



The Effectiveness of Existential-Humanistic Group Counseling in Enhancing Self-Esteem among Junior High School Students: A Pre-Experimental Study in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem plays a crucial role in adolescents' psychological development, influencing their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. However, many junior high school students experience low self-esteem, which negatively affects their confidence and social adjustment. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of existential-humanistic group counseling in improving students' self-esteem at SMP Pembangun Medan, Indonesia. A quantitative approach employing a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was utilized. Eight students identified as having low self-esteem were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a validated self-esteem questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The findings revealed a substantial increase in students' self-esteem after participating in the counseling program, with the mean score improving from 69.00 during the pretest to 106.13 in the posttest. The statistical analysis indicated a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ($Z = -2.25$; $p < 0.05$), demonstrating the effectiveness of the intervention. These findings suggest that existential-humanistic group counseling provides an effective psychological intervention for fostering adolescents' self-esteem and may serve as an alternative strategy for school counselors in promoting students' personal and social development.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social transformations that significantly influence individuals' psychological well-being and future life outcomes. During this period, adolescents are expected to establish a stable personal identity, develop healthy interpersonal relationships, and build confidence in their abilities while adapting to increasingly complex social and academic demands. One of the most fundamental psychological constructs supporting these developmental processes is self-esteem, which refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth, competence, and self-acceptance (Orth & Robins, 2022). High self-esteem has consistently been associated with greater academic achievement, emotional resilience, effective interpersonal communication, and adaptive coping strategies, whereas low self-esteem contributes to anxiety, depression, loneliness, social withdrawal, poor academic engagement, and various behavioral problems (Neff & Vonk, 2021; Orth & Robins, 2022; Sowislo & Orth, 2023). Consequently, promoting healthy self-esteem has become one of the principal objectives of educational institutions worldwide, particularly as concerns regarding adolescents' mental health continue to increase. Reports published by international organizations indicate that adolescents are increasingly confronted with psychological challenges arising from academic pressure, peer relationships, family expectations, identity development, and the widespread influence of digital technology and social media, all of which substantially shape their perceptions of self-worth and psychological adjustment (WHO, 2024; OECD, 2023). These conditions emphasize the urgent need for schools to implement evidence-based psychological interventions that foster students' personal development alongside their academic success.

The growing concern over adolescents' psychological well-being is equally evident within the Indonesian educational context. Numerous studies have reported that many junior high school students continue to experience low self-confidence, excessive fear of making mistakes, dependence on peer approval, reluctance to express personal opinions, and negative self-evaluation, all of which hinder both academic participation and social adjustment. Such psychological difficulties have become increasingly apparent following rapid technological advancement and the expansion of social media, where adolescents frequently compare themselves with others and become vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth. Consequently, guidance and counseling services are expected to move beyond their traditional remedial function by adopting comprehensive developmental approaches that promote students' emotional maturity, self-awareness, and psychological resilience (Corey, 2021). Within this framework, group counseling has emerged as one of the most effective counseling strategies because it facilitates interpersonal learning, emotional expression, peer acceptance, empathy, and constructive feedback among participants. Unlike individual counseling, group counseling enables students to recognize that their personal struggles are shared by others, thereby reducing feelings of isolation while strengthening social connectedness and confidence (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Numerous empirical investigations have further

demonstrated that structured group counseling significantly improves adolescents' emotional well-being, communication skills, social competence, and self-esteem across diverse educational settings.

Among the various counseling approaches applied in educational environments, existential-humanistic counseling offers unique theoretical and practical advantages for addressing self-esteem problems among adolescents. Rather than focusing exclusively on symptom reduction or behavioral modification, the existential-humanistic perspective emphasizes authenticity, self-awareness, personal freedom, responsibility, meaning-making, and self-actualization as essential components of psychological growth (Schneider et al., 2015; Corey, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant during adolescence because identity exploration, self-discovery, and the search for meaning constitute central developmental tasks at this life stage. Through existential-humanistic group counseling, students are encouraged to openly express their experiences, examine their beliefs and emotions, appreciate their individual uniqueness, and develop authentic relationships with peers. Such therapeutic experiences are expected to foster positive self-acceptance and strengthen students' perceptions of personal competence and self-worth. Recent psychological studies have increasingly emphasized that adolescents' psychological well-being should not merely be understood from the absence of psychological distress but also from the development of positive psychological resources such as self-esteem, resilience, autonomy, and meaningful life engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Orth & Robins, 2022). Consequently, existential-humanistic group counseling represents a promising intervention that aligns with contemporary positive psychology and developmental counseling paradigms.

