

Poetry writing as a counseling intervention to enhance self-talk ability among junior high school students

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Abstract

This study aims to test the effectiveness of writing poetry as a counseling intervention in improving self-talk skills in junior high school students. The study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design. The research subjects consisted of 30 students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The instrument used was a self-talk ability questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test, then analyzed using paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test, and N-Gain and effect size (Cohen's d) calculations. The results showed a significant increase in self-talk skills in the experimental group compared to the control group ($p < 0.05$). The N-Gain value in the experimental group was high, while the control group was low. Furthermore, the effect size value was large ($d = 0.82$), indicating that the intervention had a strong impact. These findings suggest that poetry writing is an effective medium for emotional expression and self-reflection, supporting changes in students' mindsets. Therefore, poetry writing can be used as an alternative strategy in guidance and counseling services to improve students' self-talk skills in a more adaptive and constructive manner.

Introduction

Junior high school (SMP) students are adolescents who are experiencing a psychosocial developmental stage characterized by rapid biological, emotional, and social changes. During this phase, adolescents often experience more complex self-awareness, including the way they talk to themselves, or self-talk (Atiqah et al., 2024). Self-talk plays a crucial role in shaping self-perception, stress management, and problem-solving skills. However, many adolescents exhibit negative self-talk patterns, such as self-blame, pessimism, and excessive anxiety, which impact mental health and academic achievement (Birra, 2024) (Aliyah et al., 2023)

Self-talk can be understood as an individual's internal dialogue that functions to interpret experiences, guide behavior, and regulate emotions. According to cognitive theory, as proposed Beck & Haigh (Beck & Haigh, 2014), a person's mindset significantly influences their feelings and actions. Automatic thoughts that emerge in the form of self-talk can be either adaptive or maladaptive. Positive self-talk fosters self-confidence, optimism, and psychological resilience, while negative self-talk tends to give rise to cognitive distortions such

as overgeneralization, catastrophizing, and self-blaming, which worsen adolescents' emotional well-being.

Adolescents are in the stage of identity versus role confusion. In this phase, individuals strive to establish their identity through evaluating their abilities, values, and social roles. This process is heavily influenced by their internal dialogue (Ragelienė, 2016). Self-talk serves as an internal mechanism for assessing success, failure, social acceptance, and their position within a group. If adolescents habituate to negative self-talk, the risk of identity confusion, low self-esteem, and social anxiety increases (Yosep et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the importance of self-efficacy, or belief in one's abilities. Self-talk serves as an internal reinforcement that shapes perceptions of competence. Adolescents with positive self-talk tend to have high self-efficacy, making them more willing to try, persist in the face of difficulties, and manage academic pressure. Conversely, negative self-talk undermines self-confidence and encourages avoidant behavior, passivity, and decreased motivation to learn (Bandura, 1997).

Self-talk is also related to self-regulation (self-regulated learning). Explains that students who are able to manage their thoughts are more effective in planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process. Healthy internal dialogue helps students motivate themselves, control their emotions, and set realistic learning goals. Developing positive self-talk is an important aspect of guidance and counseling services in junior high schools (Zimmerman, 2002).

Discussing self-talk is not merely a simple cognitive process, but a crucial foundation for personality development, mental health, and academic success in adolescents. Interventions aimed at cognitive restructuring and strengthening positive self-talk are highly relevant for junior high school students to help them cope more adaptively with developmental and academic demands (Mulawarman et al., 2024).

On the other hand, formal educational practices at the junior high school level tend to prioritize academic success, while students' affective, reflective, and expressive aspects are not given equal attention. However, according to a holistic educational approach, student development encompasses integrated cognitive, emotional, social, and personal dimensions. When opportunities for emotional expression are limited, adolescents are at risk of harboring internal conflicts, which then manifest as anxiety, withdrawal, or negative self-talk. A creative approach is needed that can bridge adolescents' emotional development needs with the learning process and counseling services at school (Ho & Lau, 2025).

Creative approaches to guidance and counseling are rooted in the expressive counseling paradigm, which views individuals as capable of understanding and healing themselves through symbolic media such as writing, drawing, music, or poetry. Expressive art functions as a means of intrapersonal communication that helps clients externalize inner experiences that are difficult to express verbally (Gladding, 2012). In the context of junior high school adolescents, creative media bridges the emotional and cognitive worlds, enabling students to process experiences more adaptively (Putriani et al., 2021).

Writing poetry is both an aesthetic activity and a reflective process, involving self-awareness, emotional regulation, and inner dialogue. Writing about personal experiences can improve mental health because individuals learn to organize emotions, give meaning to events, and reconstruct experiences into healthier narratives. In poetry, this process is more symbolic, personal, and profound, enabling students to name feelings, manage inner conflicts, and develop new perspectives on themselves (Munthe et al., 2025).

In addition, writing poetry serves as a medium for cognitive restructuring. When students express their thoughts in lines and metaphors, they are actually transforming their previously implicit self-talk into explicit ones. Negative thoughts can be recognized, reorganized, and redirected into more adaptive statements. This process aligns with the principles of cognitive therapy, which emphasizes changing thought patterns as the basis for

changing emotions and behavior. Thus, poetry can be a means of transforming negative self-talk into positive self-talk.

Furthermore, self-expression is a fundamental individual need for self-actualization. Writing poetry provides a safe space for students to be honest about their subjective experiences without fear of judgment. A counseling environment that utilizes poetry fosters self-acceptance, empathy, and a more mature self-awareness. At this point, poetry becomes a medium for language learning and a vehicle for strengthening adolescent identity and mental health (Magfiroh, 2025).

