

GROUP COUNSELING USING THE DISPUTE COGNITIVE TECHNIQUE TO REDUCE PEOPLE PLEASER BEHAVIOR AMONG STUDENTS AT MTSN TANJUNGBALAI

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Abstract. This research aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling with the Dispute Cognitive technique in reducing people pleaser behavior in class VIII students of MTsN Kota Tanjungbalai. The research method used is a quantitative research method with a quasi-experimental approach (quasi experiment) with a one group pretest-posttest design. The research sample consisted of 30 students who were selected purposively based on the results of observations and recommendations from BK teachers. The main instrument was a Likert scale questionnaire that measured six aspects of people pleaser behavior. The results showed a decrease in the average score from 40.10 (pretest) to 35.07 (posttest), and the Wilcoxon test showed a significance value of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$), which means there was a significant difference before and after treatment. These findings indicate that the Dispute Cognitive technique is effective in helping students change irrational thinking patterns to be more rational and build healthy social behavior. This study provides important implications for guidance and counseling services in schools to develop cognitive interventions that focus on strengthening students' identity and assertiveness.

Keywords: Group Counseling; Dispute Cognitive; People Pleaser; Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in schools is organized by educators and educational staff. Educators are professional personnel who include teachers, lecturers, counselors, instructors, tutors, facilitators, and other related professions responsible for implementing learning processes within the education system. As professional educators, teachers are tasked with educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students across early childhood education, basic education, and secondary education levels (Syukur et al., 2019).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation (Permendikbudristek) No. 19 of 2024 concerning the Teacher Professional Education program classifies teachers based on their certification status and job background. These include teachers who have completed professional training but do not yet hold a teaching certificate, active teachers without certification, teachers transitioning from other functional positions without certification, and those who already hold teaching certificates. This classification aims to clarify the implementation of the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program and ensure each category receives appropriate treatment in the certification and professional development process. The Ministerial Regulation No. 27 of 2008 on the Academic Qualification Standards and Competencies of Counselors outlines four core competencies required of school counselors: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies.

Guidance and Counseling (GC) teachers play a vital role in assisting students not only in academic matters but also in personal, social, and career development. According to Ministerial Regulation No. 111 of 2014 Article 9 paragraphs 1–6, GC teachers are responsible for delivering counseling services in schools to help students navigate various challenges, ranging from learning difficulties to personal issues. GC teachers collaborate with principals, subject teachers, parents, and external parties such as psychologists or educational institutions. Such collaboration is crucial to ensure that the guidance provided aligns with students' individual needs. The competencies of GC teachers contribute not only to service delivery but also to the understanding and support of students dealing with psychological issues, including people pleaser behavior.

People pleaser behavior among students has increasingly attracted attention in the educational context. This behavior refers to an individual's tendency to always seek to please others, often at the expense of their own needs, desires, and well-being (Lestari et al., 2021; Yunita, 2020). In the school environment, students exhibiting such tendencies often experience high emotional pressure due to the perceived need to meet the expectations of peers, teachers, and parents (Lubis & Siregar, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2022). This behavior is influenced by the role of educators in creating a learning environment that supports character development and emotional well-being.

According to Fitri and Damayanti (2023), people pleaser behavior is shaped by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Research by Lestari et al. (2022) reveals that students with low self-confidence and poor self-esteem are more vulnerable to this behavior. Social and cultural pressures that emphasize the importance of social acceptance further contribute to its development. Students who constantly strive to please others tend to neglect their emotional and psychological needs, which over time may lead to mental fatigue, stress, and excessive anxiety (Kurniati & Supriyatna, 2022; Iswarindi & Widayana, 2022).

In the long term, people pleaser tendencies may lead to serious consequences, particularly if they escalate into Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD). Initially, individuals may aim to maintain social harmony by pleasing others. However, if this habit persists uncontrollably, they may lose personal boundaries and sacrifice their needs and happiness to meet others' expectations.

