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# Neuro Linguistic Programming-Based Counseling Program for Reducing Learners' Distress

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## ABSTRAK

Permasalahan yang sering dihadapi peserta didik di antaranya adalah stres akademik. Stres akademik yang merugikan dan mengganggu peserta didik dapat menimbulkan distress. Distres yang menjangkit hampir di semua jenjang pendidikan membutuhkan penanganan serius. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan program bimbingan berbasis *neuro linguistic programming* (NLP) untuk mereduksi distress pada peserta didik di jenjang pendidikan SD sampai PT. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara umum distress peserta didik berada pada kategori sedang. Dominasi aspek distress pada siswa jenjang pendidikan SD dan SMP berada pada aspek emosi, sedangkan pada siswa jenjang pendidikan SMA, Kejuruan dan PT berada pada aspek pikiran. Melalui teknik uji perbedaan dua rata-rata diketahui bahwa terdapat perbedaan antara nilai pretest dan post-test distress siswa. Dengan demikian dapat ditafsirkan bahwa program bimbingan berbasis NLP efektif untuk mereduksi distress siswa pada jenjang SD sampai PT.

**Kata kunci:** *neuro linguistic programming*, distress, peserta didik, konseling.

Man has a brain with an incredible capacity. Nggermanto (2001:37) contends that every individual has 100 billion active cells in his brain at the time he was born. Each of this cell then develops and constructs a net up to 20,000 units of connection in every second. With the capacity of this size, brain has proven to be capable of memorizing all atoms in the universe. The capacity of the brain memory is 10,800 while the number of atoms in the universe is 10,100. It is not exaggerating then when Tracy (2001) says that the dependable technique of accelerated learning is a possibility in terms of increasing human capability of learning up to 300 – 400% more powerful than their actual learning capability.

Research conducted by Bloom (Makmun, 2000) shows that a human percentage of IQ (Intelligence Quotient) maturity and perfection reaches 92% since he was 13 years of age. It means that since he was in his junior high school, he has already had a capacity already established. Nevertheless, it is not the case with Indonesian students' learning capacity in general. Drost (KOMPAS, October 21, 2001) ascertains that through his study involving senior high school students as respondents, it shows that the level

of understanding of the 1994 curriculum is only 30%. This low percentage of understanding of the curriculum aforementioned on the students' part brings with it an implication that their understanding on the same matter of a higher level would remain low especially when it is related to the 1999 competency-based curriculum implemented as a supplement. One reason for claiming that the students' understanding on the curriculum remains low is that they actually experience some degree of distress. Field research of practicing PLBK – guidance and counseling services given to students of senior high schools across the city of Bandung – indicates that the syndrome of stress as experienced by the students accumulates to become a distress. Distress indicators experienced by the students were among others intolerably very low frequency of students' attendance, incompleting homework assigned, and very low involvement in class activities during the learning process.

Substantial problem faced by students as learners in education is termed as *academic stress*. This phenomenon refers to the existence of laziness, reluctance of doing curricula assignments, frequent absence with various unreasonable reasons, cheating or doing things forbidden. This

stress was generated uncontrollably on all levels of education and it urges the school management to take necessary steps and handle it seriously. Basically, the purpose of this study was to formulate a program of counseling based on neuro linguistic analysis to reduce the distress experienced by students of elementary schools up to colleges. The program was formulated based on empirical observation on specific phenomena of distress, factors contributing to the distress, tendency of cognitive mapping of the students, and services badly needed by those suffering from the distress. The expected result of the present study was the establishment of *Neuro Linguistic Programming* useful for the counselor to reduce the distress.

### Method

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the present study. The quantitative mode of analysis was used to observe the symptoms of distress experienced by students whereas the qualitative mode was used to reveal the distress factors and students' need for services of reducing the symptoms.

The research sampling involved 146 fifth grade students of Banjarsari Elementary School, 248 second year students of PGRI Junior High School of Cimahi City, 269 second year students of Public Senior High School 1 of Cimahi City, 451 second year students of Public Vocational School 1 of Cimahi City, and 408 first, second and third year students of Educational and Counseling Department – Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Indonesia University of Education. The research method used was a pre experiment with one-group pretest-posttest design. The number of respondents involved in the experiment was 150. 30 of each educational level represent the degree of distress categorized as high and very high was represented.

