



# The Effectiveness of Group Counseling using Mandala Expressive Art Therapy Technique to Reduce Academic Stress of Junior High School Students

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## ABSTRACT

The state of students who are bored and stressed is included in an unstable psychological condition. This psychological condition can affect the success of the learning process. One of the techniques that can be used by guidance and counseling teachers related to academic stress problems is the mandala expressive art therapy technique. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of mandala expressive art therapy techniques in group counseling to reduce the academic stress of junior high school students. This study used a one-group pre-test and post-test design, adapted from the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) scale. The subjects of this study were six second-grade students of SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya. The data analysis technique used was the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Based on the results of the output test statistics, it can be seen that the Asymp.Sig (2-tailed) value is 0.027, which is smaller than 0.05. So  $H_a$  is accepted, and  $H_o$  is rejected, which means that the mandala expressive art therapy technique in group counseling effectively reduces the academic stress of junior high school students. This research contributes as a reference for guidance and counseling teachers in designing art-based intervention programs to help students who experience academic stress.

## KATA KUNCI

Mandala Expressive Art Therapy;  
Konseling Kelompok;  
Stres Akademik;  
Siswa

## ABSTRAK

Keadaan siswa yang jenuh dan stres termasuk dalam kondisi psikologis yang tidak stabil. Kondisi psikologis siswa ini dapat memberikan pengaruh terhadap keberhasilan proses belajar. Salah satu teknik yang dapat digunakan oleh guru bimbingan dan konseling yang berkaitan dengan permasalahan stres akademik yakni dengan teknik mandala expressive art therapy. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui efektivitas teknik mandala expressive art therapy dalam konseling kelompok untuk mereduksi stres akademik siswa SMP. Penelitian ini menggunakan one group pre-test post-test design dengan menggunakan adaptasi skala Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA). Subjek penelitian ini sebanyak 6 siswa kelas dua SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan yakni Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Berdasarkan hasil output test statistics dapat diketahui bahwa nilai Asymp.Sig (2-tailed) sebesar 0,027 dan nilai ini lebih kecil daripada 0,05. Sehingga dapat disimpulkan bahwa  $H_a$  diterima dan  $H_o$  ditolak, yang artinya teknik mandala expressive art therapy dalam konseling kelompok efektif dalam mereduksi stres akademik siswa SMP. Kontribusi penelitian ini sebagai acuan bagi guru bimbingan dan konseling dalam merancang program intervensi berbasis seni untuk membantu siswa yang mengalami stres akademik.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every individual needs education daily because education cannot be separated from an individual's life. Education is also a way to humanize people by modifying individual and group behavior based on religious, philosophical, ideological, social, and cultural values (Boluk & Carnicelli, 2019). Thus, education has an important

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role in human life, namely as a means to prepare and improve the quality of human resources. One of the institutions that organize education is called an educational institution. Educational institutions that organize formal education levels are schools, both managed by the government and the private sector. Schools are places for individuals or students to conduct learning activities supervised by teachers or educators. When a student attends school, he is responsible and obligated to learn by the learning methods provided. The method is how a teacher presents material to students to achieve learning objectives (Ulfa & Saifuddin, 2018).

Giving assignments is a common way used by teachers to achieve learning goals. Giving assignments positively impacts students, which can train students in independent learning, improve skills, train hard work, and encourage creativity. In line with this, Oka & Nyoman (2020) also stated that giving assignments at the end of each lesson effectively improves student learning outcomes. However, excessive assignments can hurt students. Too many assignments can cause students to lose sleep, stress, and health problems. Students will tend to feel bored and stressed about the many tasks that must be completed so that their learning activities are disrupted, and the tasks they do cannot be completed optimally (Boekaerts, 2016).

The state of students who are saturated and stressed is included in an unstable psychological condition. This student's psychological condition can influence the success of the learning process. This is in line with research conducted by Barseli et al. (2018), which states that psychological conditions, especially academic stress, have a significant relationship with learning outcomes. Academic stress is the pressure students feel physically and emotionally due to academic demands to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes (Tharani, et al., (2017). The demands for learning outcomes can come from within students and from the surrounding environment, such as demands from parents and teachers and academic competition with other students (Alalwan et al., 2020). Thus, students become depressed and burdened by these academic demands. Academic demands are a burden, and pressure can make them negative thoughts (Wardah et al., 2020). In addition to the demands above, academic stress can also arise due to the urge to move up to the next level, pressure to achieve high scores in exams, consideration in choosing a major, worry about exams, and study time arrangements (Yulinawati et al., 2018).

