

## Effectiveness of Group Counseling Using the *Acting As If* Technique to Enhance Students' Assertive Behavior

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of group counseling, utilizing the Acting As If technique, in promoting assertive behavior among ninth-grade students at Syuhada Sukaraja Private Middle School. Persistent issues with low assertiveness—manifested in difficulties expressing opinions, declining inappropriate peer requests, and communicating confidently—highlighted the need for a structured intervention. A pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was implemented with eight purposively selected students identified as having low assertiveness. Data were collected using a standardised assertiveness questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, and the N-Gain Score. Findings revealed a substantial improvement in assertiveness, with mean scores rising from 46.50 (pretest) to 77.63 (posttest). The Wilcoxon analysis yielded a Z value of  $-2.524$  with a p-value of 0.012 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating a statistically significant change. The N-Gain score of 0.54 (56.46%) placed the intervention in the “moderate” effectiveness category. These results demonstrate that the Acting As If technique—through structured behavioural rehearsal and supportive group interaction—effectively enhances students' assertive communication skills. The technique offers a practical and replicable counselling approach for enhancing students' confidence and promoting healthy interpersonal behaviour in school settings.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is widely recognised as one of the most complex developmental stages, characterised by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that place young people in a psychologically vulnerable position. During this transitional period, adolescents begin shifting from childhood dependence toward greater autonomy, yet often experience confusion, emotional fluctuation, and difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings appropriately. Their need for belonging intensifies, and peer groups begin to exert a

substantial influence on their values, behaviours, and decision-making. This heightened sensitivity to social expectations makes adolescents more susceptible to external pressures, including negative peer influence [1], [2]. Within the global framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), assertiveness is identified as a core element of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)—a key soft skill required for healthy emotional regulation, responsible decision-making, and building positive interpersonal relationships. Without adequate assertiveness, adolescents may struggle to set boundaries, defend their rights, and resist negative social pressure, all of which are essential for healthy development in school and community environments [3], [4].

In this developmental context, assertive behaviour becomes a crucial skill that supports adolescents' emotional and social growth. Assertiveness reflects the ability to communicate needs, opinions, and feelings openly, honestly, and respectfully without infringing on the rights of others [5], [6], [7]. Adolescents who demonstrate assertiveness are generally more confident, capable of setting personal boundaries, and able to maintain healthy relationships with peers and adults. They are also better equipped to manage conflicts, make independent decisions, and navigate various social challenges. Conversely, adolescents with low assertiveness often experience fear of negative evaluation, difficulty making decisions, and increased vulnerability to peer pressure. They may avoid expressing dissenting opinions, succumb to risky behaviours to gain acceptance, or withdraw socially due to anxiety or low self-esteem. These limitations hinder their academic engagement, psychosocial adjustment, and overall emotional well-being. As a result, strengthening assertive behaviour is essential not only for improving communication skills but also for fostering resilience and social competence in the long term [8], [9], [10].

Empirical findings from various countries indicate that low assertiveness among adolescents is a widespread concern. Research conducted by Husnah et al. [11] reported substantial proportions of students exhibiting low and very low levels of assertiveness. Observations at Syuhada Sukaraja Private Middle School further reinforce these findings. Many students exhibit reluctance to speak during class discussions, struggle with declining negative invitations—such as skipping ceremonies or leaving class during free periods—and tend to appear shy, withdrawn, or overly passive in social interactions. Several students also tend to mirror their peers' behaviour uncritically, suggesting a limited capacity to assert personal boundaries or express independent perspectives. These patterns illustrate that low assertiveness significantly affects both social functioning and academic participation, emphasising the urgent need for targeted interventions within the school setting [12], [13].

