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The Effectiveness of WDEP Reality Counseling in Reducing Social Comparison Among Students

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Abstract

The excessive use of social media among adolescents has triggered the phenomenon of social comparison, which has a negative impact on mental health and academic performance. Existing interventions have not specifically addressed this issue, even though reality counseling has been proven effective for other psychological problems. This study aims to prove the effectiveness of WDEP reality counseling in reducing social comparison among students who use social media at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso. The method used is a Quasi-Experiment with a Pre-test Post-test Control Group Design, involving 10 students with moderate and high levels of social comparison. Five students were placed in the experimental group and five others in the control group. Data collection used the adapted INCOM scale, with validity (0.361-0.837) and reliability (0.895). In the basic assumption test, the pre-test and post-test results showed that all data were normally distributed and homogeneous, with a sig. value <0.05, allowing the use of the T-test to analyze score differences. The T-test results showed a significant decrease in social comparison scores in the experimental group from 92.00 to 67.40, compared to the control group, which only decreased from 89.20 to 87.60. These findings prove that WDEP reality counseling is effective and practical in helping students understand and manage their social behavior. This intervention is recommended for counselors and educational institutions as an intervention strategy to address students' psychological well-being issues.

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INTRODUCTION

A study conducted by Hootsuite (We Are Social) in the Indonesian digital data article shows that 143 million active social media users were recorded in January 2025, ranging from users of YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others (Riyanto, 2025). Another study by APJII in 2024 revealed that teenagers aged 13-19 are the most active internet user group, with an average duration of 4-6 hours using social media and are included in the high-intensity usage category (Winarko, 2023). A study by Rahmawati et al. (2020) found that social media use of more than 2 hours per day can be categorized as excessive use, which can lead to mental health disorders such as anxiety and social media fatigue, which can result in depression. The negative impacts of excessive social media use for students can cause academic procrastination, lack of self-confidence, apathetic attitudes, bullying behavior, mental and physical health disorders in adolescents, and even cause a phenomenon of both a decrease and an increase in self-confidence in teenagers. This is because they use the number of likes a photo receives as a measure of their self-worth (Akbarudina et al., 2025; Syifa & Irwansyah, 2022; Yasin et al., 2022).

Social media also gives rise to various perspectives and perceptions for its users, which can lead to social comparison (Swari & Tobing, 2024). Social comparison is a fundamental, common, and spontaneous human tendency. This is because every individual often compares themselves in terms of opinions, values, ideas, abilities, and appearance with others. The theory of social comparison was first put forward by Festinger (1954), who stated that every individual has a desire to evaluate themselves compared to others through self-evaluation and self-protection on several aspects of their lives to determine self-progress. Buunk & Gibbons explained that social comparison is a social phenomenon experienced by everyone and can happen anywhere without time limits, because basically many people fulfill fundamental functions such as providing useful information about a person's social position, a way to adapt in difficult situations, and positive feelings about themselves (Setiawati, 2020). According to Crusius et al. (2022), social comparison is a common process that influences how people think about themselves, their feelings, their motivation, and how they behave.

Festinger divided social comparison into two types. Upward comparison is comparing oneself with a person who is considered better than them, and downward comparison is comparing oneself with a person who is considered inferior to them (Tanghana et al., 2024). Vogel explained that a person tends to do upward comparison more than downward comparison when accessing social media, so it can be said that a person more often compares themselves to others who are considered superior than to others who are considered inferior (Ramadhani & Diniaty, 2024). According to Ramadhani (2024), students usually perform social comparison with their peers, including: (1) physical comparison, such as face, height, style, body shape, teeth, and skin color; (2) intelligence and academic achievement, such as public speaking ability and academic achievement; (3) social life, such as how to get along and socialize with others.

In general, the content uploaded on social media is an individual's effort to achieve

life success and always shows the best side of life. This indirectly creates a perception of an ideal life. Individuals will assume that the happiness and success in the content on social media are also real. Excessive social media use can lead to unhealthy social comparison, as they will spend hours browsing online, and the content they watch will form a perception that the lives of others in social media content are happier, better, or even more successful than their own current life. Afriana & Virgonita (2024) stated that the more active an Instagram user is in following other people's standards or engaging in social comparison behavior, the worse the user's psychological well-being will be.

