The Socratic Dialogue Technique in Improving Self-Love as an Effort to Address Toxic Friendships in Students

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Abstract
Toxic friendships need to be addressed to prevent them from harming students. Therefore, students need to develop self-love to survive toxic friendships. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Socratic dialogue technique in improving self-love as an effort to address toxic friendships in eighth-grade junior high school students. This study used a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental method, a one-group pretest-posttest design. Data processing was performed using Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) 27.0 for Windows. The sample consisted of six eighth-grade students in junior high schools in Yogyakarta, selected using purposive sampling, who were provided during group counseling services. Group counseling services utilized group dynamics to improve junior high school students' self-love so that they have awareness of toxic friendships. Data collection in this study used a psychological scale and analyzed by paired sample t-test. The results of the paired sample t-test, with a significance value of 0.001 (<0.05), indicated a significant difference between the pretest and posttest. The average scores before and after treatment showed an increase from 38 in the pretest to 79 in the posttest. This improvement demonstrates that group counseling using the Socratic dialogue technique has a significant impact, with students becoming more able to understand and appreciate themselves, as well as being more discerning in their relationships. The results of this study indicate that group counseling using the Socratic dialogue technique is effective in improving students' self-love.

1. Introduction

Adolescents at the junior high school level are going through a crucial growth phase in their lives. During this period, adolescents experience various emotional and psychosocial changes, build social relationships, and develop their own identities. One factor influencing adolescent development is friendship. Friendship is a close relationship between one person and another that has a significant influence on their behavior and lifestyle. The friendship environment plays a crucial role in adolescent development because they often spend more time with their peers than with their families. However, not all friendships are good. A friendship can have both positive and negative impacts (Pramuditya, 2025). Positive interactions with peers can provide crucial social support, valuable social learning experiences, and help adolescents develop their social identities. Adolescent friendships should be a supportive, constructive, and positive environment.

While negative friendships can be called toxic relationships. This toxic relationship often occurs among junior high school students. According to The Mental Health Association (2024), globally, 84% of women and 75% of men report being trapped in a toxic friendship at least once. According to Rizaty (2023), based on the 2023 Jakpat survey in Indonesia, 44.3% of respondents reported experiencing toxic friendships, and 14% reported experiencing them with close friends. According to the Woman Boss Organization (2022), around 90-94% of girls worldwide are victims of bullying because of their body shape. A study showed that 62.2% of Indonesian women experience body shaming, particularly regarding their large size, acne, and other appearance issues (Awaliyah et al., 2025).

Therefore, this prevalence indicates that toxic friendships are a significant social issue. The interpersonal communication that occurred during their toxic relationship was not going well. Their relationship, which initially featured openness, empathy, support, agreed-upon positive attitudes, and a sense of equality, proved insufficient to maintain a healthy relationship (Ardiany & Putri, 2024). However, it's important to remember that toxic or unhealthy friendships can have serious impacts on adolescents' mental health, such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Kusnata et al., 2025). Toxic relationships make students have low hopes and self-esteem, making them unhappy. The phenomenon of toxic friendships among high school adolescents is crucial to understand because it can impact adolescents' long-term mental, emotional, and social health (Amalia, 2024).

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Toxic friendships occur when friends hurt others through teasing or shaming them about their appearance. These relationships are detrimental to mental and social health, leaving individuals feeling unappreciated, even though friendships should provide positive support and enhance well-being without negative impacts (Dalimunthe et al., 2024). Toxic friendships trigger body shaming in the form of criticism of appearance and certain beauty standards, lowering an individual's self-esteem, and reinforcing social judgment, both directly and implicitly (Pratiwi & Sarwili, 2025). Toxic friendships can have negative impacts, namely: 1) having low self-confidence, this is a problem where individuals feel unworthy of being friends or best friends. Can feel they have too many shortcomings, which makes their friends distance themselves from them, 2) can cause depressive behavior, which means it is characterized by a bad mood, lack of interest in everything, and lack of energy, and depression is an emotional condition that is usually characterized by extreme sadness, feelings of meaninglessness and guilt, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, decreased interest, and decreased satisfaction from usual activities, 3) jealousy, which may be considered a negative thing to make individuals feel bad, individuals must be jealous because of success or bad examples, 4) having a sense of revenge, revenge is an action that occurs from competition, jealousy, envy, or anger that goes beyond limits, 5) betrayal occurs, this is when jealousy, hostility, and anger have become too overwhelming, causing feelings of disappointment in one's own friends and assuming all of this is because of one's own fault. Betrayal also occurs because of the inability to appreciate friends and disappointment because they are not comparable, and 6) anxiety disorders (Sejati et al., 2023).