Wardah et al. (2020) stated that the level of academic stress of grade XI junior high school students in Banda Aceh City was dominantly in the moderate category with details of 19.2% very low, 47.2% low, 25.9% moderate, 6.9% high, and 0.8% very high. In line with this, research conducted by Taufik (2021) in Barru Regency showed that 17% of students experienced academic stress at a low level, 73.4% experienced academic stress at a moderate level, and 11.2% of students experienced academic stress at a high level. Rosati et al. (2022) also found that 69.7% of second-grade junior high school students in Pontianak had high academic stress. In addition, Amanah et al. (2023) also found that seven students experienced moderate stress, and two students experienced severe stress in second-grade junior high school students in Jambi. This means that most students have academic stress, although at different levels, especially among adolescent students. This is because, in the adolescent phase, students are in a transition process, both in terms of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional, towards the adult phase (Syachfitri et al., 2023). This transition process results in adolescent students having more roles and responsibilities both socially and academically than in the previous phase. Therefore, adolescent students are very vulnerable to experiencing academic stress.

Giving assignments positively impacts students, which can train students in independent learning, improve skills, train hard work, and encourage creativity. In line with this, Oka & Nyoman (2020) also stated that giving assignments at the end of each lesson effectively improves student learning outcomes. However, excessive assignments can hurt students. Too many assignments can cause students to lose sleep, stress, and health problems. Students will tend to feel bored and stressed about the many tasks that must be completed so that their learning activities are disrupted, and the tasks they do cannot be completed optimally (Manwaring et al., 2017). The state of students who are saturated and stressed is included in an unstable psychological condition.

This student's psychological condition can influence the success of the learning process. This is in line with research conducted by Barseli et al. (2018), which states that psychological conditions, especially academic stress, have a significant relationship with learning outcomes. Academic stress is the pressure students feel physically and emotionally due to academic demands to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes (Trigueros et al., 2020). The demands for learning outcomes can come from within students and from the surrounding environment, such as demands from parents and teachers and academic competition with other students. Thus, students become depressed and burdened by these academic demands. Academic demands are a burden, and pressure can make them negative thoughts (Wardah et al., 2020).

Astuti et al. (2022) researched drawing and coloring media, showing that expressive art therapy techniques with coloring effectively overcome mental problems, such as stress and anxiety. After getting expressive art therapy

techniques, students are expected to recognize their emotions and reduce their academic stress. Based on this description, the problem can be formulated as follows: "Is mandala expressive art therapy technique in group counseling effective in reducing academic stress of junior high school students?". The research objectives of the problem can be formulated as follows: "To determine the effectiveness of mandala expressive art therapy techniques in group counseling to reduce academic stress of junior high school students."

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of mandala expressive art therapy techniques in group counseling in reducing academic stress in junior high school students. The focus of this study examines the exploration of how the use of art in the form of mandala drawing can contribute to the reduction of academic stress.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design

The research method used in this research is the quantitative method. According to Rofiqoh & Zulhawati (2020), the quantitative method is a way to test certain theories by examining the relationship between variables. These variables are measured by researchers, who usually use quantified research instruments so that data consisting of numbers can be analyzed based on statistical procedures. This research uses a pre-experimental design in the form of a one-group pre-test and post-test design. In this study, one group was observed at the pre-test stage, followed by treatment and post-test (Rofiqoh & Zulhawati, 2020).

The pre-test was conducted by distributing questionnaires to students in classes VIII-A, VIII-B, and VIII-C of SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya. After the students filled in the questionnaires, the researchers analyzed the scores of students with high academic stress levels. Furthermore, treatment will be carried out with group counseling for five counseling sessions for students who have been previously selected. Finally, the post-test was conducted by distributing questionnaires to VIII-grade students of SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya who had received treatment. The researcher then analyzed the questionnaire results to determine the students' final scores.

### 2.2 Location and Year of Research.

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya, located at Jl. Banjar Sugihan Baru No. 21, Banjar Sugihan, Kec. Tandes, Surabaya, East Java. This research was conducted over 6 months, from April to October 2024.

