

The Effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring Technique Cbt Group Counseling to Reduce *the Fear of Missing Out* and Improve Interpersonal Communication in Students

Hernanda Rizky Rachmawati^{1*}, Mungin Eddy Wibowo², Edy Purwanto³

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia^{1,2,3}

Corresponding Author: hernandarizky109@gmail.com

Article Info:	ABSTRACT
Accepted: 20-04-2026	Background : In the digital era, excessive social media use among adolescents has contributed to the emergence of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), which can negatively affect interpersonal communication. This issue highlights the need for effective counseling interventions to help students manage FoMO and improve social interaction.
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Keywords: cognitive behavior therapy, cognitive restructuring, Fear of Missing Out, interpersonal communication, group counseling	Objectives : To examine the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques in reducing FoMO and improving interpersonal communication among students. Method : This study used a quantitative experimental design with a randomized pretest-posttest control group. Sixteen grade XI students of SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo, selected based on high FoMO and low interpersonal communication, were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received six CBT group counseling sessions using cognitive restructuring techniques, while the control group participated in conventional group discussions. Data were collected using the FoMO Scale and Interpersonal Communication Scale and analyzed using MANCOVA and Wilcoxon tests. Finding and Implication : The intervention significantly reduced FoMO and improved interpersonal communication among students ($p < 0.01$). The findings indicate that cognitive restructuring helps students challenge irrational thoughts related to social media and develop healthier communication behaviors. This approach can be applied by school counselors as an effective intervention for addressing digital-era psychological and social challenges. Conclusion : CBT group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques is effective in reducing FoMO and enhancing students' interpersonal communication skills.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology has made social media part of the daily activities of teenagers. Social media provides a space to interact, share experiences, obtain information, and build self-identity quickly.

On the other hand, this convenience can cause psychological dependence. Students may feel like they should always be aware of their friends' activities, trends, group conversations, or the latest information. When access to social media is hampered, there is anxiety, fear of being left behind, and the urge to immediately re-examine the digital timeline.

Global data corroborates the urgency of this phenomenon. According to We Are Social and Hootsuite's Digital 2023 report, approximately 4.76 billion people worldwide actively use social media, with adolescents aged 13–19 spending an average of seven to nine hours per day on digital screens. In Indonesia specifically, as reported by (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), the proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally altered patterns of adolescent socialization, shifting the locus of social interaction from physical to virtual environments. This structural shift in communication has been identified as a significant risk factor for the emergence of FoMO, particularly among school-age adolescents whose social identity formation is highly dependent on peer validation and group belonging.

This phenomenon is known as Fear of Missing Out or FoMO. FoMO refers to individual anxiety when another person is perceived to have acquired a more interesting experience without his or her presence. In the context of adolescents, FoMO often appears through the behavior of constantly monitoring social media, feeling the need to share personal activities, being afraid of not following peer conversations, and feeling distracted when missing social moments. FoMO is not only concerned with the use of social media, but also touches on the psychological needs of students to feel connected, accepted, and recognized by their social environment.

Gupta & Sharma, (2021) describe FoMO as involving two interconnected processes: first, the subjective perception of missing out on rewarding social experiences; and second, a compulsive behavioral drive to maintain social connections through continuous monitoring of social media platforms, both of which are linked to negative mental health outcomes including anxiety and reduced life satisfaction.

In high school students, FoMO needs attention because adolescents are in the phase of finding identity and strengthening relationships with peers. When the need to connect is more met through social media, face-to-face interactions can weaken. Students can be busier with smartphones when communicating, focus less on the other person, and choose online interactions because they feel safer than live conversations. This condition can interfere with interpersonal communication, especially in the aspects of openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, and equality. Valkenburg, & Beyens, (2022) in their umbrella review, found that frequent social media engagement

is significantly associated with lower psychological well-being among adolescents, particularly when such engagement is driven by social comparison and the need for external validation rather than genuine social connection.

Interpersonal communication has an important role in students' social development. Through direct communication, students learn to understand verbal and nonverbal messages, listen to others, express opinions, manage conflicts, and build healthy relationships. Low interpersonal communication can make students less confident in interacting, easily withdrawn, and relying on social media to meet social needs. Therefore, FoMO and interpersonal communication need to be seen as two interrelated issues. Serrano-Pintado, et.al, (2022) demonstrated that structured interpersonal skills training programs in school settings significantly improved adolescents' social functioning and communication competence, confirming that these skills are teachable and that structured group formats are particularly effective in building them among secondary school students.