One way to overcome this toxic relationship that often occurs among junior high school students is to cultivate self-love within the students. An effective way to overcome a toxic relationship is by strengthening self-love (Praptiningsih et al., 2024). Self-love is loving or caring more about oneself. By having self-love, individuals can improve their quality of life, relationships with others, and their ability to lead their organizations (Bhuyan et al., 2022). Self-love shows a sense of self-acceptance and self-respect, so that individuals will feel more well-being (Abramson& Leite, 2020). Self-love plays an important role in improving self-confidence, reducing stress, and improving the overall quality of life (Husna et la., 2023). Individuals who lack self-love engage in negative behaviors, such as excessive use of gadgets, low self-confidence, smoking, alcohol consumption, and premarital sex among teenagers, even early marriage (Rani et al., 2022).

There are several ways to implement self-love in general, including: encourage self-confidence, get to know yourself better, avoid comparing yourself to others, avoid overthinking others, always remember that no one is perfect, make decisions with more confidence, maintain a more positive lifestyle, and build a healthy circle of friends (Apriolita & Jupri, 2024). These methods can be achieved through complete and targeted intervention activities. Furthermore, previous research has been conducted to increase self-love in adolescent girls and reduce their insecurities by providing them with games like "women's circle forums," sharing sessions, and watching motivational video (Putri et al., 2023).

To improve self-love in dealing with toxic relationships, interventions can be attempted that emphasize changing thoughts to love oneself so that one will not want to be in a friendship situation that leads to a toxic relationship.In this study, researchers provided group counseling services using the Socratic dialogue technique. Socratic dialogue can be applied in guidance and counseling services (Hartanti et al., 2022). According to Habsy et al. (2024), group counseling is an approach to guidance and counseling services that aims to help individuals overcome personal, social, emotional, and academic problems through structured interactions in small groups. In group counseling, the dynamics between members are used to create a supportive and open atmosphere so that individuals can learn from each other, share experiences, and receive constructive feedback (Putri, 2019; Barida et al., 2025). I'tiqafah et al., (2025) explain that the main goal of group counseling is to increase self-awareness, social skills, empathy, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities.

The use of the Socratic dialogue technique has the potential to improve the ability to express opinions critically to other individuals. The application of the Socratic dialogue technique in guidance and counseling services aims to determine the relationship and effectiveness of the integration of the Socratic dialogue technique with guidance and counseling services. The Socratic dialogue technique has been proven effective in increasing the meaning of life. This meaning in life can lead individuals to love themselves, as they feel a sense of purpose in their lives (Barida et al., 2025). This research is expected to provide useful references for developing the Socratic dialogue technique in guidance and counseling services in improving self-love. This research was conducted at junior high schools in Yogyakarta with the aim of determining the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Socratic dialogue technique in improving students' self-love

2. Method

This research uses a pre-experimental quantitative approach method conducted using a One Group Pretest-Posttest design by comparing the self-love of group members before and after group counseling using the Socratic dialogue technique. Participants in this study were students who experienced self-love problems and toxic friendships after an in-depth assessment. The research population included all 80 eighth grade students of Junior High School in Yogyakarta, while the research subjects were selected using purposive sampling techniques by considering students who had low levels of self-love based on the initial pretest results

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and were willing to participate in group counseling activities, so that 6 students were selected as research subjects.

