

The Effect of Group Counseling with Game Techniques to Improve Academic Resilience among Vocational Students

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Doi: 10.31316/g-couns.v10i03.7189

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Academic resilience is an essential component in helping vocational students overcome academic setbacks, challenges, difficulties, and pressure. However, many vocational students exhibit low levels of academic resilience, particularly in maritime and technical fields. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of game-based techniques in group counseling for improving academic resilience among vocational high school students. A quantitative method with a pseudo-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was employed. The sample consisted of 10 vocational students identified with moderate and low academic resilience based on the pre-test using the Academic Resilience Scale (11 valid and reliable items, scoring 1-4). The intervention comprised group counseling sessions integrating cooperative movement cup games across two stages. Data were analyzed using a paired sample t-test. The results showed a significant increase in the mean academic resilience score from 2.81 (pre-test) to 3.05 (post-test). The paired-samples t-test revealed $t = -2.390$ ($p < 0.05$), and Cohen's d was 0.96 (large effect). The Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed normal data distribution ($p > 0.05$). The findings indicate that group counseling using game-based techniques significantly improves academic resilience by enabling students to face challenges, adapt to rules, and collaborate in a supportive environment. In conclusion, game-based group counseling is an effective strategy for school counselors to enhance academic resilience among vocational students. Further research across different educational levels is recommended.

Keywords: academic resilience, group counselling, game techniques, vocational high school

Article info

Received November 2024, Revised July 2025, Accepted September 2025, Published April 2026

How to Cite:

Febriana., Nalle, A. P, Masi, L. M., & Apriliana, I. P. A. (2026). The Effect of Group Counseling with Game Techniques to Improve Academic Resilience among Vocational Students. *G-Couns: Jurnal Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 10 (03), July, 2586-2597. <https://doi.org/10.31316/g-couns.v10i03.7189>

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Available online at <https://journal.upy.ac.id/index.php/bk/index>

INTRODUCTION

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to withstand stressful situations and conditions that hinder their activities, and to recover and adapt to the challenges they face. In the educational context, resilient individuals are capable of thinking positively and solving problems encountered during the learning process. Resilience significantly determines a student's lifelong success, including academic achievement, thereby enabling students to excel academically. Conversely, when students have low levels of resilience, all aspects of their lives, including academic performance, are affected as they struggle to cope with academic stress and challenges (Liu & Han, 2022).

Academic resilience is an essential component for dealing with academic pressure; however, not all students possess optimal academic resilience (Irawan et al., 2022). Research conducted by Apriliana et al. (2023) among vocational students revealed that two aspects of academic resilience are particularly low: academic setbacks and challenges. Furthermore, Apriliana and Nalle (2024) highlighted that students in maritime, technology, and engineering fields at the vocational school level exhibit low to very low levels of academic resilience.

For instance, students at State Vocational High School 1 Kalabahi, particularly those in the nautical major, demonstrated low resilience. This low resilience may lead to reduced adaptability, diminished motivation to learn, and reduced social interaction with their environment. Low resilience also makes it difficult for students to adapt to unexpected changes and challenges. Students may tend to avoid change, remain stuck in their comfort zones, or feel overwhelmed when facing new situations, such as a disciplined, semi-military educational environment with clear rules and an emphasis on discipline especially in the nautical major. Although not the primary focus, nautical students are also trained in several military skills, including sports, basic techniques, and outbound activities, which can improve cooperation and leadership

Therefore, resilience is crucial for students to manage stress, overcome failure, adapt to change, and recover from adversity. Students with good resilience tend to perform better academically, are more interested and motivated, and possess good social skills, enabling them to face future challenges and succeed in their personal and professional lives (Anjelia et al., 2022). Riowati and Maulina (2022) suggest that when students experience challenging conditions, academic resilience can be naturally developed, helping them solve problems. In line with this, Poerwanto and Prihastiwi (2017) note that students' academic resilience abilities require training in everyday life. Parents and teachers are agents who provide demanding and stressful situations for children, but at the same time, they offer guidance that helps children find ways to overcome them.

School counselors are among the educators with significant responsibilities in education, playing a crucial role in helping students develop their academic resilience, contributing to character building, and improving students' attitudes and morals, which in turn enhances academic resilience. Guidance and counseling services are part of the education system in vocational high schools, indirectly providing developmental programs that support the improvement of students' intelligence, both academically and emotionally. One of the key services provided is group counseling, which can guide and support students in optimizing their developmental tasks across various aspects of their personality, including intellectual potential, morals, emotions, and talents. Group counseling is a problem-solving process that occurs in a group setting (Nalle & Apriliana, 2025), where a counselor and several counsees establish a warm, open,

inclusive, and intimate relationship characterized by disclosure, problem exploration, problem-solving efforts, assessment, and follow-up activities.