Dependent Personality Disorder is characterized by submissiveness, excessive emotional dependence, and a strong need for care and attention from others. Its core traits align with people pleaser tendencies, where individuals prioritize others' needs over their own. They often fear rejection and believe that constant approval-seeking is necessary for social acceptance. This behavior typically stems from early-formed beliefs that self-worth is defined by the extent to which one fulfills others' expectations (Carlson & Sperry, 2013).

Group counseling has proven to be an effective approach in addressing people pleaser behavior. It provides students with a platform to share experiences, receive social support, and develop skills in healthy self-expression (Asmita & Silvanetri, 2022; Nopriani et al., 2021). Group counseling allows for the application of various techniques and approaches to help individuals manage psychological challenges. In this context, counseling serves not only as a forum for sharing but also as a professional process to assist individuals in problem-solving and decision-making.

Counseling is a professional service aimed at assisting individuals facing difficulties in resolving problems and making decisions regarding specific issues. The counseling process is conducted through a series of sessions tailored to the client's needs. Counselors apply various strategies and techniques to facilitate client change (Mydin, 2019). One effective group counseling technique is disputing cognitive, which focuses on restructuring the negative thought patterns underlying people pleaser behavior (Sulaiman et al., 2023). Through this technique, students are taught to identify, evaluate, and alter irrational beliefs that compel them to constantly fulfill others' expectations (Sari et al., 2020).

The dispute cognitive approach also helps students understand the influence of external opinions on their self-perception (Febrianto & Ambarini, 2019). It supports the development of healthier perspectives on social relationships and personal boundaries (Nadhifa et al., 2020). In a safe and supportive environment, students can learn to establish boundaries, express their needs, and build self-confidence in

dealing with social pressure (Fadilla et al., 2023; ALIM et al., 2021).

The implementation of group counseling using the dispute cognitive technique has great potential in reducing students' people pleaser tendencies. This intervention not only fosters better understanding of personal thought patterns but also equips students with the skills necessary to enhance emotional and social well-being (Lestari et al., 2022; Yunita, 2020).

Initial findings related to people pleaser behavior among eighth-grade students at MTsN Kota Tanjungbalai reveal its significance as a social issue affecting peer interactions. Based on interviews with a school guidance counselor, one case involved a student who resigned from the class secretary position despite being academically and organizationally capable. The resignation was driven by guilt toward the previous secretary, a close friend. This student feared disappointing the friend and prioritized the friend's feelings over the responsibility entrusted to them. Such behavior illustrates a key characteristic of a people pleaser: difficulty in saying "no" and a tendency to conform for the sake of maintaining social harmony, even at the expense of personal interests.

This behavior has substantial implications for both the individual and the school environment. Personally, the student lost an opportunity to develop leadership and responsibility—valuable experiences for academic and social growth. The resignation may also create perceptions of indecisiveness, making the student more vulnerable to future social pressure. At the classroom level, the situation demonstrates how peer pressure can influence organizational dynamics and students' decision-making. If left unaddressed, this phenomenon could hinder the development of students' assertiveness and foster a culture of dependence on social approval, ultimately affecting self-confidence and independence in facing future challenges.

A second case involves bullying experienced by a student over the course of a semester due to their constant compliance and inability to decline requests. This student was exploited and intimidated by peers who took advantage of their people pleasing tendencies. Their conflict-avoidant nature and desire to appease others made them a target for bullying. This highlights that people pleaser behavior not only affects individual decision-making but also increases susceptibility to social exploitation.

The consequences of people pleaser tendencies in both cases are significant. Psychologically, students who constantly seek to please others often suffer from emotional stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. They feel burdened by social expectations and struggle to establish personal boundaries. In social settings, this can lead to unhealthy relational patterns. Students with these tendencies are more likely to be manipulated or pressured by peers, creating imbalance in social interactions and reinforcing bullying dynamics.

Based on the issues described above, the researchers were motivated to conduct a study titled, "Group Counseling with

Dispute Cognitive Technique to Reduce Students' People Pleaser Behavior."

