

Group Counselling with Expressive Writing Therapy to Enhance Self-Acceptance of Junior High School Students from Broken Homes

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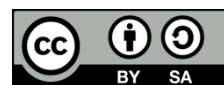
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counselling with expressive writing therapy in enhancing self-acceptance among junior high school students from broken home families at Madrasah Aliah Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Tembung. A pre-experimental design, consisting of a one-group pretest–posttest, was employed, involving eight students selected through purposive sampling based on their low self-acceptance scores. The intervention consisted of four sessions of group counselling, each incorporating expressive writing exercises to explore emotions, reflect on personal experiences, and develop coping strategies. Pretest and posttest results were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' self-acceptance, with scores increasing from the low category to the high category ($Z = -2.670$, $p = 0.008$) and a very large effect size ($r = 0.94$). The study demonstrates that expressive writing therapy, when incorporated into group counselling, effectively fosters emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and self-esteem in adolescents facing family challenges. Limitations include a small sample size, absence of a control group, short intervention duration, and potential subjectivity in self-assessment. Future research is recommended to incorporate control groups, larger samples, extended interventions, longitudinal follow-ups, and qualitative approaches to deepen understanding of self-acceptance development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a complex transitional period in human life, marked by significant biological, cognitive, social, and emotional changes. At this stage, teenagers begin to build their self-identity, develop their self-concept, and learn to understand and accept both their strengths and weaknesses [1]. However, this process does not always run smoothly,

especially for teenagers from families with a history of broken homes. An unharmonious family environment, such as divorce, separation, or prolonged conflicts between parents, can cause deep emotional wounds and disturbances in the child's personality development.

Teenagers who grow up in broken home environments often face difficulties in understanding themselves and adjusting to their social surroundings. They tend to experience feelings of low self-esteem, a sense of being lost, and difficulty accepting themselves and their family situation [2]. This condition, if left unaddressed, can impact learning motivation, interpersonal relationships, and overall psychological well-being. One important psychological aspect that should be strengthened in this group of adolescents is self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance is an individual's ability to accept all aspects of themselves, both strengths and weaknesses, honestly and realistically, without denial or negative judgment towards themselves. Individuals with good self-acceptance will be able to face life's pressures more maturely, develop their potential optimally, and have a positive outlook on themselves and the future [3]. On the contrary, low self-acceptance is often correlated with the emergence of withdrawal behaviours, social anxiety, depression, and low self-confidence.

In the context of secondary education, particularly in Madrasah Aliyah, guidance and counselling teachers play a crucial role in helping students overcome the personal and social challenges they face. However, counselling services in schools are often still conventional and individual, so they are not yet fully able to reach students with more complex emotional needs, such as teenagers from broken-home families [4]. Therefore, a counselling approach that is more participatory, empathetic, and therapeutic is needed.

One relevant approach is group counselling with expressive writing therapy techniques. Group counselling provides students with the opportunity to share experiences, gain social support, and learn from their peers' experiences [5]. Meanwhile, expressive writing therapy is a form of psychological intervention that encourages individuals to express their deepest thoughts and feelings through writing. Through the writing process, individuals can organise their emotional experiences, reduce psychological burdens, and gain a new understanding of their life experiences. The combination of group dynamics and expressive writing activities is believed to strengthen the process of self-reflection and enhance adolescents' self-acceptance [6].

The phenomenon of broken homes among high school students is an increasingly common issue in the educational context in Indonesia, including within madrasahs. Based on initial observations at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Tembung, it was found that several tenth-grade students experienced behavioural changes that reflected emotional stress due to family problems. They tend to withdraw from social environments, lack self-confidence, and have low learning motivation. This condition indicates a need for psychological interventions that can help students understand and accept their condition in a positive light.

Madrasah Aliyah Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah Tembung, as an educational institution grounded in Islamic values, has great potential in integrating psychological and spiritual approaches into its counselling services. Religious values such as sincerity, patience, and

gratitude can be effectively contextualised in group counselling sessions through reflective writing, making the therapeutic process more meaningful for students. Thus, group counselling based on expressive writing therapy serves not only as a means to strengthen self-acceptance but also as a form of character education that aligns with the vision of the madrasah.