The instruments used to collect data were questionnaires on stress potentials and interviews to ascertain the causes of distress and the tendency of cognitive mapping influencing the students' distress. The mode of this section was a Likert-type statement with a five-point scale of scoring patterns of 1 through 5, assuming equal intervals between each point. The respondents were asked to check their position on the scale with the alternatives of

“strongly feel”, “quite feel”, “feel just right”, “less strongly feel”, and “feel nothing”.

To reveal the symptoms of distress experienced by the students of elementary schools, a three-point scale of scoring patterns of 1 through 3, assuming equal intervals between each point. The respondents were asked to check their position on the scale with the alternatives of “feel just right”, “sometimes feel”, and “feel nothing”. To reveal both internal and external factors bringing about the distress and the students' cognitive mapping, an interview mode was carried out. The internal factors included time, language, memories, decision, meta program, value, belief, and attitude. The external factors included family matters, schools, and the community.

Two main issues were discussed to assess the trustworthiness of the finally emerging findings: validity and reliability. Theoretical validation was done by experts to test the accuracy of the material, construction, instruments wording, and literacy. The reliability test on the instruments used the formula developed by Spearman-Brown. Statistical tests using SPSS of 11.0 version resulted in instruments reliability on the stress symptoms being 0.782 on the elementary level students, 0.837 on the junior high school students, 0.798 on the senior high school students, 0.659 on the vocational school students, and 0.69 on the college students. Validity test on the instruments used Pearson product-moment correlations and significance probabilities with rough computing. Of the 105 items tested, there were 44 items which met the criteria for being accepted, 10 indicators represented by only 1 item, and 1 indicator being not represented.

There were two kinds of data collected in the present study: quantitative and qualitative. In analyzing quantitative data, statistical analysis was used whereas analyzing the qualitative data, non-statistical analysis was used. The statistical analysis employed statistical calculation such as mean, percentile, and standard of deviation. The non-statistical analysis was carried out by describing and giving meanings on the data to gain a logical inference.

### Results and Discussion

Below is a general description of the distress as experienced by all students from elementary schools to colleges.

**Table 1: General description of Distress syndrome experienced by elementary school students**

Category	Range of Scores	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high	117 – 131	6	3
High	102 – 116	49	18
Moderate	87 – 101	60	41
Low	72 – 86	27	33
Very low	57 – 71	4	5
Total		146	100

Table 1 shows that in general the degree of distress as experienced by the fifth grade students of Banjarsari Elementary School 5 of Bandung City falls into the category of mild leading to low. As for the distress aspect experienced by the students, it is depicted in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Description of each aspect of distress as experienced by the elementary school students**

Number	Aspect	Percentage
1	Physic	24.42%
2	Behavior	21.80%
3	Mind	22.79%
4	Emotion	30.99%

Table 2 shows that the distress aspect as experienced by fifth grade students of Banjarsari Elementary School 5 includes the aspect of emotion, followed then by the aspects of physic and mind, and finally the aspect of behavior.

**Table 3: General description of distress symptoms experienced by junior high school students**

Category	Range of scores	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	144 – 158	7	2.8%
High	117 – 143	43	17.3%
Moderate	95 – 116	87	35.1%
Low	73 – 94	85	34.3%
Very low	55 – 72	26	10.5%
Total		248	100%

Table 3 shows that in general the degree of distress as experienced by the second grade students of PGRI Junior High School of Cimahi City falls into the category of mild leading to low. Table 4 below depicts the aspect of distress as experienced by the students.

**Table 4: Description of each distress aspect experienced by the junior high school students**

Number	Aspect	Distress aspects	Percentage
1	Aspect 1	Physic	22.63%
2	Aspect 2	Behavior	24.95%
3	Aspect 3	Mind	26.04%
4	Aspect 4	Emotion	26.36%

Table 4 shows that the aspect of distress mostly experienced by the second grade students of PGRI Junior High School of Cimahi City is the aspect of emotion, followed by aspect of mind and then the aspect of behavior, and finally the aspect of physic.

