

ACADEMIC STRESS COPING STRATEGIES USING SPIRITUAL APPROACHES TO IMPROVE STUDENT RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress can have a significant impact on students, both their thoughts, behaviour and emotions. Therefore, their resilience needs to be increased to resolve their problems immediately. This phenomenological research aimed to explore students' experiences in increasing resilience due to academic stress by using a spiritual approach. Research informants comprised 10 students who succeeded in increasing resilience due to academic stress with coping strategies using a spiritual approach. The research data were obtained through interviews, analyzed using the Melis and Huberman analysis model. Then the validity of the data was checked by submerging triangulation and extending the observations. The study results showed that students use three coping strategies with a spiritual approach to deal with academic stress. First is positive thinking, which is always optimistic about the problems faced. Believing that in every problem faced, there is always a silver lining and there is a way out. Second, positive action always tries to solve problems by carrying out various positive activities. Third, positive hopping, namely always hoping and praying to Allah SWT so that he will be given strength, convenience and guidance in overcoming problems.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Academic Stress, Spiritual Approach, Resilience

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INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement has a very important role in human life, both now and in the future. With good academic achievement, individuals will get satisfaction (Kusumastuti, 2020). Good academic achievement can increase individual confidence in planning their future (Lidia Susanti, 2021). However, in reality, individuals face various problems in achieving academic achievement in the educational process. As a result, individuals experience academic stress (Andiarna & Kusumawati, 2020).

Academic stress is a negative emotional and behavioral response given by someone to academic demands or something related to learning activities (Masitoh, 2020). Academic stress usually arises due to a person's negative assessment of himself, especially related to the academic field (Lubis

et al., 2021). Academic stress symptoms can be grouped into psychological and physical symptoms (Barseli et al., 2018). Psychological symptoms include anxiety, sadness, loss of enthusiasm for learning, and even depression due to their inability to meet the academic demands imposed on them (Siregar & Putri, 2019). Physical symptoms include difficulty sleeping, lack of appetite, headaches, and diarrhea (S. Utami et al., 2020).

Several factors cause a person to experience academic stress. The first is the academic load. Academic burdens that can trigger academic stress include the large number of assignments given by teachers/lecturers, exam period that they have to face, and worries about the grades obtained not as expected. This condition, in turn, will make students spend time learning and less socializing. The result is that individuals are

increasingly depressed (Oktavia et al., 2019). Second, the interaction with classmates is less harmonious. Less harmonious interactions with classmates due to academic competition or disputes can result in discomfort in learning, which in turn impacts the decrease in enthusiasm for learning (Salmon & Santi, 2021). Third, pressure from family. Family pressures that can trigger academic stress include parents expecting their children to get good learning outcomes, parental indifference to children's education, conflicts in the family, and parents' unfair treatment of children (S. Utami et al., 2020). Fourth, individuals' worry about the future. Future worries that often trigger academic stress are worries about the chosen major that is not in line with the demands of the world of work and worries about the future after completing their studies. These worries result in the individual not being focused on his learning (Putri et al., 2020). Another opinion explains that academic stress can be caused by intense competition, more variety, work positions, increasingly rapid technological developments, and parents' high expectations (Maulinda & Rahayu, 2021). This condition is exacerbated by the inability of individuals to meet the demands of the times (Oktavia et al., 2019).

Academic stress is often experienced by each individual who undergoes the learning process but has different levels. Some are moderate, heavy, and very heavy so they can hinder learning activities (Harahap et al., 2020). Academic stress at a very heavy level can hurt individuals psychologically and physically, and it can even cause negative behavior, such as drinking alcohol and drugs (Hamrat et al., 2019). This is done solely to divert feelings of depression due to academic stress (Norma et al., 2021). The results showed that in 2020 9,666 students experienced academic stress, 36.9% at a moderate level, 10.6% severe, and 0.8% very severe (Affani, 2021). Previous research also showed that

42.5% of academic stress was caused by high academic workloads, 38.9% due to worries about the future, 9.7% due to family pressure, and 7.9% due to a lack of harmonious interactions with friends (Khasanah & Mamnuah, 2021). A critical aspect of preventing and alleviating academic stress is building individual resilience in order to be able to survive in the face of various pressures and difficulties.

