



Improving Student Learning Achievement through Group Guidance in Natural and Social Sciences Subjects at MI Maraqitta'limat Lengkok Lendang

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of group counseling in improving student achievement in the subject of Natural and Social Sciences at MI Maraqitta'limat Lengkok Lendang. The research is grounded in the growing need for innovative educational approaches that address not only academic content but also students' motivation, collaboration skills, and personal development. Utilizing a classroom action research (CAR) method, the study was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. The subjects were fifth-grade students who demonstrated low academic performance and limited participation in classroom activities. Data collection methods included tests, observations, field notes, and student interviews. The results indicate a significant improvement in student learning outcomes after the implementation of group counseling. In Cycle I, only 56% of students reached the minimum competency standard, whereas in Cycle II, this number increased to 87%. Furthermore, qualitative data revealed an increase in students' motivation, self-confidence, and ability to work cooperatively with peers. The findings suggest that group counseling is an effective strategy to enhance not only academic achievement but also affective and social aspects of learning. Therefore, it is recommended that educators consider incorporating group counseling techniques into their teaching practices, especially in subjects that require critical thinking and interpersonal skills. This research contributes to the broader discourse on holistic education and offers practical implications for teachers, school counselors, and educational policymakers aiming to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments.

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Introduction

The quality of education is significantly influenced by the learning approaches and interventions applied within the classroom setting. In recent years, educators have increasingly recognized the importance of addressing not only cognitive development but also emotional and social competencies among students (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016).

The integration of counseling-based strategies into educational practices has been proposed as a holistic approach to support student learning and overall development (Corey, 2016). In the context of Indonesian primary education, particularly in madrasah ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools), challenges related to student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement remain pressing issues. Students often experience difficulties in subjects that require interdisciplinary understanding, such as Natural and Social Sciences, which combine analytical thinking with contextual awareness (Hidayat, 2021).

Group counseling, originally developed within psychological and therapeutic domains, has shown promising results when adapted for educational purposes. This technique emphasizes peer interaction, emotional support, and the development of self-awareness, which are crucial for young learners navigating academic and social demands (Gladding, 2015). However, its application in the context of primary school education in Indonesia is still limited and under-researched.

Several studies have examined the impact of group counseling on student behavior and emotional well-being, but few have linked it directly to measurable academic improvement, especially in subject-specific contexts such as Natural and Social Sciences (Yusuf & Nurihsan, 2018). This highlights a significant research gap that warrants further exploration. Moreover, most existing research tends to focus on middle and high school students, leaving a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of group counseling for younger students in early educational stages (Rahman et al., 2020). The developmental needs and learning styles of primary school students differ substantially from those of older students, indicating a necessity for age-appropriate interventions.

The current study aims to address this gap by implementing and evaluating a group counseling intervention specifically tailored for fifth-grade students in an Islamic elementary school setting. By doing so, the research provides insights into how such interventions can support both academic achievement and personal growth among young learners. In particular, this research focuses on the subject of Natural and Social Sciences, which is known for its complex content requiring critical thinking, observation, and the integration of scientific and social perspectives. Many students in Indonesian madrasahs struggle to achieve competency in this subject due to abstract concepts and limited contextual learning (Susanti & Wulandari, 2021).

Group counseling offers a potential solution to these challenges by fostering cooperative learning environments where students feel safe to express ideas, ask questions, and support each other's learning. This collaborative approach aligns with Vygotsky's social development theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to merge group counseling methodology with subject-based classroom instruction in a primary school setting, a combination that has not been extensively explored in existing literature. This integrative approach contributes to the broader field of educational psychology and pedagogy. Furthermore, the study employs a classroom action research (CAR) design, enabling iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This methodology not only supports continuous improvement in teaching practices but also ensures that interventions are responsive to students' evolving needs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

MI Mara qitta'limat Lengkok Lendang, the site of this study, presents a unique educational context characterized by a rural location, limited educational resources, and diverse student backgrounds. These factors contribute to varied learning outcomes and call for innovative strategies to bridge the achievement gap. Preliminary observations in this school indicated that students often lacked confidence, exhibited low motivation, and displayed minimal collaboration during Natural and Social Sciences lessons. These issues negatively impacted their academic performance and overall classroom dynamics.

