ABDIMAS: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Universitas Merdeka Malang
Vol.11(2) May 2026, 456-467
p-ISSN: 2721-138X e-ISSN: 2548-7159
http://jurnal.unmer.ac.id/index.php/jpkm

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Guiding the guides: Strengthening teachers' group counseling skills in an Islamic boarding school

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ARTICLE INFO:

Received: 2026-03-02
Revised: 2026-04-20
Accepted: 2026-06-12
Published: 2026-06-30

Keywords:

Counseling self-efficacy, Group counseling, Islamic boarding school, Teachers, Counseling training

ABSTRACT

Teachers in Islamic boarding school settings, such as SMPI Sabilurrosyad, face complex challenges in addressing students' academic and psychosocial needs. In addition to supporting students' achievement in formal and Islamic subjects, teachers are also responsible for cultivating moral character. Group counseling is an important competency that enables teachers to support students in dealing with developmental, emotional, academic, and social concerns. This community service program aimed to strengthen teachers' understanding and ability to apply basic group counseling skills. The program was implemented through structured counseling training that covered key concepts of group counseling, its stages, and practical role-play activities. Teachers actively participated in experiential learning sessions designed to build confidence and readiness to apply counseling skills in the school context. The findings indicate an improvement in teachers' counseling self-efficacy, although the change was not statistically significant. Participants' reflections showed that the training helped clarify the group counseling process and increased their confidence in applying these skills to support students. This community service program contributes to strengthening counseling literacy among teachers and offers a potential model for sustainable group counseling capacity building in Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions.

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How to cite: Rahmawati, Y., Husna, F. H., Prasetyo, R. A. B., & Alifia, M. (2026). Guiding the guides: Strengthening teachers' group counseling skills in an Islamic boarding school. *Abdimas: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Universitas Merdeka Malang, 11*(2), 456-467. https://doi.org/10.26905/abdimas.v11i2.16869

1. INTRODUCTION

SMPI Sabilurrosyad, located in Malang, East Java, is a junior high school that integrates formal secondary education with an Islamic boarding school system. The school promotes holistic academic, character, and spiritual development by combining the national curriculum with the strengthening of Islamic values. It is a modern *pondok pesantren* supported by facilities such as a library, book collection, laboratory, canteen, and boarding facilities. SMPI Sabilurrosyad is recognized as one of the reputable *pesantren* in Malang. Within the *pesantren* educational system, teachers' responsibilities extend beyond academic instruction to include moral guidance, character formation, and personal supervision. Teachers serve not only as educators but also as mentors and role models who accompany students throughout their daily religious, educational, and social activities (Sauri et al., 2022; Tihul, 2020).

Despite these strengths, the boarding school environment also presents challenges for adolescent development. Living away from family requires students to develop emotional autonomy, self-regulation,

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and social adjustment within a relatively structured and demanding environment (Rahmatullah & Purnomo, 2020). Adolescence is characterized by identity exploration, emotional sensitivity, and strong peer orientation (OECD, 2019). In a 24-hour communal environment, these characteristics may increase peer influence and interpersonal conflict, particularly when emotional regulation is still developing (Rahmatullah & Purnomo, 2020; UNESCO, 2017). Studies in *pesantren* settings have also reported challenges such as bullying, truancy, theft, and adjustment difficulties, which may arise from peer influence, boredom, or difficulties adapting to institutional regulations (Arizona et al., 2019; Rahmatullah & Purnomo, 2020). These conditions highlight the importance of providing adequate psychosocial support within boarding school settings.

A preliminary needs assessment conducted at SMPI Sabilurrosyad Malang revealed variation in teachers' approaches to addressing students' emotional and behavioral concerns. Although teachers regularly provide guidance and supervision, most rely on personal experience rather than structured counseling approaches. This finding indicates the need for systematic competency development to strengthen teachers' capacity in supporting students' psychosocial well-being.

