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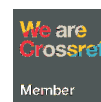
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Article

Exploring the effectiveness of benson relaxation technique in group counselling to reduce public speaking anxiety of junior high school students



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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of Benson relaxation technique in group counselling to reduce public speaking anxiety in students. The research design used is pre-experimental with a one-group pretest-posttest model. The sample consisted of five junior high school students in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan, who were purposively selected because they had very high levels of anxiety. The sample was selected through purposive sampling based on criteria that indicated very high levels of public speaking anxiety, as measured by the public speaking anxiety scale. The intervention was group counselling for four sessions with Benson relaxation technique. Results showed a decrease in anxiety from very high to low. Paired T-test showed a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05), confirming the effectiveness of the intervention. The Benson relaxation technique, which has been scientifically proven to reduce anxiety responses through regular breathing and repetition of calming words. The findings support the theoretical framework that physiological relaxation can effectively reduce anxiety by activating the body's relaxation response. This research contributes to group counselling practice by offering the effectiveness of relaxation techniques supported by group dynamics.

Keywords:

Benson relaxation technique
Group counselling
Public speaking anxiety

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Introduction

Junior high school, which typically spans 12 to 15 years of age, is a critical developmental phase as individuals transition from childhood to adolescence. During this stage, it is common to face challenges in regulating emotions and managing feelings of anxiety. Lucas (2020) highlights that public speaking is a very important skill in today's globalised world. This skill not only contributes to academic success, but also plays an important role in shaping their future social interactions and professional endeavours. Nonetheless, anxiety related to public speaking can inhibit articulating ideas, constructing arguments, and actively engaging in learning activities. Corey (2013) describes anxiety as a natural emotional response that indicates a state of discomfort, usually triggered by fear, worry, or anxiety in response to a particular event or situation. This spontaneous form of anxiety arises as an immediate reaction to a perceived threat. In psychoanalytic theory, anxiety is considered a psychological tension resulting from an internal conflict between the id, ego, and superego, which functions as a warning mechanism against potential danger. Freud, as cited by Sutardjo (2007), characterised anxiety as a feeling of helplessness that interferes with rational behaviour. Anxiety often arises as a negative reaction to stress or internal conflict, especially when individuals face life changes that require adaptation.

Transitional development in adolescence is also accompanied by the emergence of various psychological pressures, one of which is public speaking anxiety, which is often experienced by individuals in this age range. Public speaking anxiety is a common problem found in junior high school students, who are experiencing the transition phase from childhood to adolescence. During this period, individuals experience psychological instability and an intensive search for identity. The manifestation of anxiety can be in the form of physiological symptoms, such as tremors, excessive sweating, accelerated heart rate, and muscle tension. In addition, psychological symptoms are also common, including fear of negative judgement, fear of making mistakes, and feelings of inferiority (Hancock, Stone, Brundage, & Zeigler, 2010; Azhar Aziz, 2022). The results of a survey conducted by Adnan & Retnoningsih (2024) on 83 adolescent respondents aged 12-17 years who live in the Bandung city area showed that 97.6% of respondents had low public speaking skills, and 98.8% experienced anxiety when speaking in public for fear of negative judgement from others.

A deeper study of the phenomenon of anxiety requires an understanding that in psychology, anxiety is seen as an emotional and physiological response to external and internal threats or pressures. Anxiety in the context of public speaking reflects a condition in which individuals experience feelings of discomfort or threat, manifested as the body's adaptive response to the perception of disturbance or danger. Individuals experiencing this condition generally exhibit a range of symptoms, including physiological reactions (such as increased heart rate and muscle tension), behavioural responses (such as avoidance of speaking situations), emotional instability, as well as impairments in cognitive processes, such as difficulty concentrating or systematically organising ideas (Hamandia, 2022). This anxiety is often rooted in internal psychological tensions that cause hormonal imbalances, affecting the functioning of various body systems as a whole.

If the problem of public speaking anxiety in Junior High School students is not addressed, it can have a negative impact on the development of self-confidence, both in academic and social contexts. Unaddressed public speaking anxiety tends to inhibit the development of communication skills and reduce the level of active participation of students in various learning activities. Mustika et al. (2022) found a positive correlation between the level of self-confidence and public speaking anxiety among students, indicating that the lower the self-confidence, the higher the anxiety level. Furthermore, Oktonika (2024) suggested that public speaking anxiety in the classroom environment is generally not caused by intellectual inability, but rather by physical, psychological, or behavioural disorders. Thus, efforts to reduce public speaking anxiety in adolescents need special attention, considering that this skill plays an important role in supporting optimal academic achievement. If left untreated in the long term, this anxiety condition has the potential to lead to excessive fear of performing in front of others, which in turn can limit the development of one's full potential.