Resilience is adapting and thriving in adversity (Alexopoulou et al., 2019; Trigueros et al., 2020; Van Hoek et al., 2019). Resilience can also be interpreted as the ability to deal with pressure (Appukuttan & Mathur, 2022; Duhan, 2020) or respond positively to various difficulties encountered (Unachukwu et al., 2020). There are several characteristics that individuals are said to have good resilience, including being independent, having above average intelligence, having a positive attitude, being optimistic, having strong self-awareness, having varied desires, and being involved in social activities (Sholichah et al., 2019). Another opinion explains that individuals have good resilience characterized by perseverance, persistence, hard work, focus on goals, being adaptive, and controlling anxiety and negative emotions (Amelasasih et al., 2019; Salim & Fakhurrozi, 2020; L. H. Utami, 2020). Resilience has a vital role for every individual, including students. With good resilience, it can help students to rise and survive in the face of challenging conditions and various pressures that are being faced, including in dealing with academic stress.

Many aspects are related to academic stress and resilience. Several research results found a significant relationship between excessive fear and overload with academic stress and between the use of coping strategies on students' fear and stress levels (Morales-Rodríguez, 2021). Other researchers also found a significant influence between emotional intelligence and resilience on

academic stress and exam anxiety (Trigueros et al., 2020). The academic stream is also significantly related to students' resilience, adaptability, and physical health (Kennett et al., 2021). Research put forward by Li & Hasson, (2020) also found that the level of resilience and psychological health has a strong relationship with the stress level of students. Therefore it is imperative to build resilience to prevent and relieve student stress.

Based on an initial study conducted at IAIN Curup, it was found that 10 students experienced academic stress. Three experienced severe academic stress due to online learning, and 7 of them experienced mild academic stress. Ten students who are experiencing academic stress are now able to get up after attending counseling using a spiritual coping strategy (Interview with informan D.H. R., September 29, 2021). Coping is a cognitive and behavioral activity to awaken a person's ability to adapt to stressful situations (Clark & Hunter, 2019). One of the coping strategies is spiritual coping, namely, a coping strategy by increasing understanding and practice of religious teachings (A. Z. Ibrahim & Othman, 2020; M. A. Ibrahim et al., 2020).

Based on previous research and preliminary studies conducted, no study has been found that discusses stress coping strategies with a spiritual approach to increase student resilience. This study explores students' experiences who can rise from academic stress after undergoing spiritual coping. With this research, it is hoped that it can add insight and understanding that adversity due to academic stress can be revived through spiritual approach.

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research used a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2019; Kahija, 2017). This study explored students' experiences in increasing resilience due to

academic stress using spiritual coping. Research informants were students of the Curup State Islamic Institute (IAIN) who managed to recover from academic stress by using spiritual coping carried out by the Curup IAIN Guidance and Counseling Labor. The research informants amounted to 10 people. Two students of the Islamic Education Counseling Guidance Undergraduate Program, three students of the Islamic Religious Education Undergraduate Program, 1 Islamic Religious Education student Master Program, 1 student of Tadris Mathematics Bachelor, 1 student of English Tadris Bachelor Program, and two students of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Bachelor of Education Teacher Program. Informants were determined based on researchers' data obtained at the Curup IAIN Guidance and Counseling Labor. The researchers used the criteria to determine whether research informants were students who suffered from stress after attending counseling services using spiritual coping strategies.

