

Counting Blessing Activity in Managing Psychological Well-Being for University Students

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ABSTRACT

University students are individuals who must always adapt amidst the rapid and uncertain changing times. Good psychological well-being is needed to achieve optimization in every activity, both academic and non-academic. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of counting blessings in managing the university students' psychological well-being. This study applied a nonrandomized control group design with a pretest and posttest, consisting of 28 participants having psychological well-being from low to moderate levels. The participants were divided into two groups, the experimental group and the control group. The levels of psychological well-being were measured by using The Scale of Psychological Well-being (SPWB) developed by Ryff (2014) adapted by Rihlati (2018). Psychological well-being scores of the pretest and posttest were processed by SPSS 25 for Windows. This study indicated a p value of 0.394 ($p > 0.05$), meaning that there were no significant different levels of psychological well-being between the group performing counting blessings and the group not performing counting blessings. Then, this study also found that there were significantly different levels of psychological well-being of the participants before and after performing counting blessings with a p-value of 0.002 ($p > 0.05$). The efforts made by each student to interpret every positive thing in their daily life are beneficial to help them have good psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Today, rapid and uncertain changes of life require university students, as a group of young generation, to be able to manage and adapt to the changes. As university students, they may encounter multiple tasks and conflicts during their academic activities; as a result, some students may experience difficulties in achieving optimal psychological well-being. Psychological well-being of students is often discussed because it can affect their learning, both academically and non-academically (Kumalasari & Akmal, 2021). Psychological well-being also contributes to students' academic achievement. Some students who have high psychological well-being will achieve better academic targets, while students with low levels of psychological well-being tend to experience difficulties in optimizing their academic process (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2016).

In fact, most of university students have low psychological well-being. Based on some previous studies, one of them reported that they tend to have potential risks of psychological disorders (Bruffaerts, et al., 2018). In a study by Astuti (2021), 35% of students had moderate psychological well-being and 3.5% of them had low psychological well-being. Livana et al. (2020) mentioned that



the number of tasks in their learning process might be considered as a burden to them, thereby affecting their psychological well-being. Another study on 79 students of Accounting Education at Indonesian University of Education batch 2018/2019 revealed that 46% of students had moderate psychological well-being and 38% of students had low psychological well-being (Kurniasari et al., 2019).

The psychological well-being includes tackling all life problems properly, as a combination of good feelings, active roles and functions (Huppert, 2009). Ideally, optimal psychological well-being in individuals can be seen from their self-esteem, independence, purpose of life, self-development, positive relationship with other individuals, and control to social-environment (Ryff, 1995). The psychological well-being may contribute to positive or negative impacts. When individuals have optimal psychological well-being, they will be able to overcome any challenges in their life (Keyes et al., 2002) and to achieve wellness in life (Kurniasari, et al., 2019). Conversely, if they have low psychological well-being, they, especially students, may experience academic stress (Aulia & Panjaitan, 2019; Astuti, 2021) or loneliness (Pramitha & Astuti, 2018).

Ryff (1995) explained that psychological well-being is influenced by various factors. The first factor is age; with the increasing ages, the control and autonomy of the individual will also increase. The second factor is gender; women tend to be more able to create a positive atmosphere than men (Ryff, 1995). Moreover, women are more like to feel and express gratitude and this helps them to receive more personal emotional benefit than men (Lasota et al., 2020). The third factor is cultures; for example, individuals with individualistic life will have prominent self-acceptance, and individuals with collective cultures will have strong positive relationships with others. Apart from that, cultural differences may also exist in expressing gratitude, including the culture of counting blessing activity (Merçon-Vargas, Poelker, & Tudge, 2018). The last factor is socioeconomic status; individuals with economic adequacy tend to experience psychological well-being. Educational status, employment and income are social support factors in achieving psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995).

