Original Article

The Impact of Psychological Support On Improving The Achievement Of Slow Learner Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Collaboration between teachers, parents, and school counselors is essential to provide ongoing psychological support. By engaging a counselor, students can obtain guidance services that help them manage stress, develop study skills, and build confidence. This inclusive and adaptive approach allows every student, both fast and slow learners, to reach their best potential academically and emotionally. This paper aims to explore more about the concept of psychological support for improving the achievement of slow learner students at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta, Indonesia.*
Methods: *This study uses a qualitative design with a field approach at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta, collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation supported by relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Participants included class X educators. Data analysis employed triangulation, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing to ensure validity and identify key themes. The findings are presented descriptively, addressing the research focus and supported by prior studies.*
Results: *The results of the study show that SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta has compiled a guideline known as "Initial Learning Module: Building a Positive Culture at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta". This module is consistently given at the beginning of learning and is one of the leading guides in the Guidance and Counseling process. This module contains instructions on how to build the concept of psychological support that educators must apply in the SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta environment, namely through the restitution process. This process prioritizes the idea of positive discipline that must be embedded in students.*
Conclusion: *Psychological support has a complex role, affecting the mental well-being of individuals from various points of view. Future research should explore the long-term effects of psychological support on mental well-being across different populations and contexts.*

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Introduction

High school/vocational school-age students are in their late teens, which, according to Erik Erikson in his psychosocial theory, face an identity crisis versus role confusion (Cardona & Neas, 2022). At this stage, they seek to understand who they are and their place in society.

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Success in establishing a stable identity will help them feel confident in making decisions for the future, while failure can lead to role confusion that hinders their psychological development (Spengler et al., 2018). Albert Bandura, through social learning theory, emphasizes the importance of the influence of the social environment in the development of upper-middle/vocational students. At this age, relationships with peers become a significant factor in identity formation and decision-making. According to psychology, children are active creatures. Children have an innate drive to explore, pursue their desires, and set personal goals. This highlights that learning cannot be forced upon them or outsourced to others. It is only through active participation and personal experience that learning can genuinely occur for a child (Gleason et al., 2008). Bandura also highlights the importance of self-efficacy, or belief in one's abilities, which can be strengthened through social support. This confidence helps students cope with the academic and social pressures they face (Hadi & Al-Shatari, 2023).

Carl Rogers' opinion in humanistic psychology theory states that psychological support is adequate when provided with unconditional acceptance. Rogers emphasizes the importance of empathy, unconditional positive appreciation, and authenticity in interpersonal relationships. These factors allow individuals to feel heard, understood, and empowered to address their problems (Bertuzzi et al., 2021). In a biopsychosocial perspective, psychological support is considered as the result of an interaction between biological, psychological, and social factors. This approach underscores the importance of a supportive social environment as one of the factors that affect a person's mental well-being. Factors such as a harmonious family, healthy friendships, and a positive work environment can contribute to optimal mental health by providing a sense of security and reducing stress (UNICEF, 2022).

Slow learner is a term used to describe individuals who take longer to understand information and skills compared to their peers (Koirkana, 2020). According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, slow learners often lag in reaching certain stages of development, so they need an approach tailored to their capacity. Piaget emphasizes that learning strategies that support independent exploration and small steps can help them catch up (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021). From the perspective of constructivism, Lev Vygotsky emphasizes the role of social interaction and proximal development zones (ZPD) in learning achievement. According to him, individuals learn more effectively when they are assisted by more proficient people, such as teachers or peers, to achieve more complex understandings (Sujarwo, 2023). This approach shows that learning achievement is not only the result of individual effort but is also influenced by social support and a supportive learning environment (Hasibuan et al., 2022). In this case, a learning process is designed by an educator for his students; in order to support the effectiveness of learning, an educator must have the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities of an educator to be able to plan, implement, and evaluate the learning process.

