
SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION: A TECHNIQUE TO REDUCE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' TEST ANXIETY

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ABSTRAK

The present study aimed to find out the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior counseling with systematic desensitization technique in reducing 8th-grade students' anxiety test in SMPN 3 Ungaran. To this end, pre-experimental study with one group pretest-posttest design was applied. The participants of the study were five students who were recruited through random assignment. The data were collected using test anxiety scale and analyzed using Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The result of the study showed that Rational Emotive Behavior (REB) counseling with systematic desensitization technique was effective in reducing students test anxiety. The result of this study could be used as a reference for school counselors to help their students reduce their test anxiety by applying REB counseling with systematic desensitization. Future studies could consider this study as a reference to examine test anxiety.

Keywords: systematic desensitization, test anxiety, rational emotive behavior (REB)

INTRODUCTION

Test is one of the means to evaluate students' academic success. According to Olivia (2011), students' success in performing test may be influenced by cognitive factors (20%) and psychological factors (80%) A test may trigger one's positive psychological component known as achievement motivation. This motivation drives students to have intellectual, physical, and emotional preparation before taking a test. In addition to motivation, Putwain (2009) argues that the test environment also activates a negative psychological component, i.e., fear of failure, that results in

the students' anxiety. Excessive test anxiety may adversely influence one's concentration and well-being (Situmorang, Mulawarman, and Wibowo, 2018).

Widyartini and Diniarti (2016) found in their study that students' anxiety were high (26.9%) and very high (11.5%). Their finding is supported by our preliminary finding that out of sixty-eight 8th-grade students in a public junior high school in Semarang, 31 students report high level of test anxiety.

Students' test anxiety may be caused by their excessive fear of bad test result. Their test anxiety may also arise due to their irrational thought of test and test result,

negative thoughts, self-criticism, and inability to control the situation during the test (Hashmat, Hashmat, and Amanulla, 20018). Test anxiety, according to Spielberger (2005), consists of three components: cognitive, physical, and psychological component (Spielberger, 2005). The most dominant component in test anxiety is the cognitive component, indicated by concentration difficulty, confusion, and mental blocking (Tresna, 2011; Riswandi, 2014).

This kind of anxiety may irritate students cognitively, physically, and psychologically, lowering their performance and motivation during the test. Accordingly, it is necessary to reduce students' test anxiety through guidance and counseling services. One of the functions of guidance and counseling is to help students solve their problems, develop, and make self-adjustment (Dewantoro, Legowo, and Chadidjah, 2016). One of the efforts to reduce students' test anxiety is Rational Emotive Behavior (REB) counseling with systematic desensitization technique.

Systematic desensitization may help students control their anxiety by gradually conditioning the anxiety stimulus while providing students with new, more adaptive coping responses that may turns anxiety into source of motivation to do the test optimally. The present study aimed to find out the effectiveness of REB counseling with systematic desensitization technique in reducing students' test anxiety. The result of this study could be used as a reference for school counselors to help their students reduce their test anxiety by applying REB counseling with systematic desensitization. Future studies could consider this study as a reference to examine test anxiety.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This interventional study applied one group pretest-posttest design. Five 8th-grade students of SMPN 3 Ungaran were recruited using random assignment. The data were collected using the adapted version of Spielberger's test anxiety scale (in Taylor

and Deane, 2002) and analyzed using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The statistical result showed that the students' high and very high level of test anxiety turned into low level of test anxiety after the treatment was given. The analysis result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants' Test Anxiety Before and After The Treatment

No.	SP	Before Category	After Category
1	IB	High	Low
2	IM	High	Low
3	LI	Very High	Low
4	RF	High	Low
5	BP	Very High	Low
Average		High	Low

The classical assumption test result indicated that the data were not homogeneous and not normally distributed. Accordingly, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was applied in order to see the difference in students' test anxiety before and after the treatment was given. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test result is displayed in the following Table 2.

Table 2
Data Analysis (Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test)

N	T ₀		T ₁		z	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
5	3.1	0.8	1.6	0.5	-	0,043
					2,023	

The hypothesis test result indicated that REB counseling with systematic desensitization was effective to reduce students' test anxiety, as presented in table 2.

The participants' test anxiety was categorized as high. Their test anxiety was categorized as high and very high, exhibiting some symptoms related to the cognitive component such concentration difficulty, confusion, and mind blank. The physical and psychological component observed from the participants were restlessness, tension, panic, and rapid heart rate.

These components may adversely affect students' test performance, as they are confused and doubt when answering the test

item, their self-efficacy is lowered, making them lose confidence on their skill (Hashmat, 2008; Trifoni & Shahini, 2011; Rini, 2013). To prevent such harmful impacts, a school counselor can help students reduce their test anxiety by conducting REB counseling with systematic desensitization technique.

Systematic desensitization technique, according to Corey (2013), is a technique of systematically changing the negative response in order to remove negative behaviors or turn it into more positive and adaptive behavior to overcome anxiety. In the context of the present study, systematic desensitization was applied to reduce students' test anxiety due to their knowledge and irrational belief. Irrational belief describe one's fear and concern of bad things during the test. Through counseling, one's irrational belief is turned into more rational belief.

In the present study REB counseling with systematic desensitization was conducted in eight sessions with 40 minutes each. The result of this study supports previous studies (e.g., Tresna, 2011; Leksono, 2013; Lestari, 2013; Mustika, 2014; Depiani, 2014; Rajiah and Saravanan, 2014) who found that systematic desensitization technique is effective to reduce junior and senior high school students' test anxiety. This effectiveness is noticed by the lower scores after the treatment was given.

The participants lowered anxiety was also accounted for by their willingness, persistence, and motivation. Their motivation allows them to have positive views on the counseling process (Dyaningpratiwi, Wibowo, & Nusantoro, 2014).

The counseling process make the participants able to control their anxiety, have more courage to deal with negative stimulus, face problems instead of avoiding it, and be more confidence and optimistic when doing the test. Such optimism drives students' positive thought during the test and minimize fear of failure. Accordingly, they are not carried away by negative thoughts on test. Furthermore, it makes them more realistic (Rizky, 2013; Risyadi, 2016)..

CONCLUSION

The students' test anxiety before the treatment was given was categorized as high. Accordingly, a treatment of REB counseling with systematic desensitization technique was given for eight sessions with 40 minutes each. After the treatment was given, the students' anxiety level was categorized as low. Based on the decrease in average score after the treatment was given, it could be concluded that the REB counseling with systematic desensitization technique was effective to reduce students' test anxiety. The result of the study contribute to the body of knowledge of the school counselor in providing classical guidance on rational thinking and relaxation training that can be applied by students when undergoing anxiety. Future studies could consider this study as a reference to examine test anxiety Student.

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