

The Effectiveness of Reality Therapy in Group Counseling to Achieve Student Motivation for Academic Well-Being

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Abstract

Students today have to deal with various academic pressures stemming from the learning system itself or surrounding factors. Academic stress can erode students' motivation for achievement which in turn affects academic well-being. However, the counseling approach is considered an effective means to address this issue. This study examines the effectiveness of reality therapy in group counseling as a means to improve the motivation for achievement among students. This quasi-experimental study employed pre- and post-test designs for two groups involving 40 Form Four students in a secondary school in Malaysia. The students were selected through the purposive sampling method and the research instrument used was the Achievement Motivation Test (AMT) introduced by Abu Bakar Nordin (1995). Data were analyzed using the SPSS Version 26 software through a paired t-test for the pre- and post-treatment groups as well as an independent sample t-test between treatment group and control group who's given motivational reading materials. The study found significant differences between the pre- and post-test achievement motivation scores for the treatment group ($p < .05$). There were also significant differences between the level of achievement motivation for the treatment and control groups ($p < .05$). In conclusion, the application of counseling skills during counseling sessions and the use of reality therapy is seen to help enhance students' motivation for achievement as well as contribute to academic well-being. This study will aid teachers and school counselors facing low-motivated students and in turn be a catalyst for the development of guidelines or policies in the national education system for producing better quality human capital.

Keywords: Group Counseling, Reality Therapy, Academic Well-Being, Motivation

Introduction

The word motivation is generally used to describe a particular behaviour among human beings. It also has an impact on individual performance (Walters et al., 1990). Motivation through understanding is basically the inner drive or self-energy for achieving a desired goal. Thus, it is the process of generating energy for directing a need to achieve the desired goal or

aspiration. Generally, motivated individuals have the determination to achieve excellence and success in life (Sadiq & Hassan, 2021).

Human motivation has garnered much research interest and has been intensively studied scientifically since the early 20th century. Various series of tests and control groups have been developed through experiments to explore the various stimuli in motivational element which influencing individual as well as group behaviour. Among the early motivational studies is that conducted by Prof. Elton Mayo of Harvard University entitled the “Hawthorne Effect” (Bell & Smith, 2003). Motivation can be developed through various sources such as individual energy, learning, social interaction, information and information processes, values, expectations and direction. According to Guilford and Gray (1970), the motive for achieving success is a basic human need and is closely related to wanting to be “competent” and achieve excellence. This element is extremely important for students seeking to achieve success and self-excellence.

In view of such a scenario, the emphasis on motivation is among the most important elements in generating learning excellence among students. According to Nugraha (2015), motivation, expressed as a motivator for the need and desire to succeed or achieve, can be directly linked to student incentives to move towards excellence. For students in Form Four, it is urgent and important that the need to be more motivated towards achieving SPM excellence be sown and nurtured before they move on to form five.

As of 31 January 2008, the number of secondary school students in 2,163 schools was 2,279,575 while that in primary schools was 3,155,401 (Ministry of Education Malaysia). This shows the need for a school environment that has the proper motivational stimuli to act as a buffer against social problems. Clearly, schools as institutions have a major responsibility in shaping the attitudes and capabilities that a nation needs (Bahtiar, Ibrahim, Ariffin, Ismail, & Isa, 2020). Current changes that reflect the attitudes of adolescents today require the serious attention of all parties including the government and the general public. For example, 106 adolescents were detained in night clubs, 90 percent of whom were in the school-going ages of 11 to 20-years including 26 girls aged between 13 to 15-years (Berita Harian (November 16, 2008: 13). Therefore, this study is seen as necessary to understand the level of achievement-motivation among adolescents in school.

The issue of students who have poor motivation to study or succeed is frequently echoed in the press or discussed in educational talks. Students who are unable to appreciate the concept of their goals and aspirations in going to school are often mired in negative social issues as well as fail in their examinations. The study found various problems that require serious attention in improving the existing education system, especially among school students. An example of such a problem is where students are allowed to proceed to the next grade (automatic promotion) even if they have not mastered the 3Ms (reading, counting and writing) thus making it difficult for them to follow the progress of lessons, and eventually dropping out (Yew et al., 2021). The situation in the school system results in students skipping classes or dropping out of school for fear of being scolded by teachers, embarrassed by their friends who have mastered the basic skills, boredom, and lack of interest and motivation to learn (Arip et al., 2014).

