

Expressive Writing Therapy in Group Counseling to Reduce Academic Anxiety in Students at Al Huda Senior High School, Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

This research was instigated with the high levels of academic anxiety experienced by students at school impacting their concentration, decision-making skills, and academic achievement. This research aimed at describing the levels of student academic anxiety before and after the implementation of Expressive Writing Therapy technique in group counseling and determining the effectiveness of Expressive Writing Therapy technique in group counseling to reduce student academic anxiety. Quantitative approach was used in this research with quasi experimental method with a research design, namely one group pretest posttest. Purposive sampling technique was used. The samples consisted of 5 eleventh-grade students at Senior High School of Al Huda Pekanbaru, who had high levels of academic anxiety. The instrument used was academic anxiety questionnaire with Likert scale. The research findings showed that student academic anxiety levels before the treatment were in high category, and they were in moderate and low categories after the implementation of Expressive Writing Therapy technique in group counseling. The research findings showed that Expressive Writing Therapy technique in group counseling was effective in reducing student academic anxiety at Senior High School of Al Huda Pekanbaru. Based on Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test result, the score of Z was -2.032b, and Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) was 0.042 lower than 5% (0.05) significant level. Therefore, Null hypothesis (H0) was rejected, and Alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic anxiety is a common psychological phenomenon experienced by students at various levels of education in Indonesia, both in schools and Islamic schools (Rudiansyah, Amirullah, and Muhammad Yunus, 2016). Empirical data shows a relatively high prevalence of academic anxiety among high school (SMA) students. Research by Walasary & et al. (2020) showed that of all high school student respondents, only 5 students (3.4%) experienced no anxiety, while 77 students (3.4%) experienced mild anxiety, 60 students (40%) experienced moderate anxiety, and 8 students (5.3%) experienced severe anxiety. Similar findings were also revealed by Nur Laely et al. (2022) regarding

anxiety levels among high school students: 128 students experienced moderate anxiety (77.2%), 21 students experienced low anxiety (12.6%), and 17 students experienced high anxiety (18.2%). These data indicate that academic anxiety has become a serious problem that requires special attention from various parties, especially educational institutions.

Academic anxiety is caused by various factors, such as pressure to achieve, fear of failure, social comparison, academic ability, and stress management (Wahyu Eka Prasetyaningtyas et al., 2022). Therefore, academic anxiety experienced by students must be managed effectively to ensure optimal learning and achievement.

Academic anxiety is a feeling of excessive pressure or worry experienced by students regarding academic assignments, school exams, or academic situations (Wahyu Eka Prasetyaningtyas et al., 2022). If not managed properly, academic anxiety can negatively impact students' academic success (Gourav Maharajan, 2023). The negative impact of academic anxiety can disrupt students' thought patterns, physical well-being, and behavior, resulting in poor performance (Fazila Farrasia et al., 2023).

Based on a preliminary study conducted by researchers at Al Huda High School in Pekanbaru, researchers found that students experiencing academic anxiety were identified as having behavioral manifestations: difficulty concentrating in class, difficulty making decisions regarding their future, trembling hands and stuttering when speaking in front of the class. Furthermore, students also felt nervous when speaking in front of the class and struggled to understand the learning material.

Researchers also obtained information from curriculum representatives that academic anxiety is a common problem experienced by students. This typically occurs in 11th grade, when students also experience exams in high school.

One of the teachers responsible for helping students overcome academic and emotional problems is the Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher. BK teachers help overcome student anxiety through a variety of appropriate techniques and strategies. One strategy or method used by BK teachers to help students is group counseling. According to Hengki Yandri et al. (2022), group counseling is a process of assistance provided by counselors to several clients in a small group with similar problems and needing assistance in resolving the problems they are facing.

The group atmosphere creates a supportive environment, where members support each other, listen, and provide positive feedback (Indah Pemata Bunda, Yeni Karneli, and Netrawati, 2024). Through group counseling, students can also learn from others' experiences, develop social skills, and discover more effective coping strategies for managing anxiety (Adit Shaprizal, et al., 2025).

To reduce academic anxiety, one technique that can be integrated into group counseling is expressive writing therapy. Pennebaker states that expressive writing therapy can reduce levels of anxiety and depression (Falia Nur Arviani, Kholis Lur Rachman, 2024). This technique allows individuals to express their deepest feelings and thoughts through writing. Expressive writing therapy is a therapy that uses writing as a means to express unpleasant thoughts and feelings (Balawan Aliman Amali & Laili Etika Rahmawati, 2020). By writing, individuals can release pent-up emotions, thus helping them overcome psychological problems that can affect their cognitive, physiological and emotional conditions (Reni Susanti and Sri Supriyanti, 2013).

The link between writing therapy and academic performance can be explained through several psychological mechanisms. Research in Indonesia shows that suppressing thoughts and feelings about traumatic or stressful experiences results in accumulated stress in the body, increased physiological activity, and obsessive thoughts related to stressful events (Rismayanti Nursolehah & Rahmiati, R., 2022). In the long term, this condition can cause individuals to constantly be under pressure and feel socially threatened. Through expressive writing, individuals can express their experiences verbally, thereby gradually reducing inhibitions or pressure, leading to improvements in mental and physical health (Salma Qolbi, et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of expressive writing therapy in addressing students' psychological problems has been demonstrated by several previous studies. Research conducted by Amalia and Rahmawati on Efforts to Minimize Student Anxiety When Speaking in Public Using the Expressive Writing Therapy Method, showed that expressive writing techniques are effective in reducing students' anxiety levels when speaking in public (Balawan Aliman Amalia, Laili Etika Rahmawati,

2020). Meanwhile, research conducted by Melinda, Wayan, and Mayang on the Effect of Group Counseling Services with Expressive Writing Techniques in Reducing Academic Stress in Introverted Students, showed that group counseling services with expressive writing techniques have an effect on reducing academic stress in introverted students (Melinda Ywanka, Wayan Dharmayana, Mayang T. Afriwilda, 2024). These findings provide strong empirical evidence that expressive writing therapy has great potential for application in addressing various student psychological problems, including academic anxiety.

