Perceptions of Verbal Toxic Positivity in Academic Interactions: A Study among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore students' perceptions of the phenomenon of verbal toxic positivity in academic interactions, particularly between lecturers and students. Toxic positivity is a form of communication that conveys positive messages excessively without considering the emotional context of the recipient, which can actually have a negative impact on mental health. Using a descriptive quantitative method, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 81 students of the English Education Study Program at STKIP PGRI Ponorogo. The research results show that the most dominant form of verbal toxic positivity is in the form of advice and affirmation. The main triggering situation is the continuous repetition of those statements by the lecturer, especially when students are experiencing emotional stress. The psychological impacts most felt by students are low self-esteem, feelings of depression, and the inability to express emotions in a healthy way. These findings emphasize the importance of faculty awareness, both as educators and academic advisors, in building empathetic and adaptive communication to create an academic environment that supports students' mental well-being. This study also recommends the development of communication and student well-being training to avoid the practice of verbal toxic positivity in the context of academics and academic guidance.

Kata Kunci:
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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap fenomena verbal toxic positivity dalam interaksi akademik antara dosen dan mahasiswa. Toxic positivity merupakan bentuk komunikasi yang menyampaikan pesan positif secara berlebihan tanpa mempertimbangkan konteks emosional penerimanya, yang justru dapat berdampak negatif pada kesehatan mental. Dengan menggunakan metode kuantitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang disebarkan kepada 81 mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di STKIP PGRI Ponorogo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bentuk verbal toxic positivity yang paling dominan adalah jenis nasihat dan afirmasi. Situasi pemicu utama adalah pengulangan pernyataan tersebut secara terus-menerus oleh dosen, terutama ketika mahasiswa sedang mengalami tekanan emosional. Dampak psikologis yang paling banyak dirasakan mahasiswa adalah rendahnya harga diri, perasaan tertekan, dan ketidakmampuan mengekspresikan emosi secara sehat. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya kesadaran dosen, baik sebagai pendidik maupun pembimbing akademik, dalam membangun komunikasi yang empatik dan adaptif untuk menciptakan lingkungan akademik yang mendukung kesejahteraan mental mahasiswa. Penelitian ini juga merekomendasikan pengembangan pelatihan komunikasi dan well-being mahasiswa untuk menghindari praktik verbal toxic positivity dalam konteks akademik dan bimbingan akademik.

INTRODUCTION

The student-lecturer interaction is one of the external elements that has an influence on the learning process and academic achievement. It also refers to a part of the social competence that a lecturer should have. Social competence is the lecturer's ability to communicate and interact effectively and efficiently with students, fellow faculty, parents/initials, and the community (Astri & Fian, 2020; Ripki et al., 2023; Praptiningsih & Putra, 2021). This interpersonal communication between lecturers and students in the learning process interaction allows for optimal knowledge transfer. Through social interaction, there will be interaction between faculty and students (Abidin & Wandi, 2023; Nur Inah, 2015; Yuliasari et al., 2022; Zaifullah et al., 2021). Teachers with good social competence will be able to improve the quality of learning, strengthen learning motivation, and improve student academic achievement. There are three factors that influence the interaction of lecturers and students in the learning process: (1) the readiness of the lecturer in teaching; (2) the communication of the faculty with the student; and (3) the personalities of the lecturer and student (Pangalila, 2017).

As one of the incentives for achievement, giving positive motivation to students is a frequent step taken by lecturers in their interactions with students. Positive psychological interventions such as positive affirmation, meditation, and mood charting have a positive effect on student self-confidence, resulting in positive academic achievement (Achmad & Lubna, 2023; Gonaga, 2023; Kojongian & Wibowo, 2022; Lau Ung Mui & Saili, 2024). This positive affirmation can take form as of a reward or an appreciation of a positive action or word. The concept of positive psychology is in line with the theory of motivation, which states that positive affirmations play an important role in subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB), preventing prolonged negative emotions, helping to restore cardiovascular activation, and enhancing motor activity and cognitive flexibility through increased dopamine hormone (Abbas et al., 2022; Kojongian & Wibowo, 2022; Novitasari, 2023; Scheier & Carver, 1992). Positive affirmations not only boost academic achievement but also contribute to overall well-being and mental health.

