



The Implementation of Peer Counseling to Enhance Students' Assertive Behavior at SMAN 5 Bulukumba

Bau Nela Angriani Zainal¹⁾, Abdullah Sinring²⁾, Suciani Latif³⁾

^{1),2),3)} Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

e-mail Correspondent: baunelaangrianizainal@gmail.com¹⁾

Received: 15-05-2026

Revised: 24-05-2026

Accepted: 29-05-2026

Info Artikel

Abstract

Keywords: Peer Counseling, Assertive Behavior, High School Students, Guidance and Counseling.

Kata Kunci: Konseling Sebaya, Perilaku Asertif, Siswa SMA, Bimbingan dan Konseling.

There are still students at SMAN 5 Bulukumba who exhibit low levels of assertive behavior when expressing their opinions and resisting negative influences. This situation can affect the students' social interactions and self-confidence. Therefore, peer counseling has been selected as an approach to enhance the students' assertive behavior. This study aims to determine the improvement in students' assertive behavior after the implementation of peer counseling services at SMAN 5 Bulukumba. This research is motivated by students' low assertive behavior, characterized by an inability to express opinions, refusing inappropriate peer invitations, and anxiety in communication. The approach used was a quantitative study with a pre-experimental design using a One Group Pretest-Posttest Design. The study subjects were 30 11th-grade students of SMAN 5 Bulukumba selected using a purposive sampling technique. The research instrument was an assertive behavior scale that had undergone validity and reliability tests, supported by observation sheets and documentation. Data were analyzed using statistical analysis to compare assertive behavior scores before and after the treatment. The results of the study showed a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on students' assertive behavior after the implementation of peer counseling. These findings indicate that peer counseling is effective in improving students' assertive behavior, particularly in the ability to express opinions, resist negative pressure, express feelings openly, and set personal boundaries politely. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the implementation of peer counseling can improve the assertive behavior of 11th-grade students at SMAN 5 Bulukumba and can be used as an alternative guidance and counseling service to support students' social-emotional development at school.

Abstrak

Masih terdapat siswa di SMAN 5 Bulukumba yang memiliki perilaku asertif rendah dalam menyampaikan pendapat dan menolak pengaruh negatif. Kondisi ini dapat memengaruhi interaksi sosial dan kepercayaan diri siswa. Oleh karena itu, konseling sebaya dipilih sebagai upaya untuk meningkatkan perilaku asertif siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peningkatan perilaku asertif siswa setelah penerapan layanan konseling sebaya di SMAN 5 Bulukumba. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh rendahnya perilaku asertif siswa yang ditandai dengan ketidakmampuan menyampaikan pendapat, menolak ajakan teman sebaya yang tidak sesuai, serta kecemasan dalam berkomunikasi. Pendekatan yang dilakukan adalah penelitian kuantitatif dengan desain pre-eksperimen menggunakan One Group Pretest-Posttest Design. Subjek penelitian berjumlah 30 siswa kelas XI SMAN 5 Bulukumba yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Instrumen penelitian berupa skala perilaku asertif yang telah melalui uji validitas dan reliabilitas, serta didukung oleh lembar observasi dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis statistik untuk membandingkan skor perilaku asertif sebelum dan sesudah perlakuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan antara skor pretest dan posttest perilaku asertif siswa



setelah penerapan konseling sebaya. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa konseling sebaya efektif dalam meningkatkan perilaku asertif siswa, khususnya dalam kemampuan menyampaikan pendapat, menolak tekanan negatif, mengekspresikan perasaan secara terbuka, serta menetapkan Batasan pribadi secara sopan. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa penerapan konseling sebaya mampu meningkatkan perilakuertif siswa kelas XI di SMAN 5 Bulukumba dan dapat dijadikan sebagai alternatif layanan bimbingan dan konseling untuk mendukung perkembangan sosial-emosional siswa di sekolah.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are in a transitional phase toward adulthood, characterized by physical, psychological, and social changes. During this period, peer influence becomes increasingly dominant, shaping how students express themselves, make decisions, and build social relationships. As the generation destined to carry the torch of civilization, adolescents face significant challenges in developing assertive behavior—a trait crucial for establishing healthy social connections. At this developmental stage, the role of peers becomes more prominent, often superseding parental influence. Peers serve not merely as a social group but also as a key factor in shaping adolescent behavior and social identity (Parawansa & Nasution, 2022).