Vocational High School (SMK) is one of the educational institutions that aims to provide special provisions and skills for its students, where these students are prepared to enter the world of work. Ideally, Vocational High Schools (SMK) are education that prioritizes the development of students' ability to be able to work in specific fields, adaptability in the work environment, see job opportunities, and

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develop themselves in the future. Readiness is needed both physically and mentally for vocational school students to reach the next stage of life. In this case, achievements, both academic and non-academic, are one of the critical points for a student. On the other hand, the results of observations and initial interviews conducted by the author show that there are students who tend to be slow learners. In these namely conditions, students have little intellectual potential below the average of children of their age (IQ between 76 and 89). With cognitive abilities that are below average, their learning ability will be slower when compared to children of their age. This situation also makes slow learner students need more extended and more time to be able to understand the subject matter at school. Another characteristic that is also shown in slow learner students is that they cannot carry out schoolwork according to demands due to the limitations of their abilities and limited cognitive capacity.

Furthermore, slow learner students also experience difficulties in thinking abstractly, which leads to an inability to express ideas and ideas. Their reasoning is more suitable for concrete thinking skills. Slow learner students have low concentration and attention. Low concentration ability makes slow learner students often lose various important information, so the information received is not complete.

Based on this, the author wants to explore the concept of psychological support more extensively to improve the achievement of slow learner students at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta. Learning achievement is a multidimensional phenomenon that involves various factors, such as motivation, environment, cognition, and social interaction, so a comprehensive approach is needed to understand it. Dealing with slow learners requires a holistic and flexible understanding, taking into account individual needs, unique potentials, and optimal environmental support (Wati & Hendriani, 2024).

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a field approach conducted at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The research is further supported by a review of relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, and previous studies pertinent to the research focus. The participants of this study were educators from class X. Data analysis was performed using the triangulation method, which involves cross-checking the validity of the data by incorporating different sources or methods for comparison. In this study, triangulation was implemented through data reduction, which includes summarizing, selecting key points, identifying core themes, and eliminating unnecessary information. The next step, data display, involved organizing the summarized data into a coherent, systematic narrative to identify central themes and facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified based on the analyzed data, presenting research findings that address the research focus. The conclusions are presented descriptively, based on the research objectives, and supported by relevant studies.

Results

Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that upper-middle and vocational students are typically at the formal operational stage, where they can engage in abstract, logical, and hypothetical thinking. During this stage, students begin to critically examine the values, norms, and perspectives they have been taught,

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fostering the development of critical thinking skills (Idrus et al., 2023). It was further explained that attention has a vital role in learning activities. Without attention, the learning process is impossible. Attention will arise in students if the learning material is perceived as something needed, necessary for further learning, or essential in daily life. In addition to attention, there needs to be motivation. Motivation in the context of learning is a conscious effort by teachers to create motives in students that support the achievement of learning goals.

Thinking skills allow students to plan for the future more carefully, but they can also cause internal conflict when they doubt their beliefs or choices (Acoba, 2024). In Maslow's needs theory, upper-middle/vocational students focus on the need for self-esteem and actualization. They seek recognition for their achievements and potential both from peers, family, and teachers. Meeting these needs provides a psychological boost to achieve academic achievement and develop their talents or interests. When these needs are not met, students may experience a sense of low self-esteem or lack of motivation (Wibowo & Nadya, 2024). Carl Rogers, in his humanistic theory, emphasizes the importance of unconditional acceptance and empathy in supporting the psychological development of upper-middle/vocational students. At this stage, students often face pressure from the environment to meet certain expectations, so supportive and non-judgmental relationships are essential. Strong emotional support helps them develop a sense of security to explore identity and determine the direction of life (Ludyanti et al., 2023).

