



# Acceptance and Commitment-Therapy Based Counseling Group to Improve Self-Confidence of Junior High School Students

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of group counseling based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in enhancing self-confidence among junior high school students, using a true experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Two instruments were employed: treatment and measurement. The treatment instrument consisted of a guide for implementing group counseling, while the measurement instrument was a self-confidence inventory. The findings demonstrated that ACT-based group counseling effectively enhances self-confidence among junior high school students. The study provided two recommendations: (i) for guidance and counseling teachers, ACT-based group counseling can be applied to strengthen students' self-confidence and support their developmental understanding; and (ii) for future researchers, given that ACT-based counseling incorporates six core processes (acceptance, cognitive defusion, being present, self-as-context, values, and committed action). Future studies may explore its effectiveness with additional or alternative techniques.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Junior high school (known as SMP) is a formal educational level designed to cultivate students into individuals with innovative, confident, critical, and responsible character. Entering this school at the ages of 13-15 places students in adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by complex and demanding tasks arising from physical, cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual transitions (Chen et al., 2023; Zhu & Shek, 2021).

Researchers in guidance and counseling as well as psychology have extensively examined adolescence, as this stage poses numerous challenges and identity-related questions such as "Who am I?" and "What should I become?" (Koivuhovi et al., 2022; Poon et al., 2022; Wilbrecht & Davidow, 2024). At the junior high school level, adolescents often struggle with gaining social recognition from peers, and their limited judgment may lead to biased self-assessments. Such tendencies can give rise to issues including delinquency, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-confidence, self-criticism, and worthlessness, all of which contribute to low self-confidence (Alsadi et al., 2023; Gottlieb et al., 2023; Jekauc et al., 2025).

Self-confidence can be defined as the belief in one's abilities that empowers individuals to pursue and achieve goals. For students, it reflects their capacity to confront and adapt to increasingly demanding environments. As a key developmental quality, self-confidence fosters independence, supports meaningful life experiences, and enhances positive motivation (Chamidah, 2025; Ortiz-Ordoñez, 2015; Wei & Luo, 2025; Rashwan, 2023).

Lauster, a prominent German psychologist, introduced the theory of self-confidence (Sudirman et al., 2020). According to Lauster, self-confidence is the conviction in one's abilities without anxiety over chosen actions, allowing individuals to act freely and responsibly, engage in polite and warm interactions, and optimize personal development while acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses (Lasut & Kusumiati, 2024; Serva et al., 2023; Padakokal et al., 2024). Individuals with high self-confidence tend to display curiosity, openness to new experiences, and the capacity to express themselves freely (Moneva & Tribunalo, 2020).

Some researchers (Lasut & Kusumiati, 2024) categorized self-confidence into high and low levels. The degree of self-confidence in adolescents is shaped by how they perceive and evaluate themselves, as well as by the theoretical perspective applied. High self-confidence is characterized by positive attitudes, certainty in one's actions, optimism in facing challenges, a willingness to accept consequences responsibly, and the ability to make realistic and rational decisions. Moreover, positive peer interactions play a vital role in strengthening self-confidence and fostering academic achievement (Moneva & Tribunalo, 2019; Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020).

Conversely, students with low self-confidence are more likely to give up easily, hesitate to express their opinions, struggle with decision-making, and have difficulty accepting their own abilities due to constant comparisons with others (Moneva & Tribunalo, 2020; Oktafiani & Yusri, 2021; Bayat et al., 2019). These challenges adversely impact both academic performance and social development (Nadhira, 2023). Low self-confidence is also associated with repeated failure and a sense of despair (Silvia et al., 2022).

The data showed that 41 out of 181 students at SMP Negeri 5 Samarinda exhibited low self-confidence. Developing self-confidence requires more than instruction; it necessitates consistent implementation and support that allow students to experience success. Low self-confidence can diminish both academic performance and achievement motivation (Stankov et al., 2014). This issue underscores the importance of comprehensive guidance, particularly from school counseling teachers, through counseling services. Group counseling represents an effective and efficient approach to help students address personal, academic, social, and career challenges (Astuti et al., 2022). Within group counseling, students can work through problems, build confidence in

expressing their thoughts, and strengthen social connections that foster active participation (Wahyudi, 2020; Steen *et al.*, 2022; Loban *et al.*, 2024; Beasley *et al.*, 2023).

