

Effectiveness of Reality Group Counseling in Enhancing Ego Identity Among Indonesian High School Students: A Pretest-Posttest Experimental Study

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Abstrack

An individual's ego identity, a self-image that grows, develops, and internalizes through social interaction, is the culmination of the psychosocial phases they have experienced. This study examined the effectiveness of reality group counseling in enhancing the ego identity of high school students, using a pretest-posttest control group experimental design. Based on the ego identity inventory results, eight students were identified as having low ego identity. The study used two types of instruments: treatment and measurement. The treatment instrument was a reality group counseling implementation guide, and the measurement instrument was an ego identity inventory with a total item validity above the critical r value of 0.344 and a reliability coefficient of 0.957, indicating that the inventory is reliable and suitable for research purposes. Researchers analyzed the data using non-parametric statistical tests. The hypothesis testing yielded an N-Gain percentage of $109.18 > 76$ and an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.012 < 0.05$. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis, suggesting that reality group counseling effectively enhances the ego identity of high school students.

Keywords: ego identity, reality group counseling, high school students

Abstrak

Identitas ego individu, citra diri yang tumbuh, berkembang, dan menginternalisasi melalui interaksi sosial, adalah puncak dari fase psikososial yang mereka alami. Penelitian ini meneliti efektivitas konseling kelompok realitas dalam meningkatkan identitas ego siswa sekolah menengah, menggunakan desain eksperimental kelompok kontrol pretest-posttest. Berdasarkan hasil inventarisasi identitas ego, delapan siswa diidentifikasi memiliki identitas ego rendah. Penelitian ini menggunakan dua jenis instrumen: pengobatan dan pengukuran. Instrumen perlakuan adalah panduan implementasi konseling kelompok realitas, dan instrumen pengukuran adalah inventarisasi identitas ego dengan total validitas item di atas nilai kritis r 0,344 dan koefisien reliabilitas 0,957, yang menunjukkan bahwa persediaan dapat diandalkan dan cocok untuk keperluan penelitian. Para peneliti menganalisis data menggunakan tes statistik non-parametrik. Pengujian hipotesis menghasilkan persentase N-Gain 109,18 > 76 dan Asymp. Nilai Sig. (2-tailed) 0,012 < 0,05. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menolak hipotesis nol dan menerima hipotesis alternatif, menunjukkan bahwa konseling kelompok realitas secara efektif meningkatkan identitas ego siswa sekolah menengah.

Keywords: ego identity, konseling kelompok realita, siswa SMA

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INTRODUCTION

Ego identity refers to an individual's awareness of self and life direction as a self-image that develops and evolves through social interaction alongside one's developmental phases (Ding et al., 2024; Cho et al., 2024; Fino et al., 2025). It constitutes a continuous integration of internal components, including skills and beliefs that form a unique sense of self (Fajarista & Taufik, 2025; Nazinejad & Rahmati, 2022).

(Erikson, 1968) explain individuals with a high level of ego identity exhibit the following characteristics: (1) self-concept, the ability to perceive and describe oneself, marked by self-image and self-esteem; (2) commitment, the persistence in achieving goals, characterized by visionary thinking, consistency, and reflection; and (3) independence, the capacity to rely on oneself, indicated by self-regulation and self-confidence.

Individuals with low ego identity are more vulnerable to various problems than those with high ego identity. This vulnerability relates to weaker emotional control and low self-esteem. They often struggle to establish boundaries against the negative behaviors or words of others, making them more susceptible to emotional distress. In contrast, individuals with strong ego identity can value themselves and manage emotions effectively (Nazinejad & Rahmati, 2022; Mock et al., 2022; Thomas & Simon, 2024). Abdel et al. (2024) assert that adolescents develop ego identity when they can make choices among available alternatives and commit to them.

In Indonesia, low ego identity continues to drive deviant behavior among adolescents. (Trisnajaya, 2020) reported that many teenagers in major cities have engaged in premarital sex, with virginity loss rates of 51% in Jabodetabek, 54% in Surabaya, 47% in Bandung, and 52% in Medan. A related survey by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) found that 93% of the 4,500 adolescents from urban areas had engaged in kissing, 62.7% in premarital sex, and 21% had undergone abortion. Furthermore, a 2016 survey by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) revealed a 10.7% increase in juvenile delinquency from 2013 to 2016. These behaviors included fighting, dropping out of school, theft, murder, promiscuity, and drug use (Muttaqin & Ekowarni, 2016; Trisnajaya, 2020; Firdaus et al., 2021; Wowor & Risnawaty, 2024; Fajarista & Taufik, 2025).

