

## The Effectiveness of Group Guidance Services Using the Role Playing Technique in Improving Students' Interpersonal Communication

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### Abstract

Low levels of assertiveness, openness, and empathy among secondary school students frequently constitute a major obstacle to building healthy social relationships, which in turn undermines their academic achievement. This concern underlies the importance of Guidance and Counseling (GC) interventions that move beyond mere instruction toward direct experiential engagement. This study examines the extent to which group guidance services using the role playing technique can enhance students' Interpersonal Communication (IC), drawing on DeVito's comprehensive theoretical framework. Using a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, the study involved eight Class X students from SMP Taman Pendidikan Islam Medan, selected through purposive sampling from a pool of 28 students based on the lowest IC scores. Four intervention sessions focused on social simulation and progressive training of IC indicators. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to test the hypothesis, and the results showed a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ( $Z = -2.524$ ;  $p = 0.012$ ), confirming the effectiveness of the service. The group's mean IC score rose from 59.25 to 95.25, shifting from the Medium to the High category. All students (100%) who had initially fallen into the Low or Medium categories successfully reached the highest level of interpersonal communication following the intervention.

**Keywords:** Group Guidance, Interpersonal Communication, Role Playing, Secondary School Students

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### INTRODUCTION

Healthy social relationships, academic achievement, and students' emotional development largely depend on how well they are able to communicate interpersonally. In an educational context, interpersonal communication is not merely a means of exchanging messages; it serves as a pathway for students to construct shared meaning and create an inclusive and supportive learning environment (DeVito, 2016). Students who master empathy, openness, and active listening are better equipped to navigate the social dynamics of school life. Interpersonal communication is therefore often regarded as one indicator of holistic educational success (Ding, 2021; Mulyani dkk., 2021).

The interpersonal communication challenges faced by today's adolescents are also inseparable from shifting patterns of social interaction in the digital era. Most adolescents now spend more time interacting through social media than face-to-face, and this shift has raised concerns about the erosion of their real-world social skills (Lamash dkk., 2024). A longitudinal

study of adolescents aged 10–18 even found that the intensity of social media use correlates with increasingly limited face-to-face interaction, although the relationship between the two is complex and not always linear (Steinsbekk dkk., 2024). This condition confirms that face-to-face interpersonal communication skills — such as the ability to read nonverbal cues, respond empathically in real time, and resolve conflicts directly — cannot be assumed to develop naturally as adolescents grow older. Instead, these skills need to be deliberately trained through structured spaces for direct interaction, one of which is school guidance and counseling services. In other words, the urgency of experience-based interventions such as group guidance becomes increasingly relevant precisely amid this shift in adolescent communication patterns toward the digital realm.

Reality on the ground tells a different story. Many students still struggle to express their thoughts and feelings assertively, to build balanced interactions, or to remain sensitive to others' conditions. This skill gap not only damages social relationships but also triggers social anxiety, erodes self-confidence, and lowers learning motivation (Mataputun & Saud, 2020; Sahputra, 2018). This condition calls for systematic and contextual interventions within educational services, so that students can develop healthy and effective communication skills.

Schools already possess a platform for addressing students' social-emotional issues through guidance and counseling services. Unfortunately, the approaches commonly used remain largely instructional and passive, leaving students with little room to practice and reflect directly on their communication skills (Putri dkk., 2023). This gap has driven the need for intervention methods that are more participatory, applicable, and grounded in students' real experiences of social interaction.

Group guidance is one relevant response to this need. As a dynamic forum, this approach allows students to interact with one another within a structured yet supportive atmosphere. Here, participants learn to recognize themselves, understand others, and build interpersonal skills step by step (Corey dkk., 2018). Recent research reinforces this view: group guidance services based on experiential learning have been shown to genuinely enhance students' interpersonal communication skills (Mulyani dkk., 2021). This finding complements earlier evidence that group guidance effectively improves emotional intelligence, learning discipline, and students' social interaction abilities (Fadhilah dkk., 2019; Fauzi & Yustiana, 2024; Ulandari & Juliawati, 2019).

Among the various group guidance techniques, role playing is specifically designed to train social and communication skills through scenarios that mimic real-life situations. Students enact particular roles and are then invited to reflect on the experience, thereby strengthening their empathy, assertiveness, and self-confidence (Chernikova dkk., 2020). Beyond sharpening students' understanding of relational dynamics, this technique also opens space for more constructive two-way communication (Baile & Blatner, 2014; Soo dkk., 2019). Recent applied studies further reinforce this picture, showing that the implementation of role playing within group coaching contexts produces tangible effects on participants' social skills (Habsy dkk., 2024).

