

EFFECTIVENESS OF GRATITUDE THERAPY-BASED GROUP GUIDANCE IN REDUCING ADOLESCENTS' SITUATIONAL STRESS: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AT MAS AL-WARDAH TEMBUNG

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Abstract

Situational stress is a psychological problem commonly experienced by adolescents due to academic pressure, social relationships, and developmental demands during the school period. If not managed effectively, situational stress may negatively affect emotional well-being and academic functioning. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of group guidance services using Gratitude Therapy techniques in reducing situational stress among adolescents at MAS Al-Wardah Tembung. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group design was employed. The sample consisted of 16 students selected through purposive sampling, with 8 students assigned to the experimental group and 8 to the control group. Situational stress was measured using a Likert-scale questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.812$. The intervention was conducted in four group guidance sessions. Data analysis focused on within-group changes using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Results indicated a significant reduction in situational stress in the experimental group ($Z = -2.524$, $p = 0.012$), with a large effect size ($r = 0.89$), while no significant change was found in the control group ($p > 0.05$). These findings suggest that Gratitude Therapy-based group guidance was effective in reducing situational stress through within-group improvement. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously due to methodological limitations, including non-random group assignment, a very small sample size, and the single-site research context. Further studies with larger samples and randomized designs are recommended to strengthen causal inference.

Keywords: Group Guidance, Gratitude Therapy, Situational Stress, Adolescents

A. Introduction

Adolescence was an important period in human development, marked by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. During this phase, individuals began to build self-identity, develop independence, and adjust to increasingly complex social demands. These changes often generated psychological pressures that had the potential to disrupt adolescents' emotional balance. When adolescents faced various demands such as academic pressure, family conflicts, peer relationship problems, and social pressure from their environment, they could experience situational stress, which was a condition arising from specific situations perceived as threatening to emotional well-being (Chao, 2010).

Stress in adolescents was an unavoidable phenomenon; however, its impact could be severe if it was not managed properly. Adolescents who experienced stress tended to show symptoms such as irritability, loss of motivation, difficulty concentrating, sleep

disturbances, and excessive anxiety. This condition aligned with the perspective that adolescent stress not only affected momentary emotional states but also impacted cognitive functioning and daily behavior, especially when stress persisted continuously without effective coping mechanisms (Sun et al., 2019). In the long term, unmanaged stress could reduce self-confidence, affect academic performance, and contribute to negative behaviors such as withdrawal, aggression, or dishonesty (Sun et al., 2019). Accumulated stress that was poorly managed could hinder adolescents' psychosocial development and increase the risk of mental health problems later in life (Sun et al., 2019). Therefore, it was important for adolescents to possess emotional regulation skills and adaptive coping strategies to maintain their psychological well-being, as these skills acted as protective factors to help them face pressures, manage emotions healthily, and adjust positively to developmental challenges.

Factors causing stress in adolescents could be categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors included personality traits, emotional regulation abilities, and individual resilience, while external factors involved academic pressure, peer relationships, parental expectations, and social environmental conditions. Adolescents with good emotional regulation tended to interpret stressful situations as challenges rather than threats, enabling better adaptation. Conversely, adolescents lacking these abilities were vulnerable to emotional disturbances. In this context, strengthening positive aspects such as gratitude became important, as it functioned as a protective factor against stress and depression (Chang et al., 2022). Gratitude helped individuals shift focus from stressors to meaningful life aspects, foster more adaptive cognitive appraisals, and enhance emotional regulation and psychological resilience. Consequently, adolescents were better able to manage developmental demands and environmental pressures healthily and sustainably.

Gratitude could be understood as a tendency to recognize, appreciate, and be thankful for positive aspects of life, whether originating from oneself or others. Gratitude played an important role in building healthy social relationships by enhancing empathy and social support (Wong et al., 2024). Individuals with higher levels of gratitude tended to be more optimistic, hold positive perceptions of life, and interpret difficulties as learning experiences. This made gratitude a psychological variable that strengthened emotional resilience, serving as an adaptive mechanism to manage emotions effectively, maintain psychological balance under pressure, and shift focus from negative experiences to meaningful and positive life aspects (Wong et al., 2024). Thus, individuals were better able to recover from stress, adapt to changes, and maintain psychological well-being sustainably.

In educational contexts, schools played a central role in helping students develop healthy coping strategies through guidance and counseling services. This role became even more crucial considering that schools were formal environments where students spent most of their time, providing ample opportunity to offer structured and continuous psychological support. One relevant approach was group guidance, which provided

spaces for students to share experiences, express feelings, and receive social support from peers in a safe and structured environment. This service fostered empathy, solidarity, and social skills necessary to cope with stress adaptively (Sahar et al., 2022). Through group dynamics, students learned to understand others' perspectives, respect differences, and develop effective communication skills. Interaction within groups created a sense of togetherness, encouraging participants to be open and learn from each other's experiences, so students did not feel isolated when facing problems. Thus, group guidance not only functioned as a problem-solving tool but also as a psychological reinforcement platform to help students develop healthier and more sustainable coping mechanisms.