Group counselling has been widely regarded as an effective intervention for addressing developmental challenges, as it integrates interpersonal learning and experiential activities to foster emotional growth and promote behavioural adjustment. Through group dynamics, students are encouraged to share experiences, learn from one another's perspectives, and practice new social skills in a safe and supportive environment. One technique particularly relevant to enhancing assertiveness is the *Acting As If* technique, an Adlerian counselling approach that guides individuals to behave as though they already possess the desired skills or attitudes. By simulating confident and assertive behaviours during group activities, students can gradually reshape their self-perceptions, reduce anxiety,

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and build the courage needed to express themselves in real-life situations. For instance, a student who typically remains silent during discussions may practice speaking up “as if” they are confident; a student who struggles to say no may rehearse politely refusing inappropriate requests. Through repeated and guided practice, *Acting As If* helps reform unproductive behaviour patterns and promotes adaptive communication skills that support healthier peer interactions at school [14].

Although assertiveness training has been explored in various educational and counselling studies, research specifically examining the *Acting As If* technique within group counselling for Indonesian middle-school students remains limited [15], [16]. Most existing studies focus on cognitive-behavioural methods, social skills training, or communication-focused interventions, leaving a gap in understanding how Adlerian techniques can be effectively applied in the Indonesian school context, particularly among early adolescents who are still developing their self-identity and require strong interpersonal support. This gap highlights the need for a focused empirical study on the use of '*Acting As If* to enhance students' assertive behaviour'. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counselling using the *Acting As If* technique in improving students' assertive behaviour. By evaluating the impact of this intervention, the research seeks to contribute meaningful insights for guidance and counselling practitioners and support the development of evidence-based strategies to address low assertiveness among Indonesian adolescents [17], [18].

## 2. METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a Pre-Experimental design, specifically the *one-group pretest-posttest design*. This design was chosen because it enables researchers to measure changes that occur before and after the administration of an intervention in a single group, without a control group, making it suitable for preliminary studies evaluating counselling techniques [19]. In this design, participants first completed a pretest that measured their level of assertive behavior. They then received the treatment in the form of group guidance using the *Acting As If* technique. After the intervention, participants completed a posttest to determine whether any improvement had occurred [20], [21].

### Participants

The population of this study consisted of all 61 ninth-grade students at Syuhada Sukaraja Middle School. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling, based on criteria aligned with the study's objectives [22]. Students were included if their assertive behaviour score fell below 50% of the maximum score on the pretest scale, indicating low assertiveness. Based on these criteria, eight students were selected, comprising eight females and four males. This subgroup represented those most in need of assertiveness enhancement.

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## Instruments

The primary research instrument was an Assertive Behaviour Scale, adapted from Lianasari et al. [23]. The scale was adjusted to ensure content clarity, linguistic appropriateness, and alignment with the research objectives. Validation procedures involved both expert judgment and empirical reliability testing. A guidance and counselling expert evaluated item relevance and clarity, and the instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating high reliability.

## Procedure

The study followed three primary stages: pretest, treatment, and posttest.

### 1. Pretest:

All participants completed the Assertive Behaviour Scale to measure baseline levels.

### 2. Treatment (Group Guidance with *Acting As If* Technique):

The intervention consisted of six 60-minute sessions, held once a week. The session structure included:

- Session 1: Introduction, rapport building, and explanation of group rules.
- Session 2: Exploration of personal experiences related to difficulty expressing opinions.
- Session 3: Introduction to the *Acting As If* technique and demonstration by the counsellor.
- Session 4: Role-playing situations requiring assertive communication (e.g., refusing negative peer pressure).
- Session 5: Behavioural rehearsal, feedback exchange, and guided reflection.
- Session 6: Consolidation of skills, reinforcement of positive behaviours, and preparation for real-life application.

The *Acting As If* technique encouraged students to behave "as if" they already possessed assertive communication skills, enabling them to experiment with new behavioural patterns in a supportive environment.

### 3. Posttest:

After completing all sessions, participants were administered the same assertive behaviour scale to assess changes in assertiveness.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics summarised pretest and posttest scores, while inferential analysis employed the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, a non-parametric method suitable for small samples and ordinal data distributions. Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, the N-Gain Score was calculated using Hake's criteria [24]. The complete formula and classification guidelines are provided in the appendix to avoid redundancy in the main text.

