

Graded Exposure and Self-Instruction Group Counseling to Reduce Self Handicapping

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Abstract

The tendency of performing self-handicapping by students is somehow potential to reduce their academic achievement. Thus, this study strived for examining the effect of graded exposure and self-instruction group counseling to reduce students' self-handicapping behavior in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi. Experimental method was carried out with pretest-posttest comparison group design involving 21 people divided into three groups chosen using purposive sampling from 150 students of Islamic Junior High School (MTs) in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi. Findings indicated that the two kinds of counseling could effectively reduce students' tendency to do self-handicapping. In addition, the Mann Whitney test showed that the group counseling done using self-instruction was more effective than the graded exposure. Regarding these findings, counselors are recommended to implement self-instruction technique to reduce the self-handicapping behavior by Junior High School students.

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INTRODUCTION

School has a greater group scale so that it will not be free from problems related to students' achievement or behavior. Similarly, Indonesian students experience stress due to their inability to adapt to school programs, and this can lead to psychological and physical disorders (Santrock, 2007; Hidayat, 2012). Some factors underlay these phenomena are such as stressful academic demands, bad examination score, piled up assignments, and social environment. All things related to school can result in academic anxiety in accomplishing assignments, presenting a project, and facing a test (Maddox, 2014). Anxiety and depression are two common mental health that are related to individuals' intention to limit their abilities.

In the context of education, the previously mentioned limitation arises as a form of defensive strategy called as self-handicapping (Urđan and Midgley, 2001). Jones and Berglas (in Higgins, 1990) coined this term to explain a phenomenon in which individuals attempt to protect their pride through personal or environmental behavioral manipulation.

Moreover, academic environment is one of the potential fields for this to happen. Self-handicapping is a reaction that shows an individual is in limitations so that the individual will get environmental recognition for his strategy failure. (Eyink, Hirt, Hendrix, and Galante 2017) describe self-handicapping as an individual's attempt to actively or create situations which will disrupt their work and seek explanations for possible failures caused by outside the individual's ability. By doing so, handicapping can tolerate individual's disability whenever there is a task failure.

(Ferradas, Freire, Valle, and Nunez 2016) explain that the academic realm makes students focus more on avoiding negative emotions due to failure rather than focusing on the learning process. Here, students will spend more time to think about excuses for their future failures than learning strategies to achieve success. These ideas affect the tendency of performing self-

handicapping and indirectly influence self-esteem as well as self-regulation of students.

The term academic self-handicapping arises to explain the phenomenon of this behavior in the academic realm. (Rhodewalt, 2008) states academic self-handicapping is a strategy used by individuals in the academic real to avoid negative evaluations from others when they are experiencing a failure. According to (Urđan and Midgley, 2001) the existence of peer group and teachers in the education environment provides a proper situation for academic self-handicapping. One of its example is procrastination (Park and Sperling, 2012).

Self-handicapping has three dimensions as explained by (Torok and Szabo, 2018). In the same way, academic self-handicapping can be classified from three types of sources, including situation context that influences negative moods, personal quality by avoiding meeting challenges due to failure and low motivation. (Schwinger, Wirthwein, Lemmer and Steinmayr, 2014) argue academic self-handicapping can happen because there is an issue of students' low achievement motivation, and the tendency of giving low effort to study, procrastinate task, and even stop because of the inability to meet various academic demands.

Rhodewalt and Tragakis in (Rhodewalt, 2008) explains two academic self-handicapping factors, namely distal and proximal factors. Distal factor is a factor that originates from the past situations, for example individual's childhood socialization experience and past success. Proximal factor is a factor that happens in the present, for example situations considered threatening one's pride and result in others' evaluation towards the person.

A study by (Chen, Sundan, and Wang, 2018) found self-handicapping may decline health and well-being, lower ability to satisfy oneself, feel emotions more frequent because of negative thoughts. In addition, a study conducted by (Clarke, 2016) concludes students who have positive thoughts and high intrinsic motivation can modify the meaning of difficulty, problem, and challenges into conquerable ones. Self-handicapping is associated with negative

results, such as high depression and anxiety which reduce self-esteem. (Nurafifah, Hartana, and Primana, 2012) claim students how have high anxiety will be afraid of making mistakes, be defensive, and do self-handicapping.