Despite the expanding body of literature concerning counseling interventions for adolescents, important research gaps remain. Previous empirical studies have predominantly examined the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral counseling, reality therapy, solution-focused counseling, and person-centered approaches in enhancing adolescents' psychological adjustment and self-esteem. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated the application of existential-humanistic group counseling within school settings, particularly among junior high school students in developing countries such as Indonesia. Furthermore, existing studies frequently emphasize behavioral and cognitive outcomes while providing relatively limited attention to existential dimensions, including authenticity, personal responsibility, self-awareness, and meaning construction. These limitations indicate that empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of existential-humanistic counseling in Indonesian educational institutions remains insufficient. Preliminary observations conducted at SMP Pembangunan Medan revealed that several eighth-grade students exhibited characteristics commonly associated with low self-esteem, including reluctance to participate in classroom discussions, fear of making mistakes, dependence on peer acceptance, low confidence when interacting with teachers, and negative perceptions of their academic abilities. These psychological conditions may inhibit students' academic achievement, emotional adjustment, and social

development, thereby highlighting the necessity for effective school-based counseling interventions capable of strengthening adolescents' self-esteem through comprehensive psychological development rather than merely addressing behavioral symptoms.

Based on these considerations, the present study seeks to address both theoretical and practical gaps in the existing counseling literature by examining the effectiveness of existential-humanistic group counseling in enhancing self-esteem among junior high school students in Indonesia. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of existential-humanistic philosophical principles with structured group counseling procedures within the context of Indonesian secondary education, an area that has received limited empirical attention in previous studies. Unlike earlier research that primarily focused on cognitive or behavioral counseling interventions, this study evaluates the extent to which self-awareness, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, personal responsibility, and meaning-making contribute to the development of adolescents' self-esteem. Accordingly, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of counseling psychology by expanding empirical evidence regarding existential-humanistic interventions while simultaneously providing practical recommendations for school counselors in designing evidence-based guidance and counseling programs that promote students' psychological well-being, confidence, emotional maturity, and positive social adjustment. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether existential-humanistic group counseling produces statistically significant improvements in students' self-esteem following participation in structured counseling sessions, thereby offering an alternative intervention model for strengthening adolescents' personal and social development within Indonesian educational settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Studies

The effectiveness of counseling interventions in improving adolescents' self-esteem has received increasing attention from educational psychologists and counseling researchers worldwide. Numerous empirical studies have confirmed that counseling services contribute significantly to students' psychological development, particularly in strengthening self-confidence, emotional regulation, interpersonal competence, and positive self-perception. However, previous findings also indicate that the effectiveness of counseling interventions depends largely on the counseling approach employed and the developmental characteristics of participants.

A recent study by Orth and Robins (2022) emphasized that self-esteem is a dynamic psychological construct that can be strengthened through positive interpersonal experiences and supportive learning environments. Their longitudinal findings demonstrated that adolescents who received continuous psychological support exhibited significantly higher levels of self-esteem and emotional adjustment than those who lacked such support. These findings suggest that educational interventions focusing on positive self-development may effectively enhance adolescents' psychological well-being.

Similarly, Yalom and Leszcz (2020) argued that group counseling provides unique therapeutic factors, including universality, interpersonal learning, emotional catharsis, altruism, and group cohesiveness, all of which facilitate positive psychological growth. Through group interaction, participants recognize that their personal struggles are shared by others, thereby reducing feelings of isolation while increasing confidence and self-acceptance. This theoretical proposition has been supported by several empirical studies indicating that group counseling effectively improves adolescents' emotional functioning and social competence.

Within the Indonesian context, several studies have also demonstrated positive outcomes of counseling interventions for enhancing students' self-esteem. Research published in *Jurnal Konselor*, *Jurnal Kajian Bimbingan dan Konseling*, and other nationally accredited journals reported that structured counseling programs significantly improved students' confidence, communication skills, and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, most of these studies implemented Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Reality Therapy, or Solution-Focused Counseling rather than existential-humanistic counseling. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of existential-humanistic group counseling among Indonesian junior high school students remains limited.

