

# School counselors' understanding and implementation of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)-based individual counseling in junior high schools in Yogyakarta City: A preliminary study for REBT e-module development

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine school counselors' understanding and competence in implementing Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)-based individual counseling in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City as a needs assessment within a research and development framework. A mixed-methods design with a descriptive approach was employed. Twenty school counselors were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a knowledge assessment test, a needs assessment questionnaire, and structured interviews. Instrument validity was established through expert judgment, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that school counselors demonstrated a moderate level of understanding of REBT concepts. Although most participants were familiar with the fundamental principles of REBT, their practical competence remained limited, particularly in applying the ABC model, identifying irrational beliefs, and implementing disputation techniques. The interview findings further indicated that counseling practices were often based on intuition and personal experience rather than on a systematic theoretical framework. These results highlight a gap between counselors' conceptual knowledge and practical counseling skills. The needs assessment provides empirical support for the development of a practical and contextually relevant REBT-based electronic module (e-module) to enhance counselors' professional competencies. This need was reinforced by participants' strong interest in REBT, with 90% expressing willingness to learn more about the approach and 100% indicating readiness to use an REBT-based e-module. Future studies are recommended to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed e-module through experimental or quasi-experimental research designs.

**Keywords:** *need assessment; Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT); school counselors; individual counseling; counseling competence*



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## **Introduction**

Students possess diverse characteristics that influence their learning processes, including learning styles, cognitive abilities, motivation, and socio-cultural backgrounds (Turhusna & Solatun, 2020). Such diversity requires educational systems to provide adaptive and responsive services that accommodate individual student needs. Contemporary education is no longer solely concerned with academic achievement but also emphasizes students' social and emotional development, which plays a critical role in learning success (Hattie, 2008; OECD, 2019). In recent years, student mental health issues have emerged as a growing global concern. According to the World Health Organization (2025), approximately one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 years experiences a mental health disorder, with anxiety and depression being among the most prevalent conditions (Wu, Chen, & Chen, 2014; “Mental Health of Adolescents,” 2025). In Indonesia, emotional problems among adolescents have similarly increased, particularly in the form of academic anxiety, social pressure, and perfectionism (Renie Tri Herdiani et al., 2025). These conditions indicate that students require professional support that addresses not only academic concerns but also psychological and emotional challenges.

In this context, guidance and counseling services play a strategic role in supporting students' holistic development. School counselors are responsible for assisting students in addressing personal, social, academic, and career-related concerns through professional counseling services. As student problems become increasingly complex in the digital era, the demand for highly competent school counselors has also intensified (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Yusuf & Nurihsan, 2019). Professional competence constitutes a fundamental component of effective school counseling practice, as it directly affects the quality of guidance and counseling services delivered to students. To adequately respond to students' diverse developmental and psychological needs, school counselors must possess and continuously enhance their professional competencies, thereby enabling them to provide effective, ethical, and evidence-based counseling interventions (Nadhirah, Baiti, & Budiman, 2024). Consequently, school counselors are expected not only to understand counseling theories but also to implement them effectively in real counseling practice (Heriyanti, 2013).

One counseling approach that is particularly relevant for addressing students' cognitive and emotional difficulties is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), developed by Albert Ellis. REBT is a cognitive-behavioral approach that emphasizes the role of beliefs in shaping individuals' emotional and behavioral responses to life events (Ellis, 1995; David, Cotet, Matu, Mogoase, & Stefan, 2018). According to the REBT framework, emotional consequences are not directly caused by activating events but are mediated by individuals' beliefs about those events. Through its ABC model, REBT helps individuals identify and modify irrational beliefs into more rational and adaptive ones, thereby promoting healthier emotional and behavioral outcomes (Turner, 2016; Dryden, 2021).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in helping individuals cope with anxiety, stress, and various forms of dysfunctional behavior (David, Lynn, & Ellis, 2010). Within educational settings, REBT has been shown to enhance emotional regulation, rational thinking, problem-solving skills, and students' psychological well-being (David et al., 2010; Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin, & Shwery, 2004). During the COVID-19 pandemic, an experimental study conducted by Pordelan, Hosseinian, Heydari, Khalijian, & Khorrami (2023) concluded that a digital storytelling intervention integrated with REBT was more effective than an online psychology intervention based on REBT in reducing coronavirus-related anxiety and improving students' academic and social integration. Similarly, Abdullateef, Ibraheem, & Abdulkareem (2025) reported that participants who received REBT interventions demonstrated significant improvements in emotional regulation and marital satisfaction, accompanied by reductions in the intensity and persistence of negative emotions as well as the frequency of interpersonal conflicts. Several of these positive effects remained evident during follow-up assessments conducted one to three months after the intervention. These

findings indicate that REBT possesses substantial potential for application within school counseling services. Furthermore, Majdi, Holil, & Ekawati (2025) found that rational emotive behavior counseling combined with role-playing techniques was effective in enhancing emotional intelligence and empathy among participants.

