

The Role of Mindfulness in Managing Academic Stress: Implications for Student Well-being and Mental Resilience

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the implementation of mindfulness in reducing students' academic stress in junior high school and to assess its long-term impact on students' emotional well-being and mental health. This research departs from students' increasing academic stress, which often hurts their emotional well-being. Mindfulness programs involving breathing exercises and meditation are expected to help students manage academic stress and develop mental resilience. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation from students, teachers, and principals. The data was then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman approach. The findings show that mindfulness programs have succeeded in reducing students' academic stress and anxiety and improving their emotional well-being. In addition, mindfulness also has a long-term impact by helping students develop mental resilience to face future challenges. The results of the study hopefully can provide benefits that mindfulness can be applied in elementary schools as a preventive effort to reduce academic stress, as well as encourage the development of a more comprehensive educational curriculum that prioritizes student welfare as well as providing insights for the development of education policies that integrate mindfulness in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Academic Stress, Emotional Well-Being, Mental Health, Educational Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

Academic stress has become an increasingly troubling problem among students, especially in primary and secondary education settings (Luthar et al., 2020; Travis et al., 2020). This phenomenon arises due to the ever-increasing academic demands, such as exams, assignments, and high study loads (Pascoe et al., 2020; Ursin et al., 2021; Wuthrich et al., 2020). Many students feel pressured when they have to meet the expectations of their parents, teachers, and themselves to achieve satisfactory results (Browes, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). This phenomenon hurts their mental health, which is reflected in increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and other emotional problems (Giovagnoli et al., 2020). In Indonesia, academic stress is increasingly widespread, along with the development of a competitive culture in education, which requires students always to achieve high achievements (Clarke, 2020; Ismawati et al., 2023). This condition is exacerbated by the lack of attention to students' emotional well-being in many schools, which often focus more on academic achievement than social and emotional development (Zulkifli et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to find practical solutions to overcome this academic stress by implementing a

mindfulness program in schools. Mindfulness, a practice to increase self-awareness and emotional regulation, offers great potential in helping students manage their academic stress and anxiety while improving their overall mental well-being.

Academic stress is a common problem among students of all levels of education. Research by Lin et al. (2021) shows that students in some schools experience pretty high levels of stress, with symptoms such as sleep disturbances, loss of interest in learning, and increased anxiety before exams. To address these issues, mindfulness has emerged as one of the practical approaches to reducing academic stress (Limone & Toto, 2022; Zein et al., 2020). Mindfulness, which focuses on exercises to increase awareness of present-moment experiences without judgment, has been shown to have significant benefits in reducing stress and anxiety in various populations, including students (Nardi et al., 2022; Vitagliano et al., 2023; Zandi et al., 2021). Research by Shankland et al. (2021) shows that mindfulness practice can reduce anxiety and depression, as well as improve emotional well-being. In addition, a study by Lahtinen et al. (2023) revealed that a mindfulness program implemented in schools can improve concentration and reduce anxiety in students. Based on this evidence, mindfulness has been accepted as a promising method for reducing academic stress, although many challenges still need to be overcome in its implementation.

The benefits of mindfulness in reducing academic stress and improving students' emotional well-being are still research gaps that need further exploration, especially in Indonesian education. Most studies on mindfulness in schools have been conducted in Western countries, while the application of mindfulness in Indonesia is still limited. In addition, although much evidence shows the effectiveness of mindfulness in reducing academic stress, there is still a lack of in-depth research on how mindfulness is applied in the context of Indonesian culture, which has different social and emotional challenges. Thus, there is an urgent need to conduct further research on the application of mindfulness in reducing students' academic stress in Indonesia and identify the most effective ways to integrate mindfulness into the school curriculum. This study offers a new contribution by examining the implementation of mindfulness programs in Indonesian schools. The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on the junior high school level, which has rarely been considered in previous studies that have focused more on college or high school students.

