



QUALITY CONTROL EMOTIONS: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STUDENT STRESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

Rising concerns over student mental health have positioned stress management as a critical issue in higher education institutions worldwide. This research aims to analyze effective strategies for managing stress among college students, with a focus on implementing effective emotional regulation. Student stress is often influenced by academic pressure, social life, and institutional demands, which can significantly affect mental well-being. This study employs a qualitative case-study approach, using in-depth interviews with selected students at a higher-education institution to explore their lived experiences of coping with stress. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in the emotional regulation strategies students applied when facing academic, social, and personal challenges. The findings reveal that effective stress management strategies include structured time management, the application of meditation and relaxation techniques, and strong social support from peers, family, and the surrounding environment. These approaches play a crucial role in reducing academic and social stress levels. The study contributes to the development of structured mental health support programs. It offers practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to enhance students' emotional resilience and overall psychological well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

A significant problem faced by students at various universities is the increasing level of stress, along with the challenges in their academic and social lives. One theory related to stress management is emotional control theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing emotions in stressful situations (Drigas et al., 2023; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022). However, reality shows that many students struggle to control their emotions, which harms academic performance, mental well-being, and social relationships (Sverdlik et al., 2023; Watts & Pattnaik, 2023). This phenomenon reveals a gap between existing theory and reality on the ground, where many students feel unprepared or lack the skills to manage their stress. The main question is how students can manage their stress more effectively, and why there is a gap between the theoretical understanding of emotional control and the practices in students' daily lives.

Several previous studies have investigated the relationship between stress and emotion management in college students. For example, studies by Malau-Aduli et al. (2022) and Rasmussen et al. (2022) explain that stress arises when individuals perceive a threat to their well-being and cannot overcome it. Another survey by Lincoln et al. (2022), Halliburton et al. (2021) Lincoln et al. (2022) developed the theory of emotional control, which shows that how a person manages their emotions can influence responses to stress. However, although much research discusses emotional control and stress, little research connects this concept to the context of student life at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid. Some existing research tends to be general or focuses only on specific student groups, without considering their distinct characteristics and needs in dealing with stress (Al-Maskari et al., 2022; J. Li & Che, 2022). This research aims to fill this gap by providing a deeper understanding of how students at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid manage their stress and the emotional control strategies they apply in their daily lives.

This paper examines how students at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid can manage their stress through effective emotional control strategies. The questions that will be studied in this research are: What emotional control strategy do they use to manage stress? By answering this question, this research can provide a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of managing student stress and of how implementing effective emotional control strategies can help students cope with academic and social pressure. Apart from that, it is also hoped that this research can explore the potential to develop a data-based stress management system that can serve as a reference for universities in improving students' emotional and academic well-being through a data-based approach (Irawati et al., 2023; Zakiy et al., 2024).

Based on existing theories about emotional control and stress management, the research hypothesis is that students who better understand how to manage their emotions will be better able to deal with stress and have better overall well-being. We argue that students who engage in self-development activities, such as stress management training or strong social support from peers, tend to have more effective emotional control strategies in dealing with stress. On the other hand, students who lack skills in managing their emotions and stress are more likely to experience mental health problems and decreased academic performance. This research will test this hypothesis by collecting data on students' experiences with stress management and how they use emotional control strategies in their daily lives.

This study contributes to the literature by explicitly investigating the emotional control strategies used by students at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid. This unique higher education institution integrates religious and academic learning. Unlike previous research exploring stress management in general university settings, this study provides a novel perspective by examining how students in a Ma'had Aly environment, with its distinctive educational structure and religious influences, develop and implement emotional control strategies to manage stress. Furthermore, this research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks of emotional control and their practical application in a setting where spiritual, social, and academic pressures are deeply intertwined. By incorporating qualitative insights from students' lived experiences and exploring the potential for a data-driven stress management system tailored to the specific context of Ma'had Aly, this study offers a new dimension to the discourse on student well-being, with implications for educational institutions and mental health support frameworks.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative design with a case study approach. The case study approach was chosen because it enables researchers to delve more deeply into the dynamics of stress management among students at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid. With this design, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of stress management through interviews and direct observation. This approach also allows researchers to explore factors influencing students' ability to manage their emotions and stress from an academic and social perspective.