Despite its demonstrated effectiveness, the implementation of REBT in school counseling settings remains challenging. Previous studies have reported that school counselors often encounter difficulties in applying REBT systematically, particularly in identifying irrational beliefs, utilizing disputation techniques, and integrating the ABC model into counseling practice (Corey, 2016; David et al., 2018; Dryden, 2021). Furthermore, limited professional training opportunities and the lack of practical learning resources have been identified as major barriers to the implementation of cognitive-based counseling approaches in schools (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012; Mullen, Blount, Lambie, & Chae, 2017).

Several previous studies have primarily focused on examining the effectiveness of REBT interventions for students, demonstrating positive outcomes in psychological well-being, emotional regulation, and personal adjustment. However, relatively little attention has been given to school counselors' understanding and practical competence in implementing REBT. Existing evidence suggests that a substantial gap remains between counselors' theoretical knowledge and their ability to apply counseling approaches effectively in practice. Consequently, the successful implementation of REBT in schools depends not only on the effectiveness of the approach itself but also on counselors' professional competence in applying its principles and techniques.

Although research on the effectiveness of REBT has expanded considerably, studies specifically investigating school counselors' understanding, implementation competencies, and learning needs related to REBT remain limited, particularly within the Indonesian context. More importantly, few studies have explored these aspects as a preliminary stage for developing professional learning resources that support counselors' practical application of REBT. Therefore, there is a need for empirical evidence that comprehensively maps counselors' current competencies and identifies their learning needs regarding REBT-based counseling practice.

Within the framework of Research and Development (R&D), needs assessment constitutes a fundamental stage that provides the basis for designing products aligned with users' actual needs. Needs assessment enables researchers to identify existing conditions, competency gaps, and user requirements that should be addressed by the product being developed. Accordingly, before developing an REBT-based learning resource, it is necessary to obtain a comprehensive understanding of school counselors' knowledge, implementation competencies, and professional learning needs related to REBT.

One potential solution for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical competence is the use of technology-based learning media, particularly electronic modules (e-modules). E-modules facilitate flexible, interactive, and self-directed learning experiences that can be accessed according to users' individual learning needs and schedules (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Mayer, 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated that digital learning media can effectively enhance both conceptual understanding and practical skills among learners (Branch, 2009; Hrastinski, 2019). For instance, Hartanti, Nindi, & Marfu (2020) developed a Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) pocket module that was found to be effective as a reference for implementing RET in counseling practice. Similarly, Kumala & Mardhiyah (2024) reported that the web-based application "Kancani," which incorporates REBT-based interventions, effectively improved junior high school students' subjective well-being, particularly in terms of positive affect and life satisfaction. These findings suggest that digital learning resources can contribute positively to the acquisition of counseling knowledge and skills. Therefore, the development of an REBT-based e-module is considered a relevant and promising strategy for enhancing school counselors' professional competence in implementing REBT-based counseling services.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to: (1) identify the level of understanding and competence of school counselors regarding REBT-based individual

counseling in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City; (2) analyze the gap between the expected competencies and actual conditions; and (3) identify school counselors' needs for REBT-based learning media. Through this needs assessment, the findings are expected to provide a robust empirical foundation for the development of an innovative, effective, and practical digital learning resource that can serve as a self-directed learning tool for school counselors, thereby enhancing both their theoretical understanding and practical competence in delivering professional counseling services in schools.

## Method

This study constitutes the initial phase of a Research and Development (R&D) process based on the ADDIE model, specifically focusing on the first stage, namely the needs assessment (Branch, 2009). This phase aims to obtain an empirical overview of the current level of understanding and competencies of school counselors in implementing individual counseling based on Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), while also identifying the gap between their existing competencies and the expected standards. In addition, this stage seeks to map counselors' needs for relevant instructional media as a foundation for subsequent product development.

This study employed a descriptive approach using a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a complementary manner. The quantitative approach was utilized to obtain measurable data through questionnaire instruments, thereby enabling an objective and systematic analysis of school counselors' levels of understanding and competencies. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach was applied to elaborate and interpret the quantitative findings through structured interviews, providing richer contextual insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the data obtained.

The population of this study consisted of school counselors working in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City. The research participants comprised 20 school counselors from public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City area. Participants were selected purposively by considering the relevance of school counselors' roles in providing individual counseling services within the school setting. The inclusion criteria included active school counselors who had experience in delivering counseling services to students. The number of participants was determined based on the availability of respondents at the research sites and the data requirements of the preliminary study stage.

Data collection techniques in this study were conducted through tests and interviews. The test technique was employed to measure school counselors' levels of understanding, competencies, and needs related to REBT-based counseling. The test instrument adopted the instrument developed by Reskiana (2022), which consisted of multiple-choice questions, essay questions, and needs assessment items. The instrument was developed based on indicators encompassing: (1) understanding of fundamental REBT concepts, (2) ability to identify *irrational beliefs*, (3) skills in applying disputing techniques, (4) understanding and application of the ABC model, and (5) experience in REBT-based individual counseling practices. Meanwhile, structured interviews were conducted to obtain more in-depth information regarding school counselors' experiences, challenges, and needs in implementing REBT. Structured interviews covering participants' understanding of counseling approaches, the implementation of counseling services, challenges encountered in counseling practice, and their needs and interests in deepening their understanding of counseling approaches were conducted to confirm, elaborate, and enrich the quantitative findings obtained from the questionnaire.

