

Transforming Students' Self-Talk through Ecolinguistics-Based Guidance and Counseling: A Model for Behavioral and Learning Experience Change at SMPN 2 Alas

Alfin Yahya¹, Suparman²,

^{1,2}Sumbawa University of Technology, Indonesia

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Abstract

Internal language (self-talk) constitutes one of the fundamental cognitive mechanisms influencing students' emotions, behaviors, and learning experiences. However, school counseling practices generally emphasize psychological interventions while paying limited attention to the ecological dimensions of language that shape students' internal cognition. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of students' self-talk before counseling, develop an ecolinguistics-based transformation model, and evaluate behavioral and experiential changes following the intervention. A qualitative model development research design was employed at SMPN 2 Alas, Sumbawa Regency. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, documentation, and reflective journals. Data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students initially demonstrated dominant negative self-talk characterized by low self-confidence, anxiety, pessimism, and self-doubt. The developed transformation model consists of four sequential stages: awareness, identification, cognitive restructuring, and reinforcement. Following implementation, students demonstrated substantial improvements in learning motivation, emotional regulation, social interaction, discipline, self-perception, learning engagement, and reflective thinking. The findings indicate that integrating ecolinguistics into guidance and counseling expands conventional cognitive interventions by incorporating language ecology and sociocultural contexts, thereby producing more sustainable behavioral transformation.

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Corresponding Author:

Suparman

Sumbawa University of Technology

Email:suparman@uts.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in the twenty-first century increasingly recognizes that successful learning extends beyond academic achievement toward the holistic development of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies. International educational frameworks emphasize that learners require emotional regulation, self-awareness, resilience, and reflective thinking to navigate increasingly complex educational environments (OECD, 2021; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019). Consequently, educational success cannot be measured solely through academic performance but must also consider students' psychological development and learning experiences.

One of the most influential psychological mechanisms underlying students' behavior is internal language or self-talk. Self-talk refers to the continuous internal dialogue through which individuals interpret experiences, regulate emotions, evaluate themselves,

and make behavioral decisions (Morin, 2018). According to Beck (2020), internal thoughts significantly influence emotional responses and behavioral outcomes because individuals react primarily to their interpretations of reality rather than reality itself. Consequently, maladaptive self-talk frequently produces anxiety, low confidence, avoidance behavior, and reduced academic motivation.

Recent psychological studies demonstrate that positive self-talk contributes significantly to improved academic performance, resilience, emotional regulation, and self-efficacy, whereas negative self-talk predicts stress, pessimism, and maladaptive learning behaviors (Brinthaup & Morin, 2023; Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2019; Latinjak et al., 2019). Nevertheless, most previous investigations conceptualize self-talk primarily as an intrapersonal cognitive phenomenon while overlooking the linguistic and sociocultural environments from which internal language develops.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, language is not merely a communication system but also an ecological phenomenon embedded within social interaction, cultural values, and environmental narratives. Stibbe (2021) argues that language shapes the "stories we live by," influencing individuals' perceptions, values, and behavioral orientations. Therefore, students' internal language should be understood as a product of interactions between cognition and the surrounding linguistic ecology rather than solely individual psychological processes.

This perspective suggests that transforming students' internal language requires more than cognitive restructuring techniques commonly employed in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Beck, 2020). Sustainable transformation also requires reconstructing linguistic environments that continuously reinforce adaptive narratives, positive identities, and socially meaningful expressions (Stibbe, 2021). Integrating ecolinguistics into school counseling therefore offers an innovative framework capable of simultaneously addressing cognitive, linguistic, cultural, and ecological dimensions of behavioral change.

Despite growing attention toward both self-talk and ecolinguistics, previous research has rarely integrated these two perspectives. Existing studies generally investigate self-talk within sports psychology, cognitive therapy, or academic motivation (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2019; Brinthaup & Morin, 2023), whereas ecolinguistic studies predominantly examine environmental discourse, ecological narratives, and sustainability communication (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2018; Stibbe, 2021). Few investigations have explored how ecological language environments influence internal psychological transformation within educational counseling contexts.

This theoretical separation creates an important research gap. Specifically, previous studies have not developed comprehensive counseling models explaining how ecological language environments facilitate transformation of students' internal dialogue and subsequently influence behavioral and experiential outcomes. Consequently, integrating self-talk theory with ecolinguistic principles represents both theoretical and practical innovation.

