

## THOUGHT STOPPING TECHNIQUE GROUP COUNSELING TO REDUCE ACADEMIC ANXIETY

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### Abstract

The large number of students who experience academic anxiety and the challenges they face in completing their final assignments are the impetus for conducting this research. Students who feel academic anxiety or also called academic anxiety due to lack of confidence in their abilities in carrying out academic activities, are generally motivated by several factors such as the desire to graduate on time, high parental expectations, and pressure from supervisors. The aim of this research is to reduce academic anxiety in final year students by using thought stopping strategies in group counseling. Purposive sampling is used in the pre-experimental design quantitative research methodology which has a one-group pre-test-post-test design pattern. Seven students with high levels of academic anxiety will be research participants. They will receive treatment in the form of group counseling using thought stopping techniques. Four sessions were held to conduct this research. T-Test statistical samples with SPSS For Windows Version 26.0 statistical software were used in the data analysis procedure. The findings of this study show the effectiveness of thought stopping strategies in group counseling to reduce academic anxiety. The acceptance of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) is indicated by the results of the Paired Sample T-Test analysis which produces a significant probability value (2-tailed)  $< 0.05$ . It was found that after the final students underwent group counseling treatment using the thought stopping technique, there was a significant reduction in anxiety levels.

**Keywords:** anxiety academic, group counseling, thought stopping

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### Introduction

Academic anxiety often appears in final students, such as fear of meeting the supervisor, fear of making mistakes in doing the final assignment, nervousness when waiting for guidance, anxiety when asked by the supervisor, difficulty in managing time, difficulty in determining research subjects and references, difficulty in focus, wanting to graduate on time and pressure from the environment (parents and friends) (Putri, 2013). Final students are those who are at the end of their studies and must complete their final assignment or thesis within the specified time period in order to graduate. The final assignment is a scientific paper which is a requirement for obtaining a bachelor's degree (S1) which must be completed by final students in researching, analyzing problems that occur in people's lives according to the provisions. Final students will experience obstacles and problems in working on their thesis. The problems faced by final students are based on academic and non-academic aspects. Academic problems include students' difficulties in identifying research subjects, references, lack of communication with supervisors, and pressure to graduate on time. On the other hand, non-academic problems originate from the individual and his environment. This includes procrastination, poor

time management, difficulty focusing, and family pressure, especially from parents (Abdullah, Sarirah, & Lestari, 2017).

Anxiety is a normal thing that humans feel and is part of life. Humans experience anxiety because they are confused and afraid of the future. Anxiety is felt when individuals think that something bad will happen. Academic anxiety is anxiety caused by doubts about one's potential in overcoming academic obligations (Prawitasari, 2012). Academic stress is the main problem towards success in the academic field which must receive full attention from various parties (Sinaga, 2022). Students who are afraid of receiving bad treatment when meeting with lecturers are those who have experienced negative treatment, such as rejection, criticism, or objections from their supervisors. Anxiety arises when students experience fear, anxiety, and restlessness whose source is unknown. As a result of anxiety, symptoms arise, for example avoiding friends, difficulty focusing on the activities being carried out, reduced appetite, irritability, difficulty controlling emotions, illogical thinking, difficulty sleeping. Other symptoms as a result of anxiety arise in the form of psychosomatic disorders, for example shortness of breath, fast heartbeat, cold sweat and nausea (Jarnawi, 2020).

According to Holmes (in Nursilawati, 2010) the characteristics of anxiety are divided into four components. Firstly, Mood (psychological), psychologically, those who experience anxiety will feel anxious, alert, afraid, restless and insecure. In such circumstances, individuals will become irritable and angry, ending in depression. Second Cognitive, In terms of cognitive function, people with anxiety will worry about unknown problems and feel nervous. People will have difficulty concentrating, be afraid to make decisions, and have difficulty remembering things. Third, Somatic, related to somatic reactions (body reactions), people who experience anxiety will show two things: short-term symptoms (such as sweating, fast heartbeat, dizziness, and tense muscles) and long-term symptoms (such as increased blood pressure, fast heartbeat which causes the pulse to beat faster, and dizziness which causes fainting). Fourth, individual motor abilities, the person shows unusual motor behavior, such as stuttering speech, shaking hands, and rushing to do tasks (Nursilawati, 2010).