The instruments were developed based on the theoretical framework of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and counseling competencies, incorporating the indicators described above. To ensure content validity, the instruments were evaluated through expert judgment involving two experts in the field of guidance and counseling (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The content validity analysis yielded an Aiken's V coefficient of 0.922, indicating that the

instruments possessed a very high level of validity. Subsequently, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient, with the results demonstrating a reliability value greater than 0.70, thereby indicating acceptable reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). In addition, the understanding test instrument was subjected to an internal consistency analysis to ensure the reliability and quality of the test items.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively. Quantitative data obtained from the tests were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including percentages and mean scores, to describe school counselors’ levels of understanding and competencies. The analysis results were subsequently classified into three categories: low, moderate, and high based on predetermined criteria. Meanwhile, qualitative data derived from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques by identifying response patterns, categorizing major themes, and interpreting the meanings emerging from the data.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, this study employed method triangulation by comparing data obtained from the tests and interviews. Through this approach, the findings were expected to demonstrate stronger validity and reliability, as well as provide an accurate representation of school counselors’ needs in understanding and implementing REBT-based counseling.

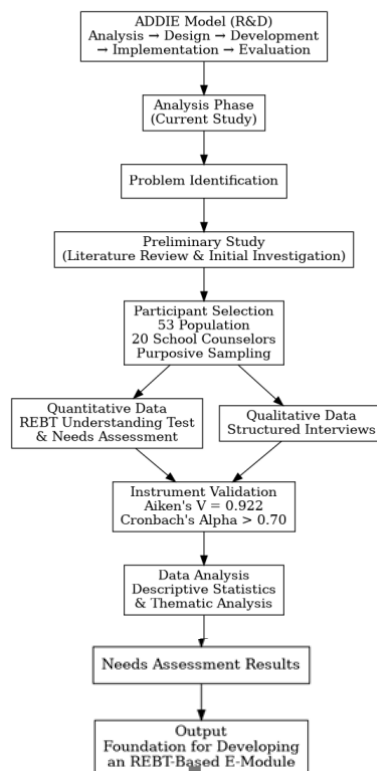


Figure 1. Research Procedure of the Needs Assessment Phase for the Development of an REBT-Based Individual Counseling E-Module.

### Findings

This section presents the empirical findings regarding school counselors’ levels of understanding, implementational competencies, and needs related to the REBT’ counseling e-module in individual counseling services at public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City. The findings were obtained through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected through tests and structured interviews. The results illustrate the actual condition of school counselors’ competencies in understanding and implementing counseling approaches, while also revealing various challenges, professional development needs, and the potential development of an REBT counseling e-module as an effort to enhance the quality of guidance and counseling services in

schools. Systematically, the research findings are presented in several subsections according to the focus of the research analysis.

### 1. Level of School Counselors' Understanding of REBT-Based Counseling

Based on interviews conducted with 20 school counselors from public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City between May and June 2025, this study aimed to identify the current condition of counselors' understanding, individual counseling practices, and the challenges encountered in implementing counseling approaches, particularly Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The interview results indicate that most school counselors still experience limitations in understanding and systematically implementing counseling approaches. Detailed findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Results of Interviews with School Counselors in Public Junior High Schools in Yogyakarta**

No	Aspect	Key Findings
1	Understanding of counseling approaches	3 (15%) counselors could no longer recall counseling approaches; 10 (50%) had not fully understood REBT; 7 (35%) understood basic theory but were unable to apply it systematically
2	Implementation of individual counseling	8 (40%) counselors used certain approaches without understanding theoretical terminology; 12 (60%) did not formally apply any approach
3	Counseling practices	Counseling was conducted through advice, suggestions, interpersonal communication, and general guidance without a systematic approach
4	Difficulties	Difficulties in selecting appropriate theories, limited time, lack of practical references, and challenges in applying theory
5	Need for understanding	15 (80%) expressed a strong desire to understand counseling theories; 4 (15%) showed moderate interest; 1 (5%) showed no interest

Based on Table 1, it can be concluded that the current condition of school counselors' understanding and practice of individual counseling in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta continues to face several fundamental challenges related to theoretical mastery, practical implementation, and the availability of learning resources.

The interview findings revealed that school counselors demonstrated varying levels of understanding regarding different counseling approaches. Approximately 15% of the participants could no longer clearly recall the counseling approaches they had previously learned, while 50% admitted that they had not yet developed a comprehensive understanding of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The remaining 35% reported that they understood the fundamental concepts of REBT but continued to experience difficulties in applying the approach systematically in counseling practice. These findings indicate that school counselors' mastery of counseling theories remains largely at a basic conceptual level and has not yet fully developed into practical counseling competence. This condition is consistent with the results of the knowledge assessment (Table 2), which showed that counselors demonstrated relatively good understanding of the foundational conceptual aspects of REBT, including its history, objectives, and general principles. However, their performance declined considerably on more technical and application-oriented aspects, particularly in identifying irrational beliefs and implementing disputation techniques.