Pre-research interviews with three school counselors at State Vocational High School 1 Kalabahi indicated that group counseling services are generally well-implemented, supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure, including a counseling room, administrative letters, assessment formats, file cabinets, computers, and LCD devices. This finding aligns with the observation that optimal guidance and counseling services at the school are influenced by the availability of such facilities. However, there are still shortcomings in service techniques; for example, counselors have never used game techniques in group counseling services because many students are still afraid to enter the counseling room and meet the school counselor. This gap highlights the need for innovative, student-friendly approaches to make group counseling more accessible and effective.

One of the services considered effective in addressing students' academic resilience is group counseling that incorporates game techniques (Masi et al., 2022). Through games, students gain experience in overcoming challenges and adapting to the game's rules, which naturally builds their resilience. Effective group games must be simple, exhilarating, create a sense of relaxation, increase intimacy, and be recognized by all group members (Tohirin, 2015). Based on this, the research team is interested in developing a group counseling model with game techniques to improve the academic resilience of vocational high school students in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of game-based techniques in group counseling in enhancing the academic resilience of vocational students.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative method using a pseudo-experimental design (one-group pretest-posttest). The research design consists of three main steps: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. There are two variables in this study: the independent variable, the group counseling model with game techniques, and the dependent variable, student academic resilience. The operational definition of the independent variable is a preventive assistance effort that involves developing personal abilities through group or joint problem-solving, facilitated by a counselor to counselees, using game techniques. The game used in this study is a movement cup with a cooperative theme, consisting of two stages: first, students move a cup filled with water using their index finger without spilling; second, students move a cup of water using a stretched cloth, both from the start line to the finish by passing through prepared obstacles.

Academic resilience, the dependent variable, is defined as students' ability to engage effectively in academic activities, using strategies to deal with setbacks, challenges, difficulties, and pressures within the academic environment. The academic resilience measurement instrument was developed independently by Apriliana and the research team in 2023, beginning with the preparation of a blueprint. The procedure for developing this instrument follows standard scale development procedures, drawing on the theoretical concepts of Martin & Marsh (2006), which conceptualize academic resilience as students' ability to effectively deal with academic setbacks, challenges, difficulties, and pressure. Educational and psychometric experts were involved in evaluating the content validity of the initial instrument draft.

Psychometric analysis was conducted using JASP version 25 and IBM SPSS Amos Version 26. The results of the validity test for the academic resilience

measurement instrument items indicated 11 valid items, each with a factor loading greater than 0.5 ($p < 0.05$). In Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) testing, the 11 items were found to have high reliability. The academic resilience scale has a maximum score of 4 and a minimum score of 1. The pre-test results identified ten respondents with moderate and low resilience levels, who were then involved in group counseling services incorporating game techniques.

Data collection was conducted using pre-tests and post-tests. The pre-test was conducted to collect data on students' academic resilience prior to group counseling treatment incorporating game techniques, using the academic resilience scale that had been previously tested for validity and reliability. The post-test was undertaken to collect data on academic resilience following the group counseling treatment incorporating game techniques, using the same data collection method as the pre-test. The implementation of group counseling services with game techniques involved several important activities: preparation (setting time and purpose, preparing necessary equipment), formation (greetings, introductions, explaining the purpose and implementation of group counseling, conducting games for familiarity), transition (re-explaining procedures, Q&A to ascertain members' activities, emphasizing principles), core activities (explaining the topic, asking for openness, discussing problems, conducting games to increase academic resilience), and termination (concluding the activity, conveying progress, committing to confidentiality, agreeing on next activities, saying thank you and farewell).