Suwarjo (2023) notes that students in junior high (SMP) and senior/vocational high schools (SMA/SMK) are, given their developmental age, in the adolescent stage. During this time, interest in, commitment to, and bonds with peers become exceptionally strong. This is partly because adolescents often feel that adults do not understand them. Consequently, adolescents frequently form exclusive groups, as they believe only their peers can truly comprehend one another. Consistent with this, most students prefer discussing serious issues with peers rather than with parents or school counselors. Peers are defined as students of roughly the same age or level of maturity.

The lack of assertive behavior has various consequences for adolescents, such as stress and anxiety stemming from an inability to openly express their desires, feelings of regret or difficulty accepting the consequences of poor choices, and an over-reliance on peers. Furthermore, expressing feelings aggressively can lead to dangerous situations for the student involved. Although theories on assertive behavior emphasize the importance of adolescents' ability to voice opinions and set healthy personal boundaries, many struggle to apply these skills in practice. There is a gap between the ideal understanding of assertive behavior gained through education and the real-world conditions adolescents face—particularly the social pressure exerted by peer groups. This pressure often acts as a barrier for adolescents in asserting their personal rights or refusing requests that conflict with their personal values, thereby triggering anxiety in an academic context.

Assertive behavior is a crucial skill for students, enabling them to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions honestly, respectfully, and responsibly without harming others. In a school setting, assertiveness helps students build healthy social relationships, resist peer pressure, and resolve conflicts constructively. However, the reality is that many students still struggle to be assertive; they tend to be passive (yielding to pressure) or even aggressive when responding to social situations.

Assertiveness is a vital social competence for every individual, particularly for adolescents undergoing a period of intense emotional and social development. According to Alberti and Emmons (2008), assertive behavior is the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings, and desires openly, honestly, and firmly without infringing upon the rights of others. Assertive individuals are generally able to uphold their own rights while simultaneously respecting the rights of others.

In the school environment, assertiveness plays a significant role in fostering healthy social relationships, enabling the objective expression of opinions, and allowing students to handle peer pressure positively. Unfortunately, many students have yet to demonstrate assertive behavior. Most tend to be either passive—such as remaining silent when their rights are violated—or aggressive—such as expressing opinions in a rude manner that harms others. This aligns with Hurlock's (1991) view that adolescents often experience an internal conflict between the desire for peer acceptance and the need for self-expression, a tension that can ultimately hinder assertive behavior.

Several factors influence students' assertive behavior, including family parenting styles, the school's social and cultural environment, interpersonal communication skills, self-esteem and self-confidence, and a lack of social guidance services. These conditions highlight the need for a more participatory approach to helping students develop assertive behavior. One method to foster assertive behavior in a way that is effective, participatory, and aligned with student characteristics is peer counseling, which enables students to assist one another in a safe environment based on equality. Peer counseling also offers students the opportunity to practice social and communication skills in real-world contexts, making them easier to apply in daily life. According to Prayitno (2004), peer counseling is a process of providing assistance from one student to another under the guidance and supervision of a school counselor—aimed at helping the student understand and resolve their problems. Peer counseling allows students to feel more comfortable sharing their issues because they are interacting with a peer who understands similar circumstances.

Through peer counselors and the empowerment of structured peer groups, students not only learn to be good listeners and helpers but also internalize assertive attitudes. This approach

aligns with research findings by Mutmainah and Kurniawan (2021), which demonstrate that peer counselor training significantly improves students' interpersonal communication and assertiveness. Furthermore, Wahyuni (2019) has shown that peer counseling has a significant impact on enhancing students' ability to express their opinions assertively.

Peer counseling is a student skill that facilitates the implementation of self-control and fosters meaningful experiences among adolescents. Specifically, peer counseling does not focus on evaluating content but rather on the processes of thinking, feeling, and decision-making. It is a support process facilitated by fellow students; guidance counselors select student volunteers to play an active role. Peer counselors are not professional counseling experts but rather students who have been selected and given specialized, brief training to help address their peers' issues.

Through peer counselors and structured counseling sessions, students not only learn to assist their friends but also develop social and communication skills that foster assertive behavior. In other words, the implementation of peer counseling has the potential to serve as an effective medium for social learning, enhancing students' assertiveness. Suwarjo (2023) emphasizes that the role of peer counselors is effective due to the emotional closeness shared between peers—a dynamic not present in relationships with teachers or other adults. A peer counselor does not act as an informant or a monitor-like figure; instead, they serve as a trusted friend recognized for their specific personal strengths and capabilities. Peer counselors are students who voluntarily wish to assist their peers through counseling activities. They can be viewed as agents who support guidance counselors in delivering school-based guidance and counseling services.

