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Group Dynamics in Building Self-Awareness and Actualizing Students' Potential through a Person-Centered Approach

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Abstract

Self-awareness and the ability to realize one's potential are central to student development. This study examined how group dynamics within person-centered counseling may foster self-awareness and help students develop their potential. Using a descriptive analytical approach, the review drew on books and scholarly studies on person-centered counseling, group counseling, self-awareness, and self-actualization. The analysis identified key ideas, grouped them into themes, and compared and synthesized findings across sources. The synthesis suggests that group counseling creates opportunities for interpersonal learning through sharing experiences, receiving feedback, and considering others' perspectives. Empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence may foster a group climate in which students feel safe expressing themselves and exploring their potential over time. By linking these relational conditions to the ways students learn from one another, the review provides a conceptual basis for empirical research on person-centered group counseling with students.

Keywords: Group Dynamics; Self-Awareness; Self-Actualization; Person-Centered Counseling; Student Development

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a process of human development that is oriented not only toward academic achievement but also toward personality formation and individuals' ability to understand themselves. Students are at a developmental stage characterized by changes in thinking patterns, emotional regulation, social relationships, and the formation of personal identity. Within this process, the ability to recognize oneself and understand one's potential becomes an important aspect that requires attention in the educational environment.

One important aspect of this development is self-awareness, namely the ability to recognize one's own condition, including emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, motivations, and goals. Self-awareness helps students understand the reasons behind their behavior, consider the consequences of their actions, and identify areas that still need improvement. Conversely, limited self-understanding may make it difficult for students to make decisions and cause them to become easily influenced by the judgments of their surroundings.

Self-awareness does not develop independently of social relationships. Students interact with peers, teachers, families, and the school environment. Experiences of being accepted, appreciated, listened to, or rejected can influence how individuals perceive themselves. Therefore, a supportive social environment is an essential element in the process of self-recognition and self-acceptance.

In addition to self-awareness, the actualization of potential is also an important aspect of student development. Rogers (1957) explained the actualizing tendency as an organism's fundamental drive to maintain, develop, and enhance its capabilities. This perspective positions students as individuals who possess the capacity to grow when provided with supportive relational conditions.

However, students' potential does not always develop optimally. Some may not yet recognize their strengths, fear expressing their opinions, lack confidence in their abilities, or become overly dependent on the judgments of others. Guidance and counseling services can provide developmental opportunities through group counseling, which enables students to interact, share experiences, listen to other members, and learn to understand differences.

Group dynamics are reflected in communication, openness, trust, acceptance, support, and feedback among members. Hasanah, Hambali, and Setiyowati (2024) examined the relevance of group guidance services in developing students' self-awareness in inclusive

schools. Susilo, Hambali, and Muslihati (2025) also discussed the use of the Structured Learning Approach in group guidance to develop self-awareness. These studies indicate that group activities can be utilized as an environment for developing self-awareness, although the strategies employed differ. The relevance of person-centered group relationships is also evident in the study by Lee and Yang (2024), who developed a person-centered group counseling program and identified changes in several psychological aspects among participants with tendencies toward relationship addiction. These findings demonstrate that person-centered principles can be implemented in a group format; however, the research context differs from that of students in schools.

One approach relevant to establishing supportive relationships is the person-centered approach developed by Carl Rogers. This approach positions individuals as persons who possess the capacity to understand and develop themselves when they are situated within supportive relationships. Rogers (1957) emphasized congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding as essential conditions for constructive change. In the development of contemporary theory, Doyle (2025) also highlighted that the process of individual actualization cannot be separated from the social environment and community. This perspective strengthens the rationale for examining group dynamics while also reminding us that group expectations can either support personal growth or create incongruence when individual identities are not respected.

The study by Hafsya, Masril, Ardimen, and Darimis (2026) provides empirical insights into person-centered group counseling for enhancing students' self-confidence. The study reported an increase in scores after seven sessions; however, it involved a limited number of participants and did not include a control group. Therefore, its findings should be interpreted cautiously and cannot be directly generalized.