The results of the initial assessment in this study show that there are relevant problems at SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo. Of the 102 grade XI students who filled the scale, as many as 52 students or 51 percent were in the high FoMO category. At the same time, 41 students or 40 percent were in the low interpersonal communication category. This data shows that some students have vulnerability to information left anxiety and do not have adequate face-to-face communication skills. This condition is the basis for the need for systematic intervention through guidance and counseling services.

This finding is consistent with Nagari, & Handayani, (2023), who documented a significant relationship between FoMO and anxiety among students at a vocational school in Indonesia, concluding that structured institutional interventions are urgently needed to address the co-occurrence of these two conditions in the secondary school context. Furthermore, McKee & Antonios, (2022) confirmed that higher levels of FoMO are reliably associated with a broader range of maladaptive behaviors in students, reinforcing the need for cognitive-focused interventions that address the underlying thought patterns driving excessive social media engagement rather than merely restricting access.

One of the relevant approaches is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). CBT departs from the assumption that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interrelated. Wrong or distorted thoughts can trigger negative emotions and maladaptive behavior. In the case of FoMO, students can have thoughts such as "I should always know what friends are doing", "I will be left behind if I don't open social media", or "I am not considered if I don't follow trends". These

thoughts encourage repetitive social media checking behaviors and ignoring direct communication.

Cognitive restructuring techniques in CBT are used to help counselors recognize irrational automated thoughts, reassess the evidence in support of and oppose them, and replace them with more realistic thoughts. In the group counseling format, students not only learn individually, but also gain support from group members. They can share experiences, practice communication, and see that FoMO problems are not experienced alone. The group process provides a safe space to build awareness, test new ways of thinking, and practice more adaptive social behaviors.

Several previous studies have examined CBT-based interventions in relation to FoMO and interpersonal communication. Przybylski, (2013) found that FoMO was significantly associated with unmet psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, demonstrating that FoMO is fundamentally a need-satisfaction deficit rather than merely a behavioral problem. Their findings suggest that therapeutic approaches addressing cognition and social skills are more appropriate than purely behavioral restrictions on social media use.

Furthermore, Young, (2013) demonstrated that CBT-based interventions were effective in addressing internet-related behavioral patterns by targeting maladaptive beliefs and replacing them with more adaptive cognitive schemas. Collectively, these studies provide empirical support for the theoretical premise underlying the present research, namely that cognitive restructuring within a group counseling context constitutes an effective and theoretically coherent approach to addressing both FoMO and interpersonal communication deficits in adolescents.

The urgency of this research is underscored by the fact that, despite the growing body of literature on FoMO, very few studies have simultaneously addressed both FoMO reduction and interpersonal communication enhancement within a single, structured group counseling intervention in the Indonesian secondary school context. Most existing interventions either focus narrowly on reducing social media use through behavioral restrictions or address interpersonal communication in isolation from its digital-psychological antecedents. The co-occurrence of high FoMO and low interpersonal communication identified in the present study's preliminary assessment affecting 51% and 40% of grade XI students respectively at SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo confirms the practical necessity for an integrated, empirically grounded intervention in this specific school context.

The novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous examination of two dependent variables FoMO reduction and interpersonal communication

improvement within a single randomized experimental design using CBT group counseling with a cognitive restructuring technique. Prior studies have tended to examine these constructs independently and without a formal experimental control condition. By integrating both outcomes within a MANCOVA analytical framework, this study contributes a more comprehensive and methodologically rigorous understanding of how cognitive restructuring, delivered in a group counseling format, can concurrently address the psychological and social communication challenges posed by excessive social media engagement among Indonesian vocational high school students.

The benefits and implications of this research are threefold. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the empirical base for applying CBT cognitive restructuring techniques in school counseling settings, particularly in addressing digital-era psychological problems among adolescents. Practically, the results provide a replicable, session-by-session group counseling model that guidance and counseling (BK) teachers can implement directly in schools. For educational policymakers, the study highlights the need to incorporate structured psychoeducational programs addressing digital literacy and mental health resilience into school guidance and counseling curricula, thereby ensuring that BK services remain responsive to the evolving psychological needs of students in the digital age.

Based on this description, this study aims to test the effectiveness of CBT group counseling cognitive restructuring techniques to reduce FoMO and improve students' interpersonal communication. The focus of the research was directed at grade XI students of SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo who had high FoMO and low interpersonal communication. This article presents a summary of the research in a journal format that includes introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusions, and suggestions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with an experimental design. The design used was a randomized pretest-posttest control group design. This design involves two groups, namely the experimental group and the control group. Both groups received a pretest and a posttest. The difference lies in the treatment. The experimental group received CBT group counseling on cognitive restructuring techniques, while the control group received conventional group discussions.