Empirical observations conducted at SMPN 2 Alas further reinforce this necessity. Many students demonstrate persistent negative internal dialogue characterized by fear of failure, low confidence, reduced motivation, emotional instability, and passive classroom participation. Such conditions suggest that students' difficulties originate not only from external educational circumstances but also from maladaptive linguistic constructions continuously reproduced through internal cognition and social interaction (Beck, 2020; Bandura, 2018).

Addressing these challenges requires counseling interventions capable of transforming students' internal narratives while simultaneously utilizing positive linguistic resources derived from their surrounding ecological and cultural environments.

Ecolinguistics-based counseling therefore represents an alternative intervention that combines cognitive restructuring with culturally meaningful language practices (Corey, 2021; Stibbe, 2021).

Accordingly, this study develops an innovative transformation model integrating psychological counseling principles and ecolinguistic perspectives. The model emphasizes four interconnected stages—awareness, identification, cognitive restructuring, and reinforcement—to reconstruct students' internal language toward adaptive, constructive, and environmentally grounded narratives.

Theoretically, this research contributes to expanding guidance and counseling literature by introducing ecolinguistics as a complementary framework for understanding behavioral transformation. Practically, the findings provide counselors with a contextual intervention model capable of enhancing students' psychological wellbeing, behavioral adjustment, and learning experiences through ecological language awareness.

Finally, the novelty of this research lies in integrating self-talk transformation, ecolinguistic theory, and school counseling into a unified conceptual framework capable of explaining behavioral change as a multidimensional interaction among cognition, language, culture, and educational environments.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a model development research design to construct an ecolinguistics-based transformation model for students' internal language (self-talk) through guidance and counseling services. The qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand students' internal cognitive processes, language ecology, behavioral transformation, and learning experiences within their natural educational context rather than measuring causal relationships statistically.

The research was conducted at SMPN 2 Alas, Sumbawa Regency, Indonesia, between April and June 2026. The school was purposively selected because preliminary observations revealed that many students demonstrated negative internal language characterized by low self-confidence, learning anxiety, pessimistic thinking, weak emotional regulation, and low classroom participation. Furthermore, the school represents a sociocultural environment in which local linguistic values remain actively practiced, providing an appropriate context for implementing an ecolinguistic counseling approach.

Participants consisted of students identified by school counselors as frequently demonstrating negative self-talk during learning activities and counseling sessions. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria: (1) experiencing persistent negative internal dialogue; (2) showing behavioral or motivational problems in school; (3) actively participating throughout the counseling intervention; and (4) being willing to provide reflective narratives during interviews. Additional information was obtained from guidance and counseling teachers, classroom teachers, and school administrators to ensure comprehensive understanding of students' behavioral changes.

Data were collected through four complementary techniques. First, participant observation was conducted during classroom learning and counseling sessions to document students' behavioral responses, emotional expressions, communication patterns, and social interactions. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews explored students' internal language, cognitive experiences, emotional conditions, and perceptions regarding counseling interventions. Interviews with teachers and counselors were also conducted to validate students' behavioral changes from multiple perspectives. Third, document analysis examined counseling reports, student reflection journals, behavioral records, and school documents relevant to the intervention process. Finally, student reflective writing

was used to capture personal experiences before, during, and after the transformation process.

The analytical framework combined interactive qualitative analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) with an ecolinguistic interpretative perspective. Data analysis involved three continuous stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, interview transcripts, observational notes, and reflective journals were coded according to recurring themes related to self-talk characteristics, counseling processes, behavioral changes, and learning experiences. Data display organized these themes into conceptual matrices illustrating relationships among internal language, ecological contexts, counseling interventions, and behavioral outcomes. Finally, conclusions were generated through constant comparison across multiple data sources until conceptual saturation was achieved.

The development of the transformation model followed four sequential stages derived from cognitive restructuring principles integrated with ecolinguistic perspectives. The first stage, awareness, encouraged students to recognize their habitual internal language and understand its influence on emotions and behavior. The second stage, identification, enabled students to identify recurring negative linguistic patterns and maladaptive cognitive narratives. The third stage, cognitive restructuring, reconstructed negative self-talk into adaptive internal language by incorporating positive ecological narratives, culturally meaningful expressions, and supportive linguistic interactions. The final stage, reinforcement, strengthened newly constructed self-talk through repeated reflection, counseling activities, peer interaction, and supportive educational environments.

