

## **The Effectiveness of Javanese Philosophy-Based Interventions in Reducing Sociocomparative Attitudes**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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This research, motivated by the socio-comparative phenomenon that occurs among children in orphanages, aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a gratitude intervention based on the Javanese philosophy "urip iku mung sawang sinawang" in abating socio-comparative attitudes and improving gratitude levels in orphans. The experimenters implemented a one-group pretest-posttest quantitative experimental design on 59 children from an orphanage in Surabaya, Indonesia. A total of 11 children participated in the intervention sessions from start to finish. Analysis of nonparametric data from the Wilcoxon rank test demonstrates that neither changes in socio-comparative attitudes ( $p=.247$ ) nor gratitude levels ( $p=.264$ ) could be considered statistically significant. Therefore, we have insufficient evidence to declare that the intervention was effective. Keyword: Sikap sosiokomparatif, kebersyukuran, desain eksperimen, falsafah jawa.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a country rich in culture, has various philosophies of life that teach local wisdom and moral values. One philosophy originating from Java is “urip iku mung sawang sinawang,” which means “life is only seen from each person’s point of view.” This expression reflects the understanding that each individual has a different perspective and life experience, and therefore, social comparisons are often irrelevant or inaccurate. This philosophy emphasizes the importance of not getting caught up in comparisons that can lead to dissatisfaction or envy, but rather focusing on one’s own life and happiness. In the modern context, social comparisons are often exacerbated by social media, which presents other people’s lives in an idealized and perfect light. Studies show that social media can increase the tendency to compare oneself with others, which can lead to a decline in psychological well-being and individual happiness (Chou & Edge, 2012). The philosophy of “urip iku mung sawang sinawang” offers an alternative approach to reducing this negative impact by encouraging individuals to focus on their own life experiences and develop gratitude and inner satisfaction (Asri, 2020). The Javanese proverb “urip iku mung sawang sinawang,” which means “life is just seeing each other,” describes the human tendency to compare their lives with those of others. This sociocomparative attitude is often the root of self-dissatisfaction, stress, and anxiety (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002).

In this context, Javanese philosophy can offer a unique approach to reducing the negative impact of such social comparisons. Javanese philosophy emphasizes the values of simplicity, self-acceptance, and togetherness, which can help individuals feel more satisfied with themselves and reduce the tendency to compare themselves with others. The widespread sociocomparative attitude in modern society has a significant negative impact on individual well-being. Individuals often feel dissatisfied, stressed, and anxious because they constantly compare themselves to others, especially through social media that promotes idealized images of life and success (Kross et al., 2013). This dissatisfaction can worsen psychological conditions and increase the risk of mental health problems (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Javanese philosophy-based interventions in reducing sociocomparative attitudes and increasing gratitude. Javanese philosophy, which emphasizes the values of simplicity, self-acceptance, and togetherness, is considered to have great potential in helping individuals overcome harmful social comparisons. By integrating these local cultural values into psychological intervention programs, it is hoped that more relevant and effective strategies can be found in the Indonesian cultural context. In addition, this study also aims to add to the empirical literature on the benefits of a culture-based approach in psychology, particularly in the context of reducing sociocomparative attitudes, which have been shown to have a significant negative impact on individual well-being (Suls & Wheeler, 2000).

Local culture-based interventions, such as those exemplified in Javanese philosophy, have great potential to improve individuals’ psychological well-being. Research shows that interventions tailored to the local cultural context can be more effective and accepted by the community (Kirmayer et al., 2003; Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Marsella & Yamada, 2010). It is important for individuals to understand the cultural context in efforts to improve mental health, with approaches that are in line with local values that are more accepted and effective in the long term. Other studies also support the importance of culturally-based interventions in improving well-being. Research by Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) shows that self-acceptance and happiness are higher in individuals who are less influenced by social comparison. Further research by Widodo (2018) shows that culturally-based or locally-philosophical intervention approaches can significantly influence individuals’ attitudes and behaviors in social

contexts. By focusing on values such as simplicity, self-acceptance, and appreciation for life as it is, these interventions aim not only to reduce social comparison but also to improve overall psychological well-being.