Psychological support is an essential component in maintaining an individual's mental health, as explained by social support theory. This theory states that positive interpersonal relationships can provide emotional resources, information, and practical help that help individuals cope with life's stresses (Yadi & Nurfarhanah, 2024). According to Lazarus and Folkman, social support functions as a stress buffer, where supportive interactions are able to reduce the impact of stress on a person's mental health (Nadeak & Nuraini, 2024). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory approach, psychological support is associated with the fulfillment of the need for belonging and love. Maslow emphasizes that individuals need a strong emotional connection to achieve mental balance and self-actualization. When individuals feel accepted and valued in their environment, they are better able to cope with life's pressures and challenges as well as reach their full potential (Organization, 2024). According to Bowlby's theory of attachment, psychological support is formed from secure relationships with significant figures, such as family or close friends. Interactions full of trust and empathy help individuals feel safe in the face of difficult situations (Széll, 2013). Strong attachment allows a person to develop confidence and better manage emotions, which has a positive impact on their psychological health (Putri et al., 2023).

Learning achievement is the result achieved by an individual after going through the learning process, as explained in the theory of behaviorism. This theory emphasizes that learning achievement can be affected by stimuli from the environment, such as rewards or punishments (Atma et al., 2021). B.F. Skinner, one of the leading figures of behaviorism, argues that learning occurs through positive or negative reinforcement that directly affects students' motivation to achieve better results (Iqbal et al., 2023). In cognitive theory, Jean Piaget highlights the

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importance of cognitive development in achieving learning achievement. According to him, individuals go through stages of intellectual development that affect the way they understand and absorb information. A person's ability to achieve optimal learning achievement depends mainly on the suitability between the material provided and the stage of their cognitive development (Destomo et al., 2021). This approach emphasizes that learning must be adapted to the mental capacity of the individual. The learning process highlights the importance of repetition, as described in the theory of power psychology. This theory suggests that learning involves training the inherent abilities in humans, such as observing, responding, remembering, imagining, feeling, and thinking. Through repetition, these abilities are refined and developed, much like a knife that becomes sharper with continuous sharpening (Nurhayati & Penna, 2023).

The motivation theory proposed by Abraham Maslow is also relevant to understanding learning achievement. Maslow stated that motivation plays a significant role in learning success, especially when basic needs such as security and a sense of appreciation have been met. When these needs are met, individuals have a stronger drive to meet higher needs, such as self-actualization, which is reflected in efforts to achieve high academic achievement (Sujadi & Aulianisya, 2020).

Albert Bandura, through social learning theory, states that the process of observation and social interaction influences learning achievement. In his view, individuals learn through imitating the behavior of others, especially if the behavior brings positive results (Subali et al., 2019). Self-confidence or self-efficacy also plays an important role; Individuals who are confident in their abilities tend to

be more persistent in facing learning challenges, thereby increasing their achievement (WALANGADI et al., 2021). Howard Gardner, with his theory of multiple intelligences, stated that slow learners may show potential in certain types of intelligence that are not always measured through traditional educational methods. For example, they may excel in kinesthetic or musical intelligence despite having difficulties in linguistic or logical-mathematical intelligence (Ru'iya et al., 2023). A multiple intelligence-based approach can help them find ways of learning that better suit their style and strengths (Cahyono et al., 2024). The theory of behaviorism proposed by Skinner is also relevant in dealing with slow learner children. Skinner suggests using positive reinforcement consistently to motivate them. For example, giving a small reward after completing a task can increase a child's confidence and motivation. This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive learning environment by minimizing stress and providing appropriate reinforcement (Anggraeni, 2022).

Lev Vygotsky, through the concept of proximal developmental zones (ZPD), explained that slow learners can be helped through intensive guidance from teachers or more proficient peers. In his view, collaboration and scaffolding (mentoring) allow individuals to understand material that is initially difficult. By providing focused support, children can gradually develop the ability to learn independently (Rofiaha et al., 2022). In addition, the view from Carl Rogers' humanistic psychological theory emphasizes the importance of empathetic relationships in supporting slow learners. Rogers believes that individuals will be more motivated to learn when they feel unconditionally accepted and valued. Creating an emotionally safe

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environment can help slow learners feel more comfortable facing their academic challenges (Hafidah & Rukli, 2022).