The unit of analysis in this research is students studying at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid, a higher education institution based in Paiton, Probolinggo, East Java. This research will focus on cases of stress management among students as they face academic challenges and navigate their social lives. Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid, an educational institution that integrates religious and academic learning, will be the research material, focusing on how students use emotional control strategies to manage stress. The research context includes educational and social activities, regulations, and culture in Ma'had Aly that influence students' emotional well-being.

The primary source of information in this research is the respondent, student Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid. They will provide first-hand insight into their experiences dealing with stress and the strategies they use to manage their emotions. Other relevant informants in this research are lecturers, *asatid*, or *asatidah*, who interact with students and provide support for stress management. Apart from that, texts in the form of documents on regulations in Ma'had Aly and theories of stress and emotional control will also be used as sources to explore the research context.

The data collection process in this research includes several methods, namely desk review, observation, and interviews. A desk review was conducted to collect relevant documents regarding regulations at Ma'had Aly, the academic system, and literature on stress management and emotional control. Direct observations will be conducted to monitor student interactions during educational and social activities and assess how stress affects them. In addition, in-depth interviews with students and other informants will be conducted to explore their experiences managing stress and to learn more about the emotional control strategies they use. Interview guidelines will be prepared to help the interview process focus on the research topic.

The data analysis process is carried out in three stages: reduction, display, and verification. At the data reduction stage, the researcher will sort and filter information relevant to the research objectives and summarize the findings from interviews and observations. The data display stage will present the data systematically, such as tables or narratives, making it easier to understand the occurring phenomena. Data verification is carried out to ensure the correctness and consistency of research findings and to confirm whether the data obtained aligns with existing theory and literature. In this case, the analytical methods used are content analysis to examine the information in interviews and documents, discourse analysis to examine how students express their experiences, and interpretive analysis to connect the findings to the concepts of stress management and emotional control in theory. -psychological theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the main findings of the study regarding student stress and emotional control in higher education. The results are organized into three key themes: dominant sources of student stress, observable physical and emotional stress manifestations, and documented stress management strategies. These findings provide an integrated understanding of how stress is experienced, expressed, and managed within the academic and social environment.

Academic, social, and financial pressures dominate stress

In this study, academic, social, and financial pressures are operationally defined as interconnected stressors experienced by students arising from academic workload demands, interpersonal relationship challenges, and economic limitations that collectively affect their emotional and psychological stability. In the field, these pressures were identified through students' accounts of overlapping academic responsibilities, peer and family expectations, and ongoing concerns about tuition fees and daily living expenses.

One informant stated, "Academic assignments often come at the same time with tight deadlines, while I also have to think about daily expenses and tuition fees." This statement illustrates that academic stress does not occur in isolation but is closely intertwined with students' financial concerns. The simultaneity of heavy academic workloads and financial responsibilities creates a compounded burden that intensifies stress levels. In this context, students are required to allocate their limited cognitive and emotional resources to multiple competing demands, namely meeting academic expectations while ensuring financial stability. The researcher interprets this condition as a form of dual-pressure stress, where academic obligations and financial insecurity mutually reinforce one another. Financial worries may reduce students' concentration, motivation, and emotional resilience, thereby impairing their ability to manage academic tasks effectively. Consequently, academic stress becomes more persistent and overwhelming, as students are unable to fully focus on learning because of ongoing concerns about meeting basic living expenses and educational costs.

Another informant explained, "Problems with friends or family often affect my focus on studying, especially when academic tasks are heavy and financial conditions are uncertain." This response highlights the significant role of social pressures in exacerbating students' stress experiences. Interpersonal conflicts and strained family relationships serve as additional stressors that undermine students' academic engagement and emotional well-being. When combined with demanding academic workloads and unstable financial conditions, social problems further deplete students' emotional resources. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence that social relationship challenges function as amplifying factors rather than independent stressors. In such circumstances, students may experience emotional exhaustion due to the cumulative effect of academic pressure, financial insecurity, and unresolved social tensions. These overlapping stressors can weaken coping mechanisms, reduce academic focus, and increase vulnerability to psychological distress. Thus, social pressures play a critical role in intensifying overall stress levels by interacting with academic and financial challenges simultaneously.

Based on observations, students experiencing academic, social, and financial pressures showed signs of fatigue, reduced classroom engagement, limited social interaction, and difficulty concentrating during learning activities. Restating these findings, the data indicate that student stress emerges from the accumulation of multiple pressures that simultaneously influence their academic performance and daily behavior within the campus environment. The data pattern shows that academic pressure is the primary source of stress, while social and financial pressures serve as reinforcing factors. Together, these stressors form a layered, interrelated pattern in which students struggle to maintain emotional balance as academic demands coincide with social conflicts and financial uncertainty.