Unfortunately, not all positive motivations have a positive impact. In some cases, people who focus on positive things when having problems later feel worse, worthless, and blame themselves (Feltner, 2023; Petrocchi et al., 2017; Praptiningsih & Putra, 2021). Even though, the phenomenon of toxic positivity is mostly discussed in corporate settings (Bhat et al., 2021; Petrocchi et al., 2017; Rasool et al., 2021; Wihardi et al., 2024) or social media (Achmad & Lubna, 2023; Feltner, 2023; Lew & Flanagin, 2023; Putra, Ramadhanti, Rahajeng, et al., 2023; Upadhyay et al., 2022), it also possible to happen in academic setting. Some students may experience high stress due to too much positive motivation, so they feel overwhelmed and unable to meet their expectations. Therefore, it is important for the lecturer to understand the needs and abilities of each student individually so that the positive motivation given can have an appropriate and supportive impact. Toxic positivity can be defined as an excessive generalization of a positive state of mind that encourages the use of positivity to suppress and replace the recognition of stress and negativity (Bosveld, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). The accumulation of stress and worse emotional imbalances in the long term can be the result of actions that contain toxic positivity. Toxic acts such as intimidation, verbal threats, filthy words, harassment, and discrimination are acts that can be more easily recognized than more subtle forms of toxicity such as negative gossip, stereotypes, sarcasm,

and micro-aggression (Fortuna & Sergio Nunes, 2020; Qian et al., 2019; Schmidt & Wiegand, 2017; Waseem et al., 2017). These more subtle forms of toxicity can also have a serious impact on one's emotional development. For example, negative gossip and stereotypes can ruin social relationships and reduce one's self-confidence. Besides, sarcasm and micro-aggression can cause chronic stress and affect mental health. These more subtle forms of toxicity can also have a serious impact on one's emotional development. For example, negative gossip and stereotypes can ruin social relationships and affect one's self-esteem. Micro-aggressions such as blasphemy or humiliating comments can also make a person feel insecure and unacceptable in a classroom environment.

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of lecturers' social competence in building effective interactions with students and its impact on motivation and academic achievement (Abidin & Wandi, 2023; Pangalila, 2017), there are still limited studies that specifically discuss the murky side of excessive positive motivation, especially in the form of verbal toxic positivity in lecturer-student interactions. The study of the toxic positivity phenomenon has taken root more in the corporate and social media contexts (Bhat et al., 2021; Lew & Flanagin, 2023), but less research has been done in the academic setting, particularly on the dynamics of academic counseling in higher education. In most cases, instructors in Indonesia also serve as academic counselors. This dual position may cause the lines between personal support and professional advice to become blurred, which could result in the inadvertent use of toxic optimism in academic counseling. Earlier studies showed the development of a positive learning environment is influenced by the lecturer's social skills (Ripki et al., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial for the lecturers to be aware of the fine line between providing encouragement and setting unrealistic expectations for students. It can be difficult for lecturers who serve as academic counselors to strike a balance between providing support and helpful guidance because they are not aware of the causes, tendencies, and effects of verbal toxic positivity.

This research aimed to deeply explore how verbal toxic positivity emerges in higher academic settings, the situations that trigger it, and its impact on students' mental health and learning motivation. The findings also aimed to strengthen the discourse of academic counseling with an empathetic approach based on balanced interpersonal communication theory and positive psychology (Abbas et al., 2022; Scheier & Carver, 1992). to end the toxic positivity, which actually causes stress, feelings of inadequacy, and mental health disorders (Bosveld, 2021; Feltner, 2023). By shedding light on the detrimental effects of toxic positivity in academic environments, this research aims to pave the way for lecturers, especially those who also act as academic counselors, to adopt a more holistic and compassionate approach in supporting students. In doing so, this study does not only contribute to the theoretical development of emotional dynamics in academic communication but also offers practical implications in the form of preventive strategies and communication guidelines for academic counselors. Furthermore, the research can support the development of structured training programs to improve counselors' sensitivity in recognizing and responding to students' emotional struggles, thereby fostering a psychologically safe academic climate that enhances both mental well-being and academic engagement.