Although previous studies consistently support the effectiveness of counseling interventions in improving adolescents' self-esteem, important research gaps remain. First, relatively few studies have specifically examined existential-humanistic counseling within school settings. Second, existing studies primarily focus on behavioral and cognitive changes while providing limited attention to existential dimensions such as authenticity, personal responsibility, freedom of choice, and meaning-making. Third, empirical investigations conducted in Indonesian junior high schools remain scarce despite increasing concerns regarding adolescents' psychological well-being. Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining whether existential-humanistic group counseling effectively enhances students' self-esteem in the Indonesian educational context.

Theoretical Foundation

Existential-humanistic counseling is a counseling approach that integrates existential philosophy with humanistic psychology to facilitate individuals' psychological growth through self-awareness, authenticity, freedom, responsibility, and meaning-making (Corey, 2021). Unlike cognitive-behavioral approaches that primarily focus on modifying maladaptive thoughts and behaviors, existential-humanistic counseling emphasizes helping individuals understand themselves more deeply and recognize their potential for personal growth.

Within group counseling settings, existential-humanistic principles are implemented through supportive interpersonal interactions that encourage participants to express feelings openly, explore personal experiences, appreciate individual uniqueness, and develop authentic relationships with others. Yalom and Leszcz (2020) explained that therapeutic factors operating within counseling

groups—including universality, altruism, emotional catharsis, interpersonal learning, and group cohesiveness—facilitate psychological development and strengthen participants' self-confidence.

For adolescents, existential-humanistic group counseling is particularly relevant because adolescence represents a developmental period characterized by identity exploration, increasing autonomy, and the search for meaning. Through structured counseling sessions, students become more aware of their personal strengths, accept their limitations, develop self-responsibility, and construct more positive perceptions of themselves. Consequently, this counseling approach is expected to contribute significantly to improving adolescents' self-esteem.

Self-Esteem Theory

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth, competence, and self-acceptance (Orth & Robins, 2022). According to Coopersmith (1967), self-esteem develops through individuals' perceptions regarding their significance, competence, virtue, and personal power. Individuals possessing high self-esteem generally demonstrate confidence, optimism, emotional stability, and effective interpersonal relationships, whereas individuals with low self-esteem tend to experience anxiety, insecurity, social withdrawal, and negative self-evaluation.

Recent psychological research suggests that self-esteem is not a fixed personality trait but rather a dynamic psychological resource that can be developed through supportive social interactions, educational experiences, and psychological interventions (Neff & Vonk, 2021). Consequently, school counseling services play an essential role in fostering students' positive self-perceptions by providing opportunities for emotional expression, self-reflection, and constructive interpersonal experiences.

Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical evidence presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Existential-humanistic group counseling has a positive and statistically significant effect on enhancing self-esteem among junior high school students.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study proposes that Existential-Humanistic Group Counseling serves as the independent variable influencing Students' Self-Esteem as the dependent variable. Through therapeutic processes emphasizing self-awareness, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, personal responsibility, and meaning-making, students are expected to develop more positive self-evaluations, stronger confidence, and healthier psychological adjustment. Consequently, participation in existential-humanistic group counseling is hypothesized to improve students' self-esteem significantly.