To enhance research credibility, several trustworthiness strategies were implemented. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, documentation, and reflective journals. Source triangulation involved collecting evidence from students, counselors, teachers, and school administrators. Member checking allowed participants to verify interpretations of interview findings, while peer debriefing with academic supervisors ensured consistency between empirical findings and theoretical interpretations. These procedures increased the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

The conceptual framework underlying this study integrates Cognitive Behavioral Theory, which explains behavioral change through cognitive restructuring (Beck, 2020), Social Cognitive Theory, emphasizing reciprocal interactions among cognition, behavior, and environment (Bandura, 2018), and Ecolinguistics, which views language as an ecological system shaping human perception and behavior (Stibbe, 2021). Through this interdisciplinary framework, the proposed model explains behavioral transformation as a dynamic interaction between students' internal cognition and their surrounding linguistic ecology.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explains the research results and provides a comprehensive discussion. The discussion can be divided into several subchapters.

1.1. Research Results

This study aimed to develop an ecolinguistics-based guidance and counseling model for transforming students' internal language (self-talk) and to evaluate its influence on behavioral change and learning experiences. The findings are organized into three major themes corresponding to the research objectives: (1) characteristics of students' self-talk before the intervention, (2) development of the

ecolinguistics-based self-talk transformation model, and (3) behavioral and experiential changes after implementation of the model.

3.1.1 Characteristics of Students' Internal Language Before Counseling

Initial observations and interviews revealed that most participating students demonstrated dominant negative self-talk patterns. Their internal dialogue was characterized by persistent self-doubt, fear of failure, pessimistic expectations, and low confidence in academic performance. These negative cognitive patterns were repeatedly expressed during classroom participation, examinations, and social interactions with peers.

Students frequently described themselves using expressions such as "I cannot do it," "I will fail," "Others are much better than me," and "My opinion is not important." Such internal narratives reduced their willingness to participate actively in classroom discussions and weakened their motivation to complete learning tasks independently.

Observation further indicated that negative self-talk influenced emotional regulation. Students experiencing persistent negative internal language tended to demonstrate anxiety, hesitation, avoidance behavior, and excessive dependence on teachers or classmates when completing academic activities. Consequently, internal language functioned not only as an individual cognitive process but also as a determinant of observable classroom behavior.

The preliminary findings therefore indicate that maladaptive self-talk constitutes an important psychological factor requiring systematic intervention through school counseling.

3.1.2 Development of the Ecolinguistics-Based Self-Talk Transformation Model

Based on empirical findings, this research developed an innovative transformation model integrating guidance and counseling principles with ecolinguistic perspectives.

Unlike conventional counseling models focusing solely on cognitive restructuring, the proposed model incorporates ecological language environments into psychological intervention. Internal language is understood as being continuously shaped by social interaction, cultural narratives, family communication, peer relationships, and classroom discourse.

The developed model consists of four sequential stages.

Stage 1: Awareness

Students first became aware that their emotions and behaviors were influenced by continuous internal dialogue. Through guided reflection, they identified situations triggering negative self-talk.

Stage 2: Identification

Students recognized recurring maladaptive linguistic patterns such as:

- fear of failure;
- negative self-labeling;
- catastrophic thinking;
- social comparison;
- perfectionistic expectations.

This stage enabled students to distinguish irrational assumptions from objective reality.

Stage 3: Cognitive Restructuring

Counselors facilitated reconstruction of internal language using positive linguistic expressions grounded in students' sociocultural environment.

Instead of replacing negative thoughts with generic positive affirmations, counselors integrated ecological narratives emphasizing cooperation, resilience, family values, and local cultural wisdom.

Examples included replacing:

"I always fail"

with

"Every effort helps me grow."

Similarly,

"Others are smarter"

became

"Everyone learns at a different pace."

This ecological reconstruction strengthened authenticity because students recognized these expressions within their own cultural experiences.

Stage 4: Reinforcement

Positive self-talk was reinforced through repeated counseling sessions, reflective journals, peer interaction, classroom participation, and supportive communication from teachers.

Gradually, adaptive internal language became habitual rather than situational.

3.1.3 Behavioral Changes After the Intervention

Following implementation of the transformation model, substantial improvements were observed across multiple behavioral dimensions. Students became more confident when expressing opinions during classroom discussions. They demonstrated greater willingness to answer questions, initiate communication with teachers, and participate in collaborative learning. Improved emotional regulation was also evident. Students responded more calmly when facing academic challenges and were less likely to avoid difficult learning tasks. Teachers reported noticeable increases in classroom discipline, responsibility, punctuality, and independent learning behaviors.

