

# Evaluating the Effectiveness of the ABCDE Technique in Group Guidance to Reduce Hoax Behaviour Among Middle School Students

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## ABSTRACT

The proliferation of hoaxes among adolescents has emerged as a critical challenge in the digital era, driven by the high intensity of social media use and limited digital literacy skills. This study examines the effectiveness of group guidance using the ABCDE technique—derived from Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)—in reducing hoax-spreading behaviour among junior high school students. A pretest–posttest one-group design involved a purposive sample of eight eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Panyabungan. Data were collected using a validated hoax behaviour questionnaire and analysed through descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. Pretest results showed that all participants were categorised as having “high” or “very high” hoax behaviour. After four structured group guidance sessions using the ABCDE model (Activating Event, Belief, Consequence, Disputation, Effect), all students showed a significant behavioural shift to the “low” category. Statistical results confirmed a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ( $Z = -2.527$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ). These findings indicate that the ABCDE technique effectively restructures students’ irrational beliefs and emotional responses, promoting critical thinking, responsible digital behaviour, and ethical media engagement. The study underscores the relevance of incorporating structured psychological interventions such as the ABCDE technique into school counselling programs to foster digital character and strengthen media literacy among adolescents.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has brought transformative changes across all sectors, including education [1], [2]. This transformation has reshaped how students access, share, and internalise knowledge. The accessibility of information via the internet and social media has enabled students to acquire knowledge

quickly and flexibly. However, this ease of access also poses significant challenges, particularly the spread of inaccurate or misleading information, commonly referred to as hoaxes. In educational settings, the presence of hoaxes has become an increasingly prevalent and disruptive issue [3]. Therefore, the education sector must adapt to technological advances and the emerging risks that accompany them.

Students, particularly from Generation Z, are digital natives who interact intensively with various online platforms. Despite their technological fluency, many students still lack the digital literacy and critical thinking skills necessary to assess the validity of online content [4], [5]. This makes them susceptible to becoming unintentional consumers and fake news distributors. As Kertanegara et al. point out, low levels of media literacy are a key contributor to hoax-spreading behaviour among students. This implies that digital skills alone are insufficient without the foundation of critical judgment and media responsibility. Therefore, the role of schools is not only to deliver academic knowledge but also to instill critical information-processing skills and responsible digital behaviour [6].

The dissemination of fake news within the school environment can lead to misinformation, social tension, and cognitive dissonance among students, which in turn hampers the development of a healthy and collaborative learning culture. Emotional triggers, social pressures, and a lack of awareness about the importance of fact-checking exacerbate the issue. Students who are not trained to verify the accuracy of information may perpetuate misinformation, often unknowingly, which underscores the urgency of integrating digital literacy and information ethics into educational curricula [7], [8], [9]. To be effective, such integration must be proactive, preventive, and embedded within academic and psychosocial frameworks.

As defined by Tandoc et al., a hoax refers to false information deliberately created to mislead readers, often provoking emotional reactions for greater reach. Due to their speed and virality, social media platforms have become the primary channels through which fake news spreads. The viral nature of these platforms intensifies the potential damage of hoaxes, especially among impressionable students. Addressing this phenomenon requires technological solutions and behavioural interventions rooted in educational psychology [10]. Such interventions must go beyond information delivery and aim to reshape students' patterns of thinking and emotional response to digital content.

One such intervention is group guidance using the ABCDE technique, derived from Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) developed by Albert Ellis [11], [12]. This technique is designed to address not only cognitive processes but also students' emotional and behavioural responses. It encourages students to critically analyse their beliefs and emotional reactions when encountering questionable information [13]. The ABCDE model—Activating Event, Belief, Consequence, Disputation, and Effect—guides students to reflect, assess, and reshape their responses to digital stimuli, fostering more rational and ethical online interactions [14], [7]. This model offers a structured yet flexible framework for guiding students toward constructive digital engagement.

Group guidance services incorporating this approach can help create supportive spaces where students collaboratively explore and challenge misinformation. Led by

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trained school counsellors, these sessions promote the development of key competencies such as media literacy, emotional regulation, and social responsibility. Research by Hikmah has demonstrated the effectiveness of such programs, showing a significant reduction in hoax-spreading behaviour among junior high school students following ABCDE-based group guidance. Similarly, studies by Putri and Sari highlight improvements in students' information verification skills, critical thinking, and awareness of the consequences of spreading false information [15]. These findings affirm the multidimensional benefits of combining psychological techniques with educational objectives.

Moreover, global studies align with these findings. For example, McGrew et al. [16] emphasised the need for educational interventions to cultivate civic online reasoning among youth. Similarly, the Stanford History Education Group found that even digitally savvy students often struggle to assess online credibility [17], [18]. These international perspectives confirm the universality of the issue and support the integration of structured behavioural guidance in educational responses to fake news [15]. Such alignment with global research enhances the relevance and transferability of localised interventions.