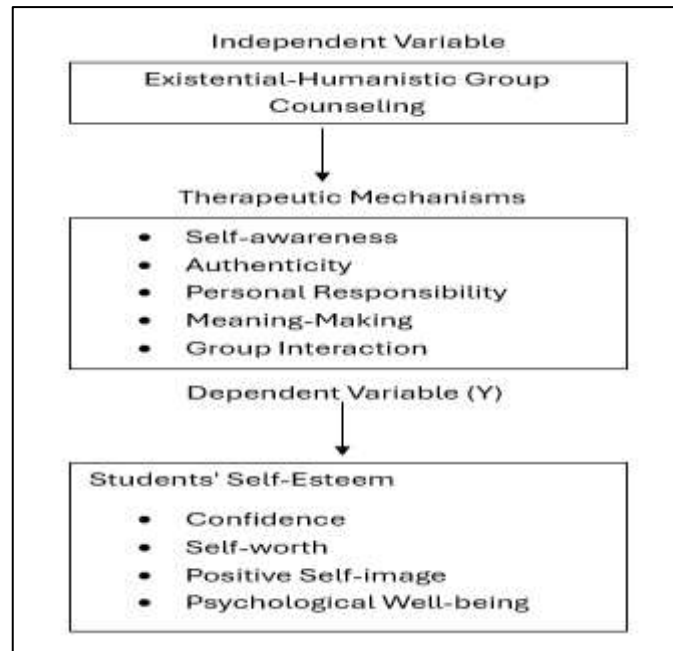


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental research design with a one-group pretest-posttest design to investigate the effectiveness of existential-humanistic group counseling in enhancing students' self-esteem. This design was selected because it allows researchers to measure changes in participants' self-esteem before and after the counseling intervention without involving a comparison group. The design is considered appropriate for evaluating the effectiveness of school-based counseling programs implemented in natural educational settings where random assignment is often impractical (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research was conducted at SMP Pembangun Medan, Indonesia, during the 2013/2014 academic year. The participants consisted of eighth-grade students who were identified as experiencing low levels of self-esteem based on preliminary observations, teachers' recommendations, and the results of an initial self-esteem assessment. A purposive sampling technique was employed because the study specifically targeted students who demonstrated characteristics indicating low self-esteem and therefore required counseling intervention. Based on the selection criteria, eight students were included as research participants.

The independent variable in this study was Existential-Humanistic Group Counseling, while the dependent variable was students' self-esteem. The counseling intervention was designed according to the principles of existential-humanistic counseling proposed by Corey (2021), emphasizing self-awareness, authenticity, personal responsibility, freedom of choice, and meaning-making. The intervention was delivered through structured group counseling sessions conducted by the researcher acting as the counselor. Each counseling session encouraged participants to express personal experiences, reflect on their feelings and beliefs, engage in interpersonal interactions, and develop positive self-

understanding through supportive group dynamics. Throughout the counseling process, therapeutic factors such as empathy, universality, emotional expression, interpersonal learning, and group cohesiveness were facilitated to promote participants' psychological growth.

Data were collected using a self-esteem questionnaire adapted from established self-esteem indicators and modified according to the developmental characteristics of Indonesian junior high school students. Initially, the instrument consisted of 50 statements measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to data collection, the instrument was subjected to validity and reliability testing. Item validity was examined using the Product-Moment Pearson Correlation, while internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The validation results indicated that 35 items met the required validity criteria and were therefore retained as the final research instrument, whereas the remaining items were excluded from further analysis. The reliability coefficient demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, indicating that the questionnaire was appropriate for measuring students' self-esteem.

The research procedure consisted of four sequential stages. First, a preliminary assessment was conducted to identify students exhibiting characteristics of low self-esteem through classroom observations, consultations with school counselors, and administration of the pretest questionnaire. Second, participants completed the pretest to determine their initial levels of self-esteem before receiving the counseling intervention. Third, existential-humanistic group counseling sessions were implemented according to a structured counseling program designed to facilitate self-exploration, emotional expression, interpersonal acceptance, and personal responsibility. Finally, after completing all counseling sessions, participants completed the posttest using the same questionnaire to evaluate changes in self-esteem following the intervention.

Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize participants' self-esteem scores before and after the counseling intervention by calculating minimum scores, maximum scores, means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions. Inferential analysis was performed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, a non-parametric statistical procedure appropriate for analyzing paired observations obtained from small samples that do not necessarily satisfy the assumption of normal distribution (Field, 2018). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between pretest and posttest self-esteem scores. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The research hypothesis was accepted when the probability value ($p < 0.05$) or when the calculated test statistic exceeded the critical value, indicating that existential-humanistic group counseling produced significant improvements in students' self-esteem.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several measures were implemented throughout the research process. The counseling procedures were conducted consistently according to the intervention protocol, participants

received identical treatment during each counseling session, and the same measurement instrument was administered during both the pretest and posttest. Furthermore, participation in the study was voluntary, and ethical considerations were carefully observed by obtaining permission from the school administration, maintaining participants' confidentiality, and ensuring that all research activities complied with educational research ethics. Participants were informed that the collected data would be used exclusively for academic purposes and that their identities would remain anonymous throughout the research and publication process.

