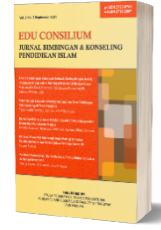




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Solution-Focused Brief Counseling: An Effective Strategy for Reducing Student Exam Anxiety

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Abstract

Keywords:

Solution-focused
brief counseling; Anxiety;
Student.

This study explores the effectiveness of brief solution-focused counseling (SFBC) in reducing exam anxiety in students. Exam anxiety is one of the factors that can interfere with students' mental health and academic performance. SFBC, as a solution- and outcome-oriented approach, relies on students' internal and external resources and has been proven effective in the school context. Through techniques such as problem-free talk, magic questions, scaling questions, exclusion questions, marking minefields, and formulaic first session tasks, this study aims to identify strategies that can reduce students' exam anxiety. The method used is Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to determine the effectiveness of using SFBC in reducing students' exam anxiety. The results showed that SFBC is effective in reducing students' exam anxiety by emphasizing the development of counseling strengths and resources. The conclusion of this study is that SFBC is an efficient and effective therapeutic approach to help reduce student exam anxiety.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:

Konseling singkat berfokus
solusi; Kecemasan; Siswa.

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi efektivitas konseling singkat yang berfokus pada solusi (SFBC) dalam mengurangi kecemasan ujian pada siswa. Kecemasan menghadapi ujian merupakan salah satu faktor yang dapat mengganggu kesehatan mental dan prestasi akademik siswa. SFBC, sebagai pendekatan yang berorientasi pada solusi dan hasil, bergantung pada sumber daya internal dan eksternal siswa dan telah terbukti efektif dalam konteks sekolah. Melalui teknik-teknik seperti pembicaraan bebas masalah, pertanyaan ajaib, pertanyaan penskalaan, pertanyaan pengecualian, menandai ranjau, dan tugas-tugas sesi pertama yang bersifat formula, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi strategi-strategi yang dapat mengurangi kecemasan siswa dalam menghadapi ujian. Metode yang digunakan adalah Systematic Literature Review (SLR) untuk mengetahui efektivitas penggunaan SFBC dalam mengurangi kecemasan ujian siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SFBC efektif dalam mengurangi kecemasan ujian siswa dengan menekankan pada pengembangan kekuatan dan sumber daya konseling. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa SFBC merupakan pendekatan terapeutik yang efisien dan efektif untuk membantu mengurangi kecemasan ujian siswa.

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Introduction

In the realm of educational psychology, understanding and addressing exam-related anxiety among students has emerged as a crucial area of focus. According to Hurlock (2006), anxiety is an uncomfortable psychological state characterized by worry, uneasiness in the mind, and bad feelings that individuals cannot avoid. This anxiety not only affects their mental health but can also interfere with academic performance and exam readiness (Alnuzaili & Uddin, 2020). The findings of research Maa (2023) revealed that eight out of 47 students experienced anxiety when facing school exams. Furthermore, Sharma et al., (2023) found that there were 17% of students in the low category, 33% in the medium category, and 50% in the high category in facing the exam. Based on this phenomenon, of course, there is a need for action to reduce the high anxiety conditions experienced by students. In the educational context, it is important to find effective strategies to help students overcome this anxiety so that they can achieve their maximum academic potential.

One approach that has emerged as an innovative solution is Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC). This approach is an adaptation of solution-focused therapy that was developed to be more applicable in educational settings. SFBC focuses on developing concrete and practical strategies to deal with the problem at hand, in this case, exam anxiety, rather than spending time analyzing the causes of the problem in depth (Gumilang, 2020).

The main characteristics of SFBC are its short duration, specific solutions, and outcome orientation (Corey, 2015). This approach emphasizes the utilization of internal and external resources possessed by students (O'Hanlon, O'Hanlon, & Weiner-Davis, 2003). The counselor helps them identify strengths and strategies that they have successfully used in the past, which can be adapted to address the anxiety they are currently facing.

In practice, SFBC is expected to help students develop a more positive and proactive perspective towards exams. It is expected to reduce anxiety; students can focus more on preparation and have higher confidence in facing exams. The approach also provides the added benefit of helping students develop coping skills that can be useful in various aspects of their lives. The brief solution-focused counseling approach is expected to not only have a short-term impact on reducing exam anxiety but also have a long-term positive influence on students' psychological well-being and academic performance. The purpose of the study was to explore and assess the effectiveness of SFBC as an intervention in reducing students' exam anxiety. The research also aims to understand how SFBC can be implemented and how it impacts students' anxiety levels, especially in the context of academic examinations.