Among school-based psychosocial interventions, group counselling has been consistently identified as an effective and developmentally appropriate approach for adolescents. A systematic review by Yusop et al. (2020) demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and interpersonal adjustment. Studies in Indonesian educational settings further show that structured group counselling interventions contribute to improvements in students' social competence, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and behavioral adjustment (Nurhidayah et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of group counselling largely depends on the facilitator's competence in managing group dynamics and applying appropriate intervention strategies (Yusop et al., 2020).

In counseling-related roles, counseling self-efficacy refers to teachers' confidence in applying facilitative skills such as active listening, reflection, clarification, and group facilitation. Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy beliefs influence individuals' motivation, persistence, and performance. In counseling contexts, mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and verbal persuasion serve as primary sources of efficacy development. Therefore, experiential components such as role-play and structured feedback were intentionally designed to provide mastery experiences that may strengthen teachers' counseling self-efficacy.

This community service program aims to strengthen teachers' conceptual understanding, basic group counseling skills, and counseling self-efficacy through structured training, role-play, and reflective feedback at SMPI Sabilurrosyad Malang.

2. METHODS

Teachers play an important role in shaping students' attitudes and behavior, including helping them develop adaptive coping strategies for social challenges (Tihul, 2020). This community service program used a participatory and experiential learning approach to enhance teachers' group counseling competencies. The program was designed in three main stages: (1) Needs assessment; (2) Module development; and (3) Training implementation and evaluation. The overall design followed a one-group pretest-posttest model to evaluate changes in teachers' counseling self-efficacy after the training.

Participants

The participants in this training were 10 teachers of SMPI Sabilurrosyad Malang, an Islamic boarding school-based junior high school that integrates academic and religious education. Participants

were selected by the principal based on their closeness to students and their availability. The selection criteria included teachers who were actively involved in daily student supervision, either as subject teachers or homeroom teachers in the boarding environment. Their roles in daily student supervision positioned them as key stakeholders in providing psychosocial assistance. Therefore, this program was designed to strengthen their counseling-related competencies within the school context.

The participants consisted of four female and six male teachers, with ages ranging from 24 to 58 years (M = 32.8). Teaching experience varied from 2 years to more than 34 years, indicating a heterogeneous professional background. This diversity allowed the program to involve teachers from various subject areas and levels of teaching experience within the Islamic boarding school. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the training. Data confidentiality was maintained, and participation was voluntary.

Instruments

The Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES), developed by Melchert et al. (1996), was used to assess individuals' confidence in performing core counseling tasks based on Bandura's self-efficacy framework. This scale measures two main dimensions, namely counseling knowledge and counseling skills self-efficacy, which reflect individuals' perceived capability to perform core counseling tasks such as establishing rapport, facilitating group processes, and managing counseling sessions. The scale consists of 20 items related to knowledge and skill competencies in both individual and group counseling. The instrument uses a 5-point Likert response scale and includes favorable and unfavorable items to reduce response bias. Response options range from 1 to 5, from agree strongly to disagree strongly. All negatively worded items were recoded so that higher scores indicated higher self-efficacy. The CSES has high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .91. The instrument was translated into Indonesian using a back-to-back translation procedure and reviewed through expert judgment involving a psychologist and fellow researchers with strong English proficiency.

During the role-play sessions, participants' counseling micro-skills were assessed using a structured observational checklist developed by the researchers. The checklist was based on basic counseling micro-skills, including attending behavior, active listening, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, questioning, summarizing, and session termination. Each skill was rated using a narrative observation format. These observations were conducted by trained research assistants who served as facilitators during the group role-play activities. Qualitative feedback after the role-play was collected through structured reflection and brief group discussions. The guiding questions included: (1) What insights did you gain from the training?; (2) What challenges did you experience during the role-play activities?; and (3) How do you plan to apply group counseling skills in your teaching practice?

