

The Effectiveness of the ABCDE Technique in Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy to Increase Self-Confidence of Victims of Verbal Bullying: Literature Review

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Abstract: Verbal bullying is a serious problem that affects an individual's psychological health and psychosocial development, especially in terms of self-confidence. Victims often internalize ridicule or insults as absolute truths, forming irrational thought patterns that trigger low self-esteem, anxiety, and withdrawal from social environments. This article reviews 10 nationally and internationally accredited literature published in the period 2020–2025 to examine the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in increasing the self-confidence of victims of verbal bullying. The results of the review show that REBT is able to change irrational beliefs into more logical, realistic, and adaptive rational ones. This cognitive restructuring process contributes to increased self-acceptance, positive emotions, and victims' courage in social interactions. The most influential stages in the ABCDE model are Disputation (D) and Effective new belief (E), as both help victims challenge negative thoughts and form new, healthier beliefs so that self-confidence can be restored. Further research suggestions include exploring the application of REBT in a group counseling format, assessing its long-term effectiveness through a longitudinal design, and integrating contextual factors such as culture, social support, and school environment, so that interventions for victims of verbal bullying can be more comprehensive and applicable.

Keywords: Self-Confidence, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Verbal Bullying

1 INTRODUCTION

In the world of education and adolescent social life, non-physical violence such as bullying, especially verbal bullying, remains a serious problem. Indonesia itself is among the top five of 78 countries with the highest number of bullying victims (Theodora et al., 2023), where 84% of children aged 12-17 have experienced violence at school (Ayuningbudi & Hanami, 2023). Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) shows that most cases of bullying occur in schools, with a significant increase from 2011 to 2016 (Chodijah, 2019; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Tobing & Lestari, 2021). Verbal bullying is a form of psychological attack carried out through words, such as ridicule, insults, slander, threats, the use of harsh or taboo words, and the spreading of derogatory gossip (Chodijah, 2019; Maghfiroh & Sugito, 2021; Mahriza et al., 2020; Makarova et al., 2020; Najah et al., 2022; Nurfaniza & Margaret, 2024; Rigby, 2007; Subroto, 2021). This behavior is repetitive and occurs in an unbalanced relationship, causing serious emotional and psychological effects on the victim (Chodijah, 2019; Najah et al., 2022; Nurfaniza & Margaret, 2024; Rigby, 2007).

A person becomes a target of bullying because of external differences such as physical appearance, culture, or achievements, as well as internal characteristics such as low self-confidence or provocative behavior (Murphy et al., 2009). Psychological factors such as emotional expression and low self-esteem also influence the risk of becoming a victim (Jamsai & Boonnak, 2023). The impact of verbal bullying on the victim's psychology includes reduced self-confidence, characterized by withdrawn behavior, low self-esteem, a tendency to remain silent, and a loss of confidence in one's own abilities (Maulidia, 2023; Rahmah & Purwoko, 2024; Widya Utami Lubis, 2023). This is also supported by other findings stating that psychological aspects such as self-confidence are the most affected by verbal bullying (Ellis et al., 1997; Freeman, n.d.). This condition shows that victims of verbal bullying experience erroneous or irrational thinking patterns that reinforce their low self-esteem.

An effective solution in dealing with the impact of bullying, especially verbal bullying, is through an interdisciplinary approach combined with psychological services such as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) (Idsoe et al., 2021; Indrasari et al., 2024). Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) counseling services are a form of therapy that can help change an individual's irrational beliefs into rational beliefs that impact their emotions and behavior (Indrasari et al., 2024). This approach teaches individuals to understand the role of cognition in emotional disorders, accept criticism, and the consequences of their behavior (Ikbal & Nurjannah, 2016; Wardani & Trisnani, 2022). Theoretically, the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) lies in the basic assumption that emotional disorders are not solely caused by external events (e.g., ridicule or insults), but rather by individuals' irrational interpretations of these events. Ellis asserts that, "people are not disturbed by things, but by the views which they take of *them*" (Ellis et al., 1997, p. 5). This means that an individual's emotional response is largely determined by their way of thinking, not by the event itself. Victims of verbal bullying often interpret ridicule as absolute truth, such as beliefs *that* "I am stupid," "I am useless," or "everyone hates me." Such irrational beliefs reinforce low self-confidence, cause anxiety, and encourage individuals to withdraw from their social environment (Mardiah, 2023; Rahmah & Purwoko, 2024). Therefore, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is relevant as an intervention because it targets the root cause of the problem, which is the irrational beliefs underlying the decline in self-confidence in victims of verbal bullying.

