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The Effectiveness of Group Counseling Services Using the Rational-Emotive Imagery (REI) Technique to Enhance Mental Well-Being among University Students

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique in enhancing the mental well-being of university students. The research employed a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest–posttest design, involving eight students from the Guidance and Counseling Education Program, Class of 2022, who demonstrated low levels of mental well-being. Participants were purposively selected based on pretest results and their willingness to attend all service sessions. The REI technique, which is part of the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach, focuses on individuals' ability to imagine stress-inducing situations and transform irrational beliefs into more rational emotional responses. The findings revealed a significant improvement in the mean scores of mental well-being, increasing from 25.63 (low category) in the pretest to 45.25 (moderate category) in the posttest. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test yielded a significance value of 0.012 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a meaningful difference between conditions before and after the intervention. These results demonstrate that group counseling services using the REI technique are effective in improving emotional regulation, resilience, and students' overall mental well-being. Therefore, this technique is recommended for implementation in counseling programs, particularly in higher education, as a strategic intervention to support students' mental health in coping with academic pressures and campus life challenges.

1. Introduction

University students are particularly vulnerable to academic stress, anxiety, and emotional pressure. Academic stress may arise from heavy academic workloads, adjustment to a new environment, financial difficulties, and social demands. Such stress can lead to mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and decreased academic performance. According to Gross (2014), emotion regulation

is a crucial skill in maintaining mental health, as individuals who are able to manage their emotions adaptively tend to be more resilient to psychological distress (Rivaldi, 2024). Symptoms of academic stress among students manifest across emotional aspects, such as restlessness, anxiety, depression, and irritability; physical aspects, including headaches, sleep disturbances, and fatigue; as well as cognitive aspects, such as difficulty concentrating and forgetfulness (Nursolehah & Rahmiati, 2022). Furthermore, research has shown a significant relationship between academic stress and future anxiety among students, indicating that higher levels of academic stress contribute to increased anxiety about the future (Mahmudah et al., 2025).

As a preventive as well as curative effort, group counseling services serve as an effective strategy to assist students in addressing their psychological challenges. One relevant and widely applied approach is the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique, which is part of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). This technique involves the use of guided imagery to help individuals visualize situations that trigger negative emotions and subsequently replace them with more rational and adaptive responses. REI has been proven effective in enhancing emotion regulation, improving thought patterns, and fostering psychological resilience in individuals experiencing stress (Suhendri et al., 2014). In the context of university students, the application of REI through group counseling can serve as an appropriate medium to cultivate emotional awareness and rational thinking collectively (Ellis, 2021).

Based on this background, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique in improving students' mental well-being. Group counseling using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique is an effective approach to help students manage negative emotions, cope with academic stress, and enhance their psychological well-being. Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) is a cognitive therapy technique that employs mental imagery to transform negative emotional reactions into more positive and rational ones (Mashudi, 2016). This technique is designed to train individuals to visualize situations that trigger stress or anxiety and subsequently modify their emotional responses through healthier and more rational visualizations (Suhendri et al., 2014).

Various studies have shown that the mental well-being of university students exists at varying levels, depending on environmental conditions and individual factors. Trihastuti and Anindya (2022), in their study of 50 students at Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia, found that the majority of students (54%) fell into the "less well-being" category of psychological well-being. These findings indicate that most students continue to experience emotional distress that affects their mental well-being (Azizah et al., 2023). Enhancing students' mental well-being aims to create an academic environment that supports their psychological, emotional, and social development. Students often face high academic pressure, social demands, and transitional life changes that may impact their mental health. With improved mental well-being, students are better able to manage stress, increase learning motivation,

and develop social skills that are essential in the professional world (Alawiyah et al., 2022).

