

## “I’M A SUPERHERO”: INCREASING STUDENTS’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL THROUGH STORYTELLING

Unika Prihatsanti<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Ika Zenita Ratnaningsih<sup>1</sup>, Anggun Resdasari Prasetyo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya Indonesia

\*e-mail: unikaprihatsanti@lecturer.undip.ac.id

**Abstract:** Psychological capital as a positive psychological characteristics that reflected through several components such self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience is important to adjust the changes that experienced by freshmen in a college. Storytelling is a form of communication that allows the listener to fully immerse in the content of the story and experience the emotions felt by the characters. This study aims to determine the effect of storytelling activities use “*I’m a Superhero*” module to increase students’ psychological capital. Quasi-experimental methods were used in the study that involving 127 first-year college students. The subjects of this study divided into two groups, 56 for the experimental group and 71 for the control group. The interventions was done for 22 days divided into six session and described in “*I’m a Superhero*” module. The analysis results using Independent sample t-test showed that there was a difference between experiment and control groups ( $t(125) = 5.176; p < .01$ ). It shows that the storytelling activity is potential to be an alternative media to increasing students’ psychological capital, so that the freshmen more independent and quickly adjust to change.

**Keywords:** *storytelling, psychological capital, freshmen, college students*

## “I’M SUPERHERO”: PENINGKATAN MODAL PSIKOLOGIS MAHASISWA MELALUI AKTIVITAS BERCERITA

**Abstrak:** Modal psikologis sebagai karakteristik psikologis positif yang tercermin melalui beberapa komponen seperti efikasi diri, harapan, optimisme, dan resiliensi merupakan hal yang penting untuk menyesuaikan perubahan yang dialami oleh mahasiswa baru di perguruan tinggi. Bercerita adalah bentuk komunikasi yang memungkinkan pendengar untuk sepenuhnya tenggelam dalam isi cerita dan mengalami emosi yang dirasakan oleh karakter dalam cerita. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh kegiatan bercerita menggunakan modul “*I’m a Superhero*” untuk meningkatkan modal psikologis mahasiswa. Metode kuasi eksperimen digunakan dalam penelitian yang melibatkan 127 mahasiswa tahun pertama. Subjek penelitian ini dibagi menjadi dua kelompok, 56 untuk kelompok eksperimen dan 71 untuk kelompok kontrol. Intervensi dilakukan selama 22 hari dibagi menjadi enam sesi dan dijelaskan dalam modul “*I’m a Superhero*”. Hasil analisis menggunakan *Independent sample t-test* menunjukkan bahwa ada perbedaan rerata modal psikologis antara kelompok eksperimen dan kelompok kontrol ( $t(125) = 5,176; p < 0,01$ ), di mana kelompok eksperimen memiliki rerata yang lebih tinggi. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan bercerita dapat menjadi media alternatif untuk meningkatkan modal psikologis sehingga mahasiswa baru lebih mandiri dan cepat menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan

**Kata Kunci:** *bercerita, modal psikologis, mahasiswa tahun pertama*

### INTRODUCTION

College students as a part of the community has a dual role as young people and intellectual candidates (Djojodibroto, 2004). Role as intellectual candidates makes student as an agent of change, agent of development, and agent of modernization (Ahmadi, 2009). It conditions make students, especially first-year students, must be able to adapt to their environment, since

they faced various of change, such new method of learning in university, campus organization and also socially life change. Moreover, students nowadays not only required to have hard skills but also they should have soft skill such communicate well, confidently, adapt, motivated, and systematically plan because John (2009) found that only 15% of hard skills contribute to success, and the 85% is soft skills.

Pardjono & Widodo (2012) also revealed that almost all aspects of soft skills and motivation make the basic requirements for workers in the industrial world. But several past studies have concluded that students experience higher stress and pressure compared to other population groups (Adlaf, Glikzman, Demers, & Newton-Taylor, 2001; Stewart-Brown, Evans, Patterson, Petersen, Doll, Balding, & Regis, 2000). To meet this challenges, students need to have a positive personal resources to achieve good academic performances.