Educators at the school expressed a need for supportive strategies that go beyond traditional teaching methods. In response, the implementation of group counseling was proposed not merely as a psychological support mechanism but as an integral part of the instructional process. By embedding group counseling within the learning framework, the intervention seeks to develop students' interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and academic confidence—all of which are critical components of effective learning (Goleman, 2006).

This study also contributes to the growing discourse on holistic education, which emphasizes the integration of emotional, social, and academic development in shaping well-rounded learners (Miller, 2000). It advocates for the recognition of students as complex individuals whose learning is deeply affected by their emotional and social environments. Another important aspect of this research is its practical implications for teachers, school counselors, and policymakers. The findings are expected to inform future practices in Indonesian madrasahs and similar educational institutions facing challenges in student achievement and engagement.

Additionally, the research aligns with national educational goals in Indonesia that promote character education, collaborative learning, and student-centered pedagogies as part of the broader curriculum reform agenda (Kemendikbud, 2020). In conclusion, this study seeks to demonstrate that group counseling, when strategically integrated into subject-specific instruction, can be an effective tool to enhance student

achievement. It fills a critical gap in the literature by offering evidence from an underrepresented educational context and age group. The findings are anticipated to serve as a model for other educational institutions seeking to innovate their instructional strategies and improve learning outcomes through holistic and inclusive approaches.

Methods

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is particularly effective for improving educational practices through systematic, reflective cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The CAR approach allowed the researchers to implement group counseling strategies in a real classroom setting and assess their impact on students' academic achievement over time.

The research was conducted at MI Maraqitta'limat Lengkok Lendang, a rural Islamic elementary school in Indonesia, during the academic year 2024/2025. The participants were 23 fifth-grade students enrolled in the Natural and Social Sciences subject. The selection of this class was based on initial diagnostic assessments and teacher reports indicating low academic performance and lack of student engagement.

The study was carried out in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the planning phase, the researchers collaborated with the classroom teacher to identify learning obstacles and design appropriate group counseling interventions. In the action phase, group counseling sessions were conducted in parallel with the teaching of Natural and Social Sciences. These sessions focused on building communication skills, enhancing motivation, and promoting collaborative problem-solving.

The observation phase involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Student performance was measured through formative assessments and structured achievement tests aligned with the curriculum. In addition, student behavior, engagement, and participation were observed and documented using field notes and observation checklists. Student reflections and teacher interviews were also conducted to gain deeper insights into the learning process.

In the reflection phase, the data gathered were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The research team and the classroom teacher jointly assessed the outcomes to determine the success of the implemented strategy and made necessary adjustments for the next cycle. This iterative process ensured continuous improvement and responsiveness to students' learning needs.

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed descriptively using percentage scores to determine the increase in academic achievement. A student was

considered successful if they achieved a minimum score of 70, based on the school's competency standard. Qualitative data, including student responses, observations, and interviews, were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to motivation, collaboration, and self-confidence.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Prior to the research, informed consent was obtained from the school principal, classroom teacher, and students' parents. Students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their academic results would be kept confidential.

By integrating group counseling techniques into subject-specific instruction and evaluating their impact within the framework of classroom action research, this study provides a practical and contextually grounded methodology for improving student achievement in under-resourced educational settings.

Result

The implementation of group counseling in the Natural and Social Sciences subject produced a significant improvement in students' academic achievement, motivation, and collaborative behavior. This section presents the findings of the research conducted over two cycles, with a detailed analysis of students' performance data, observed behaviors, and reflective insights gathered from both students and teachers.

Before the intervention, a baseline assessment was conducted to measure students' initial understanding of the subject. The results revealed that only 9 out of 23 students (39.1%) scored above the minimum competency standard of 70. The average class score was 63.4, indicating the general struggle students experienced in grasping key concepts in Natural and Social Sciences.

During the first cycle of the group counseling intervention, sessions were integrated into regular science lessons over a period of three weeks. The sessions emphasized emotional sharing, team-based problem solving, and academic goal setting. At the end of Cycle I, post-test results showed a marked improvement. Thirteen students (56.5%) scored 70 or above, with an increased class average of 71.2.