Assessing student achievement is one of the activities conducted by teachers and the school through monthly tests, term exams, as well as annual assessments. Parents too have a keen interest in the level of achievement of their children while teachers and principals want to know the extent to which their efforts have succeeded in educating their students. According to Nordin (1986), the marks received, percentages, grades and the rankings and positions attained can be set in assessing achievement. Taking this aspect of evaluating the achievement of adolescents in schools into account, it is thus important and significant to study the underlying motivations as a means to further enhance the process.

According to Zulfikri (2015), a nation with a vision needs citizens who are proficient, capable, resilient, competitive and possess a fighting spirit, especially in education which is an important and challenging field for shaping and developing society. Thus, the motivational element as the nexus underlying community and national excellence needs to be emphasized as early as in the school environment. Thus, the counseling approach is a platform for helping students listen, learn, and understand about themselves. It is a systematic intervention designed to improve the lives of other human beings. Such intervention aims to help change a person's behaviour. Consistent with the basic definition of motivation that looks at the movement and behaviour towards goals, any counseling that is conducted aims to generate behavioural changes while motivating towards achieving life goals (Zin, 2003).

Therefore, it is extremely important to provide counseling services for adolescents as it can help them deal with the various uncertainties, questions, and issues they face. This is because they are undergoing personality developments that can lead to emotional instability, misdirected urges, and difficulty in adapting to the environment (Rahman & Omar, 2008). Accordingly, Yaacob and Ahmad (2003) mention three groups of adolescents which require motivational stimuli towards improving themselves. The three groups are:

1. Low-achieving and -abilities adolescents
2. Adolescents with the failure syndrome
3. Adolescents who prioritize self-esteem and seek to avoid failure

The findings of the reality therapy methodology applied in this study coincide with the views of Glasser (1986, 2000); Seligman (1997) that flexibility in applying such therapy has enabled adaptations to be made in various sectors, issues, and purposes, including mental health issues, hospitals, mental illness clinics, prisons, rehabilitation centres and also in schools. This suggests that appropriate reality therapy can be applied in the school environment. This adaptability is based on the flexibility of the various fields found in reality therapy itself (Gladding, 2005).

The strength of reality therapy also lies in its applicability to a diverse population of clients, including in counseling sessions involving adolescents (Gladding, 2005). In particular, Gladding (2005) states that the goal of reality therapy is to assist clients in becoming psychologically resilient, rational, understanding their needs and to realize that they have choices for themselves and others. This clearly shows that reality therapy is appropriate for application along with the concept of achievement motivation which is fundamentally related to the elements of needs and choices made by human beings. Reality therapy can also be applied to different genders without restrictions and differences (Gladding, 2005). The universal

features and flexibility inherent in reality therapy allow it to be used as a basis for research. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of reality therapy in group counseling for improving the motivation for achievement among students.

Literature Review

Group Counseling

A study by Mahmud and Jusoh (2008) showed that counselors in secondary schools allocated approximately one hour a week for group counseling sessions. Of the 191 counselors who were respondents in the study, 31 (16.2%) conducted group sessions five hours a week, 123 (64.4%) had one-to-four-hour weekly sessions, and 37 (19.4%) did not conduct group sessions. These findings suggest that group counseling is becoming an increasingly popular approach in schools.

Corey (2003) states that experimental studies in the form of group counseling can have high application values, are cost effective and time saving (Tosseland & Siporin, 1986). However, the study by Utay and Lampe (1995) on the effects of the group counseling cognitive behavioural approach on improving the social skills of students with learning difficulties found no significant difference between the treatment and the control groups (Noor Azniza Ishak, 2001).

Gazda et al (1967); Natesan (2017) note that group counseling is a dynamic individual-relationship process based on conscious thoughts and behaviours. The value of such therapy lies in the elements of trust, acceptance, understanding and support (Abdul Rahman, 1999). According to Mustaffa et al (2006), the concept of group counseling basically has similarities with the concept of “syura” or consultation and “jamaah” (community) practiced by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in Mecca and Medina.

