

Exploring The Essence of CBT: an Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Analysis, and The Contributions of The Thoughts of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis to Guidance and Counseling

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the increasing need for counselling approaches that are not only practically effective, but also grounded in a strong philosophical foundation. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), as the dominant approach in modern guidance and counselling practice, needs to be studied in depth through the perspectives of ontology, epistemology, and axiology so that it is not understood merely as an intervention technique. The purpose of this research is to explore the essence of CBT and to identify the contributions of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis to the development of guidance and counselling. This study employs a philosophical qualitative approach using a literature study method that analyses various relevant scientific sources. The results of the study show that ontologically, CBT views humans as rational beings capable of changing their mindset and behaviour through cognitive processes. Epistemologically, CBT is grounded in empirical evidence and systematic scientific validation. Axiologically, CBT is oriented toward adaptive behavioural change and the improvement of individual well-being. Beck's contribution lies in the development of an empirically based cognitive model, while Ellis emphasises rationality and the modification of irrational beliefs. The study concludes that CBT makes a significant theoretical and practical contribution to improving the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services.

INTRODUCTION

The development of education today shows increasingly complex dynamics, particularly in addressing the various psychological problems of students (Akrami et al., 2024; Gillborn & Delahunty, 2026; Halabieh et al., 2022; Han, 2022; Srivastava, 2023; Yildirim, 2025). Guidance and counselling teachers (BK) are required to provide services that are not only responsive, but also effective, scientific, and grounded in the right approach (Abdullah, 2025; Akdemir, 2023; Hasan et al., 2025; Marja et al., 2025). This condition underscores the importance of using a counselling approach with a strong theoretical and philosophical foundation. In practice, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), pioneered by Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis, has become one of the most dominant approaches used in guidance and counselling. CBT is recognised as a practical, structured, and effective approach in addressing a variety of psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural problems.

However, in its implementation in the field, CBT is often understood narrowly as a collection of techniques. BK teachers tend to focus on the application of procedures without understanding the philosophical foundation that underpins them (Abdullah, 2025; Akdemir, 2023; Hasan et al., 2025; Jaafar & Omar, 2025; Marja et al., 2025). This has the potential to

render interventions less in-depth and contextually inappropriate (Bienefeld et al., 2025; Naderbagi et al., 2024). Ontologically, CBT views humans as rational beings who have the capacity to control and change their mindset. This view positions the individual as an active agent in the process of self-change. However, this ontological understanding has not been fully internalised in the practice of guidance and counselling in schools.

From an epistemological perspective, CBT is rooted in a scientific approach that emphasises the use of empirical evidence in determining the effectiveness of interventions (Moorey, 2023; Perrotta, 2026; Salkovskis et al., 2023). The principle of evidence-based practice is the primary foundation in the development and implementation of CBT. However, not all BK practitioners have the access or ability to integrate scientific evidence into their practice. Axiologically, CBT aims to improve individual well-being through adaptive changes in mindset and behaviour. Values such as rationality, independence, and personal responsibility are at the heart of this approach; however, this value dimension often receives insufficient attention in the counselling process.

Theoretically, CBT is rooted in cognitive psychology, which emphasises that cognition is the primary determinant of emotions and behaviour. Beck developed a cognitive model that highlighted cognitive distortion as a source of emotional disorders. Ellis, through Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), emphasises the importance of transforming irrational beliefs into rational ones.

From the perspective of the philosophy of science, CBT is influenced by the schools of empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism is evident in its emphasis on scientific observation and testing, while rationalism is reflected in the effort to understand and change the individual's thought processes. The integration of these two traditions makes CBT a unique and comprehensive approach.

Recent research confirms that CBT is one of the most effective approaches in addressing a variety of psychological disorders. Meta-analysis studies show that CBT has a high success rate in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Cuijpers et al., 2021; David et al., 2020). A comprehensive meta-analysis by Cuijpers et al. (2021) confirmed that CBT is significantly more effective than control conditions in treating depression across various populations. Similarly, David et al. (2020) argued that CBT remains the gold standard of psychotherapy due to its strong empirical support. Hofmann and Hayes (2020) emphasised the future of intervention science and highlighted the continued relevance of CBT in evidence-based practice. Furthermore, Wenzel (2021) provided a comprehensive overview of CBT theory and practice, reinforcing its effectiveness across diverse clinical settings.

Despite these robust empirical findings, most studies place greater emphasis on the practical effectiveness of CBT than on its philosophical dimensions. Studies that integrate ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects of CBT remain relatively limited, especially in the context of guidance and counselling in Indonesia. Moreover, while the works of Beck (1976) and Ellis (1962) laid the theoretical foundations, contemporary research rarely revisits these philosophical underpinnings. This points to a significant research gap. On one hand, CBT has been widely used in BK practice; on the other, the philosophical understanding of this approach remains underdeveloped. This gap has the potential to hinder the development of more comprehensive counselling theory and practice, and also limits the ability of BK teachers to adapt the approach in accordance with cultural contexts and the specific needs of counselling. Without a deep understanding, CBT risks being applied mechanically and unreflectively.