Counselors at universities play an important role in helping to prepare and resolve problems, so that preventive and curative support can be achieved and the anxiety problems that plague final year students will be resolved or never arise. The important role of counselors at universities is in creating guidance and counseling services to improve students' ability to predict the formation of academic stress within themselves by paying attention to academic pressure (Sinaga, 2022). There are several service strategy options that can be used, including group counseling services using the thought stopping method (Wilding, 2015). Guidance counseling offers group counseling as one of its services. Group counseling is a type of therapy where clients have the opportunity to discuss their problems and find solutions by utilizing group dynamics. Apart from emphasizing interpersonal communication by including ideas, feelings, and behavior with an emphasis on current and existing conditions, group therapy helps people prevent or correct problems in their personal, social, academic, and career domains (Susanti, 2015).

One of the techniques from the Cognitive-Behavior Therapy approach is Thought Stopping. Cognitive behavior addresses mental processes and moods to solve emotional and behavioral problems. Saying "STOP" and replacing negative thoughts with positive ones is a strategy known as "Thought stopping" which helps correct self-destructive negative thoughts (Sutriyani, 2020). Thought-disengaging techniques are components of behavioral strategies intended to improve thinking. Individual thought patterns have the power to influence behavior change. Thought breaking techniques are part of the behavioral approach used to help improve thinking processes (Nasution, 2011). The aim of the thought stopping approach is to help people manage disturbing anxiety, overcome

negative or maladaptive ideas that often arise, and overcome phobias and obsessive thoughts (Hidayati, 2015).

The results of research regarding the thought stopping technique are effective in reducing the anxiety of students who are doing their final assignments (Sari, 2021). The results of research related to thought stopping techniques combined with cognitive restructuring techniques were carried out in effective group counseling services to reduce student bullying behavior (Selvia, 2017). Other research results regarding the success and effectiveness of approaches for anxiety disorders include updated empirical evidence that explains the findings of various studies on cognitive behavioral approaches to reduce anxiety disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive anxiety disorder, anxiety due to panic, social anxiety, anxiety disorders in general. (Antonia, 2015).

The findings in the field include academic anxiety that often appears in final students, such as fear of meeting the supervisor, fear of making mistakes in doing the final assignment, nervousness when waiting for guidance, anxiety when asked by the supervisor, difficulty managing time, difficulty in determining research subjects and references, difficulty focusing, wanting to graduate on time and pressure from the environment (parents and friends). Implementation of group counseling services using thought stopping techniques is able to help final students to reduce academic anxiety in their final assignments. This research is in line with other research related to Cognitive Behavioral with Self-Talk Techniques in effective group counseling services to reduce final semester students' anxiety in completing their thesis (Savitri, 2023).

Based on the problems that occur, the aim of this research is to reduce academic anxiety in final students through group counseling using thought stopping techniques. It is hoped that this research can broaden understanding regarding the implementation of group counseling services using thought stopping techniques, especially in helping students not to experience academic anxiety when preparing their final assignments.

## Method

This research uses a pre-experimental quantitative approach with a one-group pre-test post-test design. The one-group pre-test post-test design is a research design that includes a group of respondents who are given a pre- and post-test (Abdullah, 2022). Only one group of respondents, namely the experimental group, was included in this design, and they received a pre-test, treatment and post-test.

**Table.1** Research Method Design

<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Posttest</i>
O1	X	O2

Information :

O1 = Pre-Test Value (Before treatment is given)

X = Treatment (Group Counseling Services with Thought Stopping Techniques)

O2 = Post-Test Value (After being given treatment)

This research uses an affordable population of 45 students who are completing their final assignments with a research sample of 7 people. The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling, namely a sample selection method based on certain criteria, namely students with high levels of academic anxiety (Abdullah K., 2022). Providing group counseling services using the thought stopping technique was carried out in 4 meetings on the topic of Academic Anxiety. At the first meeting build good relationships and identify problems, then at the second meeting set specific goals and explore the potential of the counselee, at the third meeting build solutions, then at the

fourth meeting identify new behavior changes and carry out evaluations with 30 minutes at each meeting.