Sani and Abd Razak (2019) state that group counseling seeks to develop student progress in the academic field as well as create healthier interactions among individuals besides attempting to resolve internal conflicts in individuals. Many researchers opt to conduct studies on group counseling as, according to Ida Hartina Ahmed Tharbe (2006), it's spread is wider, involves more time, cost and energy-saving methods, and can help more clients over a particular time span.

Achievement Motivation

Shackleton and Fletcher (1984) state the concept of achievement motivation was founded by (Murray, 1938). The concept was later developed by McClelland (1951) as the “Need for Achievement” or “nAch” for short. The level of achievement motivation in an individual can be seen through the assignment of challenging tasks where an individual's behaviour is measured through the efforts made to complete the task successfully. This can measure an individual's achievement motivation. Individuals who find excuses saying a given task is difficult and cannot be done will be considered to have low achievement motivation (Shackleton & Fletcher, 1984).

McClelland and Atkinson, in Sdorow (1995), studied achievement motivation in relation to the desire for mastery, priority, and perfection. Individuals seeking to achieve will strive to attain high levels of performance. The findings of a study by Desa (2006) show that the need

for achievement varies depending on the achievement situation. Adolescent achievement behaviour is related to several other factors such as the value of the incentives or rewards that can be derived from attaining that success.

A study by Chzin and Surat (2021) found that Malaysian students have lower achievement motivation than those in the United Kingdom. Their findings support McClelland's theory (1978) that the level of achievement motivation is higher in developed than in developing countries. This indirectly coincides with Zainun (1984) who noted that motivational development can be viewed differently between individuals according to their selves, the place and the situation.

In discussing motivation, McClelland (1961); Adnan and Mokhtar (2018) explain that achievement motivation involves a process of internal pressure from birth that occurs among individuals with the goal of obtaining satisfaction and success in self-achievement. Meanwhile, Moi (1997); Marjanti (2015) state that such motivation is a requirement to achieve excellence. It reflects the desire to do a job better, more seamlessly, and more effectively, whether in the area of employment, business, or in the field of education. Thus, this finding strengthens the view that in education, motivational levels have a critical role in contributing to success and student excellence.

Maslow's study (1954), as in Mansir (2018), found that the higher the needs of the individual the lesser the dependence on the social environment. This is because the individual uses past experience to determine his behaviour. At this point, motivation depends on an individual's inner will, ability, potential, talent, and creativity. In the meantime, the social environment is a motivating factor for achieving individual aspirations. Maslow ranked the lowest level of wants as deficient needs and the highest as developmental needs. Maslow also stated that the pinnacle of human needs is the stage of becoming the person of their dreams.

Methodology

This was a quasi-experimental study using a pre- and post-test design for two groups, namely the experimental or treatment group and the control group with reading materials or items. An experimental study is where the researcher systematically applies treatment and control measures on the subject under study and observes their effects on it. Observations were made through two AMT administrations to determine the treatment effects on the selected groups. The pre- and post-test designs are as in Table 1.

Table 1

Pre- and Post-test Designs

Pre-test	Category	Action	Post-test
X1	Treatment (TG)	Group counseling session	X2
Y1	Control (ICG)	With reading materials	Y2

The sampling method used by the researcher was purposive sampling. This is because it is the researcher who determines the subject of the study. Purposive sampling is one form of non-probability sampling. Here, researchers use their own judgment in selecting respondents who best suit the purpose of the study (Marican, 2005). The population for this study comprised Form Four students in a secondary school in Malaysia. The list of students was obtained from the Guidance and Counseling Unit and the students were required to take the Achievement

Motivation Test (AMT). Of the 100 Form-four students from three classes who took the initial (pre) AMT test, 40 who received low scores of below 50 were selected for the study group. The research instrument used in this study is the Achievement Motivation Test (AMT) introduced by (Nordin, 1995). This measurement tool was tested for its validity and generated a reliability coefficient value of .84. The AMT consists of 25 items for measuring achievement motivation levels based on six factors representing indicators for student motivation. The six factors are:

