



Reducing Academic Stress with Group Counseling with A Combination of Relaxation Techniques and Reading Al-Qur'an

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling using the relaxation technique of reading the Qur'an to reduce the stress of academic students. This type of research is quantitative research. The method used is quasi-experimental, nonquivalent control group design. Data analysis method using independent sample t test. The sample in this study amounted to 16 people, 8 people for the experimental group and 8 people for the control group. Data collection was carried out using the academic stress scale. Based on the results of the study, the Independent Sample T Test test produced a significance value (probability of error) = 0.004. This means that the statistical test results produce a sig value. $0.004 < \alpha 0.05$, meaning that there is a difference in the acquisition score treated with the relaxation technique of reading Al-Qur'an with those who are not treated. Therefore, the class average value in the experimental group is greater than the control group ($30.00 > 10.00$). Thus, it can be stated that group guidance with relaxation techniques reading the Qur'an is effective for reducing students' academic stress.

Keyword: Group counseling; relaxation; academic stress

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui keefektifan kelompok konseling menggunakan teknik relaksasi membaca Al-Qur'an untuk menurunkan stres peserta didik akademik. Jenis penelitian ini adalah penelitian kuantitatif. Metode yang dipakai adalah quasi eksperimen, desain nonquivalent control group. Metode analisis data menggunakan uji independent sample t test. Sampel dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 16 orang, 8 untuk kelompok eksperimen dan 8 untuk kelompok kontrol. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan skala akademik. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, keluaran uji Independent Sample T Test nilai signifikansi (probabilitas kesalahan) = 0,004. Ini berarti hasil uji statistik tersebut menghasilkan nilai sig. $0,004 < \alpha 0.05$, artinya ada perbedaan gain skor yang diberikan perlakuan dengan teknik relaksasi membaca Al-Qur'an dengan yang tidak diberikan perlakuan. Sebab itu nilai rata-rata kelas pada kelompok eksperimen lebih besar dari kelompok kontrol ($30.00 > 10.00$). Dengan demikian dapat dinyatakan bahwa kelompok konseling dengan teknik relaksasi membaca Al-Qur'an efektif untuk menurunkan stres peserta didik akademik.

Kata kunci: Konseling kelompok; relaksasi; stres akademik

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important part that students must take to achieve success. However, in an effort to realize educational goals, there will certainly be obstacles and challenges. These challenges are often experienced by learners and trigger stress. The social and non-social environment of students while participating in learning at school also has the potential to trigger stress. Academic stress is a condition or feeling of discomfort felt by students due to school demands that are considered stressful so that they can trigger physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioral tensions (Affum-osei, et al., 2014). Academic stress is defined as the pressure that students feel during school activities that are perceived negatively, and have an impact on their mental, physical, and learning achievements (Ariga, 2016).

Some research shows that academic stress is a global concern at every level of education. Habeeb (2010) stated that globally the percentage of students who experience academic stress is 38-71%, while in Asia it is 39.6- 61.3%. In Indonesia, the percentage of students experiencing academic stress is 36.7-71.6% (Fitasari, 2011). Even during the pandemic, 81.6% of high school students in Indonesia experienced high levels of academic stress and 18.4% of students experienced low academic stress (Gusella, 2020). Similarly, at SMPN 6 Salatiga, based on the results of the psychological scale distribution, 54% of students experienced academic stress at a moderate level, and 22.7% experienced stress in the high category, while the rest were in a low category. This situation is evidence that many students are indicated to experience academic stress.

Academic stress may be attributed to various factors, including physical demands derived from the physical environment, task demands indicated by overwhelming academic work, role demands, and interpersonal demands (Desmita, 2017). Individuals may likely exhibit four types of reactions when facing academic stress, which could be categorized as physiological reactions, emotional reactions, behavioral reactions, and positive appraisal reactions (Harjuna & Magistarina, 2021). According to Dickinson (2007), the impact of stress includes an increased risk of various mental disorders and physical illnesses such as anxiety, depression, weakened immune system, headaches, heart problems, blood pressure disorders, fatigue, allergies, and stroke.

Previous explanations imply the need for counselors' role to minimize academic stress at school. Kulsum (2013) states that the counselor's job is also to help provide assistance in

the academic, non-academic, and psychological fields and develop the potential of students. The assistance process provided by counselors in urgent conditions is called responsive services (Hermawan et al., 2019).

