# Reality Group Counseling for Indonesian-Malaysian Muslim Students with Problematic Internet Use: Is it Effective? If So, How Does It Work?

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**Abstract**

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) is one of the factors that influence mental health and psychosocial issues, particularly for students. However, limited research when it comes to such specificities as Muslim students. This research was designed to examine the effectiveness of reality group counseling in reducing the level of PIU on Muslim students. A quantitative approach with quasi-experiment pretest-posttest control group design was administered to examine the impact of reality group counseling on PIU. Twenty-eight Muslim students (14 junior and 14 high school students), from Indonesia and Malaysia, were participated in the study. Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS2) was employed to measure the PIU and was analyzed using mixed ANOVA. The results showed that reality group counseling was significantly reduced the PIU level of participants in both countries. Thus, it can be concluded that reality group counseling should be implemented to treat Muslim students with a high level of PIU. The research findings and limitations are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

The use of the internet is increasingly widespread in all areas of life, especially among young people around the world. As well as Malaysia and Indonesia which are known as countries with a majority Muslim population in Southeast Asia (Ridho et al., 2019). Just like any other country, the internet has become an important part of daily lives and has a high impact on education in particular (Ching et al., 2017). Internet has been transformed into becoming vital part of daily life and it inevitable that its users come from various group, with no exception to students. They use internet to support their academic and non-academic activities (Anderson et al., 2016).

The Internet is considered by all Muslims to reflect Western concerns and approaches. In the Islamic world, you risk losing your identity in the face of the amazing amount of Western material transmitted over the Internet. Some religious institutions consider the Internet to be a Western tool proposed to eradicate the standard reputation of Islam. Demonstrations of free conversation made possible by the Internet realize what is seen by religious authorities as undermining the multi-level structure of ethical and moral

characteristics that are at the core of traditional religions. Although the Internet is still in its infancy as a major medium, it is important that the analysis of media contributions influences the various potential impacts on the use of this new type of communication (Nadeem et al., 2019).

Globally, the number internet users have experienced dramatic growth reaching 76% all over the world (Poushter, 2016) and it is estimated that this growth will keep increasing every year. Even in Indonesia, kids and teenagers internet users reach 50% (APJII, 2019). As a matter of fact, not only in Indonesia, the prevalence of internet users in neighboring country such as Malaysia has also experienced the same phenomena that children aged 6-12 years old has been categorized as moderate users while teenagers aged 12-18 years old is categorized as at risk users (Kapahi et al., 2013). This is in line with research conducted by Khodabakhsh et al. (2020) on students in Malaysia which stated that younger students used the Internet more than older people. This is because younger students find the Internet more entertaining, interesting, interactive, and satisfying which leads them to become addicted to the internet.

There are always two sides to every coin regarding the issue with internet users, positive side and negative side. As long as it is used for relevant purpose, internet will be very useful for students to support their academic and non-academic potential. Based on research conducted by Aqil & Ahmad (2011) on Muslim students states that the Internet is a good source of information and a good channel for accessing online information sources to research scholars. On the other side, besides for the reason dealing with improving skill and self-development, the internet can also bring negative impact for them. In addition, the overuse of internet without clear purpose will only worsen the bad impact either personally, academically, cognitively or socially. Internet overuse which brings negative impact to an individual development is called problematic internet use or shortened into PIU. This problem in using internet was also called excessive internet use, compulsive internet use or internet dependence (Kuss & Griffiths, 2014; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Odaci & Çelik, 2016).

PIU is one of the factors that influence mental and psychosocial problems. Based on research conducted by Shadzi et al. (2020) students with PIU when compared to non-PIU students can develop symptoms of depression about 2.5 times higher. PIU can also increase the risk of anxiety and stress, especially in adolescents and young adults. Problems caused by PIU are such as disturbed social relationship, low level of social happiness (Caplan et al., 2009), disturbed sleep pattern (Belanger et al., 2011; Lam, 2014), depression (Ivezaj et al., 2017), the presence of problem related to psychological health such as social anxiety, fear (Issa & Isaias, 2016; Ivezaj et al., 2017), or even substance abuse behavior (Lee et al., 2013; Rahmawati, 2018).