A number of studies have identified various factors that influence the level of public speaking anxiety in junior high school students. These factors include personal, interpersonal and social environmental aspects that contribute to the emergence of anxiety. The results of research conducted by Listiyani et al. (2015) showed a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and communication in the family simultaneously with the level of public speaking anxiety. This finding indicates that high self-efficacy and supportive family communication patterns can jointly reduce anxiety levels. Research by Murni et al. (2019) found a significant relationship between anxiety and speaking ability, where individuals with high levels of anxiety tend to have difficulty expressing their opinions orally. Recent research by Aleeya and Suhesty (2025) also revealed a moderate correlation between social support and public speaking anxiety, especially in adolescents who were victims of bullying. This suggests that adequate social support plays a role in reducing the negative psychological impact experienced by adolescents in the context of public communication.

These research findings are also reinforced by a preliminary study conducted by the researcher in one of the junior high schools in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. Based on the preliminary study, the researcher found that some in a school in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan, also experienced anxiety when speaking in public. These students live in a hilly area that is quite far from the city. Banjar district is made up of various ethnic groups with the majority being Banjar, Dayak and some

Javanese. The language used daily by them is Banjar. The habit of feeling confident when speaking in public in a formal environment is still not fully developed in these students. The symptoms of public speaking anxiety experienced by these individuals include worrying about negative outcomes before or after speaking, sweating profusely, feeling uneasy, and having difficulty standing in a relaxed position.

Efforts to overcome public speaking anxiety in Junior High School students require systematic and targeted interventions. In this context, Guidance and Counselling services play a strategic role as a form of psychopedagogical intervention that aims to support learners' emotional and social development. Guidance and counselling services can be provided individually or in groups, with a focus on reducing anxiety levels and increasing self-confidence. One approach that has proven effective in this context is group counselling. Through group counselling, learners are given the opportunity to practice speaking in a safe and supportive environment, allowing them to gradually build their confidence. This approach is even more effective when combined with relaxation techniques, which are part of behaviour therapy. Relaxation techniques play a role in helping counsellors manage physical and emotional responses to anxiety, especially in situations that trigger excessive fear and high tension. This technique is applied with the aim of reducing maladaptive behaviours and improving self-regulation abilities when facing challenging situations, such as public speaking. As part of a behavioural intervention, relaxation not only decreases physiological responses to stress, but also supports learners' increased comfort and mental readiness when in public communication situations. When applied in a supportive group dynamic, this technique contributes significantly to reducing anxiety and increasing the effectiveness of students' verbal communication (Rachman, 2004).

One of the techniques that can be applied in group counselling to address anxiety is relaxation techniques, which have been shown to be effective in reducing physiological responses due to anxiety. In the context of this study, the relaxation technique used was adapted from the method developed by Herbert Benson and William Proctor. Benson's relaxation technique involves a series of steps that include finding a comfortable body position, assuming a passive or receptive posture, and focusing on a specific point or word that has spiritual significance, while breathing naturally in a calm and supportive atmosphere by repeating a word related to God while breathing in and out naturally, all supported by a calm environment. This helps the counsellor experience what is referred to as the relaxation response. By taking a passive stance and focusing on a single word, the body reduces or stops physiological activity, stimulating the parasympathetic nerves and inhibiting the nervous system (Payne, Rosemary A., & Marie Donaghy, 2010).