Counseling can be done in individual or group settings. The latter is often deemed more efficient as it can handle the same problem at one time with more than one counselee (Aminah et al., 2021). Group counseling is a process of helping counselees in a group setting by using group dynamics (Banat et al., 2020). Through group counseling, counselees can provide mutual input, consideration, and support in solving the problems experienced. In group counseling, the counselee is given opportunities to express their internal tension (catharsis) to address their emotional condition can be conditioned. In this regard, the research by Rahmandani & Kahija (2022) states that catharsis, balanced with gratitude, can reduce stress. Previous research shows that the use of group counseling can reduce academic stress levels (Putrikita & Sari, 2020; Koçak & Çelik, 2022). In addition, various techniques and approaches in group counseling have been proven effective in reducing academic stress, including using self-instruction techniques (Mardianti & Dharmayana, 2020), reality approach (Fadhlaturrahmah, 2021), stress inoculation in group counseling (Sriatun et al., 2023), snakes and ladders media in group counseling (Novaliany, 2022), self-management techniques in group counseling (Vania et al., 2019), and self-control techniques in group counseling (Andriati & Hidayati, 2021).

According to Affum-osei et al. (2014), academic stress can lead to physical, psychological, and mental tension, and employing relaxation techniques can help alleviate muscular, mental, and psychological tension. Suyono et al. (2016) further supported this by affirming that relaxation techniques can effectively decrease stress, anxiety, depression, phobias, and insomnia. Previous studies have reported the use of relaxation techniques to reduce academic stress at the high school level (Suyono et al., 2016; Nurcahyani & Fauzan, 2016); final-year students (Rustam et al., 2020); test anxiety (Rasyidin & Pratiwi, 2022; Juliawati et al., 2019); thesis-related stress (Renhoran et al., 2022).

As described earlier, group counseling and relaxation are proven to be equally beneficial for reducing academic stress. Therefore, in this research, group counseling and relaxation techniques were combined to reduce academic stress. In its development, relaxation can be done with various strategies, including muscle relaxation (Rustam et al., 2020); using breathing (Renhoran et al., 2022); and using spiritual nuances (Nugraheni et

al., 2018). All types of relaxation that have been researched have proven effective in reducing stress levels (Bunyamin, 2021). However, Dailey et al. (2011) argue that the integration of spiritual values in the implementation of interventions, when properly executed, will increase their effectiveness.

The integration of spiritual values into interventions has been explored in various studies, particularly in the context of using Quran to reduce academic stress levels. Nugraheni et al. (2018) conducted research that prove the effectiveness of Quran reading in reducing academic stress among high school students. Additionally, Munir et al. (2021) found similar results showing that reading Quran may reduce academic stress among college students. The practice of Quran reading and understanding its meaning has also been shown to alleviate anxiety among students attending boarding schools (Ma'ati & Chaer, 2016; Purwaningrum et al., 2022). Furthermore, listening to the recitation of the holy verses of the Quran has been found to alleviate academic stress (Putri et al., 2021; Ansyah et al., 2019). Therefore, the objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling that incorporates the relaxation technique of reading the Qur'an in reducing academic stress among students.

METHODS

This experimental study applied a nonequivalent control group design (Sugiyono, 2018). Data were collected using an academic stress scale with four indicators: reactions to physics, behavior, emotions, and thoughts (Harjuna & Magistarina, 2021). The instrument used had been tested for validity and reliability. The participants of this study were 8th-grade students of SMP Negeri 6 Salatiga, recruited using a purposive sampling technique. They were students with high academic stress. Sixteen participants in this study were assigned to experimental and control groups, with eight participants each. The experimental group received Qur'an reading and relaxation techniques, while the control group engaged in discussion techniques. Data were analyzed using an independent sample t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results showed a difference in pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group and control group, as described in table 1. Based on table 1, there is a difference in the average score of academic stress levels between the experimental group (30) and the control group (10). These results indicate that the level of academic stress in the

experimental group decreased faster than in the control group. Furthermore, in Table 2, the hypothesis test results show a sig value. $0.004 < 0.05$, meaning that H_a was accepted. In other words, group counseling with relaxation techniques reading Al-Qur'an effectively reduces academic stress.

Academic stress is a condition of discomfort, tension, and negative behavioral changes that arise as a result of academic demands (Lubis et al., 2021). Affum-osei et al. (2014) added that academic stress has negative effects on students' learning outcomes or academic achievement. Considering the negative impact of academic stress, appropriate interventions are needed to help students reduce academic stress.

Table 1 Pretest and Posttest Results

No	Subject	Eksperiment		Control	
		Pretes	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
1.	A	111	83	112	95
2.	B	111	76	118	113
3.	C	113	99	105	104
4.	D	111	62	113	110
5.	E	108	89	101	89
6.	F	112	90	109	85
7.	G	102	83	105	93
8.	H	105	51	113	107
N		$\Sigma 873$	$\Sigma 633$	$\Sigma 876$	$\Sigma 796$
Mean		109.125	79.125	109,5	99,5
Gain Score		30		20	

Table 2 Hypothesis Test Results

		Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ ence	Std. Error Differ ence
Stres Akade mik	Equal variances assumed	3,798	,072	3,388	14	,004	20,000	5,904
	Equal variances not assumed			3,388	10,60 7	,006	20,000	5,904

