



The Effectiveness of Group Guidance Using the Discussion Technique in Improving Interpersonal Communication of Tenth-Grade Students at MA Jeumala Amal Pidie Jaya

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Discussion techniques; Group counselling; Interpersonal communication; Senior High School students;	This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of group counseling using discussion techniques in improving the interpersonal communication of tenth-grade students at MA Jeumala Amal Pidie Jaya. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group design was employed. The sample consisted of 16 students with low interpersonal communication scores, selected through purposive sampling and divided into an experimental group (n = 8) and a control group (n = 8). Data were collected using a 48-item interpersonal communication questionnaire based on five indicators: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality using a Guttman scale (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.908). Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and the Mann Whitney U Test. The results showed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's interpersonal communication scores following the intervention ($Z = -2.524$, $p = 0.012$, $r = 0.89$), while the control group showed no significant change ($Z = -1.472$, $p = 0.141$, $r = 0.52$). The between-group comparison confirmed that the improvement in the experimental group was significantly greater than in the control group ($Z = -3.371$, $p = 0.001$, $r = 0.84$). Gains were observed across all five indicators, with the largest improvement in equality (+66.67 percentage points) and the smallest in supportiveness (+48.61 percentage points). These findings indicate that group counseling using discussion techniques is an effective strategy for improving students' interpersonal communication. The approach can therefore be adopted by school counselors as part of guidance and counseling services.
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INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is one of the most important social skills in students' lives. This skill enables individuals to effectively convey their thoughts, feelings, and information, thereby helping them build positive relationships with others. Interpersonal communication is defined as an interactive process that occurs between individuals through the collaborative and interdependent exchange and creation of messages, using a combination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Manusov, 2020). Strong interpersonal communication skills contribute to students' success in adapting to their social environment, building friendships, resolving conflicts, and enhancing academic achievement and personal development (Yu et al., 2023; DeVito, 2023; Rubin et al., 1993; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Maksum et al., 2021). Furthermore, interpersonal communication is also one of the key competencies that support an individual's future success in social and professional life (Morreale et al., 2017; Rahmi, 2022).

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by a growing need to form social relationships with peers and the surrounding community. At this stage, students are expected to possess adequate communication skills to adapt to the various social and emotional changes they

experience. Adolescents with strong social and emotional skills are better able to resolve conflicts, express emotions constructively, and elicit positive social responses, thereby enhancing the quality of their interpersonal relationships (Lv et al., 2025). However, various studies indicate that many adolescents still struggle to communicate effectively; for example, they lack confidence in expressing their opinions, have difficulty articulating their feelings, demonstrate poor listening skills, and have limited ability to build positive interpersonal relationships (Santrock, 2019). These challenges can hinder students' social development and affect the quality of their interactions within the school environment.

Interpersonal communication issues are also found among high school students, including in the context of this study. Preliminary observations indicate that some students still exhibit passive behavior during the learning process, lack the confidence to express their opinions, are reluctant to ask questions when they encounter difficulties, and tend to face obstacles in interacting with their peers. These conditions highlight the need for systematic efforts to help students develop their interpersonal communication skills. Various studies indicate that interpersonal communication skills play a crucial role in supporting social adjustment, active participation in learning, and the quality of peer relationships; therefore, these skills need to be developed through planned interventions (Rahman et al., 2024). Research findings indicate that guidance and counseling services play a vital role in facilitating students' personal and social development, including the development of interpersonal communication skills (Prayitno & Amti, 2004; Tohirin, 2015; Nasution et al., 2023).

