



The Impact of Group Psychological Counseling on Counseling Self-Efficacy: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of group counseling practice conducted with undergraduate psychological counseling and guidance (PCG) students on their counseling self-efficacy levels. The study group consisted of 36 third-year students enrolled in the Group Counseling Principles and Techniques course in the spring semester of 2019 at the Department of PCG at Atatürk University. Since the course content was theoretical and students needed to have fundamental knowledge related to the course, it was taught theoretically for the first 7 weeks (until the midterm exam). After the midterm, group counseling practice was conducted with students divided into three groups for the remaining 7 weeks. The researcher led the sessions, and the students participated as group members. The Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scales was administered immediately before and one week after the practice. After the practice, students were also asked to fill out a semi-structured form to evaluate their group experiences. This study was designed using the explanatory sequential design, one of the mixed research methods. The quantitative aspect of the research was conducted as a single-group pretest-posttest design, one of the weak experimental designs. In analyzing the quantitative data, the Paired Samples t-Test was used for pretest-posttest comparisons. For the qualitative aspect, content analysis was performed on the forms filled out by the students. The study found that group counseling practice significantly increased the counseling self-efficacy of the counselor candidates, and the students' qualitative responses supported this finding. Furthermore, students indicated that the practice contributed to their development in both professional skills and personal relationships. It is observed that individual counseling practices are generally emphasized in psychological counselor education. Considering the inadequacy of group counseling practices in counselor education and the lack of research addressing the contributions of these practices to the personal and professional development of psychological counselors, it is evaluated that the results of this research will contribute to the field.

Keywords: Group Counseling, Psychological Counseling Self-Efficacy, Mixed Research Method

Introduction

There is a considerable amount of research indicating that psychological counseling is an effective form of assistance (Corey, 2008). With the discovery of its efficacy in resolving many psychological issues, there has been a growing curiosity about factors that can enhance the effectiveness of this process (Barkham & Lambert, 2021). Effective psychological counseling assistance comprises multiple components, one of the most significant being the characteristics of the counselor who plays an active role in the counseling process (Beutler et al., 2004; Hackney & Cormier, 2005). Research has shown that counselors' personality traits, theoretical orientations, values and beliefs, coping strategies, and well-being levels are crucial in managing an effective counseling process (Conte et al., 1991; Beutler et al., 2004). The qualities necessary for effective

counseling are also a significant concern for experts who train counselors. One function of counselor education is to identify effective counselor traits and impart these traits to counselor candidates during their training (Larson, 1998; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006). This aim supports the notion that example counseling practices conducted for training purposes will help students in the field see themselves as competent and capable of managing an effective counseling process in the future.

Many factors contribute to the effectiveness of counselor training, including the presence of programs at the institutions where counselors receive their education, modeling issues, the personal characteristics of counselor candidates, the competencies of the instructors, the distribution of theoretical and practical courses, internship opportunities, the availability of necessary supervision, the adequacy of instructional materials, and examples of practice conducted in application rooms, among others. Among these factors, practical courses and supervisor support are particularly crucial in helping counselor candidates feel more competent. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) specifies that counseling students at the introductory level should receive training in fundamental knowledge such as group processes, group dynamics, and group therapy theories and technologies, and should participate as a group member in a group experience lasting at least 10 hours within an academic term. Similarly, the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) emphasizes that group leader candidates at the basic training stage should have a group experience of at least 10 hours (recommended 20 hours) as a group member or leader. In applications requiring special skills, such as group counseling, counselor training needs more experiential learning and feedback rather than just theoretical knowledge. Therefore, unlike many other academic programs, counselor education must equip students with practical skills in addition to theoretical knowledge. Indeed, a study found that one-third of field-working counselors highlighted the most significant deficiency in their undergraduate education was the lack of practical experience and supervision (Tuzgöl Dost & Keklik, 2012).

