



BUILDING STUDENTS' MENTAL RESILIENCE IN FACING ACADEMIC PRESSURE

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Abstract :

This study examines the development of mental resilience in students facing academic pressure in higher education settings. Academic pressure has become a significant concern affecting students' psychological well-being and academic performance globally. Using a qualitative approach with phenomenological design, this research explores the lived experiences of 30 undergraduate students from various disciplines at Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and psychological resilience assessments using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale. Findings reveal that students with higher mental resilience demonstrate better stress management, adaptive coping strategies, and sustained academic performance despite challenges. Five major themes emerged: development of adaptive coping strategies, role of social support networks, cultivation of self-efficacy and growth mindset, emotional regulation and stress management, and institutional support mechanisms. Students progressed from maladaptive coping such as avoidance toward problem-focused strategies including time management and help-seeking behaviors. Social support from family, peers, and lecturers proved crucial for resilience development. The study concludes that integrated interventions combining psychological education, peer support programs, emotional regulation training, and compassionate institutional policies can effectively build students' mental resilience, enabling them to navigate academic demands successfully while maintaining psychological well-being.

Keywords : mental resilience, academic pressure, student well-being, coping strategies, higher education)

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational landscape presents unprecedented challenges for students, particularly in terms of academic pressure and psychological well-being. Academic pressure encompasses various stressors including competitive environments, high performance expectations, heavy workloads, examination anxiety, and fear of failure (Brown & Ryan, 2015). These pressures have intensified in recent years due to globalization, technological advancement, and increasingly competitive job markets (Sheikhalizadeh & Piralaiy, 2017). The consequences of excessive academic pressure extend beyond temporary stress, potentially leading to burnout, anxiety disorders, depression, and impaired academic performance (Levina et al., 2016).

Mental resilience, defined as the capacity to adapt successfully to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress, has emerged as a critical protective factor in educational contexts (Masten, 2014). Resilient students demonstrate the ability to bounce back from setbacks, maintain psychological equilibrium under pressure, and sustain motivation despite



challenges. Understanding and fostering mental resilience has become essential for educational institutions committed to holistic student development (Moleong, 2016).

Previous research has explored various dimensions of student stress and coping mechanisms. However, a gap exists in understanding the specific processes through which mental resilience develops in the context of Indonesian higher education, where cultural factors, educational systems, and social expectations create unique pressures. This study addresses this gap by investigating how students build and maintain mental resilience while navigating academic demands, with particular attention to culturally relevant protective and risk factors.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the experiences of university students in developing mental resilience when facing academic pressure, identify key factors that contribute to or hinder resilience development, and propose evidence-based strategies for enhancing student mental resilience within institutional frameworks

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to gain in-depth understanding of students' lived experiences in building mental resilience. The phenomenological approach was selected because it allows researchers to explore the essence of participants' experiences and the meanings they construct around resilience and academic pressure (Creswell, 2013).

The research was conducted at Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan from March to October 2025. The study population consisted of undergraduate students across various faculties who had experienced significant academic pressure during their studies. Using purposive sampling, 30 participants were selected based on the following criteria: currently enrolled students in semesters 4-8, having experienced academic challenges or pressure, willingness to share experiences, and diverse representation across study programs.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting 60-90 minutes per participant, three focus group discussions with 8-10 students each, and psychological resilience assessments using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the data collection process, acknowledging potential biases and establishing rapport with participants to ensure authentic responses.

Data analysis followed Colaizzi's phenomenological method, involving: transcription of all interviews and focus group discussions, extraction of significant statements related to mental resilience and academic pressure, formulation of meanings from significant statements, organization of formulated meanings into theme clusters, integration of themes into exhaustive descriptions, validation of findings through member checking with participants, and synthesis of fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation of data sources and methods, prolonged engagement with participants, peer debriefing with

colleagues, and thick description of findings to enable transferability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis revealed five major themes regarding how students build mental resilience in facing academic pressure: development of adaptive coping strategies, role of social support networks, cultivation of self-efficacy and growth mindset, emotional regulation and stress management, and institutional support and resources.