The research population was 102 students in grade XI of SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo. SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo was selected as the research location based on the results of a preliminary needs assessment conducted by

the researcher, which identified a high prevalence of both FoMO and low interpersonal communication among grade XI students. In addition, the school's guidance and counseling teacher had not previously implemented structured group counseling programs to address these specific concerns, indicating a genuine service gap that warranted empirical intervention.

The selection of subjects was carried out by purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria include students aged 15 to 19 years, grade XI students for the 2021/2022 school year, have high FoMO, have low interpersonal communication, and are willing to participate in group counseling activities. From the results of the initial assessment, 16 students were selected as research subjects. Subjects were then placed into experimental groups and control groups, totaling 8 students each.

The variables studied in this study were FoMO, interpersonal communication, and CBT group counseling of cognitive restructuring techniques. FoMO is defined as excessive fear, worry, and anxiety due to feeling left behind in information, activities, or social experiences experienced by others, especially through social media. Interpersonal communication is defined as a direct communication relationship between individuals that allows for verbal and nonverbal reciprocity. CBT group counseling cognitive restructuring techniques are defined as group counseling services that help students identify, evaluate, and replace irrational thoughts with more realistic and adaptive ones.

The instruments used include the FoMO Scale and the interpersonal communication scale. The FoMO Scale is adapted from Przybylski et al., (2013) with 10 statement items measuring aspects of fear, worry, and anxiety. The adaptation process followed a systematic forward-backward translation procedure. The original English items were first translated into Indonesian by a bilingual expert in counseling psychology, then independently back-translated into English by a second bilingual expert who was blind to the original version.

Discrepancies between the back-translation and the original were resolved through expert panel discussion until conceptual equivalence was established. The adapted scale was subsequently piloted with a group of students comparable to the target sample prior to the main study to verify item comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness. The scale of interpersonal communication is developed based on aspects of openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, and equality, consistent with the framework proposed by (DeVito, 2016). In the early stages, the interpersonal communication scale consisted of 26 items. After the trial, 23 items were declared valid and 3 items were dropped.

The validity of the instrument is tested through expert review and item correlation analysis. The FoMO instrument has 10 valid items. The interpersonal communication instrument has 23 valid items after the trial process. Reliability is calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results of the reliability test showed that the FoMO Scale had an alpha of 0.93, while the interpersonal communication scale had an alpha of 0.80. Both values indicate that the instrument has a strong internal consistency.

The treatment of the experimental group was carried out in six group counseling sessions. In general, activities include the formation of counseling relationships, the identification of FoMO experiences and communication barriers, the introduction of mind, feeling, and behavioral relationships, the practice of finding automatic thoughts, the exercise of changing irrational thoughts, the preparation of new behavior plans, and the evaluation of changes. The control group followed conventional group discussions without cognitive restructuring techniques.

Data analysis was carried out with the help of SPSS 24. As a prerequisite for parametric analysis, normality testing was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which is recommended for small sample sizes ($n < 30$) (Sugiyono, 2021). The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed that data from both variables in the experimental and control groups were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). The variance homogeneity test was used as a prerequisite test before MANCOVA. MANCOVA was used to see the difference in treatment effects between the experimental group and the control group by controlling for pretest scores.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was additionally employed as a complementary nonparametric analysis to examine within-group pre-to-post changes specifically in the experimental group. Given the relatively small sample size per group ($n = 8$), the Wilcoxon test provides an additional layer of robustness to the findings, corroborating the MANCOVA results with a distribution-free inferential approach that is particularly appropriate for small experimental samples (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The combined use of MANCOVA and Wilcoxon tests thus serves complementary analytical purposes: the former addresses between-group treatment effects while controlling for baseline differences, and the latter examines within-group pre-to-post change with sensitivity appropriate to the sample size. The significance level used is 0.05.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were presented through a description of the student's initial condition, changes in pretest and posttest scores,

homogeneity tests, and hypothesis tests. Preliminary data shows that high FoMO and low interpersonal communication are still found in grade XI students of SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo. A summary of the initial distribution is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution of Student FoMO Levels

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Low	20	20%
Medium	30	29%
Height	52	51%
Quantity	102	100%

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Interpersonal Communication Levels

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Low	41	40%
Medium	49	48%
Height	12	12%
Quantity	102	100%

Based on Table 1, most students are in the high FoMO category. As many as 52 students or 51 percent showed a tendency to be afraid of missing out on information and social activities. This condition is an important concern because FoMO can make students allocate more attention to social media than to direct communication in the school environment.