Based on this discussion, this study aims to analyze the role of group dynamics in fostering self-awareness, explain the contribution of the person-centered approach to establishing a supportive group atmosphere, and describe the relationship between these processes and the actualization of students' potential.

METHODS

This study employs a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This method was selected because the discussion focuses on examining concepts and

previous research findings concerning group dynamics, self-awareness, potential actualization, and the person-centered approach. Library research enables researchers to examine theories and research findings as a basis for understanding a phenomenon conceptually (McLeod, 2025). In the context of counseling, the person-centered approach emphasizes awareness, self-congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard as essential elements in the individual growth process (Sutanti, 2020).

The data sources consist of books and scientific journal articles relevant to humanistic counseling, group counseling, personal development, and self-actualization. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the topic, clarity of publication identity, and connection to the focus of the study. Research on the implementation of the person-centered approach in groups was used to examine its practical application, while studies on group guidance and self-awareness served as comparative sources. Studies on students' self-awareness were used to understand individuals' abilities to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses (Lailatussaidah et al., 2021). Meanwhile, research on self-actualization counseling provided an empirical foundation for developing personal competencies through a humanistic approach (Supriatna, 2017). Literature on group counseling was also used to understand leadership processes, interactions, and the establishment of a group atmosphere that supports members' development (Barida et al., 2023; Nuha et al., 2024).

The literature search was conducted systematically using the keywords group dynamics, self-awareness, self-actualization, person-centered counseling, and group counseling, either individually or in combination. The search focused on journal articles that directly addressed self-awareness, self-actualization, group counseling, or the implementation of the person-centered approach. Sources were selected based on their substantive relevance to the research focus, the clarity of author and publication identities, and the availability of information regarding research objectives, methods, and findings. Publications that merely mentioned related terms without discussing them substantively were not used as primary sources. Rogers' classical literature was used as a primary source for person-centered concepts, while recent studies were employed to examine their development and application. Previous studies on group counseling have demonstrated the relevance of group services in developing students' self-esteem, openness, and interpersonal skills (Rusmana et al., 2020; Ningrum & Amin, 2026). Since records of the number of documents at each stage of the search process were unavailable, this study is not claimed to be a systematic review and does not report the number of retrieved or selected publications.

The analysis was conducted thematically through four steps. First, each source was examined to identify concepts and findings related to the research focus. Second, the information was categorized into the themes of group dynamics, self-awareness, potential actualization, and person-centered principles. Third, the findings were compared by considering similarities, differences, subject contexts, research designs, and the methodological limitations of each source. Fourth, the comparative findings were synthesized to formulate conceptual relationships among the themes and their implications for guidance and counseling services. The thematic categorization considered interaction processes, the role of group leaders, and the establishment of a conducive group atmosphere (Corey, 2022; Nuha et al., 2024). The synthesis also considered studies on group counseling as a means of developing students' personal and social competencies (Fasha et al., 2025; Rusmana et al., 2020).

Accordingly, the findings of this study are not intended to constitute direct evidence of the effectiveness of counseling programs among specific groups of students. The conclusions are formulated based on a synthesis of theories and findings from previous studies. The limitations in documenting the literature search process also mean that the findings should be interpreted as a focused conceptual review rather than a comprehensive mapping of all available publications.

RESULTS

1. Group Dynamics as an Interpersonal Learning Environment

Group dynamics serve as an interpersonal learning environment that provides students with opportunities to understand themselves and others through meaningful social interactions. Within the group process, students can express their thoughts, share personal experiences, communicate feelings, and listen to different perspectives. These interactions encourage active participation and create opportunities for mutual learning. Through open communication and constructive feedback, students become more aware of how their attitudes, emotions, and behaviors influence their relationships with others. Furthermore, group activities allow students to recognize similarities and differences among group members, thereby developing mutual understanding, respect, and social sensitivity. A supportive group environment also encourages students to participate more confidently without excessive fear of judgment or rejection. Therefore, group dynamics are not merely a

means of facilitating interaction but also an interpersonal learning process that supports personal development, self-understanding, and the development of positive social relationships among students.

