

# General Overview of Psychological Flexibility of Students in Indonesia

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This study aimed to get an overview of the psychological flexibility profile of students in Indonesia. There are many studies on psychological flexibility carried out in various countries, but for Indonesia it is still very limited. The instrument used was a multidimensional psychological flexibility inventory (MPFI) consisting of 60 items. The method used in this research was descriptive quantitative. The results showed that 159 students got a general description of psychological flexibility: 24 (15%) of students had psychological flexibility at a high level, 102 (62%) were at a moderate level, and 33 (21%) were at a low level. These results illustrate the importance of developing psychological flexibility in students through various efforts and interventions, especially in Indonesia.

**Key words:** *Psychological, Flexibility, MPFI*

## Introduction

Psychological flexibility is an integral part of mental health and behavioural effectiveness. It is characterised by a person's ability to focus on their current situation, take appropriate actions to achieve goals and values, and be prepared to face a psychological event that is challenging or undesirable. The importance of psychological flexibility was stated by Kashdan & Rottenberg (2010), which included various individual abilities to recognise and adapt to various situations, change the mindset or behaviour, maintain balance, be aware, open, and commit to behaviour according to firmly held values. Kashdan & Rottenberg further stated one of the components in psychological flexibility is the ability to change cognitive experiences quickly. Other components

related to an individual's ability to withstand pressure, have openness, and self-control. In other words, someone who is psychologically flexible can act according to the situation based on the belief values, be able to deal with depressing situations, does not hide, and can control his behaviour. Psychological flexibility is closely related to wellbeing. Several research results have revealed that psychological flexibility significantly correlates with wellbeing (Marshall & Brockman, 2016). This means, to achieve an ideal state of wellbeing, people need to develop psychological flexibility in life.

Psychological flexibility implies that a person needs to be flexible in dealing with situations and conditions. Individuals sometimes experience internal events such as depression, anxiety, self-doubt, self-confidence that can circumvent their commitment to act according to their values and goals. However, people with psychological flexibility can deal with these difficult internal events in a particular way; one of which is paying attention. In paying attention to their psychological events, people deliberately observe their internal experiences from time to time in a way that is not elaborative, open, and non-judgmental (Brown & Ryan, 2003). By adopting a wise approach, psychologically flexible people do not need to focus too much to avoid, suppress, or control unwanted or difficult internal experiences. This, by itself, can facilitate better mental health (Baer, 2003).

The importance of psychological flexibility has attracted the attention of researchers. Various studies have been conducted to look at the relationship between psychological flexibility and various related variables including welfare (Imani et al., 2016; Marshall & Brockman, 2016; Wersebe et al., 2018), self-efficacy (Jeffords et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2015), quality of life (Leonidou et al., 2017), attention (Masuda & Tully, 2012), compassion (Marshall & Brockman, 2016), and self-adjustment (Montiel et al., 2016).

Other results suggest that low psychological flexibility affected individuals negatively. A person who does not have psychological flexibility is prone to experience several problems and disorders (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010), including depression (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Montiel et al., 2016; White et al., 2013), stress (Wersebe, 2018), eating disorders (Bluett et al., 2016; Masuda, Price, Anderson, & Wendell, 2010), higher emotions (Nevanperä et al., 2013), psychological distress (Wiggs & Drake, 2016), and anxiety (Arch et al., 2012; Berryhill et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2014).

Research on psychological flexibility is also related to cultural factors. Psychological flexibility begins to develop and is oriented towards cultural practice. Psychological flexibility is considered important in cultural evolution, such as reducing interpersonal and intergroup conflicts, raising values of caring, and reducing punishment (Biglan, 2009). Studies on psychological flexibility have been included in various cultures such

as: Marshall & Brockman (2016) researched the correlation of psychological flexibility, compassion, and wellbeing in Australia; Azadeh et al., (2015) researched the role of psychological flexibility in high school students who experience social anxiety in Iran; and the study of Xu et al. (2018) who validated the Chinese version of the questionnaire in China.

