

# The Effectiveness of Empty Seats Technique in Resolving Verbal Communication Difficulties

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**Abstract**—In school environment, verbal communication is a main support in learning activity. However, it often happens that students tend to have difficulties in verbal communication such as miscommunication that leads to a failure in making a relation, conflict, also may disturb thinking process. These happened because of disruption in communicating such as articulating, voice, accuracy and fluency problem and verbal language problem. Therefore, it is needed to develop a technique to overcome those problems. One of many ways is to an individual counseling service using empty seats technique approach branch from Gestalt theory. The aim of this research was to find the effectiveness of this counseling technique to resolve verbal communication difficulties from students of VII grade. It was a quantitative research with experimental research. The research was conducted at SMPN 31 Banjarmasin. The population was VII grade students with total 120 students while the sample was acquired through inclusion criteria with purposive sampling technique, with a number of eight students. The instrument of the research and data collection was in form of measurement scale of verbal communication difficulties. The data were analyzed using t-test formula. Based on the data obtained from the testing of obtained  $t > t$  table 0.95% ( $5.60 > 3.182$ ), then  $H_0$  was rejected, which means there were different levels of verbal communication difficulty percentage of students before being given a counseling by using empty seats technique and after given a counseling. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the individual counseling with an empty seats technique was effective in overcoming the difficulties of verbal communication. Therefore, the counselors were suggested to apply the empty seats technique in overcoming difficulties in verbal communication of the students.

**Keywords**—*Empty Seats Technique, Verbal Communication Difficulties*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As social human beings, people cannot avoid interaction between one another. There is a different needs and a specific objective to be achieved, even to speak and treat other human beings in a civilized way. It takes an interaction with a way of communicating. In order to communicate in good ways, students need to have a verbal and non-verbal skills. Communication of the subject of this case is Included as verbal communication. Verbal communication itself is a

sending and receiving of meaning either in oral or written communication.

However, various problems were often found in the verbal communication. The problem is for instance the emergence of a miscommunication that makes a failure in relationships, makes a conflict and may impede the process of thinking. It is caused by an interruption in communication such as articulation disorders, disorders of the voice, fluency and fluency disorders, as well as language disorders.

In school environment students ages are ranged from 12 to 20 years old. On these ranges, they are in teenager phase (12-15 years old) and late adolescent phase (16-20 years old). Related to the task fulfilling, these students are accused to be more active in various things. Many demands push them to be able to communicate well. Unfortunately, it often happens that students tend to have difficulties in verbal communication. The verbal communication difficulties that happen to students cannot be separated with their learning and social problems. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a technique that can be used by school counselor to overcome this verbal communication problem.

One counseling service that can help students in coping with the verbal communication problem is empty seats technique. Empty seats technique is a role play that is executed by an individual (a client) using a dialogue in describing dream. The role which is being played is done by turning the students one by one on the provided seats. In the implementation of the empty seats technique, verbal communication in students need to be raised and moved. In order to do so, the therapy counselors need to know students' needs in fulfilling the issues so that they pay attention and get their interest to achieve meaningful goals [2].

As a result, the main purposes of this study are to find (1) how the description of verbal communication difficulties on the students of SMPN VII Banjarmasin before given an empty seats technique is; (2) how the description of verbal communication difficulties on the students of SMPN VII Banjarmasin after given the empty seats techniques is; and (3) whether the empty seats technique is effective in overcoming verbal communication of SMPN VII students Banjarmasin.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. Verbal Communication

Language according to Larry L. Barker in [3] has three functions namely naming or labeling, interacting and transmission. Verbal communication is a process of transferring and accepting symbols that have meaning, whether in the form of information, thought, or opinion. Meanwhile, according to [4] in verbal communication activity speaking is the meaning of verbal communication itself. In fact, there is no rule mentioning that the meaning transferred through oral and written could also be defined as speaking.

From some definitions above, it can be concluded that verbal communication is a process of transferring and accepting meaning or message that has similarity in meaning between one person and another through words or sentences whether it is oral or written.

Verbal communication can be influenced by some factors namely [3]:

#### 1) *Self and Other Imagery*

When someone communicates to other people, he/she may have a self imagery. So, other people imagery to communicate influences the way and ability of a person in communicating. Basically, people learn to create their own imagery through connection with others, especially other human being whom he/she considered as important for himself, like father-mother, teacher and etc.

#### 2) *Psychological Atmosphere*

Psychological atmosphere is recognized to influence communication because it is hard to communicate when someone is sad, confused, angry, dissappoint, envy, etc due to the psychological atmosphere. In short, someone's feeling is hard to be controlled by other people.

