



The Implementation Of Individual Counseling Using Reality Therapy To Enhance Self-Identity Of Vocational High School Students

Helvy Hilyatul Aulia ¹, Fauzi Nur Ilahi ², Sabrina Dachmiati ³

^{1,2,3} Department of Guidance and Counseling Indraprasta PGRI University, Indonesia

¹ e-mail: helvyha1310@gmail.com

Received [24-11-2025]

Revised [28-12-2025]

Accepted [31-12-2025]

Abstract. *Self-identity is a vital aspect of adolescent development that does not automatically mature with age, but rather requires a deep reflective process and sufficient psychological support. School-based counseling services, particularly individual counseling with a reality therapy approach, can serve as a restorative space for students experiencing identity confusion. This study aims to describe the process and outcomes of applying reality therapy techniques in helping a vocational high school student shape a clearer sense of self. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving one tenth-grade student at SMK Negeri 18 Jakarta. The findings reveal that individual counseling based on reality therapy helps the counselee recognize psychological needs, re-evaluate life choices, and build confidence in engaging with social roles. The counseling process emerged as a transformative experience that touched the student's personal and emotional dimensions, showing tangible improvements in behavior, social participation, and self-perception. This study recommends wider implementation of similar counseling approaches, supported by school policies that prioritize students' long-term psychological growth.*

Keywords: *Individual Counseling, Reality Therapy, Self-Identity, Adolescence.*

INTRODUCTION

An individual's journey to self-discovery is often marked by clashes between social expectations and inevitable inner dynamics. Amidst the accelerating pace of social change, adolescents, as a transitional age group, are often trapped in uncertainty about their direction (Yanti et al., 2021). They are not only faced with academic demands and career choices, but also with deeper questions: "Who am I?", "What is important to me?", and "Where do I want to go?" These questions often arise silently, yet they create real anxiety, influencing how they think, feel, and act. When answers to these questions are not fully established, existential doubts form, distancing adolescents from the psychological balance necessary for daily life.

Self-identity is not automatically given through biological development but must be cultivated through exploration, reflection, and ongoing encounters with social realities and personal experiences (Dewany et al., 2023). In a society filled with expectations and competition, adolescents find themselves at a crossroads, confronted with social pressures and uncertain choices (Herdayati & Syahrial, 2019). If the process of self-exploration is hampered by limited access to guidance, a lack of understanding of adolescent psychological dynamics in the community, or even the individual's own lack of openness to themselves, symptoms of self-doubt will emerge (Haolah et al., 2018). This can be seen through social withdrawal, reluctance to actively participate, and difficulty expressing opinions and emotions in a healthy manner.

In secondary education settings, this phenomenon often emerges unnoticed. Adolescents go through school days with nearly identical faces, but harboring varying emotional burdens. Some may be physically present in class but psychologically absent from conversations about the future and the meaning of life (Istiqomah & Habsy, 2019). They can become silent individuals, not because they lack potential, but because they have not yet found a safe enough space to understand and accept themselves. Teachers, homeroom teachers, and other educational staff often fail to realize that behind report cards and regular attendance lies an internal struggle over self-image, the meaning of existence, and unexpressed feelings of alienation (Riswana et al., 2023).

In such situations, counseling services cannot be interpreted solely as a response to explicitly emerging behavioral problems. Counseling should serve as a bridge for students to self-identify, understand their choices, and develop the capacity to take responsibility for their life decisions (Sunarko, 2018). This is where the individual counseling approach finds its role as a forum for personal interaction that allows individuals to open up without pressure and rework experiences that influence their self-assessment (Sekali & Tohir, 2020). When counseling is developed with a reality-based approach, as proposed by William Glasser, the goal of this service is no longer simply to resolve problems, but rather to encourage change through awareness of choice, responsibility, and decision-making that favors a more meaningful life (Côté, 2006).