The characteristics of students who become peer counselors can be assessed through individual qualities such as personality, academic performance, discipline, popularity within the school, fear of God, and gender (Kamore & Tiego, 2015). These characteristics enable peer counselors to share the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they have acquired with their fellow students and the wider community. Lutomia and Sikolia (2002) state that the qualities of a good peer counselor include openness, understanding, good communication skills, humility, empathy, a strong sense of dedication, discipline, and the ability to listen well.

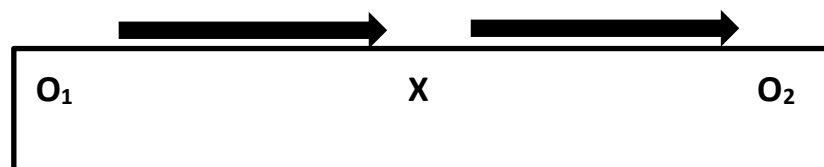
Research by Afri, Sarman, and Yaksa (2019) indicates that group counseling services utilizing assertive training techniques can significantly enhance students' assertive behavior. Furthermore, Hasanah, Suharso, and Saraswati (2015) found that peers exert a positive influence on the development of students' assertive behavior, although the magnitude of this influence is relatively small. Studies by Winardo, Hadiwinarto, and Syahrman also demonstrate the effectiveness of group counseling services in improving students' assertive behavior during peer

interactions. These three studies share a common focus with the present research: enhancing students' assertive behavior through guidance and counseling services and the role of peers. However, this study specifically examines the implementation of peer counseling for students at SMAN 5 Bulukumba as a means to improve assertive behavior (Afri et al., 2019; Hasanah et al., 2015; Winardo et al., 2018).

The rationale for selecting peer counseling is to equip guidance and counseling teachers with the necessary skills to provide effective support and guidance through peer counselors. Additionally, this approach serves to extend the reach of guidance and counseling teachers in addressing school-related issues, particularly given the significant shortage of guidance and counseling staff at SMAN 5 Bulukumba, which has a student population of 840 (based on school data). This program aims to assist guidance and counseling teachers in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities within the school by leveraging student support through peer counselors.

METODE PENELITIAN

This study is a pre-experimental study utilizing a One-Group Pretest–Posttest Design. This design involves a single group that receives a pretest prior to the intervention and a posttest following the intervention, without a control group. The design is employed to observe changes in students' assertive behavior after receiving peer counseling services. The design model is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below:



Legend:

O1 = Pre-test score prior to the intervention (first measurement)

X = Treatment or intervention using peer counseling services

O2 = Post-test score following the intervention (second measurement)

The selection of this design was based on school conditions—specifically, the limited number of students willing to participate and school policies that precluded the formation of a comparison group. Furthermore, given the relatively short timeframe of the study, this design represented the most relevant and methodologically justifiable choice.

The research subjects consisted of Grade XI students who demonstrated low to moderate assertive behavior scores based on initial screening results. A total of 30 students were selected as subjects using purposive sampling, based on the following criteria:

1. Experiencing difficulty expressing opinions in class

2. Lacking the confidence to decline requests from peers, even when contrary to their own wishes
3. Willingness to participate in the entire series of peer counseling activities
4. Ability to follow instructions, simulations, and role-play sessions

Research Variable (X): Peer Counseling

Peer counseling is a psychological support process provided by trained students to their peers through empathetic communication, role modeling, and emotional support to enhance assertive skills. The intervention consists of three core sessions.