Need Assessment

To strengthen the needs assessment process, informal interviews were triangulated with teachers' informal discussions about student behavioral issues and classroom challenges. However, the assessment primarily involved the school principal. The needs assessment interview explored the challenges faced by teachers in assisting students. Differences in teachers' age and experience contributed to different approaches in handling students' problems. As a result, inconsistencies were found in how the school responded to rule violations. In assisting students, particularly those dealing with emotion regulation, academic pressure, and motivational difficulties, the school preferred positive interventions rather than negative interventions such as physical punishment. These findings indicated the need for structured training in group counseling skills to better support students in a boarding school with high academic and psychosocial demands.

Development of Training Module

Based on the needs assessment, the team developed a structured training module to enhance teachers' conceptual understanding, facilitative competencies, and counseling self-efficacy in implementing group counseling. The module was organized into four sequential components to ensure systematic competency development that includes introduction to the group counseling concept, the micro-skill of counseling, group dynamics and stages of group development, and practical group counseling techniques.

Introduction to the group counseling concept

The first component provided foundational knowledge about the principles, objectives, scope, and ethical considerations of group counseling in educational settings. Conceptually, the module drew on Corey's framework of group counseling, which views group processes as a way to facilitate interpersonal learning and emotional growth. From this perspective, the group setting serves as a structured interactional space where members gain insight through feedback, emotional expression, and shared experiences. These processes function as therapeutic factors in group counseling (Latupasjana et al., 2021).

The micro-skill of counseling

The second component addressed micro-counseling skills as foundational competencies for effective facilitation. The module emphasized core helping behaviors, including attending skills, active listening, reflection, clarification, summarizing, and basic questioning techniques. Strengthening these competencies is theoretically associated with increased facilitator confidence and effectiveness. This is consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, which states that perceived self-efficacy develops through mastery of specific skills (Bandura, 1997). In educational settings, teacher self-efficacy has been linked to adaptive classroom management and greater responsiveness to student needs (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Group dynamics and stages of group development

Understanding group dynamics and developmental stages equips facilitators to manage typical interaction patterns, resistance, role emergence, and cohesion development. Contemporary group dynamics theory highlights how norms, roles, and cohesion influence group behavior and outcomes (Forsyth, 2019). Stage-based models further delineate predictable phases through which groups evolve, which can inform facilitation strategies (Wheelan, 2005). Empirical studies in Indonesian school settings also support the importance of managing group processes to enhance counseling effectiveness (Hariyadi et al., 2025).

Practical group counseling techniques

The final component integrated practical group counseling techniques aligned with school-based concerns. This section connected conceptual knowledge and facilitative skills with procedures for planning and conducting group counseling sessions. The inclusion of this component was grounded in experiential learning principles, which emphasize that professional competence develops through the application of conceptual understanding in practice (Kolb, 2014). In educational settings, structured group-based interventions have been associated with improvements in students' socio-emotional competencies and behavioral adjustment. This finding underscores the importance of procedural clarity in school counseling programs (Taylor et al., 2017; Aida & Habyz, 2019).

The module was delivered through lectures, discussions, role-play, and reflective sessions. Through theoretical explanations, participants were expected to understand the basic concepts of counseling, the

types of problems that can be addressed through group counseling, and the advantages and limitations of group counseling. Role-play was used to provide participants with a practical illustration of counseling, allowing them to observe the implementation of micro-skills and the stages of counseling. After the role-play session, participants practiced their skills by taking the role of counselor.

Program Implementation

The training was conducted at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, with a total duration of eight hours. The implementation followed a structured four-stage model designed to support progressive competency development. This structure moved from conceptual knowledge to skill acquisition and experiential application in order to facilitate meaningful learning transfer. The overall flow of the program is presented in Figure 1.