**Table 5: General description of distress syndrome experienced by the senior high school students**

Category	Range of scores	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	134 – 154	14	52.2%
High	113 – 133	58	21.56%
Moderate	91 – 112	104	38.67%
Low	71 – 91	81	30.11%
Very low	50 -70	12	4.5%
Total		269	100%

Table 5 shows that in general the degree of distress as experienced by the second year students of Public Senior High School 1 of Cimahi City falls into the category of mild leading to low. As for the distress aspect experienced by the students, it is depicted in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Distress syndrome experienced by senior high school students**

Number	Aspect	Distress aspects	Percentage
1	Aspect 1	Physic	22%
2	Aspect 2	Behavior	23%
3	Aspect 3	Mind	31%
4	Aspect 4	Emotion	24%

Table 6 shows that the aspect of distress mostly experienced by the second year students of Public Senior High School 1 of Cimahi City is the aspect of mind, followed by the aspect of emotion and then the aspect of behavior, and finally the aspect of physique.

**Table 7: General description of distress syndrome experienced by vocational school students**

Category	Range of scores	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	145 – 160	4	0.88%
High	123 – 144	65	14.41%
Moderate	101 – 122	237	52.54%
Low	79 – 100	143	31.70%
Very low	57 – 78	12	2.66%
Total		451	100%

Table 7 shows that in general the degree of stress mostly experienced by the second year students of Public Vocational School 1 of Cimahi City falls into the category of mild leading to low. As for the distress aspect experienced by the students and further description about the aspects of students' distress as a variable is shown below.

**Table 8: Description of each aspect as experienced by vocational school the students**

Number	Aspect	Distress aspects	Percentage
1	Aspect 1	Physic	21.6%
2	Aspect 2	Behavior	25.98%
3	Aspect 3	Mind	29.25%
4	Aspect 4	Emotion	23.12%

Table 8 shows that the aspect of distress as experienced by the second year students of Public Vocational School 1 of Cimahi City proves to be the aspect of mind, followed by the aspect of behavior and then the aspect of emotion, and finally the aspect of physique.

**Table 9: General description of distress syndrome experienced by university/college students**

Category	Range of scores	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	134 – 149	10	4.80%
High	120 – 133	31	14.9%
Moderate	105 – 119	77	37.01%
Low	90 – 104	69	33.17%
Very low	75 – 89	21	10.09%
Total		408	100%

Table 9 shows that the degree of distress as experienced by the second, third and fourth year students of the Department of Educational Psychology and Counsling – Faculty of Educational

Sciences of the Indonesia University of Education falls into the category of mild leading to low. As for the distress aspect experienced by the students, it is depicted in Table 10 below.

**Table 10: Description of each aspect of distress experienced by university/college students**

Number	Aspect	Distress aspect	Percentage (%)
1	Aspect 1	Physic	24
2	Aspect 2	Behavior	25
3	Aspect 3	Mind	28
4	Aspect 4	Emotion	21

Table 10 shows that the aspect of distress mostly experienced by the second, third and fourth year of the Department of Educational Psychology and Counsling – Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Indonesia University of Education is the aspect of mind, followed by the aspect of behavior and then physique, and finally the aspect of emotion.

The study resulted in some indication that in general the distress experienced by all students fell into the category of moderate. The aspect of distress evidently dominant among the students of elementary schools and junior high schools was the aspect of emotion whereas the same findings on the students of senior high schools, vocational schools and university/college were the aspect of mind.

General description of the factor playing significant role in generating the distress experienced by students led to some findings worth discussing. Interviews made with 30 students representing each level of education revealed that internal factors contributed to the distress with the categories of high and very high. The internal factors were the use of language, beliefs, memory, attitudes, and the preparedness of students to challenge the demands with various degrees.

External factors causing the distress were those coming from family, schools, and the community. External factor as the cause of distress among elementary school students proved to be the overloaded weight of study materials. At the junior high school level, the external factor causing the distress most was the social environment. At the senior high school level, the external factor playing a greater role in generating the distress was that of family matters. At the university/college level of education, the external factor contributing

significantly to the emergence of the distress was campus environments of which proved to be the most conspicuous was the academic too heavy load.