Dependent Variable (Y): Assertive Behavior

Assertive behavior is the ability of students to express opinions, decline inappropriate requests, state feelings, and set boundaries in a polite manner. It is measured using an assertiveness scale (15 items, 1–4 Likert scale).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of peer counseling services was significantly effective in enhancing assertive behavior among students at SMAN 5 Bulukumba. This is evidenced by the Wilcoxon test results, which yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000 (< 0.05) and an effect size (r) of 0.873, indicating a large effect. This improvement reflects a transformation in the students, who became more capable of expressing their opinions, refusing negative peer pressure, and asserting their rights positively without harming others. The 100% success rate of the intervention was driven by the students' initially low baseline proficiency, the effective use of role-modeling methods, and the creation of a safe peer environment that reduced social anxiety. Although the questionnaire instrument had limitations regarding the indicator for expressing disagreement, the researchers successfully reinforced the validity of the findings through data triangulation involving direct observation, role-play exercises, and progress notes in peer counselors' logbooks. The integrated data demonstrate tangible evidence of behavioral change, such as the use of "I-messages," vocal stability, and the courage to set personal boundaries. Theoretically, these findings support the view held by Alberti and Emmons that assertive behavior is a social skill that can be developed through peer support, thereby establishing peer counseling as a valid, comprehensive, and authentic strategy for implementation in school settings.

Analysis Component	Description and Findings	Interpretation & Meaning
Hypothesis Testing (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test)	($Z = -4.786$) with Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000	There was a highly significant difference in students' assertive behavior before and after the intervention ($(p < 0.05)$).
Effect Size	($r = 0.873$)	Classified as a large effect size ,

		indicating that peer counseling had a very strong practical impact.
Intervention Outcome	100% of participants showed an increase in their assertiveness scores.	The intervention was entirely successful because it effectively targeted students with initially low levels of assertive behavior.
Key Supporting Factors	Peer role modeling and a supportive, safe environment.	These factors reduced social anxiety and enabled students to adopt new assertive behaviors more quickly through observation and practice.
Behavioral Indicators	Use of I-messages , polite refusal, and consistent eye contact.	Students were able to maintain their personal rights without harming or offending others, demonstrating effective assertive boundary setting .
Data Triangulation	Combination of questionnaires, observations, role-play sessions, and counselor logbooks.	This approach compensated for the limitations of the questionnaire, particularly on the indicator of expressing disagreement , thereby enhancing the validity of the findings.
Theoretical Foundation	Supports the theory proposed by Alberti & Emmons (2008) .	The findings demonstrate that assertive behavior is a form of social learning that can be developed through peer support.

DISCUSSION

This discussion is structured to interpret the research results based on theory, empirical findings, and the students' socio-cultural context. The improvement in students' assertive behavior following peer counseling services is analyzed using the framework of Social Learning Theory and modern peer counseling theory, alongside qualitative and quantitative data obtained during the intervention process.

Behavioral Change Based on Social Learning Theory (Bandura)

The study results indicate a significant improvement in students' assertive behavior following peer counseling services. These findings align with the concept of observational learning within Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that behavior is acquired through four psychological processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In this study, peer counselors served as behavioral models for the counselees to emulate. During modeling sessions, counselees observed (attention) how peer counselors expressed opinions and politely declined requests. Subsequently, counselees stored these behavioral examples (retention) to practice them later through role-play (reproduction). The increase in assertive behavior was also driven by the process of motivation, as counselees were encouraged to adopt assertive behaviors through peer reinforcement—specifically support, empathy, emotional validation, and a sense of acceptance. These findings are supported by research from Putra & Mahfud (2024), which

suggests that peer modeling is more readily accepted by adolescents than modeling by authority figures.

Thus, the post-intervention shift in assertiveness scores resulted not merely from the provision of information, but from a social learning process that unfolded naturally and contextually among the students.

The Role of Peer Counseling in Fostering Assertiveness

Peer counseling has proven effective in enhancing students' assertive skills due to characteristics that distinguish it from traditional counseling. The relationship between counselor and counselee is one of equal standing, allowing the counselee to feel more comfortable and free to express themselves without fear of judgment or reprimand. Furthermore, the language used by peer counselors resonates more closely with students' daily lives, making examples of assertive language easier to understand and emulate. Additionally, the absence of hierarchical pressure in the peer counseling setting provides counselees with the opportunity to experiment with new behaviors without feeling self-conscious (Tindall & Gray, 1985).

These findings align with research by Sari (2021) and Lestari (2023), which concluded that peer counseling can improve adolescents' interpersonal communication skills, the courage to refuse requests, and the ability to express opinions. Moreover, a study by Mutmainah and Kurniawan (2022) demonstrated that the empathetic relationship inherent in peer counseling fosters an increase in students' self-efficacy regarding assertive behavior. Thus, peer counseling services—incorporating modeling, empathy, and emotional support—play a vital role in developing assertive behavior among students.