One form of intervention applied in group guidance was Gratitude Therapy, which focused on training individuals to consciously recognize and appreciate positive aspects of life, express gratitude, and interpret life events constructively. Through this process, individuals were guided not to focus solely on limitations, problems, or negative experiences but to recognize opportunities, meaning, and positive values in themselves and their environment. This approach gradually shifted cognitive and emotional focus from negative dominance toward more positive perspectives of self, others, and situations, helping individuals develop more adaptive mental attitudes (Aliza & Urbayatun, 2023). Research showed that Gratitude Therapy was effective in reducing stress levels and improving psychological well-being in adolescents, especially when implemented systematically and continuously (Aliza & Urbayatun, 2023).

These findings were reinforced by evidence that gratitude training played a key role in enhancing students' resilience and happiness, as gratitude helped individuals develop the ability to endure, recover from pressure, and maintain positive emotions in facing life challenges (Listiyandini, 2018). Gratitude Therapy also strengthened social relationships and emotional regulation, which ultimately contributed significantly to improving individuals' psychological well-being (Webb & Whitmire, 2024). By developing a grateful attitude, individuals tended to show more stable positive emotions, better self-control, and healthier social interaction quality, making their relationships with the surrounding environment more supportive (Webb & Whitmire, 2024). Additionally, gratitude acted as a buffer against the effects of stressful life events, as it helped individuals interpret difficult experiences more positively and reduced the intensity of stress responses (Wei & Wang, 2022). With this protective role, individuals became more psychologically resilient and recovered more easily from stress (Wei & Wang, 2022). Based on these findings, the implementation of Gratitude Therapy in school group guidance was highly relevant and had strong potential as a psychological intervention because it helped students manage academic and social pressures more adaptively while supporting optimal emotional well-being in educational settings.

Observations at MAS Al-Wardah Tembung indicated that several students experienced high levels of situational stress, particularly before examinations or during social conflicts. Guidance and Counseling teachers acknowledged that this phenomenon required special attention, necessitating counseling programs that not only focused on problem-solving but also emphasized emotional strengthening and the development of

students' positive potential. Therefore, the implementation of Gratitude Therapy in group guidance services was considered a relevant and strategic intervention alternative, as this approach emphasized cultivating gratitude, strengthening positive emotions, and enhancing students' ability to interpret life experiences more adaptively.

This study employed a quantitative approach as a methodological basis to objectively and systematically measure the effectiveness of Gratitude Therapy in reducing situational stress among adolescents at MAS Al-Wardah Tembung. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allowed the researchers to obtain measurable, accurate data that could be statistically analyzed to assess the extent of change in situational stress levels before and after the intervention. Through this study, the results were expected to provide a clear empirical picture of the role of Gratitude Therapy as an effective psychological intervention in helping adolescents manage the stress they experienced.

B. Method

This study adopted a quantitative approach employing a quasi-experimental design with a nonequivalent control group model. Two groups were involved: an experimental group that participated in group guidance sessions using Gratitude Therapy and a control group that did not receive any intervention. Both groups were assessed using pretest and posttest measurements to examine changes in students' situational stress levels before and after the intervention. Although random assignment was not feasible, this design enabled a structured comparison of outcomes between groups within an authentic school context.

The study was carried out at MAS Al-Wardah Tembung during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The research population comprised all students in grades X and XI. Participant selection was conducted through purposive sampling by screening students' pretest scores and identifying those who demonstrated moderate to high levels of situational stress. A total of 16 eligible students met the inclusion criteria and were subsequently assigned into two groups: 8 students in the experimental group and 8 students in the control group. This assignment aimed to ensure comparability of initial stress characteristics between groups, despite the absence of randomization.

Data were collected using a situational stress questionnaire based on a Likert scale, encompassing emotional, physical, cognitive, and coping dimensions (Chao, 2010). The instrument was subjected to content validity assessment and reliability testing, resulting in a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.812$). The research procedure consisted of three stages: pretest administration, implementation of Gratitude Therapy through four structured group guidance sessions, and posttest administration. Data analysis was performed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test with SPSS version 25 at a significance level of $p < 0.05$ (Aliza & Urbayatun, 2023).