Psychological capital (psycap) as a concept that focused on person's positive psychological condition has an important thing in students' academic performance (Hossein, Manijeh, & Pasha, 2014; Luthans, Luthans, & Jensen, 2012). The concept of psycap as positive resources has been developed more than a decades, it characterized by hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Hope is defined as a positive psychological state based on awareness of mutual influence between agency (energy to achieve goals) and pathways, namely planning to achieve goals (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991). Self-efficacy is a beliefs or confidence about ability to exert motivation, cognitive abilities and actions that is needed to perform successfully with certain tasks in context certain (Bandura, 1997). Resilience is an ability to return from adversity and it is a positive activities challenging (Masten & Reed, 2002). Optimism is an explanatory style that provides attribution of events positive events on personal, permanent and pervasive causes and interpret negative events on external factors, temporary as well as situational (Seligman, 1998).

Previously, concept of psycap growth in industrial/organizational settings as a predictor of individual performance and work attitude (Avey, 2014; Larson & Luthans, 2006), but lately this concept also widely investigated in education settings. Psycap empirically tested to be positive predictor of individual creativity, achievement motivation, and negative predictor of perceived stress (Sarwar & Rahman, 2017; Wen & Lin, 2014) in University students. It makes psycap recognized as key issue among academic and industrial community under the umbrella of Positive Organization Behavior (POB).

There are several efforts to develop

psycap-based interventions since more than a decade ago, and there has been evidence that psycap is a state-like psychological resource that can be developed. Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs (2006) developed Psycap Intervention (PCI), a highly focused training that empirically tested to improve psychological capital. This training using strategy that focused in the positive aspect of the person including goal-oriented framework, such as goal design, pathway generation, and overcoming obstacles (Luthans et al., 2006). PCI also referred by other researcher to improve psychological capital over the world in several settings. Russo & Stoykova (2015) replicate the PCI in students and professionals in Bulgaria and found that after training, overall Psycap component was improve, and this condition stable over one month. Meanwhile, Song, Sun, & Song (2019) found that positive resources intervention in the PCI may be effective against the treatment of depression in China. Other interventions that have also been proven to developed psycap are highly focused, 2-hour web-based training intervention (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008) and a structured reading materials (Zhang, Li, Ma, Hu, & Jiang, 2014).

However, studies about psycap development mostly done in western context, and it is not clear yet if the intervention method apply in Indonesia. To fill this gap, based on the micro-intervention model from Luthans et al. (2006), this study try to propose improving students' psycap trough storytelling activities. Storytelling consists of two words, "story" and "telling" which means the activity of telling a narrative story. It can be used for children to the adults to learn something new. Lestari (2012) use storytelling to kindergarten students, meanwhile Morgan & Dennehey (1997) use in the context of organization to communicate norms and value. Moreover, storytelling also effective to use in organization to transfer knowledge, facilitate the study of previously unknown materials, and improve emotional relationships (Sole & Wilson, 1999).

There are several methods in storytelling, such as case-based, narrative-based, scenario-based, and problem-based instruction. Each method presents the learner with a temporary command, sequence of information and uses a concentration mechanism. Storytelling can facilitate direct teaching through verbal or

linguistic means and help in mental construction of the sequence of events. The semantic structure and sequence of information in a story acts as a focus mechanism that helps in investigation, decision making, and learning (Andrews, Hull, & Donahue, 2009).

Storytelling could immerse listeners to the story to the point that they start to feel the characters' feeling (Morgan & Dennehy, 1997), it because listeners subconsciously remember similar experiences that hold a personal meaning for them. People can easily remember things that happen to them rather than to others. Ruggles (2002) described the influence of story in knowledge management, storytelling enables listeners to become visually and emotionally invested in the story, which helps them, to memorize the information delivered through the story. The advantages storytelling also allow expressing and comprehending difficult situations.

