



## ENHANCING SELF-EFFICACY AND ASSERTIVENESS AMONG STUDENTS EXPERIENCING ACADEMIC ANXIETY THROUGH COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING-BASED GROUP COUNSELING

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### Abstract

Self-efficacy is a crucial factor in supporting individuals' success during the learning process. Students who believe in their own potential tend to achieve optimal performance. Assertiveness is also an important factor in developing effective interpersonal relationships. In the pursuit of academic and non-academic achievement, students are often confronted with challenges such as anxiety. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling using cognitive restructuring in enhancing self-efficacy and assertiveness among students of SMPN 11 Kota Magelang who experience academic anxiety. This study employed a quasi-experimental method with a pretest-posttest design and involved 18 students selected through purposive sampling. The results of data analysis demonstrated an increase in both variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that cognitive restructuring-based group counseling is effective in enhancing students' self-efficacy and assertiveness.

**Keywords:** : *self-efficacy, assertiveness, group counseling, cognitive restructuring, academic anxiety.*

### Introduction

Self-efficacy is a crucial factor in supporting individual success during the learning process. Students who believe in their potential tend to achieve optimal performance. Conversely, students who lack confidence in their abilities often become trapped in doubt and depend on others. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief or confidence in their ability to organize, perform a task, achieve a goal, produce something, and implement actions to demonstrate certain skills. Student self-efficacy is also influenced by various factors, one of which is the role of the teacher. According to Florina (2019), teachers can convince students of their abilities so that students have confidence during the learning process. The approach taken by teachers to improve student self-efficacy aims to produce students who can improve themselves and reflect on their weaknesses during the learning process. In line with this, Arcoverde (2022) explains that teacher education programs should aim to improve students' self-regulation skills and strengthen self-efficacy-based learning strategies. Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence in themselves, demonstrated by their ability to successfully complete a specific task. Meanwhile, Liu (2024) mentioned the importance of individuals having self-efficacy beliefs and their impact in predicting student success. Furthermore, developing an individual's social environment to enhance their self-efficacy can improve their ability to build and maintain new relationships. Furthermore, Deniz (2021) argued that individuals

who build successful social relationships may prefer to fulfill these needs less in virtual environments.

Assertiveness is also a crucial factor in building effective interpersonal relationships. Improving or acquiring socio-emotional skills contributes to academic and personal adaptation. The way students think about themselves and others influences their social skills and psychological well-being. Students with high self-efficacy and assertiveness tend to have a strong belief in their competence, which supports academic achievement and positive interpersonal relationships. Sousa (2021) explains that they are able to express their opinions openly and reject factors that interfere with their academic achievement. Low levels of assertiveness impact self-esteem, leading to anxiety and depression. According to Hamraoui (2023), the importance of recognition and appreciation can improve psychological well-being. Furthermore, if necessary, assertiveness training can boost self-confidence. This training helps individuals better cope with stress, increase self-confidence, express ideas and emotions logically, reduce anxiety, and strengthen social relationships, according to Lestari (2020).

In their efforts to achieve academic and non-academic achievements, students often face challenges such as anxiety. Anxiety can cause confusion and perceptual distortions, which disrupt the learning process by reducing concentration, memory, and the ability to connect information. Some obstacles in learning negatively impact both learning and exam preparation, causing anxiety and demotivation. Cakmak (2023) explains that individuals experiencing anxiety often have difficulty expressing their feelings, opinions, or desires clearly. They tend to comply with others' requests even when they do not align with their own desires. This is in line with Patra and Levi's (2023) statement that teacher feedback significantly impacts students' anxiety levels. Identifying students' anxiety is necessary to reduce the cumulative effects of anxiety.

Data obtained from the schools that were the subjects of the study showed that 48.82% of students experienced learning problems, 46.85% personal problems, 23.56% social problems, and 17.35% career problems. The main problems faced by students were academic anxiety (60.10%), laziness in learning (30.55%), fatigue and lack of enthusiasm (36.45%), difficulty mastering the subject matter (31.25%), and drowsiness while studying (30.05%). These data indicate that many students feel anxious about their academics at school, resulting in a lack of confidence in their abilities, which impacts academic achievement.

Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers play a crucial role in improving students' self-efficacy and assertiveness through group counseling services aimed at helping group members solve life's problems through interpersonal support and problem-solving, as well as developing coping skills for the future. Cognitive-behavioral group therapy is effective in improving self-efficacy and assertiveness in students experiencing anxiety. Cognitive Restructuring techniques, as part of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), help replace negative thoughts with more rational and adaptive ones. Cognitive Restructuring involves applying learning principles to the mind, with the goal of replacing negative thoughts with more positive ones. According to Erford (2016), this technique is based on the assumption that irrational thoughts and unhealthy cognitions result in negative behavior, and changes in cognitions can alter those behaviors. Meanwhile, Kerkeni (2024) explains that CBT can help individuals reduce anxiety levels. On the other hand, interventions conducted using Cognitive Restructuring techniques in group counseling along with self-instruction are effective in improving self-efficacy. According to Anggita (2021), this demonstrates the importance of guidance and counseling in developing service utilization when dealing with low student self-efficacy. Furthermore, Maulidia (2021) states that CBT is also effective in improving assertive behavior. Furthermore, Setiyowati (2023) explains the effectiveness of group counseling using the Cognitive

Restructuring technique, which has been proven effective in increasing student self-confidence.

Although numerous studies have examined self-efficacy, assertiveness, anxiety, and CBT interventions separately, several issues remain unanswered. These include: Existing studies tend to focus on one or two variables (e.g., CBT for self-efficacy or CBT for assertiveness). There is limited research integrating self-efficacy, assertiveness, and academic anxiety into a single intervention, particularly in the context of group counseling in schools. While CBT and Cognitive Restructuring are known to be effective for general anxiety, their specific effectiveness in addressing academic anxiety, which impacts students' low self-efficacy and assertiveness in schools, needs further study. School data indicates that more than 60% of students experience academic anxiety, but no studies have directly tested Cognitive Restructuring interventions in group counseling to address specific issues (laziness, fatigue, difficulty mastering material). Further research is needed to address the cognitive-behavioral processes that change during intervention, as well as the role of group dynamics in reinforcing these changes. Thus, there is a gap between knowledge about the effectiveness of CBT for each variable (self-efficacy, assertiveness, academic anxiety) and the need for integrated and contextualized interventions in schools, particularly based on specific data on academic anxiety and student learning difficulties. Research on this topic would be highly relevant to strengthening the role of guidance counselors in addressing student issues holistically.

## Method

This study employed a pre-experimental method with a pretest-posttest design. This design involves administering pretests and posttests to pre-formed groups. The researcher administered both the experimental and control treatments to the entire group, beginning with a pretest to all groups. Afterward, the experimental treatment was administered only to the experimental group, and a posttest was administered to identify differences between the groups. In this study, the experimental treatment was applied to two experimental groups: the self-efficacy group and the assertiveness group.

The subjects of this study were students experiencing academic anxiety. Sampling was conducted using a specific method to ensure the sample was representative of the population. According to Supangat (2008:4), a sampling technique refers to the method of drawing samples from a population, both in terms of determining the number and the method of sampling, with the aim of ensuring that the selected sample reflects the characteristics of the population. In this study, a cluster random sampling technique was applied to collect initial data. Furthermore, after the initial conditions were identified, the researcher switched to a purposive sampling technique. Sarwi and Rusilowati (2013:74) explain that purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on specific considerations. In this study, the sample was selected based on the criteria of students with high levels of anxiety regarding further study.

From a total population of 558 students, 18 students with high levels of academic anxiety were selected. Data collection was conducted using psychological scales: the academic anxiety scale, the self-efficacy scale, and the assertiveness scale. The academic anxiety variable, this instrument, has two main aspects: physiological and psychological. For the physiological aspect, the first indicator is muscle tension, with an example of a favorable statement: "My muscles feel stiff when I have a lot to think about related to school assignments." The second indicator is pain in a limb, with an example of a favorable statement: "My head suddenly becomes dizzy when I think too much about schoolwork." The third indicator is hypervigilance, with an example of a favorable statement: "I often have nightmares when I have too much schoolwork." Meanwhile, for

the psychological aspect, an indicator of doubt is exemplified by the favorable statement: "I feel nervous when faced with difficult schoolwork." The indicator of worry is exemplified by the favorable statement: "I'm afraid the teacher will scold me if I don't complete the assignment." An indicator of negative thinking is exemplified by the favorable statement: "It's unlikely for me to complete a very complex school assignment."