## METHOD

We used a quantitative experimental research design, specifically a one-group pretest-posttest design. We chose this design so that we could investigate the effectiveness of the intervention we would give to the research participants. We did not use a control group due to limitations in the number of subjects available in the field.

The participants in our study were children from the Maslahatul Ummah Orphanage located in Surabaya, East Java. The orphanage children who participated in this study were aged 6-18 years. The number of participants who took part in this intervention was 59. 33 participants attended the first intervention session; 37 participants attended the second intervention session; and 29 participants attended the third intervention session. Eleven participants completed all stages of the intervention. The average age of the 59 participants in our study was 12.2 years with a standard deviation of 3.01 years. A total of 61.01% of participants were male, while 38.98% were female. Approval was given by the Chair of the Maslahatul Ummah Orphanage Foundation for the orphanage children to participate in the study.

Our intervention consisted of one initial conditioning session (research socialization) and three intervention sessions (two material sessions and one workshop session). In the first session, the initial conditioning, we explained to the research participants what activities they would be doing during the research. We provided material on social comparison in the second session, Intervention Stage 1. The philosophy of “urip iku mung sawang sinawang” was explained in the third session, Intervention Stage 2. We packaged the Javanese philosophy of “urip iku mung sawang sinawang” and the material on gratitude in the form of a 90-minute in-person group psychoeducation intervention and a daily gratitude journal exercise. The fourth session was the final session, namely Intervention Stage 3, where we held a workshop as an intervention to increase gratitude.

In the Phase 1 Intervention, we provided 60 minutes of material on social comparison in general and the message of “Ojo Dibandingke” to the children in the orphanage. Afterwards, we also held an interactive session by inviting the children in the orphanage to write down the things they are grateful for. We measured their understanding of the material in Intervention Phase 1 using pre-tests and post-tests.

Next, in Intervention Phase 2, we provided material on the Javanese philosophy of “urip iku mung sawang sinawang” and its relation to the influence of self-comparison on psychological conditions for 90 minutes. We measured their understanding of the material with pre-tests and post-tests as well.

In Intervention Phase 3, we distributed exercise books and workbooks to the children in the orphanage. We invited them to practice being grateful for the things they already have by filling out the gratitude diary in the workbook and exercise book. We designed the workbook and exercise materials to be suitable for children aged 6-18 years and to support the formation of a habit of filling out a daily gratitude journal exercise. Interventions in the form of daily gratitude journal exercises, skill-building workshops, and in-person psychoeducation have been proven to reduce stress and strengthen resilience (Caragol, 2022).

Our research focuses on two main dependent variables, namely the sociocomparative attitudes of

children in orphanages and gratitude. In the context of this study, the specific socio-comparative attitude investigated is upward social comparison, which describes how children compare themselves to individuals they perceive to be in a higher or better position. The second dependent variable, gratitude, relates to the gratitude felt and expressed by these children. This study also examines the influence of the independent variable, namely the intervention based on the Javanese philosophy of “urip iku mung sawang sinawang.”

The upward social comparison scale we developed (USC-29) has 29 items. Each item has been assessed for content validity by four psychologists who reviewed our scale. The Cronbach's alpha value of our USC-29 scale is  $\alpha=.932$ . The gratitude scale we used (Gratitude Questionnaire-6/GQ-6) has six items. The Cronbach's alpha value of the GQ-6 scale according to Putri's (2021) test results is  $\alpha=.702$ , and the scale has been assessed as having good content validity by professional reviewers.

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest will be analyzed using a psychometric t-test processing if the data is parametric or a Wilcoxon rank test if the data is nonparametric using the Jamovi application. This analysis aims to identify significant changes between the conditions before and after the intervention.

If there are missing values in the response data of the intervention research subjects on the upward social comparison scale, then these values will be imputed using the mean imputation technique, where the mean of the subjects' responses on other items is copied to replace the missing values on the items whose answers are missing. The justification for this is the high Cronbach's alpha value on our upward social comparison measurement tool ( $\alpha=.932$ ), so it can be expected that the subjects' answers will be relatively consistent on each item.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

First, we will describe the changes between the pre-intervention and post-intervention conditions. The data we used to measure these changes were from 11 participants who completed all stages of the intervention. It should be noted that because one subject had one missing value on the upward social comparison scale, we used the mean imputation technique, in which we imputed the mean value of the subject's responses on other items.