Compared to other simulation techniques used in group guidance, such as sociodrama or psychodrama, role playing is more flexible and does not require a fixed script or storyline. Sociodrama generally focuses on resolving social problems shared by the group, whereas psychodrama places greater emphasis on the in-depth exploration of one group member's personal psychological conflict (Corey dkk., 2018). Role playing, by contrast, allows facilitators to design shorter, more targeted scenarios aimed at specific skills, making it easier to adapt to the limited duration of group guidance sessions in schools. This characteristic makes role playing more practical to implement within regular GC services compared to other simulation techniques that demand longer preparation and execution time. This flexibility also enables facilitators to adjust the complexity of scenarios to a group's specific needs, such as practicing how to decline an unwanted invitation or express a dissenting opinion, without having to follow the elaborate dramatic structure typically required in psychodrama (Baile & Blatner, 2014).

Empirical evidence on the impact of role playing on students' social skills is already substantial. Eskawati and Wangid recorded a significant increase in self-efficacy following four sessions of role-playing-based group guidance (Eskawati & Wangid, 2023). Subandi et al. reported that this technique outperformed conventional services in promoting students' social interaction (Subandi dkk., 2020), while Ustomi et al. confirmed that this simulative approach also enhanced students' overall interpersonal communication ability, including the aspects of empathy and self-expression (Ustomi dkk., 2024). Similar findings have emerged in a more specific context: the

application of group guidance using the role playing technique has been reported to specifically improve students' interpersonal communication skills (Setyowati & Maharani, 2023).

Nevertheless, most of these studies have not explicitly positioned interpersonal communication as a primary variable measured through a comprehensive theoretical set of indicators. Many still employ simple experimental designs with limited samples and have not been widely applied systematically at the secondary school level in Indonesia. This gap creates room for further investigation, particularly within the context of secondary education, which involves distinctly complex social dynamics.

This study was designed to examine the effectiveness of group guidance services using the role playing technique in enhancing the interpersonal communication of secondary school students, integrating DeVito's framework, which encompasses the indicators of openness, empathy, social support, and assertiveness as the basis for measurement (DeVito, 2016). The novelty of this study lies in its combination of a practical intervention approach with a solid foundation in interpersonal communication theory, as well as its application within the Indonesian school context, which remains rarely examined empirically. This study is expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of GC services that are experience-based, contextual, and measurable.

This study is limited to several aspects to keep its scope focused. In terms of substance, the study only examines the effectiveness of group guidance services using the role playing technique on students' interpersonal communication in general, without analyzing its effects on each of the seven IC indicators separately or on other variables that might also be affected, such as academic achievement or social adjustment. Methodologically, the study employs a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, meaning the results obtained demonstrate change within the same subjects before and after the intervention, but cannot fully isolate the intervention's effect from possible extraneous variables operating during the research period. In terms of population and sample, the research subjects are limited to eight Class X students from SMP Taman Pendidikan Islam Medan, selected through purposive sampling based on the lowest IC scores; the findings therefore represent conditions within a group of students with similar characteristics and may not be generalizable to the broader population of secondary school students, whether in terms of educational level, school background, or other geographic regions in Indonesia. Finally, the intervention was implemented over a relatively short period of four sessions, meaning this study cannot address questions regarding the sustainability of students' IC improvement over the long term after the service ends. Based on the background and theoretical review presented above, the research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference in students' interpersonal communication ability before and after receiving group guidance services using the role playing technique.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in students' interpersonal communication ability before and after receiving group guidance services using the role playing technique.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. This design was chosen because it is suitable for measuring change within the same subjects before and after treatment, without requiring a control group. Ethical and practical considerations within the educational context were the main reasons for this choice, given that randomly assigning students to control and experimental groups is difficult to achieve ideally in the field (Shadish dkk., 2002; Sugiyono, 2013). Through this design, the researcher sought to evaluate the direct impact of group guidance services using the role playing technique on students' interpersonal communication skills in a structured manner.

