Effectiveness of Group Counseling Services Based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in Overcoming Social Anxiety Among Boarding Students

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Abstract: This study aims to determine the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in reducing social anxiety among university students. The research employed a quantitative method with a one-group pretest–posttest design. The participants were students experiencing moderate to high levels of social anxiety. Data were collected using a social anxiety scale that had been validated and tested for reliability, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.884. The normality test showed a significance value of 0.200, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Hypothesis testing using a paired sample t-test in SPSS 23 for Windows resulted in a significance value (2-tailed) of 0.00 < 0.05, signifying a significant reduction in social anxiety after the intervention. The findings highlight that REBT not only effectively reduces negative irrational beliefs but also strengthens students' confidence in social interactions within academic environments, especially those adapting to structured educational settings such as boarding systems. This demonstrates a contextual novelty compared to previous studies conducted on general student populations. Therefore, implementing REBT-based group counseling is highly recommended as a counseling intervention in higher education. Future research may expand by comparing boarding and non-boarding student populations, employing a control group, or incorporating follow-up assessments to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of REBT interventions

Keywords: Rational Emotive Behavior, social anxiety, university students, Boarding

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is often described as a crucial transition phase from childhood to adulthood, during which individuals experience rapid cognitive, psychosocial, and physical development (Santrock, 2011). These changes not only shape how adolescents think, manage emotions, and make decisions, but also influence their interactions with their environment, making this period vulnerable to developmental challenges (Atikah, 2022). Specifically, the psychological aspects of adolescence are characterized by intense emotional fluctuations and increased sensitivity, which require the achievement of key developmental tasks such as building more mature social relationships with peers, honing communication skills, and achieving emotional independence from parents or authority figures (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). Failure to complete these tasks has the potential to trigger maladaptive emotional responses, such as prolonged symptoms of depression or anxiety (Atikah, 2022).

In the context of age classification, Sarwono (2011) divides adolescence into three stages: early adolescence (11-14 years), middle adolescence (15-17 years), and late adolescence (18-21 years). This last age group, which often includes freshmen, stands out for its higher levels of anxiety compared to other groups, particularly during the transition from secondary school to higher education and independent living (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020). Recent research supports these findings; for example, a survey of freshmen showed that 81.7% of them experienced significant anxiety upon entering college (NHE Annisa et al., 2022). This ensures students' vulnerability to anxiety disorders, which can interfere with their academic and social adaptation.

Anxiety itself is defined as an emotional response to the perception of a disturbing threat, creating discomfort through feelings of tension, worry, fear, or unease that hinder the ability to face the situation calmly (Siregar, 2019; Syarkawi, 2019). According to Frank, as cited by Puspitasari and

Aristawati (2020), anxiety arises when an individual is confronted with a feared object or situation, often associated with compulsive disorders. Etymologically, the term comes from the Latin "anxius" and the German "angst," which describes negative effects such as excessive worry about uncertain future possibilities (Astuti et al., 2019). Anxiety can be triggered by any stressor, accompanied by physical symptoms such as increased blood pressure or rapid heartbeat, and often occurs in social settings—a form known as social anxiety (Sigarlaki & Nurvinkania, 2022).

Social anxiety specifically involves intense fear, nervousness, or anxiety when interacting with others (Yudianfi, 2022). Greca and Lopez (1998) described it as excessive worry about social situations that require performance in front of others, where individuals fear negative evaluation, excessive attention, embarrassment, or humiliation. Its underlying cause is often rooted in cognitive distortions, where the social environment is viewed as a constant threat (Sigarlaki & Nurvinkania, 2022). This phenomenon is closely linked to irrational beliefs—illogical and unfounded thoughts that trigger negative emotions and behaviors, impairing overall quality of life (Febby, 2024; Sugara et al., 2023). For those with social anxiety, these irrational thoughts typically focus on fears of failure or poor public judgment, such as the belief that others will always judge them negatively or that even simple actions can lead to humiliation (Oktapiani & Putri, 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2019).

Among students, social anxiety often peaks during midterm or final exams, when they have to face lecturers and classmates face-to-face. Fear of negative scrutiny or criticism can make them hesitate to participate, as seen in a study in Makassar where 86.3% of students reported similar experiences (Damayanti et al., 2023). Preliminary interviews with three Darul Ulum University students at the Al-Musta'in Girls' Campus Boarding School in Jombang also confirmed this pattern: they often felt negatively evaluated during presentations or class discussions, which triggered recurrent anxiety. The impact is far-reaching; social anxiety can suppress engagement in learning, encourage avoidance of social situations, and even threaten applicants and future career prospects (A. Jallaleng et al., 2022; Jatmiko, 2017). Therefore, appropriate interventions, such as counseling services, are urgently needed to help students manage this issue.