This study explores how mindfulness can be part of preventive efforts to improve students' mental health in the long term, not just as an intervention to reduce stress in the short term at SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah. This study seeks to explore mindfulness practices' short-term and long-term impacts on students' academic anxiety levels and to evaluate whether mindfulness techniques can help students develop mental resilience in facing academic and life challenges. This study also explores how academic stress affects students and its implications for mental health. This study is expected to be a reference as an original contribution for educators and policymakers to design better programs to reduce academic stress and improve mental well-being in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah because this location is considered representative of understanding the application of mindfulness in the context of elementary education in Indonesia. SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah was chosen because this school has a learning program that supports student character development, including social and emotional education. The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type (Maxwell, 2020). A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, and other related parties about applying mindfulness to reduce academic stress. Descriptive research aims to describe and understand the phenomena that occur in a particular context without making generalizations, thus providing a clearer picture of how mindfulness is

applied and its impact on students at SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah.

Data were collected through three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore in-depth perspectives from various parties involved in implementing mindfulness, including the principal, teachers, and students who participated in the mindfulness program. Interviews with teachers and principals aimed to understand their motivations for implementing mindfulness in schools and their perceptions of its impact on students. Meanwhile, interviews with students aimed to discover their direct experiences participating in the mindfulness program, how they felt about academic stress before and after participating, and to what extent they felt changes in their ability to manage stress. Observations were conducted to record how mindfulness activities were applied in daily activities in the classroom and how students responded to the mindfulness exercises. Documentation was used to support interviews and observations by collecting data related to the curriculum, mindfulness activity schedules, and notes or reports from teachers regarding changes seen in students. Table 1, the use of various data collection techniques provides a comprehensive view of the implementation of mindfulness and its impact on students.

Table 1. Research Matrix

Collection Techniques	Purpose	Respondent	Collection Method
Interview	Exploring in-depth perspectives from principals, teachers, and students on the implementation of mindfulness and its impact on academic stress	Principal, Teacher, Student	Live interviews
Observation	Recording the application of mindfulness in classroom activities and students' responses to mindfulness exercises	Student	Field observations
Documentation	Support interviews and observations with data related to the curriculum, schedule of mindfulness activities, and notes of changes in students	Documents, Teachers	Collection of documents and reports

According to Miles and Huberman, this study uses a data analysis model consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and concluding/verification(Matta, 2022). The first stage, data reduction, involves the process of filtering, sorting, and focusing information relevant to the research objectives. Data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation will be organized and arranged to make it easier to analyze. At this stage, the researcher will identify the main themes that emerge from the collected data, such as students' feelings about academic stress, the changes they feel after participating in mindfulness, and teachers' opinions about the effectiveness of this program. Furthermore, the data presentation stage will organize the information that has been reduced into a clear and structured narrative. The data that has been grouped will be presented as a description of how mindfulness is applied and its impact on students. In the final stage, conclusions are drawn or verified by concluding the data that has been presented and verifying the findings with other existing evidence, such as documents or further observations. Data analysis using this approach allows researchers to provide a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the implementation of mindfulness and its impact on student's academic stress at SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Improved Emotional Well-Being

The phenomenon shows increased academic stress in students, especially when facing exams and school assignments that pile up. Many students seem anxious and restless and have difficulty focusing on their studies because of the pressure they feel. This often leads to a decline in

their emotional well-being, reflected in their class behavior, such as lack of participation or absenteeism at school. In this context, mindfulness interventions began to be implemented to help students cope with academic stress. Mindfulness is a practice that involves paying full attention to the present moment without judgment, which can help students become more aware of their thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in excessive anxiety about the future, such as exams or schoolwork. With mindfulness exercises, students are taught to focus on breathing and respond to their feelings in a calmer and more controlled way. This allows them to face academic challenges more effectively and reduce the feelings of pressure that often arise as assignments and exams approach. The results of this mindfulness application are expected to improve students' emotional well-being, giving them space to breathe and respond better to academic pressure. Mindfulness not only provides students with the skills to reduce anxiety but also improves their ability to stay calm and focused on the task at hand, reducing the stress they feel.

