Cognitive Behavior Group Counseling to Reduce Academic Anxiety

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Article Info

Abstract

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This study attempted to examine the effectiveness of cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique to reduce academic anxiety. Meanwhile, the design used in this study was pre-test and multiple post-test designs. In this case, the researchers involved eight students in the eleventh grade or class XI of Public Senior High School 1 Pringgarata (SMA Negeri 1 Pringgarata). The subjects' data were collected through statistic Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) which was focused on class related anxiety, learning related anxiety, and text anxiety. For more, the collected data were analyzed by using repeated measure ANOVA. It resulted that there was a reduction in students' academic anxiety ($F_{(2.14)} = 393.24$, $p < 0.01$). These findings assert that cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique is effective to reduce the academic anxiety of the students of SMA Negeri 1 Pringgarata.

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INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is an individual's response to an unpleasant situation experienced by everyone in daily life. Ottens (1991) explains that academic anxiety is a problem which may influence the majority of students' learning activity. Pekrun, Frenzel, Götz, and Perry (2007) asserts this statement who stats that academic anxiety tends to disturb the learning process and decline achievement, including attention, and memory performance. When anxiety has much control over students, it will give negative effects to students who then lead to a decrease in psychological aspect, result in the low learning outcome, and make students avoid doing tasks. All of these threads are caused by the decrease in attention, concentration and memory performance on students.

The above phenomena are supported by Freeston, Ladouceur, Gagnon, Thibodeau, Rhéaume, Letarte, and Bujold (1997) that anxiety is the realization of a psychological condition which might influence people in every aspect of life. Hashempour, and Mehrad (2014) show that academic anxiety experienced by students are strongly related to a learning process. That is when students' academic anxiety level increases, their learning process turns to be ineffective.

Academic anxiety is related to cognitive. According to Sharf (2016), the type of counseling which applies to understand the nature of the emotional phenomenon, attitudes disorder, and focus on the cognitive aspect of individuals' reaction is counseling which utilizes cognitive behavior approach. Matson, and Ollendick (1988) argue that cognitive behavior approach is made through several specific procedures by using cognition as the major part of counseling. Moreover, the focus of this counseling is perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts.

In group counseling, Gladding (2012) states that cognitive behavior group counseling is useful for dealing with anxiety, discomfort, stress, confidence, and social interaction aimed to change any irrational thoughts into the rational ones. This is in line with Dewinta, and Menaldi study (2009) that cognitive behavior can change

cognition, emotion, and behaviors that cause anxiety. Therefore, academic anxiety truly influences students' learning habits so that it will impact students' intellectuality (Siddiqui, and Rehman, 2014).

Wong, Kwok, Low, Man, and Priscilla (2018) show that cognitive behavior treatment could improve students' anxiety. Next, Matsumoto, and Shimizu (2016) reveal that cognitive behavior therapy is effective to reduce students' anxiety. Also, techniques in cognitive behavior are applied, including cognitive restructuring.

Cognitive restructuring is a technique done to stop negative thoughts by counselees and help them to restructure the negative thoughts into the positive ones (Cormier, Nurius, and Osborn, 2009). In the implementation of cognitive restructuring technique, clients are helped to restructure their cognition which tends to produce a negative mindset and causes anxiety (Hanifa, and Santoso, 2015).

Another study was done by Akinsola, and Nwajei (2013) which proves that cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique is effective to reduce students' academic anxiety. The findings of this study assert that students experienced academic anxiety reduction after receiving group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique. Also, the study investigated the implication of cognitive restructuring technique on students' anxiety. However, the study results cannot be generalized as proof that cognitive restructuring in group counseling can reduce academic anxiety.

Cognitive behavior group counseling would be able to help individuals to deal with anxiety problems and negative thoughts because cognitive behavior has more focus on restructuring and repair of irrational cognition and balancing the effects of events which inflict individuals.

The aspects of cognition in cognitive behavior are such as change the way of thinking, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, imagination and facilitate individuals in recognizing and changing any mistakes in cognitive aspects (Myrick, 2011).

