

IMPROVING EMOTIONAL BALANCE OF AT-RISK STUDENTS THROUGH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING USING A LOVE-BASED CURRICULUM APPROACH

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Abstract

Emotional balance is essential for everyone, including at-risk students, as it helps them overcome challenges and live their daily lives more effectively. This study aims to develop and test the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach to improve the emotional balance of at-risk students. This research employed a mixed-method Research and Development (R&D) design using the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation). The analysis and design stages utilized a qualitative approach through interviews and observations involving 37 students at MAN Kota Palangka Raya in the 2024/2025 academic year. The implementation and evaluation stages used a quantitative approach with statistical analysis techniques to measure the effectiveness of the love-based curriculum. The findings revealed that guidance and counseling services with a love-based curriculum approach were effective in enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students, as indicated by an 89.2% reduction in anxiety levels, a 91.9% increase in the ability to manage negative emotions, and a 62.2% improvement in positive interpersonal relationships. The indicators of success for the love-based curriculum include increased empathy, self-awareness, and social skills, while the indicators of emotional balance include reduced anxiety, improved management of negative emotions, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. In conclusion, guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach are highly effective in improving the emotional balance of at-risk students through the implementation of *dzikir* therapy, Peer Guidance (*Bimbingan Teman Sebaya*), and *huma betang* counseling.

Keywords: Love-Based Curriculum, Emotional Balance, At-Risk Students, Guidance and Counseling

INTRODUCTION

Emotional balance plays a vital role in supporting students' academic success, mental well-being, and interpersonal relationships. In the school context, students who experience emotional difficulties—often categorized as at-risk students—are more vulnerable to poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and social isolation. Addressing their emotional challenges is therefore crucial for their holistic development. Guidance and counseling services have long been recognized as essential in assisting students in managing personal, academic, and social issues.

At-risk students are generally defined as individuals who are at higher risk of academic failure, behavioral problems, or social

exclusion due to various factors such as family instability, socio-economic challenges, emotional disturbances, or lack of support systems. Karcher and Finn (2005) emphasize that these conditions contribute significantly to students' disengagement from school and their vulnerability to dropping out. Similarly, Slavin (2009) explains that at-risk students often face multiple barriers to learning and require more intensive and personalized support, particularly in managing their emotions and building positive interpersonal skills. These conditions necessitate a more humanistic and compassionate educational approach, such as a love-based curriculum, which emphasizes care, empathy, and emotional connection within learning and counseling processes.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in education. Goleman (2003) argued that emotional intelligence, including emotional regulation, is more predictive of success than IQ. Salovey and Mayer (1990) also highlighted emotional balance as a key component of emotional intelligence that allows individuals to manage their own emotions and respond appropriately to others.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have explored emotional support for students. For instance, Widyarto et al. (2024) investigated the role of group counseling in reducing students' anxiety levels, while Nurhidayah et al (2025) examined the impact of mindfulness-based interventions on students' emotional regulation. However, most of these studies applied cognitive-behavioral or skills-based approaches, with limited attention given to affective and spiritual values. This opens the opportunity for implementing a love-based curriculum, a values-driven approach that integrates love, compassion, and spirituality into educational and counseling settings.

This indicates a research gap in developing a more holistic and humanistic approach to emotional guidance—one that integrates love, compassion, tolerance, and spirituality. In response to this, the present study introduces and evaluates a love-based curriculum approach in guidance and counseling services. This approach integrates *dzikir* therapy, Peer Guidance (*Bimbingan Teman Sebaya/BTS*), and *huma betang* counseling, offering a culturally and spiritually grounded method of emotional development.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of affective, spiritual, and cultural components tailored to Indonesian students—an area rarely explored in previous research. While most existing interventions rely on cognitive-behavioral techniques, the love-based curriculum offers an alternative approach rooted in empathy, compassion, spirituality, and collective values to foster emotional development.

Therefore, this study aims to develop and assess the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach in enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-method Research and Development approach using the ADDIE model, which consists of five stages. The *Analysis stage* involved identifying the problems and needs of at-risk students. In the *Design stage*, guidance and counseling services were planned using a love-based curriculum approach to enhance students' emotional balance. The *Development stage* focused on creating the curriculum based on the design. During the *Implementation stage*, the services were delivered to selected participants. Finally, the *Evaluation stage* assessed the effectiveness of the love-based curriculum through a quantitative approach using statistical analysis.

In the *Analysis stage*, the problems and needs of at-risk students were identified using a guidance and counseling needs assessment, which included the Student Needs Questionnaire, Problem Checklist, observations, and interviews. The *Design stage* involved planning guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach aimed at enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students by emphasizing values such as compassion, tolerance, peace, and appreciation for differences. In the *Development stage*, the love-based curriculum was developed based on the previous design, incorporating *dzikir* therapy, Peer Guidance, and *huma betang* counseling. The *Implementation stage* was carried out with 37 students at MAN Kota Palangka Raya, selected from a total of 1,058 students, who were under the supervision of the guidance and counseling teacher. Finally, the *Evaluation stage* assessed the effectiveness of the love-based curriculum using a quantitative approach, specifically by analyzing percentage data collected through Google Forms.

