

Application of Cognitive Restructuring Technique to Reduce Fear of Missing Out in Social Media Use Among Vocational High School Students

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ABSTRACT

High social media use among adolescents contributes to Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), an anxiety driven by cognitive distortions that encourages compulsive online engagement. Vocational high school students are particularly vulnerable because demanding academic and practical training schedules often lead them to seek psychological compensation through social media. This study aimed to: (1) describe students' FoMO levels before and after the intervention, (2) explain the implementation of cognitive restructuring in group counseling, and (3) examine its effectiveness in reducing FoMO. A quantitative quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group was employed. Twenty eleventh-grade students with high FoMO scores were assigned to an experimental group ($n = 10$) and a control group ($n = 10$). Data were collected using an adapted FoMO Scale (28 valid items; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.907). The intervention consisted of seven group counseling sessions based on Cormier and Cormier's (1985) six-stage cognitive restructuring model. The independent samples t -test showed a significant effect ($t = 16.906$, $p < .001$). Students in the experimental group improved from high/very high to moderate/low FoMO levels, whereas the control group showed no meaningful change. These findings provide empirical evidence that structured cognitive restructuring is effective for reducing FoMO among vocational high school students and supports its integration into school guidance and counseling services to promote adolescents' digital wellbeing.

KEYWORDS

Fear of Missing Out; Cognitive Restructuring; Group Counseling; Social Media; Vocational High School Students

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INTRODUCTION

The digital era has fundamentally transformed the patterns of social interaction among adolescents. Social media has now become the primary medium for communication, information consumption, and the construction of social identity. The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) reports that Indonesia has 210.03 million internet users, with the 13–18 age group showing the highest penetration rate at 99.16%, making adolescents the most dominant yet most vulnerable group to the negative impacts of excessive social media use (APJII, 2022). Globally, approximately 96% of 15-year-olds in the European Union use social media daily (Bertoni et.al., 2025), while the average global internet user spends more than two hours per day on social media platforms (Bertoni et.al., 2025). This high intensity of internet use is one of the factors contributing to the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among adolescents (Wahyuningtyas et.al., 2024).

FoMO is defined as a form of anxiety that arises when a person feels that others may be enjoying more enjoyable or meaningful experiences, accompanied by a strong urge to stay connected to others' activities through social media (Przybylski et.al., 2013). This condition is a manifestation of unmet basic psychological needs, namely relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Maknun et.al., 2023). In Indonesia, FoMO has been shown to influence anxiety levels and life satisfaction among Generation Z (Puspitasari et.al., 2025), and is closely linked to weak self-control and low student engagement in learning (Li, 2024). These impacts are a serious concern, particularly for vocational high school students, whose packed schedules of vocational practice actually make them more prone to using social media as an escape, thereby increasing their risk of FoMO compared to general high school students.

A preliminary study at a vocational high school in Makassar revealed an alarming picture. Of the 155 students who completed the FoMO scale adapted from Przybylski et.al. (2013) and underwent a validation process, it was found that 2% (3 students) fell into the very high category, 70% (108 students) into the high category, 5% (5 students) into the moderate category, 21% (33 students) into the low category, and 2% (3 students) into the very low category. Interviews with Guidance and Counseling teachers revealed that many students frequently check social media during class hours, prefer watching live streams on TikTok over doing schoolwork, and experience anxiety when unable to access the internet. This behavior is associated with cognitive distortions, including "should" statements (the belief that one must always follow trends), emotional reasoning (prioritizing immediate pleasure), and catastrophizing (exaggerating negative consequences when offline) (Chand et.al., 2024).

These findings indicate that the root of the FoMO problem among vocational high school students is cognitive in nature, not merely observable behavior. One technique that has been empirically tested in several previous studies is the application of the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) approach using cognitive restructuring techniques. According to Beck (2006), the cognitive restructuring technique works by identifying, evaluating, and changing the irrational beliefs underlying anxiety and maladaptive behavior. This approach aligns with the views of Afdilah et.al. (2020), who assert that FoMO, as a form of social anxiety rooted in cognitive distortions, is best addressed through cognitive restructuring. In this study, the intervention was conducted using group counseling, a guidance service that brings together a number of clients in a guided therapeutic process to explore and change thought patterns collectively.

Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring techniques within the CBT framework for reducing FoMO. Widadiyah & Zulfa (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of this technique among high school students in Tangerang, Fitri et.al. (2024) found similar results among social media-using adolescents in Bayung Lencir, and Sahara Putri et al. (2015) showed a significant reduction in FoMO through CBT based group counseling at SMA Negeri 9 Pekanbaru. In a more local context,

Aslam et al. (2024) found through a case study at a junior high school in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, that FoMO was driven by negative thought patterns stemming from irrational perceptions of social media, and recommended cognitive restructuring as an appropriate intervention, although the technique was not empirically tested. Similarly, a study among junior high school students at SMPN 8 Makassar found that academic procrastination behavior decreased from the high to the low category following the application of cognitive restructuring techniques, with the technique proving significantly effective in reducing the behavior

However, all of these studies share three fundamental limitations. First, the study populations were limited to high school students or general university students, so the findings cannot be directly generalized to vocational high school students, who possess distinct psychosocial characteristics. Second, none of these studies explicitly linked the intervention to specific cognitive distortions that emerge in the context of social media use, such as “should” statements, emotional reasoning, and catastrophizing. Third, the implementation of interventions in these studies was not supported by structured and measurable session protocols, leaving procedural replicability and accountability weak.

These gaps in prior research form the basis of this study. Vocational high school students face distinct academic pressures due to the intensity of their vocational practice schedules, coupled with high reliance on social media as a space for social compensation a combination that logically increases vulnerability to FoMO, yet has never been the focus of specific interventions in the Indonesian guidance and counseling literature. This study aims to fill this gap with three key innovations: (1) targeting vocational high school students as a population that has long been neglected in FoMO intervention research; (2) designing and implementing a cognitive restructuring protocol tailored to the specific cognitive distortions in the social media behavior of vocational high school students; and (3) employing an experimental design with pre-post measurements to empirically and measurably test the intervention’s effects. Thus, this study aims to: (1) describe the profile of FoMO among vocational high school students in Makassar before and after the intervention; (2) describe the implementation of cognitive restructuring techniques; and (3) test the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on reducing FoMO among vocational high school students.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design, specifically a non-equivalent control group design with a pretest-posttest pattern. This design was chosen because it allows for testing the effectiveness of the intervention in a school setting where true randomization is not feasible. The study was conducted at a vocational high school in Makassar.

The study population comprised Grade XI students identified as having very high or high FoMO scores based on the initial administration of the FoMO scale. A total of 111 eligible students

were identified across five classes: XI TITL, XI TESH, XI TKR, XI TKJ, and XI DPIB. Sampling was conducted using proportional random sampling, yielding a final sample of 20 students, consistent with Roscoe (1975) recommendation of a minimum of 10–20 subjects for experimental research. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group ($n = 10$), which received group counseling with cognitive restructuring, and a control group ($n = 10$), which received group counseling without any specific technique.

The research instrument used the Fear of Missing Out scale developed by Przybylski et.al. (2013) with two main aspects: dissatisfaction with the psychological need for relatedness and dissatisfaction with the psychological need for self. The scale used a four point Likert response scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Of the initial 32 items, validity testing using Corrected Item Total Correlation (IBM SPSS v.23) yielded 28 valid items, with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.907, classified as very good (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Content validation was conducted by two expert validators from the field of guidance and counseling.

The intervention was conducted over seven sessions, utilizing six stages of cognitive restructuring techniques based on Cormier and Cormier (1985), a stage structure also adopted in recent Indonesian school counseling research (Magfirah et.al., 2025): (1) providing the rationale for the goals and an overview of the procedure; (2) analyzing the client's thoughts; (3) introducing and practicing coping thoughts; (4) shifting from negative thoughts to coping thoughts; (5) introduction and practice of positive reinforcement; and (6) homework and follow up. Each session lasted 45 minutes, facilitated by the researcher as a counselor in a group counseling format using a Service Implementation Plan (SIP) and Student Worksheets (SW).

Data analysis consists of two stages. First, descriptive statistical analysis using frequency distributions and percentages to describe FoMO levels before and after the intervention. Second, inferential statistical analysis using an independent samples t-test to test for differences in gain scores between the experimental and control groups. Prior to hypothesis testing, a normality test (Shapiro-Wilk, recommended for small sample sizes) and a homogeneity of variance test (Levene's Test) were conducted using IBM SPSS v.23 as prerequisites for parametric analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

FoMO Levels of the Experimental Group Before and After the Intervention

Before the intervention (pretest), all members of the experimental group ($n=10$) were in the high to very high FoMO category, with 3 respondents (30%) in the very high category (scores 96–124) and 7 respondents (70%) in the high category (scores 79–95). The average pretest score for the experimental group was 88.7. This condition reflects a tendency among students to intensely check social media during class hours, prefer to watch TikTok live streams rather than complete assignments, and experience anxiety when unable to access the internet.

