

Reducing Phubbing Behavior Among High School Online Game Players Through Rational Emotive Behavior Group Counseling

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Abstract

The high use of smartphones among Generation Z, particularly in online gaming activities, influences students' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. This condition leads to phubbing behavior, namely ignoring social interactions, thus requiring interventions that address cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects comprehensively. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Rational Emotive Behavior approach in reducing phubbing behavior among high school students who are active online game players. The research design employed was a pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The subjects consisted of six students selected through purposive sampling. The instrument used was a phubbing behavior scale, which had met validity and reliability requirements. The results indicate that group counseling with the Rational Emotive Behavior approach is effective in reducing phubbing behavior among high school students who engage in online gaming.

1. Introduction

Digital developments have a great impact on life, especially in the field of communication and entertainment through the use of smartphones that allow various activities to be carried out easily, such as communicating, playing games on mobile phones, and accessing social media. This shows a significant increase in internet usage, where Indonesia is recorded to have more than 190 million smartphone users in 2023 (Statista, 2023). This condition greatly affects Generation Z who have been familiar with digital technology since an early age and have a high intensity of internet use, including in online gaming activities (Mandas & Silfiah, 2022). This condition greatly affects Generation Z who have been familiar with digital technology since an early age and have a high intensity of internet use, including in online gaming activities (Wijoyo et al., 2020). This behavior is also related to an irrational mindset that can give rise to maladaptive behavior and hinder the individual's self-development (Setiyowati, 2017). In addition, online gaming addiction that has been categorized as a mental disorder in ICD-11 is characterized by excessive prioritization of gaming activities, which occurs mostly in students (Kardefelt-Winther, 2017). Phubbing behavior is influenced by low self-control, cell phone usage habits, boredom proneness, and high duration of cell phone use in daily life (Risdiyana et al., 2024).

The increase in phubbing behavior in students is a problem that needs to be addressed immediately because it can interfere with social interaction, reduce communication skills, and inhibit social-emotional development. This problem is related to an irrational mindset that reinforces maladaptive behavior, so intervention that refers to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects as a whole is needed. Rational emotive behavior (REB) group counseling is seen as relevant to help change this irrational mindset, but research testing its effectiveness in reducing phubbing behavior in students is still limited. Based on a preliminary study through interviews with School counselors in one of the private senior high schools in Malang, Indonesia, it was found that there were students who showed phubbing behavior, both from the subject teacher's report and the results of direct observation, such as playing games during the learning process.

Phubbing behavior in students who actively engage in online gaming is not only influenced by the intensity of smartphone use, but also by the existence of irrational beliefs that underlie this behavior. Phubbing is different from online gaming addiction. Online gaming addiction focuses on an individual's dependence on gaming activities, while phubbing refers to the behavior of ignoring others in social interactions because attention is more focused on smartphones (Jatira et al., 2024). For students who actively engage in online gaming, smartphones function as the main medium of playing games so that excessive use has the potential to disrupt direct social interaction.

According to the theory of Rational Emotive Behavior (REB), problematic behavior arises as a result of irrational beliefs. Ellis explains that an individual's emotional and behavioral consequences are influenced more by his or her belief in an event than by the event itself (Kuang et al., 2024). Research shows that irrational beliefs are positively related to mobile phone dependence, anxiety when away from mobile phones, and excessive smartphone use (Kuang et al., 2024). In students who actively engage in online gaming, beliefs such as "I have to stay online so I don't miss a game", "my teammates will get angry if I'm offline", or "playing games is more fun than interacting in person" can encourage the emergence of phubbing behaviors.

In addition, irrational beliefs also contribute to social avoidance and loneliness which ultimately increase dependence on smartphones (Kuang et al., 2024). Students who feel more comfortable in the virtual world than in the real social environment tend to focus on smartphones even though they are in a face-to-face communication situation. This condition suggests that the root of phubbing behavior lies not only in gaming activities, but also in the underlying irrational beliefs (Jatira et al., 2024).