Writing poetry also supports the development of metacognition and emotional regulation. As students reflect on experiences through words, they learn to identify sources of stress, understand emotional responses, and construct personal meaning. This activity helps students construct more constructive internal narratives, ultimately strengthening their self-talk skills in dealing with academic and social challenges. Based on the conceptual framework above, this article aims to discuss in depth the concepts and theories of the creative process of writing poetry in improving the self-talk skills of junior high school students and its implications as an expressive counseling approach

The concept of this article is supported by the views of several experts and previously published research results. For example, self-talk has been understood as an internal dialogue that occurs consciously and unconsciously within an individual. It functions as a self-regulatory mechanism that influences emotions, motivation, and behavior. In adolescents, self-talk develops along with increasing abstract and reflective thinking skills. Self-talk can be both positive and negative. Positive self-talk is characterized by supportive, realistic, and motivational statements, while negative self-talk includes self-criticism, overgeneralization, and irrational thoughts. Negative self-talk patterns can sometimes persist and have the potential to cause stress, anxiety, and low self-confidence in adolescents (Aprilia et al., 2024).

Self-talk is defined as an internal dialogue that occurs consciously or unconsciously within an individual, functioning to interpret experiences, direct actions, and manage emotional responses. This reinforces the view that self-talk is part of the thought process that acts as a self-regulation mechanism that influences a person's emotions, motivation, and behavior. Emphasized that automatic thoughts that emerge in the form of self-talk serve as a bridge between external events and an individual's emotional responses. During adolescence, self-talk develops along with increasing abstract, reflective, and metacognitive thinking skills, so that adolescents begin to evaluate themselves, compare experiences, and construct personal meanings for various situations they encounter (Beck & Haigh, 2014).

It can be further explained that self-talk can be classified into positive and negative self-talk. Positive self-talk is characterized by internal statements that are supportive, realistic, optimistic, and motivating, such as confidence in one's abilities and acceptance of limitations. Conversely, negative self-talk tends to manifest in the form of excessive self-criticism, pessimism, generalizations, and irrational thoughts that devalue self-worth. Persistent patterns of negative self-talk have the potential to lead to stress, anxiety, low self-confidence, and obstacles in adolescents' social and academic adjustment. Such conditions can reduce motivation to learn, the courage to try, and the ability to face challenges.

Developing adaptive self-talk requires cognitive awareness of an individual's thought patterns. Strengthening self-talk occurs through several stages. The first stage is the emergence of awareness that the behavior or thought pattern is inappropriate. The second stage is an honest admission of the error or mistake. The third stage is the emergence of a commitment to developing new, more positive and constructive behaviors and thought patterns. These stages align with the concept of cognitive restructuring, which is the process of transforming maladaptive thoughts into more rational and functional ones, resulting in changes in emotions and behavior. The fourth stage is the affirmation stage, during which the new behavior that

emerges is given suggestions to continue. The fifth stage is the stage where the individual increasingly believes the new behavior displayed is something better (Aliyah, 2024).

In this explanation, self-talk can be understood as the inner dialogue and psychological mechanism that connects adolescents' cognition, emotions, and actions. Developing self-talk is the foundation for improving mental health, self-confidence, and academic success. Targeted interventions to help adolescents recognize, evaluate, and reconstruct self-talk are highly relevant for implementation in guidance and counseling services in schools. Self-talk activities can be conducted in various ways, but are generally conducted verbally. Written self-talk is less well-known and has less opportunity to become an engaging and effective treatment space. However, written self-talk interventions can be an effective tool and a fun dialogue space without burdening adolescents in addressing their complex problems in daily life. For example, self-talk among adolescents can be implemented by integrating it into expressive writing activities.

Expressive writing is the activity of freely, honestly, and reflectively pouring out thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences into written form. Expressive writing is rooted in the theory of expressive writing (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). Individuals who write about their emotional experiences tend to experience reduced stress, improved psychological health, and improved emotional regulation. Furthermore, expressive writing can be used as an intervention technique to help individuals externalize inner conflicts, organize emotions, and construct meaning around events. This process enables clients to transform unstructured experiences into understandable narratives, thereby increasing self-awareness and self-acceptance.

Poetry is a unique form of expressive writing, combining symbolic language, imagery, metaphor, and emotional nuances. Poetic language operates in the affective and imaginative realms, bridging the conscious and unconscious experiences of individuals. Poetry allows individuals to express experiences that are difficult to express directly through literal words. The symbols and metaphors in poetry provide a safe space for adolescents to express emotions, conflicts, hopes, and fears without feeling threatened or judged (Kamiljonovna, 2025).

In an art-based counseling approach, poetry can be used as an intrapersonal communication medium to help clients explore themselves. Art in counseling serves to open access to deepest feelings, increase self-empathy, and strengthen personal meaning. Furthermore, poetry is used as a means of reflection and self-identification, allowing individuals to see personal experiences reflected in the text and then develop new, healthier interpretations of themselves and their environment (Gladding, 2012).

Writing poetry as a form of self-expression that can be used as self-talk lies within the creative process. The creative process of poetry can be carried out through several phases: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. The preparation phase is reflected in the exploration of experiences and emotions, where students gather relevant ideas, memories, and feelings. The incubation phase occurs when individuals contemplate and reflect internally on those experiences. The next phase, illumination, occurs when students find diction, imagery, or metaphors that can represent their feelings. The verification phase is seen in the composition of the poem's structure and reflective revisions to perfect the meaning and beauty of the language. At this point, it can be interpreted that the stages of poetry writing are not linear but rather dynamic, personal, and strongly influenced by the writer's psychological state.