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$$g = \frac{S_{Post} - S_{Pre}}{S_{max} - S_{Pre}} \quad (1)$$

Where:

- g = N-Gain score  
 $S_{post}$  = posttest score  
 $S_{pre}$  = pretest score  
 $S_{max}$  = maximum/ideal score

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Result

Descriptive statistics of *pretest* and *posttest scores* of students' assertive behaviour are presented in Table 1. The purpose of this analysis is to summarise and describe the participants' scores before and after receiving group guidance intervention using the Acting As If technique. The data summary includes the number of participants (N), the average (Mean), the standard deviation (Std. Deviation), and the minimum and maximum scores.

Table 1. Statistics Descriptive Score

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Score	8	37	51	46.50	4.309
Posttest Score	8	69	90	77.63	8.551
Valid N (listwise)	8				

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis, based on Table 1 above, are derived from the 8 participants who took part in the study. Before receiving the intervention, the assertive behaviour score (Pretest score) had an average (M) of 46.50 with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.309. The lowest score in the *pretest stage* was 37, and the highest score was 51. This indicates that, in general, students' assertive behaviour levels were still relatively low before receiving group guidance services using the '*acting-as-if*' technique. This condition highlights that most students are not yet able to express their opinions, feelings, and rights openly and often remain passive in social situations.

This finding aligns with research by Insani et al. [25], which revealed that many students struggle to express their opinions firmly and positively due to a lack of training in assertive skills. A similar finding was reported by Fajriyah Nur Afriyanti [26], who found that adolescents' assertive behaviour was low due to a lack of social training experiences that foster courage in interactions. Furthermore, Eslami et al (2016) found that low levels of assertiveness correlate with high levels of social anxiety and low self-confidence in adolescent students.

After participants received group guidance intervention using the Acting As If technique, the Assertive Behaviour score (Posttest Score) showed an average (M) of 77.63 with a standard deviation (SD) of 8.551. The lowest score in the *posttest stage* was 69, and the highest score was 90. These results indicate a significant increase compared to the *pretest*

score. This increase suggests that group guidance services utilising the Acting As If technique are effective in helping students enhance their assertive behaviour.

This finding aligns with research by Putri & Darmayanti [28], which emphasises that group guidance services enhance students' ability to defend their rights appropriately and resist negative social pressure. Besides that, Yuliandari and HM [29] conducted research that the Acting As If technique was effective in increasing participants' self-confidence, even though it was applied to adolescents with a different topic (adolescents with obesity). Thus, the results of this study are consistent with previous empirical evidence that the guidance group effectively utilizes the Acting As If technique to increase assertive behavior through structured behavioral exercises and interactive group experiences.

Table 2. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

		Ranks		
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
posttest - pretest	Negative Ranks	0 <sup>a</sup>	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	8 <sup>b</sup>	4.50	36.00
	Ties	0 <sup>c</sup>		
	Total	8		

a. posttest < pretest  
b. posttest > pretest  
c. posttest = pretest

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	posttest - pretest
Z	-2.524 <sup>b</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.012

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test  
b. Based on negative ranks.

The results of the *Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test* are in Table 2. *Ranks* show that there are no negative ranks ( $N = 0$ ) with a mean rank and sum rank of 0.00, indicating that no students experienced a decrease in assertive behavior scores after receiving group guidance services using the "acting as if" technique. On the other hand, there are positive ranks ( $N = 8$ ) with a mean rank and sum rank of 4.50 and 36.00, which indicates that all students experienced an increase in posttest scores compared to pretest scores, with a mean rank of 4.50 and a sum of ranks of 36.00. In addition, ties ( $N = 0$ ) indicate that no students' scores remained the same or did not change. In other words, the services provided consistently had a positive impact on all study participants. These results show that group guidance services, which utilise the 'acting as if' technique, are effective in improving students' assertive behaviour.