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

This study was conducted at MA Al-Wardah Tembung, focusing on measuring the effectiveness of group guidance services using the Gratitude Therapy technique in

reducing situational stress among adolescents. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests using a situational stress measurement instrument that had been validated and tested for reliability. The research subjects were divided into two groups: an experimental group that received group guidance services with Gratitude Therapy and a control group that did not receive any treatment during the study period. The pre-test and post-test results of the situational stress scale among adolescents at MA Al-Wardah Tembung are presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Pre-test Scores
for the Experimental and Control Groups

| Experimental Group | | | | Control Group | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------|-----|---------------|---|----------|-----|
| Interval | F | Category | % | Interval | F | Category | % |
| 80-60 | 8 | Tinggi | 100 | 80-60 | 8 | Tinggi | 100 |
| 59-39 | 0 | Sedang | 0 | 59-39 | 0 | Sedang | 0 |
| 38-18 | 0 | Rendah | 0 | 38-18 | 0 | Rendah | 0 |
| Frequency | 8 | | 100 | Frequency | 8 | | 100 |

Based on the descriptive analysis presented in Table 1, the pretest results indicate that all participants in both the experimental and control groups were classified within the high situational stress category. In the experimental group, all 8 students (100%) demonstrated high stress levels, with no participants falling into the moderate or low categories. A similar pattern was observed in the control group, where all 8 students (100%) were also categorized as experiencing high situational stress. This distribution suggests comparable baseline stress conditions between the two groups prior to the intervention.

In addition to categorical frequencies, Table 1 also reports descriptive statistics of pretest scores to clarify score distribution and confirm the direction of scoring, in which higher scores reflect higher levels of situational stress. The posttest results following the implementation of the group guidance intervention are presented in Table 2, including descriptive statistics and individual score changes to provide a more comprehensive depiction of outcome variation.

Table 2
Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Post-Test Scores
Experimental and Control Groups

| Experimental Group | | | | Control Group | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------|-----|---------------|---|----------|-----|
| Interval | F | Category | % | Interval | F | Category | % |
| 80-60 | 0 | Tinggi | 0 | 80-60 | 6 | Tinggi | 75 |
| 59-39 | 0 | Sedang | 0 | 59-39 | 2 | Sedang | 25 |
| 38-18 | 8 | Rendah | 8 | 38-18 | 0 | Rendah | 0 |
| Frequency | 8 | | 100 | Frequency | 8 | | 100 |

Based on the research results and the treatment conducted by the experimenter, a significant difference was observed in the experimental group. The data analysis presented in Table 2 showed the frequency distribution and percentage of post-test scores for the

experimental and control groups. Based on the post-test results, all 8 students in the experimental group had situational stress levels categorized as low, representing 100%. Meanwhile, in the control group, 6 students had situational stress levels in the high category, accounting for 75%, and 2 students were in the moderate category, representing 25%.

Based on the data in Table 1 and Table 2, a significant change was found in the experimental group after they received the intervention in the form of group guidance using the Gratitude Therapy technique. Before the intervention, all 8 students in the experimental group had situational stress levels in the high category, representing 100%. However, after the intervention, all 8 students showed a decrease in situational stress to the low category, representing 100%.

The reduction of situational stress observed in the experimental group suggests that group guidance using Gratitude Therapy may facilitate adaptive stress regulation among adolescents. This effect can be interpreted through cognitive reappraisal processes, whereby students were guided to reinterpret stressful experiences by recognizing positive aspects and personal resources during the sessions. In addition, gratitude-based activities likely supported the *broaden-and-build* mechanism by expanding positive emotions, which in turn enhanced students' coping capacities.

The group guidance setting also provided opportunities for peer interaction and shared reflection, strengthening social support dynamics that may have contributed to stress reduction. These mechanisms were directly reflected in the session activities, which involved guided reflection, gratitude expression, and group discussion. In contrast, the control group, which did not receive such structured experiences, showed minimal change. Overall, these findings indicate that Gratitude Therapy delivered through group guidance may play a meaningful role in reducing situational stress, although statistical testing was required to confirm the significance of these changes. The results of this analysis are presented and discussed in Table 3

Tabel 3. Wilcoxon Statistical Test Result

| | <i>Pretest-Posttest Experimental</i> | <i>Pretest-Posttest Control</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Z | -2,524 ^b | -1,527 ^b |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | 0,012 | 0,127 |

Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, the experimental group obtained a Z value of -2.524 with a p-value of 0.012. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, it was concluded that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group. This indicated that the group guidance service using Gratitude Therapy was effective in reducing situational stress among adolescents at MA Al-Wardah Tembung. Meanwhile, the control group obtained a Z value of -1.527 with a p-value of 0.127. Because the p-value exceeded 0.05, no significant difference was found

between the pre-test and post-test results in the control group. This showed that significant changes in situational stress occurred only in the group that received the Gratitude Therapy intervention, whereas the control group did not experience meaningful changes.