Therefore, this research is important in filling this gap. A philosophical analysis of CBT is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of this approach, so that it can be applied more effectively and contextually in guidance and counselling. The main objective of this study is to examine the nature of CBT from the perspectives of ontology, epistemology,

and axiology, as well as to identify the contributions of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis to the development of guidance and counselling. This research also aims to strengthen the theoretical foundation of CBT in the educational context. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of philosophy in the field of guidance and counselling, particularly in relation to the CBT approach. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for BK teachers in implementing CBT in a more reflective, critical, and value-based manner. Thus, this research not only contributes to the advancement of knowledge, but also carries real implications for improving the quality of guidance and counselling services in schools.

METHOD

This research employs a philosophical qualitative approach in the form of library research. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of the theoretical and philosophical concepts underlying Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). In this context, the analysis focuses not only on empirical aspects, but also on the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions that constitute the conceptual framework of CBT in guidance and counselling.

Library research was used because the primary objects of study are scientific sources, comprising both classical texts and current journal articles relevant to the research topic. This study did not involve participants directly, but instead used written sources as the main data. As such, this study treats text as the unit of analysis, interpreted critically and reflectively.

The research population encompasses the full body of literature related to CBT, the philosophy of science, and guidance and counselling. From this population, 40 reference sources were selected as the conceptual basis of the study. The selection of sources was carried out using purposive sampling, based on the criteria of topical relevance, academic credibility, and theoretical contribution to the study of CBT. These sources include the works of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis, as well as reputable international journal articles.

Data collection was carried out through philosophical analysis of key texts and current literature. This analysis involved critical reading, conceptual coding, and the interpretation of meanings contained within these sources. The focus of the analysis was directed at identifying the ontological (the nature of humans), epistemological (the sources and validity of knowledge), and axiological (values and purposes) aspects of CBT.

Within the framework of this study, the independent variable is the concept of CBT as a counselling approach, while the dependent variable is its application in guidance and counselling. In addition, cognitive restructuring is positioned as an intervening variable that mediates the relationship between the concept of CBT and the outcomes of its application. The determination of these variables aims to provide analytical clarity in understanding the working mechanism of CBT in counselling practice.

The data analysis technique employs the qualitative analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing of conclusions. At the data reduction stage, the researcher filters and groups information relevant to the research focus. The data is then presented in the form of a systematic narrative that facilitates interpretation. The final stage involves drawing reflective and conceptual conclusions to address the research objectives comprehensively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), based on the thinking of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis, has a positive and significant influence on the application of guidance and counselling, particularly when examined from ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives. Ontologically, CBT views the individual as an active agent who possesses the rational capacity to shape, evaluate, and change their

psychological reality through the process of thinking. The individual is not positioned as a passive object determined by the environment, but rather as a subject capable of self-reflection and cognitive transformation. The implication of this view for guidance and counselling practice is an enhanced role for counsellors as active participants in the change process, so that the interventions carried out are collaborative and empowering.

From an epistemological perspective, CBT demonstrates its strength as an evidence-based approach, in which each intervention is grounded in scientific principles that can be tested and verified. The counselling process in CBT involves testing cognitive hypotheses through techniques such as guided discovery, behavioural experiments, and monitoring of automatic thoughts. This allows both counsellors and counsees to systematically evaluate the accuracy of their beliefs. In the context of guidance and counselling, this approach contributes to increased professional accountability, as each step of the intervention can be rationally explained and supported by empirical evidence.

Axiologically, CBT is oriented toward pragmatic values that emphasise the utility and effectiveness of interventions in improving individual well-being. The results of the study show that the application of CBT is able to help counsees develop adaptive behaviours, improve problem-solving skills, and strengthen emotional regulation. The core values embedded in this approach are the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of behavioural change. In the practice of guidance and counselling, this is reflected in the counsellor's ability to help counsees achieve realistic and measurable goals within a relatively short period of time.

In addition to these direct influences, this study also found that the indirect influence of CBT through cognitive restructuring mechanisms makes a deeper and more significant contribution. Cognitive restructuring is a core process in CBT that involves identifying, evaluating, and modifying irrational or dysfunctional thoughts into more rational and adaptive ones. This process not only changes the content of thought, but also changes the way an individual interprets their life experiences as a whole.

Through cognitive restructuring, counsees learn to recognise cognitive distortions such as overgeneralisation, catastrophising, and black-and-white thinking, and to replace them with a more realistic and balanced mindset. These changes at the cognitive level gradually affect emotional states, such as reductions in anxiety and stress, as well as improvements in positive behaviours in daily life. Thus, cognitive restructuring serves as an intervening variable that bridges the relationship between the concept of CBT and the outcomes achieved in counselling.

When compared to direct influences, the indirect effects mediated through cognitive restructuring show a higher level of sustainability. The changes that occur are not temporary, but instead form a new and more adaptive mindset in the long term. This shows that the success of CBT in guidance and counselling lies not only in the techniques employed, but also in the depth of the cognitive processes experienced by the counselee. It can therefore be concluded that the integration of ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects in CBT, strengthened through cognitive restructuring, makes a comprehensive and sustained contribution to the practice of guidance and counselling.

