



# The Effectiveness of Group Counseling Using the Solution Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) Approach to Improve Flow in Learning for Islamic Boarding School Students

Mutia Hafizah<sup>1</sup>, Neviyarni S<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Program Studi Magister Bimbingan dan Konseling, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia.

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Corresponding Author:

Neviyarni S

[neviyarni\\_s@fip.unp.ac.id](mailto:neviyarni_s@fip.unp.ac.id)

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**Abstract:** Flow in learning is an optimal state when students are fully engaged with focus, motivation, and high levels of satisfaction. However, not all students in Islamic boarding schools are able to achieve this due to academic pressure, environmental adaptation, and concentration difficulties. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of group counseling using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach in improving student flow in learning. The method used was quantitative research with a quasi-experimental design in the form of a pretest-posttest control group design. The sample consisted of 20 students selected by simple random sampling from a population of 114, then divided into an experimental group (10 students) and a control group (10 students). The experimental group participated in group counseling with the SFBC approach, while the control group received no special treatment. The research instrument used a Likert scale. Data analysis was performed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test to measure changes in each group and the Mann-Whitney U test to compare differences between groups, because the data were not normally distributed. The results showed a significant increase in learning flow in the experimental group after participating in SFBC group counseling, while the control group did not experience significant improvement. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in flow levels between the experimental and control groups. Thus, the SFBC group counseling approach is effective in improving learning flow in Islamic boarding school students.

**Keywords:** Effectiveness of group counseling; Flow in learning; Solution Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC)

## Introduction

Education is a systematic process to develop human potential and encourage behavioral change for the better (Prayitno, 2009). Educational success is inseparable from an effective learning process, which encourages students to build and integrate new knowledge with existing ones, deepen understanding, and develop critical thinking skills (Lusiana et al., 2019;

Nurfarhanah, 2012). However, in practice, many students face challenges in completing academic assignments, which results in low cognitive, emotional, and behavioral learning engagement (Zahri et al., 2017; Dewany et al., 2023).

Learning engagement has three important dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Cognitive engagement reflects students' mental activity in learning and problem-solving (Fredricks et al., 2004),

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emotional engagement is seen through interest or anxiety, while behavioral engagement is seen through active participation. These three dimensions have been shown to be positively correlated with academic achievement, with behavioral engagement having the greatest impact (Xu et al., 2023). In boarding schools, learning engagement is not only related to academic achievement but also able to suppress negative behaviors such as absenteeism and build discipline (Martin et al., 2016).

Boarding schools generally contribute significantly to academic achievement, especially in developed countries (Steel et al., 2015; Behaghel et al., 2020). In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools also play a significant role through the integration of academic and religious curricula, parenting styles, and structured pesantren management (Ridwansyah & Mutiah, 2019; Nisa & Saputra, 2024). However, this system requires students to adapt to collective life and busy schedules, which is not always easy for every individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zhong et al., 2024). Research by The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) even shows that although 68% of students acknowledge increased discipline and independence, some still experience high levels of learning pressure (Martin et al., 2021).

In the context of education, one indicator of optimal engagement is the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Flow is a state where an individual is fully immersed in an activity with high concentration, intrinsic enjoyment, and deep motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Bakker, 2005; Fong et al., 2014; Shernoff et al., 2014). Flow occurs when challenges are balanced with skills, but can be hampered by excessive routine or lack of preparedness (Asakawa, 2004; Prihandrijani, 2016). Internal factors such as intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation also influence the achievement of flow (Mesurado et al., 2016; Setiyowati et al., 2020). Meanwhile, external factors such as a conducive learning environment also determine students' success in achieving flow (Budiani et al., 2021). Meanwhile, external factors such as a conducive learning environment also determine students' success in achieving flow (Nurfitri & Ifdil, 2020; Aeni & Azzahra, 2021).

The collective life and structured schedules in boarding schools have been shown to improve engagement, discipline, and academic achievement, as reported by R. K. Lodhwal (Syukur et al., 2024). This environment can also increase learning motivation and trigger flow (Meliawan, 2023; Prihandrijani, 2016). However, not all students adapt easily to this pattern, so supporting strategies are needed to help them optimize their engagement in learning.

One potential alternative intervention is group counseling services. Group counseling has been shown to improve students' discipline, focus, and motivation to learn (Corey, 2013; Telaumbanua, 2018). One prominent approach is Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC), which focuses on strengths, goals, and solution achievement (Syapitri et al., 2023). This approach has been shown to be effective in various contexts, including adolescent recovery and self-concept enhancement, and has potential for application in schools to boost motivation and build flow experiences in learning (Netrawati et al., 2023).

Ar Risalah Islamic Junior High School is an Islamic boarding school that integrates academic and Islamic curricula in a balanced manner, with a rigorous selection process for the new student admissions (PPDB). However, based on initial surveys and reports from guidance counselors, indications of low learning flow were found, especially among eighth-grade students, characterized by lack of concentration, easily distracted attention, and low learning participation. This condition indicates weak cognitive, emotional, and behavioral student engagement, negatively impacting motivation and academic achievement. Eighth-grade students were selected as research subjects because they are in a stable phase of adapting to the school environment and learning rhythm, making them relevant for testing the effectiveness of interventions.

Based on the above description, this study aims to test the effectiveness of SFBC-based group counseling services in improving the learning flow of eighth-grade students at SMP Perguruan Islam Ar Risalah. This study is expected to provide not only theoretical contributions by enriching the literature on flow in Islamic boarding schools, but also practical contributions in the form of recommendations for counseling service strategies to increase student learning engagement.

