



# Increasing Empathy in Class X SMA 2 Batu Students Through Peer Counseling Training

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## Abstract

Empathy is not yet fully possessed by all students. Many students do not realize that empathy is very important to have. The presence of peer counseling in schools plays a crucial role because not all students are open to counseling with school counselors. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of peer counseling training in increasing empathy among high school students. The method used in this research is qualitative with a descriptive approach. The study was conducted at SMAN 2 Batu with tenth-grade students, involving a total of three student subjects. Data were collected through interviews after the subjects participated in peer counseling training. The results of the study concluded that peer counseling training is effective in increasing empathy among tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Batu. This is evidenced by changes in several students who participated in the peer counseling training, where initially, the students did not have empathy for their peers or teachers, but after participating in the training, these students showed changes in understanding the importance of developing empathy.

**Keywords:** empathy; peer counseling; senior high school

## 1. Introduction

The success of education in the learning process is not only measured by academic achievements but also by the ability of students to develop empathy, which plays a crucial role in the success of education in Indonesia. In relation to the Curriculum for Character Education (SKKPD) at the high school level, students have the responsibility to develop social awareness. The needs assessment results show that social awareness is a significant aspect that requires development among students. Social awareness pertains not only to an individual's social aspects but also to their personal aspects, which support and build each other (Haikal et al., 2022). In this regard, students learn about the diversity of social interactions, one of which is developing a sense of empathy.

Empathy can be defined as the ability to care about what others are experiencing or about their environment (Ursula, 2021). Empathy is essential for individuals to establish social relationships with those around them. According to Ursula (2021), students are considered to have empathy if they comply with school rules and show concern in various matters, which optimally supports their academic development. Conversely, students lacking empathy often violate school rules, which generally hampers their potential and achievements. Empathy, or empathic understanding, involves the counselor experiencing the feelings and understanding the thoughts of the counselee as if putting themselves in the counselee's position, without losing awareness of their own feelings and thoughts (Suryawati, 2016). Another perspective states that empathy is the skill to feel what others feel and understand their experiences. Empathy manifests when someone can comprehend or sense another person's emotional state (Suryawati, 2016).

Empathy is closely related to social competence. According to Rismi (2021), empathy is both an affective and cognitive activity, involving understanding someone's mood or emotional condition and emotionally immersing in their experience. Eisenberg (2002) explains that empathy involves both cognitive and affective aspects. The cognitive aspect involves intellectual processes to accurately understand another's perspective, imagining their feelings when happy, disappointed, or angry, and interpreting their facial expressions, viewpoints, and manner of speaking. The affective aspect involves an individual's tendency to experience others' emotions, such as crying, suffering, feeling hurt, sadness, and distress.

In the field, it is evident that not all students possess empathy. Many students are unaware of its importance. A lack of empathy skills, if not addressed promptly, can have significant negative impacts (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). This is evident when students come for counseling and express that if they cry in class, their peers think they are seeking attention or pity. Another phenomenon is that many students do not follow school rules, such as arriving late, incomplete school uniforms, not paying attention during class, using their phones during lessons, and sleeping during class. The lack of empathy among students cannot be ignored, as it leads to negative behavior. Serious problems are often discussed with close friends due to the strong bond and commitment to peer relationships (Bestari et al., 2022). Without immediate solutions, achieving national education goals will be difficult. Peer counseling plays an important role, as not all students are comfortable with traditional counseling from school counselors.

Peer counseling involves students providing guidance to other students. The guiding students receive basic training from school counselors on the necessary skills to be effective counselors. These peer counselors become mentors, helping to solve problems faced by their peers (Hamidah & Hasanah, 2021). According to Hidayati (2019), peer counseling provides assistance to students experiencing problems, aiming to solve these problems through conversation. One way for students to develop empathy in their daily lives is through peer counseling. Students with empathy create a comfortable environment for others. Peer counseling teaches students how to help and pay attention to their peers and implement these skills daily. Peer counselors are trained in listening, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Hastu et al., 2019).