The interview findings also revealed that the implementation of counseling approaches in individual counseling services has not been carried out consistently. Approximately 40% of the counselors reported using certain counseling approaches in their practice, yet they lacked a clear understanding of the theoretical terminology or framework underlying those approaches. Meanwhile, 60% acknowledged that they did not formally employ any counseling approach when providing individual counseling services. As one participant stated, "I usually adjust my counseling strategy to the student's problem. Sometimes I use concepts that I learned during my studies, but I do not follow the theoretical procedures systematically." Another counselor explained, "In most cases, I conduct counseling spontaneously and provide advice to students

rather than following the stages of a particular counseling approach.” These statements suggest that counseling practices are primarily guided by personal experience and professional intuition rather than by systematic, theory-based counseling approaches.

Regarding counseling practice, most school counselors reported that individual counseling services are generally conducted through providing advice, guidance, motivation, and interpersonal communication aimed at helping students identify solutions to their problems. Although such strategies may provide emotional support to students, they do not necessarily reflect the application of the specific techniques that characterize the REBT approach. This finding indicates a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, resulting in counseling practices that tend to be intuitive and insufficiently structured.

With respect to the challenges encountered, school counselors identified several major obstacles, including difficulties in selecting counseling theories that appropriately match students’ problems, limited time available for counseling services, a lack of accessible and practical reference materials, and difficulties in translating counseling theories into concrete intervention procedures. One participant remarked, “I understand the theory in general, but I often become confused when I have to apply it to actual cases encountered by students.” Another participant added, “The techniques used in REBT are quite difficult to understand without concrete case examples and sufficient practice opportunities.” These findings reinforce the results of the knowledge assessment, which revealed relatively low levels of competence in identifying irrational beliefs (50%) and applying disputation techniques (40%), both of which constitute core components of REBT implementation.

Nevertheless, the interview findings demonstrated a strong motivation among counselors to enhance their professional competence. Approximately 80% of the participants expressed a strong desire to deepen their understanding of counseling theories and techniques, while an additional 15% reported a moderate level of interest. Only 5% indicated no particular interest in further studying counseling approaches. This strong motivation was reflected in one counselor’s statement: “I would like to understand more practical counseling approaches so that I can assist students more effectively.” Another participant emphasized that systematic, practical, and easily accessible learning resources would greatly support the improvement of counseling competence.

Overall, the interview findings corroborate the quantitative results, indicating that school counselors possess a basic understanding of REBT but continue to face difficulties in implementing the approach systematically in counseling practice. At the same time, their strong motivation to learn and their expressed need for more practical learning resources highlight significant opportunities for the development of REBT-based instructional media. Therefore, the findings of this needs assessment provide a strong empirical foundation for the development of an REBT-based individual counseling e-module designed to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical counseling competence among school counselors.

## 2. Results of REBT Counseling Understanding Test

To complement the qualitative data, a structured test of understanding of REBT-based counseling was administered using a multiple-choice instrument delivered via Google Forms. The use of an online platform was justified by its efficiency in reaching participants across different schools, facilitating standardized data collection, and ensuring ease of access and response during the data collection process. The results reveal varying levels of mastery across different indicators, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Results of REBT Counseling Understanding Test**

No	Indicator	Percentage of Correct Responses
1	History of REBT	90%
2	Primary focus of REBT	85%
3	Strategies for reducing emotional distress	75%
4	Factors causing emotional distress	75%

No	Indicator	Percentage of Correct Responses
5	Goals of REBT counseling	80%
6	Identification of irrational beliefs	50%
7	Emotional disturbances in REBT	60%
8	Case study analysis	70%
9	Disputing techniques	40%
10	REBT counseling techniques	90%

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that school counselors demonstrated a relatively strong understanding of the foundational concepts of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The highest scores were found on indicators related to the history of REBT (90%) and REBT counseling techniques (90%), followed by the primary focus of REBT (85%) and the goals of REBT counseling (80%). These findings suggest that most counselors possess adequate knowledge of the theoretical foundations and general principles of the REBT approach, which may have been acquired through their preservice education, professional training, or independent learning activities.

In contrast, lower scores were observed on indicators requiring more advanced conceptual and practical competencies, particularly the identification of irrational beliefs (50%) and the application of disputing techniques (40%). These aspects represent the core intervention components of REBT and require counselors not only to understand theoretical concepts but also to apply them effectively in counseling sessions. The relatively low performance on these indicators suggests that many counselors experience difficulties in translating theoretical knowledge into practical counseling skills.

This pattern is further supported by the interview findings, which revealed that counselors generally understood the basic concepts of counseling theories but often lacked confidence in applying specific REBT procedures during individual counseling sessions. Several participants reported difficulties in identifying students' irrational beliefs, formulating appropriate disputation strategies, and systematically implementing the ABC model in practice. As a result, counseling interventions tended to rely more on personal experience and intuitive judgment rather than on a structured theoretical framework. These findings indicate a substantial gap between counselors' conceptual understanding and their practical competence in implementing REBT-based counseling, highlighting the need for professional development resources that emphasize practical application and skill enhancement.

