

# The Effectiveness of Humanistic Group Counseling Based on Unconditional Positive Regard in Reducing Academic Shame Among Junior High School Students

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## Abstract

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique in reducing academic shame among junior high school students. Academic shame is a negative academic emotion that appears when the students interpret failures or learning difficulties as a form of personal incompetence, so it leads low self-confidence, reducing learning motivation, and decreasing academic participation. This study used a quantitative experimental method with one group pretest and posttest design. The research subjects were 15 junior high school students with medium to high levels of academic shame. They are selected through purposive sampling. Data collection technique utilized the Academic Shame Scale, supplemented by observational and documentary data. Data analysis was conducted using a paired-sample t-test to assess differences in scores before and after the intervention. The results indicate that the implementation of group counseling services using a humanistic approach successfully created a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental group environment. The implementation of the Unconditional Positive Regard technique consistently helped the students felt accepted and appreciated, so they were more active to express their feelings and academic experiences. Positive changes were showed in the reduction of academic shame, the increase of self-confidence, the courage to express opinions, and the students' engagements in the academic activities. Thus, Group Counseling Services based on a humanistic approach are effective in reducing academic shame, supporting emotional and academic development of the students.

## 1. Introduction

Junior high school is a crucial developmental period for students, both academically and psychologically. During this phase, students are in a transitional stage from childhood to early adolescence, characterized by increasing academic demands, changes in social interaction patterns, and the development of a stronger sense of self-awareness. The learning system in junior high school requires the students to be more independent, able to adapt to various subjects, and face more structured and competitive academic evaluations. These conditions often create psychological pressure that affects students' emotional condition during the learning process. During early adolescence, the development of emotional regulation and the increase of self-awareness are generally important factors influencing how students understand and respond to academic experiences (Silvers, 2022; Mertens et al., 2022). Additionally, various demands in the learning process can trigger emotions such as stress, anxiety, and mental pressure, which impact students' engagements and academic performance (Rani, 2025).

The academic pressure experienced by the junior high school students can arise to various negative academic emotions, one of them is academic shame. Psychologically, academic shame is part of self-conscious emotions which are emotions arising from negative self-evaluation, particularly when an individual feels they have failed to meet expected standards (Farouk, 2013). This concept differs significantly from the concept of guilt, which focuses on judgment regarding wrong behavior, whereas shame emphasizes a negative evaluation in themselves as a whole, thereby having a stronger impact on an individual's self-esteem (Curtis, 2023). Academic shame arises when students interpret failure, low grades, or learning difficulties as a personal sign of inadequacy. This feeling is not only related to academic outcomes but also to how students assess their self-esteem and academic identity in the presence of teachers and peers. Students who get academic shame tend to feel embarrassed, have low self-esteem, and fear receiving negative evaluations from the school's environment, so those lead them to be reluctant to actively participating in learning activities (Bynum et al., 2021).

The academic shame got by students can have a significant impact on the overall learning process. Students experiencing academic shame often exhibit avoidance behaviors, such as procrastinating or failing to complete assignments, hesitating to ask questions when they do not understand materials, and being reluctant to express their opinions in the class. Academic shame is also closely linked to the emergence of avoidance behavior, where students tend to withdraw from learning situations as a response to perceived experiences of failure (Turner et al., 2002). This condition also implies low academic engagement, as negative emotions such as shame can hinder students' participation actively and attention in the learning process (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). Furthermore, high levels of shame in an academic context are correlated with low self-efficacy, leading students to feel less capable of managing and meeting academic demands (Passanisi et al., 2015; Baldwin et al., 2006). Furthermore, a tendency toward shame-proneness in an academic context can weaken students' self-regulation abilities in learning, which can make them worse in the quality of the learning process and outcomes (Sullins et al., 2024). In the long term, this condition can reduce learning motivation, academic engagement, and hinder the development of students' potential. Research in Indonesia indicates that poorly managed negative academic emotions contribute to low students' motivation and learning participation, so it needs an appropriate intervention through school guidance and counseling services (Mega et al., 2014).

