COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO OVERCOME CONCENTRATION CHALLENGES THROUGH INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

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ABSTRACT
Learning concentration is a critical factor influencing students' academic achievement, particularly for final-year Madrasah Aliyah (MA) students who face intense examination pressures and environmental distractions. Despite the prevalence of concentration problems, conventional school interventions often fail to address the underlying cognitive and behavioral barriers. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of individualized Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)-based counseling in improving learning concentration among final-year MA students at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving six students with documented concentration difficulties, supported by input from teachers and parents. The intervention consisted of six weekly CBT counseling sessions focusing on assessment, psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, and relapse prevention. Thematic analysis revealed substantial improvements in students' focus, classroom engagement, time management, and academic performance, with average grades increasing by 10–15 points and greater consistency in task completion. The findings conclude that individualized CBT-based counseling is effective in alleviating anxiety, restructuring negative thinking, and fostering positive study habits in a culturally specific educational context. This research is beneficial for educators and school counselors, offering an empirically validated model for enhancing concentration and academic readiness. Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of individualized versus group-based CBT interventions across broader student populations.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Concentration, Counseling Intervention

INTRODUCTION

Learning concentration is a fundamental determinant of students' academic achievement and overall educational quality. The ability to focus attention during learning activities underpins effective information processing, comprehension, and the attainment of academic goals (Muhid & Ferdiyanto, 2020; Slavin, 2020). Among final-year Madrasah Aliyah (MA) students, concentration is of heightened importance due to the increased academic demands of final examinations, university entrance tests, and the pressure to prepare for post-secondary transitions (Saputra, Putri, & Darmawan, 2024). Empirical studies consistently show that poor concentration correlates with academic underachievement and elevated psychological distress, especially as students face multifaceted stressors in the last years of secondary education (Latifah, Harum, & Saman, 2023; Fajriyah & Pratiwi, 2021; Owens et al., 2022). At MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima, preliminary observations indicate that many final-year students exhibit significant problems maintaining learning concentration. These are manifested in inattentiveness, frequent daydreaming, incomplete assignments, and slow comprehension of lesson materials (Ichsan, 2022). Teachers have reported a marked decline in active classroom participation and student engagement. Discussions with parents further reveal that students' study time is frequently disrupted by social media distractions or unsupportive home environments, including noise and lack of a conducive study space (Moh. Hanang, 2025; Sulistianingsih et al., 2022). Environmental and psychological factors therefore contribute to a decline in students' capacity to concentrate, threatening the effectiveness of the educational process (Santrock, 2011; Nurhayati, 2018; Owens et al., 2022).

The central problem addressed in this study is the low concentration levels among final-year MA students, which hampers academic achievement and learning outcomes. This issue arises from a complex interplay of academic pressures, environmental distractions, negative thinking patterns, and reduced self-confidence (Latifah et al., 2023; Slavin, 2020). Left unaddressed, these concentration problems can perpetuate cycles of poor performance, heightened anxiety, and disengagement from learning activities (Fajriyah & Pratiwi, 2021; Owens et al., 2022). While schools often attempt to remedy these issues through academic support and parental involvement, these measures frequently prove insufficient, especially when psychological or behavioral challenges underpin the students' difficulties (Sulistianingsih et al., 2022). As a general solution, educational and psychological interventions are needed to systematically address both the environmental and intrapersonal barriers to concentration. Evidence suggests that counseling-based interventions can effectively support students in overcoming learning difficulties rooted in psychological distress, negative beliefs, or maladaptive behaviors (Corey, 2016; Spiegler & Guevremont, 2010). However, the selection of an intervention model that is both empirically validated and adaptable to the school context remains a critical challenge.