2. Self-Awareness from a Person-Centered Perspective

From a person-centered perspective, self-awareness develops through an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and accept personal experiences, feelings, abilities, and limitations. This process requires a supportive psychological environment in which individuals can express themselves freely without experiencing excessive judgment or pressure. Empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence are essential relational conditions that facilitate this development. Empathy enables individuals to feel understood, while unconditional positive regard encourages self-acceptance regardless of personal weaknesses or limitations. Congruence supports consistency between personal experiences, feelings, and self-expression. Through these conditions, students can gradually develop a more realistic understanding of themselves and become more open to recognizing aspects of their personalities that may previously have been difficult to acknowledge. Consequently, self-awareness is not simply the ability to identify personal characteristics but also involves accepting personal experiences and developing a more authentic understanding of oneself.

3. The Role of Group Dynamics in Fostering Self-Awareness

Group dynamics contribute to the development of students' self-awareness through several interconnected interpersonal processes, including openness, active listening, empathetic feedback, and reflection. Openness provides opportunities for students to communicate personal experiences and express emotions more honestly. Active listening allows group members to understand different perspectives while recognizing the importance of mutual respect. Meanwhile, empathetic feedback helps students identify aspects of their attitudes and behaviors that may not have been previously recognized. Reflection enables students to evaluate their experiences, understand emotional responses, and identify behavioral patterns in their daily interactions. These processes create opportunities for students to compare their self-perceptions with feedback received from others without necessarily accepting every external judgment. Through continuous interpersonal engagement, students can develop a more comprehensive understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, emotional responses, and social behavior. Therefore, group

dynamics can facilitate self-awareness by providing meaningful opportunities for personal reflection and learning through interactions with others.

4. Actualization of Students' Potential

The actualization of students' potential involves the process of recognizing, developing, and expressing individual abilities through supportive experiences and meaningful opportunities. Students possess different interests, talents, capacities, and personal characteristics that require appropriate conditions to develop. In this regard, a supportive group environment can encourage students to explore their abilities, communicate ideas, express opinions, and participate in activities without excessive fear of making mistakes. Psychological safety and positive acceptance are important because they enable students to develop confidence in expressing their personal characteristics. Furthermore, interactions with other group members can provide new perspectives that help students recognize opportunities for personal growth. However, potential actualization should not be understood merely as achieving particular accomplishments or demonstrating specific abilities. It also involves developing personal awareness, accepting individual limitations, taking responsibility, and continuously improving oneself. Thus, the development of students' potential requires an environment that respects individual differences and provides opportunities for gradual and meaningful personal development.

5. Integrating Group Dynamics and the Person-Centered Approach

The integration of group dynamics and the person-centered approach provides a conceptual framework for creating supportive interpersonal experiences that encourage students' self-awareness and potential actualization. Group dynamics facilitate interaction, communication, feedback, and shared reflection, while the person-centered approach establishes relational conditions based on empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. The combination of these elements can create a group environment in which students feel respected, accepted, and encouraged to express their experiences. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this integration cannot be separated from several important considerations. Participants need sufficient readiness to engage in group activities, while counselors must possess the competencies required to facilitate communication, maintain group cohesion, and respond appropriately to individual needs. Participation also needs to be managed to ensure that every member has an opportunity to contribute. In addition, confidentiality must be protected to maintain trust and psychological safety. Therefore,

successful integration requires both appropriate group management and consistent application of person-centered principles.

