# Strength-Based Counseling: Alternative Counseling to Increase Student Hope during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** COVID-19 has affected the world of education in particular. The COVID-19 pandemic created a new conceptualization of schools with learning methods changed to learning from home, having limited interaction with teachers and classmates. Transitioning and adapting to a new way of life has an emotional impact on students. The current situation creates uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness. The emergence of despair in students is an example of the low power of hope in students, which will have a broad impact on other dimensions of life. This study is a literature review that discusses how strength-based counseling can help increase student hope during COVID-19. This literature review can be used as a reference for counselors through the self-strength counseling model.

**Keywords:** strength-based counseling, student hope, COVID-19.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the education sector. The United Nations (UN) reports that COVID-19 has caused at least 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries to carry out educational activities that are not as usual because schools were closed. Because of the pandemic, at least 94% of study rooms were forced to close (UNSDG, 2020). Furthermore, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2020) revealed that the Covid-19 crisis created a new conceptualization where children have limited interaction with teachers and classmates. Adapting to this new way of life and accepting further education is emotionally stressful for many families, especially school-age children (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Disruption to the world of education has a long-term impact. Disruption to education has a long-term

effect that endangers the welfare of students (both physical and psychosocial), such as uncertainty, fear, and creates hopelessness for students.

The emergence of hopelessness (desperation) in these students is an example of the low power of hope in students, which will have a broad impact on other dimensions of life. Hope is one of the dimensions of character strength. The power of hope is a condition of agency thinking or encouragement to achieve goals and pathways thinking or ways to achieve goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hope has a substantial relationship with elementary, middle, and college students (Chen, Huebner, and Tian, 2020). Individuals with high hope enjoy the value they get compared to individuals with low hope. Also, individuals with higher hope tend to achieve their life goals than individuals with lower hope. (Feldman & Dreher, 2012). Hope can encourage students' academic success to complete academic assignments, get higher scores on academic tests, have confidence in their ability to solve problems and gain life satisfaction when experiencing academic stress or pressure (Rand, Shanahan, Fischer, & Fortney, 2020). Misra's research results (Davidson, Feldman, and Margalit, 2012) revealed various sources of student stress stemming from the academic load (e.g., increased class load) and interpersonal relationships (e.g., changes in social networks and activities). People with high hope tend to pursue their goals and experience more positive emotions successfully. On the other hand, people with low hope tend to have more difficulty overcoming obstacles to achieving their goals and experience more negative emotions (Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011). These studies revealed that hope is crucial in achieving goals and success in life.

In adolescence, individuals are faced with making important choices that can affect their lives well in the future. Each option is embedded in it a power that is believed to set meaningful goals, see how to achieve goals, and drive those goals (Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, & Rand, 2002). Reinforcement of hope will help individuals succeed and perform various developmental tasks (Aminah, Ilfiandra, and Saripah, 2020). Individual development at the adolescent stage demands the role and contribution of hope in achieving different life goals (Hartanto, 2017). Therefore, more emphasis and attention need to be given to the adolescent stage to develop hope. There are several fundamental reasons for the urgency of developing hope in adolescence. First, adolescence is a transitional stage with conditions of anticipation and reflection resulting from the environment of family, friends, and society. Second, the power of hope teaches components of teaching objectives that are different from other positive psychological constructs. Third, adolescence is a time of rapid cognitive development. Thus, adolescence allows students to think and reason in a broader perspective (Egan, 2011).

Hope development is known to be done through various counseling approaches. Some of the counseling approaches used are cognitive-behavioral counseling, narrative counseling, solution-focused counseling, and feminist counseling(Gallagher, Pedrotti, Lopes, & Snyder, 2019). One new paradigm counseling approach developed to increase hope is the strength-based counseling model.

## Method

### Research Design
This study consists of a literature review that discusses expectations and the counseling approach used to develop student expectations. Data sources are mainly from Science Direct with the help of Publish or Perish tools, and some articles from Google Scholar, Research Gate, and Mendeley.

