Improving Students' Self-Esteem through Group Counseling with Assertive Training and Positive Reinforcement Techniques

Risno Rahmat Ihtiar✉, Sugiyo Sugiyo, Awalya Awalya

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
	Self-esteem is a crucial part of mental health, especially in self-acceptance. Low self-esteem is said to be a risk factor for the mental health issue development, including depression, antisocial, and low academic achievement. This study strived for examining the effectiveness of group counseling with assertive training and positive reinforcement techniques to improve students' self-esteem. It was a quasi-experimental study with the factorial design 2x2. The study collected the data from 12 counseling sessions in group A, B, and C with the time allotment of 45 minutes for each. Self-esteem scale (SES) was the instrument used in this study. Based on Wilcoxon test, the assertiveness training positive reinforcement, and the combination of those techniques obtained similar intensity (correlated sample). In addition, the results of Two-Way ANOVA test have proved that the combination technique was the best treatment. The findings of this study can be a cognitive map for identifying students' low self-esteem and their management on an ongoing basis.

✉ Correspondence address:
Gedung A Kampus Pascasarjana Unnes
Jl. Kelud Utara III Semarang 50237
E-mail: risnorahmatihtiar.spt@students.unnes.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Education is a place for people to develop through continuous processes and developmental stages. It is similar to that of Mutitama & Awalya (2017) that education is a conscious and planned effort to develop students based on their potential. Jahja (2011:1) states developmental process covers changes, including physical, intellectual, social, moral, linguistic, emotional, and feeling, interest, motivations, attitudes, personality, talents, and creativity aspects. Each of them basically links and makes new connections that later specialize different psychological state between a person and the other.

According to Adigun (2020) self-esteem is the major component of social maturity and mental health of a person. Basically, it refers to the extent to which self-confidence reflects self-value and self-acceptance or the way an individual thinks of himself (Jelić, 2022). Low self-esteem causes a secondary characteristic, namely academic avoidance which further results in a tertiary characteristic, namely bad learning habits, disliked skills, social and other discipline problems. Low self-esteem can also cause someone vulnerable to stress (Johnson, et al., 2020). As Lecompte et al (2014) explain that self-esteem refers to the characteristics of self that are consciously recognized by individuals, namely how a person describes himself. Self-esteem is valued high when the individual feels himself honored and respected. Meanwhile, individuals with low self-esteem tend to have low opinion on themselves.

In the preliminary study, 20 students were found to have low self-esteem indicated by behavior, such as opposing, avoiding activities related to school (academic), feeling a failure in achieving or in building relationships, lacking of confidence, being shy, not having firmness in speech or attitude, and showing deviant behavior such as disturbing or making a fuss to get attention.

The above results were strengthened by the results of the interviews with subject teachers at MA Nurul Ummah Sampit using the following statement items: first, some students show a lack of confidence; second, feeling unable to carry out learning activities; third, fear of failure in social relationships; fourth, feel hopeless in absorbing learning and not a few of them feel depressed due to pressure from inside and outside themselves; fifth, feel isolated; sixth, less able to express themselves; seventh, highly dependent on the environment; and eighth inconsistent in speech and behavior.

To deal with the previously mentioned problems, a group counseling service with assertive training and positive reinforcement techniques was chosen. Selfi (2017) defines assertive training as a training that can be applied especially in interpersonal situations where individuals have difficulty accepting the fact that asserting oneself is a proper or correct action. Common observable assertive behavior in a person is like the feelings of fear, silence and shame which cause the person appear to be eliminated in association and the surrounding environment. If assertive behavior is allowed to drag on, it will have a negative impact on individual behavior in the school environment and as citizens of the community.

Another way to help improve self-esteem is by using a positive reinforcement technique. Nagle, et al (2014) explain positive reinforcement is a technique to increase the possibility of a behavior by giving reward. Complement is one of the examples to be given to students to make them proud and feel motivated to do the same thing and even improve what has been achieved. The application of positive reinforcement techniques must be carried out as soon as possible so that it is maintained and increases the positive behavior of clients (students).

