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Group Counseling Using Symbolic Modeling Techniques to Enhance Students' Self-Efficacy in Continuing Their Education

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Abstract

Low self-efficacy in continuing education to higher education requires appropriate guidance and counseling services. This study examined the effectiveness of group guidance using the symbolic modeling technique in improving students' self-efficacy in continuing education. A quantitative quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was used. The sample consisted of 24 twelfth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sutera Padang, Indonesia, prioritizing those with low self-efficacy, selected through purposive sampling and divided into experimental (n = 12) and control (n = 12) groups. Data were collected with a Likert-scale self-efficacy questionnaire and analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, Mann-Whitney U test, and N-Gain with SPSS 25.0. The experimental group's average score increased from 93.8 (moderate) to 133 (very high) with Asymp. Sig. 0.002, while the control group increased from 95.3 to 106 with Asymp. Sig. 0.003. The Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant posttest difference between groups (Asymp. Sig. 0.002), with an average N-Gain of 70% (moderately effective) for the experimental group, far higher than the control group's 13% (ineffective). Group guidance using the symbolic modeling technique is effective in improving students' self-efficacy in continuing education. The findings imply that vicarious experience through symbolic media can strengthen students' confidence in planning further education. Guidance and counseling teachers are advised to apply this technique in a programmed manner, particularly for students with low self-efficacy, and schools are encouraged to include it in guidance programs for final-year students.

Keywords: Continuing Education; Group Guidance; Self-Efficacy; Symbolic Modeling Technique.

INTRODUCTION

High schools (SMA) play a crucial role in preparing students to acquire the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills to pursue higher education, as mandated by Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia No. 10 of 2025 on Graduate Competency Standards. However, students' awareness of and confidence in pursuing higher education still vary, due in part to a lack of interest in learning and low expectations for advancing through higher education (Purnamasari et al., 2024).

Nationally, Indonesia's Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) for higher education is only around 31–32%, far below that of several other developing countries such as Brazil (69.73%), Colombia (59.29%), and Iran (58.67%) (World Bank, 2024). In West Sumatra, the higher education GER stands at 43.29%, meaning that approximately 56% of the population of college-age students has not yet accessed higher education (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). A similar situation is observed at Sutera State High School No. 2, where only 24% of the 2023 graduates, 33% of the 2024 graduates, and 29% of the 2025 graduates went on to pursue higher education. Preliminary observations of 115 twelfth-grade students in January 2026 also showed that 30.4% of

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students stated they would not continue their education or were still undecided about doing so—a proportion that cannot be ignored in the context of student educational planning (Ayu et al., 2020).

Students' interest in continuing their education is influenced by internal factors, such as self-efficacy, and external factors, such as parental support and socioeconomic conditions (Sanyoto & Zamroni, 2024; Febrianti & Nawantara, 2022). Self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks and achieve goals (Bandura, 1995), has been shown to have a significant and positive influence on students' interest in pursuing higher education (Siregar & Putra, 2025; Ramadhan et al., 2018). In fact, self-efficacy is also cited as one of the key mechanisms that encourage students to seek help (help-seeking) when facing various academic and psychological challenges (Triyono et al., 2026). However, several studies indicate that students' self-efficacy in Indonesia remains suboptimal; for example, 56% of students fall into the moderate category (Fauziah et al., 2022), and 53.16% of students in West Sumatra fall into the moderate category (Suryani & Sano, 2024).

One service that has proven effective in helping students improve their self-efficacy is group counseling, which leverages group dynamics to provide social support and positive encouragement (Safriliani et al., 2020; Atikah & Asni, 2023). However, group counseling conducted without specific techniques is considered unable to deeply address students' personal dynamics (Fahrulida & Pratomo, 2025), making more targeted techniques necessary. One relevant technique is symbolic modeling, which involves presenting behavioral models through symbolic media such as videos, films, images, or stories for students to observe and imitate (Asa et al., 2024). This technique is based on Bandura, (1986) social learning theory, which asserts that new behaviors can be learned through four cognitive processes, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation and that vicarious experience is one of the strongest sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services using the symbolic modeling technique in enhancing the self-efficacy of students at Sutera State High School No. 2 regarding their decision to pursue higher education. The novelty of this study lies in the specific application of the symbolic modeling technique to build students' self-efficacy during the critical decision-making phase regarding continuing their education a context that has not been extensively examined in previous similar studies.