Various previous studies have attempted to address the issue of low self-acceptance in teenagers from broken homes through various counselling approaches. The research by Sudiarsana et al., which utilised cognitive-behavioural-based group counselling, has proven effective in helping students change negative thinking patterns about themselves [7]. Meanwhile, Arias-Pujol & González applied reality counselling to strengthen students' responsibility and self-control [8]. Nevertheless, both approaches emphasise cognitive restructuring and providing insight, while the aspects of emotional catharsis and the expression of students' deep feelings are not yet optimally facilitated. In the context of adolescents from broken homes who carry heavy emotional burdens, the need to channel feelings through expressive media becomes important in the process of recovery and self-acceptance.

One potentially effective method in this context is Expressive Writing Therapy (EWT), which involves freely writing about significant emotional experiences. Dadouch states that expressive writing can help individuals organise traumatic experiences, release inner pressure, and enhance self-understanding and self-acceptance [9]. International research conducted by Gerger & Knaevelsrud also shows that EWT can significantly improve psychological health and self-acceptance [10]. However, the implementation of expressive writing therapy in the context of Indonesian education, particularly in religiously-oriented madrasahs, is still very limited. Research that combines expressive writing therapy with group guidance services in Islamic-based educational institutions is almost non-existent.

This gap indicates that existing research still fails to address the integrative needs between emotional, social, and spiritual aspects in adolescents' self-acceptance process. Therefore, this study presents a novel intervention model that integrates the benefits of group counselling dynamics, including empathy, social support, and joint reflection, with expressive writing therapy as a means of emotional catharsis and self-meaning reconstruction. This approach is expected to help students from broken homes not only understand their feelings but also accept their own and their families' conditions more positively.

From the perspective of novelty, this study makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research aims to integrate the group counselling approach with expressive writing therapy in the context of Islamic education at madrasah aliyah, an area that has not been widely studied in Indonesia. This integration also adds a religious dimension by embedding the values of self-reflection (*muhasabah*), gratitude (*syukur*), and trust in God (*tawakal*) into the reflective writing process, making the therapy more spiritually meaningful. Practically, this study offers an alternative counselling method for guidance and counselling teachers in addressing students from broken homes who experience self-acceptance crises. This approach can serve as an innovative strategy to

create a counselling process that is more humanistic, reflective, and aligned with the religious values of students in madrasah.

Thus, this study not only contributes to expanding the understanding of the effectiveness of Group Counselling with Expressive Writing Therapy but also offers an innovative counselling service model relevant to the social and spiritual context of madrasah students in Indonesia. This research is expected to serve as an initial step in developing more empathetic, expressive, and value-based counselling practices, particularly to help students from broken homes achieve a more complete and meaningful self-acceptance.

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach, utilising a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design. This design was chosen to determine the effectiveness of group counselling with expressive writing therapy in improving self-acceptance among students from broken home families in Class X at Madrasah Aliah Al-Jamiatul Washliyah Tembung. Through this design, the researcher can compare measurement results before and after the intervention to observe changes in self-acceptance levels following the treatment administration. However, this design has limitations, namely the absence of a control group, which restricts the study's ability to draw causal conclusions [11].

The subjects of this study were tenth-grade students from families with broken homes who exhibited low levels of self-acceptance. The selection of subjects was conducted using purposive sampling, which involves selecting samples based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives [12]. The established criteria include students from broken home families due to divorce, separation, or prolonged parental conflicts, and those with a low self-acceptance score based on pretest results, specifically below 60% of the maximum total score on the self-acceptance scale.

The instrument used in this study is a self-acceptance scale questionnaire, which was developed based on Rogers' theory of self-acceptance. This scale consists of 30 statements with four response options using a Likert scale, namely strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) [13]. This instrument encompasses three main dimensions of self-acceptance, namely acceptance of one's own condition, acceptance of life experiences, and self-appreciation. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Examples of statement items in this questionnaire include: "I can accept the shortcomings that exist within myself" and "I am proud of myself despite having a difficult past."

The research procedure consisted of three main stages: pretest, intervention, and posttest. In the first stage (pretest), all participants completed a self-acceptance scale to determine their initial condition before the treatment. The second stage involved an intervention in the form of group guidance using expressive writing therapy, conducted over four sessions spanning weeks, with each session lasting 90 minutes [14]. In practice, the counsellor facilitates participants in expressing their thoughts and feelings through writing about their life experiences, especially those related to family situations and the emotional conflicts they have experienced. The details of activities in each session are as follows:

1. First session: self-introduction, formation of group dynamics, and exploration of commonly experienced negative emotions.
2. Second session: writing about the most memorable or painful personal experiences to help participants identify the sources of negative feelings.
3. Third session: reflecting on the meaning of those experiences and the process of self-acceptance, as well as acceptance of family situations.
4. Fourth session: writing a personal development plan, reinforcing the meaning of life, and strengthening the commitment to become a more positive individual.