When individuals enter high school, they transition into adolescence. Jung et al. (2013) found that exploration in ego identity formation is a critical phase at this stage. Adolescents have yet to establish commitments to their social roles, leaving them susceptible to negative behaviors such as delinquency and deviance. Every adolescent undergoes a different journey in forming ego identity some progress quickly, while others face obstacles that slow the process. Several external factors influence the success of ego identity development: (1) social expectations, (2) the quality of parent-child relationships, (3) parenting styles, and (4) the presence of role models. (Noon, 2020; Ciecich & Topolewska, 2017; Syed & McLean, 2016).

Marcia (1988) explains five main aspects of ego identity: (1) Religious aspect, referring to an individual's perspective on religion and the existence of God; (2) Racial aspect, involving the individual's acceptance and recognition of inherited physical-biological traits; (3) Occupational aspect, reflecting the individual's awareness of their potential and consistency in pursuing career goals; (4) Relational aspect, denoting the ability to perform social roles and maintain relationships; and (5) Gender aspect, representing the awareness and acceptance of one's gender. Based on Erikson's theory (Nadiyah et al., 2021), ego identity development includes four identity statuses: diffusion,



foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Erikson (Clit, 2023) emphasized that adolescents form ego identity when they can make choices among available alternatives and commit to them.

Preliminary studies involving school counselors and the administration of the Ego Identity Inventory at a high school in Surabaya revealed that students with low ego identity often exhibit rule-breaking behaviors, ranging from minor to serious infractions. These include wearing the wrong uniform, excessive makeup, dating on school grounds, deliberately sleeping during lessons, causing disruptions, eating or drinking during class, intentionally cutting power during lessons, frequently using vulgar language, skipping classes, truancy, and theft. Additionally, analysis of the Student Needs Assessment Questionnaire showed that many high school students still struggle to understand their potential.

Ego identity issues, as outlined in the 2007 Guidelines for Guidance and Counseling Implementation, fall under the personal-social domain in guidance and counseling and are essential to students' personality development and life competencies. Therefore, its inclusion is essential to achieving the standard of student independence. In educational settings, school counselors help students meet these standards. One strategy within the Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program is providing counseling services, which fall under responsive services (Gysbers & Henderson, 2014).

One counseling method that can improve students' ego identity is Reality Counseling, developed by William Glasser in 1961. Mason and Dye (2017) described it as an approach that emphasizes present circumstances, while Wubbolding (2016) defined it as a counseling model centered on individual awareness. Glasser posited that individuals possess the capacity to make choices among various life options—a concept he called Choice Theory. According to this theory, all behaviors—actions, thoughts, emotions, and physical conditions are total behaviors and are subject to choice. Individuals can select responses and perceptions to achieve desired emotions and physical states (Wubbolding, 2016; Bradley, 2014).

In Reality Counseling, a healthy individual is someone who achieves a successful identity by upholding the 3Rs: Right, universally accepted truths; Reality, acknowledgment of actual conditions; and Responsibility, accountability for one's total behavior. In contrast, problematic individuals are not considered mentally ill but as people who fail to apply the 3Rs, resulting in dissatisfaction with the outcomes of their choices. Therefore, Reality Counseling aims to help individuals logically and responsibly achieve a successful identity, enabling personal satisfaction without neglecting social aspects (Glasser, 2014; Mason & Dye, 2017; Sudiarsana et al., 2021).

The reality counseling procedure includes the following steps: (1) building a supportive therapeutic relationship (involvement); (2) assessing the counselee's total behavior in relation to the problem (assessment); (3) analyzing desires and efforts to meet five basic needs (wants), (4) reviewing the counselee's perceptions and actions toward achieving those wants (Direction and Doing); (6) encouraging the counselee to reflect on their experiences based on the 3Rs and Choice Theory (Evaluation); and (7) guiding the counselee to develop a plan following SAMIC³ principles—Simple, Attainable, Measurable, Immediate, Controlled by the Counselee, Committed, and Continuous (Wubbolding, 2009; Khalid, 2023; Taghizadeh et al., 2023; Nikoogoftar et al., 2024).