Meanwhile, for the self-efficacy variable, this instrument has two dimensions (indicators). The first dimension is Academic Self-Efficacy, with example items: "I try my best to complete assignments given by the teacher" and "I try various ways to complete assignments." The second dimension is Self-Efficacy in Self-Regulation, with example items: "I complete assignments on time" and "I work on assignments independently."

Furthermore, for the assertiveness variable, this instrument has five indicators. The first indicator is the ability to face reality, with an example of a favorable statement: "I believe every problem has a solution." The second indicator is the willingness to listen and consider others' perspectives, with an example of a favorable statement: "I feel happy when I get advice from friends." The third indicator is the ability to initiate and maintain comfortable relationships with others, with an example of a favorable statement: "I try to be considerate of the feelings of others who try to express their opinions." The fourth indicator is choosing the right intonation or form of expression in a conversation, for example a favorable statement: "I usually express my gratitude to friends who are willing to share their opinions." The fifth indicator is expressing feelings openly, for example a favorable statement: "I tend to be open and honest in expressing my opinions." The scale criteria can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1** Academic Anxiety Scale Criteria

Answer Options	Score	
	<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Unfavourable</i>
Very Appropriate	4	1
Appropriate	3	2
Not Appropriate	2	3
Not Appropriate	1	4

**Table 2** Self-Efficacy Scale Criteria

0	10	20	30	40	50	60
Can't do it			Quite confident I can do it			Very confident I can do it

**Table 3** Assertiveness Scale Criteria

Answer Options	Score	
	<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Unfavourable</i>
Very Appropriate	4	1
Appropriate	3	2
Not Appropriate	2	3
Not Appropriate	1	4

Before use, this instrument underwent expert validation and was then pilot tested. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics to quantify levels of academic anxiety, self-efficacy, and assertiveness as percentages. Quantitative data in this

study were collected using self-efficacy and assertiveness scales, which were administered to the experimental group before and after participating in Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling. The effectiveness of the intervention was measured by comparing the difference in pretest and posttest scores on both scales. This difference analysis was tested using the Wilcoxon test in SPSS.

## Result and Discussion

Improvements in self-efficacy and assertiveness were measured by comparing pretest and posttest scores. Table 4 presents the results of descriptive analysis and Wilcoxon tests for both groups.

**Table 4** Results of Descriptive Analysis and Wilcoxon Test

Measurement		Self-Efficacy Group (N=9)	Assertiveness Group (N=9)
<i>Pretest</i>	<b>M</b>	42.33	55.44
	<b>SD</b>	7.791	4.890
<i>Posttest</i>	<b>M</b>	61.77	65.44
	<b>SD</b>	4.256	6.210
<b>Z</b>		-2.521	-2.520
<b>P</b>		<0.05	<0.05

Based on descriptive analysis, there was an increase in self-efficacy scores from the pretest (M=42.33) to the posttest (M=61.77). Similarly, assertiveness increased from the pretest (M=55.44) to the posttest (M=65.44). The Wilcoxon test results confirmed the effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling in improving both self-efficacy (Z=-2.521, p<0.05) and assertiveness (Z=-2.520, p<0.05) in students with academic anxiety.

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling in improving the self-efficacy of students with academic anxiety. The method used was group counseling treatment for one group of students. The effectiveness of the intervention was measured by comparing pretest and posttest scores using a self-efficacy scale, without involving a comparison or control group.

As a result, the group showed an increase in their average self-efficacy score from 42.33 (pretest) to 61.77 (posttest), representing a 19.44% increase. Statistical analysis using the Wilcoxon test yielded a Z-count of -2.521. This confirmed that the difference in scores was significant, and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted. This means that Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling was proven effective in increasing self-efficacy. This increase is strongly suspected to occur through the interaction process within the group counseling sessions.