- 1) Measuring goal planning for achievement
- 2) Measuring student perseverance
- 3) Measuring expectations of achievement
- 4) Measuring levels of anxiety
- 5) Measuring willingness to take risks
- 6) Measuring attitudes toward achievement

Results and Discussion

Table 2

Paired T-test analysis of the treatment group

Category	Min	S D	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
Pre-achievement Motivation	44.0	6.59	21.984	7	.000
Post-achievement Motivation	104.6	6.28			

p<.05

The results obtained show a significant difference between the pre- and post-test achievement motivation scores for the treatment group. The significance value of .000 was much smaller than the .05* level that was set. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis fails to be rejected, indicating that the pre- and post-achievement motivation scores of the subjects in the treatment group were significantly different.

The analysis of the pre-test conducted on both study groups, namely the treatment group and the control group with materials, showed a low AMT score indicating a low level of achievement motivation for both groups. However, following a group counseling session for the treatment group using the reality therapy approach, significant differences were recorded in the pre-test (mean = 44.0) and the post-test (mean = 104.6) scores of the study subjects. An analysis using this paired t-test showed that the level of achievement motivation of the treatment group improved significantly based on the two AMTs that were administered. This indicates that the reality-therapy group counseling approach is effective in enhancing the level of achievement motivation among students.

This study's findings match those of Zuria et al (2004) who showed that students with problems and who lack self-motivation could benefit more from individual and group counseling compared to motivational talks. Meanwhile, Kadir et al (2008) and Zakaria (2016) found that respondents who had undergone such counseling sessions had a more positive attitude compared to those who had not.

According to Kasim and Husain (2006); Sipon (2014), counselors use certain techniques to gradually educate and guide clients in making the correct choices and decisions on issues. This strengthens the results of the study which showed that the researchers successfully applied the appropriate technique of reality therapy group counseling in enhancing student motivation. The appropriateness of therapies used can lead to academic well-being. A study by Salleh (2022) found that a calm and contented demeanour generally contributes to contentment and well-being. By understanding life through reality therapy, group members become more content and this leads to higher levels of self-motivation.

The experimental methods based on the pre- and post-tests for both groups showed some degree of improvement in achievement motivation. This means that the test administrations offer greater opportunities to nurture any forms of change in group members. This is supported by Marican (2006) who stated that experimental methods are mostly long-term in nature or performed over a specific time period and involve more than a single observation on respondents. This provides the opportunity to see the changes that occur over time as well as in the achievement motivation levels of the members of the study group.

A study by Jhih-Ting (2004) on the effect of reality therapy on the self-development of Forms Five and Six students in a secondary school in China using experimental methods involving a treatment group and a control group with materials showed that the approach can be applied on high school students. This is because the counseling methods that were implemented twice weekly on the pre- and post-test studies group had a positive impact on students' self-development.

The pre- and post-achievement AMT scores for the control group with reading materials showed significant differences during the administration of the pre-test (mean = 43.9) and the post-test (mean = 96.0). This indicates that the medium of reading through the given materials was effective in improving the achievement motivation levels of this group. Thus, an intermediate medium such as group counseling or any form of experience and motivational reading materials coupled with the applied reality therapy can enhance the achievement motivation levels in students.

In addition, the higher level of achievement motivation of the control group with reading materials also shows that even without group intervention, having motivational reading materials and reality therapy are also effective in improving students' achievement motivation. This is related to the statements of two major experts in the theory of humanistic learning, namely Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow who emphasize the uniqueness of the human self. Self is seen as having potential, giving potential, and being able to develop good potential to achieve progress (Lebar, 1999; Kasim & Husain, 2006).

Table 3

Independent sample t-test between groups for the motivation levels of the treatment group and control group with materials

Group	N	M	SD	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
Treatment	20	104.6	6.278		
Control group with materials	20	96.0	4.504	14	.007

$p < 0.05$

The results obtained show a significant difference in the levels of achievement motivation between the treatment group and the control group with the reading materials. The significance value is .007 which is much smaller than the .05* that was set. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis fails to be rejected. The level of achievement motivation of the treatment group was higher ($M = 104.6$, $SD = 6.278$) compared to the control group with the reading materials ($M = 96.0$, $SD = 4.504$).