Research reveals that high social media use has an impact on increasing social comparison in adolescents, high body dissatisfaction in adolescents, and the intensity of Instagram use can also influence the extent of the role of social comparison on the quality of life of adolescents. The higher the intensity of Instagram use, the greater the potential to be involved in social comparison, which can then lead to a decrease in the quality of life of adolescents (Amanda et al., 2021; Atiqah et al., 2025; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2021, 2021; Swari & Tobing, 2024). Firdaus et al. (2023) revealed the effects of self-comparison on university students, which include the emergence of social anxiety, low life satisfaction, depression, low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and academic procrastination. It is undeniable that the negative effects of social comparison can also occur in school students, because both students and university students are generally in a similar age range and are both pursuing formal education, so social media becomes a means to obtain information and entertainment.

From the explanation of the social comparison phenomenon, it can certainly have an impact on various aspects of students' lives as social media users. An intervention that the researcher believes is suitable for reducing the impact of the social comparison phenomenon on students is through reality counseling using the WDEP technique (Wants, Doing and Direction, Evaluation, and Planning). Reality counseling helps students (clients) face the reality of how to properly meet their needs responsibly. Meanwhile, the WDEP technique is used to provide assistance to students (clients) so they can evaluate their desires, behavior, and then determine a more appropriate plan (Kabri et al., 2023). A study analysis by Zulfikar et al. (2024) found that the reality approach emphasizes individual responsibility for their actions, helping clients change their behavior and meet basic needs constructively. Reality counseling has also proven effective in addressing adolescent problems, bullying, rehabilitation of sexual offenders, increasing motivation, improving self-esteem, and also mental health.

This approach has also been proven effective in helping to assess situations and circumstances more realistically, helping to reduce mental burden, helping to find meaning in life, helping to have hope for life, and maintaining or increasing self-esteem in people with HIV/AIDS (Fiana, 2020). Reality counseling has been proven effective in reducing symptoms of depression in Hemodialysis patients and in female patients with heart disease (Farnoodi et al., 2020; Kudang et al., 2019). Reality counseling with the WDEP technique has also been proven effective in reducing academic procrastination behavior in students (Rahman & Pratiwi, 2025). It is known that low self-esteem and

academic procrastination performed by students are among the negative impacts of social comparison. Based on this study, social comparison needs to be reduced so that it does not affect students' academic performance at school.

To date, research on the intervention of reality counseling using the WDEP technique to reduce student social comparison has not been widely studied in Indonesia. Although existing literature has confirmed that excessive social media use consistently triggers upward comparison that can damage self-esteem and trigger anxiety, and on the other hand, that reality counseling has proven effective in dealing with psychological problems such as anxiety and low self-esteem, there has been no research that bridges these two areas in one study. The novelty of this research is the development of an innovative and structured intervention model that not only focuses on limiting screen time but also targets the root psychological problems underlying student social comparison. Thus, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of reality counseling with the WDEP technique to reduce social comparison in students.

METHOD

This study used a quasi-experimental method with a pre-test post-test design, comparing the experimental and control groups through measurements before and after the intervention was given. According to Arikunto (in Rahmawati, 2016), the research sample used purposive sampling, a technique for finding a sample based on a specific purpose or inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were: (1) XI grade students; (2) active users of Instagram and TikTok applications or one of them; (3) average screentime of 2-6 hours per day; (4) willing to participate in counseling sessions. From the results of the pre-research survey scoring, it was found that 10 students met the inclusion criteria and had high initial scoring results, indicating a potential for social comparison. The experimental group consisted of 5 students from XI grade at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso, who were selected by purposive sampling from a total population of 33 students. Meanwhile, the control group consisted of 5 students from XI grade at SMK Trunojoyo Jember, who were also selected by purposive sampling from the same total population of 33 students. The inclusion criteria were based on the results of the social comparison scale with a score of 80 or above, which is included in the medium and high categories.

There are three classifications of social comparison levels in this study: low, medium, and high. However, the researchers only proceeded with interventions for students with medium and high levels of social comparison. Data collection used the modified INCOM social comparison scale instrument from previous research (Fitri & Cholilah, 2024). The social comparison scale consists of 31 valid (0.361-0.837) and reliable (0.895) items with two dimensions, namely ability and opinion. The scale used was a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree).