Furthermore, this study examined the effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling in increasing the assertiveness of students experiencing academic anxiety by providing an intervention in the form of Cognitive Restructuring-based counseling to one group of students. Measurements were conducted using a pretest before the intervention and a posttest using an assertiveness scale afterward. This study used a one-group design, meaning there was no comparison group (control group) that did not receive treatment.

In this group, the average assertiveness score increased from 55.44 (pretest) to 65.44 (posttest), representing a 10.00 increase. These results indicate a significant change after participants participated in the counseling series. This increase in assertiveness is strongly suspected to be a result of the dynamics and interactions established during the group counseling process. Therefore, implementing group counseling using this technique is highly recommended for improving student assertiveness.

The effectiveness of the intervention was assessed based on a comparison of pretest and posttest scores. The Wilcoxon statistical test produced a Z-value of -2.520. Because this significance value is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the initial and final measurements. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) is accepted, meaning that group counseling using cognitive restructuring techniques has proven effective in improving the assertiveness of students experiencing anxiety related to further study.

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical significance. Substantially, this study demonstrates that Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling is an effective and efficient intervention for simultaneously improving two key psychological constructs: self-efficacy and assertiveness, in a population of students with academic anxiety. Significant improvements in these two variables are important because they are crucial factors in coping with academic stress.

High self-efficacy means students have stronger confidence in their ability to plan, implement, and complete academic tasks. This serves as a driving force for facing challenges, reducing avoidance, and increasing persistence. Meanwhile, increased assertiveness enables students to communicate their needs, limitations, and difficulties more clearly, thereby reducing sources of stress and creating a more supportive learning environment. Therefore, the effectiveness of this intervention has important implications for efforts to support mental health in schools, as it offers a structured, group-oriented approach to building students' psychological resilience.

Based on the data obtained, this study demonstrates that Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling is significantly effective in improving self-efficacy and assertiveness in students with academic anxiety. Descriptive analysis showed a significant increase in mean scores for both variables. These results were supported by the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, which confirmed that the increase was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for both self-efficacy ( $Z = -2.521$ ) and assertiveness ( $Z = -2.520$ ). These findings supported the research hypothesis and indicated that the intervention successfully achieved its objectives.

The improvements occurred as a result of a structured process within a group counseling setting facilitated by Cognitive Restructuring techniques. This process involved students identifying and recognizing irrational beliefs underlying their academic anxiety. Furthermore, through the guidance of the facilitator, students learned to replace negative thought patterns with more realistic perceptions that supported their academic performance. Furthermore, the support provided through group dynamics provided a space for students to share experiences, encourage each other, and learn from each other's successes. This process fostered new confidence and the courage to be assertive.

The results of this study indicate that Cognitive Restructuring interventions in group counseling settings are effective in reducing academic anxiety in students. These findings not only support the research hypothesis but also provide strong confirmation of the theoretical expectations of the cognitive-behavioral approach. Theoretically, Cognitive Restructuring is designed to identify and correct cognitive distortions and irrational beliefs that underlie emotional disturbances and maladaptive behaviors. In the context of academic anxiety, students often hold negative beliefs such as "I will definitely fail" or "If I'm not perfect, I'm worthless." The results demonstrate that through the restructuring process, these beliefs can be confronted and replaced with more realistic and functional thoughts, such as "I can try my best even if the results aren't guaranteed to be perfect."

Furthermore, these findings directly support the research of Ilkhchi et al. (2011) and Keshi & Basavarajappa (2013), which demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy in a group context. However, the most significant contribution of this

study lies in its specificity: previous studies have generally used a comprehensive cognitive-behavioral therapy package (involving multiple techniques), making it difficult to isolate which component is most responsible for change. By using only one technique, Cognitive Restructuring, this study successfully identified that mindset modification (cognitive change) is a core mechanism in its own right, even without the support of other behavioral techniques such as homework assignments or behavioral activation. This provides more specific empirical evidence for the cognitive-behavioral approach and supports Damayanti & Nurjannah's (2016) implication that focused interventions can produce significant impact.

From a mechanism of change perspective, the observed improvements in students can be explained through three cognitive stages: (1) identification of cognitive distortions (e.g., catastrophizing or overgeneralization regarding schoolwork), (2) disputation to test the validity of these beliefs, and (3) replacement with adaptive cognitions. In a group context, this process is reinforced by social dynamics: students can see that their peers share similar fears and successfully change their mindsets, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and increasing collective self-efficacy. Thus, group settings are not merely a means of efficiency, but also a source of social validation that accelerates cognitive restructuring.