One of the services that can be used to develop students' interpersonal communication skills is group counseling. Group counseling provides participants with the opportunity to exchange experiences, express opinions, offer feedback, and learn from the group dynamics that emerge during the activity (Hartinah, 2017; Rusmana, 2009). Through group interaction, students can gain social experiences that support the development of communication skills and other interpersonal skills. Therefore, group counseling is viewed as an effective strategy for helping students address various social and personal development issues (Dwi Mulyani et al., 2025; Hasyim et al., 2025; Suryani & Kurniawan, 2023). The effectiveness of group counseling is greatly influenced by the techniques used during the counseling process. One technique frequently used is the discussion technique. The discussion technique encourages group members to actively participate in expressing ideas, providing feedback, exchanging information, and solving problems collaboratively. This process directly trains students' abilities to communicate and interact with others. Previous studies have shown that discussion techniques in group counseling are effective in enhancing various aspects of student development, such as interpersonal communication skills, self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and motivation to learn (Adison, J. & Suryadi, 2021; Anfa'u & Moesarofah, 2020; Kurniawati & Wangid, 2022).

Nevertheless, research on the effectiveness of discussion techniques in improving students' interpersonal communication still needs to be expanded across various educational contexts. The characteristics of the school environment, the culture of student interaction, and diverse group dynamics can lead to different results in each research setting. Several previous studies have examined interpersonal communication among students using various group guidance techniques. Zuhara (2015) and Pertiwi. Y. A (2018) employed the sociodrama technique to improve students' interpersonal communication, while Hermanita et al., (2020) and Nadila et al., (2022) applied the focus group discussion (FGD) technique, and Eka Hikmah Aprilia (2023) used a simulation game technique for the same purpose. Other studies have examined interpersonal communication in different contexts, such as the relationship between communication skills and organizational effectiveness in the workplace (Okoro et al., 2017) and the influence of teachers' communication styles on student motivation (Roszkowska & Trepka-Starosta, 2020). Meanwhile, studies that specifically employed the discussion technique, such as those conducted by Munawaroh & Wangid (2022), were carried out among junior high school students (MTsN), whose developmental characteristics and social interaction patterns differ from those of senior high school students. This indicates that although numerous studies have addressed interpersonal communication, research specifically examining the discussion technique within group counselling among Islamic senior high school (madrasah) students, particularly in the context of MA Jeumala Amal Pidie Jaya, remains

limited. Furthermore, most of these previous studies did not employ a quasi-experimental design involving both experimental and control groups, thereby limiting the strength of their conclusions regarding the causal effectiveness of the intervention. This gap indicates the need for further empirical investigation using a more rigorous research design in a different educational setting to verify and extend the findings of previous studies. In this study, interpersonal communication is operationally defined based on the framework proposed by DeVito (2023), which identifies five components of effective interpersonal communication: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. This framework was selected because it provides clearly observable indicators that can be systematically measured before and after an intervention, making it well-suited to the quasi-experimental design employed in this study.

Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of group counseling using discussion techniques in improving the interpersonal communication of 10th-grade students at MA Jeumala Amal Pidie Jaya. The research findings are expected to provide an empirical contribution to the development of guidance and counseling services, particularly regarding the use of discussion techniques as a strategy to improve students' interpersonal communication.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design of the nonequivalent control group type. This design involved an experimental group and a control group that were both administered pretest and posttest measurements. The study was conducted at MA Jeumala Amal Pidie Jaya, involving 16 tenth-grade students with low levels of interpersonal communication, selected through a purposive sampling technique based on the following criteria: students were in the tenth grade, identified by the school counselor as showing passive communication behavior, obtained a low interpersonal communication score on the pretest administered to the entire tenth-grade population, and voluntarily agreed to participate as respondents. The research sample was divided into two groups: an experimental group consisting of eight students and a control group consisting of eight students.