Researchers and practitioners have employed a variety of approaches to enhance self-confidence, including (i) support provision, (ii) cognitive behavioral counseling, (iii) group counseling, (iv) physical fitness strategies, and (v) other specific interventions (Wahlbeck *et al.*, 2018; Freeman *et al.*, 2024; Finsrud *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, counselors must not only recognize the key elements that contribute to the development of self-confidence but also carefully evaluate how different interventions influence its growth.

One counseling approach that can support students struggling with self-confidence is group counseling based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Ritonga *et al.*, 2021). This approach emphasizes acceptance, mindfulness, and commitment processes that promote behavior change in line with personal values. In doing so, it enhances psychological flexibility and enables individuals to engage constructively with their thoughts and emotions (El-Ashry & Nashwan, 2024).

Group counseling based on ACT intentionally fosters psychological flexibility, acceptance of negative experiences, and improved management of thoughts, enabling individuals with low self-confidence to acknowledge their experiences and act in alignment with their values (Gunawan & Oriza, 2023). The primary objective of this approach is to encourage students to commit to living meaningful and fulfilling lives.

ACT-based group counseling guides students toward their chosen values through six interrelated techniques: acceptance, cognitive defusion, being present (contact with the present moment), self-as-context, values, and committed action (Moran, 2010). These techniques are designed to complement and strengthen one another, functioning effectively only when applied collectively, while their impact diminishes when used in isolation. The six ACT processes, intended for integrated use, promote psychological flexibility but are less effective as stand-alone strategies (Fung, 2015). Evidence further suggests that ACT enables individuals to cope with difficult thoughts and emotions while pursuing a purposeful and satisfying life (Davis *et al.*, 2024). Within ACT-based group counseling, students benefit from group dynamics that encourage discussion, idea sharing, and collaborative problem-solving.

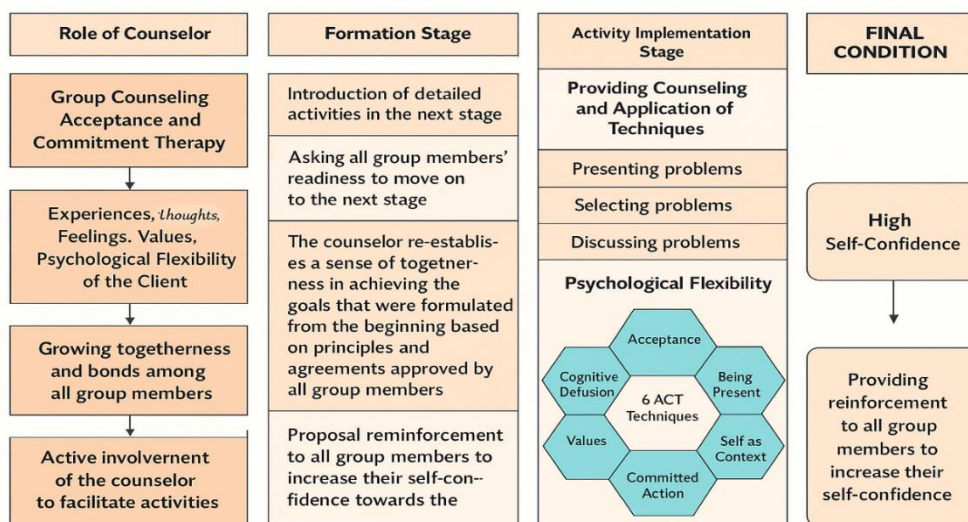
Grounded in contextual behavioral science, ACT-based group counseling views psychological suffering as a natural part of human existence and supports individuals in accepting difficult experiences—including thoughts and emotions—without judgment, control, or avoidance (Ummah, 2019). This process encourages students to acknowledge unwanted thoughts, feelings, and experiences through systematically structured steps that foster a meaningful life purpose (Nuraini & Hartini, 2021). At its core, ACT emphasizes change through acceptance, leading to constructive actions and value-based life choices. Developed by clinical psychologist Steven C. Hayes, ACT rests on the principle that acceptance and commitment can substantially improve psychological well-being. Consequently, ACT represents a promising counseling approach for enhancing students' self-confidence.

Existing evidence indicates that ACT can effectively enhance self-confidence by emphasizing acceptance and commitment. While these findings are encouraging, further controlled studies are needed to determine whether ACT is equally effective, or potentially more effective, than other approaches across a range of psychological issues (Webster, 2011).

Given this background, ACT-based group counseling is essential as an alternative intervention to enhance students' self-confidence. This approach is goal-oriented, emphasizes actionable steps, and follows a systematic process designed to help students achieve meaningful well-being. Within this framework, heterogeneous groups are formed, enabling students to learn from one

another's experiences while cultivating openness, honesty, and mutual respect. By integrating group counseling with ACT principles, students can identify their core values, set realistic and attainable goals, and strengthen their confidence.

