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Self-Criticism and Psychological Well-being: A Study to Find Out the Relationship and Influence on Vocational Students

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Abstract: Important for vocational students to achieve psychological well-being amidst technological developments that increase self-critical behaviour. Information overload, increased self-com, and other psychological health issues can increase self-critical behaviour. This can hinder the achievement of the six dimensions of psychological well-being. So, it is necessary to know the correlation between these two variables in vocational students. This study aims to determine the relationship between self-criticism on psychological well-being in vocational students. A total of 1812 students were included, and participants completed assessments of self-criticism and psychological well-being. The result is self-criticism and psychological well-being is in a medium category with scores M = 60.34; SD = 2.86 and M = 118.48; SD = 2.53 sequentially. Analyses assessed the extent to which the intercept and linear slope of self-criticism were associated with assessments of psychological well-being. Findings suggest that a decrease in self-criticism is associated with better psychological well-being in vocational students. There was a relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being. The implication of this finding suggests applying intervention with a focus on reducing self-criticism to improve student's psychological well-being.

Key Words: Self-criticism; Psychological well-being; Vocational students

INTRODUCTION

Vocational students, who are pursuing specialized technical or career-oriented programs may be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of self-criticism. These students often face demanding curricula, high-stakes assessments, and the pressure to perform well in order to secure future employment. Furthermore, the cognitive and interpersonal challenges inherent in advanced scholarly activities, such as academic writing and reading, can exacerbate feelings of self-criticism and undermine psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being is a good, happy, satisfied, and positive state experienced by a person as a result of the achievement of the six dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 2018). According to Ryff, psychological well-being consists of six dimensions, namely: purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth/development, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and self-

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acceptance (Ryff, 1989). These six dimensions are the result of Ryff's conversion of three existing psychological theories, namely developmental psychology by Erikson, clinical psychology such as self-actualization by Maslow, maturity by Allport, and others. The third scholarship is mental health from Jahoda. In addition, Ryff compiled factors that affect psychological well-being such as age, gender, social status, culture, and life experiences.

During vocational school, psychological well-being is an important thing to have. Researchers suggest that a state of psychological well-being influences a student's behavior and helps to achieve developmental tasks (Sugiyo et al., 2019). Furthermore, this state of well-being is able to lead students to a state of self-actualization, self-recognition, mental health, full functioning, maturity, and having goals as a model of psychological well-being. This is certainly a major and important need considering that vocational students are at a transitional stage towards adulthood, a place of self-recognition and identity formation, and directing themselves for further independent life.

However, vocational students who are in their teenage years experience life along with technological developments that affect their lives. Some studies suggest that today's students tend to experience stress, anxiety, and depression due to a decline in mental health and other declines such as abilities, physical conditions, personal relationships, and an increase in other problematic behaviors in adolescents (Hakim et al., 2017; Jannah et al., 2015; Rahardjo et al., 2020). This is especially true as a result of the use of social media, which is increasingly used by adolescents attending vocational school.

Through social media, students receive a large amount of information. Liu (2021) revealed that the situation provides easy and unlimited access to various positive and negative information so that students experience information overload. In vocational students, this information is used as material for self-assessment so that they make comparisons between themselves and others (Schemer et al., 2021). Self-critical behavior is also increasing. This is in accordance with what Pynnonen (2021) said that certain resources will determine whether an individual's mental state is good or bad. In this aspect, the negative information obtained leads adolescents to self-critical behavior so that they experience negative feelings, low self-concept and life satisfaction and hurt themselves (Hartas, 2021).

In full, Shulman (2015) explains that self-criticism makes individuals less confident and have difficulty in fulfilling their developmental tasks. Other research suggests that a lack of self-criticism will help to increase self-awareness and reflection skills (Robins et al., 2005). Self-criticism leads individuals to maladaptive functioning, which is shown by complacent behavior with negative judgments, self-blame, and fear of losing approval if they fail (Michaeli et al., 2022). Self-criticism tends to lead individuals to compromise efforts to achieve their goals so as not to experience failure or loss. Self-criticism is a state of perceptual bias or misinterpretation of unpleasant circumstances or other sources of stress, causing difficulties to adjust (Dickson et al., 2016).

Michaeli (2022) presents the results of research showing that psychological well-being as a variable is influenced by self-criticism. During this time, individuals undergo a critical process of self-evaluation and self-reflection, which can have important implications for their psychological well-being. Self-criticism, the tendency to engage in harsh self-evaluation and judgment, has been identified as a key factor that can impact vocational student's mental health and overall functioning. Understanding the relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being in vocational students is crucial, as it can inform the development of targeted interventions and support strategies to promote positive youth development (Rose et al., 2019).