Phubbing needs attention because it can cause various negative impacts, such as increased loneliness, anxiety, disruption of social relationships, and the emergence of feelings of not being appreciated in the interlocutor (phubbee) (Farkhah et al., 2023). Among students who actively engage in online gaming, this behavior appears through the tendency to keep playing games when interacting with others, ignoring the calls of teachers or friends, and preferring virtual activities to direct communication (Madjid, 2020). Therefore, interventions are needed that are able to target the root of the problem in the form of irrational beliefs.

One relevant approach is Rational Emotive Behavior (REB) counseling. REB aims to change irrational beliefs to be more rational and adaptive so that individuals are able to develop healthier behaviors (Corey, 2015). Through the process of identification, dispute, and replacement of irrational beliefs, REB counseling has the potential to help students who actively engage in online gaming reduce phubbing behavior and improve the quality of their social interactions (Farkhah et al., 2023).

As an intervention effort, group counseling services can be used to reduce phubbing behavior through the use of group dynamics so that students learn from each other and overcome problems together (Pratiwi & Karneli, 2024). Karadag et al. (2015) defined phubbing as a behavior that moves away from interpersonal communication because individuals focus more on smartphones. In addition, phubbing is a tendency to ignore the people around them when interacting because they focus on using mobile phones rather than the surrounding environment (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Warren (2013) state that one of the relevant approaches in group counseling is rational emotive behavior (REB), which emphasizes the interconnectedness between thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Through this approach, students are expected to be able to replace irrational thinking with rational ones and form more adaptive affective and behavioral responses.

From several previous studies, no studies have been found that specifically test the use of group counseling with a rational emotive behavior approach to reduce phubbing behavior in high school students who actively play online games. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of rational emotive behavior group counseling in reducing phubbing behavior in students who actively engage in online gaming. It is hoped that this article can contribute to the progress of counseling guidance innovations, especially in an effort to reduce the phubbing behavior of students who actively engage in online gaming.

2. Method

This research uses a quantitative approach with experimental methods, especially the pre-experimental design of one group pretest-posttest. The treatment provided is in the form of group counseling services with a rational emotive behavior (REB) approach. The research subjects consisted of 6 students of grade tenth who were selected through the purposive sampling technique with the criteria of: (1) having a level of phubbing behavior in the medium to high category based on the results of the scale, and (2) willing to participate in the entire series of research. The implementation of treatment was carried out through five group counseling meetings in accordance with the experimental guidelines that had been prepared by the researcher. The instrument used is a phubbing behavior scale adapted from The Phubbing Scale developed by Karadag and refined by Zulviana (2023). Based on Karadag's theory, phubbing behavior includes two main aspects, namely communication disturbance and phone obsession. The results of the validity test showed that the instrument was declared valid with a calculated r-value of > 0.361 and a significance level of < 0.05 , although there were 3 items that did not meet the valid criteria out of a total of 22 statements. The reliability test is declared reliable if the Cronbach alpha score > 0.6 (Sugiyono, 2019). Based on the score, it shows a value of 0.925, so the remaining items can be said to be reliable. Data analysis was carried out descriptively and using the Wilcoxon signed rank test.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The results of this study describe changes in students' phubbing behavior before and after receiving group counseling based on the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy approach. The intervention was implemented with Grade tenth students actively engage in online gaming. To determine the effectiveness of the intervention, students' phubbing behavior scores obtained from the pretest and posttest were compared using a phubbing behavior scale.

Before the treatment is carried out, students are directed to fill out a pretest to get an initial score of the level of phubbing behavior. Then, students participated in rational emotive behavior approach group counseling for 5 meetings with the aim of reducing phubbing behavior. After all treatments are completed, students fill out a posttest using the same scale to find out any changes in phubbing behavior after the treatment.

The results of the pretest and posttest were reviewed to see the comparison of scores before and after treatment. These differences in scores are the basis for evaluating the success of the treatment provided. Table 1 present the pretest-posttest scores of the phubbing behavior of the subjects of this study.

Table 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results

No	Research Subject	Pretest	Category	Posttest	Category	Drop Points
1	DA	51	Medium	33	Low	18
2	GR	49	Medium	34	Low	15
3	SM	52	Medium	35	Low	17
4	SDR	48	Medium	33	Low	15
5	BRA	50	Medium	34	Low	16
6	RML	47	Medium	35	Low	12
Average		49.5		34		

The results of the students' pretest scores showed that 6 students obtained moderate results with a percentage of 100%. The category indicates that phubbing behavior has appeared in students, although it is not yet at a high level. This condition shows a tendency for students to focus more on mobile phone use than direct social interaction, especially when they are with other people. These behaviors still need attention because they can affect the quality of interpersonal communication and social relationships of students in daily life.