The reality of students' lives is not always determined by what appears on the surface. Some of them may appear to be actively participating in school activities, but are actually experiencing identity confusion due to undisclosed internal pressures (Septiyowati & Prasetyo, 2021). When a student, for example, must juggle the roles of both student and breadwinner at a young age, their psychological reach for self-awareness becomes more complex (Purwanti, 2013). In situations like this, efforts to develop self-identity cannot simply rely on verbal advice or motivation from teachers, but require interventions that tap into personal awareness through reflective and gradual dialogue, such as those facilitated by individual counseling using reality techniques (Rambe & Syarqawi, 2023).

This research aims to examine in depth how the application of individual counseling using reality techniques can help students rebuild their sense of self, especially when their personal identity becomes blurred due to social pressures, the burden of roles outside of school, and unsupportive relationships. By placing the client's personal experience at the center of attention, this study aims to explore the extent to which the counseling process can raise awareness of the psychological needs that have been.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unformed Self-Identity

AS, a 10th-grade student who was the main subject of this study, exhibited psychological dynamics typical of adolescents in the process of discovering their identity. Early symptoms recorded through observation and interviews indicated that AS had limited social interaction patterns. He tended to avoid participating in class conversations, complained about a lack of appreciation from his peers, and felt unheard when asking questions. Beyond mere passive behavior, AS's nonverbal expressions and choice of words when talking about himself indicated a lack of confidence in his personal worth. He went about his school days functionally, but was not fully present emotionally or socially.

This phenomenon reflects the conditions described by Erikson in the identity versus role confusion stage of development. In this phase, adolescents are challenged to answer existential questions about who they are and what role they will play in life. When the environment,

whether family, school, or peers, fails to provide a safe space for self-exploration, individuals are at risk of identity confusion.

This is also evident in AS's case, who, on the one hand, wants to demonstrate his potential but, on the other, feels he lacks a safe place to express himself. This situation is exacerbated by the complex realities of AS's personal life. The absence of a father figure who has long since abandoned the family, the economic burden requiring him to work part-time, and the responsibilities of being the eldest child make his adolescence more challenging than it should be. While other teenagers fill their days with social activities and exploring interests, AS must instead focus on survival. In this regard, external factors have influenced the internal structure of his identity formation.

These findings corroborate the research of Purwanti (2013), which showed that the majority of students fall into the intermediate self-identity category, where awareness of personal roles has begun to form but is not yet firmly rooted. Similarly, Côté (2006) emphasized that self-identity formation is not simply an individual psychological process but also the result of dynamic social and environmental interactions. In AS's case, minimal interaction with peers and a lack of emotional support from adult figures make the identity formation process slow and fraught with obstacles.

The Effectiveness of Individual Counseling

The four consecutive sessions of individual counseling conducted with AS demonstrated a gradual process of uncovering previously hidden layers of inner clarity. During the first session, AS still showed hesitation in fully expressing her feelings. Her sentences were normative, cautious, and emotionally censored. However, as the second and third sessions progressed, the client began to demonstrate greater emotional openness. She began to talk about the injustices she felt in her family life, feelings of being left behind by her friends, and the uncertainty of her future. The counselor, in this case, was not merely a passive listener but acted as a reflective facilitator, helping AS reframe the meaning of her reality.

The effectiveness of individual counseling was most evident when the client began to distinguish between emotions stemming from anger at her circumstances and disappointment stemming from personal expectations of herself (Lestari et al., 2021). For example, in the third session, AS began to realize that her fear of socializing stemmed not entirely from the attitudes of her friends but also from feelings of inferiority shaped by childhood experiences and family dynamics.

This realization became a crucial turning point, marking the success of counseling not just as an intervention, but as a process of self-healing. The effectiveness of this method is further enhanced by the characteristics of the individual technique itself, which allows for a warm and empathetic therapeutic relationship. The counseling room becomes the only place for AS to feel understood, valued, and accepted without pressure. In this space, clients learn that they have room for failure, but also opportunities for growth. This aligns with the findings of Ramdhoni & Giri (2024), who demonstrated that a counseling process using a reality approach can reawaken students' self-confidence and sense of responsibility for their lives.