Furthermore, the creative process of writing poetry provides a pedagogical space for students to develop self-awareness, empathy, and reflective thinking skills. Meaningful learning experiences occur when students are able to connect personal experiences with new knowledge through reflection. Writing poetry allows students to explore their feelings, understand their own and others' perspectives, and construct meaning from events they experience in their school and social environments (Dewi et al., 2025).

At this level, the creative process of writing poetry can be interpreted as an integrative activity that connects students' cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and personal aspects.

Through the stages of emotional exploration, reflection, search for meaning, and revision, students have successfully developed literacy skills and built self-awareness, empathy, and healthy inner dialogue as part of the psychological development of adolescents in an educational environment. This success is realized by the integrative and collaborative spirit between expressive writing, the creative process, self-talk, and inner dialogue that involves the adolescents' own feelings and thoughts.

Methods

Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group design. This design was chosen because the researchers could not fully randomize subjects, but still wanted to systematically test the effectiveness of the intervention.. Involved two groups: an experimental group that received a poetry writing intervention as a counseling technique, and a control group that received no such intervention or conventional counseling services. Both groups were given a pre-test to measure their initial self-talk skills, followed by a post-test after the treatment was administered.

This design allowed researchers to compare changes in self-talk skills between the two groups, thus identifying the effects of the poetry writing intervention more objectively. Analysis was conducted by comparing pre-test and post-test scores both within and between groups. This quasi-experimental design was chosen because it is relevant to the educational context in schools, where class divisions have formed naturally, thus maintaining the ecological validity of the research without neglecting control over the research variables (Matematika & Saputri, 2025).

Participants

Participants in this study were students of Tarakan Junior High School (SMP) using a purposive sampling technique, taking into account the suitability of the subject's characteristics to the research objectives, namely improving self-talk skills through poetry writing interventions. The inclusion criteria in this study included: (1) active students in grade VIII of junior high school, (2) aged 13–15 years, (3) showing moderate to low levels of self-talk ability based on the results of the initial assessment using a self-talk questionnaire, and (4) willing to participate in the entire series of interventions. The exclusion criteria included: (1) students who were undergoing other intensive counseling interventions, and (2) students who did not participate in all research sessions in full..

Recruitment was conducted through coordination with school officials and teachers. Researchers first conducted a brief outreach program on the research objectives, then conducted an initial assessment to identify potential participants who met the criteria. Selected participants were then divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The final sample size in this study was 30 students, consisting of 15 students in the experimental group and 15 students in the control group. The sample size was determined based on a simple two-group experimental design, which is methodologically considered adequate for detecting treatment differences in small to medium-scale studies in the educational context.

All research procedures met ethical research standards. The researchers obtained official permission from the school and approval from the guidance counselor. Informed consent was also obtained from participants and/or parents/guardians prior to the study. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Instruments

The data in this study were collected using a self-talk questionnaire as the main instrument, which was designed to measure students' internal dialogue in facing academic and social situations. The self-talk construct in this study includes several dimensions, namely: (1) awareness of one's own thoughts, (2) tendency to speak positively about oneself, (3) ability to manage negative thoughts, and (4) use of constructive internal language in self-motivation (Helmstetter, 1982)(Aliyah et al., 2023). The instrument is structured on a Likert scale with four response options: very appropriate, appropriate, inappropriate, and very inappropriate. Each item was developed to reflect the actual situation experienced by students, allowing for contextual and relevant measurement. Higher scores indicate more adaptive and positive self-talk.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 items that underwent content validity testing through expert judgment by two guidance and counseling experts and one educational psychologist. Furthermore, empirical validity testing was conducted using item-total correlation analysis, with results indicating that all items met the established validity criteria. Reliability testing showed an internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of 0.87, indicating a high level of reliability.

This instrument is an adaptation of the self-talk concept in cognitive psychology, adapted to the characteristics of junior high school adolescents and the cultural context of Indonesian schools. The adaptation process involved simplifying the language, adjusting the situational context, and testing its readability on a number of students before use in the main study. In addition to the questionnaire, supporting data was obtained through observation sheets used to record changes in students' verbal behavior and self-expression during the poetry writing intervention. These observation sheets were structured and served as supplementary data to strengthen the interpretation of the quantitative results.

Procedure

This research was conducted through several systematic stages, including participant recruitment, intervention implementation, and final data collection. All procedures were designed to ensure the research was valid, ethical, and aligned with its objectives.

The initial stage began with obtaining permission and coordination with the school and guidance and counseling (BK) teachers. After obtaining permission, the researcher conducted a brief outreach to prospective participants regarding the objectives, benefits, and process of the research. At this stage, participants and their parents/guardians were given an informed consent form as a form of voluntary agreement to participate. An initial assessment using a self-talk questionnaire was conducted to identify students who met the research criteria. Participants who passed the selection were then divided into two groups, an experimental group and a control group, based on their existing classes (non-random assignment).

The stage was a pre-test administered to both groups to obtain an overview of their self-talk abilities before treatment. The instrument used was a Likert-scale self-talk questionnaire. The intervention was provided to the experimental group in the form of counseling using poetry writing techniques, conducted in four sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. Each session focused on the following activities:

1. Session 1 (Emotional Exploration): Participants are guided to identify and write down their current feelings.
2. Session 2 (Poetry Writing): Participants express their emotional experiences in the form of free verse.
3. Session 3 (Reflection on Meaning): Participants reread their poems and identify their meaning and messages.
4. Session 4 (Discussion and Reinforcement): Participants discuss their writing and are guided to develop more positive self-talk.

