



Mental Health Socialization and Education to Improve Student Literacy in Vocational Colleges: A Study at Politeknik Negeri Madiun

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ABSTRACT

Student mental health is a critical issue in higher education, particularly at vocational colleges, which simultaneously require academic preparedness and practical skills. This community service activity aims to improve students' mental health literacy through outreach and education integrated into the learning process at the Madiun State Polytechnic.

The implementation method uses a participatory approach by integrating mental health materials into learning activities, including the delivery of basic mental health concepts, an introduction to academic stress, and adaptive coping strategies. The activities were conducted through interactive lectures, discussions, case studies, and learning reflections.

The results of the activity indicate an increase in students' understanding and awareness of the importance of mental health, as well as their ability to recognize and manage academic stress more adaptively. The integration of materials into learning has proven effective because it provides a contextual and sustainable learning experience.

Therefore, this activity contributes to the development of a learning-based mental health education model at vocational colleges.

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1. Introduction

Student mental health has become an increasingly important issue in higher education institutions worldwide due to the growing academic, social, and psychological pressures experienced by students. University students are often required to adapt to demanding academic environments, tight deadlines, financial challenges, and social transitions simultaneously. Recent studies indicate that mental health problems among university students continue to increase globally. The World Health Organization reported that one in eight people worldwide experiences mental health disorders, with anxiety and depression being among the most common conditions

affecting young adults and students [1]. In Indonesia, several studies have also shown that a considerable proportion of college students experience moderate to high levels of academic stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion due to academic workloads and adjustment pressures [2]. These conditions demonstrate that mental health issues among students are no longer isolated problems but have become a significant concern requiring systematic educational intervention.

In vocational higher education, the challenges faced by students can be even more complex. Vocational students are expected not only to master theoretical knowledge but also to develop practical competencies and job-ready skills that align with industry demands. This dual responsibility often increases students' academic burden because they

must complete classroom learning, laboratory practice, fieldwork, and competency-based assignments simultaneously. Previous studies reported that vocational students frequently experience higher stress levels due to intensive practical learning systems and performance-oriented assessments [3]. In many cases, students struggle to balance academic expectations with personal well-being, which may lead to fatigue, decreased motivation, and psychological distress. Prolonged exposure to such conditions can negatively influence students' academic achievement, social functioning, and overall quality of life. Academic stress that is not properly managed may contribute to more serious mental health problems. Research indicates that students experiencing chronic stress are more vulnerable to anxiety disorders, depression, burnout, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic performance [4]. Furthermore, mental health problems among students are often associated with reduced concentration, lower productivity, decreased self-confidence, and difficulties in maintaining interpersonal relationships. These impacts not only affect students' educational experiences but may also influence their future professional readiness and long-term psychological well-being. Therefore, preventive and educational efforts are necessary to help students develop adaptive coping strategies and maintain emotional resilience throughout their academic journey.

Mental health literacy plays a crucial role in enabling students to recognize, understand, and manage psychological problems effectively. According to Anthony F. Jorm, mental health literacy refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that assist individuals in their recognition, management, and prevention [5]. Individuals with good mental health literacy are generally more capable of identifying early signs of psychological distress, seeking appropriate help, and applying adaptive coping mechanisms when facing emotional challenges. Mental health literacy also contributes to reducing stigma and increasing awareness regarding the importance of psychological well-being. Consequently, strengthening mental health literacy among students is considered an essential strategy in promoting healthy learning environments and preventing the escalation of mental health problems in higher education settings.

Despite its importance, evidence suggests that mental health literacy among students remains relatively low. Many students still have limited understanding of stress management, emotional regulation, and available mental health support services [6][7]. Some students are unable to recognize symptoms of anxiety or depression, while others perceive mental health problems as signs of personal weakness rather than conditions requiring support and intervention. Low mental health literacy often results in delayed help-seeking behavior, self-stigma, and reduced willingness to discuss emotional difficulties openly. Studies have also shown that students frequently rely on maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as social withdrawal or avoidance behaviors, when dealing with academic stress [8]. These findings highlight the urgent need for educational initiatives that can improve students' awareness, knowledge, and practical skills related to mental health management.

Traditional mental health outreach programs that rely primarily on lectures or one-way communication are often insufficient to produce meaningful and sustainable behavioral change. Although awareness campaigns may increase general knowledge, they frequently fail to provide students with practical skills and reflective experiences necessary for applying mental health concepts in real-life situations. Therefore, more participatory and student-centered approaches are increasingly recommended in higher education contexts. One promising approach is experiential learning, which emphasizes active participation, reflection, collaboration, and practical application of knowledge [9][10]. Through experiential learning, students are encouraged not only to understand concepts theoretically but also to engage directly in activities that foster self-awareness, emotional understanding, and adaptive coping strategies.