This study employed quantitative data analysis methods (Sugiyono, 2014). The goal was to determine the effectiveness of a group counseling model incorporating game techniques in improving the academic resilience of vocational high school students in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The hypothesis test used was a paired sample t-test (two paired samples) to determine whether there is a difference in the average academic resilience of students who experience two different treatments, namely academic resilience before group counseling with game techniques and academic resilience after group counseling with game techniques. The calculation formula followed Sugiyono (2015). Prior to the t-test, it was established that the data were normally distributed and homogeneous using SPSS Version 26. The results of the paired-sample t-test were evaluated using the following criteria: if $-t \text{ count} < -t \text{ table}$ and $p\text{-value} < 0.05$, then H_0 is rejected, indicating a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study uses four indicators of academic resilience, based on Martin & Marsh (2006), to measure and categorize students' academic resilience: students' ability to effectively deal with academic setbacks, challenges, adversity (difficulties), and pressure in the academic environment. The academic resilience scale has a maximum score of 4 and a minimum score of 1. The details of the mean scores for each item on the pre-test and post-test are presented in the following table 1,

Table 1.
 Mean Score of Pre-test and Post-test on each Item of Academic Resilience

No.	Indicator	Statement	Mean Pre	Mean Post	No
1.	Students' ability to effectively deal with academic setbacks	1) I have done my schoolwork to the maximum, but the results are still poor, so it takes me a very long time to get excited again.	1.90	2.00	1
		2) It is very difficult to accept sincerely when I fail to achieve academic achievement.	2.20	2.50	
		3) Poor grades on schoolwork have affected my self-confidence.	2.10	2.20	
2.	Students' ability to effectively deal with challenges in the academic environment	4) Although I have a lot of schoolwork, I am confident that I can complete it on time.	3.80	3.80	2
		5) I take every school assignment seriously, even if it is a difficult assignment.	3.50	4.10	
		6) Any learning problems I face, I can overcome well without harming myself and others.	3.70	4.20	
3.	Students' ability to effectively deal with adversity	7) I believe that I am capable of completing difficult assignments.	3.80	4.00	3
		8) For me, doing difficult school assignments is a very valuable life experience.	3.90	3.60	
4.	Students' ability to effectively deal with pressure in the academic environment	9) Learning stress has taken over me so that I am too lazy to study and do assignments.	1.90	2.70	4
		10) It is hard for me to deal with the pressure of assignments from my school teachers.	2.10	2.30	
		11) The pressure of current assignments makes me unsure that I can complete my grades in the subjects at hand.	2.00	2.10	

As shown in Table 1, the lowest pre-test scores were observed for indicators related to academic setbacks and pressure, particularly items 1 (1.90), 9 (1.90), and 11 (2.00). Conversely, the highest pre-test scores were observed in the challenges and adversity indicators, including items 4 (3.80), 7 (3.80), and 8 (3.90). After implementing group counseling using game techniques, improvements were observed across almost all items. Item 5 increased from 3.50 to 4.10, item 6 increased from 3.70 to 4.20, and item 9 increased markedly from 1.90 to 2.70.

The most significant improvements in Table 2 were observed in items related to taking difficult assignments seriously (item 5, increase of 0.60), overcoming learning problems (item 6, increase of 0.50), and learning stress management (item 9, increase of 0.80). For the academic setbacks indicator, item 2 increased from 2.20 to 2.50 (increase of 0.30). For the adversity indicator, item 7 increased from 3.80 to 4.00 (increase of 0.20), while item 8 slightly decreased from 3.90 to 3.60 (decrease of 0.30). For the pressure indicator, item 10 increased from 2.10 to 2.30 (an increase of 0.20), and item 11 increased from 2.00 to 2.10 (an increase of 0.10). These results indicate that game techniques were particularly effective in helping students face academic challenges and manage learning-related stress, although the decrease in item 8 suggests that some students may have reconsidered whether difficult assignments are always a valuable life experience.

Respondents with moderate and low levels of academic resilience were offered group counseling services incorporating game techniques to enhance their academic resilience. The following table presents the academic resilience scores of the ten student participants in the pre-test and post-test,

Table 2.

Academic Resilience Score of Students as Participants in Pre-test and Post-test

No.	Initial	Gender	Age	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score
1.	AM	L (Male)	17	3.09	3.00
2.	AW	L (Male)	15	3.09	3.00
3.	DRM	P (Female)	15	2.55	2.82
4.	EM	P (Female)	16	2.73	3.27
5.	HA	P (Female)	17	3.09	2.91
6.	JAL	P (Female)	17	2.91	3.27
7.	JLM	L (Male)	16	2.64	2.64
8.	KZM	L (Male)	17	2.82	3.45
9.	NME	P (Female)	16	2.45	2.73
10.	NL	L (Male)	15	2.73	3.36
Mean				2.81	3.05

As shown in Table 2, the participants comprised five male and five female students, aged 15 to 17 years. In the pre-test, the lowest score was 2.45 (participant NME) and the highest was 3.09 (participants AM, AW, and HA). In the post-test, the lowest score was 2.64 (participant JLM) and the highest was 3.45 (participant KZM). Seven out of ten participants showed an increase in academic resilience scores. The mean score increased from 2.81 in the pre-test to 3.05 in the post-test, an overall increase of 0.24 points. To further understand the distribution of resilience levels, Table 4 presents the categorization of students' academic resilience levels,