Benson's relaxation technique that helps from the physiological side can also integrate spiritual values, especially in an Islamic context. Benson's relaxation technique is a form of relaxation that combines relaxation response techniques with an individual's belief system or belief factors. This technique focuses on the repetition of certain phrases, such as the names of God or words that have a calming effect on the counsellor, spoken rhythmically in a regular pattern, accompanied by a passive attitude (Benson, H., & William P: 2010). This is the uniqueness of Benson's relaxation technique, which helps the counselee to focus attention on certain objects, words, or concepts continuously and effortlessly, so that the counselee can reach a calm or relaxed state more quickly. In addition, this technique has the advantage of being able to be done alone, does not require assistance, and can be done anywhere, which can also improve coping mechanisms to reduce anxiety when speaking in public. In the Qur'an Surah Al-Fussilat (41) verse 30, reminds mankind of the importance of tranquillity and protection from Allah SWT. "Indeed, those who say, "Our Lord is Allah", then they remain on the straight path, the angels will descend upon them, (saying), "Do not be afraid and do not grieve, and give them good news with (entry) into the paradise prepared for you."" (QS. Al-Fussilat: 30). According to the commentary of Ibn Kathir (2015), this verse means: "Indeed, those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah', then they remain steadfast, angels will descend upon them, (saying), 'Fear not and grieve not, and rejoice in the paradise which Allah has promised you.'" This interpretation explains that those who believe in Allah are encouraged to remain firm in their faith and keep their hearts open so that disappointment does not take root in their hearts. Believers are also encouraged

not to grieve over worldly matters. Therefore, this verse is very relevant to this study, as it emphasises that everything should be done with full confidence, free from anxiety and worry.

An integrative approach between Benson's relaxation technique and the values of belief in God held by the counselee by combining psychological and spiritual aspects has the potential to provide more comprehensive results in dealing with anxiety. Benson's relaxation technique, which has been scientifically proven to reduce stress responses through regular breathing and repetition of calming words, can be harmoniously combined with Islamic spiritual values through the practice of *zikr* or remembrance of God. In the context of public speaking anxiety, repeating phrases such as "La ilaha illallah" or "Hasbunallahu wa ni'mal wakil" not only fulfils the element of relaxation through repetition, but also instils a sense of calm and trust in Allah, as promised in Surah Al-Fussilat verse 30 that Allah gives peace to those who are firm in faith. This integration shows that psychological and spiritual approaches can complement each other in addressing anxiety holistically.

Based on the above description, this research is specifically directed at applying the relaxation technique in the context of Benson's relaxation technique in group counselling to reduce public speaking anxiety in students. This research focuses on the application of relaxation techniques to reduce public speaking anxiety. The relaxation technique is applied through the existing dynamics in group counselling, which aims to allow the counselee to directly practice relaxation by interacting in the group. This approach helps the counsellors to manage the physical and psychological aspects of their anxiety.

Methods

The method used in this study is the experimental method, which is a quantitative research approach that is most appropriate for testing cause-and-effect relationships (Sukmadinata, 2009). Another perspective explains that the experimental method is a research approach used to seek the effect of certain treatments on other variables in a controlled environment (Sugiyono, 2013). This study used a pre-experiment design in the form of a one-group pretest-posttest design. The research location was one of the secondary schools in Banjar district, South Kalimantan, which is located in a hilly area. The subjects of this study were selected using purposive sampling, which consisted of 5 students with details of 2 male students and 3 male students who had a very high level of public speaking anxiety. The instrument used in this study is a public speaking anxiety scale, with the type of measurement scale used to analyse the results of the pretest and posttest. The public speaking anxiety scale goes through a process of content and construct validity with the help of experts in the field of guidance and counselling so that the scale used is in accordance with the constructs measured. The validity test results show that 47 items in the measurement scale are valid. For the instrument reliability test, the results obtained using Cronbach's alpha are 0.938, indicating that the instrument to measure public speaking anxiety is reliable. The treatment material in the form of guidelines for the Benson relaxation technique in group counselling has been declared suitable for use based on the results of expert validation in the field of guidance and counselling. The Benson relaxation technique was implemented in group counselling services by school counsellors. There are 4 treatment implementation meetings with a duration of 40 minutes each session with a specific application of the Benson relaxation technique for 10-20 minutes. Data analysis in this study used normality test, homogeneity test, and hypothesis testing using t-test.

Results and Discussion

Based on the research objectives, the results of the study can be explained as follows: (1) to describe the level of public speaking anxiety before following the relaxation technique. (2) to describe the level of public speaking anxiety after getting relaxation techniques. (3) to analyse the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing public speaking anxiety.