Researchers noted significant changes in students' behavior after participating in mindfulness sessions. Before implementing mindfulness interventions, students often look restless and unfocused, especially during exams or academic assignments. Many of them seem rushed and stressed, thus reducing their ability to think clearly and complete tasks well. However, after mindfulness exercises were applied regularly, researchers observed that students showed a calmer and more controlled attitude. They are better able to sit quietly and focus during lessons, and despite facing complex tasks, they do not panic or get anxious quickly. One example that can be seen is a student who previously often avoided exams because of fear of failing, who can now face them with more confidence after participating in mindfulness exercises. During mindfulness sessions, researchers also noted that many students began to show signs of relaxation, such as calmer breathing and more relaxed postures. This suggests that they are starting to learn to respond to stress more positively and effectively. These observations show that mindfulness plays an important role in creating a more harmonious learning atmosphere and supporting students' emotional well-being, which in turn helps them cope better with academic pressure.

Table 2. Aspects of Emotional Well-Being

Aspect		Description	Impact Observed
Reduction of Academic Stress		Mindfulness helps students reduce anxiety and stress caused by exams and academic assignments	Students are calmer and can better manage academic stress
Improved Focus and Concentration		Students become more focused and able to sit quietly during lessons and exams	Students can cope with academic pressure more effectively and be better prepared for challenges
Increased Student Engagement		Students are more active in class discussions, ask questions, and engage in learning activities	Students are more open to class discussions and don't feel scared or anxious when asking questions
Improving Emotional Regulation Ability		Mindfulness improves students' ability to regulate their feelings and emotions when facing academic challenges	Students are more patient and more open in finding solutions to challenging tasks
Increased Confidence		Students who were previously anxious or afraid of exams became more confident in dealing with them	Students show increased confidence and calmness in the face of a big exam or task

Table 2 states that it is analyzed that the implementation of mindfulness in SMP Ash-Siddiqiyah has had a significant positive impact on improving students' emotional well-being. Mindfulness helps students to focus more on the present moment and reduce excessive anxiety about exams and academic assignments. By improving students' ability to manage attention and respond to their feelings more calmly, mindfulness helps create a more supportive environment

and reduce academic stress. Both in students' attitudes and in their increased participation in class, suggest that mindfulness interventions can effectively support students' emotional development, reduce anxiety, and increase engagement in learning. When applied consistently and in a supportive atmosphere, mindfulness can help students develop emotional regulation skills to bring into their lives outside of school. Thus, mindfulness can be an effective solution for helping students manage academic stress and improve their emotional well-being.

Reduces Anxiety

Many students show high academic anxiety, especially when facing exams or large schoolwork. This anxiety is often seen in their behavior, which makes them seem restless, have difficulty concentrating, or even avoid academic activities. This phenomenon can affect their learning quality, as excessive anxiety hinders their ability to think clearly and effectively. As time goes on, some students begin to show signs of stress that interfere with their emotional well-being, such as irritability, depression, or withdrawal from social interactions in class. To overcome this, the school at Ash-Shiddiqiyah Junior High School began to implement a mindfulness program as one of the solutions to reduce students' academic anxiety. Mindfulness is an exercise that involves techniques such as deep breathing and meditation to help individuals stay focused on the present moment and accept and manage their feelings and thoughts calmer. With this technique, students are taught not to get caught up in anxiety related to exams or assignments but rather to deal with them more controlled and attentive. Mindfulness programs are expected to reduce the strain students experience and provide them with the tools they need to manage their anxiety, helping them feel more prepared and confident in facing academic challenges.