The independent sample t-test analysis was used to examine the differences in the student achievement motivation scores of the two groups i.e., the treatment group and control group with materials. The analysis found a significant difference in their mean achievement motivation scores. The treatment group showed a higher level of achievement motivation compared to the control group with materials. The respective means for the treatment and control groups were 104.6 and 96.0. This also suggests that group interventions together with the application of reality theory are more effective in improving student achievement motivation. This is consistent with the view of Jacob et al (2002) that without theoretical inputs counselors cannot explore more deeply, and discussions will merely revolve around relationships and interactions. Thus, the use of reality theory in group counseling is seen as a generator and catalyst for conducting, exploring and encouraging the development of group members.

The application of reality theory was also effective in improving student achievement motivation among both study groups. This is in line with Glasser (1986) who noted that members of a reality therapy group will emerge fully aware of their values through the experience of undergoing this therapy. Success in reality therapy group counseling can be measured through the new behaviours formed by members in becoming more responsible for achieving their existing or present-oriented goals (Mustaffa et al., 2006).

This study's findings also support those of Salmiah Monshie, Rusnani Abdul Kadir and Asmah Ismail (2005) that group guidance and counseling methods are of interest and used by researchers to improve academic achievement and performance levels as the alternative involves more many students who can be helped at any one time. In addition, the influence of peers while interacting in the group further reinforces the knowledge and changes experienced by group members. Husain (2016) found that the degree of validity of group counseling modules is at the good levels while the degree of reliability of the module is at the

very good level. This further strengthens the findings of studies using group counseling techniques on students.

In addition, the element of interaction between group members comprising age ranges and those needing similar achievement levels also contributed to enhancing the achievement motivation levels of the treatment group. This coincides with the findings of Desa (2006) and Quek (2006) who stated that other than family members, peers have a strong influence on student achievement motivation. This indicates that the influence of members of such peer groups need to be taken into account. If students are not well guided in their choice of group members, their academic achievements will be affected. Apart from helping develop social abilities and cognitive skills, peers also influence personal attitudes and behaviours (Nursuhaili, 2010).

The cohesion of groups is also seen as a “lubricant” for the strong motivational drives achieved through close relationships and mutual assistance throughout their journey. Napier and Gershenfeld (1989) state that the level of group cohesion is formed when members find that through the group, their needs are met and they are able to collaborate and be loyal to the group to achieve their goals. According to Yalom (1985); Rahman (2004); Burn (2004); Salleh et al (2006) such feelings develop when a member feels himself part of the group and that the group is important to him. This element of cohesion evokes higher levels of achievement motivation for the treatment group. As stated by Johnson and Johnson (1991), such group cohesion leads to fulfilment and joint achievement as well as assist in completing assignments no matter how complex they are.

The findings of the study indicate that the module design based on reality therapy is effective in strengthening students’ motivations to achieve. The application of counseling skills during counseling sessions and the use of reality therapy also helps in advancing and strengthening group membership.

Conclusion

This study identified the level of effectiveness of group counseling that was attained using reality therapy in strengthening the motivation to achieve for 40 students who obtained low scores of below 50 in the Achievement Motivation Test (AMT). It also examined the relationship between the level of student achievement motivation and motivational reading activities. The findings clearly indicate an increase in the level of student achievement motivation due to the application of reality therapy in group interventions and the use of motivational reading materials. In view of the present circumstances of students facing various academic stress issues and which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the emphasis on motivational aspects is among the most important elements for generating learning excellence. As students, they need to ensure that their academic well-being is at an optimal level in order to equip them to be agents of change in producing quality human capital for promoting national development. Therefore, they need to have a high degree of motivation to enable them to excel in the academic field whether in the curriculum or extra-curriculum domains. As such, teachers and counselors should play a role in providing counseling services and adapt to the situation or pandemic issues to strengthen the motivation for achievement among students. The findings of this study can be a catalyst for the development of guidelines or policies in the national education system for helping

students having low levels of motivation, and for dissemination throughout the school system.

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