Description of Public Speaking Anxiety Level Before Getting Benson Relaxation Technique in Group Counselling

The research subjects consisted of 5 seventh graders from one of the junior high schools in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan who experienced very high public speaking anxiety based on a scale that met the standards of reliability, content and construct validation. An overview of the level of public speaking anxiety before receiving the service was in the very high category (with an average score of 83%), as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Public Speaking Anxiety Scale Pretest Results

Code	Pretest Score	%	Category
U	160	85,11	Very High
M	157	83,52	Very High
AZ	156	82,98	Very High
NZ	155	82,45	Very High
AH	154	81,92	Very High
Average	156,4	83	Very High

Overview of Anxiety Level of Public Speaking After Receiving Benson Relaxation Technique in Group Counselling

According to Wiramihardja, as cited in Chandra Dewi and Fitniwillis (2017), relaxation involves the release of physical tension, which in turn contributes to a decrease in psychological stress. Group counselling incorporating relaxation techniques can be seen as an effective approach to help individuals manage public speaking anxiety. This service was provided through group interaction and the application of relaxation practices, aiming to reduce the anxiety level of 3 female and 2 male students in class VII in one of the schools in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. As a result, the main objective of the relaxation technique was achieved-helping individuals feel more confident and comfortable when communicating in front of an audience.

One of the techniques used in group counselling to help reduce anxiety is relaxation. Group counselling using Benson's relaxation technique is a form of guidance and counselling intervention designed to help individuals who experience anxiety when speaking in public. This service operates through group dynamics and the application of relaxation methods to help reduce public speaking anxiety. The main goal of this approach is to lower anxiety levels by addressing various components such as mood, cognition, physical symptoms, emotional responses, and motor behaviour. As a practical implementation of this group counselling method, the researcher has developed a structured guide that aims to help overcome public speaking anxiety. The guide, which has undergone expert judgement, is based on Herbert Benson and William Proctor's (2000) theory of relaxation techniques and is specifically designed to help junior high school students manage their public speaking anxiety.

Group counselling is essentially individual counselling conducted in a group setting. It involves a counsellor and a number of counsellors - at least two - who engage in a counselling relationship that aims to replicate the conditions of individual counselling. These conditions include a warm, open, permissive, and friendly atmosphere. In this environment, counsellors are encouraged to disclose their problems, explore their root causes, work on problem-solving strategies (sometimes using specific methods), and engage in evaluation and follow-up activities (Prayitno and Erman Amti, 2015; Rasimin & Hamdi, 2021).

The Benson relaxation technique was developed by Dr Herbert Benson, a professor at Harvard Medical School. This technique aims to activate the body's relaxation response, which is a physiological condition opposite to the stress response. Relaxation techniques such as the Benson method can produce a physiological state opposite to that of stress, characterised by decreased heart rate and muscle tension. The steps include: Find a quiet place, Sit comfortably. Close the eyes, Relax the muscles of the body Focus on one repeated word or phrase (e.g. "calm" or "peace"), Breathe slowly

and naturally, Do it for 10-20 minutes (Benson, Herber, & William Proctor, 2010). The relaxation techniques applied in the four group counselling meeting sessions were effective in providing significant progress to the counsees in overcoming public speaking anxiety.

An overview of the application of relaxation techniques to reduce public speaking anxiety is outlined below. In the first session, the participants revealed the problems they faced regarding public speaking anxiety, which included aspects such as mood, cognition, somatic symptoms, affect, and motor behaviour. They described how anxiety affected their thoughts, emotions and physical responses when speaking in front of an audience. At this stage, they began to realise that their anxiety could be addressed through relaxation techniques and group support. In the second session, participants were guided to reach a state of relaxation by assuming a comfortable posture, being passive and receptive, and focusing their minds on a single word related to God, repeated rhythmically with natural breathing in a calm environment. This process allows them to experience what is known as the relaxation response. During this session, the participants began to show improvement in the affective aspect-they felt calmer and less anxious about negative outcomes. They also began to learn how to manage the negative emotions associated with public speaking anxiety. Basic relaxation techniques were introduced to help reduce stress and increase confidence. In the third session, participants were assigned to repeat the relaxation exercises and then tasked to prepare a Master of Ceremony (MC) script and a poem as a public speaking exercise. Through these activities, they began to show improvements in motor aspects, such as reduced trembling and less clipped speech. In terms of somatic responses, their previously elevated pulse rates began to stabilise, and other physical symptoms such as excessive sweating were reduced. The participants also reported an improvement in their mood, experiencing more positive feelings and less anxiety before speaking. In the third session, counslee U verbally conveyed the condition of decreasing public speaking anxiety in the aspects of mood and cognition by stating *"Before this performance I have practised with relaxation techniques that are part of breathing exercises to reduce my nervousness even though there is still a nervousness"*. Consellant AH also said that relaxation that combines breathing exercises, limb relaxation, and remembering God is very helpful for reducing anxiety. As conveyed by the counslee *"I also ma'am ... although there is still nervousness but not as nervous as before knowing the relaxation technique, the practice of dhikr and breathing slowly exhaling is calming before practicing to be this MC"*. In the **fourth session**, the participants stated that they experienced significant positive changes in themselves. They were able to manage excessive anxiety, reduce concerns about negative outcomes, and stabilise their physical responses when speaking in public. In terms of behaviour, they demonstrated a more fluent and structured way of speaking, as well as increased confidence in delivering messages. This improvement was also supported by observational data, which showed that participants who previously struggled to control various aspects of public speaking anxiety were now better equipped to handle it. This confirms that group counselling using relaxation techniques was effective in helping the participants manage their anxiety and increase their confidence in public speaking situations.