Research instruments are tools used by researchers to collect and measure data according to the research variables. Instruments are structured based on theories and indicators related to the variables being studied. According to Sugiyono, research instruments are used to measure social and natural phenomena observed by researchers. In this study, the instrument used was a self-love scale to measure an individual's level of self-love in dealing with toxic friendships. The instrument was structured based on aspects of self-love, such as self-acceptance, self-respect, and the ability to maintain boundaries in friendships. The study used a Likert-style psychological scale of 1–4, namely Very Unsuitable, Unsuitable, Suitable, and Very Suitable. The higher the score obtained, the higher the individual's level of self-love in dealing with toxic friendships. The measurement tools used are psychological scales, namely the self-love scale, which has been tested for validity and reliability. Data analysis in this study was conducted T-Test using the IBM SPSS Statistics program. SPSS aims to simplify data processing, resulting in more accurate and systematic analysis results. Before testing the hypothesis, the researcher first conducted prerequisite analysis tests, including normality and homogeneity tests.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

To determine the data analysis technique, prerequisite tests were carried out, namely the normality test shown in Table 1 and the homogeneity test shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PRETEST	0.193	6	.200*	0.963	6	0.844
POSTTEST	0.293	6	0.117	0.822	6	0.091

Table 2. Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PRETEST	Based on Mean	3.706	1	10	0.083

The normality test is conducted to determine whether the research data is normally distributed. Normally distributed data is a prerequisite for using parametric statistical tests. In this study, the normality test can be performed using the Shapiro-Wilk or Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests in SPSS. Decision-making is based on the significance value (Sig.). If the significance value is greater than 0.05, the data are considered normally distributed, while if the significance value is less than 0.05, the data are considered non-normally distributed. The following is the output of the normality test results, pay attention to the "test of normality" table in the "Shapiro Wilk" section. In the output, the sig. value can be seen in the "Shapiro Wilk" section, both (pretest and posttest) show results of >0.05 (0.844 for the pretest and 0.091 for the posttest) so that the data is normally distributed so that it can be analyzed using a paired sample t-test to determine the Socratic dialogue technique to increase self-love as an effort to deal with toxic friendships in students.

The homogeneity test is conducted to determine whether the research data have equal variance or are homogeneous. This test is used as a prerequisite before testing the hypothesis. In SPSS, the homogeneity test typically uses the Levene Test. Decision-making is based on the significance value. If the significance value is greater than 0.05, the data is considered homogeneous; if the significance value is less than 0.05, the data is considered heterogeneous. Based on the data output, the sig. value based on the mean is 0.083 (>0.05), thus it can be concluded that the variance of the pretest and posttest data is homogeneous. Thus, the research data has met the requirements for analysis using the paired sample t-test.

The results of statistical assumption tests further strengthen the validity of this study's findings. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test indicated that the pretest and posttest data were normally distributed, while the homogeneity test indicated that the data variance was homogeneous. With both assumptions met, the use of the Paired Sample t-test was deemed appropriate and capable of producing accurate results.

After the prerequisite tests were met, the researcher conducted a hypothesis test using a Paired Sample t-Test. This test was used to determine whether there was a difference between the scores before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the treatment or service provided to increase self-love in individuals experiencing toxic friendships. The basis for decision-making was based on the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed). If the significance value is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results, thus concluding

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that the treatment had an effect on increasing self-love. Conversely, if the significance value is greater than 0.05, there is no significant difference between the two data sets.

The research results can be described in Table 3. Based on the paired sample t test table, the sig. value is 0.001 (<0.05), so Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted, meaning there is a difference in pretest and posttest scores so it can be known that Socratic dialogue technique counseling is effective to improve self-love as an effort to deal with toxic friendship in students.

