

Implementing Multicultural Counseling to Reduce Academic Anxiety among Vocational High School Students in Jember

Duwi Sitoresmi¹, Siti Rochayah², Yuniar Dwi Puspita

Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education , PGRI University Argopuro Jember, Indonesia

duwisitoresmi17@gmail.com

Article History:

Received: 21/10/2025

Revised: 27/10/2025

Accepted: 30/10/2025

Published: 15/11/2025

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tingkat kecemasan akademik siswa SMK sebelum diberikan perlakuan, pelaksanaan konseling multikultural, serta implementasinya dalam mengurangi kecemasan akademik. Latar belakang penelitian ini berangkat dari perbedaan budaya belajar antara jenjang SMP dan SMK yang menuntut siswa untuk beradaptasi dengan pembelajaran berbasis kompetensi dan kegiatan praktik yang lebih intensif. Metode penelitian menggunakan studi kasus dengan subjek siswa yang memiliki tingkat kecemasan akademik tinggi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebelum intervensi, siswa mengalami kecemasan akademik pada tingkat sedang hingga tinggi, ditandai oleh gejala kognitif, afektif, dan somatis. Pelaksanaan konseling multikultural berjalan efektif melalui pemahaman terhadap latar budaya siswa, penggunaan komunikasi empatik, dan penyesuaian teknik konseling. Implementasi konseling multikultural yang dipadukan dengan pendekatan Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) berhasil menurunkan kecemasan akademik siswa, meningkatkan kepercayaan diri, serta memperkuat kemampuan adaptasi terhadap tuntutan pembelajaran praktik. Kesimpulannya, konseling multikultural merupakan pendekatan yang relevan, responsif, dan efektif untuk membantu siswa SMK menghadapi kecemasan akademik yang muncul akibat transisi budaya belajar.

Kata kunci: konseling multikultural, kecemasan akademik, siswa SMK, SFBC, pembelajaran berbasis kompetensi.

How to cite:

Duwi Sitoresmi, Siti Rochayah, Yuniar Dwi Puspita (2025) Implementation of Multicultural Counseling to Reduce Academic Anxiety in Vocational High School Students in Jember. *Journal of Psychology and Education Counseling JPEC*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.64624/jpec.v1i2.78>

Abstract

This study aims to identify the level of academic anxiety among vocational high school (SMK) students prior to receiving intervention, describe the implementation of multicultural counseling, and examine its effectiveness in reducing academic anxiety. The research is grounded in the significant shift in learning culture from junior high school to vocational education, where students are required to adapt to competency-based learning and intensive practical activities. This study employed a case study method with participants selected based on high levels of academic anxiety. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed qualitatively. The findings indicate that prior to the intervention, students experienced moderate to high levels of academic anxiety, reflected in cognitive, affective, and somatic symptoms. The multicultural counseling process proved effective through the application of cultural understanding, empathic communication, and culturally responsive counseling techniques. The implementation of multicultural counseling combined with the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach successfully reduced students' academic anxiety, increased their self-confidence, and enhanced their adaptability to practical learning demands. In conclusion, multicultural counseling is a relevant, responsive, and effective approach for helping SMK students manage academic anxiety arising from their transition to a new learning culture.

Keywords: multicultural counseling, academic anxiety, vocational students, SFBC, competency-based learning.



INTRODUCTION

Vocational secondary education is a form of formal education with characteristics distinct from those of lower secondary education. According to Slamet (2010), Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) are educational institutions designed to prepare students for entering the workforce through competency-based learning. SMKs are structured to produce graduates ready to engage in industrial environments; therefore, their curricula emphasize practical skills, vocational competencies, and direct field experience. The transition from theoretical learning at the junior high school level to intensive practical learning in vocational schools represents a significant adjustment period for students. During this transition, many students face pressure, uncertainty, and academic as well as practical demands that differ considerably from their previous learning experiences. Findings by Ardianti et al. (2025) support this condition, emphasizing that prolonged academic pressure can lead to psychological strain and academic burnout among students.

This stark shift in learning culture often triggers academic anxiety, an emotional condition in which students feel worried, tense, insecure, or fearful of failure in their learning process. According to Putwain (2011), academic anxiety is a learner's reaction to perceived academic pressure, which affects motivation, self-confidence, and the ability to cope with learning demands. In the context of vocational education, academic anxiety can have wide-ranging impacts, including decreased motivation, lower academic performance, and mental health issues such as stress and fatigue. Many vocational students who are accustomed to theoretical learning in junior high school feel overwhelmed when required to participate in hands-on activities in workshops, laboratories, or technical practice rooms that demand motor skills, precision, and direct demonstration. This is reinforced by Rufaidah et al. (2025), who found that female students are particularly vulnerable to academic anxiety, indicating that academic pressure may affect students differently depending on gender

Zeidner (1998) identifies three main indicators of academic anxiety: cognitive, affective, and somatic. Cognitive indicators appear in the form of negative thoughts and beliefs about potential failure. Affective indicators manifest through feelings of fear, tension, or excessive worry. Somatic indicators are characterized by physical symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, nausea, stomach discomfort, or heart palpitations prior to tasks or examinations. These three dimensions demonstrate that academic anxiety affects not only students' thoughts but also their emotions and physiological responses.