**Figure 1** presents the ACT-based group counseling model for enhancing self-confidence among junior high school students. The background highlights the need for research aimed at determining the effectiveness of ACT-based group counseling in improving junior high school students' self-confidence.



**Figure 1.** Acceptance and commitment therapy-based group counseling to improve JHS students' self-confidence.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design using a true experimental method, which involved variable control, two experimental groups, intervention, and outcome testing. Subjects for both groups were selected from a defined population through a self-confidence questionnaire. At the initial stage, both groups completed a pretest to examine baseline conditions. A valid pretest result was indicated when the scores of the two groups did not differ significantly (Ibrahim et al., 2018). Following the intervention, a posttest was administered to both groups to identify significant score differences and to demonstrate the intervention's effectiveness. The research was conducted at a junior high school, with seventh-grade students serving as the population in the 2024/2025 academic year. The sample consisted of 16 students who met the characteristics and criteria of low self-confidence, as measured by the self-confidence questionnaire used in this study. The research design is illustrated in **Figure 2**.

$R_1$	$O_1$	$X_1$	$O_2$
$R_2$	$O_3$	$X_2$	$O_4$

**Figure 2.** Research design. Remarks: R1 is the experimental group; R2 is the control group; O1 is the pretest experimental group (before intervention); X1 is the intervening in the experimental group with acceptance and commitment-therapy-based group counseling; O2 is the post-test experimental group (after intervention); O3 is the pretest control group (before intervention); X2 is the Intervening in the second experimental group with person-centered group counseling; and O4 is the posttest control group (after intervention)

This experimental design involved two groups. The subjects were selected using a self-confidence inventory (Lauster, 2006), which consists of five indicators: (i) belief in one's own abilities, (ii) optimism, (iii) objectivity, (iv) responsibility, and (v) rationality and realism. The inventory was first administered as a pretest to measure baseline self-confidence. Following this, Experimental Group 1 received group counseling based on ACT, while Experimental Group 2 received person-centered group counseling. At the conclusion of the study, both groups completed a posttest using the same self-confidence inventory grounded in Lauster's theory. To minimize internal validity threats related to instrumentation, the researchers randomized the inventory items. A statistically significant improvement in self-confidence in one group over the other was interpreted as evidence that the intervention (particularly ACT-based group counselling) was responsible for the increase. Intervention effectiveness was evaluated by comparing pretest and posttest self-confidence scores.

### 2.1. Data Source

The data sources consisted of junior high school students identified as having low self-confidence based on the inventory results. The researchers employed purposive sampling, which is commonly used in quantitative research. As a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling involves selecting participants who meet specific criteria and are considered representative of the target population.

### 2.2. Data Collection Technique

The researchers collected data to assess the effectiveness of the intervention by comparing baseline and post-intervention results. The self-confidence inventory was employed as the measurement instrument (Lauster, 2006), comprising five indicators: (i) belief in one's own abilities, (ii) optimism, (iii) objectivity, (iv) responsibility, and (v) rationality and realism. The inventory demonstrated item validity with  $r$ -values exceeding the  $r$ -table threshold of 0.344 and a reliability coefficient of 0.903, indicating strong consistency and stability. These psychometric properties ensured the instrument's appropriateness for sample selection and its alignment with the study's objectives.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the pretest and posttest self-confidence scores using statistical methods. To examine the significance of changes before and after the intervention, the non-parametric Mann–Whitney test was employed. Statistical formulas were applied to test the hypotheses. The decision rule specified that if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)  $\leq \alpha = 0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) would be rejected; conversely, if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)  $> \alpha = 0.05$ ,  $H_0$  would be accepted.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intervention for the experimental group was conducted over a period of five months. A pretest was administered at the beginning to assess self-confidence before the intervention, and a posttest was conducted at the end to evaluate self-confidence after the intervention process. Both assessments used the same instrument, namely the self-confidence inventory (Lauster, 2006). Data were analyzed using the Mann–Whitney test to ensure accuracy and precision in determining the final results. The self-confidence inventory consisted of 35 valid items measured on a four-point Likert scale. Accordingly, the minimum possible score was  $35 \times 1 = 35$ , and the maximum possible score was  $35 \times 4 = 140$ . A total score between 35 and 70 indicated low self-

confidence, scores between 70 and 105 reflected moderate self-confidence, and scores between 105 and 140 signified high self-confidence. Based on the data presented in **Table 1**, the mean pretest score in the experimental group was 66.3, while the mean posttest score was 122.2. It can therefore be concluded that the students' average score in the experimental group increased by 55.8 points.

