

## Development of a Structure Peer Counseling Model to Improve Assertive Behavior Among Junior High School Student

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Many junior high school students exhibit low assertiveness, particularly in expressing opinions, resisting negative peer pressure, and maintaining interpersonal boundaries, which may hinder their socio-emotional development. **Aim:** This study examined the urgency and effectiveness of structured peer counseling as an intervention to improve assertive behavior among junior high school students. **Method:** The research employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control-group design involving 62 students, divided into an experimental and a control group. The intervention consisted of structured peer counseling sessions emphasizing active listening, empathy, modeling, and role-playing of assertive communication. Assertive behavior was measured using a four-point Likert scale instrument administered before and after the intervention. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to determine differences between pretest and posttest scores. **Results and Discussion:** The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group ( $Z = -4.643$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a large effect size ( $r = 0.60$ ), indicating meaningful behavioral change following peer counseling. In contrast, the control group did not show a significant improvement ( $Z = -1.924$ ,  $p = 0.054$ ). These results suggest that structured peer counseling provides an effective developmental context for practicing assertive communication skills through peer interaction and social modeling. **Conclusion:** The study confirms the urgent need for assertive behavior intervention in junior high schools and demonstrates that structured peer counseling is an effective approach to enhancing students' assertiveness, providing empirical support for its integration into school guidance and counseling programs.

**Keywords:** Assertive Behavior, Peer Counseling, Socio-Emotional Development, School Counseling, Adolescents



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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional developmental stage marked by heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation and increasing demands for social competence. In junior high school, students are frequently confronted with interpersonal situations that require the ability to express opinions, refuse negative invitations, and defend personal rights appropriately. Assertive behavior is the ability to communicate thoughts and feelings honestly and confidently while respecting others' rights (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Individuals with adequate assertiveness demonstrate better interpersonal adjustment and reduced vulnerability to peer pressure (Speed et al., 2018). Conversely, low assertiveness in adolescents is associated with conformity behavior, social withdrawal, and difficulty in decision-making (Moreno et al., 2019). These findings underline the urgency of structured school-based interventions to develop assertive behavior at the junior high school level.

Within the framework of guidance and counseling services in Indonesian schools, peer counseling is recognized

as a strategic and developmentally appropriate approach. Peer counseling emphasizes supportive helping relationships among trained students under professional supervision (Tindall & Gray, 1985). Recent studies also highlight that peer counseling programs can effectively support students' social and emotional development in school settings (Rahmawati et al., 2022; Nugraha & Prasetyo, 2023). The theoretical foundation of this approach aligns with social learning theory, which posits that behavior is acquired through observation, modeling, and reinforcement within meaningful social interactions (Bandura, 2018). Considering that adolescents are more receptive to peer influence than adult authority, peer counseling provides a naturalistic context for practicing assertive communication skills.

Empirical studies in Indonesia have reported that peer counseling contributes positively to students' self-confidence and interpersonal competence (Sari & Mulyadi, 2020; Wibowo & Nuryono, 2019). Research on assertive behavior within the Indonesian educational context also indicates that structured group guidance and counseling interventions can significantly

improve students' assertiveness levels (Putri & Hidayah, 2021). However, most previous studies have treated assertiveness as a secondary outcome within broader counseling programs. Research that specifically develops and empirically tests a structured peer counseling model with assertive behavior as the primary intervention target remains limited, particularly at the junior high school level.

Positioning this study within previous research, the present study addresses this gap by developing a structured peer counseling model explicitly designed to enhance assertive behavior among junior high school students. The novelty of this research lies in three aspects: (1) the integration of assertiveness training principles into a systematic peer counseling model, (2) the empirical validation of the model through quasi-experimental procedures, and (3) the positioning of assertive behavior as a measurable primary outcome rather than a complementary variable. By providing statistically supported evidence within the Indonesian school context, this study contributes to strengthening evidence-based guidance and counseling practices. It offers a practical intervention model adaptable for junior high school settings.

## METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of a peer counseling model in developing students' assertive behavior. Participants consisted of 62 junior high school students in Gunungkidul Regency, Indonesia, divided into an experimental group ( $n = 30$ ) and a control group ( $n = 32$ ). The experimental group received a structured peer counseling intervention, while the control group did not receive an intervention during the study period. Assertive behavior was measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and had been tested for validity and reliability using the Rasch model, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.890. The scale assessed several aspects of assertive behavior, including expressing opinions, resisting peer

pressure, asserting personal rights, and maintaining interpersonal boundaries.