6. Implications for Guidance and Counseling Services

The integration of group dynamics and the person-centered approach offers a conceptual foundation for developing guidance and counseling services that emphasize students' personal development. Group counseling can provide opportunities for students to explore personal experiences, understand emotional responses, recognize individual strengths and limitations, and develop more constructive interpersonal relationships. Counselors can facilitate these processes by establishing a supportive atmosphere, encouraging active participation, providing empathetic responses, and respecting individual differences. The approach also highlights the importance of considering students' readiness, individual needs, group participation, and confidentiality when implementing counseling activities. Furthermore, the evaluation of counseling outcomes should distinguish between self-awareness, self-confidence, self-acceptance, and self-actualization because these constructs are related but represent different aspects of personal development. Accordingly, each outcome requires appropriate indicators to ensure meaningful evaluation. Since the present study is based on a focused literature review, its conceptual propositions should be examined through further empirical research to determine their practical applicability and effectiveness in educational guidance and counseling settings.

DISCUSSION

1. Group Dynamics as an Interpersonal Learning Environment

Group dynamics refer to the interaction processes that occur among members when they engage in shared activities. These processes are reflected in communication, relationships among members, the formation of group norms, a sense of belonging, openness, and the ability to provide and receive responses. In group counseling, the helping process takes place through both the relationship between the counselor and group members and the relationships among the members themselves.

Groups provide interpersonal experiences that enable students to listen to other people's experiences, identify similarities and differences, and view problems from broader perspectives. Members who initially feel alone may realize that others also encounter similar difficulties. This experience can foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.

Group interactions also provide opportunities to learn how to express opinions, listen actively, respect differences, and respond appropriately. Students can recognize their behavioral patterns when interacting with others. Feedback from other members can reveal discrepancies between intentions, behaviors, and the impacts of those behaviors as perceived by others. Nevertheless, information from peers does not constitute an absolute judgment of an individual; feedback needs to be reconsidered by its recipient based on their own experiences and understanding. Group dynamics do not always develop positively on their own. The dominance of certain members, passive attitudes, negative judgments, and a lack of trust can hinder openness. Therefore, counselors need to establish group agreements and ensure balanced opportunities for participation.

2. Self-Awareness from a Person-Centered Perspective

Self-awareness refers to the ability to understand one's own condition realistically, including feelings, thoughts, needs, values, abilities, and limitations. In the person-centered approach, an individual's subjective experience constitutes an important element in the counseling process. Rogers (1957) explained the relational conditions in counseling that support constructive change, including congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding.

In this study, self-awareness is distinguished from self-confidence and self-acceptance. Self-awareness concerns the ability to recognize and understand one's own condition; self-confidence is more closely related to belief in one's ability to perform certain tasks; whereas self-acceptance concerns an individual's attitude toward accepting their own condition. These three concepts may be interrelated, but they cannot be used interchangeably. This distinction is important to ensure that research findings on self-confidence are not interpreted as direct evidence of increased self-awareness.

Unconditional positive regard means that counselors value members as individuals, even though not all behaviors they demonstrate must necessarily be approved. Empathy is reflected in the willingness to listen to and understand members' experiences from their own perspectives. Congruence relates to the counselor's genuine and consistent attitude within the counseling relationship. In a group context, these principles extend beyond the relationship between the counselor and individual members. Counselors also need to facilitate members' learning to listen without judgment, respond empathetically, and respect

the personal boundaries of others. These three conditions help establish a safe atmosphere in which students can explore their experiences and feelings.

Self-awareness is not developed through coercion or labeling. Counselors do not determine who students are or what kind of individuals they should become. Instead, counselors provide relationships that enable students to understand their experiences, recognize their feelings, and discover meaning in those experiences.

3. The Role of Group Dynamics in Fostering Self-Awareness

Group dynamics can support self-awareness through self-disclosure, listening to other members' experiences, providing feedback, personal reflection, and strengthening responsibility. When students explain their experiences, they learn to construct an understanding of themselves. Listening to other members' experiences broadens their perspectives, while empathetic feedback helps them recognize aspects of themselves that they may not have previously been aware of.