METHODS

This study is a quantitative study employing a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design (Sugiyono, 2017). The independent variable is group counseling using the symbolic modeling technique, and the dependent variable is students' self-efficacy in continuing their education. The research design is shown in Figure 1.

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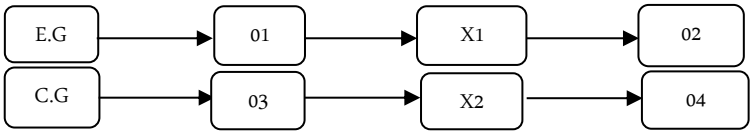


Figure 1 Rancangan Quasi Experiment Design

Notes :

E.G : Experimental Group
C.G : Control Group
O1 : Experimental Group Pretest
O2 : Experimental Group Posttest
O3 : Control Group Pretest
O4 : Control Group Posttest

X : Treatment (group guidance service using the symbolic modeling technique)
X2 : Conventional group guidance service (without any specific technique)

The population comprised all 99 twelfth-grade students of Sutera State High School 2 in the 2026-2027 academic year. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) twelfth-grade students; (2) a low pretest self-efficacy score as the priority, supplemented by students with moderate to high scores to enrich group dynamics, broaden members' perspectives, and practice real social skills; and (3) willingness to participate in the entire intervention.

Low self-efficacy was defined as a score $\leq$ 92 ($\leq$ M – 0.5 SD; M = 98.45, SD = 12.07), a criterion met by 33 of the 99 students. Twenty-four students were selected and assigned to an experimental group (n = 12) and a control group (n = 12) using (pretest score matching), in line with the ideal group counseling size of 8-12 members (Prayitno & Amti, 2004; Corey, 2016). Each group included 6 students with low self-efficacy and 6 with moderate to very high self-efficacy. The two groups were comparable at pretest (experimental M = 93.75; control M = 95.25).

The program consisted of seven sessions: one pretest session, five treatment sessions, and one posttest session, each lasting 70 minutes. The experimental group received group counseling using the symbolic modeling technique, implemented in four stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation and reinforcement (Bandura, 1997). Each session used a variety of media, including pictures, videos, short film clips, storybooks, and animations. The control group received conventional group counseling without any specific technique, consisting of lectures and question-and-answer sessions, with the same time allocation. The counseling content was developed from an analysis of pretest items across three aspects of self-efficacy: magnitude, strength, and generality.

Data were collected using a Likert-scale self-efficacy questionnaire developed by the researcher based on Bandura, (1995) theory, with three indicators: magnitude (task difficulty), strength (level of confidence), and generality (scope of the task). The instrument was reviewed by the supervisor and three expert judges and tried out on 50 students, yielding 38 valid items with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.943. The questionnaire was administered before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention in both groups.

Data analysis began with a description of the data, categorizing self-efficacy scores into five categories (very high, high, moderate, low, and very low). Hypothesis testing used nonparametric statistics because [the sample size was small and/or the data were not normally distributed]. The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was used to examine pretest-posttest differences within each group, and the Mann-Whitney U Test to examine posttest differences between the experimental and control groups, using SPSS version 25.0. The magnitude of improvement in self-efficacy was calculated with the N-Gain formula to determine the effectiveness of the service.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Self-Efficacy of Students in the Experimental and Control Groups Before and After the Intervention

A comparison of the mean self-efficacy scores of students on the pretest and posttest in the experimental and control groups is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Mean Self-Efficacy Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pretest Mean	Category	Posttest Mean	Category
Experimental	93,8	Moderate	133	Very High
Control	95,3	Moderate	106	High

Table 1 shows that at the pretest stage, the average self-efficacy scores for both groups fell into the moderate category—93.8 for the experimental group and 95.3 for the control group—indicating that the two groups were relatively equivalent before the intervention. After the intervention, the average score of the experimental group rose sharply to 133 (very high category), while the control group's score increased only to 106 (high category). All 12 students in the experimental group experienced an increase in their scores without exception, whereas in the control group, the increase was uneven, and one student actually experienced a decrease in score. This difference in patterns indicates that the symbolic presentation of behavioral models to the experimental group provided a stronger vicarious experience in shaping students' self-confidence compared to the conventional service provided to the control group (Bandura, 1997).