**Table 1.** Pretest-posttest results of experimental group 1.

No	Names	Pretest	Categories	Posttest	Categories	Differences	Remarks
1.	ETS	64	Low	129	High	65	Improved
2.	EDN	68	Low	131	Moderate	63	Improved
3.	SAS	62	Low	102	Medium	40	Improved
4.	APRD	67	Low	130	High	63	Improved
5.	GAA	67	Low	134	High	67	Improved
6.	MAC	69	Low	132	High	63	Improved
7.	MRTN	66	Low	126	High	60	Improved
8.	NKM	68	Low	94	Moderate	26	Improved
<b>Sum</b>		<b>531</b>		<b>978</b>		<b>447</b>	

An increase in scores from the pretest to the posttest was also observed in Experimental Group 2. The pretest and posttest results for Experimental Group 2 are presented in Table 2. In Experimental Group 1, the mean pretest score was 66.3, while the mean posttest score reached 122.2, indicating an increase of 55.8 points. A similar improvement from pretest to posttest was also observed in Experimental Group 2, as presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Pretest-posttest results of experimental group 2.

No	Names	Pretest	Categories	Posttest	Categories	Differences	Remarks
1.	DKL	69	Low	90	Moderate	21	Improved
2.	RAS	68	Low	108	High	40	Improved
3.	SKR	68	Low	93	Moderate	25	Improved
4.	VPP	67	Low	103	Moderate	36	Improved
5.	AFDO	69	Low	91	Moderate	22	Improved
6.	MHA	68	Low	92	Moderate	24	Improved
7.	IFA	63	Low	88	Moderate	25	Improved
8.	GFP	67	Low	128	High	61	Improved
<b>Sum</b>		<b>539</b>		<b>793</b>		<b>254</b>	
<b>Mean</b>		<b>67.3</b>		<b>99.1</b>		<b>31.7</b>	

**Table 3** shows that both experimental groups experienced score increases from pretest to posttest after receiving counseling services. However, Experimental Group 1 demonstrated a greater improvement compared to Experimental Group 2. In the pretest, students in Experimental Group 1 were categorized as having low self-confidence. After participating in group counseling based on ACT, their posttest scores shifted to the moderate and high categories, with six students classified as high and two as moderate. Similarly, students in Experimental Group 2 also began in the low category. Following person-centered group counseling, their posttest scores improved to the moderate and high categories, with six students classified as moderate and two as high. The mean score increase in Experimental Group 1 was 55.8, whereas Experimental Group 2 showed an increase of 31.7. These findings indicate that ACT-based group counseling was more effective in improving students' self-confidence compared to person-centered group counseling.

**Table 3.** Pretest-posttest total score differences between both groups.

Groups	Total Pretest Score	Total Posttest Score	Increased Score
Experimental group 1	531	978	447
Experimental group 2	539	793	254

Several factors may account for this difference. First, Experimental Group 1 received group counseling based on ACT, which previous studies have shown to be effective in enhancing students’ self-confidence. Second, during the counseling sessions, students in Experimental Group 1 exhibited more noticeable behavioral changes and provided more positive responses on the posttest self-confidence inventory. Third, students in Experimental Group 1 demonstrated stronger motivation to improve their self-confidence, participating more actively and interactively than those in the control group. As a result, the difference between pretest and posttest scores was more substantial in Experimental Group 1 following the ACT-based group counseling intervention. The normality test results showed a Sig. value of 0.005 for Experimental Group 1 and 0.030 for Experimental Group 2, both of which were below 0.05. Therefore, the data from both groups were not normally distributed.

Given this result, the researchers employed the non-parametric Mann–Whitney test to examine whether a significant difference existed between the two independent samples and to determine the effect of the intervention. The test results indicated that each experimental group consisted of eight students, with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.012. Since this value was below 0.05 ( $0.012 < 0.05$ ), the researchers rejected  $H_0$  and accepted  $H_a$ , concluding that the score distribution in Experimental Group 1 was statistically higher than that of Experimental Group 2 following ACT-based group counseling. This finding demonstrates that the intervention had a positive influence on students’ self-confidence. To further evaluate the effectiveness of ACT in improving self-confidence, the researchers conducted an N-Gain test, as presented in **Table 4**.

