

THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-TALK TECHNIQUES ON THE SELF-CONFIDENCE OF BULLYING VICTIMS AT STATE MIDDLE SCHOOL 11 TARAKAN

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ABSTRACT

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Bullying remains one of the most prevalent psychosocial problems among adolescents and frequently contributes to decreased self-confidence among victims. This study aimed to examine the effect of self-talk techniques on the self-confidence of bullying victims at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan. A quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design employing a one-group pretest-posttest model was utilized. The study involved eight eighth-grade students identified as victims of verbal bullying and selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a self-confidence scale consisting of 26 items covering self-belief, optimism, objectivity, responsibility, and rational-realistic thinking. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, normality tests, homogeneity tests, and paired-samples t-tests using SPSS. The findings revealed a substantial increase in the mean self-confidence score from 52.88 before treatment to 90.75 after six sessions of group counseling using self-talk techniques. The paired-samples t-test showed a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. These findings demonstrate that self-talk techniques effectively improve the self-confidence of bullying victims by promoting positive thinking, emotional regulation, and adaptive self-perceptions. Therefore, self-talk-based group counseling may serve as an effective intervention strategy for school counselors in supporting students who experience bullying and strengthening their psychological well-being.



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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional stage characterized by substantial physical, cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial changes. During this period, individuals experience rapid developmental processes while simultaneously seeking identity, autonomy, and social acceptance (Steinberg, 2017; Santrock, 2019). Although adolescence is often regarded as a period of opportunity and self-exploration, it is also accompanied by emotional instability and heightened sensitivity to social evaluation, making adolescents particularly vulnerable to various psychosocial problems, including bullying victimization (Arseneault, 2018; UNESCO, 2019). The school environment, which should function as a safe and supportive setting for students' development, frequently becomes a context in which aggressive behaviors and peer victimization occur.

Bullying has emerged as one of the most serious issues affecting adolescents worldwide. It refers to repeated aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims, causing physical, emotional, and psychological harm (Olweus, 2013). Among its various forms, verbal bullying remains the most prevalent type experienced by secondary school students. Verbal bullying includes insulting, mocking, humiliating, giving negative nicknames, spreading rumors, threatening, and using offensive language intended to undermine the victim's dignity and self-worth (Coloroso, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Unlike physical aggression, verbal bullying often leaves no visible injuries, yet

its psychological consequences may be more profound and long-lasting (Zych et al., 2019).

Recent studies have demonstrated that verbal bullying constitutes the most common form of peer victimization among adolescents. UNESCO (2019) reported that approximately one-third of students worldwide have experienced bullying, with verbal harassment being the most frequently reported form. Similarly, research conducted in Indonesia indicates that verbal bullying affects between 60% and 70% of junior high school students and is significantly associated with emotional distress and social withdrawal (Febriani, 2025; Winata, 2025). These findings suggest that verbal bullying represents a persistent problem requiring effective psychological interventions to minimize its negative consequences.

Victims of verbal bullying often experience significant psychological difficulties, including anxiety, depression, social isolation, and diminished self-esteem (Karyanti, 2019; Arseneault, 2018). One of the most detrimental outcomes is the deterioration of self-confidence. Self-confidence refers to an individual's belief in his or her abilities, competence, and personal worth, enabling effective adaptation and successful engagement with life challenges (Bandura, 1997; Mruk, 2013). Adolescents with high self-confidence tend to demonstrate better social adjustment, academic performance, and emotional resilience. Conversely, students with low self-confidence frequently exhibit fear of failure, negative self-perceptions, social withdrawal, and difficulties expressing opinions or participating actively in classroom activities (Santrock, 2019).

Previous studies have consistently shown that bullying victimization negatively affects self-confidence among adolescents. Azmi (2021) found that students experiencing verbal bullying exhibited low levels of self-confidence, characterized by excessive worry, poor social interaction, and difficulties concentrating on academic activities. Furthermore, victims often internalize negative messages received from peers, leading to distorted self-perceptions and persistent negative thinking patterns (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Such cognitive distortions contribute to feelings of helplessness and reinforce the belief that they are incapable, unattractive, or socially unacceptable.