Peer counseling plays a vital role in fostering empathy among students. Regular peer counseling training has positive impacts, such as fostering good social relationships between students and their peers (Septdiningtyas et al., 2023). Research by Suryawati (2016) shows that peer counseling is effective in enhancing students' empathy, evidenced by changes in behavior and increased empathy scores. Observations by Destiyana (2016) at Madrasah Mu'allimaat Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta indicate that students often display egocentric behavior and struggle to understand their peers. Therefore, it is crucial to instill empathy in students to create good social relationships. This study aims to understand how peer counseling services can enhance empathy among high school students.

## 2. Method

The method used in this research is qualitative with a descriptive approach. According to Afrizal (2016), qualitative methods are defined as social science methods that collect and analyze data in the form of human actions and words, without attempting to quantify the qualitative data obtained, thus not analyzing numbers. Qualitative descriptive research methods focus on factual information gathered through observation, interviews, and document studies (Rusandi & Rusli, 2021). This method was chosen to obtain a field overview and understand the results of peer counseling training on students' empathy.

The research was conducted at SMAN 2 Batu with tenth-grade students, involving a total of three student subjects. The research instruments were designed to measure the subjects' understanding of peer counseling and were based on the characteristics of empathy as defined by Eisenberg (2002). Data were collected through interviews after the subjects had undergone peer counseling training. The interview results from several subjects were then analyzed according to the instruments, and the conclusions drawn became the research findings.

During data collection, the researcher aimed to select and apply data collection methods appropriate to the issues being addressed. The methods used in this research included observation, which aimed to obtain information about the general school environment, observe the activities conducted, the interactions among students, record, analyze, and conclude the levels of empathy among students at SMAN 2 Batu. This was done to gather information relevant to the research topic.

Interviews were conducted as conversations where the interviewer sought information from the research subjects. The interview method used was guided open interviews, where the interviewer freely asked questions about the influence of peer counseling on students' empathy at SMAN 2 Batu. Additionally, the documentation method involved collecting data through documents such as magazines, diaries, books, regulations, and others (Astuti, 2019).

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Result

This research was conducted in April and May 2024. The Peer Counseling activities were carried out in two interconnected series: the Peer Counseling Seminar and the Peer Counseling Training. Each series consisted of four stages: preparation, implementation, closure, and evaluation. In the first stage, preparation, the outcomes included: (a) Job descriptions for each team member and the schedule of activities, (b) Terms of Reference (TOR) for the activities, (c) Data collection of class representatives, and (d) Coordination with the speakers.

The second stage, implementation, consisted of three phases. The outcomes of the first phase included agreements between the team, the school counselor, and the vice principal for curriculum. The coordination results indicated that the school counselor supported the activity and recognized its potential to aid in future peer counseling, given the significant age difference between counselors and students. Coordination with the vice principal for curriculum ensured the cooperation of subject teachers and provided dispensations for students participating in the activities.

The first activity, the Peer Counseling Seminar, introduced students to the concept of peer counseling. The seminar covered basic materials necessary for peer counseling, ensuring students understood peer counseling before practicing it. The second activity, the Peer Counseling Training, involved practical exercises on how to conduct peer counseling, with the aim of fostering empathy among students.

Based on the activities and interviews conducted with students from SMAN 2 Batu, identified as A, B, and C, the following insights were gained:

- Student A stated, "After participating in this activity, I understand that empathy is crucial in my social interactions. Initially, I was indifferent to my classmates from different ethnic backgrounds. Moving forward, I realize I need to change and remind my friends who might be like me." This indicates that the activity raised Student A's awareness of empathy and the importance of peer counseling.
- Student B mentioned, "I realized after this activity that my previous behavior was wrong. I often ignored my teacher by playing on my phone or sleeping during classes I didn't like. I now understand that my actions might have hurt my teacher, and I have promised myself to change

gradually." This shows that Student B acknowledged their mistakes and exhibited positive behavioral changes.

- Student C said, "Yes, ma'am, I agree with my friends. I now understand that my behavior was wrong, like frequently being late to school, which even led to my parents being called. I feel guilty for my actions." This reflects Student C's realization of their errors and a newfound open-mindedness.

From these interviews, it is evident that students A, B, and C demonstrated gradual but significant improvements, highlighting the effectiveness and importance of peer counseling in fostering empathy and behavioral change.