Generally, psychological counselors strive to reach a point of competence and excellence, separate from their individual sense of profession and professional commitment. To this end, they pursue the goal of enhancing their education and skills and continuously developing themselves in many areas (Bond, 2016). Professional competence involves possessing the necessary level of professional skills, having the appropriate attributes and education, and working in a beneficial and ethical manner. However, merely possessing a skill is not sufficient for demonstrating that skill behaviorally. Individuals' beliefs about their personal skills and abilities influence their behavior and motivation (Bandura, 1986). This brings the concept of self-efficacy to the forefront.

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to evaluate their skills and competencies and transform them into actions. In the social learning theory proposed by Bandura, the concept of self-efficacy emphasizes that in order for an individual to use their abilities effectively, they must first have confidence in that area (Pajares, 2002). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs about how successfully they can perform the actions needed to cope with potential situations they might face; it involves organizing and effectively carrying out the activities necessary to achieve a certain performance (Wood & Bandura, 1989). This concept is based not on what is actually true but on what the individual believes to be true regarding their own behaviors (Bandura, 1995). The perception of self-efficacy is related to an individual's beliefs about their ability to accomplish a task (Kurbanoglu, 2004).

Counseling self-efficacy is defined in various ways, including an individual's judgments and beliefs about their ability to provide effective counseling assistance to their clients (Larson, 1998), the effectiveness of the counselor in meeting the needs of their clients (Aksoy & Diken, 2009), and the ability of counselors to integrate and utilize their cognitive, behavioral, and social skills in the counseling process (Larson & Daniels, 1998). From these definitions, we can summarize counseling self-efficacy as counselors' belief in their ability to effectively carry out the counseling process. Self-efficacy is a concept that expresses an individual's

confidence in their ability to perform a task, rather than merely possessing a skill. Individuals who have the necessary skills to cope with a situation but cannot use these skills functionally are considered to have low self-efficacy (Yildirim & İlhan, 2010).

A review of the literature reveals that the concept of counseling self-efficacy has been examined in conjunction with factors such as an individual's humor style and supervision experiences (Satici, 2014), personality traits (Yam & İlhan, 2016), job satisfaction (Durmuş, 2015), satisfaction with educational life (Erkan, 2011), and teachers' perceptions of counselors' competence (Taytaş & Tanhan, 2013). Some studies have investigated whether counseling self-efficacy differs in terms of variables such as age, gender, and education level, concluding that there is no significant difference (Özgün, 2007; Bakar et al., 2011; Bilgiç, 2011; Özteke, 2011; Lam et al., 2013). Other studies have found that counselors may experience doubts about their counseling self-efficacy at times, even if their education level and experience increase (İkiz, 2010). In addition, some research has found a positive relationship between individuals' education levels and counseling self-efficacy (Sharpley & Ridgway, 1993; Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Tang et al., 2004; Bilgiç, 2011; Bakar et al., 2011; Asarlı, 2012; Iarussi et al., 2013; Taytaş & Tanhan, 2013; Yam & İlhan, 2016). Counselors with higher counseling self-efficacy beliefs, in addition to adequate counseling skills, may exert more effort and remain calmer when facing difficult therapy situations (Lent et al., 2006). Another study determined that self-efficacy plays a mediating role in reducing burnout among school counselors (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021).

Parich-Fox et al. (2020) found that self-efficacy in career counseling is directly influenced by the training received and recommended that such training should shift from the traditional method of teaching career theories to a more practice-oriented approach. Tang (2019) noted that school counselors who participated in supervision sessions experienced a significant increase in self-efficacy compared to those who did not participate. Lohani and Sharma (2023), in their systematic review, determined that the supervision received by counselors effectively contributed to key developmental areas such as

self-awareness and self-efficacy, though this topic often remains under explored in empirical research. Furthermore, Istiqomah et al. (2024) found that cognitive-behavioral group counseling techniques based on self-talk and Socratic dialogue effectively enhanced students' career self-efficacy.

Psychological counseling self-efficacy belief is crucial for counselors in managing successful processes and providing effective counseling assistance to their clients, as well as for their career goals and commitment to the profession (Larson, 1998). Schiele et al. (2014) highlighted that while research has explored the relationship between counseling self-efficacy and variables such as counselor education, skills, and experience levels, there has been minimal focus on this topic among school mental health practitioners. Their study emphasized that counseling self-efficacy is a significant factor in effective practices and that mechanisms to enhance self-efficacy among school mental health professionals should be considered. Lent et al. (2006) also underscored the need for further research to examine counseling self-efficacy and its relationship with therapy-related variables.