#### 3) *Physical Environment*

In regard to physical environment, communication can take place anywhere and anytime with different style and way. Communication that takes place in the family and society is different from the communication in school. The atmosphere at home is informal while the atmosphere at school and community is formal; therefore, the communication that takes place must obey the norm.

##### a) *Language*

Verbal communication is often the language used which was unable to represent an object in question precisely. Someone assortment interpretation of the language used is due to the use of language (in a cultural context).

##### b) *Age Difference*

The age difference makes people talking by previously considering whom the people they talk to. Everyone has each word that must be understood according to their life span.

The Following is verbal communication disorders in the academic field: (1) Reading disorder, according to [1] people whose grammar is bad, in form of speaking or listening, cannot understand any meaning from what has been uttered as well as cannot understand the messege of the written form. (2) Dyslexia, it is a developmental disorder including difficulty in

language acquisition in both reading and writing. (3) Writing disorder, it is divided into two, namely expressive writing and dysgraphia. Difficulty in expressive writing is marked by an inability to express thoughts or feelings into writing. The main symptom is an error in the spelling of words, grammar, punctuation, paragraphs and very bad handwriting. People who have this disorder also experience the lack of themes in their writing [5]. Meanwhile, according to [1] speech and language disorders including problems in speech such as articulation disorder, voice disorder, and speech fluency disorder, and language problem such as difficulty receiving information and expressing language. (4) Articulation disorder, it is a problem in the pronunciation sounds correctly. Articulation problems generally can be fixed with talking therapy although it would take many months or years (Spiel et al 2001 in [1]). (5) Voice disorders, it appears in the unclear speech, hard, too fast, too high, or too low. Voice of children who harelipped are usually difficult to understand. (6) Accuracy or fluency disorder, it is usually called "stuttering". This condition occurs when a child's speech stammering, long pauses, or repetitive. The anxiety that was felt by children for stuttering usually makes their condition worse. (7) Language disorder is divided into (1) Receptive language disorder is the acceptance and understanding of the language. As a result, someone may find it hard and difficult to process received information effectively. (2) Expressive language disorder is related to the ability to use language in expressing ideas and communicating with others. The problem in this discussion is the common language disorder. There are several characteristics of individuals suffering from oral expressive language disorder (Boyles & Contadino, 1997) in [1] namely feeling shy and withdrawn, as well as having problems in social interaction; postponing in giving answers; finding proper words hard; having scrambled and disorganized thought that makes listeners face some problems; eliminating an integral part of the sentence or the information needed for comprehension; having serious learning problems.

### B. Empty Seats Technique

Empty seats technique is a way to encourage counselees to internalize introjections. Basically, the empty seats technique is a technique of playing the roles by the counselees themselves. Often, counselors do not need any process to play the role as he/she approaches the two seats although it will still be beneficial for a variety of emotional feelings verbally and nonverbally [6].

Empty seats technique is the technique of playing the role performed by one individual (the client) to use dialogue to describe dreams. Then, the role that he/she plays performed in turn by the other individual on the provided seats alternately.

#### 1) *Role and Function of Counselor in Empty Seats Technique*

Most counselees will initially be reluctant to talk to an empty chair. To assist and encourage counselees in this process, the counselor can stay beside them and model the appropriate behavior to make a statement on behalf of a role in the empty seats. In this process, the role of the counselor is

to direct the course of the game's role by giving instructions to the counsees when to move from one chair to another [6]. To create an atmosphere that increases exploration, the counselor should be deeply involved and honest with clients. Polster and Polster (1973) emphasize that counselors should be fun, energetic, and humane.

## 2) *Implementation procedures of Empty Seats Technique in Counseling*

### a) *First Meeting:*

#### (1) FIRST STAGE

The first session is an early stage of the introductory session between the counselor and counselee, held within more or less 5 minutes.

- (1) The counselor explains individual counseling services as well as the counselor and counselee roles respectively.
- (2) The counselor informs the principles and codes of conduct that are held by counselee or the counselor in the counseling process.
- (3) At this stage the counselor try to establish a good relationship to the counselee in order to help foster a sense of trust towards the counselor.
- (4) Counselor and counselee make a time agreement during the counseling process. Meetings are held twice a week, and the counseling process is implemented for  $\pm$  45 minutes.

#### (2) MIDDLE STAGE

The middle stage was done for  $\pm$  13 minutes to which the counselor identifies problems of verbal communication difficulties experienced by the counselee.

