



## The effectiveness of assertive training group counselling in improving students' interpersonal communication

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| Article Info                                                                                     | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <b>Keywords:</b><br>Group guidance,<br>assertiveness training,<br>interpersonal<br>communication | Interpersonal communication is essential for students' social development and the establishment of positive relationships. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of group guidance using assertiveness training in improving interpersonal communication among Grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'allimin Yogyakarta. A quasi-experimental method with a nonequivalent control group design was employed, involving 14 students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received seven sessions of assertiveness training, while the control group received no intervention. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Mann-Whitney U test. The results revealed a significant improvement in interpersonal communication in the experimental group, with mean scores increasing from 47.86 to 94.86 ( $Z = 2.371, p < .05$ ). Meanwhile, the control group showed a nonsignificant increase from 47.85 to 62.28 ( $Z = 1.725, p > .05$ ). A significant difference in posttest scores was also found between the experimental and control groups ( $Z = 3.134, p < .05$ ), favoring the experimental group. These findings suggest that group guidance incorporating assertiveness training is an effective approach to improving students' interpersonal communication and offers practical implications for strengthening school guidance and counseling services. |

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15294/jubk.v15i2.31440>

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p-ISSN 2252-6889

e-ISSN 2502-4450

## Introduction

Interpersonal communication is a basic skill that plays an important role in building healthy social relationships among individuals in a school environment. Purwanti et al., (2022) define interpersonal communication as a process in which messages, information, thoughts, and attitudes are conveyed between two individuals, who exchange roles as communicators and recipients with the aim of achieving mutual understanding. Furthermore, Abed et al. (2023) state that interpersonal communication is a social event that occurs when individuals interact with other individuals. Meanwhile, Klinkosz et al. (2021) state that interpersonal communication is a social process involving elements such as openness, empathy, positive support, trust, and readiness, which ultimately form attitudes of mutual trust, understanding, and respect among individuals.

Research by Tschannen-Moran et al., (2006) confirms that good interpersonal communication improves student learning achievement through emotional support, effective cooperation, positive relationships with teachers, and constructive social and conflict resolution skills. Meanwhile, students with poor interpersonal communication skills may isolate themselves, which can affect their interactions with peers, teachers, and the wider social environment (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Therefore, improving interpersonal communication is an important focus in guidance and counselling services.

Assertive training is an effective behavioral approach to improving interpersonal communication. Assertive training is a training procedure designed to help individuals develop social skills, particularly in expressing their attitudes, feelings, thoughts, opinions, and rights honestly (Moss et al., 2021).

Assertive training is a technique for training individuals to be courageous in expressing their behavior, through processes such as role-playing, practicing, or following certain social models (Yosep et al., 2024). The effectiveness of this technique has been proven in various studies, such as that conducted by Putri et al. (2023),

which showed that assertive training significantly improved the interpersonal communication of secondary school students. Similar findings were obtained by Ayidah Nasution & Alfin Siregar (2024), who concluded that assertive training significantly improved students' interpersonal communication. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services that use assertive training techniques in improving the interpersonal communication skills of Grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Yogyakarta. This study makes a theoretical contribution to the field of guidance and counseling, particularly regarding the effectiveness of behavioral approaches in improving students' interpersonal communication.

In addition, this study contributes practically in the form of an assertive training-based group service model that can be adopted by guidance and counseling teachers in helping students with poor interpersonal communication. Methodologically, this study enriches the empirical literature through a quasi-experimental approach that can be replicated in other secondary education contexts. The benefits of this research are felt by students as a means of improving interpersonal communication skills and the courage to express themselves in a healthy manner, and by schools as a basis for developing guidance service programs that are better adapted to students' psychological needs.

## Method

The research subjects were selected from 100 Grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Yogyakarta based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. the selection of inclusion criteria was based on Madrasah Mu'alimin students in Yogyakarta who had low interpersonal communication skills and were willing to participate in assertive training group counselling, while the exclusion criteria were students outside Madrasah Mu'alimin Yogyakarta who had high interpersonal communication skills and were unwilling to participate in assertive training group counselling. Then, from this number of students, 14 students were selected at random and divided into two groups: 7 students in the experimental group received group guidance intervention using assertive training techniques for seven sessions, and 7 students in the control group did not receive any special intervention.

The instrument used was an interpersonal communication scale questionnaire developed by the researcher and validated by experts, adapted to the indicators of interpersonal communication theory developed by DeVito, consisting of 35 items. The scale options for each item ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The validity test results indicated that 26 items were valid and 9 items were invalid. The valid items had a total item correlation range of 0.25 to 0.55, while the alpha reliability was 0.70.

The experimental design and procedure used a pretest-posttest control group design involving an experimental group and a control group. The experimental and control groups had the same characteristics. In this design, both groups were given an initial test (pretest) with the same test. Then, the experimental group received special treatment for 7 sessions, each lasting  $2 \times 45$  minutes. The first session (significance) trained students to say no without hurting other people's rights, the second session (competence) trained students to express their opinions clearly and confidently through role play, the third session (power) trained students to reject peer pressure or assert personal boundaries clearly, the fourth session (openness) trained students to express their thoughts and feelings assertively, the fifth session (empathy) trained students to listen actively and respond empathetically, the sixth session (equality) trained students to express their opinions openly and fairly without harming others, and the seventh session (evaluation and follow-up) trained students and gave them assignments to apply the assertive techniques they had learned in their daily lives.

