

REBT Counseling for Indonesian Diaspora Junior High School Students from Arab Indonesian Multicultural Families at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah

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Abstract

This study explores the application of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) in addressing the fear of speaking Indonesian among two Indonesian diaspora junior high school students from Arab Indonesian multicultural families at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah. The problem examined in this study is not merely related to linguistic ability, but rather to psychological factors, particularly feelings of shame and fear of being mocked, which are rooted in irrational beliefs about social evaluation. This study aims to describe the process and outcomes of REBT counseling in modifying students' irrational beliefs, emotional responses, and speaking behaviors. A qualitative approach with a multiple case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of counseling sessions, and documentation of counseling records. The counseling process was conducted through pre-intervention assessment, REBT-based intervention using the ABCDE model, and post-intervention evaluation. The findings indicate that REBT counseling facilitated meaningful changes in students' cognitive and emotional patterns, marked by increased emotional awareness, a shift from reactive to reflective emotional responses, and the development of more adaptive beliefs toward speaking Indonesian. These cognitive and emotional changes were followed by behavioral improvements, as students gradually demonstrated greater confidence and willingness to communicate in Indonesian. The study concludes that REBT is an effective counseling approach for addressing language-related social anxiety in multicultural school settings and highlights its practical relevance for guidance and counseling services in Indonesian schools abroad.

Keywords : Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy; Language Anxiety; Indonesian Diaspora Students; Multicultural Counseling; Junior High School

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in students' academic participation, social interaction, and identity development in school settings. In Indonesian schools, language use functions not only as a medium of instruction but also as a determinant of students' confidence, classroom engagement, and peer relationships. From an educational psychology perspective, language use is closely related to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that interact dynamically in learning situations (Schunk, 2012). Therefore, difficulties in language use should not be understood solely as linguistic problems, but also as psychological and social issues.

This complexity becomes more pronounced in Indonesian schools abroad. Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah (SIJ), as an Indonesian overseas school, serves students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Indonesian diaspora students from Arab-Indonesian mixed-marriage families. In their daily lives, these students are often exposed to multiple languages, with Arabic or other languages being more dominant than Indonesian. Such conditions shape students' cultural identity, social attachment, and communication experiences in ways that differ from students educated in Indonesia (Yuliani & Lestari, 2019).

Preliminary observations and communication with teachers indicated that not all junior high school students at SIJ feel confident using Indonesian actively, particularly in formal classroom interactions. Two students who became the focus of this study consistently avoided speaking Indonesian, not because of structural language incompetence, but due to feelings of shame and fear of being mocked by peers. When asked to speak, the students tended to remain silent, lower their heads, or provide very brief responses to avoid social attention.

This phenomenon reflects symptoms of social anxiety driven by irrational beliefs. Fear of speaking is often associated with negative assumptions about social evaluation, such as beliefs that making mistakes will inevitably lead to ridicule or rejection (Horwitz, 2016). Such beliefs influence students' emotional responses and lead to avoidance behaviors as a form of self-protection. Over time, language-related anxiety may hinder students' self-confidence, academic participation, and social adjustment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) is a cognitive-behavioral counseling approach that emphasizes the relationship between activating events, beliefs, and emotional-behavioral consequences (Ellis & Dryden, 2007). According to REBT, emotional disturbances are not caused directly by events themselves, but by individuals' irrational beliefs about those events. In educational contexts, REBT has been widely applied to address anxiety, excessive shame, and avoidance behaviors by challenging and restructuring irrational beliefs (Dryden & Neenan, 2018).

REBT is particularly relevant for addressing fear of speaking Indonesian because the core problem lies in students' perfectionistic demands, fear of negative evaluation, and overgeneralization of language mistakes. Through cognitive disputation, students are guided to reinterpret speaking errors as part of the learning process rather than as threats to self-worth. This approach aligns with evidence showing that cognitive-behavioral interventions

are effective in reducing social anxiety and increasing communicative confidence (Hofmann & Otto, 2017).

Despite extensive research on REBT and anxiety reduction, studies focusing on the application of REBT to Indonesian language anxiety in overseas Indonesian schools remain limited. Furthermore, the unique context of Indonesian diaspora students from Arab–Indonesian multicultural families introduces psychosocial dynamics that have not been sufficiently explored. This study contributes to the limited literature by examining the application of REBT within an overseas Indonesian school context. Therefore, this study aims to describe the application of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy for two Indonesian diaspora junior high school students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah who experience fear of speaking Indonesian due to shame and fear of ridicule, with a focus on changes in irrational beliefs, emotional responses, and speaking behaviors.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes experienced by students following REBT counseling. The multiple case design allowed for comparative analysis of two students with similar presenting problems within the same educational context.

The study was conducted at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah (SIJ) at the junior high school level. The participants consisted of two Indonesian diaspora students from Arab–Indonesian mixed-marriage families. Participants were selected purposively based on recommendations from the school counselor and met the following criteria: (1) possessing basic Indonesian language competence, (2) demonstrating fear of speaking Indonesian in school settings, and (3) avoiding verbal communication due to feelings of shame and fear of ridicule.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation of counseling sessions, and documentation of counseling records. Interviews were conducted with the students to explore their language experiences, irrational beliefs, emotional reactions, and perceived changes after counseling. Supporting interviews were also conducted with the school counselor to obtain contextual information regarding students' behaviors.

