Improving Interpersonal Communication Skills through Group Guidance with Assertive Training Techniques

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Abstract: This study aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of group mentoring services utilizing assertive training techniques in enhancing the interpersonal communication skills of students. A quasi-experimental design was employed, with a sample of twenty students from a public junior high school in Indonesia, evenly divided into experimental and control groups using probability sampling with simple random sampling techniques. Interpersonal communication skills were assessed using instruments developed by the researchers and evaluated by experts. Data analysis involved the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov. The results indicate a significant increase in the interpersonal communication skills of the experimental group students, with their average scores increasing from 67.2 before receiving group counseling services to 123 after implementing assertive training techniques. In contrast, the control group's average scores increased from 87.1 to 105.6 after the same intervention. This study highlights the effectiveness of group mentoring with assertive training techniques in enhancing students' interpersonal communication skills, contributing valuable insights to the field of educational psychology and counseling.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, group guidance, techniques assertive training

INTRODUCTION

In life, communication is the most crucial aspect. All people in the world will inevitably communicate with one another since they are social creatures. Communication is a social event, an event that occurs when humans interact with others. Communication is one of the problems that can hinder the educational process because in the learning process teaching requires good and optimal communication (Handayani, 2011). Through communication, individuals can create relationships and manage relationships with other individuals, without communication there will be no social relationship with others. Communication in life becomes a bridge to leads us to a variety of needs (Enjang, 2009). In essence, communication serves as the bridge that not only connects individuals but also paves the way for fulfilling various interpersonal needs. This profound significance of communication underscores its relevance in both educational and broader social contexts, making it a crucial area of study and exploration.

Interpersonal communication is communication that takes place between two people who have a stable and clear relationship, so the individual needs to have interpersonal communication skills (Rakhmat, 2012). Then, Deddy (2005) states that interpersonal communication is a process of communication that takes place between people face-to-face, enabling everyone involved in communication to capture the reactions of others directly, both verbal and non-verbal. The ability and quality of communication are crucial to the quality of life of everyone (Ningrum, 2015). According to Prayitno (2018), teenagers should practice showing compassion by practicing active listening and respect for others. People who communicate well will be able to carry out their responsibilities more successfully. Interpersonal communication is important because it affects how well students are in the future, so students need to be able to communicate with others well. It is important to do the learning at school well and effectively (Sahputra et al., 2016).

Many problems arise when students do not have interpersonal communication skills. A study by Okoro et al. (2017) finds that a variety of factors affect students' communication skills, including their capacity to use speaking and listening skills to establish and maintain impressions during conversations and ensure that the message is understood. Similarly, if there are problems in communicating then it will raise problems as by Suryaningsih and Mohamad (2014), that the poor interpersonal communication skills of students, can hinder individual development as well as social relations in the school environment. To reach the plans and objectives of the school, which call for students who are performing, personal, and ethical, students must have strong interpersonal communication skills. These abilities can aid students in becoming more communicative and collaborative.

Roszkowska and Trepka-Starosta (2020) argue that, in Poland, interpersonal communication skills influence the assessment of the quality of teacher-student relations and the anxiety that students feel about others. Then, 62% of students in junior high school have sufficient communication skills, 32% have moderate communication skills, and 6% have high communication skills (Astuti et al., 2013). Further, in Western Sumatra, several students experience interpersonal communication difficulties; 25% of students are in the low category, 60% are in the medium category, and 15% are in the high category (Kurnia & Afrinaldi, 2022). It demonstrates how students' ability to learn at school may be hampered by issues with interpersonal interactions. According to Yusuf et al. (2020), studying interpersonal communication is essential since it has a significant and positive impact on learning. Based on the findings, it can be said that the student's interpersonal communication skills still require improvement. If actions cannot be done immediately, students cannot establish good social relationships and ethics in communicating.

In improving interpersonal communication skills, counseling teachers can provide skills training to help students improve their interpersonal communication skills (Wicaksono, 2013). Counseling teachers can provide group counseling (Tobing & Annisa, 2020). There is a significant improvement in student interpersonal communication in the school between before and after applying group counseling (Iskandar et al., 2015). Prayitno (2018) explains that the general purpose of group mentoring is to improve the communicative ability of the service participants (students), more specifically group guidance aims to encourage the development of feelings, thoughts, perceptions, insights, and attitudes to realize more effective behavior. Based on previous studies, group guidance can help students improve interpersonal communication skills effectively, with approaches or techniques present in guidance and counseling that can be combined in group coaching.