Meanwhile, the control group was not given any treatment. After the experimental group received treatment and the control group did not, both groups were tested with the same post-test. The results of the two post-tests were compared, as were the pre- and post-test results for each group, to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. Data analysis was performed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to assess pre- and post-treatment differences within one group, and the Mann-Whitney test to compare the experimental and control groups.

## Result and Discussion

Statistical data description in the experimental group showed that the average interpersonal communication score before treatment (pretest) was 47.86 ( $SD=6.28$ ). After receiving treatment in the form of assertive training group guidance, the average interpersonal communication score increased to 94.86 ( $SD=3.53$ ). Meanwhile, in the control group, the pretest average interpersonal communication score was 47.85 ( $SD=6.28$ ) and increased to 62.28 ( $SD=4.34$ ). These results are visualized in the following table.

**Table 1.** Pre-test and Post-test of Interpersonal Communication for the Experimental and Control Groups

| <b>Komunikasi<br/>Interpersonal</b> | <b>Pre Test</b> |           | <b>Post Test</b> |           | <b>Z</b> | <b>p</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                                     | <i>Mean</i>     | <i>SD</i> | <i>Mean</i>      | <i>SD</i> |          |          |
| Eksperimen                          | 47.86           | 6.2831    | 94.86            | 3.5322    | -2.371   | < 0.05   |
| Kontrol                             | 47.85           | 6.2830    | 62.28            | 4.3470    | -1.725   | > 0.05   |
| Z                                   | 0.000           |           | -3.134           |           |          |          |
| p                                   | > 0.05          |           | < 0.05           |           |          |          |

Table 1 shows a difference in results between the experimental group, which received assertive training group counselling intervention, and the control group, which did not receive any treatment. The experimental group showed a greater increase in interpersonal communication, whereas the control group showed no increase. Table 1 shows the results of the Wilcoxon test for the experimental group with a Z value of -2.37 and  $p < 0.05$ . Meanwhile, the Wilcoxon test results for the control group also showed a Z value of -1.72 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, the Mann-Whitney test results for the experimental group yielded a Z value of -3.13 with  $p < 0.05$ .

These results confirm a significant difference between the experimental group, which received assertive training and guidance, and the control group, which did not receive similar treatment: the experimental group had higher interpersonal communication scores than the control group. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of assertive training group guidance in improving the interpersonal communication of Grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Yogyakarta. Archbell & Coplan, (2022) stated that students with low interpersonal communication skills usually show difficulties in interacting effectively, tend to be shy, avoid social involvement, feel anxious when communicating, and are less able to respond spontaneously in conversations. Mojtahedzadeh et al., (2024) state that low interpersonal communication skills can cause students to become isolated and experience difficulties in interacting with peers, teachers, and their social environment.

The findings of this study indicate that assertive training group guidance is effective in improving the interpersonal communication of Grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Yogyakarta. This is in line with research conducted by Nuha et al., (2024) that the application of assertive training can improve individuals' interpersonal communication to be more open, confident, and effective in social interactions. (Lubis, 2020) showed that assertive training is proven to be effective in improving students' interpersonal communication skills. In addition, Yosep et al. (2024) found that assertive training significantly improves interpersonal communication skills and empathy and reduces bullying behavior among students. Similarly, Ayidah Nasution & Alfin Siregar, (2024) also concluded that assertive training can significantly improve students' interpersonal communication. Furthermore, research by Ekwelundu, (2022) concluded that assertive training can shape healthy and assertive interpersonal communication skills.

Assertive training techniques are a learning program aimed at helping individuals express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards others while still respecting and appreciating others' rights (Ademokoya, 2020). The results of the study indicate that assertive training group guidance is effective in improving the interpersonal communication of Grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Yogyakarta, and that there is a significant difference in scores between the experimental group that received the intervention and the control group that did not receive it.

## Conclusion

Group guidance using assertive training techniques has been proven effective in improving the interpersonal communication of grade XI students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. This intervention led to significant changes, helping students interact more openly, empathetically, and confidently than students who did not receive similar treatment. This study has practical implications for guidance and school counselors seeking to integrate assertive training techniques into group counseling services as an effective psychosocial intervention. Assertive training techniques can help students build self-confidence, manage emotions in a healthy way, and improve the quality of interpersonal relationships. In addition, group guidance using assertive training techniques can be used as part of efforts to prevent psychological problems and improve social skills related to poor interpersonal communication in the school environment. list/numbering form. If forced to have item list/numbering, but it is written in a paragraph.

## Author Contributions Statement

**Lalu Muhammad Nasir:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **DYP Sugiharto:** Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Ernest Ceti Septyanti:** Supervision, Validation, Project administration, Writing – review & editing. All authors contributed to the development of this manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

### Declaration of Generative AI

ChatGPT was utilized during the preparation of this manuscript to support language refinement and improve the clarity of the academic writing. The authors reviewed the suggested changes and revised the text as appropriate. All authors accept responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors state that they have no known financial interests or personal relationships that could be perceived as having influenced the research or the conclusions presented in this manuscript.

### Funding Statement

No specific funding was received from public, commercial, or nonprofit organizations to support the research reported in this article.

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