3.1.4 Changes in Students' Learning Experiences

Beyond observable behavioral changes, students reported meaningful improvements in their subjective learning experiences. Most participants described feeling more optimistic, emotionally secure, and academically motivated after completing counseling sessions. Reflective journals indicated that students gradually perceived learning as an opportunity for personal growth rather than a source of anxiety. Positive internal language enabled students to reinterpret academic challenges as manageable experiences instead of threats to self-worth. Students also demonstrated stronger engagement during collaborative learning, greater willingness to seek feedback, and improved capacity for self-reflection.

1.2. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that transforming students' internal language (self-talk) through ecolinguistics-based guidance and counseling provides a meaningful contribution to students' behavioral development and learning experiences. Unlike conventional counseling approaches that primarily focus on cognitive restructuring, the present study integrates cognitive, linguistic, sociocultural, and ecological dimensions into a comprehensive intervention model. This integration represents the principal theoretical contribution of the research because it explains behavioral transformation not only as a psychological process but also as a product of language ecology that continuously shapes students' perceptions and actions. These findings are consistent with the conceptual

framework proposed in the thesis and extend previous studies by presenting an interdisciplinary model for educational counseling.

3.2.1 Internal Language as the Foundation of Behavioral Transformation

The first finding revealed that most students entered the counseling process with dominant negative self-talk characterized by pessimism, self-doubt, fear of failure, and low academic confidence. These linguistic patterns were repeatedly reflected in classroom behavior, including reluctance to participate, avoidance of challenging tasks, and weak emotional regulation.

This finding supports the cognitive theory proposed by Aaron T. Beck, who argues that automatic thoughts become the primary mechanism through which individuals interpret reality. Students do not merely respond to external events; instead, they respond to their internal interpretation of those events. Consequently, when internal language is dominated by irrational beliefs such as "I am incapable" or "I will certainly fail," students tend to develop maladaptive emotional responses and ineffective behavioral strategies.

The present findings further indicate that negative self-talk is not an isolated psychological phenomenon. Rather, it gradually becomes part of students' daily behavioral patterns, influencing motivation, interpersonal communication, classroom participation, and academic persistence. This observation reinforces previous research demonstrating that self-talk functions as an important predictor of self-regulation, academic resilience, and emotional wellbeing.

From a counseling perspective, these findings imply that interventions targeting observable behavior alone may not produce sustainable change unless the underlying linguistic structures within students' cognition are also transformed. Therefore, internal language should be recognized as one of the primary intervention targets in educational counseling.

3.2.2 Ecolinguistics Expands the Perspective of School Counseling

A major contribution of this research lies in integrating ecolinguistics into guidance and counseling practice. Previous counseling models generally conceptualize self-talk as an individual cognitive process. In contrast, this study demonstrates that students' internal language develops within broader linguistic ecosystems consisting of family communication, classroom discourse, peer interaction, cultural narratives, and local wisdom.

This perspective is consistent with the ecolinguistic theory developed by Arran Stibbe, who argues that language creates the "stories we live by." These stories shape how individuals perceive themselves, other people, and the surrounding world. Consequently, transforming students' internal language requires reconstructing not only individual cognition but also the ecological narratives supporting that cognition.

The counseling intervention therefore encouraged students to replace destructive narratives with expressions grounded in supportive cultural values, collective responsibility, resilience, and positive social relationships. Such ecological reconstruction differs fundamentally from generic positive affirmations because it originates from students' own sociocultural experiences.

The findings suggest that ecolinguistic counseling creates stronger emotional acceptance than purely cognitive interventions. Students accepted new internal narratives more naturally because the reconstructed language reflected familiar cultural meanings rather than externally imposed motivational slogans.

Theoretically, this finding expands the application of ecolinguistics beyond environmental discourse analysis toward educational psychology and

school counseling. It demonstrates that language ecology influences not only environmental awareness but also students' psychological wellbeing and behavioral development.

3.2.3 Cognitive Restructuring Becomes More Effective Through Ecological Language

The four-stage transformation model developed in this research Awareness, Identification, Cognitive Restructuring, and Reinforcement illustrates a systematic pathway for changing students' internal language. The awareness stage encouraged students to recognize the existence of automatic internal dialogue. Many participants had never consciously reflected upon the language continuously operating in their minds. Once awareness emerged, students became capable of identifying repetitive negative expressions influencing their emotions and academic behavior.