Based on Table 2, as many as 41 students or 40 percent are in the category of low interpersonal communication. This data shows that there are still students who experience barriers in openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, or equality when interacting. These preliminary findings reinforce the need for interventions that not only reduce social media-related anxiety, but also rebuild interpersonal communication skills.

Table 3. Average Pretest and Posttest Experimental and Control Group

Variable	Groups	Pretest M	Pretest SD	Posttest M	Posttest SD
FoMO	Experiments	66,38	1,60	32,50	7,37
FoMO	Controls	51,50	8,50	50,50	7,94
Interpersonal communication	Experiments	56,00	16,02	85,75	6,73
Interpersonal communication	Controls	58,88	15,42	58,63	15,55

The average score of FoMO dropped from 66.38 to 32.50 after six sessions of CBT group counseling of cognitive restructuring techniques. In contrast, the control group experienced only a small change from 51.50 to 50.50. In the interpersonal communication variable, the experimental group increased from 56.00 to 85.75. The control group saw almost no change, from 58.88 to 58.63.

These changes indicate a consistent direction of effect. The treatment not only decreases the tendency of FoMO, but also improves students' ability to communicate. The decrease in FoMO in the experimental group can be read as a result of students' ability to recognize automatic thoughts about information lag and test it more realistically. Improved interpersonal communication can be understood as a result of social practice in a group, including sharing experiences, listening to other members, and receiving feedback.

Table 4. Variance Homogeneity Test Results

Variable	F(1,14)	p	Remarks
FoMO	5,841	> 0.05	Homogeneous
Interpersonal communication	0,087	> 0.05	Homogeneous

Table 5. Summary of the MANCOVA and Wilcoxon Tests

Variable	Groups	Pretest M	Pretest SD	Posttest M	Posttest SD	S/F
FoMO	Experiments	66,38	1,60	32,50	7,37	Z = -2.93*
FoMO	Controls	51,50	8,50	50,50	7,94	F(1,12) = 42.89*
Interpersonal communication	Experiments	56,00	16,02	85,75	6,73	Z = -2.34*
Interpersonal communication	Controls	58,88	15,42	58,63	15,55	F(1,12) = 53.11*

Description: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

The homogeneity test showed that the variance between groups was homogeneous. Thus, MANCOVA analysis can be performed to test the difference in treatment effects. The overall multivariate test yielded a significant result, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.12$, $F(2, 11) = 38.74$, $p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.88$, indicating a large effect size and confirming that the combination of both dependent variables significantly differentiated the experimental and control groups after controlling for pretest scores. This multivariate result constitutes the primary evidence for the effectiveness of the CBT group counseling intervention.

The univariate follow-up analyses within the MANCOVA framework showed that CBT group counseling of cognitive restructuring techniques was effective in reducing students' FoMO, $F(1, 12) = 42.89$, $p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.78$. The same result also appeared for the interpersonal communication variable, $F(1, 12) = 53.11$, $p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.82$. Both effect sizes are classified as large, demonstrating not only statistical but also practical significance of the intervention. This means that there was a significant difference in outcomes between the experimental group and the control group after controlling for initial scores.

The Wilcoxon test in the experimental group showed a significant decrease in FoMO, $Z = -2.93$. In interpersonal communication, the Wilcoxon test showed a significant improvement, $Z = -2.34$. These findings support the hypothesis that CBT group counseling techniques cognitive restructuring

techniques are effective in lowering FoMO while improving students' interpersonal communication.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that students' FoMO can be lowered through CBT group counseling of cognitive restructuring techniques. The change was seen in the decrease in the average FoMO score of the experimental group from the high category to the low category. These results can be explained through the basic mechanisms of CBT. As (Alford & Beck, 1998) articulated, CBT operates on the premise that dysfunctional emotions and behaviors are maintained by distorted cognitive appraisals; modifying these appraisals is therefore the primary mechanism of therapeutic change.

Students learn that the fear of being left behind arises not only because of social media, but also because of the way they interpret social information. When students think that they should always follow a friend's activities, the emotions that arise are anxiety. These emotions then drive repetitive social media checking behavior, a pattern consistent with the cognitive-behavioral model of FoMO described by (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Through cognitive restructuring, students are invited to identify the automatic thoughts that trigger FoMO. For example, students may think that not opening social media will make them lose friends. In the counseling session, the mind is tested through rational questions. Students assess whether the thought is true, whether there is any other evidence, and what are the consequences of continuing to maintain the thought. This process helps students formulate alternative thoughts such as "I can still make friends even if I don't always open social media" or "I can choose the right time to use my smartphone". This new mind lowers anxiety and helps students control digital behavior.