Stress manifests physically and emotionally among students

In this study, physical and emotional manifestations of stress are operationally defined as observable changes in students' bodily conditions, emotional expressions, and behavioral responses that indicate psychological strain. In the field, these manifestations appeared during academic activities, dormitory life, and social interactions, including signs of physical fatigue, emotional withdrawal, reduced concentration, and visible mood changes that reflect students' difficulty in managing stress.

Table 1. Observation of Stress manifests physically and emotionally among students

Observation Findings	Indicators
Students appeared physically exhausted during lectures	Frequent yawning, slouched posture, slow responses
Decreased focus during learning activities	Difficulty maintaining attention, delayed task completion
Emotional withdrawal in social settings	Limited interaction, avoidance of group discussions
Mood instability during academic routines	Irritability, silent behavior, and facial expressions showing tension
Disrupted daily routines	Irregular attendance, reduced participation in activities

The observational data indicate that students' stress is not only psychological but also manifests in physical and emotional symptoms. Physical fatigue and reduced concentration suggest cognitive overload, while emotional withdrawal and mood instability reflect internal emotional strain. Restating these findings, students under stress demonstrate observable behavioral changes that interfere with their academic engagement and social participation. The consistency of these manifestations across different settings strengthens the interpretation that stress significantly affects students' physical energy and emotional regulation in daily academic life.

The data pattern shows that physical exhaustion and emotional changes frequently occur together, forming a repeated and interconnected response to stress. Students who display signs of fatigue also tend to withdraw socially and show emotional instability, indicating a cyclical pattern where physical strain and emotional distress reinforce one another. This pattern suggests that student stress is a multidimensional condition that manifests consistently across academic, social, and personal contexts.

Time management supports religion and reduces stress

In this study, time management, social support, and religious strengthening are operationally defined as structured activities, institutional programs, and routine practices documented through visual and written records that demonstrate students' efforts to regulate stress. In the field, these strategies were identified through documented schedules, photographs of religious activities, and records of academic and social programs that reflect students' intentional engagement in stress regulation practices.

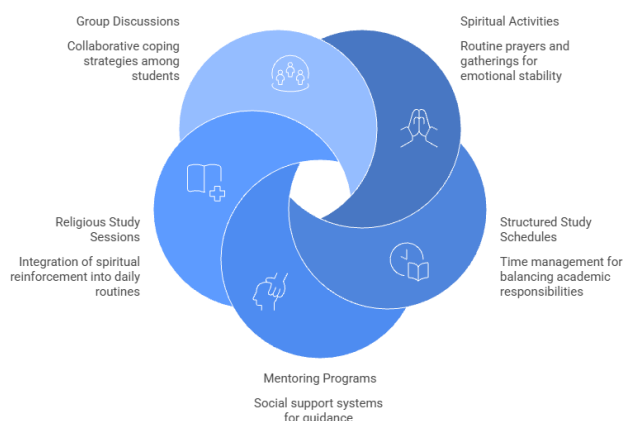


Figure 1. Comprehensive Stress Management Strategies

Based on documentation review and field observation, students consistently participated in scheduled religious and academic activities, indicating a structured daily routine. The presence of organized schedules and regular spiritual programs suggests that students are encouraged to manage their time systematically while engaging in activities that promote emotional calm. The researcher interprets these documented practices as intentional institutional mechanisms designed to support students' emotional regulation and reduce stress through routine, discipline, and collective engagement.

Restating the findings, the documentation confirms that tangible, observable practices, including time management, social interaction, and religious engagement, support students' stress management. These documented activities demonstrate that students are not relying solely on individual coping mechanisms but are supported by structured programs and environments that facilitate emotional regulation and stress reduction. The data pattern shows that time management, social support, and religious strengthening are consistently integrated into students' daily academic and social lives. These strategies appear as recurring, organized, and institutionally supported practices, forming a cohesive pattern in which structured routines and collective spiritual activities function together to help students manage stress more effectively.