In the learning process, students set goals they aim to achieve, but they often encounter obstacles, such as mastering the learning material. This challenge generates motivation to overcome the barrier, prompting students to engage in studying the material in order to reach their desired goal. For slow learner students, psychological support can be provided through an empathy-based approach and unconditional acceptance, as advocated by Carl Rogers. Giving motivation and rewards for their small business can help build confidence. In addition, teachers need to provide additional time to provide individual guidance or small group learning that allows them to get more attention in understanding the material (Susilo & Prihatnani, 2022). Good grades serve as a form of operant conditioning or positive reinforcement, motivating children to study even harder. Conversely, if a child receives a poor grade, they may experience fear of not attending class, which can also drive them to study more diligently. This is an example of negative reinforcement or escape conditioning, where the child is motivated to avoid unpleasant consequences by improving their performance.

Unlike slow learners, fast learners need psychological support in the form of intellectual challenges that can spur their creativity and enthusiasm. Teachers can assign additional projects or more complex assignments according to their level of ability. This is in line with Lev Vygotsky's theory of proximal developmental zones (ZPD), where students learn most effectively when faced with challenges that are slightly beyond their current abilities but can still be solved with minimal help (Ningsih & Suyatno, 2023). In addition to academic support, upper/vocational students also need emotional support to cope with pressures from the school and family environment. According to Abraham Maslow, the need for a sense of security and appreciation must be met so that students can focus on academic achievement. Teachers and parents can create a supportive atmosphere by showing appreciation for the efforts of students, both fast learners and slow learners, without making comparisons that are detrimental to one party (Nur Wahyuni et al., 2022).

Discussion

Each student has different characteristics from the others, meaning that no two people are the same. These learning differences affect the way and outcomes of students' learning. Psychological support has a vital role in improving the learning achievement of slow-learner students, as explained by Maslow's theory of needs (Abraham & Siaputra, 2024). Maslow said that the need for a sense of security and acceptance must be met first before individuals can achieve self-actualization, including in the context of education. Slow-learner students who feel emotionally supported will be more motivated to learn because they no longer feel pressured or afraid of failure (Magut, 2021). Slow learner students need directed guidance and supportive social interaction to achieve better learning achievement. Psychological support, such as encouragement from teachers or peers, can help them overcome understanding gaps. With the proper scaffolding, students can slowly develop independent abilities in learning, which directly improves their academic achievement (Fakhruddin et al., 2024). According to Carl Rogers in humanistic psychology theory, unconditional acceptance of the environment is essential for the

development of slow learner students. When they feel valued and accepted for who they are, their confidence increases, so they are more open to the learning process (Zakiah et al., 2022). Empathetic-based psychological support allows students to feel safe in the face of academic challenges, which ultimately helps them achieve better learning outcomes (Janah & Aprilia, 2023).

Albert Bandura, through social learning theory, shows that self-efficacy has a significant influence on learning achievement. Psychological support can increase the self-efficacy of slow learner students by providing positive reinforcement and teaching them how to manage emotions when facing learning difficulties (Maharani & Purnama, 2023). When students believe in their abilities, they tend to be more persistent and committed to achieving their academic goals (Rahardjo & Pertiwi, 2020). Skinner, in his behaviorist approach, emphasizes that a supportive learning environment with positive reinforcement can encourage learner students to be more enthusiastic about learning. (Lisiswanti et al., 2022). Psychological support from teachers and parents, such as rewarding them for their small efforts, can increase motivation and focus on learning. With this consistency in providing support, slow-learner students can more easily reach their academic potential (Journal et al., 2020).

SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta is a Vocational High School located at Jalan Tarumanegara, Banyuanyar, Banjarsari, Surakarta. SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta formulated six goals. The first and second objectives explain that students who study at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta have good morals and extensive knowledge. Third, it is closely related to the previous goal, where students have good morals and extensive knowledge, which are then supported by the expertise competencies in SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta,

which are able to make students skilled and professional. The four students are equipped with knowledge and broad insights; it is hoped that after graduation, they can open an independent business that produces job opportunities in their environment. Fifth and sixth, with a large number of abundant natural resources, it is hoped that students will be able to manage these resources by generating creativity that produces new business opportunities and can compete in the era of globalization.

