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## Student Academic Stress Management Strategies through Spiritual and Psychological Approaches

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of academic stress among students has affected their mental health, morale, interest, and learning achievement. For this reason, universities should have good management skills for managing student stress so that the quality of education can be maintained properly. This study aims to uncover strategies for managing student academic stress through spiritual and psychological approaches. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis based on literature studies obtained from the internet, in the form of journals, books, YouTube, online news, and social media. The results showed that spiritual and psychological approaches can minimize student academic stress. The strategies applied through the spiritual approach are: building a religious culture; the practice of dhikr; praying in congregation; prayer; and reading the Qur'an. The strategies applied through the psychological approach are effective time management, relaxation techniques to relieve physical tension, and meditation to calm the mind. The unique finding in this study is the importance of a balance between the two approaches to dealing with stress. By understanding spiritual values and applying appropriate psychological techniques, individuals can more effectively manage stress and maintain their mental and physical health. When used in balance, these strategies provide individuals with a holistic solution to academic stress.

**KEYWORDS:** Academic stress, students, spiritual approach, psychological approach

### INTRODUCTION

People face problems differently, and not everyone can overcome life's obstacles. It is clear that social difficulties, such as problems with friendships, work, education, family, and romance, are likely to be the cause of the increasing suicide rate, especially in Indonesia (Febiola, 2023). It is commonplace among adults, even students, when they are unable to handle the stress of pre-existing problems. This will lead to tragic outcomes such as running away or, worse, suicide. The American Psychological Association defines suicide as the act in which a person kills. Suicide is still an issue in the world today; up to 800,000 people are said to die by suicide every year. This is one of the major problems that must be addressed through the psychology of religion approach (Chai et al., 2022).

According to Hurlock, students are generally in the early adult age range, which is between the ages of 18 and 40. This period of life is a period of searching for stability and a reproductive

period full of problems and emotional tensions (Primanita & Lestari, 2018). Students experience various demands that they must fulfill daily, including academic demands. Al-Dubai, al-Naggar, al-Shagga, and Rampal suggested that one of the main factors causing stress in students is academic problems. As a result of these demands, many students face serious mental health crises (Husnar et al., 2017).

When students want to continue their studies at a university, it may be terrifying, but the stress of acquiring knowledge can endanger their lives. Students are the nation's young generation, and it is expected that they can contribute greatly to the success of this country. Due to the changing and modifying nature of study plans and activities, students are prone to stress. Everyone experiences stress in different ways and to varying degrees. Academic problems are one of the many elements that contribute to stress. Based on previous research, stress caused by academic difficulties accounted for 52% of the components, interpersonal interactions for 28%, and environmental factors for 20%. A previous investigation of 25 university students by the researcher revealed that 100% of students experienced academic stress, with the clue that students have a condition of frustration, conflict, burden, or self-mandatory pressure due to academic demands (Damayanti & Samaria, 2021).

According to Islamic belief, stress is caused by a person's heart drifting away from Allah SWT. The relationship between a servant and his creator will weaken if there is a growing gap in the servant's heart between Allah and himself. This can give the impression that there is no way out of the various problems a person is experiencing and that life is difficult (Burhani & Fadhila, 2023). The impact of stress will get worse if not handled properly. One way to control and reduce this impact is to increase spirituality (Hamka & Yusuf, 2023). According to Malone and Dadswell, spirituality consists of optimistic and realistic thinking while assisting a person in making the most of difficult situations. It enhances mental well-being, positive emotions, and rational problem-solving to strengthen immunity (Malone & Dadswell, 2018). According to research by Kaufman et al., external well-being enhances the adaptive functioning of healthy behaviors (Kaufman et al., 2019). Each religion follows a unique set of spiritual practices. There are two types of relationships in Islamic spirituality: the relationship with humanity (horizontal) and the relationship with Allah (vertical) as God (Hamka et al., 2020).

The relationship with humans is based on helping others (alms) to ease their burdens or difficulties, while the relationship with God is based on performing worship, such as dhikr, prayer, and sharing (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016). This has the potential to improve people's relationship with God and make them happier (Hamka & Astuti, 2019). Therefore, spiritual encounters are an important component of religious life (Desti Azania & Naan, 2021). Spirituality has a positive impact on human mental health through health measures, providing social support, and improving well-being (Fardin, 2020). This study offers solutions to control stress, namely through understanding spiritual values and psychological approaches. The selection of these two approaches is based on the consideration that the two approaches have a functional relationship with one another. In spiritual understanding, such as dhikr, prayer, and reading the Qur'an, there is an inseparable unity, so doing one of these three things can cover other approaches. The psychological approach also has a highly functional relationship; for example, when doing meditation, the process has similarities with relaxation. Likewise, in the Islamic approach, when done, you can feel the impact of meditation and relaxation (Bunyamin, 2021).