### 3. School Counselors' Self-Assessment of REBT Understanding

In addition to the objective test, this study also employed a self-assessment (self-rating) to examine school counselors' perceived level of understanding of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). The inclusion of self-assessment aimed not only to identify counselors' cognitive perceptions regarding their competencies, but also to explore the extent to which their self-confidence and perceived mastery corresponded with the objective test results. In the context of professional competence development, self-assessment constitutes an important component because it reflects individuals' awareness of their own strengths and limitations in understanding and implementing counseling approaches. Therefore, the self-rating results provide complementary insights into the actual condition of school counselors' readiness to apply REBT within individual counseling services in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Self-Rating of School Counselors' Understanding of REBT**

Score	Category	Percentage
5	Highly understand	5%
4	Understand	60%
3	Less understand	30%
2	Not understand	5%
1	Very poorly understand	0%

Based on the data presented in Table 3, it can be observed that the majority of school counselors assessed their level of understanding of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) as being in the “understand” category, comprising 12 counselors (60%). This was followed by the “less understand” category with 6 counselors (30%), while a smaller proportion fell into the “highly understand” category with 1 counselor (5%) and the “not understand” category with 1 counselor (5%). No respondents indicated that they “very poorly understand” REBT.

In general, this distribution indicates that school counselors’ self-perceptions regarding their understanding of REBT tend to fall within the moderate-to-high range. This suggests that most counselors perceive themselves as having acquired foundational knowledge of REBT. However, a closer examination reveals that the proportion of counselors who genuinely possess a high level of understanding remains very limited, with only 5% of respondents categorized as “highly understand”.

Interestingly, a discrepancy emerged between counselors’ self-perceptions (*self-rating*) and the results of the previous objective test. Although 60% of counselors stated that they “understand” REBT, the test results demonstrated that their competencies in applied aspects, such as identifying *irrational beliefs* and implementing disputing techniques, remained relatively low. This finding indicates the presence of an *overestimation bias*, namely the tendency of individuals to evaluate their abilities more positively than their actual competencies. In addition, the relatively high percentage within the “less understand” category (30%) suggests that a considerable number of counselors are aware of their limitations in understanding REBT. Such awareness constitutes a positive indicator, as it may foster greater motivation to learn and further develop professional competencies.

Overall, the self-rating results indicate that although school counselors demonstrate a relatively high level of confidence in their understanding of REBT, such understanding has not been fully accompanied by adequate practical competencies. Therefore, there is a need for instructional interventions in the form of learning media that not only enhance conceptual understanding, but also strengthen implementational skills in REBT-based counseling practices.

#### 4. School Counselors’ Needs and Perceptions toward REBT

In addition to the data presented above, the researchers also administered several questions related to the need for developing an e-module as a practical learning medium for school counselors. The results indicate that school counselors demonstrate a high level of interest in the development and use of the REBT approach. Detailed findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. School Counselors’ Needs and Perceptions toward REBT**

Aspect	Results
Experience using REBT	80% have used it, 20% have not
Interest in learning REBT	90% interested, 10% not interested
Willingness to apply REBT model	100% willing

Based on the data presented in Table 4, it can be interpreted that school counselors in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta demonstrate high levels of exposure, interest, and readiness toward the use of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in individual counseling services. First, in terms of prior experience, 16 counselors (80%) reported having previously used REBT, while 4 counselors (20%) stated that they had never used it. This finding indicates that REBT is not an entirely unfamiliar approach for school counselors. However, when linked to the previous comprehension test results, such usage was most likely not conducted systematically or grounded in a comprehensive theoretical understanding. In other words, there is an indication that counselors may have implicitly practiced certain REBT principles without fully recognizing them as components of a structured counseling approach.

Second, regarding interest in learning REBT, 18 counselors (90%) expressed an interest in studying REBT further. This percentage reflects a very high level of motivation toward professional competency development, particularly in understanding counseling approaches that

are relevant to students' needs. This strong interest also indicates counselors' awareness of their current limitations in understanding REBT, as well as their recognition of the need to improve the quality of counseling services.

Third, in terms of implementation readiness, all 20 counselors (100%) stated their willingness to use an REBT counseling model if it were made available. This finding demonstrates a highly positive acceptance of the development of REBT-based instructional models or learning media, such as e-modules. This complete willingness constitutes a strong indicator that the innovation being developed has substantial potential to be adopted in school counseling practices.

Overall, these findings reveal an interesting pattern characterized by the combination of initial exposure (previous use of REBT), awareness of limitations (indicated by the need for further learning), and a high level of readiness for change (willingness to use the model). Such conditions create a highly favorable momentum for developmental intervention, as school counselors not only require support, but are also prepared to accept and implement REBT approaches in a more systematic manner.

Therefore, these findings reinforce the urgency of developing practical and accessible REBT-based instructional media. The high levels of interest and readiness among school counselors provide a strong foundation suggesting that the product to be developed has considerable potential to effectively enhance individual counseling competencies in schools.