The choice of a quasi-experimental design without a control group in this study also reflects the researcher's ethical responsibility toward subjects already identified as having urgent intervention needs. Given that the eight research subjects were selected precisely because their IC scores fell into the lowest category of the initial population, withholding some students from the intervention for the sake of a control group was considered inconsistent with the principle of beneficence in educational research involving vulnerable populations (Shadish dkk., 2002). Practical considerations further reinforced this choice: the limited time available for GC services in schools, together with the small number of students meeting the low-score criterion, made it difficult to form a statistically equivalent control group under ideal conditions. Although this design carries consequences for external validity, as elaborated in the limitations section, the one-group

pretest-posttest design was still considered adequate for the initial purpose of this study — namely, to test whether or not change occurred within the same subjects, as preliminary evidence of role playing's feasibility as an intervention technique before being tested further with a more rigorous design.

The research was conducted at SMP Taman Pendidikan Islam, Medan, with an initial population comprising all 28 Class X students. The sample was determined through purposive sampling, that is, deliberately selecting participants based on criteria aligned with the research objective and intervention needs (Arikunto, 2013). Subject selection began with administering the Interpersonal Communication pretest questionnaire to all 28 students. Based on the results of this initial assessment, inclusion criteria were established: students with the lowest levels of interpersonal communication (Low to Medium category) who were also willing to participate actively. This selection process yielded 8 students as the final research subjects, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of Research Subjects

| Description                          | Total     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Initial population (Class X)         | 28        |
| Selected subjects (lowest IC scores) | 8         |
| Low category at pretest              | 3 (37.5%) |
| Medium category at pretest           | 5 (62.5%) |

The eight selected students subsequently participated in the group guidance service and were intensively involved in role-playing simulations throughout the intervention period.

This study also gave attention to the ethical dimensions of research involving minor subjects. As emphasized in school counseling ethical standards, confidentiality within a group guidance context cannot be fully guaranteed as it can in individual counseling, given that information disclosed by one group member may become known to other members (American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 2010). For this reason, before the intervention began, the researcher provided an explanation to the subjects and the school regarding the research objectives, implementation procedures, and the limits of confidentiality applicable within the group forum, as part of an effort to safeguard students' psychological comfort throughout the intervention process. This ethical consideration is consistent with the principle of caution required in quasi-experimental research involving vulnerable populations within educational settings (Shadish dkk., 2002), particularly because the research subjects were students already identified as having interpersonal communication difficulties and potentially more sensitive to stressful social situations during the simulations.

Data were collected using an interpersonal communication questionnaire based on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), developed from an expanded version of DeVito's theoretical framework. This instrument covers seven indicators of interpersonal communication, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Indicators of the Interpersonal Communication Instrument

| No | Indicator                                                  | Theoretical Source                                                 |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Openness, Empathy, Supportiveness, Equality, Assertiveness | Devito (DeVito, 2016)                                              |
| 2  | Emotional Regulation                                       | Eganov et al. (Eganov dkk., 2020)                                  |
| 3  | Active Listening and Responsiveness                        | Bodie et al. (Bodie dkk., 2015); Reis & Clark (Reis & Clark, 2013) |

Operationally, the seven indicators were translated into 28 statement items, with four items allocated to each indicator. The indicators of Openness, Empathy, Supportiveness, Equality, and Assertiveness — drawn from DeVito's framework (DeVito, 2016) — are each represented by four statements measuring their specific aspects, such as willingness to express feelings for the Openness indicator or the ability to politely decline an invitation for the Assertiveness indicator. The Emotional Regulation indicator, based on Eganov et al., is measured through four statements assessing students' ability to remain calm and control anger when facing differing opinions (Eganov dkk., 2020). The seventh indicator, Active Listening and Responsiveness, is measured through four statements assessing the habit of listening to a speaker until they finish and giving responses that show attentiveness, drawing on the framework developed by Bodie et al. (Bodie dkk., 2015) and Reis & Clark (Reis & Clark, 2013) (2013). The total score across all items was then summed to

obtain a score range from 28 (minimum) to 112 (maximum), which was subsequently categorized into three levels — Low (28–56), Medium (57–84), and High (85–112) — as the basis for interpretation at both the individual and group levels.

Content validity was tested through expert judgment by academic experts and school counselors, while internal reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which reached 0.87 — a figure indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming the instrument's suitability for measuring changes in student behavior (Azwar, 2013).

