


Group Guidance Gratitude Intervention Technique to Improve the Meaning of Life of Inclusive Students

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals with a strong understanding of the meaning of life tend to be able to face challenges with greater resilience, have better mental health, and are able to set life goals that align with personal and social values. The meaning of life is something that a person deems important and serves as a goal in carrying out their life's tasks, which can lead to feelings of happiness or pleasure (Qori'ah & Ningsih, 2020).

Priatama et al. (2019) define the meaning of life as something a person discovers in life that has special value for that individual. Bastaman (2007) states that the meaning of life is something believed to be true and that gives a person special value, making it a purpose in life. Bastaman also states that experiencing a meaningful life is the gateway to satisfaction and happiness. When someone successfully achieves or discovers meaning in their life, life feels important and worthwhile.

The existence of meaning in life is a crucial aspect for well-being and self-achievement, including for students (Wu et al., 2024). Individuals who have a sense of meaning in life will be able to understand the meaning and purpose of their lives (Victoriana et al., 2023). The meaning of life can serve as a fundamental motivation for humans to achieve a meaningful life. This meaningful life is the most fundamental human desire that must be internalized and believed in to achieve a valuable and meaningful life (Yulilla, 2017).

Zetta & Rachim (2021) state that the physical limitations experienced by people with disabilities, directly or indirectly, can lead to various psychological problems. These include anxiety, social withdrawal, apathy, and dependence on others. People with disabilities experience limitations or impairments in their social functioning, which impacts their physical activity,

confidence, and self-esteem in interacting with others and their environment (Nafi et al., 2020). This condition limits opportunities for socializing, attending school, and working, and can lead to discriminatory treatment from individuals without disabilities.

Naraswari & Syafiq (2018) revealed that people with disabilities have long been considered incapable of carrying out activities independently due to their limitations. The negative stigma they experience from others often makes them feel inferior or have low self-esteem. This negative stigma comes not only from the outside community but also from their families. People with disabilities are considered a burden, troublesome, embarrassing, and useless.

According to data from the Central Java Provincial Education Office, in 2026, there were 27,868 students with special needs or inclusion requiring special attention. These students were spread across various schools at various levels, both elementary and secondary, both in formal schools implementing inclusive education and in schools specifically for children with special needs. Of these, 6,073 inclusive students were in secondary education.

The conceptual framework outlined above demonstrates the need for more systematic assistance for inclusive students in terms of striving to improve their sense of meaning in life. This will enable them to be more self-actualized, with a positive sense of meaning in life, and thus find effective daily living conditions. In school settings, the management and support of inclusive students includes guidance and counseling services. Of the various services implemented in schools, group guidance services are considered the most appropriate for addressing existing problems. According to Prayitno (2017), group guidance is a service that utilizes group dynamics to help students develop communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal.

Selecting group guidance services allows each member to actively participate and share experiences to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to address problems or develop their personal lives, including positive character development (Rusmana, 2017). The purpose of group guidance services is to develop social skills, particularly communication skills, among participants. It also encourages the development of values, thoughts, perceptions, insights, knowledge, and attitudes to foster more effective behavior (Juliawati, 2014).

According to Kurniasari (2019), group guidance using the gratitude intervention technique is a process of helping through group dynamics to foster feelings of gratitude in response to kindness received, whether in the form of material benefits or moments of peace. This is supported by Watkins' (2014) opinion regarding a new intervention to improve psychological well-being, the gratitude intervention, which states that this technique is suitable for group implementation. Watkins (2014) explains that this technique has four stages: recounting, reflection, expression, and reappraisal. Furthermore, Rizki (2024) explains that gratitude intervention as group guidance is the process of aiding students in a group environment.

Study Aim and Hypothesis

The large number of inclusive students in Central Java Province who experience poor meaning of life, makes researchers think about helping them improve their quality of life, namely by providing group guidance interventions with gratitude intervention techniques so that inclusive students experience an increase.

This study aims to test the effectiveness of group guidance services using gratitude intervention techniques in improving the meaning of life for inclusive students in Central Java. The hypothesis is that group guidance services using gratitude intervention techniques are effective in improving the meaning of life for inclusive students in Central Java.

METHODS

Design

The research approach used is quantitative research with a pre-experimental design. This means that this study will examine the effectiveness of group guidance services using the gratitude

intervention technique in improving the meaning of life of inclusive students in Central Java. This research is an experimental study with a one-group pretest-posttest design, described as follows.