Theme 1: Development of Adaptive Coping Strategies

Participants described various coping mechanisms they developed over time to manage academic pressure. Twenty-three participants (76.7%) reported that they initially relied on emotion-focused coping such as avoidance or denial when first encountering academic stress. However, through experience and reflection, they shifted toward problem-focused coping strategies including time management, seeking help from lecturers, forming study groups, and breaking large tasks into manageable steps.

One participant stated: "At first, when I got overwhelmed with assignments, I would just sleep or watch videos to escape. But I realized this made things worse. Now I make a schedule, prioritize tasks, and tackle them one by one. It feels more in control." This progression from maladaptive to adaptive coping represents a critical aspect of resilience development, consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping.

****Table 1: Types of Coping Strategies Reported by Students****

Coping Strategy Type	Initial Use (%)	Current Use (%)
Problem-focused coping	23.3	73.3
Emotion-focused (adaptive)	30.0	60.0
Emotion-focused (adaptive)	76.7	16.7
Emotion-focused (adaptive)	63.3	10.0

Theme 2: Role of Social Support Networks

All participants emphasized the crucial role of social support in building resilience. Support came from multiple sources including family members who provided emotional encouragement and practical assistance, peers who offered understanding and shared experiences, lecturers and academic advisors who provided guidance and flexibility, and religious communities that offered spiritual support and perspective.

Students who reported stronger social support networks demonstrated higher resilience scores on the CD-RISC assessment. The mean resilience score for students with strong support was 78.4 compared to 62.1 for those with limited support. Participants described how sharing struggles with others who

understood their experiences reduced feelings of isolation and provided validation for their emotions.

Theme 3: Cultivation of Self-Efficacy and Growth Mindset

Eighteen participants (60%) described a transformation in their beliefs about their capabilities and the nature of intelligence. Initially, many held fixed mindset beliefs, viewing academic abilities as innate and unchangeable. Through repeated experiences of overcoming challenges, receiving constructive feedback, and witnessing their own improvement, they developed growth mindset orientations and stronger self-efficacy.

One participant explained: "I used to think I was just not smart enough for certain subjects. But after struggling with statistics and finally understanding it through hard work and tutoring, I realized I can learn anything if I put in effort and get the right help. Now when something is difficult, I see it as a challenge to grow, not proof that I can't do it."

This finding aligns with Dweck's research on mindset and Bandura's self-efficacy theory, both of which identify beliefs about capability as central to resilient functioning. Students with higher self-efficacy demonstrated greater persistence in the face of academic setbacks and recovered more quickly from poor performance.

Theme 4: Emotional Regulation and Stress Management

Participants identified emotional regulation as a learned skill essential for maintaining resilience under pressure. Twenty-five participants (83.3%) reported that they initially struggled to manage anxiety, frustration, and disappointment related to academic challenges. Over time, they developed various emotional regulation strategies including mindfulness and meditation practices, physical exercise and sports participation, journaling and reflective writing, seeking professional counseling when needed, and reframing negative thoughts.

****Figure 1: Emotional Regulation Strategies and Their Effectiveness****

[A chart showing the percentage of students using each strategy and their self-reported effectiveness ratings: Mindfulness/meditation (46.7%, effectiveness 7.8/10), Exercise (73.3%, effectiveness 8.2/10), Journaling (40%, effectiveness 7.5/10), Professional counseling (26.7%, effectiveness 8.9/10), Cognitive reframing (56.7%, effectiveness 8.1/10)]

Students who regularly practiced emotional regulation techniques reported feeling more in control during stressful periods and better able to maintain focus on their goals despite emotional challenges.