Table 3.
 Categorization of Students' Academic Resilience Levels

Category	Score Range	Pre-test (n)	Post-test (n)
Very Low	1.00 - 1.75	0	0
Low	1.76 - 2.50	3	1
Moderate	2.51 - 3.25	7	5
High	3.26 - 4.00	0	4
Total		10	10

As shown in Table 3, before the treatment, 3 students were in the low category, 7 in the moderate category, and none in the high category. After the treatment, the number of students in the low category decreased to 1, the number in the moderate category decreased to 5, and 4 students moved up to the high category. This indicates a positive shift in academic resilience levels following the group counseling intervention with game techniques.

To determine the effectiveness of the group counseling model incorporating game techniques, a paired sample t-test (two paired samples) was conducted using SPSS Version 26. The results of the paired-sample t-test showed a t-statistic of -2.390, while the t-table value at degrees of freedom (df) = 9 and significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ was -2.262. Since $-2.390 < -2.262$, and the p-value was $0.000 < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This means there is a significant difference between the average academic resilience score before group counseling with game techniques (Mean = 2.81) and after (Mean = 3.05). The negative t-value indicates that the average pre-test score is lower than the average post-test score.

Prior to the paired sample t-test, the assumption of normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Table 5 below presents the results of the normality test,

Table 4.
 Normality Test Results (Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig.	Interpretation
Pre-test	0.912	10	0.308	Normal
Post-test	0.894	10	0.187	Normal

As shown in Table 4, the significance values for both pre-test (0.308) and post-test (0.187) are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed. Furthermore, to determine the magnitude of the treatment effect, Cohen's d effect size was calculated as shown in Table 5,

Table 5.
 Effect Size (Cohen's d)

Mean Pre-test	Mean Post-test	SD Pooled	Cohen's d	Interpretation
2.81	3.05	0.25	0.96	Large effect

Based on Cohen's criteria (d = 0.2 small, 0.5 medium, 0.8 large), the effect size of 0.96 indicates a large effect, meaning that the group counseling model with game techniques has a substantial impact on improving academic resilience among vocational high school students. Observations during the counseling sessions indicated that students were enthusiastic when participating in game-based challenges and collaboratively devised strategies to complete tasks. Therefore, it can be concluded that

the group counseling model with game techniques is proven effective in enhancing the academic resilience of vocational students.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that group counseling with game techniques significantly improves academic resilience among vocational high school students. This is evidenced by an increase in the mean score from 2.81 on the pre-test to 3.05 on the post-test, with a paired-samples t-test showing $t = -2.390$ ($p < 0.05$). The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.96$) indicates a large effect, meaning that the intervention had a substantial impact. These results align with Cassidy's (2015) definition of academic resilience, which refers to students' ability, potential, or dynamic capacity to persist and succeed in their studies despite various academic and non-academic challenges.

The most notable improvements were observed in the indicators of academic setbacks and pressure. Specifically, item 9 ("Learning stress has taken over me so that I am too lazy to study and do assignments") increased from 1.90 to 2.70 (an increase of 0.80), and item 2 ("It is very difficult to accept sincerely when I fail to achieve academic achievement") increased from 2.20 to 2.50. This finding supports the work of Martin & Marsh (2006), who explain that academically resilient learners have a practical ability to deal with setbacks in the academic environment, including poor grades and negative feedback on assignments, as well as the ability to handle academic pressure. The game techniques provided students with a safe space to experience failure in a low-stakes environment and learn to bounce back, consistent with Riowati and Maulina (2022), who state that when students experience challenging conditions, academic resilience can be naturally developed, helping them solve problems.

Improvements were also seen in the challenges indicator, particularly item 5 ("I take every school assignment seriously, even if it is a difficult assignment"), which increased from 3.50 to 4.10, and item 6 ("Any learning problems I face, I can overcome well without harming myself and others"), which increased from 3.70 to 4.20. These results align with Martin & Marsh's (2006) framework, which posits that academically resilient students possess a practical ability to deal with challenges in the academic environment, including being mentally tough during exams and bouncing back from poor grades. However, it is worth noting that item 8 ("For me, doing difficult school assignments is a very valuable life experience") slightly decreased from 3.90 to 3.60. This may indicate that after the intervention, students became more realistic or critical about the value of difficult assignments, rather than automatically viewing them as valuable. This dynamic nature of academic resilience is explained by Apriliana and Suranata (2025), who state that academic resilience, as a dynamic process, means it will continue to unfold and fluctuate within students.

