

Reducing Phubbing Behavior Through Group Counseling with Positive Self-Talk Techniques

Indri Ariani¹, Nefi Darmayanti²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling services using positive self-talk techniques to reduce phubbing behavior among junior high school students. This research employs a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. The research participants consisted of 8 students from class VIII-7 of SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu with high phubbing scores based on pretest results. The intervention was carried out through 4 group counseling sessions for 45 minutes per session. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test analysis showed that all participants experienced a significant decrease in phubbing behavior scores, with a Z value of -2.536 and an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) significance of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$). All data fell into the category of negative ranks, meaning no participants had scores that remained the same or increased. The results of this study indicate that group counseling services using positive self-talk techniques have been proven to be very effective in reducing phubbing behavior among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu. The positive self-talk technique can help participants increase self-awareness of their phubbing habits, manage the urge to misuse smartphones, and improve direct communication skills with friends or family. Therefore, group counseling services with positive self-talk techniques are recommended for guidance teachers as an optimal and sustainable intervention strategy to reduce phubbing and improve self-control and the quality of students' social interactions in the digital era.

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Corresponding Author:

Indri Ariani

Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Email: indri303212044@uinsu.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has changed the patterns of social interaction in society, including among teenagers [1]. Information and communication technology, especially smart devices (smartphones), provides limitless space in accessing information, communicating, and expressing oneself [2]. However, behind these great benefits, a new phenomenon emerges that can disrupt the quality of interpersonal relationships, namely

phubbing, a behavior of ignoring the presence of those around due to being too focused on the phone screen [3].

Phubbing is not just a trivial habit but a communication disruption that triggers psychosocial impacts, such as feelings of being unappreciated, reduced social closeness, and weakened empathy [4]. This phenomenon is increasingly concerning when it affects school-aged adolescents, where the psychosocial development phase demands the formation of self-identity and the strengthening social skills. Adolescence is a crucial stage in the search for identity and the formation of healthy interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, excessive use of gadgets drives them away from fundamental interactions and creates emotional disconnection from their surroundings [5].

In the environment of SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu, initial observations and interviews show that some students often exhibit phubbing behavior, both during lessons, break times, and in group activities. This phenomenon affects low social participation, weak team cooperation, and decreased social sensitivity towards peers. If not appropriately addressed, this behavior can create an individualistic communication pattern, lower learning achievements, and hinder the holistic character development of students.

Efforts to reduce phubbing behavior must be carried out through educational and psychological approaches that build students' self-awareness [6]. Group counseling becomes a strategic alternative in guidance and counseling because it provides a space for reflection, interaction, and collective growth in a supportive environment [7]. Through group dynamics, students learn from personal experiences but also the experiences and perspectives of others, making the process of behavior change more meaningful and comprehensive.

One of the effective techniques applied in group counseling to address maladaptive behaviors such as phubbing is positive self-talk [8]. This technique involves internalizing affirmative messages to direct, motivate, and reinforce constructive behavior. In social cognition, individuals shape their behavior through observation and self-evaluation [9]. Students can change their cognitive schemes about gadget usage and build commitment to healthy social interactions by directing their inner conversation towards a positive direction.

Digital technology development has significantly impacted the community's social life, especially for the younger generation [10]. One of the social symptoms that arises from the misuse of technology is phubbing, which is the behavior of ignoring direct social interactions because of attention focused on gadgets [11]. This phenomenon is increasingly widespread among junior high school students, currently in an important phase of identity formation and strengthening social relationships. Unfortunately, the academic world's attention to this issue is still dominated by theoretical and correlational approaches, while efforts to develop psychopedagogical-based interventions remain limited [12].

Previous research, such as that conducted by Damayanti, Mutakin, and Budiono, has focused more on the psychosocial consequences of phubbing, such as loneliness, depression, and the deterioration of interpersonal relationships [13]. Meanwhile, other studies in Indonesia by Hapsari, Makhmudah, and Kholili have revealed the prevalence of phubbing behavior among students, but have not been accompanied by an applied and systematic intervention approach in the context of formal education [14]. Some of the intervention approaches that have been applied so far are still superficial, such as calls to reduce the use

of gadgets or restrictions on access during study hours, which have proven less effective because they do not address the cognitive and emotional roots of such behavior.