Mindfulness programs have a significant impact on reducing students' academic anxiety. Teacher A stated, "Since implementing mindfulness, many students seem calmer and can focus more during exams. Normally, they are anxious and worried about the results of the exam, but after practicing mindfulness regularly, they become more confident." This indicates that mindfulness helps students organize their thoughts better and reduces anxiety during exams or significant assignments. Teacher B also added, "Students who used to often look nervous or restless are now better able to manage their anxiety. They have started to get to know breathing techniques that help them calm down when they feel stressed." This explanation shows that mindfulness programs affect anxiety levels and provide students with practical skills to deal with stressful situations. Teacher C said, "Before mindfulness was implemented, many students were anxious when they had to do big assignments. Now, they're better able to manage that anxiety and feel more in control." Interviews with these teachers revealed that mindfulness practices have proven effective in helping students reduce academic anxiety and preparing them to be more confident in completing assignments and exams.

Changes in the behavior of School students can be seen after they are involved in the mindfulness program. Prior to the implementation of mindfulness, students often showed signs of anxiety when facing challenging exams or assignments. They appear agitated and anxious and often have difficulty concentrating on the material being taught. Many students seem distressed, such as biting their nails, playing with their hair, or looking uncomfortable in class. However, after the mindfulness program was implemented regularly, researchers observed that students began to show clear improvements. They look more focused and better able to manage their anxiety when assignments or exams come. During the first exam, after the mindfulness program began, many students who were previously worried about their exam results were now able to deal with it more calmly. They can sit longer with focus and seem more patient when working on complex problems, using breathing techniques taught in mindfulness programs to stay calm. Researchers also noted

that students who previously often avoided exams or significant assignments because of anxiety were now more confident and showed no signs of agitation or panic. These observations show that mindfulness programs have a very positive impact in reducing students' academic anxiety and improving their ability to cope with academic challenges more effectively.

The mindfulness program has effectively reduced academic anxiety in Ash-Shiddiqiyah Junior High School students. Mindfulness provides students with the necessary tools to manage their anxiety, including breathing and meditation techniques that allow them to stay focused and calm in stressful situations. With mindfulness exercises, students no longer feel pressured by assignments or exams, as they are taught to respond to their anxiety in a healthier and more controlled way. This is in line with research showing that mindfulness can help individuals reduce anxiety and stress by giving them the ability to direct their attention to the moment and respond to negative feelings without judgment. The mindfulness program at School also contributes to increased student engagement in learning, as they feel better able to cope with academic challenges without being trapped in excessive anxiety. In addition, the program helps create a more harmonious learning atmosphere where students can work with more focus and are not easily distracted by anxious feelings. As such, mindfulness can be considered a highly effective strategy in helping students reduce academic anxiety, improve their emotional well-being, and prepare them to face academic challenges more confidently.

Long-Term Impact on Mental Health

The students face significant challenges in managing academic stress, especially during exams and assignments that demand high concentration. Excessive anxiety often affects their emotional well-being and, in some cases, decreases the quality of learning. Despite the increased awareness of the importance of mental health among students, most of them still do not have the right skills to manage the academic stress they experience. This is where mindfulness programs start to play an important role. In addition to helping students reduce anxiety in the short term, mindfulness is expected to have a long-term impact on their mental health. Mindfulness exercises teach students to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings without judgment, giving them the tools to deal with stress more constructively. These long-term impacts include increased mental resilience, allowing students to be more resilient to future stress and pressure, both in their academic context and lives in general. By continuing to apply mindfulness, students learn to manage their feelings and stress and develop a more flexible mindset and resilience to life's challenges. The mindfulness program at Ash-Shiddiqiyah Junior High School focuses on reducing the academic stress that students are experiencing today. It gives them a strong foundation to face more significant emotional challenges in the future, thus shaping their mental health in the long run.

