

The Effectiveness of the Emotional Control Card (ECC) Technique in Group Counseling to Reduce Anxiety in Students at STKIP Tulungagung

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) group counselling with the emotional control card (ECC) technique in reducing student anxiety levels. The study used a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest group control design, and the research subjects were students from STKIP Tulungagung divided into an experimental group (20 students) and a control group (20 students). The data collection instrument was the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS). The data analysis showed that group counselling using REBT with the ECC technique effectively reduced anxiety levels among students. The significant value of $0.000 < \alpha 0.05$ indicates a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The mean anxiety level of the experimental group was 66.90, while that of the control group was 49.45.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas konseling kelompok Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) dengan teknik *emotional control card* (ECC) dalam menurunkan tingkat kecemasan siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain quasi eksperimen dengan desain *pretest-posttest group control design*, dan subjek penelitiannya adalah mahasiswa STKIP Tulungagung yang terbagi dalam kelompok eksperimen (20 siswa) dan kelompok kontrol (20 siswa). Instrumen pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS). Analisis data menunjukkan bahwa konseling kelompok menggunakan REBT dengan teknik ECC efektif menurunkan tingkat kecemasan siswa. Nilai signifikan $0,000 < \alpha 0,05$ menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan antara kelompok eksperimen dan kontrol. Rerata tingkat kecemasan kelompok eksperimen adalah 66,90, sedangkan kelompok kontrol adalah 49,45.



INTRODUCTION

Teenagers must continue developing their ideas and creativity through academic achievement as

well as behavior in the current educational environment. These demands often make teenagers

anxious because of their performance or adaptations that may not be running optimally (Walean et al., 2021). Anxiety is a psychological condition that is very common in students in academic situations, such as exams, presentations, or group discussions. According to prior research, anxiety in students can impact their academic performance and overall mental health (Sayin, 2015). In addition, constant anxiety can increase the risk of developing more severe anxiety disorders in the future (Van Leeuwen et al., 2021).

The results of the Basic Health Research (Indonesian: *Riset Kesehatan Dasar* or *Riskesdas*) in 2013 on anxiety levels in Indonesia show a percentage of 6% for ages 15 years and over, or around 14 million Indonesians experience emotional disorders by showing symptoms of anxiety and depression (*Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan*, 2013). Meanwhile, it was reported that 25% of university students experienced mild anxiety, 60% experienced moderate anxiety, and 15% experienced severe anxiety.

The anxiety experienced by students is in the form of realistic, neurotic, or moral anxiety. This is evident from the findings of a study conducted at the Teaching and Education College (Indonesian: *Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan* or *STKIP*) Tulungagung on new students majoring in Elementary School Teacher Education (Indonesian: *Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar* or *PGSD*) in the 2017/2018 academic year. Several students experienced symptoms during presentations, including cold sweat, palpitations, and difficulty speaking. Not only that, but when they are about to face exams, these symptoms are also experienced by some students and are included in anxiety symptoms.

Symptoms of anxiety experienced will appear according to the intensity of anxiety each individual feels. According to Wood (Mukholil, 2018), there are several physical symptoms of anxiety, including restlessness, aches, twitching of the eyelids, tense facial expressions, sweating, dry mouth, persistent urination, difficulty con-

centrating, frequent hands sweating, stomach upset, palpitations, feeling of congestion in the throat, while psychological symptoms include fear, confused thoughts, and feeling hopeless.

Feelings of anxiety experienced by students are negative thoughts or irrational thoughts from students. Irrational thinking is a problem for individuals because it can hinder individuals from achieving goals, create extreme emotions that result in stress, inhibit mobility, and lead to self-harm behavior, blaming reality (misinterpreting events that occurred or are not supported by solid evidence). Irrational thinking also contains an illogical way of evaluating oneself, others, and the surrounding environment (Hartati & Rahman, 2017; Mustikasari et al., 2014). Therefore, guidance and counseling services are required to convert irrational to rational concepts.

Counseling guidance services for students function in the process of assisting individuals during their college years so they can avoid and also overcome difficulties, make reasonable adjustments, and make life goals to achieve optimal development. One approach to counseling is group counseling. According to Corey (2016), group counseling aims to help individuals to solve problems in life, both common and difficult, such as problems in personal, social, learning, academic, and career. Group counseling services focus on interpersonal and problem-solving strategies related to conscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The advantages of group counseling are that it is more efficient and can save time, money and counselor energy. To be able to reduce student anxiety, group counseling goes through four stages, namely the initial stage, the transitional stage, the activity stage, and the termination stage.

One technique in group counseling that can be applied to overcome anxiety is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). REBT focuses on helping individuals realize that they can live a more rational life by changing irrational thinking to become rational (Japar et al., 2021). This approach can be done in individual or group set-

tings. If done in groups, group leaders and members can help each other and learn to apply principles and procedures (Japar et al., 2020).