Figure 1. Research Design

Participants

The population in this study was all-inclusive students identified as experiencing a low sense of meaning of life. Based on the results of a questionnaire on the level of meaning of life of inclusive students distributed to approximately 6,073 inclusive students at the secondary education level in Central Java province, 1,200 inclusive students were identified as experiencing a low sense of meaning of life. The initial assessment results of the meaning of life of the inclusive students indicated a large study population. Based on the characteristics of the treatment, namely the gratitude intervention group guidance service, which has a limited group size, purposive sampling was used to select seven students with the lowest level of meaning of life as study subjects.

Instruments

Data collection techniques used questionnaires and observations, each with its own instruments. Before using the instrument, a reliability test was conducted using standards determined by Azwar (2012), which states that if the Cronbach's alpha correlation results approach 1, it can be interpreted as reliable.

The questionnaire was used to measure the level of meaning in life of inclusive students. Furthermore, observations were used to monitor the development of the level of meaning in life of inclusive students in Central Java. According to Utami & Setiawati (2019), the meaning of life is something that arises intrinsically from within a person. Humans must first fulfill their basic needs to fulfill their values throughout their lives.

This instrument was developed to uncover the level of meaning in life among students with disabilities. Therefore, this instrument was designed from aspects contained in the meaning of life, including: a) Creative values, namely the activity of creating, working, creating, and carrying out tasks and obligations as best as possible with full responsibility. b) Experiential values, namely belief in and appreciation for the values of truth, virtue, beauty, faith, religion, and love. Embracing and believing in a value can give someone meaning to life. c) Attitudinal values, namely accepting with fortitude, patience, and courage all forms of inevitable suffering, such as incurable illness, death, and the approach of death after maximum effort has been made.

Data Analysis

Two data analysis techniques were used in this study: descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Descriptive analysis was needed to identify the level of meaning of life of students before and after the intervention. Inferential analysis was then needed to determine the effectiveness of the research. The type of test used is the Wilcoxon test or Z test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The description of the level of meaning of life of inclusive students before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the intervention with the gratitude technique group guidance service was used for

descriptive statistical analysis. The following is presented in the form of a frequency distribution table classified into five categories: very high, high, medium, low, and very low. The results are as follows.

Table 1. Level of meaning of life of inclusive students in the study, pretest and posttest

Interval	Category	Pre-Test (F)	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (F)	Post-Test (%)
136–160	ST	0	0%	2	28,6%
110–135	T	0	0%	5	71,4%
84–109	S	3	42,9%	0	0%
58–83	R	4	57,1%	0	0%
32–57	SR	0	0%	0	0%
Total		7	100%	7	100%

Table 1 shows that the low level of meaning of life among inclusive students before the intervention or treatment with the gratitude intervention group guidance service was categorized as very high for 3 students (42.9%), low for 4 students (57.1%), and no students were in the medium, low, or very low categories.

After the gratitude intervention group guidance service, the level of meaning of life among inclusive students increased. This is evident in the data on the meaning of life of inclusive students, which were categorized as high for 5 students (71.4%), and very high for 2 students (28.6%). This indicates that the level of meaning of life among inclusive students increased after receiving the gratitude intervention group guidance service three times.

Table 2. Observational data on the increase in the level of meaning of life among inclusive students at each meeting

N	P I	P II	P III
1	70%	70%	70%
2	90%	90%	80%
3	100%	100%	90%
4	70%	70%	70%
5	80%	80%	50%
6	80%	80%	60%
7	80%	80%	60%
Average	81,4%	81,4%	68,6%

Table 2 above shows the meaning of life of inclusive students at each meeting. At the first meeting, all students still experienced a low level of meaning of life. Furthermore, at the second meeting, there was an increase in the meaning of life of inclusive students: 1 student was in the very high category, 3 students were in the high category, and 3 students were in the medium category at meeting 3. At the third meeting, 5 students were in the medium category, and 2 students were in the low category. At this meeting, there were no more students in the low category. Based on the observation results, each student participated in the intervention process from beginning to end.

To determine the effect of the gratitude intervention group guidance service on increasing the meaning of life of inclusive students, a non-parametric statistical test, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, was used. The Wilcoxon (Z) test is a test of the difference in average parameters for two paired samples.

