

Reality counseling: Overcome anxiety and build self-confidence in thesis completion

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Abstract: Anxiety in completing theses is a common issue faced by final-semester students. This anxiety arises from various challenges, such as difficulty focusing on the thesis topic, trouble writing the background of the problem, confusion about thesis structure and content, limited mastery of theory, weak research methodology skills, and ineffective communication with supervisors. These issues often lead to anxiety and low self-confidence among students. One effective intervention to address these challenges is group counseling with a reality approach. This study employed a pre-experimental quantitative method with a one-group pretest-posttest design. After using purposive sampling, six students meeting the criteria for group counseling participants were selected. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using a t-test. The results revealed a significant effect of the reality approach in reducing anxiety and boosting self-confidence, with a t-count value of 24.413, exceeding the t-table value of 2.571. In conclusion, group counseling with a reality approach is proven effective in alleviating anxiety and improving self-confidence in final-semester students working on their theses.

Keywords: Anxiety; counseling reality; group counseling; self-confidence

Introduction

Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that arises within a person. It includes restlessness, worry, confusion, and fear of things that have not yet happened. It also involves thoughts that threaten physical and psychological security. Anxiety occurs as a result of conflict, particularly when someone experiences life changes, whether in personal, family, social, or academic situations (Susilo, 2019). In the academic context, anxiety is commonly experienced by students, particularly those in their final semester working on their thesis. Final-year students frequently face anxiety and low self-confidence due to the pressures of completing their thesis (Wakhyudin & Putri, 2020).

This phenomenon is also evident among final-year students at Hamzanwadi University, where anxiety stems from several factors. Internally, students struggle with poor time management, procrastination, weak academic writing skills, inadequate mastery of theoretical concepts, and difficulty in prioritizing tasks. Externally, the challenges include a lack of parental support, particularly for students from broken homes, difficulties in dealing with supervisors, and pressure from employment demands. In extreme cases, high anxiety levels have led students to fall victim to thesis-writing scams, lacking confidence in their ability to meet supervisors' revisions; some students pay substantial amounts for assistance, only to be defrauded, resulting in financial loss and deep emotional trauma.

Symptoms of thesis-related anxiety manifest in both psychological and physical forms. Psychologically, students may experience stress, shame, social withdrawal, fear of interaction, difficulties concentrating, and even trauma. Physically, anxiety may lead to sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, headaches, pale complexion, and difficulty engaging in clear verbal communication. Increased stress delays graduation and hinders students' transition to adulthood and readiness to enter the workforce.

Addressing this issue requires targeted interventions, mainly counseling services. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of counseling in mitigating anxiety.

Individual counseling using the Emotion-Focused Coping approach has been shown to help students manage thesis-related anxiety (Husniah & Fauzi, 2023). Similarly, individual counseling with the Self-Modeling technique has significantly reduced students' anxiety when interacting with supervisors, as evidenced by a marked improvement in anxiety levels after intervention (Syafri et al., 2021).

Despite these findings, no specific research has yet explored the effectiveness of group counseling in addressing thesis-related anxiety among final-year students at Hamzanwadi University. This study aims to fill this gap by providing evidence-based solutions that can serve as a guideline for the university. The findings are expected to enable Hamzanwadi University to design more effective interventions to support final-year students in overcoming thesis-related anxiety.

Reality-based group counseling has been effectively applied to improve the academic responsibility of Manggarai students at Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan. Research findings indicate that this counseling approach significantly enhances students' sense of responsibility in academic settings (Juita et al., 2021). Similarly, other studies have demonstrated that the reality approach helps individuals take greater responsibility for themselves, particularly in overcoming procrastination, including delays in completing their thesis (Baitina, 2020; Solichah, 2020). This result highlights the universal nature of thesis-related anxiety as an issue in higher education, affecting students across both public and private universities. However, no similar studies have been conducted at Universitas Hamzanwadi, indicating a gap that warrants exploration.

Reality therapy pioneered by William Glasser, emphasizes that humans are social beings with purposeful and goal-driven behaviors. According to Glasser's theory, individuals are responsible for their choices, independent of external factors such as family, environment, or childhood conflicts. Instead, behavior is viewed as a deliberate choice. Reality therapy is widely applied in counseling, education, and evaluation, focusing on teaching responsibility while avoiding coercion or punishment (Pare & Habsy, 2024). Counselors adopting this approach take an active, directive, and didactic role (Ardi, 2024).

As defined by Prayitno, group counseling is a service aimed at addressing issues within a small group of students, typically consisting of 5 to 8 members (Prayitno, 2004). However, opinions on the ideal group size vary. Some researchers suggest a minimum of 2 participants (Madidar & Muhid, 2022), while others propose 4 (Rohana et al., 2020) or 6–8 participants (Dartina et al., 2024). The optimal group size, as recommended by Nisa (2022) is six members. This synthesis of literature underscores the efficacy of reality-based group counseling for addressing academic challenges. It offers a structured yet flexible solution to help students manage their responsibilities and overcome thesis-related anxiety.