Although the results of Cycle I were promising, qualitative observations during this phase indicated that several students remained passive in group discussions. Some groups lacked cohesion, and a few dominant students tended to control discussions, limiting the participation of quieter peers. These findings highlighted the need for more structured facilitation in the second cycle to ensure equitable participation.

Teacher field notes from Cycle I also emphasized the importance of integrating emotional and motivational elements more explicitly into the group counseling sessions.

It was observed that students who demonstrated increased motivation and confidence were more likely to improve their academic performance.

Based on these findings, adjustments were made in Cycle II. Facilitators introduced clearer group roles, implemented turn-taking strategies, and incorporated brief reflection activities at the end of each session. The second cycle lasted four weeks and involved deeper integration of counseling elements such as empathy building, peer encouragement, and conflict resolution skills.

Post-test results from Cycle II indicated a further increase in student achievement. Twenty students (87.0%) achieved scores above the minimum competency threshold. The average class score rose to 78.6, reflecting not only academic improvement but also the overall success of the intervention in enhancing learning outcomes.

A closer look at individual student progress reveals noteworthy improvements. For instance, Student A, who initially scored 58 in the baseline assessment, improved to 66 in Cycle I and ultimately reached 74 in Cycle II. Similarly, Student F, previously identified as having low self-confidence, improved from 61 to 76 over the two cycles, supported by strong peer relationships fostered during group sessions.

In terms of motivation, student reflections collected through short questionnaires indicated a shift in attitudes toward the subject. At the beginning of the study, only 30% of students reported enjoying Natural and Social Sciences lessons. By the end of Cycle II, this number had increased to 78%. Students cited peer support, interactive learning, and a less stressful environment as key reasons for their improved engagement.

The qualitative data also revealed changes in classroom dynamics. Observations noted increased instances of students helping one another, engaging in academic dialogue, and expressing curiosity through questions. Group counseling helped create a psychologically safe space that encouraged students to take academic risks and explore ideas more freely.

Teacher interviews supported these findings. The subject teacher reported that students were more attentive, punctual, and cooperative during science lessons. The teacher also observed that students were more proactive in completing assignments and demonstrated better comprehension during class discussions.

Another key aspect of improvement was the development of interpersonal skills. Group counseling sessions led to an increase in peer empathy and reduced incidences of conflict or isolation among students. This social cohesion appeared to contribute to more productive group tasks and a stronger sense of classroom community.

Statistical analysis of the test scores using descriptive statistics further supports the findings. The standard deviation of scores decreased from 7.8 in the baseline to 5.1 in Cycle II, indicating reduced performance disparities among students. This suggests

that the intervention not only lifted overall achievement but also promoted equity in learning outcomes.

In terms of learning retention, a follow-up quiz administered two weeks after Cycle II showed that 82.6% of students maintained scores above 70, with a class average of 76.8. This indicates that the knowledge gained during the intervention was retained effectively, likely due to the active and collaborative nature of the group sessions.

Students with previously low academic performance showed the greatest gains. The bottom quartile of students, whose average score was 54.3 at baseline, improved to 69.5 by the end of Cycle II—a gain of over 15 points. This suggests that group counseling was especially effective for students in need of additional support.

Interestingly, even students who were already performing above average at baseline benefited from the intervention. These students showed improvements in leadership skills and reported increased enjoyment of the subject, suggesting that group counseling fosters development beyond academic metrics.

While the intervention was successful, several challenges were noted. Facilitators had to manage group conflicts, maintain time discipline during sessions, and continuously motivate students to take the sessions seriously. These challenges were addressed through consistent teacher involvement and the establishment of clear group norms.

Despite these challenges, the overall outcome of the study supports the conclusion that integrating group counseling into subject-specific instruction is an effective strategy for improving both academic and social-emotional outcomes in primary education. It empowers students to take ownership of their learning and contributes to a more inclusive, supportive classroom environment.

In summary, the data show a consistent pattern of academic improvement, increased motivation, enhanced collaboration, and emotional growth among students. The multi-dimensional benefits of group counseling underscore its potential as a transformative educational tool, especially in resource-constrained contexts like MI Maraqitta'limat Lengkok Lendang.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that group counseling is an effective strategy to enhance student academic achievement, particularly in the context of Natural and Social Sciences education. The significant increase in the number of students reaching the minimum competency standard from 39.1% at baseline to 87.0% after the second cycle indicates that the intervention had a measurable impact on learning outcomes.