Moreover, other impacts particularly in academic life are disturbed aspects of multiple intelligences such as degrading interpersonal and intrapersonal ability and decreasing face to face social interaction (Caplan, 2010; Kuss & Griffiths, 2014; Young & De Abreu, 2017), decreasing level of motivation to work and to study (Ravizza et al., 2014), and also decreasing students' level of motivation to achieve something (Choi et al., 2011). Furthermore, the results of a study conducted in Pakistan show that when using the internet, students sometimes neglect religious obligations which explain the anti-religious aspect in line with the increasing effect of excessive internet use. This is different for rural students as there is no internet facility in most rural areas of the country (Nadeem et al., 2019). In addition, understanding religious culture will have a huge impact on Muslim students who intend to clarify the assessment of various internet cultures. With the rise of religious fundamentalism, comes a response to globalization and innovation (Campbell, 2005; Nadeem et al., 2019).

Among college students, Nadeem et al. (2019) found that intrinsic religious orientation was a protective factor against compulsive Internet use, whereas those who had undergone deconversion showed higher problematic use. Although these associations are fairly

consistent, Ekşi and iftçi (2017) did not find a significant relationship between students' level of belief and problematic Internet use. Furthermore, there have been many studies conducted to reduce the level of internet addiction on students (Firouzkouhi et al., 2021; Han et al., 2020; Tasiye et al., 2021), but there has been no previous research that focuses on individual identification of Muslims and internet addiction.

According to the aforementioned explanation, intervention is necessary in order to facilitate Muslim students experiencing PIU to be more responsible to their role as students to develop their academic and non-academic potential. Thus, intervention given is expected to be able to accommodate students' intelligence level to counter internet abuse which causes students to neglect their responsibility. One of the interventions that focus on regain an individual responsibility is reality counseling in group setting. Reality counseling aims to make students able to more responsible for their choice without disturbing other people's rights as well as to help them accept reality in fulfilling their need, without denying it (Fuller & Fuller, 1982; Glasser, 2015). In addition, the application of group setting aims to provide dynamic situation among the individuals in order to interact each other and exchange experiences so that each member's will be more open minded (Berg et al., 2018; Corey, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to test the effectiveness reality group counseling especially in decreasing the tendency of problematic internet use in high school Muslim students (junior and senior high school) in Indonesia and Malaysia.

**Rationale of the Current Study**

This study is different from previous studies because it specifically focusing to decrease the Muslim student's problematic internet use by examining the effectiveness of group counseling with a reality approach. The use of reality counseling carried out with group services provides the members of the group get opportunities to solve their problems through interaction with other members helped by a counselor (Sutanti et al., 2018).

Based on the research conducted by Saletti et al. (2021), who examined meta-analysis of interventions that have been used to deal with problems of internet use. Efforts to prevent PIU must continue to be carefully designed and theoretically informed, use evidence-based and multiple strategies to address identified risks and protective factors, and engage relevant stakeholders for their implementation, following the prevention guidelines established for the field of psychology (APA, 2014). In addition, careful attention should be placed on the conceptualization and selection of the behaviors and assessment tools used to measure outcomes, as they are critical to guiding interventions and measuring their effectiveness.

Research conducted by Herianto & Darminto (2019) that tested the effectiveness of reality group counseling to reduce the habit of using cell phones during the learning process showed that reality group counseling was effective to use. However, this study only examines the use of cellphones during the teaching and learning process, not specifically leading to excessive and problematic internet use. According to Ismail & Zawahreh (2017), the use of technology and the Internet, in particular, is based on individual control. The decision to use a particular website, switch to another site, or log out is a personal decision related to internal and individual control. It is in line with Madukwe et al. (2016) stated that the purpose of reality counseling is to help counselees have greater control over their own lives and be able to make better choices.

**Hypotheses**

1. Reality group counseling is effective in decreasing the level of problematic internet use of Muslim students.
2. There is an interaction effect on the effectiveness of reality group counseling to decreasing the level of problematic internet use of Muslim students.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This experimental study which was conducted in two countries (Indonesia-Malaysia. This research is quantitative in nature, and uses a quasi-experimental design. The experimental design used was a pre-post control group design involving 2 groups, namely the experimental group and the control group. Counseling activities are carried out face to face.

### Participants

The participants of the research were 56 students divided into two education levels. 28 Indonesian students consisted of 14 Muslim students of junior high school (5 male and 9 female students) and 14 Muslim students of senior high school (6 male and 8 female students) while in Malaysia, 28 students consisted of 14 students of junior high school (3 male and 11 female students) and 14 students of senior high school (6 male and 8 female). The participants were selected using purposive sampling technique with inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were students who had problematic internet use categorized as high and very high and Muslim.