In a review study, the primary issues experienced by counselors included encountering unfamiliar problems, feeling inadequate, and not receiving sufficient supervision support (Boyacı, 2018). Some studies have also highlighted that practical courses during undergraduate education are insufficient, that there are difficulties in translating theory into practice, and that counselors do not feel competent in certain areas (Korkut Owen, 2007; Demirtaş-Zorbaş & Ulaş, 2014; Koçyiğit Özyiğit & İşleyen, 2016; Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Bengisoy & Özdemir, 2019). In a qualitative study, counselors prioritized recommendations such as 'increasing practical applications and supervision training' to enhance the effectiveness of counselor education. Literature reviews indicated that most studies on counselor education focus on academic skills, with few addressing the development of personal characteristics or other personal traits of counselors (Korkut Owen & Tuzgöl Dost, 2020).

As can be seen from the above-mentioned studies, while there are many studies on which characteristics affect the self-efficacy of psychological counselors,

there are very few studies on what supports the self-efficacy in psychological counselors. While previous studies focused mostly on individual psychological counseling and supervision, group psychological counseling practices seem to remain in the background. It is possible to come across many studies on effective group counseling training in the literature (e.g. [Furr & Barret, 2000](#); [Davenport, 2004](#); [Yalom, 2015](#); [Corey, 2007](#); [Shumaker et al., 2011](#); [Zhu, 2018](#)). However, Information on what personal characteristics group counseling practices contribute to, apart from professional development, and how they can be improved seems to be quite limited. Therefore, the specific components of a group experience that are helpful for counselor training remain less clear ([Kline et al., 1997](#)).

Based on all this information, this study aims to examine the effect of interpersonal group-style counseling, conducted with third-year undergraduate students but not normally included in the curriculum, on students' counseling self-efficacy. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

- Does group counseling practice have a positive effect on students' counseling self-efficacy levels?
- What are the students' views on the group counseling process they participated in?
- Do the qualitative findings of the research explain the quantitative findings?

Method

Research Design

This study was conducted using a mixed research method. In this research method, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data to define their problems more effectively. The researcher then combines the qualitative and quantitative data to produce a stronger body of knowledge. This approach allows for more valid and reliable results ([Creswell, 2017a](#)). The research design used in this study is the explanatory sequential design. The aim of this design is to explain the relationships and trends that emerge within the quantitative data through a qualitative study ([Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015](#)). In the explanatory sequential design, qualitative data is used to elaborate on the quantitative findings. Therefore, the research was conducted in two phases.

After the experimental intervention, qualitative data was collected from the participants, and the findings were then combined with the quantitative data for interpretation.

Quantitative Aspect of the Research

This study was conducted using a weak experimental design, specifically a single-group pretest-posttest design. In this design, randomization and matching processes are not performed ([Creswell, 2017b](#); [Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018](#)). The study was carried out within the course context with the existing single class, so a control group could not be formed.

Qualitative Aspect of the Research

In the qualitative aspect of this study, a case study design was preferred. In case studies, a specific situation is identified, and an attempt is made to explain how this situation elucidates an issue ([Creswell, 2017a](#)). For this purpose, after the counseling intervention, student opinions were gathered on whether this practice had an impact on their personal and professional development.

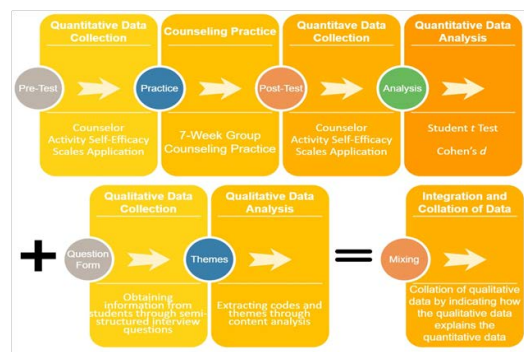


Figure 1 Explanatory Sequential Design Schema of Mixed Research Method

Data Collection Tools

In the quantitative aspect of the research, the Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scales was used. The scale was developed by [Lent et al. \(2003\)](#) and adapted to Turkish culture by [Pamukçu and Demir \(2013\)](#). The scale consists of three subscales: 'helping skills', 'managing the counseling process', and 'handling challenging counseling situations'. The Helping Skills subscale is further divided into three dimensions: Exploration, Insight, and