Group counseling is basically an individual counseling done in a group setting. Based on Wibowo (2019: 56) group counseling is the realization of counseling with help of group to help, give feedback, and share learning experiences. It refers to guidance and counseling principles, namely confidentiality. According to Ristianti & Fathurrochman (2020) confidentiality covers all data and information

about students (clients) who are the target of services, namely data or information that should and should not be known to others. In other words, in the implementation of group counseling, the counselor is obliged to provide assurance to all counselees (group members) that the information they receive will be maintained and kept in full confidentiality.

The purpose of group counseling is to give chances for individuals to review and solve problems in a group setting (Nurdiana, et al., 2020). It is in line with the aims of character education created by the government, namely character building is emphasized to create a conducive learning atmosphere so that students can study effectively in an atmosphere that promotes a sense of security, mutual respect, and make students (clients) become independent individuals.

The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of group counseling with assertive training and positive reinforcement techniques or their combination on students' self-esteem. Moreover, the advantages of this study was to foster courage in students in exploring with other students through group dynamics in order to create a sense of mutual respect and respect for themselves in an effort to support a better life.

METHODS

There were 20 students with low self-esteem criteria included in this study and grouped into group A (assertive training), group B (positive reinforcement, C (combination), and D (control). Each consisted of 5 students with the indication of low self-esteem. Specifically, the students' initial conditions are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Students' Self-Esteem Conditions

No.	Class	Observable Students
1	X	12
2	XI	8
	Total	20

Subjects were determined based on the results of preliminary study and strengthened by the interviews with some teachers. In terms of instrument, self-esteem scale (SES) which has 26 statement items was used. This scale was designed using guidelines that referred to experts judgments. All items were measured using a likert scale with five answer choices (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Alternatively, two tests were conducted to validate the data, namely using expert judgments and corrected item-total correlation. Based on expert's judgments, there needed some improvement on the statement items to be more in line with the aspects and indicators. Once the instrument was validated, the validity and reliability were assessed using corrected item-total correlation from total 63 students and resulted in 20 students who had low self-esteem in accordance with the subject selection criteria, namely; low, medium, and high. Those 20 students were placed into four groups, including assertive training, positive reinforcement, combination, and control.

Regarding the results of the validity test using corrected item-total correlation using IBM SPSS Statistics 23, it was concluded that 20 items were valid, while the other 6 were not. Next, the alpha cronbach test found that the reliability of the instrument was 0.890. In other words, the instrument was proper to use.

This experimental study used a factorial design of 2x2 in which each variable had two variations manipulated at the same time with the following stages. First, pretest was carried out on students of class X and XI as many as 20 people using a self-esteem scale. After successfully collecting the data, it was proceed through the data analysis by looking at the results of pretests, consisting of low, medium and high scores. Second, the treatment was given to the experimental group by using group counseling procedures with assertive training, positive reinforcement and combination techniques. The treatment was carried out in three meetings; first, the counselors were focused on grouping by establishing good relationships with counselees and explained the aim of their coming; second,

the counselors were focused on the formation process and the transition process to create a more conducive group atmosphere. Third, the treatments were given to groups prepared in advance. In the last step, the students were asked

to fill out posttest in form of the same scale as the pretest to see the conditions before and after the treatment. In details, the flow of treatment is specifically described in table 2.