In this regard, guidance and counseling services have a strategic role in helping students to manage emotional issues related to the learning process. School guidance and counseling services also have a vital role in the development of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) which specifically by helping students develop the skills to recognize, understand, and adaptively manage emotions within an academic context (Simion, 2023). Additionally, school counselors are expected to possess socio-emotional competencies to support students in navigating various behavioral dynamics and emotional challenges within the learning environment, thereby fostering a more conducive learning climate (Serrano et al., 2023). One of approaches in guidance and counseling services relevant to help students overcome academic shame is the humanistic approach. The humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of acceptance, empathy, and respect for the individual as a unique and valuable person. In an educational context, this approach views students as individuals with the potential person to grow when placed in a supportive environment free from negative judgments. The humanistic approach helps students understand experiences of failure in a more positive situation. They can also build self-acceptance when facing academic demands (Pramanik & Khuntia, 2023).

The humanistic approach has one of its key techniques, namely Unconditional Positive Regard, which is showed through the attitude of accepting students as they are without conditions. The application of this technique aims to create a warm and supportive relationship between the counselor and the students, so that students feel safe to express their feelings, thoughts, and academic experiences. This approach is also in line with opportunities for personal growth, where individuals can develop optimally when in a supportive and accepting environment free from judgment (Dmitrienko et al., 2017). In the context of group counseling services, Unconditional Positive Regard is particularly crucial because students do not only receive acceptance from the counselor but also the experience is supported and understood by their peers. Unconditional Positive Regard is viewed as a core factor in building effectively therapeutic relationships because empathy and self-acceptance can strengthen students' openness and trust in the counseling process (Frankel et al., 2012). The dynamic and positive group allow students to realize that learning difficulties are a normal experience and can be faced by anyone. Through group counseling services using a humanistic approach, students are expected to develop a sense of self-acceptance, reduce feelings of academic shame, and boost their self-confidence in facing the learning process. A safe and non-judgmental group environment provides a space for students to learn to manage academic emotions adaptively. Furthermore, group counseling services have been proven effectively in enhancing students' social support and self-acceptance through positive internal interactions (Harel et al., 2011).

However, empirical studies specifically examining the effectiveness of group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) technique in reducing academic shame among junior high school students, particularly at one of junior high school in Surakarta, remain in limited implementation. Previous studies have mostly focused on general emotional issues such as psychological well-being, burnout, and self-concept using a humanistic approach or the Unconditional Positive Regard technique (Tripertwi & Siregar, 2025; Afkari et al., 2025; Udele et al., 2025). Furthermore, studies on Unconditional Positive Regard in an educational context generally emphasize the role of teachers and interpersonal relationships, rather than specifically as an intervention to address specific academic emotions such as academic shame (Swarra et al., 2017). Therefore, research integrating group counseling, the humanistic approach, Unconditional Positive Regard techniques, and a focus on academic shame among junior high school students remains limited implementation in previous studies, so those indicate a significant and interesting research gap to get in-depth exploration.

Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique in reducing academic shame among Junior High School students. This study is expected to provide practical contributions to school counselors in

designing services that are more responsive to students' academic emotional issues, as well as theoretical contributions to the development of guidance and counseling studies in school environment.

## 2. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach using an experimental method. The design utilized is pre-experimental, specifically one group pretest and posttest design. The objective of this study is to determine the effectiveness of group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique in reducing academic shame among students. In this design, students were done a pretest, followed by a post test, then they received the intervention in the form of group guidance services. They finally took a posttest to observe the changes that occurred. The research subjects consisted of 15 junior high school students with medium to high levels of academic shame. Subject selection was conducted using purposive sampling, based on criteria including students who showed feelings of shame regarding their academic abilities, low self-confidence, and a tendency to avoid participation in learning activities. The research variables consisted of two types: the independent variable (X), which was group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique; and the dependent variable (Y), which was academic shame among students.