**Table 4.** Effectiveness level criteria.

Percentage (%)	Interpretation
< 40	Ineffective
40 – 55	Less effective
56 – 75	Adequately effective
> 76	Effective

The researchers conducted an N-Gain test to evaluate the effectiveness of the counseling services in improving junior high school students’ self-confidence by calculating the difference between pretest and posttest scores. A prerequisite for performing the N-Gain test was the existence of a significant score difference between the experimental and control groups. The analysis was carried out using SPSS version 30, and the results are presented as follows.

The N-Gain analysis revealed that Experimental Group 1 achieved a mean N-Gain score of 76.0394, or 76%, which was categorized as effective. The scores ranged from a minimum of 36.11% to a maximum of 91.78%. In contrast, Experimental Group 2 obtained a mean N-Gain score of 43.9010, or 43.90%, which was categorized as less effective, with scores ranging from 29.58% to 83.56%.

These descriptive statistics highlight a difference in effectiveness between Experimental Group 1, which received ACT-based group counseling, and Experimental Group 2, which received person-centered group counseling. Experimental Group 1 demonstrated greater effectiveness in enhancing self-confidence compared to Experimental Group 2.



To examine whether this difference was statistically significant, the researchers conducted an independent-samples t-test. The results showed a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.005, which was below 0.05. Accordingly, the researchers accepted  $H_a(2)$  and rejected  $H_o(2)$ , concluding that ACT-based group counseling was significantly more effective than person-centered group counseling in improving students' self-confidence. Based on the research hypothesis, the study concludes that ACT-based group counseling is an effective intervention for enhancing junior high school students' self-confidence.

Based on the posttest administered to 77 seventh-grade students, 16 were identified as having low self-confidence. These students tended to feel incapable, struggled to interact with their environment, gave up easily, and lacked the courage to express their opinions. Low self-confidence was further characterized by persistent worry and anxiety about others' perceptions, dissatisfaction with both physical and non-physical abilities, feelings of shame and confusion, pessimism, and frequent self-comparisons.

The pretest and posttest results from the self-confidence questionnaire indicated notable changes in students' self-confidence. Before the intervention, most students were categorized as having low self-confidence; however, after the intervention, their scores shifted into the moderate and high categories. The improvement was more pronounced in Experimental Group 1 than in Experimental Group 2. This finding aligns with previous research (Cao et al., 2022), which reported that ACT counseling enhances psychological resilience and self-confidence. Similarly, other researchers (Elita et al., 2017) found ACT effective in fostering self-confidence by enabling clients to accept negative thoughts and feelings without resistance, align their actions with personal values, and strengthen psychological flexibility. Furthermore, group counseling is highly beneficial in helping students develop the skills necessary to overcome obstacles.

Both Experimental Group 1 and Experimental Group 2 consisted of eight students each. The researchers implemented six intervention sessions for the experimental groups: one pre-counseling session, four counseling sessions, and one post-counseling session, following the previous framework (Gunawan and Oriza, 2023). The control group, meanwhile, received five sessions: one pre-counseling session, three counseling sessions, and one post-counseling session (Fitra et al., 2023). Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was adapted to the group's dynamics. Student consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation from the beginning to the end of the intervention. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Rumbruren & Hamzah, 2024), who concluded that ACT can be effectively applied across diverse settings, including group contexts and community health services, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.

ACT-based group counseling fostered a supportive environment that enabled students to explore their potential and pursue sustainable personal growth. The counselor's role was central; through careful initial assessment and the use of appropriate approaches, counselors guided students in addressing their self-confidence challenges. The students' willingness to participate, confirmed through consent forms, further facilitated the counseling process. This study extends the field of guidance and counseling by demonstrating that ACT-based group counseling—previously applied primarily to older adolescents and adults in healthcare contexts—can also serve as a practical and effective intervention for early adolescents in junior high school who experience low self-confidence.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.012, which was below 0.05 ( $0.012 < 0.05$ ). Thus,  $H_a$  was accepted and  $H_o$  was rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference in score distribution between Experimental Group 1 and Experimental Group 2. The analysis



demonstrated that Experimental Group 1, which received ACT-based group counseling, achieved higher scores than Experimental Group 2, which received person-centered group counseling. The N-Gain test further showed that Experimental Group 1 obtained an average N-Gain score of 76%, categorized as effective, while Experimental Group 2 achieved 43.90%, categorized as less effective. In addition, the independent-samples t-test yielded a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.005, which was below 0.05. Therefore, the researchers concluded that there was a significant difference in effectiveness between the two groups, with the ACT-based group counseling proving more effective in improving students' self-confidence.

## 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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