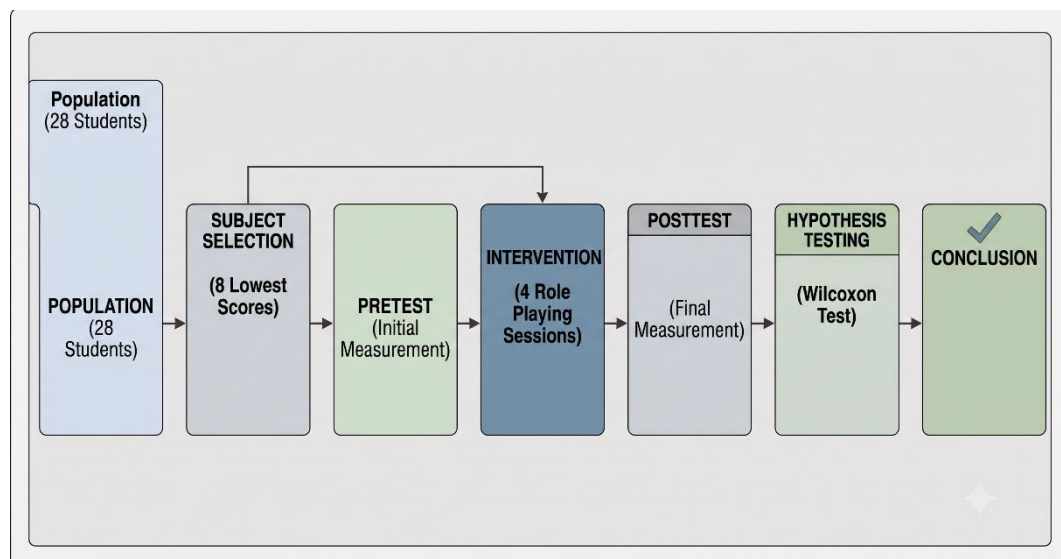
The intervention was conducted over four group guidance sessions using the role playing technique, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. Each session was progressively designed to train aspects of interpersonal communication through simulations of social situations close to adolescents' daily lives, such as expressing opinions assertively, resolving conflict, and expressing empathy. Implementation followed Corey et al.'s stages of group guidance — forming, transitioning, working, and terminating (Corey dkk., 2018) — with the researcher acting as the facilitating counselor, supported by observation documentation and participant reflection.

Data were processed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and categorical frequencies as a general picture of score change. Hypothesis testing employed the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, chosen for its suitability to a pretest-posttest design with a small sample ( $N=8$ ) and its ability to accommodate the possibility of non-normally distributed data (Pallant, 2020). The significance level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

The choice of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test over parametric tests such as the paired sample t-test also took into account the overall characteristics of the research data. Beyond the small sample size ( $N=8$ ), which makes the normality assumption difficult to satisfy convincingly, the ordinal-interval IC score data resulting from the summation of Likert items are also prone to violating the homogeneity-of-variance assumption when analyzed with a parametric approach on such a small sample (Pallant, 2020). Nonparametric tests such as the Wilcoxon work by comparing the ranks of score differences between paired data, rather than the raw values directly, making the test results more resistant to potential outliers or asymmetric data distributions — conditions more likely to occur in small samples than in large ones (Field, 2018). This approach yields more trustworthy hypothesis-testing results for research designs with a limited number of subjects, as in this study.

The research procedure in brief: Population (28 Students) → Subject Selection (8 Lowest Scores) → Pretest (Initial Measurement) → Intervention (4 Role Playing Sessions) → Posttest (Final Measurement) → Hypothesis Testing (Wilcoxon Test) → Conclusion. This sequential research procedure is further detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Procedural Flow of the Role-Playing Group Guidance Research



\*Procedure adapted from established experimental designs for social science research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Group guidance services using the role playing technique were tested to measure their impact on the interpersonal communication (IC) of Class X students. Descriptive analysis served as the initial step in mapping a general picture of students' IC before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Total Interpersonal Communication Scores

| <b>Statistic</b>    | <b>Total IC Score Pretest</b> | <b>Total IC Score Posttest</b> |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| N                   | 8                             | 8                              |
| Minimum             | 53                            | 87                             |
| Maximum             | 66                            | 105                            |
| Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )  | 59.25                         | 95.25                          |
| Std. Deviation (SD) | 4.892                         | 6.319                          |

Based on Table 3, the mean IC score rose sharply from 59.25 at pretest to 95.25 at posttest — a 36-point increase indicating a substantial intervention effect, sufficient to shift the group's average from the Medium to the High category. The lowest posttest score (87) even exceeded the highest pretest score (66), indicating that all participants — including the 3 students initially in the Low category — achieved an IC improvement of at least the High category.

