Rational Emotive Imagery Approach to Enhance Self-Esteem among Primary School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the self-esteem of primary school students, a significant concern in today's globalized environment that increasingly impacts students' mental health. Self-esteem remains a pressing issue for children, including those in primary schools. The main objectives of this research are to identify the contributing factors to low self-esteem among primary school students and investigate the effectiveness of the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique in enhancing their self-esteem. The study involved a Year 6 student from a school in the Kubang Pasu district. The participant was selected based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), indicating low self-esteem levels. This qualitative study utilized a case study design, employing interviews, observations, and document analysis for data collection. Findings reveal that low self-esteem is influenced by three primary factors: a lack of social support, negative impacts of social media, and dissatisfaction with physical appearance. The results further demonstrate that the REI technique effectively enhances self-esteem by helping students address irrational thoughts and adopt positive self-perceptions. This study suggests that all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and school counselors, should collaborate to address self-esteem issues and foster healthier psychological development among students.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Rational Emotive Imagery, Primary School Students, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem, defined by Feshbach et al. (1996), refers to an individual's positive or negative valuation of themselves. Duffy et al. (2006) describe self-esteem as a personal evaluation that forms an integral aspect of self-concept. According to Mansur and Siti Nordiar (1998), self-esteem represents the level of confidence an individual has in their worth, importance, and abilities, reflected through their daily behaviors. Self-esteem thus serves as a measure of self-acceptance and belief in one's value (Chapman, 2000).

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a growing concern over declining self-esteem levels among school-aged children, particularly primary school students. Factors such as the increased use of social media, academic pressure, and family dynamics have significantly influenced children's perceptions of themselves. Research by Keles et al. (2020) highlights the detrimental effects of excessive social media exposure, where children compare themselves to unrealistic standards portrayed online, leading to dissatisfaction with their own lives. Additionally, academic pressures imposed by parents and schools exacerbate stress and erode students' confidence (Shohaimy & Kutty, 2021).

Family environments also play a crucial role in shaping self-esteem. Parental neglect, lack of emotional support, or over-criticism can contribute to a child's low self-worth (Mustaffa, 2021). According to the World Health Organization (2022), psychological issues such as low self-esteem and anxiety have risen significantly, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prolonged school closures and disruptions in routine have amplified emotional and social challenges among students.

Given the severity of this issue, intervention strategies such as Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) are essential. REI, a component of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), directly addresses irrational beliefs and maladaptive thought patterns that lower self-esteem (Ellis, 2000). This study seeks to address this critical gap by exploring the REI technique's potential to rebuild confidence and promote a healthier self-concept among primary school students.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The development of self-esteem in students is influenced by emotional, physical, and cognitive challenges. Many children struggle to express their emotions, which leads to unaddressed psychological issues (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). These challenges are further exacerbated by post-pandemic disruptions, with the Ministry of Health Malaysia (2022) reporting an alarming increase in mental health concerns among primary school students, particularly low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem has far-reaching consequences, contributing to emotional disorders, delinquent behaviors, and suicidal tendencies (Shohaimy & Kutty, 2021). Without targeted interventions, these problems can persist into adolescence and adulthood, hindering students' overall development. School counselors face challenges in effectively addressing these issues due to limited structured techniques designed to build self-esteem.

The Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique, as part of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), offers a systematic approach to help students challenge irrational thoughts, replace negative perceptions, and adopt healthier self-beliefs (Ellis, 2000). Despite its proven success in other therapeutic settings, its application in school counseling, particularly for primary school students, remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of REI as an intervention for building self-esteem, equipping counselors with evidence-based strategies to nurture confident, emotionally resilient students.

School counselors play a pivotal role in addressing such issues, yet many lack access to specific, structured techniques to intervene effectively. The Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique provides a systematic approach for counselors to help students challenge irrational thoughts and replace them with positive self-perceptions (Ellis, 2000). Despite its potential, REI remains underutilized in school counseling settings, particularly for primary school students. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate the effectiveness of REI in addressing self-esteem issues, equipping counselors with evidence-based tools to nurture emotionally resilient students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the factors contributing to low self-esteem among primary school students.
2. To examine the effectiveness of the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique in improving self-esteem.