### Instrument

Research data were collected using Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS2) instrument (Caplan, 2010), which had been adapted into Indonesian and Malaysian language with 0.9 reliability level (chronbach' alpha). GPIUS2 consisted of 15 items of questions with 5 sub indicators consisting of preferences of online social interaction (POSI), excessive internet use, preoccupation cognitive, mood regulation, and negative outcome. This instrument has 7 answer choices in likert scale from 1-7 (1= *"strongly disagree"* to 7= *"strongly agree"*). In general, the measurement score obtained was classified into five categories as follows: normal ($\leq 21$), light ($\leq 42$), moderate ($\leq 63$), high ($\leq 84$), and very high ($\leq 105$).

### Procedures

There are several steps taken, the study was performed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (WMA, 2013). First, the researcher gave a pretest to determine the level of problematic internet use of students before the intervention. Second, the researcher gives informed consent to be read, understood, and signed which contains the rights, obligations and risks that may occur during the research process to the subject. Third, providing 6 sessions of reality group counseling interventions with 2x40 minutes allotment for each session. The group leader several authors both in Indonesia and Malaysia who also a professional counselor in guidance and counseling able to provide counseling services using a reality approach. Next, the experimental group will be given group counseling with a reality approach, while the control group will be given treatment as usual (TAU). Fourth, the provision of a post-test to see changes in the level of problematic internet use of students.

### Data Analysis

Before testing the hypothesis, the normality test is carried out. Research data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and mixed design ANAVA using SPSS 23 software.

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Table 1. Demographic Data and the Comparison of Research Subjects' Mean

**Indonesia**

| Group | Experiment T1 M | SD | T2 M | SD | Control T1 M | SD | T2 M | SD | Age | Sex Male(%) | Female(%) | PIU Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JHS | 71.28 | 9.70 | 62.71 | 8.36 | 76.57 | 6.98 | 69.57 | 4.79 | 15-16 | 5(.09) | 9(.16) | High |
| MD | 8.72* | | | | 6.71* | | | | | | | |
| SE | 3.9 | | | | 3.95 | | | | | | | |
| Sig. | .03 | | | | .00 | | | | | | | |
| SHS | 73.42 | 9.18 | 59.00 | 6.42 | 69.00 | 3.56 | 64.57 | 1.27 | 15-16 | 6(.11) | 8(.14) | High |
| MD | 13.89* | | | | 4.69 | | | | | | | |
| SE | 3.96 | | | | 3.74 | | | | | | | |
| Sig. | .00 | | | | .22 | | | | | | | |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | 11(.20) | 17(.30) | |
| Sig. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Malaysia**

| Group | Experiment T1 M | SD | T2 M | SD | Control T1 M | SD | T2 M | SD | Age | Sex Male(%) | Female(%) | PIU Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JHS | 79.57 | 7.25 | 62.43 | 8.97 | 83.00 | 10.26 | 68.43 | 16.57 | 14-15 | 3(.04) | 11(.20) | High |
| MD | 18.11* | | | | 14.28* | | | | | | | |
| SE | 3.93 | | | | 3.95 | | | | | | | |
| Sig. | .00 | | | | .00 | | | | | | | |
| SHS | 66.29 | 7.65 | 52.71 | 8.58 | 65.71 | 4.61 | 66.43 | 10.64 | 15-16 | 6(.11) | 8(.14) | High |
| MD | 13.44* | | | | -.843 | | | | | | | |
| SE | 3.93 | | | | .91 | | | | | | | |
| Sig. | .00 | | | | .83 | | | | | | | |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | 9(.16) | 19(.34) | |
| Sig. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Note. JHS= Junior high school, SHS = Senior high school, M = Mean, MD = Mean difference (T1-T2), SD = Standard Deviation, SE = Standard Error, L = Male, P = Female

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of descriptive data and analysis of the research, which are show in table 1. Demographic data of research subjects in general can be seen in table 1. The characteristics of total student samples (n = 56) which became the participants of this study was 20 male students (36%) and 36 female students (64%) from two different education levels (junior high school and senior high school) in Indonesia and Malaysia. In general, students becoming participants in this study were aged 15 years old and the majority of them were female. Overall, these students had been identified as having PIU categorized as high.