There has been no investigations the use of storytelling as psycap intervention, particularly in Indonesia. A story plays a crucial part in several studies in psychology. Some positive interventions utilized narration as a component of research. Seligman, Steen, Park, & Paterson (2005) discovered that applying storytelling methods could assist students in handling their depression and anxiety. With his colleagues, he developed the Penn Resilience Program (PRP) through stories. PRP was designed to help teenagers in dealing with challenges. Ceylan (2016) found that short stories has benefits for the students, such as broadening their perspectives, enabling to think about the reasons rather than the result, showing different life styles, providing a comparison between their own culture and other cultures, increasing their appreciation for literature and making them read more stories. Moreover Mokhtar, Halim, & Kamarulzaman (2011) found that storytelling has beneficial effects on communicative skills students.

In education field, studies about storytelling have been conducted to particularly help students in enhancing specific academic skills as well as other required skills such as speaking and reading (Purnamasari, 2003; Lestari, 2012). In non-education fields, story use to describe how customers decide the brands and characters (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), increase readiness to change (Silangit & Rosyid,

2014), and to improve resilience (East, Jackson, O'Brien & Peters, 2010). Based on those studies, it can be concluded that storytelling provides a positive impact on individuals. This study aims to determine the effect of storytelling activities use "*I'm a Superhero*" module to increase students' psychological capital.

## METHODS

A quasi-experimental with untreated control group design with pretest and posttest that involves 127 first-year psychology students from a state university in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia was conducted for this study. Subjects were randomly assigned at the experiment group (56 subjects; M = 7, F = 49) and control group (71 subjects; M = 14, F = 57). Randomization was done by randomization database using Microsoft Excel.

The experiment group received six session storytelling intervention "*I'm a Superhero*" that conducted in 22 days. The intervention conducted by facilitators that used series of group discussion, exercises, listen, read and writing a stories. The six sessions consists of:

- (a) *Introduction session* aims to motivate participants to participate, explain the purpose activity, and get to know each participant.
- (2.a) *Ready for fight session* aims to motivate participants to leave all their worries behind and introduce simple stress releasing practice using relaxation methods. This relaxation is given as an initial foundation so that participants are able to generate optimism in themselves, because optimism has an important impact so that individuals cope with stress in various aspects of their lives (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Scheier & Carver, 1992, in Lopez & Snyder, 2003). Individuals who have high optimism have confidence in their competence so that later they will not experience learning difficulties (Mukhid, 2009).
- (2.b) *There is still hope session* aims to help participants understand what is hope and how to develop hope by listening a story. In this session, participants were sit in a circle and see each other faces, a storyteller read a story and participants were asked

to listen carefully to the story. Once the storytelling process was completed, participants were required to give their response to the story. Each participant was free to give his or her respond voluntarily. They were also asked to relate the story to their personal experiences

By listening to stories, this process will encourage participants to actively use their awareness, especially in terms of the ability to increase eksplorasi and imagination. Stories that are resolved through stories will build problem-solving competencies. Therefore, storytelling that can empower students to consider new and inventive ideas. In other word, developing imagination process can contribute to self-confidence and personal motivation, being able to achieve their hopes and dreams (Mokhtar et al., 2011).

- (3.a) *Listen to My Story*. This session, aims to help participants understanding self-efficacy and how to develop it by creating their “river of life”. Participants were asked to make a river of life. River of life is a river that contains the stages of life of each participant that is considered meaningful by them. After completing the process, the participants must tell their stories.

There are positive effects in intellectual, social and emotional development of students who are encouraged to use storytelling. When individuals tell stories and also listen to stories, it has the benefit of sharing experiences and mutual understanding. We also share about personal anecdotes, values and ideas. Listening, discussion and negotiation is a skill to express accurately thoughts and feelings. This is an important capital in learning many things and also daily communication (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004)

- (3.b) *Explore your potential session* design to help participants to have self-efficacy to take actions and complete the challenging tasks or assignments. At this stage participants are asked to explore their strengths and weakness, namely in terms of internal and external. The task done must then be told to other participants in one

group. In building an ability in students, it requires activities that make students able to manage a problem either through managing potential, making predictions, making problem formulations, observing and then communicating the results. Such steps are very important and are needed by participants in building cognitive abilities (Widyaningrum, Sarwanto, & Karyanto, 2013)