Observations conducted at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan revealed similar phenomena. Several students who experienced verbal bullying demonstrated signs of declining self-confidence. They reported feeling ashamed when ridiculed because of physical appearance, academic performance, or personal characteristics. Some students became socially withdrawn, avoided interactions with peers, and preferred isolation. Others expressed fear of speaking in class due to concerns about being laughed at or criticized by classmates. These experiences indicate that bullying victimization extends beyond temporary emotional discomfort and may significantly impair students' psychosocial development and academic engagement.

Interviews with students further revealed persistent negative self-perceptions among victims of bullying. Some students believed that they were unworthy, untalented, and unappreciated by others. They frequently engaged in self-critical thoughts and anticipated rejection from peers, resulting in decreased participation in social and academic activities. Several students expressed feelings of trauma and even wished to transfer schools or graduate as soon as possible. Such findings are consistent with cognitive theories suggesting that emotional disturbances are largely influenced by maladaptive thinking patterns and irrational beliefs (Beck, 2011).

School counselors at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan have implemented several preventive and therapeutic strategies, including psychoeducation, individual counseling, person-centered

therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT), and positive reinforcement approaches. Despite these efforts, some students continue to experience low self-confidence following verbal bullying incidents. This condition indicates the need for interventions that directly address the negative cognitive processes underlying reduced self-confidence.

One intervention that has received increasing attention in cognitive-behavioral approaches is self-talk. Self-talk refers to internal dialogue through which individuals interpret experiences, regulate emotions, and influence behavior (Hardy et al., 2009). Positive self-talk enables individuals to replace irrational and self-defeating thoughts with constructive and adaptive cognitions, thereby promoting emotional well-being and enhancing self-confidence (Erford, 2017). According to Helmstetter's theory, self-talk consists of several forms, including silent talk, self-speak, self-conversation, self-writing, and tape-talk, all of which aim to transform negative internal narratives into positive and empowering beliefs (Hestilia, 2023).

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of self-talk interventions in improving psychological functioning. Ilma (2024) demonstrated that self-talk significantly reduced depressive symptoms and enhanced students' confidence. Wahyuni (2024) reported that self-talk interventions enabled students to identify negative thoughts, reconstruct irrational beliefs, and develop healthier self-perceptions. Moreover, cognitive-behavioral research indicates that positive self-talk strengthens self-efficacy and resilience, both of which are essential components of self-confidence (Bandura, 1997; Neff, 2011).

Although positive reinforcement techniques have also been found effective in promoting adaptive behaviors (Nufus, 2024), these interventions primarily focus on modifying external behaviors rather than addressing the internal cognitive processes experienced by victims of bullying. In contrast, self-talk directly targets maladaptive thoughts and facilitates the development of positive self-beliefs, making it particularly suitable for students who experience reduced self-confidence following verbal victimization. Furthermore, self-talk is relatively simple to implement, encourages self-awareness, and enables students to independently maintain positive cognitive patterns in daily life.

Despite the growing body of literature concerning bullying and self-confidence, studies investigating the effectiveness of self-talk interventions among victims of verbal bullying remain limited, particularly within Indonesian junior high school settings. Previous research has predominantly focused on reducing bullying behaviors or addressing emotional disturbances without specifically examining self-confidence enhancement among victims. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of self-talk techniques for strengthening self-confidence among bullied adolescents is still insufficient.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of self-talk techniques on the self-confidence of bullying victims at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan. Using a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, this research seeks to determine whether self-talk interventions can effectively improve students' self-confidence by transforming negative thinking patterns into more positive and adaptive beliefs. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of evidence-based counseling interventions and provide practical implications for school counselors in addressing the psychological consequences of bullying among adolescents.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design using a one-group pretest-posttest model to examine the effect of self-talk techniques on the self-confidence of verbal bullying victims. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan, East Tarakan District, North Kalimantan, from January to February 2026. The study population consisted of 122 eighth-grade students, while the sample comprised eight students identified as victims of verbal bullying and experiencing low levels of self-confidence. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Sugiyono, 2019). The intervention procedure included three stages: pretest administration, six treatment sessions employing self-talk techniques, and posttest administration. Data were collected using a self-confidence scale developed based on five dimensions, namely self-belief, optimism, objectivity, responsibility, and rational-realistic thinking. The instrument consisted of 26 items measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with separate scoring procedures for favorable and unfavorable items (Azwar, 2017).

