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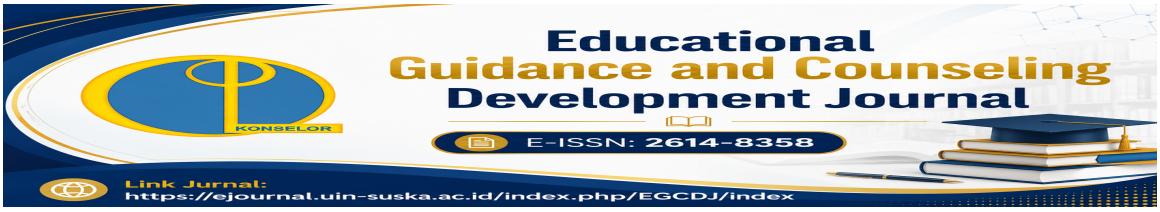

The Role of the Leader as a Catalyst for Dynamics in Group Psychoeducation: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of group leaders as catalysts of dynamics in group psychoeducation through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines for articles published between 2019 and 2026 from reputable databases. A total of seven studies met the inclusion criteria after undergoing a rigorous screening process based on conceptual relevance and methodological quality. Thematic analysis indicates that the effectiveness of group psychoeducation is highly determined by the quality of group dynamics. In this context, the group leader, as a catalyst, plays an active role as a facilitator of dynamics, a creator of a safe psychological climate, and a manager of interactions and conflicts. These findings confirm that leadership quality contributes significantly to the effectiveness of psychoeducation. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of strengthening relational, adaptive, and process-based leadership competencies in the practice of group psychoeducation.

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INTRODUCTION

Developments in mental health services have shown a significant increase in the use of group-based approaches, particularly psychoeducation. This approach not only emphasizes the delivery of information but also utilizes social interaction as the primary mechanism for facilitating psychological change (Almizri et al., 2022). In the context of guidance and counseling, psychoeducation is considered an effective intervention because it integrates cognitive, emotional, and social aspects through member interaction (de Oliveira & Dias, 2023). Several studies indicate that group-based interventions contribute to increased resilience (Aragonès et al., 2026), as well as strengthen self-understanding and an individual's adaptive capacity (Sweet et al., 2023). This underscores that group

psychoeducation is considered to have the potential as a holistic intervention that integrates cognitive, emotional, and social aspects through member interaction.

The success of group psychoeducation is highly determined by group dynamics. Dynamics not only reflect interactions among members but also encompass cohesion, interpersonal communication, active participation, and the development of a sense of safety and mutual trust. The classical perspective asserts that individual behavior within a group is the result of dynamic interactions between the individual and their environment. This is reinforced (Ristianti, 2023) by the fact that, through group dynamics, members can share experiences, support one another, and develop a deeper understanding of the issues they face. Thus, the quality of group dynamics becomes the primary determinant of the effectiveness of group psychoeducation.

Recent studies increasingly emphasize that the effectiveness of group psychoeducation is strongly influenced by the quality of leadership and the emotional climate developed within the group process. Effective leaders are not only responsible for delivering psychoeducational materials but also for facilitating emotional regulation, reducing relational conflict, and strengthening cohesion among group members. Research by Park et al. (2024) demonstrated that leaders who possess positive beliefs regarding emotional expression are more capable of creating healthy interpersonal dynamics and reducing conflict within groups. In addition, adaptive leadership styles have been shown to significantly contribute to the development of group cohesion and collaborative engagement among participants (Abdel-Azeem et al., 2025). These findings indicate that leadership in psychoeducational groups functions not merely as procedural guidance but as an interpersonal mechanism that shapes the overall quality of group interaction.

Furthermore, contemporary research highlights the importance of transformative and relational leadership approaches in maintaining meaningful group interaction. Proches et al. (2024) explain that group-based facilitation emphasizing reflective interaction and emotional presence can foster deeper engagement, trust, and psychological connectedness among participants. Similarly, Nuha et al. (2024) argue that psychoeducational group leaders play a central role in creating participatory and supportive group environments that encourage active communication and collective learning processes. This suggests that the success of psychoeducational interventions is increasingly dependent on the leader's capacity to construct an emotionally safe atmosphere where members feel encouraged to participate openly and collaboratively..