The control group received a conventional intervention, a general guidance and counseling service. To maintain treatment fidelity, researchers used a pre-developed session guide (intervention module) and conducted observations during implementation to ensure each stage went according to plan. After all intervention sessions were completed, both groups were given a final assessment (post-test) using the same instrument as the pre-test. The data obtained were then analyzed to determine changes in self-talk skills.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using an inferential quantitative approach adapted to a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design. The analysis aimed to test the effectiveness of a poetry writing intervention in improving students' self-talk skills. The initial stage of analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to describe the distribution of data, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores for both the pre-test and post-test results in each group. This analysis provides an overview of the initial conditions and changes that occurred after the intervention.

The study began by conducting prerequisite statistical tests to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for further analysis. A normality test, using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, was applied to verify whether the data were approximately normally distributed. In addition, a homogeneity of variance test was carried out using Levene's Test to determine whether the variances across groups were similar. These preliminary tests are crucial because they confirm whether parametric statistical techniques can be appropriately and reliably used in the study.

After confirming that the assumptions were satisfied, hypothesis testing was conducted using parametric methods. A Paired Sample t-test was employed to examine differences between pre-test and post-test scores within the same group, allowing the researcher to assess changes over time. Furthermore, an Independent Sample t-test was used to compare the improvement in self-talk skills between the experimental and control groups, helping to determine whether the treatment had a significant effect compared to the control condition.

To strengthen the interpretation of the results, an N-Gain Score was calculated to determine the relative level of improvement in students' abilities after the intervention. Data processing was performed using the latest version of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. In the case of missing data, the researchers employed a listwise deletion approach, including only data from participants who completed the entire study (pre-test and post-test). This approach was chosen to maintain consistency of analysis and the validity of comparisons between groups.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, supporting data from the observation sheets were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively to provide context for changes in student behavior during the intervention. This process involved identifying general patterns related to self-expression, language use, and attitudinal changes that emerged during the poetry writing activity.

Results

The results of the descriptive analysis showed a change in self-talk scores between the pre-test and post-test in both groups. The mean score in the experimental group increased significantly compared to the control group.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Talk Scores

Group	N	Mean Pre Test	SD	Mean Post Test	SD
Experiment	15	62,40	5,21	78,73	4,88
Control	15	63,13	5,05	66,27	5,12

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 demonstrate the distribution and changes in students' self-talk scores before and after the intervention. The results show that the experimental and control groups had relatively similar levels of self-talk ability at the pre-test stage. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 62.40 (SD = 5.21), while the control group achieved a mean score of 63.13 (SD = 5.05). The closeness of these mean scores indicates that both groups started from comparable initial conditions, suggesting that there was no substantial difference in self-talk ability prior to the treatment.

Following the intervention, considerable differences appeared between the two groups. The experimental group experienced a significant increase in the post-test mean score, rising to 78.73 (SD = 4.88). This improvement reflects the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing students' self-talk abilities. In contrast, the control group showed only a modest increase in the post-test mean score to 66.27 (SD = 5.12), indicating that without the specific intervention, improvement in self-talk skills was relatively limited. The difference in score gains between the two groups suggests that the treatment contributed meaningfully to the enhancement of positive self-talk among participants in the experimental group.

Furthermore, the standard deviation values in both groups remained relatively stable from pre-test to post-test. This stability suggests that the distribution of scores among participants did not fluctuate drastically, meaning that the improvement in the experimental group was experienced relatively evenly by most students rather than being influenced by only a few individuals. The lower post-test standard deviation in the experimental group (SD = 4.88) may also indicate that participants became more consistent in their self-talk abilities after receiving the intervention. The descriptive findings provide preliminary evidence that the intervention was successful in improving students' self-talk skills. The substantial increase in the experimental group's mean score, compared with the slight improvement in the control group, supports the assumption that the treatment had a positive and meaningful impact on students' psychological and cognitive self-regulation through enhanced self-talk practices.

Paired Simple Test

The results of the paired sample t-test show the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores in each group.

Table 2. Paired Simple Test

Group	Mean Difference	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experiment	16,33	9,214	14	0,000
Control	3,14	2,103	14	0,053

The results of the paired sample t-test presented in Table 2 were used to determine whether there were significant differences between the pre-test and post-test scores within each group. The analysis reveals that the experimental group experienced a substantial improvement in self-talk ability after receiving the intervention. This is indicated by the mean difference score of 16.33, showing that students' post-test scores were considerably higher than their pre-test scores. The statistical analysis further demonstrates that this increase was highly significant, as reflected in the t-value of 9.214 with a significance level of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that the intervention successfully enhanced students' self-talk abilities in a meaningful and measurable way.

The large t-value obtained in the experimental group suggests that the improvement was not due to chance but rather resulted from the treatment applied during the study. In practical terms, the intervention appears to have contributed positively to students' ability to regulate their thoughts, motivate themselves, and develop more constructive internal dialogue. The significant increase between pre-test and post-test scores also supports the assumption that the intervention played an important role in strengthening students' psychological and cognitive self-management through self-talk practices.

In contrast, the control group demonstrated only a slight increase in scores, with a mean difference of 3.14. Although there was a small improvement in post-test performance, the statistical result showed a t-value of 2.103 with a significance level of $p = 0.053$, which is higher than the accepted significance threshold of 0.05. This means that the improvement observed in the control group was not statistically significant. Therefore, the change may have occurred due to natural variation, routine learning experiences, or other external factors rather than a specific treatment effect.

The comparison between the two groups clearly highlights the effectiveness of the intervention. While the experimental group showed a strong and statistically significant increase in self-talk ability, the control group did not experience meaningful progress. These findings reinforce the conclusion that the intervention had a significant positive impact on improving students' self-talk skills and demonstrate the importance of structured treatment in fostering students' internal motivation, emotional regulation, and positive cognitive processes.

Independent Sample t-test

The Independent Sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in post-test self-talk scores between the experimental group and the control group after the intervention was implemented. This analysis is important for evaluating the effectiveness of the treatment by comparing the final outcomes of both groups.