## Method

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design of a non-equivalent control group design. The study population was 114 eighth-grade students of SMP Perguruan Islam Ar Risalah. The sample was taken using a cluster random sampling technique, consisting of 20 students with low learning flow levels, which were divided into an experimental group of 10 students and a control group of 10 students. The experimental group was given group counseling services using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach, while the control group was given group counseling services without the SFBC approach. The research instrument was a learning flow scale in the form of a Likert scale. Data analysis was

carried out using the Wilcoxon test to measure changes within groups and the Mann-Whitney test to compare differences between groups.

## Result and Discussion

This study aims to analyze and determine the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach in improving learning flow in eighth-grade students of SMP Perguruan Islam Ar Risalah. Based on the histogram of the processed pretest and posttest data of the learning flow level in the experimental and control groups, changes in flow scores can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Histogram of flow in pretest and posttest learning of experimental group

Score	Category	Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%
≥ 162	Very high	1	10	6	60
144-161	High	1	10	2	20
126-143	Medium	2	20	2	20
108-125	Low	4	40	0	0
90-107	Very low	2	20	0	0
Total		10	100	10	100

Based on the data analysis results in Table 1 above, the average learning flow score of students in the experimental group experienced a significant increase. The pretest score was 125.0, which is in the low category. After being provided with group counseling services using the SFBC approach, the posttest score increased to 162.5. This increase indicates a significant change in the level of learning flow. The average N-Gain score obtained was 37.5.

Based on the data analysis in Table 2 below, the average learning flow score of students in the control group experienced an insignificant increase. The pretest score was 125.5, which is in the low category, and increased to 145.1 in the posttest, which is in the high category. However, this increase was not significant, as evidenced by the average N-Gain score of only 19.6.

**Table 2.** Histogram of flow in pretest and posttest learning of control group

Score	Category	Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%
≥ 162	Very high	1	10	2	20
144-161	High	1	10	4	50
126-143	Medium	2	20	3	20
108-125	Low	4	40	1	10
90-107	Very low	2	20	0	0
Total		10	100	10	100

**Table 3.** Histogram of learning flow after being given group counseling services with SFBC and without SFBC approaches

Score	Category	Experiment				Control			
		Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
≥ 162	Very high	1	10	6	60	1	10	2	20
144-161	High	1	10	2	20	1	10	4	50
126-143	Medium	2	20	2	20	2	20	3	20
108-125	Low	4	40	0	0	4	40	1	10
90-107	Very low	2	20	0	0	2	20	0	0
Total		10	100	10	100	10	100	10	100

Based on Table 3, all 20 students in the experimental and control groups experienced changes in their learning flow scores from pretest to posttest. However, the increase in scores in the experimental group was higher than in the control group. This finding indicates that group counseling services using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach are effective in improving students' learning flow.

This study analyzed the flow levels of eighth-grade students at Ar Risalah Islamic Middle School in Padang City before and after treatment. The analysis showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups, with greater improvement in the experimental group. This increase in scores reflects

positive developments in aspects of flow, such as concentration, goal clarity, and self-control.

During the service, students in the experimental group demonstrated active participation, openness in expressing problems, and support among group members in developing solutions. Their understanding of the SFBC stages improved, group dynamics became more conducive, and students' self-confidence grew as the process progressed.

These findings align with previous studies showing that SFBC can improve self-control (Hikmah, 2016), reduce academic procrastination (Sandy & Susilowati, 2021), and strengthen social skills and psychological well-being (Naraswari et al., 2024). SFBC is based on the belief that individuals possess internal

resources to solve problems (Dolan, 2007). Typical techniques such as miracle questions, exceptions, and scaling encourage self-disclosure, build self-confidence, and increase student engagement in learning (Hana et al., 2020).

Globally, the effectiveness of SFBC has been supported by a meta-analysis (Franklin et al., 2020), which concluded that SFBC improves academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and emotion regulation. Fitch et al. (2012) also found that SFBC improves academic self-confidence and emotion regulation and metacognitive strategies. Gingerich & Peterson (2013) noted that approximately 74% of studies showed positive results of SFBC on academic, internalizing, and social behavior problems. Thus, the SFBC approach has proven effective in helping students achieve a state of flow, characterized by deep focus, intrinsic motivation, and full engagement in learning activities. SFBC also encourages students to recognize their strengths, set meaningful goals, and develop solutions based on positive experiences.

The effectiveness of SFBC is further enhanced by its implementation within the context of group counseling. Group counseling provides a safe space for students to share, provide emotional support, and learn together within a positive group dynamic. Therefore, a systematic effort is needed to implement group counseling services using the SFBC approach in schools, particularly in boarding school settings. Guidance and counselors need to be provided with adequate training to apply this approach professionally and contextually, tailored to students' needs.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis and hypothesis testing, it was concluded that group counseling services using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach were effective in improving students' flow in learning. Specifically, first, there was a significant improvement in the experimental group that participated in the SFBC service. The supportive group atmosphere encouraged active participation, openness, and collaboration among members. Second, the control group also experienced an improvement, but not significantly, because the service was still provided according to the basic principles of group counseling even without a specific approach. Third, there was a striking difference between the two groups, where students in the experimental group showed higher posttest scores, indicating greater engagement in the SFBC stages. These findings strengthen the effectiveness of the SFBC approach in facilitating flow conditions, especially in boarding education environments.

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## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, M.H.; data curation, preparation of the initial draft of the manuscript, review and editing of the manuscript, visualization, N.S. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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