Based on the explanation above, the researchers are interested in examining more deeply the effectiveness of expressive writing therapy techniques in group counseling to reduce academic anxiety in students at Al Huda High School, Pekanbaru.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method. The research design used a one-group pretest-posttest, with different treatments administered to the same group (Sugiyono, 2017). In this design, the subjects were given a pretest before the treatment and a posttest after the treatment.

The study was conducted at Al Huda High School, Pekanbaru, in 2025. The subjects and data sources were 11th-grade students identified as experiencing academic anxiety at Al Huda High School, Pekanbaru. The object of this study was the effectiveness of the expressive writing therapy technique in group counseling to reduce academic anxiety. The population in this study was all 96 11th-grade students. The sample size of 5 students was selected using purposive sampling, based on the criteria of having high levels of academic anxiety.

The research instrument used an academic anxiety questionnaire with a Likert scale consisting of 26 statements, each with a positive and unfavorable score. The questionnaire's answer choices were adjusted to suit the research needs and consisted of four alternative answers: Very Appropriate (VA), Appropriate (A), Not Appropriate (NA), and Very Unsuitable (VU). The questionnaire measured four aspects of academic anxiety: psychological, cognitive, somatic, and motor. Data analysis used the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to determine differences in students' academic anxiety levels before and after receiving expressive writing therapy in group counseling. Before distributing the questionnaire, researchers first conducted validity and reliability tests.

Analysis

The results of the study showed that students' academic anxiety levels before treatment were high. Based on pre-test results, all students in the study were in the high category, with a percentage of 100%.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Academic Anxiety Before Treatment

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
26-52	Low	0	0%
53-78	Currently	0	0%
79-104	Tall	5	100%
Total		5	100%

Based on Table 1 above, it can be seen that all students in the sample were in the high academic anxiety category (100%) before receiving expressive writing therapy in group counseling.

After receiving expressive writing therapy in group counseling, students' academic anxiety levels decreased. Post-test results showed that 3 students were in the low category (60%), while 2 students were in the moderate category (40%).

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Academic Anxiety After Treatment

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
26-52	Low	3	60%
53-78	Currently	2	40%
79-104	Tall	0	0%
Total		5	100%

Based on table 2 above, it can be seen that after being given treatment, the level of academic anxiety of students who were in the high category, namely 5 students, decreased to 2 students in the medium category (40%) and 3 students in the low category (60%).

Table 3. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test

Test Statistics	Pretest - Posttest
Z	-2.032
Asymp. Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.042

Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test above, a significance value of $0.042 < 0.05$ was obtained. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, thus the expressive writing therapy technique in group counseling is declared effective in reducing students' academic anxiety. Thus, the expressive writing therapy technique in group counseling is effective in reducing academic anxiety in students at Al Huda High School, Pekanbaru.

DISCUSSION

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test results showed a Z-value of -2.032b and an asymp. sig. (2-tailed) of 0.042, which is less than the 5% significance level (0.05), thus rejecting H_0 . Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test after implementing the expressive writing therapy technique on academic anxiety in students, indicating a decrease. This conclusion was confirmed through testing using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

The high level of academic anxiety in students before treatment indicates that they still experience significant academic stress. This condition is characterized by feelings of fear, nervousness, worry, difficulty concentrating, and a lack of confidence in facing academic situations. With the expressive writing therapy technique, students' academic anxiety can be reduced, including through emotional catharsis, cognitive restructuring, increased insight, and the development of more adaptive coping strategies. This effectiveness has been consistently proven across various educational settings, from junior high school and high school to university students with various types of anxiety such as exam anxiety, public speaking anxiety, and anxiety in completing academic assignments. Expressive writing therapy techniques provide students with a space to deeply explore their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. This process helps individuals understand their situations from a more objective and rational perspective, identify maladaptive thought patterns that contribute to anxiety, and develop narratives about their academic experiences. Through structured writing activities, students are gradually able to process previously suppressed negative emotions and reduce the cognitive load that hinders learning.

Furthermore, research also shows that expressive writing therapy contributes to improving important aspects of students' psychological well-being, including reducing all four aspects of academic anxiety: psychological, cognitive, somatic, and motor. This technique enables students to improve their perception of academic stress, transform previously maladaptive emotional responses into more constructive ones, reduce physical manifestations of anxiety such as muscle tension and trembling, and control avoidance behaviors that hinder learning. Thus, expressive writing therapy not only reduces anxiety symptoms but also facilitates changes in how students face and manage their academic challenges. Expressive writing therapy helps students express suppressed thoughts and emotions through writing. Writing provides an opportunity for students to understand their feelings more deeply and reduce the emotional burden they feel.

Group counseling also provides a supportive atmosphere for students. Through group dynamics, students can listen to each other, provide support, and share experiences related to their academic anxiety. This helps students feel calmer and less alone in facing problems. These results align with previous research showing that expressive writing therapy is effective in reducing students' academic anxiety and stress. Thus, the expressive writing therapy technique can be used as an alternative guidance and counseling service in schools to help students overcome academic anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the expressive writing therapy technique in group counseling is effective in reducing academic anxiety in students at Al Huda High School, Pekanbaru. Students' academic anxiety levels before treatment were in the high category, while after treatment, they decreased to the medium and low categories.

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.042 < 0.05$, thus accepting the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, expressive writing therapy can be used as a technique in group counseling services to help students reduce academic anxiety.

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