## Discussion

### 1. The Gap between Conceptual Understanding and Implementational Competence in REBT

The findings of this study indicate that school counselors in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta possess a relatively good level of understanding regarding the fundamental conceptual aspects of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), such as its history, objectives, and general principles. However, their implementational competencies, particularly in identifying *irrational beliefs* and applying disputing techniques, remain within the low category. These findings indicate the existence of a gap between theoretical mastery and counseling practices in the field.

From the perspective of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), the ability to identify irrational beliefs constitutes a central component of the counseling process, as irrational beliefs are considered the primary source of emotional disturbances and maladaptive behaviors. Ellis (1995) argued that the emotional consequences experienced by individuals are not directly caused by activating events themselves, but rather by the belief system through which individuals interpret and evaluate those events. Therefore, counselors' ability to identify and evaluate irrational beliefs is a critical prerequisite for conducting disputation and cognitive restructuring processes. The findings of the present study indicate that school counselors' competence in identifying irrational beliefs remains relatively low, which may affect the accuracy and effectiveness of the interventions provided to students (Khairuzzakiah & Siregar, 2024).

These findings are consistent with recent studies demonstrating that the successful implementation of REBT in educational settings is largely determined by counselors' competence in identifying irrational thinking patterns and systematically applying cognitive techniques. An experimental study conducted by Pordelan, Hosseinian, Heydari, Khalijian, and Khorrami (2023) found that structured REBT-based interventions significantly reduced anxiety and improved students' academic and social integration. Similarly, Abdullateef, Ibraheem, and Abdulkareem (2025) reported that REBT-based counseling programs were effective in enhancing emotional regulation and reducing the intensity of negative emotions among participants, highlighting the importance of REBT mastery among counseling practitioners. Furthermore, Majdi, Holil, and Ekawati (2025) found that Rational Emotive Behavior Counseling combined with role-playing techniques significantly improved participants' emotional intelligence and empathy. Collectively, these studies suggest that the

effectiveness of REBT depends substantially on counselors' ability to translate theoretical concepts into systematic counseling practices.

Nevertheless, several recent studies have also reported that school counselors continue to encounter challenges in implementing the REBT approach optimally, particularly in identifying irrational beliefs, applying the ABC model, and consistently conducting disputation techniques. This condition indicates the existence of a gap between conceptual understanding and practical counseling competence, which remains a significant challenge in school counseling services. Therefore, more practical and contextually relevant learning resources are needed to support school counselors in strengthening their implementation skills and applying REBT more professionally in counseling practice.

Furthermore, disputing techniques (D within the ABC model) represent the primary mechanism for transforming irrational thinking into rational thinking. Without this competency, the REBT counseling process cannot function optimally. This finding is consistent with the argument proposed by Windy Dryden (2021), who stated that the effectiveness of REBT is highly dependent on counselors' abilities to conduct logical, empirical, and pragmatic disputation of clients' beliefs.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the research conducted by Daniel David et al. (2018), which demonstrated that many counseling practitioners experience difficulties in translating REBT concepts into actual practice, particularly in technical aspects such as *cognitive restructuring*. Similarly, Gerald Corey (2016) asserted that although cognitive-behavioral approaches are widely taught in counselor education, their implementation often remains suboptimal due to insufficient practical training.

This gap may also be explained through the perspective of transfer of training theory, which suggests that knowledge acquired in academic settings cannot always be effectively transferred into professional practice without contextual learning support (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). In this context, school counselors require instructional media or learning tools that not only explain theoretical concepts, but also provide concrete examples and opportunities for practical exercises.

## 2. Counseling Practices that Remain Intuitive in Nature

The interview findings indicate that most school counselors continue to conduct individual counseling using predominantly intuitive approaches, such as providing advice, direction, and emotional support without employing a systematic theoretical framework. This pattern suggests that counseling services have not yet been fully grounded in scientific approaches. From a professional standpoint, counseling should be guided by clearly defined theoretical orientations to ensure that intervention processes are structured, purposeful, and measurable. As emphasized by Gladding (2018) the absence of a theoretical foundation risks reducing counseling to mere interpersonal interaction with limited therapeutic impact.

The interview findings revealed that most school counselors continue to conduct individual counseling using intuitive approaches, such as providing advice, guidance, and emotional support without relying on a systematic theoretical framework. This practice indicates that counseling services have not been fully grounded in evidence-based and theory-driven approaches and instead tend to depend on counselors' personal experiences and professional intuition. From a professional counseling perspective, counseling should be implemented based on a clearly defined theoretical approach to ensure that assessment, intervention, and evaluation processes are conducted in a systematic, purposeful, and measurable manner (Gladding, 2018). A theoretical framework serves as a conceptual guide that helps counselors understand the sources of clients' problems, select appropriate intervention strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of counseling services. Without a strong theoretical foundation, counseling risks becoming merely a supportive interpersonal interaction that may provide temporary relief but fails to facilitate sustainable cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change.

