

Effectiveness of Client-Centered Group Counselling in Enhancing Social Skills of Anxious Introverted Students

Indah Nurhaliza¹, Fauziah Nasution²

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

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of group counselling services employing the Client-Centred Therapy approach in enhancing the social skills of students with anxious introverted traits. Employing a quantitative method with a One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design, the study involved 11 seventh-grade students of MTs Al-Ulum Medan who were identified as having high levels of anxious introversion. The instrument used was an introversion scale, and the data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The findings revealed a significant decrease in introversion levels after the intervention, with all participants shifting from the high category (121–134; 76%–84%) to moderate and low categories (113–119; 71%–74%). Statistical analysis indicated $Z = -2.950$, $p = 0.003$ (< 0.05), and effect size $r = 0.89$, which reflects a significant effect. These results demonstrate that Client-Centred Group Counselling is effective in reducing social anxiety and enhancing students' social skills, particularly in areas such as communication, cooperation, and self-confidence. The study highlights that school counsellors are encouraged to adopt client-centred group counselling as part of their structured psychosocial support. Further research is recommended to expand this model across various school contexts with larger samples, stronger experimental designs, and long-term evaluations.

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Corresponding Author:

Indah Nurhaliza
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Email: indah303213146@uinsu.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in schools is not only oriented towards academic achievement but also emphasises the development of students' social and emotional aspects [1]. One of the important skills that students should possess is social skills, as they serve as the foundation for the ability to communicate, collaborate, and adapt to the surrounding environment [2]. Good social skills enable students to build healthy interpersonal relationships, manage emotions appropriately, and avoid psychosocial problems such as social isolation or deviant

behaviour. This aligns with the view of Purnama et al. that social intelligence plays a crucial role in an individual's success in community life [3].

However, in practice, not all students can develop social skills optimally. A phenomenon often encountered in schools, including at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Al-Ulum Medan, is the presence of students with anxious-introvert traits. Students with these characteristics tend to withdraw, have difficulty expressing their opinions, feel anxious in interactions, and are less able to build positive social relationships. This condition can hinder personal development while also affecting their academic and non-academic success. The selection of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Ulum Medan as the research location was based on initial findings that several students showed signs of being anxious-introverted, such as reluctance to speak in public, avoidance of interactions with peers, and feeling unconfident when facing a new social environment. This condition has the potential to hinder the achievement of educational goals, which emphasise a balance between mastering knowledge, skills, and personality development.

One effort that can be made to help students with anxious and introverted traits improve their social skills is through group counselling services. Group counselling offers a safe and supportive environment for students to express themselves, develop social skills, and receive support from their peers [4], [5], [6], [7]. According to Loeb, group counselling is effective in developing interpersonal skills, fostering empathy, and enhancing self-confidence [8].

In the context of this study, the therapy technique used is client-centred therapy, developed by Carl Rogers. This approach emphasises providing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence from the counsellor to the counselee. The primary principle of this therapy is to help individuals discover their potential, understand their emotions, and develop adaptive skills through a warm and supportive counselling relationship [9]. Thus, anxious introverted students can feel accepted, more open, and motivated to practice social skills within group dynamics.

Several previous studies have proven the effectiveness of group counselling services in helping students improve various psychosocial aspects. Research by Bidayah, Netrawati, and Karneli shows that group counselling with a cognitive-behavioural approach can reduce the level of social anxiety in high school students [9]. Similarly, a study by Sayyidhina et al. found that group counselling services have a significant effect on increasing the self-confidence of shy students [10]. The results of this research highlight the effectiveness of group counselling as a valuable intervention strategy for addressing issues related to students' social interactions.

However, the research by Shaprizal et al. still focuses on students' social skills in general, without paying special attention to groups of students with anxious introvert characteristics. In fact, students with these characteristics have different psychological dynamics compared to shy students or students with typical social anxiety. They not only experience difficulties in interacting but also tend to withdraw and struggle to express their emotions healthily [11]. This requires a counselling approach that is more personal, empathetic, and capable of exploring each student's potential.