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS software and involved both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of participants and changes in self-confidence scores before and after the intervention. Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumption of normality was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test to determine whether the data were normally distributed, while homogeneity analysis was performed to assess the similarity of variance between variables (Field, 2018). To determine the effectiveness of the self-talk intervention, a paired-samples t-test was employed to compare the mean differences between pretest and posttest scores obtained from the same participants. This statistical technique is appropriate for evaluating changes occurring before and after treatment within a single group and has been widely applied in counseling and educational intervention research (Pallant, 2020). A significance level of 0.05 was adopted as the criterion for hypothesis testing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The effectiveness of the self-talk technique was initially examined through a comparison between pretest and posttest scores. The findings demonstrated a substantial increase in students' self-confidence after participating in six sessions of group counseling using self-talk techniques. Detailed comparisons are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
 Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Self-Confidence Scores

No.	Participant Code	Pretest Score	Category	Posttest Score	Category	Score Increase
1	AN	65	Moderate	85	High	20
2	AK	51	Low	81	High	30
3	ML	44	Low	97	Very High	53
4	RS	43	Low	92	Very High	49
5	SH	61	Moderate	88	Very High	27
6	QS	42	Low	100	Very High	58
7	MA	59	Low	100	Very High	41
8	AG	58	Low	83	High	25
Mean		52.88	Low	90.75	Very High	37.88

Source: research results

Before treatment, two students (25%) were categorized as having moderate self-confidence, while six students (75%) were classified in the low category. The average pretest score was 52.88, indicating low self-confidence. After receiving the self-talk intervention, five students (62.5%) reached the very high category and three students (37.5%) reached the high category, with a mean posttest score of 90.75. Overall, the average increase in self-confidence scores was 37.88 points, suggesting that the intervention produced meaningful improvements.

Normality Test

Prior to hypothesis testing, the normality assumption was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Table 2.
Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Results

Group	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	0.891	8	0.239
Posttest	0.905	8	0.318

Source: research results

The results revealed significance values of 0.239 for the pretest and 0.318 for the posttest, both exceeding the threshold of 0.05. Therefore, the data were normally distributed and suitable for parametric analysis.

Homogeneity Test

The homogeneity test was performed using Levene's test.

Table 3.
Test of Homogeneity of Variance

Basis	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	0.714	1	14	0.412
Based on Median	0.609	1	14	0.448
Based on Median (Adjusted df)	0.609	1	13.697	0.448
Based on Trimmed Mean	0.714	1	14	0.412

Source: research results

The significance value based on the mean was 0.412 (>0.05), indicating homogeneous variance. Consequently, the data met the assumptions required for paired-samples t-test analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

To determine whether the self-talk intervention significantly affected self-confidence, a paired-samples t-test was conducted.

Table 4.
Paired Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest – Posttest	-37.875	14.307	5.058	-49.836	-25.914	-7.488	7	0.000

Source: research results

The paired-samples t-test yielded a significance value of 0.000, which was lower than 0.05,

with $t = -7.488$. These findings indicate a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. Therefore, the self-talk technique implemented through group counseling significantly improved the self-confidence of bullying victims at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan.