The reliability test in this study used the Cronbach's alpha method to measure the internal consistency of the social comparison scale. The test results showed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.895 for 31 statement items. This value exceeds the threshold of 0.7,

indicating that the social comparison scale has good reliability and can be used as a consistent measurement tool in this study.

Experimental $\longrightarrow$ $\boxed{T_1 \ X \ T_2}$

Control $\longrightarrow$ $\boxed{T_1 \ - \ T_2}$
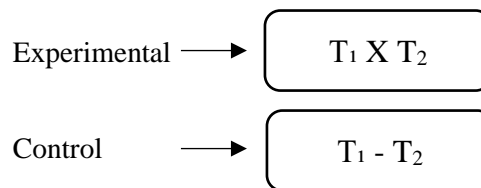
Figure 1. Research Design Scheme

Description:

T_1 : Measurement of students' social comparison before the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention (pre-test)

X : Intervention (Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique)

T_2 : Measurement of students' social comparison after the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention (post-test)

This research was conducted in three steps: 1) giving a pre-test to the experimental and control groups, 2) providing the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention to 5 students in the experimental group, and 3) giving a post-test to the experimental and control groups. Data analysis used paired and independent T-tests with SPSS after checking the population for normality and homogeneity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research that has been conducted, the interval description for each category of students' social comparison level can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Social Comparison Scale Categories and Intervals

Category	Interval
Low	31-61
Medium	62-91
High	92-124

Based on Figures 2 and 3, a comparison of the decrease in scores and categories from pre-test and post-test in both the experimental and control groups is shown. The score difference in the experimental group ranged from 10-45 points, and the category decreased from the pre-test, where 2 students with a high social comparison level dropped to medium, 2 students who were previously in the medium category also saw their scores drop, and 1 student who was previously in the medium category dropped to low. This shows a significant decrease after the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention was administered to the experimental group. On the other hand, the control group experienced a decrease of only 4-5 points, and 2 students who were previously in the high category in the pre-test dropped to medium in the post-test, while the other 3 students remained in the medium category. The control group did not experience a significant decrease in either the pre-test or post-test, as they were not given the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention.
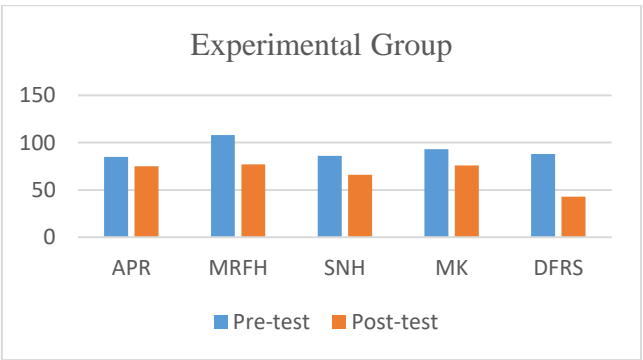
Figure 2. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Experimental Group
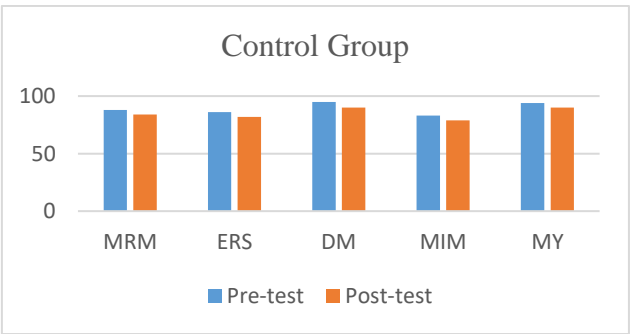

Figure 3. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Control Group

Next, a normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method was conducted to ensure that the distribution assumptions were met. This method is used for a number of respondents less than 30. A homogeneity test was also used to ensure that the data variance from the experimental and control groups were the same. The IBM SPSS version 31 software was used to process and analyze the data.

Tabel 2. Normality and Homogeneity Test Result for the Experimental Group

Normality	Sig.	Statistic	Homogeneity	Sig.	Levene Statistic
Pre-test	0,089	0,805	Pre-test	0,368	0,912
Post-test	0,938	0,981	Post-test	0,144	2,622

The results of the normality test of the social comparison scale in the experimental group showed a sig. value of 0.089 on the pre-test and 0.938 on the post-test. These values are > 0.05, which means the data is normally distributed. Then, for the homogeneity test in the experimental group, the sig. value was 0.368 on the pre-test and 0.144 on the post-test. These values are > 0.05, which means the data is homogeneous.