Some studies show cognitive approach can be used to reduce self-handicapping behavior of students. One of which is by (Kearns, Forber, and Gardiner, 2007). They used cognitive behavioral therapy with cognitive behavioral approach to gain positive effects so that self-handicapping can be reduced. In line with the counseling process for self-handicapping behavior, counselors can make use of techniques to obtain better counselees behavior, including graded exposure and self-instruction. Graded exposure therapy gives opportunities to subjects to feel they have abilities to counter threats caused by any objects or situations and encourages them to change (Meditania, Siswandi, and Iskandarsyah, 2020). This technique is generally used in reducing fear and emotions, such as shame and unrealistic guilt (O'donohue, 2017).

Several experts have confirmed graded exposure can be one of successful therapies to help clients with various problems, for example phobia, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, PTSD, and generalized anxiety disorder (O'donohue, 2017). Self-handicapping affects not only emotion and behavior, but also academic achievement (Schwinger, Wirthwein, Lemmer and Steinmayr, 2014). Another technique is self-instruction. It is a self-regulation strategy which can be used for students to regulate themselves to achieve problem solving and solutions for their problems (Babakhani, 2011). In this technique, students are directed to restructure cognitive patterns, assumptions, beliefs, irrational judgments, and self-blame (Fiorentika, et al., 2016).

With regard to the above explanation, there is a need for interventions to reduce self-handicapping behavior of students. One applicable strategy is to give services in group using cognitive behavioral therapy with the basis of physiological signs and symptoms are related

to the interaction between thoughts, behavior and emotions (Roemer, Orsillo and Pedneault, 2008).

This study aimed to examine the interventions given in the form of group counseling using graded exposure and self-instruction techniques to reduce the tendency of self-handicapping behavior. The findings are expected to provide input for guidance and counseling teachers in reducing cases of students' self-handicapping behavior tendencies.

METHODS

Of 150 students, there were 21 who were chosen due to their tendency of performing self-handicapping behavior. They were grouped into three with seven students in each. To sort them the researchers used purposive sampling to Public Islamic Junior High School (MTsN) in Kendari City who were assumed to have high self-handicapping tendency.

Self-handicapping scale developed by (Rhodewalt, 2012) was adopted by the researchers to collect the data after it has been back translated and validated by experts. This instrument has 25 items that have been adjusted in terms of language and culture in Indonesia. It also has four indicators, namely lack of effort, illness, procrastination, and emotional upsettedness in conjunction with evaluative performances with a value between r_{xy} 0.291 to 0.555 and a cronbach alpha score of 0.85.

Some procedures were carried out in this study. First, the researchers distributed the self-handicapping scale instrument to be filled by the subjects. Second, the subjects were given the interventions in form of cognitive behavioral therapy group counseling (with graded exposure technique) for five sessions for group 1, (self-instruction technique) for five sessions for group 2, and the combination (graded exposure and self-instructions) for five sessions for group 3. The duration of the treatment was 80 minutes, and it was followed by posttest using the previous scale.

Non-parametric statistics with the Mann Whitney test was used as the data analysis

technique in this study. It was directed to examine the extent of the effectiveness of the group counseling with graded exposure, self-instruction, and the combination of both techniques in reducing the tendency of self-handicapping behavior and providing benefits to the reduction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collection and analysis, the data of students' self-handicapping in the group of graded exposure technique was (M = 107.57; SD = 10.55), self-instruction technique was (M = 101.57; SD = 13.50), and the combination of graded exposure and self-instruction techniques was (M = 104.19; SD = 11.97). Further details are presented in the following table 1.

Table 1. The results of the effectiveness of the group counseling with graded exposure, self-instruction techniques and the combination of graded exposure and self-instruction techniques.

Grup	SD	Posttest				Z ₁
		Mean	SD			
GE	107.57	10.55	76.14	9.79	-3.00**	
SI	101.57	13.50	72.14	7.88	-3.70**	
GE+SI		104.19	11.97	74.66	8.84	-3.32**
Z ₂					-4.05*	

Notes : GE : Graded Exposure Technical Group, SI : Self-Instruction Technical Group, GE+SI : Kombinasi GE dan SI Technical Group, Z₁ : Wilcoxon Test Result For each Group
 Z₂ : Mann Whitney Test For all Group
 *p<0.01 **p<0.05

After that, the effectiveness of the use of the technique in each group was further analyzed using Wilcoxon test. Again, the results showed all techniques were effective to reduce the tendency of self-handicapping behavior by students. (Z=-3.00, Z=-3.70, Z=-3.32, all p< .05, respectively). Related to Mann Whitney test, there found a difference regarding the level of reduction of self-handicapping from all techniques. It is available in the following table 1.