In a previous study conducted by Ainun Mardiah (2023) on increasing the self-confidence of students who are victims of bullying through individual counseling using the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach with homework assignment techniques, the study showed that REBT is effective in helping victims of bullying increase their self-confidence. Based on these findings, this study attempts to present a new use of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) by using the ABCDE technique to treat victims of verbal bullying. The ABCDE technique was chosen because it is the core of REBT, which emphasizes the identification of the relationship between A (activating event), B (beliefs), and C (consequences, both emotional and behavioral), Disputation (the process of challenging irrational beliefs), and Effect (the formation of new, more rational beliefs), so that it is expected to help victims of verbal bullying challenge their irrational thoughts and form more rational beliefs. This study also describes a framework for analyzing the psychological impact of verbal bullying and the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) interventions in increasing victims' self-confidence. This research is compiled in the form of a literature study by reviewing various previous research sources relevant to the application of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in dealing with the decline in self-confidence of victims of verbal bullying that have been accredited by Sinta and Scopus. The data collection methods and analysis techniques are described in detail in the Materials and Methods section, while the results of the literature synthesis and discussion of the main findings will be presented in the Results and Discussion section.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method used in this study was a systematic literature review (SLR) to obtain data relevant to the topic discussed. SLR is a way of synthesizing scientific evidence to answer specific research questions transparently and reproducibly, including all published evidence on a topic and assessing the quality of existing evidence (Lame, 2019). The SLR approach involves careful evaluation and identification of journals to comply with specific rules or guidelines in each process that focuses on identifying and analyzing relevant scientific literature to understand existing knowledge in a particular domain (Akmal et al., 2025). The data sources in this study were obtained from two stages, as follows:

1. The first stage involved obtaining 37 articles through searches on several databases such as Google Scholar, SINTA, Scopus, and Scimago using the keywords Verbal Bullying, Self Confidence, and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in the time span of 2019–2025.
2. The second stage involved filtering articles based on specific criteria using the keywords "Effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in Increasing Self-Confidence in Victims of Verbal Bullying" within the time span of 2020–2025, which resulted in 10 articles.

All analyzed articles were national and international journals accredited by both SINTA and Scopus, ensuring their scientific quality, relevance, and currency.

3 RESULTS

Based on the results of literature screening using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, a number of articles relevant to the research topic were obtained after going through the stages of identification, selection, and in-depth analysis. Of the total articles found in the initial database, only 10 articles met the inclusion criteria, such as discussing

the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) counseling in increasing self-confidence in victims of bullying.

Table 1.1 Literature Review

Article Title	Author Name; Publication Year	Method	Participants	Results
Enhancing the Self-Confidence of Bullying Victims Through Individual Counseling Using Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy Homework Techniques for Seventh Grade Students at SMP Negeri 1 Amuntai Selatan in the First Semester of 2022/2023	Mardiah. 2023	Type of Research: Quantitative Data Collection: Interviews and Observations Data Collection Instruments: Questionnaires and Document Studies	Research Subjects: 8 students from class VII A of SMPN 1 Amuntai Selatan.	There is a difference in the level of self-confidence of bullying victims before and after receiving REBT counseling. REBT counseling can increase the level of self-confidence of bullying victims.
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) to Reduce Anxiety in Bullying Victims Among Adolescents	Shah. 2020	Type and Design of Research: Quantitative and qualitative Data were analyzed quantitatively using a questionnaire on the anxiety of bullying victims. Qualitative analysis was performed on data obtained from interviews, observations, and follow-ups.	The research subjects were 28 seventh-grade students at the Muhammadiyah Al Mujahidin Islamic Boarding School in Gunungkidul during the 2017-2018 academic year.	The positive effects of group counseling using the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach can increase self-confidence.
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) Counseling to Improve Teenagers' Self-Confidence	Rahmawati . 2022	Type of research: descriptive qualitative Data Analysis: Interviews, Observations, and Documentation	Research Subject: 1 person with the initials NH	The research results indicate that the individual's self-confidence increased after receiving Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) counseling.