For effective problem-solving, a counseling teacher can add one of the techniques that can help students improve interpersonal communication skills, namely assertive training (Hartono, 2001). Assertiveness is the key to interpersonal behavior and a vital key to human relations, a skill that can be learned and maintained through regular practice (McNamara in Ghalab et al., 2023). As highlighted by Avşar and Alkaya (2017), the assertiveness skill itself plays a pivotal role in boosting self-confidence and improving interpersonal communications. This skill, as stated by Lin (in Aliyar Najafabadi et al., 2020), contributes to a positive change in self-perception, self-confidence, interpersonal communication, and overall well-being. Assertiveness training increases individuals' ability to adopt proper communication, which can improve an individual's health and reduce a sense of frustration and thus create healthy relationships.

Assertive training is a valuable technique that empowers individuals to transform their self-perception, enhance assertiveness, and alleviate anxiety-driven inhibitions. This approach encompasses a range of cognitive and behavioral methods, including behavioral rehearsal, modeling, role-playing, exposure, and cognitive restructuring (Baggio in Di Consiglio et al., 2023). It is noteworthy that assertive communication training, as demonstrated by Karakas (Ardita, 2019), effectively enhances the ability to convey both negative and positive feelings. Then, assertive training is a counseling method that focuses on developing individual assertivity skills. This technique involves teaching individuals how to express their thoughts, feelings, and needs directly and respectfully while keeping an eye on the rights and feelings of others (Sudaryanto et al., 2022). It involves several key components, including providing guidance and instruction on assertive skills, modeling assertive behavior by counselors, role-playing as a means of training, feedback from counselors, and assignment of tasks for training outside counseling sessions (Al Atikho et al., 2023).

Mousa et al. (2011) state the purpose of assertive training is to teach counsel to act or behave according to their needs and wishes while respecting the rights and interests of others. Assertive training is a behavioral change procedure that teaches, guides, trains, and encourages clients to express and behave firmly in a particular situation (Astinah, 2018). Therefore, this study aims to identify the effectiveness of group guidance using assertive training techniques in improving students' interpersonal communication skills. Previous research has examined the effectiveness of group mentoring services with assertive training techniques in various contexts. These findings include significant improvements in individual assertiveness skills, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, social interaction skills, support in career planning, and encouraging altruistic behavior (Anyamene et al., 2016; Ahadinasrikin et al., 2021; Sudaryanto et al., 2022; Shohila & Riswani, 2022; Rahmatyana & Irmayanti, 2020; Nengsih et al., 2015; Azizah & Murtafi'ah, 2021; Mesa et al., 2020; Faradita et al., 2018). Therefore, group counseling services with assertive training techniques have great potential in helping individuals better personal development, one of which is in improving interpersonal communication skills.

METHODS

This quantitative research used experimental research designs using quasi-experimental designs. This was chosen as it offers a practical approach when complete random assignment is challenging or not feasible, which was the case in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quasi-experimental designs allow for using control and experimental groups, similar to true experimental designs, but they accommodate situations where the

researcher may have limited control over random assignment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was conducted in a junior high school in Indonesia, where a sample of twenty students was selected using probability sampling and technique simple random sampling and divided equally into experimental and control groups, each comprising ten students. The instrument used in this research was the interpersonal communication skills of students who had been judged by their experts. The instrument validity test results involving 168 respondents were obtained r_{table} of 0.361. The final validity testing value of the instrument consisting of 50 of these items was 0.361 per item indicating that the instrument is valid. In terms of reliability, the instrument had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.923 which is very reliable.