Furthermore, the results of this study also demonstrate consistency with Pratama's study (2022), which highlighted that socially isolated students tend to show significant progress after participating in individual counseling. Although the focus of Andriyani's research was on increasing self-confidence, the process that occurred in AS subjects indicates that this improvement is closely related to the formation of a stronger and more conscious identity. Counseling is not merely a medium for resolving complaints, but a psychological intervention process that reaches the deepest layers of students' self-structure.

Thus, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of individual counseling depends not only on the techniques used, but also on the sustainability of the therapeutic relationship established and the accuracy of understanding the individual's psychological dynamics. In this case, the reality technique is an appropriate approach because it allows the client to not only become aware of their situation but also to consciously and responsibly decide how they will respond to it.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, as its primary focus was to delve deeply into the psychological dynamics of a student experiencing an identity crisis and undergoing individual counseling using reality techniques. This approach was chosen to enable a comprehensive understanding of the client's subjective experiences, which cannot be adequately explained through quantitative approaches or statistical generalizations.

The primary subject of this study was a 10th-grade student at SMK Negeri 18 Jakarta who exhibited symptoms of an identity crisis, including withdrawal, lack of confidence in his or her own abilities, and discomfort in establishing social relationships. In addition to the student, the Guidance and Counseling teacher was also involved as a source of supplementary information, providing additional perspectives on the student's behavior and development within the school environment. Data collection was conducted through direct observation, in-depth interviews spanning four counseling sessions, and documentation in the form of attendance records, service implementation plans (RPL), and written reflections from the counselor.

The entire analysis process did not stop at recording field findings but instead progressed toward sensitive interpretation of subtle changes in the client's verbal and nonverbal expressions. In constructing meaning from the data obtained, the researcher did not separate theoretical understanding from field experience; Both are combined to reread counseling events as a dynamic process of identity transformation. Data validity is tested through source and time triangulation, which involves comparing information between sources and across meetings. Thus, the method used in this research serves not only as an academic procedure, but also as a way to listen to voices often overlooked in formal educational spaces.

RESULTS

Implementing Reality Techniques

One of the main strengths of the reality counseling approach lies in its ability to encourage clients to recognize that life choices are within their own control, not determined by circumstances or other people. During the counseling process, particularly during the third and fourth sessions, the counselor gradually guided AS to understand that her passivity, lack of self-confidence, and confusion in social relationships were not immutable. Through open dialogue and reflective questioning, AS began to evaluate whether her current lifestyle and thought patterns were truly helping her achieve the peace and goals she desired.

The application of reality techniques in this counseling was demonstrated, among other things, through the development of a behavior change plan, the identification of unmet needs, and the assignment of responsibility to the client for determining how she would respond to the social situations around her (Widodo et al., 2024).

For example, in the third session, AS was given the opportunity to reflect on the content of a video related to the courage to pursue personal achievement despite lagging behind others. AS's response to the video reflected the internalization of the value that success is not about how quickly someone achieves a goal, but rather the extent to which they have the courage to take action based on their own decisions.

Reality therapy, in this case, is not only a tool for developing practical solutions but also a mirror that helps clients see their capacity for re-choice. Glasser's theory, which states that individuals feel more alive when they are able to fulfill basic needs such as love, freedom, worth, and pleasure, is manifested in AS's experience (Mootalu et al., 2024). She begins to feel that she has the space to pursue healthy social relationships, to feel valued, and to no longer rely on the judgments of others as the basis for her self-worth.

These findings align with research by Maslikan (2018), which suggests that reality therapy can help students develop a sense of self-identity through the achievement of consciously designed and realistic life goals. Similarly, Pratama's study (2022) found that students who initially had low learning interest experienced improved self-perception after undergoing reality therapy, which emphasized personal responsibility and life choices. In this study, AS demonstrated the ability to re-prioritize her life, reaffirm that she chose her major of her own free will, and expressed a desire to become more actively involved in social life and academic activities.