Psychological well-being is influenced by a positive assessment of one's cognition or affection (Bolier et al., 2013). This is in line with positive psychology discussing positive emotions in restoring life welfare and gaining a positive environment to increase an individual's strengths (Sarmadi, 2018). Meanwhile, a positive activity is an activity to cultivate positive thoughts, actions and emotions (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). A previous study indicated that positive activities could improve an individual's mental well-being (Bolier et al., 2013). Some examples of positive activities include expressing gratitude (Seligman et al., 2005), counting kindness (Otake et al., 2006) and counting blessings (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Counting blessings is one of the positive activities involving writing down the blessings felt each day, thereby making an individual more grateful. Based on previous research, gratitude had a significant positive impacts on the psychological well-being of students during the pandemic, where individuals with good psychological well-being tend to be calm and could minimize anxiety because they were more at peace with their life paths (Fatmala & Sari, 2022). Furthermore, high levels of gratitude play a role in the psychological well-being of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities, as individuals are better able to thrive with gratitude (Asmarani & Sugiasih, 2019). Moreover, high levels of gratitude will lead to increased psychological well-being because psychological well-being seen from good self-acceptance, occurs when individuals have a positive attitude, accept, and acknowledge both positive and negative aspects within themselves (Ritmiani et al., 2023).

Counting blessings is a positive activity and one of factors that can affect an individual's psychological well-being. Counting blessings is an activity to write down or make points for everything we are grateful for every day (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Several studies have shown that counting blessings cultivate psychological well-being and happiness, as well as increasing positive effects on individuals (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Sanjiwani et al. (2023) found that the activity of counting blessings can reduce psychological distress in breast cancer patients. The activity involved patients writing down five things they are grateful for, providing them with a space

to learn to see the positive aspects of their experiences and find meaning in their lives. [Kristiana et al. \(2021\)](#) also found that counting blessings training has an impact on increasing teachers' prosocial behavior in inclusive schools. Counting blessings helps teachers engage in more prosocial behaviors, such as empathy, kindness, and taking responsibility for social issues in the workplace, thus providing a foundation for helping students learn, especially those with special needs. Another study found that counting blessings significantly increases gratitude levels among inmates. The formed gratitude can motivate inmates to view life and themselves from a positive perspective and engage in more positive self-evaluation ([Peng et al., 2021](#)). Based on a review of previous study, a gap was identified related to the research issue, namely counting blessings and psychological well-being by comparing research methods, respondents, and research results from previous studies. The gap found was the difference in respondents among students, particularly students of Islamic University of Indonesia from all cohorts using a quasi-experimental research method. This led the researchers to be interested in investigating the results of this difference.

To this end, the current study aims to determine the effectiveness of counting blessings in managing psychological well-being of university students. Subsequently, the hypotheses of this study uncover that (1) there is a significant different score between group performing the counting blessings and the group not performing the counting blessings, and (2) there is a different average score of psychological well-being before and after counting blessings. Hopefully, this study can provide benefits for students to achieve sustainable psychological well-being.

METHODS

The participants in this study were selected by using a purposive sampling technique. Its criteria were active students at Islamic University of Indonesia from all batches, having moderate to low levels of psychological well-being based on The Scale of Psychological Well-being. (SPWB). Initial measurements, or pretests, were conducted on several students by filling out a psychological well-being scale; this was also used as a screening. 30 participants met the criteria, and then they were divided randomly into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group consisted of 15 students, and the control group consisted of 15 students. However, during this study, one participant was dropped from each group, so the number of participants was 28 students. They consisted of 28 students with 8 males and 20 females

This study applied a nonrandomized control group design with pretest and posttest. The experimental group received the treatment, but not for the control group. However, both groups received the same pretest and posttest, but the placement of the subjects was not random ([Martin, 2008](#)). The pretest was performed to both groups before the treatment, and the posttest was performed after completing the treatment. This study then compared between both groups. The experimental group was asked to write down three points that they are grateful for and their reasons, while the control group was asked to write down three points that burdened them and their reasons.

The psychological well-being variables were measured by The Scale of Psychological Well-being (SPWB) developed by [Ryff \(2014\)](#) adapted into Indonesian by [Rihlati \(2018\)](#). This scale consisted of 18 items and 6 aspects of psychological well-being; every 3 items measured one aspect. The six aspects were self-acceptance, positive relationship with others, control of the environment, autonomy, personal growth and life goals. The psychological well-being was assessed by using a Likert scale with six answer choices (very inappropriate, not appropriate, somewhat inappropriate, somewhat appropriate, appropriate, and very appropriate). The six answer choices were divided into two statements, favorable statements (10 items) and unfavorable statements (8 items). The scores of favorable statements were 1 = very appropriate, 2 = not appropriate, 3 = somewhat inappropriate, 4 = somewhat appropriate, 5 = appropriate, and 6 = very appropriate. Then, for the unfavorable statements, the scores were the opposite. A Cronbach's alpha value on the psychological well-being scale used in this study was 0.722.