Table 3. Normality and Homogeneity Test Results for the Control Group

Normality	Sig.	Statistic	Homogeneity	Sig.	Levene Statistic
Pre-test	0,523	0,919	Pre-test	0,368	0,912
Post-test	0,356	0,890	Post-test	0,144	2,622

The results of the normality test of the social comparison scale in the control group showed a sig. value of 0.523 on the pre-test and 0.356 on the post-test. These values are > 0.05, which means the data is normally distributed. Then the homogeneity test in the control group showed a sig. value of 0.368 on the pre-test and 0.144 on the post-test. These values are > 0.05, which means the data is homogeneous. All data from the experimental and control groups showed normality and homogeneity, so a paired sample t-test was then performed. The paired sample t-test was used to compare the means of the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group, to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two tests.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Descriptive Statistics

Group	Mean Pre-test	Mean Post-test	Std. Deviation Pre-test	Std. Deviation Post-test
Experiment	92,00	67,40	9,460	14,328
Control	89,20	87,60	5,167	6,656

From Table 4, it is known that in the experimental group there was a significant decrease in the average score from 92.00 to 67.40. Meanwhile, in the control group, the decrease in the average score was not too significant, from 89.20 to only 87.60. The standard deviation on the experimental group's pre-test was smaller than its post-test, which is also an indicator that the data is more homogeneous compared to the control group.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test (Paired Sample T-Test)

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Eror Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Paired Differences			**95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**				
Pair 1	Experimental Pre-test - Experimental Post-test	24,600	13,686	6,120	7,607	41,593	4,019	4	0,016

The results of the paired sample t-test showed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test values, with an average difference of 24.60 and a standard deviation of 13.68. The t-value was 4.019 and the sig. value was 0.016 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention has a real effectiveness in reducing social comparison in XI grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso.

Table 6. Independent Sample Effect Sizes

		Point Estimate
Value	Cohen's d	1,644
	Hedges' correction	1,484
	Glass's delta	1,228

Based on Table 6, the results obtained were Cohen's d of 1.644, Hedges' correction of 1.484, and Glass's delta of 1.228. These three values show that the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention has a very large impact in reducing social comparison in XI grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso. This refers to Cohen's classification where a value above 1.20 falls into the very large effect category, which indicates that the changes are not only statistically significant but also have a strong practical relevance in the context of implementing psychological interventions. Thus, these findings strengthen the conclusion that the counseling intervention applied in this study proved to be practically effective in helping to reduce social comparison in the research subjects.

Table 7. Effect Size Classification According to Cohen's

Interval	Criteria
0,20	Kecil
0,50	Sedang
0,80	Besar
1,20	Sangat besar

Social comparison was first proposed by Festinger (1954), who stated that every individual has a desire to evaluate themselves compared to others through self-evaluation and self-protection on several aspects of their lives in order to determine their self-progress. Social comparison is the human tendency to make social comparisons with others who are perceived to have a better life, opinions, abilities, and appearance than themselves. This comparison is done to evaluate self-development and excel in various aspects of life.

Social comparison in students occurs due to several factors, including: (1) self-esteem, which is a person's good or bad response to themselves; (2) gratitude, which is a positive feeling about the benefits received. Individuals with high gratitude tend to be more grateful for and appreciate the good things in their lives, both small and large; (3) lifestyle, which is the way an individual lives as shown in various forms of activities, interests, and opinions; (4) social media, which is a result of the high intensity of social media use, so individuals tend to see, idealize, and then compare their lives with the lives of others on social media (Firdaus et al., 2023; Situmorang, 2024).

Based on the introduction above, it is known that there are negative impacts of social comparison among students. Therefore, the researcher was interested in applying the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique as a solution to the social comparison phenomenon in XI grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso. In this study, the researcher was interested in knowing the difference between the experimental group

that received the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention and the control group that received no intervention.