These findings are consistent with those reported by Mullen et al. (2017), who found that many school counselors tend to employ eclectic approaches without a comprehensive understanding of the theories underlying their interventions. As a result, counseling practices often become less systematic

and more difficult to evaluate in terms of effectiveness. Similarly, Carey and Dimmitt (2012) emphasized that theory-based counseling is a critical component of effective school counseling practice because it enables counselors to design interventions that are responsive to students' needs, objectively monitor client progress, and document counseling outcomes in an accountable manner. More recent evidence also supports the importance of theoretical competence in counseling practice. Research by Odebode et al. (2023) demonstrated that counselors' theoretical competence is positively associated with the quality of counseling services and the effectiveness of psychological interventions provided to students. Likewise, Shillingford-Butler et al. (2022) found that counselors with stronger theoretical knowledge exhibit higher levels of professional self-efficacy when addressing complex student issues.

Within the context of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), the systematic application of the approach is particularly important because each component of the ABCDE model serves a distinct and interconnected function in helping clients identify, challenge, and modify irrational beliefs that contribute to emotional and behavioral difficulties. Limited understanding of REBT concepts, terminology, and procedural stages may lead school counselors to conduct counseling sessions in an unstructured manner, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the intervention (Nabila & Setyawan, 2024; Nasution & Syarqawi, 2025; Pertiwi, Noviani, & Putri, 2024; Putri, Suarni, & Dharsana, 2022). This finding is further supported by David et al. (2018), who argued that the effectiveness of REBT largely depends on counselors' ability to implement each stage of the model consistently and systematically. Similarly, Dryden (2021) noted that difficulties in identifying irrational beliefs and conducting effective disputation are among the primary factors limiting the success of REBT implementation in counseling practice. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate an urgent need for more practical and contextually relevant learning resources to support school counselors in strengthening their implementation competencies and applying REBT professionally and effectively in school counseling settings.

### 3. Limited Access to Practical Learning Resources

One of the important findings of this study is the limited access of school counselors to practical, applicable, and contextual learning resources in understanding and implementing Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). Most school counselors still rely on textbooks, training modules, or theoretical materials that place greater emphasis on conceptual aspects rather than implementational skills. Consequently, the understanding acquired tends to remain at the level of theoretical knowledge and has not yet developed into practical competencies that can be systematically applied in individual counseling services.

This condition indicates the existence of a gap between the professional needs of school counselors in the field and the learning resources currently available. In practice, school counselors require not only an understanding of the definitions, concepts, and stages of REBT, but also real case examples, counseling simulations, guidance in applying disputing techniques, and practical exercises that can assist them in translating theory into actual counseling situations. When the available learning resources are overly abstract and theoretical, the process of transferring knowledge into professional practice becomes less effective.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Hrastinski (2019), which stated that the effectiveness of professional learning is strongly influenced by the availability of relevant, contextual, and easily applicable learning resources in real practice. From the perspective of adult learning, effective adult learning should be problem-centered, experience-based, and oriented toward learners' practical needs (Knowles et al., 2014). Therefore, learning approaches that merely emphasize theoretical mastery without providing practical experience tend to be less effective in developing school counselors' professional competencies.

Within this context, the development of digital learning media such as e-modules constitutes a relevant and strategic solution. Research conducted by Clark & Mayer (2016) demonstrates that digital learning media designed interactively and contextually can enhance both conceptual understanding and

learners' practical skills. Therefore, an REBT e-module should not merely function as a source of theoretical information, but also as an experience-based learning medium that includes case simulations, practical exercises, professional reflection, and systematic implementation guidelines. Accordingly, the development of an REBT e-module represents a strategic step toward bridging the gap between theoretical mastery and the practical competencies of school counselors in individual counseling services within schools.

#### 4. High Levels of Need and Motivation among School Counselors

The findings of this study indicate that 90% of school counselors expressed an interest in learning REBT further, while 100% stated their willingness to use an REBT-based counseling model if it were made available. The high level of interest among school counselors in studying REBT more extensively reflects a strong professional awareness regarding the importance of mastering counseling approaches that are relevant to students' needs.

From the perspective of learning motivation theory, intrinsic motivation constitutes a primary factor influencing learning success, including the development of professional competencies (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Individuals with high levels of motivation tend to be more active in seeking new knowledge, developing skills, and transforming their professional practices. Therefore, the strong motivation demonstrated by school counselors in this study represents an important foundation for the development of REBT-based competencies. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Gysbers & Henderson (2012), which emphasized that the professional development of school counselors is highly dependent upon individual awareness and commitment to continuous learning.

The high demand for REBT is also influenced by the relevance of this approach to the problems commonly experienced by students in schools. School counselors recognize that many students encounter difficulties related to irrational thinking patterns, such as excessive anxiety, social pressure, low self-confidence, and perfectionism. Within this context, REBT is perceived as an appropriate approach because it focuses on restructuring the thought patterns that constitute the primary source of emotional disturbances (King, Plateau, Turner, Young, & Barker, 2024).

These findings demonstrate a strong relationship between field-based needs and users' readiness to adopt learning innovations. Such conditions create a highly favorable momentum for the development of an REBT e-module, as school counselors not only require practical learning media, but also demonstrate readiness to accept and implement the approach in a more systematic manner.