The counseling intervention followed three stages: pre-intervention, involving problem identification and mapping of irrational beliefs; intervention, consisting of four to five REBT counseling sessions using the ABCDE framework; and post-intervention, involving follow-up interviews and observations to assess changes in beliefs, emotions, and speaking behaviors.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Credibility was ensured through technique triangulation and source triangulation, while ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research findings were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation of the counseling process, and documentation of counseling records involving two Indonesian diaspora junior high school students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah. The results focus on changes in irrational beliefs, emotional responses, and Indonesian speaking behaviors following Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) counseling.

1. Initial Condition of the Students

Prior to the intervention, both students exhibited relatively similar problem patterns. They tended to avoid speaking Indonesian during classroom activities and social interactions. When required to speak, observable signs of anxiety appeared, such as lowering their heads, speaking very softly, or remaining silent. Initial interviews revealed that feelings of shame and fear of being mocked were the primary reasons for avoiding the use of Indonesian.

2. Problem Mapping Based on the ABCDE Model of REBT

The mapping of students' problems based on the ABCDE stages of REBT is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mapping of Students' Problems Based on the ABCDE Model of REBT

Component	Student 1	Student 2
Activating Event (A)	Being asked to speak Indonesian in class	Interacting with peers using Indonesian
Belief (B)	"If I speak incorrectly, I will be mocked"	"It is better to stay silent than be laughed at"
Consequence (C)	Shame, anxiety, choosing silence	Fear, withdrawal, avoiding interaction
Disputation (D)	Challenging the belief that mistakes always lead to ridicule	Challenging the assumption that silence is safer

Effective Belief (E)	“Mistakes are part of learning”	“I am allowed to try even if I am not fluent yet”
New Feeling/Behavior (F)	Feeling calmer and beginning to speak	Increased confidence and willingness to interact

Table 1 indicates that the core of the students’ problems lay in irrational beliefs related to social evaluation. After undergoing cognitive disputation, students gradually developed more rational and adaptive beliefs toward Indonesian language use.

3. Changes in Emotional Regulation and Speaking Behavior

Changes in emotional regulation and speaking behavior before and after REBT counseling are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Changes in Emotional Regulation and Indonesian Speaking Behavior

Aspect	Before Counseling	After Counseling
Emotional awareness	Difficulty identifying fear and shame	Able to recognize and verbalize emotions
Emotional response	Reactive and avoidant	Calmer and more reflective
Self-belief	Low confidence and fear of judgment	More realistic self-acceptance
Speaking behavior	Silent and passive	Beginning to speak and try

Social interaction	Withdrawn	More open and engaged
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Observational data showed that following REBT counseling, both students gradually demonstrated increased willingness to use Indonesian. Although fluency was still developing, students appeared calmer and no longer avoided communicative situations.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy was effective in helping students overcome fear of speaking Indonesian caused by irrational beliefs. This supports the fundamental REBT assumption that emotional and behavioral disturbances are not directly caused by activating events, but by individuals' interpretations and beliefs about those events (Ellis & Dryden, 2007).

The fear of speaking experienced by the students was closely related to social anxiety and negative evaluation concerns. Beliefs such as "I will be mocked" or "I must not make mistakes" reflect perfectionistic demands and overgeneralization, which are characteristic of irrational beliefs (Dryden & Neenan, 2018). Through the disputation process in REBT, students were guided to critically examine these beliefs and replace them with more rational and adaptive cognitions.

The observed improvement in emotional regulation aligns with emotion regulation theory, which emphasizes cognitive reappraisal as a key mechanism in managing emotional responses (Gross, 2015). After counseling, students no longer reacted impulsively to speaking situations but demonstrated greater emotional control and reflective responses.

In the context of Indonesian diaspora students from Arab–Indonesian multicultural families, cultural and linguistic factors contributed to heightened sensitivity toward social judgment. Multicultural environments may intensify fears of being perceived as different or inadequate. In this regard, REBT functioned not only as a cognitive-behavioral intervention but also as a supportive framework that facilitated self-acceptance and confidence within a multicultural school setting (Sue & Sue, 2016).

These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions in reducing social anxiety and avoidance behaviors among students (Hofmann & Otto, 2017). From a school counseling perspective, the results underscore the importance of addressing underlying irrational beliefs rather than focusing solely on language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that fear of speaking Indonesian among Indonesian diaspora junior high school students is primarily rooted in irrational beliefs related to shame and fear of negative social evaluation rather than linguistic incompetence. The application of Rational

Emotive Behavioral Therapy enabled students to reconstruct maladaptive beliefs, leading to improved emotional regulation and increased willingness to communicate in Indonesian.

In the context of Arab Indonesian multicultural families, language use is closely intertwined with identity and social acceptance. REBT proved effective as a counseling approach that bridges cognitive restructuring with cultural sensitivity, supporting students' self-acceptance and communicative confidence. These findings may inform school counselors working in multicultural and bilingual contexts.

Future research may expand this study by involving larger samples, employing longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of behavioral changes, or integrating REBT with multicultural counseling approaches.

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