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method through descriptive analysis based on literature studies obtained from books, journals, online news, and other electronic data sources. The existing data is then used as material for analysis to understand student academic stress management strategies through spiritual and

psychological approaches. After being compiled and processed properly, the data is presented as a journal article.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study of stress was first conducted by Hans Selye in 1950 and is seen as the main figure in stress studies. Selye defined stress as the body's nonspecific response to environmental demands, leading to physiological responses, caused by stressful events (stressors) (Hendriani, 2018). Several factors can cause stress, such as trauma, nervous tension, heat, cold, muscle fatigue, polluted air, and radiation. The body reacts to stress in the same way it responds to danger through a series of biochemical changes called the General Adaptation Syndrome (Ahmad, 2020).

Stress is a neutral concept and refers to things that are often experienced and felt by humans in their daily lives. Stress is part of human life; everyone has experienced and will experience stress disorders, whether mild, moderate, or severe. Stress is an integral part of modern civilization today, whether in the family environment, school environment, or community environment, and can be experienced by all elements of society regardless of age, gender, and socio-economic status (Saleh Baqtayyan, 2015).

Many definitions of stress are put forward by experts according to their paradigm. According to Smith and Lutgendorf, stress can specifically be defined as an automatic physical response to challenges or other situations that require a person to adapt to change (Permata et al., 2019). Vermont defines stress as a mismatch between environmental demands (stressors) and a person's ability to meet these demands. Khan stated that stress occurs when a person faces a situation that is considered very stressful and is unable to manage or make adjustments properly, causing disturbances in physical and mental health. This is Lazarus and Folkman's view that the state of stress experienced by a person will have an unfavorable effect, both physiologically and psychologically (Maryam, 2017).

One type of stress is academic stress, which is caused by excessive student workload, competition, failure, financial factors, poor relationships between students and lecturers, and family problems (Busari, 2014). According to Barsel et al., academic stress is the subjective perception of academic situations or responses felt by learners (students) in the form of physical reactions, behavior, thoughts, and negative emotions that arise due to educational or academic demands (Barseli et al., 2017; Ariyani et al., 2023).

Academic stress in students is something that has been widely researched and identified among the causes as being due to too many tasks, competition between students, failure, financial factors, poor relationships between students and lecturers, and family problems at home (Busari, 2014). The results of a survey conducted by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors found a growth in psychological problems among college students of around 95% in counseling centers across America. The survey also found an increase in the number of students experiencing serious psychological problems between 2013 and 2014 in 70% of counseling centers on various campuses in America (Reetz et al., 2014).

Alvin suggests several internal factors that cause academic stress. The mindset of individuals will be tested when they have expectations, whether they can control the situation at hand or not. Another factor is the individual's belief in their ability to achieve certain expectations. Human abilities have limits, while belief in something that has limits can cause discrepancies and collisions with real conditions. In the end, these expectations trigger distress in individuals.

An external factor that causes academic stress is the pressure to excel. Individuals who have expectations of their academics do not want to lose competitiveness in achievement. Individuals will always strive to achieve high levels of achievement to get praise from the surrounding environment and take pride in themselves. Another external factor is the demands of social status; as stated by Averill, Catlin, and Chon (Worgan et al., 2013), expectations arise when getting social

acceptance. Education level is also one of the symbols of social status. Successful individuals will achieve high social status, but success is always accompanied by failure. Individuals must try and struggle to face various problems to achieve it. Thus, the higher the individual's goal to achieve social status, the more vulnerable they are to experiencing stress (Husnar et al., 2017).

In general, people who experience distress cannot manage stress, so it hurts them. If they fail to choose the right coping strategy, stress can hurt a person, such as physical health problems due to the occurrence of psychological disorders called psycho-somatic or loss of individual happiness. Therefore, it is very important to understand the early symptoms of stress and immediately manage it properly so as not to cause ongoing negative effects.

### **Student Academic Stress Management Strategies**

In this study, there are two general approaches to managing student academic stress, namely through a spiritual approach and a psychological approach, as explained below.