The research informants were determined using a purposive sampling technique (Sugiono, 2019). The data were collected by using semi-structured interviews (Nazir, 2019). In collecting data, researchers interviewed research informants until the data obtained answers the research questions. The data obtained were analyzed using the Melis and Huberman data analysis model, which consisted of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2018; Sugiono, 2019). To obtain accurate data, the data obtained is checked for validity using extended interview techniques and source triangulation (Creswell, 2019). An extension of the interview was carried out if the data obtained did not answer the research questions in the first phase of the interview. The researcher conducted the second interview phase until the data was as expected. Source

triangulation was carried out by comparing the data obtained from one informant with another.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Symptoms and Causative Factors

Based on the study results, several symptoms of academic stress experienced by different students can be expressed. Some students experienced anxiety if they get low grades that are not as expected and had an impact on the termination of the Bidik Misi scholarship (Interview with informan D.H.R., October 15, 2021). There were also those who were characterized by mild depression and filled with feelings of sadness because of high academic demands while the learning process has not normally been running (Interview with informan D.P.S., October 16, 2021). Another informant explained that the emergence of academic stress symptoms was accompanied by decreased appetite, unable to sleep, and decreased self-confidence (Interview with informan S.R., October 17, 2021). Symptoms of academic stress were also marked by decreased interest, both in doing academic tasks (Interview with informant B.A., Interview with informant, October 18, 2021), attending lectures, and conducting mid-term and end-semester exams (Interview with informan R.P.S., October 19, 2021).

Symptoms of stress experienced by students have something in common with symptoms of academic stress experienced by individuals in general. Kumar (2017) explains that one of the symptoms of academic stress that individuals often experience is emotional tension. Another opinion explains several symptoms that characterize academic stress. First, physical symptoms, such as stomach pain, tiredness, headache, and cold sweats (Ardi, 2021; Pendry et al., 2020). Second, symptoms of the mind, such as confusion, chaotic thoughts, loss of hope, decreased self-confidence, and negative thinking (González-Torres et al., 2021). Third, behavioral

symptoms include lying, undisciplined, difficulty concentrating, and not caring about learning material (Trevethan et al., 2022). Fourth, emotional symptoms include irritability, disappointment, panic, and fear (Moawad, 2020).

The study's results also revealed several things that cause students to experience academic stress. First, there is a change in the lecture system from offline to online. The online lecture system uses several media, including WhatsApp, Google Meet, and Zoom (Interview with informant G.A.Z., October 19, 2021). Among students who studied online, they experienced internet network problems (Interview with informant M.J., October 20, 2021), and there were also those who experienced economic limitations in purchasing internet data packages (Interview with informant E.F., October 21, 2021). At the same time, the lecture continued (Interview with informant N. E., October 22, 2021). All assignments given by lecturers must be sent using the internet network (Interview with informant M. M., October 23, 2021). As a result, students were anxious and worried that their learning outcomes would decline and had the impact on Bidik Misi scholarship that has been obtained so far (Interview with informant D.M., October 24, 2021).

Second, it was not easy to find references for making assignments (Interview with informant F.Y., October 24, 2021). During online lectures, lecturers also give some assignments to students. These assignments are in the form of personal assignments and group assignments (Interview with informant H., October 25, 2021). In making assignments, students only rely on reference sources from the internet that are difficult to access where they live (Interview with informant E.K., October 26, 2021). They cannot find reference sources from the library (Interview with informant B.N., October 26, 2021), while the assigned assignments given

by the lecturer must be collected following the stipulated time (Interview with informant D.R.J., October 27, 2021). Likewise, making group assignments and experiencing problems coordinating with group friends (Interview with informant N.E., October 22, 2021) due to living far apart and the limitations of the internet network where students live. Some students have very high expectations in completing assignments, but on the other hand, students find various obstacles in realizing their expectations. This is the main factor that triggers academic stress among IAIN Curup students, especially in an online learning during the pandemic.

This study's results are aligned with previous studies' findings, which stated that several things that can cause academic stress are the many demands placed on individuals, both academic and non-academic demands (Kumar, 2017). Various pressures can also cause academic stress. These pressures can take the form of time management pressure, exams, fear of failure and parental expectations (Ang & Huan, 2006), too many assignments, less harmonious relationships with friends, teachers and regulatory changes (Subramani & Kadiravan, 2017), academic pressure, high level of competition (Zakaria, 2019) and demands to maintain and pursue achievements (Barseli et al., 2018, 2020). Another opinion explains that exams are the most significant contributor to academic stress (Bosch et al., 2004; Wuthrich et al., 2020). Various pressures and demands are accompanied by psychological stressors such as a lack of competence, ability, and capacity to adapt to various pressures and demands (Moawad, 2020; Trigueros et al., 2020). Under these conditions, it will be easier for individuals to experience academic stress.