Table 2. The Procedures of the Treatments

No.	Meeting	Agenda
1.	Session 1	Pada The counselor formed a good relationship with the group members by praying, introducing himself, delivering his purposes, and closing.
2.	Session 2	Some activities were carried out, such as greetings, seat management/ counseling room management, praying, ice breaking, explaining the purposes, sharing a discussion topic about "how to know ourselves", until concluding the core of the topic, sharing impression and critics, and ending with closing
3.	Session 3	Some activities carried out were greetings, seat management/ counseling room management, praying, ice breaking, and explaining the purposes. In group A, the counselor gave a topic of "self-liking", "self-competence" for group B, and "self-liking and self-competence" for group C followed by concluding the contents of the topics, and ending with closing.
4.	Session 4	Some activities carried out were greetings, seat management/ counseling room management, praying, ice breaking, and explaining the purposes. The counselor explained self-esteem, including definition, aspects, and characteristics, then followed by drawing conclusion. Then, the counselor gave the instrument to see the end-result (posttest) after receiving the treatments. Finally, the activity was ended with praying and closing

The data analysis techniques in this study were adjusted to the intensity and variables. Those covered two-way ANOVA test on gain score and Wilcoxon test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bases on the pretest data, the 20 students had low self-esteem. In details, the assertive training group gained the mean of 39.00 and SD of 3.162, the positive reinforcement group obtained the mean of 43.20 and an SD of 1.789, the combination group obtained the mean of 41.00 and SD of 3.281, and the control group obtained the mean of 55.40 and 1.149. In addition, the post-test results showed an increase

in each group, namely the assertive training group mean was 33.20 and the SD was 8.228, the positive reinforcement group mean was 20.40 and SD was 8.649, the combination group obtained mean was 26.80 and SD was 10.433, and the control group obtained mean was 1.00 and SD was 5.385.

The N-Gain score or the difference between pretest and posttest score in the assertive training group was 45.16 for the mean and 12.18 for the SD, in the positive reinforcement group there obtained the differences in mean was 36.08 and SD was 15.67, in the combination group, the differences in mean was 54.38 and SD was 13.04, and the the control group gained the mean of 1.89 and

SD of 9.56. The description of the pre-test and post-test data as well as the N-Gain Score of the study can be seen in table 3.

Tabel 3. Data Description

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		N-Gain Score	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Asseretive Training	39.00	3.162	33.20	8.228	45.16	12.18
Positive Reinforcement	43.20	1.789	20.40	8.649	36.08	15.67
Combination	41.00	3.281	26.80	10.433	54.38	13.04
Control	55.40	1.140	1.00	5.385	1.89	9.56
Total	178.6	9.372	81.4	32.695	137.51	50.44

Based on the results of pretest, both experimental and control groups had were in low category of self-esteem, and after the treatment, there occurred significant increase in the posttest score of the experimental groups with the combination technique. It can be seen from the value of N-Gain score it obtained before and after the treatment.

Table 4. Two-Way ANOVA Test Results

Effect	$F^{(1, 16)}$	P
Assertive Training	33.85	< 0.01
Positive Reinforcement	17.47	< 0.01
AT*PR	4.31	< 0.01

The results of Two-Way ANOVA showed that the mean of the assertive training technique effect was (F : 1, 33.85) = 0.00, p < 0.01. Based on this description, it was confirmed that the group counseling with assertive training technique can increase the dependent variable from the control group. Furthermore, the mean effect of the positive reinforcement technique was (F : 1, 17.47) = 0.00, p < 0.01. This explained that the positive reinforcement technique group counseling gained a higher level than the control group. Meanwhile, the mean interaction level effect of using assertive training and positive reinforcement techniques was (F : 1, 4.31) = 0.00, p < 0.05, indicating an interaction between the use of assertive training and positive reinforcement techniques on students' self-esteem. To confirm the results of the Two-Way ANOVA test, see figure 1.
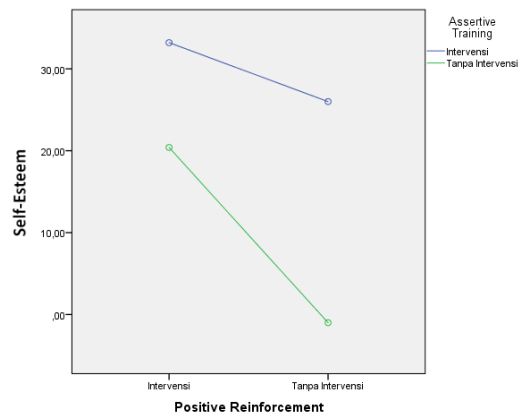

Figure 1. The Interaction Effects of the Techniques Used in This Study

To see the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, it is necessary to do a comparability test using the Wilcoxon test, as described in table 5.