Furthermore, research by Suerte et al. employed a counselling approach based on cognitive-behavioural or psychoeducational techniques, whereas the use of client-centred therapy in group counselling services in schools or madrasahs is still relatively rarely studied. In fact, the approach developed by Carl Rogers has its main strengths in unconditional acceptance, empathy, and a warm counsellor-client relationship, which is theoretically very relevant for anxious introverted students [12].

Thus, two research gaps can be identified: the lack of studies specifically examining students with anxious introverted characteristics in the context of improving social skills through group counselling services, and the limited research utilising client-centred therapy techniques as an intervention approach in group counselling within the madrasah environment.

The novelty of this research lies in the application of client-centred therapy in group counselling to enhance the social skills of anxious introverted students, which has not been widely implemented in the context of madrasahs. The study focuses on students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, thereby providing a unique contribution to the development of guidance and counselling service models in Islamic educational institutions, which have been more extensively studied in general schools to date. The development of an intervention model based on empathy, unconditional acceptance, and the counsellor's authenticity is expected to serve as an innovative alternative for addressing social skill barriers in students with specific personality traits. Therefore, this research offers added value by expanding the literature on group counselling services while also providing a new perspective on the application of client-centred therapy in a madrasah environment characterised by Islamic values.

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design, aiming to determine the effect of a treatment on the research subjects, although it does not yet meet the criteria for an actual experiment. The design employed is the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design [13]. In this design, the experimental group does not use a control group; instead, a comparison is made between the pretest results (O1) before the treatment (X) and the posttest results (O2) after the treatment [14].

Pretest O1	Treatment X	Posstest O2
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The research population consisted of 29 students of class VII-1 at MTs Al-Ulum Medan. From this number, 11 students were selected as samples using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of samples based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria included students who exhibited symptoms of anxious introversion, such as difficulty interacting, reluctance to cooperate, a lack of confidence in group settings, rarely participating in discussions, and a tendency to be shy when speaking in front of peers. A total of 11 students were identified as meeting these criteria based on the results of the introversion scale assessment.

The main research instrument was an introversion scale questionnaire adapted from the research of Bidayah et al. [9]. This scale uses a Likert model with five response categories, encompassing indicators of activity, sociability, risk-taking, impulsivity, expressiveness, reflectiveness, and responsibility. This instrument has previously been tested for content validity by the original researcher and has been deemed reliable, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of greater than 0.70, making it suitable for use in this study. In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher also employed observation, interviews, and documentation techniques as supplementary data to reinforce the findings.

The research procedure was carried out in several stages, namely, Pretest, where all samples were given an introversion scale to measure the level of anxious introversion before the intervention. Counselling Implementation is an intervention in the form of group counselling services using a client-centred therapy approach. The intervention consisted of 6 meeting sessions, each lasting 60 minutes. The structure of each session included an opening stage, exploration of students' feelings and experiences, provision of stimuli for self-reflection, group discussion, and a closing stage emphasising insights and follow-up plans. After the intervention was completed, the samples were given the introversion scale again to observe the changes that had occurred [15].

The data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The choice of the Wilcoxon test was based on two main considerations. First, the research data were ordinal, obtained from a Likert scale. Second, the sample size was relatively small ($n = 11$), thus not meeting the assumption of a normal distribution. Therefore, the Wilcoxon test, as a non-parametric test, is more appropriate for comparing pretest and posttest scores [16].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The initial measurement (Pretest) was conducted on 29 students of class VII-1. From the results, 11 students were identified as having a high category of Anxious Introvert level (119–160). The scores obtained ranged from 121 to 134, with a percentage of 76% to 84%, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pretest Results of the Introvert Scale

No	Respondent	Score	Category	%
1	R3	121	Tall	76%
2	R5	125	Tall	78%
3	R7	125	Tall	78%
4	R13	130	Tall	81%
5	R17	129	Tall	81%
6	R19	123	Tall	77%
7	R21	132	Tall	83%
8	R24	127	Tall	79%
9	R25	134	Tall	84%
10	R27	125	Tall	78%
11	R28	125	Tall	78%

These results indicate that students in the high category tend to be Anxious Introverts, which can potentially hinder social skills. Therefore, group counselling services were provided using Client-Centred Therapy techniques. After the intervention, all participants (11 students) retook the post-test. The results showed a significant decrease, with scores falling into the moderate to low category (113–119) or 71%–74% (Table 2).