After the entire session was completed, participants were given a posttest using the same instrument to measure changes in the level of self-acceptance after undergoing the intervention. The pretest and posttest data were then analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, as the data were ordinal and the sample size was relatively small. This test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between self-acceptance scores before and after the treatment [15].

In its implementation, this study also considers the ethical aspects of research [16]. The researchers first obtained permission from the madrasa authorities as well as consent from the students and their parents (informed consent) before conducting the study. All participant identities were kept confidential, and the researchers ensured that the therapy activities were carried out safely, without pressure, and provided psychological benefits to the participants. Additionally, the principle of non-maleficence was applied to ensure that no adverse effects occurred during or after the intervention process.

Thus, this research method is systematically designed to assess the effectiveness of group counselling through expressive writing therapy as an innovative approach to help students from broken home families develop better self-acceptance skills, understand their emotions, and build a positive outlook on life and themselves.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The implementation of this study utilised group counselling services combined with the expressive writing therapy technique to enhance self-acceptance among junior high school students. On the first day, the researcher began by distributing questionnaires to the students. The questionnaires aimed to identify students' level of self-acceptance and served as pretest data before the intervention. After collecting and analysing the questionnaires, it was found that eight students fell into the very low category of self-acceptance. Based on these results, eight students were selected as subjects for group counselling.

In the first session (*recognition/initial writer*), the researcher gathered the eight students in a prearranged location. The session began with an introduction and ice-breaking activities to create a comfortable atmosphere. The researcher explained the purpose of the program and introduced the concept of self-acceptance for students from broken homes, including its common causes and negative psychological, social, and spiritual impacts. The expressive writing therapy technique was also introduced as a method for expressing deep emotions in writing, and it has been proven to help reduce emotional stress. The principles of confidentiality and non-judgmental behaviour within the group were emphasised to foster

trust and encourage openness. This initial session was crucial in building commitment among the students to actively and openly participate in the group counselling process.

In the second session (*examination/writing exercise*), the students were guided to explore emotional experiences related to their struggles with self-acceptance as children from broken homes. Through expressive writing therapy, they were asked to write about events that triggered sadness, anger, anxiety, or feelings of worthlessness. The researcher encouraged them to reflect on both positive and negative life experiences. Worksheets (LKS) were distributed, and students were instructed to write freely without concern for grammar or language rules. The goal was to help them open up and reduce fear or anxiety. This activity provided space for reflection, allowing students to recognise connections between their emotions. The session maintained privacy while focusing on emotions and empathy, helping students understand that emotions can be managed in healthier, more productive ways.

In the third session (*juxtaposition/feedback*), the focus was on developing alternative strategies to manage emotions effectively. After writing their feelings with more profound reflection, students were encouraged to identify new ways of responding to emotional stress, such as confiding in trusted individuals or engaging in positive activities. The researcher asked students to reread their writings to understand better and internalise their thoughts. They then shared their writings and participated in group discussions. The discussions aimed to raise awareness, helping students reshape their behaviours, attitudes, and perspectives toward themselves and their situations. Worksheets were again distributed, prompting students to write about the personal obstacles they faced in achieving self-acceptance. After sharing and discussing these obstacles, another worksheet was given, asking them to write down their future hopes and aspirations.

The group counselling sessions, incorporating expressive writing therapy, were conducted on August 5, 2025. In the final stage, known as *application to oneself*, students were encouraged to apply their new insights in their daily lives. The researcher helped them reflect on what they had learned throughout the sessions, highlighting aspects to improve, change, and maintain. Students were then guided to make a written commitment to personal growth. They wrote personal commitment statements in which they pledged to change specific behaviours and strengthen their self-acceptance. These written commitments served as a guide for their ongoing personal development. The results of the four sessions demonstrated that the application of expressive writing therapy within group counselling was effective in improving students' self-acceptance, providing them with greater emotional resilience, healthier coping strategies, and a stronger sense of self-worth.

Table 1. Score Range

Score Category	Category
> 70	Very High
55–69	High
30–54	Low
< 30	Very Low

The results of the study show that the pretest was conducted to identify the initial description of students' tendencies towards broken homes before they received treatment using the expressive writing technique. A total of 30 students from classes VIII A and VIII B served as the initial population from which the researcher selected samples according to the required criteria. Based on the results from the 30 students, eight students were found to have a high category of broken home tendency. These eight students were then selected to undergo the pretest using the Self-Acceptance Tendency Instrument. This step was taken to achieve the expected results while minimising errors in the assessment process.