As research in guidance and counseling has evolved, the role of the group leader has shifted from a passive facilitator to an active actor who initiates and manages the group process. The quality of leadership has been shown to influence the direction and quality of group dynamics (Kinsella, 2023). The ability to respond to emotional needs and interpersonal sensitivity are key factors in enhancing member engagement. However, there is variation in the literature regarding how leadership influences group dynamics. A study (Sing-Kiat Ting et al., 2022) emphasizes structural aspects such as session management and content delivery. Meanwhile, (Muss et al., 2025) highlight relational dimensions such as empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and the ability to build trust. These differences indicate that the role of leadership has not yet been fully understood as a procedural mechanism integrated into group dynamics.

From a contemporary perspective, group leaders are understood as catalysts for group dynamics. (Ike Nurhidayah et al., 2025) argue that group leaders do not function as absolute controllers but rather as guides who facilitate the creation of optimal conditions for the development of group dynamics. This role emphasizes the leader's ability to encourage active participation, build cohesion, and create a safe and supportive environment for group

members (Zhao et al., 2022). However, the use of the term catalyst in the literature remains largely metaphorical and has not yet been operationalized conceptually. Thus, although the leader's role is recognized as important, the mechanisms by which leaders activate and direct group dynamics remain unexplained.

Based on the above review, research on group leaders and group dynamics is still largely conducted separately. Studies that specifically position leaders as catalysts of dynamics within the context of group psychoeducation remain limited. Furthermore, systematic syntheses regarding the relationship between leadership characteristics and effective group dynamics have not been extensively developed. This gap indicates a need to critically examine how the group leader functions as a catalyst for dynamics within group psychoeducation. This study is expected to clarify conceptual mechanisms, identify patterns of findings, and contribute to the development of evidence-based psychoeducation services.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively examine the role of group leaders as catalysts of dynamics in group psychoeducation. This approach was chosen because it allows for a systematic, transparent, and evidence-based synthesis of research findings, thereby minimizing subjective bias and enhancing the validity of the conclusions. The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, which includes the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and study inclusion.

Data were collected through a systematic search of several reputable scientific databases, namely ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar. The literature search strategy utilized a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to enhance the sensitivity and specificity of the search. Keywords used included: "psychoeducational group" or "group psychoeducation," "group leader" or "facilitator," and "group dynamics." Strict inclusion criteria included: (1) scientific articles published between 2019 and 2026 to ensure up-to-date information (state of the art), (2) articles in Indonesian or English, and (3) studies that explicitly discussed group psychoeducation, group dynamics, or the role of group leaders.

The quality of the selected articles was evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) criteria. The assessment was based on several aspects, including the clarity of the research objectives, the appropriateness of the methodological design, the validity and reliability of the data, and the relevance of the findings to the focus of the study. Only articles of moderate to high quality were included in the final analysis. The results of the selection process showed that seven articles met all the established inclusion and quality criteria. This relatively limited number of articles reflects the scarcity of research explicitly examining the integration of leadership and group dynamics within the context of psychoeducation. Thus, the strict selection process does not limit the scope but ensures that the analyzed studies are conceptually relevant and methodologically sound.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify and synthesize patterns of findings related to the role of group leaders. The analysis stages included open coding, theme grouping, and interpretation. The focus of the analysis includes the leader's functions, the creation of a psychological climate, the management of group interactions, and the construction of member participation. This approach allows for the identification of consistent patterns as well as variations in findings across studies, resulting in a more comprehensive and in-depth synthesis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

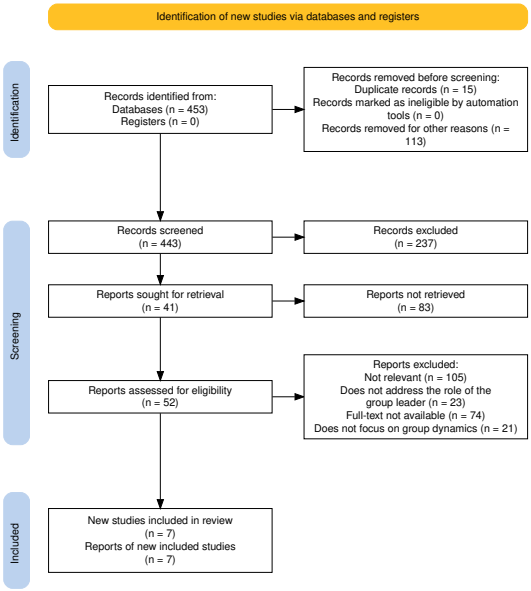

Figure 1. *Systematic Literatur Review* (SLR) Diagram

A literature review conducted using scientific databases yielded 453 articles from the initial search results. After an inclusion-based screening process, seven articles were selected for analysis in this study. A synthesis of the findings indicates that the effectiveness of group psychoeducation is not solely determined by the intervention's content, but by the quality of group dynamics as the primary mechanism of change. More specifically, the thematic synthesis highlights the role of the group leader as a catalyst for dynamics, reflected in several functions: facilitator of dynamics, shaper of the psychological climate, manager of interactions and conflicts that guide communication, mediator of differences, and maintainer of relational balance within the group, as well as constructor of the interaction space. These four functions recur across various research designs and interventions, whether in clinical, community, or online settings.