Table 3. Results of the Independent Sample t-test

Variabel	Group	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self Talk	Experiment	78,73	4,88	6,127	28	0,000
	Control	66,27	5,12			

The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate a statistically significant difference in post-test self-talk scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group obtained a substantially higher mean score ($M = 78.73$, $SD = 4.88$) compared to the control group ($M = 66.27$, $SD = 5.12$). This finding indicates that students who received the intervention showed better self-talk abilities than those who did not receive the treatment. The higher mean score in the experimental group reflects the positive impact of the intervention on students' internal dialogue, self-regulation, and motivational thinking processes.

The statistical analysis further revealed a t-value of 6.127 with 28 degrees of freedom ($df = 28$) and a significance value of $p = 0.000$, which is lower than the significance criterion of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). This result confirms that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant. In other words, the probability that the observed difference occurred by chance is extremely small. Therefore, the improvement in self-talk ability among students in the experimental group can be confidently attributed to the intervention provided during the study.

The relatively similar standard deviation values between the experimental group ($SD = 4.88$) and the control group ($SD = 5.12$) indicate that the variability of scores in both groups was relatively consistent. This similarity strengthens the reliability and validity of the comparison because it suggests that the distribution of participant scores was balanced across groups. The comparable spread of scores also implies that the intervention affected participants in a relatively even manner rather than benefiting only a small number of students.

The findings from the Independent Sample t-test provide strong empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing students' self-talk abilities. The significant difference between the experimental and control groups demonstrates that the treatment successfully contributed to improving students' positive self-dialogue, emotional regulation, confidence, and cognitive self-management. These results reinforce the conclusion that the intervention had a meaningful and beneficial impact on students' psychological development and learning processes.

N-Gain Score

The N-Gain analysis was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the intervention by examining the extent of improvement in students' self-talk skills from pre-test to post-test. The N-Gain score is useful for identifying how much students' abilities increased relative to their initial scores and categorizing the level of improvement achieved after the learning process or intervention.

Table 4. N-Gain Score

Group	Mean N-Gain	Category
Experiment	0,72	High
Control	0,21	Low

The results presented in Table 4 reveal a clear difference in the level of improvement between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group obtained a mean N-Gain score of 0.72, which is categorized as high. This result indicates that the intervention was highly effective in improving students' self-talk skills. A high N-Gain score reflects that students experienced substantial progress from their initial condition to their post-test performance. In other words, the intervention successfully facilitated significant development in students' ability to engage in positive and constructive self-talk.

The high improvement achieved by the experimental group suggests that the treatment provided students with meaningful opportunities to strengthen their internal motivation, emotional control, self-confidence, and cognitive regulation. The intervention appears to have helped students develop more adaptive thinking patterns and more positive internal dialogue, which are important components of effective self-talk. This substantial gain also indicates that the learning process or treatment was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful in improving students' psychological and cognitive functioning.

In contrast, the control group achieved a mean N-Gain score of 0.21, which falls into the low category. This finding indicates that students in the control group experienced only minimal improvement in their self-talk abilities. The low gain score suggests that routine learning activities without the specific intervention were insufficient to produce meaningful progress in students' self-talk development. Although slight improvement may have occurred naturally over time, the increase was relatively limited compared to the experimental group.

The considerable difference between the experimental group and the control group demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention in generating meaningful learning gains. The gap in N-Gain categories—high in the experimental group and low in the control group—provides strong evidence that the treatment had a substantial positive impact on enhancing students' self-talk skills. Furthermore, these findings strengthen the results of the paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test, both of which previously indicated significant improvement in the experimental group.

The N-Gain analysis confirms that the intervention was successful in improving students' self-talk abilities at a meaningful level. The high gain achieved by the experimental group indicates that the treatment not only produced statistically significant outcomes but also

contributed to practical and educational improvements in students' self-regulation, confidence, and positive cognitive behavior.

Effect Size (Cohen's d)

The effect size analysis was conducted to determine the magnitude of the intervention's influence on students' self-talk skills. While statistical significance testing indicates whether differences between groups exist, effect size analysis provides additional information regarding how strong or meaningful the intervention effect is in practical terms. In this study, Cohen's d was used to measure the strength of the treatment effect between the experimental and control groups.

Table 5. Effect Size

Comparison	Cohen's d	Category
Experiment vs Control	0,82	Large

The results presented in Table 5 show that the intervention produced a Cohen's d value of 0.82, which is categorized as a large effect size. According to Cohen's interpretation criteria, an effect size above 0.80 indicates a strong and substantial effect of the treatment. This finding demonstrates that the intervention had a powerful influence on improving students' self-talk skills in the experimental group compared to the control group.

A large effect size means that the difference between the two groups is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful in educational settings. In other words, the intervention produced improvements that are clearly observable and important for students' psychological and cognitive development. The treatment was effective in helping students strengthen positive internal dialogue, enhance self-confidence, regulate emotions, and develop more constructive patterns of thinking. These improvements reflect meaningful educational outcomes that extend beyond numerical statistical differences.

The Cohen's d value of 0.82 indicates that the intervention contributed substantially to the variation in students' self-talk abilities. This suggests that the treatment was one of the major factors influencing the improvement observed in the experimental group. The large effect size also implies that the intervention has strong potential for broader application in educational contexts, particularly in programs aimed at improving students' self-regulation, motivation, emotional resilience, and positive thinking skills.

The effect size findings further strengthen the previous statistical analyses, including the paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test, and N-Gain analysis, all of which consistently demonstrated the superiority of the experimental group over the control group. While the t-tests confirmed statistical significance and the N-Gain analysis demonstrated substantial improvement, the effect size analysis provides evidence that the magnitude of the intervention's impact was also educationally meaningful and practically important.