Table 2. Pretest Frequency Distribution of Self-Acceptance

Category	Score	Pretest
Very High	> 70	0 (0%)
High	55–69	0 (0%)
Low	30–54	8 (100%)
Very Low	< 30	0 (0%)
Total		8 (100%)

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of the pretest results for students' self-acceptance levels prior to the application of treatment. Based on the data in the table, all respondents (8 students, or 100%) fall into the low category, with scores ranging from 30 to 54. No students were in the very high (>70), high (55–69), or very low (<30) categories. This indicates that before the intervention was implemented, students' overall self-acceptance levels were still low, thus requiring guidance programs or therapy to help improve their self-acceptance. After providing group counselling treatment in four sessions, the respondents were administered the same scale used in the pretest. The results of the posttest can be seen in the following table:

Table 3. Posttest Frequency Distribution of Self-Acceptance

Category	Score	Posttest
Very High	> 70	0 (0%)
High	55–69	8 (100%)
Low	30–54	0 (0%)
Very Low	< 30	0 (0%)
Total		8 (100%)

Based on the results of the pretest and posttest, it can be concluded that there was progress or improvement as a result of group counselling services incorporating the expressive writing therapy technique, leading to an increase in students' self-acceptance. This improvement is evident from the data above, which shows that students' self-acceptance shifted from the low category to the high category. Before testing the hypothesis, prerequisite tests were first conducted using a normality test. The results of the normality testing are described in the following table:

Table 4. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Analysis

Test Statistics ^a	
	Posttest - Pretes
Z	-2.670 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

Table 4 presents the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis, which was used to determine the differences in students' self-acceptance levels between the pretest and posttest scores. Based on the test results, a Z value of -2.670 was obtained with a significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.008. Since the significance value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. Thus, the intervention provided, in this case group counselling with expressive writing therapy, has been proven effective in increasing students' self-acceptance. This finding suggests that expressive writing therapy in group counselling has a significant impact on enhancing self-acceptance.

Table 5. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and Effect Size

Test	Z Value	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Effect Size (r)	Interpretation
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	-2.670	0.008	8	0.94	Very large effect

Table 5 presents the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, along with the effect size (r) to assess the practical significance of the provided intervention. Based on the analysis results, a Z value of -2.670 with Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.008 was obtained, indicating a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the pretest and posttest scores. The sample size (N) was eight students, with a calculated effect size of $r = 0.94$. This value falls into the very large effect category according to Cohen's criteria, indicating that group counselling using expressive writing therapy has a very strong impact on improving self-acceptance among students from broken homes [17]. Thus, these results confirm that the intervention was not only statistically significant but also has high practical significance in the context of students' psychological development.

The research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H0: There is no improvement in self-acceptance among students from broken home families after receiving group counselling services using the expressive writing therapy technique.

Ha: There is an improvement in self-acceptance among students from broken home families after receiving group counselling services using the expressive writing therapy technique.

3.2. Discussion

The research results indicate that group counselling services using the expressive writing therapy technique significantly increase the level of self-acceptance among students from broken home families. Initial data show that all respondents (8 students, or 100%) fell into the low category (scores 30–54) in the pretest, indicating low self-acceptance prior to the intervention. This aligns with previous research showing that children from broken home

families tend to have a higher risk of experiencing emotional stress, low self-esteem, and difficulties in developing self-acceptance [18].

After being given four group guidance sessions using the expressive writing technique, the posttest results showed a significant increase, with all students falling into the high category (scores 55–69). The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis yielded a Z value of -2.670, with a significance level of 0.008 ($p < 0.05$) and an effect size of $r = 0.94$, which, according to Cohen, is considered a very large category [17]. This indicates that the intervention is not only statistically significant but also has a strong practical effect on students' psychological development. These findings support research by Ramadhani & Baroroh, which shows that writing about intense emotional experiences can improve psychological well-being, strengthen self-acceptance, and reduce anxiety [19]. Mordechay et al. also emphasise that expressive writing practices provide therapeutic effects by helping individuals process emotional experiences and enhance self-understanding [20].

In addition to the benefits of expressive writing, the group guidance format also makes a significant contribution to enhancing students' self-acceptance. Group dynamics enable students to share experiences, gain social support, and learn from the experiences of others, ultimately strengthening their self-esteem and emotional resilience [21]. The final stage of the session, which involves applying the insights gained to oneself and making personal commitments, provides students with the opportunity to integrate the insights into their daily lives, aligning with the principles of sustainable behaviour change in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) [22].