The counsellor also actively monitored progress outside of the counselling sessions by regularly checking how the participants experienced changes in their daily lives. By gaining a more comprehensive view of the situation, the counsellor was able to provide more targeted support and ensure that the positive changes that occurred during the counselling sessions were sustained and applied in a broader context. After the group counselling sessions with relaxation techniques are completed, follow-up meetings are held to monitor progress and ensure that the positive changes from the counselling sessions are sustained and applied in daily life. This meeting was designed as a forum for the participants to share their experiences in dealing with public speaking situations after the counselling programme. In this meeting, the counsellor collects feedback from the participants on the effectiveness of the counselling programme. This feedback is essential to assess the positive impact that has been achieved and identify areas that may still require further improvement. After attending the counselling meeting with relaxation techniques, it was found that was able to recognise the forms of symptoms that appear when experiencing public speaking anxiety, mesiswami aspects of mood and cognition, identify somatic and affective aspects, and recognise motor behaviour

and ways to reduce public speaking anxiety through relaxation exercises. The description of the posttest results shows an average of 47% which is included in the low category, as presented in the following table.

Table 2. Public Speaking Anxiety Scale Posttest Results

Code	Pretest Score	%	Category
U	101	53.73	Low
M	89	47,35	Low
AZ	87	46,28	Low
NZ	84	44,68	Low
AH	83	44,15	Low
Average	88,8	47	Low

Analysis of the Effectiveness of Benson Relaxation Technique in Group Counselling to Reduce Public Speaking Anxiety in Students

To determine the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing public speaking anxiety, hypothesis testing was conducted using t-test. The difference in scores before and after treatment is as follows:

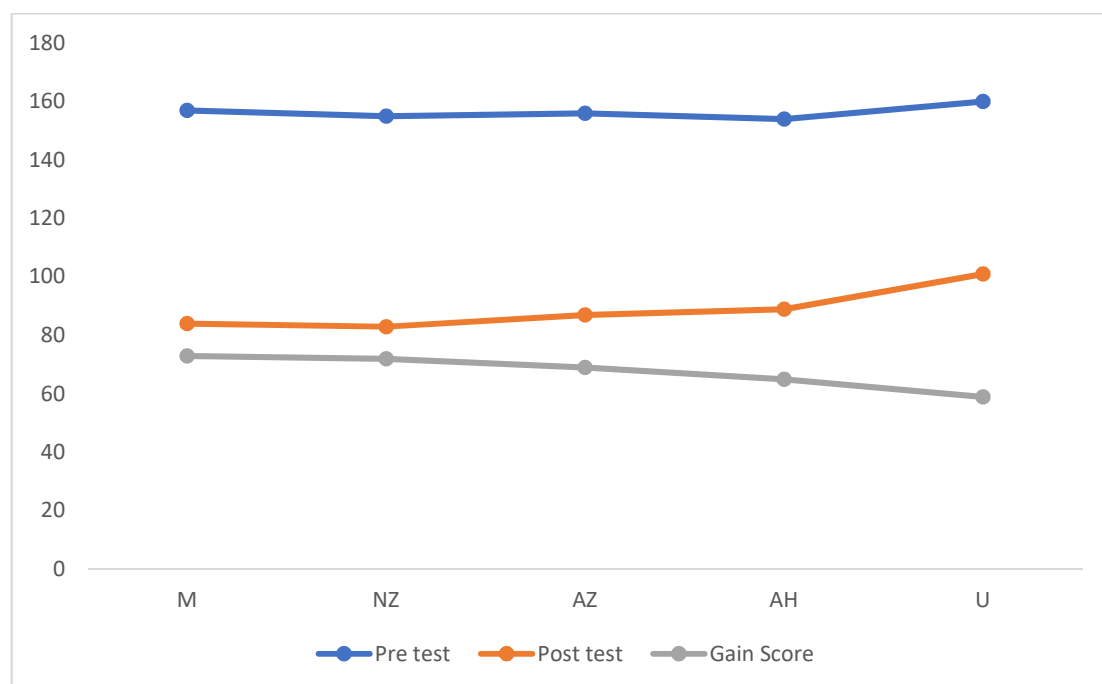


Figure 1 Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results of Student s Public Speaking Anxiety Level

Based on the graph shown, there is a decrease in the level of anxiety in public speaking before and after getting treatment through group counselling services with relaxation techniques. In the pretest results, the average anxiety level was recorded at 83%. After receiving treatment, the average score dropped to 47%, which indicates a 36% decrease in anxiety. This shows that group counselling services with relaxation techniques contribute to reducing public speaking anxiety. There were variations in students' anxiety reduction that were influenced by various other factors outside of the Benson relaxation technique training. Student M experienced a decrease in score from 157 (very high) to 84 (low) with a gain score of 73 points, the highest among all participants. This shows that M responded very well to the Benson relaxation technique. Contributing factors were high intrinsic motivation to change, openness during group counselling sessions, as well as the ability to follow the relaxation technique instructions consistently. NZ showed a decrease from 155 to 83, with a gain of 72 points.

This positive response demonstrates the effectiveness of the relaxation technique in reducing NZ's anxiety. Other influential factors were social support from peers in the group, as well as NZ's tendency to adapt easily in an emotionally safe environment. AH experienced a decrease from 154 to 89 with a gain of 65 points. The relaxation technique had a positive impact but the decrease was not as great as the other participants, which was influenced by students who tended to still lack concentration during relaxation sessions. Student U had the highest initial score (160) and decreased to 101, with a gain of 59 points, the lowest among other participants. This decrease remains significant and indicates the success of the intervention. The low gain score could be influenced by several things, such as a more chronic level of anxiety, resistance to relaxation techniques, or lack of active engagement in group dynamics.

The percentages for each aspect of public speaking anxiety also showed a decrease, as seen in the graph below:

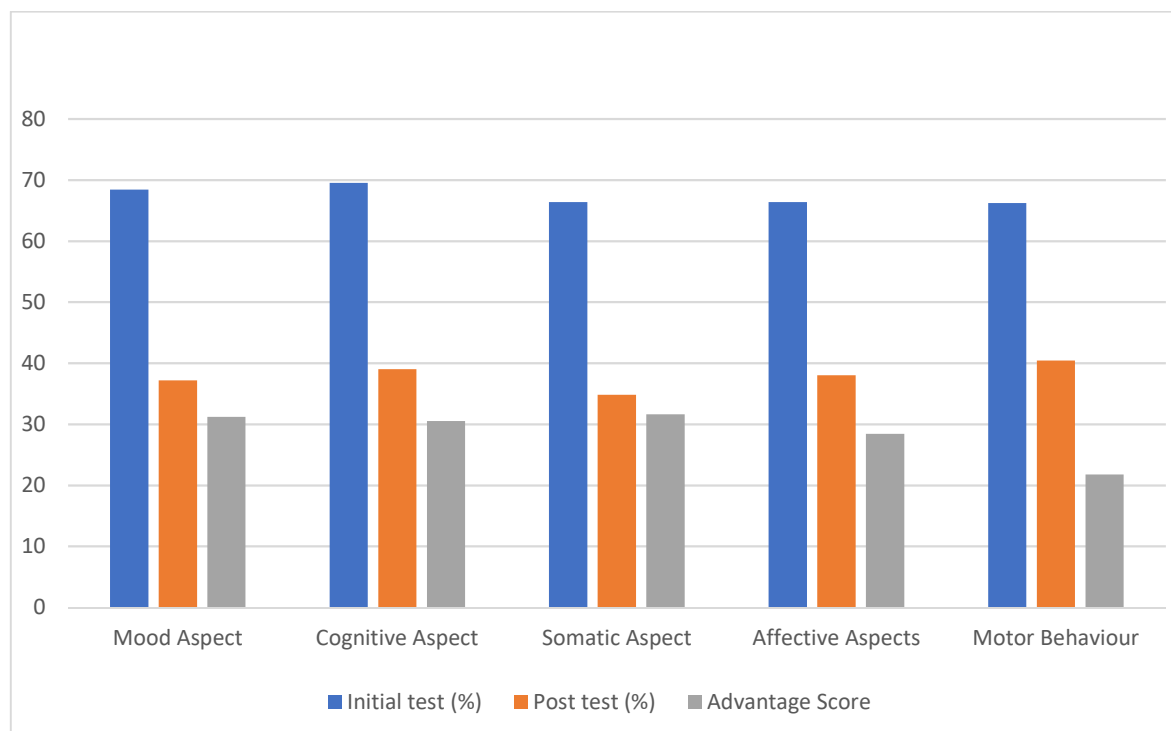


Figure 2 Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Based on Aspects of Public Speaking Anxiety

Based on the presentation of data regarding changes in anxiety levels in various aspects (mood, cognitive, somatic, affective, and motor behaviour), as well as responses to the counselling process, there is a decrease in several aspects. The details are as follows: mood aspect decreased by 31.2%, cognitive aspect by 30.3%, somatic aspect by 31.6%, affective aspect by 28.4%, and motor behaviour aspect by 21.76%. Overall, the average decrease in anxiety after treatment reached 28.7%.

The smallest decrease was in the motor aspect of public speaking anxiety compared to the cognitive and somatic aspects. Motor aspects, such as trembling, uncontrolled hand movements and muscle tension, are bodily reactions that are often automatic and lack conscious control. Motor responses involve the motor nervous system that regulates muscle movement. Changes in this system require repeated physical exercise for better control. The greater reduction in cognitive and somatic aspects is because they are more quickly influenced through relaxation techniques or cognitive restructuring. A study by Wallach, Safir and Bar-Zvi (2009) showed that virtual reality-based exposure therapy (VRET) can help reduce public speaking anxiety, but changes in motor aspects take longer to be significant.

Exploration of the effectiveness of Benson's relaxation technique in research by going through several statistical tests. To determine whether the data followed a normal distribution, a normality test was conducted. Pretest and posttest data are considered normally distributed if the significance value (sig) is greater than 0.05. Based on the pretest and posttest data of the participants, the significance value obtained is 0.20, which is greater than 0.05, indicating a normal distribution. The result of the homogeneity test was sig 0.182 > 0.05 so it was concluded that homogeneity was acceptable. Once normality and homogeneity were confirmed, a Paired Sample T-Test was conducted to assess the difference between pretest and posttest results. If the significance value is greater than 0.05, then the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is rejected. In this study, the T-Test results showed a significance value of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which indicates that group counselling using relaxation techniques is effective in reducing public speaking anxiety in students. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that group counselling with relaxation techniques significantly reduces students' public speaking anxiety.

The findings of this study that Benson's relaxation technique effectively reduces public speaking anxiety in students are influenced by relaxation conditions that combine deep breathing techniques and words or expressions that a person believes can be calming by remembering God so as to reduce the burden of feelings felt by someone who can affect health. The results of research by Cahyanti, L., et al, (2023), Nur Afifah Setiawati, et al (2024) the Benson relaxation technique is effective for overcoming anxiety, the relaxation obtained can have a reassuring effect, reduce worry, and anxiety. Siti Robaiyani, et al. (2024) Relaxation techniques with the help of calming breathing exercises can also help reduce stress levels.

Rogers (2023) anxiety when speaking in public is natural. A relaxed individual helps to increase confidence in public speaking. Shenny Sitinjak (2024) practice of deep breathing techniques, as well as repetitive practice, has been shown to be effective in reducing anxiety and improving public speaking performance. Vini Oktaviani (2021) fighting anxiety into courage is the most appropriate action and can be done in a relaxed and comfortable condition. A relaxed condition can allow you to interact with the environment better.

The findings of this study that the effective Benson relaxation technique reduces public speaking anxiety is also influenced by the support of group dynamics contained in the group counselling process activities. Group dynamics in group counselling contribute significantly to the success of the relaxation techniques applied. A supportive atmosphere, a sense of community, and empathy between members create a psychologically safe environment for participants to express anxiety and try relaxation techniques openly. According to Corey (2016), in group counselling, social support and active involvement between members encourage participants to be more committed to the change process. Relaxation techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing or progressive muscle relaxation become more effective when done in a positive group context, as participants feel less alone in dealing with their problems (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). In addition, the social learning model in groups allows participants to mimic and reinforce relaxation skills practised by other members. Thus, healthy group dynamics not only enhance participants' emotional comfort, but also strengthen the internalisation of relaxation techniques in a deeper and sustainable manner.