Students with this syndrome suggest that they need some counseling to fulfill their special needs. The needs they feel they have to fulfill include: (a) the use of various teaching methods appropriate to their flair created by their subject teachers such as the use of multimedia in the teaching-learning process in the classroom, and (b) the addition of school facilities such as internet services, library and sports centers.

It was also revealed by the present study that there was a tendency of the emergence of distress cognitive mapping along the way with students as the learners. Interviews made with 30 students experiencing the distress with the categories of high and very high revealed that the tendency of the students' cognitive patterns can be explained as follows:

1. Language. Commonly, those students suffering from distress used words carrying some destructive meanings to express themselves such as "fed up", "reluctant", "get bored", and "confused".
2. Belief. Students with this syndrome tend to have a low degree of confidence.
3. Memory. In general, students experiencing the distress were closely tied with their failures in the past.
4. Time. The students' preparedness to lessen the tension of severe demands were not dependable enough in that they were less responsive towards the emerging challenges.
5. Decision. The students tended to avoid themselves from taking the opportunity to ameliorate the challenges.
6. Attitude. In general, students with the distress tended to be skeptical and acted less promisingly to solve problems being faced.

These syndrome-driven students need some counseling badly. Interviews made with 30 students experiencing the distress with the categories of high and very high revealed that students of the elementary level of education needed some counseling on personal and learning matters. The students of junior high schools needed some social-

related-matters type of counseling. The students of senior high schools needed some counseling on both personal and social matters. The students of the vocational level of education needed to be the subject of counseling on career development. And, the students of higher education institutions needed some counseling on career development and learning matters as well.

The effectiveness of this NLP-based counseling program to reduce the distress experienced by students of elementary to higher levels of education works satisfactorily. To describe the data, t-test was employed. It resulted in a significant degree of difference between the pretest scores and the post test scores gained by the students. Therefore, it can be interpreted that NLP-based counseling program is effective to reduce the distress experienced by the students of elementary school up to students of higher education levels.

Results of the field study conducted on the fifth grade students of the Public Elementary School 5 of Banjarsari show that the degree of distress they experienced fell into the moderate category. Unless necessary steps of intervening systematically through a program are taken, it is likely that the students' distress grows more intense, that is, falling into the category of high or even very high. The students' main distress aspect of the dimension of emotion includes indicators like the feeling of curiosity, nervousness, restlessness, the feeling of being worthless, difficulties of adapting with humorous atmosphere, being skeptical towards life, the feeling of sorrow leading to helplessly crying, the feeling of being abandoned, easily getting angry, inferiority, easily getting offended, the feeling of being gloomy, the feeling of fear without good reasons, the feeling of being moody, easily making complaints, and getting panicked very easily.

Results of the field study conducted on the second year students of the Public Junior High School 2 of PGRI in the city of Cimahi show that the degree of distress they experienced fell into the moderate category. The students' main distress aspect of the dimension of emotion includes indicators such as restlessness, easily getting angry, inferiority, the feeling of sorrow leading to a cry, the feeling of being abandoned, easily getting offended, the feeling of curiosity, the feeling of being not satisfied, the feeling of unhappiness, the feeling of being lost in peacefulness, getting panicked very easily, and not having a sense humor.

Results of the field study conducted on the second year students of the Public Senior High School 1 in the city of Cimahi show that the degree of distress they experienced in general fell into the moderate category. The students' main distress aspect of the dimension of mind includes indicators such as easily getting forgetful, the feeling of not having clear goal in life or not knowing how to infer meanings in life, inability of setting priorities in life, getting confused or messed up, having no meaningful achievements, inability of deciding what is good to choose, feeling of being hopeless, keeping thinking negatively, feeling of being worthless, and being unable to see the ways of living a good life.

Results of the field study conducted on the second year students of the Public Vocational School 1 in the city of Cimahi show that the degree of distress they experienced in general fell into the moderate category. The students' main distress aspect of the dimension of mind includes indicators such as getting forgetful easily, seeing no ways of what to achieve or what could contribute to meaningful life, inability of deciding the priorities in life, getting confused or messed up, tendency of degrading in terms of achievements, being unable to decide what is good to choose, feeling of being hopeless, keeping thinking negatively, feeling of being worthless, and being unable to see the ways of enjoying life.