Improvements in these two variables have crucial functional implications for students. High self-efficacy plays a key role in academic success. Students who are more confident in their abilities tend to be more persistent, resilient to challenges, and avoid self-doubt, dependency, and procrastination. Furthermore, increased assertiveness enables students to manage stress and anxiety more effectively; express opinions, needs, and feelings logically; reject things that could interfere with their academic achievement without excessive anxiety; and build healthier interpersonal relationships.

Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in supporting academic success. Confidence in one's own capacity will encourage optimal achievement, while a lack of this confidence can lead students to self-doubt, dependency, academic procrastination, and avoidance of challenging tasks.

In parallel, assertiveness enables individuals to effectively manage stressors, develop self-confidence, express ideas and emotions logically, reduce anxiety, respect the rights of others, and increase stress resilience. Assertiveness is reflected in behavior that allows individuals to act according to their own interests and rights without experiencing excessive anxiety, while also comfortably expressing feelings without violating the rights of others.

Comparative analysis revealed disparities in the level of improvement, with self-efficacy scores showing higher gains than assertiveness scores. Similar findings were observed in the Wilcoxon (Z) test results, which were higher in the self-efficacy group. This pattern indicates that the process of identifying, evaluating, and substituting negative thoughts for adaptive thought patterns through Cognitive Restructuring has a more optimal impact on developing self-efficacy in students with academic anxiety.

Although the statistical test results were significant, it is important to consider alternative explanations that may have contributed to the increase in posttest scores. These include participants knowing they were being studied and therefore behaving accordingly, students possibly experiencing natural maturation in dealing with their anxiety, and administering the same scale (pretest and posttest) allowing students to become more familiar with and understand the items, which could have influenced their responses. However, the one-group pretest-posttest design does have limitations in controlling for these alternative explanations. These findings suggest the need for a more rigorous design, such as one with a control group, to ensure that the changes were truly caused by the Cognitive Restructuring intervention and not by other factors. Furthermore, although the

results indicate effectiveness, this study has limitations because it was not designed with a follow-up phase to monitor the sustainability of the intervention's impact. Consequently, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the increase in assertiveness persisted in students after the intervention.

Based on the findings and limitations above, it is recommended that: a pretest-posttest control group design be conducted to control for participant effects; a follow-up study be conducted by adding the necessary post-intervention measurements to test the durability or effects of group counseling; explored the research variables to determine the mechanisms by which change occurs; and conducted a comparative study to compare the effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling with other group counseling approaches in order to determine a more optimal approach for students with academic anxiety. These findings have several implications: cognitive restructuring techniques in a group format can be adopted as a program to help students overcome academic anxiety; this counseling program is relatively efficient because it serves several clients simultaneously and offers the benefits of group dynamics; and supports the importance of allocating resources for group counseling services as an integral part of school guidance and counseling programs. Overall, the findings of this study provide strong initial evidence and are consistent with the theoretical framework and previous research, that Cognitive Restructuring group counseling is an intervention with great potential to empower students experiencing academic anxiety. Despite methodological limitations, these results pave the way for the development of more effective school counseling programs and further research.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling has proven effective in improving both self-efficacy and assertiveness in students experiencing academic study anxiety. However, differences in effectiveness were observed between the two variables, with this technique showing a greater impact on improving self-efficacy than assertiveness.

As a practical implication, it is recommended that Guidance and Counseling Teachers adopt Cognitive Restructuring-based group counseling as an intervention strategy to improve the self-efficacy and assertiveness of students facing academic anxiety.

For future research, several recommendations are recommended: expanding the study population, for example, to students at other levels or university students, including a control group for comparison, and conducting follow-up studies to measure the long-term durability of the intervention's effects on improving self-efficacy and assertiveness.

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## **Author Contributions Statement**

This research involved teamwork. IH contributed to the research concept, design, and data analysis. FPU contributed to the research implementation process and on-site observations. HR and MS contributed to data collection, documentation, and administration.

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