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique in enhancing students' mental well-being. This research seeks to determine the extent to which the application of REI within the context of group counseling can assist students in managing irrational thoughts, fostering positive thinking patterns, and strengthening their ability to cope with academic pressures as well as personal challenges. Through this intervention, students are expected to develop healthy emotional skills, increase self-confidence, and build adaptive coping mechanisms, which ultimately contribute to improved overall mental well-being. Thus, this study not only aims to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the REI intervention but also offers practical contributions to the development of guidance and counseling services in higher education.\

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design, specifically the one-group pretest–posttest design. This design was chosen because the researcher utilized only one experimental group without a control group, while still conducting measurements before and after the intervention (Sugiyono, 2019). Through this design, the researcher was able to examine the effect of group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique on students' mental well-being. The subjects of this study were students with low to moderate levels of mental well-being, as determined by measurements using a mental well-being scale. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) active students, (2) willingness to participate in all group counseling sessions, and (3) mental well-being scores below the average. A total of eight students were selected for the experimental group, in accordance with the ideal characteristics of group counseling services (Corey, 2009). The purposive selection of participants also strengthens the validity of the findings. In quantitative research, selecting subjects who genuinely require intervention helps minimize bias and enhance the effectiveness of the services provided (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The independent variable in this study is group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique, while the dependent variable is students' mental well-being. Rational Emotive Imagery is part of the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach, which emphasizes the use of rational imagery to transform irrational beliefs into rational ones (Neenan & Dryden, 2004). The instrument used in this study was a mental well-being scale developed based on a Likert model with five response levels: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. This scale was designed to measure the frequency of experiences or feelings related to respondents' mental well-being. Each item on the scale reflects relevant psychological aspects, such as emotion regulation, life satisfaction, and resilience. The total score was obtained by summing all items,

which was then analyzed to determine the level of participants' mental well-being. The categorical assessment (low, moderate, high) was adjusted according to the score ranges established in the scaling guidelines.

3. Results and Discussion

The data collection process in this study was carried out using a standardized and validated mental well-being scale. The instrument was administered to students in two measurement stages, namely the pre-test and post-test, allowing changes in mental well-being to be observed objectively. The pre-test stage was conducted prior to students' participation in the group counseling sessions using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique. At this stage, participants were asked to complete the scale based on their personal condition within a specified period of time. The pre-test results served as baseline data or an initial overview of the students' level of mental well-being before receiving the intervention.

Subsequently, the students participated in a series of group counseling sessions using the REI technique, which were designed in several structured meetings. The purpose of these sessions was to help students identify and transform irrational thoughts into more rational ones, foster positive attitudes, and enhance their emotional management skills. After the entire series of sessions was completed, the post-test stage was administered using the same instrument as in the pre-test. The post-test aimed to obtain comparative data to determine whether there were significant changes in students' mental well-being following the intervention. The pre-test and post-test data were then statistically analyzed to measure differences in scores before and after the intervention, thereby allowing conclusions to be drawn regarding the extent to which group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery technique were effective in improving students' mental well-being. The study was conducted with eight (8) students, consisting of four males and four females, all of whom initially demonstrated low levels of mental well-being. To provide a clearer picture of the students' level of mental well-being, Table 1 presents a set of statements used as research instrument items.

Table 1. Research Instrument

Number	Statements
1	I feel optimistic about my future
2	I feel that I am useful
3	I feel relaxed
4	I feel interested in other people
5	I have leftover energy
6	I have handled my problems well
7	I have been thinking clearly
8	I feel comfortable with myself
9	I feel close to other people
10	I feel confident
11	I am able to make my own decisions about various matters
12	I feel loved
13	I am interested in new things
14	I feel cheerful

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results on Improving the Mental Well-Being of BKPI Students, Class of 2022

The purpose of conducting the pre-test was to obtain an initial overview of the mental well-being condition of BKPI students, Class of 2022, prior to the treatment, which consisted of group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery technique. Meanwhile, the post-test was administered to observe changes in the mental well-being condition of BKPI students, Class of 2022, after receiving the group counseling intervention with the Rational Emotive Imagery technique. The pre-test and post-test data are presented in Table 2 below. These assessments provide a clear basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention.