A frequency analysis was conducted to observe the shift in students' IC levels from pretest to posttest, using the categories Low ( $\leq 56$ ), Medium (57–84), and High (85–112). Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4. Shift in Frequency of Students' Interpersonal Communication Level Categories

| <b>Interpersonal Communication Level</b> | <b>Pretest Frequency (%)</b> | <b>Posttest Frequency (%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Low (28–56)                              | 37.5%                        | 0%                            |
| Medium (57–84)                           | 62.5%                        | 0%                            |
| High (85–112)                            | 0%                           | 100%                          |
| Total                                    | 100%                         | 100%                          |

Based on Table 4, before the intervention, the majority of subjects (62.5%) were in the Medium category, with the remainder (37.5%) in the Low category. After the intervention, all students (8 of 8, or 100%) reached the High category. This complete shift is an initial indication that the role-playing service had a substantial impact on students' IC, and this warranted statistical testing for significance.

Hypothesis testing was conducted to confirm whether the difference in IC scores between pretest and posttest was also statistically meaningful. Because the data did not meet the normality assumption and the sample was small ( $N=8$ ), the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used with  $\alpha = 0.05$  (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020; Siregar, 2016). Tables 5 and 6 present the results.

Table 5. Wilcoxon Test Ranks Results

|                | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean Rank</b> | <b>Sum of Ranks</b> |
|----------------|----------|------------------|---------------------|
| Negative Ranks | 0        | .00              | .00                 |
| Positive Ranks | 8        | 4.50             | 36.00               |
| Ties           | 0        |                  |                     |

All subjects ( $N=8$ ) fell within the Positive Ranks — meaning all eight students experienced an increase in IC scores after the intervention, with none decreasing or remaining unchanged.

Table 6. Wilcoxon Test Statistics Results

|                        | <b>Posttest – Pretest</b> |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Z                      | -2.524                    |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.012                     |

Based on Table 6, a Z value of -2.524 was obtained with a two-tailed asymptotic significance of 0.012. Because the p-value (0.012) is smaller than  $\alpha$  (0.05), the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). Thus, there is a significant difference in students' interpersonal communication ability before and after receiving the group guidance service using the role playing technique. This result confirms the acceptance of the working hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) proposed in this study.

Beyond statistical significance, the magnitude of the recorded score change also indicates a substantial practical effect. The 36-point mean increase, relative to the instrument's total score range (28–112), corresponds to a shift of more than 40% of the maximum possible score range — a magnitude of change rarely found in short-term interventions lasting only four sessions. The consistency in the direction of change across all subjects, as reflected in the absence of Negative

Ranks or Ties in Table 5, further reinforces the confidence that the observed effect is not merely a statistical coincidence or regression to the mean, but rather a systematic and uniform pattern of change across all group members. This pattern is important to note, given that in a small-sample design ( $N=8$ ), a significant  $p$ -value needs to be interpreted alongside effect size and consistency in the direction of change, rather than relying solely on the  $\alpha = 0.05$  threshold (Field, 2018).

## DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis in this study definitively confirms the working hypothesis (H1), namely that there is a significant difference in students' IC ability before and after receiving the group guidance service using the role playing technique. This decision is based on a significance value of  $p=0.012$ , which falls below the  $\alpha=0.05$  threshold, marking the success of the intervention as designed from the outset.

The descriptive data and categorization further reinforce this picture of effectiveness. The 36-point mean increase successfully shifted the group's IC from the Medium to the High category, while all subjects (8 of 8) reached the High category following the intervention — including the 37.5% of students who had initially been in the Low category. This finding is consistent with the view that group guidance is an ideal medium for facilitating the development of students' social-emotional skills (Corey dkk., 2018; Fadhilah dkk., 2019), in which students gain a supportive and structured space to interact, observe peer behavior, and receive constructive feedback. The presence of the role playing technique within this forum is what serves as the primary catalyst for behavioral change in students.