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research method with a quasi-experimental approach, specifically using a one-group pretest-posttest design (Sugiyono, 2016), aiming to measure the effectiveness of group counseling using the Dispute Cognitive technique in reducing people pleaser behavior among students. The research was conducted over a period of three months at MTsN Kota Tanjungbalai, involving a population of 808 students. A purposive sample of 30 eighth-grade students was selected based on observations and recommendations from school guidance counselors. The primary instrument used was a Likert-scale questionnaire developed based on indicators of people pleaser behavior, supported by documentation as supplementary data. The collected data were analyzed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test and the paired sample t-test to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The instrument's validity and reliability were tested beforehand to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data obtained.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Instrument Testing

Based on the results of the validity test conducted on the research instrument administered to 40 students from a different school, the critical r-value (r-table) was determined to be 0.312, with a degree of freedom (df) of 38 at a 0.05 significance level.

TABLE I
VALIDITY TEST RESULT

Statement	r-count	r-table	Validity
P1	0.527	0.312	Valid
P2	0.687	0.312	Valid
P3	0.389	0.312	Valid
P4	0.266	0.312	Invalid
P5	0.361	0.312	Valid
P6	0.407	0.312	Valid
P7	0.560	0.312	Valid
P8	0.493	0.312	Valid
P9	0.436	0.312	Valid
P10	0.536	0.312	Valid
P11	0.648	0.312	Valid
P12	0.632	0.312	Valid
P13	0.582	0.312	Valid
P14	0.433	0.312	Valid
P15	0.578	0.312	Valid

The calculations revealed that 14 out of the 15 items tested had correlation coefficients (r-count) greater than the r-table

value, indicating that they were valid. However, one item, namely item P4, obtained an r-count of 0.266, which was below the threshold and therefore declared invalid. Consequently, item P4 was excluded from further analysis, and only the remaining 14 items were used to measure people pleaser behavior in subsequent stages of the study. These findings demonstrate that the majority of the instrument items possessed acceptable discriminative power and were deemed suitable as measurement tools within the context of this research.

TABLE II
RELIABILITY TEST RESULT

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.790	14

The reliability test was conducted using SPSS version 22 software, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.790 for the 14 validated items. This value exceeds the commonly accepted minimum reliability threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instrument had a high level of internal consistency and could thus be considered reliable. In other words, the fourteen items consistently measured the construct of people pleaser behavior among students and produced stable and dependable results. Accordingly, the instrument was deemed appropriate for further analysis in this study.

B. Pre-test and Post-test

The initial stage of the intervention began with the identification of students who exhibited tendencies toward people pleaser behavior. This identification was carried out through the administration of a pretest using a validated instrument or questionnaire specifically designed to measure the degree to which individuals engage in excessive people-pleasing behavior.

The final phase of the study involved the collection of posttest data. The posttest served as an evaluative step to assess the effectiveness of the intervention implemented through group counseling using the dispute cognitive technique. The purpose of the posttest was to determine the extent of change in students' people pleaser behavior after completing all counseling sessions. By comparing posttest results with pretest scores, the researchers could evaluate the impact of the treatment on reducing students' persistent tendencies to excessively please others. The posttest served as a critical indicator for determining the success of the intervention and as supporting data in drawing conclusions from the research findings. The pretest-posttest results are presented as Table 3.

TABLE III
 PRE AND POST TEST RESULT

Initial	Pre-test	Post-test
S.U.B	43	39
R.U.Z	29	41
S.R	51	43
F.A	31	37
F.A	31	41
A.R	49	31
R.A	51	40
F.A	44	42
H.K	40	44
A.A	41	32
A.A	40	32
N.M	35	25
Z.A.F	40	25
N.A	41	29
Q.K	39	32
A.A.B	30	36
R.J	50	36
A.F.A	30	42
S	32	39
F.H	34	31
S.K.H	45	38
A.Z.R	40	40
R.V	43	42
A.K	48	31
R.F.S	36	14
A.U.Y	36	40
A.N	36	30
V.T	48	39
S.A.D	44	36
M.D.	46	25
Mean	40.10	35.07