Group counseling also provides social influences that support change. Group members can see that the FoMO experience is experienced by other friends. This awareness reduces embarrassment and increases the courage to discuss problems. When students share experiences, other members provide feedback, support, and new perspectives. The process helps students build an understanding that in-person interaction remains important and cannot be completely replaced by social media. This is supported by Giancola et al., (2025), who found that among adolescents aged 14–19, FoMO significantly mediated the relationship between age and online vulnerability, with younger adolescents being particularly susceptible due to heightened FoMO, and who emphasized the importance of group-based interventions that address emotional and psychological factors in reducing such vulnerability.

The improvement in interpersonal communication in the experimental group can also be explained through the group process. In each session, students have the opportunity to speak, listen, respond, and reflect on experiences. This activity trains the aspect of openness because students learn to express their thoughts and feelings more clearly. The empathy aspect develops when students listen to the experiences of other members. The support aspect is seen when students give reinforcement to friends. Positive attitudes and equality grow because every member has an equal space to participate. Torres, & Caracas, (2023) provided empirical support for this mechanism, demonstrating that structured communication training for adolescents produced significant improvements in communicative competence compared to controls, with gains attributed to the active, participatory nature of training that mirrored the group-based practice opportunities provided in the present study's CBT sessions. Similarly, Nasution, & Damayanti, (2023) showed that group counseling with structured techniques produced significant improvements in interpersonal communication skills among students from challenging family backgrounds, confirming that the group counseling format itself serves as a powerful vehicle for developing students' practical communication abilities.

The results of this study are in line with research demonstrating that social skills and social media use are interrelated. However, as Karadağ et al., (2015) demonstrated, excessive online interaction can amplify FoMO through a self-reinforcing cycle of social comparison and information monitoring. Therefore, interventions that only limit the use of social media are not sufficient. Students also need to be trained to build direct relationships, communicate social needs in a healthy way, and manage thoughts that trigger digital anxiety, consistent with the integrative CBT approach advocated by (Cormier, S. & Osborn, 2009).

The difference in results between the experimental group and the control group showed that the change did not occur simply because the students gathered in the group. The control group that received conventional discussions showed no major changes. This strengthens the position of cognitive restructuring techniques as an important and necessary component of the intervention. As Corey, (2013) noted, it is the structured, technique-driven nature of CBT that distinguishes it from supportive group discussion, because the systematic identification and modification of automatic thoughts provides a clear mechanism of change beyond mere social contact.

This technique provides a clear working structure, ranging from problem identification, automatic thought discovery, thought evaluation, thought change, to new behavior plans, which is consistent with the structured CBT

protocol described by Young, (2013) in internet-related behavioral interventions. Practically, these findings can be used by guidance and counseling teachers to develop responsive services in schools. BK teachers may use a small group format for students who show a tendency for high FoMO and low interpersonal communication. Services can be directed to understanding mindsets, regulating smartphone use, practicing direct communication, and drafting behavioral commitments. Thus, BK services do not stop at the advice to reduce social media, but touch the cognitive and social roots of the student's problems.

Although the results show the effectiveness of the intervention, this study has limitations. First, the study has not used follow-up measurements to determine the durability of the effects of the intervention. Second, the subject of the study is limited to grade XI students in one school, so generalizations need to be done carefully. Third, the number of subjects in the experiment was relatively small. Subsequent research could expand the number of samples, involve different grade levels, and use a repeating measurement design to see the stability of the changes. In terms of implementation, Mitchell, et.al, (2024) noted that CBT group counseling programs in school settings are most effective when they are embedded within comprehensive counseling curricula and when counselors receive adequate training, suggesting that future applications of the present model should also consider the preparation and supervisory support provided to implementing BK teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the research hypothesis is accepted: CBT group counseling using cognitive restructuring techniques is significantly effective in reducing Fear of Missing Out and improving interpersonal communication among grade XI students of SMK Bina Patria 1 Sukoharjo. This is evidenced by significant decreases in FoMO scores and significant increases in interpersonal communication scores in the experimental group following six intervention sessions, with MANCOVA results confirming significant between-group differences for both variables after controlling for pretest scores.

The large effect sizes obtained further demonstrate the practical significance of the intervention. Conceptually, these findings reinforce that FoMO is rooted in maladaptive cognitive appraisals that, when restructured through a group counseling process, enable students to regulate social media use and strengthen interpersonal skills including openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, and equality. Future research is recommended to expand the sample, extend intervention duration, and incorporate follow-up measurements to assess the long-term durability of these effects.

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