Action. The Handling Challenging Counseling Situations subscale is divided into two dimensions: Relationship Conflicts and Client Problems. The internal consistency coefficient of the overall scale was found to be $\alpha=.98$. The internal consistency coefficients of the subscales were $\alpha=.92$, $\alpha=.95$, and $\alpha=.95$, respectively. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be $\alpha=.97$, and the subscales were $\alpha=.93$, $\alpha=.94$, and $\alpha=.93$, respectively.

In the qualitative aspect of the research, semi-structured open-ended questions were used as the data collection tool. Students were given a written form containing five questions, which asked about the impact of the intervention on their personal and professional development, the positive and negative aspects they found in the intervention, and their suggestions regarding the practice. This approach aimed to provide data diversity by soliciting students' opinions to examine the effect of the intervention on self-efficacy.

Study Group and Implementation Process

The sampling method used in the experimental phase of the research is the convenience sampling technique (Büyüköztürk, 2019). The study group consisted of 36 third-year students (29 females, 7 males) enrolled in the Group Counseling Principles and Techniques course in the spring semester of 2019 at the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance at Atatürk University. Since the course

content was theoretical and the students needed to have basic knowledge related to the course, it was taught theoretically for the first 7 weeks (until the midterm exam). After the midterm exam, group counseling practice was conducted with the students divided into three groups of 12 each for the remaining 7 weeks. The group practice was conducted in the form of an interpersonal group (process-oriented group). While the process groups were unstructured, some group activities/experiments (Voltan Acar, 2002; Yıldırım & Durmuş, 2015) were utilized to enhance intra-group interaction. The scales were administered immediately before and the week after the intervention, and finally, the students were asked to fill out a form with 5 questions.

Data Analysis

In this study, quantitative analyses were conducted using the JASP statistical software. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normality of the data, and since $p>.05$ was obtained for all dimensions, the data were considered to be normally distributed. Because the data showed a normal distribution, pretest and posttest comparisons were made using the Paired Samples t-Test (Student t-Test). The effect sizes of the differences between the pretest and posttest were examined using Cohen's d test results. For the qualitative data, relevant codes and themes were derived through content analysis. These codes and themes are presented in Table 4.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

Table 1 t-Test Results for Helping Skills Self-Efficacy and its Sub-Scales

Pre-Test	Post-Test	t	df	p	Mean Difference	Cohen's d
Exploration	Exploration	-7.276	35	< .001	-6.92	-1.213
Insight	Insight	-6.958	35	< .001	-8.62	-1.160
Action	Action	-6.510	35	< .001	-7.35	-1.085
Helping Skills	Helping Skills	-7.720	35	< .001	-22.89	-1.287

Cohen's d > 0.8 (strong effect)

According to the analysis results (see Table 1), there was a significant increase ($p<.001$) in the self-efficacy scores for helping skills in counseling (including the dimensions of exploration, insight, and action) among the students who participated in

the group counseling practice compared to before the intervention. When examining the effect size of the difference, it was found that all dimensions had a strong effect ($d > 0.8$) (Pallant, 2017).

Table 2 t-Test Results regarding Session Management Self-Efficacy

Pre-Test	Post-Test	t	df	p	Mean Difference	Cohen's d
Session Management	Session Management	-7.522	35	< .001	-16.985	-1.254

Cohen's d > 0.8 (strong effect)

The students' self-efficacy scores for session management were also compared before and after the intervention and are presented in Table 2. Accordingly, there was a significant increase in

the self-efficacy scores for session management compared to before the intervention ($p < .001$). The effect size of this difference was also determined to be strong ($d > 0.8$).