Method

This study employed a pre-experimental research design, precisely a one-group pretest-posttest approach (Sugiyono, 2019). Initially, students' levels of anxiety and self-confidence were assessed as pre-test data. Afterward, participants underwent group counseling using a reality therapy approach (X). After the intervention, a post-test was conducted to evaluate their anxiety and self-confidence changes.

Data collection utilized validated and reliable instruments to measure anxiety and self-confidence levels. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, where participants were selected based on specific criteria rather than randomly or by region. The target sample consisted of students with high anxiety and low self-confidence. Six students meeting the following criteria were included: (1) enrolled in the 2020 cohort, (2) had not participated in thesis guidance for at least two months, and (3) exhibited physical and psychological symptoms of anxiety and low self-confidence.

It is common practice to use a sample size of six participants in group counseling research with purposive sampling (Farid, 2021; Iriastuti, 2022; Mardianti & Dharmayana, 2020). The data were analyzed using non-parametric statistics, with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for hypothesis testing, complemented by a t-test to verify the results. This structured methodology ensures an accurate assessment of the intervention's impact on reducing anxiety and improving self-confidence among the participants.

Result and Discussion

Pre-test data were analyzed to categorize students' levels of anxiety and self-confidence. This categorization was performed using descriptive statistics, which included key metrics such as the number of participants in each group, the mean scale score, standard deviation, variance, and the minimum and maximum scores. The researcher developed the questionnaire used in this study but underwent reliability and validity testing to ensure accuracy. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha formula, where a value greater than 0.60 indicates reliability, while a value below 0.60 suggests unreliability. The formula is as follows:

$$\alpha = \left[\frac{k}{k-1} \right] \left[1 - \frac{(\sum Si^2)}{St^2} \right]$$

Explanation of Terms:

α : Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

k : Number of items

$\sum Si^2$: Sum of item variances

$\sum St^2$: Total variance

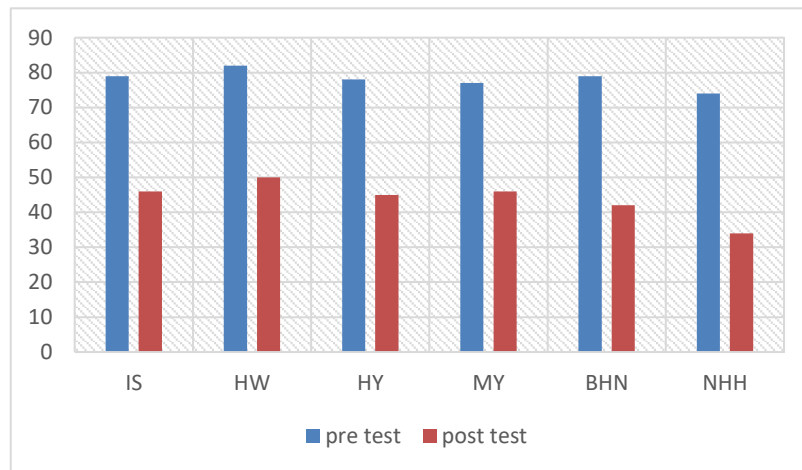
The reliability test results showed a variance of 3.5 and a Cronbach's Alpha value of 1.037, exceeding the threshold of 0.60. The result indicates that the instrument was reliable for assessing anxiety and self-confidence. This robust validation ensures that the instrument accurately reflects participants' psychological states, laying a solid foundation for the study's findings.

Anxiety and self-confidence were categorized into five levels: very high, high, medium, low, and very low. The table below presents the pre-test and post-test results of group counseling using the reality approach with the WDEP technique:

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Results for Anxiety and Self-Confidence

Respondent	Pre-test	Category	Post-test	Category
IS	76	High	46	Low
HW	72	Medium	50	Medium
HY	71	Medium	45	Medium
MY	72	Medium	46	Medium
BHN	70	Medium	42	Medium
NHH	75	High	34	Medium
Total	436		263	

Based on Table 1, the data indicate significant improvements in anxiety and self-confidence levels among students working on their theses. Initially, the pre-test results showed most students falling into the medium and high categories. However, the post-test results revealed a shift to the low category for both anxiety and lack of self-confidence. Additionally, the results are visualized in Graph 1, illustrating the score differences before and after the intervention.



Graph 1. Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Anxiety and Self-Confidence

The graph highlights the impact of the group counseling intervention, which effectively addressed the anxiety and self-confidence issues of final-year students. The counseling process was carried out using a reality-based approach with the WDEP technique. The counseling sessions were structured into four stages: the opening stage, the transition stage, the core stage, and the closing stage. This systematic approach significantly reduced the psychological challenges faced by students, helping them gain confidence and manage their anxiety effectively.

The effectiveness of reality group counseling in reducing anxiety and increasing students' self-confidence was analyzed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software. This analysis includes descriptive statistics, normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk), homogeneity tests to check data consistency, and paired t-tests to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

The normality test, performed with SPSS version 25, showed that the significance values for both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (0.200) and Shapiro-Wilk (0.310) tests were more significant than 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed. The homogeneity test,

which checks for equal variances between the pre-test and post-test, showed a significance value of 0.216, more significant than 0.05, confirming that the data were homogeneous, meaning the variances were similar.