## Results and Discussion

Snyder's theory of hope (Gallagher et al., 2019; Lopes & Snyder, 2003; Snyder, 2000) is perhaps the most well-articulated contemporary hope theory and has received considerable attention in the last three decades. This theory began when Snyder and his colleagues interviewed people about goal-directed thinking, which ultimately defined hope as "a cognition containing goal-directed thinking." This goal-directed thinking will occur when individuals plan to achieve goals. Hope emphasizes agency and pathways to achieve the goal more than positive thinking. This emphasis is made explicit in two separate but related components, which are defined in the definition of hope as "a constructive set that is based on the reciprocally derived sense of successful agency and pathways." This definition can be interpreted as hope being a set or collection of cognitions based on an understanding derived from agency and pathways

(Snyder et al., 2002). Thus, hope always includes three components, namely goals, agency thinking, and pathways thinking.

Goals are hope that is expected. Goals are everything a person wants to obtain, do, be, experience, or create. The goal may be huge (takes a long time to achieve) or very small (only takes a few minutes and seconds to complete). According to hope theory, when a person initiates a behavior should be directed towards achieving a specific outcome. Before starting the conduct, one must engage in two types of cognition: pathways and agency thinking (Snyder et al., 2002).

First, pathways refer to cognitions that show the plans or strategies used to achieve goals. A person's view of the future can affect his current thinking. People who have high hope will be more assertive in determining plans to achieve future goals (Snyder, 2002). When faced with obstacles, individuals who have high hope can find several alternative paths that effectively produce these alternative paths (Feldman & Kubota, 2014). Second, the agency is cognition that conveys one's determination, motivation, and capacity to achieve goals (Bernardo, 2020). People who have high hope are more determined to achieve the goals they want to achieve. Thus, components and pathways reinforce each other to influence each other and are sustainable in goals.

Hope is critical in promoting health, well-being, and adaptive behavior. Therefore, developing hope in the general population is considered a priority. Hope theory has been successfully applied in the therapeutic process individually and in groups (Hodson, Maccallum, Watson, & Blagrove, 2021). The results include (e.g., increased self-esteem, meaning in life, and increased agency thinking). Counseling techniques are focused on agency development and pathways-thinking. For example, pathways can be improved through goal mapping activities, where individuals are encouraged to evaluate plans to goals. In contrast, agency development focuses on developing goal-focused motivation adjusting the mindset to achieve goals.

### Counseling Approaches Model to Increase Hope

The development of hope in individuals has been carried out through various ways and approaches. Hope can be developed through home, community, and school settings. The result of hope is based on the premise that "hope is learned." Developing theory and research to establish hope is mainly done through intervention in schools. The development of hope through the intervention process based on the literature review and research results is primarily done through counseling. Various counseling approaches used by researchers in developing hope are based on a philosophical study, the urgency of which is the background of the problems faced. Various experimental studies were conducted to increase individual hope associated with other variables.

Various counseling approaches have begun to be explored by researchers. Among them are mental rehearsal strategies (Davidson et al., 2012), hope-based intervention (Marques et al., 2011; Marsay et al., 2018; Chan et al., 2019), self-management support intervention (Martin, Clyne, Pearce, Turner, & Turner, 2019), art-based group intervention (Larsen et al., 2018), narrative photo-taking intervention (Lurie et al., 2020), miracle question (Steinbrecher, Jordan, & Turns, 2020). These various approaches are still focused on the problems and illnesses experienced by individuals

In addition, several school-based programs intervention has been developed to increase hope among children and youth, many of which can be used or adapted for implementation in the guidance curriculum (ASCA, 2005). The Making Hope Happen Program (Lopez, 2013) is a school-based intervention developed to increase expectations in students through didactic teaching and group work. MHH was first piloted at the junior high school level. The MHH program consists of five 45-minute sessions with 8 to 10 junior high school students. The Making Hope Happen program describes educators' strategies in developing the power of hope in youth. The Making Hope Happen program integrates three approaches, namely solution-focused therapy, narrative techniques, and cognitive-behavioral techniques (CBT), to assist adolescents in developing the power of hope. Integration through three processes is considered too complex and heavy to be implemented in adolescents. The second is The Brief-hope Intervention (Chan et al., 2019). This program is an intervention based on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) with eight sessions that help adolescents determine the desired goals and increase hope. The Brief Hope Intervention program takes a long time, so the program is challenging to carry out at a young age (Chan et al., 2019).