During the treatment, participants will enter the WhatsApp group according to their groups, the experimental group and control group. The two groups will receive different treatment. The

experimental group was asked to write down three points that they were grateful for and their reasons, while the control group was asked to write down three points that burdened them and their reasons. The treatment provided to the control group is a placebo aimed at providing a tangible effect even though it actually does not yield any therapeutic impact.

This activity lasted for seven consecutive days every night; they wrote the points through Google Form during 19.00-21.00 Jakarta Time. On the seventh day, they were asked to fill out The Scale of Psychological Well-being Scale (SPWB) as a posttest. Also, they were also asked to fill out an evaluation form for this study.

The method of data analysis used in this study was an assumption test consisting of a normality test and a homogeneity test. Then, the hypotheses were tested by Mann Whitney Test to determine different average scores in the group performing the counting blessings and the group not performing the counting blessings. Next, the hypotheses were tested by the Wilcoxon test to determine different average scores of psychological well-being before and after treatment in the experimental group. The Wilcoxon test was also performed in the control group to determine different average scores of psychological well-being before and after treatment and to compare the scores of the control group and the experimental group. In addition, the comparison between pretest and posttest scores in the experimental and control groups was conducted to determine score changes of psychological well-being before and after treatment. The data analysis was processed by using SPSS version 25 for Windows.

RESULTS

Normality Test

The significance values of pretest and posttest in the experimental group were $p = 0.200$ ($p > 0.05$) and $p = 0.200$ ($p > 0.05$). Meanwhile, the significance values of pretest and posttest in the control group were $p = 0.200$ ($p > 0.05$) and $p = 0.182$ ($p > 0.05$). Thus, the results of the normality test in both groups were normally distributed.

Homogeneity Test

Based on analysis of the homogeneity test on the pretest and posttest using the Levene Test, it showed a significant value based on mean of $p = 0.192$ ($p > 0.05$) on the pretest data and a significance value based on mean of $p = 0.302$ ($p > 0.05$) on the posttest data. These results indicated that all the data were homogeneous.

Hypothesis Test

Based on the table 1, the significance Asymp value (2-tailed) of gained score showed a p value = 0.394 ($p > 0.05$). It could be concluded that there were no significant different levels of psychological well-being in the experimental and control groups before and after treatment. Thus, the first hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1. *Mann Whitney Test*

	Sig.	Results
Gained Score of Experimental Group & Control Group	0.394	Not Different

Table 2 demonstrated a significant value (2 tailed) with $p = 0.002$ ($p > 0.05$). This implied that there were different levels of psychological well-being in the experimental group before and after treatment. Thus, it could be concluded that the second hypothesis was accepted. Then table 3 pointed out that the comparison of the mean values in the experimental group was 66.2857 in pretest and 76.5714 in posttest. Therefore, there was an increased score of psychological well-being in the experimental group before and after treatment with a value of 10.2857.

Table 2. *Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on Experimental Group*

	Sig.	Result
Pretest & Posttest of Experimental Group	.002	Different

Table 3. *Comparison Means of Pretest and Posttest on Experimental Group*

	Mean
Pretest	66.2857
Posttest	76.5714

Next, an additional analysis test with the Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test in the control group in table 4 showed a significance value (2 tailed) of $p = 0.005$ ($p > 0.05$). This implied that there were different levels of psychological well-being before and after treatment. Then table 5 reported that the comparison of the mean results in the experimental group was 68.5714 in the pretest and 76.3571 in the posttest. Therefore, there was an increased score of psychological well-being in the control group before and after treatment, with a value of 7.7857.

Table 4. *Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on Control Group*

	Sig.
Pretest & Posttest on control group	.005

Table 5. *Comparison Means of Pretest and Posttest on Control Group*

	Mean
Pretest	68.5714
Posttest	76.3571

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of counting blessings in managing students' psychological well-being. Subsequently, this research found out that there was no significant different score between group performing the counting blessings and the group not performing the counting blessings, thus rejecting the first hypothesis. However, based on data analysis of the pretest and posttest, there was a significant effect of counting blessings on increasing psychological well-being of the students, thus confirming the second hypothesis.