The significance of this research lies in its timely response to the increasing spread of fake news among students in the digital era. While young people today are digitally active, many still lack the necessary skills to evaluate information, making them vulnerable to misinformation. This study highlights the urgency of developing students' digital literacy and emphasises the importance of fostering emotional awareness and responsible behaviour in online interactions. By integrating the ABCDE technique into group guidance services at schools, the research introduces a holistic approach that addresses students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses to digital information. Such an integrative strategy reflects a paradigm shift from reactive to preventive educational models.

Unlike previous studies focusing on cognitive training, this research innovatively applies a structured psychological model within a collaborative school setting. The novelty lies in using the ABCDE technique for individual counselling and as a group guidance method that promotes discussion, self-reflection, and character formation. In doing so, it supports the development of students as critical, ethical, and socially responsible digital citizens. Furthermore, by situating this intervention within the context of the Indonesian school system while drawing on globally recognised theoretical foundations, the research bridges local educational challenges with international discourse on media literacy and behavioural education. Ultimately, this study contributes a preventive, character-oriented model for addressing fake news in schools, empowering students to become active change agents in their digital environments. The study thus offers a novel and context-sensitive contribution to the evolving field of media and psychological literacy in education.

**Research Question:** To what extent is the ABCDE technique, applied through group guidance services, effective in reducing fake news dissemination behaviour among junior high school students?

**Hypothesis:** Group guidance services employing the ABCDE technique significantly reduce students' tendency to spread hoaxes and improve their critical evaluation of digital information.

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## 2. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental type that aims to test the effectiveness of group guidance services with the ABCDE technique in reducing hoax behaviour in students. The design used is the One Group Pretest-Posttest Design, namely by providing intervention to one group without a control group. This design allows researchers to compare students' behavioural conditions before and after being given treatment, using pretest and posttest measurements [21]. Such a design is particularly suitable for exploratory interventions to evaluate initial effectiveness in a controlled educational setting. The structure of the design is as follows:

Table 1. One-Group Pretest-Posttest Research Design

Group	Pretest (O1)	Treatment (X)	Posttest (O2)
Experiment	O1	X	O2

Information:

O1 = Initial test (pretest) before treatment is given

X = Treatment/intervention (e.g., use of media, methods, technology, etc.)

O2 = Final test (posttest) after treatment is given.

After treatment, a posttest was conducted using the same questionnaire to assess whether there were significant changes in students' behaviour in responding to information on social media. The data obtained were analysed using the Wilcoxon test. This approach ensures consistency between the pre- and post-intervention assessments, allowing for accurate measurement of behavioural change.

The subjects of this study were 32 eighth-grade students (class VIII-3) from SMP Negeri 2 Panyabungan. However, a sample of 8 students was selected using a purposive sampling technique for more targeted intervention and manageable group facilitation. This sampling method was chosen based on several predetermined criteria: (1) students' level of exposure to fake news or hoaxes, (2) frequency of social media use, and (3) interest and commitment to actively participate in all group guidance sessions. These criteria were determined through preliminary observations and consultations with school counsellors. These considerations ensured that the intervention would benefit individuals most likely to benefit, thus maximising its effectiveness.

The data sources in this study consisted of:

Primary data: Pretest and posttest scores from the hoax behaviour questionnaire administered to the selected students.

Secondary data: Documentation and observation notes taken during the group guidance sessions.

The data collection techniques included:

Questionnaire:

A structured, written instrument used to measure students' hoax behaviour before and after the intervention. This questionnaire was adapted from previous research and tested for

validity and reliability, with a reported Cronbach’s alpha of 0.78, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The questionnaire covered several key indicators, including: (a) the tendency to share information without verification, (b) trust in news lacking credible sources, and (c) attitudes toward information clarification. The adaptation process involved expert judgment to ensure contextual relevance to junior high school students.

Observation:

Conducted throughout the group sessions to assess student engagement, group dynamics, and behavioural responses related to hoax awareness. The facilitator systematically recorded field notes during each session.

Documentation:

Used to record the progress and activities of each guidance session, including student reflections, counsellor notes, and group outcomes. These qualitative records supported the interpretation of changes observed in student behaviour.

The research was implemented through four structured group guidance sessions, each designed using the ABCDE (Activating Event, Belief, Consequence, Disputation, Effect) model. This technique was employed to help students explore and reconstruct their thought patterns and emotional responses toward digital information, particularly fake news. The sessions aimed to build students’ critical thinking, emotional awareness, and behavioural responsibility in the context of digital media use. Each session included specific thematic content, reflective exercises, and collaborative discussions guided by the school counsellor.