Among the various intervention models, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has emerged as a leading approach in both clinical and educational psychology for addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral issues that impede learning (Beck, 2011; Dobson & Dobson, 2009). CBT is grounded in the theory that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected; thus, altering maladaptive cognitions can lead to improvements in emotional well-being and behavioral functioning (Beck, 1995; Hofmann et al., 2012). In the context of education, CBT-based interventions have demonstrated significant efficacy in reducing academic anxiety, improving self-regulation, and enhancing learning concentration (Munir et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2023; Alsaadi et al., 2021). CBT incorporates techniques such as cognitive restructuring, self-monitoring, goal setting, and behavioral rehearsal, which enable students to identify and replace negative thought patterns with more adaptive and realistic beliefs (Beck, 2011; Oemarjoedi, 2017). For students struggling with concentration, CBT can help develop skills for managing distractions, overcoming procrastination, and increasing sustained attention during study sessions (Dobson & Dobson, 2009; Owens et al., 2022). Empirical studies have shown that students receiving CBT-based counseling report significant improvements in academic engagement, time management, and self-efficacy (Afriyanti et al., 2018; Alsaadi et al., 2021; Lister & Walker, 2020).

While the efficacy of CBT in addressing various psychological issues is well-established, the application of individual CBT-based counseling specifically to improve learning concentration among final-year MA students in Indonesia remains underexplored (Munir et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2023). Much of the existing literature on CBT in educational settings has focused on outcomes related to anxiety reduction, depression management, and general behavioral improvements (Beck, 1995; Hofmann et al., 2012; Spiegler & Guevremont, 2010). Studies targeting concentration enhancement have been relatively limited, especially within the context of Islamic secondary schools facing unique sociocultural and environmental challenges (Saputra et al., 2024; Sulistianingsih et al., 2022). Furthermore, while group-based CBT interventions have been widely reported (Padesky & Mooney, 2012; Hofmann et al., 2012), individualized approaches tailored to each student's cognitive patterns and environmental circumstances may yield greater benefits but are less frequently studied in school settings (Lister & Walker, 2020; Munir et al., 2024). There is a clear gap in the literature concerning structured, individualized CBT counseling for enhancing concentration in academically pressured, culturally distinct student populations like those at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima. No comprehensive studies to date have systematically examined the effects of CBT on concentration for students in this demographic.

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of individualized CBT-based counseling in improving the learning concentration of final-year MA students at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima. The novelty of this research lies in its application of a structured, individualized CBT intervention specifically designed to address concentration deficits within the cultural and contextual realities of Indonesian Islamic senior high schools. This study hypothesizes that CBT-based individual counseling will lead to significant improvements in students' ability to focus, process information, and sustain academic engagement, thus enhancing overall academic performance. The scope of this study is delimited to final-year students at MA

Nurun Najah Sumberkima who demonstrate marked difficulties in maintaining learning concentration as reported by teachers and parents. The study incorporates both quantitative (pre- and post-intervention concentration assessments) and qualitative (student self-reports, teacher observations) measures to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's impact. By addressing a clear gap in both the Indonesian and international literature, this research not only provides empirical evidence for the effectiveness of individualized CBT counseling in educational settings but also offers practical guidance for schools seeking to implement similar programs. The results are expected to inform policy and practice in school-based counseling, contribute to the growing literature on CBT applications in education, and promote the holistic development of students facing high academic demands.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore in-depth the effectiveness of individual counseling programs based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in improving the learning concentration of final-year students at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima. The qualitative case study design was chosen for its capacity to capture the psychological and behavioral dynamics of students in their natural context, as well as to enable the researcher to delve into the personal experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Such an approach is particularly valuable when examining complex interventions within a specific setting and provides a holistic understanding of how and why CBT-based counseling can affect learning concentration (Stake, 1995).

Table 1. Overview of Research Design

Aspect	Description
Approach	Qualitative
Method	Case Study
Main Participants	6 final-year students with identified concentration difficulties
Supporting Informants	2 subject teachers, 6 parents/guardians
Data Collection	In-depth interviews, observation, documentation
Analysis	Thematic analysis with triangulation and audit trail