**TABLE 1.** Reliability Coefficients of the Upward Social Comparison Scale–29 Items (USC-29)

Variable	Item Rest Correlation	Cronbach's alpha
Upward Social Comparison	0.372-0.735	0.932

Our research results were tested using the non-parametric Wilcoxon rank test, which showed insignificant changes in socio-comparative attitudes ( $p=.236$ ). The Wilcoxon rank test on the gratitude scale also showed insignificant results ( $p=.264$ ). Normality testing using the Shapiro-Wilk test showed  $p=.020$  on the socio-comparative attitudes scale and  $p=.020$  on the gratitude scale, indicating that the data did not meet the assumption of normality.

**TABLE 2.** Mean Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention

Variable	Mean Pre-Intervensi	Mean Post-Intervensi	Shapiro-Wilk	Wilcoxon Rank Test (p)	Wilcoxon Rank Test (W)
Upward Social Comparison	63.3	71.5	p=.020	p=.236	W=12.0
Gratitude	29.5	30.5	p=.020	p=.264	W=20.0

At the beginning of the intervention, measurements were taken using a scale of upward social comparison with a mean of 63.3 and gratitude with a mean of 29.5. At the end of the intervention, measurements were taken again using the sociocomparative scale, with a mean value of 71.5, and the gratitude scale, with a mean value of 30.5, indicating an increase in the mean social comparison and gratitude scales of 8.2 and 1, respectively. Although there was an increase in the gratitude variable, it was not statistically significant.

**TABLE 3.** Mean Pretest and Posttest of Phase 1 Intervention

Score Increase	Mean Pretest	Mean Posttest	Wilcoxon Rank Test (p)	Wilcoxon Rank Test (W)
6.7 (13%)	50.3	50.7	p=.088	W=74.0

In Intervention Phase 1, we found that there was an increase in the mean pretest and posttest scores of the orphanage children, with a mean pretest score of 50.3 and a mean posttest score of 57.0, based on data from 30 participants who took part in Intervention Phase 1. There were actually 33 participants, but three only took one test (not both), so their data was excluded. The results of the Wilcoxon rank test showed a p=.088, indicating that the results were not statistically significant. However, when looking at the direct comparison of mean scores, there was an increase of 6.7 or about 13%.

**TABLE 4.** Mean Pretest and Posttest of Phase 2 Intervention

Score Increase	Mean Pre-Intervensi	Mean Post-Intervensi	Wilcoxon Rank Test (p)	Wilcoxon Rank Test (W)	Rank biserial correlation
7.2 (11%)	63.1	70.3	p=.032	W=83.5	rrb= -.486

In the results of Intervention Phase 2, there was an increase in the scores of the orphanage children's understanding of the material that had been given, with a pretest score of 63.1 rising to 70.3 on the posttest, as seen from the data of 35 participants who took part in Intervention Phase 2. There were actually 37 participants, but two only took one of the tests (not both), so their data was discarded. The increase was 7.2 or about 11% from the initial score on the pretest. The results of the Wilcoxon rank test showed p=.032, which indicates statistically significant results. The increase in the knowledge of orphanage children had an impact on short-term knowledge and required further intervention and data mining techniques to turn the children's knowledge into long-term knowledge or attitude change.

The limitations of this study do not mean that it has no implications for various parties. The limitations of this study actually have practical implications for researchers and future researchers regarding the

factors that caused this intervention-based study to not produce significant results, such as knowledge related to the phenomenon of the “White Bear Problem” in the delivery of material, suggestions for establishing a control group, and so on, which can serve as insights and stepping stones for future research. Moreover, this study also raises cultural values in the form of Javanese philosophy that can foster a spirit of nationalism and increase cultural awareness for readers, researchers, subjects, and future researchers

## DISCUSSIONS

Our findings indicate that our intervention did not produce significant results in changing the socio-comparative attitudes or gratitude of the research participants. The intervention succeeded in increasing the participants' understanding of both materials when viewed from the increase in the mean, but only the material in Intervention Stage 3 produced a statistically significant increase. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether the knowledge gained will be retained in the long term, as further review and intervention are needed to ensure that the increase in knowledge has a long-term impact. Several methodological and theoretical possibilities may explain these results.