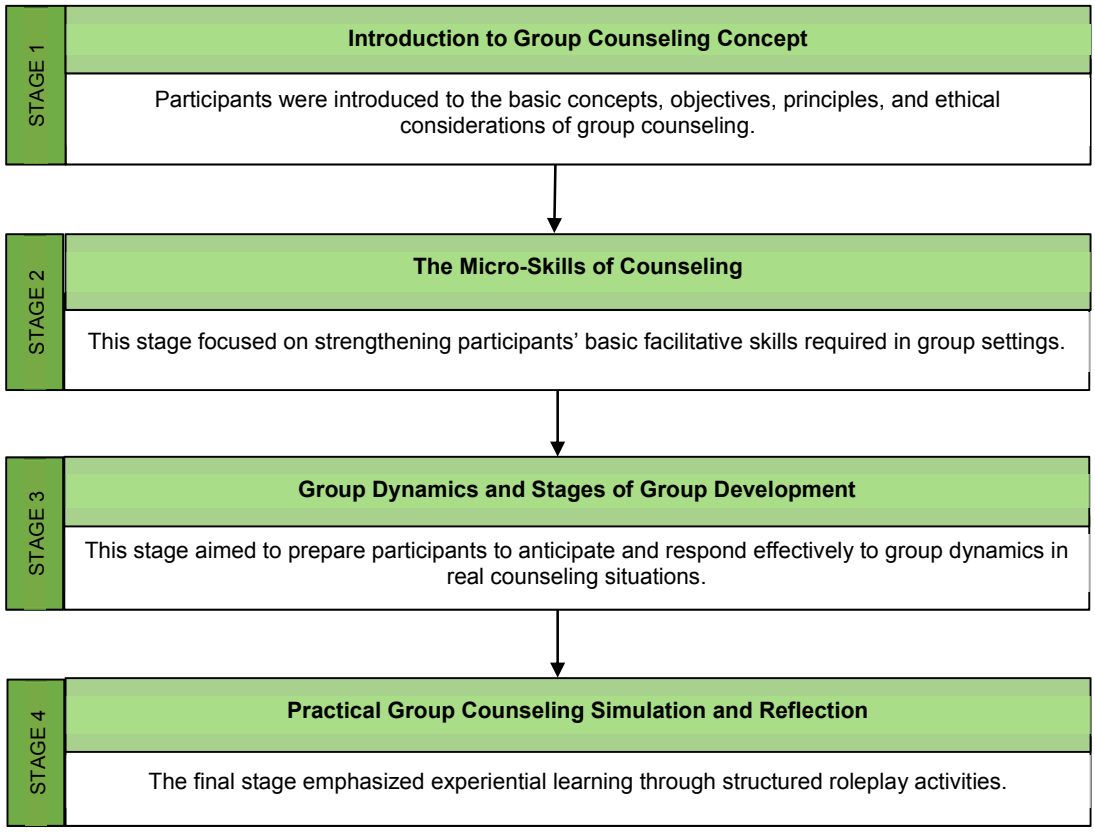


Figure 1. Four-step program for training teachers

Stage one focused on introducing the fundamental concept of group counseling. In this stage, participants were provided with an overview of definition, objectives, ethical considerations, and procedural steps involved in conducting group counseling sessions. Given the diverse academic background of participants, this stage aimed to establish a shared conceptual foundation and cultivate professional awareness regarding their role in providing psychosocial support to students within the boarding school context.



Figure 2. Presentation of group counseling material and question-and-answer session

Stage two introduced counseling micro-skills. Participants were guided to understand essential facilitative skills, including building rapport, attending behavior, active listening, questioning techniques, paraphrasing, reflection, summarizing, and appropriate termination. This stage emphasized the importance of structured communication in creating a supportive and safe group environment.

Stage three addressed group dynamics and the stages of group development. In this phase, the trainer demonstrated how group counseling is structured, including the formation, transition, working, and termination stages. Several participants were invited to act as counselees during the demonstration to provide a realistic illustration of group processes.



Figure 3. Group counseling practice session

The final stage consisted of practical group counseling simulation and reflective discussion. Participants were encouraged to take turns assuming the roles of counselor and counselee within small groups. Each group was observed by assistants who provided structured feedback. This stage was designed to provide mastery experience, which are considered essential in strengthening counseling self-efficacy. A detailed description of activities, methods, and materials used in each stage is presented in Table 1.