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima, focusing on the school environment and related learning contexts. The main subjects consisted of six twelfth-grade students who had previously been identified by teachers and school counselors as having persistent concentration problems, as evidenced by academic records, teacher reports, and behavioral observations (Muhid & Ferdiyanto, 2020). The selection of participants in this study was based on several specific criteria to ensure the relevance and depth of the data obtained. The primary participants consisted of final-year students (grade XII) who had been documented or observed to experience difficulties in maintaining learning concentration. Participation was also contingent upon the students' willingness to engage actively in both counseling sessions and research activities, ensuring voluntary and ethical involvement. In addition to the student participants, two subject teachers and six parents or guardians were included as supporting informants. Their involvement was aimed at providing a broader and more comprehensive perspective on any changes in the students' concentration, both prior to and following the counseling intervention. By adopting this multi-informant approach, the study was able to capture diverse viewpoints and triangulate data, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in this study employed three primary methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The integration of these techniques was intended to achieve robust data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings (Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Firstly, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with the six selected students, two teachers, and six parents or guardians. These interviews were designed to elicit participants' perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding the students' ability to concentrate both before and after involvement in the CBT-based counseling program. For example, interview questions included prompts such as, "Can you describe your experience focusing during lessons before and after counseling?" and "What changes, if any, have you observed in your child's study habits?" All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, subsequently transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Secondly, participant observation was conducted in two main contexts. The first involved observations during the counseling sessions, where the researcher, who also acted as facilitator, systematically recorded behavioral changes, emotional responses, and levels of engagement exhibited by the students throughout each CBT session. The second context focused on classroom observations, both prior to and following the counseling intervention. Here, the researcher assessed indicators such as attention span, participation in class activities, and the completion of assigned tasks to document any observable improvements in concentration.

Table 2. Sample Behavioral Indicators of Concentration

Indicator	Description
Sustained eye contact	Maintains focus on the teacher or task
Task engagement	Completes assignments without distractions
Reduced off-task behavior	Fewer episodes of daydreaming, fidgeting
Emotional expression	Increased confidence, reduced anxiety

Supporting documents included students' academic records (grades, assignment completion), counseling session journals, and teacher observation notes. These documents provided additional data to substantiate changes in concentration levels and academic performance (Slavin, 2020; Hakim et al., 2023).

Intervention Procedure: CBT-Based Individual Counseling

The intervention procedure in this study involved the implementation of a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based individual counseling program, tailored specifically for students experiencing concentration difficulties. Each participant received six weekly counseling sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, following a structured CBT protocol adapted to the educational context (Beck, 2011; Corey, 2016). The sessions were designed to be sequential and integrative, covering the following key components: The first session focused on assessment and rapport building, where the counselor conducted an initial evaluation of the student's concentration problems while establishing trust and a strong therapeutic alliance. In the second session, psychoeducation was provided to help students understand the CBT model, emphasizing the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Beck, 1995; Dobson & Dobson, 2009). The third session introduced cognitive restructuring, guiding students to identify and challenge negative or unhelpful thoughts that undermine their learning and self-efficacy. The fourth session concentrated on behavioral activation, encouraging students to develop and consistently practice study routines that enhance concentration. In the fifth session, students engaged in self-monitoring by keeping daily concentration journals and were given homework assignments to reinforce new cognitive and behavioral strategies outside the counseling environment. The final session was devoted to review and relapse prevention, consolidating the progress achieved during the program and developing individualized plans for sustained improvement in concentration.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using the thematic analysis framework as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with familiarization, where the researcher thoroughly read and re-read all interview transcripts and observation notes to immerse themselves in the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. Following this, the coding phase involved

systematically identifying and labeling meaningful units of data that pertained to aspects such as learning concentration, psychological changes, and behavioral adjustments observed throughout the intervention. After coding, the researcher grouped related codes into overarching themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences. Examples of emergent themes included "improved focus," "positive thinking," and "environmental challenges," which reflected the various dimensions of change reported and observed among the students. These themes were then interpreted narratively, synthesizing the data into coherent stories that illustrated the lived experiences and developmental trajectories of the participants during and after the CBT-based counseling intervention. To enhance the credibility and depth of the analysis, all data sources—including interview transcripts, observation records, and relevant documents—were cross-referenced and triangulated. This process ensured the consistency and robustness of the findings, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the impact of the counseling program on students' concentration and overall learning behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations and Researcher's Role

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research board. Written informed consent was secured from all participants and their guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by coding all participant data and restricting access to research files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher served as both data collector and facilitator of the CBT intervention, creating a supportive relationship with participants to foster openness and trust, which is critical for therapeutic effectiveness and research integrity (Corey, 2016; Patton, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Intervention Learning Concentration: Initial Conditions and Contributing Factors