METHODS

This quantitative study aims to obtain information related to the types of verbal toxic positivity, situations that trigger verbal toxic positivity, and its mental impact on 81 students of the English Language Education Study Program, STKIP PGRI Ponorogo. This sample was selected based on the researcher's accessibility to the sample (convenience sampling). The researcher conducted an initial survey related to verbal sentences that are often spoken by lecturers in academic communication with students and have the potential to become toxic positivity. From the survey, six sentences were selected that appeared most often based on their toxic positivity category. These sentences were used as the basis for compiling the questionnaire. A questionnaire is defined as a self-reporting data collection tool that must be filled out by each participant (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, there are 24 closed questions related to the types of sentences, potential situations that trigger verbal toxic positivity, and the potential mental impact of verbal toxic positivity on student-student interactions in learning. In this section, students are given four choices for each statement: never, rarely, sometimes, and often. The purpose of this section is to determine the types of verbal toxic positivity sentences that are most commonly found in student-student interactions in learning. In the second section, the questionnaire was used to obtain information about situations that have the potential to cause verbal toxic positivity. The third section of the questionnaire was used to obtain information about the mental impact experienced by participants when receiving sentences that cause verbal toxic positivity in interactions between students in learning. The three sections of the questionnaire have been tested for empirical validity and reliability through a trial on 60 respondents. The trial data were analysed using the item-total score correlation formula using SPSS . The results of the trial showed that 23.4% of the instrument items used were valid at a significance level of 0.01 and 76.6% were valid at a significance level of 0.05. The Cronbach's Alpha value obtained was 0.73 so that all questionnaires were declared to have high reliability. The results of the quantitative data were then analysed using descriptive statistics. Researchers used tables to present the data.

RESULTS

In this study, verbal toxic positivity is categorized into four types, namely: verbal toxic positivity from worldview, personal experience of verbal toxic positivity, verbal toxic positive advice, and verbal toxic positive affirmations. In addition, this study also identifies situations that are considered to have the potential to produce verbal toxic positivity along with the mental impacts that may result. In Table 1, it can be seen that the sentences/phrases that are usually used to give positive affirmations to students. Meanwhile, Table 2 shows data about students who were given certain sentences or phrases to determine which verbal toxic positive categories were the most and least used.

Table 2. showed types of verbal toxic positivity that appear in interpersonal communication. They are classified into four main categories: worldview, personal experience, advice, and affirmation. A worldview type of verbal toxic positivity refers to the belief that everything happens for a reason and that individuals should always look on the bright side of things, regardless of the

situation. A personal experience type of verbal toxic positivity involves dismissing someone's negative emotions by comparing them to one's own experiences and explaining how they overcame similar challenges. This type of verbal toxic positivity consists of offering unsolicited advice and solutions without truly listening to the other person's feelings. An affirmation type of verbal toxic positivity entails invalidating someone's feelings by constantly telling them to "just be positive" or "look on the bright side", without acknowledging their pain or struggles.

The findings show that in the worldview category, the phrase "stay positive" is the most frequently uttered, with a percentage of 58%. This expression reflects forced optimism and potentially ignores the individual's true emotional condition. On the other hand, the phrase "those who are slow to act will only get the rest of those who are quick to act" is the least frequently spoken (35%), indicating that statements containing competition or time pressure are less often used in a pseudo-positive context.

Table 1. Sentences/Phrases that Usually Used to Give Positive Affirmation to Students

Worldview	Personal experience	Advice	Affirmation
Stay positive.	More references are available now than in the past.	Never give up!	Sure, you can do it.
Pray and have faith that God won't put you through more than you can handle.	People would have to put in more effort in my day.	Simply learn the lesson.	It's not as horrible as you believe.
There's a reason for everything.	You're luckier than me, by the way.	Get rid of your negative feelings.	Why can't you get an A? What's so hard?
Happiness is an option	Even if I have more serious issues, I never feel as anxious as you do.	There are more people who face more difficulty than you.	Rejection doesn't have to be a big deal; it's okay because the others are better than you.
Those who are slow to act will only get the rest of those who are quick to act	It's still not as much as I have experienced before.	Don't think about what's wrong.	Thank you; you could have had it worse.
Something may not come to those who just wait	Don't get overreacted; I've failed many times more than you.	Failure is not an option.	It's a pity that you're easy to give up and impatient.