From the results of the pre-experiment survey, there were 10 students with high initial social comparison survey scores, 5 students from SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso who were in the experimental group and 5 students from SMK Trunojoyo Jember who were in the control group. Then the students were asked to fill out the pre-test questionnaire for the social comparison scale to find out their initial condition further. After the pre-test was conducted, there were 2 students from each group who were in the high social comparison category and 3 of them were in the medium category. The students who had a high social comparison level in the experimental group were MRFH and MK, while the ones in the medium level were APR, SNH, and DFRS. In the control group, students with a high level were DM and MY, while those in the medium level were MRM, ERS, and MIM.

The students selected in the experimental group were then given the group-based Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention. The first stage began with building a relationship; the researcher also asked about the clients' readiness and willingness to participate in group counseling, and the researcher explained the reasons for gathering the clients in group counseling. In the second stage, the researcher explored their Wants to get the clients' views by asking them to fill out a prepared worksheet. Next, the researcher found which part was a problem according to reality counseling, then proceeded with Needs to guide the clients on what they actually wanted and needed in the current situation. Then, the researcher identified the differences or conflicts between the desires they expressed and reality based on the worksheet.

The fourth stage was Direction and Doing. Exploration in this stage was done to understand what progress the clients had achieved to meet their needs. The researcher observed the clients' behavior and explained that everything that happened was a result of the clients' low self-control and showed that the behavior currently being carried out was not effective enough to meet the clients' wants and needs. Through this stage, the researcher helped students evaluate whether their current behavior could help them achieve their desires, and built awareness that social comparison was actually detrimental to their psychological well-being.

The fifth stage was Planning and Commitment. The researcher, together with the clients, prepared an action plan to help the clients meet their wants and needs. In preparing a good plan, it must meet the SAMIICCC principles: simple, attainable, measurable, immediate, involved (client involvement), controlled by planner (controlled by the plan maker or client), committed, and the last one, continuously done. This stage invited the clients to prepare specific steps to reduce unhealthy behavior and ensure the plan was realistic and measurable. The clients wrote down their commitment and responsibility for the alternative choices that had been mutually agreed upon. Before ending the counseling session, the researcher explored the clients' feelings and thoughts during their participation in the group counseling, and did not forget to distribute the post-test

questionnaire afterward. The post-test was also given to the control group, which was the students of SMK Trunojoyo Jember.

Based on the group counseling stages that have been carried out, it is hoped that through the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique, it can help students deal with the problem of social comparison as a negative consequence of social media use. It is expected that students can develop a better sense of self-acceptance, increase self-control, focus on self-development, no longer perform social comparison against their self-worth, and build group interaction within the group dynamics.

It can be seen in this study that there was a decrease in the post-test results of the experimental group after being given the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention compared to the previous pre-test results. This decrease was due to the advantages of the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique according to Glasser, which is that reality counseling focuses on the current situation and tries to help clients realize that every action is basically a choice to meet basic needs. Reality counseling emphasizes the importance of planning so that clients have the drive to improve their behavior.

The hypothesis test results also showed that the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique has a positive effect in reducing social comparison in XI grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso. There was a significant difference in the t-test, the pre-test and post-test values between the experimental group that was given the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention and the control group that did not receive the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention. The Cohen's d value also showed 1.644, which falls into the classification with a very large effect on the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention to reduce social comparison in students.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique method is proven to be successful and effective in reducing student social comparison. Unlike other counseling interventions, the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique focuses on helping clients understand and manage their current behavior with four aspects, namely Wants and Needs, Direction and Doing, Self-Evaluation, and Planning and Commitment. The significant difference in the decrease in social comparison in the experimental group and the control group is also an indicator of the success of the Reality Counseling with WDEP Technique intervention compared to other counseling interventions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted on students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bondowoso, it was found that the WDEP reality counseling intervention was able to reduce social comparison among students through the stages described above. The results of the analysis showed a significant decrease in the experimental group compared to the control group. These findings confirm that the WDEP reality counseling intervention can be an efficient and practical approach in helping to overcome social comparison among students who use social media. This approach focuses on helping counselees understand and manage their current behavior through four aspects, namely Wants and Needs,

Direction and Doing, Self Evaluation, and Planning and Commitment. Therefore, the WDEP reality counseling intervention technique can be adopted by counselors and educational institutions as an intervention strategy to address students' psychological well-being issues.

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