Group dynamics contained in group counselling support the effectiveness of relaxation techniques to reduce student anxiety is also found in some previous research results. The results of the literature review from Harahap & Silvianetri (2024) from 7 research articles indexed by sinta with the study of the effectiveness of counselling group to reduce student anxiety The results of the study showed that of the seven articles that were analysis with the focus of the discussion of group counselling gave positive results and revealed that counselling group with using various approaches is effective in reducing student anxiety when facing exams. Research by Nurcahyani and Fauzan (2016) showed that relaxation techniques in behavioural group counselling were effective in reducing high school students' learning stress. Although the main focus of the study was on the effectiveness of relaxation techniques, group dynamics play an important role in the

counselling process. The interaction between group members, social support, and sense of community formed during counselling sessions can increase participants' comfort in practising relaxation techniques. This is in line with the findings of Burlingame, McClendon, and Alonso (2011), who stated that positive group dynamics are a key factor in positive change in group psychotherapy. Thus, the success of relaxation techniques in group counselling depends not only on the methods used, but also on the quality of interaction and cohesion within the group.

The results of these findings support the results of previous research stating that the Benson relaxation technique can decrease physiological and psychological responses to stress and anxiety. The technique works by enhancing mental calmness through breath work, repetition of words or phrases, and an attitude of surrender and calm. This process allows individuals to achieve a relaxed state that can reduce symptoms of anxiety, including those that arise when facing public speaking situations.

The variation in the reduction of students' anxiety levels also suggests that the effectiveness of this technique is not only influenced by the Benson relaxation technique, but also by a number of other factors. These factors include students' initial anxiety levels, their level of understanding and engagement in counselling, and environmental support such as teachers and peers. Pebriyana, H. (2018) that there is a correlation between anxiety, self-confidence, and speaking ability of class VIII students of Tanak Maik junior high school. Personal characteristics such as self-confidence and previous experience of public speaking can also affect how much benefit students feel from the relaxation exercises provided. Rahmanita (2025) that there is a very significant negative relationship between positive thinking and public communication anxiety when facing muhadharah in Boarding School students.

This study has several limitations. First, this study did not measure or analyse trends in public speaking anxiety in research subjects in the long term after receiving relaxation techniques, but only focused on efforts to reduce public speaking anxiety experienced now. Secondly, this study was conducted with only one experimental group without a control group. The implications of the results of this study provide evidence that the Benson relaxation technique can effectively reduce public speaking anxiety in students. This approach can be a conceptual and practical reference for guidance and counselling counsellors in the development of future counselling strategies.

Conclusion

he findings of this study indicate that the application of Benson relaxation techniques in group counselling contributes significantly to reducing public speaking anxiety levels among seventh-grade students at a junior high school in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. Variations in the degree of anxiety reduction among students also indicate that the effectiveness of this technique is influenced by several other factors, such as individual characteristics, emotional readiness, and the quality of group dynamics during the counselling process. Theoretically, the results of this study support the view that relaxation techniques can effectively reduce anxiety by integrating calming physiological responses with spiritual values that provide a sense of safety and comfort. The Benson relaxation technique applied in this study combines relaxation response components with elements of personal belief or faith systems. The process of this technique focuses on repeating specific phrases, such as the name of God, in a rhythmic and regular manner. This repetition aims to facilitate a calmer mental state, help manage emotional responses more adaptively, and enhance focus, thereby minimising anxiety related to public speaking. Specifically, the greatest reduction in anxiety levels was observed in the somatic aspect, followed by the mood aspect, the cognitive aspect, and the smallest reduction in the motor behaviour aspect.

This study provides practical contributions to the development of group counselling interventions by demonstrating that Benson relaxation techniques combined with positive group dynamics can be an effective approach to addressing public speaking anxiety among junior high school students. Therefore, counsellors in educational settings are encouraged to consider incorporating these

techniques into their broader intervention strategies. Future research is recommended to include analyses that account for more diverse subject characteristics and employ experimental designs with control groups. Such approaches will strengthen the validity of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of relaxation techniques across different contexts and student populations.

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