Table 5. Wilcoxon Test Results

Group	Mean Rank Positive	Z	P
Assertive Training	3.00	- 2.02	< 0.05
Positive Reinforcement	3.00	- 2.03	< 0.05
Combination	3.00	- 2.02	< 0.05
Control	0.00	- .368	< 0.05

The results of Wilcoxon test showed that the assertive training was effective to improve students' self-esteem with the value of ($Z = - 2.02$; $p < 0.05$). Similarly, the positive reinforcement technique resulted in an increase in students' self-esteem with the value of ($Z = - 2.03$; p 0.05). The combination technique also enhanced students' self-esteem with the value of ($Z = - 2.02$; $p < 0.05$). However, the control group only improved a few of the students' self-esteem with the value of ($Z = - .368$; $p < 0.05$). The output of the Wilcoxon test above has confirmed that the technique of assertive training, positive reinforcement and the combination was effective and had almost the same effectiveness in increasing students' self-esteem. Differences in students' self-esteem also occurred in the control group but had a lower Z value than the use of other techniques.

Based on the data analysis, it was known that the group counseling with an assertive training can improve students' self-esteem. It is in line with a study by Maharani & Ningsih (2015) that assertive training focuses on cases or who has difficulty expressing inappropriate feelings. In this technique, students are equipped with the ability to do good habits repeatedly through activities that occur so that the formation of self-esteem is continuous. Endah & Sugiyo (2016) argue that the counselor's main task in every service is to develop potential and help counselees become independent in drawing conclusions to realize lives that are productive, safe, and advantageous for others. Some possible activities to realize are by intentionally equip skills and encourage students to be independent and learn from experiences the have gained from the group.

The data analysis results also stated that the positive reinforcement technique was able to improve students' self-esteem. It is in association with a theory by Mulawarman, et al (2019:125) that positive reinforcement covers the provision of pleasant reinforcement after the desired behavior is displayed so that the desired behavior tends to be repeated, increased and settled in the future. The effectiveness of using positive reinforcement techniques is to provide feedback that aims to make students able to have good habits repeatedly.

In the combination technique, the students achieved the advantages from both techniques so that they were able to be firm in their desires, had sustainable good habits, and could indirectly improve the self-esteem. This is in line with the opinion of Saefulloh et al (2019: 119) that self-esteem is a person's general assessment of himself, both in the form of a negative assessment and a positive assessment which ultimately results in a feeling of worth or self-usefulness in living life.

Regarding the above description, the implementation of group counseling with assertive training, positive reinforcement, and the combination techniques were effective to improve the students' self-esteem at MA Nurul Ummah Sampit.

CONCLUSION

With regard to the above discussion, it can be concluded that the techniques of assertive training, positive reinforcement, and combination are effective to enhance students' self-esteem. Prior to the treatment, the average self-esteem of students was low, while after the treatment the condition got better in the experimental group, but pretty fair in the control group.

Some limitations in this study are; first, limited samples due to the involvement of only class X and XI; second, the treatment sessions

were not optimal due to COVID-19 limitations by the school.

Furthermore, the future researchers are suggested to provide continuous treatments if they are about to use assertive training, positive reinforcement, and the combination of those techniques, apart from their advantages and effectiveness. This study is expected to be the counselor's reference in dealing with students' low self-esteem, which is an affective reaction (assessment) of a person towards himself. Through this study, students will be able to recognize the symptoms of low self-esteem and the efforts and actions that must be taken to deal with these problems.

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