One promising approach is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), developed by Albert Ellis as a form of psychotherapy that focuses on irrational thoughts that cause fear and stress (Neenan & Dryden, 2010). REBT helps individuals replace irrational beliefs—such as the assumption that negative judgment from others is inevitable or that perfection is necessary for acceptance—with more realistic and adaptive perspectives (Aisy & Purwanto, 2024; Asrori & Hasanat, 2015). In doing so, students can learn to cope with concerns related to failure, evaluation, or time management, reducing overall anxiety levels. Empirical evidence supports its effectiveness; for example, Arnita (2022) found that REBT successfully reduced students' anxiety during exams, while Fakhriyani (2019) demonstrated similar results in managing general anxiety issues.

In the student context, REBT can be implemented through a group counseling format, which involves interacting in small groups to address shared issues by increasing awareness of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Wardiati, 2017). This approach not only releases pent-up emotions but also builds trust, understanding, and support among members, aligning with the realities of everyday life.

This background concerns social anxiety as a common obstacle for students, especially during exams, which can impair learning participation and communication skills if left untreated. REBT-based counseling groups offer a potential solution by transforming irrational beliefs into rational ones, thereby improving social adaptation. This study aims to test the effectiveness of this intervention in reducing social anxiety in Darul Ulum University students at the Al-Musta'in Girls' Campus Boarding School in Jombang, providing a practical contribution to higher education in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research employed a quantitative experimental method using a one-group pretest–posttest design to examine the effect of the intervention on the dependent variable. The independent variable (X) was group counseling based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), while the dependent

variable (Y) was the level of social anxiety among students at Darul 'Ulum University, Al-Musta'in Islamic Boarding School for Girls, Jombang, East Java. The population consisted of 25 students, and a sample of 8 participants was selected using purposive sampling based on the criterion of high social anxiety. The data collection instrument used was a Social Anxiety Scale developed by the researchers with reference to the dimensions proposed by La Greca and Lopez, covering Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations (SAD-New), and Social Avoidance and Distress in General (SAD-General). The scale consisted of 35 valid items ($r > 0.312$) on a four-point Likert format. Reliability testing yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.884, indicating a very high internal consistency. Data analysis employed a paired-sample t-test using SPSS 23 to compare pretest and posttest results with a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This research was conducted on July 2, 2025 with a quantitative approach, where researchers distributed questionnaires to a population of 25 Darul Ulum University students at the Al-Musta'in Putri Campus Boarding School, Jombang, to identify the level of social anxiety; the pretest was conducted outside of regular lecture hours by distributing questionnaires to the entire population, resulting in the selection of a sample of 8 students who were classified as having high social anxiety based on score categorization (low: <73, medium: 73-107, high: ≥107, calculated from the mean of 90 and standard deviation of 17). Furthermore, treatment in the form of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy group counseling was given to this sample group after researchers agreed on joint rules and schedules to ensure the smooth running of the intervention process.

Table1. Data categorization results, Categorization Formula

Score	Score Range	Category
X < M – 1SD	X < 73	Low
M – 1SD ≤ X < M + 1SD	73 ≤ X < 107	Currently
M + 1SD ≤ X	107 ≤ X	Tall

Pretest Results

The researchers first administered a social anxiety questionnaire to Darul Ulum University students at the Pondok Kampus Putri (female campus). The data were then categorized, resulting in eight students with low levels of anxiety. Based on the data obtained, the following categorizations were made:

Table 2. Pretest Data

No	Name	Score	Category
1	FF	108	Tall
2	CA	109	Tall
3	RWS	109	Tall
4	MY	108	Tall
5	FA	109	Tall
6	LC	112	Tall
7	SM	108	Tall
8	SP	108	Tall
Total		871	
Average		108.8	

Posttest Results

Post-Test Results After the students received the treatment, the researcher distributed the questionnaires again to determine the results after the post-test. The post-test results showed a decrease in social anxiety levels. The students' post-test results are as follows:

Table 3. Posttest Data

No	Name	Score	Category
1	FF	76	Currently
2	CA	83	Currently
3	RWS	73	Low
4	MY	76	Currently
5	FA	78	Currently
6	LC	75	Currently
7	SM	71	low
8	SP	81	Currently
Total			613
Average			76.2

Comparison Results

The following graph shows the comparison of pretest and posttest results after the rational emotive behavior group counseling approach. The graph above shows that high levels of social anxiety decreased after the rational emotive behavior group counseling approach.