Table 2. Types of Verbal Toxic Positivity within Lecturer-Students Interaction (∑=81)

Types of Verbal Toxic Positivity	The most said sentence/phrase	%	The least said sentence/phrase	%
Worldview	Stay Positive	58%	Those who are slow to act will only get the rest of those who are quick to act	35%
Personal experience	More references are available now than in the past.	58%	Even if I have more serious issues, I never feel as anxious as you do.	33%
Advice	Never give up!	65%	Failure is not an option	25%
Affirmation	Sure, you can	65%	Rejection doesn't have to be a big deal; it's okay because the others are better than you.	44%

This tendency reflects a cultural narrative in academic settings that overemphasizes optimism and productivity, potentially minimizing or invalidating students' struggles and emotional authenticity. The worldview statements appear to be rooted in well-intentioned moral or spiritual encouragement. However, when such phrases are repeatedly used without empathetic listening or contextual understanding, they can evolve into toxic forms of positivity. This may lead students to suppress genuine emotions like frustration, anxiety, or disappointment out of fear that

expressing them would be seen as weakness or lack of faith. On the other hand, statements like "Those who are slow to act will only get the rest of those who are quick to act"—although less frequently uttered—represent a more aggressive push for urgency and competitiveness. These findings suggest a dual pressure: to not only maintain positivity but also to perform at a consistently fast pace, which may heighten stress and reduce self-compassion among students. Thus, academic environments need to foster more emotionally balanced communication that validates students' experiences while still offering constructive support.

In the context of academic guidance, these phrases often emerge when students express learning difficulties, task pressure, or disappointment with academic results. Instead of providing a space for emotional validation and strategic support, those statements actually encourage students to suppress negative feelings and pretend everything is fine. In fact, academic guidance should be a platform for honestly and openly identifying learning obstacles and designing solutions that align with the needs and capacities of each individual. If the culture of toxic positivity is allowed to persist in mentoring practices, the student-faculty relationship will become a one-way relationship that emphasizes superficial resilience rather than empathy and growth.

In the personal experience category, the most frequently expressed phrase is "more references are available now than in the past," with a percentage of 58%. This shows a tendency to compare past and present conditions positively, but it risks denying someone's unique feelings or experiences. Meanwhile, the phrase "Even if I have more serious issues, I never feel as anxious as you do is the least used" (33%). This expression, although it contains a comparison of experiences, can be considered condescending and lacking empathy, so its use tends to be avoided. These findings suggest that such personal experience assumes that other people's problems should not stress them because there are others who have worse problems who often do not provide support or help to students who are under stress. This lack of empathy and understanding can create a toxic environment where students feel invalidated and unsupported in their struggles. It is important for educators to be mindful of the impact their words can have on students and to provide a supportive and compassionate learning environment.

Prevalent tendency among lecturers to compare students' current academic experiences with their own past struggles. Statements like "There are more sources of reference now than there used to be" and "People would have to put in more effort in my day" reflect an implicit expectation that today's students should find things easier or be more resilient simply because conditions have changed. This indicates a tendency among lecturers to compare their past experiences with the current conditions of students in a non-constructive context. While these remarks may be intended to motivate, they often come across as dismissive of the real and evolving challenges faced by students today. More concerning are statements such as "I've even got worse problems, but I'm never stressed like you" or "Don't get overreacted; I've failed many times more than you", which downplay students' emotional experiences and create a comparison-based communication pattern. This can foster guilt, shame, or feelings of inadequacy, especially when students are already vulnerable. By positioning the lecturer's experience as superior or more difficult, these messages invalidate students' current struggles and can silence them from expressing their feelings or seeking help. This reinforces a harmful narrative that resilience means suppressing emotion, which contradicts the principles of psychological well-being. Therefore, educators must strive for

empathetic dialogue by acknowledging the uniqueness of each student's situation rather than measuring it against their own past experiences.

In the context of academic guidance, such a communication pattern can lead to feelings of invalidation regarding the difficulties faced by students. Instead of providing practical solutions or emotional support, the lecturer shifts the focus to their own personal experiences, as if the students are "luckier" and should not complain. This can evoke feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and even loss of motivation to study among students. However, the main function of academic guidance is to help students understand their challenges objectively and find strategies to overcome them, not to compare or belittle the burdens they experience. Therefore, it is important for lecturers to realize that personal experiences are not always relevant to be used as comparisons in an academic context. On the contrary, a more student-centered and empathetic approach is greatly needed so that academic guidance can become a safe space for students to be open, reflect, and grow. The use of communication based on active listening and emotional validation can strengthen the lecturer-student relationship, build trust, and encourage more sustainable academic success.