The research procedure was initiated with a pre-test to establish a baseline for students' interpersonal communication skills before any treatment was introduced. Subsequently, the experimental group underwent five group mentoring sessions that incorporated assertive training techniques specifically designed to enhance students' interpersonal communication skills. Meanwhile, the control group participated in five group guidance sessions that did not incorporate assertive training techniques. Each mentoring session was structured to be 40 minutes in duration, ensuring a consistent treatment experience for both groups. To assess the impact of the treatment, data analysis was conducted using the Wilcoxon signed ranks test, which is appropriate for comparing related samples, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-independent sample test. These statistical methods allowed for a robust examination of the changes in students' interpersonal communication skills across the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up measurements. The results obtained from these analyses were subsequently used to address the research hypotheses and identify any significant differences in the effectiveness of assertive training techniques in improving students' interpersonal communication skills over time.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

At school, it is expected that students have good communication skills such as interpersonal communication, because through communication students can develop their own potential. However, it was found that some students have low interpersonal communication skills. Table 1 below shows the level of interpersonal communication skills of high school students.

Table 1. Overall Data on Students' Interpersonal Communication Skills

Category	Interval	F	%
Very High	140-170	10	3,46
High	117-143	154	53,28
Medium	90-116	101	34,94
Low	63-89	17	5,88
Very Low	34-62	7	2,42
Total		289	100

There are 7 students in the very low category with a percentage of 2.42%, 17 in the lower category with 5.88%, 101 in the medium category with 34.94%, 154 in the high category with 23.3%, and 10 in the extremely high class with 3.46%. The objective of the pretest and posttest is to find out a picture of students' interpersonal communication skills before and after giving group mentoring services.

Table 2. The Pretest and Posttest Results of the Experimental Group

No	Initial	Pretest Score	Pretest Category	Posttest Score	Posttest Category
1	AA	87	Low	128	High
2	CA	81	Low	119	High
3	NMP	84	Low	133	High
4	AGS	60	Very Low	144	Very High
5	FK	61	Very Low	118	High
6	KAH	57	Very Low	123	High
7	C	58	Very Low	114	Medium
8	YPG	62	Very Low	116	Medium
M	HH	60	Very Low	117	High
10	DMR	62	Very Low	118	High
Total		672	Low	1230	High
Average		67,2	Low	123	High

Based on the above table it is known that the comparison of students' interpersonal communication skills of the experimental group before being given treatment shows an average score of 67.2 with the low category. After treatment, the average increased to 128 with the high category. There were significant differences in the experimental groups before and after the treatment. This proves that group guidance using assertive training techniques does change the student's interpersonal communication skills. Here are the results of the Wilcoxon signed rank test which can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results of Students'
Interpersonal Communication Skills in the
Pretest and Posttest of the Experimental Group

Test Statistics[a]	
	PostTest – PreTest
Z	-2.807[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

Based on Table 3 above, it can be seen that the probability figure Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of interpersonal communication skills of the experimental group students is 0.005 or probability below 0.05 (0,005 < 0.05). From that result, Ho was rejected and HI was accepted. Thus, the first hypothesis tested in this study is acceptable, namely, "there are significant differences in interpersonal communication skills of experimental group students before and after following group guidance using assertive training techniques". Then there are the pre-test and post-test results from the control group.

Table 4. The Pretest and Posttest Results of the Control Group

No	Initial	Pretest		Posttest	
		Score	**Category**	**Score**	**Category**
1	ZS	84	Low	93	Medium
2	SDR	93	Medium	117	High
3	NZ	89	Low	116	Medium
4	NZA	92	Medium	107	Medium
5	MZA	74	Low	100	Medium
6	UF	90	Medium	127	High
7	NVA	88	Low	98	Medium
8	RF	84	Low	101	Medium
9	KNS	87	Low	92	Medium
10	EN	90	Medium	105	Medium
Total		871	Low	1056	Medium
Average		87,1	Low	105,6	Medium

It can be seen from the above table that the interpersonal communication skills of the control group before and after the treatment, which is an average of 87.1 in the low category. After the treatment, the average is 105.6 in the medium category. There were significant differences in the control group before and after treatment. Here are the results of the Wilcoxon signed rank test that can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results of Students'
Interpersonal Communication Skills in the
Pretest and Posttest of the Control Group

Test Statistics[a]	
	PostTest – PreTest
Z	-2.805[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

Based on Table 5 above, it can be seen that the probability figure Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of interpersonal communication skills of the control group students is 0.005 or probability below 0.05 (0,005 < 0.05). According to the results, Ho was rejected and HI was accepted. Thus, the second hypothesis tested in this study is

acceptable, that "there is a significant difference in interpersonal communication skills of control group students before and after following group guidance services without special treatment". Here are the results of Kolmogorov Smirnov in two independent samples.