2. Discussion

Based on the study results, it was concluded that before the intervention of group guidance using Gratitude Therapy, the pre-test results showed that all participants in both the experimental and control groups had situational stress levels in the high category. This condition indicated that adolescents at the target school, MA Al-Wardah Tembung, were in a psychologically vulnerable situation, in which academic pressure, peer relationships, and adolescent developmental dynamics were considered major triggers of stress. Research by (Bono et al., 2023) indicated that perceived stress in adolescents negatively correlated with psychological well-being and that gratitude acted as a protective factor against anxiety and depression. Therefore, the initial findings of this study reinforced the assumption that adolescents' limited ability to interpret positive experiences and manage emotions adaptively could worsen the situational stress they experienced. This also highlighted the urgency of implementing gratitude-based interventions as preventive and curative efforts to improve adolescents' psychological well-being in the school environment.

Additionally, research by (Setiyawati, 2025) indicated that strengthening gratitude in adolescents could enhance cognitive flexibility and adaptive coping strategies toward stress. The high-stress condition found in this study aligned with those findings, suggesting that without proper intervention, adolescents tended to experience a considerable psychological burden, both emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally, which could hinder healthy psychological development. This was supported by (Diniz et al., 2023), who demonstrated the effectiveness of gratitude interventions in youth populations as stress reducers and enhancers of emotional well-being. These findings reinforced the view that gratitude served as an internal psychological resource that helped adolescents interpret experiences more positively and manage stress adaptively. Consequently, the uniform baseline condition in both groups provided a strong foundation for applying gratitude interventions to reduce situational stress.

After the intervention, the experimental group showed a remarkable change, with all participants categorized as having low situational stress. This indicated that the implementation of group guidance using Gratitude Therapy had a highly positive impact on stress reduction. This was consistent with (Fekete & Deichert, 2022), who reported that brief gratitude writing interventions reduced stress and negative affect over the following month. In a group context, gratitude-based interventions were also demonstrated by (Kalamatianos et al., 2023), who applied a gratitude program in a university student group and found improvements in psychological well-being. In contrast, the control group, which did not receive the intervention, did not show meaningful changes, with the majority of participants remaining in the high or moderate stress categories. This

reinforced that the changes observed in the experimental group were not merely due to time or external factors.

Thus, the discussion indicated that the post-intervention condition strongly supported the assumption that gratitude as a group intervention technique could effectively reduce situational stress. Gratitude helped individuals reinterpret experiences, improve emotion regulation, and strengthen internal psychological resources that supported well-being and emotional resilience.

The effectiveness of the intervention was also supported by statistical analysis, which showed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group, whereas no significant difference was found in the control group. The use of Gratitude Therapy in a group setting proved to provide tangible benefits in the school context, as group interaction allowed for reflection, experience sharing, and the collective reinforcement of positive meaning. This was in line with (Webb et al., 2025), who found that gratitude could serve as a psychological strength protecting adolescents from the impact of stressful life events by enhancing emotion regulation and positive perceptions of difficult situations. Research by (Ubaidah, 2025), examining gratitude from an Islamic psychology perspective, also confirmed that cultivating gratitude could improve emotional well-being and reduce stress in adolescents, as gratitude fostered acceptance, sincerity, and spiritual closeness that contributed to inner calm. Consequently, the combination of internal findings from this study and relevant external evidence reinforced the conclusion that group guidance using Gratitude Therapy was effective in reducing situational stress among adolescents.

E. Conclusion

Based on the findings, group guidance using Gratitude Therapy was associated with a reduction in situational stress among adolescents in the experimental group, while minimal change was observed in the control group. Prior to the intervention, participants reported high situational stress related to academic demands, peer relationships, and developmental challenges. The post-intervention pattern suggests that Gratitude Therapy delivered in a group guidance context may support adaptive stress regulation; however, the results should be interpreted cautiously due to methodological constraints. Several limitations warrant consideration. The small sample size and single-school setting limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the absence of random assignment may have introduced selection bias, and outcome measurement was confined to self-reported situational stress without behavioral indicators or long-term follow-up. Despite these limitations, the study offers practical implications for school guidance services. Schools may consider integrating Gratitude Therapy into group guidance programs, with implementation supported by targeted training for counselors in gratitude-based techniques and group facilitation. Based on the present intervention, four sessions of approximately 45-60 minutes appear feasible. Regular outcome monitoring is recommended to evaluate program effectiveness. Future research should involve larger

and more diverse samples, apply randomization where feasible, include longer follow-up periods, and replicate the study across multiple school settings to strengthen external validity.

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