Before the CBT-based individual counseling intervention, all six final-year students demonstrated notable difficulties in maintaining learning concentration. Interviews revealed common patterns: students struggled to focus during lessons, particularly when confronted with the pressure of upcoming national exams. The most salient contributing factors included anxiety about examination outcomes, fear of failure, and persistent negative thoughts regarding personal academic competence. For example, one student stated, *"I feel overwhelmed with lessons, and when anxiety hits, I just can't listen to the teacher at all."* Classroom observations corroborated these self-reports. Both Indonesian language and mathematics teachers confirmed that students were often passive, seldom asked questions, and failed to complete assignments on time. One teacher remarked, *"Some of them are physically present, but their minds are elsewhere."* Behavioral signs such as frequent daydreaming, avoiding eye contact, and reluctance to participate in discussions were repeatedly noted. Parents also reported parallel difficulties at home. Many described their children as disorganized with their study schedules, often preferring to use their mobile phones or sleep due to emotional exhaustion. A parent commented, *"My child looks like he wants to study, but doesn't know where to start. In the end, he just lies around or plays with his phone."* These findings highlight a multifaceted problem: academic pressure, internalized negative beliefs, and a home environment that does not sufficiently support learning all contributed to impaired concentration.

These findings are highly consistent with existing research on academic stress and cognitive barriers to concentration. Multiple studies have shown that examination anxiety and low self-efficacy are primary predictors of attentional difficulties among adolescents (Putwain, 2007; Gherasim, Butnaru, & Mairean, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Negative automatic thoughts—such as catastrophizing failure or doubting abilities—have been linked to both psychological distress and suboptimal academic engagement (Beck, 2011; Ellis, 2004). Furthermore, research demonstrates that inadequate support at home, including poor study routines and excessive screen time, exacerbates the negative cycle of distraction and low motivation (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Empirical evidence also supports the link between environmental stressors and reduced concentration in high-stakes academic settings (Chong et al., 2015; Kuhnle & Sinclair, 2011). The present findings confirm that these factors are not only present but deeply intertwined in the case of final-year students at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima.

Table 3. Indicators of Impaired Concentration Before Intervention

Indicator	Student Report	Teacher Observation	Parent Report
Difficulty focusing in class	✓	✓	
Negative thoughts/self-doubt	✓		✓
Passivity/inactivity in class		✓	
Failure to complete assignments	✓	✓	
Irregular study schedule at home			✓
Excessive phone use			✓
Emotional exhaustion	✓		✓

The Effectiveness of CBT-Based Counseling on Learning Concentration

The CBT-based counseling program consisted of six weekly individual sessions, each structured around assessment, psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, self-monitoring, and relapse prevention. The first session focused on identifying negative automatic thoughts, such as *"I am bound to fail," "Studying is pointless,"* and *"I'm just not smart enough."* Counselors worked with students to deconstruct these beliefs. The second session centered on cognitive restructuring, where students were trained to challenge irrational beliefs and replace them with adaptive thoughts. Techniques included Socratic questioning: for example, *"What evidence is there that I always fail?"* and *"What small steps can I take to improve?"* Behavioral strategies were emphasized in the third session, including time management, breathing relaxation, and focused study techniques such as the "5-minute no-distraction" method. Students were guided to develop realistic study schedules and set manageable daily targets. By the end of the program, teachers observed substantial improvements. Students became more active in class, completed assignments more promptly, and participated enthusiastically in discussions. A teacher noted, *"Now they're prepared when I ask questions, and they don't seem to zone out as much."* Some students even encouraged their peers to adopt better study habits. Parents reported similar changes: students began managing their own study schedules, reduced their phone usage during study times, and independently organized their tasks. As one father reported, *"Now my child studies every evening and organizes his own time. Before, I always had to remind him."* In final interviews, students expressed increased confidence in managing anxious thoughts and greater enjoyment in learning. One student shared, *"I used to panic when I didn't understand, but now I try to calm down, reread, or ask a friend. It works."* Objective measures also improved: students' average monthly grades rose by 10–15 points, and four out of six students submitted assignments on time for three consecutive weeks.