In addition, students who actively engage in online gaming have a fairly high intensity of mobile phone use so that it has the potential to increase phubbing behavior if not controlled properly. Therefore, treatment is given as a step to help students develop self-control, improve the quality of interpersonal communication, and build more effective social interactions. Thus, even though the measurement results are in the medium category, it is still important to provide treatment to prevent the increase in phubbing behavior and help students build more positive social behavior.

After being given rational emotive behavior group counseling treatment for 5 meetings, the posttest results showed that 6 students were at a low level with a percentage of 100%. Based on the average pretest-posttest score, there was a decrease, namely 49.5 to 34.

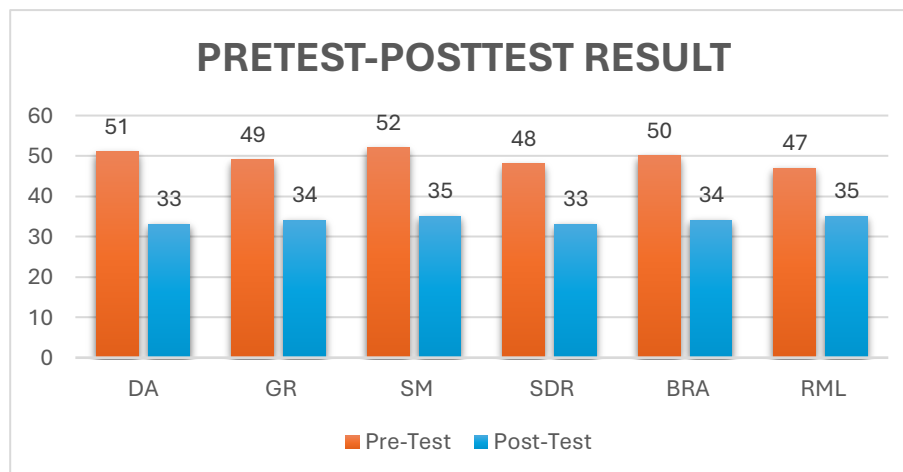


Figure 1. Pretest-Posttest Result

The results of the posttest of these 6 students showed that after being given treatment, there was a significant decrease in phubbing behavior. Posttest results show all students were at a low level of phubbing behavior. The success of this rational emotive behavior group counseling activity is influenced by the attitude, involvement, and motivation of students during the service process. The analysis of the difference in pretest and posttest scores using the Wilcoxon test with the IBM SPSS 21 application present in Table 2.

Table 2. Wilcoxon Test Results

Ranks		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
REB - Phubbing	Negative Ranks	6 ^a	3.50	21.00
	Positive Ranks	0 ^b	.00	.00
	Ties	0 ^c		
	Total	6		
a. Posttest < Pretest				
b. Posttest > Pretest				
c. Posttest = Pretest				

If there is a value in positive ranks, it indicates an increase and if there is a value in negative ranks, it indicates a decrease. From Table 2, it can be seen that there was a decrease in the phubbing behavior score of 6 students. This is evidenced by the results of the sum of ranks of 21.00 and the mean rank of 3.50 on negative ranks. These results show that the students' phubbing behavior scores have decreased significantly.

After describing the difference between the pretest and posttest scores, statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether the observed decrease in phubbing behavior was significant. Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, a Z value of -2.207 was obtained (see Table 3). A negative Z value indicates a decrease in phubbing behavior scores from pretest to posttest. The significance value obtained, namely Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) 0.027. The hypothesis is acceptable if the results of the Wilcoxon test get Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) < 0.05 and the hypothesis will be rejected if the results of the Wilcoxon test obtain Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) > 0.05. A value of 0.027 indicates < 0.05 which means the hypothesis is acceptable. Based on the results of the Wilcoxon test, it can be said that rational emotive behavior group counseling has been proven to be effective in reducing the phubbing behavior of students who play online games.