The instrument used in data collection in this research was the academic anxiety scale. Indicators of academic anxiety consist of the psychological aspect "I feel worried when facing the final semester", the cognitive aspect "I feel confused when faced with the supervisor's thoughts", the somatic aspect "I feel my heart beat faster (nervous) when asking questions to the lecturer supervisor regarding the continuation of the final assignment", motor aspect "I sweat when asked questions regarding the final assignment".

The scale used in this research consists of 25 items using the Likert Summating Rating Scale method with four answer choices for each statement, namely: Strongly agree (SS), Agree (S), Disagree (TS) and Strongly Disagree (STS). Based on the results of the validity and reliability test of the academic anxiety scale using the total item correlation in this test, it ranges from 0.375 to 0.599 and the results of the scale reliability test obtained a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.769. The data analysis method used in this research is the Paired Sample T-Test with the SPSS For Windows Versions 26.0 statistical program.

## Result and Discussion

The graphical results of the comparison of pre-test and post-test results in table 2 show that the pre-test score is  $549 \geq 364$  post-test score. This shows a decrease in academic anxiety in final students before and after being treated with group counseling services using the thought stopping technique.

**Table.2** Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

No.	Name	Pre-Test Results	Type	Post-Test Results	Type	Improvement	
						Mark	%
1	AA	77	High	56	Low	21	11%
2	AK	78	High	52	Low	26	14%
3	AT	81	High	50	Low	31	17%
4	CP	79	High	53	Low	26	14%
5	FH	76	High	44	Low	32	17%
6	SR	80	High	54	Low	26	14%
7	YA	78	High	55	Low	23	12%
Total		549		364		172	108%
Average						26,42857143	26%
Minimum						21	11%
Maximum						32	17%

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the seven subjects experienced a decrease in academic anxiety with different value differences. From the results of the pre-test and post-test scores, group members stated that there was a decrease in the level of academic anxiety in final students who had been given treatment in the form of group counseling with thought stopping techniques by 26%. Then hypothesis analysis was carried out using the Paired Sample T-Test with the SPSS For Windows Versions 26.0 statistical program.

**Table.3** Paired Sample T-Test Results  
Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<b>PRE TEST</b>	78.4286	7	1.71825	0,64944
<b>POST TEST</b>	52.0000	7	4.04145	1.52753

	Paired Samples Test				t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Paired Differences							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
<b>PRE TEST – POST TEST</b>	26.42857	3.95209	1.49375	22.77349	30.08365	17.693	6	.000

Based on the calculation results in table 3, it shows that the significance value (2-tailed) is less than 0.05. The mean or average value of the post-test score is 52.00, which is smaller than the pre-test score of 78.42. This shows that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test. Thus, it can be said that final students who received treatment in the form of group counseling using the thought stopping technique experienced a decrease in their level of academic anxiety.

A student is someone who is studying or undergoing higher education, be it academic, polytechnic, institute, high school or university. Every university, whether private or state, will certainly have scientific work produced by students before leaving the campus. In a university setting, the final assignment or scientific work given by students to their university is in the form of a thesis (Papilaya, 2013).

Academic anxiety often appears in final students, such as fear of meeting the supervisor, fear of making mistakes in doing the final assignment, nervousness when waiting for guidance, anxiety when asked by the supervisor, difficulty in managing time, difficulty in determining research subjects and references, difficulty in focus, wanting to graduate on time and pressure from the environment (parents and friends). Based on the problems that occur, the aim of this research is to reduce academic anxiety in final students through group counseling using thought stopping techniques. It is hoped that this research can broaden understanding regarding the implementation of group counseling services using thought stopping techniques, especially in helping students not to experience academic anxiety when preparing their final assignments.