Evaluations

Teachers' counseling competence was measured using the Counselor Self-Efficacy (CSES) developed by Melchert et al. (1996), which assesses individuals' confidence in performing core counseling tasks based on Bandura's self-efficacy framework. Participants completed the scale before and after the training, and changes in mean scores were analyzed using a paired samples t-test. In addition to quantitative assessment, qualitative evaluation was conducted through reflective discussions and written feedback forms to capture participants' learning experiences, perceived benefits, and readiness to apply group counseling skills in practice.

Table 1. Stages of implementation

Activities	Methods and Materials
Introduction to the group counseling concept	Methods: Lecture and discussion. Materials: Presentation slide The trainer introduced the basic concepts, objectives, and procedures of group counseling. The session aimed to provide participants a fundamental understanding of how group counseling differs from individual counseling and its relevance within the school context.
The micro-skill of counseling	Methods: Lecture Materials: presentation slide The trainer explains about the stages of counseling, and the micro-skills. The micro-skills include attending skills, active listening, paraphrasing, reflection, clarification, questioning, encouragement, summarizing, and termination skills.
Group dynamics and stages of group development	Methods: Lecture and discussion Materials: presentation slides The trainer explains about the interaction pattern within counseling groups and the skill to manage each stage of the group process effectively.
Practical group counseling techniques	Methods: Roleplay and Reflection Roleplay 1 Trainer as a counselor, and 5 participants as counselee. Other participants were asked to play as observers. The trainer demonstrated how to run group counseling from the beginning, and how to use micro-skills. At the end of the session, the trainer led a class reflection and discussion about the experience. Roleplay 2 The participants who previously acted as counselee in the first session, are asked to be a counselor on this part, while others become the counselee. Each group was accompanied by one assistant who observed the session and provided structured feedback. After the roleplay, participants engaged in a reflective discussion to share insight, challenges, and key learning experiences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The community service program was implemented as planned and received active participation from the teachers of SMPI Sabilurrosyad Malang. Throughout the session, participants demonstrated intense engagement, particularly during discussion and roleplay activities. The experiential components of the training enabled teachers to connect theoretical concepts with real classroom challenges. There are 10 participants of the training, the demographic data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic data of participants

Demographic Data	Category	Amount	Percentage (%)
Age	<30 years old	4	40
	30-40 years old	4	40
	>40 years old	2	20
Sex	Male	6	60
	Female	4	40
Years of Service	<10 years	7	70
	10-20 years	2	2
	>20 years	1	10
Current Degree	Bachelor Degree	7	70
	Master Degree	3	30

As presented in table 2, the participants ranged in age from 24 to 58 years old (M=32.8). The majority of participants were male teachers (60 percent), with female teachers representing 40 percent of the sample. Most participants had less than 10 years of teaching, while a smaller proportion had between 10 to more than 20 years of experience. In terms of educational background, 70 percent held a bachelor's degree from various subjects, and 30 percent held a master's degree. This distribution indicates variability in professional experience and academic background, which may have influenced differences in baseline counseling confidence and responsiveness to the training.

Table 3. Counseling self-efficacy before and after training (n =10)

Competency Indicator (CSES)	Before Training (%)	After Training (%)	Improvement (%)
Overall counseling self-efficacy (knowledge and practical skills in conducting group counseling)	64.2	67.5	+3.3

The quantitative evaluation was conducted using a counseling self-efficacy scale administered before and after the training to capture teachers' overall confidence in performing counseling tasks. As presented in Table 3, the mean score increased from 64.2 to 67.5 percent of the maximum possible score, with an improvement of 3.3 percent. This indicates a positive direction of change in teachers' counseling self-efficacy. Although the magnitude of improvement was modest, likely due to the limited sample size and short training duration, the positive trend suggests that the training contributed to strengthening participants perceived competence. In applied educational settings, even modest gains in self-efficacy may influence professional behavior over time.

