DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP COUNSELING GUIDE WITH RELAXATION, SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION, AND FLOODING TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE INTERACTION ANXIETY

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Abstract

This study aims to develop group counseling guidelines incorporating relaxation techniques, systematic desensitization, and flooding to alleviate anxiety in interactions among junior high school students. The research follows a developmental research model adapted to field conditions, encompassing six stages: (1) planning, (2) product development, (3) expert testing of guidance and counseling materials, media testing, (4) product revision, (5) user testing, and (6) finalization of the group guidance counseling product. The validation of this guide involved four validators, including two material experts, a media expert, and product users. Material expert testing yielded an average score of 3.5 (absolutely appropriate), while the media expert test resulted in an average score of 3.9 (absolutely appropriate), and the product user test obtained an average score of 3.3 (absolutely appropriate). Product revisions were made based on feedback from expert testers, ensuring that the guidebook is considered highly useful, easy to use, precise, interesting, and suitable for counselors to assist students in reducing anxiety during interpersonal interactions. It is important to note that this research is limited to user trials, and counselors are cautioned against implementing the guidelines without further recommendations.

Keywords: group counseling, relaxation techniques, systematic desensitization, flooding, anxiety

Introduction

Issues commonly felt and occurring in students' lives at school include anxiety in social interactions (Padila et al., 2021). Anxiety in interacting with others is characterized by worry, nervousness, and fear when in social situations. This includes concerns about judgment from others, avoiding activities involving meeting and interacting with others, and feeling more comfortable when alone (Rahma, 2022). According to Mallorquí-Bagué et al. (2016), interaction anxiety involves fear and avoidance behaviors when meeting, communicating, and expressing oneself with others. Interaction anxiety, as defined by Hutchins et al. (2021), is "persistent anxiety and fear of one or more social situations or performances in which the individual is exposed to unfamiliar people or potential scrutiny by others." Social interaction anxiety, as described by Knyazev et al. (2016), refers to anxiety in relation to social situations involving a large amount of direct social interaction with others (such as meeting someone new at a party, talking to an interesting person, expressing one's views).

Social anxiety is a hazardous mental disorder, particularly for adolescents. According to the results of the Indonesia National Adolescent Health Survey (I-NAMHS), which measures the incidence of mental disorders in adolescents aged 10 to 17 in Indonesia,

social anxiety disorder is the most prevalent mental disorder among adolescents, affecting 3.7%. This includes anxiety in social interactions, social phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder. Furthermore, major depressive disorder affects 1%, behavioral disorders affect 0.9%, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) each affect 0.5% (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2022).

It is not unlikely that social interaction anxiety is widespread throughout the country, considering that the survey was conducted among adolescents across Indonesia. Therefore, the researchers took the initiative to conduct observations and interviews with students and Guidance and Counseling teachers at State Junior High School 2 Pakisaji, Malang Regency. The results of observations and interviews indicate that seventh-grade students experience anxiety, feelings of worry, and fear when interacting with unfamiliar or less familiar classmates or teachers. Students tend to be quiet when meeting someone new, exacerbated by the perception that it is more challenging to interact than before the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, information obtained from the Guidance and Counseling teachers at the school indicates the difficulty in helping students reduce interaction anxiety due to the lack of supportive media and the large number of students requiring guidance and counseling services at school according to their needs.

The interaction anxiety experienced by students is feared to affect the education process because, in this case, students find it difficult to build social relationships and obtain information related to learning (Cordier et al., 2021). This situation will be disruptive if individuals, including students, experience anxiety in interacting with others because, during their time at school, students are required to establish relationships with their surroundings, including teachers, principals, or other students (Moghaddam Poor & Sepahvand, 2018). Someone who is socially fearful tends to be shy, withdrawn, and lacks skills in interaction, as individuals perceive negative responses in social interactions (Mekuria et al., 2017). This issue can be addressed by school counselors, including providing counseling services with appropriate procedures and techniques, allowing students to resolve their issues and develop optimally.

Therefore, the researchers argue that there is a need to address the issue of social interaction anxiety experienced by students. One suitable counseling method for students to improve their interaction skills is group counseling, defined as a service conducted in a group setting that utilizes the dynamics among members to discuss each member's issues in personal, social, learning, and career fields (Pradesi, 2019). According to Briesch DuBois et al. (2017), the goal of group counseling includes enhancing abilities, talents, attention, and other skills, especially communication. Through group counseling activities, students are prepared to quickly adapt to peers in the group, learn to interact, and communicate within their group (Jeong & Kim, 2017).

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The second technique is systematic desensitization. According to Alang (2020), anxiety can be overcome by guiding individuals to associate deep relaxation when in situations that evoke anxiety. One form of desensitization is flooding. In aversive conditioning, undesired behavior is continuously paired with aversive stimuli to reduce reinforcement for the undesired behavior (Wati et al., 2021).