- (4) *My Success Story* aims to help realize the importance of self-management to build resilience. In this session, Trainer provides an introduction to video material that is a character’s success story. Participants in each group were asked to discuss what resilience can be taken from the story of the character that is about how to get out of the situation. Previous research shows that the level of resilience is high in a person is usually positively correlated with self level high efficacy, self confidence, and discipline; courage and optimism in the face of failure; above average cognitive capacity - average; and have a greater chance of being free from stress (Portzky, Wagnild, Bacquer, & Audenaerly, 2010).
- (5) *Action Plan: What I’m going to do session* help participants understand their need to build optimism as a foundation to take the action. Participants were asked to work on worksheets in the form of an action plan. The action plan consists of the current study plan, and the plan 2 years later and the plan after graduation. Participants that participants are responsible for implementing the “Action Plan” when back to college.
- (6) *Self-monitoring session* invite participants to read one story each day, and participants ask to find the morale of the story on the worksheet for 21 days. The stories that binding in a book titled “21 hari bercerita” consisted of 21 various kinds fiction and non-fiction stories (i.e., “Just Call me Kartini” - Kartini is an Indonesian national hero who fights for woman’s emancipation), or animal fables (i.e., “A Tale of The little frog”) were given to the participants. The subjects in experiment group read one story each day for 21 days. By the end of the week, subjects were

asked to complete the self-evaluation form by answering several questions, such as “after reading the stories from the book, what comes up in your mind?”, “What do you feel right now?”, and “What characteristics have you learned after reading the stories?”.

The assignment of reading book 21 tells a story, also has benefits to the learning process of students. A positive attitude towards reading is closely related to the learning process read well. The purpose of the reading process is students cognitively and affection wants to get pleasure and new information. Attention to the contents of the text cognition and affection readings are poured out in the process of gaining understanding reading. When reading has become a trend and as an entertainment activity, then students will be more active to read (Anderson in Holmes, Powel, Holmes, & Witt, 2007).

The pre-test (Time 1) and post-test (Time 2) were measured by Psychological Capital (PsyCap) Questionnaire that modified from Luthans et al. (2007) that consist of 24 items with four possible alternative responds (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 4 = *Strongly agree*). The

Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24) have been adapted in various studies, but majority this instruments were used in industrial settings. Prihatsanti, Prasetyo, & Ratnaningsih (2016) adapt this questionnaire in educational settings especially higher education. Some items that contain the word / organizational / company context are replaced with the college context, such as “*I feel confident contributing to the discussion about the company’s Strategy*” to “*I feel confident that I can contribute to the discussion about the lecture topic*”. Validation using Rasch model showed that  $\alpha = .80$ , while the reliability of the person test was .77 and the reliability item 1.00.

Effects of the intervention were examined using independent sample t-test to measure the difference in the level of pscap between the experiment and control groups before and after treatment, and paired sample t-test to examine difference before and after treatment in the experiment group. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

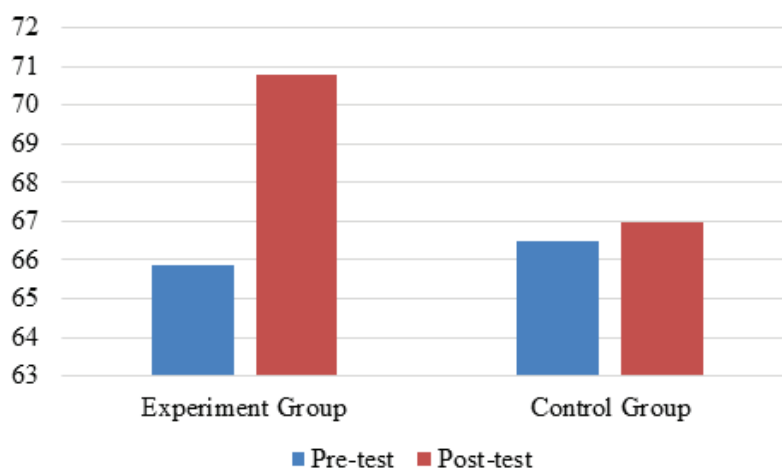
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Pre-test and Post-test score in Experiment and Control Groups shown at Table 1 and Figure 1.