Feedback needs to be delivered politely, specifically, and without degrading others. Its purpose is not to determine whether an individual's personality is right or wrong, but rather to provide an additional perspective. To prevent feedback from becoming a form of social pressure, members should be given the right to accept, consider, or disregard feedback that they perceive as inappropriate. Subsequently, reflection helps members connect group experiences with their everyday lives and determine aspects they wish to improve.

Hafsya et al. (2026) reported an increase in self-confidence scores following seven sessions of person-centered group counseling. The mean score increased from 88.11 to 117.78, and the N-Gain value was reported as 0.36. However, the study involved nine participants without a control group and did not include follow-up measurements. These findings constitute preliminary evidence concerning self-confidence, rather than direct evidence that the self-awareness of all students necessarily increases.

The findings of Lee and Yang (2024) provide a comparison that is more closely related to the person-centered group counseling format. Their developed program was tested on a group with tendencies toward relationship addiction and demonstrated changes in self-concept clarity, unconditional self-acceptance, and distress tolerance. Nevertheless, these findings cannot be directly transferred to the student context because the participants' characteristics, the problems addressed, and the program objectives were different. The

significance of these findings for the present study primarily lies in their support for the potential application of person-centered principles in group processes.

4. Actualization of Students' Potential

Potential actualization refers to the process of developing individual abilities and qualities. Potential may include academic abilities, creativity, social skills, leadership, communication, and particular interests. Potential does not always become visible because students may not yet have the courage to demonstrate their abilities, may fear making mistakes, or may be concerned about other people's judgments.

From Rogers' perspective, the actualizing tendency encourages individuals to grow and develop their capacities. Unconditional positive regard helps students understand that their self-worth is not determined solely by achievement. Empathy helps them recognize their needs and interests, while congruence provides an example of genuine and open relationships. Evidence from the educational context is also presented by Montika, Aprison, and Yusri (2022), who reported an improvement in students' self-actualization through the client-centered approach in individual counseling. Because the research design and service format were different, this study is more appropriately understood as supporting the relevance of an individual-centered approach rather than providing evidence of the effectiveness of group dynamics. Meanwhile, Puspitarini et al. (2025) developed and tested a self-actualization scale for university students in Indonesia. This measurement study highlights that self-actualization needs to be translated into clear indicators before being evaluated in guidance and counseling services.

Within groups, potential actualization can be supported through opportunities to express ideas, try new roles, receive support, and evaluate personal development. Students can identify their abilities, interests, obstacles, and realistic development steps. However, actualization should not be imposed through uniform standards because each individual has different interests, backgrounds, and developmental paces.

5. Integrating Group Dynamics and the Person-Centered Approach

The integration of group dynamics and the person-centered approach combines group interaction processes with relational qualities that respect individuals. Counselors can begin activities by establishing agreements concerning mutual respect, confidentiality, voluntariness, and balanced opportunities for participation. Once relationships and trust

have been established, members can be encouraged to explore their experiences, feelings, strengths, and areas they wish to develop.

Counselors need to avoid providing advice prematurely. Students should be given opportunities to discover understanding through sharing experiences, listening, and reflecting on those experiences. Activities can then continue with the identification of potential and the formulation of simple and realistic personal development steps.

Group implementation needs to consider group size, members' readiness, time, location, and ethical principles. Not every personal experience needs to be shared in front of the group. Confidentiality should be explained as a shared commitment, accompanied by a realistic clarification that counselors cannot fully guarantee the behavior of other members outside the sessions. Counselors need to consider individual counseling services when students face problems requiring more specialized intervention. Khairati et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of preparing for person-centered group counseling, including considerations of location, time, group size, members' readiness, and ethical commitments. Thus, a safe atmosphere is not merely the result of a counselor's friendly attitude but needs to be established through consistent group planning and management.