The choice to apply Reality Counseling is grounded in the premise that the highest level of ego identity achievement status is characterized by individuals who commit to and take responsibility for consciously made decisions (Mock et al., 2022; Thomas &



Simon, 2024). Reality Counseling emphasizes awareness, commitment, and responsibility (Corey, 2017). Based on the characteristics of the student population and findings from the preliminary study, the researcher applied group-based Reality Counseling, as group settings offer students opportunities to express conflicting emotions, explore self-doubt, and develop an interest in sharing with others (Chen & Rybak, 2017).

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of Reality Counseling. Systematic reviews on character counseling by Heydarpour et al. (2018), Aziz (2022), and Hajhosseini (2016) found that it effectively addresses psychological problems. Erikson (1956) stated that individuals attain ego identity when they understand themselves holistically. Therefore, the researcher assumes that group-based Reality Counseling can indirectly enhance ego identity. Figure 1 shows the reality counselling to improve SHS students' ego identity.

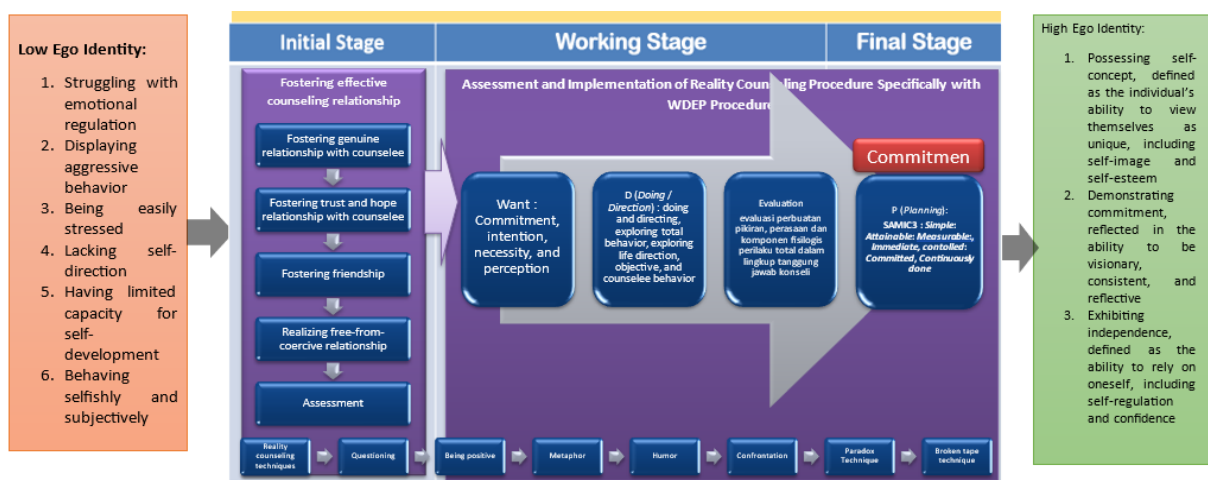


Figure 1. Reality Group Counseling to Improve the Ego Identity of SHS Students

Based on the described background, the research problem in this study is: Is reality group counseling effective in improving the ego identity of high school students?

METHOD

This quantitative approach used an experimental design. An experimental design is a research method that involves a treatment presumed to cause or influence the phenomenon under investigation (Dantes, 2023). The study used a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design to examine differences in the conditions of a single experimental group before and after receiving the treatment, namely reality group counseling. The following is the schematic design of this study:

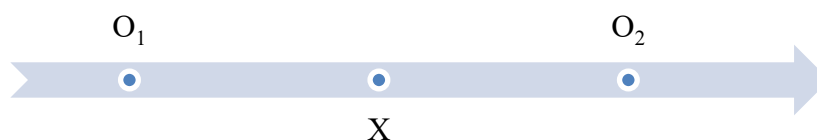


Figure 2. Pretest & Posttest One-Group Experimental Design



Remarks:

O₁ : The initial condition of ego identity before the given treatment (Pretest)

X : Treating the experimental group with reality group counseling

O₂ : The final condition of ego identity after receiving the treatment (Posttest)

The study involved only one experimental group. The researcher selected subjects using an ego identity inventory adapted from Erikson (1968) as a form of pretest to determine the students' initial ego identity levels. The next step was to deliver the Reality Group counseling intervention to the experimental group. At the end of the research process, a posttest was administered using the same ego identity inventory to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. To avoid internal validity threats from instrumentation, the researcher randomized the inventory items. Since the ego identity scores in the experimental group are statistically significant, they indicate the improvement resulted from the group counseling intervention. Measure the success of the intervention by comparing the ego identity inventory scores before and after the intervention.