Handling anxiety in students is an urgent need. Group counseling using the REBT technique effectively reduces anxiety in various populations, including university students (Ellis, 2002; Kesuma et al., 2022). One of the techniques used in REBT group counseling is the emotional control card (ECC) which can help individuals to control emotions and overcome anxiety.

The ECC technique from REBT aims to help individuals control negative emotions by reinforcing healthy and positive mindsets. According to Ellis (1986), the ECC technique is used to relieve inappropriate feelings or strengthen appropriate feelings so that individuals can realize that what they are doing will be judged by others and individuals can motivate themselves. This technique is used in group therapy using cards containing inspirational and motivational quotes to help individuals change their mindsets and reduce anxiety levels.

In the context of this study, using the ECC technique can reduce anxiety by bringing individuals to imagine what will happen if their irrational thoughts continue to disturb them. For example, students who experience high anxiety are asked to imagine several things that will harm and benefit them if the anxiety continues to increase. Then, the imagination is poured on the card so that students always remember the positive and negative events that will occur by looking at the card, and anxiety will decrease (Sklare et al., 1985).

Although research on efforts to reduce anxiety by using REBT has often been carried out (Dharmayana et al., 2017; Fauzi et al., 2022; Fauziah et al., 2020; Sari & Makin, 2018), research on the effectiveness of using ECC techniques in group counseling for reducing anxiety in students is still minimal. This research focuses on students who experience anxiety in facing final semester exams. In its completion, this re-

search focuses on group counseling using the REBT approach with the ECC technique.

METHODS

The research method used in this study is a quasi-experimental method with a pretest-posttest control group design. In the experimental group, group counseling will be given using the ECC technique, while in the control group, group counseling will be carried out without using the ECC technique.

Table 1.

Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design

	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Experimental Group	O ₁	X _a	O ₂
Control Group	O ₃	X _b	O ₄

O₁ = experimental group pretest

X_a = group counseling with ECC technique

X_b = group counseling without ECC technique

O₂ = experimental group posttest

O₃ = control group pretest

O₄ = control group posttest

The research subjects in this study were students at STKIP Tulungagung who experienced high anxiety levels. The research subjects were taken from the STKIP Tulungagung student population of various study programs. Sampling was done by purposive sampling with inclusion criteria for students who experienced high anxiety levels and could participate in group counseling programs. Previously two classes (PGSD-A and PGSD-B) were given the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) to determine their level of anxiety. Based on the results of the scale, it was found that 40 students experienced high anxiety and moderate anxiety. The research subjects were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group, where each group consisted of 20 people.

The treatment instrument used is a counseling module based on the REBT approach with one of the ECC techniques. The module is structured according to the development procedure

by Borg & Gall (2003). Based on the results of content validity conducted through an expert test, an index of 0.9 was found, which means that the group counseling guide using the ECC technique is suitable for student intervention.

The anxiety variable data collection instrument used was DASS developed by Lovibond (1995). This instrument aims to measure anxiety symptoms consisting of 42 items. For user convenience, DASS was adapted into Indonesian by following the steps: (1) translating the instrument into Indonesian; (2) consulting the translation results with language experts; (3) rearranging and rewriting the instrument question items according to the researcher's words; and (4) giving weight according to the weighting set.

The type of instrument and the data collection technique for this instrument was modified using a Likert scale which has four possible answer options, namely: always (*selalu* or S), often (*sering* or SR), sometimes (*kadang-kadang* or KD), and never (*tidak pernah* or TP). Each answer qualification is given a score, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Answer Qualification Model

Answer	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Score	4	3	2	1

Validity and reliability tests were carried out by involving 100 respondents. Validity was obtained using item analysis, while reliability was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. The range of scores from the inter-item correlation test was -0.193–0.633. Based on the r table, it was found that 17 items were dropped (the range of scores included in the valid category was 0.199–0.633), so there were 25 items used for the pretest and posttest. The reliability score is 0.713, which is included in the high category.

The experimental group received six sessions of REBT group counseling using the ECC technique. REBT group counseling effectively reduces anxiety in college students (Deen et al., 2017; Maulida, 2021). In this group counseling,

ECC is used as an intervention technique. This technique seeks to assist individuals in regulating their emotions and enhancing their cognitive skills for dealing with emotional issues (Ellis & MacLaren, 1998).

The stages of group counseling using ECC were given to the experimental group, divided into six sessions. The implementation time for each meeting is about 60 minutes. The implementation of research at STKIP Tulungagung in the PGSD Department starts from November to December. Group counseling intervention procedures are described in Table 3.

