

The Effectiveness of Group Counseling Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Reduce Students' Academic Burnout

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Abstract

Academic burnout is a kind of problem experienced by students. To deal with this, acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling was assumed to be the solution. Hence, this study attempted to examine the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling to reduce students' academic burnout. It used multiple group pretest-posttest design and involved 14 students grouped into two chosen using purposive sampling technique based on high level of academic burnout. The students' data were collected using Maslach Burnout Inventory-Students Survey (MBI-SS) which has been adopted to Indonesian and obtained cornbach alpha coefficient of 0.85. Based on mixed ANOVA test, the acceptance and commitment therapy grup counseling was effective to reduce the students' academic burnout. Further implications and limitations of this study are discussed in the discussion chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a phase between child and adult marked by physical, behavioral, cognitive, biological, and emotional changes (Anggakristi et al., 2021). Student is the main element of educational system in every country. Therefore, considering students' mental health to avoid failure which further causes stagnancy is important for the development of education and progress of each country. Academic pressure such as high demand of educational requirements and lack of attention to psychological factors can cause great psychological burden and gradually depress students.

Continuously decreasing energy and motivation will affect the deceleration of progress on tasks or activities of students, so they will tend to procrastinate as a form of dispensation for academic burnout they feel (Simbolon & Simbolon, 2021). During learning process, students surely often find difficulties, such as academic burnout as the most often found symptoms (Prilianinda et al., 2020). When this happens again and again, students will find it hard to follow the learning process (Helfajrin & Ardi, 2020). Stress can affect students' health (Hamaideh, 2011), and individuals who experience high level of stress are vulnerable to burnout (Abarghoueiet al., 2016).

Academic burnout is a series of psychological problems occur due to academic stress or pressure. It is indicated by three components: exhaustion due to academic demands (emotional exhaustion), cynicism and lack of interest in schoolwork (cynicism) and feelings of incompetence as a student (inefficacy) (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Academic burnout not only gives negative effects on students' academic achievement, but also becomes a significant reason for poor school performance, losing interest in completing school tasks, and poor healthiness (Lin et al., 2014, Popa-Velea et al., 2017). According to Rahman (2020) students who encounter academic burnout usually confront symptoms such as lack of interest in subjects, reluctance to

attend classes, lack of participation, frequent truancy, and feeling of inefficient learning in class.

Students with academic burnout have not incentive to participate in classroom activities and show negative behavior such as not attending class, being late for class, leaving the class earlier, being lazy to study, unable to do tasks and execute their own plans, declining achievement, and having a possibility to drop out (Ratna et al., 2014). In other words, they have no feeling of responsible and responsive to their poor performance (Qingyi & Jiali, 2012).

Besides academic problems, burnout is associated with behavioral issues, such as consuming alcohol (Jackson et al., 2016), insomnia (Pagnin et al., 2014), drug abuse (Walburg et al., 2015), excessive use of the internet and social media (Walburg et al., 2016), the emergence of self-destructive ideas (Dyrbye et al., 2008), and others.

Unfortunately, academic burnout is often considered as a common problem, and there were only few students looking for assistance in a developing country like Indonesia. Hence, an intervention to reduce this problem needs to be given. It can be done by using an approach aiming at improving psychological aspects to be more flexible and better (Luoma & Hayes, 2007). Acceptance and commitment therapy was chosen by the researchers to help students manage stress, anxiety or other depression problems, and represent a promising avenue for promoting mental health. Danitz et al., (2016).

Therefore, this study strived for reducing academic burnout using an intervention that could cover the previously mentioned aspect in a counseling service. Particularly, the intervention was Acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling.

The focus of therapeutic work of acceptance and commitment therapy is to accept and relieve thoughts, feelings, and sensations rather than control or avoidance to facilitate changes of experience and pursue meaningful life activities (Hayes et al., 2011).