A comparison of the average pretest and posttest scores is illustrated in the following graph:

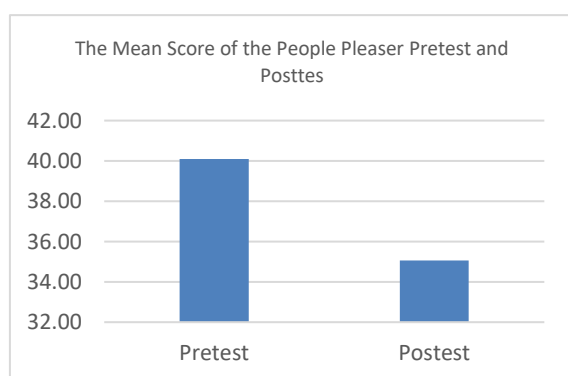


Fig. 1 The mean score of the people pleser pretest and posttest

Based on the calculated average scores, it was found that the pretest mean score was 40.10, while the posttest mean score decreased to 35.07. This decrease indicates a positive change in students after undergoing group counseling with the dispute cognitive technique. The higher pretest score reflects a more dominant presence of people pleaser behavior prior to the intervention, while the lower posttest score indicates a reduction in that tendency. To further substantiate these findings, statistical analysis was subsequently conducted using SPSS version 22.

C. Tests of Normality

TABLE IV
 NORMALITY TEST RESULT

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.095	30	.200*	.952	30	.195
Posttest	.154	30	.068	.904	30	.011

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the results of the normality test conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, it was found that the pretest data had significance values of 0.200 (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and 0.195 (Shapiro-Wilk), both of which are greater than 0.05. These results indicate that the pretest data were normally distributed. However, the posttest data showed significance values of 0.068 (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and 0.011 (Shapiro-Wilk), with the Shapiro-Wilk value being less than 0.05, indicating that the posttest data were not normally distributed. Since the assumption of normality was not met for the posttest data, parametric tests could not be applied. Therefore, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, a non-parametric alternative, was used to test the hypothesis, as it is appropriate for data that do not meet the assumption of normality. Using this approach allows researchers to assess the effectiveness of group counseling with the dispute cognitive technique in reducing people pleaser behavior more accurately and in alignment with the data characteristics.

D. Hypothesis Test

The selection of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for hypothesis testing was based on the finding that the posttest data were not normally distributed, as indicated by a Shapiro-Wilk significance value below 0.05. Since the normality assumption required for parametric tests was not met, a non-parametric test was deemed more appropriate. The Wilcoxon test was chosen because it is suitable for comparing two related samples—in this case, the pretest and posttest scores—to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference before and after the intervention. Through this method, the researchers were able to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling using the dispute cognitive technique in reducing people pleaser behavior with greater precision and appropriateness to the nature of the data.

1) Ranks Test

TABLE V
 RANKS TEST RESULT

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttest Pretest	Negative Ranks	21 ^a	15.98	335.50
	Positive Ranks	8 ^b	12.44	99.50
	Ties	1 ^c		
	Total	30		

a. Posttest < Pretest

b. Posttest > Pretest

c. Posttest = Pretest

Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as shown in Table 6, it was found that 21 students experienced a decrease in their posttest scores compared to their pretest scores (Negative Ranks), with a mean rank of 15.98 and a sum of ranks of 335.50. Meanwhile, only 8 students showed an increase in scores (Positive Ranks), with a mean rank of 12.44 and a sum of ranks of 99.50. Additionally, 1 student had the same score in both the pretest and posttest (Ties). These results indicate that the majority of participants experienced a reduction in people pleaser behavior after the intervention, suggesting an improvement or decline in the tendency to engage in such behavior.

2) Statistics Test

TABLE VI
STATISTICS TEST RESULT

Posttest - Pretest	
Z	-2.553 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.011

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on positive ranks.