Finding shows how students respond to changes in themselves after participating in mindfulness programs regularly. Before mindfulness programs, students were seen to be trapped in a cycle of anxiety and stress that prevented them from doing well on exams or academic assignments. However, positive changes began to appear after a few months of mindfulness implementation. Researchers observed that students were calmer during exams and showed a more optimistic mindset in the face of academic difficulties. A student who used to feel pressure when faced with an immense task can now face it more patiently and confidently. These students are seen managing stress better and improving their ability to maintain focus despite distractions or challenges. Mindfulness exercises help students build more substantial and more flexible mental resilience. Researchers also noted that students who previously felt pressured by failure or poor judgment can now better accept failure as part of the learning process and not let it affect their

emotional well-being in the long run. This indicates that mindfulness has helped them develop essential skills for managing their feelings and stress and maintaining better mental health over time.

Researchers concluded that the mindfulness program at Junior High School positively impacts students' mental health in the short and long term. The program not only helps students reduce the academic stress they are currently experiencing, but it also provides them with the skills to manage feelings and anxiety more effectively in the future. One of the most important aspects of mindfulness is its ability to help individuals develop mental resilience, which is the ability to remain calm, positive, and focused despite pressure or adversity. This mental resilience is crucial for students because they have to deal with academic stress and other emotional challenges in their lives. In the long run, mindfulness gives them the tools to respond to life's stresses more healthily and constructively. Mindfulness at School also helps students develop valuable social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness and empathy, that support their mental health, as shown in Figure 1.

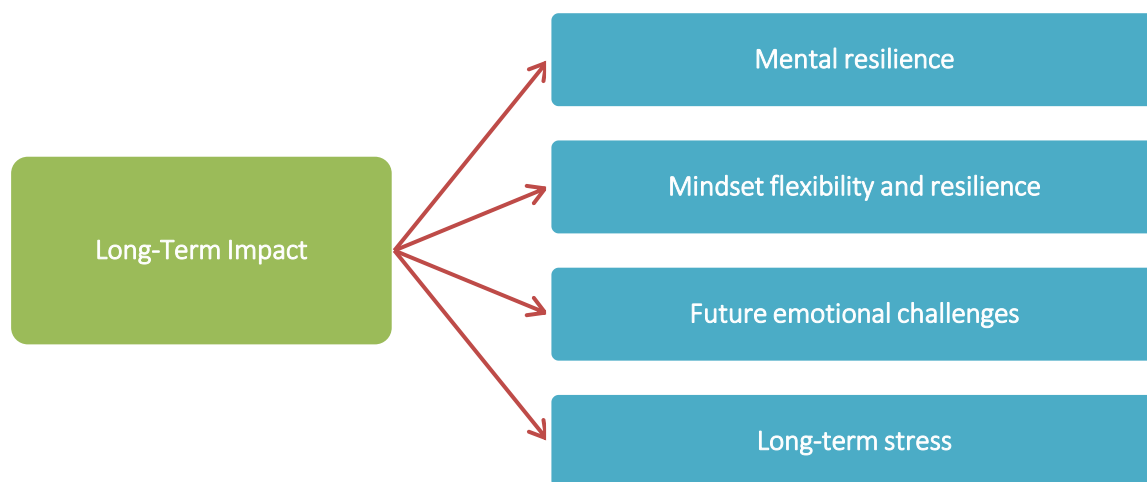


Figure 1. Long-Term Impact

With mindfulness, students learn to accept their feelings without judgment and not let them get in the way of achieving their goals. The program is not just to reduce stress in the short term but to help students develop valuable mental resilience they can use throughout their lives. This analysis supports the understanding that mindfulness is an effective tool in improving students' mental health, creating a healthier learning environment, and helping students develop emotionally and psychologically in the future.

Discussion

The implementation of mindfulness interventions in schools has had a significant positive impact on students' emotional well-being, especially in reducing academic stress. Mindfulness helps students focus more on the present moment and reduce anxiety related to exams or academic assignments. Students become calmer, more focused, and better able to manage their emotions, leading to increased participation in class and reduced absenteeism (Egan et al., 2022; Galante et al., 2021). The results show that mindfulness provides skills to reduce anxiety and strengthens students' emotional regulation abilities, which is crucial in helping them face academic challenges and create a more harmonious learning environment.