The importance of psychological flexibility in education can be explained through the opinions of several experts. Zaheer (2015) explained the results of his research that psychological flexibility contributes to the quality of life and peer support in learning – when students have high psychological flexibility, they feel a greater level of peer support in learning. Another study conducted by Jeffords et al. (2018) states that psychological flexibility has a positive influence on student self-efficacy. Psychologically flexible students have the opportunity to persevere and complete tasks related to their education. Besides, there is an increase in social competence through the contribution of psychological flexibility experienced by students (Rosenberg, 2018).

Based on the explanation above, the researcher intended to find out a general description of the psychological flexibility of students in the country of Indonesia, especially in SMA/SMK Daarut Tauhid Boarding School, Bandung. Research on psychological flexibility is still very limited in Indonesia so this research can contribute and direct further research on psychological flexibility in Indonesia.

## **Methods**

This research used a quantitative approach because in this study, more emphasis is placed on numerical data analysis. The research method used in this research is quantitative descriptive. Through quantitative descriptive research methods a description can be obtained of the psychological flexibility of SMA and SMK students of Daarut Tauhid Boarding School class X in the 2018/2019 school year. 157 students participated in this study. The data collection tool used in this study was a psychological flexibility scale. The psychological flexibility scale from Rolffs et al. (2018) used alternative answers; strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The data analysis technique used in this study was descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistical calculations in the form of frequency and percentage obtained the results of the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to obtain a general description profile of the psychological flexibility of students in Indonesia, especially the SMA/SMK Daarut Tauhid Boarding School, Bandung. Data obtained related to the psychological flexibility of students are

placed into three categories, namely high, medium, and low levels. The results of the instruments distributions to the students carried out in May 2019 are as follows: from 157 students we obtained a general description of psychological flexibility. 24 (15%) of students have psychological flexibility at a high level, 102 (64%) are at a moderate level, and 33 (21%) are at a low level. These results are presented in the following Table 1.

**Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Psychological Flexibility**

Score	Number of Students	Frequency	Level
211-242	24	15 %	High
180-211	102	64 %	Moderate
149-180	33	21 %	Low

Empirical evidence in this study showed that the psychological flexibility of students in Indonesia still needs to be developed. The findings of this study supported the results of previous studies that have been studied by Azadeh et al. (2015), Jeffords et al. (2018), and Zaheer (2015), who stated the importance of psychological flexibility for individuals, especially in education.

To help individuals develop flexibility, some efforts and interventions can empirically be used to help individuals increase their psychological flexibility. Various efforts and interventions that have been used in developing psychological and cognitive flexibility include the interaction of children and parents (Williams et al., 2012), cognitive-behavioural counselling (Nazarzadeh et al., 2015), mindfulness-based intervention (Ruskin et al., 2018), dialectical behaviour therapy (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010) and acceptance and commitment therapy (Morris, 2014).

Interactive efforts between parents and children influence children's psychological flexibility development (Williams, Ciarochi, & Heaven, 2012). This study has found that the way parents interact with children has a significant impact on a child's level of psychological flexibility. This effort is a natural effort made by parents to their children so that the better the interaction of parents to children, the more influence on children's psychological flexibility; otherwise the less parent interaction, the lower the child's psychological flexibility. The counselling approaches to develop psychological/cognitive flexibility are cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness-based intervention, dialectical behaviour therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy.

An intervention that can be used is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). The terms Cognitive Therapy (CT) and the general term CBT are often used as synonyms to describe psychotherapy based on cognitive models. The term CBT is also used for a group of techniques in which cognitive approaches and a series of behavioural procedures are

combined (Knapp & Beck, 2008). CBT has been used as a general term to include standard CT and theoretical combinations of cognitive and behavioural strategies. In CBT, the way people feel is related to the way they think about a situation and not only to the nature of the situation itself. With the CBT approach, individuals learn how to think, which can contribute to emotional problems such as depression and anxiety. Individuals learn to reduce emotional problems by identifying distortions in thinking, viewing thoughts as ideas about what is happening, and considering situations from different points of view (Rector, 2010).

Nazarzadeh et al., (2015) examined the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in perfectionist cognitive flexibility. According to research (Glass, Maddox, & Love, 2013), the human brain can learn new behaviours, shape memory in the brain, and change perceptions during life, and apparently perfectionists in addition to possessing information and behavioural abilities, they also adhere to some behaviours, beliefs and follow them continuously.