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results yielded a Z value of -2.553 with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.011. Since the significance value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. Observing the direction of change in the previous table (Ranks), where the majority of posttest scores were lower than pretest scores, this significant difference indicates a decrease in people pleaser behavior following the group counseling intervention using the dispute cognitive technique. This suggests that the intervention was effective in reducing students' tendencies to excessively please others.

The counseling intervention consisted of three main sessions, systematically and sequentially designed using a cognitive-behavioral approach with the dispute cognitive technique. The first session aimed to build initial understanding of people pleaser behavior, including its definitions, characteristics, and negative impacts. During this phase, participants were introduced to each other, a safe and comfortable atmosphere was established, and initial problems faced by the counselees were explored. Activities were conducted in a participatory manner through open discussion and personal experience sharing.

The second and third sessions focused on further exploration and processing of previously expressed issues. In the second stage, counselees were guided to recognize irrational thoughts underlying people pleaser behavior. The third session focused on training rational thinking skills through the dispute cognitive technique and directly challenging irrational beliefs. Each stage involved reflective activities, peer feedback, and reinforcement of commitment toward change (Dryden, 2021). If significant progress was observed before the final stage, the counseling process could

be concluded earlier, adjusted to the needs and individual development of each participant.



Fig. 2 Counseling Provision

The findings of this study indicate that group counseling using the dispute cognitive technique is effective in reducing people pleaser behavior among students. The reduction in the average score from the pretest (40.10) to the posttest (35.07), along with the Wilcoxon test result showing a significance value of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$), provides empirical evidence that a significant change occurred following the intervention. The majority of students (21 out of 30) experienced a decrease in scores after the intervention, suggesting that they began to reduce their excessive need to please others. This finding implies that students started to develop more rational thinking and no longer based their social behavior solely on the desire to gain others' approval.

This result aligns with Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) theory developed by Albert Ellis, which underpins the dispute cognitive technique. According to Ellis (1994), unhealthy emotional and social behaviors often stem from irrational beliefs such as "I must be liked by everyone" or "Saying no makes me a bad person." The dispute cognitive technique aims to challenge (dispute) such irrational thoughts and replace them with more rational and functional beliefs. In the context of this study, students were assisted in identifying and replacing beliefs that drove their people pleaser tendencies, enabling them to act according to their own needs without guilt or fear of rejection.

The success of the intervention was also influenced by the dynamics of group counseling itself. According to Corey (2016), group counseling provides a supportive environment in which individuals can learn from others' experiences, receive feedback, and realize they are not alone in facing their problems. Within the group sessions, students with people pleaser tendencies could share experiences, recognize similar irrational thought patterns, and receive social support to change. This safe and supportive setting served as an effective medium for accelerating cognitive and behavioral transformation.

People pleaser behavior typically intensifies during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by the search for identity and social acceptance (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents often feel the need to please others to be accepted within their social groups. However, if unaddressed, this tendency can evolve into a self-damaging behavioral pattern. The dispute cognitive technique helps students break out of this mindset by raising awareness that social acceptance does not require continuous self-sacrifice. This awareness is

essential for supporting adolescents in building a healthy identity and establishing clear personal boundaries.

The findings of this study have important implications for the field of education, particularly in the context of school guidance and counseling services. School counselors can adopt the dispute cognitive approach in group counseling settings as a strategic method for addressing people pleaser behavior, which is often hidden yet significantly impacts students' psychological well-being. Such interventions not only foster more rational thinking but also promote the development of assertiveness, self-confidence, and independent decision-making skills. For broader implementation, counselor training in REBT techniques and group dynamics is crucial to ensure systematic and sustainable interventions within the school environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that group counseling using the dispute cognitive technique is effective in reducing people pleaser behavior among students. This conclusion is supported by the decrease in average scores from pretest to posttest and the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, which demonstrated a significant difference before and after the intervention, with a significance value of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$). The dispute cognitive technique proved effective in helping students identify and replace irrational beliefs underlying people pleaser behavior and in encouraging the emergence of more rational and assertive attitudes. Therefore, this approach can serve as an effective alternative intervention within school-based guidance and counseling services.

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