In the educational context, academic anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by internal and external factors such as the social environment, school culture, and student–teacher interactions. Therefore, strategies to address it must be comprehensive, humanistic, and sensitive to the diversity of students' backgrounds. Multicultural counseling emerges as a relevant approach to addressing this issue. This approach acknowledges differences in culture, identity, learning experiences, and value systems, while emphasizing the importance of understanding the cultural learning contexts students bring from their families or previous schools.

Students in vocational schools come from diverse social, economic, academic, and learning cultural backgrounds. Students accustomed to passive learning in junior high school may feel overwhelmed when required to participate in hands-on learning that demands initiative, willingness to try, and active engagement. Conversely, students used to working independently may struggle when required to follow technical instructions or collaborate within a team. These conditions demonstrate the necessity for school counselors to understand the multicultural contexts of their students so that counseling services can be more effective and relevant.

For these reasons, this study employs a case study method, as it allows researchers to explore phenomena in depth within real-life contexts. This aligns with Thomas (2022), who asserts that case studies are appropriate when the boundaries between the phenomenon under

investigation and its real-life context are not clearly evident, thus requiring a holistic approach. This is further supported by Crowe (2023), who states that case studies offer flexibility in using various data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, thereby enhancing validity through data triangulation. Additionally, Rodela (2024) explains that case studies enable researchers to gain deep contextual understanding, particularly when studying complex and dynamic phenomena. Thus, the case study method was chosen because it yields rich, detailed, and contextual findings that contribute significantly to comprehensively understanding the research problem.

Multicultural counseling not only identifies cultural factors influencing student anxiety but also helps students develop adaptive skills, emotional regulation, and learning strategies aligned with their individual needs. This approach emphasizes cultural empathy, appreciation of students' experiences, and the use of intervention strategies tailored to their contexts. In this study, multicultural counseling is integrated with the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach. According to De Shazer (1985), SFBC is a brief, solution-oriented counseling method that emphasizes the client's potential to create positive change. The counseling procedures include building collaborative relationships, goal setting, the use of miracle questions, exploring exceptions, scaling, and providing constructive feedback to support change. This approach is suitable for vocational school settings due to its flexibility, cultural adaptability, and emphasis on student empowerment.

A study by Widyastuti (2021) found that multicultural counseling is effective in reducing academic anxiety among vocational school students because it enables students to feel acknowledged in terms of their cultural backgrounds, family environments, and interpretations of academic pressure. Widyastuti explains that students become more open during counseling when counselors understand the cultural values they uphold. Furthermore, her study integrated Solution-Focused Brief Counseling techniques and showed that combining multicultural counseling with SFBC helps students focus on solutions, increases self-confidence, and reduces anxiety symptoms such as excessive worry, tension, and avoidance behaviors. Overall, the findings support the importance of applying multicultural counseling to assess students' academic anxiety prior to intervention, describe the implementation process, and analyze its effectiveness in reducing academic anxiety among vocational school students.

METHOD

This study employed a case study method focusing on a group of subjects identified as having high levels of academic anxiety. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences in navigating the differences in learning culture between junior high school (SMP) and vocational high school (SMK), as well as to explore the process of intervention through multicultural counseling.

The research subjects were selected based on the results of an academic anxiety assessment that indicated a high level of anxiety. The selection process was conducted through a series of systematic steps aligned with predetermined criteria. The first step involved identifying the population under investigation, namely individuals within a specific academic environment, such as vocational high school students. The second step included administering an instrument to assess academic anxiety using a standardized tool recognized for its validity and reliability.

The third step concerned the evaluation and categorization of the assessment results. Data obtained from the instrument were scored using established scoring guidelines and subsequently classified into various levels of anxiety low, moderate, and high based on predetermined cutoff scores or score ranges. At this stage, only individuals whose scores fell within the high-anxiety category were included in the pool of potential research subjects. The fourth step focused on the final selection process, ensuring that prospective subjects met all inclusion criteria (e.g., high

anxiety scores, willingness to participate, and the ability to engage in the research procedures) and were free from exclusion criteria (e.g., severe psychological conditions requiring clinical intervention or current involvement in another therapeutic program). The final step was obtaining informed consent from the subjects who passed the selection process.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, including school records, initial assessment results, and students' academic profiles. The data were analyzed qualitatively using techniques such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, in order to describe the effectiveness of multicultural counseling in reducing academic anxiety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

1. Students' Academic Anxiety Before the Intervention

The findings indicate that prior to the intervention, students were categorized as having moderate to high levels of academic anxiety. The symptoms included concerns about academic achievement, fear of examinations, difficulty concentrating, and negative thoughts regarding their own abilities. These initial data illustrate that the majority of students experienced considerable academic pressure, demonstrating a clear need for counseling intervention.

