to understand others' feelings, control their behavior, express their opinions, and listen to the perspectives of other group members (Corey, 2016). Interactions in group guidance foster empathy and a mindset of mutual respect for differences (Budiarti et al., 2022; Huda & Ardiyan, 2022). Therefore, group guidance has significant potential in creating a child-friendly school climate.

Research on the impact of guidance and counseling services on social skills has been extensively conducted. Ardila et al. (2019) found that psychoeducational group services using modeling techniques effectively improved elementary school students' social skills. Damayanti et al. (2022) also showed that online group counseling using discussion techniques is quite effective for high school students. Meanwhile, Krisnanda et al. (2023) revealed that group counseling positively impacts the interpersonal communication of junior high school students. However, most of these studies use an experimental approach and have not explored the students' subjective experiences or the contribution of group counseling to the realization of Child-Friendly Schools.

The implementation of Child-Friendly Schools requires collaborative involvement from the entire school community. Teachers are responsible for creating a safe and comfortable environment for students to learn, play, and socialize (Yunitasari et al., 2024). Guidance and counseling teachers also play a strategic role in supporting character building in students through their services (Akhyar, 2024). Counselors act as facilitators who design services, particularly in developing social skills as the foundation for healthy interactions and creating a favorable school climate (ASCA, 2022). Structured and sustainable services serve as a means for students to cultivate empathy, appreciate differences, and build harmonious social relationships.

Based on this description this study aims to examine the impact of group guidance in realizing Child-Friendly Schools. Specifically, this study aims to (1) explore the social skills competencies acquired by students after participating in group guidance, (2) analyze the implementation process of group guidance as perceived by students as relevant, and (3) examine the benefits of group guidance in developing students' social

skills as a contribution to the realization of Child-Friendly Schools. Thus, schools can become safe, comfortable, and enjoyable places for all students.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the meaning of students' experiences after group guidance (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research subjects were 16 junior high school students in Central Java Province, who were fully involved in several group counseling sessions and grouped by gender to observe different dynamics of experience. Data collection was conducted post-group counseling sessions. Data collection techniques included (1) group counseling worksheets, (2) participatory observation during group counseling sessions, and (3) field notes and researcher reflections. Data analysis was conducted by identifying meaningful quotes, formulating meaning, grouping into themes, and developing essential descriptions of student experiences (Manen, 1997). Data validity was maintained through the researcher's direct involvement in the activity process and through cross-checking and reviewing findings to ensure consistency in interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through phenomenological analysis, this study reveals four main themes reflecting the profound meaning of students' subjective experiences in group counseling. The four themes were systematically identified and presented in Table 1, which describes the dynamics of students' social skill development and its contribution to Child-Friendly Schools.

Table 1. Themes from Student Experiences in Group Guidance: Essential Meanings and Contributions to Child-Friendly Schools

No	Main Theme	Description Elements			
		Essential Meaning	Male Subject	Female Subject	Contribution to Child-Friendly Schools
1	Awareness of positive communication	Students realize the importance of speaking politely and controlling	Listen actively, maintain tone of voice, use polite language	Understand your friends' perspectives, speak politely, show empathy	Creating safe communication without verbal abuse

		their emotions			
2	Reflection on the Implementation Process of Group Guidance	Students experience awareness and desire for change through group dynamics	Ice breaking builds enthusiasm, recognizes poor communication, desire for change	Ice breaking builds a sense of security, awareness of the importance of politeness, and awareness of managing emotions	Cultivating introspective attitudes and social readiness in interactions
3	Growth in empathy and social perspective	Students begin to understand the feelings and perspectives of others in social interactions	Realizing that a high tone hurts friends, wanting to adjust oneself	Restraining emotions when disagreeing, trying to understand other points of view	Promoting tolerance and respect for differences
4	Applying social skills in school life	The skills acquired are applied in real-life situations at school	Not imposing one's will, interacting more comfortably	Be considerate of your friends' feelings, speak softly and politely	Encourage healthy social interactions and respect the rights of all students

The results of this study indicate that the group counseling process provides space for students to engage in self-reflection. This reflection is profound and relates to their social and emotional experiences. Through a phenomenological approach, it was revealed that students gained new awareness of their daily behavior, particularly in communication and emotion management. The group dynamics, which began with ice-breaking activities, created a sense of security and encouraged openness, prompting students to express themselves without fear or embarrassment. These findings are consistent with the research of Mepieza (2024) and Sasan et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of psychological safety in facilitating active student engagement.

