

## Application of Counseling with a Cognitive Behavior Therapy Approach to Handling Inferiority Complex in Students

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Cognitive Behavior Therapy; Inferiority Complex; Students	An inferiority complex is a psychological condition experienced when an individual feels inferior, helpless, and views themselves as a failure despite having adequate abilities. This condition is often experienced by students or individuals during emerging adulthood, a transitional phase characterized by personal, academic, and social demands. This research aims to determine the effectiveness of application of counseling with a cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) approach in overcoming an inferiority complex. The research approach used was an experiment with a single-case experimental design method. The subjects in this study were DA, a third-semester student at the Faculty of Psychology, University X, who experienced inferiority complex problems based on assessments conducted using interviews, intelligence tests, and perfectionism scales. The results showed a significant decrease in the symptoms of the inferiority complex experienced by the subject. The subject began to recognize and challenge their irrational thoughts, showed increased self-confidence, and was more adaptive in dealing with failure and academic pressure. These findings confirm that application of counseling with a cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) approach can be declared effective as a psychological intervention in overcoming the inferiority complex in students.

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## INTRODUCTION

The transition period from adolescence to adulthood is known as emerging adulthood, a period of individual development that generally occurs between the ages of 18 and 25. This period is characterized by exploration and self-discovery, such as individuals starting to determine their desired career path, forming self-identity, and feeling caught between adolescence and adulthood (Robins et al., 2002; Santrock, 2019). College students belong to the emerging adulthood age group and often face various academic, social, and personal challenges. Arnett (2016) states that intellectual and social experiences, as well as independent living and learning to be responsible for daily life tasks, are important factors that shape students from early adolescence into more mature young adults. This transformation process does not always run smoothly; students may encounter failure during this process (Hardy et al., 2015). While failure is normal and can be adaptively responded to without causing psychological problems, many students face failure maladaptively, which causes the emergence of inferiority (Permatasari et al., 2017).

Inferiority is a concept introduced by Alfred Adler. Adler observed that all humans are born with physical weaknesses or deficiencies, which make individuals feel incomplete or imperfect (Feist & Feist, 2021). Adler believed that feelings of inferiority or low self-esteem are a natural part and response to human development, not a sign of weakness or abnormality (Cheng et al., 2021). These feelings of inferiority are seen as motivating forces in behavior. With these feelings, individuals will continue to struggle and compensate, making efforts to overcome them. Throughout life, individuals are driven by the need to overcome these feelings and strive to achieve higher levels of development (Cardoso et al., 2023). However, excessive compensation tends to lead to excessive feelings of inferiority and unrealistic goals. The individual's inability to cope with these excessive and unbalanced feelings of inferiority refers to the concept of an inferiority complex, a condition that develops when a person is unable to compensate for normal feelings of inferiority (Schultz & Schultz, 2017).

This study examines the situation experienced by the research subject, identified as DA, a third-semester student at the Faculty of Psychology at University X. In his previous education, DA was an outstanding student and the top-ranked student in his school, successfully entering University X through the National Achievement-Based Selection (SNBP). DA's academic achievements during high school indicate that he possesses strong intellectual abilities and learning capacities. This is supported by the results of an intelligence test, which showed the subject's intellectual ability score of 106, classified in the average category based on the Weschler categorization (Coertjens et al., 2023). The subject's ability to absorb the meaning or essence of verbally conveyed information is very good, and it does not take him long to understand and process the information he receives. Upon entering university, DA began to show symptoms indicative of an inferiority complex. When the subject started comparing himself with his peers and felt he did not possess comparable abilities, he perceived himself as a burden due to having a slower rhythm or way of working. This actually stemmed from the subject's fear of making mistakes and experiencing failure, especially when joining committees or organizations. Such failures were seen by the subject as errors that would continue to haunt him, leading him to feel he had no advantages. The subject's tendency to disregard previous achievements or successes aligns with earlier research by Cahyaningtyas et al. (2020), which stated that an inferiority complex causes individuals who are capable learners to feel incapable, helpless, and trapped in a prolonged cycle of inferiority.

The primary factor causing the subject's inferiority complex is perfectionism. Based on an assessment using the perfectionism scale developed by Hewitt & Flett (1991), the results showed that the subject exhibited a high level of perfectionism, falling into the unhealthy perfectionism category—demonstrated by simultaneously high levels of perfectionist striving and concern. The subject consistently desires perfect results or to be the best in everything, feels that others expect perfection from him, and worries that anything less than perfect could be judged as poor work by those around him.