The data source included all high school students identified as having low ego identity based on the inventory. The researcher used purposive sampling, a technique considered appropriate in quantitative research. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that selects participants based on specific criteria representative of the target population.

Data collection was used to measure the intervention's effectiveness. The researcher compared baseline and post-intervention data using the Ego Identity Inventory, based on Erikson's theory (1968), as the pretest instrument. The inventory included indicators such as (1) self-concept, (2) commitment, and (3) independence, demonstrating item-total validity higher than the r-table value of 0.344 and a reliability coefficient of 0.957. This indicates that the inventory was highly reliable and capable of producing stable results, allowing the researcher to obtain a sample that aligned with the research objectives.

The ego identity scores obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using statistical methods. To examine the significance of changes before and after the intervention, the researcher used the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. This study applied statistical formulas to test the research hypothesis. The criterion for rejecting or accepting the null hypothesis (H₀) is as follows: if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is \leq the significance level ($\alpha/2 = 0.05$), then H₀ is rejected. Conversely, if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is > 0.05 , then H₀ is accepted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The intervention process for the experimental group was conducted over five months. A pretest was administered at the beginning of the intervention to measure participants' ego identity, and a posttest was conducted after the intervention to assess their ego identity. Both the pretest and posttest used the same instrument, the Ego Identity Inventory, based on Erikson's theory (1968).

The data analysis employed the Wilcoxon test to determine the final results with precision and rigor. The ego identity questionnaire consisted of 31 valid items measured using a Likert scale with four response options. Thus, the minimum possible score was $31 \times 1 = 31$, and the maximum was $31 \times 4 = 124$. Scores ranging from 31 to 77 were classified as low, scores from 78 to 99 as moderate, and scores from 100 to 124 as high. The following are the pretest and posttest results from the experimental group:



Table 1.
 Pretest-Posttest of Experimental Group

No.	Counselee	Pretest	Category	Posttest	Category	Gain / Difference
1.	EPW	67	Low	92	Moderate	25
2.	MENA	75	Low	107	High	32
3.	HS	75	Low	96	Moderate	21
4.	IHA	71	Low	110	High	39
5.	KTN	61	Low	97	Moderate	36
6.	NH	68	Low	109	High	41
7.	RWB	74	Low	95	Moderate	21
8.	YABN	76	Low	112	High	36

Table 1 shows that eight students receiving reality group counseling have increased posttest scores. Therefore, reality counseling proved effective in enhancing ego identity in the experimental group. The data were subsequently processed using SPSS 25.00 for Windows. This hypothesis test aimed to determine the differences in scores before and after the rational emotive behavior group counseling. Prior to conducting the Wilcoxon test, the researcher performed normality and homogeneity tests.

Table 2.
 Pretest-Posttest Descriptive Statistic Results

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean
Pretest	8	61.00	76.00	567.00	70.8750
Posttest	8	92.00	112.00	818.00	102.2500
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Table 2 shows that the students obtained a minimum pretest score of 61, a maximum pretest score of 76, and a total pretest score of 567. Additionally, they obtained a minimum posttest score of 92, a maximum of 112, and a total of 818. Thus, the average score increased from 70.875 in the pretest to 102.25 in the posttest.

Table 3. N-Gain Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ngain Score	8	.76	1.50	1.0918	.28940
Ngain persen	8	75.8	150.0	109.180	28.9397
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Table 3 presents the N-gain results, with a minimum score of 0.76, a maximum score of 1.50, a mean of 1.09, and a standard deviation of 0.28940. Since the mean score of 1.09 exceeds 0.7, the N-gain, or the difference between the pretest and posttest scores, falls into the "high" category. The N-gain percentage indicates a minimum score of 75.8, a maximum score of 150, a mean of 109.18, and a standard deviation of 28.9397. The mean N-gain percentage of 109.18 exceeds 76, confirming that reality group counseling effectively increases students' ego identity.

In addition to using descriptive statistics, the researcher applied the Wilcoxon test using SPSS. By reviewing the Wilcoxon Ranks Table, the decreases (negative ranks), increases (positive ranks), or equal values (ties) between the pretest and posttest scores can be observed. Furthermore, the hypothesis test results can be determined by referring



to the Test Statistics Table, in which an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value < 0.05 indicates that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected. Conversely, if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) A value > 0.05 indicates that H_a is rejected and H_o is accepted.

Table 4.

Ranks Uji Wilcoxon				
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttest - Pretest	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	8 ^b	4.50	36.00
	Ties	0 ^c		
Total		8		
a. Posttest < Pretest				
b. Posttest > Pretest				
c. Posttest = Pretest				

Table 5.