The findings also reveal differences among research approaches. Quantitative studies generally focus on intervention outcomes without deeply examining the underlying interaction processes. In contrast, qualitative and mixed-methods studies more fully reveal process-oriented aspects, including the leader's role in building trust, fostering openness, and managing group dynamics. This discrepancy indicates that the relationship between leadership and group dynamics is more often understood in terms of outcomes rather than the complex processes involved.

The articles analyzed in this study are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Characteristics and Research Findings

No	Author & Year	Title	Research Method	Role of the Leader	Group Dynamics
1.	Williams et al., (2025)	A Culturally Tailored Psychoeducation Group for Reducing Mental Health Stigma of African American Women and their Social Support	Experimental	The leader serves as a cultural educator and mediator, delivering culturally sensitive material and facilitating safe and inclusive discussions	Group cohesion and openness were established, marked by increased trust and acceptance in discussing mental health stigma
2.	Cintoli et al., (2024)	The Psychoeducational Interventions: a Valuable Communication Tool to Support the Caregiver of People with Dementia	Quantitative Intervention	The facilitator serves as an educator and communication facilitator, helping participants understand the condition and encouraging interaction among caregivers	Increased social support and cohesion, as well as more open interaction in sharing caregiving experiences
3.	Higgins et al., (2022)	Factors Influencing Attendees' Engagement with Group Psychoeducation: A Multi-stakeholder Perspective	Mixed methods (multi-stakeholder)	Leaders act as motivators and facilitators of participation, guiding member engagement through responsive communication styles and approaches	Increased engagement and active participation, marked by discussion involvement and consistent attendance
4.	Chelouche-Dwek & Fonagy, (2026)	Parent Learning Groups in Alternative Provision: A Mixed-Methods Study of Psychoeducation, Mentalization, and Peer Support	Mixed methods (convergent)	Leaders act as facilitators of reflection and catalysts for insight, fostering mentalization processes and self-understanding among members	Trust, empathy, and openness are established, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the group improves
5.	Cipolletta et al., (2019)	The Effectiveness of Psychoeducational Support Groups for Women with Breast Cancer and Their Caregivers	Mixed-methods (exsplanatory)	The leader acts as an emotional facilitator and support leader, helping members express their feelings and support one another	Increased group cohesion and emotional expression, marked by a sense of togetherness and connection among members
6.	Holsbrekken et al., (2025)	Effects of a Psychoeducational Group Intervention for Adults Diagnosed with ADHD: a Pilot Randomized Controlled Study	Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)	The leader serves as an educator and group structurer, managing the session flow, rules, and systematic delivery of material	Stable participation and directed interaction emerge, with more consistent member engagement
7.	Sweet et al., (2023)	Impact of Online Group Psychoeducation	Pilot study (pre-post design)	The leader serves as a facilitator and moderator of online	There was an increase in engagement, interaction, and social support, as

No	Author & Year	Title	Research Method	Role of the Leader	Group Dynamics
		and Support Sessions on Receptivity Towards Digital Mental Health Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pilot Study		interactions, guiding discussions and psychoeducation in a virtual setting	well as openness toward digital mental health services

DISCUSSION

The synthesis of seven studies indicates that the role of group leaders is multidimensional, operating through various complementary and context-dependent functions. All studies demonstrated enhanced group dynamics; however, the ways in which leaders implemented their roles varied depending on the intervention's objectives, participant characteristics, and the methodological approaches employed. In studies with experimental and quantitative designs, the leader's role tends to be more structured as an educator and process facilitator. Leaders function to ensure the intervention proceeds systematically, maintain engagement, and direct the flow of communication within the group. This fosters cohesion, enhances participation, and stabilizes interactions. However, this approach tends to view group dynamics as the result of the intervention's design rather than as a process actively shaped through ongoing interactions.

Conversely, mixed-methods studies highlight a more relational dimension. Leaders play a role in fostering the quality of interactions through facilitating reflection, managing emotions, and strengthening connections among members. Processes such as the development of trust, empathy, and openness serve as indicators that group dynamics evolve through intersubjective experiences, not merely through the delivery of content. This indicates that the effectiveness of group psychoeducation depends not only on the intervention structure but on how interactions are mediated and interpreted within the group. This difference in approach suggests that the linear assumption linking intervention design and group dynamics requires more critical examination. Group dynamics do not always form automatically through program structure but depend on the quality of interactions that develop during the process. Thus, the effectiveness of group psychoeducation is not determined solely by what is provided in the intervention, but by how interactions are mediated and interpreted within the group.