Table 3. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PRETEST - POSTTEST	-41,167	2,041	0,833	-43,309	-39,025	-49,400	5	0,001

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that group guidance services using the Socratic dialogue technique are effective in improving students' self-love. The self-love improvement indicates a significant change in the students, particularly in terms of understanding, acceptance, and self-esteem. Changing a habit of self-love that wasn't initially present requires a challenging process. Throughout the process, this habit of self-love goes through an initial balance, a disruption to that balance, and a new balance. This new balance is the goal of getting used to self-love (Kusnadi & Chaerowati, 2025).

The results of this study also confirm that group counseling plays an effective role in developing students' personal aspects through the dynamics of group interactions. In a group setting, students can share experiences, receive feedback from peers, and learn from others' perspectives. This helps students develop a more comprehensive understanding of themselves and strengthens their sense of self-acceptance and self-esteem. Socratic therapeutic dialogue enables individuals to recognize themselves through a dialectic that Socratically defines what they desire. Therefore, dialogue enables one to discover their own good through this activity. Students are guided to desire happiness by loving themselves (Delorme, 2019). Socratic dialogue has also proven effective in improving students' problem-solving abilities (Salsabila et al., 2023). Socratic dialogue leads individuals to strengthen their commitment to upholding the values of virtue. Engaging in rational discourse can best serve as a means of preserving the well-being of already virtuous souls, rather than as a means of transforming virtuous individuals by rationally motivating them to achieve devotion for its own sake (Thaning & Gersel, 2020).

Through the group counseling service process, which emphasizes reflective dialogue with in-depth questions, students are encouraged to think more critically about their personal experiences, express their feelings openly, and re-evaluate their perspectives on themselves. The relationship between self-love and the Socratic dialogue technique is evident in the process that occurs during counseling. This technique encourages students to answer in-depth questions about their experiences, feelings, and perspectives on themselves. Through this process of reflection, students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and learn to accept themselves without over-judgment. Students' mental health will improve if self-love also increases (Agustriyani et al., 2025). This is because when students have self-love, their psychological well-being and social well-being also increases (Zahro et al., 2025). Self-love allows individuals to be themselves without having to depend on other people's opinions (Arsini, et al., 2023; Khumairoh et al., 2024). Self-love in a toxic relationship can make individuals think logically when faced with excessive control, poor communication, emotional abuse, and inequality in the relationship (Chi & Dariyo, 2025).

3.3. Implications

These findings have important implications for the implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools, particularly group counseling services, as self-love is a fundamental skill students need to develop self-acceptance, self-respect, and a positive attitude toward themselves in both social and academic life. Besides that, the Socratic dialogue technique not only helps students understand themselves more deeply but also fosters a sense of self-acceptance, appreciation, and self-care. This process ultimately strengthens students' self-love gradually and sustainably.

3.4. Limitations

This research was limited to students at one junior high school in Yogyakarta with low self-love and experiencing toxic relationships. The research could be implemented across all schools in a systematic, randomized trial to test the efficacy of Socratic dialogue more broadly.

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4. Conclusion

Based on the results of research on the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Socratic dialogue technique in increasing self-love in adolescents, it can be concluded that this service has proven effective when implemented on students at Junior Middle School in Yogyakarta. This is demonstrated by the increase in self-love scores in all students after the treatment, and is supported by the results of the Paired Sample t-test. Through an in-depth and reflective dialogue process, students are guided to answer various questions that help them explore personal experiences, understand emerging emotions, and reevaluate their perspectives on themselves. This process encourages students to be more accepting of themselves, aware of their potential, and less preoccupied with limitations, thus enabling optimal self-love development. Based on the results and limitations of this study, future researchers are advised to extend the duration of each group counseling session to ensure a more visible and profound impact of the intervention on students' self-love. A longer duration allows students sufficient space for self-reflection through the Socratic dialogue process. Furthermore, future research is expected to focus not only on personal aspects but also link self-love with social and academic aspects, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of student development. The Socratic dialogue technique is also recommended for continued use, as it is effective in helping students explore their thoughts, understand their emotions, and develop a more positive self-perception.

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

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