#### **Spiritual Approach**

Currently, there is a tendency for an increase in religious studies in the Muslim community, both from academic groups and the general public. The impact of the increase in religious studies is an increase in awareness of the practice of religious teachings. This can be observed from the increasing enthusiasm of the community to attend prayers in congregation and the formation of Islamic study groups such as taklim assemblies and dhikr groups that periodically conduct taklim, dhikr, and tadarrus al-Qur'an in congregation (KompasTV 2020).

Normatively, a Muslim who practices the teachings of Islam properly and istiqamah (obligatory and sunnah) will have high mental peace and is not prone to stress because all Islamic teachings have an impact on improving mental health for those who practice them. However, not all Muslims have a good understanding and practice of Islamic teachings. Therefore, this study discusses three practices in Islam that can be used as a reference for managing stress, namely dhikr, prayer, and reading the Qur'an.

#### **Dhikr**

The practice of dhikr is not foreign to Muslims. Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH until now, dhikr has been carried out by Muslims who want to purify the heart, reassure the soul, and get closer to Allah SWT. Dhikr is either chanted in the heart or recited, either individually or in groups. Many benefits can be obtained for people who do dhikr. In addition to getting a great reward from Allah swt., people who dhikr also get direct benefits in the form of peace of mind, as said by Allah swt. in QS al-Ra'd/13:28. Ar-Ra'd 13:28 In this study, there are two general approaches to managing student academic stress, namely through a spiritual approach and a psychological approach, as explained below.

الْفُؤُوبُ تَطْمَئِنُ اللَّهُ يَذْكُرُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَلَوْبُهُمْ وَتَطْمَئِنُ عَامِلُو الْأَيْنَ

(i.e.) those who believe and whose hearts are calmed by the remembrance of Allah. Remember, it is only with the remembrance of Allah that the heart is at peace.

Dhikr in language is remembering, while in terms it is a serious endeavor to divert human ideas, thoughts, and attention to God and the hereafter. This dhikr aims to reverse the entire human character and divert one's main attention from the world that has been very much loved towards the hereafter, which has so far not been recognized at all (Ilyas, 2017).

The diligence of a believer in dhikr to mention the name of Allah swt. by saying *bertasbih*, *bertakbir*, *beristigfar*, praying, and reading the Qur'an will lead to the purity of his soul and will make him feel calm. The peace of mind obtained by the practitioners of dhikr will inhibit the work of the sympathetic nervous network and stimulate an increase in the performance of the

parasympathetic nervous system, which is the nerve that secretes 'endorphins' that stimulate the creation of peace and tranquility.

Several scientific studies have found the effect of the intensity of dhikr and prayer practice on reducing anxiety, increasing immunity, and promoting peace of mind. Fatemi (Saleh & Riyadi, 2010), found various stress reduction techniques used by nursing students in Iran, including social support strategies, establishing friendships or making new friends, humor strategies, and spiritual strategies of dhikr and prayer.

The aspect of dhikr that can cause calmness for those who practice it is the feeling of always being with and under the supervision of Allah swt. Yurisaldi found that sentences containing jahr letters, such as the sentences '*tawhid' laa ilaaha illallah*' and '*istighfar' astagfirullah*', can facilitate the removal of carbon dioxide from the lungs (Saleh & Riyadi, 2010).

The results of research on the benefits of dhikr can be an encouragement for Muslims to do dhikr intensively to improve mental health. Dhikr is a light worship because it can be performed in all conditions, does not require costs, and can be performed anytime and anywhere (at home, at work, and in mosques). Dhikr has high virtues and great rewards from Allah swt. and has functional benefits for humans, namely that it can stimulate the endorphin fluid in the brain, which causes the soul to feel peaceful and serene, and it can increase the body's immune system, which has an impact on improving health levels (M. K. Nashori 2022).

### **Prayer**

The most frequently described religious and spiritual activity used to manage excessive academic pressure is prayer. Praying reportedly allows students to ask for help and helps them get through academic challenges and other problems (Park & Kim, 2018). The results of a study by Rahmawati showed that 73.5% of students prayed to God very often and believed in their prayers. Similarly, more than half performed strategies by trying to strengthen themselves and being grateful at all times (Rizkillah & Rahmawati, 2022). These results are in line with previous research that the coping strategies most frequently used by international students are praying and thanking all (Defina & Rizkillah, 2021). Bartkowski et al. reviewed several research results showing that prayer performed in a congregation and carried out in an orderly and solemn manner is very effective in overcoming depression and anxiety, both in the short and long term. Shihab recounts the experience of Alexis Carrel, a surgeon who once received the Nobel Prize in medicine, who said, 'Many of the patients he handled experienced accelerated recovery due to a lot of prayers' (Shihab, 2018). The results of a survey by the Times magazine and CNN in 1996 showed that 70% of patients believed that faith in God and diligent prayer could accelerate the healing process of the patient's illness, and 64% of patients wanted doctors to provide psycho-religious prayer therapy in addition to medical therapy (Hawari, 2005).