Experiential learning is considered particularly relevant for mental health education because it allows students to connect theoretical concepts with their personal experiences and daily academic challenges. Activities such as reflective discussions, case analyses, collaborative problem-solving, and stress management simulations can help students internalize mental health knowledge more effectively. Previous studies have demonstrated that experiential and participatory learning approaches can improve students' emotional awareness, coping abilities, and attitudes toward mental health issues [11]. In addition, interactive learning environments can create a safer and more supportive atmosphere that encourages students to discuss emotional concerns openly and reduce stigma associated with mental health problems.

At Politeknik Negeri Madiun, mental health education has not yet been fully integrated into the formal learning process, resulting in limited opportunities for students to obtain structured and continuous mental health literacy education. Existing learning activities tend to focus primarily on technical and vocational competencies, while psychological well-being and emotional resilience receive relatively limited attention. Consequently, many students may lack adequate knowledge and skills to manage academic stress effectively. Considering the increasing psychological challenges faced by vocational students, integrating mental health education into course-based learning becomes highly relevant and necessary.

Based on these conditions, the present activity aims to enhance students' mental health literacy through the integration of mental health education into learning activities at vocational higher education institutions. By incorporating experiential learning principles into the educational process, this program is expected to provide students with both conceptual understanding and practical coping skills that can support their psychological well-being. Furthermore, this approach is expected to create a more contextual, participatory, and sustainable learning experience that contributes to the development of healthier academic environments and improved student well-being in vocational higher education settings [13][16].

2. Method

The activity was conducted at Politeknik Negeri Madiun and targeted university students as the primary participants. The program was implemented over a three-month period, from January to March 2025. The implementation was designed using a participatory approach that actively involved students in the learning and reflection process, enabling them to identify and discuss mental health challenges experienced in academic life [6], explain flowchart below:

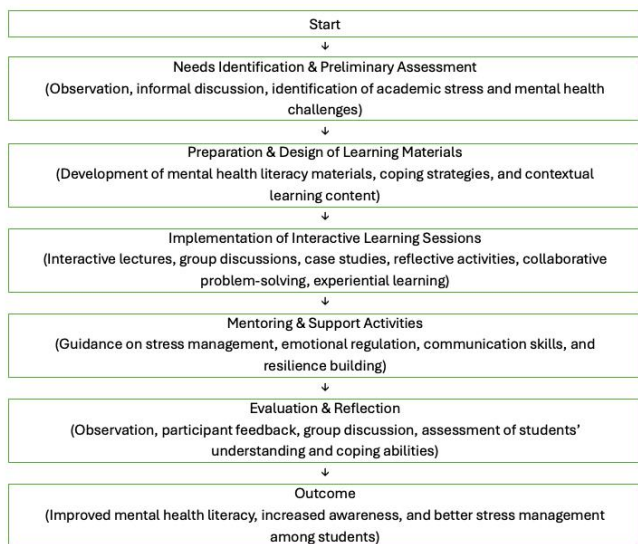


Figure 1. Flowchart Method

The first stage of the program focused on needs identification and preliminary assessment. During this phase, observations and informal discussions were conducted to understand the students' experiences related to academic pressure, stress, anxiety, and emotional well-being. The findings from this stage were used as the basis for developing learning materials and determining the most relevant intervention strategies for the participants.

The second stage involved the preparation and design of learning materials. The materials emphasized fundamental concepts of mental health literacy, including understanding mental health conditions, recognizing symptoms of academic stress, and identifying appropriate coping strategies [2][12]. In addition, the materials were adjusted to the academic context of university students to ensure relevance and practical applicability in daily campus activities.

The implementation stage was carried out through a series of interactive learning sessions conducted weekly throughout the program period. The learning methods included interactive lectures, group discussions, case studies, reflective activities, and collaborative problem-solving exercises. Experiential learning principles were also applied to encourage students to learn from their personal experiences and peer interactions [5][9]. Through these activities, participants were encouraged to express their perspectives openly and develop adaptive strategies for managing stress and maintaining psychological well-being.

Mentoring activities were conducted alongside the learning sessions to provide additional support for participants. Facilitators guided students in practicing stress management techniques, emotional regulation, and healthy communication skills. The mentoring process also aimed to strengthen students' self-awareness and resilience in dealing with academic and social challenges within the campus environment.

The final stage consisted of evaluation and reflection activities. Evaluation was conducted through direct observation, participant feedback, and group discussions to assess improvements in students' understanding of mental health issues and their ability to apply coping strategies in everyday situations [1]. The results indicated increased student awareness regarding the importance of mental health literacy, as well as improved confidence in recognizing and managing academic stress effectively.

3. Result and Discussion

The results of the intervention indicate a substantial improvement in students' mental health literacy after participating in the learning activities. Prior to the intervention, many students demonstrated limited understanding of basic mental health concepts, including difficulties in recognizing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Several students initially perceived mental health problems merely as signs of personal weakness rather than conditions that could be understood and managed through appropriate coping strategies. This condition is consistent with previous studies reporting that young people often possess insufficient mental health literacy and limited awareness regarding psychological well-being [3][7]. Following the intervention, students were able to explain key mental health concepts more accurately and demonstrated a stronger understanding of the relationship between academic pressure, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being. Evidence of this improvement was reflected in classroom discussions, reflective assignments, and students' ability to identify stress triggers and propose adaptive coping mechanisms during case-based learning sessions. These findings suggest that structured educational interventions can effectively bridge knowledge gaps and promote healthier coping behaviors among vocational college students.