Table 3. Phubbing Behavior Statistics Test Results

Test Statistics ^a	REB - Phubbing
Z	-2.207 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.027
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on positive ranks.	

3.2. Discussion

The subject of this research is high school students who are in the search for their identity where with the support of increasingly sophisticated technology, they have the convenience of exploring their interests and dreams so that they do not stutter with technology and are able to keep up with the development of the digital era. However, the rapid development of technology also has an impact on adolescents' mindsets and behaviors, both positive and negative (Fadilah et al., 2022), One of them is the emergence of phubbing behavior, which is the tendency to ignore relationships between individuals because of their focus on their phones. Individuals who phubbing tend to experience attention and emotional distortions and potentially hurt others because they seem to be paying attention but are actually distracted by their devices (Youarti & Hidayah, 2018). In this context, the use of online games also strengthens phubbing behavior because it's addictive, interactive, and competitive nature makes adolescents more attached to games so that they prioritize play activities over direct interactions, which in turn increases the tendency to constantly check or play games while communicating with others.

In an effort to prevent phubbing behavior in students, intervention services are needed that focus on converting irrational thoughts into rational, emotional, and healthy behaviors (Vanden Abeele, 2020). This skill is very important to reduce phubbing behavior, especially high school students. The approach used by researchers in providing interventions for phubbing behavior is group counseling with a rational emotive behavior (REB) approach. This approach focuses on the process of challenging and replacing students' irrational thoughts with rational ones. In addition, REB also helps develop healthier emotions and improve students' social interaction skills. In a group setting, students are given the opportunity to practice new behaviors, perform role reversals, develop social skills, and interact directly with other group members (Corey, 2015).

This study was conducted on 6 grade tenth students during six meetings, namely one pretest meeting, one group formation and relationship development meeting, three treatment meetings, and one posttest meeting. At the pretest meeting, students were directed to fill in the phubbing behavior scale as an initial measurement to choose the group to be given rational emotive behavior group counseling treatment. After the pretest meeting, the researcher selected the subjects using purposive sampling by determining 6 students who were included in the subject criteria in this study. At the first meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of counseling and the series of group counseling processes that would be carried out during three meetings, as well as an explanation of how the ABC mindset works in rational emotive behavior group counseling. At this meeting, the researcher explained about the treatment that would be carried out three counseling sessions in a duration of 60 minutes.

The first treatment was carried out at the second meeting with the aim of being able to oppose irrational thoughts about the problem of phubbing behavior due to playing online games. In this session, the researcher applied a dispute technique that made group members together break down irrational thoughts that appeared into rational thoughts by debating these irrational thoughts. This session shows how students judge, blame, and blame themselves for their behavior. In addition, in the counseling process, students strive to help each other to stop devaluing others and evaluate their behavior (Corey, 2015). At this meeting, there were three students who were hesitant to tell their stories during the counseling session. However, because the other three students had started to be active in the counseling session, the three people who were previously passive began to feel comfortable and actively participate in the counseling process. After the counseling process ended, the researcher invited group members to reflect on the activities and give homework containing the format of dispute irrational belief, as well as filling in the evaluation of the results of the researcher.

In the third meeting, the researcher continued the second treatment with the emotive technique, namely the role reversal technique with the aim that students are able to apply good emotional management through the role reversal technique. In this technique, students take on the role of others so that students can increase their awareness of the situation they are experiencing (Bradley, 2018). In this session, group members imagined themselves to be someone who had a rational mind, while the researcher was someone who had an irrational mind. Researchers and group members gave each other responses and compared different perspectives from the rational minds that the group members role-played. In the counseling process, the six students were active in responding and providing their perspective with rational thoughts to researchers who had irrational thoughts. At the end of the counseling session, the researcher and group members together reflect on the activity, and the researcher gives homework, namely a homework sheet and fills out the evaluation of the results.