QUESTION RESEARCH

1. What are the contributing factors to low self-esteem among primary school students?
2. To what extent does the Rational Emotive Imagery technique improve self-esteem among primary school students?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, enabling an in-depth examination of a single participant with low self-esteem.

Sampling: A purposive sampling approach was employed to select one Year 6 student who exhibited low self-esteem based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

Data Collection: Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participant and the school counselor to identify factors influencing self-esteem.

Observations: Classroom behavior and social interactions were observed and recorded using a checklist.

Document Analysis: Analysis of the RSES scores and reflective journals provided insights into the participant's thought patterns and emotional responses.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes related to self-esteem and the impact of the REI technique.

FINDING

A. Lack of Social Support

Interviews: The participant reported limited parental support due to work commitments and negative interactions with peers.

Document Analysis: The "Blob Tree" assessment revealed feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

Observations: The participant exhibited isolated behavior in class, avoiding group activities and social interactions.'

B. Influence of Social Media

Interviews: The participant expressed dissatisfaction with their life when comparing it to social media influencers.

Dissatisfaction with Physical Appearance: Document **Analysis:** Journals reflected a desire to emulate idealized lifestyles portrayed online.

C. Dissatisfaction with Physical Appearance

Interviews: The participant highlighted insecurities about their small physical stature, particularly during physical education classes.

Observations: Negative comments from peers about the participant's appearance were observed, leading to avoidance behaviors.

D. Impact of Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) Technique

Interviews: Post-intervention, the participant reported increased confidence and a more positive self-perception.

Document Analysis: RSES scores improved significantly after the intervention.

Observations: Positive behavioral changes were observed, including active participation in class and improved peer interactions.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study corroborate previous research, demonstrating the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)-based techniques in addressing self-esteem challenges. Firstly, the alignment with

Cherry (2022) underscores that structured approaches like REI can effectively dismantle irrational beliefs that often underpin low self-esteem. By incorporating visual imagery, students are guided to replace negative thoughts with constructive self-perceptions, enabling long-term cognitive restructuring.

Secondly, the data reveal critical insights into the role of social influences. For instance, parental involvement—or the lack thereof—emerges as a primary determinant of self-esteem. This aligns with Keles et al. (2020), who emphasized the detrimental impact of familial neglect and peer isolation. However, this study extends these findings by highlighting how REI compensates for such deficits through targeted cognitive exercises.

Thirdly, the adverse effects of social media remain a recurring theme. Existing literature (Shohaimy & Kutty, 2021) correlates excessive social media use with unrealistic self-comparisons. The current research advances this discourse by demonstrating REI's efficacy in mitigating these influences. By fostering positive visualization, students develop a resilient self-concept that is less susceptible to external pressures.

Additionally, the intervention's success in addressing dissatisfaction with physical appearance is particularly noteworthy. Journals and observations indicate that REI not only improves self-perception but also equips students with coping mechanisms to navigate societal standards. This finding resonates with Imaduddin Hamzah (2022), who advocated for school-based interventions tailored to address appearance-related anxieties.

Finally, the study contributes to the practical application of REI within school counseling frameworks. Unlike traditional methods, which often lack specificity, REI provides a replicable model that counselors can adapt to diverse student needs. This aligns with contemporary calls for evidence-based practices in educational psychology.

All to all, the discussion underscores the multidimensional efficacy of REI. It not only validates its theoretical foundations but also highlights its adaptability and scalability as an intervention for primary school students. Future studies should explore longitudinal impacts and comparative analyses with alternative therapeutic approaches.

A. Implications

This study underscores the practical application of the REI technique for school counselors. The findings advocate for its adoption as an evidence-based strategy to address self-esteem issues, fostering psychological resilience among students.

B. Conclusion

The Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique effectively enhances self-esteem by addressing irrational beliefs and promoting positive self-evaluations. Collaboration among stakeholders is crucial to support students' emotional well-being. Future research should explore the scalability of REI interventions across diverse student populations.

IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights the practical application of the REI technique for school counselors in addressing self-esteem issues. The findings suggest that REI can serve as a valuable intervention for enhancing self-esteem, particularly among primary school students.

CONCLUSIONS

The Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique effectively addresses low self-esteem by targeting irrational thoughts and promoting positive self-evaluation. This study underscores the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and counselors to create supportive environments for students. Future research should explore the scalability of REI interventions across diverse student populations and compare its efficacy with other counseling techniques.

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