RESEARCH RESULT

The research findings are presented according to the sequential stages of the quantitative analysis conducted in this study. The analysis began with the identification of participants, followed by the measurement of students' self-esteem before the intervention, implementation of existential-humanistic group counseling, measurement of self-esteem after the intervention, and hypothesis testing using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. This sequence was designed to determine whether the counseling intervention significantly improved students' self-esteem.

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the results of preliminary observations, teacher recommendations, and the administration of a self-esteem screening questionnaire. Eight eighth-grade students at SMP Pembangun Medan who demonstrated low levels of self-esteem were selected to participate in the counseling program. These students exhibited several characteristics associated with low self-esteem, including reluctance to express opinions during classroom discussions, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence in communicating with teachers and peers, and negative self-evaluation regarding their academic abilities.

Before the counseling intervention was implemented, all participants completed the self-esteem questionnaire to determine their initial psychological condition. The descriptive analysis indicated that the overall level of self-esteem among participants was relatively low.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Self-Esteem Before and After the Intervention

Measurement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Category
Pretest	8	68	71	69.00	1.19	Low
Posttest	8	98	113	106.13	5.82	Moderate

Table 1 shows that the average self-esteem score before the counseling intervention was 69.00, indicating that the participants generally possessed low levels of self-esteem. The relatively small standard deviation ($SD = 1.19$) suggests that participants exhibited similar psychological characteristics before receiving the counseling program.

Following the pretest, participants attended a series of structured existential-humanistic group counseling sessions. The intervention emphasized

self-awareness, authenticity, personal responsibility, freedom of choice, interpersonal acceptance, and meaning-making through interactive group discussions. During the counseling sessions, students were encouraged to share personal experiences, express emotions openly, provide constructive feedback to peers, and reflect upon their strengths and personal values. The counseling process was conducted in accordance with existential-humanistic counseling principles, aiming to facilitate participants' psychological growth and improve positive self-evaluation.

Upon completion of all counseling sessions, participants completed the same self-esteem questionnaire as a posttest. The descriptive statistics revealed a substantial increase in students' self-esteem following the intervention.

Mean Self-Esteem Scores Before and After the Counseling Intervention

Comparison of students' average self-esteem scores measured during the pretest and posttest.