The advice category shows the high level of dominance in the use of toxic optimistic phrases. The phrase "Never give up!" ranks at the top with a frequency of 65%. Although it sounds motivating, this phrase can become a form of emotional invalidation when delivered without considering someone's psychological context. On the other hand, "Failure is not an option" was only said by 25% of respondents, indicating that the pressure to not fail is considered less relevant or too demanding and thus rarely chosen in daily communication. These findings suggest that the verbal toxic positivity statement of the kind of advice often spoken to students tends to contain a message to keep fighting and not give up in the face of challenges. However, it should be noted that saying too much of this kind of statement can also burden students and make them feel unauthorized to feel negative emotions or experience failure. It is important for educators to be mindful of the messages they are sending to students and to create a supportive environment that allows for a healthy expression of emotions and acceptance of setbacks.

An affirmation type of verbal toxic positivity entails invalidating someone's feelings by constantly telling them to "just be positive" or "look on the bright side," without acknowledging their pain or struggles. Affirmations are often used as a form of support, but they can potentially become verbal toxic positivity if spoken without considering the actual conditions of the students. In the affirmation category, the phrase "Sure, you can" is the most frequently said (65%). This can be an indication that affirmation that seems supportive can become toxic if not accompanied by acknowledgment of the challenges someone faces. This statement closes the space to acknowledge the difficulties faced by students and tends to promote false optimism. As for the phrase "Rejection doesn't have to be a big deal; it's okay because the others are better than you," it occupies the lowest position (44%), possibly because it contains a comparison that is belittling and unconstructive. This shows that although affirmative phrases are often used, their insensitive forms tend to be avoided. Affirmative statements that downplay individual difficulties can result in low emotional validation, decreased self-efficacy, and the risk of inducing feelings of shame or inferiority. Empty affirmations like this can hinder students' self-awareness regarding their learning obstacles.

Advice and affirmative sentences are usually used in a toxic manner and could indicate a reluctance to dismiss or downplay students' emotions outright. Verbal toxic positivity can

negatively affect the motivation and self-confidence of students, as well as hinder their development. This can create a hostile learning environment where students feel pressured to suppress their true emotions in order to conform to societal norms of unwavering positivity. A more effective statement is to provide more specific support and appreciation for their achievements and efforts, thereby boosting their motivation and confidence. A more constructive guidance response should include recognition of students' struggles, followed by situationally responsive encouragement, such as providing process-based feedback or learning strategies. This approach builds reality-based confidence and supports self-regulated learning.

This result aligns with previous research findings (Indreswari et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2009), which state that enhancing one's positive self-perception may not be effective and may worsen one's situation, especially for those with low self-esteem. In particular, if someone lacks the ability to be an optimistic, upbeat person or the ability to positively interpret a situation that is currently unfolding from a positive perspective, then adopting a positive outlook or finding positive motivation will have a detrimental effect (Hafilia & Priyambodo, 2022; Lalufiansyah & Ariyanto, 2023; Subiyakto & Mutiani, 2019). Only positive aspects of a situation will benefit you if they are carried out in a context of ongoing events that cannot be controlled. If we experience any negative events together, we may benefit from any positive feedback or insights into future experiences. But if this happens in a situation that can be controlled, then we can even feel worse. In fact, less positive motivation can be used, especially when one feels that one's identity is threatened, as in the case of race-based negotiations that could end in a decline in mental health. (Perez & Soto, 2011). This shows an expanding understanding of the concept of verbal toxic positivity and how it can affect students in the learning environment.

Students' perceptions of triggering situations of verbal toxic positivity

Things can go wrong during the interaction between the lecturer and students, which can lead to verbal toxic positivity. This toxic positivity can create a barrier to open communication and hinder genuine connection between the lecturer and students. The following table shows possible situation that can trigger verbal toxic positivity.

Table 3. Types of Triggering Situations of Verbal Toxic Positivity within Lecturer-Students Interaction (∑=81)

Possible Situation of Verbal Toxic Positivity	Percentage
Uttering it repeatedly	23 (28%)
Uttering it while students feel depressed	22 (27%)
Uttering in public	18 (22%)
Uttering in an arrogant manner	11 (14%)
Uttering out in an offensive manner	6 (7%)

Settings become important when considering the impact of toxic positivity in academic settings. The findings in Table 3. show that verbal toxic positivity statements are most often repeated to students (28%). This mechanical repetition, though possibly intended to encourage, can lose its empathetic value over time and instead become counterproductive. It may make students feel that their individual struggles are being met with generic, surface-level platitudes rather than genuine support. This pattern shows that in the process of lecturer-student interactions,

especially in the context of learning or academic guidance, there is a tendency to use motivational phrases repeatedly, which are intended to uplift spirits, but can actually have a negative impact when the psychological condition of the students is not taken into account. Instead of providing support, the excessive repetition of positive statements in emotionally vulnerable conditions can actually be perceived as a form of denial of students' feelings and hinder healthy emotional expression.