Results of the field study conducted on the university students in their second, third, and fourth years of the Department of Psychology Education and Counseling of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of UPI (The Indonesia University of Education) in the city of Bandung show that the degree of distress they experienced in general fell into the moderate category. The students' main distress aspect of the dimension of mind includes indicators such as getting forgetful easily, seeing no ways of what to achieve or what could contribute to meaningful life, inability of deciding the priorities in life, getting confused or messed up, tendency of degrading in terms of achievements, being unable to decide what is good to choose, feeling of being hopeless, keeping thinking negatively, feeling of being worthless, and being unable to see the ways of enjoying life.

In general, the distress-generating factor as indicated by the students as learners is divided into two aspects: internal aspect and external aspect.

The internal aspect concerns with the language use, beliefs, memory, attitude, and the preparedness of students to challenge the demands with various degrees. The findings of the present study suggest that the dominant factor contributing significantly to the distress proves to be the internal factor – the fact of which is echoed by Robin (2006) that an individual has in his mind some sort of force to exercise a mastery on his own mind through his own personal drives.

It is also worth noting that there are factors serving as the source of stress on students. They are among others: a) family matters quite possibly comprising the parents' mental disturbance and personalities, the parents' disharmonious marriage, lacking in caring, control and discipline, unrealistic expectation on the children, unhealthy competition among brothers and sisters in the family – disharmony among members of the family; b) school and curriculum including high appreciation attributed by the school's dignitaries, school disciplinary rules of conduct, and examination activities; c) community affairs including bad influences deriving from the people living around, rejection by the people, and being the object of ridicule by fellow students or friends.

The learners suffering from the distress feel the importance of having their special needs fulfilled. As the researcher sees to it, the special needs the learners believe the subject teachers can provide include the use of various teaching methods. To the students' point of view, the routines gear them to some sort of stagnation in that the conventional and monotonous medium of instruction has been a potential source of generating distress. According to Dilts (2002), an effective teaching involves individual's flair and learning efforts (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).

Another issue concerning the special needs the students hope is the provision of school facilities. Sufficient facilities provided should make it possible for the learners to study independently and thus work with very minimum assistance from the teachers. Other than that, school facilities would enable and support students of any levels to reach the goal of education.

General distress cognitive mapping tends to govern some strategy implemented by the students. Essentially, the students sources of information coming from the outside have to manage and make use of. Tad (2003) point out that an individual's school of thought is evidently influenced by the

words of a language of his choice, his belief, his attitude, his memory, and his being prepared in terms of time management.

Students of elementary level of education to students of higher education institutions have something in common with regard to their thinking mechanism. They tend to use a destructive language, they have a low sense of confidence, unwilling to accept changes, and behaving an unacceptable negative way. Therefore, the development of this model is geared towards the establishment of effective, positive thinking.

Counseling services for the students under discussion should cover four emphases, dealing with personal matters, social issues, learning problems, and career development. The four emphases are in concordance with the learners' needs. Those students of elementary level of education experiencing the distress need personal and learning services more than other students due to the fact that they actually need to understand and develop their personality in the right and positive way. By way of giving guidance in their learning, these students would find it easier to develop a good learning habit and solve learning problems positively.

Students of junior high schools need more counseling on social issues for the reason that they can find help with their attempt to socialize with their social environments especially with their fellow students of the same age. Those students of senior high schools need more emphasis on personal services which in turn would help them to understand, accept, direct, and develop their potentials. Students of vocational schools have different needs to fulfill during the counseling sessions; manually career development. This would eventually lead them to plan their future the right way (Juntika, 2002). University/college students with the syndrome of distress need to have counseling emphasizing personality and learning problems. Adopting academic tradition of learning at higher education level seems to be burdensome to some extent in that they are not really well prepared. The four counseling services aforementioned are initially intended to help the learners find their way to become outstanding and dependable individuals in facing any changes.