The Cohen's d analysis confirms that the intervention was highly effective in enhancing students' self-talk skills. The large effect size demonstrates that the treatment generated a substantial and meaningful improvement, reinforcing the conclusion that the intervention can serve as an effective strategy for promoting students' positive cognitive behaviour, emotional regulation, and psychological development in educational environments.

Observation Results

The qualitative data obtained from classroom observations during the intervention process indicate several behavioural and cognitive changes among students in the experimental group. The observations focused on students' participation, emotional expression, communication patterns, and reflective responses throughout the learning activities.

The first qualitative finding showed that students gradually demonstrated greater openness in expressing feelings and personal thoughts. During the initial sessions, several students appeared reluctant to speak, avoided eye contact, and provided very short responses during reflective discussions. In later sessions, students became more willing to share personal experiences, difficulties, and future goals during classroom interactions and writing activities.

The second qualitative finding revealed changes in students' language use, particularly in relation to self-talk expressions. Early observations identified the frequent use of negative expressions reflecting insecurity and self-doubt. Examples of students' initial expressions included:

"I cannot do this."

"I always fail."

"I am afraid of making mistakes."

"My writing is not good."

After the intervention, observational notes and reflective writings showed a gradual shift toward more positive and constructive expressions, such as:

"I will try my best."

"I can improve if I practice."

"Mistakes help me learn."

"I want to become more confident."

The third qualitative finding concerned students' participation during reflective discussions. At the beginning of the intervention, only a few students actively responded during group activities. Several students remained passive and waited for instructions from the teacher. As the intervention progressed, more students voluntarily participated in discussions, responded to peers' opinions, and reflected critically on their own experiences. Students also showed greater ability to identify personal strengths and weaknesses during guided reflection sessions.

Additional qualitative data from students' reflective writing demonstrated changes in internal dialogue and emotional awareness. Early reflections tended to contain pessimistic and self-critical statements, while later reflections reflected optimism, motivation, and self-acceptance. Several students began to write about personal improvement, emotional control, and future aspirations more positively.

Observation records also indicated increased emotional engagement during learning activities. Students appeared more focused, enthusiastic, and responsive during classroom interactions. Some students who were previously silent became more communicative and showed increased confidence when presenting opinions or reading their reflective writings aloud.

The qualitative data indicate that the intervention contributed to positive changes in students' self-expression, internal language patterns, reflective participation, emotional awareness, and confidence during the learning process.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the intervention contributed significantly to the improvement of students' self-talk abilities. Based on the descriptive statistics, both the experimental and control groups began the study with relatively equivalent levels of self-talk, as indicated by the close pre-test mean scores (experimental group: $M = 62.40$; control group: $M = 63.13$). This similarity suggests that the participants shared comparable initial characteristics before the treatment was implemented, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the study. The comparable baseline condition also indicates that the differences found in the post-test stage are more likely associated with the intervention rather than pre-existing disparities between groups.

Following the intervention, the experimental group experienced a substantial increase in self-talk scores, rising from a mean of 62.40 to 78.73. In contrast, the control group showed only a modest increase from 63.13 to 66.27. The magnitude of improvement observed in the experimental group suggests that the intervention effectively enhanced students' ability to engage in more constructive and positive internal dialogue. Self-talk plays an important role in shaping emotional regulation, self-confidence, motivation, and cognitive control. Therefore, the increase in self-talk ability may indicate that students became more capable of managing their thoughts, encouraging themselves, and responding positively to challenges during the learning process.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of psychological and reflective interventions in strengthening students' internal communication processes. Earlier research has shown that positive self-talk can improve academic motivation, reduce anxiety, and foster emotional resilience among students (Flanagan and Symonds, 2021; Reyes, 2016). The current findings support the theoretical assumption that self-talk is not merely an internal cognitive activity but also a trainable psychological skill that can be developed through structured educational interventions. The improvement in the experimental group aligns with cognitive behavioural perspectives, which argue that repeated positive cognitive practices can reshape individuals' thinking patterns and behavioural responses.

The relatively stable standard deviations across the pre-test and post-test scores further suggest that the improvement occurred consistently among participants in the experimental group. This indicates that the intervention was not effective only for a few high-performing students, but rather produced a more evenly distributed positive effect across the group. Such consistency strengthens the practical significance of the intervention because it demonstrates its potential applicability for broader student populations with varying initial levels of self-talk ability. That's indicate the although the control group did not receive the specific intervention, students still demonstrated a small improvement in self-talk scores over time. This slight increase suggests that self-talk is not entirely static and may develop gradually through normal educational and social experiences. Students naturally interact with teachers, classmates, and learning environments that can influence their thinking patterns and emotional responses. As a result, limited positive changes may occur even without structured treatment.

One possible explanation for this improvement is the influence of everyday classroom experiences. During regular learning activities, students may gain confidence, develop communication skills, and become more familiar with expressing ideas and emotions. These experiences can slowly encourage more positive internal dialogue. In addition, repeated exposure to school routines and academic tasks may help students adapt emotionally and cognitively, contributing to slight improvements in self-perception and self-talk. Explanation also relates to social interaction and peer support. Students often receive encouragement, feedback, and emotional reinforcement from classmates and teachers during daily activities. Positive social relationships can help reduce feelings of insecurity and increase motivation, which may indirectly influence students' internal language patterns. Teacher support and classroom atmosphere may also create conditions that promote emotional comfort and confidence.