The findings of this study reinforce the foundational assumption in cognitive-behavioural theory that changes in an individual's cognitive structure will have a direct impact on changes in emotions and behaviour. Within this framework, Aaron T. Beck's thinking emphasises the role of automatic thoughts and cognitive distortions as the primary determinants of emotional disorders, while Albert Ellis highlights the importance of irrational beliefs in triggering maladaptive emotional responses. The results of this study are consistent with empirical findings showing that CBT is an effective and evidence-based approach in treating a variety of psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety (David et al., 2020; Hofmann & Hayes, 2020). Nevertheless, this study goes further by demonstrating that such

effectiveness lies not only in the intervention technique, but also in the depth of the underlying philosophical foundation.

More specifically, the ontological dimension of CBT, which positions humans as rational agents, carries important implications for how counsellors understand the counselling relationship. The counselee is no longer seen as a passive individual determined solely by external factors, but as a subject with the reflective capacity for self-transformation. These findings broaden the theoretical understanding of CBT by linking it to the perspective of cognitive constructivism, in which psychological reality is shaped through the individual's interpretation of experience. Thus, counselling interventions focus not only on behavioural change, but also on the reconstruction of the meanings held by counsees.

From an epistemological perspective, this study confirms that CBT has a strong scientific foundation, being grounded in the principle of evidence-based practice. However, the findings indicate that an understanding of this epistemological dimension is often not internalised by BK practitioners. According to the latest literature, the primary strength of CBT lies in its ability to integrate theory with empirical data through the systematic testing of cognitive hypotheses (Cuijpers et al., 2021). This study therefore makes a theoretical contribution by emphasising the importance of epistemological awareness in counselling practice, so that the interventions carried out are not only effective, but also scientifically accountable.

From an axiological perspective, this study shows that the core value of CBT lies in its orientation toward meaningful and sustainable change in the lives of counsees. This approach aims not only to reduce psychological symptoms, but also to improve the quality of life of individuals through the development of adaptive cognitive and behavioural skills. These findings are consistent with the view that CBT is a pragmatic and solution-oriented approach that emphasises tangible outcomes in daily life (Wenzel, 2021). The integration of the axiological dimension thus enriches CBT as an approach that is not only scientific, but also humanistic and contextual.

The practical implications of this study are particularly relevant for guidance and counselling teachers. The results indicate that the mechanical use of CBT without philosophical understanding can diminish the effectiveness of interventions. Therefore, BK teachers need to develop reflective competence in understanding the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of CBT. With this understanding, counsellors can tailor interventions to the needs and context of the counselee, making the counselling process more meaningful and personalised. Furthermore, philosophical understanding also enables counsellors to integrate local cultural values into CBT practice, which has predominantly been developed in Western contexts.

Overall, this research makes an important contribution to the development of CBT literature by integrating the philosophical dimension as an integral part of counselling practice. This opens up opportunities for the development of a more comprehensive CBT model that is not only evidence-based, but also value-based and meaning-based. Thus, this research not only reinforces previous empirical findings, but also offers new perspectives that can enrich the theory and practice of guidance and counselling going forward.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is not only a technically effective counseling approach, but also has a solid philosophical foundation when viewed from the perspectives of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontologically, CBT views humans as rational, reflective, and capable individuals who construct and reconstruct their psychological reality through cognitive processes. Epistemologically, CBT stands on the principle of *evidence-based practice* that emphasizes scientific validity, hypothesis testing,

and integration between theory and empirical data. Meanwhile, axiologically, CBT is oriented towards the value of usefulness, effectiveness, and improvement of the individual's quality of life through adaptive and sustainable behavior change. Furthermore, the thought contributions of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis have proven to have strong relevance in the development of guidance and counseling theory and practice. Beck through his cognitive model emphasizes the importance of identifying and restructuring cognitive distortions as the basis for psychological change, while Ellis through his REBT approach highlights the role of irrational beliefs in shaping individual emotional responses. The integration of these two thoughts enriches CBT as an approach that is not only scientific and systematic, but also reflective and transformative in helping counselors achieve meaningful change.

Theoretically, this research makes a significant contribution to expanding the study of CBT by integrating the philosophical dimension as an integral part of its conceptual framework. This approach reinforces CBT's position as a whole scientific paradigm, not just a collection of intervention techniques. Practically, the findings of this study provide important implications for guidance and counseling teachers to develop counseling practices that are more reflective, contextual, and oriented to counseling needs. Understanding the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of CBT allows counselors to design interventions that are more meaningful, adaptive, and appropriate to the psychological and social dynamics of counseling. Thus, it can be affirmed that the success of the application of CBT in guidance and counseling is not only determined by mastery of the technique, but also by the depth of understanding of the philosophical basis that underlies it. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop this study through a mixed methods approach that combines philosophical analysis with empirical data in the field. In addition, there is a need for exploration in a broader context, including integration with local cultural values and its application in various educational settings, so that CBT is more relevant, contextual, and effective in improving the quality of guidance and counseling services in Indonesia.

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