The results of this study are also consistent with research that emphasises the importance of psychological interventions based on self-expression for students from broken home families. For example, research by Lindo et al. demonstrates that intervention programs emphasising emotional expression and self-reflection can enhance emotional regulation and self-acceptance in children experiencing family conflicts [23]. Another study by Aldieri also found that group interventions that facilitate expressive writing help adolescents build a more positive self-narrative, enhance psychological resilience, and strengthen adaptive coping skills [24].

Furthermore, research by Jannah shows that low self-acceptance is correlated with an increased risk of depression and maladaptive behaviour in adolescents, making interventions that can enhance self-acceptance have important implications for long-term mental health [25]. In the context of education, improving self-acceptance can support academic achievement, learning motivation, and students' social engagement [26]. Thus, group guidance interventions based on expressive writing are not only effective in a psychological context but also have a positive impact on students' holistic development.

These findings confirm that the combination of group guidance with expressive writing techniques can be an effective alternative to support students from broken home families in developing self-acceptance, emotional resilience, and self-esteem. This intervention also underscores the importance of employing a therapeutic approach that integrates individual reflection, emotional expression, and group interaction, as recommended in the literature on developmental psychology and counselling.

Upon reviewing related literature, several studies were found that discuss topics different from the focus of this research, specifically the self-acceptance of students from broken home families through group guidance services utilising expressive writing therapy. For example, a study by Mianti et al. explored the effectiveness of game-based learning (gamification) on the academic motivation of high school students, which emphasised cognitive engagement and learning strategies, but did not address psychological aspects such as self-acceptance or the impact of family conditions [27]. Nonetheless, the motivational principles derived from the study can provide insights into how non-clinical interventions may influence student development.

Another study by Hadiwinarto evaluated the impact of using interactive digital media on improving students' mathematical literacy skills [28]. The research results indicate an improvement in academic competence through the use of interactive media; however, the focus is on cognitive aspects, rather than affective or emotional ones. This study differs from current research findings, which show that expressive writing therapy is more effective in building self-reflection skills, emotion management, and self-acceptance in students facing family conflicts.

In addition, a study by Latifatma & Arsini investigated the effect of regular exercise on physical well-being and stress levels in adolescents [29]. The results indicate that physical activity has a positive effect on physiological stress; however, they do not examine specific psychological changes, such as self-acceptance or self-esteem. This underscores that psychological interventions focused on emotional reflection, such as group guidance with expressive writing, have a different and more profound impact on students' affective aspects.

Although the journals mentioned above are not directly relevant to this study, the comparison emphasises the uniqueness of the intervention used in this research. The use of expressive writing therapy in the context of group guidance not only focuses on strengthening academic competence or reducing physical stress, but specifically facilitates self-understanding, emotional experience processing, and the enhancement of self-acceptance among students from broken home families. In other words, this study fills a gap that has not been extensively explored in the literature, specifically in the area of non-clinical techniques for fostering self-acceptance in emotionally vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the difference in focus between this research and these irrelevant studies underscores the importance of selecting psychological interventions that align with the goals of students' affective development. The expressive writing-based approach offers a systematic framework for individual reflection that can be applied in group sessions, unlike academic learning strategies or physical health interventions, which often emphasise cognitive or physiological outcomes. Thus, this study makes a specific contribution to the development of counselling services that target self-acceptance and psychological well-being of students from broken home families.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that group counselling services using expressive writing therapy techniques are effective in increasing self-acceptance among students from broken home families. The pretest-posttest results indicated a shift in scores from the low category to the

high category, supported by the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis ($Z = -2.670$; $p = 0.008$) with an effect size of $r = 0.94$, indicating a very large effect. This intervention helps students manage emotions, build psychological resilience, and strengthen self-esteem through reflection and the creation of personal commitments. The practical implication of this research is that expressive writing therapy can be an effective method for school counsellors and psychologists in supporting students' affective development, especially for those facing family challenges. Theoretically, these findings support the notion that emotional expression through writing and group interaction can foster self-understanding and psychological well-being. The study's limitations include a small sample size, a single-group design without a control, a limited intervention duration, and potential subjectivity in self-acceptance assessment. Based on these findings, future research is recommended to use a control group, increase the sample size, extend the intervention duration, conduct long-term follow-ups, and integrate qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the self-acceptance change process.

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