Table 3.
Group Counseling Implementation Guidelines

Session	Treatment
I	Orientation Stage
II	Transitional Stage
III	Activity Stage 1: Change in Cognition
IV	Activity Stage 2: Building Self Image
V	Activity Stage 3: Developing New Opportunities
VI	Termination Stage

Before the treatment was given, a pretest was carried out on both groups of research subjects using DASS to measure students' anxiety levels. Numerous international studies have examined this instrument's reliability, including one conducted in Indonesia (Masdar et al., 2016; Syafitri et al., 2021).

The data collection procedure was carried out by giving instruments to both groups of subjects at the beginning of the study (pretest) to measure their initial anxiety levels. After that, the experimental group was given intervention in the form of REBT group counseling and used the ECC technique for six meetings. After the intervention, the two groups of subjects were again given instruments to measure their anxiety level after the intervention (post-test).

Hypothesis testing was carried out by analyzing data in parametric inferential statistics using an independent sample t-test for a gain score. Analysis of the independent sample t-test for a gain score was used to determine whether there were differences and the effectiveness of using the ECC technique in group counseling in the experimental and control groups.

RESULTS

Based on the results of the pretest, it can be seen that in the experimental group, the anxiety level of six students was in the very high category, eleven students were in the high category, and three students were in the medium category. The following is a description of the pretest results in graphical form.

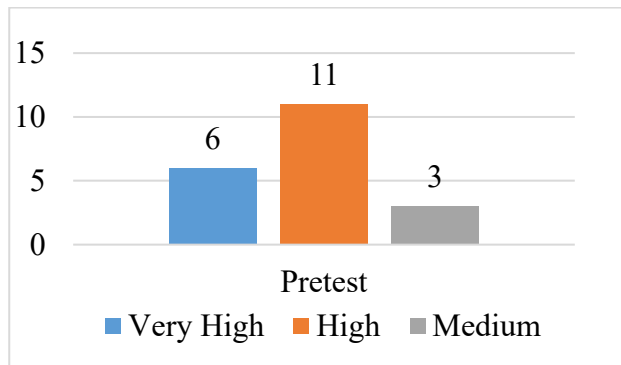


Figure 1.

Graph of Experimental Group Pretest Results

After that, the intervention in the ECC technique was given to the experimental group. As a result, the posttest results showed that two students were in the low category and 18 were in the very low category. The graph below compares the pretest and posttest after being given treatment.

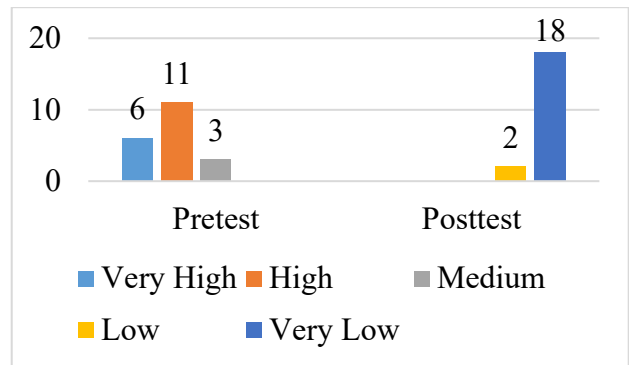


Figure 2.

Graph Comparison Between the Pretest and Posttest in the Experimental Group

In the control group, according to the pretest results, two people were in the very high category, one in the high category, five in the medium category, four in the low category, and eight in the very low category, whereas for the posttest results, the student’s anxiety level showed that no subject was in the very high category, two people were in the high category, three in the medium category, five in the low category, and ten in the very low category. The following is a comparison chart between the pretest and posttest in the control group.

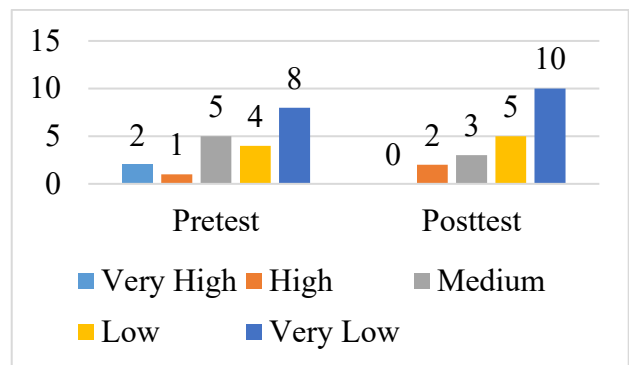


Figure 3.

Graph Comparison Between the Pretest and Posttest in the Control Group

Data analysis was carried out in the experimental group, and the control group was presented based on the development of the subjects before and after being given treatment. In this research, the data analysis used is the analysis of independent samples t-test for the gain score. The statistical test results show the following data.