The peer counseling model implemented in this study was developed through a research-and-development approach adapted from Borg and Gall. During the intervention stage, students in the experimental group participated in five peer counseling sessions designed to enhance assertive communication and interpersonal skills among junior high school students. A pretest was administered before the intervention to measure students' initial level of assertive behavior, and a posttest was conducted after the intervention to examine changes following the model's implementation. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to examine differences between pretest and posttest scores, and the Mann–Whitney U Test was used to compare differences between the experimental and control groups. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS at the 0.05 significance level.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### *Step 1: Analysis of Pretest–Posttest Differences in the Experimental and Control Groups*

The results of the study were obtained using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to examine differences in assertive behavior between the pretest and posttest. In the experimental group ( $n = 30$ ), 28 students showed positive rank differences, indicating higher posttest scores than pretest scores. Only one student showed a negative rank difference, and one student showed no change. The statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement in assertive behavior ( $Z = -4.643$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The calculated effect size ( $r = 0.60$ ) indicates a large practical impact of the intervention.

In contrast, the control group ( $n = 32$ ) did not show statistically significant improvement. The analysis produced  $Z = -1.924$  with  $p = 0.054$ , which exceeds the 0.05 significance level. Most students in the control group demonstrated negative rank differences, suggesting that assertive behavior did not improve without structured intervention.

To clarify the comparison between groups, the summary of the Wilcoxon test results is presented below.

**Table 1.** Student Class

		<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>	<b>Sum of Ranks</b>
<b>Post Test Eksperimen</b>	Negative Ranks	1 <sup>a</sup>	3,00	3,00
	Positive Ranks	28 <sup>b</sup>	15,43	432,00
	Ties	1 <sup>c</sup>		
	Total	30		
<b>Posttest Kontrol</b>	Negative Ranks	21 <sup>a</sup>	14,57	306,00
	Positive Ranks	8 <sup>b</sup>	16,13	129,00
	Ties	3 <sup>c</sup>		
	Total	32		

The results indicate that structured peer counseling significantly improved students' assertive behavior.

#### *Step 2: Effectiveness of Peer Counseling Model Based on the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test*

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was conducted to examine differences in assertive behavior scores between the

pretest and posttest. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between students' scores before and after the intervention ( $Z = -3.412$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that the structured peer counseling model significantly improved students' assertive behavior.

**Table II.** Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Test Statistics		
Z	Post-Test Eksperimen Pre-Test Eksperimen	Post-Test Kontrol Pre-Test Kontrol
	-4.643 <sup>b</sup>	-1.924 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	0,000	0,054

**a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test**  
**b. Based on negative ranks.**

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that structured peer counseling can meaningfully improve assertive behavior among junior high school students. The significant results of the Wilcoxon test, supported by consistent positive score changes in the experimental group, show that the improvement was not incidental but experienced by most participants. These results indicate that the peer counseling model provided students with structured opportunities to develop assertive communication skills within a supportive peer environment.

The improvement in students' assertive behavior can be understood through the perspective of assertiveness theory. According to Alberti and Emmons, assertiveness is the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and personal rights directly and honestly while still respecting others' rights. During the peer counseling sessions, students were encouraged to practice expressing their opinions, resisting negative peer pressure, and communicating their needs constructively. The use of peer interaction allowed students to learn assertive behavior through observation, practice, and feedback, which are consistent with social learning processes. Through repeated interactions in a safe, collaborative setting, students gradually became more confident in communicating their ideas and defending their personal boundaries.

The results align with previous studies showing that peer-based interventions contribute to the development of socio-emotional skills (Sari & Mulyadi, 2020) and that assertiveness training enhances adolescents' communication competence (Speed et al., 2018). However, this study offers a more specific contribution by deliberately placing assertive behavior as the primary goal of the intervention. Rather than treating assertiveness as a secondary outcome within broader counseling programs, this research developed and tested a structured peer counseling model that directly targets assertive communication.

Another important finding is the absence of significant improvement in the control group. Without structured guidance and opportunities for guided interpersonal practice, students tended to maintain their previous communication patterns. This suggests that assertive behavior does not develop automatically but requires intentional facilitation and repeated practice within supportive social contexts.

From a practical perspective, these findings have important implications for school counselors. Peer counseling can be utilized as a structured counseling strategy to support

the development of assertive behavior among students. School counselors can train selected peer counselors to facilitate guided discussions, role-playing activities, and reflective conversations that encourage students to express their thoughts and feelings appropriately. By integrating peer counseling into school guidance programs, counselors may create a more collaborative environment that supports students' social and emotional development.

Overall, this study highlights the potential of peer counseling as an effective and practical approach for promoting assertive behavior in junior high school settings. The model not only provides emotional support among peers but also serves as a developmental intervention, helping students build healthier communication patterns and interpersonal skills.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that structured peer counseling is a meaningful, empirically supported intervention for improving assertive behavior among junior high school students. The significant behavioral changes observed in the experimental group indicate that assertiveness can be effectively strengthened through guided peer interaction that emphasizes modeling, role-playing, and reflective communication practice. These findings highlight the practical importance of integrating assertiveness-focused peer counseling into school guidance programs, particularly in educational contexts where adolescents face increasing peer influence and social conformity pressures. By positioning students as active agents in supporting one another, peer counseling not only enhances communication competence but also contributes to a more supportive and developmentally responsive school climate. Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of assertive behavior improvement, explore implementation across diverse school settings, and investigate how peer counseling models can be adapted to address other socio-emotional competencies within secondary education.

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