The categorization of students' academic resilience levels showed a positive shift. Before the treatment, 3 students were in the low category and 7 in the moderate category, with no students in the high category. After the treatment, the number of students in the low category decreased to 1, the number in the moderate category decreased to 5, and 4 students moved up to the high category. This finding is consistent with research by Apriliana et al. (2023) on vocational students, which revealed that two aspects of academic resilience are particularly low: academic setbacks and challenges. The improvement in this study suggests that game techniques effectively address these specific weaknesses. Furthermore, Apriliana and Nalle (2024) highlighted that students in maritime, technology, and engineering fields exhibit low to very low levels of

academic resilience. The fact that four students from the Nautical Department in this study moved into the high category after the intervention demonstrates that group counseling with game techniques can be an effective solution for students in these demanding fields.

The success of game techniques in improving academic resilience can be explained by the characteristics of effective group games as described by Tohirin (2015), they must be simple, exhilarating, create a sense of relaxation, increase intimacy, and be recognized by all group members. The movement cup game used in this study fulfilled these characteristics. Students worked together to move a cup filled with water using their fingers or a stretched cloth, facing obstacles that required collaboration and problem-solving. Through games, students face challenges and learn to adapt to various rules, which naturally helps them develop resilience. This is supported by Masi et al. (2022), who stated that one of the services considered effective in addressing students' academic resilience is group counseling incorporating game techniques. The enthusiasm observed during the counseling sessions confirms that games create a conducive atmosphere for learning resilience skills.

The group counseling format itself played a crucial role in the intervention's success. According to Nalle and Apriliana (2025), group counseling is a problem-solving process that occurs in a group setting, where a counselor and several counsees establish a warm, open, inclusive, and intimate relationship. In this study, students had a safe space to discuss problems, gain deeper insights, and share ideas and opinions, which helped build their self-confidence. This is consistent with the findings of Della and Wirastania (2023), who demonstrated that group counseling services are effective in fostering students' academic resilience, and Nurdestama et al. (2021), who confirmed the effectiveness of group counseling in developing academic resilience through adventure-based experiences. The social support from peers during the games likely served as a protective factor, as described by Martin (2013) and Martin & Marsh (2006) as a factor that supports resilience, in contrast to risk factors that threaten it.

The findings of this study have practical implications for school counselors, particularly those working in vocational high schools. As noted by Poerwanto and Prihastiwati (2017), students' academic resilience requires training in everyday life, and parents and teachers are agents who provide challenging situations while offering guidance to help children overcome them. School counselors can integrate game techniques into their group counseling services to help students develop academic resilience in an engaging and effective manner. This study also supports the statement by Anjelia et al. (2022) that students with good resilience tend to perform better academically, are more interested and motivated, and possess good social skills, enabling them to face future challenges and succeed in their personal and professional lives. However, this study has limitations, including a small sample size ($n=10$) and the absence of a control group. Future research is recommended across different educational levels, including elementary, junior high, and senior high school, to explore the broader applicability of this approach. Future studies may also examine academic resilience in relation to other psychological or educational variables, such as emotional intelligence or academic motivation, as suggested by Agustina and Rejeki (2024), who found that incorporating games into counseling sessions increased academic motivation among students.

CONCLUSION

Group counseling integrating game techniques has proven an effective approach for enhancing academic resilience among vocational students. The use of games allows students to experience challenges, adapt to varying rules, and collaborate with peers in a supportive environment, fostering resilience naturally and engagingly. This study expands the use of group counseling by incorporating game-based techniques in the vocational education context, offering practical implications for school counselors seeking to strengthen students' academic perseverance. Given these findings, further research is recommended across educational levels, including elementary, junior high, and senior high school, to explore the broader applicability of this approach. Future studies may also examine academic resilience in relation to other psychological or educational variables to deepen understanding of the factors that support students' academic success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia for the research grant that made this study possible. The authors also extend their appreciation to the Principal and the school counselors of State Vocational High School 1 Kalabahi for their permission, support, and cooperation throughout the data collection process. Special thanks are also conveyed to all students who willingly participated in this study. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge the valuable contributions of the research team members from the Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences, Universitas Nusa Cendana, for their assistance and collaboration during the implementation of the group counseling intervention.

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