The data collection technique was conducted using an academic shame scale developed based on indicators of negative academic emotions, such as feelings of shame regarding academic ability, fear of being negatively evaluated, and a tendency to withdraw from learning. This scale employs a Likert scale with five response options: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. This instrument is based on the Compass of Shame Scale concept by Elison (2000), which has been proven to have good construct validity. In this study, validity test results showed item-total correlation coefficients > 0.30, while reliability tests yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.70, thus the instrument was valid and reliable for use. Additional data was obtained through observations during group counseling sessions and documentation in the form of service implementation records. The research procedure was conducted in several stages, namely: (1) preparation, such as students' identification and the development of research instruments, (2) implementation of the pretest, (3) implementation of the intervention in the form of group counseling services, (4) implementation of the posttest, and (5) analysis and reporting of research results. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the use of SPSS software. The descriptive analysis was used to determine the profile of students' academic shame scores before and after the intervention. Normality testing used the Shapiro-Wilk test, while hypothesis testing used a paired-sample t-test to assess significant differences between pretest and post test results. The significance level used was 0.05.

## 3. Results and Discussion

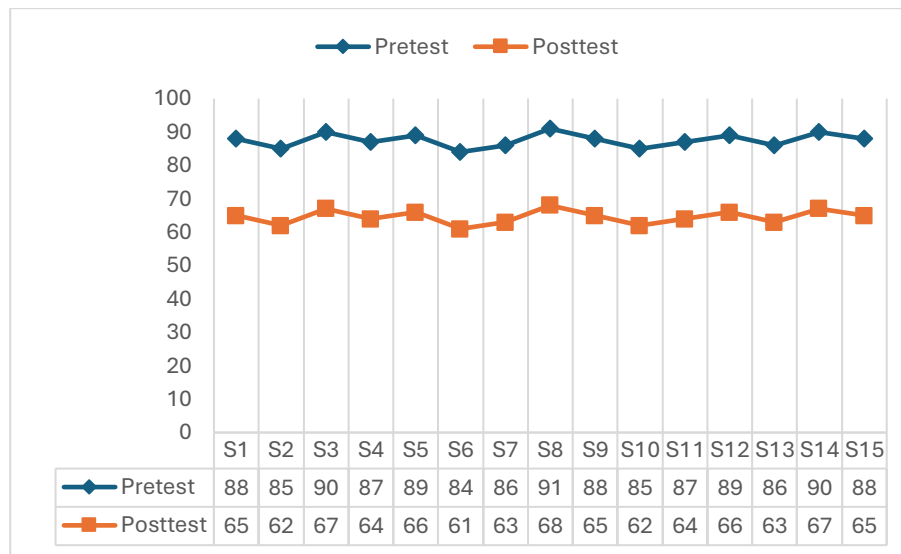
### 3.1. Description of Students' Academic Shame Data

This study involved 15 junior high school students identified as experiencing academic shame in the medium to high categories. The subject selection was based on initial measurement results using the academic shame scale as well as recommendations from school counselors. Measurements of academic shame levels were conducted twice: before (pretest) and after (posttest) the provision of group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique. The purpose of these measurements was to determine changes in students' academic shame levels after participating in group counseling. The students' academic shame scores at the pretest and posttest stages are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Students' Pretest and Post test Academic Shame Scores**

No	Respondent	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
1	S1	88	65	23
2	S2	85	62	23
3	S3	90	67	23
4	S4	87	64	23
5	S5	89	66	23
6	S6	84	61	23
7	S7	86	63	23
8	S8	91	68	23
9	S9	88	65	23
10	S10	85	62	23
11	S11	87	64	23
12	S12	89	66	23
13	S13	86	63	23
14	S14	90	67	23
15	S15	88	65	23

When presented in graph form, the data from the table 1 can be seen on Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Differences in Students' Pretest and Post test Results**

Based on the Figure 1, it can be seen that all the students got a decrease in academic shame scores after participating in group counseling. This decrease in scores indicates a shift in students' emotional awareness toward a more positive direction.

### 3.2. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of students' academic shame scores using SPSS are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Academic Shame Scores**

Measurement Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	15	87.93	2.10
Post test	15	64.93	2.10

The mean score for academic shame in the pretest stage was 87.93, while in the post test stage it decreased to 64.93. This decrease in the mean score indicates that the group counseling services provided had a positive impact on reducing students' academic shame. Data Normality Testing

A normality test was conducted to determine whether the data was normally distributed. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used for normality testing because the sample size was less than 50. Based on the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, a significance value of 0.820 was obtained, which is greater than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that the academic shame data is normally distributed, so the analysis can proceed using parametric statistical tests.