Table 1 also shows that all experiment groups in all levels, either in Indonesia or Malaysia, experienced a significant decrease in PIU level ($MD_{(JHS\ IDN)}$ = 8.72, $MD_{(SHS\ IDN)}$ = 13.89, $MD_{(JHS\ MYS)}$ =18.11, $MD_{(SHS\ MYS)}$ = 13.44, p < .05). Meanwhile, the control group in each level in both countries shows different result. In this group, only two groups experiencing a significant decrease. However, the decrease was not as high as experiment group ($MD_{(JHS\ IDN)}$ = 6.71*, $MD_{(JHS\ MYS)}$ = 14.28, p < .05; $MD_{(SHS\ IDN)}$ = 4.69, $MD_{(SHS\ MYS)}$ = -.843, p > .05). This different result indicates that the practice of Reality group counseling was statistically effective in reducing the level of PIU experienced by the students. This finding is supported by the result of mixed anava analysis (between the subjects) in table 2 showing that there is difference between experiment and control group (F = 4.65, p < .05).

The result of the comparison of the mean in table 1 in general is strengthened by the elaboration of mixed anava analysis result (within subjects) in table 2. Mixed anova test in table 2 explains in detail how the relationship between repetitive measurement (T1-T2) with

The data in table 2 shows that there is no significant decrease in PIU level from pre-test to post-test (T1-T2) if seen from age, sex, education level, and country aspect (F = .00, 1.08, 1.07, 1.20, p > .05, respectively). By referring to table 1, the result of mixed anava indicates that Reality group counseling given to students is able to reduce students' PIU level regardless their age, sex, education level, or home country (table 1). This indication is also supported by the result of another mixed anava analysis from within subject aspect which shows that interaction between repetitive measurement with research group and countries, either by including education level or not is not significant F = .01, 1.13, p > .05, respectively).

A contrast interaction is shown by significant relation between repetitive measurement (T1-T2) and groups, either by including education level or not (F = 4.57, 6.40, p < .05, respectively). This statistical result shows that the change from pre-test to post-test from each student in both countries, either in junior high level or senior high level, when seen from research groups (experiment and control) is significantly different. The mean of students' PIU level of experiment group (either in junior high level or senior high level) overall shows a more significant decrease compared to that of control group (table 1).

In addition, the decrease of PIU level in each student seen from education level and countries (without regarding to experiment or control group) shows significant difference in

Table 2. Analysis of Mixed Anava

| Effect | Time | Within Subject | | | Between Subject | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Df | Sig. | F | df | Sig. |
| Time*Age | T1–T2 | .00 | 1 | .96 | .15 | 1 | .70 |
| Time*Sex | T1–T2 | 1.08 | 1 | .30 | .20 | 1 | .66 |
| Time*Group | T1–T2 | 4.57* | 1 | .04 | 4.65* | 1 | .04 |
| Time*Edu Level | T1–T2 | 1.07 | 1 | .31 | 5.97* | 1 | .02 |
| Time*Nation | T1–T2 | 1.20 | 1 | .28 | .022 | 1 | .88 |
| Time*Group*Edu Level | T1–T2 | 6.40* | 1 | .02 | .192 | 1 | .66 |
| Time*Group*Nation | T1–T2 | .01 | 1 | .94 | .239 | 1 | .63 |
| Time*Edu Level*Nation | T1–T2 | 5.23* | 1 | .03 | 2.99 | 1 | .09 |
| Time*Group*Edu Level*Nation | T1–T2 | 1.13 | 1 | .29 | 1.03 | 1 | .32 |

the decrease (F =5.23, p < .05). Seen from the result of mean differences in table 1, the statistical result indicates that there is different focus on the decrease of PIU level in each education level. Senior high school level of education in both countries has on the average bigger decrease than the average decrease in junior high school level (Table 1). This result is also supported by between subject analysis showing that there is difference between the both education level. (F = 5.97, p < .05).

**Discussion**

Two main findings have been observed in this study. First, reality counseling in a group setting was proven to be able to reduce the level of problematic internet use of students. Second, there is an interaction effect between junior high school and high school students, which is more dominant seen in high school students. In Relation to the first finding, through the application of Reality group counseling, the students are encouraged to fulfill their basic needs without neglecting the rules, responsibilities or their real condition (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016; Corey, 2013). Furthermore, SAMI$^2$C$^3$ mechanism applied in Reality group counseling makes the students able to choose a new behavior that is in accordance to their ability so that they do not feel forced or burdened (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016; Corey, 2012). Apart from choosing a new behavior, Reality counseling in group setting also encourages students to improve their self-evaluation, thus, they can see their self-capability (Wubbolding, 2017). Reality group counseling also focuses on commitment which will ease students to optimize the fulfillment of new behavior (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016; Kim, 2008). In reality counseling, basically, all behaviors performed voluntarily will result in satisfaction and will be more effective (Glasser, 2011; Wubbolding, 2017). These factors make Reality group counseling accepted by all of the students, particularly the Muslim students in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Different result between these two levels occurs because senior high school students are relatively on the phase of entering psychological maturity. This is regarding to the fact that an individual grows from a kid into teenager, and as they grow older, they become more stable (Del Piero et al., 2016). Kuss et al. (2013) reported that younger students tend to be easily distracted during the process of their identity formation, self-reality formation, interpretation, and building close relationship in real world. This indicates that younger students has lower ability to cope and thus make internet an escape from their problem (Guglielmucci et al., 2017).