Table 1. Research Procedure

Stage	Description	Methods Used
Analysis	Identifying the problems and needs of at-risk students	Student Needs Assessment (AKPD), Problem Checklist, observation, and interviews
Design	Designing guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach to improve students' emotional balance	Emphasizing values of compassion, tolerance, peace, and appreciation for differences
Development	Developing the love-based curriculum based on the previously created design	Incorporating <i>dzikir</i> therapy, Peer Guidance (<i>BTS</i>), and <i>huma betang</i> counseling
Implementation	Implementing guidance and counseling services using the love-based curriculum approach with selected participants	37 students at MAN Kota Palangka Raya in the 2024/2025 academic year
Evaluation	Evaluating the effectiveness of the love-based curriculum using a quantitative approach and statistical analysis	Percentage analysis via Google Form

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To evaluate the effectiveness of the love-based curriculum approach in enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students, the study focused on three key emotional indicators: the reduction of anxiety levels, the improvement in managing negative emotions, and the enhancement of positive interpersonal relationships. These indicators were selected because they represent critical aspects of emotional well-being that are often disrupted in at-risk students. Their selection was also guided by the emotional intelligence framework proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), which emphasizes emotional

regulation and interpersonal functioning as essential components of personal development.

Data collection was conducted through a quantitative survey using Google Forms, in which students were asked to self-assess their emotional states both before and after receiving guidance and counseling services. The responses were then categorized into effective and ineffective outcomes based on changes in emotional indicators. This approach provided a clear picture of the impact of the intervention. The percentage results for each emotional indicator are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Research Findings

Emotional Balance Indicators	Effective	Not Effective
Reduction in anxiety levels	89,2%	10,8%
Improvement in the ability to manage negative emotions	91,9%,	8,1%
Enhancement of positive interpersonal relationships	62,2%.	37,8%

The results of this study demonstrate that guidance and counseling services utilizing a love-based curriculum approach are effective in enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students. As shown in Table 2, this effectiveness is reflected in three key emotional indicators. First, anxiety levels decreased by 89.2%, indicating that students

experienced a significant reduction in emotional distress following the intervention. Second, the ability to manage negative emotions increased by 91.9%, suggesting an improvement in emotional regulation skills among participants. Third, positive interpersonal relationships improved by 62.2%, showing that students became more

capable of engaging in healthy social interactions.

These findings affirm the importance of integrating affective and spiritual elements—such as *dzikir* therapy, Peer Guidance (*Bimbingan Teman Sebaya/BTS*), and *huma betang* counseling—into school-based counseling programs. The reduction in anxiety aligns with Goleman's (2003) assertion that emotional self-regulation is a critical component of emotional intelligence, and is essential for maintaining mental well-being. Similarly, the improved capacity to manage negative emotions supports Salovey and Mayer's (1990) framework, which identifies emotional regulation as central to interpersonal functioning.

Compared to previous interventions that focused primarily on cognitive-behavioral techniques, the love-based curriculum approach offers a more holistic and culturally relevant model. Bangun (2022) emphasized the effectiveness of group counseling in reducing anxiety, particularly through structured behavioral sessions. Meanwhile, Koch (2024) highlighted the role of mindfulness-based interventions in helping students regulate emotions, though the approach remained cognitive in nature. In contrast, the love-based curriculum incorporates the spiritual practice of *dzikir*, peer-led emotional support through *BTS*, and community-based values embedded in *huma betang* counseling, which appear to address both the emotional and cultural needs of Indonesian students—especially those at risk.

In sum, the results suggest that a love-based curriculum not only fosters individual emotional development but also promotes social harmony, empathy, and resilience. This approach may serve as an effective alternative or complement to existing models of guidance and counseling in schools.

Emotional balance is crucial for everyone, including at-risk students, as it enables them to overcome their problems and live their daily lives more effectively. Good emotional balance helps students manage their challenges and enhances both their mental and

physical well-being. The psychological well-being of students falls under the domain of guidance and counseling teachers in schools or madrasahs. These teachers serve as coordinators of student well-being, especially in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Guidance and counseling teachers assist students in various areas, including personal, social, academic, and career development, helping them overcome personal and academic issues while also developing their potential. A comprehensive role of guidance and counseling teachers contributes to creating a supportive environment for students' optimal development. Therefore, comprehensive and professional counseling services are essential, particularly for at-risk students. These students need to be given space to grow and develop into better individuals, starting with managing their emotions. Emotional balance is not only necessary but also essential for all students, especially those facing challenges.