The key to this service's success lies in the unique mechanism of role playing as an experiential learning method. Unlike passive instructional approaches, role playing places students in social scenarios that resemble real life, compelling them to interact while simultaneously internalizing new skills. This process aligns with the structured stages of group work (Corey dkk., 2018), in which a safe and supportive atmosphere encourages students to dare to experiment with new communication patterns.

This mechanism can be explained more deeply through the four-stage experiential learning cycle proposed by Kolb: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). Within the context of role playing in this study, students undergo a concrete experience when enacting a character in a social scenario; they then reflect on that experience through group discussion and feedback; from this reflection, students form a new understanding of effective communication patterns; and in the following session, that understanding is tested again through a new scenario demanding active application. This repeating cycle is what distinguishes role playing from conventional instructional methods, because participants do not stop at cognitively understanding a concept but continue to test and refine their skills through repeated experience (Kolb dkk., 2001). Within a group guidance context, this Kolb cycle is reinforced by the presence of fellow group members as a source of authentic feedback, something difficult to replicate in individual learning or one-way instruction.

The effectiveness of this experiential learning cycle is further supported by findings from a large-scale meta-analysis of simulation-based learning across various educational levels, which shows that simulation methods consistently produce higher learning outcomes than conventional instructional approaches, with the effect growing stronger when simulation is accompanied by structured reflection and feedback sessions (Chernikova dkk., 2020). This finding is relevant to the intervention design in this study, in which each role-playing session did not stand alone as a mere simulation activity but was always followed by a group reflection process that enabled students to link the simulated experience to a conceptual understanding of effective interpersonal communication. Without this reflective component, simulation risks remaining a purely entertaining activity without meaningful transfer of learning to students' real-life situations outside the group forum.

In more detail, this effectiveness is evident in role playing's ability to train all seven IC indicators within DeVito's framework (DeVito, 2016). One of the most important mechanisms is role-taking — adopting another person's point of view — which directly strengthens Empathy. When students enact a character different from themselves, such as a troubled friend or an angry individual, they are compelled to view the situation from an opposing perspective (Chernikova dkk., 2020). This trained empathy becomes an important foundation for the development of the Social Support and Equality indicators in student interaction.

Simulation scenarios also serve as the primary training ground for Assertiveness and Openness — two indicators that students often find difficult to express. In simulations of conflict or situations demanding refusal, students practice conveying their thoughts and feelings honestly without being aggressive (Baile & Blatner, 2014). Through repeated practice and direct feedback from fellow group members, students build self-confidence and the ability to communicate constructively (Soo dkk., 2019). A group atmosphere free of judgment further opens space for students to accept criticism, thereby reinforcing the Openness indicator.

This strengthening of assertiveness through role playing aligns with the core principles of assertiveness training long developed in the clinical psychology and counseling literature. Alberti and Emmons emphasize that assertiveness is not an innate talent but a skill that can be learned through repeated practice in a safe setting, in which individuals get the opportunity to try new communication patterns without facing real social consequences (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Group guidance forums using the role playing technique essentially provide precisely this kind of ideal condition: students can “practice failing” — for instance, trying to express a refusal in a less-than-ideal way — without bearing genuine social consequences, before eventually finding a more effective communication pattern through repetition and feedback. This risk-free characteristic of the forum is what makes role playing especially effective for training assertiveness and openness, two indicators that are naturally difficult to develop through passive instructional approaches because both require the courage to take direct social risks.

Role playing also optimizes the reactive IC indicators, namely Emotional Regulation and Active Listening. Scenarios involving disputes or differences of opinion naturally trigger emotional responses, allowing students to practice controlling anger and giving calm responses before reacting (Eganov dkk., 2020). Acting as a listener within the simulation demands full attention, followed by giving an appropriate response, showing attentiveness, and responding accurately (Bodie dkk., 2015; Reis & Clark, 2013).