The research gap becomes increasingly evident from school guidance and counseling services. Group counseling has been extensively studied concerning improving social skills, emotion regulation, and stress reduction; however, it has not been specifically directed to address phubbing behavior. Furthermore, positive self-talk as a cognitive strategy for restructuring negative thought patterns and developing self-awareness is rarely integrated into group counseling practices at the junior high school level.

In this case, the research conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu seeks to address these methodological and practical needs. This study offers novelty in two main aspects: it integrates the technique of positive self-talk within the dynamics of group counseling, theoretically combining cognitive-behavioral approaches with interpersonal processes in groups. This combination aims not only to change students' external behavior but also to target changes in perceptions and internal dialogue that affect their decisions in social interaction. Focus on middle school students in rural areas such as Bilah Hulu, who have not been much affected by interventions based on modern cognitive psychological theories. In other words, this research expands the empirical scope of phubbing studies in Indonesia and presents relevant intervention alternatives that align with local socio-cultural characteristics.

With this approach, this research is expected to contribute significantly to developing counseling practices in schools, especially in shaping students' character with social awareness, self-control, and better interpersonal skills in the digital era. In addition, this research also enriches the scientific literature on cognitive-based intervention techniques in education, which has not yet been widely applied to technology-based social behavior cases such as phubbing.

2. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design. This design is chosen because it allows the researcher to measure changes in the phubbing behavior variable before and after the treatment, even without a control group for comparison. This design complies with the guidelines. Sugiyono [15] states that the one-group pretest-posttest design is suitable for testing the effectiveness of a treatment in educational or psychological settings, with the assumption that the changes that occur come from the intervention provided. The structure of the design is described as follows:

$$O_1 - X - O_2$$

Where:

O_1 (Pretest) is the Initial measurement of phubbing behavior before treatment is given;

X (Treatment) is the Provision of group counseling services based on positive self-talk techniques;

O_2 (Posttest) is a Re-measurement of phubbing behavior after treatment is given.

The method for determining participants was purposive sampling, a non-probabilistic sampling technique based on specific criteria. According to Hasibuan [16], Purposive sampling is relevant when researchers have specific criteria for selecting subjects most

representative of the research objectives. In this context, the main criterion is eighth-grade students with high scores on the phubbing behavior scale. Out of a total of 35 students who participated in the pretest, eight students were selected as participants based on the highest scores in the range of 28–30, which falls into the high phubbing category according to the approach of extreme score distribution or the top 20% [17]. This technique is commonly used in intervention studies to reach subjects who need treatment directly.

The instrument used is the Phubbing Behavior Scale, adapted from Davis' research [18]. This scale consists of 10 statement items representing the two main dimensions of phubbing behavior: Interpersonal Communication Disruption and Smartphone Obsession. The statements are arranged in a four-point Likert scale format: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Using a four-point scale without a neutral option aims to encourage respondents to take an explicit stance on each item, and a scale without a neutral point can enhance the clarity of respondents' attitudes in attitude and behavior studies [19].

The validity test of the items was conducted through inter-item correlation analysis, and all statements were statistically declared valid. Meanwhile, the reliability test results showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.532, which is classified as low according to general standards, but is still acceptable in the context of exploratory research or pilot testing of scales in small groups, as explained by Siregar [20]. The low reliability indicates the presence of response variability among participants, most likely influenced by factors such as differences in personal experiences with phubbing, interpretations of the scale items, or the limitation in the number of statements. Therefore, the results obtained in this study need to be interpreted cautiously and serve as a basis for developing more comprehensive instruments.