Method

This study utilized the systematic literature review (SLR) method, starting with the identification, review, and evaluation of previous research and ending with the interpretation of findings. Data collection centered on studies published in the past five years, using "solution-focused brief counseling" and "student exam anxiety" as search keywords. The search was expanded across reputable academic databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Scopus, as well as scholarly journals known for their rigorous peer review processes. From an initial literature

pool of ten journals, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, ultimately narrowing the selection to five journals for detailed review. These criteria ensured the relevance and quality of the studies selected for analysis. The information extracted from these studies underwent an assessment check of the effectiveness and applicability of SFBC in reducing exam anxiety among students. This SLR aims to provide a structured and systematic evaluation of the available literature, offering reliable conclusions and recommendations for practical applications and future research.

Result

Based on the literature review, research related to the application of SFBC to reduce anxiety can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Application of SFBC to reducing student exam anxiety

No	Researcher	Title	Result
1	Stackpole & Garza, (2023)	Overcoming Stage Anxiety with a Solution-Focused Approach	The study demonstrated the effectiveness of SFBC in reducing dance exam anxiety in students. Quantitative results showed a significant reduction in performance anxiety, with an average pre-intervention score of 126 and a post-intervention score of 105.68.
2	Gumilang (2020)	Using Solution Focused Brief Counseling to Reduce Anxiety in Facing the Examination Vocational High School Students	The results of this study show that SFBC is effective in reducing students' exam-taking anxiety. This counseling approach helps students set goals, find solutions, foster optimism, and increase motivation, leading to a significant reduction in anxiety levels.
3	Sartika (2020)	Reduction of Anxiety Facing National Examinations Through Islamic Brief Counselling for Students	The research results outlined in the citations provided show that Islamic brief counseling is effective in reducing students' anxiety facing national exams. Overall, this study shows that Islamic brief counseling is a valuable tool in helping students manage their anxiety related to academic assessments, such as national exams.
4	Altundağ & Bulut (2019)	The effect of solution-focused brief counseling on reducing exam anxiety	The research conducted resulted in the fact that the SFBC approach is effective in reducing students' exam anxiety.
5	Hammoud et al., (2019)	Solution-focused brief group therapy on self-esteem and exam anxiety first secondary school female students in Koshkoueeh City	This study shows that group training using a solution-focused approach is effective in reducing exam anxiety and improving self-esteem in female students at secondary schools in Koshkoueeh City.

Based on the series of studies that have been presented, there is consistent evidence supporting the effectiveness of SFBC and Islamic brief counseling approaches in reducing anxiety faced by students in academic contexts. Ranging from reducing dance exam anxiety, vocational high school exam anxiety, to national exam anxiety, both approaches proved significant in reducing anxiety scores-with an average decrease from pre-intervention to post-intervention scores-as well as increasing students' optimism and motivation. The study also showed that SFBC, whether applied individually or in groups, was effective in improving the self-esteem of female students in secondary schools. These overall findings confirm the value of a brief solution-focused counseling approach and cultural adaptation in an educational context to address anxiety related to academic evaluation.

Discussion

This literature review explores in depth the condition of anxiety in students. Anxiety is a complex emotional response, often characterized by feelings of tension, worry, and fear that can vary in intensity from mild to severe. Anxiety is a reaction to stress and can be considered an adaptive mechanism that alerts individuals to threats and prepares them to face and solve problems (Blanchard, Griebel, & Nutt, 2011). In the context of students, anxiety is a condition full of worry, fear, pressure, unease, guilt, insecurity, erratic thoughts, and physical tension (Apriliana, Suranata, & Dharsana, 2019).

Anxiety conditions in students are conditions that will hinder the learning process and learning development. The anxiety cycle is located in the environment where it occurs and is then connected to the anxiety that provokes it (Apriliana et al., 2019). Students' fear of dealing with exams will cause excessive anxiety and worry (Windura, 2008) Anxiety can be said to be excessive when it continues to occur and can last for a long time (Santrock, 2012).