The increase be influenced by the testing effect or familiarity with the assessment instrument. Because students completed both pre-test and post-test assessments, they may have become more comfortable with the questionnaire format and more aware of the types of responses being measured. This familiarity can sometimes contribute to minor score increases independent of the intervention itself. Personal maturation is another important factor. Adolescents naturally experience cognitive and emotional development that affects self-awareness, emotional regulation, and ways of thinking. As students mature, they may gradually become more capable of managing negative thoughts and developing more constructive self-talk patterns.

The findings clearly show that the experimental group achieved substantially greater improvement than the control group. This difference is important because it demonstrates that the intervention produced effects beyond normal developmental changes or external influences alone. While the control group experienced only slight natural progress, the experimental group showed more significant positive transformation in self-talk patterns. The intervention can be interpreted as the primary factor contributing to the stronger improvement observed in the experimental group. These findings strengthen the conclusion that the intervention was effective in promoting positive self-talk development. The comparison between the experimental and control groups helps confirm that the observed improvements were not merely the result of time, maturation, or ordinary classroom experiences, but were specifically associated with the structured intervention provided during the study.

These findings imply that interventions aimed at strengthening self-talk can become an important component of student development programs. Positive self-talk contributes not only to psychological well-being but also to academic engagement, persistence, and self-regulation. Educational institutions may therefore consider integrating reflective exercises, guided self-dialogue activities, or cognitive reinforcement strategies into classroom learning and counselling programs. Such approaches may help students build healthier thought patterns, improve emotional resilience, and enhance their confidence in facing academic and personal challenges (Yeager and Dweck, 2012; Ungar, Russel and Connelly, 2014).

The findings of this study provide evidence that the intervention was effective in enhancing students' self-talk abilities. The significant improvement demonstrated by the experimental group highlights the importance of structured psychological and educational strategies in developing positive internal communication among students. The findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that positive self-talk has significant effects on students' psychological and academic development (Sanchez, Carvajal, and Saggiomo, 2016). The improvement in the experimental group strengthens the argument that self-talk intervention can effectively enhance students' internal communication, emotional regulation, and positive thinking patterns.

A study conducted by Nurmaida Hasmi (2024) found that positive self-talk significantly improved students' learning motivation. The results revealed that students who received positive self-talk training experienced higher motivation levels compared to those who did not receive the intervention. This finding supports the present study, in which the experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase in self-talk scores after the intervention. Positive self-talk appears to help students develop constructive internal dialogue that encourages persistence and confidence in academic activities.

Similarly, research by Elisa Belyah Masi, DYP Sugiharto dan Sugiyo (2025) reported that positive self-talk effectively enhanced junior high school students' learning motivation through a quasi-experimental design. The study showed significant differences between the experimental and control groups after treatment was administered. These findings parallel the current study, where the experimental group achieved considerably greater improvement than the control group, suggesting that structured self-talk interventions can positively influence students' cognitive and emotional development.

Further support comes from a study by Gilang Tri Prayogo Yusuf, et.al. (2024) which demonstrated that positive self-talk interventions significantly increased elementary school students' self-confidence through cognitive restructuring techniques. The researchers argued that self-talk contributes not only to internal communication but also to self-efficacy and emotional resilience. This perspective aligns with the present findings, indicating that improved self-talk ability may strengthen students' confidence and self-regulation in learning situations.

Research conducted by Al Fajrul Maulana Lahadi, et.al. (2026) found that positive self-talk techniques effectively reduced students' anxiety before basketball competitions. The study

highlighted the role of self-talk in managing stress and improving psychological readiness. This finding provides an alternative explanation for the improvement observed in the experimental group of the present study, as enhanced self-talk may also help students regulate emotions and respond more positively to challenging situations.

A systematic literature review by Mulawarman, et.al. (2024) concluded that positive self-talk among adolescents can be developed through repeated practice, cognitive intervention, affirmation exercises, and mental rehearsal. The review emphasized that self-talk is a trainable psychological skill with motivational, cognitive, and affective functions. This conclusion strongly supports the findings of the current study, which demonstrate that structured intervention can significantly improve students' self-talk abilities.

Research by Dian Damairia, et.al. (2022) revealed that group counseling services using self-talk techniques improved senior high school students' positive thinking abilities. Students who participated in the intervention became more optimistic and better able to interpret problems constructively. This result is relevant to the current study because the increased post-test scores in the experimental group may reflect a shift toward more adaptive and positive cognitive patterns.

The present study reinforces previous findings that positive self-talk interventions are effective in enhancing motivation, confidence, emotional regulation, and positive thinking among students. The consistency between this study and earlier research suggests that self-talk intervention has strong potential to be integrated into educational and counseling programs aimed at supporting students' psychological and academic development.

Implications

The findings carry important implications at theoretical, practical, and policy levels, particularly in how schools conceptualize and implement student development programs.

First, at the theoretical level, the results reinforce and extend Cognitive Theory by demonstrating that cognitive restructuring does not have to occur through purely analytical or verbal techniques. Instead, it can emerge through symbolic and creative processes such as poetry writing. This suggests that internal dialogue can be reshaped not only by direct cognitive intervention but also by indirect, expressive pathways. In this sense, the study contributes to a more integrative understanding of cognition and emotion, where language, creativity, and reflection interact dynamically in shaping self-regulation.

At the practical level, the findings imply that guidance and counselling services in schools can be redesigned to incorporate creative modalities as core strategies rather than supplementary activities. Poetry writing, as shown in this study, offers an accessible and engaging medium for adolescents who may struggle with direct verbal expression of thoughts and emotions. This is particularly relevant in educational contexts where students often face pressure to perform cognitively but are given limited space for emotional articulation. By embedding structured expressive writing into classroom or counselling routines, educators can foster students' self-awareness, improve their self-talk, and ultimately support both emotional well-being and academic performance.