The verbal toxic positivity also most likely happens when students are in a state of stress or experiencing emotional pressure (27%). This suggests that timing is crucial; even well-intended remarks may be perceived as dismissive or hurtful if not delivered with emotional attunement. This can create a sense of frustration and isolation for the student, as their legitimate concerns are being brushed aside with trite and dismissive responses (Putra, Ramadhanti, & Rizky, 2023). Students may also feel pressured to suppress their true emotions and only express positivity, leading to a lack of authenticity and genuine connection in the academic environment.

Public delivery of toxic positivity remarks, such as during lectures or open discussion forums (22%) was also identified as a trigger. When students receive comments in front of others, especially those that downplay their difficulties or impose positivity, it can lead to embarrassment or perceived judgment. This aligns with research (Dweck, 2016) that emphasizes the importance of psychological safety and emotional validation in learning environments. This situation illustrates how the interaction between lecturers and students sometimes does not provide a safe space to express difficulties or failures openly without fear of being judged or belittled in public. In the context of academic supervision, such practices can hinder healthy two-way communication and cause students to be reluctant to seek further help or guidance. When motivational expressions are normative and conveyed without context, students risk feeling misunderstood or even ashamed of their current situation.

Interestingly, statements delivered in an arrogant (14%) or offensive tone (7%) were less frequently perceived as verbal toxic positivity. This may indicate that students are more likely to classify such interactions under outright disrespect or harshness rather than under the more subtle form of toxic positivity, which often masquerades as kindness or encouragement. Nonetheless, these numbers still reinforce the need for lecturers to be mindful of their tone, body language, and non-verbal cues, as they contribute significantly to the way messages are received. These results reflect the broader findings of (Feltner, 2023; Praptiningsih & Putra, 2021), which argue that dismissive positivity can erode trust and alienate students, especially when mental health concerns are rising in higher education. The fear of being misunderstood or invalidated may discourage students from opening up about their struggles, resulting in unaddressed emotional distress and decreased academic engagement. Thus, the implications are clear: addressing these situational triggers is vital for cultivating an empathetic and psychologically safe academic atmosphere.

Students' perception possible psychological effect due to verbal toxic positivity

Toxic positivity, which involves an overly exaggerated positive outlook on the world, can lead to unrealistic expectations and conflicting perceptions of reality. It may result in individuals believing that success only happens to good people and that failure is a consequence of a bad

attitude (Feltner, 2023; Putra, Ramadhanti, Rahajeng, et al., 2023). The result of the questionnaire on the possible mental effect of verbal toxic positivity is shown in the following Table 4.

Table 4. Types of Possible Pqsychological Impacts of Verbal Toxic Positivity within Lecturer-Students Interaction (∑=81)

Possible Mental Impacts of Verbal Toxic Positivity	Percentage
having low self-esteem	17 (21%)
having repressed feelings	15 (19%)
Being left out	13 (16%)
being underestimated	12 (15%)
being desperate.	11 (14%)

Table 4 indicates that the most dominant psychological impact felt by students due to verbal toxic positivity in interactions with lecturers is low self-esteem, as expressed by 21% of respondents. This indicates that when overly simplified and repeated positive statements are made without considering the emotional context of the students, they actually feel inadequate or unable to meet expectations. Toxic positivity can create internal pressure to "stay happy," which actually undermines a person's ability to face complex emotional realities. In the context of academic mentoring, statements like "You can definitely do it" without concrete guidance can lead to hidden pressure, especially for students who are facing real academic difficulties.

