

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling to Improve Student Self-Adjustment: A Comparison of the Exception Question and Miracle Question Techniques

An-Nur Pasha Ramadhan¹, Mungin Eddy Wibowo², Sugiyo³

Universitas Negeri Semarang¹, Universitas Negeri Semarang², Universitas Negeri Semarang³

e-mail: ramadhan281100@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach, using the Exception Questions and Miracle Questions techniques, in improving student adjustment at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang. This study employed an experimental method with a Randomized Pretest-Posttest Comparison Group Design, involving 21 seventh-grade students divided into three groups: Exception Questions, Miracle Questions, and a control group. The instrument used was a self-adjustment scale that had been tested for validity and reliability. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to assess effectiveness within each group and the Kruskal-Wallis Test to examine differences in effectiveness between groups. The results showed that both techniques were equally effective in improving adjustment but the differences between the groups were not statistically significant.

Keywords: SFBC, Exception Question, Miracle Question, Group Counseling, Self-Adjustment

A. INTRODUCTION

Adjustment is a crucial skill that enables students to adapt effectively to the demands of their academic, social, and emotional environments. At the Islamic Junior High School (MTs) level, this skill becomes even more crucial, given that students are in a developmental transition period and are vulnerable to academic pressure, social change, and social dynamics. Recent developments in guidance and counseling studies indicate that adjustment problems among junior high school students tend to increase with higher academic demands, greater social interaction complexity, and the psychological changes of adolescence. This condition aligns with initial findings at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang, where several

students exhibited symptoms of poor adjustment, such as inability to communicate effectively, difficulty adjusting to the school environment and peers, tension when receiving academic assignments, and the emergence of withdrawal behavior, fear, low self-confidence, and discomfort in class there are no comparative studies on the Exception vs. Miracle Question; the context of MTs (Islamic junior high schools) has not been extensively studied there are no comparative studies on the Exception vs. Miracle Question; the context of MTs (Islamic junior high schools) has not been extensively studies

The Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach is more suitable for adolescents than Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) because it focuses on solutions, individual strengths, and rapid and realistic changes. Adolescents are generally still in a stage of cognitive and emotional development, making them less adept at abstract analysis and rational debate, the hallmarks of CBT (Aaron T. Beck) and REBT (Albert Ellis). In contrast, SFBC uses simpler, more concrete, and future-focused techniques, making it more easily accepted, reducing resistance, and increasing adolescent motivation and engagement in the counseling process.

The gap between the ideal situation ideal expectations and empirical reality and the reality on the ground is clear. Ideally, students are expected to meet academic demands, interact positively with peers, and actively participate in the school environment. However, observations and interviews indicate that some students experience obstacles in adjusting, both academically, socially, and emotionally. These conditions can hinder learning and development, reduce motivation, and affect students' psychological well-being.

Given these gaps, targeted interventions are needed to help students improve their adjustment. One relevant approach is Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC), a counseling model that focuses on students' strengths, potential, and solutions. This approach is considered more appropriate for adolescents because it focuses on positive change without delving deeply into problems. Two key techniques in SFBC Exception Questions and Miracle

Questions have been shown to be effective in helping clients recognize successful experiences and develop a vision of a desired future, such as Wijayanti's (2020) research on group counseling to increase learning motivation using the SFBC approach. Previous research has shown that these two techniques can improve various positive aspects such as self-control, interpersonal communication, and learning motivation.

Based on this background, this study was conducted to address students' low self-adjustment at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang through the implementation of SFBC group counseling. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Exception Question and Miracle Question techniques in improving students' self-adjustment and to compare their effectiveness. An effective and applicable counseling intervention model can be developed, which guidance and counseling teachers can use to help students navigate the dynamics of their development.