Table 2. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results on Improving Mental Well-Being

Student Initials	*Pre-Test*		*Post-Test*	
	Score	Category	Score	Category
BKR	28	Low	41	Moderate
IR	21	Low	39	Moderate
MLK	25	Low	45	Moderate
RRB	28	Low	53	High
SM	27	Low	52	High
YA	25	Low	46	Moderate
FZ	27	Low	42	Moderate
MR	24	Low	44	Moderate
Total Score	205		362	
Average	25,625	Low	45,25	Moderate

The mental well-being scores of BKPI students, Class of 2022, demonstrated a clear improvement for each participant in the post-test compared to the pre-test. Initially, during the pre-test, all students were classified in the low mental well-being category, indicating that they were experiencing significant emotional and psychological challenges. Following the implementation of the group counseling intervention using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique, the post-test results showed a substantial increase in scores for all participants. Specifically, six students moved into the moderate category, reflecting a marked improvement in their emotional regulation, resilience, and overall psychological functioning.

Meanwhile, two students achieved scores in the high category, demonstrating exceptional progress and the ability to manage stress and negative emotions more effectively. This shift highlights the positive impact of REI-based counseling in enhancing mental well-being. The results underscore the importance of targeted interventions for students who initially exhibit low mental well-being, as structured support can facilitate significant personal and emotional growth. Overall, the findings suggest that REI techniques are an effective tool for promoting mental health and fostering adaptive coping strategies among university students.

Differences Between Pre-Test and Post-Test Results in Improving the Mental Well-Being of BKPI Students, Class of 2022

The differences in the frequency of mental well-being conditions among BKPI students, Class of 2022, can be observed from the pre-test and post-test results, as presented in the following table.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Pre-Test Scores

Pre-test

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	21	1	12.5	12.5	12.5
	24	1	12.5	12.5	25.0
	25	2	25.0	25.0	50.0
	27	2	25.0	25.0	75.0
	28	2	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Post-Test Scores

POST-TEST

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	39	1	12.5	12.5	12.5
	41	1	12.5	12.5	25.0
	42	1	12.5	12.5	37.5
	44	1	12.5	12.5	50.0
	45	1	12.5	12.5	62.5
	46	1	12.5	12.5	75.0
	52	1	12.5	12.5	87.5
	53	1	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Tables 3 and 4 above illustrate the differences in the mental well-being conditions of the research subjects before and after receiving group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery technique. Furthermore, the differences in the mental well-being of BKPI students, Class of 2022, can also be observed from the processed pre-test and post-test data using SPSS 22.00, the results of which are presented in Table 5 below. These tables provide a clear visualization of changes in scores for each participant. They also allow for an easy comparison of frequency distributions and category shifts in mental well-being before and after the intervention.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics Output

Paired Samples Statistic

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Mental Well-Being	8	7	21	28	25.63	2.387
Post-Test Mental Well-Being	8	14	39	53	45.25	5.007
Valid N (listwise)	8					

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis in the Paired Samples Statistics table, it can be seen that the mean mental well-being score of students before receiving group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery technique was 25.63. Meanwhile, the mean mental well-being score after the intervention was

45.25. Therefore, the data from the table indicate an increase in the average score of 19.62 points. This substantial improvement reflects the effectiveness of the REI-based group counseling sessions in enhancing students' emotional regulation and overall psychological well-being. The results suggest that structured mental imagery exercises can significantly support students in managing stress and developing resilience. Overall, these findings provide strong evidence for incorporating REI techniques into regular counseling programs in higher education settings. The following is a graph comparing the pre-test and post-test scores:

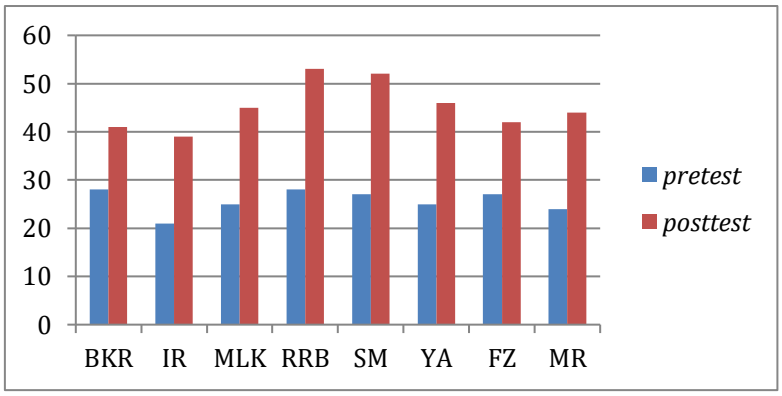

Figure 1. Comparison Graph of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted by analyzing the differences between pre-test and post-test data using the Wilcoxon test. The analysis involved comparing each participant's scores before and after the intervention to determine whether there were statistically significant changes in the variables studied. The significance value obtained from the Wilcoxon test was then used to decide whether the null hypothesis, which states that no difference exists, could be rejected. Thus, this testing not only provides an overview of the direction of change but also indicates the magnitude of the intervention's effect on the measured variables. The results of this test are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results for Pre-Test and Post-Test Mental Well-Being of BKPI Students, Class of 2022

Test Statistics[a]	
	POST-TEST – PRE TEST
Z	-2.527[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.012

a. *Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test*
b. *Based on negative ranks.*

Table 6 above shows that the probability value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) for the subjects' responses before and after the intervention was 0.012. This value indicates a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Since the Asymp. Sig. value is less than the alpha level (0.012 < 0.05), the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted. Acceptance of Ha confirms that the observed changes are not due to

chance. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention provided to the students. Group counseling using the Rational Emotive Imagery technique successfully improved emotional regulation.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique have a significant impact on improving students' mental well-being. This is evident from the increase in the average mental well-being score of the eight research subjects, which rose from a pre-test score of 25.63 (low category) to a post-test score of 45.25 (moderate category). The 19.62-point increase indicates a highly positive change after the subjects participated in all sessions of group counseling using the REI technique. Statistically, the effectiveness of this service is supported by the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, which showed a significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.012. This value is lower than the predetermined significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicating a significant difference between the conditions before and after the intervention. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted, meaning that group counseling services using the REI technique are effective in improving the mental well-being of BKPI students, Class of 2022.

In the REI sessions, students were trained to visualize situations that trigger stress or emotional pressure and then consciously replace irrational responses with healthier and more logical visualizations. This process strengthens emotional control, reduces anxiety, and fosters greater psychological resilience. The results of this study are supported by Mashudi (2016), who stated that the use of imagery techniques in REBT can significantly enhance the resilience of individuals experiencing emotional stress. Similarly, Suhendri et al. (2014) demonstrated that group counseling using the REI approach is effective in reducing students' anxiety. In other words, REI-based group counseling can serve as an effective and strategic psychological intervention to improve students' mental well-being, particularly in the high-pressure environment of higher education. This service also reinforces the role of guidance and counseling as a platform for developing students' mental, emotional, and social capacities.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that group counseling services using the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique are proven effective in enhancing students' mental well-being. All research subjects showed a significant improvement, moving from the low to the high mental well-being category. The analysis indicated that this difference did not occur by chance but was the result of the intervention provided. Eight BKPI students from the Class of 2022 at UINSU were selected as research subjects because they met specific criteria, namely having low mental well-being based on the pre-test results and being willing to participate in all group counseling sessions. This purposive selection ensured that the REI intervention was delivered to students who genuinely needed it, allowing the results to be observed clearly and accurately.

The REI technique, rooted in the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach, effectively helps students manage negative emotions, replace irrational thoughts, and enhance rational thinking skills through mental imagery exercises. This has a positive impact on students' emotional resilience and their adaptation to academic pressures. In REBT, imagery techniques assist clients in addressing irrational thoughts through mentally constructed emotional experiences. Therefore, group counseling services using the REI technique are highly recommended for widespread implementation in higher education as both a preventive and curative effort to comprehensively improve students' psychological well-being.

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