After receiving seven sessions of cognitive restructuring intervention, significant changes occurred. The posttest showed that there were no longer any respondents in the very high category; only 1 respondent (10%) remained in the high category, while 4 respondents (40%) were in the moderate category, and 6 respondents (60%) had reached the low category. The average posttest score dropped to 60.3, indicating a substantial reduction in FoMO. The complete data is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Pretest and Posttest Descriptive Data of the Experimental Group

Interval	Category	Pretest		Posttest	
		F	P%	F	P%
96-124	Very High	3	30%	-	-
79-95	High	7	70%	-	-
62-78	Moderate	-	-	4	40%
45-61	Low	-	-	6	60%
28-44	Very Low	-	-	-	-
Jumlah		10	100%	10	100%

FoMO Levels of the Control Group Before and After the Intervention

In the control group that did not receive the intervention, the pretest results showed that 2 respondents (20%) were in the very high category, 5 respondents (50%) in the high category, and 3 respondents (30%) in the moderate category, with an average score of 84. In the posttest, the changes were not significant: 1 respondent (10%) in the very high category, 6 respondents (60%) in the high category, 2 respondents (20%) in the moderate category, and 1 respondent (10%) in the low category, with an average score of 80.6. The 3.4 point decrease in the average score in this control group did not indicate a clinically significant change. The complete data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Pretest and Posttest Descriptive Data of the Control Group

Interval	Category	Pretest		Posttest	
		F	P%	F	P%
96-124	Very High	2	20%	1	10%
79-95	High	5	50%	6	60%
62-78	Moderate	3	30%	2	20%
45-61	Low	-	-	1	10%
28-44	Very Low	-	-	-	-
Jumlah		10	100%	10	100%

Prerequisite Tests

The Shapiro-Wilk normality test yielded a significance value of 0.783 for the experimental group and 0.742 for the control group, both well above the critical value of 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed. The Levene's Test for homogeneity of variances yielded a p-value of $0.463 > 0.05$, indicating that the variances of the two groups are homogeneous. The fulfillment of these two prerequisites validates the use of the parametric independent samples t-test.

Hypothesis Testing: Independent Sample T-Test

Prior to hypothesis testing, the comparison of gain scores between the two groups is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Gain Score Comparison Between Experimental and Control Groups

Kelompok	Rata-rata Gain Score	Standar Deviasi
Eksperimen (n=10)	28,4	3,658
Kontrol (n=10)	3,4	2,914

Independent sample t-test results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Independent Sample T-Test Results

Levene's for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Lower	Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper
Hasil	Equal variances assumed	.563	.463	16.906	18	.000	25.000	1.479	21.893	28.107
	Equal variances not assumed			16.906	17.143	.000	25.000	1.479	21.882	28.118

Based on Table 4, the t-value is 16.906 with degrees of freedom (df) = 18 and a significance level (Sig., 2-tailed) = 0.000. Since the significance level of 0.000 is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. The mean difference in gain scores between the two groups is 25.000, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 21.893 to 28.107. These results statistically prove that the application of cognitive restructuring techniques has a significant effect on reducing Fear of Missing Out in social media use among students at SMK X Makassar.

DISCUSSION

FoMO Profile Among Students

The high level of FoMO among the entire experimental group sample prior to the intervention reflects negative thought patterns in students' daily lives. Psychologically, this condition is driven by cognitive distortions that lead students to interpret digital absence as a real social threat. The three most dominant forms of cognitive distortion identified in this study are "should statements" the belief that one must always follow trends to avoid being excluded; "emotional reasoning" drawing conclusions about reality solely from feelings, such as "I feel left out, so I must be left out"; and catastrophizing imagining disproportionate consequences when unable to access social media. These distortions reinforce one another and form maladaptive thought patterns that consistently generate anxiety and compulsive behavior toward social media.

Vocational high school students' vulnerability to this condition has specific structural roots. Unlike general high school students, vocational high school students face a double burden: on one hand, a packed schedule of vocational training that consumes cognitive energy, and on the other, a persistently high psychological need for social connection. This situation makes social media a space for psychological compensation where students fulfill social needs that are not met within

their vocational routines (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020). This combination explains why FoMO develops more intensely among vocational high school students compared to other adolescent groups, while also underscoring the urgency of interventions specifically designed for their characteristics.

Following the intervention, the profile of FoMO in the experimental group underwent significant changes. All participants experienced a decrease in severity, shifting from the previously high and very high categories to the moderate and low categories. This change was not merely a numerical decrease on the scale but reflected a genuine shift in how students interpreted their digital experiences. Students who previously automatically interpreted absence from social media as being left behind began, following the intervention, to critically evaluate such thoughts before responding to them emotionally. Conversely, the control group that did not receive the intervention showed no significant category changes, indicating that the reduction in FoMO in the experimental group was a direct result of the cognitive restructuring process, not merely due to maturation or external influences (Kurniawan et.al., 2023).