Table 6. Results Analysis Kolmogorov Smirnov 2 Independent Samples Interpersonal Communication Skills Students Groups Experimental and Control

Test Statistics[a]		
		VAR00001
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.800
	Positive	.000
	Negative	-.800
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.789
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
a. Grouping Variable: The Posttest of the Experimental and Control Groups		

Based on Table 6, the Z score for the two-sided test was 1,789 with the probability figure Sig. (2-tailed) interpersonal communication skills of the experimental group and control group students was 0,003 or probability below 0.05 (0,003 < 0.05). From that result, Ho was rejected and HI was accepted. Thus, the third hypothesis tested in this study is acceptable, namely, "there are significant differences in interpersonal communication skills of the experimental group students who follow group guidance using assertive training techniques with the control group who are given group guidance services without special treatment".

As previously presented, the experimental group, which underwent group guidance treatment with assertive training techniques, exhibited a marked enhancement in their interpersonal communication skills. In contrast, the control group, subjected to group mentoring without assertive training techniques, showed marginal improvement, if any. This lends credence to our hypothesis that group mentoring services when integrated with assertive training techniques, play an effective role in augmenting students' interpersonal communication skills.

The utilization of group guidance infused with assertive training techniques bestows students with the advantage of actively honing their communication skills (Lubis et al., 2022). Notably, Aldina and Fadhli (2020) corroborate the effectiveness of group guidance in improving students' interpersonal communication skills. It is, therefore, plausible to assert that the implementation of group guidance featuring assertive training techniques is conducive to enhancing students' communication proficiency. Through role-play and practical exercises, students gain the opportunity to strengthen their communication abilities (Budiarti, 2020). Singgih (2007) contributes by elucidating the concept of assertive practice as a method aimed at fostering social adjustment behavior by encouraging the expression of feelings, attitudes, expectations, opinions, and rights. Nurmagandi et al. (2022) highlight that assertive communication practice can also have a positive impact on adolescent communication skills in interpersonal relationships within social environments.

Even group guidance sessions without specialized treatment have been found to enhance students' interpersonal communication skills (Tobing & Annisa, 2020). However, the extent of this improvement is relatively modest, largely attributed to the absence of practical exercises that actively engage students in honing their communication abilities. The importance of using assertive training techniques in group guidance to improve student interpersonal communication skills is also reinforced by research conducted by Setyowati and Maharani (2023). In this study, role-playing techniques are used in group counseling to help students practice and develop their interpersonal communication skills through role simulation. The results of this study confirm that role-playing techniques are effective in improving the interpersonal communication skills of students (Setyowati & Maharani, 2023). In a broader context, there is evidence from other studies that support the effectiveness of group guidance with assertive training techniques in improving student interpersonal communication skills. Prasetia et al. (2022) suggested that Gestalt therapeutic techniques in group guidance and counseling can contribute positively to student interpersonal communication skills. The findings of this study align with prior research, which has consistently demonstrated the efficacy of group mentoring services incorporating assertive training techniques in bolstering interpersonal communication skills (Lubis et al., 2022). Similar positive outcomes have been observed in the context of improving overall student interpersonal communication (Astinah, 2018), fostering assertive communication in adolescents (Shohila & Riswani, 2022), and enhancing self-esteem (Mujiyati, 2015). In light of the aforementioned, it becomes evident that the implementation of group guidance featuring assertive training techniques is a potent catalyst for the enhancement of students' interpersonal communication skills. Thus it can be said that giving group guidance with this technique can improve the interpersonal communication skills of students because student services

can also practice in person his ability to communicate by playing a role so that after playing this role, students can communicate even better (Budiarti, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Students have an awareness of the importance of qualified communication skills as the key to digging and developing their potential. To improve communication skills, students begin to demonstrate proactive actions such as more courageous interaction with others, sharpen openness in communicating, and strive to improve their overall communication skills. In this study, both the experimental and control groups experienced a significant improvement in their interpersonal communication skills. Nevertheless, the results show that changes occurring in the experimental group employing group guidance services using assertive training techniques are much more effective compared to the control group only employing regular group mentoring services. The results provide important implications for counseling practitioners, highlighting the importance of incorporating assertive training techniques into various aspects of counseling services, including in the personal, social, learning, and individual career development contexts.

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