6. Implications for Guidance and Counseling Services

This study implies that guidance and counseling services need to provide opportunities for developing students' strengths rather than focusing solely on problem resolution. Counselors need to pay attention to relationship quality, manage member participation, and direct activities toward reflection and personal development.

Critically, the reviewed literature does not yet provide consistent evidence that a particular form of group dynamics automatically improves all aspects of personal development. Hasanah et al. (2024) and Susilo et al. (2025) position self-awareness as a target of group services, whereas Hafsya et al. (2026) and Safitri et al. (2025) focus more on self-confidence. Lee and Yang (2024) examined a person-centered program for a group experiencing relationship-related problems, while Montika et al. (2022) investigated self-actualization through individual counseling. Differences in variables, subjects, and service formats mean that the research findings cannot be combined as though they measured the same effects. Furthermore, groups can serve as sources of support as well as sources of conformity pressure; therefore, the quality of facilitation, a sense of safety, and respect for

individual choices constitute important conditions. The contribution of this study is a conceptual synthesis that connects group interaction mechanisms with person-centered relational conditions, rather than asserting causal effectiveness that has not yet been tested.

Service evaluation can consider member engagement, the ability to recognize personal feelings and strengths, openness in communication, and potential development plans. Evaluation should not merely measure the courage to speak or the number of actively participating members because the development of self-awareness may occur gradually, and some reflective processes are not always visible through verbal behavior. To make evaluation more systematic, counselors can use written reflections, group process records, participation observations, and follow-up conversations. Self-awareness indicators may include the ability to identify emotions, recognize personal strengths and limitations, and explain the reasons behind decisions. Potential actualization indicators may include the ability to establish goals that align with personal interests, undertake development steps, and assess progress realistically. These indicators constitute proposed operational measures for guidance and counseling services, rather than standardized instruments validated by this study.

The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on library research without direct testing among groups of students. Furthermore, some previous studies examined related variables, such as self-confidence and self-acceptance, which are not entirely equivalent to self-awareness or potential actualization. Further field research is required to examine the implementation of this integrated approach.

Research implication, this study highlights the importance of integrating group dynamics and the person-centered approach into guidance and counseling services to foster students' self-awareness and potential actualization. Counselors are encouraged to create supportive environments that emphasize empathy, acceptance, openness, and meaningful interpersonal interaction.

Research limitations, this study is limited to a focused literature review and conceptual analysis. It does not involve direct empirical observation or testing of the proposed approach. Therefore, its findings cannot establish the actual effectiveness of the integration in specific educational settings.

CONCLUSION

Group dynamics have the potential to foster students' self-awareness and actualization of their potential through openness, mutual listening, empathetic feedback, and reflection. These processes provide students with opportunities to understand their feelings, abilities, limitations, and behavioral patterns through interpersonal experiences. The person-centered approach provides a relational foundation through empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Integrating these principles with group dynamics can create an environment that values each member's uniqueness. However, its success depends on participants' readiness, counselors' skills, the management of participation, and the protection of confidentiality. The literature reviewed also indicates that self-awareness, self-confidence, self-acceptance, and self-actualization are related but distinct constructs and therefore need to be evaluated using appropriate indicators. The contribution of this study lies in its conceptual synthesis of the mechanisms of interpersonal learning within group dynamics and the relational conditions of the person-centered approach. Since this study employs a focused literature review rather than a systematic review, further empirical research using measurable procedures and indicators is needed to examine its implementation and direct impact on students.

This study contributes to the field of guidance and counseling by providing a conceptual synthesis of interpersonal learning mechanisms within group dynamics and the relational principles of the person-centered approach. It also clarifies the relationship between self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-confidence, and self-actualization as distinct but interconnected constructs.

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct empirical studies using experimental, quasi-experimental, or qualitative designs to examine the implementation and effectiveness of this integrated approach. Further research should also employ appropriate measurement indicators to evaluate changes in students' self-awareness and potential actualization.

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