The effectiveness of this NLP-based counseling program works to reduce the degree of distress. Any individuals are prone to stress. The experience of having stress takes place when the

organs of body react to both real and imaginary situations (Haney, 2004:1). A situation in which the stress emerges is called the stressor. The so called luck-generating stress helps individuals to stay alert and manage to produce expected achievements. According to Selye (1983:1-2), stress can be both useful and destructive. The destructive stress is known as distress. Lazarus & Folkman (1984:19) contend that stress is termed as a strong force coming from the feeling of pain, a great sorrow, sadness, fatigue, or irresistible exhaustion. The phenomena reflected by this syndrome are among others weak-looking physical condition, unhealthy mind, emotion, and the way of behaving.

One way of solving the problem encountered by the individuals experiencing the distress is by benefiting the NLP-based counseling program. NLP helps individuals communicate with themselves, reduce various forms of unreasonable fear, control the negative emotions, and curiosity (Ibrahim, 200:12). NLP would surely be a good assistance in realizing millions of people to live a healthy life with proper and balanced weight free from being intimidated and any negative feelings.

In the perspective of NLP, stress is a natural phenomenon emerging as a consequence of environmental changes. Dilts (2002) argues that stress is very much driven by a system inside the individual's programmed cells of the brain which automatically responds to certain stimuli. The role NLP plays here is to learn how the brain works and what systems govern the overall chains of circles. This way, the individuals are enabled to respond positively to the potentially emerging stress. From the NLP's point of view, the stress known as distress attacks individuals who are bound to casting their mind back to uncomfortable, bad experiences thus making it possible for the individuals to react to the situations. NLP has the power to transfer the bad experiences into valuable experiences individuals can benefit from.

## Conclusion

The study on the fifth year students of Banjarsari Public Elementary School and the students of Public Junior High School 1 of PGRI in the city of Cimahi shows that the level of distress they experience falls into moderate category. The students' main aspect of distress refers to the emotional dimension. Results of the study on the second year students of Public Senior High School 1 of Cimahi

City and students of Public Vocational School 1 of Cimahi City indicates that in general the distress experienced falls into the moderate/mild category. These students' main aspect of distress belong to the dimension of mind. Results of the study on the second, third and fourth year university students of the Department of Psychology Education and Counseling - Faculty of Educational Sciences of UPI (The Indonesia University of Education) indicates that the distress they experienced falls into the moderate/mild category. Their main aspect of distress belongs to the dimension of minds.

In general the distress-generating factors are divided into two mainstreams namely internal aspect and external aspect. The study indicates that the dominant factor that causes the distress is the internal aspect. The external factors contributing to the source of distress are among others:

1. family matters comprising the parents' mental disturbance and personalities, disharmonious marriage of the parents, lacking in caring, control and discipline, the parents' too high and unrealistic expectations on the children, unhealthy competition within the members of the family or, in other words, the emergence of disharmony within the family especially among biological brothers and sisters;
2. school and curriculum which comprise high appreciation awarded by the school's dignitaries, school discipline, and formal examination activities;
3. community, in which bad influences of the people living around seems potentially spreading, rejection by the people living in the same environment, and the students being the object of ridicule by their fellow students and friends.

The special needs as expected by the students as learners with the syndrome are the use of various teaching methods by their subject teachers. Other than that, school facilities should be provided to fulfill the students' needs. The students' distress cognitive mapping essentially concerns with the way students manage and make use of sources of information not generated within their own initiatives.

Students of all levels of education – from elementary schools to university/college have something in common in that the mechanism of thinking patterns tends to be negative such as using destructive type of language, having low sense

of confidence, unwilling to accept changes, and behaving in a negative and unacceptable manner.

There are four kinds of service the students who experienced the distress need to have: personal, social, learning and career counseling services. One promising way of solving the problem in giving services is by intervening the individuals experiencing the distress: benefiting from the NLP-based counseling program. The program effectively helps individuals to communicate with themselves, reduce the intensity of unreasonable fear, and control the negative emotions and curiosity. The program also enables individuals to change uncomfortable experiences into favorable, pleasing, valuable experiences which individuals would benefit from a great deal.

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