The reason for using systematic desensitization and flooding techniques in this study is that relaxation techniques are considered insufficient in reducing communication anxiety. Therefore, additional techniques are employed to eliminate and transform negative behaviors into positive ones. With this, the researcher believes that the implementation steps of these three techniques need to be clarified at the beginning. The first step designed by the researcher in the group counseling guide for relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety is to practice relaxation techniques first by (1) Making the counselees comfortable by asking them to wear comfortable clothing before conducting group counseling, (2) Creating a comfortable environment, (3) Providing examples of relaxation exercises. After the relaxation technique is administered, the counselor will evaluate the results. If the relaxation technique has successfully reduced anxiety, the group counseling process can be concluded. However, if not, the counselor will instruct the next technique, which is systematic desensitization.

The steps of systematic desensitization in the group counseling guide involve assisting group members in analyzing the behavior that triggers interaction anxiety, writing it down, and analyzing it. The counselor then explains the scenario that makes the counselee feel anxious and guides them to eliminate the behavior that triggers interaction anxiety. After the systematic desensitization technique is administered, the counselor will evaluate the results. If the systematic desensitization technique has successfully reduced anxiety, the group counseling process can be concluded. However, if not, the counselor will instruct the next technique, which is flooding.

The flooding technique can be carried out gradually and with direct situations. For example, with interaction anxiety, starting by encouraging counselees to interact directly

with one person, then gradually increasing to two people until all group members are involved. After the systematic flooding technique is administered, the counselor will evaluate the results. If the flooding technique has successfully reduced anxiety, the group counseling process can be concluded. However, if not, the counselor will instruct to repeat the flooding technique. These are the steps designed by the researcher, later compiled into a training guide for counselors. The development of this training guide is done because the researcher has not found a guide suitable for students with interaction anxiety characteristics. Additionally, counselors greatly need this guide as their task is to work towards resolving issues experienced by students.

Based on the various reviews above, the counselor's need for a group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety with others in students is highly essential. This is the basis for conducting this research.

Method

This developmental research was descriptive, following procedural steps to create a guide. The development process aligned with Borg and Gall's procedures, with slight modifications by the researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The population comprised junior high school counselors in Malang Regency, with the selected sample being State Junior High School 2 Pakisaji in Malang Regency. This selection was made because counselors needed this guide, and students experienced communication anxiety. Three instruments were used in this research: a need assessment to determine if counselors required a guide; the results of the need assessment indicated that counselors needed a guide. Subsequently, the researcher created a group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety. The second instrument was used to test the validity of the prototype guide, tested by subject matter and Guidance and Counseling media experts. The researcher calculated the average value to determine if the prototype guide was valid or not, with an interpretation scale ranging from very disagree/absolutely inappropriate/totally unacceptable (0-1), disagree/inappropriate/unacceptable (1.01–2), agree/appropriate/acceptable (2.01–3), to strongly agree/absolutely appropriate/totally unacceptable (3.01–4). The third instrument was an interaction anxiety instrument used by counselors to identify students with high interaction anxiety levels, allowing the counselor to provide group counseling services using relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques. Indicators of the interaction anxiety instrument included (Thompson et al., 2019): (1) Disruption of daily activities, (2) Experienced emotional pressure, (3) Avoidant behavior. As the main focus of this research was product development, the researcher adapted Thompson et al.'s (2019) research instrument titled "Evaluation of The Social Phobia Scale and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale as Assessments of Performance and Interaction Anxiety," considering its proven validity and reliability.

The research and development model consisted of the following steps: Stage I - Planning by identifying the research problem and potential, conducting literature reviews, and performing a need assessment. The output of this stage was the research introduction containing the rationale for the study and the need for training guide development. Stage II - Product development by structuring the content of the group counseling book with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques. The output was a prototype training guide ready for validity testing by validators. The researcher also developed an assessment instrument for the prototype guide for validators in this stage. Stage III - Product testing involving validators with expertise in Guidance and Counseling

subject matter and media. In this stage, the researcher received ratings and written feedback as revisions for the developed prototype. After revising the prototype, the researcher obtained a scientifically valid Guidance and Counseling guide tested by validators. Stage IV - User product testing. The valid product was then handed over to counselors at State Junior High School 4 Pasrepan Satu Atap, Pasuruan Regency, to determine whether the training guide could be used for junior high school students in general. In this stage, the researcher received ratings and feedback, which were subsequently used for revision by product users to assess whether the developed product was applicable in the field. Due to time constraints, the researcher only conducted the development procedure until the user testing stage, without proceeding to limited field testing.

Result and Discussion

The results of the trial for the development of a group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety among junior high school students were conducted in two stages. The first stage involved testing by counseling experts, and the second stage included testing by potential product users (school counselors). The goal of involving expert testers was to assess the guide's appropriateness, usefulness, ease of use, and attractiveness of content. The researcher made revisions to the product/guide based on feedback from the expert testers, making the product suitable for use. Here are the detailed results of the expert testing:

a. Material Expert Judgment

The evaluation was conducted through direct discussions and a questionnaire for expert content assessment. Two experts were appointed to assess the content. The results of expert evaluations 1 and 2 for the development of a group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety among junior high school students received an average score of 3.3 and 3.7, falling into the category of very useful, very easy, absolutely appropriate, and very attractive.