### 2.3 Population, Sample, or Research Subject

The population in this study was 91 students in class VIII of SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya who filled out the distributed questionnaire. This study used a purposive sampling technique. In purposive sampling, the appointment of a sample is based on certain characteristics or properties that are considered to have a close relationship with the characteristics or properties of a previously known population (Kusumastuti et al., 2020). Purposive sampling must be based on prior information about the state of the population. The sample criteria used in this study are: a) VIII grade students at SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya; b) Students have academic stress in the high category. In this study, researchers selected six students with academic stress in the high category to be sampled.

### 2.3 Data Collection

This study used a Likert scale form of academic stress inventory. The inventory was adapted from the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) by Sun et al. (2011), which has been translated into language. It consists of 34 statement items that use study pressure, task load, worry about grades, self-expectations, and hopelessness. The validity value of the academic stress inventory is 0.35 - 0.67, and the reliability value is 0.913.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this study is the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the results of 6 second-grade students of SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya. Researchers used the SPSS version 30 application with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to determine whether or not there was a significant decrease in academic stress. The criteria for this test are: a) If the Asymp.Sig value <0.05, then  $H_a$  is accepted and  $H_o$  is rejected; b) If the Asymp.With a sig value >0.05,  $H_o$  is accepted, and  $H_a$  is rejected.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Results

The level of academic stress of second-grade students at SMP Negeri 26 Surabaya is divided into three categories: mild, moderate, and high. To categorize the pre-test scores, researchers used several steps in Microsoft Excel as follows:

- a. Average (Mean) is obtained by using Insert - Functions - AVERAGE which is 83.
- b. Standard Deviation (SD) is obtained using Insert - Functions - STDEV which is 10.

Based on the results of data analysis from the pre-test results on second-grade students, 18 students have high-category academic stress, 63 students have moderate-category academic stress, and 10 students have mild-category academic stress. However, only six students were selected as research subjects. The following is the data on the results of the academic stress pre-test that has been carried out.

Table 3 Pre-Test Results of Research Subjects

No.	Names	Pre-Test Score	Category
1.	NNB	103	High
2.	JAPK	105	High
3.	LC	104	High
4.	KKW	104	High
5.	ILC	102	High
6.	SNA	99	High

Students selected as research subjects are given treatment using mandala expressive art therapy techniques with group counseling. After giving the students treatment, the researcher gave a post-test to see the level of academic stress. The following is the data on the results of the academic stress post-test that has been carried out.

Table 4 Post-Test Results of Research Subjects

No.	Names	Pre-Test Score	Category
1.	NNB	81	Medium
2.	JAPK	92	Medium
3.	LC	80	Medium
4.	KKW	72	Medium
5.	ILC	80	Medium
6.	SNA	80	Medium

After obtaining the results of the pre-test and post-test scores, a comparison of the scores before and after the group counseling treatment with the mandala expressive art therapy technique is then carried out. The following are the results of the comparison of the subject's pre-test and post-test scores:

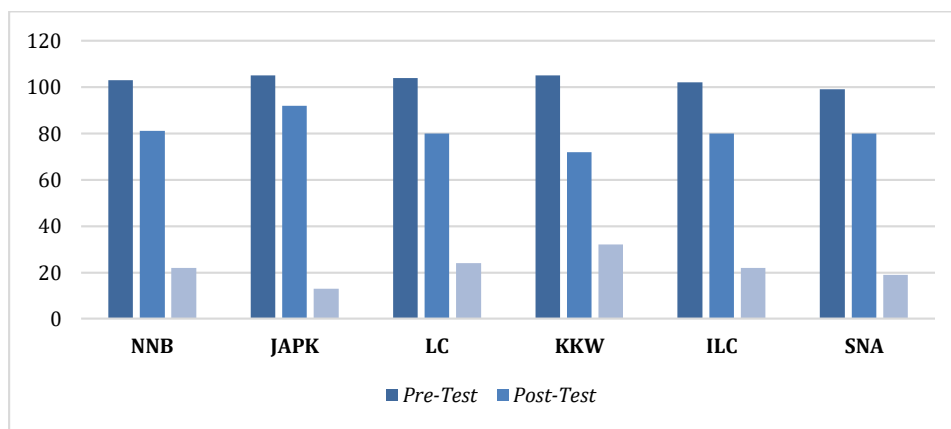


Figure 1. Comparison Result of Pre-Test & Post-Test Score

Based on the data results from the diagram above, it can be seen that there is a difference in scores between before and after group counseling treatment with mandala expressive art therapy techniques. The average pre-test score is 103. The average post-test score after group counseling treatment with mandala expressive art therapy techniques is 81 points. Then, the average decrease in student academic stress is 23 points. After comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test scores, further analysis was carried out using the Wilcoxon test with the help of IBM SPSS version 30. The following are the results of the Wilcoxon test that has been carried out:

Table 5. Wilcoxon Test Ranks

		Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
PostTest Stres Akademik -	Negative Ranks		6 <sup>a</sup>	3.50	21.00
PreTest Stres Akademik	Positive Ranks		0 <sup>b</sup>	.00	.00
	Ties		0 <sup>c</sup>		
	Total	6			

- a. PostTest Stres Akademik < PreTest Stres Akademik
- b. PostTest Stres Akademik > PreTest Stres Akademik
- c. PostTest Stres Akademik = PreTest Stres Akademik

Based on the results of the Wilcoxon test, it can be concluded that the treatment given significantly reduces the level of academic stress in the research subjects. This can be seen from the results obtained for the negative ranks: the N value is 6, the mean rank value is 3.50, and the sum of ranks is 21.00. That is, the six research subjects experienced a decrease in scores in the post-test. In positive ranks, it is known that the value obtained is 0 in both the N value, mean rank, and sum of ranks. This means there is no increase in scores from the four research subjects. In addition, the value of Ties is 0, which indicates that no subjects have the same score between pre-test and post-test.

Table 6. Test Statistics Uji Wilcoxon

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
Z	PostTest Stres Akademik - PreTest Stres Akademik -2.207 <sup>b</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.027

- a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
- b. Based on positive ranks.

Based on the results of the test statistics output, it can be seen that the Asymp.Sig (2-tailed) value is 0.027, which is smaller than 0.05. So, Ha is accepted, and Ho is rejected, which means that the mandala expressive art therapy technique in group counseling effectively reduces the academic stress of junior high school students.

### 3.2. Discussion

The research that has been conducted is quantitative research with the type of research, namely One Group Pre-Test - Post-Test. Initially, researchers gave students pre-test instruments regarding academic stress to measure their stress levels. Furthermore, the researcher again measured the subject's academic stress level with a post-test instrument after receiving treatment from the researcher. In this study, researchers did not use a control group as a comparison group. The subjects in this study were taken based on the results of the pre-test score on the academic stress instrument, which scored in the high category. The high level of academic stress in these students can hinder the student learning process if not addressed. Therefore, researchers provide group counseling treatment with mandala expressive art therapy techniques for five counseling sessions. Based on the results of the academic stress instrument pre-test score, researchers found six student subjects with high academic stress levels. These students are NNB, JAPK, LC, KKW, ILC, and SNA.

Researchers provide treatment by utilizing a group counseling atmosphere so that students can provide mutual support to each other and can provide advice on how each student can overcome the academic stress experienced. Group counseling aims to improve students' socialization skills, especially communication skills. This allows students to express their opinions well and share the story of their artwork with other students.

In group counseling, researchers use expressive art therapy techniques by coloring mandalas. This mandala coloring technique can help students to express feelings and emotions that cannot be expressed verbally. This study supports previous research by Astuti et al. (2022), which found that 66.66% of participants experienced decreased academic stress scores after receiving art therapy training. Astuti et al. (2022) revealed that research on art therapy could be an alternative to overcome academic stress problems in students, especially junior high school students. In addition, research conducted by Fitria & Putri (2022) shows that art therapy can be used to reduce academic stress experienced by students. This happens because group members can express their feelings through art therapy through drawing and coloring activities (Fitria & Putri, 2022). Then, research conducted by Raimaini & Zahit (2023) found that there was a difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, which showed that engaging in therapeutic art activities, especially coloring mandalas, could reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. This is because coloring circular patterns such as mandalas can make the mind calmer and more focused to be more concentrated (Faradina et al., 2019).