#### 5. The Relevance of REBT to Junior High School Students' Problems

The findings of this study indicate that the problems experienced by junior high school students are predominantly cognitive-emotional in nature, including academic anxiety, perfectionism, social pressure, and the need for social acceptance. These findings confirm the data reported by the World Health Organization, which states that adolescents aged 10–19 years worldwide experience mental health disorders, with anxiety and depression being the most dominant problems. From a counseling perspective, this pattern is highly relevant to the focus of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), which emphasizes cognitive restructuring of irrational beliefs.

Within REBT theory, emotional disturbances are caused by three primary forms of irrational beliefs, namely *demandingness*, *awfulizing*, and *low frustration tolerance* (Ellis, 1995). The findings of this study reveal that many students demonstrate forms of *demandingness*, such as excessive demands to always succeed, gain social acceptance, and fulfill academic expectations perfectly. Such patterns of thinking have the potential to generate anxiety, stress, and deterioration in students' mental health.

Research conducted by Nurhayani, Khairuddin, & Arista (2024) demonstrated that the REBT approach is effective in reducing students' academic anxiety in Indonesia. Similar findings were reported by Turner (2016); Dewangga, Yusmansyah, & Widiastuti (2018), who found that REBT was capable of improving students' self-confidence, academic performance, and mental health through the modification of irrational thinking patterns.

These findings strengthen the argument that REBT is not only theoretically relevant, but also possesses practical effectiveness within the Indonesian educational context. Therefore, the limited understanding and implementational competencies of school counselors regarding REBT constitute a serious concern, as they may directly affect the quality of counseling services provided to students.

## 6. Implications for the Development of REBT-Based E-Modules

Based on the findings of this study, the development of an REBT-based e-module emerges as a strategic solution to address the various challenges faced by school counselors. However, it is essential to critically examine whether an e-module can effectively meet these needs.

From a theoretical perspective, e-modules offer advantages in terms of flexibility, accessibility, and interactivity, as highlighted by Mayer (2009). Nevertheless, their effectiveness largely depends on the instructional design employed. If an e-module merely presents theoretical content, it will offer little added value compared to traditional textbooks. Branch (2009) emphasizes that the development of instructional media must be grounded in a thorough analysis of user needs. In the context of this study, the e-module should therefore be designed to include real-case simulations, disputing exercises, step-by-step practical guidelines, and reflective activities.

Empirical studies by Musaad & Suparman (2023); Sandi, Syahri, & Gusti (2025), demonstrate that e-modules designed using a problem-based learning approach are more effective in enhancing practical skills compared to conventional e-modules. This suggests that an REBT-based e-module will be effective only if it functions as a learning tool rather than merely an information tool.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the argument that the implementation of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in educational settings depends not only on conceptual understanding, but also on counselors' practical readiness. This finding challenges the assumption that theoretical mastery will automatically lead to practical competence. From the perspective of practical implications, the findings indicate the need to strengthen the professional culture of guidance and counseling services within schools. School counselors require training programs that focus not only on theoretical knowledge, but also on the systematic application of counseling approaches in real counseling situations. In addition, institutional support from schools is necessary in providing adequate time, supervision, and professional development facilities to enable school counselors to implement the counseling approaches especially REBT more effectively and optimally.

Nevertheless, this study also has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, this study involved only 20 school counselors from public junior high schools in Yogyakarta. Therefore, the generalization of the findings to broader educational contexts, different school levels, or other regions with distinct characteristics should be undertaken cautiously. Second, this study was limited to the needs assessment stage within the framework of Research and Development (R&D). Consequently, further research is required to proceed to the stages of developing and evaluating the effectiveness of the REBT e-module as a learning medium.

Third, this study primarily focused on school counselors' understanding of and needs for an REBT counseling e-module. As such, it did not comprehensively examine other external factors that may influence the implementation of REBT-based counseling, such as institutional support, school counseling policies, counselors' workload, and digital readiness in utilizing more practical and technology-based learning media. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the substantive value of the findings; rather, they provide an important foundation for future research that is more comprehensive and application-oriented in enhancing school counselors' competencies in individual counseling practices using the REBT approach.

## Conclusion

This study found that school counselors in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City possess a relatively adequate understanding of the fundamental concepts of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), yet continue to encounter difficulties in its practical implementation,

particularly in identifying irrational beliefs and applying disputing techniques systematically during individual counseling sessions. These findings indicate a gap between counselors' conceptual understanding and practical counseling competencies, highlighting the need for learning resources that can effectively bridge theory and practice. The high level of interest and readiness among counselors to learn and utilize REBT suggests that the development of an REBT-based e-module has strong potential as a professional development tool for enhancing counseling competencies. However, this study was limited to school counselors in public junior high schools in Yogyakarta City and did not extend to the development or effectiveness testing of the proposed product. Therefore, future research is recommended to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of an REBT-based e-module through experimental or quasi-experimental designs and to involve broader participant populations in order to generate more comprehensive insights into the implementation of REBT-based counseling in school settings.

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