The core stage, which includes material presentation, discussion, and role-playing, encourages students to connect communication concepts with personal

experiences. Students actively discuss both positive communication experiences and those that trigger conflicts. Some students honestly admit to having used inappropriate or harsh words when emotional. A male student stated, "It turns out that refusing an invitation to play does not have to be done rudely, but can be done assertively" [CLL5], reflecting the development of awareness of poor communication and supporting the development of assertive communication skills. This finding supports the research by Herman et al. (2020), which shows that assertive communication training effectively reduces bullying behavior and improves healthy social skills, thereby strengthening positive social dynamics in the school environment.

Role-playing activities attract students' attention because they are based on real experiences. The female student group acted out a group discussion scene where they listened to and understood each other's perspectives. One student shared, "Through role-playing, I can practice speaking politely during discussions, even when there are differences of opinion, because I usually get carried away by my emotions" [CLP2]. This highlights the importance of emotional management in social interactions and reinforces understanding of politeness. Meanwhile, the male student group acted out poor communication in online gaming, which they later recognized as a habit that needed to be changed. A student reflected, "This activity made me realize that the habit of using harsh language while playing online games is a form of communication that I need to change" [CLL3], demonstrating the process of internalization and motivation for positive change.

These findings are supported by research Kravets & Lubyanytska (2023), which shows that role-playing methods support the understanding of effective communication. This is also supported by Andreou (2006), who states that good social skills can reduce aggressive behavior, including verbal aggression. Mahyuddin (2016), states that the use of role-playing techniques can trigger self-reflection to become a better person than before. Additionally, research by Polan et al. (2013), states that adolescents with good social skills have a lower risk of engaging in bullying and violent behavior.

Thus, the group guidance process in the form of ice breaking, discussion, and role play is not only perceived as relevant and meaningful by students. They also

contribute significantly to fostering introspective attitudes, self-awareness, and social readiness to interact healthily and respect differences. Forms an important foundation for implementing Child-Friendly Schools, emphasizing respect for children's rights to safety, dignity, involvement, and development in a supportive learning environment. In line with the findings of Sasmita & Wantini (2023), these results confirm that humanistic structured group guidance can create a Child-Friendly School climate free from harshness, build character, and empower students as active subjects in the educational process. Experiences in group dynamics become the point of new awareness among students in building more constructive social relationships, and an exceptionally positive communication awareness.

Positive communication awareness is one of the primary social skills competencies that develop between male and female students, who are different yet complementary. Male students experience development in active listening, regulating tone of voice, and using polite language. One male student stated, "I listen carefully before responding, which avoids conversation misunderstandings" [CLL1]. This aligns with the findings of Strekalova et al. (2019) that males tend to demonstrate empathy through non-verbal actions such as active listening, as they express feelings verbally less frequently. Additionally, voice tone regulation is part of the students' reflection, as seen in the statement, "I started speaking in a calmer tone because a high-pitched tone triggers a similar response" [CLL2]. This finding aligns with Caballero et al. (2021), who stated that a polite and calm tone elicits a more positive emotional response than a high-pitched tone. Male students also learned to use polite language, in line with the findings of Ibrahim et al. (2025), who noted that this creates a safe and comfortable learning environment.

Meanwhile, female students excelled in understanding other people's perspectives, speaking politely, and showing empathy. They stated, "I try to understand the reasons behind differences of opinion, then respond with well-chosen and polite words" [CLP4], which shows deep reflection on the importance of thoughtful and empathetic communication. This finding aligns with Van der Graaff et al. (2014), who state that women have an advantage in perspective-taking and empathy compared to

men, thereby supporting harmonious interpersonal relationships and reducing aggressive behavior (Santrock, 2019). This explains that gender influences communication style (Chandra et al., 2023; Nofia, 2016; Sulistiyo et al., 2016).

The awareness gained from this experience contributes to the Child-Friendly School, particularly in creating safe, healthy, and verbally non-violent communication. This reflects the principles of Child-Friendly Schools that strengthen character and create a humanistic school climate (Iskandar et al., 2024). Positive communication is a crucial element in building a school culture that upholds respect for every student's dignity, rights, and expressions (Liestyasari et al., 2021). Once positive communication skills begin to develop, students start to realize that their emotions and words have an impact on others. This awareness is reflected in more controlled behavior, such as improving communication skills, demonstrating the ability to understand others' perspectives, and showing empathy.