Hayes et al., (2010) in their study mention acceptance and commitment therapy as

the most effective counseling method to deal with problems such as boredom which causes depression. Alternatively, this approach improves mental healthiness since it enables individuals to accept every single experience and events ever happened and make them function normally in daily life orienting towards their life goals. Since studies focusing on the implementation of acceptance and commitment therapy on counseling to deal with academic burnout are still limited, the present study presents a novelty of showing the function of this approach to reduce academic burnout through group counseling and enriches literature on students' academic burnout. This issue seems to exist at every educational level, especially secondary school. It is considered a very serious problem for educators. For this reason, this study can complement and strengthen previous studies to be a basis for further researchers.

METHODS

Purposive sampling technique was used to select 14 subjects of the study of 78 students of class XI MA DDI Lil-Banat Parepare. They were then grouped into experimental and control groups with each consisted of 7 students.

Maslach Burnout Inventory-Students Survey (MBI-SS) scale from Schaufeli, Maslach, Leiter & Jackson (2002) was adapted and utilized to collect the students' data. To do the adaptation, back translation was done. This scale consists of 25 items with 3 indicators. Based on the test, it gained alpha coefficient of 0.85.

The current study used a quantitative approach in the form of experimental method with the design of multiple group pretest-posttest and involved two groups, namely experimental and control.

Several steps were carried out during the investigation. First, the researchers gave pretest to measure the students' academic burnout prior to receiving the intervention. Second, the students were given the intervention of acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling for six times with time allotment

2x45 minutes for each meeting. Third, posttest was given to determine any reduction of behavior. Fourth, the researchers performed follow-up activities after two weeks of posttest. After that, the data obtained from pretest, posttest, and follow-up were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA to see reduction of the students' academic burnout.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data description of this study indicated the previous condition of the students' academic burnout in the experimental group was high (M = 77.43, SD = 3.69). Similarly, the control group condition before the treatment was high (M = 76.71, SD = 6.10; see Table 1).

Table 1. Data Description

		Experimental	Control
Pretest	M	77.43	76.71
	SD	3.69	6.10
Posttest	M	64.14	76.57
	SD	3.80	6.24
Follow Up	M	59.71	76.43
	SD	1.49	5.99

Table 2. Mixed ANOVA Analysis Results

Effect	F	Df	P
Time	153.49	2.24	<0.01
Group	14.021	1.12	<0.01
Time*Group	144.62	2.24	<0.01

Acceptance and commitment therapy data were analyzed using mixed ANOVA. It aimed to examine the effectiveness of this treatment in reducing the students' burnout in pretest, posttest, and follow-up.

Regarding table 2, the results of mixed ANOVA analysis showed an effect of time within the assessment stages on the reduction of academic burnout (F (2.24) = 153.49, p<0.01). In details, table 3 elaborates the comparison results of time effects (T1-T2), (T1-T3), and (T2-

T3), and those showed reduction. For more, the intervention of acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling given to the experimental group during T1-T2 for academic burnout variable gained the value of MD=6.714, SE=0.347 p<0.01. Then T1-T3 (MD=9.000, SD=0.649) and in the last measurement T2-T3 (MD=2.286, SD=0.559). After being given treatment, there was a change to be to a moderate level indicated by the condition during posttest (M = 64.14, SD = 3.80), and after the next timeframe the level of academic burnout declined indicated by the value of (M = 59.71, SD =1.49).

Other results presented an effect of group on the reduction of academic burnout (F (1.12) = 14.021, p<0.01). This value confirmed that the experimental group which received acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling experienced greater reduction of academic burnout than the other group.

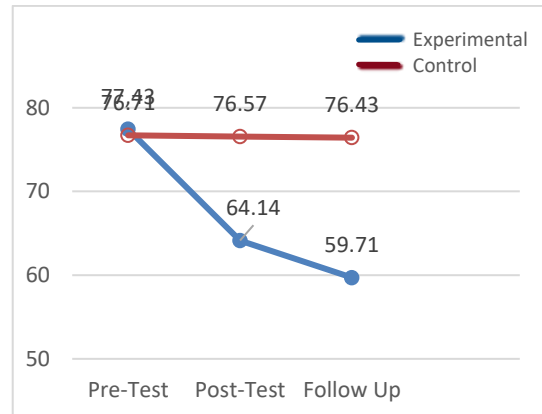
Finally, the findings of this study also showed that there was an interaction effect between time and group on the decrease in academic burnout (F(2.24) = 144.62, p<0.01). Based on graph 1, it can be seen that the experimental group that received the acceptance and commitment therapy intervention had the highest decrease at the time of follow-up compared to other groups at different assessment stages, and there was no change so that the data tended to be seen consecutively (M=76.57, SD=6.24) and (M=76.43, SD=3.99).