Alternatively, the aim of identification decides the direction of therapy movements. Eben though group leaders lead discussion and cooperation with group members, the group members themselves choose their own goals (Corey, 2012).

A characteristic which differentiates the practice of cognitive attitudes is on the systematic activities for specific goals and evaluation. Their concepts and procedures are stated explicitly, empirically tested, and continuously revised (Corey, 2012). Based on principles, characteristics, previous studies, and phenomena regarding anxiety, therefore, the use of cognitive behavior to reduce students' academic anxiety is effective.

METHODS

Subjects in this study were the class XI students of SMA Negeri 1 Pringgarata, consisting of 8 students (4 female students, and 4 male students).

Table 1. The Systemic of Cognitive Behavior Counseling Activities

Sessions	Activities
1.	Delivering understanding related to upcoming activities, building an interpersonal relationship, and collaborative cooperation, discussing irrational and rational thoughts.
2.	Explaining A-B-C principles to strengthen group members' beliefs. Analyzing clients' thoughts in a situation full of pressure and causes academic anxiety.
3.	Inviting group members to understand or reflecting the relationship between thoughts and feeling to build up awareness. practicing coping thought (CT), observing the focus shifting of client thoughts which harm themselves and transforming it into preventive form. All those thoughts were developed for counselees.
4.	Developing more rational thoughts that were applicable in the real-life situation, transferring negative thoughts to coping thought (CT). These steps trained clients to move on from academic anxiety-based causes to preventive thoughts.
5.	Creating self-reinforcement to achieve goals. training positive reinforcement by having counselors as the model and clients practicing positive self-expression with the aim of appreciating every achievement.
6.	Delivering what has been achieved by the group members and having a discussion about objective data. Giving homework and follow-up to make clients practice skills obtained from CT in the real-life situation

The instrument used was the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) focused on class related anxiety, learning related anxiety, and test anxiety developed by (Peixoto, Mata, Monteiro, and Pekrun, 2005).

The AEQ inventory has 35 items and uses Likert scale with five options criteria, namely: STS (very infeasible), TS (infeasible), CS (fair), S (feasible), and SS (very feasible). Additionally, indicators in this instrument are class related anxiety, learning related anxiety, and test anxiety. This instrument had item validity of 0.379 to 0.745 and alpha coefficient reliability of 0.393.

The session of group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique to reduce academic anxiety was done six times. Each session had 90 minutes time allotment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis of cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique was done by using repeated measure ANOVA. This technique was used to compare repeated measurements on the same subject with the aim of knowing the reduction of students' academic anxiety in pre-test, post-test, and follow-up.

Table 2. The Analysis of Repeated Measure ANOVA on Cognitive Restructuring

	M	SD	$F_{(2.14)}$
T_1	197	9.304	
T_2	119	7.79	393.24
T_3	104	4.30	

Based on Table 1, the results showed that the mean of students' academic anxiety treated by using cognitive restructuring technique got reduction, namely pre-test: M = 197, SD = 9.307; post-test: M= 119, SD = 7.79; follow-up: M = 104, SD = 4.30. Thus, there was a significant reduction (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up) done by cognitive restructuring technique. For more, based on the results of the test of repeated measure ANOVA on a test of within-subjects effects by using cognitive restructuring, there found influences ($F_{(2.14)}$ = 393.24, p < 0.01).

Table 3. The Difference of Mean Score of Cognitive Restructuring (Pairwise Comparison)

Comparison	MD	SE	p
Pre-test – post-test	77.37	4.33	< 0.01
Pre-test – follow-up	92.75	3.49	< 0.01
Post-test – follow-up	15.37	2.58	< 0.01

According to the results of the test comparison of time effect on Table 2, there was a significant reduction on students' academic anxiety between pre-test assessment to post-test (MD = 77.37, p < 0.01), pre-test to follow-up (MD= 92.75, p < 0.01) and post-test to follow-up (MD= 15.37, p < 0.01). The analysis results concluded that there was a reduction in students' academic anxiety happened in every phase of measurement.

The findings of this study assert that cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique contributed changes to students' academic anxiety reduction. The counseling done in 6 sessions gave a positive impact on students' personality regarding academic anxiety.