Table 1. Stages of Research Implementation

| Stage | Activity | Description |
|--------------|---|--|
| Pretest | Initial measurement of phubbing behavior | All participants were asked to complete a phubbing behavior scale to determine the level of behavior before the intervention. |
| Intervention | Group counseling using the positive self-talk technique | The intervention was carried out in 4 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes, with the following details: |
| | Session 1: Introduction to the concept of phubbing | Explaining the definition of phubbing, its causes, and its impact on social interactions and interpersonal relationships. |
| | Session 2: Introduction to positive self-talk and identification of negative thoughts | Introducing the concept of positive self-talk and helping students recognize negative thinking patterns related to gadget dependency. |
| | Session 3: Positive affirmation practice | Training students to transform negative thoughts into positive affirmations to develop a more adaptive mindset toward gadget use. |
| | Session 4: Reflection and commitment to change | Reflecting on experiences during the sessions, evaluating behavioral changes, and building a commitment to reduce phubbing independently. |
| Posttest | Re-measurement of phubbing behavior | Participants again completed the phubbing behavior scale to evaluate changes after the intervention and determine the effectiveness of the service provided. |

The data obtained were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test through IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. This test was chosen because it is suitable for non-parametric data derived from two paired measurements. The researchers presented the decision-making criteria in this research in the form of Table 2 below.

Table 2. Data Analysis Techniques Using Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

| Component | Description |
|------------------------------|--|
| Type of Statistical Test | Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test |
| Analysis Tool | IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 |
| Type of Data | Non-parametric data from two paired measurements (pretest and posttest) |
| Purpose of Use | To examine the effectiveness of group counseling using the positive self-talk technique on changes in students' phubbing behavior |
| Reason for Choosing the Test | The Wilcoxon test is appropriate for non-parametric data that are not normally distributed and is used to measure differences within the same group. |
| Decision-Making Criteria | - If $p < 0.05$: There is a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores → The intervention is considered effective |

This research was conducted with attention to the ethical principles of educational research and child developmental psychology. Before the research began, the researcher obtained official permission from the school, written consent from the parents/guardians of the students, and Direct assent from the students as participants. All participants were provided clear information regarding the research's purpose, benefits, and procedures. The researcher also ensured that participant data was kept confidential and used only for scientific purposes. No intervention is harmful, coercive, or causes psychological discomfort for the students.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This research was conducted in May at SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu. A pretest on the phubbing scale was distributed to 35 students of class VIII-7. Based on the pretest results, eight students with the highest scores categorized as 'high' were selected as research participants. The pretest results are presented in the table below:

Table 3. Pretest Results of Research Participants

| Category | Interval | Frekuensi | Persentase (%) |
|-----------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Very high | 34 – 40 | 0 | 0 |
| high | 28 – 33 | 8 | 100 |
| Moderate | 22 – 27 | 0 | 0 |
| Low | 16 – 21 | 0 | 0 |
| Very low | 10 – 15 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 8 | 100 |

Based on the data in Table 3, the researchers continued by providing an intervention in the form of group counseling using the positive self-talk technique to 8 participants with a high level of phubbing. The group counseling service was conducted in 4 meeting sessions,

each lasting about 45 minutes. The first session focused on building relationships among group members and introducing the concepts of phubbing and positive self-talk. The second session aimed for group members to recognize negative thoughts that often arise and transform them into positive self-talk statements. The third session was directed at formulating a phubbing-free strategy based on positive self-talk and applying it in daily activities. The fourth session focused on sharing experiences after implementing the established strategies, reflections, evaluations, and commitments. After completing all intervention sessions, the researcher provided a posttest to 8 participants using the same instrument. The posttest results showed a difference in scores from the pretest results, indicating a change in phubbing behavior after participating in group counseling services.

The results of the comparison between the pretest and posttest can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results

| Participant | Skor <i>Pretest</i> | Category | Skor <i>Posttest</i> | Category |
|-------------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|----------|
| DS | 30 | High | 23 | Moderate |
| HK | 30 | High | 23 | Moderate |
| CA | 30 | High | 21 | Low |
| AN | 30 | High | 22 | Moderate |
| ID | 29 | High | 22 | Moderate |
| AK | 28 | High | 23 | Moderate |
| SS | 28 | High | 23 | Moderate |
| PS | 28 | High | 22 | Moderate |
| Average | 29,125 | High | 22,375 | Moderate |

Alternatively, if changed in the form of a diagram, the comparison of the pretest and posttest results is seen in Figure 1 below:

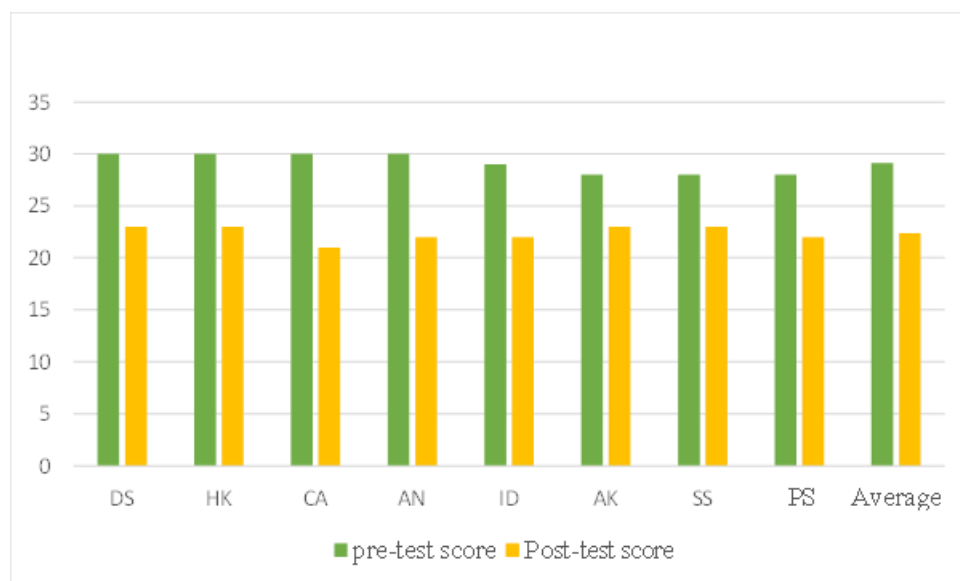


Figure 1. Comparison Diagram of Pretest and Posttest Results

Figure 1 shows the comparison results of the pretest and posttest scores of phubbing behavior among eight students who participated in the study. All participants initially fell into the high category, with pretest scores ranging from 28 to 30, and an average of 29.125. The results obtained from the posttest scores indicate that all participants experienced a decline, with values ranging from 21 to 23, and the average decreased to 22.375, which falls into the moderate category. This change in category indicates that group counseling interventions using positive self-talk techniques have a positive impact on reducing the level of phubbing behavior among eighth-grade students at SMP N 1 Bilah Hulu.

Next, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted to ensure that the score differences are statistically significant. This study hypothesizes that group counseling using the positive self-talk technique can reduce the phubbing behavior in students of class VIII-7 at SMPN 1 Bilah Hulu. Decision-making is based on the significance value (Asymp. Sig): if the p value < 0.05 , then there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results, thus the hypothesis is accepted. Conversely, if $p > 0.05$, there is no significant difference, and the hypothesis is rejected.

The following are the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to answer the research hypothesis:

Table 5. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Analysis

| | N | | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|---|----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| <i>Posttest - Pretest perilaku phubbing</i> | Negative Ranks | 8 ^a | 4.50 | 36.00 |
| | Positive Ranks | 0 ^b | .00 | .00 |
| | Ties | 0 ^c | | |
| | Total | 8 | | |

a. *posttest phubbing behavior < pretest phubbing behavior*

b. *posttest phubbing behavior > pretest phubbing behavior*

c. *posttest phubbing behavior = pretest phubbing behavior*

Table 6. Test Statistics^a *Posttest – Pretest Phubbing Behavior*

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Z | -2.536 ^b |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .011 |

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on positive ranks.

Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results, a Z value of -2.536 was obtained with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) significance of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$). This result indicates a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of phubbing behavior after being provided with an intervention in group counseling services using positive self-talk techniques. All participants experienced a decrease in scores, as shown by the analysis results, placing all data in the Negative Ranks category, meaning no participants had scores that remained the same or increased. Therefore, it can be concluded that group counseling services using positive self-talk techniques effectively reduce phubbing behavior among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu.

3.2. Discussion

The research results indicate that group counseling services using positive self-talk techniques are proven very effective in reducing phubbing behavior among eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu. All participants who initially fell into the high category in the pretest experienced a statistically significant decrease in scores to the moderate category, with one participant even reaching the low category. The average score decreased from 29.13 to 22.38. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test show a Z value of -2.536 with a significance $p = 0.011$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the difference is statistically significant. This decrease in scores indicates that the positive self-talk technique can transform the participants' mindset from being previously passive and unaware of phubbing habits to being more reflective and controlled. This approach is consistent with cognitive-behavioral theory, Nurrahmi & Putri, which states that cognitive restructuring can alter behavior, replacing negative automatic thoughts with more positive affirmations [21].