According to Hewitt & Flett (1991), individuals with unhealthy perfectionism who fail to meet set expectations or feel dissatisfied when they don't reach established standards will feel like failures and experience low self-esteem. An inferiority complex arises because of perfectionism. When individuals fail to meet their personal standards, they experience regret, blame themselves, and tend to compare themselves unfavorably to others (Başkurt & Zeren,

2024). Consistent with this, Lee et al. (2020) added that excessive attention to failures and mistakes, coupled with the stress from the gap between standards and actual behavior, increases a sense of inferiority.

Another contributing factor to the subject's inferiority complex is the perception of physical limitations, such as issues related to weight or other physical aspects (Tripathy, 2018). Assessment revealed that during puberty, the subject experienced low confidence in his physical condition, leading him to withdraw from social groups. He believed that because he was physically unattractive, he needed to compensate by excelling academically. This pattern reflects compensatory behavior that, however, resulted in overreliance on academic achievement for self-esteem. When the subject ultimately failed to meet these compensation demands, his inferiority complex intensified. This observation aligns with Adler's (2013) view that physical or other limitations encourage compensatory efforts, but failure in compensation leads to the development of an inferiority complex.

Based on the subject's condition, the intervention provided to address the inferiority complex is counseling using a Cognitive Behavior Therapy approach. Johnson (2017) states that one step in overcoming an inferiority complex is to reexamine one's beliefs. Individuals are expected to challenge distorted thought patterns and transform them into new, more rational ones. They are also encouraged to practice relaxation techniques and engage in positive activities that enhance skills and self-confidence. These steps are consistent with the basic principles of Cognitive Behavior Therapy: thoughts, feelings, and behavior are reciprocally interconnected. This approach helps individuals recognize, evaluate, and change their irrational beliefs through cognitive restructuring techniques, relaxation, and various behavioral strategies (Beck, 2021).

The effectiveness of this approach is supported by previous studies, such as Wahidah & Adam (2019), who found that CBT counseling was effective in changing negative beliefs in students with high intelligence and many positive qualities but who focused on pessimism, low self-confidence, and negative self-perceptions. Another study by Cahyaningtyas et al. (2020) showed that CBT counseling effectively increased positive self-reflection in students, who no longer viewed their shortcomings as insurmountable obstacles. These findings suggest that CBT can be a relevant approach to helping individuals overcome negative thought patterns, increase self-confidence, and rebuild positive self-perceptions.

Therefore, this research aims to determine the effectiveness of counseling with a Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) approach in overcoming inferiority complex in college students, specifically examining changes in cognitive patterns, emotional regulation, and adaptive behaviors following the intervention. The benefits of this study include providing empirical evidence for the efficacy of CBT in addressing inferiority complex among students, offering practical intervention strategies for campus counseling services, and contributing to the development of more effective psychological support systems in educational settings to enhance students' mental well-being and academic performance.

## METHOD

The subject in this study was a 19-year-old student at the Faculty of Psychology, University X. Identified as DA, the subject experienced an inferiority complex based on

assessments using intelligence tests, personality tests, and a perfectionism scale. The study employed an experimental approach with a single-case experimental design, observing the subject's condition before and after the intervention (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data analysis included quantitative methods and interviews to evaluate changes in the subject's condition following the intervention.

The intervention consisted of counseling using a cognitive behavioral therapy approach, conducted over five sessions: one opening session, three intervention sessions, and one evaluation and termination session. The following outlines the intervention design.

**Table 1. Intervention Design**

No	Session	Duration	Overview
1.	Psychoeducation	60 minutes	In this session, the researcher conducted psychoeducation with the subjects, explaining the results of the assessment and the current problems, including their definition, characteristics, contributing factors, and potential impacts. The researcher also explained the intervention process to be implemented.
2.	Cognitive Models and Cognitive Distortions	120 minutes	In this session, the researcher explained how thoughts influence emotions and behavior and identified the subjects' core beliefs, intermediate beliefs, and automatic thoughts. The session concluded with an evaluation and homework assignments, including "Challenging Thought" and "Putting Thoughts on Trial" worksheets, to help the subjects challenge their negative thoughts.
3.	Cognitive Restructuring	120 minutes	In this session, the researcher guided the subjects to challenge previous rules, assumptions, and negative automatic thoughts, using Socratic questioning to become more balanced, realistic, and rational. The session concluded with an evaluation and homework assignments, called "thought records," to record thoughts that arise in various situations, along with their accompanying feelings and behaviors.
4.	Positive Behavior Activities	120 minutes	In this session, the researcher helped the subject discover positive aspects and strengths within himself, helped the subject find activities that strengthen his positive aspects, and taught

				breathing relaxation techniques. The session ended with an evaluation and the provision of homework, namely a "life-story" to create a life story that enables AG to find meaning in himself, a "self-esteem journal" worksheet that the subject needs to fill out for a week or until the next meeting.
5.	Evaluation and Termination		60 minutes	In this session, the researcher evaluates the overall performance and development of the subject during the intervention process, including changes in perspective, self-understanding, differences before and after participating in the intervention, and the implementation of exercises that will be carried out in the future.