The first theoretical possibility relates to the Ironic Process Theory factor, also known as the “White Bear Problem,” which shows that the more someone is told not to think comparatively, the more they think about it. This phenomenon occurs because the prohibition continues to linger in the subject's mind (Wang et al., 2020). In addition, even though the subject's level of understanding has increased, existing knowledge is not enough to change attitudes and behavior. For this reason, subjects need to independently make the decision to change their behavior. The Transtheoretical Model of psychology explains that knowledge alone is not enough to motivate behavioral change. Instead, health behavior change involves progress through six stages of change: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. Other factors, such as self-efficacy, also play an important role in changing a person's attitudes and behaviors. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to achieve desired goals, and it can influence the extent to which a person is willing to change their attitudes and behaviors. This shows that in addition to environmental factors, internal factors such as self-efficacy also play a role in shaping a person's attitudes and behaviors (Schunk & DiBenetto, 2021).

In terms of methodology, there are several possibilities that need to be considered. First, extraneous variables may not be well controlled, which could affect the results of the study. Second, although there were no direct measurements, based on observations from five observers present at the research site, it can be concluded that the research subjects may have felt tired during the study process (where the material was presented at night), which could have affected their participation and responses. Given that this is only a possibility based on the researchers' observations, further measurements are needed to prove this. Third, there was attrition or mortality of subjects, where some subjects may have stopped participating before the study was completed. Given the limitations of our study, we recognize that further research is needed to control for extraneous and confounding variables that may affect the results of the study. In addition, future studies may increase the number and scope of samples to anticipate possible subject attrition.

## CONCLUSION

Sociocomparative attitudes are attitudes of comparing oneself with others. There are two types of sociocomparative attitudes, namely upward social comparison, or comparing oneself with others above

us, and downward social comparison, or comparing oneself with others who are in a lower situation or condition than us. This study focuses on upward socio-comparative attitudes. This phenomenon is caused by several factors, including a lack of self-acceptance, a lack of gratitude, and so on. This study was conducted to change this attitude into something more positive by increasing the sense of gratitude in the target subjects, namely the children at the Maslahatul Ummah orphanage in Surabaya. In order to solve the problems listed in the problem formulation, this study conducted several stages of intervention to realize this using the Javanese philosophy of "urip iku mung sawang sinawang" (life is just a reflection).

Based on the final analysis, several conclusions show that the intervention produced empirical evidence related to how the Javanese philosophy of "urip iku mung sawang sinawang" can be used to increase knowledge related to gratitude, although it has not been proven significantly in terms of changing attitudes from socio-comparative to gratitude itself. This can be explained theoretically by the possibility of the Ironic Process Theory or "White Bear Problem" phenomenon in this study, whereby the more people are told not to think comparatively, the more they think about it, thereby increasing socio-comparative attitudes among orphanage children. Meanwhile, based on methodological explanations, there is a possibility that there are several uncontrolled extraneous variables. However, there are also data analysis results that show an increase in the aspect of gratitude.

Although the study showed insignificant results in terms of changing the socio-comparative attitude towards gratitude in orphanage children, this study succeeded in expanding the knowledge of orphanage children regarding the intervention material that had been provided. Not only for orphanage children, but this study can also provide insight and become an important consideration for future researchers in an effort to avoid the "White Bear Problem" phenomenon. The researchers were also able to provide insight that changing attitudes cannot be achieved through increased knowledge alone. Several attitude change models, such as the Transtheoretical Model, explain that increased knowledge alone is not enough to change a person's attitude, but that several internal factors are needed, such as beliefs, self-efficacy, and attitudes that can encourage individuals to change their socio-comparative attitudes to gratitude. Therefore, the suggestion for future researchers is to ensure that gratitude-based interventions to reduce sociocomparative attitudes are not influenced by the Ironic Process Theory by ensuring that the intervention process runs as well as possible.

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