Prayer is important for believers as a form of testimony to human weakness and a statement of the greatness of Allah SWT. Islam teaches that all human activities are always accompanied by prayers, from the time they wake up in the morning until they go to sleep again at night. Muslims who always pray will always think positively because all their life problems have been submitted to Allah as the ruler of all creatures, and the things they face are seen as the best, which Allah has designed for them (Bunyamin, 2021).

### **Reading the Qur'an**

The Qur'an is the greatest mu'jizat that has been revealed by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. It is worthy of reward for those who read it and can be an antidote for those who have psychological problems (Yanggo, 2016). The Qur'an is also referred to as As Shifa, which means healer, having the power to handle and cure mental distress. It has been revealed in the Qur'an Surah Yunus verse 57: 'O mankind, verily there has come to you a lesson from your Lord and a cure for the diseases in the breast and guidance and mercy for those who believe'.

The meaning of the above verse is that the Qur'an is a cure for all kinds of diseases, including liver diseases that cause stress. The heart disease referred to here is feeling anxious because of thinking about the assumptions of the community, feeling anxious because of thinking about the family at home, feeling guilty for making mistakes so that they are imprisoned, feeling discouraged for fear of being ostracized by the community, and so on (Nugraheni et al., 2018).

Based on research conducted by Ansyah, it is explained that tadabbur surat al-Insyirah training can reduce academic stress levels in students. This means that appreciation of the Qur'an, in this case Q.S. al-Insyirah, can be used as an approach in psychotherapy against psychological disorders. Although this research is limited to tadabbur on Surah al-Inshirah, reading and tadabbur on other verses can still increase inner calm and eliminate stress symptoms in a person (Ansyah et al., 2019).

Research Ansyah proves that counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology reduces the subject's academic stress (Ansyah et al., 2019). These results reinforce research by Intan Aghita Putri and H. Fuad Nashori that applying Al-Fatihah as a form of therapy can help reduce psychological problems (Putri & Nashori, 2021). This also includes listening to the Murottal Al-Quran to reduce patient anxiety before surgery (Faridah, 2015).

The Qur'an, a guide to life for Muslims, has been proven by many studies to have a functional impact on improving human mental health. Therefore, reading the Qur'an must be a Muslim movement while studying its meaning. To obtain the optimal impact of reading the Qur'an, one needs to pay attention to ethics in reading the Qur'an, pay attention to tajweed, try to contemplate the meaning of the verses, and practice the instructions in personal, family, and social life (Bunyamin, 2021).

### **Psychological Approach**

There are many ways offered by experts to manage and prevent stress from hurting individuals who experience it. Before choosing and determining the method to be used, one needs a good understanding of stress and all its aspects, including the characteristics of individuals experiencing stress, to choose the right strategy for managing stress. The following will outline some psychological strategies to manage stress.

### **Time Management**

Time is one of the important resources that must be controlled properly so that the work done can be completed according to the time that has been set. Work that cannot be completed according to the set time plan can be a source of stress for workers and can cause anxiety or depression, which results in decreased work productivity and even negative impacts in the form of physical disorders. Therefore, time management skills are needed so that the work done can be effective and efficient.

Students or workers who can manage time by setting goals, prioritizing, and evaluating the process and results of what is done will help complete planned tasks and work effectively and efficiently to avoid time deadlines that often cause a person to work under pressure so as not to achieve good results and even fail to complete the task.

### **Relaxation**

Relaxation is currently one of the alternative psychological approaches that are widely used in managing stress and anxiety, either as a separate therapy or as part of a holistic therapy. Manzoni et al. argued that the practice of relaxation varies but has the same goal, which is to produce an impact on relieving stress symptoms characterized by slow breathing, decreasing blood pressure, reduced oxygen consumption, and the emergence of mental tension (Manzoni et al., 2008).

Relaxation is the concentration of the mind so that the muscles become relaxed. In a calm state, the blood vessels become elastic to facilitate blood flow throughout the body, which causes the feeling to be comfortable and warm. The heart rate will slow down, and the work of the heart is not heavy, which will affect the work of other organs of the body. Relaxation can also be defined as a calming meditation with concentrated breathing with concentrated breathing to restore the body to a fit state.