Table 3 t-Test Results for Challenging Counseling Situations Self-Efficacy and its Sub-scales

Pre-Test	Post-Test	t	df	p	Mean Difference	Cohen's d
Relationship Conflicts	Relationship Conflicts	-4.938	35	< .001	-8.411	-0.823
Client Problems	Client Problems	-5.983	35	< .001	-15.972	-0.997
Challenges in the Consultation Process	Challenges in the Consultation Process	-5.802	35	< .001	-24.383	-0.967

Cohen's d > 0.8 (strong effect)

The analysis results show a significant increase ($p < .001$) in the students' self-efficacy regarding difficulties in the counseling process, including its sub-dimensions, after the intervention. The effect size of this difference was also determined to be strong ($d > 0.8$) (see Table 3).

Based on these analysis results, it can be concluded that the group counseling practice led to a significant increase in students' counseling self-efficacy across all three dimensions.

Qualitative Findings

Table 4 Data Coded with Lean Coding Method

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Total Frequency	Percentage
Personal Benefit	Self-disclosure	18	58	21
	Empathy	4		
	Personal awareness	8		
	Communication skills	4		
	Sense of self-efficacy	24		
Occupational Benefit	Professional confidence	23	67	24
	Group management and leadership	19		
	Gaining professional experience	12		
	Acquiring professional skills	13		
Positive Aspects	Active communication within the group	14	89	32
	Breaking prejudices	13		
	Enhancing the perception of competence	21		
	Observation opportunity	12		
	Motivation	7		
	Gaining experience	14		
	Confidentiality	8		
Negative Aspects	Few number of sessions	12	30	11
	Large number of group members	18		

Recommendations	Increasing the number of sessions	14	33	12
	Creating a more heterogeneous group	8		
	Reducing the number of members	11		
Total			277	100

After conducting the group counseling practice in the interpersonal group style with the students for 7 weeks, their personal opinions about the process were collected in written form. The students' opinions were categorized under themes such as personal benefits, professional benefits, positive aspects, negative aspects, and suggestions. The codes under these headings were extracted and the frequencies of these codes' occurrences are presented in Table 4.

Accordingly, all students indicated that the practice provided both professional and personal benefits to varying degrees. In the personal benefits section, the most emphasized perceptions were related to self-efficacy, which was indeed the primary factor the practice aimed to address. In addition, other prominent factors in personal gains included self-disclosure and personal awareness.

In terms of professional benefits, the most frequently mentioned aspect was the increase in students' professional confidence, along with many

positive comments regarding gaining experience. Regarding the positive and negative aspects of the practice, students predominantly expressed positive views. The two main negative aspects highlighted were the limited number of sessions and the large number of group members. This suggests that students found the practice beneficial and desired more of it. The most prominent positive feature was related to perceptions of self-efficacy. Moreover, aspects such as group communication, gaining experience, and breaking prejudices against others were particularly appreciated by the students in the practice.

When the findings from the quantitative data are evaluated together with the findings from the qualitative study conducted in this section, it can be concluded that the group counseling practices aimed at increasing students' counseling self-efficacy levels are effective. The students' opinions also support this finding.

The Point of Interface (Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings)

Table 5 The Point of Interface

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Interviews Supporting Quantitative Results	How do Qualitative Results Explain Quantitative Results?
It was found that there was a significant difference in the students' counseling self-efficacy levels before and after the group counseling practice, and that the students' counseling self-efficacy increased significantly.	Regarding the group counseling practices, students expressed many positive opinions, particularly highlighting self-efficacy, professional competence, and professional confidence.	The significant difference obtained from the quantitative results is consistent with the positive opinions expressed by the students regarding the experimental study, and both findings support each other.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, it was found that group counseling practices significantly increased counseling self-efficacy. A similar result was determined in a study by [Pamukçu and Kağnıcı \(2017\)](#), where students reported that their self-efficacy perceptions increased as a result of skill-based group training. The researchers stated that group experiences were effective in learning counseling skills and that

participants' self-efficacy perceptions increased. This study also revealed that students' group leadership experiences and observing others in leadership roles showed similar positive effects. Similarly, [Chan et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy group work with undergraduate students and found that the practice led to a significant increase in counseling self-efficacy. [Tang \(2019\)](#) identified significant increases in self-efficacy among

school counselors who participated in supervision sessions. [Lohani and Sharma \(2023\)](#) emphasized in their systematic review that supervision received by counselors was effective in key developmental areas such as self-awareness and self-efficacy. All these findings are quite parallel to the results of this study.