At the fourth meeting, the researcher continued the third treatment with a behavioral technique, namely reinforcement. This meeting aims to identify and change the value systems and irrational beliefs that group members have to be more positive and rational. Through the provision of rewards and punishments, group members are expected to internalize the expected values so as to encourage the formation of more adaptive behaviors (Suriarti et al., 2020). In this session, group members first expressed their understanding of the concepts of self-reward and positive reinforcement. In this process, four children were very active in expressing their understanding and the other two children strengthened the understanding of members who had expressed their opinions. Then, the researcher explained the concepts of self-reward and positive reinforcement in group members. At the end of the counseling process, the researcher gave homework, namely a self-management sheet and joint reflection followed by the provision of a result evaluation sheet.

At the last meeting, the researcher invited all members of the group to reflect and evaluate the things that had been obtained in the entire series of counseling processes that had been carried out. The researchers invited group members to review the changes in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors experienced during five counseling meetings. The researcher also directed the group members to practice the A-B-C-D-E concept independently (Amirah & Karneli, 2025). Researchers and counselors exchange positive experiences and support each other for the changes that have been achieved. At the end of the process, the researcher rewarded the group members who had undergone changes and continued to end the entire series of counseling processes for five meetings.

Through this study, it was found that there was a significant decrease in the level of phubbing behavior of students after participating in group counseling services with a rational emotive behavior approach. This change can be seen from the attitude of group members who are active during the counseling process. Group members actively express their opinions, listen when others speak, and encourage each other (Safitri & Istati, 2022). In addition, counseling motivates each other to reduce phubbing behavior, whether it is inside or outside the counseling session. Group members also remind each other when outside of counseling sessions to reduce phubbing behavior and increase their social and social activity, and not to be easily lulled by online games when they are studying or doing things that require focus (Yani & Hasibuan, 2025). In research by Zulviana (2023) It also showed that rational emotive behavior group counseling can reduce phubbing behavior.

These changes are inseparable from the treatment plan systematically compiled by the researcher. In the first meeting, students were given an understanding of the working concept of the ABC mindset in group

counseling with a rational emotive behavior approach. Furthermore, in the second, third, and fourth meetings, students are involved in the group counseling process by applying three main techniques in the approach, namely the technique of cognition (dispute), the technique of emotion (role reversal), and the technique of behavior (reinforcement). These three techniques are an important part of the rational emotive behavior counseling approach that complements each other in helping behavior change (Suriarti et al., 2020).

The success rate of this research is influenced by the active involvement of students during the research activity process. Students are willing to actively participate in the entire counseling series from start to finish (Damayanti et al., 2024). The positive changes that occurred were also strengthened by the group interaction that occurred throughout the counseling session. A positive group atmosphere facilitates the exchange of input and emotional support between members which plays an important role in driving behavioral transformation (Hasibuan, 2023).

3.3. Implications

The results of this study contribute to the development of guidance and counseling services in schools, especially in dealing with phubbing behavior that arises due to online gaming habits. The rational emotive behavior approach has been proven to be effective in reducing phubbing behavior in high school students who actively play online games through the application of techniques such as dispute, role reversal and reinforcement. The findings are also in line with research Zulviana (2023), which shows that rational emotive behavior group counseling is effective in reducing phubbing behavior in high school students. Therefore, School counselors are expected to use this approach as an alternative strategy to help suppress phubbing behavior in students who actively engage in online gaming.

3.4. Limitations

This research has a number of limitations in its implementation. The process of providing group counseling services with a rational emotive behavior approach to reduce phubbing behavior in high school students who actively play online games is only applied to one small group at school. In addition, this study did not involve a control group or a comparison group, so it cannot be sure that the changes that occurred were completely not caused by other factors. Therefore, researchers are then advised to use a wider sample and involve control groups or comparators so that the research results obtained are more optimal.

4. Conclusion

Group counseling with a rational emotive behavior approach is effective in reducing phubbing behavior in high school students who actively engage in online gaming. The decrease in scores between pretest and posttest and strengthened by the results of the Wilcoxon test which showed significant differences before and after treatment. The researcher provided several suggestions for the development of further research, namely: (1) School counselors are advised to use group counseling services with a rational emotive behavior approach as one of the strategies to reduce phubbing behavior in students who are online game activists; (2) Researchers are further advised to use experimental designs involving control groups so that the effectiveness of counseling or intervention services can be tested more robustly and allow for more objective comparison of results.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors 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

AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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