Discussion

Students' primary sources of stress generally come from academic pressure, financial problems, and social relationships (Bekkouche et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2021). Heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and high-standard exams often cause academic stress (Ward, 2021; Wuthrich et al., 2020). Financial issues, such as tuition fees and living expenses, are an additional burden, especially for students who depend on scholarships (Malet Calvo et al., 2022; Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). Conflicts in social relationships with

friends and family also worsen students' mental conditions (Escobar et al., 2020; X. Li et al., 2021). The combination of these factors creates significant stress for many students.

Symptoms of stress experienced by students generally involve physical and emotional impacts (Chia et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2020). Physically, many students report feeling tired, headaches, and sleep disorders such as insomnia (Dąbrowska-Galas et al., 2021). Emotionally, stress often leads to anxiety, irritability, and a loss of motivation (Madva et al., 2023; Richards, 2022). Some students also expressed excessive worry about their academic and career futures, which affected their mental health. These symptoms reflect the significant impact of stress on students' physical and emotional well-being.

Practical strategies for managing stress in college students include regular exercise, good time management, and adequate self-care (Loi & Pryce, 2022). Many college students find that exercising helps reduce physical and mental tension, while good time management, such as creating a schedule and prioritizing tasks, helps them stay organized and reduces anxiety (Alhasani et al., 2022). Apart from that, relaxation techniques such as meditation and deep breathing are also considered effective in calming the mind (Pattyn et al., 2024; Toussaint et al., 2021). Social support from friends and family also plays a vital role in providing comfort and reducing stress. Implementing these strategies can help students overcome the stress they face.

Religious strengthening is an effort to deepen your spiritual relationship with God, which can provide inner calm and emotional stability (Jadidi et al., 2022; Wahab, 2022). For students, religious strengthening is often carried out through worship activities such as prayer, reading the Koran, and participating in religious studies (Wening & Hashanah, 2020). This activity helps one live a spiritual life and effectively cope with stress and anxiety caused by academic demands. With religious reinforcement, students feel calmer, more focused, and confident that their efforts will be blessed with the best results (Labrague & De Los Santos, 2020; Zhou & Yao, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study reinforce the relevance of emotional control theory in understanding student stress within higher education contexts. The results demonstrate that stress is not solely an individual psychological response but emerges from the interaction between academic demands, social dynamics, financial conditions, and emotional regulation capacities. This study extends existing theoretical frameworks by illustrating how emotional control operates holistically, integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Moreover, the findings suggest that emotional control should be understood as a contextual and dynamic process, shaped by institutional structures and cultural-religious environments, rather than as a purely individual skill. This perspective contributes to a more nuanced conceptualization of stress management that bridges theoretical assumptions with lived student experiences.

From a practical perspective, the study offers important implications for higher education institutions in designing comprehensive stress management interventions. The documented effectiveness of time management practices, social support systems, and religious strengthening highlights the need for institutions to provide structured programs that support students' emotional well-being. Universities can utilize these findings to develop integrated mental health support models that combine academic guidance, peer mentoring, and spiritual or value-based activities. In addition, institutional policies that promote balanced academic workloads, accessible financial assistance, and

supportive learning environments can significantly reduce student stress. Implementing such strategies may enhance students' emotional resilience, academic engagement, and overall well-being in higher education settings.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex factors contributing to student stress, emphasizing the significant roles of academic pressure, financial constraints, and social conflicts. The key insight gained is that stress is not merely a personal issue but a systemic challenge requiring institutional support. The findings underscore the importance of balanced academic expectations, effective coping strategies, and mental health interventions. Self-care practices, time management, and religious reinforcement are critical tools in managing stress, demonstrating the necessity of a holistic approach to student well-being. This research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical insights into the correlation between stressors and student performance and identifying practical coping strategies. By recognizing the interconnectedness of academic, psychological, and social factors, educational institutions can design targeted interventions to improve student well-being. These findings encourage further discussion on integrating structured mental health support, lifestyle coaching, and spiritual well-being into student development programs.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research primarily relies on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to bias and personal interpretation. Additionally, the study focuses on a specific student population, limiting the generalizability of findings across diverse academic and cultural settings. Future research should expand its scope by incorporating more extensive and varied samples, employing quantitative measures such as stress level assessments, and exploring longitudinal data to track stress patterns over time. Another limitation is the lack of an in-depth examination of institutional policies that could alleviate student stress. Further studies should explore how universities can implement structured mental health programs, academic workload adjustments, and financial support systems to create a more student-friendly environment. Future research can provide more comprehensive recommendations by addressing these gaps, ultimately contributing to the development of holistic and sustainable stress management frameworks in higher education.

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