Table 4.
Mean Gain-Score Results

Gain	Group	N	Mean
	Experimental	20	27.50
	Group	20	20.35

The table of mean results above shows that the experimental group's mean result of 27.50 has a more significant change than the control group's mean result 20.35.

Table 5.
Hypothesis Test Results

Gain	F	Sig	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	4.456	0.037	3.133	38	0.004

The analysis results showed an F value of 4.456 with a significance of 0.037 and $p < \alpha 0.05$, so there was a variance in the data between the experimental and control groups. In other words, the data variance between the two groups is different. Because the data is varied or heterogeneous, what can be seen in the t-test table is equal variances not assumed, namely, the t-value is 3.133 with a significance of 0.004 so that the p-value is $0.004 < \alpha 0.05$, which means it is significant. In conclusion, the ECC technique in group counseling effectively reduces anxiety in students.

DISCUSSION

The ECC is an REBT technique that aims to help clients recognize and change irrational thoughts that cause negative emotions and maladaptive behavior (Dryden et al., 2010). This technique uses cards that contain rational and irrational statements related to client problems, such as anxiety. The client is asked to choose a card according to his mind and read it repeatedly. Thus, clients can realize and correct their irrational thoughts with healthier and more realistic rational thoughts.

According to the research's findings, the ECC technique in group counseling effectively

reduced anxiety. This technique is not widely used in Indonesia. This can be seen from the need for more publications and modules available in Indonesian. Indeed, several studies have tried to apply the REBT technique, but there has yet to be an exploration of the ECC type. Several REBT studies in Indonesia were carried out by Rizkiyani (2017), who tried to apply REBT in Lampung, and Mahfud (2019), who developed this REBT technique to reduce the impact of bullying. Moreover, research on REBT and ECC is rarely carried out in Indonesia, even though this technique is well-known in individual and group counseling in various countries.

Applying REBT techniques, especially with ECC, can be effective because ECC helps clients turn intense feelings into lighter ones and re-develop thinking and rational skills. The ECC technique is also suitable for several reasons.

First, this technique can be used in group counseling, an effective and efficient form of guidance and counseling services to deal with psychological problems experienced by many people in Indonesia. The communal Indonesian culture makes this possible because group support will be more meaningful than individual considerations as in Western culture (Ampuni, 2005). Group counseling can provide benefits such as social support, learning from the experiences of others, opportunities to practice social skills, and increased self-esteem. The ECC technique facilitates group counseling by providing structure, focus, and relevant discussion material for group members.

Second, ECC techniques can reduce anxiety by teaching clients how to manage their emotions more positively and adaptively. Emotional management is important because poor emotional management tends to exacerbate anxiety (Averill, 2015). This technique can also improve the client's ability to face academic and non-academic challenges and pressures more confidently and optimistically through better emotional management (Junaedi et al., 2022; Turner & Barker, 2013; Turner, 2016).

Third, the ECC technique has empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in reducing student anxiety. This research also adds empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the REBT technique, especially ECC, in overcoming anxiety in students.

The results of this study indicate that the ECC technique can be an option that is quite effective in overcoming anxiety in students. This technique can be applied in schools and campuses as part of institutional support to reduce the anxiety of students and students. One of the institutions that can take a role is Guidance and Counseling.

Guidance and counseling are important in guiding individuals in dealing with anxiety. This important role includes assisting individual development in a more optimal direction and helping to overcome factors inhibiting individual development. According to Corey (Eryanti, 2020), this counseling is based on the assumption that each individual is tenacious, resourceful, capable, and can construct solutions that can change their lives.

The counseling process used is group counseling. Thompson and Rudolph (Kuswara et al., 2018; Prayitno, 1995) explain that the purpose of group counseling starts with the client following the counselor's rules until decision making, developing awareness, self-development, curative and self-acceptance. Group counseling, in general, places more emphasis on problems that can be overcome in a short time. Group counseling focuses on individual interpersonal and problem-solving strategies related to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that students who experience high anxiety in facing exams or public speaking can be helped using group counseling to reduce anxiety levels. The approach that can be taken in group counseling is using the REBT approach. The research results proved that the REBT approach with one of the techniques, namely the ECC technique, could reduce students' anxiety

levels when they were about to face exams or various speak in public.

CONCLUSION

The group counseling process with the ECC technique effectively reduces anxiety in students at STIKIP Tulungagung. Therefore, counselors should be able to use group counseling with various techniques and approaches to reduce counselee anxiety. Future researchers are expected to be able to explore anxiety with different research designs or by adding subjects to obtain broad generalizations and see overall changes that can be used as a consideration to see whether other factors influence individual self-change.

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