##### (1) First Step

Before counselor identifies the problems faced by the counselee, the counselee is given relaxation in advance so that the counselee feels comfort and calm while revealing the problem to the counselor.

##### (2) Second Step

Furthermore, the counselor identifies problems of the counselee by digging counselee's problems experienced when communicating through asking a few questions, such as: What are your problems in verbal communication? Why do you think these problems appeared? How is the communication pattern you have done previously? What changing attitude that you want so that it could help you in overcoming the verbal communication difficulties that you are dealing with now?

##### (3) Third Step

After counselor identifies problems and explore the background in the counselee, the counselor then offers alternative solutions to problems in communicating verbal difficulties faced by counselee using the technique of empty seats, the process is carried out for  $\pm$  10 minutes. Counselors at this stage explains the technique of empty seats to which as follows: (a) Informs the definition of the empty seats technique and its role in overcoming the difficulties of verbal communication. (b) Introduce and

demonstrate the technical implementation of empty seats technique in overcoming difficulties and verbal communication. (c) Explain the advantages and positive impact of the use of techniques of empty seats in overcoming difficulties and verbal communication.

##### (4) Fourth step

At the first step, counselor helps the counsees to recognize their problem and find the behaviours that indicate the verbal communication difficulties on the counselee. At the second step after counselee realized his/her problem and the source of the problem, the counselee has to decide the development that he/she wants. In the third step, the counselor explains the implementation strategy of empty chair technique to the counselee, such as the counselor provides two face to face empty chairs, and the counselee is asked to sit down on one of the chairs and the counselor asks them to imagine that there is someone in front of him/her and is now talking to the him/her; On the first meeting, the counselor is allowed to sit in front of the counselee and acts as an interlocutor, the purpose is to encourage the conversation to serious conversation between the counselee and the interlocutor. After that, the counselor leaves the chair slowly so the counselee acts responsively on both chairs to relate the communication. The counselor asks counselee to repeat and note the result of the technique used in 3 days continuously and on the fourth day the counselor observes the counselee technique implementation.

##### (5) Fifth Step

Based on the stage that counselor conducted, the counselor asks the counselee to make a final conclusion from the meetings and collaborate to discuss the advantage and the challenge of the activity so that the problem can be anticipated on the next meeting. (*The counseling process is conducted during  $\pm$  15 minutes*).

#### (3) CLOSING STAGE

The counselor concludes the activity conducted and make an appointment for the next meeting, the counselee has to bring activity on the implementation on the empty chair technique and the their development during the use of the technique.

### b) *Meeting II*

#### (I) BEGINNING STAGE

On the second meeting, on the beginning stage the counselor does a rapport again. This process is conducted for 10 minutes.

#### (2) MID STAGE

The counselor reminds the problem and agreement that have been made on the previous meeting, (1) The counselor asks the note of the empty chair implementation result from the counselee so the counselor is able to review the counselee development. (2) The counselor helps the counselee to

conduct self evaluation by making a repeated note during the technique implementation of the empty chair technique. Then, the counselee makes a conclusion by himself/herself. (3) If the data collected by the counselee show a successful development on the final stage, the counselor is able to evaluate the counselee that becomes a reward for them. (4) However, if the data collected still show deficiency on the target behaviour, the counselor and counselee have to revise the strategy on the lack of the implementation. (*The counseling process is conducted for ± 30 minutes*).

### (3) FINAL STAGE

After the second stage done, the counselor on the final stage asks the counselee to conclude few things on the counseling. Then, between the counselor and counselee, an appointment for the next meeting is arranged.

#### c) Meeting III

##### (1) BEGINNING STAGE

On the third meeting, on the beginning stage, the counselor asks the counselee to relax, so the counselee feel more prepare and open to tell their self development. (*The counseling is conducted for ± 10 minutes*).

##### (2) MID STAGE

On this stage the counselor conducts some activities such as: (1) repeating on the previous counseling result. (2) reviewing the data result note that were collected by the counselee about target behaviour, which is the result of revision or improvement on the empty seats technique, (3) asking the counselee to make a target behaviour improvement chart from the implementation of counseling technique. (4) giving reward to the counselee in the form of motivation so that the counselee has more confident and is able to solve his/her problem. (*The counseling process is conducted for ± 25 minutes*).

##### (3) CLOSING STAGE

The final stage on the third meeting is the last stage of the individual counseling between the counselor and counselee. The counseling ends by getting a counselee data that show the success changing of behavior and the development on verbal communication aspect. The counselor can ask some questions such as: How is your feeling after you implement the empty seats technique on solving your verbal communication problem? Do you realize the specific problem of verbal communication on yourself? Does your problem of verbal communication decrease?