The existing literature suggests that self-criticism is associated with a range of negative psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, among adolescents (Shahar et al., 2005). For instance, studies have found that self-critical students are more vulnerable

to developing depressive symptoms, particularly when faced with negative life events that align with their self-critical tendencies. Furthermore, self-criticism has been linked to poorer academic achievement, with research indicating that the interaction between self-criticism and depressive symptomatology can predict decreased grade point average over time. Additionally, self-critical emotions, such as shame and self-loathing, have been found to be associated with a variety of psychological difficulties in youth, including substance abuse, eating disorders, and social (Ashra et al., 2021).

Few studies to date have examined the relationship between psychological health in vocational students and the types of academic challenges specific to this population. However, research on graduate students has revealed that the cognitively demanding tasks of scholarly writing and reading can contribute to heightened stress, exhaustion, and imposter syndrome. Similarly, studies have demonstrated that self-criticism is related to depressive symptoms in both children and adolescents. Moreover, the occurrence of stress mediates the relationship between cognitive vulnerability, such as self-criticism, and depressive symptoms over time. At the same time, self-criticism predicts above and beyond other depressogenic factors, such as attributional styles (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023)..

Research suggests that there is a negative relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being in adulthood. Particularly due to significant personality changes in adulthood due to the high level of rigor and emotional stability that is different from adolescence (Donellan et al., 2015). In contrast to the situation of vocational students who have unstable characters, identity searches, and others. Therefore, researchers want to know the correlation of self-criticism with vocational students's psychological well-being.

This study aimed to understand the relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being. Besides, this research also describes the level of self-criticism and psychological well-being of vocational students.

METHOD

This is a correlational study to find out how much self-criticism has to do with students' psychological well-being. We used quantitative methods with a non-experimental research design because variables can be measured and produce numerical scores that can be processed, analyzed, and interpreted statistically.

Participants

This survey comprised 1,812 vocational school students from 10 vocational institutions in Semarang City, Indonesia. This study utilised a cohort of vocational school students that were randomly assigned. This study will concentrate on a cohort of students aged 15 to 18 years, selected from local educational institutions. This study imposes no gender restrictions; both female and male students may be subjects of research.

Sampling Procedures

This study employs simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is a method of sample selection whereby every member in the population have an equal probability of being chosen. The primary aim of SRS is to guarantee that the selected sample accurately reflects the population, enabling the generalisation of analytical results to the entire population. This research employs

random sample selection without consideration of individual characteristics within the population (Lin et al., 2015).

Instrumentations

Data were collected from 10 schools three of which are private schools and seven are public schools in Semarang and the questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms and direct distribution. This study uses two scales, namely, the Psychological Well-being scale made by Carol D. Ryff (1989). This scale consists of six mutually correlated elements, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The psychological well-being scale used in this study is a medium form of 42 items with 3 items per aspect. This instrument has a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.908. Second, the psychological scale used in this study is the self-criticism scale (Gilbert et al., 2004). This scale consists of 22 items that measure the different ways people think and feel about themselves when something goes wrong with them with scores ranging from 1 to 4 (very inappropriate to very appropriate). To measure self-criticism using the self-criticism scale which consists of 3 components namely inadequate self, reassured self, and hated self. The reliability of the scale as measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.90 for the inadequate self-component, 0.86 for the reassure self-component, and 0.84 for the self-efficacy component. The assessment of the instrument is in the form of a Likert scale, where there are favorable statements and some are unfavorable with six answer choices.

Data Analysis

This study uses a correlational research design. Data analysis in this study is descriptive analysis. Meanwhile, simple regression analysis uses a regression model. The data analysis procedure was carried out after 1812 respondents answered the questionnaire which was distributed via Google Form and direct distribution. Then processed with the help of Microsoft Excel and SPSS 24.0. Prerequisite tests were also carried out before testing the correlation between self-criticism and psychological well-being, a prerequisite test; 1) Normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test with Dallal-Wilkonson-Lilliefors correction, with decision making if the significance value is > 0.05, then the residual value is normally distributed, if the significance value is <0.05, then the residual value is not normally distributed. 2) Linearity test, seen from 2 forms, namely linearity and deviation from linearity, and 3) Heteroscedasticity test was given to see if it was feasible to use the regression test. The hypothesis in this study is there is a relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being in adolescents.