Thus, the application of reality techniques in counseling is not merely a momentary intervention, but an existential experience that reactivates the client's personal agency. They no longer see themselves as victims of circumstances, but rather as individuals capable of responding in new ways, grounded in self-awareness and responsibility.

The Impact of Counseling on Social and Emotional Dynamics

The changes AS experienced after counseling were not limited to intrapersonal aspects but also touched broader social and emotional aspects. One of the most obvious indicators was increased participation in the classroom environment. AS began to show active participation in group discussions, became more confident in answering teacher questions, and began communicating more comfortably with classmates. Furthermore, in extracurricular activities, particularly the Rohis organization he led, AS began to take on a larger role as leader, including in decision-making and activity coordination.

This transformation did not occur suddenly, but was built through a counseling process that provided a safe space for expressing emotions, admitting weaknesses, and accepting support. Behind the apparent behavioral changes, there was a deeper internal shift: from an individual who felt invisible to one who believed that their presence brought value. This strongly resonates with the identity theory of Eka Pitri et al. (2023), where the identity achievement stage is characterized by an individual who has explored various possibilities and ultimately made a fully conscious choice. In this case, AS moved from a moratorium filled with doubt to a phase of commitment, where he began to trust his own choices.

Counseling also impacted AS's emotional capacity to manage disappointment, fatigue, and frustration. He learned that feelings need not be suppressed or denied, but can instead be processed into energy for making healthier decisions. The client also began to see that not everyone understands his feelings, and that this is not a failure, but rather a social reality that he needs to accept without losing control.

These findings support the research of Wenny Yusfi Nasution (2019), which states that guidance and counseling play a role in helping students develop self-acceptance, emotional responsibility, and social readiness. In AS's case, all of these aspects began to manifest after the counseling process. Furthermore, the results of this study reaffirm that changes in student behavior will not occur solely through cognitive approaches or formal teaching, but through an interactive process that touches the deepest layers of their psyche.

This impact demonstrates that counseling should not be positioned as an additional intervention, but rather as an integral part of the educational experience that values humans as beings who grow through relationships, dialogue, and self-awareness. Counseling conducted in

a space that respects personal dignity can change not only the way students think, but also the way they stand in a world that is sometimes too busy, but often does not really listen.

CONCLUSION

The application of individual counseling using reality techniques has opened up psychological recovery for students experiencing an identity crisis, as evidenced by the reflective journey of a counselee with the initials AS at SMK Negeri 18 Jakarta. Through the four-session process, the counselee demonstrated an attitude transformation born not from mere guidance but from a gradual self-awareness developed through warm and equal therapeutic dialogue. Counseling not only facilitated the expression of suppressed emotions but also encouraged the counselee to reframe their perspective on themselves, their environment, and their future. Increased self-confidence, courage to assume social roles, and the ability to responsibly evaluate life choices indicate that the reality approach has a profound effect on the formation of a more focused and stable self-identity.

The results of this study suggest that educational institutions need to position counseling services not as an administrative supplement but as the heart of the student's maturation process. Guidance and Counseling teachers are not only tasked with resolving behavioral problems but also act as companions on students' inner journeys as they discover their direction in life.

The success of the reality technique in this case requires ongoing training for school practitioners so they can implement a counseling approach that is reflective and adaptive to students' psychological needs. For future researchers, exploration of variations in approaches and expanding the number of participants is essential to understand more broadly how counseling can work transformatively in various types of schools and social backgrounds of students.