This positive self-talk technique can reduce phubbing behavior by helping participants become aware of the losses associated with phubbing through several stages. First, participants are invited to identify negative or irrational automatic thoughts that trigger phubbing behavior, such as 'I will miss out on news if I do not check my phone' or 'using my phone is more interesting than listening to others.' Then, they are trained to consciously replace those thoughts with more rational and adaptive positive self-talk statements. Examples of positive self-talk developed include: 'Face-to-face interaction with friends/family is far more valuable than notifications on my phone,' 'I want to be a good listener and appreciate the person in front of me,' or 'Focusing on the conversation will strengthen my relationships.' Through the repetition and internalization of these positive sentences, participants began to build an awareness that phubbing not only disturbs others but also harms themselves. They realized that phubbing can lead to: (1) a decrease in the quality of social relationships and communication, (2) triggering feelings of loneliness and isolation even while being in a crowd, (3) reducing self-confidence in direct interactions, and (4) hindering the development of essential social skills. This awareness was reinforced when they started to feel the direct benefits of reducing phubbing, such as deeper conversations, positive responses from conversation partners, and an increased sense of connection. Thus, positive self-talk changes thoughts, triggers more adaptive behavioral changes, and enhances self-control over smartphone use. Phubbing is when a person neglects friends, family, or others around them and focuses more on their phone, ignoring or not listening to what their conversation partner is saying. This excessive addiction to phones falls into behavior phubbing [22].

Two main factors can influence a person's behavior of phubbing. First is the addiction to smartphones and the internet, where individuals are more interested in the virtual world than real-life interactions. Second, there is addiction to social media and messaging applications like Instagram, WhatsApp, and the like [23]. 8 participants with high phubbing levels also experience this. Some participants admitted feeling anxious if they do not reply to messages quickly, even while in direct conversation, and some participants also admitted to being exhausted by the topics or bored with their friends, thus choosing to play on their

smartphones instead. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce this phubbing behavior to improve socialization skills or interpersonal communication [24].

From the perspective of Islam, maintaining manners and ethics in social interactions is an integral part of noble character. The Qur'an and Hadith teach extensively about the importance of valuing the presence of others, listening attentively, and maintaining kinship ties. Allah SWT's words in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 10 state: 'Indeed, the believers are brothers; so make peace between your brothers and fear Allah that you may receive mercy.' (Department of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2005, QS. Al-Hujurat: 10) This verse emphasizes the importance of maintaining brotherly relationships and social harmony. The phubbing behavior, which ignores conversation partners in favor of a smartphone, clearly contradicts these values. It can lead to feelings of undervaluation, damage trust, and weaken social bonds. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent.' (HR. Bukhari No. 6018; Muslim No. 47). This hadith emphasizes the importance of maintaining the quality of communication, including giving full attention while interacting. Therefore, efforts to reduce phubbing behavior are relevant to Islamic teachings to improve social or interpersonal communication skills and foster strong Islamic brotherhood.

The group dynamics results during group counseling implementation show significant progress in participants' self-awareness, social interaction, and self-regulation skills. In the first session, participants were introduced to phubbing, a behavior of ignoring people around them due to being overly focused on their phones. Through discussion and sharing experiences, the participants realized that they often engage in this habit, especially when interacting with friends or family. This awareness was then followed by introducing the concept of positive self-talk as a strategy to overcome such impulses. Participants were encouraged to create examples of positive self-talk sentences that can enhance self-awareness and self-control.

In the second session, after understanding the basic concept of positive self-talk, participants began to delve deeper into the negative thoughts that usually arise before they engage in phubbing. They learned to identify trigger situations, such as feeling bored, anxious, or uncomfortable when not holding a smartphone, and then formulated positive self-talk statements as substitutes for those negative thoughts. This activity was complemented with simple exercises and simulations so that participants could understand, accept, and apply this technique in real life.