Mindfulness-based intervention is designed to train individuals to develop attention and practise it in everyday life. Mindfulness is defined as "paying attention in a certain way, deliberately, at the moment, and without judgment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Further conceptualisations of mindfulness propose a two-component model. One component involves self-regulation of attention to the current experience, and the other involves adopting an orientation of openness and acceptance of one's experience (Bishop, 2004). Therefore, this intervention teaches attention skills to increase deliberate attention, to develop different relationships with one's mind, and to practise different strategies in relation to distressing thoughts and emotions in non-judgmental ways. Through practice and experiential practice, individuals learn to retreat or break away from initial thinking by creating meta-awareness (i.e., conscious awareness), which ultimately counteracts negative thoughts over and over and increases cognitive flexibility (Shapiro et al., 2018).

The next approach is to use Dialectical Behaviour Therapy. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy was originally designed to treat behaviour in individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (Rizvi et al., 2013). DBT is a development of CBT – CBT is protocol-based, while DBT is principle-based (Swales & Heard, 2017). In CBT, the counsellor follows special procedures, for example, when an individual comes in a panicky condition, a sequencing procedure is followed to overcome panic by providing psycho-educational education, teaching abdominal breathing, and so on, whereas DBT counsellors are more flexible in dealing with individual problems. The next difference between DBT and CBT is the intervention way. CBT can be given in a group or individual format but rarely occurs in both simultaneously. At the same time, DBT consists of four

different modes of therapy: individual therapy, group skills, telephone consultation, and team therapy.

DBT recognises that there are problems with individual ways of thinking, but counsellors first encourage individuals to accept then help make changes so that individual thinking is more balanced (Dijk, 2012). DBT uses a transactional framework that relies on the concept of identifying and synthesising differences, referred to as dialectics. In DBT, counsellors demonstrate dialectics with the Zen Buddhist practice of loving acceptance from individuals while simultaneously increasing behaviour change and growth through training in didactic skills (Banks, Melinda, & Gibbons, 2016). According to Kashdan & Rottenberg (2010), DBT is considered to be able to develop psychological flexibility.

The final approach, which is seen to develop psychological flexibility, is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). ACT is a transdiagnostic intervention that is usually given in individual therapy settings; but can also be delivered in various formats depending on the therapeutic context (Dindo, Liew, & Arch, 2017). ACT uses an acceptance and attention strategy to develop behavioural change that is done by increasing psychological flexibility (Shapero et al., 2018). ACT is one of the third wave cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) interventions, which emphasises the context and function of psychological phenomena, and the importance of psychological flexibility (Hayes, 2004).

Various interventions that have been proposed are interventions that can be used to develop psychological flexibility. Effective approaches tested can be used to develop the psychological flexibility of the students. However, the intervention emphasises more the behavioural approach, so researchers can then examine various other approaches such as psychoanalysis, humanism, and postmodernism to develop psychological flexibility and answer the question; "Can psychological flexibility be developed through approaches other than behavioural?"

## **Conclusion**

The general description of psychological flexibility that has been proven empirically in Indonesia has shown the importance of developing psychological flexibility in the students. The results showed there were still many students at levels low and medium. Various efforts have been developed by researchers before, but are still very limited in Indonesia.

Research suggestions are addressed to various related parties. First, school counsellors are expected to develop students' psychological flexibility by learning and practising optimising psychological flexibility in themselves before being developed in the students



by actively participating in seminars, training, and workshops related to counselling approaches. Instil positive values in yourself and hone emotional intelligence in an effort to integrate personality competencies in daily life and professional practice.

Second, the LPTK of the counselling educator in the Counselling Study Program in Bandung Indonesia is expected to be able to hold a training program on an ongoing basis for counselling teachers in the school.

Third, the next researchers are expected to be able to study the factors that influence psychological flexibility from various aspects based on the results of previous studies. Conduct research on the development of instruments of psychological flexibility from other perspectives. Explore more deeply the contribution of other factors that are predictors of the formation of psychological flexibility. Conduct further research on interventions to increase the psychological flexibility of students.

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