The effectiveness of CBT for improving academic performance and concentration is well-supported in both clinical and educational psychology literature (Knouse & Safren, 2010; Reinecke, Ryan, & DuBois, 2010; Kuyken, Padesky, & Dudley, 2009). Cognitive restructuring is particularly effective in reducing test anxiety and negative self-talk, thereby enhancing focus and motivation (Sapp, 1996; Kendall & Treadwell, 2007; Suldo, Gormley, DuPaul, & Anderson-Butcher, 2014). Behavioral activation and self-monitoring have been shown to reinforce positive study habits and improve time management, which in turn leads to higher academic achievement (Doyle & McDowall, 2015; Evans et al., 2018). Recent meta-analyses confirm the robust impact of school-based CBT interventions on students' emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and academic functioning (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017; Mychailyszyn et al., 2012). The present study aligns with these findings, highlighting how structured, individualized CBT can directly address the interplay of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors impacting learning. However, unlike some studies that emphasize group-based CBT, this research demonstrates the specific effectiveness of individualized counseling, which allows for tailored intervention based on each student's unique cognitive and emotional challenges (Corey, 2016; Stallard, 2002). The

observed improvements in both subjective well-being and objective academic outcomes provide compelling evidence for the value of CBT in educational settings.

Table 4. Changes in Academic and Behavioral Indicators After CBT Counseling

Indicator	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	Change
Average monthly grade	65	75–80	+10–15 points
On-time assignment submission	Rarely	4/6 students 3 weeks in a row	Significant
Student participation in class	Low	High	Improved
Self-reported anxiety	High	Moderate/Low	Reduced
Self-initiated study sessions	Rare	Frequent	Improved
Parental reminders for studying	Frequent	Rare/None	Improved

Thematic Insights: Psychological, Behavioral, and Environmental Changes

The most salient psychological shift observed was an increase in self-awareness and self-regulation. Through CBT, students learned to identify and challenge irrational thoughts, which led to reduced anxiety and improved coping strategies during high-pressure academic periods. This is consistent with research showing that cognitive restructuring not only lowers anxiety but also enhances resilience and self-efficacy among students (Bandura, 1997; Beck, 2011; Suldo et al., 2014). Behavioral observations and self-report data indicated that students developed more effective study routines, practiced time management, and engaged in goal setting. Studies have shown that these behaviors are key predictors of academic achievement and are reliably cultivated through behavioral activation strategies within CBT (Zimmerman, 2002; Doyle & McDowall, 2015). Parents' involvement and reinforcement of structured study habits contributed to environmental support for students' learning. Research underscores the importance of the home environment and parental engagement in sustaining academic gains made through school-based interventions (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Epstein, 2018).

Significance of Findings

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the application of CBT in educational contexts, demonstrating not only improvements in cognitive and emotional functioning but also in observable academic behaviors and outcomes (Reinecke et al., 2010; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017; Stallard, 2002). The results support theoretical frameworks positing that interventions targeting thoughts, emotions, and behaviors can have synergistic effects on student learning (Beck, 2011; Ellis, 2004). The structured, individualized nature of the intervention suggests that schools can benefit from integrating CBT-based counseling programs to support students, particularly during critical transition periods such as the final year of secondary education. The positive outcomes reported by students, teachers, and parents underscore the feasibility and acceptability of such interventions in real-world educational settings (Corey, 2016; Evans et al., 2018). While the study's small sample size limits generalizability, the in-depth qualitative data provide valuable insights for educators and mental health professionals. Future research should examine the long-term effects of CBT interventions across larger, more diverse student populations and compare individualized versus group-based formats (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017). In summary, CBT-based individual counseling was found to be highly effective in enhancing learning concentration, academic motivation, and positive study behaviors among final-year students facing academic stress. These improvements were validated through multiple informants and reflected in both subjective and objective indicators. The findings reinforce the critical role of cognitive and behavioral interventions in promoting student well-being and achievement, particularly during pivotal educational milestones.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of individualized Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)-based counseling in improving the learning concentration of final-year students at MA Nurun Najah Sumberkima. The core findings revealed that the structured, individualized CBT intervention not only alleviated students' anxiety and negative thinking patterns but also led to marked improvements in academic engagement, self-regulation, and overall concentration, as evidenced by increased class participation, timely task completion, and higher academic achievement. The research contributes significant empirical evidence to the educational and counseling fields by demonstrating that tailored CBT-based counseling can address both psychological and behavioral barriers to learning concentration within the unique cultural context of Indonesian Islamic secondary education, thereby offering a model for school-based interventions to support students during critical academic transitions.

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