In addition, students demonstrated significant progress in applying practical coping strategies to manage academic and personal stress. During the implementation process, students actively practiced techniques such as time management, emotional regulation, prioritizing academic responsibilities, and problem-solving exercises. Evidence of these positive changes emerged from students' reflective journals and group discussions, where participants reported feeling more capable of organizing academic tasks, reducing procrastination, and managing emotional reactions during stressful situations. Several students also expressed that they became more aware of the importance of balancing academic demands with rest and social support. The intervention therefore not only improved conceptual understanding but also strengthened students'

practical capacity to maintain psychological well-being in everyday academic life.

Another important finding was the positive shift in students' attitudes toward mental health issues. Prior to the intervention, discussions related to mental health were often perceived as uncomfortable or stigmatizing. Many students hesitated to share emotional experiences due to fear of negative judgment from peers. However, after participating in experiential learning activities, students became more open and confident in discussing mental health challenges in both classroom interactions and reflective sessions. Evidence of this attitudinal change could be observed through increased participation in discussions, students' willingness to share personal experiences related to stress management, and greater empathy toward peers experiencing emotional difficulties. This indicates that the intervention contributed not only to cognitive improvement but also to stigma reduction and the development of a more supportive learning environment.

The implementation of the experiential learning approach played a crucial role in achieving these outcomes. Through interactive discussions, case analyses, reflective activities, and collaborative problem-solving exercises, students were encouraged to actively engage with the learning material rather than passively receive information. Evidence from classroom observations showed that students participated more enthusiastically during practical and discussion-based activities compared to conventional lecture sessions. Students also demonstrated improved critical thinking when analyzing mental health scenarios and proposing adaptive coping responses. These findings support previous studies suggesting that experiential learning approaches are highly effective in strengthening cognitive understanding, self-awareness, and behavioral change because students are directly involved in the learning process [5][8]. The active and reflective nature of experiential learning enabled students to internalize mental health concepts more meaningfully and apply them within real-life contexts.

Furthermore, the intervention contributed to the creation of a more positive academic atmosphere within the classroom. Students showed increased peer support, stronger communication during collaborative tasks, and greater sensitivity toward classmates experiencing academic stress. Evidence from facilitator observations indicated that students became more willing to provide encouragement and constructive feedback to one another during group activities. This improvement in social interaction suggests that mental health education can positively influence not only individual coping abilities but also the broader social climate within vocational higher education settings. A supportive classroom environment is particularly important because peer relationships often play a significant role in students' psychological adjustment and academic persistence.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified during the implementation process. Time limitations within the course structure restricted opportunities for deeper exploration of mental health topics and reduced the continuity of follow-up activities. In some sessions, facilitators were unable to fully accommodate extended discussions or individual reflections due to limited instructional time. Additionally, variations in

students' prior knowledge, emotional readiness, and learning capacities influenced the overall effectiveness of the intervention. Some students adapted quickly to reflective and discussion-based learning approaches, while others required more guidance and additional time to engage actively in the activities. These findings indicate that the success of mental health education programs may depend on the availability of adequate instructional support and flexible learning strategies tailored to students' diverse backgrounds and learning needs.

The findings therefore highlight the importance of integrating mental health education into the curriculum in a more systematic and sustainable manner. Embedding mental health topics as a continuous component of vocational education would provide students with ongoing opportunities to strengthen self-awareness, emotional resilience, and adaptive coping skills throughout their academic journey. Continuous implementation could also support the development of a campus culture that prioritizes psychological well-being and reduces stigma associated with mental health discussions. In the long term, such integration is expected to contribute not only to improved student well-being but also to enhanced academic engagement, learning motivation, and overall educational quality [14].

4. Conclusion

This activity demonstrates that integrating mental health education into the learning process is an effective approach to improving students' mental health literacy and awareness. Through this integration, students not only gain a deeper understanding of mental health concepts but also develop practical skills to manage stress and emotional challenges in a more adaptive manner. The learning-based approach allows students to engage actively with the material, fostering both cognitive and behavioral changes that support their overall well-being [10][11].

Furthermore, the program highlights the importance of embedding mental health education within the curriculum as a sustainable strategy rather than relying solely on one-time interventions. By incorporating mental health topics into regular coursework, students are provided with continuous exposure and opportunities for reflection, which can strengthen their resilience and coping capacities over time.

Therefore, this program has strong potential to serve as a replicable model for integrating mental health education into vocational higher education. Its application in other vocational institutions could contribute to the development of more supportive learning environments and promote the psychological well-being of students on a broader scale.

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