Qualitative feedback further supported the quantitative results and revealed three dominant themes. First, participants reported increased conceptual clarity and a more structured understanding of group counseling. Many participants stated that the training provided clearer frameworks and systematic procedures for conducting counseling sessions. Teachers expressed that they had previously relied on intuitive approaches, whereas the training helped them understand structured stages and micro-skills. As one participant noted, "Before this training, I usually relied on intuition when assisting students. Now I understand the stages of group counseling and have a clearer structure to guide the process" (Participant 1).

Second, participants emphasized the value of experiential learning and role-play practice. Role-play was consistently described as the most meaningful component of the training. Direct practice opportunities helped participants understand theoretical concepts more concretely. As one participant stated, "The opportunity to practice directly was the most meaningful experience because it helped me understand the concepts more concretely" (Participant 2). Another participant explained, "Role-play made the theories easier to understand, and it allowed me to experience what it feels like to facilitate a counseling session" (Participant 3). Several teachers suggested that future sessions should provide more time for practice and repeated simulation. For example, one participant stated, "We need to practice more often to understand students and deepen our understanding of counseling in the school context" (Participant 4)

Third, participants highlighted the need for follow-up and sustainability. They emphasized the importance of continued training and monitoring. Suggestions included routine implementation, follow-up supervision, and broader dissemination to other Islamic boarding schools. One participant stated, "I hope there will be follow-up activities, such as monitoring or supervision, to continuously improve our skills after the training" (Participant 5). Some participants also recommended more focused materials

related to student counseling and structured monitoring after implementation. As one participant noted, "In the future, it would be good if we could focus more specifically on practicing how to address issues that commonly occur in schools" (Participant 8).

Overall, participants highlighted the role-play sessions as the most valuable component of the training because they provided direct practice opportunities and immediate feedback. Several teachers also stated that they previously relied on informal approaches when addressing students' emotional or motivational concerns. After the training, their awareness of structured facilitation techniques and counseling micro-skills improved.

Discussion

The findings of this community service program indicate that group counseling training improved teachers' conceptual understanding and practical readiness, although the quantitative result did not reach statistical significance. The positive trend in mean scores suggests initial gains in perceived competence. However, the absence of statistical significance may be explained by the limited sample size (n = 10) and the short duration of the training. This finding is consistent with evidence that professional development programs tend to have stronger effects on teacher self-efficacy when they are sustained and comprehensive. A recent meta-analysis by Zhou et al. (2023) found that structured professional development interventions can significantly enhance teacher self-efficacy, particularly when programs are conducted over time with active engagement and opportunities for reflection. Similarly, research indicates that higher teacher self-efficacy is associated with greater student engagement and learning outcomes, highlighting the importance of strengthening teacher confidence through sustained practice and support (Emiru & Gedifew, 2024).

In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), psychosocial support and adaptive teaching practices are crucial because of the unique social and educational structures of boarding schools in Indonesia. Studies on *pesantren* education highlight the complex interaction patterns and leadership dynamics that shape student experiences in these settings (Hanafi et al., 2021). In addition, *pesantren* learning environments often integrate informal social practices and communal activities that influence students' emotional and social development (Sauri et al., 2022). These contextual features underscore the importance of equipping teachers with practical group facilitation skills to support adolescents' adjustment beyond the academic classroom.

Teachers' roles are not limited to transferring knowledge; they also cultivate resilience, morality, and responsibility by providing practical examples and guidance in addressing problems adaptively. With basic counseling skills, teachers can listen without judgment and develop unconditional positive regard toward students, thereby improving the quality of teacher-student relationships (Cadima et al., 2015). Moreover, counseling skills help teachers recognize students' problems, even within the limits of their professional role. In accordance with professional ethics, cases involving psychological issues, problematic behavior related to clinical diagnosis, or conditions requiring specialized intervention should be referred to psychologists or psychiatrists (Triyono & Musyarofah, 2016). Therefore, schools are encouraged to develop integrated student support systems involving students, teachers, parents, and mental health professionals to address students' problems more comprehensively.