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that self-talk techniques are effective in enhancing the self-confidence of students who have experienced bullying. Prior to the intervention, most participants demonstrated low self-confidence characterized by fear of expressing opinions, feelings of inferiority, social withdrawal, and excessive concern about negative evaluations from peers. These characteristics are consistent with previous findings indicating that victims of verbal bullying frequently experience psychological distress, low self-esteem, and reduced confidence in social and academic contexts (Zahra, 2023; Azmi, 2021).

Following six sessions of group counseling, participants exhibited substantial improvements in self-confidence. The increase in mean scores from 52.88 to 90.75 reflects not only statistical significance but also meaningful psychological changes. Students became more willing to participate in classroom discussions, present assignments, ask questions, and interact with peers without fear of ridicule. According to Erford (2017), self-talk facilitates cognitive restructuring by replacing irrational and self-defeating beliefs with healthier and more adaptive thoughts. This process allows individuals to reinterpret negative experiences and develop a more positive self-concept.

The success of the intervention may also be attributed to the systematic stages of self-talk implementation. Participants first identified negative thoughts associated with bullying experiences, such as feelings of incompetence, worthlessness, and fear of rejection. These thoughts were subsequently recorded and transformed into positive affirmations. Finally, students practiced applying positive self-statements in daily situations. Such cognitive reframing is consistent with cognitive-behavioral principles, which emphasize that changing maladaptive thinking patterns leads to improvements in emotions and behaviors (Corey, 2021).

The present findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Wahyuni (2024), who reported significant improvements in students' self-confidence after the application of self-talk techniques. Similar findings were obtained by Setianingrum and Asni (2024), demonstrating that group counseling combined with self-talk significantly increased students' confidence levels. These studies collectively suggest that self-talk is a practical and effective intervention for addressing psychological difficulties among adolescents.

Analysis of individual participants further revealed varying degrees of improvement. Participants QS, ML, and RS showed the greatest increases, suggesting that students with initially low self-confidence may experience substantial benefits when provided with structured cognitive interventions. Moreover, qualitative observations during counseling sessions indicated that participants gradually became more optimistic, responsible, objective, and realistic in evaluating themselves. Improvements were particularly noticeable in self-belief and optimism, whereas responsibility exhibited comparatively smaller gains.

Another important finding concerns the sustainability of the intervention. Follow-up observations indicated that participants continued to employ positive self-talk independently after the completion of the counseling sessions. This suggests that self-talk may produce long-term benefits rather than merely temporary improvements. Students reported becoming more capable of managing emotions, responding rationally to criticism, and maintaining positive perceptions of themselves despite experiencing unfavorable social situations. Such outcomes support Helmstetter's theory that repeated positive internal dialogue contributes to the development of enduring psychological resilience.

Overall, the results demonstrate that self-talk techniques implemented through group counseling constitute an effective strategy for strengthening self-confidence among victims of bullying. Beyond improving students' perceptions of themselves, the intervention promoted

emotional regulation, adaptive thinking, and greater social participation. These findings imply that school counselors may incorporate self-talk techniques into guidance and counseling programs as preventive and curative interventions aimed at fostering students' psychological well-being and resilience.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that self-talk techniques implemented through group counseling significantly improved the self-confidence of bullying victims at SMP Negeri 11 Tarakan. Prior to the intervention, most participants exhibited low levels of self-confidence characterized by fear of expressing opinions, feelings of inferiority, social withdrawal, and excessive concern about negative evaluations from peers. Following six sessions of treatment, participants demonstrated substantial improvements, as reflected in the increase of the mean score from 52.88 to 90.75 and the significant result obtained from the paired-samples t-test ($p < 0.05$). These results confirm that self-talk techniques are effective in transforming negative self-perceptions into more positive and adaptive beliefs.

The study also suggests that self-talk contributes not only to enhancing self-confidence but also to strengthening emotional regulation, optimism, and social participation among bullying victims. The ability of students to maintain positive internal dialogue after the intervention indicates the potential long-term benefits of this technique. Therefore, school counselors are encouraged to incorporate self-talk-based group counseling into guidance and counseling programs as a preventive and curative approach to promote students' psychological resilience and overall well-being.

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