When discussing emotions, Daniel Goleman is one of the most prominent figures in the field of emotional intelligence. His book *Emotional Intelligence* helped popularize the concept and brought it to wider public attention. Goleman (2003) expanded on the emotional intelligence theory initially proposed by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, by adding several components—such as motivation, empathy, and social skills—and making the theory more applicable to everyday life.

According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional balance is a crucial aspect of emotional intelligence. It enables individuals to recognize and manage their own emotions as well as those of others, thereby improving interpersonal relationships and mental well-being. Individuals with good emotional regulation tend to form healthier relationships and show better coping mechanisms in stressful situations.

Another theory that supports the importance of emotional balance is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) viewed emotional stability as part of

psychological needs that must be met before individuals can reach higher levels of personal growth and self-actualization. From this perspective, emotional balance is not just desirable but essential for achieving both mental and physical well-being.

In the educational context, emotional balance is particularly important for at-risk students, who often struggle with managing their emotions due to complex personal or environmental factors. These emotional difficulties can significantly affect their academic performance, social adjustment, and overall mental health. Therefore, it becomes necessary to design and evaluate effective support systems that target emotional development alongside academic success.

A love-based curriculum is one such approach that can be used to support the emotional balance of at-risk students. It emphasizes the importance of love, compassion, tolerance, and emotional connection in the learning process, helping students to build emotional resilience and develop healthier self-regulation. This aligns with the principles of humanistic education, which place care and emotional support at the center of the learning experience (Syafira et al., 2024). In addition, recent findings have shown that affective approaches—such as mindfulness and emotional presence—can significantly enhance students' well-being and emotional stability in educational contexts (Luciano & Lantaka, 2024).

Accordingly, this study aims to develop and test the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach in enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students. The goal is to assist students in overcoming emotional challenges and improving their overall well-being. The success indicators of the love-based curriculum include increased empathy, self-awareness, and social skills, while the indicators of emotional balance are reflected in reduced anxiety, improved ability to manage negative emotions, and enhanced positive interpersonal relationships.

The findings of this study indicate that guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach are effective in improving the emotional balance of at-risk students. This is evidenced by an 89.2% reduction in anxiety levels, a 91.9% improvement in the ability to manage negative emotions, and a 62.2% increase in positive interpersonal relationships. These outcomes highlight the success of an intervention model rooted not only in structured guidance, but also in emotional and spiritual development, which is crucial for at-risk students.

The services proved to be highly effective through the implementation of three key components: *dzikir* therapy, Peer Guidance (*Bimbingan Teman Sebaya/BTS*), and *huma betang* counseling. Rather than relying on punitive or purely behavioral approaches, the love-based curriculum emphasizes emotional support and values such as compassion, tolerance, peace, and respect for differences. This reflects principles of humanistic education, which prioritize empathy and holistic student development (Noddings, 2005).

In *dzikir* therapy, students are guided to remember God Almighty (*dzikrullah*), seek forgiveness for their sins, and praise divine greatness and the Prophet. This spiritual practice aims to bring calmness to the heart and reconnect students with their inner peace—similar to how mindfulness practices have been found to promote emotional regulation (Calin & Ginara, 2023).

The Peer Guidance (*BTS*) program, designed by students, for students, and facilitated by students themselves, provides platforms for education, consultation, and emotional support. It addresses personal, social, academic, and career-related concerns, and uses contemporary communication tools—particularly social media such as Instagram—to make the process relatable and accessible. Peer support programs like *BTS* have been shown to strengthen emotional connectedness and reduce feelings of isolation among adolescents.

When students face deeper emotional challenges, guidance and counseling teachers can implement *huma betang* counseling, which combines Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques with the local Dayak philosophy of *huma betang*. This philosophy promotes togetherness, mutual respect, cooperation, and equality, offering culturally relevant counseling that resonates with students' values and lived experiences. The integration of CBT and local wisdom allows students to develop greater self-awareness and social understanding, ultimately supporting the development of emotional balance as reflected in measurable outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study on the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services using a love-based curriculum approach in enhancing the emotional balance of at-risk students yielded highly positive results. It can therefore be concluded that this approach is highly effective in supporting students' emotional development through the implementation of *dzikir* therapy, Peer Guidance (*Bimbingan Teman Sebaya/BTS*), and *huma betang* counseling. The love-based curriculum helps students understand and manage their negative emotions, enabling them to live their daily lives more effectively. This is evidenced by a significant reduction in anxiety levels (89.2%), an improvement in the ability to manage negative emotions (91.9%), and an increase in positive interpersonal relationships (62.2%). As such, guidance and counseling teachers may consider adopting a love-based curriculum as a viable approach to assist students in developing adaptive coping skills and achieving greater independence in their personal lives.

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