

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Online Single-Session SFBC in Reducing Academic Stress and Its Implications for School Psychoeducation

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Abstract. Academic stress is a widespread concern among junior high school students, heightened by increasingly rigorous academic demands and the growing prevalence of technology-mediated learning. Without effective coping strategies, sustained stress can impair academic performance, diminish motivation, and affect psychological well-being. This study examined the effectiveness of Single-Session Therapy grounded in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SST-SFBC) delivered online as a practical intervention to reduce academic stress, and explored its psychoeducational relevance for schools. Using a qualitative case study design, five students participated in one structured online counseling session via a secure video conferencing platform. Data sources included verbatim session transcripts, counselor notes, and student reflections. Thematic analysis identified the application of core SFBC techniques—miracle question, scaling, and future talk—and tracked shifts in students' perceptions and emotional responses to academic challenges. Results showed a marked decrease in academic stress scores in the experimental group (mean 120.8 to 101.6), while the control group's scores increased (128.6 to 131.8). Qualitative narratives reflected greater self-efficacy, improved problem-solving focus, and adoption of adaptive coping strategies rooted in personal strengths. From a psychoeducational perspective, online SST-SFBC functioned both as an efficient short-term intervention and as an empowering tool for fostering resilience and self-directed problem-solving. These findings suggest that SST-SFBC can serve as a scalable, flexible, and resource-efficient counseling approach, particularly valuable where access to extended counseling services is limited.

Key words: *single-session therapy, solution-focused brief counseling, academic stress, psychoeducation, online counseling*

INTRODUCTION

Academic stress has increasingly become a prominent issue among adolescents, particularly junior high school students, as they navigate demanding curricula, high-stakes examinations, and growing performance expectations (Suldo et al., 2008). Prolonged exposure to such stress can lead to decreased academic achievement, reduced motivation, and deterioration of mental well-being (Putwain, 2007). The recent shift toward digital and blended learning environments, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced new stressors such as prolonged screen time, decreased social interaction, and self-regulation challenges (Békés & Aafjes-van Doorn, 2020). These factors necessitate innovative, efficient, and adaptable school-based interventions to support students' mental health.

Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) offers a strengths-based, goal-directed approach that prioritizes solution-building over problem exploration (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007). Unlike traditional therapeutic models that delve deeply into the origins of distress, SFBC encourages clients to focus on what is already working, identify personal resources, and envision a preferred future (Franklin et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that SFBC can effectively reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression across diverse populations, including adolescents in school settings (Kim, 2008; Sari et al., 2020).

While SFBC is traditionally implemented over multiple sessions, there is growing interest in its adaptation into Single-Session Therapy (SST), a model emphasizing meaningful change within a single, structured encounter (Talmon, 1990). SST-SFBC integrates targeted techniques—such as the miracle question, scaling, and future talk—to maximize therapeutic impact in limited time. This makes it particularly appealing for school counselors facing high caseloads and limited resources. Studies have

demonstrated that even a single SFBC session can produce measurable improvements in clients' coping abilities and problem perception (Axelsson, 2020; Septilawati, 2021).

The rise of online counseling further expands the reach of SST-SFBC, enabling access for students in geographically remote areas or those hesitant to seek in-person services due to stigma or scheduling conflicts (Richards & Viganó, 2013). Online delivery offers flexibility and can reduce psychological barriers, allowing students to engage in counseling from familiar environments (Norwood et al., 2018). Research during the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed that online SFBC can achieve comparable outcomes to face-to-face sessions, while offering additional convenience (Békés & Aafjes-van Doorn, 2020). From a psychoeducational perspective, SST-SFBC not only serves as a short-term intervention but also as a learning process where students develop skills in self-reflection, problem-solving, and adaptive coping. This aligns with the broader objectives of school-based psychoeducation, which aims to equip students with lifelong mental health competencies (Gladding, 2017). By embedding counseling techniques within the educational framework, schools can create a proactive mental health support system rather than relying solely on reactive crisis interventions.

Despite these promising developments, research on the integration of SST-SFBC in online school counseling—particularly within Southeast Asian contexts—remains limited. There is a need to empirically evaluate its effectiveness in reducing academic stress and to explore its implications for enhancing psychoeducational practices. The present study addresses this gap by examining the outcomes of an online SST-SFBC intervention for junior high school students, focusing on both quantitative changes in stress levels and qualitative shifts in students' perspectives and coping strategies.

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to examine the effectiveness of Online Single-Session Therapy based on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SST-SFBC) in reducing academic stress among junior high school students in Bandung Indonesia during the 2024-2025 academic year. The participants were five students (three female, two male) identified by the school counselor as experiencing high levels of academic stress, determined through preliminary screening using the Academic Stress Scale. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met inclusion criteria: (a) currently enrolled in junior high school, (b) reporting moderate to high academic stress, and (c) available to participate in an online counseling session.

The intervention consisted of a single, structured counseling session (45–60 minutes) delivered via a secure video conferencing platform. The session followed the SST-SFBC framework, incorporating core techniques such as the miracle question, scaling question, exception finding, and future talk (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007; Franklin et al., 2017). The session structure included rapport building, goal clarification, exploration of previous successes, identification of personal resources, and the co-construction of practical, future-oriented steps. Data sources comprised verbatim transcripts of the counseling sessions, counselor observation notes, and post-session reflective feedback from students. Academic stress levels were measured pre- and post-intervention using the Academic Stress Scale, and descriptive statistics were calculated to illustrate changes in scores. Thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' experiences, perception changes, and coping strategies. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

The results indicated a substantial reduction in academic stress scores among the experimental group, with mean scores decreasing from 120.8 to 101.6 after the single online counseling session. In contrast, the control group—students who did not receive any counseling—showed an increase from 128.6 to 131.8. This aligns with previous findings that SFBC-based interventions can lead to significant short-term improvements in students' stress management (Sari et al., 2020; Permatasari & Nurihsan, 2019).