Theme 5: Institutional Support and Resources

The availability and accessibility of institutional support significantly influenced students' capacity to build resilience. Participants identified several institutional factors that either facilitated or hindered resilience development. Facilitating factors included accessible counseling services, flexible academic policies for students experiencing difficulties, lecturer understanding and willingness to provide extensions or accommodations, peer mentoring programs, and wellness workshops and stress management training.

However, students also noted barriers including limited awareness of available support services, stigma associated with seeking psychological help, insufficient counseling staff to meet student demand, and rigid academic structures that did not accommodate individual circumstances.

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the dynamic and multifaceted process through which students develop mental resilience in response to academic pressure. Rather than being a fixed trait, resilience emerges as a developmental capacity that students can cultivate through experience, support, and intentional practice.

The progression from maladaptive to adaptive coping strategies observed in this study reflects the importance of learning from experience and having opportunities to develop effective responses to stress. Educational institutions can facilitate this development by explicitly teaching coping skills, stress management techniques, and problem-solving strategies rather than assuming students naturally possess these capabilities (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

The central role of social support networks aligns with extensive research demonstrating that connectedness protects against the negative effects of stress and promotes psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, social relationships hold particular significance, making peer support, family involvement, and community connection especially important for student resilience. Universities should prioritize creating opportunities for meaningful social connection through study groups, peer mentoring, and community-building activities.

The transformation from fixed to growth mindset represents a crucial cognitive shift that enables students to view challenges as opportunities for development rather than threats to their self-worth. This finding suggests the value of interventions that explicitly address students' beliefs about intelligence, ability, and the learning process. Lecturers can foster growth mindset through the way they provide feedback, emphasizing effort and strategies rather than innate ability, and by sharing their own experiences of struggle and growth (Dweck, 2006).

The development of emotional regulation skills emerged as essential for maintaining well-being under pressure. This finding underscores the need for universities to incorporate emotional intelligence and self-regulation training into student development programs. Given the high effectiveness ratings for professional counseling, institutions should prioritize making mental health services accessible, affordable, and destigmatized.

Finally, the findings regarding institutional support highlight that while individual resilience is important, institutional structures and cultures significantly shape students' capacity to thrive under pressure. A truly resilience-promoting educational environment requires systemic approaches that include compassionate policies, accessible support services, lecturer training in student mental health, and a culture that values well-being alongside academic achievement.

The integration of these findings suggests a comprehensive model of student resilience that encompasses individual capacities (coping skills, self-efficacy, emotional regulation), relational resources (social support, mentoring), and environmental factors (institutional policies, support services, academic culture). Effective interventions must address all three levels to create sustainable change.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that building mental resilience among students facing academic pressure is a developmental process influenced by individual, relational, and institutional factors. Students develop resilience through learning adaptive coping strategies, cultivating social support networks, developing self-efficacy and growth mindset, practicing emotional regulation, and accessing institutional support and resources. The research demonstrates that resilience is not an innate trait but a capacity that can be systematically developed through appropriate experiences, support, and education.

The findings have important implications for educational practice and policy. Universities should implement comprehensive resilience-building programs that include explicit instruction in coping strategies and stress management, peer support and mentoring initiatives, growth mindset and self-efficacy interventions, accessible mental health services and emotional regulation training, and compassionate academic policies that accommodate student needs. Furthermore, institutional culture must shift from viewing student struggles as individual failures to recognizing academic pressure as a systemic issue requiring collective responsibility and comprehensive support.

Future research should explore the long-term outcomes of resilience-building interventions, investigate cultural variations in resilience processes across different Indonesian contexts, examine the specific role of spiritual and religious factors in Muslim students' resilience, and develop validated instruments for assessing resilience in Indonesian student populations. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking resilience development throughout students' academic careers would provide valuable insights into critical periods and intervention opportunities.

Ultimately, fostering student mental resilience is not only about helping individuals survive academic pressure but about creating educational environments where all students can thrive, develop their full potential, and emerge as psychologically healthy, capable, and confident graduates prepared for the challenges of professional and personal life..

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