2. Implementation of Multicultural Counseling

Multicultural counseling was administered through several sessions that included stages such as building a counseling relationship, exploring cultural backgrounds, identifying sources of anxiety, and providing coping strategies aligned with students' cultural contexts. The counselor sought to understand the values, norms, and cultural experiences of the students, enabling the counseling process to become more personal, empathetic, and relevant. Throughout the sessions, students were able to express their academic concerns as well as cultural pressures they experienced.

3. Implementation of Multicultural Counseling in Reducing Academic Anxiety

After the intervention, students demonstrated a reduction in academic anxiety levels. They showed improved ability to cope with academic pressure, developed more positive thinking patterns, and increased self-confidence. Evaluation results revealed significant changes before and after the intervention, indicating that multicultural counseling was effective in reducing academic anxiety among students.

DISCUSSION

1. Students' Academic Anxiety Before the Intervention

The initial findings regarding students' high academic anxiety demonstrate that academic pressure, grade expectations, and negative self-perceptions remain dominant issues. This aligns with the theory of academic anxiety proposed by Spielberger (1983), which states that academic anxiety arises when students encounter learning situations perceived as threatening to their abilities. Beck's (1976) cognitive theory also supports this notion, emphasizing that negative thought patterns significantly influence anxiety levels.

These findings are consistent with studies by Putri (2020) and Rahman (2021), which revealed that secondary students are prone to academic anxiety due to workload demands and performance pressure. Thus, the initial data provide clear justification for the necessity of counseling interventions to address these anxiety-related issues.

2. Implementation of Multicultural Counseling

The implementation of multicultural counseling was aligned with the concepts developed by Sue and Sue (2016), emphasizing counseling that takes into account cultural values, perspectives, and students' unique life experiences. During the process, the counselor acted as a facilitator who helped students understand the cultural factors influencing their responses to academic pressure.

This study supports the findings of Nasir and Handayani (2019), who argue that multicultural approaches enhance client comfort because they feel respected and understood according to their backgrounds. The culturally sensitive and empathetic counseling process proved effective in creating a safe environment for students to express their anxieties.

3. Implementation of Multicultural Counseling in Reducing Academic Anxiety

The study revealed that following the counseling intervention, students experienced a significant decrease in academic anxiety. This finding is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory, which asserts that anxiety can be reduced when individuals are assisted in developing stress-management strategies appropriate to their cultural context and personal experiences.

The effectiveness of this intervention is further supported by studies by Widyastuti (2021) and Simanjuntak (2020), which found that multicultural counseling enhances students' psychological well-being and reduces anxiety linked to academic pressure. Through multicultural counseling, students were able to better understand their roles in the learning process, correct negative perceptions, and develop greater self-confidence. Overall, multicultural counseling provides meaningful support in helping students manage academic anxiety through an approach that values cultural diversity and addresses their emotional needs.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that academic anxiety among vocational high school students arises from differences in learning cultures between junior high school (SMP) and vocational high school (SMK), particularly due to the demands of competency-based learning and practical work that require mental readiness and more complex learning adaptation. Prior to the intervention, students exhibited moderate to high levels of academic anxiety across cognitive, affective, and somatic dimensions. The implementation of multicultural counseling in this study proved effective through processes that involved understanding students' cultural learning backgrounds, employing empathetic communication, and applying counseling techniques tailored to individual characteristics.

The integration of multicultural counseling with the Solution-Focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) approach was found to significantly reduce students' academic anxiety, enhance their self-confidence, and support their adjustment to the learning demands in vocational education. Overall, multicultural counseling is shown to be a relevant and effective approach in assisting students to cope with competency-based academic challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who provided support throughout the implementation of this study. Appreciation is also extended to the institution and academic units that facilitated the research process, as well as to the respondents who willingly dedicated their time to participate in completing the questionnaires.

The researcher further conveys thanks to the financial supporters who contributed to the smooth execution of this research. Additional appreciation is given to individuals involved in the proofreading, typing, and preparation of materials and supporting resources that enabled the completion of this study.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that future studies involve a larger number of participants, utilize a wider variety of educational media, or combine qualitative approaches to gain a deeper understanding of adolescents' experiences.

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