The third session focuses on developing personal strategies. Each participant is asked to identify three situations that most often trigger phubbing behavior. On average, the situations most frequently trigger participants' phubbing behavior are when they feel bored during social interactions or conversations with friends/family. For example, when they are chatting but the topic is uninteresting or they feel disconnected from their conversation partner, they tend to open their smartphones to divert their attention. Second, when they feel anxious or uncomfortable in social situations. For example, when in a new environment or feeling less confident when talking to others, they use their smartphones as an escape to reduce discomfort; by playing with their smartphones, they feel safer and do not have to engage directly in interactions that make them uncomfortable. Thirdly, when notifications

or urges to check their smartphones arise, for instance, receiving a message, social media notifications, or the habit of automatically checking their smartphones, even during face-to-face conversations. From these situations, they then construct positive self-talk sentences for each of these situations. They also create a daily schedule that includes smartphone-free times, such as when chatting with friends/family, during family meals, or study hours.

The fourth session is a moment of reflection, evaluation, and commitment. Participants review the process they have gone through from the first to the third session, then they write down the changes they have experienced and the understandings they have gained by filling out reflection and evaluation sheets, as well as writing personal commitment statements to continue applying positive self-talk in their daily lives as an effort to reduce phubbing. Thus, the dynamics of this group counseling indicate a continually developing learning process, where participants not only understand the material presented but also begin to habituate themselves to applying positive self-talk to reduce phubbing behavior in their daily lives.

Psychologically, this result shows the success of the cognitive restructuring process, a key approach in cognitive-behavioral theory. In this process, participants are trained to recognize negative automatic thoughts that have triggered phubbing behavior, such as: 'If I do not reply to the message now, I will be labeled as uncaring,' and to replace them with more adaptive and positive statements like 'Focusing on the conversation partner makes me more appreciated and trusted.' This concept is in line with the findings of Fitriana, Wibowo, and Purwanto, which state that smartphone addiction is closely related to cognitive distortions that can be corrected through cognitive therapy approaches [25].

This finding is also supported by Karadağ, Tosuntaş, and Erzen, who revealed that phubbing is rooted in bad habits, emotional dependence on digital notifications, and feelings of insecurity in face-to-face interactions [26]. This was found in study participants who use their phones to escape when they feel bored, anxious, or uncomfortable in social situations. This is where positive self-talk plays an important role in strengthening self-control and shaping a new awareness of the value of direct interaction.

Interestingly, the changes in participants were reflected in their posttest scores and the group dynamics during the four intervention sessions. Participants realized phubbing behavior had become an unconscious habit in the first session. The second session helped them identify and combat the negative thoughts driving that behavior. The third session provided a space for participants to devise tangible and personal strategies, such as setting up phone-free schedules during meals, study times, or conversations with family. The fourth session became a moment of reflection and commitment, where they acknowledged the changes and expressed their determination to maintain the new, more adaptive behavior.

This process reflects a transformational approach in group guidance, as described by Davis, stating that profound changes in students' behavior can only be achieved when supported by a supportive, open, and consistent group dynamic [18]. It is not surprising that after the intervention, participants reported an increased quality of relationships with friends and family, feeling more appreciated, and a better ability to control the urge to check their phones excessively.

Finally, it can be concluded that group guidance interventions using positive self-talk techniques are statistically effective in reducing phubbing behavior and encouraging holistic changes encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. This intervention can raise new awareness that valuing others in communication is about ethics and building quality relationships and healthy personalities in the digital era.

4. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that group counseling services with positive self-talk techniques effectively reduce phubbing behavior among SMP Negeri 1 Bilah Hulu students. The average score decreased from 29.125 to 22.375, and the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, with a significance value of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$), indicate a significant difference before and after the intervention. All participants experienced a decrease in scores, indicating the success of the intervention in changing behavior. These results suggest that positive self-talk techniques can be integrated into school group counseling services as an effective strategy for fostering healthy social behavior and reducing dependence on gadgets. However, this study has several limitations, such as a small number of participants, the absence of a control group, and a relatively low instrument reliability (0.532). Therefore, the results of the study need to be interpreted with caution. The researchers recommend that future studies involve a larger sample, use an experimental design with controls, improve the quality of the instruments, and extend the duration of the intervention so that the results obtained are stronger and more applicable.

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