**Table 1. Paired Samples T Test Pre-test and Post-test score in Experiment and Control Group**

Group	M	SD	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Pre-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Post-test			
Experiment Group	65.84	5.45	70.77	5.15	-6.921	55	< .001
Control Group	66.49	4.71	66.99	5.85	- .960	70	.341



**Figure 1. Pre-test and Post-test score in Experiment and Control Group**

Table 1 described the overview of the mean scores in the pre-test and post-test in the experiment and control group. Based on the paired sample *t*-test indicates that there was any significant difference in the experiment group in after intervention ( $t(55) = -6,921; p < .001$ ). Meanwhile there was no significant difference in the control group. It can be seen clearly from Figure 1 that there were increasing scores of psycap between pre-test and post-test, its indicate that the storytelling intervention effective to use as alternative to developing psycap.

The result independent *t*-test analysis of the gain scores showed that there were significant difference between experiment and control group ( $t(125) = 5.176; p < .001$ ). Moreover, the effect size shows that storytelling has a large impact on the enhancement of students' psycap ( $d = .925$ ). That means the experimental group had significant changes compared to the control group. It is indicate that the intervention was effective.

## Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the effect of storytelling to increase students' psychological capital. Findings of this study showed that there was an enhancement in students' psychological capital after the intervention. It supported the hypothesis that students' psychological capital significantly increased after intervention in the experimental group, but in the control group there was no significant change in psycap.

Students' psycap needs to be developed because it will have a positive impact on their capacity on the future. Psycap as individual capital no less important like human capital (experience, education, expertise, ideas, and knowledge capacity owned) and social capital (good relations with others) since it offers a dynamic capacity and ability to develop sustainably (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). Compared to human capital and social capital, psychological capital is more focused on developing who you are and who you are becoming (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006).

As an individual's positive psychological condition with several characteristics: having the confidence to take any action necessary to complete challenging tasks (self-efficacy), positive attribute about the present and future

success (optimism), perseverance in achieving goals (hope), and ability to stand tall and bounce back from problems to reach success (resilience) (Luthans et al., 2007), psycap has unique role for individuals performance.

Bandura (1997) found that individuals who had confidence (efficacy) would make maximum efforts in completing the given task. Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams III, & Wiklund, (2002) further explained that individuals with high expectations not only have the power to achieve goals but can also consider many ways to achieve those goals if one method does not work. Individuals with high expectations will be able to estimate the obstacles and challenges that exist. Efficacy, optimism and hope as a proactive construct but resilience is more of a reactive capacity which is described as the ability to face difficulties and can adapt and rise again.

In the organization context, several research has been done investigate positive relationship psycap to positive outcomes. Liwanto & Kurniawan (2015) found that psycap has a positive relationship to employee performance. When individuals increase capacity of psycap, it will improve individual performance as well. This notions also happen at education context, when student have a strong psycap, students has capability to do academic and non-academic task. There were several evidence that psycap has positive and significant relationship to the academic performance (Sweet, Swayze, & Busse, 2019; Hossein et al., 2014), and student engagement (Siu, Bakker, & Jiang, 2014). Furthermore, Hendri, Rochayati, & Fahmi (2015) investigate that entrepreneurial intention also can enhance using psycap design. It conclude that PsyCap is expected to be able to provide a way for students to achieve their goals, be realistically optimistic, give confidence to do something or make positive changes in the workplace and the environment and recover from failure.

Increased psychological capital can be developed through communicating stories related to one's success. Storytelling stimulates the subject, each story will be explored independently according to personal experience. Stories have the power to influence one's thoughts, especially when faced with problems, effectively helping in producing positive results.