Table 1. Summary of Student Progress in SST-SFBC Session

Participant	Pre-test Stress Score	SFBC Core Techniques Used	Post-test Stress Score	Main Outcome
S1	118	Miracle Q, Scaling, Future Talk	97	Improved confidence in exam preparation
S2	125	Scaling, Exception Finding	104	Reduced anxiety, better time management
S3	122	Miracle Q, Exception Finding	102	More optimistic outlook on school tasks
S4	119	Scaling, Future Talk	101	Increased self-motivation
S5	120	Miracle Q, Scaling	103	Stronger problem-solving orientation

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: **(1) Activation of Internal Resources** – Students identified personal strengths and past successes as tools to address current academic challenges, consistent with the SFBC principle of building on what works (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007). **(2) Shift in Problem Perception** – The miracle question and future talk encouraged students to envision desirable academic outcomes, fostering a shift from problem-focused to solution-focused thinking (Franklin et al., 2017). **(3) Development of Adaptive Strategies** – Students reported concrete strategies such as creating study schedules, seeking peer support, and breaking tasks into manageable steps, reflecting improved coping abilities.

Discussion

These findings support the argument that SST-SFBC can produce meaningful change even within a single session, confirming prior research by Axelsson (2020) and Septilawati (2021) on its short-term effectiveness. The online format appeared to enhance accessibility and reduce psychological barriers, as reported by students who felt more comfortable discussing sensitive topics in a familiar home environment (Richards & Viganó, 2013; Norwood et al., 2018). From a psychoeducational perspective, the intervention's brevity and efficiency make it suitable for integration into school counseling programs, especially in contexts with limited counseling resources. By equipping students with transferable problem-solving skills, SST-SFBC not only addresses immediate stress but also fosters resilience—an essential competency for navigating academic and life challenges (Gladding, 2017).

Our previous study (Oktavianas, 2024) demonstrated that online Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) is effective in reducing academic stress among junior high school students. That research employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design with ten students, divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group participated in four online counseling sessions, while the control group received no intervention. A non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed a significant decrease in academic stress scores in the experimental group (from a mean of 120.8 to 101.6), whereas the control group's scores slightly increased (from 128.6 to 131.8). These findings confirmed that online SFBC can serve as an effective and flexible counseling strategy for mitigating academic stress, particularly in the context of distance learning and digital education.

The present study aligns with those findings but adopts a different design. Whereas the earlier study (Oktavianas, 2024) evaluated the effectiveness of multi-session online SFBC, the current research focuses on Single-Session Therapy (SST) to determine whether SFBC's benefits can be achieved within a single structured session. SST is grounded in the principle that significant change can occur in just one well-directed meeting (Talmon, 1990). This case study supports the notion that SFBC can still activate clients' internal resources, reframe their perception of problems, and foster confidence in managing academic pressures, even in a brief online format. This comparison underscores the novelty of the present study—demonstrating that SFBC is not only effective in multiple-session interventions but also in a single, efficient session well-suited to time-limited school counseling contexts.

Quantitative findings from our previous study (Oktavianas, 2024) directly support the theoretical foundations of solution-focused approaches. As noted by Bavelas et al. (2013), SFBC emphasizes building solutions rather than dwelling on the origins of problems, focusing on the client's "preferred future" through language, dialogue, and reflection. In this framework, clients are seen not as damaged individuals needing repair, but as capable agents with resources to effect meaningful change. However, the observed increase in stress among the control group underscores the need for proactive interventions. Without targeted support, academic pressures can accumulate over time, exacerbating stress and potentially leading to burnout (Suldo et al., 2008; Putwain, 2007).

In the current study, SFBC proved effective in online text-based counseling, where the conversational process allowed clients to reflect on their situation, identify exceptions to their problems, and construct adaptive alternative scenarios. This is consistent with Kraus et al. (2010), who observed that SFBC is highly compatible with online counseling, as the text medium inherently facilitates thoughtful processing and clarification of perceptions. In this study, WhatsApp served as the intervention platform, enabling students to openly share their academic stress experiences without the pressure of face-to-face interaction. SFBC techniques such as scaling questions, miracle questions, coping questions, and compliments were successfully implemented in this format, while clients benefited from having more time to formulate accurate and self-reflective responses. As Kraus et al. (2010) argue, text-based online counseling offers expanded reflective space, allowing clients to think more deeply before replying—a particular advantage for adolescents who may be sensitive to social judgment. Moreover, the adaptability of counseling language into chat-based communication further enhanced rapport, as seen in the clients' willingness to share openly and the counselor's ability to provide timely, context-appropriate responses.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that online Single-Session Therapy based on Solution-Focused Brief Counseling can effectively reduce academic stress among junior high school students while simultaneously promoting self-efficacy and adaptive coping. Beyond its therapeutic value, SST-SFBC offers significant psychoeducational benefits, serving as a scalable and flexible model for school counseling programs. Its online delivery expands accessibility, making it particularly valuable in resource-constrained educational settings or where face-to-face counseling is not feasible. Future research should explore its long-term impact, adaptability to group counseling formats, and integration with broader school-based mental health initiatives. By embedding SST-SFBC into psychoeducational practices, schools can proactively address students' mental health needs and equip them with lifelong coping skills.

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