B. THEORETICAL BASIS

1. Self-Adjustment

Self-adjustment is an individual's ability to balance their own demands and those of their environment to achieve a harmonious balance between personal needs and social expectations. Ghufroon & Risnawati (2016) explain that self-adjustment encompasses an individual's ability to adapt thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to demands arising in academic, social, and emotional contexts. For MTs-aged students, self-adjustment is crucial, as they are in early adolescence, a transitional phase marked by significant physical, cognitive, and social changes. Poor self-adjustment can lead to problems such as withdrawal, excessive anxiety, tension in schoolwork, discomfort in the classroom, and even conflict with peers. Therefore, self-adjustment is a crucial aspect of optimal student development.

2. Group Counseling

Group counseling is a support service that provides several individuals with the opportunity to work together to achieve specific goals through group dynamics. group counseling allows direct interaction among members, providing

opportunities for students to learn through experience, sharing, and supporting one another. In the school context, group counseling is effective in addressing developmental issues, including adjustment, because the group environment can foster a sense of acceptance, encourage courage to express opinions, and motivate behavioral change.

3. Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC)

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) is a counseling approach that emphasizes solutions rather than problems, developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. This approach focuses on clients' potential, strengths, and existing abilities to resolve their problems (de Shazer, 1985; Berg, 1994). SFBC is particularly relevant for MTs students because it is brief, positive, and emphasizes clients' capacity to create change through small and realistic steps (Sklare, 2014). In practice, counselors assist clients in identifying goals, recognizing past successes, and constructing a vision of a preferred future (Franklin et al., 2012; Kim, 2008).

a. Exception Question Technique

Exception questions are a technique to help clients identify moments when problems did not arise or arose with less intensity. These moments are called exceptions. By identifying past successes, clients more easily see that change is possible because they have the internal capacity to overcome problems. This technique is effective for improving self-adjustment because it encourages students to recognize situations in which they successfully adjust.

b. Miracle Question Technique

Miracle Questions are a technique to help clients envision the ideal change they want to achieve, as if a miracle had occurred. Clients are asked to describe in concrete terms their desired behaviors, thoughts, and situations after the problem is resolved. This technique facilitates exploration of a positive future, builds a sense of purpose, and increases motivation for change. In the context of self-adjustment, Miracle Questions help students visualize ideal conditions in which they can interact, participate in lessons, and manage their emotions effectively.

4. Previous Research

Several studies have shown that SFBC is effective in improving positive psychological aspects in students, such as self-confidence, self-control, social competence, and learning motivation. Ateş's (2016) study found that SFBC was effective in improving adolescents' social competence. Research by Indika, Karneli, & Netrawati (2024) showed that the miracle technique was effective in improving self-adjustment, and research by Widayanti (2020) revealed that the exception technique was effective. Other research has shown that Exception Questions and Miracle Questions can help reduce academic anxiety and improve adaptability. However, research specifically testing these two techniques in the context of MTs students' adjustment is still limited. This underscores the importance of this study as an empirical contribution.

5. Framework

The adjustment problems students at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang experience indicate a gap between ideal conditions and reality. The SFBC intervention is expected to help students identify past successes through the Exception Question technique and build a picture of the future through the Miracle Question technique. Both techniques are expected to improve students' adjustment by focusing on internal strengths and increasing motivation. Theoretically, changes occurring after the intervention can be measured by an increase in adjustment scores on the posttest compared to the pretest.

C. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In accordance with the quantitative research design (Randomized Pretest-Posttest Comparison Group Design), the research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

There is a difference in self-adjustment scores between the pretest and posttest in the SFBC group counseling group using the Exception Question technique.

Hypothesis 2 (H2)

There is a difference in self-adjustment scores between the pretest and posttest in the SFBC group counseling group using the Miracle Question technique.

Hypothesis 3 (H3)

There is a difference in the effectiveness of improving self-adjustment between the Exception Question, Miracle Question, and the control groups.

Hypothesis 4 (H4)

The Miracle Question technique is more effective than the Exception Question technique in improving student self-adjustment.

D. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Participants

Participants in this study were seventh-grade students at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang, selected based on their initial self-adjustment scores. A total of 21 students were selected as research subjects. The randomization in this study was conducted using a simple random assignment technique. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were randomly assigned into three groups: the exception question group, the miracle question group, and the control group. The assignment was carried out using a randomization method (e.g., random number generator/lottery method), ensuring that each participant had an equal chance of being placed in any group. Therefore, this study employed true randomization. (a) the SFBC group counseling group using the Exception Question technique, (b) the SFBC group counseling group using the Miracle Question technique, and (c) the control group.

Each group consisted of seven students. All participants were involved in the research process from the pretest to the posttest.

2. Measurement Instrument

The research instrument used a self-adjustment scale structured around four aspects: personal adjustment, academic adjustment, social adjustment, and

emotional adjustment. This scale underwent validity and reliability testing during the instrument pilot phase.

Validity testing showed that all items had correlation coefficients within acceptable limits.

The instrument demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.88. The validity test results showed that all items had r -calculated values greater than the r -table value (r -calculated $>$ r -table), indicating that all items were valid and appropriate for use in this study. The instrument was administered twice, at the pretest and posttest, to determine changes in adjustment levels before and after the intervention.

3. Research Procedures

The study used a Randomized Pretest-Posttest Comparison Group Design, which began with the preparation phase, intervention implementation, and final measurement. The research procedures included:

Preparation Phase

- a. Determining research subjects based on the results of the initial measurement.
- b. Determining groups through random assignment.
- c. Preparing guidelines for implementing SFBC counseling sessions.

Pretest

All subjects were given a self-adjustment scale to determine their initial level of adjustment before the intervention.

Intervention Implementation The intervention consisted of six group counseling sessions held twice weekly. The Exception Question group participated in counseling sessions that focused on identifying past successes (exceptions) related to adjustment. The Miracle Question group participated in counseling sessions that emphasized exploring an ideal future using the miracle scenario technique. The control group did not receive SFBC counseling but continued with their school activities as usual.

Posttest

After all intervention sessions were completed, the self-adjustment scale was administered to all participants again to determine changes in their level of adjustment.

Final Stage

Pretest and posttest data from the three groups were then analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using nonparametric statistical methods due to the relatively small sample size and the nonnormal distribution of the data. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

It was used to determine differences in adjustment scores between the pretest and posttest in each group (the Exception group, the Miracle group, and the control group). The test results were used to assess the intervention's effectiveness in each group.

The Kruskal-Wallis Test

It was used to determine differences in effectiveness between the three groups. This test helps determine whether the Miracle Question is more effective than the Exception Question and compares it with the control group.

E. RESEARCH RESULT

1. Wilcoxon Test Results for the Exception Question Group

Based on the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value was obtained = 0.018 ($p < 0.05$). This value indicates a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores in the group given SFBC group counseling with the Exception Question technique. This means that this technique is effective in improving student adjustment.

2. Wilcoxon Test Results for the Miracle Question Group

The group receiving the Miracle Question technique also showed improvement. In your thesis, the significance value displayed is 0.018 (the same

results are presented in the discussion). This indicates that the Miracle Question technique is effective in improving student adjustment.

3. Wilcoxon Test Results for the Control Group

In the control group, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results showed an Asymp. Sig. = 0.334 ($p > 0.05$). This means there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores in the group that did not receive counseling intervention.

4. Kruskal-Wallis Test Results (Intergroup Differences)

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine the differences in effectiveness between the three groups. The analysis results showed:

- $H = 3.614$
- $df = 2$
- Asymp. Sig. = 0.164 ($p > 0.05$)

This value indicates that there was no statistically significant difference among the three groups, although a trend in mean ranks was observed.

5. General Interpretation of Research Results

(a) The Exception Question effectively improved adjustment ($p = 0.018$). (b) The Miracle Question also effectively improved adjustment ($p = 0.018$). (c) The control group showed no significant change ($p = 0.334$). (d) The Miracle Question had the highest mean rank, indicating the greatest improvement descriptively. (e) However, the difference between the groups was not statistically significant ($p = 0.164$), so the hypothesis of a difference in effectiveness between the groups was rejected.

F. DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that both the Exception Question and Miracle Question techniques within the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach were effective in improving students' adjustment at MTS Negeri 1 Palembang. This improvement was evident in the significant difference between pretest and posttest scores in the two experimental groups. Specifically, the

Exception Question technique helped students rediscover moments of past success (exceptions), situations when they were able to adapt well. By recognizing their past successes, students became more confident and motivated to repeat these adaptive behaviors in current situations. This aligns with SFBC theory, which emphasizes that change can be built by reinforcing small successes already experienced by counselees.

Meanwhile, the Miracle Question technique had a greater impact, as indicated by the highest mean rank in the Kruskal-Wallis test results. This technique allows students to imagine the ideal state they want to achieve when their adjustment problems have been resolved. This positive future visualization plays a crucial role in increasing internal motivation, reducing anxiety, and encouraging students to act in line with the vision of change they desire. The ability to concretely envision solutions helps students organize small steps toward that ideal state. This finding aligns with De Shazer and Berg's opinion that the Miracle Question is an important technique in SFBC because it can activate a constructive future orientation.

Furthermore, the dynamics of group counseling sessions also contribute to improving student adjustment. Interactions between group members create an atmosphere of mutual support, openness, and empathy. Students who initially felt insecure become more comfortable sharing their experiences and learn by observing others experiencing similar challenges. The group environment provides opportunities for students to practice social skills, improve communication skills, and build positive relationships. This aligns with group counseling theory, which states that group dynamics can reinforce behavioral change through modeling and interpersonal feedback.

Overall, this study confirms that group counseling using the SFBC approach is an effective intervention for improving student adjustment. Both the Exception Question and the Miracle Question can help students recognize their potential, clarify goals, and develop more adaptive behavior. These findings

support Ateş's (2016) and other studies demonstrating the effectiveness of SFBC in improving adolescents' social competence, self-control, and adaptability.

G. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that both the exception question and miracle question techniques led to significant improvements within their respective groups, as shown by the differences between pre-test and post-test scores. However, the between-group analysis revealed no statistically significant differences among the exception question group, miracle question group, and control group in the post-test scores. This suggests that while each intervention was effective in improving participants' outcomes over time, neither technique was significantly more effective than the others when compared across groups.

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach, using the Exception Question and Miracle Question techniques, in improving student adjustment at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang. Based on data analysis using the Wilcoxon and Kruskal-Wallis tests, the following conclusions were obtained:

The Exception Question technique effectively improved student adjustment. This was demonstrated by a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores in the first experimental group. The Miracle Question technique was also effective in improving student adjustment. This group experienced significant improvement and had the highest mean rank, indicating the greatest impact.

The control group showed no improvement in adjustment, indicating that the change would not have occurred without counseling intervention. There was no statistical difference in effectiveness between groups, as determined by the Kruskal-Wallis test. However, a descriptive trend indicated that the Miracle Question provided greater improvement than the Exception Question. Overall, this study confirms that the SFBC approach can be an effective group counseling

service to help students improve their adjustment skills, particularly in social, academic, and emotional domains.

Recommendations: Practical Suggestions

1. For Guidance Teachers/School Counselors

Guidance teachers are advised to use the SFBC approach, specifically the Miracle Question and Exception Question techniques, as an alternative counseling service to help students experiencing adjustment problems. This approach is practical, solution-oriented, and easy to implement in group counseling.

2. For Students

Students are expected to use the counseling experience to recognize their potential better, develop a positive mindset, and improve their ability to adjust to social and academic environments.

3. For Schools

Schools need to support the implementation of ongoing counseling programs, especially for students exhibiting adjustment problems. Schools are also advised to provide conducive facilities and time for group counseling.

Theoretical Suggestions

1. Future research can use a larger sample size to obtain stronger statistical power, so that differences in effectiveness between techniques can be more clearly seen.
2. Further research can compare SFBC with other counseling approaches, such as CBT or REBT, to determine which intervention model is more optimal in improving adjustment.
3. In addition to using the self-adjustment scale, subsequent research can add in-depth observations or interviews so that the results are more comprehensive.

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