The Influence of Local Culture: Siri', Sungkanness, and Eastern Norms

The local culture of South Sulawesi is characterized by strong values such as *siri'* (honor/self-respect), *sipakatau* (mutual respect), and *sungkanness* (a sense of reluctance or hesitation to cause discomfort to others). These cultural values often lead students to avoid conflict and adopt a passive stance to avoid being perceived as rude, arrogant, or disrespectful. Consequently, students who actually disagree or harbor objections may still go along with their peers' suggestions to preserve social harmony. Pre-research data reflects this, showing that many students feel "uncomfortable refusing," "afraid of hurting a friend's feelings," or "too hesitant" to say no.

Peer counseling provides a safe space for students to practice expressing disagreement while remaining polite and respectful of cultural norms. Through role-playing and modeling exercises, students learn that saying "no" can be done courteously without offending others. This cultural context reinforces research findings indicating that peer counseling not only enhances

communication skills but also helps students navigate their social and cultural identities. Thus, peer counseling interventions are both relevant and effective in fostering assertive behavior that aligns with local cultural values (Rahmawati, A. H., Suwarjo, & Utomo, H. B., 2019).

Instrument Limitations and the Role of Data Triangulation

During the instrument validity test, it was found that five items related to the "expressing disagreement" indicator were discarded; consequently, this aspect was not fully measured by the questionnaire. This limitation could affect the completeness of the quantitative data, necessitating a methodological step to address the gap.

Data triangulation was conducted through:

Direct observation

During counseling sessions, the guidance counselor and the researcher recorded the counselee's behavior, including the ability to express disagreement during role-play situations.

Example of an observation finding:

"The counselee was able to say, 'Sorry, I can't,' with a steady voice, without hesitation, and maintaining good eye contact."

Role-play

Role-play demonstrated whether the counselee could apply the taught assertive behaviors, particularly in situations involving declining invitations, expressing opinions, and setting boundaries.

Peer counselor notes

Peer counselor logbooks showed the counselee's gradual progress; for example:

"By the third session, the counselee began to feel confident enough to express disagreement firmly yet politely."

This data triangulation strengthens the research findings, demonstrating that aspects of assertive behavior not captured by the questionnaire could still be robustly evidenced through qualitative data. Thus, the research conclusions remain valid and comprehensive.

An analysis of the theory and field data indicates the following:

1. Improvements in assertiveness occur through processes of modeling and reinforcement, in accordance with Social Learning Theory.
2. Peer counseling is effective due to the egalitarian nature of the relationship, the use of relevant language, and the provision of emotional support.
3. Local culture influences passive behavior; however, peer counseling assists students in expressing their opinions respectfully.

4. Data triangulation reinforces the research findings, despite certain limitations inherent in the instruments used.

This discussion demonstrates that peer counseling is an appropriate, effective, and relevant approach for enhancing assertive behavior among students at SMAN 5 Bulukumba. Based on the comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, the study's findings have addressed all research objectives. First, statistical test results reveal a significant increase in assertive behavior following the intervention, confirming that the goal of improving student assertiveness through peer counseling was achieved. Second, the mechanisms of change observed—specifically modeling, role-playing, and peer reinforcement—demonstrate the effectiveness of peer counseling as an intervention strategy within a secondary school setting. Third, findings from observations, peer counselor records, and student behavioral dynamics during the intervention show that assertiveness can be enhanced without disregarding local cultural norms—such as **siri** (honor/shame), **sungkanness** (reluctance/hesitation), and the etiquette of politeness found in Bugis-Makassar culture. Thus, peer counseling not only succeeded in improving students' abilities to refuse requests, express opinions, and set boundaries, but also fostered assertive behavior that is adaptive and remains aligned with school cultural values and student characteristics (Nurmastuti, Sanyata, & Prawati, 2026).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and data analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of peer counseling is effective in enhancing the assertive behavior of students at SMAN 5 Bulukumba. This is evidenced by the increase in post-test scores across all students (positive ranks = 30) with no score decreases (negative ranks = 0), alongside a significance value indicating a meaningful improvement. This improvement is reflected in the students' confidence in expressing opinions, their ability to decline inappropriate requests, and their capacity to express feelings appropriately. Furthermore, the peer counseling process provided a safe environment for students to practice assertive communication skills through modeling, role-playing, and reinforcement activities. Despite limitations regarding the research instrument—specifically the exclusion of certain items related to the "expressing disagreement" indicator—observations and process records consistently demonstrate a tangible improvement in the students' assertive behavior.

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