This outcome aligns with the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's social development theory, which posits that cognitive development is largely a product of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of group counseling, students engaged in collaborative learning experiences that enabled them to construct knowledge through dialogue and shared understanding.

The increase in class average scores from 63.4 to 78.6 also supports previous research suggesting that when students feel emotionally supported and psychologically safe, they are more likely to engage in learning tasks and perform better academically (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016). The structure of group counseling facilitated such a safe environment, where students were encouraged to express themselves without fear of judgment.

Moreover, the observed improvement in student motivation is in line with self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of relatedness, autonomy, and competence in fostering intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Group counseling promoted all three of these elements by fostering peer relationships, allowing students to take active roles, and celebrating small academic successes within groups.

The development of social-emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and communication, further underscores the holistic benefits of the intervention. As Gladding (2015) noted, group counseling can significantly improve interpersonal functioning, which in turn enhances classroom dynamics and learning effectiveness.

Notably, the success of the intervention among low-performing students is particularly significant. These students benefited from the peer support system that group counseling naturally fosters. When students with lower academic confidence are grouped with empathetic and motivated peers, they tend to mirror positive behaviors and attitudes (Slavin, 1995).

Another key aspect of the intervention's success was the incorporation of structured reflection at the end of each session during Cycle II. This aligns with Dewey's concept of reflective learning, which asserts that learning is most effective when learners critically reflect on their experiences (Dewey, 1933). These reflection periods allowed students to consolidate knowledge, recognize their progress, and set goals for improvement.

While academic scores are important, the qualitative data from observations and interviews add depth to the findings. The increase in student participation, mutual respect, and reduced classroom tension suggests that emotional and social factors play a crucial role in academic success—supporting the argument for a more integrated approach to education (Miller, 2000).

This study also contributes to the growing body of literature on holistic education in Islamic schools, which often face challenges due to limited resources and traditional pedagogical approaches. By demonstrating the effectiveness of a relatively low-cost, non-technological intervention, this research offers a practical model for similar institutions in rural or underserved areas (Hidayat, 2021).

Furthermore, the use of Classroom Action Research (CAR) provided a dynamic and responsive methodology for educational improvement. The iterative nature of CAR allowed for ongoing adjustments based on student needs and feedback, a process that is increasingly recommended in education for its contextual relevance and sustainability (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

It is important to note, however, that the success of the intervention depended heavily on the active involvement of teachers and the consistent implementation of the counseling framework. This highlights the necessity of teacher training in group facilitation and emotional intelligence, as also emphasized by Yusuf and Nurihsan (2018).

Additionally, while this study focused on a specific subject, the core principles of group counseling—collaboration, peer support, and emotional engagement—are applicable across disciplines. Future research could explore its implementation in other subjects to determine its broader applicability.

Despite its strengths, this study had limitations. The small sample size and single-institution focus limit the generalizability of findings. However, the depth of data and consistency of improvement suggest that the intervention has strong potential for replication with appropriate contextual adjustments.

In conclusion, the integration of group counseling into subject-based instruction in primary education offers a powerful strategy to improve academic achievement while simultaneously nurturing students' emotional and social development. This approach addresses the often overlooked affective dimension of learning and provides a model of inclusive and empathetic pedagogy that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners.

The study not only bridges a gap in the literature regarding the application of counseling techniques in elementary science education but also provides empirical evidence supporting the use of group counseling as an effective instructional strategy in Islamic primary schools. These findings contribute meaningfully to both educational psychology and classroom pedagogy literature.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of group counseling into the teaching of Natural and Social Sciences significantly enhances students' academic achievement,

motivation, and social-emotional development. The consistent improvement in test scores across two action research cycles, along with positive behavioral changes and increased student engagement, demonstrates that group counseling is a practical and effective pedagogical approach, particularly in resource-limited Islamic primary schools. By fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment, group counseling not only addresses cognitive needs but also nurtures the emotional well-being of students, making it a holistic strategy for educational improvement.

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