RESULTS

This study's results are provided and analysed according to the research objectives, with descriptive statistics of the study variables, including their means and standard deviations.

Table 1. Descriptive Data

Variable	M	SD	Range		
			Low	Middle	High
Self-Criticism	60.34	2.86	5	1573	233
Psychological Well-being	118.48	2.53	43	1282	487

Based on the Table 1, it can be seen that the total respondents in this study were 1812 vocational school students. Table 1 also shown that the psychological well-being variable obtained

a value (M = 118.48; SD = 2.53). Meanwhile, the self-criticism variable is known to be the value (M =60.34; SD = 2.86). For the low category psychological well-being variable amounted to 43 (2.3%), medium 1282 (70.7%), high 487 (26.8%), meanwhile for the low category self-criticism variable amounted to 5 (0.28%), 1573 (86.76%), and 621(12.96%) high.

Table 2. Regression Analysis Results

Predictor	R	R^2	F	p
Self-Criticism	.233	.054	103.951	.000
Psychological Well-being				

In Table 2, it can be seen that the results of the simple regression analysis show that self-criticism and psychological well-being simultaneously affect ($p < 0.05$; t = -10.196). The analysis result also shows the percentage effect of psychological well-being and self-criticism of 5.4% (R^2 = 0.54). Then it is known that self-criticism contributes to psychological well-being (β = -0.489, $p < 0.05$). Then, based on the results of the correlation analysis without controlling for the self-criticism variable, the correlation coefficient score was negative 0.233 with a significance value of p = 0.00 ($p < 0.01$). This shows that there is a negative significant relationship between psychological well-being and self-criticism in a lower category (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this study, it was found a negative slightly significant correlation between self-criticism and psychological well-being. When considered in the context of previously documented changes in personality during young adulthood, it appears likely that the reductions in self-criticism observed in the current study represent negativity (e.g., decreases in Neuroticism) or increases in positive attributes such as self-esteem. It is possible that such decreases in negativity are a wide phenomenon that represents broader maturational changes that take place during this period of life (Bleidorn et al., 2009). In a similar vein, decreases in self-criticism or increases in self-esteem can have a significant impact on real-world life experiences. Maintaining low self-criticism or high is conducive to coping with stressors and handling relationships or work environments in a confident and effective manner (Hutteman et al., 2014). Self-criticism is an internal attack or inner harassment against the self that brings feelings of inadequacy, despair, and even self-hatred and wants to punish oneself when individuals experiences failure or bad events (Gilbert et al., 2004). Individuals who have high self-criticism have been shown to have higher resilience to pain, even increasing positive affect (Fox et al., 2019). High self-criticism in the form of self-hatred and self-disgust coupled with a belief in others' poor judgment of them are strong predictors of NSSI (Cunha et al., 2017; Gouveia et al., 2016).

In Ryff's (2018) model, an individual high in self-acceptance must acknowledge and accept multiple aspects of the self. Although seeing themselves as special, adolescents expressed self-criticism and were troubled about some internal experiences, especially intrusive thoughts or feelings related to their characters. They also expressed perfectionistic beliefs and experienced feelings of personal failure. This is new for the literature and shows that the quality of self-acceptance plays out in a complex way for these individuals. This complexity of interaction between participants' experiences and Ryff's well-being model can be seen throughout the discussion above. In some ways, participants' experiences fit within the general structure of the model, but the specific context they find themselves in, along with the personal qualities they bring to their work, complicate the picture. Bhullar, Hine, and Phillips (2014) point out that while the well-being model appears both empirically valid and clinically useful, it is still

not clear how the separate dimensions of psychological well-being combine within an individual. Furthermore, Mehrotra, Tripathi, and Banu (2013) suggest that the psychological well-being dimensions need to be understood in an in-depth, culturally grounded way.

On the other hand, this research differs from previous studies that claimed self-criticism influences psychological well-being. This recent study has provided a deeper understanding of the influence of self-criticism on psychological well-being (Dweck, 2006). It underscores the importance of comprehending the complex role of self-criticism in the context of psychological well-being. In a society that often considers success and achievement as the primary measures of happiness, self-criticism has become a central challenge for many individuals. In this context, a quote from the renowned author and prominent psychologist Albert Ellis is quite relevant: "Self-criticism is the root of many psychological problems."