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test to compare pretest and posttest scores within each group, and the Mann-Whitney U test to compare posttest scores between the experimental and control groups. A summary of the test results is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of Results from the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test and the Mann-Whitney U Test

Test	Z-Value	Asympt. Sig. (2-tailed)	Notes
Wilcoxon: Experimental Pretest-Posttest	-3,066	0,002	Significant
Wilcoxon: Control Pretest-Posttest	-2,944	0,003	Significant
Mann-Whitney U: Experimental Posttest vs. Control	-3,034	0,002	Significant

Based on Table 2, the results of the Wilcoxon test for the experimental group showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.002 (< 0.05), indicating a significant difference in self-efficacy between the pretest and posttest. Similar results were also found in the control group with an Asymp. Sig. of 0.003 (< 0.05), although the Z-value for the control group (-2.944) was smaller than that of the experimental group (-3.066), indicating that the magnitude of change in the control group was relatively weaker. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney U test on the posttest scores of both groups yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.002 (Mann-Whitney U = 19.000; Wilcoxon W = 97.500), indicating that there was a significant difference in self-efficacy between the experimental and control groups after the intervention.

To determine the extent of the improvement, an N-Gain analysis was conducted on both groups. The results showed that the average N-Gain for the experimental group was 70%, falling into the "moderately effective to effective" category, with all students achieving positive N-Gains ranging from 56% to 88%. In contrast, the control group's average N-Gain was only 13%, falling into the "ineffective" category; in fact, two students even had negative N-Gains. The 57-percentage-point difference in average N-Gain between the two groups reinforces the evidence that group counseling using symbolic modeling techniques is far more effective than conventional counseling in enhancing students' self-efficacy to continue their education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that group counseling services using symbolic modeling techniques are effective in enhancing students' self-efficacy in continuing their education. During the counseling sessions, students were encouraged to observe, through symbolic media, models of individuals who successfully

continued their education despite facing various obstacles, thereby providing students with vicarious experiences that strengthened their self-confidence. Theoretically, these results are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997), which asserts that observing the success of role models who share similar characteristics with the individual is one of the strongest sources of self-efficacy.

These findings are also consistent with the results of a study by Bisri et al., (2018) which showed that group counseling using modeling techniques effectively increased high school students' self-efficacy in making decisions about continuing their education, as well as a systematic review by Rahmawati et al., (2022) which confirmed that group services—including those using symbolic modeling techniques—effectively increased the self-efficacy of high school and vocational high school students. Similar results were also reported by Widhiyanti et al., (2026) who found that the application of modeling techniques through group counseling significantly increased students' career self-efficacy.

In contrast, in the control group, the increase in self-efficacy was weaker and less consistent because the instruction provided was dominated by lecture-based methods without the presentation of concrete models that students could identify with. This finding aligns with the view that group counseling conducted without specific techniques has not been able to deeply address students' personal dynamics (Fahrulida & Pratomo, 2025), as well as with the finding that limited facilities and a lack of active student involvement act as barriers to the effectiveness of conventional group counseling (Harahap et al., 2024).

Overall, the difference in results between the experimental and control groups confirms that the presentation of the model whether through videos, images, or stories—is the key differentiating factor in the effectiveness of group counseling services for fostering students' self-efficacy, rather than merely the delivery of information. The stages of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation and reinforcement applied systematically in the symbolic modeling technique—enable students not only to gain a cognitive understanding of the importance of continuing their education but also to develop the belief that they are capable of achieving it.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations, including a relatively small sample size and a scope limited to a single school; therefore, the results of this study need to be further tested in a broader context and population to strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

Group counseling using the symbolic modeling technique significantly increased students' self-efficacy in continuing their education. The experimental group rose from the moderate category (M = 93.8) to the very high category (M = 133), while the control group, which received conventional counseling, also improved significantly but less markedly, from the moderate category (M = 95.3) to the high category (M = 106). After the intervention, the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group, with a mean N-Gain of 70% (moderately effective) compared with 13% (ineffective). These findings show that symbolic modeling is more effective than conventional group counseling and support Bandura's view that vicarious experience builds confidence in one's ability to pursue higher education. Accordingly, guidance and counseling teachers are recommended to apply the technique systematically, using symbolic media such as pictures, videos, and short films, particularly for students with low self-efficacy. Schools should include it in guidance programs for final-year students and provide the necessary media and training. Because the sample was small and limited to one school, future researchers are encouraged to use larger and more varied samples to strengthen generalizability.

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