Hypothetical testing

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Data Type	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Average Score	85,4	123,1	2,71 ^b	0,000

Based on Table 3 above, hypothesis testing using the Wilcoxon two-related samples test revealed a significant difference in mean scores before and after treatment. After data analysis, the Z-score was 2.731 with an Asymp-Sig value of 0.000 < 0.05, with a pretest score of 85.4 and a posttest score of 123.1. This means that the null hypothesis (Ho), "Group Guidance with the Gratitude Intervention Technique is Effective in Improving the Meaning of Life of Inclusive Students in Central Java," is accepted, as the difference test results obtained an Asymp-Sig value smaller than the specified alpha (error level) of 0.05.

The results of this analysis indicate that Group Guidance with the Gratitude Intervention Technique is significantly effective in improving the Meaning of Life of Inclusive Students in Central Java.

Discussion

Research conducted on inclusive students in Central Java showed that after treatment, pretest and posttest scores improved. Based on these results, it can be concluded that group guidance using the gratitude intervention technique is effective in improving the meaning of life of inclusive students in Central Java. This aligns with research by Wood et al. (2009) which states that the meaning of life can be enhanced through the expression of gratitude. This is because gratitude is strongly related to components of psychological well-being, namely environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, life purpose, and self-acceptance. The greater the sense of gratitude, the greater the sense of meaning of life; conversely, the lower the sense of gratitude, the lower the sense of meaning of life (Jannah & Najwa, 2023).

The results of this study indicate that the gratitude intervention technique is effective in improving the meaning of life of inclusive students in Central Java. This occurs due to the positive relationships established and the warm, compassionate, empathetic nature of group members. Problems that arise as inclusive students feel they share the same fate can be addressed within a supportive group. In line with this research, selecting group guidance services using gratitude interventions allows each member to actively participate and share experiences to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to address problems or develop their personal lives, including positive character development in students (Rusmana, 2017). According to Hartanti (2022) group guidance services can encourage the development of feelings, thoughts, perceptions, insights, and attitudes that support more effective behavior.

Consistently, a high level of gratitude can improve an individual's psychological well-being (Rahayu & Setiawati, 2019) and can help manage stress by focusing on what is to be grateful for (Manita et al., 2019). Emmons (2007) defines gratitude as recognizing the benefit, acknowledging the benefit, and returning the favor or appreciating it. These conditions are considered fundamental to enhancing an individual's meaning in life. Research on the efficacy of group guidance using the gratitude intervention technique by Zulaehah (2017) also stated that this technique was effective based on the Mann-Whitney U Test with a significance value below 0.05 (i.e., Asymp. Sig. 0.018). Another study by Ramli (2024) on group guidance through gratitude exercises using Rasch model analysis and the Mann-Whitney U Test showed a satisfactory category, indicating that this technique is suitable for use in increasing meaning of life, as demonstrated by a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores.

Meaning of life for inclusive students is a crucial element of an individual in an inclusive setting. Therefore, serious, and systematic efforts are deemed necessary to improve the meaning

of life in inclusive students in Central Java to improve quality of life and better plan despite the limitations they experience.

Implications

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge while offering new insights into the meaning of life among inclusive students, particularly at the secondary education level. Practically, this study provides inclusive students with a deeper understanding of the importance of finding meaning in life as a foundation for personal growth and a more positive life orientation. For guidance and counseling practitioners in schools, the results can serve as a reference in designing and implementing programs that are more responsive to the unique needs of students with disabilities, including the development of counseling interventions, psychological support policies, and inclusive school environments. Furthermore, for educational institutions, this research offers valuable insights into the significance of life meaning as a basis for fostering the full potential of inclusive students, thereby supporting the creation of more adaptive, supportive, and inclusive educational systems.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

One limitation is that not all the study population received the treatment, due to the population distribution across a wide provincial area. Furthermore, some of the samples also had limitations that prevented them from fully participating in the treatment. Future research should examine the meaning of life for inclusive students in higher education, who may face more complex issues. Similarly, a broader study population could help produce more representative results.

CONCLUSION

The low level of meaning in life among inclusive students, which was previously in the low and concerning category, experienced a significant improvement. In fact, not a single inclusive student fell into the low category. The gratitude-based group guidance intervention was conducted over four sessions. This technique successfully addressed the low level of meaning in life among inclusive students. The researchers recommend that mentors and guidance counselors for inclusive students be more diligent in addressing students' meaning in life and maximizing guidance and counseling services, particularly the implementation of gratitude-based group guidance.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

ESS and ATDA agree to the final version of this article.

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