Then, on the last stage the counselee is asked to see the extend of their development compare to the first meeting.

### III. METHOD

This study employed quantitative research with experimental research design. It used the pre-experimental design in the form of intact-group comparison design in which there is one group used for research, but it is divided into two. Half of the group was the experimental (with treatment) and the other half was the control group (without treatment).

The research setting of this study was at SMPN 31 Banjarmasin. The subjects were the VII grade students and the object of the research was the difficulty of verbal communication on student of the VII grade students at SMPN 31 Banjarmasin. The researcher consideration to choose the VII grade because new students just entered the school and still on the process of adaptation with school society. On the other hand, they are also on the stage of development and growing, so there are physical and psychological change that often cause some problems at new school.

The population of the research was 120 students of the VII grade at SMPN 31 Banjarmasin. The following considerations and steps were used to determine the sample:

1) Interviewing the counselor of SMP Negeri 31 Banjarmasin. Based on interviews result concluded that the seventh grade students had a tendency to experience difficulties in verbal communication.

2) The interview result was also supported by the field observations on the problem of verbal communication difficulties experienced by students.

3) The subjects were given questionnaires on verbal communication difficulties to determine the level of difficulty they experienced.

After conducted sample filtering base on above points, the researchers divided verbal communication measurement scale to the population for further sample filtering. So, from the given questionnaire, eight students were taken as the research samples.

Data collection technique in this study was questionnaire in the measurement scale using likert scale. The questionnaire was used to test validity and reliability. The result of  $r_{\text{measure}}$  bigger than  $r_{\text{table}}$  (taken from product moment table score with total  $N = 40$  by trust standart 95%). The reliability has already tested with 0.904 *Alpha Cronbach* score, it was bigger than  $r_{\text{table}}$  0.381 on the level of significance 95%.

The data obtained were then analyzed by using T-test to find the effectiveness of the empty chair implementation on solving students verbal communication problem. Then, the researchers analyzed the results of the pre-test, middle test, and post-test that can be seen in following section.

### IV. RESULT

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that there was a different average score between before and after counseling with empty chair technique in the experimental group. The previous average score was 64.30% and after conducting the empty chair counseling on the second meeting percentage decreased to 77.63%. On the last meeting the decreasing was 82.36%.

**TABLE I. PRE-TEST, MIDDLE-TEST, AND POST-TEST RESULT OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP BEFORE COUNSELING**

Code	Before counseling		Category
	Score	%	
Kl. 1	117	65 %	S
Kl. 2	128	71 %	T
Kl. 3	109	61 %	S
Kl. 4	109	61 %	S
average	115.75	64.30	

**TABLE II. PRE-TEST, MIDDLE-TEST, AND POST-TEST RESULT OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP MIDDLE COUNSELING**

Code	Middle counseling		Category
	Score	%	
Kl. 1	128	71 %	T
Kl. 2	137	76 %	T
Kl. 3	146	81 %	T
Kl. 4	148	82 %	T
average	139.75	77.63	

**TABLE III. PRE-TEST, MIDDLE-TEST, AND POST-TEST RESULT OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AFTER COUNSELING**

Code	After counseling		Category
	Score	%	
Kl. 1	140	78 %	T
Kl. 2	154	86 %	T
Kl. 3	149	83 %	T
Kl. 4	150	83 %	T
average	148.25	82.36	

**TABLE IV. DIFFERENCES OF (PRE-TEST AND MIDDLE TEST) AND (MIDDLE TEST AND POST TEST) BEFORE, MIDDLE AND AFTER COUNSELING**

Code	Pre-Test & Middle Test differences	Middle Test & Post-Test differences
Kl. 1	5 %	7 %
Kl. 2	5 %	10 %
Kl. 3	20 %	2 %
Kl. 4	21 %	1 %
average	12.75%	5%

Table 5 shows that there was a different average score and percentage before and after counseling in the control group. The percentage before counseling was 66.25% and on the post-test result decreasing to 62.08. The percentage of verbal communication problem on control group did not change, but the percentage of verbal communication problem on counselee changed into -4.25%. Therefore, the verbal communication problem in the control group has got an improvement compared to the pre test.