Implementation of Cognitive Restructuring in Group Counseling

The application of the six stages of cognitive restructuring according to Cormier and Cormier (1985) proceeded systematically over seven sessions, with each stage designed to target different cognitive aspects. The rationalization stage builds awareness that anxiety stemming from FoMO originates from how students interpret social media content, not from social media itself; this shift in perspective serves as the foundation for the entire subsequent change process. The automatic thoughts analysis stage is the most crucial point, where negative thoughts that have been operating subconsciously are externalized and critically examined. Resistance that emerges at this stage some participants view their negative thoughts as a “normal” response actually confirms how deeply these cognitive distortions are ingrained and how crucial the explicit identification process is (Beck, 2006). In the coping thought stage, participants actively replace negative thoughts with more adaptive and accurate alternatives, for example, changing “I’ll definitely fall behind if I don’t go online now” to “I can still enjoy my time without constantly checking social media.” The group counseling format reinforces this process through the mechanism of universality the awareness that other participants experience the same cognitive distortions which naturally reduces the intensity of negative thoughts and accelerates acceptance of new ways of thinking (Haghnejad Azar, 2025).

What distinguishes this study from previous research is the presence of a protocol that explicitly links each stage of the intervention to specific types of cognitive distortions that arise in the context of social media use. In other words, the restructuring process is not generic but is designed to address the negative thought patterns that have actually been identified among vocational high school students. This approach is important because the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring depends heavily on how personally relevant the intervention material is to participants the closer the examples of cognitive distortions discussed align with participants’ real life experiences, the stronger their cognitive motivation to make changes (Sofiannisa et.al., 2025). Assigning homework during the consolidation phase also serves as a consolidation mechanism: the newly formed adaptive thought patterns developed in the sessions need to be repeatedly practiced in real life contexts to truly replace the old, automatic thought patterns (Beck, 2006). Through a combination of systematic stage structures, the contextual relevance of the material, and

independent practice between sessions, the cognitive change process occurring in this study can proceed organically and meaningfully for each participant.

Effect of Cognitive Restructuring on FoMO Reduction

The effectiveness of cognitive restructuring techniques in reducing FoMO among students at Vocational High School X in Makassar can be explained through the core mechanism of CBT: the intervention targets the causal root of FoMO cognitive distortions rather than merely its symptoms. As long as the negative thought patterns underlying FoMO remain unchanged, compulsive social media behavior will continue to recur even if externally restricted. Cognitive restructuring works by dismantling and rebuilding students' interpretive schemas regarding social media stimuli, so that notifications or content that previously triggered anxiety are no longer automatically interpreted as threats (Beck, 2006). These cognitive changes then impact behavioral dimensions: students report improved ability to control the urge to check social media, are more selective in consuming content, and are able to set healthier usage limits.

These changes occur because cognitive restructuring effectively breaks the chain linking digital stimuli to anxiety responses. Before the intervention, this chain operated automatically and unconsciously: students viewed social media content, negative thoughts arose spontaneously, anxiety increased, the urge to keep monitoring social media intensified. After undergoing the restructuring process, students develop new metacognitive capacities the ability to catch negative thoughts before they trigger an emotional response, evaluate them rationally, and then choose a more adaptive response.

(Clark & Beck, 2010) promote It is this capacity that explains why the changes that occur are comprehensive: not only does the intensity of anxiety decrease, but patterns of behavior and the way students interpret their social lives as a whole also shift. These findings align with (Widadiyah & Zulfa, 2024) which demonstrate the effectiveness of CBT-based cognitive restructuring in reducing FoMO, while also providing a more specific contribution in the form of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of a structured protocol among vocational high school (SMK) students a group that has historically been underrepresented in the FoMO intervention literature in Indonesia. The limitations of this study include a relatively small sample size, a quasi experimental design without pure randomization, and the absence of a follow-up period, which makes the durability of long term effects uncertain; this becomes an important agenda for future research.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the cognitive restructuring technique implemented through group counseling is effective in reducing Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among vocational high school students. The intervention not only decreased students' FoMO levels but also promoted meaningful changes in the way they interpreted and responded to their experiences on social media. By helping students identify, challenge, and replace irrational thoughts with more rational and adaptive ones, the intervention contributed to healthier cognitive patterns, which were reflected in improved emotional regulation and more balanced behavioral responses. These findings indicate that addressing maladaptive thinking is a key mechanism for reducing FoMO among adolescents. Furthermore, the findings highlight the relevance of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) framework, particularly cognitive restructuring, as an evidence-based approach that can be integrated into school guidance and counseling services. As social media continues to shape adolescents' daily lives, school counselors need interventions that address not only observable

behaviors but also the underlying cognitive processes that maintain psychological difficulties. Therefore, this study provides empirical support for the use of cognitive restructuring in educational settings while contributing to the growing body of evidence on effective school-based interventions for promoting adolescent mental health in the digital era.

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