Both Muslim students in Indonesia and Malaysia may suffer from PIU because basically they try to fulfill their basic need of academic accomplishment, friendship, pleasure, freedom, or even lifestyle through internet (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016; Corey, 2013). Ironically, even when they are accessing the internet, they sometimes forget their obligations as a Muslim (Nadeem et al., 2019). The fulfillment of those needs does not fully concern rule aspects (in terms of norms or law), responsibility, and their real condition (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016; Corey, 2013). The portion of the need fulfillment, in fact, tends to lead merely on pleasure so that it makes them addicted and ignore their tasks and responsibilities as students, either in doing their homework or studying (Ma, 2011). The students who are at first intended to do positive internet activities become distracted to use the internet for such a long duration of time. This brings negative impacts to their real life (Guglielmucci et al., 2017; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Rachmayani, 2017).

Some other findings show that theoretically, the decrease of students' PIU level is influenced by such aspects as self-control and self-management in the students' self. As reported by previous studies, PIU correlates negatively to self-control (Mei et al., 2016) and Self-control management (Akın et al., 2015). When these two variables increase, PIU experienced by an individual will decrease. This is further supported by research conducted by Omar (2020) which states that therapists can provide reality therapy-based group

counseling that allows internet addicted clients to recognize that they may have allowed themselves to choose to become addicted to internet use in unhealthy ways and that they are responsible for mental disorders or psychiatric disorders that arise through internet use that are a consequence of spending long hours online. The results of previous studies show the reality of therapy-based group counseling which shows a decrease in the level of internet dependence among students and an increase in their actual level of life satisfaction Odacı & Çelik (2017).

### Limitations and Suggestion

Reality group counseling is proven to be able to decrease students' PIU level in high school levels in Indonesia and Malaysia. The application of Reality group counseling will be more effective if given to an individual who has had psychological maturity and a better and mature way of thinking than to an individual who has not been stable because, in Reality group counseling, there is a concept of behavior choices selecting with SAMIC3 that requires commitment and maturity of all aspects in an individual self. In addition, theoretically, there is self-control and self-control management roles in the shaping of the new behavior. Therefore, further research related to the influence of Reality group counseling mediated by self-control and self-control management is necessary.

Regarding the research design used, the method of determining the research subject group by purposive sampling does not really guarantee the representation of the research population and not using repeated measurements to see the effect of the intervention over a certain period of time. Therefore, futher research can use different types of research analysis, to expand the reach of research, research for the level of college students is needed along explore the relationship between the problem of internet use and the level of religiosity of Muslim students in more depth.

### Implications

The results of this study provide evidence that the effect of reality group counseling can have an effective effect on decreasing problematic internet use on muslim students and can be used as a conceptual and practice reference in the development of future counseling.

## CONCLUSIONS

In addition to testing the effectiveness of reality counseling in reducing the level of Problematic Internet Use, this study provides a new understanding of the different interactions shown, where it turns out that psychological maturity also has an effect. Younger students certainly need more counselor efforts to understand their psychological paradigm. In general, the younger students are easily distracted as they shape their identities, shape their reality, interpret the real world, and build close relationships. This indicates that young students have poor coping skills, making the Internet a hiding place for problems. This becomes something important for future researchers, to be able to consider the psychological maturity factor in providing interventions. Younger students certainly need more counselor efforts to understand their psychological paradigm. Because, the decrease of students' PIU level is influenced by such aspects as self-control and self-management in the students' self.

## AUTHOR CONTRUBUTIONS STATEMENT

MW, AAH AJ, IA has prepared research designs, collected data at the study site and analysed data. MTA has prepared and arrange research results. MW, MEW, EP has provided guidance, instructions, criticisms, and advice in the preparation of research designs and supervision during the research process.

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