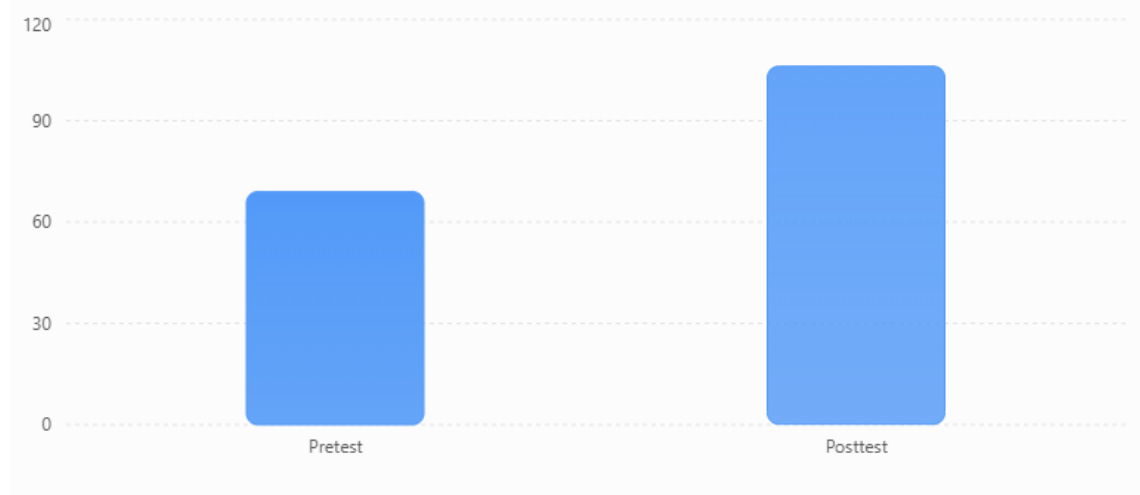


Figure 2. Mean Self-Esteem Scores Before and After the Counseling Intervention

As illustrated in Figure 2, the mean self-esteem score increased from 69.00 during the pretest to 106.13 in the posttest, representing an improvement of approximately 53.8%. This descriptive finding indicates that students demonstrated more positive self-evaluation, greater confidence, and improved psychological adjustment after participating in the existential-humanistic group counseling program. To determine whether the observed improvement was statistically significant, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed because the study involved paired observations from a relatively small sample size. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test demonstrated that the calculated value ($Z = -2.25$) exceeded the critical value ($Z = -1.96$) at the 5% significance level. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, while the research hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. These results indicate that existential-humanistic group counseling produced a statistically significant improvement in students' self-esteem.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that existential-humanistic group counseling significantly enhanced the self-esteem of junior high school students.

The descriptive analysis revealed a substantial increase in participants' self-esteem scores following the counseling intervention, while the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant. These findings indicate that the counseling program successfully facilitated positive psychological changes among the participants. Rather than merely increasing students' confidence temporarily, the intervention appeared to strengthen their overall perception of personal worth, self-acceptance, and confidence in interacting with others. This result supports the fundamental assumption of existential-humanistic counseling that individuals possess the inherent capacity for growth when provided with supportive interpersonal relationships that encourage authenticity, responsibility, and self-awareness (Corey, 2021; Schneider et al., 2015).

One important explanation for these findings lies in the therapeutic characteristics of the existential-humanistic approach itself. Unlike cognitive or behavioral counseling approaches that primarily focus on changing maladaptive thoughts or behaviors, existential-humanistic counseling encourages individuals to understand themselves more deeply, recognize their freedom of choice, accept responsibility for their decisions, and construct meaningful interpretations of their life experiences. During the counseling sessions, participants were encouraged to openly express personal feelings, discuss their experiences without fear of criticism, and receive constructive feedback from other group members. Such experiences enabled students to recognize that their insecurities and personal struggles were shared by others, thereby reducing feelings of isolation while strengthening self-acceptance. This therapeutic process corresponds closely with Yalom and Leszcz's (2020) concept of universality and interpersonal learning, which suggests that positive group interactions facilitate psychological growth through mutual acceptance, empathy, and emotional support.

The present findings are also consistent with contemporary psychological theories emphasizing that self-esteem is not a fixed personality trait but rather a dynamic psychological resource that develops through continuous interaction with the surrounding environment. Orth and Robins (2022) argued that adolescents' self-esteem evolves through repeated experiences of social acceptance, personal achievement, and positive interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2020), through Self-Determination Theory, explained that psychological well-being develops when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Existential-humanistic group counseling addresses these three psychological needs simultaneously by encouraging students to make authentic choices, recognize their personal strengths, and establish meaningful relationships within the counseling group. Consequently, improvements in self-esteem observed in this study can be understood as the cumulative outcome of increased self-awareness, greater emotional acceptance, and more positive interpersonal experiences throughout the counseling process.

The findings of this research further support previous empirical studies investigating counseling interventions for adolescents' psychological development. Several international studies have reported that structured group

counseling significantly improves adolescents' confidence, emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological well-being. Although many previous investigations employed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, Reality Therapy, or Person-Centered Counseling, they consistently concluded that supportive counseling environments contribute positively to adolescents' self-esteem. The present study extends this body of knowledge by demonstrating that existential-humanistic group counseling is equally effective in improving self-esteem among Indonesian junior high school students. Therefore, the findings complement existing evidence by illustrating that positive psychological development can be achieved not only through cognitive restructuring or behavioral modification but also through deeper processes of self-awareness, authenticity, meaning-making, and personal responsibility.

Within the Indonesian educational context, the findings possess important practical implications. Indonesian adolescents frequently experience psychological challenges associated with academic competition, peer acceptance, family expectations, and increasing exposure to social media. These pressures often contribute to negative self-evaluation and reduced confidence during adolescence. The present findings indicate that school counseling services should move beyond remedial approaches focusing solely on behavioral problems and instead implement developmental counseling programs that strengthen students' psychological resources. Existential-humanistic group counseling provides an effective alternative because it facilitates emotional expression, self-reflection, empathy, and constructive interpersonal interaction, all of which are essential components of healthy adolescent development. Consequently, school counselors may integrate existential-humanistic principles into regular guidance and counseling programs to promote students' psychological well-being alongside their academic achievement.