### 3.3. Hypothesis Testing (Paired Sample T-Test)

The hypothesis test was conducted using a paired-sample t-test to determine the difference in the students' levels of academic shame before and after receiving group counseling services. The decision criteria for the t-test (paired-sample t-test) are present below.

If  $t\text{-}(calculated) > t\text{-}(table)$ , then  $H_a$  is accepted and  $H_o$  is rejected.

If  $t\text{-}(calculated) < t\text{-}(table)$ , then  $H_a$  is rejected and  $H_o$  is accepted.

If  $Sig\ (2\text{-tailed}) > 0.05$ , then  $H_a$  is rejected and  $H_o$  is accepted.

If  $Sig\ (2\text{-tailed}) < 0.05$ , then  $H_a$  is accepted and  $H_o$  is rejected.

The results of the paired-sample t-test show a significance score of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , so it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the pretest and post test scores. This indicates that group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique are effective in reducing academic shame among junior high school students.

The results of the environmental analysis in this study are as follows:

**Students' Condition Before the Implementation of the Service.** The results of the initial observation showed that students experiencing academic shame tended to be passive in learning activities and at the beginning of group counseling sessions. Some students appeared to be lower their heads, rarely eyes contact, and hesitant to express their opinions during discussions. This indicates that academic shame affects students' self-confidence and social engagement in the learning process.

**Changes After the Implementation of Group Counseling Services.** After participating in group counseling sessions using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique, the students began to demonstrate positive changes in attitude and behavior. They became more active in speaking, were more willing to express their opinions, and more active in mutual supports to their group peers. Based on interview results, the students felt more accepted and appreciated, and were more comfortable sharing their learning experiences without fear of judgment. One of the students even realized that learning difficulties were not done by themselves, so the students' shame had previously begun to reduce.

**The Role of the Guidance Counselor and Documentation of Activities.** Observations indicate that the guidance and counseling teacher consistently applied the Unconditional Positive Regard technique through empathy attitudes, unconditional acceptance, and the use of supportive language that did not blame the students. This approach created a safe and supportive group atmosphere, so it enabled the students to feel comfortable and confident in actively participating. The documentation of activity, such as process notes and reflections, also revealed an increase in self-confidence, the courage to face academic challenges, and students' readiness to engage more actively in classroom learning. Therefore, the results of observations, interviews, and documentation indicate that group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique make a tangible contribution to reduce academic shame among junior high school students.

### 3.4. Discussion

The research findings indicate that group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique have a positive and significant impact on reducing academic shame among junior high school students. These findings demonstrate that feelings of shame arising from experiences of failure or academic difficulties can be reduced through supportive and accepting group interactions. This indicates that academic shame is not merely a cognitive issue but is also deeply tied to students' emotional experiences within social contexts and interpersonal relationships (Turner & Husman, 2008).

The application of a humanistic approach in group counseling services provides a foundation for students to build stronger self-acceptance. This approach positions students as individuals of value and potential, regardless of their academic achievements (Bailey & O'Keefe, 2013). The empathy and unconditional acceptance provided by school counselors create a safe and non-judgmental service environment. Such situations help students feel appreciated and understood, making them more active to share emotional experiences which is previously hidden due to feelings of shame (Sinha, 2017).

The Unconditional Positive Regard technique is crucial in this process as it helps shift students' perspectives on academic failure. When students accept that they are still appreciated despite facing learning difficulties, negative self-perceptions begin to reduce (Udele, et al., 2025). This non-judgmental attitude provides an emotional space for students to view their academic experiences more objectively and healthily. In the context of academic shame, this means students no longer interpret failure as a reflection of personal inadequacy, but rather as part of the learning process that can be addressed and improved.