Wilcoxon Statistics Test	
	Posttest - Pretest
Z	-2.527 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.012
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

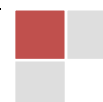
Table 5 presents the negative ranks section, which shows a value of 0 across all columns, indicating that none of the eight participants experienced a decrease in score. The positive ranks section shows an N of 8, a mean rank of 4.5, and a sum of ranks of 36, indicating that all eight participants increased their scores. Additionally, the ties section shows a value of 0, meaning no identical scores appeared between the pretest and posttest.

Furthermore, Table 6 shows an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.012. Referring to the predetermined decision criteria, $0.012 < 0.05$, which means “ H_a is accepted.” Based on the research hypothesis, it can be concluded that reality group counseling effectively enhances the ego identity of high school students.

Discussion

Reality counseling shares several conceptual connections with ego identity. Shafiabadi and Farzad (2015) emphasized that individuals have the right to make choices and must take responsibility for their thoughts and actions by applying the 3Rs Right, Reality, and Responsibility. Nowruzpoor et al. (2021) explain that success in reality counseling depends on meeting essential needs, such as appreciation, validation, happiness, and freedom. Erikson (1968) defined ego identity as an individual’s awareness and understanding of the self, desires, goals, and social existence. Erikson (Zahid & Goth, 2022) stated that individuals achieve a full ego identity when they can fully accept themselves and what occurs in their lives.

Erikson (1968) outlined the indicators of ego identity as follows: (1) self-concept, the ability to construct self-image and self-worth; (2) commitment, the capacity to be visionary, consistent, and reflective; and (3) autonomy, the ability to regulate oneself and maintain self-confidence. These indicators align with the implementation of the 3Rs



(Reality, Responsibility, Right) in fulfilling basic human needs such as power, love and belonging, freedom, fun, and survival (Watson et al., 2014).

Reality counseling possesses characteristics that support the development of ego identity. Hsu et al. (2020) found that ego identity achievement occurs when individuals commit to and take responsibility for their decisions. Dehkordi et al. (2019) found that reality counseling emphasizes consciousness, individual responsibility, and commitment in goal achievement, all of which relate to ego identity achievement. Thus, this study confirms that reality counseling effectively enhances ego identity by fostering self-awareness, commitment, and responsibility. Ebrahimi et al. (2023) also supported this claim, highlighting that the reality approach consistently promotes individual awareness and acceptance of personal roles and responsibilities.

Similar research reinforces this study's findings. Padillah (2020) found that reality counseling can address identity crises in adolescents. Marcia et al (1993) noted that individuals experiencing such crises have not yet achieved ego identity status, indicating a close relationship between identity crises and ego identity. These individuals may not have engaged in any exploration (diffusion), may have accepted labels imposed by others (foreclosure), or may be stuck in the exploration phase and thus confused about which role fits them best (moratorium).

Mahardika (2021) found that group reality counseling effectively enhanced self-efficacy and career decision-making among vocational students by increasing self-confidence and vision-oriented thinking. Murat et al (2023) concluded that reality counseling was effective in improving self-esteem among children who experienced bullying, focusing on the development of self-respect. These findings suggest that group reality counseling serves as a practical solution to address various psychological problems among students, particularly regarding ego identity. It facilitates a positive shift in individuals' thoughts and behaviors, which leads to more positive emotional and physical responses. Based on these findings, guidance and counseling practitioners and academics must further explore group reality counseling to enhance their professional practice.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that cognitive reality group counseling effectively enhances high school students' ego identity. This conclusion is supported by hypothesis testing using the non-parametric Wilcoxon test. The N-Gain percentage reached 109.180, exceeding the threshold of 76, indicating the effectiveness of the applied counselling. Additionally, the Wilcoxon test yielded an Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) value of 0.012, below the 5% significance level (0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, indicating that cognitive reality group counseling effectively improves ego identity among high school students. Referring to the established conclusion, the researcher offers several recommendations for consideration: (1) for school counselors: They can utilize the findings by adopting the implementation guide for cognitive reality group counseling, which has been validated both ecologically and by experts. This approach offers several advantages: it requires a short duration, is practical, and is easy to understand and implement; (2) for future researchers: while this study employed a pretest-posttest control group design, future research may explore alternative designs, such as single-subject design, action research in guidance and counseling, or other experimental methods. These approaches may further validate the effectiveness of cognitive reality group counseling.



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