Table 2. Post-test Results of the Introvert Scale

No	Respondent	Score	Category	%
1	R3	113	Low	71%
2	R5	118	Low	74%
3	R7	117	Low	73%
4	R13	119	Moderate	74%
5	R17	119	Moderate	74%
6	R19	116	Low	73%
7	R21	118	Low	74%
8	R24	118	Low	74%
9	R25	119	Moderate	74%
10	R27	117	Low	73%
11	R28	117	Low	73%

The comparison of scores shows a consistent decline. For example, R21 decreased from 132 (83%) to 118 (74%), and R25 from 134 (84%) to 119 (74%). Thus, the intervention has been proven effective in reducing the level of Anxious introversion while simultaneously improving students' social skills.

To further determine the effectiveness of the intervention on the level of anxious introversion in students' social skills, the researcher conducted statistical tests, namely the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, using IBM SPSS Statistics 23 to identify significant differences before and after the implementation of group counselling services using the Client-Centred Therapy technique.

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test

Table 3. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the Pretest

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
posttest - Pretest	Negative Ranks	11 ^a	6,00	66,00
	Positive Ranks	0 ^b	0,00	0,00
	Ties	0 ^c		
	Total	11		

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

Table 4. Post-test Anxiety Level of Introverted Students

	Posttest - Pretest
Z	-2.950 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.003

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on positive ranks.

From the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, it was found that all participants (N = 11) experienced a decrease in scores from the Pretest to the posttest, as indicated by the number of negative ranks being 11 and the number of positive ranks being 0. There were no ties between the Pretest and post-test scores (ties = 0), which indicates that all respondents showed positive changes after the intervention. The Z value of -2.950 and the significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of $0.003 < 0.05$ indicate that there was a significant difference between the Pretest and post-test scores. Thus, it can be concluded that the intervention provided in this study successfully reduced the level of anxious introversion in the aspect of students' social skills.

This finding reinforces that group counselling services using the Client-Centred Therapy technique were effective in improving the social skills of students experiencing anxious introversion. The decrease in scores not only demonstrates a quantitative improvement but also qualitatively shows development in personality, perseverance, and students' ability to make positive changes. Overall, this data provides strong evidence that the implemented intervention was successful in enhancing students' social skills, which is an essential aspect in supporting their social relationships and future academic success.

The initial measurement (*Pretest*) of 29 students in grade VII-1 showed that 11 students had a high level of *Anxious Introvert* (score 121–134; 76%–84%). After being given group counseling services with *the Client-Centered Therapy* technique, *the post-test* results showed that all participants moved to the moderate to low category (score 113–119; 71%–74%).

Table 5. Summary of Pretest and Post-test Results of the Introvert Scale (N=11)

Category	Score Range	Pretest (n)	Post-test (n)
High	119–160	11	0
Moderate	76–118	0	3
Low	32–75	0	8

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results showed that all participants experienced a decrease in scores, with negative ranks (11), positive ranks (0), and ties (0). The Z value = -2.950, with a significance level of $p = 0.003 (< 0.05)$, indicates a significant difference between the Pretest and post-test scores. Additionally, the effect size was found to be $r = 0.89$, which falls into the large effect category. This indicates that the intervention was not only statistically significant but also had a very strong impact on reducing the level of Anxious Introversion.

Thus, group counselling services based on Client-Centred Therapy have been proven effective in improving students' social skills. Quantitatively, there was a consistent decrease in scores; qualitatively, the intervention contributed to personality development, perseverance, and students' ability to make positive changes in their social interactions.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that group counselling services using the Client-Centred Therapy technique have a significant impact on reducing the level of Anxious introversion in students. Initial data (Pretest) showed that 11 students were in the high category (scores 121–134; 76%–84%), meaning they experienced quite serious obstacles in social skills due to introverted tendencies accompanied by anxiety. However, after the intervention, all students moved to the medium to low category (scores 113–119; 71%–74%). The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test reinforced this finding with a Z value of -2.950 and $p = 0.003$ (< 0.05), as well as an effect size $r = 0.89$, which falls into the large category. Thus, the intervention is not only statistically significant but also has a strong impact in helping students reduce their anxious introversion.