Table 4. Comparison Results of Pretest and Posttest

PRE-TEST RESULTS				POST TEST RESULTS			
NO	NAME	Score	Categorization	NO	NAME	Score	Categorization
1	FF	108	Tall	1	FF	76	Currently
2	CA	109	Tall	2	CA	83	Currently
3	RWS	109	Tall	3	RWS	73	Low
4	MY	108	Tall	4	MY	76	Currently
5	FA	109	Tall	5	FA	78	Currently
6	LC	112	Tall	6	LC	75	Currently
7	SM	108	Tall	7	SM	71	Low
8	SP	108	Tall	8	SP	81	Currently
Total	871			Total	613		
Average	108.8			Average	76.6		

Hypothesis Testing

Researchers conducted a normality test to determine whether the variables and the data under study were normal. This test demonstrated whether the scores of the distributed variables were normal. A normal value greater than 0.05 indicates that the data is considered normal. A normal value less than 0.05 indicates that the data is abnormal. A non-normal value less than 0.05 is used in this study. The results of the normality test are as follows:

Table 5. Normality test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		Unstandardized Residual
N		8
Normal Parameters [a,b]	Mean	.0000000
	Standard Deviation	3.95396534
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.204
	Positive	.204
	Negative	-.145
Test Statistics		.204
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200 [c,d]
a. Test distribution is Normal.		
b. Calculated from data.		
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.		
d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.		

Based on the table above, it can be seen that if the significance value shows a number of 0.200, meaning the sig value > 0.05, the data can be said to be normal.

After conducting normality and homogeneity tests, a paired sample t-test is then performed. The purpose of the paired sample t-test is to compare the pretest and posttest scores. The paired sample t-test results are as follows:

Table 6. T-test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	
Pair 1	Pre-post	32,250	4,268	1,509	28,682	35,818	21,373	7	.000

From the table above, it shows that sig (2-tailed) is 0.000, so it is said that the alternative Ha is accepted. Ho is rejected, meaning that there is a striking difference in the average between the pretest with a total of 108.8 and the posttest with a total of 76.6 using the rational emotive behavior group counseling approach technique to reduce the level of social anxiety of students.

Discussion

The implementation of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) based group counseling intervention to reduce social anxiety of students at Al-Musta'in Putri Campus Islamic Boarding School began with initial coordination between researchers and Islamic boarding school supervisors, followed by an informal approach and introduction to the students to explore the root causes of high anxiety,

before conducting a pretest by distributing questionnaires to 25 students to measure anxiety levels; the pretest results produced a score categorization (low: <73, medium: 73-107, high: ≥107, based on a mean of 90 and SD of 17) which identified 8 students with high anxiety (average 108.8) as treatment samples after the group rules were agreed upon. The treatment was carried out in four sessions: the first meeting focused on recognizing, exploring, and defining anxiety symptoms; second, identifying irrational beliefs through active involvement; third, applying REBT techniques to reduce anxiety by changing negative thoughts into rational ones; and fourth, the reflection of the entire process was continued with a posttest, which showed a significant decrease in anxiety to a total score of 613 (mean 76.6), confirmed by the normality test (sig. 0.200 >0.05), homogeneity (sig. 0.097), and paired sample t-test (sig. 2-tailed 0.000 <0.05), thus rejecting the null hypothesis and proving the effectiveness of the intervention.

These results align with preliminary research, such as Ajei (2023) who found group REBT effective in reducing social anxiety in late adolescents (t=-5.716, sig. 0.000 <0.05); Nurhikmah and Ananda (2022) who reported an increase in rational understanding, planning, and career commitment post-REBT with symbolic techniques and live modeling, where clients realized previous negative thoughts were barriers to productivity and learned to apply simple steps such as skill development and positive thinking; Apriyanto et al. (2022) with a Wilcoxon test (sig. 0.003 <0.05) which showed improvements in mental health in 11 students through REBT; Arnita (2022) who proved that group REBT reduced students' exam anxiety as a basic counseling program; and Daulay et al. (2025) who highlighted the effectiveness of REBT, CBT, and self-talk in groups to overcome thesis stress, create social support, reduce isolation, and provide long-term academic skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that group counseling services with the Rational Emotive Behavior (REB) approach are effective in reducing the level of social anxiety among students at Al-Musta'in Putri Campus Islamic Boarding School. Participants experienced a significant decrease in anxiety and a shift in thinking patterns from irrational to more rational. Therefore, this approach is feasible to be implemented as an integral component of guidance and counseling services within the boarding school environment. The alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, supported by the paired sample t-test results showing a significance value of 0.000 < 0.05.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Al-Musta'in Putri Campus Islamic Boarding School integrate REB-based group counseling services into its student development programs to help minimize social anxiety and improve self-confidence. Students are expected to participate more openly in counseling activities and continue developing rational thinking in dealing with social pressures. Boarding school supervisors also need to be more responsive to anxiety symptoms and collaborate with counselors in providing appropriate support. Further research is suggested to involve a larger sample, extend the duration of sessions, and include follow-up assessments to examine the long-term effectiveness of the REB approach.

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