### **3.2 Discussion**

The research conducted at SMAN 2 Batu revealed significant behavioral changes, specifically an increase in empathy among Class X students. This was evidenced by several findings, such as students previously not adhering to school rules, arriving late, incomplete uniforms, not paying attention in class, sleeping in class, playing on their phones, and being indifferent to classmates of different ethnicities. According to Eisenberg's (2002) theory, the lack of empathy at SMAN 2 Batu was particularly evident when students worked in groups, as those of different ethnic backgrounds were often excluded. Therefore, Peer Counseling activities aimed to foster changes in empathy among students. After the activities, there were significant improvements. Students who used to sleep in class or play on their phones during lessons showed better behavior, and students of different ethnicities were included in group work. This indicates a positive change. Peer counseling also helped address peer-related issues by increasing empathy.

Peer counseling and group guidance have shown effectiveness in enhancing various aspects of student well-being and socio-emotional skills. Peer counseling has been proven to improve emotional intelligence in high school students (Atika, 2015). Furthermore, peer counseling training has positively impacted the psychological well-being of high school students (Linayaningsih et al., 2017). These interventions leverage peer dynamics to facilitate personal growth and social support. Peer counseling and empathy training have shown promising results in enhancing emotional intelligence and reducing bullying behavior among students. Lika (2019) reported that empathy training increased awareness and reduced bullying tendencies in high school students. Arifin & Fahyuni (2018) implemented peer counselor training in an Islamic junior high school, resulting in improved counseling service effectiveness. Collectively, these studies indicate that peer counseling and empathy-focused interventions can be valuable tools for developing emotional intelligence, empathy, and positive behavioral changes in various educational settings, potentially contributing to a more supportive and empathetic school environment.

Peer counseling training has shown promising results in enhancing empathy and addressing bullying among high school students. Research has shown that empathy can be effectively taught, particularly to university students, through Rogerian-based peer facilitation skills training (Hatcher et al., 1994). For high school peer counselors, the skills of presence and empathy appear to be the most crucial for their development (Huang et al., 2009). Individual counseling services have been proven to increase students' empathy levels in a school setting (Ursula, 2021). Additionally, peer counseling training interventions have been effective in increasing understanding of bullying and developing counseling skills among student council members aged 13-15 (Purbasafir & Fasikhah, 2024). These findings suggest that implementing

peer counseling programs in high schools can be a valuable approach to fostering empathy, addressing bullying issues, and enhancing overall student well-being.

The process of change among the students involved a series of events starting with the Peer Counseling Seminar, followed by Peer Counseling Training. These sessions helped students develop crucial skills, such as listening, problem-solving, and decision-making. Through these activities, students gained a deep understanding of the importance of peer counseling and empathy, leading to noticeable behavioral changes. Therefore, Peer Counseling is an effective method to enhance students' empathy. It allows students to share their concerns more freely and build trust with their peers. Trust is challenging to establish, but Peer Counseling training, aligned with Basic Counseling Skills, helps students build trust, closeness, and comfort with their peers.

Peer Counseling helps students understand that each of their friends has different problems. Therefore, maintaining good relationships and having basic counseling skills are essential. These skills help students develop a desire to help, support, and accompany friends facing issues. Particularly for adolescents, empathy is crucial in social interactions. Adolescents often consider their peers as important as family, making it essential to foster and increase empathy or the ability to understand and think about their peers' experiences, which is a form of empathetic behavior (Suryawati, 2016). Empathy in the counseling process influences individuals' perspectives. When individuals listen and use empathy, they understand and respond positively to others (Narti et al., 2023). Peer counseling focuses on the thinking process, feeling, and decision-making. Therefore, peer counseling fosters feelings of respect and empathy (Astiti, 2019). Empathy in the counseling process influences each individual's perspective (Hidayati, 2019).

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that peer counseling training is effective for increasing the sense of empathy of class X students of SMAN 2 Batu. Evidenced by the changes of some students who participated in peer counseling training activities, where initially students did not have a sense of empathy with fellow friends and teachers but after participating in peer counseling training activities these students showed changes in the importance of fostering a sense of empathy. where previously many students slept in class, played cellphones did not listen when the teacher explained some of it did not happen in class. Then when there is group work, students of different ethnicities have also been included in group work, which is good enough in the changes that occur after the activity is carried out. besides that, peer counseling changes in empathy also help in peer problems. In this case there is a connection between peer counseling and empathy.

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