These findings are in line with the views of Rogers (1951), the originator of Client-Centred Therapy, who emphasised that individuals can develop optimally when in a counselling environment full of acceptance (unconditional positive regard), empathy, and authenticity (congruence). Such a counselling climate allows introverted students with social anxiety to express themselves openly without fear of being judged, thereby reducing psychological barriers and strengthening social skills.

Several previous studies support this result. Lee and You found that group counselling is effective in enhancing the social skills of high school students who tend to withdraw [17]. Through group dynamics, students learn to express their feelings, practice empathy, and develop courage in social interactions. Belanger, Weeks, and Arthur also emphasise that Client-Centred Therapy helps students reduce social anxiety because this approach focuses on self-acceptance and unconditional support from the counsellor [18].

Further Bohart studies indicate that introverted students with high anxiety experience significant improvements in communication skills after participating in nondirective group counselling [19]. The mechanism of self-reflection, validation of experiences, and feedback from peers has been proven to be an important factor in overcoming tendencies to withdraw. This aligns with the research of Vala, Farahbakhsh, Bajestani, and Boroujeni, who found that client-centred group interventions can enhance self-confidence and interpersonal communication skills in middle school students [20].

Psychologically, an Anxious Introvert is a combination of a tendency to withdraw (introversion) and a high level of anxiety. This condition can negatively impact students' social-emotional development, including isolation, low participation in learning activities, and limited ability to build interpersonal relationships [21]. Therefore, intervention through group counselling services becomes relevant, as students can receive social support, learn new skills, and internalise positive experiences from interactions with group members [22].

Furthermore, this study aligns with the findings of Pulungan & Harahap, who stated that group counseling based on a humanistic approach can reduce social anxiety in

introverted students in Korea [23]. Similarly, Wulandari & Suwarjo demonstrated that group counselling is effective in enhancing social engagement among junior high school students who experience social phobia [24].

Thus, this study not only affirms the effectiveness of Client-Centred Therapy in the context of group counselling but also makes a new contribution to its application with madrasa students who have Anxious Introvert tendencies. This intervention has been proven to have a dual impact, namely reducing levels of anxious introversion while simultaneously enhancing students' social skills. This success is important, as social skills are a protective factor for long-term academic achievement and psychological well-being [25].

Practically, the results of this study suggest that schools, particularly madrasahs, should enhance their counselling services with a group-based Client-Centred approach. Such interventions focus not only on academic aspects but also on students' mental health and social-emotional development. School counsellors and guidance teachers can use these findings as a reference in designing counselling programs that are more humanistic, participatory, and tailored to the needs of anxious, introverted students.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that group counselling services using the Client-Centered Therapy technique are effective in reducing the level of Anxious Introversion in seventh-grade students of class VII-1. The pretest results showed that 11 students were in the high category (score 121–134; 76%–84%), but after the intervention, all participants moved to the moderate to low category (score 113–119; 71%–74%). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test yielded a Z value of -2.950, with a significance level of $p = 0.003$ (< 0.05) and an effect size of $r = 0.89$ (considered a large effect), confirming that this intervention is statistically significant and has a strong impact on improving students' social skills. The implications of this study suggest that a client-centred counselling approach, in line with Rogers' theory, can facilitate self-acceptance, enhance interpersonal communication, and promote the development of social skills in students who tend to be anxious and introverted. School counsellors are encouraged to adopt client-centred group counselling as part of structured psychosocial support, while schools and parents can utilise it as a supportive strategy to enhance children's socioemotional development. Nevertheless, this study has limitations due to its small sample size, a pre-experimental design without a control group, and a short intervention duration, which limit the generalizability of the results. Therefore, further research should expand this model across various school contexts with a stronger experimental design, larger sample sizes, long-term evaluations, and a mixed-methods approach to obtain more comprehensive and sustainable results.

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