So it needs continuous development for researchers to explore new approaches. Along with developing the positive psychology paradigm, a new approach to developing hope has emerged that uses more assumptions and self-power-based philosophies/Strength-based Counseling (Smith, 2006).

**Strength-based Counseling Model**

Strength-based counseling or self-strength counseling is a process of helping individuals. The counselor learns the strengths and qualities of individuals in a positive perspective during the therapeutic process or in the school context. This new perspective can help families and schools discover the resilience of youth.

Furthermore, adolescents are taught to identify their strengths and direct them when facing a problem (Snyder; Hartanto, 2020). This concept of self-strength counseling uses strength categories as the foundation for building and using rational counseling interventions. This approach is developed by reframing the individual's perception of the focus of a situation where everything is considered wrong and problematic to recognizing and acknowledging what is right. The individual can then develop positive, realistic, and achievable goals.

The therapeutic process that occurs in self-strength counseling focuses on the competence and strengths of the counselee. The counselor emphasizes the strength of the counselee during the intervention process. When strengths are the focus of intervention, clients tend to have motivation, involvement, life satisfaction, productivity and performance, and self-understanding. As for the comparison of the role of counselors in a strength-based approach with traditional counselors (Smith, 2006), it can be seen in table 1:

**Table 1. Comparison of the Role of Counselors in a Strength-Based Approach with Traditional Counselors**

| No | Strength-Based Counselor | Traditional Counselor |
|----|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Thinking in the perspective of solutions and the counselee's mental health as a relative state rather than absolute perfection | Tend to conceptualize in terms of problems and the counselee's mental illness |
| 2 | Using language and metaphors from the counselee | Using technical jargon from the professional (counselor) |
| 3 | Avoiding the counselee's pathology. Counselors focus on what is suitable for the client and place the client's behavior as a series of mental health functions | Seeing the pathological things from the counselee: focus on what is wrong with the counselee |
| 4 | Counselors and counselees together construct goals as collaborators | Counselors are not aligned in setting some goals in counseling |
| 5 | Counseling focuses on strength, survival, and coping skills in helping the counselee desire/desire to live | The counselor focuses on eliminating the counselee's pathology |
| 6 | The counselor accepts the problem definition provided by the counselee | The counselor defines the problem to be addressed in therapy |

(Source: Smith, 2006)

There are ten steps used in the Strength-based Counseling approach (Mirshafiee & Jafari, 2019; Smith, 2006):
  1. By creating the therapeutic alliance,
     Counselors build relationships by helping clients identify and gather strengths and competencies to face challenges and difficulties.
  2. Identifying strengths

Counselors teach clients to tell their life stories. Telling someone's life story will help the individual in understanding life.

3. Assessing presenting problems,
   Clients are trained to express their problems by using problem-solving questions.

4. Encouraging and instilling hope,
   Counselors help clients change their perspectives on the difficulties they are experiencing and create a feeling that clients can change or solve problems.

5. Framing Solutions,
   Counselors help identify and evaluate coping methods with the clients' past and sources of support for dealing with problems. Counselors seek information about what is done in the client's life. Together with the counselee, producing a solution, they develop a realistic action plan that will help the counselee realize his goals. The counselor also encourages the counselee to detach himself and others from the past. The technique used at this stage is the exception question, the forgiveness technique.

6. Building strength and competence,
   Counselors help students to understand that they have the power to make a difference in their lives

7. Empowering,
   Counselors help activate their social resources

8. Changing,
   Counselors teach students that change is a process, not a separate event. Student strengths are considered as the basis for making the desired changes.

9. Resilience building,
   Counselors actively seek to help students create flexibility that will strengthen them against returning to previous problems or separating similar problems

10. Evaluation and terminating,
    counselors and students determine whether students have succeeded in achieving their goals. Change can be attributed to intervention and self-esteem.

## Conclusion

Hope is an important aspect and becomes a determining factor and correlates with various variables of individual life. Hope is an important focus and goal in human life. Hope is the heart of various activities of human life. Strength-based counseling as a new paradigm emphasizes the development of modalities rather than individual pathology. In the perspective of strength-based counseling, hope is the foundation in fighting and avoiding mental illness and developing a personal quality of life. Individuals with high hope have more direction and purpose in living life and doing good deeds. The strong impact of developing hope is related to academic achievement, dropouts, mental health, and physical health.

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