Individual Counseling Based on REBT to Address Verbal Bullying Behavior	Permana et al., 2025	Research Type: Qualitative with participatory observation, in-depth interviews with three students who were victims of bullying and one guidance counselor, as well as documentation in the form of counseling protocols and counseling record cards. Data Analysis: transferability testing, reliability testing, and confirmation testing.	Research Population: 3 students	This study shows that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) counseling is effective in treating students who are victims of verbal bullying at SMP Negeri 9 Cirebon with its positive effect in increasing self-confidence.
Emotional Regulation in Bullying Victims Through the REBT Approach	Febriani et al., 2025	Research Type: Qualitative with a descriptive method. Data used: Primary data and secondary data. Primary data sources: Students who were victims of bullying, classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and classmates of bullying victims. Secondary data sources: Documents and notes from interviews with counselors, classroom teachers, guidance counselors, classmates, archival sources, personal documents, and official documents, data obtained from archives owned by SMP Negeri 18 Pontianak, such as student profiles. Analysis techniques: Problem identification, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment/assistance, evaluation, and follow-up.	The research subjects were students who were victims of bullying.	The application of REBT counseling on the emotional regulation of students who are victims of bullying resulted in visible changes in their responses to bullying, positive changes in perspective, and improvements in the subjects' skills in managing their emotions, thereby boosting their self-confidence and developing a positive perspective of themselves and their environment.
The Effect of Group Counseling Using the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) Approach on Improving Student Learning Motivation	Dinayanti & Daulay. 2024	Type of Research: Quantitative Design: Non-Equivalent Control Group Design (quasi-experimental) Instruments: Learning motivation questionnaire (Likert scale) Data Analysis: Normality Test, Homogeneity Test, and Independent Samples t-Test using SPSS 20.	Total population: 50 ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 17 Medan Sample: 16 students (8 experimental groups, 8 control groups)	REBT was proven to significantly increase students' self-confidence.

The Effectiveness of Group Counseling Using the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) Approach to Improve Student Self-Confidence at SMPN 33 Bekasi	Apriyanto & Asni. 2024	A quantitative approach with a pre-experimental method using a single group pre-test and post-test design. Data analysis techniques used the Wilcoxon test, and the instrument used was a Likert scale questionnaire to measure students' self-confidence before and after the intervention.	The population reached was class VIII.3 of SMPN 33 Bekasi, consisting of 43 students. From this population, 10 students were selected as research samples using purposive sampling techniques, selected based on certain criteria that indicated low self-confidence levels.	REBT was effective in increasing students' self-confidence. After attending counseling sessions, students became more confident in their abilities, more courageous in expressing their opinions, and showed positive changes in their attitudes and daily behavior at school.
Individual Counseling Using Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in Improving Self-Confidence in Adolescent Victims of Bullying	Agusliana et al. 2024	Type of Research: Qualitative Method: Case Study Data Collection Techniques: Interviews, Observations, Documentation Analysis Model: Miles & Huberman (data reduction, data presentation, verification/conclusion)	One subject (a teenage girl with the initial "T") Location: Tulung Selapan Village Characteristics: Victim of verbal bullying due to obesity (weight 80 kg, height 165 cm, BMI 29.6) Initial symptoms: low self-esteem, shy about interacting, avoids social environments.	REBT is effective in boosting the self-confidence of adolescent victims of verbal bullying due to obesity
REBT Individual Counseling Approach: Improving the Academic Performance of Bullying Victims	Taufik & Prasetyant o. 2025	Type: Qualitative Method: Case Study Data Collection Techniques: Observation, Interviews, Documentation Data Analysis: Miles & Huberman Model (data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing)	1 student (initials VL, grade XI) School: State Senior High School 1 Muncar, Banyuwangi Characteristics: victim of bullying, experiencing social anxiety, withdrawal, and decreased motivation to learn	REBT is effective in boosting the self-confidence of students who are victims of bullying.
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) Counseling Approach with Cognitive Debate Techniques to Improve the Self-Confidence of Grade VII.F Students at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar	Tari et al. 2020	Data collection method in the form of a self-confidence questionnaire. The data analysis technique used was percentage analysis, where after all responses were collected, they were tabulated.	The sample in this study consisted of 40 students at SMPN 12 Denpasar.	The results show that the percentage score of seventh-grade students in class VII F increased after undergoing <i>Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy</i> (REBT) counseling.