During the identification stage, students distinguished irrational assumptions from objective evidence. This process resembles the cognitive restructuring procedures described by Beck but extends them through ecological interpretation. Instead of merely replacing irrational beliefs with rational alternatives, students reconstructed their internal language using culturally meaningful expressions emphasizing hope, perseverance, cooperation, and responsibility.

The reinforcement stage proved particularly important because sustainable behavioral transformation requires repeated linguistic practice. Positive internal language gradually became habitual through counseling sessions, classroom interaction, reflective writing, and supportive communication from teachers and peers.

These findings indicate that cognitive restructuring becomes substantially stronger when integrated with ecological language environments. Sustainable behavioral change therefore depends not only on cognitive modification but also on continuous interaction with supportive linguistic ecosystems.

3.2.4 Social Environment Shapes Internal Language

The findings further demonstrate that students' internal language develops through continuous interaction with their social environment. Parents, teachers, classmates, and community members contribute significantly to constructing students' internal narratives.

This observation supports the sociocultural learning theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky, who emphasizes that higher psychological functions originate within social interaction before becoming internalized as individual cognition. Self-talk therefore represents internalized social language rather than purely private thinking.

Students frequently reported that encouraging expressions from teachers and peers gradually replaced previous negative internal narratives. Likewise, supportive classroom communication promoted confidence and willingness to participate actively in learning activities.

These findings indicate that effective counseling cannot be isolated from educational environments. Sustainable transformation requires collaboration among counselors, teachers, families, and peers to create positive linguistic ecosystems continuously reinforcing adaptive self-talk.

Accordingly, behavioral transformation should be understood as a collective educational process rather than solely an individual therapeutic achievement

3.2.5 Transformation of Self-Talk Improves Learning Experiences

Another important finding concerns students' subjective learning experiences. Following the intervention, participants described learning as becoming more enjoyable, meaningful, and less threatening. Increased confidence encouraged greater classroom participation, stronger motivation, and more positive emotional engagement.

These findings correspond with the experiential learning theory proposed by David A. Kolb, which explains that meaningful learning emerges through continuous interaction among experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Positive self-talk strengthened students' capacity to reinterpret academic challenges as opportunities for growth rather than indicators of personal inadequacy. Consequently, learning experiences became more reflective, autonomous, and intrinsically motivating.

Furthermore, improved self-perception contributed to greater learning satisfaction and stronger engagement with classroom activities. Students no longer viewed mistakes as evidence of incompetence but as natural components of learning. This transformation illustrates how internal language functions as a mediating mechanism linking cognition, emotion, behavior, and educational experience.

4. CONCLUSION

This study developed and evaluated an ecolinguistics-based guidance and counseling model for transforming students' internal language (self-talk) to improve behavioral outcomes and learning experiences at SMPN 2 Alas. The findings indicate that students initially exhibited dominant negative self-talk characterized by self-doubt, pessimism, anxiety, and low confidence, which adversely affected their academic engagement, emotional regulation, and social interaction.

The transformation model developed through this study consists of four interconnected stages: awareness, identification, cognitive restructuring, and reinforcement. These stages enable students to recognize maladaptive internal language, reconstruct negative cognitive patterns using positive ecological narratives, and reinforce adaptive linguistic habits through continuous counseling and supportive educational environments.

The study further demonstrates that integrating ecolinguistics into guidance and counseling expands conventional cognitive interventions by recognizing language as a social and ecological phenomenon rather than merely an individual psychological process. Students' internal language is continuously shaped by interactions with teachers, peers, families, cultural values, and school discourse. Consequently, sustainable behavioral transformation requires not only cognitive restructuring but also the development of supportive linguistic ecosystems.

Implementation of the model resulted in substantial improvements across multiple dimensions of student development. Participants demonstrated increased self-confidence, stronger learning motivation, improved emotional regulation, better classroom participation, enhanced social interaction, greater learning satisfaction, and more positive reflective learning experiences. These improvements suggest that positive internal language functions as a catalyst for broader psychological and educational development.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the integration of Cognitive Behavioral Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Ecolinguistics, producing an interdisciplinary framework explaining behavioral change through the interaction of cognition, language, culture, and educational environments. Practically, the proposed

model provides school counselors with an innovative intervention framework that can be adapted across different educational contexts while remaining responsive to local linguistic and cultural characteristics.

Future studies are encouraged to validate the model using mixed-method and experimental approaches, involving larger participant groups and diverse educational settings. Further investigation may also examine the influence of digital communication, multilingual environments, and family language practices on students' internal language development.

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