The findings of the current study were not in line with previous research results which stated that the activity of counting blessings significantly associated with the decreased of psychological distress (Sanjiwani et al., 2023) and daily stress (Krejtz, 2016), as well as enhancing subjective well-being and life satisfaction Froh et al., 2008; Emmons & McCullough, 2003) which are closely related to an individual's psychological well-being. Another previous study about gratitude was conducted by Putri (2012), involving 340 participants, reported that there was a significant positive relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being. Moreover, the researchers assume that the first hypothesis was rejected due to several factors, including the need for participants to express personal appreciation for the blessings felt through tangible actions. Furthermore, the duration of the counting blessings activity is very short, which was only one week. Hence, it is understandable that no significant difference was found between participants who were engaged in counting blessings and those who did not.

In this current study, participants were only asked to write down the blessings they felt each day without knowing whether they genuinely felt grateful for those blessings or not as a form of personal appreciation. Being grateful is not enough if it is just about writing down things to be grateful for. Moreover, it also needs to demonstrate expressions or gestures of the blessings received (O'Connell, O'Shea, & Gallagher, 2016) and prosocial actions as a form of gratitude (Kristiana et al., 2021).

Based on the counting blessings activities, there are some factors leading to gratitude, starting from great aspects to simple aspects related to daily activities, such as being healthy, having healthy

parents, completing daily activities well, eating sufficiently, completing assignments properly, having good friends, getting scholarships, etc. Positive emotions can encourage individuals to increase positive perceptions (Layous et al., 2014). In line with this, based on the reflections made by the participants by telling their feelings after the counting blessing intervention, most of them were able to feel significant positive changes in themselves because they had never performed counting blessings before.

As previously mentioned, there are various factors that make them feel more grateful after performing the counting blessings because it helps change his/her view on life to be more positive by being grateful, in particular are internal factors. Definitely, by being able to express all relevant positive daily factors in the form of gestural or verbal gratitude expressions and also prosocial behaviors, the counting blessing activity will be more meaningful. Nevertheless, this study also yielded positive results indicating that counting blessings still have a significant relationship with students' psychological well-being. Thus, students can consider counting blessings activities as a positive daily habit alternative to manage psychological well-being. The reaction of counting blessings to gratitude is an adaptive psychological strategy in which individuals can positively interpret their daily experiences. Therefore, abilities to pay attention, to appreciate and to enjoy aspects of life may be relevant factors in well-being (Janoff-Bulman & Berger, 2000).

Based on the discussion above, the psychological well-being of the participants is influenced by social support and interpersonal relationships, in which social support and interpersonal relationships are obtained from family relationships. This is in line with external factors of psychological well-being, social supports and relationships with other individuals, thereby making them feel cared for, valued and loved (Handono & Bashori, 2013). There were threats beyond the control of the researcher during this study, that participants experienced a learning effect. This threat might occur because they tend to recall their answers during the pretest. In addition, factors that might affect their psychological well-being were interpersonal influences. Another threat was experimenter's bias because participants previously knew the purpose of this study and the researchers acted as observers as well as experimenters who interacted directly with the participants.

This study also has a number of limitations. Firstly, the number of subjects may not be able to represent the population. Secondly, social desirability may occur in the process of collecting pretest and posttest data. Social desirability is the tendency of respondents to answer statements in accordance with answers that are considered good according to others. If this happens, then the data is not able to represent the actual state of the respondents. Thirdly, duration of the intervention is very short, which is only one week. In previous research (Sanjiwani et al., 2023), the intervention of counting blessings activity was conducted for one month and its results proved to be significant in reducing stress levels. Furthermore, extending the duration of the counting blessings activity as a treatment is expected to be more effective in influencing the participants' psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it could be concluded that counting blessings had a positive effect on the student's psychological well-being before and after performing the counting blessings. Counting blessing activity is one form of gratitude-based intervention that is relatively simple and can be easily implemented by students as a positive daily habit. Researchers hope that through this study, it can serve as an insight and reference for future researchers about the effects of counting blessings on students' psychological well-being and to develop theoretical knowledge in the field of psychology.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS: AFA and AAN jointly designed the study, compiled the theoretical framework and discussion of the research results. Meanwhile, EK and FAC were responsible for conducting experiments and collecting data from research participants. Next, MAS prepared the background, objectives, and urgency of the research and TF analyzed the research data. HQ was responsible for overseeing the research process and assisting in the revision of the research article. All authors have approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest.

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