The application of the thought stopping technique attempts to stop thoughts because a person's beliefs and thoughts can sometimes cause detrimental actions. This technique is often used to change negative ideas into positive ideas. Positive thoughts will lead to positive behavior, which can help reduce worry due to anxiety and negative thinking. The thought stopping technique was used in group counseling services in this study for four sessions. Seven group members were sampled and one group leader/experimenter supervised the implementation of the service. The implementation of group counseling services using thought stopping techniques was carried out in 4 sessions on the topic of Academic Anxiety problems with the task of developing the influence of group counseling services using thought stopping techniques to reduce academic anxiety in final students.

The pre-test and post-test results decreased, with a minimum value of 11% while the maximum value was 17%, according to the results of the data processing that had been completed. The experimenter, who was the group leader, helped students think less negatively by asking them to name any negative thoughts they might have and then asking them to "stop" as soon as they did. By using this thought stopping method, you can manage negative thoughts, reduce anxiety, increase self-confidence, and not give up easily. Academic anxiety can be reduced in students by stopping for a moment and replacing their negative thoughts with positive thoughts. This can increase motivation and help students' anxiety levels.

This research shows that final students who are writing their final assignments experience academic anxiety which comes from their negative thoughts "whether they will

be able to do the final assignment, be able to graduate on time, get a good supervisor, be able to find a research subject". The academic anxiety that occurs can be reduced if they are able to manage and change negative thoughts into positive thoughts. This research concludes that the lower a student's ability to manage negative thoughts regarding the final assignment, the higher the academic anxiety they experience. On the other hand, the higher a student's ability to manage negative thoughts regarding the final assignment, the lower the academic anxiety they experience. This finding is in line with previous research in the Long-term effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy for youth with anxiety disorder. CBT therapy has shown beneficial results in adolescents with anxiety disorders in the long term. The results in this study were the disappearance of all symptoms when diagnosed with anxiety and there was no significant difference between anxiety recovery carried out in groups and individually (Kodal, 2018).

Furthermore, other research modified CBT by involving parents or family in the treatment process (James, 2018). Previous research has identified Cinematherapy and thought stopping techniques to reduce social anxiety, in social interactions, not all individuals feel safe and comfortable, but there are those who have feelings of anxiety, fear or worry about the surrounding environment which is called social anxiety. The Cognitive Behavioral Approach will help individuals to rebuild thought patterns (attitudes, assumptions and beliefs), test thought patterns, decide what is useful and what is not useful for the individual (Thahir, 2018). This thought stopping technique is also used as therapy for HIV/AIDS sufferers who experience anxiety. HIV/AIDS sufferers can detect negative thoughts that cause stress, then they can be stopped and their anxiety can decrease (Hidayati, 2015).

The findings in this research have several important implications, both for experimenters or counselors as information and for readers to reduce academic anxiety by implementing group counseling services using thought stopping techniques in completing final assignments. To reduce academic anxiety, the way to do this is to have high motivation because according to research findings, motivation and academic anxiety are significantly correlated. The drive to learn increases as the level of academic anxiety decreases. On the other hand, students will be more motivated to study when their academic worries are reduced (Vivin, 2019). There are two factors, namely internal and external factors, which have an impact on students' success in completing their education. Motivation to complete a final assignment is an internal factor that comes from within the individual. This is a very powerful component because the person who prepares and executes the success plan is the one who controls it. Facilities and a supportive atmosphere are examples of external influences, as is the availability of adequate references and support from parents and friends (Winardi, 2014).

This research has several limitations and still has several things that need to be improved, such as the small number of samples, only using one group, namely the experimental group, and not evenly distributed in each department. And it is hoped that future researchers can provide a control group in the research.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of group counseling services using the thought stopping technique is effective in reducing academic anxiety in final students. It is hoped that students will be able to stop negative thoughts and then change these negative thoughts into positive thoughts. Based on the research results, it showed that each subject experienced a decrease in their scores between before and after being given group counseling treatment using the thought stopping technique.

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## Author Contributions Statement

Each author had a defined role and provided a comprehensive contribution to the research.

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