Strategies for Coping with Academic Stress with A Spiritual Approach

Students use various ways to alleviate the academic stress they experience, one of which is by increasing resilience through spiritual coping (Interview with informant D.P.S., October 16, 2021). Spiritual coping is one of the strategies used by lecturers to help students to increase resilience to academic stress (Interview with informant S.R., October 17, 2021). There are three steps of spiritual coping in increasing the resilience of students who experience academic stress: building positive thinking towards problems, positive action, and positive hopping (Interview with informant D.H.R., October 15, 2021).

First is positive thinking, always thinking positively about the problems at hand. The initial step that must be instilled in the client in alleviating problems is to build a positive client thinking about the problems he faces (Interview with informant B.A., October 18, 2021). Furthermore, R.P.S., (Interview with informant, October 19, 2021) explains that in order to build a client's positive thinking about the problems at hand, four important things need to be instilled in the client, namely: First, providing an understanding to the client that every human being faces various problems. Second, make clients understand that people who face problems are normal. Third, provide understanding to the client that other people can guide the client to alleviate his problems. Fourth, to convince clients that every problem faced is always a lesson and there is a solution (Interview with informant D.H.R., October 15, 2021). Several students explained the same thing about their experiences in increasing resilience in order to be able to rise from academic stress as follows:

...during an online learning, if I experienced academic stress, then consulted with one of the counseling lecturers at IAIN Curup. First of all, I was motivated to think positively about the problems at hand, given the understanding that every problem must

have a solution (Interview with informant G.A.Z., October 19, 201).

...true, I once consulted with a counseling lecturer at IAIN Curup when I was confused and worried that my grades would drop as a result of learning. At that time, I was given the understanding that everyone must be faced with various problems, and for every problem, there must be a lesson. The problem faced is not to be thought about but to try to find a solution (Interview with informant E.K., October 26, 2021).

Prayitno & Amti (2019) explained that building a client's positive mind on the problems faced is important. Positive thoughts about the problems at hand can help clients alleviate the problem (Ahmad & Maulana, 2019). Cognitive elements that must be developed in the client's thinking include: First, the client realizes that he is experiencing a problem. Second, the client understands the problem at hand. Third, the client wants to alleviate the problem at hand. Fourth, the client understands that the client can solve the problem himself. Other people are only limited to assisting. Another opinion explains that positive thoughts about the problems at hand will give rise to an optimistic attitude of clients to rise from adversity (Nurmala et al., 2019). On the other hand, counselors must also understand the ins and outs of the problems faced by clients in order to be able to provide appropriate and complete treatment (Basith, 2020; Ramadhani & Ulfia, 2022).

Second, positive action is always trying to solve the problems faced by doing various positive activities. According to D.H.R., (Interview with informant, October 15, 2021), clients must be given an understanding that any problems they face must be resolved immediately. The alleviation can be done by

yourself by asking friends for help or consulting with someone more skilled (Interview with informant D.P.S., October 16, 2021). The client must carry out positive activities to alleviate the problems faced according to the advice and agreement made by the counselor (Interview with informant F., October 17, 2021). Carrying out various positive activities to solve problems is important because the client himself can only solve problems. The counselor is limited to assisting (Interview with informant B.A., October 18, 2021). This is in line with the explanations of several clients as follows:

...when doing counseling, there are some directions and agreements that must be made. Thank God after doing it, the academic stress problems that I faced during online lectures slowly began to be alleviated (Interview with informant N. E., October 22, 2021).