The research conducted by the researcher resulted in a decrease in academic stress scores that differed in each student. NNB initially scored 103 (high category), becoming 81 (medium category). Then, JAPK, who scored 105 (high category), became 92 (medium category). Then, LC, who scored 104 (high category), became 80 (medium category). Furthermore, KKW, who scored 104 (high category), became 72 (medium category). ILC who scored 102 (high category) became 80 (medium category). And finally, SNA, who scored 99 (high category), became 80 (medium category). This research shows that each student's academic stress score decreased. In addition, the results of the Wilcoxon test showed an *Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)* value of 0.027. Because  $0.027 < 0.05$ , it can be concluded that  $H_a$  is accepted and  $H_o$  is rejected, which means that the mandala expressive art therapy technique in group counseling effectively reduces the academic stress of junior high school students.

Based on the research that has been done, it has also been found that some characteristics of students are suitable for participating in mandala expressive art therapy activities to reduce their academic stress, like subject KKW, who gets demands from his parents to get satisfactory results in learning activities that have been carried out at school. Subjects feel that these demands become a burden, which can trigger academic stress. However, after doing this mandala expressive art therapy activity, subject KKW realized these demands were for their good. So, indirectly, the subject developed his stress coping strategy, namely accepting responsibility. Furthermore, all group members also feel burdened by all the tasks they face, so there are group members who have excessive worries about the exams to be taken, namely the SNA subject. Subject SNA worries too much about things that the subject has not experienced, and this results in anxiety and stress towards him. Then, subjects NNB, JAPK, LC, and ILC were overburdened by classmates with high academic ambitions. This caused the subject to have difficulty understanding and concentrating on lessons, making him feel hopeless about himself. Subjects tend to use stress coping strategies with escape-avoidance, where subjects avoid and escape from their learning responsibilities because they do not have confidence in their abilities. This can occur when individuals have difficulty expressing and regulating feelings. Therefore, individuals can channel their feelings and emotions with expressive art therapy by coloring mandalas. However, using expressive art therapy mandala techniques is only effective in short-term or temporary use. This means that the academic stress experienced by the subject can decrease when coloring mandalas. If problems such as academic stress are not addressed by further intervention, the academic stress experienced by the subject will reappear before treatment.

The application of Mandala Expressive Art Therapy techniques in group counseling is an effective solution to reduce academic stress in junior high school students. Not only does it help them cope with academic pressure, but it also develops healthy coping skills, improves emotional well-being, and strengthens self-confidence in facing school tasks. This approach is effective because it combines elements of art and self-reflection, which can help students manage anxiety and improve their emotional balance. In group counseling sessions, students get support from counselors and peers, which creates a more supportive environment and allows them to feel more understood. In addition, drawing and coloring mandalas have a meditative effect that can calm the mind and improve students' focus and concentration when facing academic challenges.

#### 4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The implication of this research is the importance of continuing to develop mandala-expressive art therapy techniques in group counseling to overcome academic stress in students. This research can make a real contribution to developing more effective and efficient counseling services to overcome students' academic stress problems so that students can optimize their academic activities. In addition, students gain new skills and

understanding of academic stress and how to manage it, especially by using mandala expressive art therapy. Several impacts occur when implementing the mandala expressive art therapy technique; special attention is required. The impact is that some students struggle to determine the color and feel tired during the coloring process because the mandala pattern is quite complex. However, students also enjoy coloring the mandala.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The Mandala Expressive Art Therapy technique has proven effective in helping junior high school students reduce academic stress. Participation in repetitive mandala drawing activities provided a relaxing effect and helped students positively express their emotions. Subjects feel that these demands become a burden, which can trigger academic stress. However, after doing this mandala expressive art therapy activity, subject KKW realized these demands were for their good. So, indirectly, the subject developed his stress coping strategy, namely accepting responsibility.

Furthermore, all group members also feel burdened by all the tasks they face, so there are group members who have excessive worries about the exams to be taken, namely the SNA subject. Subject SNA worries too much about things that the subject has not experienced, and this results in anxiety and stress towards him. Then, subjects NNB, JAPK, LC, and ILC were overburdened by classmates with high academic ambitions.

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However, using expressive art therapy mandala techniques is only effective in short-term or temporary use. This means that the academic stress experienced by the subject can decrease when coloring mandalas. If problems such as academic stress are not.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The first author is responsible for formulating the research idea and objectives, methodological design, data analysis, and discussion. The second author was instrumental in checking the methodology design. The third and fourth authors checked the data analysis and research results.

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