Gangadharan and Madani's research on nursing students at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia showed that progressive muscle relaxation is very effective in reducing depression, anxiety, and stress levels in nursing students (Gangadharan et al., 2018). After the intervention, most of the participants felt relaxed, and the negative emotional state became normal again so that they could carry out learning activities in a state that was no longer depressed.

According to Aryani, the real benefits of relaxation training include: (1) relaxation will make individuals better able to avoid excessive reactions due to stress; (2) stress-related problems such as hypertension, headaches, and insomnia can be reduced or treated with relaxation; (3) reducing anxiety levels; some evidence has shown that individuals with high levels of anxiety can show positive physiological effects through relaxation exercises; (4) reducing the likelihood of stress-related disorders and controlling anticipatory anxiety before anxiety-provoking situations, such as when facing an exam; (5) reducing certain behaviors that often occur during periods of stress, such as reducing the number of cigarettes consumed, alcohol use, drug use, and overeating; (6) increasing enthusiasm in performing daily activities; and (7) fatigue, mental activity, and delayed physical exercise can be overcome more quickly by using exercise (Aryani, 2016).

## **Meditation**

Meditation is the activity of concentrating the mind on a particular target with an optimal level of awareness and feeling the effects of meditation in itself. If a person is not aware of the meditation process or is carried out in a state of unconsciousness, it is only called concentration (Suryani, 2000). The effect of meditation is a decrease in brainwave frequency; breathing becomes slower; and oxygen demand decreases. The brainwave frequency reaches an alpha state; this state is called a homeostatic or balanced state. With this state of brain calmness, the brain will release endorphins that function to minimize pain and stimulate calmness and peace within, and self-healing will occur.

Meditation is often used by therapists to treat clients' psychological disorders, either alone or complemented with other strategies. The purpose of meditation, according to Widodo and Purwanigsih, is to accustom the body to regulate the rhythm of breath appropriately to accelerate concentration and appreciation, accelerate the healing process, reduce stress levels, and improve health levels (Widodo & Purwanigsih, 2013).

Meditation was originally part of the worship practices of Hindus and Buddhists, but meditation has undergone changes and developments because it has been used as an alternative to fitness recovery and therapy for people with psychological disorders. In Islam, the practice of solemn prayer and dhikr is equivalent to the practice of meditation. Therefore, Muslims who are not skilled in carrying out meditation practices can simply sit quietly and solemnly, then pray and dhikr. God willing, they will get the same calming effect as people who practice meditation, which is even more meaningful because there are Divine values in it.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the importance of a combination of spiritual and psychological aspects in managing stress. In the context of spiritual values, particularly in Islam, practices such as dhikr, prayer, and recitation of the Qur'an are recognized as effective means of relieving stress and

achieving inner calm. In the psychological context, time management, relaxation techniques, and meditation are proven approaches to managing mental stress. Spiritual approaches emphasize the close relationship between the individual and their values. Dhikr, prayer, and recitation of the Qur'an have a significant impact on mental calmness, bringing awareness of a higher existence and protection and providing peace in the face of stress. Meanwhile, the psychological approach leads to stress management with a focus on understanding time, relaxation techniques to ease physical tension, and meditation as a way to calm the mind. These two approaches, combined, offer a holistic view of stress. The integration of spiritual values with psychological techniques provides an opportunity for individuals to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, achieve mental balance, and improve their physical health. These strategies, when used in a balanced manner, can provide a solid foundation for dealing with daily stresses while also providing long-term benefits for maintaining overall health. In managing stress, it is important to understand that there is no single solution that can be applied to every individual. Each person has different preferences and needs for dealing with stress. However, combining spiritual and psychological approaches provides a broad foundation for comprehensively addressing stress challenges. This underscores the importance of not only managing stress at the moment but also building a strong mental health foundation to face future challenges. By considering both of these aspects, individuals can acquire effective tools to deal with stress and maintain holistic wellness, reducing and even eliminating one's stress burden.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Akhmad Syahri contributed to compiling and analyzing concepts about strategies for handling student academic stress through a spiritual approach, as well as designing and compiling this article according to the template.

Sri Afsinatun contributed to finding additional references to complete the data for this research.

Nimatul Dinawisda contributed to compiling and analyzing concepts about strategies for handling student academic stress through a psychological approach.

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