4 DISCUSSION

Based on a review of previous studies, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) has been proven effective in increasing self-confidence in individuals who are victims of verbal bullying. A number of studies support the effectiveness of REBT in increasing the self-confidence of victims of verbal bullying. Mardiah (2023) found that students who were initially passive, closed off, and felt unworthy of friendship, after undergoing REBT counseling began to dare to speak, ask questions to teachers, and interact with peers. Similar results were confirmed by Agusliana (2024), who showed that victims of obesity bullying were able to think more positively and stop comparing themselves to others after undergoing four sessions of REBT counseling. Research by Apriyanto and Asni (2024) also confirmed that REBT-based group counseling significantly increased the self-confidence of junior high school students, as evidenced by changes in behavior that were more open and confident. In addition, Rahmawati (2022) shows that the use of cognitive disputation, rational analysis, and homework assignment techniques in REBT can help adolescents overcome fear and doubt, making them more confident in their abilities. Verbal bullying generally causes psychological effects such as low self-confidence, withdrawal from social environments, and irrational beliefs that they are worthless or deserve to be shunned.

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), developed by Albert Ellis (1997), is based on the assumption that emotional disturbances do not arise directly from events experienced by individuals, but rather from beliefs formed in response to those events. According to Ellis (1997), the core of REBT is to challenge irrational thoughts through the ABCDE model so that individuals can form new, more rational beliefs. The ABCDE technique in Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is the main framework that explains how this intervention is effective in increasing self-confidence in victims of verbal bullying. In stage A (Activating Event), victims experience triggering events in the form of ridicule, insults, or derogatory comments from peers. These events usually give rise to negative interpretations that then affect the victim's psychological condition. Stage B (Beliefs) shows that victims often internalize these taunts into irrational beliefs, such as "I am worthless," "I deserve to be mocked," or "I am incapable." It is these beliefs that actually lower self-confidence, not the taunts themselves.

Furthermore, in stage C (Consequences), these irrational beliefs lead to consequences such as low self-esteem, shame, social anxiety, and even withdrawal from school and social environments. This condition is in line with the findings of Mardiah (2023), who found that victims of verbal bullying tend to be passive, withdrawn, and feel unworthy of associating with their peers. In stage D (Disputation), the counselor challenges irrational beliefs through specific methods, such as cognitive disputation and rational analysis. For example, victims are asked to question: "Is it true that my self-esteem is determined by other people's ridicule?" or "Do all my weaknesses mean that I have no strengths?" Through this disputation process, victims are trained to find evidence that refutes their irrational beliefs. The final stage, E (Effect), is the result of cognitive restructuring. Victims begin to build more adaptive rational beliefs, such as "my self-esteem is not determined by other people's words" or "I have abilities that I can develop even though I have been ridiculed." This change has a direct impact on increasing self-confidence. Agusliana's (2024) research proves that after participating in four sessions of ABCDE-based REBT counseling, victims of obesity bullying began to think positively and stopped comparing themselves to others. Similar results were also found by Rahmawati (2022), who found that the use of homework assignment techniques in ABCDE made teenagers more courageous in expressing their ideas and confident in their abilities.

Thus, the ABCDE technique in REBT systematically works to change the way victims of verbal bullying think from irrational to rational. This process helps victims realize that teasing does not determine their self-worth, trains them to reject negative beliefs, and ultimately rebuilds their lost self-confidence. Therefore, it can be asserted that the ABCDE technique is central to the effectiveness of REBT in increasing self-confidence in victims of verbal bullying, as it addresses the root of the problem, namely irrational beliefs that undermine self-esteem.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) has been proven effective as a counseling approach to deal with the effects of verbal bullying, particularly decreased self-confidence. This effectiveness lies in its ability to identify and modify irrational beliefs formed as a result of ridicule or insults, then replace them with healthier, rational beliefs. Through cognitive restructuring, victims learn that the negative behavior of others does not reflect their self-worth. This prevents the internalization of negative self-talk and allows victims to rebuild a more positive, realistic, and adaptive self-concept.

Specifically, the Disputation (D) and Effective new belief (E) stages in the ABCDE model are key to increasing the self-confidence of victims of verbal bullying. The disputation process challenges false beliefs such as "I am worthless because I am teased" and replaces them with rational beliefs such as "other people's teasing does not determine my self-worth."

When internalized, these new beliefs generate positive emotions, increase self-confidence, and strengthen the victim's courage to re-engage in social interactions. Thus, REBT not only reduces emotional distress but also serves as a comprehensive strategy to strengthen self-confidence and help victims of verbal bullying rise to meet psychosocial challenges.

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