REFERENCES

- Côté, J. E. (2006). Social Identity and the Construction of Identity among Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 35(5), 710–723. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9099-9>
- Dewany, R., Hariko, R., & Karneli, Y. (2023). Structuring Techniques in Individual Counseling Services. *Journal of Guidance, Counseling, and Psychology*, 3(2), 62–69.
- Eka Pitri, T., Hartini, H., & Warlizasusi, J. (2023). Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Helping Students Find Their Identity at SMAN 6 Kepahiang.
- Haolah, S., Atus, A., & Irmayanti, R. (2018). The Importance of Counselor Personal Qualities in Implementing Individual Counseling. *FOKUS (Guidance & Counseling Studies in Education)*, 1(6), 215–226.
- Herdayati, S. P., & Syahrial, S. T. (2019). Research Design and Data Collection Techniques in Research. *National International Online Journal of the University of August 17, 1945 Jakarta*, 7(1), 1689–1699.
- Istiqomah, D., & Habsy, B. A. (2019). The Effectiveness of Reality Counseling in Overcoming Anxiety in Expressing Opinions in Junior High School Students. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Counseling*, 3(1), 61–70.

- Lestari, R. D., Mangantes, M. L., Kasenda, R. Y., & Tinus, D. (2021). Guidance and Counseling Teacher Strategies in Overcoming Identity Crises. *Educouns Journal: Journal of Education and Counseling Guidance*, 2(1), 70–74.
- Maslikan, M. (2018). The Effectiveness of Reality Group Counseling in Improving Junior High School Students' Understanding of Self-Identity. *Perspectives of Educational Sciences*, 32(2), 107–115.
- Mootalu, K., Ilolu, R., & Yusuf, I. (2024). Application of Erik Erikson's Theory in Education: A Developmental Psychology Perspective. *Tarqiyah: Journal of Islamic Education*, 2(2), 94–100.
- Nasution, W. Y. (2019). Guidance and Counseling Services for Self-Identity of MAL UINSU Students in the 2017/2018 Academic Year.
- Pratama, K. B. (2022). Implementation of Individual Counseling Services with a Reality Therapy Approach to Address Low Student Interest in Learning at SMA Negeri 1 Kampar Timur.
- Purwanti, F. (2013). Adolescent Self-Identity in Grade XI Students of SMA Negeri 2 Pematang in Terms of Gender. *Developmental and Clinical Psychology*, 2(2).
- Rambe, A., & Syarqawi, A. (2023). Effectiveness of Individual Counseling Services with a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Approach in Reducing Communication Anxiety in Students at SMA Negeri 4 Tebing Tinggi. *Biblio Couns: Journal of Counseling and Education Studies*, 6(2), 90–101.
- Ramdhoni, I., & Giri, P. A. S. P. (2024). Individual Counseling with a Reality Approach in Developing Self-Confidence in Students of SMP Negeri 8 Denpasar. *CENDEKIA: Journal of Social Sciences, Language, and Education*, 4(3), 57–69.
- Riswana, A. A., Umari, T., & Khadijah, K. (2023). Achieving Career Identity in Students of SMK PGRI Pekanbaru. *Wahana Konseling Journal*, 6(2), 165–177.
- Sekali, R. B. K., & Tohir, A. (2020). Efforts to Increase Student Self-Acceptance Through Individual Counseling with a Reality Approach in Grade XI Students of SMA NEGERI 15 Bandar Lampung. *Journal of Evaluation and Learning*, 2(2), 135–147.
- Septiyowati, T., & Prasetyo, T. (2021). The Effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning and Discovery Learning Models on Elementary School Students' Critical Thinking Skills. *Basicedu Journal*, 5(3), 1231–1240.
- Sunarko, P. A. (2018). Implementation of a Reality Approach Group Counseling Process to Address Low Self-Esteem Cases of Four Students at the Child-Friendly Community Foundation. *Psycho-Education*, 16(1), 21–34.
- Widodo, B., Susilaningih, C. Y., & Fransisca Mudjijanti, M. M. (2024). Reality Therapy Counseling Approach. CV. AE Media Grafika.

Yanti, S. H., Hawi, A., & Syarnubi, S. (2021). The Effect of the Application of the Firing Line Strategy on Students' Understanding of Islamic Religious Education Subjects in Class VII at Sukaraya State Middle School, Karang Jaya District, Musi Rawas Regency. *Raden Fatah Islamic Education Journal*, 3(1), 55–65.