Although the quantitative impact on counseling self-efficacy was limited, qualitative feedback indicated that participants gained a clearer understanding of counseling stages, the application of micro-skills during sessions, and opportunities to apply structured strategies. Teachers emphasized the value of experiential components, such as role-play, which is consistent with evidence suggesting that practice-

based professional development contributes substantially to applied competence and instructional confidence (Zhou et al., 2023). Experiential learning theory also highlights the importance of concrete experience and reflective practice in strengthening professional capability (Kolb, 2014). Furthermore, collaborative and work-embedded professional learning communities have been shown to strengthen teacher capacity and reflective practice, both of which are important for translating theoretical knowledge into practice (Goh et al., 2017). Therefore, this program may be viewed as an initial training model that can be further developed by addressing the gaps identified in this evaluation.

Several supporting and inhibiting factors were identified during the implementation of this community service program. The first supporting factor was the commitment of the school and principal to collaboration, as shown by the participants' active involvement throughout the program. The second supporting factor was assistance from psychology students, who helped the sessions run smoothly. Their assistance included preparation support and observation during the role-play sessions. The observation records were useful for both trainers and participants in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

However, several factors also limited the overall training process. First, participant attrition occurred because two teachers left the session during the lunch break. This may have been influenced by competing teaching responsibilities and time constraints, which are common in boarding school settings. To minimize attrition in future programs, participants should be informed in advance about the full duration of the training and evaluation to ensure their commitment. Second, the training duration was relatively short, which limited the extent to which all goals could be achieved. This issue was particularly relevant because participants had different levels of educational background and practical knowledge related to counseling. Minor logistical suggestions also emerged, including the need to improve time management and maintain confidentiality during role-play feedback sessions. Overall, the qualitative findings indicate that the training enhanced teachers' counseling literacy, practical awareness, and readiness to apply structured facilitation strategies in the boarding school context.

Several implications can be drawn from this evaluation. First, professional development efforts should be embedded as ongoing processes rather than isolated events, as longitudinal coaching, collaborative learning, and reflective practice may have stronger effects on teachers' counseling self-efficacy and instructional competence. Second, boarding school-based institutions may benefit from integrating structured group counseling into their student support systems to promote psychosocial well-being, particularly in culturally specific environments such as *pesantren*. Finally, future community service programs should consider larger samples and longer evaluation periods to improve statistical power and capture delayed or longitudinal effects, because changes in self-efficacy often require repeated application and contextual reinforcement.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This community service program demonstrates that structured group counseling training can enhance teachers' conceptual understanding, practical skills, and perceived readiness to facilitate group counseling in an Islamic boarding school context. The experiential components, particularly role-play and guided reflection, contributed to increased awareness of counseling stages and the application of micro-skills. However, the quantitative result did not reach statistical significance, likely due to the small sample size and short training duration. These findings suggest that Islamic boarding schools should initiate teacher development programs, particularly those focused on student facilitation, and integrate student support systems involving multiple stakeholders to enhance students' school well-being.

This program has several limitations, including the small number of participants, short training duration, absence of a control group, and lack of a delayed post-test. Future programs should extend

the training duration and include regular practice and supervision involving a professional counselor or psychologist. Expanding the number of participants to other Islamic boarding schools and incorporating a delayed post-test would also enhance statistical power and allow better evaluation of long-term impact. In addition, Islamic boarding schools are encouraged to integrate structured group counseling practices into their internal student support systems to promote emotional regulation, peer adjustment, and overall psychosocial well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas Brawijaya, for the 2025 Internal Grant. The authors would also like to thank SMPI Sabilurrosyad Malang for more than two years of cooperation, support, and partnership.

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