Another important contribution of this study concerns its theoretical implications. Previous Indonesian counseling research has predominantly examined the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions, reality therapy, or solution-focused counseling in improving students' psychological functioning. Comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to existential-humanistic counseling despite its strong philosophical foundation in personal growth and self-actualization. By providing empirical evidence that existential-humanistic group counseling significantly enhances students' self-esteem, this study expands the existing counseling literature and demonstrates that existential-humanistic principles remain highly relevant for contemporary educational settings. The findings also reinforce the proposition that adolescents' self-esteem develops not only through external achievement but also through authentic self-understanding, meaningful interpersonal relationships, and acceptance of personal responsibility.

Despite these valuable contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships with complete certainty. Second, the relatively small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations.

Third, the research was conducted within a single educational institution, meaning that cultural, institutional, and demographic characteristics may differ from those of other schools. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ true experimental or quasi-experimental designs involving larger and more diverse samples across multiple educational settings. Additionally, future researchers may compare existential-humanistic counseling with other evidence-based counseling approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, or Reality Therapy, to determine the relative effectiveness of each intervention in enhancing adolescents' self-esteem.

Overall, the findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that existential-humanistic group counseling constitutes an effective school-based intervention for enhancing adolescents' self-esteem. Through processes emphasizing self-awareness, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, personal responsibility, and meaning-making, students developed more positive self-perceptions and greater confidence in their abilities. Accordingly, existential-humanistic group counseling represents not only an effective counseling strategy for addressing low self-esteem but also a valuable developmental intervention capable of fostering adolescents' long-term psychological well-being and personal growth within educational settings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of existential-humanistic group counseling in enhancing self-esteem among junior high school students at SMP Pembangun Medan. The findings demonstrated that the implementation of existential-humanistic group counseling significantly improved students' self-esteem, as evidenced by the increase in posttest scores compared with the pretest results and confirmed through the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. These findings indicate that the counseling intervention successfully facilitated positive psychological development by encouraging students to develop greater self-awareness, authenticity, personal responsibility, interpersonal acceptance, and confidence in their own abilities.

The results further support the theoretical assumption that existential-humanistic counseling provides an effective developmental approach for strengthening adolescents' positive self-evaluation. Rather than focusing solely on behavioral change, the counseling process enabled participants to explore personal experiences, construct meaningful interpretations of themselves, and establish supportive interpersonal relationships within the counseling group. Consequently, improvements in students' self-esteem reflected not only increased confidence but also enhanced psychological well-being and emotional maturity.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that school counselors should consider integrating existential-humanistic group counseling into regular guidance and counseling programs, particularly for students demonstrating low self-esteem and difficulties in social adjustment. Educational institutions are encouraged to provide structured counseling services that emphasize personal growth, emotional expression, and self-development as essential components of

students' holistic education. Furthermore, educational policymakers may utilize the findings of this study to strengthen comprehensive school counseling programs that promote students' mental health alongside academic achievement.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Although this study provides empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of existential-humanistic group counseling in improving adolescents' self-esteem, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, limiting the ability to establish stronger causal relationships between the counseling intervention and the observed improvements in self-esteem. Second, the relatively small sample size, consisting of only eight participants from a single junior high school, limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Third, the study focused exclusively on self-esteem as the primary outcome variable, without examining other psychological constructs that may also be influenced by existential-humanistic counseling.

Future research is therefore recommended to employ quasi-experimental or true experimental designs involving larger and more diverse samples across multiple educational institutions to improve the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies investigating the relative effectiveness of existential-humanistic counseling and other evidence-based counseling approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Reality Therapy, or Solution-Focused Brief Counseling, would further enrich the counseling literature. In addition, future researchers are encouraged to examine the long-term effects of existential-humanistic group counseling on other aspects of adolescent psychological development, including resilience, emotional intelligence, academic motivation, psychological well-being, interpersonal competence, and life satisfaction. Such investigations will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of existential-humanistic counseling in promoting positive youth development within educational settings.

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