Baumgartner and Schneider (2023) showed that mindfulness can reduce anxiety and improve students' psychological well-being, helping them focus and manage stress more effectively. Mindfulness interventions can improve students' emotional regulation, which is directly related to

improving their ability to face academic challenges (Norouzi et al., 2020; Strohmaier et al., 2021). Zeilhofer (2023) emphasized that mindfulness plays an important role in improving students' ability to stay calm and focused, which is in line with the findings of this study regarding improving students' ability to face exams without excessive anxiety. Mindfulness in education is a tool to improve students' mental health, which is evident in the reduction of stress experienced by students at Ash-Shiddiqiyah Junior High School. Mindfulness reduces anxiety and increases student engagement in learning activities, as observed in students more actively participating in class. These findings reinforce the argument that mindfulness is an effective intervention to support students' emotional well-being and mental health in an academic environment.

Mindfulness programs are effective in reducing students' academic anxiety in schools. Students who initially showed anxious behavior, such as restlessness, stress, or difficulty concentrating, began to show significant changes after participating in the program. Mindfulness programs, which involve breathing techniques and meditation, help students stay focused and manage their anxiety in the face of exams or significant assignments (Strohmaier et al., 2021; Vidal-Meliá et al., 2022). Students become calmer and more confident, especially when facing exams or assignments that previously caused excessive anxiety. Researchers have concluded that mindfulness techniques not only help students relieve temporary anxiety but also provide long-term skills to deal with academic pressure in a more controlled manner.

Mindfulness has been shown to reduce anxiety levels and increase focus on academic tasks (McLeod & Boyes, 2021). This is in line with the findings in the study, where students who participated in the mindfulness program were more focused and less easily affected by anxiety. Mindfulness can help individuals manage stress, which is in line with the results of this study, which showed a reduction in anxiety and stress among students. Abedi et al. (2023) found that students who practiced mindfulness could better regulate their emotions in stressful situations, which was reflected in improved attitudes and exam-facing skills by students at school.

Mindfulness reduces short-term academic anxiety and contributes to developing lasting mental resilience among students (Shankland et al., 2021). Students who were initially susceptible to academic pressure began to show significant improvements in managing stress and challenges, both inside and outside the academic context. Researchers observed that after several months of implementing the program, students became calmer and more confident in facing exams and significant assignments. This suggests that mindfulness has a long-term impact that goes beyond reducing anxiety; it forms a more resilient mindset, where students learn to stay focused amidst pressure and accept adversity as part of the learning process.

Teaching students the mental skills needed to face future challenges more healthily and constructively healthier is a fundamental foundation for their long-term mental health. Neumann and Tillott (2022) found that mindfulness can improve mental resilience by helping individuals manage stress more effectively. This is in line with research findings, where students showed better ability to cope with stress after participating in the program. Mindfulness techniques can reduce anxiety and improve emotional well-being, which is also reflected in positive changes in student behavior.

CONCLUSION

The mindfulness intervention applied to students of SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah had a positive impact on improving their emotional well-being. Mindfulness successfully reduces stress caused by academic pressure by helping students be more present at the moment and reducing anxiety that often arises related to exams or schoolwork. In addition, mindfulness techniques such as breathing and meditation effectively calm students' minds and bodies so they feel more in control and can

better face academic challenges. The program also showed a long-term impact on students' mental health because, in addition to reducing academic stress, mindfulness helped students develop mental resilience, which is important for facing life's challenges in the future.

The contribution of the findings of this study is significant for the development of educational curricula, especially those that focus on students' emotional well-being. However, this study has limitations, one of which is that the implementation of mindfulness in SMP Ash-Shiddiqiyah was only carried out for a limited time, so its long-term impact in a broader context cannot be measured. Thus, further research is needed involving a broader sample and a longer duration to explore the effectiveness of mindfulness in various schools and social contexts.

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