Similarly, [Saraç \(2021\)](#) found that group experiences were effective in developing students' communication and self-disclosure skills, while [Atıcı et al. \(2011\)](#) reported that students participating in group guidance activities showed confidence and development in recognizing skills, understanding their importance, and using them (such as recognizing and expressing emotions and thoughts, changing thoughts and reactions, understanding people, and improving communication skills). In line with these findings, this study also revealed that students expressed that group counseling practices contributed to their empathy, self-awareness, communication skills, and professional skills. [Aladağ et al. \(2011\)](#) indicated in their meta-analytic study that all students, whether participating as leaders, members, or observers in counseling practices, were positively affected by these experiences. One of the most important tools a counselor should use is themselves as an individual ([İkiz, 2010](#); [Voltan Acar, 2012](#)). For a counseling process to be successful, it is important for the counselor to understand and express their own emotions ([Hackney & Cormier, 2005](#); [Metel Otlu et al., 2016](#)) and to harmonize their personality traits with therapeutic skills ([Voltan Acar, 2012](#); [Savi Çakar & İkiz, 2016](#)). While theoretical and technical knowledge forms the foundation of therapy, it is insufficient on its own for conducting an effective helping process. A counselor's personal characteristics, values, needs, and motivations can either hinder or support their effectiveness in the counseling process ([Corey, 2008](#)).

[Corey and Corey \(1997\)](#) stated that the personal and professional characteristics of group leaders directly affect the group process and determine whether the group is successful or ineffective. Similarly, [Corey \(2008\)](#) recommended that counselors undergoing group counseling training should meet three conditions: (1) have received individual counseling, (2) have received group counseling, and (3) have participated in a training

group or supervision group. [Yam and İlhan \(2016\)](#) examined the components affecting counseling self-efficacy and concluded that additional training beyond undergraduate education (such as a master's degree or external special training) only made a difference in the dimension of session management. They found that counseling self-efficacy is significantly influenced by counselors' personality traits, their state of continuous anxiety, and their perceptions of the adequacy of the training they received.

In conclusion, it can be said that even though the group counseling practice conducted with students was short-term, it had positive effects on various personal and professional factors, especially the counseling self-efficacy of counselor candidates. This positive impact is likely to contribute to their success as psychological counselors and influence their future career goals ([Larson, 1998](#)).

Limitations and Recommendations

The research was conducted with only the data obtained from the experimental group, without a control group, since all students were required to attend the course. This makes it impossible to observe the impact of other courses or experiences the students might have had during the experimental process. Therefore, it is recommended that similar studies be designed as extracurricular activities and conducted with a control group.

In this study, the 'interpersonal group' was used as the group type. In order to discover the most effective results, it should be investigated whether studies conducted with different group types will yield similar results.

In the study, only the self-efficacy variable was examined. However, psychological counseling experiences are expected to impact many variables, such as individuals' attitudes toward others, values, human relationships, and self-esteem. It is important to include and examine different variables to determine how and to what extent counselor candidates are affected by these experiences.

Both within the scope of course curriculums and as extracurricular activities, increasing the variety of group experiences (e.g., group guidance, psycho-educational groups, structured group counseling experiences on different topics, social project work

conducted in groups, etc.) can create environments and opportunities that contribute to the development of counselor candidates. Furthermore, research on these practices can identify best practices in counselor education, ensuring their integration into learning processes. Based on the results of this and similar studies, the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance at Atatürk University has added a one-semester (14 weeks) elective course titled ‘Group Counseling Practices’ to the undergraduate curriculum, effective from 2024. Similar studies can reveal which practices contribute most to education, to what extent, and when they can be offered to students, providing guidance to relevant units.

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