To see the performance of each technique in reducing self-handicapping behavior, the Mann Whitney test was carried out. It resulted graded exposure technique was less effective than self-instruction (Z=-4.30, p<0.05).

Furthermore, self-instruction technique was more effective than the combination technique (Z=-2.72, p>0.05), while the graded exposure technique and the combination technique had no difference (Z=-2.89, p<0.05). All these results are attached in the table 2.

Table 2. Mann Whitney Test

Kelompok	Z	Sig
Kel. GE – SI	-4.30	< 0.05
Kel. SI – (GE+SI)	-2.72	> 0.05
Kel. GE – (GE+SI)	-2.89	< 0.05

Notes : GE : Graded Exposure Technical Group, SI : Self-Instruction Technical Group, GE+SI : Combining Graded Exposure and Self-Instruction Technical Group

This study analyzed the effectiveness of group counseling with graded exposure and self-instruction in reducing the tendency of self-handicapping behavior by students. The aim of

examining effectiveness was to get an overview of the extent to which the interventions of group counseling with graded exposure and self-instruction effective to reduce students' self-

handicapping behavior. Graded exposure technique is a technique that orients towards the provision of repeated and systematic interventions to the subjects so that it will influence things they fear, avoid, or experience. It was found that graded exposure technique implementation in the group counseling could reduce students' self-handicapping behavior. A study by (Kearns, Forbes and Gardiner, 2007; Fadhli and Sudirman, 2021) supports this finding in which cognitive behavior therapy can effectively reduce the tendency of self-handicapping behavior. Again (O'donohue, 2017) explains that graded exposure has proved to be used and is a successful type of therapy in helping clients with various problems, such as phobias, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, PTSD, and generalized anxiety disorder.

Alike graded exposure, self-instruction became an effective strategy in helping students to regulate themselves in the way they understand, analyze, solve, and evaluate problems. The use of self-instruction technique to reduce self-handicapping is in association with what was done by (Javidan, Khanzadeh and Abolghasemi, 2018; Yavuzer, 2015). In their research, they said that the application of the cognitive behavior therapy approach has been proved effective and became a type of therapy that is successful in overcoming various problems. Additionally, what distinguishes the current study and other studies by (Javidan, Khanzadeh, and Abolghasemi, 2018; Kearns, Forbes and Gardiner, 2007; Yavuzer, 2015) was that this study used cognitive behavioral therapy to reduce self-handicapping. Alternatively, the subjects of this study were Junior High School students, and the techniques used were not only focused on the techniques available in the cognitive behavioral therapy.

According to the findings, the implementation of cognitive behavioral therapy group counseling with graded exposure and self-instruction was effective to reduce students' self-handicapping behavior. Thus, counselors can use these techniques to improve students' negative behavior to be more positive and

adaptive one. What is more, self-instruction became the most effective technique among the three. (Chandra, Wibowo, and Sunawan, 2019) agree that self-instruction is a cognitive technique which uses a method of personal understanding by verbalizing oneself so that the subject has full control over his behavior. They add that self-verbalization is done step by step secretly and only done by oneself. Then, graded exposure provides students an experience to feel they have abilities to face threats from objects or situations they fear.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation group counseling with self-instruction and graded exposure techniques can reduce students' self-handicapping behavior. However, among the three techniques of graded exposure, self-instruction, and the combination of both, self-instruction appears to be the most effective technique. It can be a conceptual and practical reference for the development of the future counseling. Consequently, the implementation of group counseling service with self-instruction is recommended to reduce students' self-handicapping behavior.

Future researchers are expected to use this study as a supporting reference, especially for the topic of self-handicapping whose studies are still few in Indonesia. Regarding the methods, the purposive sampling technique cannot fully guarantee the study to obtain the representativeness of the population and see the effect of the intervention over a certain period of time. Therefore, further studies can use different types of research analysis and to expand the scope of research. Also, studies for the case of students at the upper level than Junior High School are needed.

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