Anxiety has symptoms that will affect both physical and mental individuals. Depending on what the triggering factor is, students experience different levels of anxiety. However, students usually experience anxiety in the form of objective, neurotic (nervous), or moral anxiety (Soelaeman, 2010). The impact of anxiety can also be physical, according to Wood (2007), explaining that anxiety will have symptoms in physical conditions such as restlessness, aches, twitching of the eyelids, a face that looks tense, sweating, dry mouth, continuous urination, lack of concentration, sweaty hands, stomach pain, and a faster beating heart. Furthermore, a more dangerous impact is shortness of breath and a feeling of suffocation (Reissland, Froggatt, Reames, & Girkin, 2018).

Based on this, it can be interpreted that anxiety will make students uneasy, not calm; even the heart beats fast, sweats, trembles, and has difficulty breathing. Meanwhile, mental anxiety can cause excessive fear and difficulty concentrating. On the other hand, anxiety has causal factors that can be multifactorial, involving a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors (Hidayah et al., 2023). According to (Blanchard et al., 2011), major life changes, traumatic experiences, environmental stress, physical health conditions, and genetic factors all have an impact on anxiety. Broadly speaking, student anxiety factors, according to Fitriyani (2021), are divided into two categories: internal factors, which include the way students think in the learning process; students' emotional conditions, which are influenced by stress and academic pressure; and external factors, such as the environment, which is influenced by home conditions or conditions at school.

Based on this, there is a need for intervention strategies to reduce students' exam-taking anxiety. Approaches such as SFBC offer customized interventions based on students' specific needs and contexts that offer flexibility in what is needed reduce exam anxiety.

SFBC is a future-focused and goal-directed therapeutic approach developed in the early 1980s by Insoo Kim Berg, Steve de Shazer, and their colleagues at the Milwaukee Brief Family Counseling Center (Shazer & Dolan, 2012). Over time, solution-focused brief therapy is also called solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) (Wahyudin, 2022). SFBC is a future-focused and goal-directed

counseling approach that emphasizes the needs of the counselee, their strengths, and resilience by focusing on their pre-existing or conceptualized solutions and exceptions to their problems (Shazer & Dolan, 2012). Corey (2015) added that SFBC is a counseling approach that utilizes the strengths possessed by the counselee to construct solutions. SFBC counselors emphasize that counselees are experts in their problems, and counselors put themselves in a position of not knowing (Wahyudin, 2022).

SFBC in an educational context focuses on identifying realistic learning goals, developing a positive attitude towards exams, and strengthening effective coping strategies. Through this approach, students are encouraged to see exams as an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned rather than as a threat or burden. This approach also focuses on collaboration between counselors and students, where students are considered experts in their own lives and counselors are facilitators who help them find and implement solutions (Wahyudin, 2022). This is in contrast to traditional therapeutic approaches, which are often more dominated by direction from the counselor.

SFBC is suitable for school settings because it focuses on solutions, prioritizes the future over problems, and does not require long sessions (Kurniawan, Mappiare AT, & Atmoko, 2019; Walter & Peller, 2013). SFBC is very suitable for the school context because it is in line with the need for time-limited interventions, which allow students to engage in the therapeutic process without feeling pressured to do more sessions than they feel necessary (Ramli, Hidayah, & Fauzan, 2018; Ratner, George, & Iveson, 2012). School counselors have used SFBC extensively in the school setting to address student issues. SFBC is applied in school settings to address a variety of student problems, including learning and behavioral problems (Kim, 2013). SFBC can be used in schools in group counseling settings for time effectiveness (Corey, 2015; Wahyudin, 2022).

Based on these explanations, it can be concluded that SFBC is an efficient, flexible, and practical approach, especially in a school setting. It supports students' personal development in a positive and constructive way, recognizing their strengths and abilities to find solutions to their own problems. This approach emphasizes collaboration and independence.

In its implementation, there are several techniques for implementing SFBC (Corey, 2015; Ratner et al., 2012), namely: (1) Problem-Free Talk: The counselor asks various things that are not related to counseling to build relationships with the counselee, (2) Miracle Question: This technique invites the counselee to imagine the change they want as if it magically happened overnight. This question helps the counselee identify what would be different in their life if their problem suddenly disappeared, (3) Scaling Question: The counselee is asked to rate a particular aspect of their life on a scale, for example, from 0 to 10. This helps the counselee evaluate their progress and identify what it would take to move up on the scale, (4) Exception Question: The counselor helps the counselee identify times in the past when the problem they are facing did not occur or when the situation was better. This helps the counselee to see that change is possible and to build solutions based on what has worked before, (5) Flagging the Minefield: The counselor asks the counselee to identify potential challenges, triggers, or "mines" that could derail their progress towards their goals, (6) The Formula First Session Task: The counselor gives the counselee a task to record the process of change and solutions that can continue to be applied.