The Paired Sample t-test, which was used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, had a significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates a significant effect of the group counseling intervention with the WDEP technique on reducing students' anxiety and lack of self-confidence.

Table 2. Paired Samples Correlations

	Mean	St Deviation	Std. ErrorMean	Sig. (2- tailed)
Pre-test-Post- test	34.33333	3.44480	1.40633	.000

The results of the paired samples correlation showed a mean of 34.33, indicating an overall change in anxiety and self-confidence levels, with a standard deviation of 3.44, suggesting some variation in the participants' responses. The standard error mean of 1.41 provided an estimate of the precision of the sample mean difference. These findings collectively confirm that the group counseling intervention using the reality approach and the WDEP technique effectively reduced students' anxiety and lack of self-confidence.

The group counseling service using the reality approach with the WDEP technique is an effective solution for reducing anxiety and low self-confidence among final-year students at Universitas Hamzanwadi. The hypothesis test results show a significant reduction in anxiety and self-confidence, with a t-value of 24.413, which is greater than the t-table value of 2.571, as detailed in the results section. This result indicates that the reality approach with the WDEP technique is effective in addressing personality development issues, such as anxiety and self-confidence (Abdi et al., 2024), responsibility (Juita et al., 2021), communication skills in social interactions (Yolanda et al., 2024), and other personality aspects (Kurniati & Supriyatna, 2022).

The study also found differences in anxiety levels between male and female students at Universitas Hamzanwadi in completing their theses. This outcome is in line with previous research, which suggests that female students tend to experience higher levels of anxiety compared to male students. For instance, in the male group, nine students showed no anxiety, 5 had mild anxiety, and 1 had moderate anxiety, with no students experiencing severe anxiety. In contrast, in the female group, five students showed no anxiety, 11 had mild anxiety, 1 had moderate anxiety, and 3 had severe anxiety. A Mann-Whitney test showed a p-value of 0.033, which is less than 0.05, indicating a significant difference in anxiety levels between male and female students during thesis completion (Qulbiyah, 2024).

Various factors contribute to anxiety in final-year students working on their theses, including both internal factors and external influences. The study identified several key factors, such as family issues, peer support, and guidance from thesis advisors, significantly impacting students' motivation, openness, and confidence in completing their theses. Previous research supports these findings, showing that 83.8% of students who received family support, 89.2% who received peer support, and 81.1% who received support from their thesis advisors experienced lower anxiety levels. Bivariate analysis showed significant relationships (p-value < 0.05) between these factors and students' anxiety about their theses (Hermambang et al., 2021).

The reality counseling approach proved highly effective in helping students at Universitas Hamzanwadi re-evaluate themselves, reshape their self-concept, and view their thesis as a manageable challenge rather than an insurmountable obstacle. This perspective helps students realize that completing their thesis is a normal part of their academic journey. Many students eventually succeeded in completing their thesis, and those who participated in group counseling with the WDEP technique showed positive changes in their commitment and personality development. As a result, all students who received the counseling service successfully graduated.

The WDEP technique focuses on planning and translating understanding into tangible actions. After a series of reflection and understanding, students developed a commitment to their goals, which was followed by concrete steps toward achieving them. The reality approach encourages students to explore their thoughts about their thesis and align them with their broader life goals and career plans. This approach is consistent with research by Yolanda et al (2024), which showed that students experiencing career choice anxiety also experienced significant changes. In this study, post-test results showed that students' anxiety levels decreased significantly, as evidenced by lower scores for students in both the moderate and low categories.

The reality approach plays a crucial role in teaching students responsibility. Group counseling using this approach helps reduce anxiety and low self-confidence by fostering a supportive environment where students motivate each other and hold themselves accountable for completing their thesis. Furthermore, the reality approach is effective in reducing negative behaviors, such as verbal bullying, among students (Rahmat, 2023).

Conclusion

Anxiety among final-year students at Universitas Hamzanwadi while completing their theses is a common issue. It is believed that students can manage their emotions by rethinking their perspectives. Group counseling with a reality approach has proven effective in creating a positive student environment. However, this study has limitations, such as: (1) the sample size was limited to 6 participants. Future research could include a larger sample to strengthen the data for broader generalization. (2) the researcher developed the instrument used in this study, and future studies could use internationally validated tools to measure anxiety and self-confidence. (3) The group counseling sessions were relatively short, so future researchers could extend the sessions to better explore the issues and reinforce solutions. (4) Universities, as teacher education institutions (LPTK), also have a responsibility to address students' anxiety and self-confidence issues, such as providing time management or stress management training to support final-year students, especially those who have participated in group counseling. (5) It is crucial for future researchers to collaborate with thesis advisors from partner universities during the counseling process and refine their methodology to ensure the quality of the research.

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