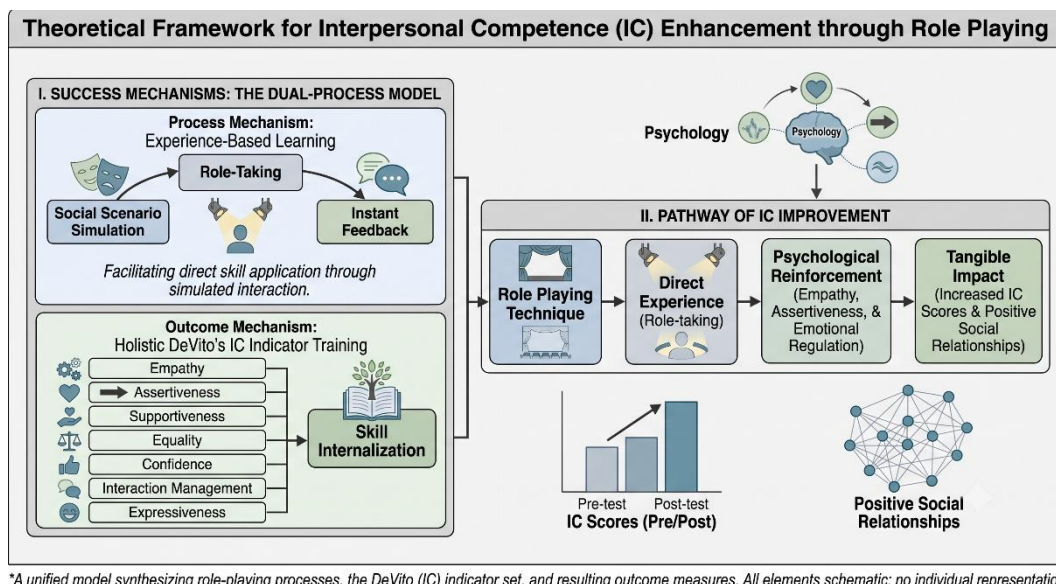
The effectiveness of role playing within a group context can also be understood through the lens of Bandura’s social learning theory, which emphasizes that people largely learn new behaviors through observation and imitation of models around them, not solely through direct experience (Bandura, 1977). Within a group guidance forum, each student learns not only from their own experience of enacting a character but also from observing how their peers handle similar scenarios using different strategies. This modeling process enriches the repertoire of communication strategies available to each student, since they are exposed to a range of conflict-resolution and emotional-expression approaches drawn from fellow group members, not only from the single scenario they themselves enact. This combination of direct experience (as emphasized in Kolb’s framework) and observational learning (as emphasized in Bandura’s framework) explains why the intervention’s impact appeared evenly distributed across all research subjects, rather than being confined only to students who happened to enact particular scenarios.

Beyond the factors of technique and learning mechanism, the success of interventions of this kind is also inseparable from the facilitator’s role in guiding the group process. A competent facilitator must be able to create a psychologically safe atmosphere from the very first session, manage group dynamics so that every member has an equal opportunity to participate, and guide the reflection process so that learning from the simulated experience is genuinely internalized rather than becoming mere momentary entertainment (Corey dkk., 2018). In this study, the researcher’s role as facilitating counselor allowed for direct adjustment of scenarios and feedback intensity based on student responses during each session — a flexibility difficult to replicate in rigid, module-based interventions. Nevertheless, this reliance on facilitator competence is also an important note for replicating this study’s results in other contexts, since the effectiveness of role playing likely depends not solely on the technique itself but also on the skill of the counselor facilitating it.

The success of this group guidance service can be summarized through two mechanisms. First, the Process Mechanism — how role playing facilitates experience-based learning through social scenario simulation, role-taking, and instant feedback. Second, the Outcome Mechanism — how this process holistically trains all seven of DeVito’s IC indicators, thereby producing lasting skill internalization. The pathway of IC improvement can be depicted as follows: Role Playing Technique → Direct Experience (Role-taking) → Psychological Reinforcement (Empathy, Assertiveness, & Emotional Regulation) → Tangible Impact (Increased IC Scores & Positive Social

Relationships). The conceptual framework connecting these mechanisms to the IC improvement pathway is further illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Unified Theoretical Framework for Interpersonal Competence (IC) Development via Role Playing.



This study's findings are consistent with a number of prior studies. Subandi et al. reported that role playing outperformed conventional services in boosting students' social interaction (Subandi dkk., 2020), while Ustomi et al. confirmed that this simulative approach could improve students' overall interpersonal communication (Ustomi dkk., 2024). More recent studies further add weight to this body of evidence: experience-based group guidance has been shown to effectively improve students' interpersonal communication skills (Mulyani dkk., 2021), and the application of role playing within group coaching produces tangible effects on participants' social skills (Habsy dkk., 2024). This consistency of results across studies further validates role playing as an intervention technique with a well-established theoretical foundation for soft-skill development (Eskawati & Wangid, 2023).