On the other hand, Sklare (2014) added that in its implementation, SFBC has the following stages: (1) Establishing Rapport: The counselor begins by building a trusting relationship with the client, creating a comfortable and safe environment for the client to discuss their concerns, (2) Identifying Client Goals: The counselor helps the client articulate what they want to achieve through counseling. This involves asking questions like, "What are your best hopes from our meeting?" or "How can I help you?" to clarify the client's desired outcomes, (3) Exploring the 'Miracle Question': The counselor may use the "miracle question" to help clients envision a future where their problem is resolved. This helps clients identify what changes would occur if the problem were no longer present, (4) Recognizing Exceptions: The counselor and client work together to identify times when

the problem does not occur or is less severe, which are known as exceptions. This helps clients see that change is possible and that they already have the resources to create solutions, (5) Scaling the Problem: Clients are asked to rate the severity of their problem on a scale, which helps them assess their current status and track progress over time, (6) Building on Client Strengths: The counselor encourages the client to recognize their strengths, resources, and past successes that can be used to address the current problem, (7) Developing a Message: At the end of each session, the counselor may construct a message for the client that includes compliments, a bridging statement, and a task or suggestion to encourage further progress, (8) Homework Assignments: Clients may be given tasks to complete between sessions that build on the therapeutic work done during the session and encourage clients to apply solutions in their daily lives, (9) Reviewing Progress: In subsequent sessions, the counselor and client review the progress made towards the client's goals and adjust the approach as needed, (10) Termination: Once the client has achieved their goals or made significant progress, the counseling process may be concluded, with the understanding that the client can return if new issues arise or further support is needed.

Based on this understanding, it can be interpreted that SFBC has several key techniques, including problem-free talk, miracle questions, scaling questions, exception questions, flagging the minefield, and the formula first session Task. These techniques are designed to explore the strengths, resources, and adaptability of the counselee. They assist the counselee in identifying and actualizing potential solutions to their problems in a highly counselee-centered and future-oriented manner. This approach emphasizes the importance of seeing the counselee as an individual who has the unique ability to solve their own problems with support and guidance from the counselor.

The combination of SFBC techniques and stages will make students' test anxiety problems reduced because there is no continuous problem and positive changes are inevitable after counseling takes place (Wardana, Rahman, & Multisari, 2023). Various research results reviewed in this study show that student anxiety when facing exams can be reduced by the SFBC approach. Research conducted by Stackpole & Garza (2023), Gumilang (2020), Altundağ & Bulut (2019), and (Hammoud et al., 2019) consistently show that SFBC can effectively reduce exam anxiety. In addition, research conducted by Sartika (2020) which explored Islam-based SFBC to reduce anxiety in facing national exams, offers an interesting perspective on spiritual values and principles in counseling approaches to reduce exam anxiety in students.

The research resulted in the fact that SFBC is able to reduce student anxiety in facing exams, but of course further research is needed because the research that has been done has several limitations, namely relying on literature reviews that may not cover all relevant literature, the research conducted does not include primary empirical data regarding the effectiveness of SFBC in specific contexts, and this study also does not pay attention to demographic factors related to the effectiveness of SFBC in reducing test anxiety in college students.

Conclusion

SFBC has been identified as an innovative and effective approach to addressing exam exam anxiety among students, a common issue that can significantly impact their mental health and exam anxiety. By concentrating on the development of practical strategies and leveraging both internal and external resources available to students, SFBC has proven to be a suitable and successful method within school environments. It assists students in overcoming exam anxiety and equips them with coping skills that are beneficial across various life aspects.

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on the application of SFBC has demonstrated its efficacy in reducing student exam anxiety. SFBC operates by focusing on the client's strengths and resources to drive solutions rather than dwelling on problems. The process includes building rapport, setting goals, exploring "magic" questions, recognizing exceptions, evaluating problem severity, leveraging

client strengths, assigning tasks, and reviewing progress. The research literature on SFBC further supports its use in exam anxiety-related issues. In summary, SFBC is a promising and resource-oriented therapeutic approach that effectively reduces exam anxiety in students.

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