**TABLE V. PRE-TEST, MIDDLE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULT OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IN THE CONTROL GROUP BEFORE COUNSELING**

Code	Before counseling		Category
	Score	%	
Counselee 1	117	65 %	S
Counselee 2	128	71 %	S
Counselee 3	112	62 %	S
Counselee 4	120	67 %	S
Average	119.25	66.25%	

**TABLE VI. PRE-TEST, MIDDLE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULT OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IN THE CONTROL GROUP AFTER COUNSELING**

Code	After counseling		Category
	Score	%	
Counselee 1	107	59 %	S
Counselee 2	122	68 %	S
Counselee 3	112	62 %	S
Counselee 4	106	59 %	S
Average	111.75	62.08%	

**TABLE VII. DIFFERENCES OF (PRE-TEST AND MIDDLE TEST) AND (MIDDLE TEST AND POST TEST) BEFORE AND AFTER COUNSELING**

Code	Pre-Test & Middle Test differences
Counselee 1	-6 %
Counselee 2	-3 %
Counselee 3	0 %
Counselee 4	-8 %
Average	-4.25%

The research findings of this study showed empty seats technique effectiveness on communication problem of the seventh grade students. It shows decreasing score on test result. Based on the individual counseling, the empty seats technique implementation based on total percentage collected from the experimental group was 82.36% and control group was 62.08%. Overall, the treatment influenced can be formulated as:

$$\text{Treatment influenced} = O_1 - O_2 \Rightarrow 82.36\% - 62.08\% = 20.28\%$$

$O_1 = \text{Experimental group}$        $O_2 = \text{Control group}$

From the reduction of the post-test results in the experimental group and the control group in the results obtained 20.28%. Thus, it can be concluded that the individual counseling with an empty seats technique is effective in overcoming the students difficulties on verbal communication, which is characterized by the score decreasing after the verbal communication difficulties were given individual counseling.

**V. DISCUSSION**

The research findings show that the implementation of individual counseling with empty seats technique is effective in overcoming students verbal communication problem. One of the counselees got the optimal result in counseling process. He is the one who was very enthusiastic towards the counseling techniques conducted. This counselee also has a high motivation in overcoming his difficulties in communication.

This result is due to the influence of internal and external factors. In internal factors, in addition to the requirement of a strong commitment, understanding and knowing yourself are very important. Students are expected to recognize the things that are associated with symptoms that cause difficulty in communicating. So, the stage to recognize and understand themselves is an early stage in overcoming obstacles and demands of life that makes students to be always ready in facing all kinds of conditions they will encounter.

On the other hand, environment also influence students in making positive change on themselves through support, attention, and acceptance from outside. These will strengthen students commitment to make improvement on themselves related to daily life communication. Effective communication process between parents and children also help children to understand themselves, their feeling, their thought, their opinion and their ambition. Negative communication (verbal abuse) influences children brain development. Children who are always in underpressure situation will find themselves hard to think.

For the control group, (K1.1) had a problem with the voice. When the counselee spoke their voice was hoarsely so that the spoken word was not clear. This is because the counselee is male. The voice change was normal on teenager phase. However, the counselee felt distracted by the change because it was not familiar. Because of that, along with the counselor guidance, the counselee decided to train themselves talking with gentle voice. However, on the last meeting when giving the post test, the counselee did not show expected change.

Counselee (K1. 2) had difficulties in understanding the reading material. This counselee has a dyslexia. Hoensby (1984:9) in [5i], defined dyslexia not only making difficulties in reading but also in writing. For beginning training, the counselee decided to read more books to train her understanding. However, this counselee had an obstacle because she did not have much free time. As a result, on the posttest, she did not decrease the level of verbal communication problem.

Counselee (K13) had difficulties in finding vocabulary when making a story in Bahasa Indonesia lesson. This counselee was categorized as a student who has difficulties on expressive writing marked by the inability of express their thought or feeling in form of writing so it is hard for other people to understand. The main indication is the mistakes in spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraph and bad hand writing [5]. However, from the counselee post-test result, he did not experience a change the level of verbal communication problem.

Counselee (K1.4) had difficulties in arranging word and he delayed on giving answer. This obstacle causes his shyness

to talk in front of the classroom. This counselee trains himself to talk in front of the class, but he did not have enough confident with what he wanted to say. Therefore, on the third meeting, after gotten the post test result, this counselee still has difficulties in verbal communication.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

From the result it can be concluded that description of difficulties in verbal communication on students is in the middle level before given the empty seats technique. Description of difficulties in verbal communication on students is in the low level after given the empty seats technique. Empty seats technique is effective in overcoming students verbal communication difficulties.

## VII. SUGGESTIONS

The principal is suggested to better provide facilities to support individual counseling service. The teachers and counselor can increase their cooperation to help students improve their potency optimally, especially on the ability of effective verbal communication. The counselor can create a counseling guidance and service based on students need, especially on verbal communication improvement.

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