...so that the counseling results are effective. In addition to having positive thoughts about the problems at hand, I am also asked by the counselor to carry out various positive activities related to the problems I am facing, such as borrowing library books, finding locations with smooth internet access during my online lectures, advised to stay alone in the hostel. I did all of that, thank God, while I was studying online, I was still optimistic that I could follow it well (Interview with informant N.E., October 22, 2021).

...in my experience, the most important thing so that we can rise from academic stress is that we must be able to address the problems we face positively, think positively, and we must try to do various things to overcome the problems we face (Interview with informant F.Y., October 24, 2021).

This study's results were aligned with the view that explains the importance of building positive action in the counselling process, both for the counsellor and the client (Sulfemi & Yasita, 2020). Positive action is a special effort that is directly carried out to deal with the main source of the problem with the aim of solving the problem at hand (Yudhawati, 2018). The positive action that needs to be built in the counselor is that the counselor must accept the client as he is, show positive behavior towards the client, be willing to help the client, try as optimally as possible in helping the client and show empathy towards the client (Musyrihin, 2020). The positive action that must be developed in the client is that the client must do positive things that are directly related to the problems he faces, and the client is willing to try as optimally as possible to make various efforts to solve the main source of the problems he faces (Mulawarman et al., 2019).

Third, positive hopping, which is always hoping and praying to Allah SWT to be given strength, convenience, and guidance in overcoming the problems at hand. According to D.P.S., (Interview with informant, October 16, 2021), this is important for Muslims because Islam teaches that Allah SWT is the owner of everything (Interview with informant F., October 17, 2021). Allah SWT is Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Allah SWT will give strength, and guidance to every servant He wills, including in alleviating the problems he faces (Interview with informant R.P.S., October 19, 2021). Furthermore, D.H.R., (Interview with informant October 15, 2021) explained that by asking Allah SWT, the client still has the hope to be free from the problems he faces (Interview with informant B.A., October 18, 2021). This hope, in turn, becomes the driving force and driving force for clients to rise from academic stress (Interview with

informant D.P.S., October 16, 2021). Several students explained that:

....when I experience anxiety and confusion in dealing with various problems related to online lectures, apart from trying, I always pray to ask Allah SWT to be given ease. I often pray Duha, pray tahajjud and read the Koran. Alhamdulillah, I have become more optimistic in dealing with the problems I am experiencing (Interview with informant D.M., October 24, 2021).

.... yes, at least always hoping to Allah SWT makes me calmer in dealing with various problems. I believe Allah S.W.T. is the owner of everything, and Allah SWT will grant everything that is asked of his servant (Interview with informan M. M., October 23, 2021

.... in addition to trying to overcome various problems, I always ask Allah SWT for guidance so that he is given the strength and ability to solve my problems. Our job is only to try; the one who determines everything is Allah SWT (Interview with informant D.R.J., October 27, 2021).

Positive hopping is a client's positive expectation of the problem (Komalasari, 2020). In the counseling process, the client expects immediate alleviation of the problems. The task of humans is only to try as optimally as possible. The determinant of success is Allah SWT (Wardaningsih & Widyaningrum, 2018). Therefore, prayer becomes an important part of every human endeavor. People who do not want to pray are arrogant because they do not place Allah SWT as the determinant of everything (Fatmawati, 2022). In the Islamic perspective, prayer is not just a request but a medium to get closer to Allah SWT (Fauzan,

2022). Prayer can give birth to peace, increase the spirit of life, and can control emotions (Nugraha, 2020; Rinjani et al., 2020; Samsidar, 2020; Sany, 2022, 2022). With prayer, it can also give birth to an optimistic attitude toward the various problems faced (Komalasari, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Coping strategies with a spiritual approach to increase student resilience due to academic stress are carried out through three stages. First, build positive thinking about the problems faced by clients so that clients understand that they are experiencing problems that need to be addressed immediately. Second, positive action, namely, the client must make a special effort immediately to deal with the primary source of the problem and solve the problem faced by constantly carrying out various positive activities. Third, positive hopping, which is always hoping and praying to Allah SWT so that he will be given strength, convenience, and guidance in overcoming the problems at hand. The human obligation is only to try; The only determinant of success is Allah SWT.

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