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, a non-parametric statistical test, was applied for data analysis. This method was chosen due to the small sample size and the non-normal distribution of the data. The test compared the pretest and posttest scores to determine whether a statistically significant change in students' hoax-spreading behaviour occurred after the intervention. The results of this test served as the basis for concluding the effectiveness of the group guidance sessions using the ABCDE technique. This analysis was conducted using SPSS software to ensure accuracy and reliability in statistical computation.

To adhere to ethical research standards, all participating students were provided with informed consent forms signed by both students and their guardians. The research also received approval from the school's ethical review board, ensuring that all procedures complied with ethical considerations regarding student involvement, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. In addition, anonymity was maintained throughout data analysis and reporting.

Table 2. Categories of Hoax Behaviour Pretest Results

Category	Interval Formula	Interpretation
1	$X < M - 1.5SD$	Very Low
2	$M - 1.5SD < X \leq M - 0.5SD$	Low
3	$M - 0.5SD < X \leq M + 0.5SD$	Moderate / Sufficient
4	$M + 0.5SD < X \leq M + 1.5SD$	High
5	$M + 1.5SD < X$	Very high

This pretest was conducted using a questionnaire instrument whose validity and reliability have been tested. It contained indicators of hoax-spreading behaviour, such as the habit of spreading information without verification, the level of trust in news without clear sources, and attitudes toward clarifying information. The pretest results served as the baseline for assessing the intervention's impact. Following the pretest, the groups received intervention in the form of group counselling services using the ABCDE technique. Group guidance sessions are conducted in several meetings with structured materials, such as digital literacy training, news analysis simulations, and critical discussions about the impact of hoaxes on everyday life. These materials were aligned with the objectives of enhancing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural competencies.

Table 3. Hoax Behaviour Posttest Result Categories

Category	Interval Formula	Interpretation Range
1	$X < M - 1.5SD$	Very Low
2	$M - 1.5SD < X \leq M - 0.5SD$	Low
3	$M - 0.5SD < X \leq M + 0.5SD$	Moderate
4	$M + 0.5SD < X \leq M + 1.5SD$	High
5	$M + 1.5SD < X$	Very high

After the intervention, a posttest was conducted using the same questionnaire to assess whether there were significant changes in student behaviour in responding to information on social media. The data obtained were analysed using the Wilcoxon test. The comparative analysis between pretest and posttest scores provided empirical evidence of the intervention's effectiveness in reducing hoax-related behaviours.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

Descriptive analysis results regarding group guidance using the ABCDE technique to reduce hoax behaviour in eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Panyabungan were obtained from the pretest and posttest stages. The analysis was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the intervention by observing the shift in hoax behaviour categories before and after treatment. Based on the pretest results prior to the intervention, it was found that the overall hoax behaviour among students fell into the high and very high categories, as shown in Table 4

Table 4. Pretest Results of Hoax Behaviour

Category	Interval Formula	Interval	Frequency
Very Low	$X < M - 1.5SD$	$X < 12$	0
Low	$M - 1.5SD < X \leq M - 0.5SD$	$13 < X \leq 32$	14
Moderate	$M - 0.5SD < X \leq M + 0.5SD$	$33 < X \leq 63$	12
High	$M + 0.5SD < X \leq M + 1.5SD$	$64 < X \leq 73$	4
Very high	$M + 1.5SD < X$	$X < 73$	4

Based on the focused sample of 8 students selected purposively, it was found that four students were in the very high category, and four students were in the high category. This shows that all participants exhibited problematic hoax behaviour before the

intervention. Behaviours included sharing unverified information, trusting unclear sources, and lacking awareness of the importance of clarification. These findings serve as a critical foundation for the intervention.

After implementing four group guidance sessions using the ABCDE technique, a posttest was administered. The results are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Posttest Results of Hoax Behaviour

Category	Interval Formula	Interval	Frequency
Very Low	$X < M - 1.5SD$	$X < 12$	0
Low	$M - 1.5SD < X \leq M - 0.5SD$	$13 < X \leq 32$	8
Moderate	$M - 0.5SD < X \leq M + 0.5SD$	$33 < X \leq 63$	0
High	$M + 0.5SD < X \leq M + 1.5SD$	$64 < X \leq 73$	0
Very high	$M + 1.5SD < X$	$X < 73$	0

All eight students moved into the "low" category, with no participants remaining in the moderate, high, or very high categories. This significant drop from higher levels to a uniformly lower level indicates a strong impact of the intervention.

Furthermore, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to evaluate the significance of the change between pretest and posttest scores. Table 6 presents the output.