As many as 19% of students also reported experiencing feelings of being depressed or unexpressed. (repressed feelings). This indicates that students feel they do not have a safe space to express negative emotions because they fear being perceived as weak or unprofessional. Rogers (1961) in his theory of unconditional positive regard, emphasizes the importance of empathy and acceptance in interpersonal relationships, including the teacher-student relationship. If the lecturer only responds to student complaints with phrases like "Don't think negatively" or "What's important is enthusiasm," then students are likely to suppress their emotions which may result in the rejection, minimization, and cancellation of human emotional experience. This reaction can the open communication that is greatly needed in the academic mentoring process.

Additionally, 16% of students reported feeling left out, and 15% felt belittled. (being underestimated) when verbal toxic positivity occurred. Effective communication in academic relationships requires an exchange of meanings based on empathy and equality. When lecturers fail to demonstrate an understanding of each student's unique circumstances, the academic relationship becomes imbalanced and risks causing students to withdraw from the mentoring process.

Lastly, 14% of students stated that they felt desperate due to interactions filled with toxic positivity. Statements that sound positive but are pressuring, such as "You must not fail" or "Everything must have a silver lining," can create the illusion that failure or negative emotions are not valid. According to the positivity theory criticized by Held (2002), the excessive force to always be positive can become a form of emotional denial that actually delays personal development. In the interaction between lecturers and students, especially in academic supervision, it is important for lecturers to balance motivation and emotional validation so that students feel understood, not judged. This attitude will create a supportive mentoring climate and encourage healthy academic and emotional growth.

DISCUSSION

This research identifies certain sentences, situations, and mental conditions that can trigger toxic positivity. This research identifies four main categories of verbal toxic positivity that often appear in lecturer-student interactions, namely worldview, personal experiences, advice, and affirmation. These four categories reflect a communication pattern that appears supportive but, in reality, can harm the psychological condition of students. In the context of academic guidance, words of advice and affirmation are often delivered with the intention of providing encouragement. However, when used without understanding the emotional context of the students, these statements have the potential to suppress legitimate expressions of negative feelings and reinforce a culture of pretense in facing academic difficulties.

The study results show that phrases in the categories of advice and affirmation are most often used by lecturers in academic interactions. This indicates a dominance of optimistic narratives in academic communication, which is often not accompanied by acknowledgment of the real difficulties faced by students. Lecturers sometimes feel more comfortable providing solutions or positive motivation rather than listening, affirming, or validating students' negative feelings. Sentences like "You have to stay positive," "Don't think about it too much," or "There's always a silver lining" can be forms of toxic positivity when said in situations where students actually need empathy and space to express disappointment, anxiety, or exhaustion. The category of personal experience in toxic positivity shows that many lecturers compare the current academic conditions with their past. Although the intention is to encourage students to be grateful or to strive harder, such statements often deny the unique emotional experiences of students and instead evoke feelings of guilt or inadequacy. Especially if accompanied by belittling statements like "I've been through worse but never as stressed as you," the mentoring relationship becomes unequal, erodes trust, and distances students from a safe space to share their challenges. Although generally well-intentioned, such narratives can create new psychological pressures, namely the demand to always be strong and not show vulnerability. In the long term, such communication patterns can weaken the emotional development of students and hinder the process of reality-based reflective learning.

The emotional context during the delivery of a message greatly determines whether a statement is constructive or becomes a form of toxic positivity. Verbal toxic positivity most often occurs when students experience mental pressure (27%) or when those phrases are repeated mechanically (28%). In this context, positive statements are no longer a form of support but rather a mechanism of denial of legitimate negative emotions. When students feel sad, disappointed, or anxious, they need empathy and a space for emotional validation, not shallow normative reinforcement. In the context of the dual role of lecturers as educators and companions in the academic and emotional development of students, the findings regarding toxic positivity in academic interactions have important implications for the implementation of academic guidance and counseling by lecturers.

Another important finding is the risk of verbal toxic positivity being conveyed in public spaces, such as in classrooms or open discussion forums. Statements that belittle or demand optimism can turn into verbal toxic positivity if delivered in public, causing students to feel ashamed, humiliated, or judged. This not only disrupts the psychological safety of students but also potentially hinders their courage to openly express difficulties. In the long term, this condition

can erode the trust between lecturers and students and diminish the quality of the mentoring relationship.