Counselors can provide assistance in reducing academic stress through both responsive and preventive basic services (Hermawan et al., 2019). Responsive assistance can be done through group counseling. In this study, responsive services in the form of group counseling were used to reduce students' academic stress. Group counseling is a

service that utilizes group dynamics to solve counselees' problems, including academic problems (Banat et al., 2020). Through group counseling, students experiencing academic stress can express their tensions through group dynamics. Group dynamics may also provide students with support and reinforcement to help reduce academic stress. This has been proven in several previous studies, which revealed that the use of group counseling could decrease students' academic stress (Putrikita & Sari, 2020; Koçak & Çelik, 2022). Group counseling could be done using a range of techniques and approaches to address academic stress, such as self-instruction techniques (Mardianti & Dharmayana, 2020), reality-oriented approaches (Fadhlaturrahmah, 2021), stress inoculation (Sriatun et al., 2023), snake ladder-based group counseling (Novaliany, 2022), self-management techniques (Vania et al., 2019), and self-control techniques (Andriati & Hidayati, 2021), among others.

Each intervention has different impacts on the level of academic stress. In this study, to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, an experimental group and a control group were provided. The experimental group received treatment with Quranic reading relaxation techniques, while the control group used discussion techniques. The results of this study found differences in the level of academic stress between the experimental and control groups. The differences found in the results between the experimental and control groups were influenced by the type of intervention used. This is supported by Aryani et al. (2022), who stated that interventions should be tailored to the identified problems.

Additionally, Fitriana (2019) revealed that the success of interventions is influenced by the attitudes and skills of the counselor. Counselor skills can be demonstrated in the counseling process. The group counseling process in this study was systematically conducted through the initial, transition, activity, and closing stages (Adhiputra, 2015). Specifically, the activities in the first meeting involved building rapport among group members and identifying stressors. Subsequent meetings focused on preparing counselees for group counseling. The core stage involved providing interventions to the counselees. The final stage consisted of evaluation and termination to ensure changes in the level of academic stress.

The implementation of group counseling to reduce academic stress needs to employ techniques. The technique used in this group counseling is relaxation technique. The relaxation technique is used to reduce tensions experienced during academic stress. As mentioned by Affum-osei et al. (2014), academic stress triggers tension in physical,

psychological, and mental aspects. Through relaxation, the tension in muscles, mental state, and psyche can be minimized. Suyono et al. (2016); Sudiarto et al. (2015) reinforced that relaxation techniques can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, phobias, and insomnia. Relaxation techniques are necessary to calm and stabilize the labile conditions caused by stress. According to Dickinson (2007), stress can increase the risk of various mental disorders and physical illnesses, including anxiety, depression, weakened immune system, headaches, heart problems, blood pressure disorders, loss of energy, allergies, and strokes. Renhoran et al. (2022) used deep breathing relaxation techniques to stabilize breathing and calm the agitated mind. The deep breathing relaxation technique utilizes regulated breathing by inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. Suwardianto's research (2011) stated that deep breathing relaxation techniques could improve lung ventilation and increase oxygen in the blood, inducing relaxd state. Several studies have also proven that relaxation can reduce academic stress, such as relaxation techniques to reduce academic stress in high school students (Suyono et al., 2016; Nurcahyani & Fauzan, 2016); relaxation techniques to reduce test anxiety (Rasyidin & Pratiwi, 2022; Juliawati et al., 2019); relaxation to reduce stress while working on a thesis (Renhoran et al., 2022); muscle relaxation to reduce stress in senior college students (Rustam et al., 2020).

In its development, various innovations in relaxation techniques have been made, such as muscle relaxation (Rustam et al., 2020), breathing techniques (Renhoran et al., 2022; Ningsih & Adelia, 2022), and spiritual nuances (Nugraheni et al., 2018). These techniques are proven to be effective in reducing stress levels (Bunyamin, 2021). This study combined relaxation techniques with Quranic reading. The results showed that the relaxation-Quranic reading combination was effective in reducing academic stress. This is supported by several studies on the impact of Quranic reading in reducing academic stress. Nugraheni et al. (2018) found that Quranic reading can reduce academic stress in high school students. Quranic reading has also been proven to reduce academic stress at the college level (Munir et al., 2021). Quranic reading and its interpretation can reduce anxiety among students in Islamic boarding schools (Ma'ati & Chaer, 2016; Purwaningrum et al., 2022; Martala et al., 2022; Munjirin, 2020). Listening to the sacred verses of the Quran can also reduce the level of academic stress (Putri et al., 2021; Ansyah et al., 2019; Rachman et al., 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Academic stress is a condition of psychological strain caused by academic demands. This condition can be reduced through psychological assistance by counselors in schools. Psychological assistance that can be used as an alternative to reduce academic stress is a relaxation technique counseling group reading the Qur'an. The results of this study prove that the counseling group relaxation technique of reading Al-Qur'an is effective in reducing the stress of academic learners. The results of this research contribute theoretically and practically to counselors and previous researchers. The generalizability of this study's result would be higher if more participants were involved.

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