An educator designs a learning process for his students; in order to support the effectiveness of learning, a teacher must have the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities of a teacher to be able to plan, implement, and evaluate the learning process. The learning process will run well if there is interaction between educators and students, so a method is needed to ensure that the interaction runs well. Teaching or education method is a way used by educators to convey specific subject matter, skills, or attitudes so that learning and education are effective and the goals are well achieved. In this case, SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta has compiled a guideline known as "Initial Learning Module: Building a Positive Culture at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta". This module is consistently given at the beginning of learning and is one of the leading guides in the Guidance and Counseling process.

This module contains instructions on how to build the concept of psychological support that educators must apply in the SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta environment, namely through the restitution process. This process prioritizes the idea of positive discipline that must be embedded in students. It also encourages students to have self-discipline so that they can behave with reference to universal virtue values and have intrinsic motivation. Restitution includes stabilizing identity. This aims to

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change the identity of the child from a person who is considered a failure because of making a mistake to a successful person. Second, validation of wrong actions. Every action is carried out with a purpose, which is to meet basic needs. If a person understands what basic needs underlie an action, he will be able to find the most effective ways to meet those needs. An educator must be able to manage the classroom well; with good classroom management, an optimal atmosphere will be created so that the material delivered by students is also good. Educators can coordinate with students to create a harmonious and conducive atmosphere.

Third, ask for confidence. Every learner is basically internally motivated. When the identity of success has been achieved, and the behavior that is considered inappropriate has been validated, then the child will be ready to be associated with the values he believes in and move on to become the person he wants to be. In this case, students are expected to be able to show their existence through various academic and non-academic achievements. Psychological support not only helps slow learners feel more confident but it also provides a strong foundation for them to overcome learning challenges (James et al., 2022). The appropriate balance of empathy, guidance, and motivation can significantly enhance students' academic performance. This process involves ongoing evaluation, which must be systematic and continuous to reflect students' abilities accurately. In the context of school learning, particularly in the classroom, teachers bear the primary responsibility for student outcomes. A common mistake among teachers is limiting evaluations to specific times, such as at the end of a lesson, mid-term, or at the conclusion of a teaching program. This approach neglects the importance of regular assessments to monitor and support student progress throughout the learning process. Through the "Initial Learning Module: Building a Positive Culture at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta", learning by combining the correct elements of empathy, guidance, and motivation can significantly improve students' learning achievement.

Conclusion

Psychological support for upper-middle/vocational students needs to consider differences in learning abilities, such as fast learners and slow learners, in order to maximize their academic potential. An individualized approach is key. Teachers and parents must recognize the needs and learning styles of each student. Fast learners need additional challenges to maintain their interest, while slow learners need more intensive guidance and gradual delivery of material so as not to feel left behind. SMK 9 Surakarta, through the "Initial Learning Module: Building a Positive Culture at SMK Negeri 9 Surakarta", shows that the psychological development of high school/vocational students is a complex process that involves cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. The restitution process prioritizes the concept of positive discipline that must be embedded in students. It also encourages students to have self-discipline so that they can behave with reference to universal virtue values and have intrinsic motivation. Understanding and support from the surrounding environment is essential to help them get through this phase well and reach their full potential.

Authors Contributions

The author's contributions to this research are as follows: Anniez Rachmawati Musslifah (First Author) developed the research design, created instruments to measure psychological support and academic performance in slow learner

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students, and conducted data analysis on the impact of psychological support. She was also responsible for writing the initial manuscript draft and editing the theory and methodology sections. Evelyne Henny Lukitasari (Second Author) assisted in the graphic design and visualization of research data, supported the creation of communication materials, and was involved in visual editing and presenting the research findings. Yunita Primasanti (Third Author) contributed to the research methodology and statistical analysis, helped design the data collection procedures, and drafted the conclusions based on the research findings, along with performing the final manuscript editing.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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