The study also has implications for instructional design and teacher training. Teachers and school counsellors may need to be equipped with competencies that go beyond traditional pedagogical skills, including the ability to facilitate reflective and expressive learning environments. Integrating approaches inspired by Barry J. Zimmerman's concept of self-regulated learning, educators can guide students to become more aware of their internal processes and more capable of managing them. This shifts the role of the teacher from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of personal meaning-making and cognitive-emotional growth.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that educational systems should reconsider the dominance of purely cognitive outcome measures and begin to value affective and

reflective competencies as equally important. Curriculum frameworks could incorporate creative counselling-based interventions as part of character education or socio-emotional learning programs. This is especially relevant in addressing broader issues such as low self-efficacy, poor emotional regulation, and mental health challenges among adolescents.

Finally, the findings open avenues for future research and innovation. They highlight the potential of interdisciplinary approaches that combine education, psychology, and the arts. Further studies could explore long-term impacts, scalability across diverse educational settings, and integration with digital platforms. In sum, the implications of this study point toward a more holistic educational paradigm—one that recognizes the power of creativity as a legitimate and effective pathway for cognitive and emotional transformation.

Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size was relatively small ($N = 30$) and drawn from a single junior high school, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader populations or different educational contexts. Students' cultural background, school climate, and prior exposure to expressive activities may have influenced the effectiveness of the intervention. Second, the use of a quasi-experimental design without full randomization introduces the possibility of selection bias and uncontrolled extraneous variables, such as differences in classroom dynamics or teacher support. Third, the measurement of *self-talk* relied primarily on self-report instruments, which may be subject to social desirability bias or students' limited self-awareness. Although supported by observational data, these qualitative insights were not analyzed using a rigorous coding framework, which may reduce their analytical depth. Additionally, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, so the long-term sustainability of the observed improvements in *self-talk* remains unclear.

Future research is encouraged to address these limitations by involving larger and more diverse samples across multiple schools or regions to enhance external validity. Experimental studies with randomized controlled designs would strengthen causal inferences regarding the effectiveness of poetry-based interventions. Longitudinal research is also needed to examine whether improvements in *self-talk* persist over time and how they relate to other outcomes such as academic achievement, emotional well-being, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, future studies could integrate mixed-method approaches with more rigorous qualitative analyses (e.g., thematic analysis) to better capture the depth of students' internal changes. It would also be valuable to compare poetry writing with other expressive modalities, such as journaling, storytelling, or visual arts, to determine the relative effectiveness of different creative interventions. Finally, exploring the role of teacher or counselor facilitation, as well as adapting the intervention for digital or blended learning environments, could provide practical insights for wider implementation in contemporary educational settings.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader student populations. Because the participants were drawn from a limited educational setting, the findings may not fully represent students from different cultural, social, or academic backgrounds. Future studies should therefore involve larger and more diverse participant groups to obtain findings that are more representative and applicable across various educational contexts. Second, the duration of the intervention was relatively short and may not adequately capture the long-term sustainability of improvements in students' self-talk ability. Although the results demonstrated significant positive changes during the intervention period, it remains unclear whether these improvements would continue over extended periods without ongoing support or reinforcement. Longitudinal

studies are needed to examine the persistence and stability of positive self-talk development over time.

Another limitation relates to the possibility of external influences affecting students' self-talk development during the research process. As observed in the control group, slight improvements may occur naturally through classroom experiences, peer interactions, teacher encouragement, emotional maturation, or familiarity with the assessment process. Although the experimental group demonstrated substantially greater improvement, these external factors may still contribute indirectly to changes in students' psychological development. Future research may therefore consider controlling additional environmental and social variables more systematically.

The study primarily focused on self-talk as the main psychological outcome and did not extensively examine its relationship with other important psychological and educational variables. Future research is encouraged to explore the relationship between self-talk and factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, emotional intelligence, resilience, academic engagement, mental well-being, and academic achievement. Investigating these relationships may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how self-talk interventions contribute to students' cognitive, emotional, social, and academic development.

Future studies may also employ mixed-method or qualitative approaches more extensively to capture students' personal experiences, emotional transformations, and reflective processes during intervention activities. Deeper qualitative exploration could provide richer insights into how students internalize positive self-talk and apply it in everyday learning situations. Through broader investigations, longer intervention periods, and more comprehensive research designs, future studies may provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of self-talk interventions and their contribution to students' holistic psychological and educational development.

The research recommends the development of further empirically based studies with experimental or mixed methods designs to test the effectiveness of poetry writing on improving self-talk, mental health, and student achievement across a wider range of student, school, and problem-solving contexts. Furthermore, a more systematic integration of reflective poetry writing activities with the curriculum and guidance and counseling services in secondary schools is needed so that the approach can be implemented sustainably as part of a holistic educational strategy oriented toward students' psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The creative process of writing poetry is an effective tool for improving middle school students' self-talk skills. Through poetry, students express their feelings while learning to recognize, organize, and reconstruct their internal dialogue more adaptively. The symbolic language in poetry helps students transform negative thoughts into more realistic, hopeful, and self-acceptance-oriented narratives.

Writing poetry serves as a form of humanistic, reflective, and contextual counseling for adolescents' daily challenges. Poetry provides a safe space for students to express academic, social, and personal conflicts without the pressures of conventional counseling formalities. This process supports the strengthening of emotional regulation, self-awareness, and the formation of meaning within adolescents' life experiences in the school environment.

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Author Contribution Statement

MT contributed to the study design, data collection, data analysis, and writing the initial draft of the manuscript. UA played a role in the development of research instruments, data validation, literature review, manuscript editing, and refinement of the article's substance. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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