Table 1. Implementation of Group Counseling Sessions

Sessions	Topic	Objective
1	Group Formation/Orientation	Building rapport and explaining the objectives and rules of the group counseling activity
2	Openness	Developing students' ability to recognize themselves and others and express opinions openly
3	Empathy	Developing empathy and understanding of others' feelings and perspectives
4	Supportiveness	Encouraging students to respect differing opinions and provide constructive support
5	Positiveness	Fostering positive thinking and cooperative interpersonal relationships
6	Equality	Developing awareness of equal value among individuals in interpersonal interactions

Data were collected using an interpersonal communication questionnaire adapted from an instrument developed by Zuhara (2015), consisting of 48 items that measure five aspects of interpersonal communication: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The instrument used a Guttman scale with two response options ("Yes" and "No"), producing dichotomous scores of 1 and 0. Content validity was established through expert judgment by two counseling experts, and item validity testing using the point-biserial correlation formula confirmed that all 48 items were valid. The instrument's reliability, measured with Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.908, indicating a very high level of internal consistency.

The experimental group received an intervention in the form of group counseling using discussion techniques over a two-week period. The activities were carried out in six sessions, each lasting 45–60 minutes. Each session focused on developing specific aspects of interpersonal communication tailored to the interpersonal communication indicators. Meanwhile, the control group received no structured intervention from the researcher throughout the study period. Unlike the experimental group, they did not participate in any group counseling sessions. However, both groups remained subject to the school's standard academic and counseling activities, ensuring that any observed differences in posttest scores could be attributed specifically to the discussion-based group counseling intervention received by the experimental group. After all sessions were completed, both groups took a posttest using the same instrument to measure changes in the students' interpersonal communication levels. This study received permission from the school prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Respondents' identities were kept confidential and coded during data analysis and reporting.

RESULTS

Changes in Students' Interpersonal Communication Scores

A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine changes in students' interpersonal communication scores before and after group counseling sessions using discussion techniques. The results showed that the experimental group experienced a substantially greater increase in interpersonal communication scores compared to the control group.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Interpersonal Communication Scores

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Difference
Experimental	8	14.13	40.38	26.25
Control	8	14.00	16.00	2.00

Changes Across Interpersonal Communication Indicators

To provide a more detailed picture of the intervention's effect, changes were also examined separately for each of the five interpersonal communication indicators: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality.

Table 3. Mean Scores by Interpersonal Communication Indicator

Indicator	Max Score	Pre-Exp. (%)	Post-Exp. (%)	Gain-Exp. (pp)	Pre-Ctrl (%)	Post-Ctrl (%)	Gain-Ctrl (pp)
Openness	9	30.56	83.33	+52.78	37.50	40.28	+2.78
Empathy	9	38.89	86.11	+47.22	34.72	36.11	+1.39
Supportiveness	9	29.17	77.78	+48.61	27.78	33.33	+5.56
Positiveness	9	30.56	83.33	+52.78	26.39	30.56	+4.17
Equality	12	20.83	87.50	+66.67	22.92	28.12	+5.21

Note: pp = percentage points. Values represent group means as a percentage of the maximum possible score for each indicator.

As shown in Table 3, the experimental group demonstrated substantial gains across all five indicators (47–67 percentage points), whereas the control group showed only marginal changes (1–6 percentage points) across the same indicators. The largest improvement in the experimental group was observed in equality (+66.67 pp), followed by openness and positiveness (+52.78 pp each), while the smallest though still substantial improvement was found in supportiveness (+48.61 pp). These findings indicate that the discussion technique contributed to improvement not only in students' overall interpersonal communication score, but consistently across each of its underlying components.

Results of the Wilcoxon Test

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was conducted to determine within-group differences in interpersonal communication scores before and after the intervention. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality was assessed using both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Given the small sample size ($n = 8$ per group), the Shapiro-Wilk test was prioritized as it is more appropriate and sensitive for small samples (Razali, N. M., & Wah, 2011). The Shapiro-Wilk results indicated that the data were not normally distributed across all groups: pretest experimental ($W = 0.930$, $p = 0.016$), posttest experimental ($W = 0.908$, $p = 0.038$), pretest control ($W = 0.919$, $p = 0.024$), and posttest control ($W = 0.938$, $p = 0.039$), with all p -values falling below the 0.05 threshold. These results justify the use of nonparametric statistical tests, namely the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for within-group comparisons and the Mann-Whitney U test for between-group comparisons.