From a conceptual perspective, group dynamics function not merely as a medium for interaction but as the primary mechanism driving psychological change. Active participation, open communication, cohesion, and social support emerge as key indicators consistently associated with intervention success. However, dynamics do not form automatically; rather, they are influenced by how interactions are facilitated and managed within the group. Findings (Cintoli et al., 2024) indicate that active interaction and the sharing of experiences among members enhance the quality of interpersonal relationships. (Higgins et al., 2022) confirm that participants' engagement levels are influenced by how interactions are facilitated within the group. Furthermore, (Cipolletta et al., 2019) found that emotional expression within the group plays a crucial role in building cohesion and a sense of connectedness. Thus, group dynamics are not merely a medium for interaction but also the primary mechanism driving participants' psychological change.

In this context, the group leader emerges as a key factor in activating these dynamics. The leader's role extends beyond mere facilitation to that of a catalyst who initiates, directs, and optimizes group interactions. In this model, the leader functions through four primary roles that activate group dynamics to mediate the achievement of intervention outcomes. First, the leader acts as a facilitator of dynamics. In this role, the leader is tasked with encouraging member participation, maintaining the flow of discussion, and ensuring active engagement within the group. (Higgins et al., 2022) demonstrate that the leader's facilitation style significantly influences participants' engagement levels. This underscores that the leader plays a role in activating group dynamics through adaptive communication strategies.

Second, the leader as a shaper of the psychological climate. A safe and supportive climate allows members to be more open in sharing experiences and feelings. Findings (Chelouche-Dwek & Fonagy, 2026) indicate that leaders capable of facilitating the process of reflection (mentalization) can enhance empathy, trust, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the group. Additionally, (Williams et al., 2025) demonstrate that a leader's cultural sensitivity also plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive and conducive atmosphere. Third, the leader as a manager of interactions and conflicts. In group dynamics, differing viewpoints and potential conflicts are inevitable. The leader plays a role in guiding these interactions to remain constructive and productive. Although not all studies explicitly address conflict, findings suggest that leaders capable of effectively managing interactions can maintain relational balance within the group and prevent group dysfunction.

Fourth, leaders as constructors of interaction spaces. This role relates to a leader's ability to create spaces for dialogue that enable active engagement and the exchange of experiences among members. In this context, leaders not only facilitate interactions but also shape the structures and atmosphere that support meaningful interactions. This is evident in the study (Sweet et al., 2023), where leaders remained capable of fostering effective interactions even when conducted online. A notable finding from this study is that the leader's catalytic function is adaptive to the context, whether in face-to-face or virtual settings. This indicates that the leader's role as a catalyst does not depend on the medium of interaction but rather on their interpersonal and facilitative skills.

Thus, this model offers a conceptual contribution by emphasizing that leadership in group psychoeducation should be understood as a catalytic mechanism operating through relational and contextual processes. This perspective broadens the understanding of leadership from a structural function toward leadership as a dynamic process in shaping the quality of group interactions. However, this study has limitations, particularly regarding the number of studies analyzed and the significant methodological variation. These limitations impact the generalizability of the findings and highlight the need for more focused follow-up research, especially in examining procedural mechanisms in greater depth through longitudinal and observational approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that group dynamics serve as a central mediator in the effectiveness of group psychoeducation, while also positioning the group leader as a key actor who activates these mechanisms. In contrast to structural approaches that emphasize intervention design, these findings suggest that participants' psychological changes are more strongly determined by the quality of interactions actively mediated by the leader. Conceptually, this research offers a reconceptualization of the leadership role as a catalyst operating through four functions: facilitating dynamics, constructing a psychological climate, regulating interactions, and orchestrating the space for dialogue. This model emphasizes that

group dynamics are not merely contextual variables but emergent processes shaped through relational, adaptive, and contextual leadership practices.

Consequently, the development of evidence-based group psychoeducation must integrate the leadership dimension as a core component. However, the limited number of studies and the dominance of outcome-based approaches highlight the need to strengthen process-based research. Therefore, future research should focus on: (1) testing the catalytic model through longitudinal and experimental designs, (2) exploring micro-process interactions to identify mechanisms of change, and (3) developing standardized constructs and instruments capable of operationalizing the catalytic role of leaders, including in digital settings.

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