Table 6. Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test Output

	Posttest - Pretest
Z	- 2,527 <sup>b</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,012

The test yielded a p-value of 0.012 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. Therefore, the hypothesis that group guidance using the ABCDE technique effectively reduces hoax behaviour is supported.

### 3.2. Discussion

The results of this study confirm the effectiveness of group guidance using the ABCDE technique in reducing hoax-spreading behaviour among students. The drastic shift from high and very high categories to the low category demonstrates that students underwent behavioural adjustments and more profound cognitive restructuring. This suggests that hoax behaviour was not merely situational but habitual and rooted in irrational thought patterns successfully addressed through the intervention.

The ABCDE technique, rooted in Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), comprises five stages—Activating Event, Belief, Consequence, Disputation, and Effect. This structured approach encourages students to critically reflect on their beliefs and behaviours, especially those related to information sharing in digital environments. In the context of hoax behaviour, students were trained to pause, analyse content critically, and assess the consequences of impulsive sharing.

Group guidance also played a vital role in the learning process. The social nature of group counselling allows students to observe and learn from one another, fostering shared understanding and emotional validation. Through role-playing, simulations, and

discussions, students received theoretical input and practised new behaviours in a safe, structured setting. This aligns with Bandura's theory of social learning, where modelling and reinforcement play crucial roles in behaviour change.

The findings of this study align with previous research. For example, Amirah, Karneli, and Netrawati found that REBT-based group counselling effectively addressed irrational beliefs and improved students' emotional regulation. Other research also introduced an extended ABCDEF model, adding a "Future Plan" stage, to reinforce behavioural change through strategic planning [22], [23], [24]. Similarly, studies conducted in various educational settings have shown that ABCDE-based guidance reduces maladaptive behaviours and strengthens rational thinking and self-efficacy [25].

This study's main contribution lies in offering a holistic, structured, and context-sensitive intervention to address hoax behaviour. Integrating REBT in school counselling represents a shift from purely cognitive literacy efforts to psychoeducational strategies that address students' emotional and ethical dimensions.

However, the study is not without limitations. The small sample size (8 students) and the absence of a control group limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, external influences such as family digital literacy, media exposure at home, and peer environments were not controlled. Nevertheless, the consistency of behavioural change across all subjects strongly indicates a causal relationship between the intervention and the observed outcomes.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research expands the application of REBT beyond clinical contexts into mainstream educational settings. The ABCDE technique offers school counsellors a replicable model for addressing digital behaviour issues, such as hoax-spreading, cyberbullying, and impulsive online behaviour. It also promotes character education by promoting critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and moral responsibility.

In conclusion, group guidance using the ABCDE technique effectively addresses adolescent hoax behavior. It enables students not only to avoid misinformation but also to become ethically aware digital citizens. Schools and educational stakeholders are encouraged to adopt this approach as a part of their long-term strategy to promote responsible media use and critical awareness in the digital era.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the overall findings and analysis, this study concludes that group guidance using the ABCDE technique effectively reduces hoax-spreading behavior among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Panyabungan. Through four structured guidance sessions, students were systematically guided to identify triggering events (Activating Events), confront irrational beliefs (Beliefs), evaluate the consequences of their actions (Consequences), challenge faulty thinking (Disputation), and internalize healthier, more rational thought patterns (Effect).

This intervention significantly reduced hoax behavior and fostered meaningful changes in students' cognitive and emotional responses to digital information. The group-based format created a reflective, collaborative environment where students could

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collectively share personal experiences, challenge misinformation, and build a shared understanding of ethical media practices. This process substantially improved their digital literacy and nurtured a stronger moral responsibility when engaging with online content.

Integrating affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions in the ABCDE technique highlights its relevance as a comprehensive strategy for character education in the digital age. Theoretically, this study reinforces the applicability of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in school-based guidance programs, particularly in addressing irrational cognitions related to information consumption and dissemination. Practically, it offers a viable model that can be adopted by school counselors and educators to mitigate misinformation and promote ethical digital behavior among adolescents.

At the policy level, the findings emphasize the importance of embedding digital character education and media ethics into national curricula to equip students with the skills and values necessary for becoming responsible and critically aware digital citizens.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations. The small sample size and lack of a control group limit the generalizability of the results. Future research is encouraged to involve larger and more diverse populations, adopt experimental or longitudinal methodologies, and explore the integration of complementary tools—such as digital journaling or online collaborative platforms—to enhance and sustain the impact of the intervention.

In conclusion, group guidance using the ABCDE technique has proven not only to be an effective method for reducing hoax behavior but also a strategic approach to shaping the mindset and character of students in an era increasingly defined by digital interaction. This intervention offers a promising direction for schools aiming to cultivate media-savvy, emotionally intelligent, and ethically grounded youth in today's dynamic information landscape..

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