Riza (2016) explains that this intervention is aimed at teaching clients various coping skills in order to help then developing lifestyle which is adaptive, flexible, and conducive for reducing anxiety. Also, Erford (2016) states that cognitive restructuring technique is used to give treatment for individuals who are suffering polarized mind, showing fear and anxiety in a particular situation by identifying thoughts which cause anxiety so that the individuals can fight against their self-defeating feelinds by having coping thoughts.

Based on the description above, the researchers concluded that cognitive restructuring is the process of changing students' thinking errors which are wrong to be a realistic mind, carried out by counselors who aim to assist students in finding alternative thoughts. According to Richardson, Stallard, and Velleman (2010), cognitive behaviors have a positive impact on the prevention, treatment of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents. The results of the analysis showed that the cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique could contribute positively to reducing students' academic anxiety.

Based on the results of the observations during the intervention, in general, it went smoothly. This was evidenced by the change in the level of reduction in the academic anxiety of students before and after the treatment of group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique conducted six times with stages in cognitive restructuring techniques. Further, in the experimental group, the treatment was focused on looking at the cognitive effects of students which may cause academic anxiety. In line with Key, Craske, and Reno study (2003) the participants who were treated with cognitive action gave significant results to reduce their belief in the cause of anxiety. Therefore, individuals who experience high academic anxiety tend to have low motivation.

According to Wilding, and Milne (2013) students who experience high academic anxiety show symptoms such as (1) students are unable to hold discussions in class, (2) when asked to explain material, students show different movements, such as looking down, glancing his friends, nervous and so on, (3) after dialogue with the teacher then the student focus is lost, (4) the students are unable to explain what is in their mind and (5) students are often out of focus while following the lesson. Negative thoughts will limit one's thoughts, confine themselves, create conversations within ourselves that will weaken and prevent them from focusing on the success of completing academic assignments.

Pekrun, Frenzel, Götz, and Perry (2007) explains that anxiety in academic contexts tends to disrupt the learning process and decrease performance, including disrupting memory performance. In line with this, Daley (2005) states that there are various reasons that affect anxiety while in class, the learning process and during the exam, namely lack mastery of the materials, lack of confidence, fear of being judged, not accustomed to appearing in public, feeling unprepared, anxious whenever teachers ask questions, and self-esteem decreases.

These various problems of academic anxiety can be minimized if students have confidence, responsibility and have a positive mindset in themselves. Furthermore, anxiety can

also be interpreted as an increased and unhappy emotional state, which is characterized by increased physiology and various other symptoms such as acceleration of heart rate and so on.

Next Mahato, and Jangir (2012) argue that if academic anxiety is not handled well, it will have a negative impact on students; For example, they will hate teachers, procrastinate homework, do school work badly, play truant, lie to their parents, and withdraw from the environment. From this opinion, it is concluded that the negative impacts of increased anxiety will decrease students' academic performance.

The distribution of instruments to participants who had high academic anxiety in this study was exposed to the psychological instrument Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) which was focused on class related anxiety, learning related anxiety and tests anxiety as many as three ties, namely pretest, posttest, and follow-up after two weeks.

This study has successfully tested the effectiveness of the cognitive behavior group counseling to reduce academic anxiety. However, there were still many limitations in it. The limitations of the study included limited investigation only to reduce academic anxiety of students with cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique, while cognitive behavioral approach still has many techniques that can be used to reduce academic anxiety and there are still many problems experienced by students can be reduced by using cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the effects of the implementation of cognitive behavior group counseling with cognitive restructuring technique to reduce academic anxiety. It can be seen from the results of the pretest, posttest and follow-up results analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA which showed changes. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that students' academic anxiety in SMA Negeri 1

Pringgarata can be reduced through cognitive behavior group counseling service with cognitive restructuring technique.

The effectiveness test done in this study was done by focusing on cognitive restructuring at the beginning of the implementation of cognitive behavior group counseling. Besides, this study had no comparison group, so future studies are expected to add comparison groups. Also, the range of time used for repeated measurement in this study was quite short, so future studies are expected to use a considerable amount of time.

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