The condition of group dynamics also has a crucial role in reducing academic shame. Peer interactions create opportunities to share similar academic experiences, so the students realize that emotional conflicts which are like shame do not happen to any single individual. This awareness reduces feelings of isolation and strengthens a sense of social connections within the group. In group counseling services, peer support serves as a highly meaningful source of reinforcement because students can understand one another, offer encouragement, and accept differences in learning experiences (Huri, et al., 2024).

Observational results indicate that students' openness and active participation increased following the group counseling sessions. Students became more willing to speak up, more willing to try new things in the learning process and demonstrated higher self-confidence. These changes indicate that academic shame not

only reduces emotionally but also positively impacts students' academic behavior, such as engagement in discussions and readiness to evaluate themselves during the learning process.

The findings above are consistent with those of other studies showing that group counseling services using a humanistic approach can enhance self-esteem and emotional regulation in students. For example, Azzahrah et al. (2025) study found that implementing humanistic-based group counseling services effectively improved emotional intelligence and self-confidence among high school students. These findings align with the results of this study which provides space for self-acceptance can reduce negative emotional burdens such as shame and low self-esteem. Additionally, Kifli et al., (2019) research indicates that interpersonal techniques delivered through group counseling can help students reduce academic anxiety and enhance academic social engagement. Another relevant study by Tripertiwi and Siregar (2025) also indicates that group counseling services which use a humanistic approach are effective in reducing feelings of academic shame and enhancing students' learning motivation. These results align with the findings of this study, which demonstrate that humanistic interventions not only impact students' emotional aspects but also influence academic behavioral aspects, such as increasing students' participation and engagement in learning activities.

For overall study, this discussion indicates that group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique are an effective and innovative service approach in helping students manage academic emotions such as academic shame. The findings of this study make an important contribution to guidance and counseling practices in schools. Moreover, those reinforce the theoretical foundation that a humanistic approach can improve students' emotional well-being and academic engagement through respectful and interpersonal empathy relationships.

### 3.5. Implications

The practical implications of this study are the need for school counselors to systematically integrate a humanistic approach into group services to create a safe and supportive environment for students. Furthermore, these findings also open opportunities for the development of more structured and measurable academic emotion-based intervention programs in school environment. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on academic shame by linking it to the humanistic approach and the Unconditional Positive Regard technique as relevant and contextual intervention strategies at the junior high school level.

### 3.6. Limitations

Nevertheless, this study has limitations that must be considered. This is a qualitative study with a relatively limited number of subjects, so generalizing the findings must be done in detail. Furthermore, the assessment of the reduction in academic shame relies heavily on students' subjective perceptions; thus, for the future research incorporating quantitative measurements would provide stronger quantification of the intervention's impact. Another limitation is in the absence of a control group, so it is difficult to confirm that the observed changes are entirely from the intervention which is given. Furthermore, the relatively short duration of the intervention also means that the long-term effects on the sustained reduction of academic shame have not yet been observed. Therefore, the future research is recommended to use a stronger experimental design with a larger sample size and longitudinal measurements to obtain more comprehensive and easily generalized results.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that group counseling services using a humanistic approach through the Unconditional Positive Regard technique are effective in reducing academic shame among junior high school students. Statistical analysis results show a significant difference between pretest and post test scores ( $p= 0.000 < 0.05$ ), which indicate a reduction in the level of academic shame after participating in the program. Qualitatively, the results of observations, interviews, and documentation reinforce these findings. The students demonstrated an increase of self-confidence, the courage to express their opinions, and active engagements in group activities as well as the classroom learning process. School counselors who demonstrated empathy, unconditional acceptance, and a non-judgmental attitude were able to create a safe, comfortable, and supportive group atmosphere for the students. These findings indicate that a humanistic approach using the Unconditional Positive Regard technique is not only effective in reducing negative emotions such as academic shame but also has a positive impact on students' behavior and learning motivation. Thus, this approach is worthy of being adopted as a guidance and counseling service strategy in schools to comprehensively enhance students' emotional well-being and academic engagements.

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The sole author has read and approved the final manuscript and is fully responsible for its content.

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## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Declaration on AI Use

The author(s) declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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