Various forms of verbal toxic positivity found in this study indicate the need for a paradigm shift in lecturer-student communication, especially in academic mentoring practices. According to several studies (Novitasari, 2023; Sokal et al., 2020; Sujarwo et al., 2020), toxic positivity in the academic environment can contribute to increased anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among students. This situation is exacerbated when students feel that their negative emotions are not accepted or not worthy of being felt. This not only impacts mental health but also the quality of the relationship between lecturers and students, which should be built on trust, empathy, and two-way communication. Moreover, the emergence of toxic positivity in academic interactions can indicate a lack of social competence among lecturers in communicating effectively and efficiently (Ripki et al., 2023). Lecturers who only focus on delivering positive messages without reading the emotional situation of students show a lack of social sensitivity in building healthy communication.

This awareness will strengthen the trust between students and lecturers, open up more open communication spaces, and create a more positive and productive learning environment. Communication that only emphasizes optimism without acknowledging real conditions actually hinders the process of self-reflection and problem-solving. On the contrary, effective academic guidance should provide space for students to openly express their challenges and be met with empathy, active listening, and strategic support. A positive communication pattern is essential for building a healthy academic atmosphere. Such communication can, regrettably, turn toxic and psychologically damaging if it is not accompanied by emotional sensitivity and social competence. As research results in other contexts (Bosveld, 2021; Fortuna & Sergio Nunes, 2020; Qian et al., 2019; Schmidt & Wiegand, 2017; Sokal et al., 2020; Waseem et al., 2017) indicate, it is important for lecturers to be wise in choosing language and approach when interacting with students. Lecturers do not only help students build healthy coping mechanisms by acknowledging and validating negative emotions. He or she also actively contributes to developing their academic and emotional resilience.

These research findings expand the understanding of how verbal toxic positivity can become an obstacle to healthy interpersonal relationships in higher education. Referring to previous literature (Indreswari et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2009), contextually inappropriate positive motivation can actually worsen the situation, especially for students with low self-confidence. Although this discussion provides an overview of the types, triggering situations, and impacts of toxic positivity in lecturer-student interactions, there are several limitations that need to be considered. First, the lack of direct empirical data from verbal interactions studied qualitatively or quantitatively limits the generalization of these findings in the broader context of higher education. Second, students' perceptions of toxic positivity are highly subjective, requiring a methodological approach capable of capturing emotional and social nuances in depth, such as in-depth interviews or direct observations. Third, cultural factors and local norms within the educational context in Indonesia can also influence how toxic positivity is interpreted and accepted by students, so the results of this study may only be applied in a national context.

Therefore, further research is needed to examine why some students are more vulnerable to the negative effects of toxic positivity compared to others. Further research is also needed

involving more participants from various cultural backgrounds and educational institutions to produce a more comprehensive and representative understanding of this phenomenon. Further research is also needed to find a more inclusive and supportive approach model in academic guidance that can effectively address the issue of toxic positivity in educational settings. Through this model, lecturers can also help students not only achieve academic success but also develop mental resilience and emotional balance. This becomes an important foundation in creating a quality, humanistic, and student welfare-oriented learning environment.

CONCLUSION

This research identifies four main groups of verbal toxic positivity emerges in higher academic settings in interactions between teachers and students. They are worldview, personal experiences, advice, and affirmation. The phenomenon of verbal toxic positivity in academic interactions between teachers and students occurs when teachers provide excessively positive motivation without considering the emotional state of the students. In academic guidance, words of advice and affirmation are often given with the intention of providing encouragement, but when they are used without understanding the emotional context of the students, these statements can suppress legitimate expressions of negative feelings and reinforce a culture of pretense. These phrases often seem supportive, but they can harm the psychological well-being of students. This shows that communication that is overly focused on optimism can ignore the emotional needs of students to be understood and validated. The imbalance risks of the verbal toxic positivity occurence can disrupt the relationship between teacher and student and reduce the effectiveness of academic guidance.

This research has limitations because it only focuses on the description of interactions between students and lecturers within academic councelor settings, without involving institutional perspectives or nonverbal communication dimensions. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore toxic positivity more broadly, both from the perspective of academic policies and within the context of more complex social relations in the campus environment. Further studies can also develop measurement instruments that can detect the intensity and impact of verbal toxic positivity on students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Various forms of verbal toxic positivity found in this study indicate the need for a paradigm shift in communication between teacher and student, especially in academic guidance practices. Therefore, it is important to study possible faculty training programs design that emphasize the importance of emotional validation, process-based feedback, and recognition of students' learning challenges as efforts to create an inclusive academic atmosphere that is psychologically safe and supports the holistic development of students.

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