The Test Statistics table shows a Z value of -2.524 with a significance of Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.012. Because the significance value is smaller than the error level of 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ),  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted; therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of students' assertive behavior. Thus, group guidance services using the '*acting as if*' technique have proven effective in improving the assertive behaviour of grade IX students at Syuhada Sukaraja Private Middle School.

### N Gain Score Test

After conducting the *Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test*, the researchers also used the *Normalised Gain (N-Gain) score test*. According to Syafriani [30], effectiveness testing can be conducted by comparing scores before and after the intervention. The categorisation of the effectiveness of the *N-gain score* can also be seen in percentage form, as shown in the following table:

Table 3. Category Interpretation N-Gain Effectiveness

Percentage (%)	Information
<40	Ineffective
40-55	Less Effective
56-75	Enough Effective
>76	Effective

Source: Syafriani et al. [30]

From the *N-Gain Score estimation test* carried out using IBM SPSS version 31, the results are shown in the following table:

Table 4. N-Gain Results

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ngain_Skor	8	.40	.75	.5429	.13946
Ngain_persen	8	41.24	78.00	56.4626	14.50404
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Based on the results of the *N-Gain analysis* in Table 4, the average (mean) N-Gain value is 0.54, which indicates that, according to the Gain criteria table, this value falls within the "moderate" category. In addition, the percentage results above indicate that the average N-Gain percentage value is 56.46, which, based on Table 3, means that this percentage falls within the "quite effective" category according to the criteria for determining effectiveness levels. Thus, it is concluded that there is a significant difference in improvement between the *posttest* and *pretest scores of students after receiving treatment in the form of group guidance services with the acting as if technique*. This increase is categorised as "moderate" and its level of effectiveness can be assessed as "quite effective", indicating that the intervention has had a positive influence on students' assertive behaviour skills.

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of group guidance services using the *'acting as if' technique in enhancing assertive behaviour* among ninth-grade students at Syuhada Sukaraja Private Junior High School. The data analysis revealed an increase in the average score from 46.50 in the pretest to 77.63 in the posttest. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test produced an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.012, indicating a significant difference between students' assertive behaviour before and after the treatment. Furthermore, the N-Gain Score test yielded an average value of 56.46%, which falls into the "quite effective" category. These results show that group guidance services employing the *'acting as if' technique effectively enhance students' assertive behaviour*.

The findings are consistent with prior studies that applied group guidance approaches using different techniques. Siregar [31] found that group guidance was effective in developing assertive behaviour through group therapy, highlighting the importance of group dynamics, such as social support and peer feedback, in driving behavioural change. Similarly, Tamala [32] reported that applying the *acting as if* technique in group guidance improved students' self-confidence. Although focusing on different aspects, both studies suggest that the *acting-as-if* technique in group guidance can foster positive behavioural transformations through structured practice and interaction.

This study demonstrates that the implementation of group guidance services, utilising the *'acting as if' technique*, is effective in enhancing assertive behaviour among ninth-grade students at Syuhada Sukaraja Private Junior High School. Therefore, this technique can serve as a viable alternative for guidance and counselling teachers to improve students' assertive skills through organised counselling sessions.

### 3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study showed a significant improvement in students' assertive behaviour after they participated in group guidance sessions using the *'acting as if' technique*. The increase in the average score from the pretest to the posttest, supported by a Wilcoxon significance value of 0.012 and an N-Gain percentage of 56.46%, demonstrates that the intervention was successful in strengthening students' ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and rights more firmly and confidently.

This improvement reflects the core principles of Adlerian counselling, which emphasize that individuals can change their behavioral patterns by practicing the attitudes and actions they wish to develop. When students "acted as if" they were already confident and assertive, they gradually internalised these behaviours, resulting in increased self-efficacy and social courage. Throughout the group sessions, students engaged in repeated behavioural rehearsal, allowing them to practice assertive communication in a supportive and structured setting. This experience was further strengthened by cognitive reframing, which helped students view social interactions more realistically and replace negative assumptions with confident expectations. In addition, group support played a crucial role, as peers provided encouragement, feedback, and shared experiences that helped reduce anxiety and normalise assertive behaviour.