Based on cognitive approach, individual is actively absorbs, measures, compares and responds to stimuli before reacting (Boeree, 2006). A relevant story can attract participants' attention, enabling them to match it with their experience and immediately recognize its value.

In the second to fifth session, participants asked to join into small group to listen the other story and tell their own story. Those session aims to invite participants visualize the story in their minds. They can imagine the story and create a hypothetical plot situation. Thus, each participant can understand the morale of the story and relate it to their own experiences. When participants listen to the other story, they may feel same story, emotions and it can help to find solution to their own problem. Listen the other story also may participants have empathy and develop optimism, because they are not alone facing the problem. When participants aware that the others also has a same or maybe a bigger problem, they will motivate and more resilient to bounce back from the problem that they faced.

Siswanto (2008) also explains that stories also contain educative or intellectual values, such: (a) developing language skills, (b) developing reading skills, (c) developing sensitivity to stories, (d) improving writing skills, (e) helping the development of social aspects, (f) foster the development of emotional aspects, (g) foster the development of aspects of creativity, and (h) foster the development of cognitive aspects. Furthermore, Simanjuntak (2008) argue that everyone, from children to adults, likes a good story, so stories are powerful way to convey teachings, messages and warning.

Stories also serve to provide information, because through stories one will learn about things, situations, and places that have never been encountered before. In this study, the material used is the story of real and fictitious figures through analogy reasoning methods, then the subject will get insight and inspiration by: 1). Exploring the problems that occur both characters in the story and problems in themselves, 2). Look for the relationship between the problems that occur in the characters in the story with problems in themselves, 3). Build conclusions from the similarity of the relationship of characters in the story with problems in themselves. They have the same problem with the characters in

the fear story even though each subject has a different opinion about the amount of fear they experience when compared to the characters in the story, and 4). Choose the appropriate concept and apply to the target problem (independent).

The material compiled in this module, especially *21 hari bercerita* book in the sixth session, consists of fiction and non-fiction stories using analogy reasoning methods that allow participants to gain better insights and inspiration when exploring problems in stories and real life, finding correlations between problems in stories and their problems, and making conclusion based on that. When subjects face the same problem as the characters in the story, for example fear, even though each subject has a different intensity of fear compared to the characters in the story, they are able to choose the best solution and apply it to their real problems.

Storytelling, which is outlined in the I'm Superhero module makes students actively participate in looking for positive capacities illustrated by the characters in the story. It was designed because students find it easier to understand the main ideas of a story when they are asked to visualize the story rather than memorizing sentences (Morgan & Dennehy, 1997). In the sixth session, participants ask to read a story each day and answer the question that will make them contemplating and introspection, the purpose is to build hope and optimism.

Previous research using the storytelling method was conducted by Li (2006) who used digital storytelling to improve self-efficacy. Tomasulo & Pawelski (2012) claim that storytelling is a suitable medium for developing positive interventions. This means that storytelling can be used to increase one's positive psychological capacity. This is evidenced by the results of this study in which storytelling increases students' psychcap ( $t = 5.176, p < .01$ ).

From the results of the evaluation of the intervention, the participants stated that both fictional and non-fictional characters enlightened them in evaluating themselves positively. In addition, the characters can help students increase their confidence to achieve their goals, to never give up, stay motivated, have the desire to achieve something, stand tall against all obstacles, and to always be optimistic when facing problems, especially during their study period.

Not any follow-up provided in the measurement of psychop after the post-test was done is a limitation of this study. Further research can be done by follow up measurement and outcomes measurement, like academic performances, and evaluated the story content in the module.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that storytelling using I'm Superhero module has a significant effect in improving student psychop. This program recommended to apply for first year college students to improve their psychop to facing the change from high school to university. Storytelling can be applied because it is an interactive method that can be used to regulate psychological aspects in various settings. Storytelling has good benefits because there is a process of constructive exchange of events experienced with different emotions that can lead to the process of creative learning.

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