This growth in empathy and social perspective is important in creating a child-friendly school. The principles of a Child-Friendly School emphasize the importance of respecting every student's dignity, expression, and rights, including the right to feel emotionally safe and valued in social interactions (UNICEF, 2020). When students can see from their peers' perspectives and respond to differences with empathy, they help create an inclusive, non-discriminatory, and supportive social environment. This is in line with the findings of Mestre et al. (2009) and Santrock (2019), which state that empathy and perspective-taking are important foundations for harmonious social relationships and the reduction of aggressive behavior.

After experiencing growth in empathy and understanding social perspectives, students began to apply these social skills in their daily interactions at school. This application became a clear indicator of the contribution of group guidance to the realization of a Child-Friendly School culture. Students demonstrate behavioral changes, such as considering others' feelings, speaking more softly and politely, not imposing their will, and building healthy and equitable interactions, indicating that the skills acquired are understood cognitively and applied affectively and behaviorally. These findings align with Brackett et al. (2011), who emphasize the effectiveness of a

participatory approach in developing students' social-emotional competencies. Additionally, they reinforce the findings of Polan et al. (2013), which show that social skills honed through a participatory approach tend to improve the quality of interactions and reduce the risk of bullying and violence.

These behavioral changes reflect the success of group counseling in shaping students' moral and social awareness. In the context of Child-Friendly Schools, this aligns with Iskandar et al. (2024) and Liestyasari et al. (2021) who argue that a child-friendly school climate requires the active contribution of students as agents in building a safe, fair, and collaborative school culture. Students who can maintain healthy social relationships also help maintain the emotional safety of their peers and contribute to creating an environment free from verbal and social violence. Thus, facilitating students' journey from personal awareness to behavioral change rooted in human values and actively participating in shaping a school culture based on human values, tolerance, and non-discrimination to realize a Child-Friendly School (Andreou, 2006; Mahyuddin, 2016; UNICEF, 2018).

This study has limitations due to the subjective nature of the data obtained, as individual perceptions and the possibility of reflective bias inherent in the phenomenological approach greatly influence the interpretation of meaning conveyed by students. Additionally, the group dynamics that formed during the guidance process had unique characteristics that were not entirely under the researcher's control, which could affect the depth of reflection and the quality of interaction among members. However, these limitations open up opportunities to build collaboration in designing services that are adaptive to the real needs of students in their respective environments.

Practical implications for counselors, especially guidance and counseling teachers, can be used to design programs to instill positive communication, empathy, and tolerance values. Must integrate these values into various school activities to create a safe, inclusive learning environment that encourages respectful student interactions. Habit-forming programs can be developed through class forums, collaborative projects, anti-bullying campaigns, or student aspiration rooms. This provides practical direction for the development of child-friendly value-based programs. If positive communication

values and social awareness are systematically and continuously integrated, schools become safe, equitable, and happy spaces for all students to grow.

Further research can use a mixed-method design to explore the dimensions of student experiences more comprehensively and provide quantitative data to support the generalization of findings. In addition, expanding the subjects to diverse school levels and characteristics is also necessary to explore strategies for strengthening social skills that are appropriate to the cultural context and psychosocial needs of students. The development of social skills programs in schools can be aligned with the principles of Child-Friendly Schools.

CONCLUSION

Social skills training through group guidance provides meaningful experiences for students in understanding and reflecting on the dynamics of their social relationships, particularly in terms of positive communication, empathy, and the ability to build healthy relationships. Through a phenomenological approach, it was revealed that activities such as ice breakers, discussions, and role-playing create a safe and reflective space for students to recognize their roles in social interactions, foster self-awareness, and develop attitudes of mutual respect and tolerance toward differences. The experiences students internalize during this process demonstrate social-emotional transformation that improves interpersonal skills and reinforces values that support realizing a Child-Friendly School in an inclusive, participatory, emotionally safe, and verbally non-violent environment. Therefore, group guidance is a supportive strategy in fostering a school culture that values children's rights and facilitates their holistic social development. Further research could explore the dimensions of students' experiences in different socio-cultural contexts or develop intervention models integrated with the school curriculum.

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