Table 1. Material Expert Judgment

	Appropriateness	Usefulness	Easiness	Attractiveness	Total Score
Material Expert Judgment 1	3.2	3.6	3.0	3.5	3.3
Material Expert Judgment 2	3.6	4.0	3.5	4.0	3.7

b. Media Expert Judgment

The evaluation was conducted using direct discussions and a questionnaire for the assessment by media experts. According to the media experts, the media expert evaluation results for the development of the group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety among junior high school students obtained an average score of 3.9, falling into the category of very useful, very easy, absolutely appropriate, and very attractive.

Table 2. Media Expert Judgment

	Appropriateness	Usefulness	Acceptableness	Feasibility	Total score
Material Expert Judgement 1	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.9

c. Product User Test

     User Product Test Evaluation was conducted by the Guidance and Counseling teacher at State Junior High School 4 Pasrepan Satu Atap, Pasuruan Regency. According to the product user evaluator, the user product test results for the development of the group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety in junior high school students were quite good, obtaining an average score of 3.3, falling into the category of very useful, very easy, absolutely appropriate, and very attractive.

Table 3. Product User Test

	Appropriateness	Usefulness	Easiness	Attractiveness	Total skor
Material Expert Judgment 1	3.2	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.3

     This research resulted in a group counseling guidebook with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety in junior high school students. The structure includes an introduction, table of contents, Chapter 1 (rationale, methods used, counseling stages, group counseling objectives, development objectives, targets, expected competencies, service scenarios), Chapter 2 guide procedures (general instructions, specific instructions, implementation procedures, example verbatim), Chapter 3 (evaluation procedures, evaluation instruments, evaluation instrument analysis guidelines), Chapter 4 conclusion, and finally, a bibliography.

     The benefits of creating this group counseling guidebook with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques are to assist students with high interaction anxiety. The advantages of developing this guidebook for reducing interaction anxiety with others in junior high school students include facilitating counselors in providing services to students as an alternative way to convey information about group counseling guidance services with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce interaction anxiety. It also helps students take clear steps and serves as a reference to enhance knowledge in reducing interaction anxiety with others.

     This guide can be considered ready for use by counselors as it has undergone validation by subject matter and guidance and counseling media experts, as well as potential users. The researcher developed this guide in response to counselors' needs for students experiencing social interaction anxiety, which includes physical, behavioral, and cognitive anxiety reactions during social interactions (Padila et al., 2021).

     Individuals with social interaction anxiety tend to avoid social situations, fearing negative evaluations from others (Primasari, 2015). This negative evaluation is seen as a possibility and certainty (Malaon, 2022). There are four fundamental skills in interaction: (1) mutual understanding, (2) precise and clear communication of thoughts, (3) mutual acceptance or assistance, and (4) conflict resolution and interpersonal problem-solving. These basic interaction skills can pose obstacles to communication (Asrori, 2015). Students with interaction anxiety may not necessarily lack academic abilities, but deficiencies in communication skills can impact their academic performance.

     To address interaction anxiety, group counseling methods are employed, involving a dynamic interpersonal relationship process that serves a therapeutic function within a small group aiming to assist individual development (Undar, 2021). The issues discussed in group counseling encompass individual problems arising within the group, covering various areas of guidance such as personal, social, learning, and career guidance. The assumption in this study is that group counseling involves an interactive process among adolescents, leading to feedback, learning processes, and the practice of new behaviors, expressing emotions, offering attention and assistance, and providing opportunities to

learn social skills. Group counseling is expected to help students quickly adapt to their group peers, enhancing interaction and communication skills. The advantage of group counseling procedures lies in aiding the social development of counselees and their ability to engage in social interactions within the group (Loekmono, 2018). When individuals are in a group, social abilities and skills become essential.

This guide also has its limitations because it only reaches the user product testing phase, involving school counselors. Therefore, this guidebook cannot yet be used to provide services or treatment to counselees or students. To determine the effectiveness of the group counseling guide with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques for reducing social interaction anxiety among middle school students, field testing should be conducted with students.

Conclusion

The development consists of a set of group counseling guides with relaxation, systematic desensitization, and flooding techniques to reduce social interaction anxiety among middle school students. It includes an introduction, implementation procedures, evaluation, and conclusion. Based on the assessments of subject matter experts, media experts, and product users, it is concluded that the developmental product is quite feasible and has met the requirements for acceptance both theoretically and practically in terms of usefulness, accuracy, ease, and attractiveness. Future researchers are expected to create more engaging guidebooks to reduce social interaction anxiety, providing varied and appealing services to students, aiming to capture their interest and enthusiasm in participating in group counseling activities at school. It is hoped that subsequent researchers can conduct field tests on this guide to determine its effectiveness in reducing social interaction anxiety among middle school students, enabling its widespread use.

Acknowledgments

Author Contributions Statement

In this article, EKWS, as the first author, took on the roles of writing, analyzing data, translating its results, and discussing the findings. Meanwhile, LL, as the second author, played a part in studying the introduction, emphasizing the topic's significance, compiling the article comprehensively, and submitting it.

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