Recent research indicates that excessive self-criticism can trigger psychological well-being disorders such as anxiety, depression, and high levels of stress (Smith et al., 2022). These findings provide additional support for previous findings that excessive self-criticism often exacerbates psychological well-being issues. Consistent with the findings of this study, recent research also confirms that self-criticism can have negative impacts on psychological well-being in various aspects of life (Brown et al., 2023). This research shows that individuals with high levels of self-criticism report lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction. This aligns with the understanding that excessive self-criticism can damage self-image and positive self-perception. However, it's important to note that the impact of self-criticism is not absolute. Some individuals may be able to use self-criticism productively as a motivator to achieve goals and enhance their performance (Dweck, 2006).

Factors such as social support and self-compassion have been at the forefront of recent (Gilbert et al., 2006). Research in the "Journal of Clinical Psychology" suggests that individuals with strong social support are better able to cope with self-criticism and have higher levels of psychological well-being (Stevens et al., 2021). Additionally, research in the "Journal of Positive Psychology" highlights the role of self-compassion in reducing the negative effects of self-criticism. Self-compassion is the ability to treat oneself with kindness and understanding when facing failure and mistakes, and this research suggests that enhancing self-compassion can help individuals better manage their self-criticism Gilbert et al., 2006).

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on the role of self-criticism in vocational student's psychological well-being. The results indicate that self-criticism is a significant predictor of decreased psychological well-being and that this relationship is particularly pronounced in the presence of depressive symptomatology (Auerbach et al., 2014; Ashra et al., 2021). These findings highlight the importance of addressing self-critical tendencies in vocational students, as they can have far-reaching implications for their mental health and overall functioning. Interventions that target self-criticism, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and self-compassion training, may be particularly beneficial for students struggling with mental health challenges (Cornacchio et al., 2017).

Interventions aimed at reducing self-criticism and promoting self-compassion may be particularly beneficial for vocational students, as they can help to mitigate the negative impact of self-criticism on psychological well-being. It is important to note that the cross-sectional nature of this study precludes any conclusions about the directionality of the relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being. Additionally, the findings suggest that when working with vocational students, it is crucial to consider the interplay between self-critical tendencies and depressive symptoms, as this interaction can have a compounding effect on various aspects of their lives, including academic performance (Marsh et al., 2017; Fiorilli et al., 2019).

In a clinical context, therapeutic approaches that acknowledge the role of self-criticism in individuals' lives and provide tools to address it are becoming increasingly important. Therapists can

play a crucial role in helping their clients identify harmful self-criticism patterns and develop strategies to cope with them. Therapeutic approaches that incorporate concepts such as self-compassion have been proven effective in helping individuals reduce their levels of self-criticism and improve their psychological well-being (Gilbert, 2006). However, research on self-criticism and psychological well-being is still in its developmental stages, and there is much to explore regarding the underlying mechanisms of this relationship and effective ways to manage self-criticism. Future research can delve deeper into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between self-criticism and psychological well-being and may use more in-depth qualitative studies to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences related to self-criticism and their efforts to address it (Sbarra et al., 2012).

Limitations and Recommendation

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, some limitations must be recognized. The complexity of human development means that other factors are not fully explored and may also significantly influence peer interaction and social maturity. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits the ability to draw definitive causal relationships. Future research should consider a longitudinal design to capture the dynamic nature of these relationships over time and include a more diverse sample to increase the generalizability of the findings. It is important to note that this study is limited in its scope and generalizability. The sample was focused on vocational students, and the findings may not be directly applicable to other student populations. Further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which self-criticism affects the psychological well-being of vocational students. Additionally, interventions aimed at reducing self-criticism and promoting resilience in this population should be developed and evaluated.

CONCLUSION

This study involved vocational students who focused on the level of psychological well-being and self-critical ability and how the relationship between the two affects students. Based on the discussion and results that have been presented, there are several things that can be concluded. First, that vocational student well-being is in the moderate category on all six accompanying indicators. This illustrates that students' psychological well-being has not been fully achieved. Therefore, students experience poor conditions in living their lives, have indications of difficulty in independence, lack of adaptability to change, difficulty building positive relationships, lack of self-acceptance, and unclear goals and self-development. Second, the ability to self-criticism shows a high category, especially in the reassure self-indicator compared to the other two indicators which are in the medium category. This shows that students are able to regulate their emotions well, and have a high need to interact and connect and be accepted positively with their social environment. Third, there is negative relationship between self-criticism ability and psychological well-being in vocational students. It is understood that self-criticism ability influences the psychological well-being of students. Therefore, it is recommended to identify the relationship between indicators in each variable in order to obtain information on predictors that have further influence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

and Technology through DPA LPPM UNNES in 2023. Contract Number: 49.20.6/UN37/PPK.10/2023 Dated June 20, 2023.

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