Table 4. Results of the Wilcoxon Test

Group	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect Size (r)	Description
Experimental	-2.524	0.012	0.89 (large)	Significant
Control	-1.472	0.141	0.52 (medium-large)	Not Significant

Note: Effect size r was calculated using the formula $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$. Criteria for effect size interpretation follow Cohen (1988): small ($r \approx 0.10$), medium ($r \approx 0.30$), large ($r \approx 0.50$).

The experimental group showed a statistically significant improvement in interpersonal communication with a large effect size, indicating that the group counseling intervention using discussion techniques had a substantial practical impact on participants. In contrast, the control group did not show a statistically significant change during the study period.

Mann-Whitney Test Results

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether the improvement in interpersonal communication differed significantly between the experimental and control groups, based on students' posttest scores.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney Test Results (Posttest: Experimental vs. Control)

Comparison	U	Z	Sig.	Effect Size (r)	Description
Experimental vs Control	0.000	-3.371	0.001	0.84 (large)	Significant

The results indicate that the improvement in interpersonal communication among students in the experimental group was significantly higher than that in the control group, with a large effect size. Thus, the research hypothesis stating that group counseling using discussion techniques is effective in improving students' interpersonal communication is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that group counseling using discussion techniques is effective in improving the interpersonal communication of tenth-grade students. The Wilcoxon test showed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group ($Z = -2.524$, $p = 0.012$, $r = 0.89$), while the control group showed no significant change ($Z = -1.472$, $p = 0.141$, $r = 0.52$). The between-group comparison using the Mann-Whitney U test further confirmed that the improvement in the experimental group was significantly greater than in the control group ($Z = -3.371$, $p = 0.001$, $r = 0.84$), with a large effect size indicating that the intervention had substantial practical significance beyond mere statistical significance.

These findings are consistent with, and extend, prior research on discussion-based group interventions. Satriawan (2020) and Adison, J. & Suryadi (2021), both cited in the Introduction as evidence that discussion techniques improve interpersonal communication, were conducted among junior secondary school students without a quasi-experimental control-group design. The present study extends this line of research by employing a quasi-experimental design with a control group and by demonstrating the intervention's effectiveness among senior secondary (madrasah) students precisely the gap identified earlier, where research on discussion techniques within group

counseling among Islamic senior high school students remained limited and prior studies rarely employed a comparison group strong enough to support causal claims. Sulaksono (2022) similarly identified discussion as one of six techniques most suitable for improving students' communication skills, alongside sociodrama, peer group, empty chair, self-talk, and assertive training, further reinforcing the theoretical basis for the technique used here. Nelani Khairun & Dodi Pasila Putra (2023) reported that group counseling using discussion techniques increased adolescent girls' courage and confidence in expressing opinions publicly, while Adison, J. & Suryadi (2021) found that discussion-based group counseling developed both verbal and nonverbal interpersonal communication skills. Taken together, these findings reinforce the proposition that interpersonal communication is a learnable, trainable skill that responds to structured group intervention, while the present study's quasi-experimental design provides stronger causal evidence than most of this prior work.

Why the Discussion Technique Was More Effective Than the Control Condition?

Beyond confirming statistical significance, it is important to explain the mechanism through which the discussion technique produced a substantially larger effect than the regular group counseling received by the control group. Three interrelated factors appear to account for this difference.

First, the discussion technique created a structured yet organic group dynamic in which every member was required to take an active communicative role proposing ideas, responding to peers, and negotiating shared understanding rather than passively receiving information. This directly exercised the behavioral components of interpersonal communication (expressing opinions, listening, giving feedback) in a way that generic group counseling, which tends to be more instructional and less participatory, does not.