Table 3. Pairwise Comparison Results

Time	MD	SE	P
T1-T2	6.714	0.347	<0.01
T1-T3	9.000	0.649	<0.01
T2-T3	2.286	0.559	<0.01

Notes: T1=Pretest, T2=Posttest, T3=Follow up

Figure 1. Academic Burnout Graph



In figure 1, the results of posttest and follow-up were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and showed that the treatment given to the experimental group from pretest, posttest, and follow-up reduced the burnout. It can be seen from the effect of time, the effect of group, and the effect of interaction between time and group which confirmed the high level of reduction on the experimental group. Thus, the data proved that the acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling was effective to reduce the students' academic burnout.

In contrast to the experimental group, the findings of this study showed that the control group which did not receive any intervention experienced no significant reduction of academic burnout.

Brinkborg et al., (2011) in their study findings mention that the ACT intervention significantly reduces stress and fatigue levels and improves overall mental health compared to the control group. However, no statistically significant effect was found in those with low stress at the start of the study. Among high-exposure participants, a significant proportion (42%) met the criteria for clinically significant change. The intervention was successful in reducing stress and burnout symptoms as well as improving overall mental health.

Walker (2017) in his study argues that acceptance and commitment therapy intervention is very helpful in reducing fatigue. The ACT approach encourages clients to avoid their problems even if they have difficulty dealing with problems. In addition, this

intervention can train counsees to accept troublesome thoughts considered unhappy by applying the values they believe in. In other words, through this approach students are expected to accept their own conditions.

Hayes, Bach and Boyd (2010) mention in their research that ACT is seen as a very effective counseling approach to solve problems such as boredom or fatigue that can lead to depression. In addition, this approach works well on the improvement of mental health because it allows individuals to accept every experience and event that has ever happened and make it function normally in daily life based on the individual's life goals.

ACT model has six processes (acceptance, cognitive diffusion, presence, self-context-values, and action) that simultaneously contribute to psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2011). Acceptance and cognitive diffusion are the main process required to become open to direct personal experience without any avoidance. ACT processes also maintain "centered-response styles" using the components of awareness and self-context for the current focus (Hayes et al., 2011). Values and commitment drive individuals to choose action based on their personal values although they face difficulties.

The concept of ACT is in line with a study by Puolakanaho et al., (2019) which concludes that the statistically significant reduction of the overall stress symptoms and increase in academic can be done through ACT. What is more interesting is the improvement caused by the intervention was experienced more by people whose stress level was high at the beginning of the study. In addition, poor academic performance has nothing to do with the intervention results. The findings suggest that acceptance and engagement models and programs are also possible for early intervention by adolescents. This can improve adolescents' health and well-being which can be applied in a variety of settings, including schools.

Another similar result to the findings is from a study by Andriani et al., (2017) which has revealed high level of burnout of students may be due to students' involvement in school

which then declines their psychological well-being. Surely it affects students' academic performance at school. For more, school burnout is a psychological syndrome caused by stress of long-term pressure experienced by students at school.

Unfortunately, the present study has not yet found the influence of gender to observe the effect of time on the cognitive behavioral group counseling with self-instruction technique to deal with academic burnout. The credibility of personal data will highly depend on the level of cognition, emotion and situation by the time participants provide answers. Thus, the future studies are recommended to conduct longitudinal investigations using mixed method to enrich and support what has been achieved by quantitative approach.

CONCLUSION

With regard to the findings, it can be concluded that acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling is effective to reduce the academic burnout of the students of MA DDI Lil-Banat Parepare. The effectiveness of this treatment is greater than the placebo group.

Several implications are made, namely counselors or guidance and counseling teachers need to use acceptance and commitment therapy group counseling to reduce students' academic burnout. The future researchers are suggested to conduct in-depth studies on acceptance and commitment therapy programs to reduce stress and academic burnout experienced by undergraduate students.

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