Although consistent with prior literature, this study offers its own novelty. Previous studies have generally measured communication or social interaction in general terms, or linked them to other variables such as self-efficacy. This study's main contribution lies in validating the effectiveness of role playing on IC as measured through DeVito's comprehensive framework, encompassing seven vital indicators (DeVito, 2016). This robust measurement foundation demonstrates that role playing effectively trains specific IC dimensions — Empathy, Assertiveness, and Emotional Regulation — rather than merely surface-level social interaction.

The scientific weight of this study is further strengthened by the empirical data produced. The shift of 100% of subjects into the High category constitutes highly convincing evidence of practical success and provides a solid foundation for Guidance and Counseling Teachers in Indonesia. Practically, these findings suggest that group guidance using the role playing technique can serve as the primary and most effective method for addressing interpersonal communication problems among secondary school students.

Behind these convincing results, methodological limitations remain that must be acknowledged. This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, involving only eight subjects (N=8). This limitation makes it difficult to fully control extraneous variables and restricts the generalization of results to a broader student population (Shadish dkk., 2002). Nevertheless, internal validity remained strong, as all subjects showed consistent score improvements, with a highly significant p-value.

Another limitation that must be acknowledged concerns the nature of the measurement instrument used. The interpersonal communication questionnaire in this study is self-report in

nature, meaning the scores obtained reflect students' perceptions of their own communication ability rather than direct observation of their communicative behavior in real interactions. There is a possibility that students provided socially desirable answers (social desirability bias), particularly at posttest after becoming aware of the intervention's purpose, meaning the recorded score increase may also reflect a change in self-perception rather than actual behavioral change alone. Combining self-report measurement with direct behavioral observation or third-party assessment (for example, from teachers or peers) in future research could provide a more comprehensive picture of the extent to which increased IC scores are genuinely reflected in students' everyday communicative behavior.

These findings carry important practical implications for the development of GC services in schools. GC teachers are advised to adopt role playing as an experience-based method for addressing interpersonal communication problems as well as other social skills, given that this method effectively transforms cognitive knowledge into behavioral skills even within a relatively short intervention period — only four sessions. Building on the existing limitations, future researchers are advised to employ a true experimental design with a control group and a larger sample to strengthen external validity, as well as to examine the effectiveness of role playing on each IC indicator separately to identify which components are most responsive to the intervention.

These practical implications become even more relevant when linked to the interpersonal communication challenges faced by adolescents in the digital era, as touched upon in the introduction. As most of today's adolescent social interaction occurs through screen-mediated channels, group guidance forums based on role playing offer a rare space for students to practice face-to-face communication skills in a structured and reflective manner. This service thus functions not only to address existing interpersonal communication deficits but also plays a preventive role in preparing students for the demands of real-world social interaction, which they increasingly practice less naturally outside of school. GC teachers and education policymakers should consider integrating this role playing technique more systematically into the GC service curriculum — not merely as an incidental program for students with low IC scores, but as part of a preventive social-emotional skill development program reaching all students, given that the need for strong interpersonal communication skills tends to be universal among adolescents amid the current shifting landscape of social interaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of group guidance services using the role playing technique in improving students' interpersonal communication. The results of the statistical and empirical analysis show that the working hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted: group guidance services using the role playing technique are proven to be significantly effective in enhancing the interpersonal communication ability of secondary school students. The group's mean IC ability improved substantially, shifting from the Medium category at pretest to the High category at posttest. Indeed, all research subjects — including students who had initially been in the Low category — were successfully transformed, such that 100% of students reached the High category. This achievement confirms that this experience-based technique is able to deeply internalize IC indicators such as Empathy, Assertiveness, and Openness.

These findings offer two main contributions to the field of Guidance and Counseling. First, a theoretical contribution in the form of empirical validation of DeVito's interpersonal communication framework, expanded with the indicators of emotional regulation and active listening, within the context of GC services in Indonesian secondary schools — a context that has remained rarely examined systematically. Second, a practical contribution in the form of preliminary evidence of role playing's feasibility as a short-term intervention technique that is efficient in terms of implementation time while still delivering a significant and evenly distributed impact across all research subjects. Based on these findings, role playing is recommended as a primary intervention method that is both effective and applicable for Guidance and Counseling Teachers in schools. For future research, it is recommended that a true experimental design with a control group and a larger sample be used to strengthen the generalizability of the results.

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