Source: Developed by researchers based on the Cognitive Behavior Therapy intervention model of Beck (2021) and Corey (2017)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intervention, namely counseling using a cognitive behavioral therapy approach, was proven effective in addressing the inferiority complex experienced by the subjects. This can be seen through the evaluation conducted by the researchers before and after the intervention process based on aspects of thoughts, emotions, and behavior. The comparison of the results before and after the intervention is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Comparison of Thoughts, Emotions, and Behavior Before and After the Intervention**

Before intervention	After the intervention
<b>Aspects of the Mind</b>	
The subject had thoughts of dropping out of college, downplaying his potential by getting lost in negative thoughts and habitually engaging in negative self-talk which reinforced feelings of helplessness.	Thoughts of dropping out of college have disappeared, and the subject has begun to reflect on and recognize his or her potential, focus on his or her strengths, and set more realistic personal standards. Furthermore, although negative self-talk still occurs, the subject is able to pause and practice positive affirmations or reflection to avoid becoming consumed by negative thoughts.
<b>Emotional Aspect</b>	
Subjects tend to feel anxious, restless, and have difficulty controlling their emotions when facing stressful situations. Subjects also feel unaccepted by their group mates, resulting in feelings of alienation and a lack of self-confidence in social interactions.	Subjects became calmer in dealing with situations and demonstrated improved emotional control. Furthermore, they felt more confident in social interactions and were able to open up to their group mates.
<b>Behavioral Aspects</b>	
The subject showed passive behavior that showed signs of withdrawal, such as not attending	The subject consistently attended lectures and no longer slept in class, indicating increased

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lectures, sleeping in class and being reluctant to participate in group discussions.

motivation to learn. In group interactions, the subject also began to play an active role, was more open, and bolder in expressing his opinions.

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Source: Primary data from observations and interviews of researchers (2024)

Based on the comparisons made, it was shown that CBT intervention was effective in addressing the inferiority complex experienced by the subjects. This aligns with Beck (2021), who stated that psychological disorders or problems experienced by individuals are influenced by how they perceive and structure their own experiences. Faulty thought processes or drawing incorrect conclusions based on inadequate information are factors that exacerbate the emergence of psychological disorders experienced by individuals. Through the CBT approach, subjects are encouraged to recognize and identify irrational and maladaptive thoughts and taught to transform and redirect these thoughts into more rational and adaptive ones.

Several factors contributed to the success of this intervention: first, the subjects' cooperative attitude. Subjects demonstrated a cooperative attitude from the beginning of the session until the end of the intervention session, demonstrated by their willingness to consistently attend sessions as agreed, as well as their active and open attitude throughout the intervention process. This is a crucial part of the cognitive behavioral therapy approach, where successful counseling is largely determined by active collaboration between therapist and client. Clients not only receive information but are also expected to apply the strategies learned in their daily lives (Prout & Fedewa, 2015).

Another factor is homework assignments. Subjects stated that one of the most memorable aspects of the intervention process was homework assignments. With the homework assignments, they felt that outside of the intervention process, they could independently apply the techniques taught. The homework assignments enabled them to independently examine cognitive distortions and replace them with more balanced and functional thoughts. This aligns with Corey (2017), who stated that homework is a crucial part of the Cognitive Behavior Therapy approach because it reinforces learning gained in sessions, helps clients generalize skills to real-life situations, and increases clients' independence in managing their thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, clients' cooperative and consistent homework assignments are important indicators of achieving more adaptive change.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that counseling with a Cognitive Behavior Therapy approach effectively addressed inferiority complex issues in a college student, DA, who initially showed low self-esteem, feelings of failure, and irrational thoughts. Following the intervention sessions, the subject was able to recognize and modify irrational thought patterns, boost self-confidence, and develop greater adaptive skills in managing academic pressures and setbacks. The intervention's success was supported by the subject's cooperation, openness, motivation for change, and consistent engagement with therapeutic assignments, reflecting CBT's emphasis on active collaboration between therapist and client. These results provide valuable guidance for practitioners and researchers developing CBT-based treatments for similar psychological challenges in higher education. Future research could explore the approach's effectiveness with



larger and more diverse student populations to enhance generalizability and investigate long-term outcomes.

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