Second, the intervention followed a staged process (forming, transitioning, core activity, and termination) that systematically built psychological safety before demanding vulnerability. Early sessions focused on rapport-building and self-disclosure (openness), while later sessions required more socially demanding behaviors such as expressing empathy, offering support, and negotiating equal standing with peers. This sequencing likely allowed skills to compound: students who had already practiced openness and empathy in earlier sessions were better equipped to practice more complex indicators such as equality in later sessions.

Third, the discussion format inherently distributes communicative power equally among participants, since no single member including the group leader dominates the conversation. This structural feature may explain why the equality indicator showed the largest improvement among all five indicators (see Table 3), increasing from 20.83% to 87.50% (a gain of 66.67 percentage points) in the experimental group, compared to a marginal gain of only 5.21 percentage points in the control group. Because equal participation was continuously modeled and reinforced across all six sessions, students appear to have internalized this norm most strongly by the end of the intervention.

By contrast, supportiveness showed the smallest though still substantial gain among the experimental group (48.61 percentage points). This may reflect the fact that supportive behavior (offering encouragement, validating others without judgment) requires a deeper level of interpersonal trust that typically develops more gradually than openness or positive thinking, suggesting that longer or more intensive interventions may be needed to maximize gains in this particular indicator. The control group's marginal gains across all indicators (1.39-5.56 percentage points) can be attributed to the general group counseling they received from the school counselor, which touched on communication-related topics but lacked the structured, participatory discussion format that actively trains interpersonal skills through practice rather than instruction. This distinction supports DeVito, (2023) conceptualization of interpersonal communication as comprising five interrelated components openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality each of which appears to require active behavioral rehearsal, not passive exposure, to develop meaningfully.

These results align with the broader theoretical understanding that structured interpersonal skills interventions can meaningfully reduce interpersonal difficulties and strengthen social

relationships, particularly among adolescents (Beenen et al., 2023). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating, at the level of specific indicators, precisely how a structured discussion-based intervention produces these gains.

Study Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the intervention was conducted over a relatively short period (six sessions across two weeks), constrained by the school's proximity to end-of-semester examinations; a longer intervention period may be needed to consolidate gains, particularly for indicators such as supportiveness that appeared to improve more gradually. Second, the small sample size ($n = 16$) and the use of purposive sampling limit the generalizability of these findings to the broader population of senior high school students. Third, the study measured outcomes only immediately after the intervention, without a follow-up assessment; consequently, the durability of the observed improvements over time could not be determined. Future research should consider extending the intervention duration, employing larger and more diverse samples, and incorporating follow-up measurements to assess the long-term sustainability of intervention effects.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that group counseling using discussion techniques significantly improves the interpersonal communication of tenth-grade students at MA Jeumala Amal Pidie Jaya. Following the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement with a large effect size, while the control group showed no significant change. Gains were evident across all five interpersonal communication indicators: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality, with the most pronounced improvement observed in equality. These findings confirm that discussion techniques, through their structured yet participatory format, provide adolescents with direct behavioral practice in communication skills that passive or instructional approaches do not offer.

The main contribution of this study lies in demonstrating, through a quasi-experimental design with a control group, the effectiveness of discussion techniques among senior secondary madrasah students a population previously underrepresented in this line of research and in showing how this effectiveness manifests differently across specific interpersonal communication indicators. Practically, school counselors are encouraged to incorporate structured, discussion-based group counseling into regular guidance programs as a strategy to strengthen students' interpersonal communication. Particular attention should be given to indicators such as supportiveness, which appear to develop more gradually and may therefore benefit from extended session duration or additional intervention sessions. Future research is recommended to employ larger and more diverse samples, extend the intervention period, and include follow-up assessments to evaluate the long-term sustainability of these effects.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

This article is a sole-authored work. The author bears full responsibility for all stages of the research, encompassing the conceptualization and research design, literature search and selection, data analysis and synthesis, as well as the writing and editing of the manuscript in its entirety.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques. All processes of research, analysis, and writing were conducted entirely by the author, and the author takes full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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