The success of this intervention is also consistent with findings from previous studies. Lestari et al. [33] reported that structured group role-play could successfully enhance

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assertiveness by improving students' social confidence and reducing their avoidance behaviours. Similarly, Rahmawati and Qonita [34] found that group counselling incorporating cognitive-behavioural elements significantly improved adolescents' assertive communication abilities. Their study highlighted the importance of guided cognitive restructuring, which resonates with the cognitive reframing element of the current intervention. Hasibuan [35] also found that the acting-as-if technique was effective in increasing students' social courage, demonstrating that adopting desired behaviours during counselling sessions could produce lasting changes in real-life social settings.

When combined with previous evidence from Insani et al. [25], Fajriyah Nur Afriyanti [26], Siregar [31], and Tamala [32], these studies collectively reinforce the conclusion that structured group-based interventions—whether through Adlerian, role-play, or cognitive-behavioural approaches—are consistently effective in helping adolescents strengthen their interpersonal skills. Taken together, this body of research supports the idea that the behavioural practice and group interaction embedded in the 'acting as if' technique are well-suited to enhancing assertive behaviour among students.

Despite the compelling results, this study has certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small, involving only eight students, which reduces the generalizability of the findings. The study was conducted in a single school, which means that the results may not accurately reflect the experiences of students in different educational contexts or cultural environments. Additionally, because the study employed a pre-experimental design without a control group, the improvement observed cannot be attributed solely to the intervention with complete certainty, as external factors cannot be entirely excluded.

Despite these limitations, the findings have significant practical implications. School counsellors and guidance teachers may consider integrating the 'acting as if' technique into their regular counselling programs, as it is simple to implement, interactive, and capable of fostering meaningful improvements in students' assertive communication. By providing students with opportunities for behavioural rehearsal, reflection, and peer support, counsellors can help them develop stronger self-confidence and more effective interpersonal skills.

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that group guidance using the 'acting as if' technique can effectively enhance students' assertive behaviour. The combination of theoretical grounding, statistical evidence, and consistency with prior research strongly suggests that this method offers a valuable approach for supporting adolescents' personal and social development.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The results of this study demonstrate that group guidance services utilising the Acting As If technique are effective in enhancing the assertive behaviour of ninth-grade students at Syuhada Sukaraja Private Middle School. This conclusion is supported by clear empirical evidence. Students' average assertive behaviour scores increased from 46.50 in the pretest to 77.63 in the posttest, showing a substantial gain of 31.13 points. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test yielded a Z value of  $-2.524$  with a significance level of  $p = 0.012$ , indicating that the difference between pretest and posttest scores is statistically significant.

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The N-Gain value of 0.54 (or 56.46%) also places the intervention in the “fairly effective” category, indicating that the technique produced a moderate yet meaningful improvement. These findings reinforce the notion that practising desired behaviours within a structured group setting can enhance students’ confidence, communication skills, and willingness to express their needs and opinions. Through the *Acting As If* technique, students were encouraged to rehearse assertive responses and adopt confident postures during group activities. This behavioural practice helped reduce passive tendencies and allowed students to internalise more adaptive patterns of communication. As a result, the intervention successfully facilitated the development of assertive behaviours in a supportive and interactive environment. The effectiveness demonstrated in this study also highlights the practical value of the *'Acting As If' technique for school counsellors* and guidance practitioners. Its structured format, combined with peer interaction and behavioural modelling, makes it a feasible method for addressing issues related to low self-confidence, communication difficulties, and social withdrawal among adolescents. Although the results are promising, future research should consider using larger sample sizes, incorporating control or comparison groups, and implementing long-term follow-up assessments to determine whether the improvements in assertive behaviour are sustained over time. Such enhancements would strengthen the generalizability and robustness of the findings. Overall, this study confirms that the Acting As If technique offers an effective and practical approach for promoting assertiveness in students and can serve as a valuable component of school-based counselling programs.

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