



Exploring Students' Coping Strategies for Academic Stress through the Lens of Islamic Principles

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Abstract

University students often experience different levels of stress while completing academic tasks, which may lead to significant stress, especially when dealing with examinations. Numerous studies have highlighted the critical role that religion can play in managing and coping with such stress. This study identifies the symptoms of academic stress that the undergraduate students are facing during examinations and investigates the coping mechanisms utilised by them to manage academic stress through an Islamic perspective and the impacts of these Islamic coping strategies. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys with fifty three undergraduates from a local university in Sarawak and in-depth interviews with fifteen selected students. It investigates how Islamic coping strategies are experienced and examines their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects. Findings reveal that the students predominantly engage in three forms of Islamic religious coping: worship in the heart (internal spiritual reflection), verbal worship (such as prayer and zikr), and worship by action (observable religious practices). These coping behaviors significantly contribute to mitigating stress by fostering cognitive resilience, emotional calmness, and constructive behavioral responses. The study underscores that awareness of both internal and external stressors alongside religious coping facilitates effective stress management, which in turn improves academic performance. Furthermore, the findings highlight the potential impacts of employing Islamic coping strategies, as suggested by the respondents. Understanding these impacts can help students choose appropriate coping mechanisms to manage academic stress more effectively. Besides, educational institutions and academics may utilise the findings to support students in managing academic stress more effectively and to design targeted programmes that address the identified stressors. This research enriches understanding of Islamic spirituality as a valuable resource for stress relief among students, offering practical insights for educational institutions to integrate spiritual support in student wellness programmes.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Stress Coping Strategies, Islamic Principles, University Students

1. Introduction

Academic stress is a common experience among university students worldwide and is often escalated during examination periods and while meeting academic demands, completing assignments and on-going assessments. This stress can adversely affect most students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. Extensive research has been conducted on various psychological and behavioral strategies for the management of academic stress, with particular scholarly attention directed toward the potential role of religious coping mechanisms. Among Muslim students, Islamic principles and practices provide a holistic guideline for managing stressful experiences, especially during examinations. Islamic spirituality focuses on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, thereby providing Muslims with a comprehensive and integrated set of coping resources grounded in faith and religious rituals. These coping strategies include internal spiritual reflection (worship in the heart), verbal worship (such as prayer and zikr), and worship through physical actions (such as attending congregational prayers / 'solat jemaah'). Research suggests that these Islamic religious coping methods contribute significantly to reducing stress, fostering resilience, and promoting positive mental health outcomes. Despite the growing interest, there remains a gap in understanding the specific ways Muslim university students apply Islamic coping strategies to manage academic stress, particularly during examination periods. This study aims to explore the symptoms of academic stress experienced by undergraduate students, identify the coping mechanisms or strategies rooted in Islamic principles they employ, and assess the different impacts of these strategies. By doing so, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that student support services can adapt and contribute to the development of culturally relevant stress management programmes in educational institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Stress: Definition and Stress Response

In general, a stressor is anything physical or mental that disturbs the body's balance (homeostasis) and causes a stress response (Lu et al., 2021). This stress response involves both behaviors and physical changes in the body. Stress is a complex phenomenon that can have both advantageous and adverse effects on most individuals. Notably, not all stress is



harmful as *eustress*, or positive stress can enhance motivation, increase energy levels, and improve focus, thereby facilitating better performance and resilience (de la Fuente et al., 2025; Pascoe et al., 2020). In contrast, when stress exceeds an individual's capacity to cope and results in negative physical or psychological consequences, it is referred to as *distress* (Högberg et al., 2023). The nature of stress varies among individuals, depending on its duration, frequency, and factors. Consequently, stress presents in multiple forms, each exhibiting differing characteristics. According to Lu et al. (2021), acute stress is a short-term response triggered by immediate challenges such as exams or sudden problems. Chronic stress, on the other hand, results from prolonged exposure to ongoing stressors like persistent work pressure or illness and is associated with cumulative negative health effects (Zakaria et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). Certain individuals may experience acute stress more frequently, characterised by prolonged episodes of acute stress that are commonly associated with disordered lifestyles marked by persistent deadlines and recurrent interpersonal conflicts (de la Fuente et al., 2025). Traumatic stress arises from exposure to severe adverse events such as natural disasters or violent incidents and may lead to long-term conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Wang et al., 2022). Environmental stress is caused by adverse surroundings, including noise, pollution, overcrowding, or unsafe living conditions, all of which negatively impact physical and psychological well-being (Zakaria et al., 2018). Meanwhile, psychological stress stems from cognitive and emotional factors, including worries, fears, and negative thoughts related to academic demands, social pressures, or self-imposed expectations (Pascoe et al., 2020). Lastly, physiological stress involves disruptions within the body, such as illness, injury, sleep deprivation, or nutritional deficiencies, activating biological stress pathways and potentially compromising health (de la Fuente et al., 2025). Understanding the different types of stress is important for creating support and solutions that address the specific causes and nature of stress, especially for students in schools or universities.

Academic stress is a pervasive issue faced by university students worldwide, triggered primarily by examination pressures, performance expectations, and workload (Misra & McKean, 2000). The adverse effects of academic stress include anxiety, depression, decreased academic performance, and impaired social functioning (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). Consequently, identifying effective coping mechanisms has become a vital point in educational psychology and student wellness research.

2.2 Academic Stress: Prevalence and Symptoms

Kumar and Bhukar (2013) stated that the university years are more stressful than the years at other stages of life. Research indicates that many university students experience stress ranging from moderate levels (Asif et al., 2020; Yikealo et al., 2018) to high or severe levels (Asif et al., 2020; Reddy et al., 2018). Notably, academic stress is a mental distress that relates to apprehended frustration associated with academic failure. According to Kadapatti and Vijayalaxmi (2012) academic stress is the product of a combination of academic-related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual. They stated that academic factors were the predominant cause of stress in most students, followed by physical, social, and emotional. The majority of students with stress reported high scores of poor self-esteem, and about half scored high on depression scales (Baste and Gadkari, 2014). Results from the literature suggest that higher levels of stress are associated with poor academic performance (Sohail, 2013). To add, Lee and Larson (2000) revealed that academic stress occurs when they face pressure from their environment, and react based on how they see or judge the situation. This stress is not just a small issue as Kadapatti and Vijayalaxmi (2012) described it as a "career stopper" meaning that it can affect someone's ability to succeed in their studies and future career. This problem has become a serious concern because it is closely related to the increasing number of mental health issues among students (Nadamuri and Ch, 2011).

Many students have revealed that stress affects both the body and mind (Shaw et al, 2018). If academic stress is not managed properly, it can seriously affect a person's ability to study effectively. Academic stress can make concentrating difficult, reduce motivation, and lead to poor academic performance (Misra and Mckean, 2000). Moreover, academic stress can strain relationships with friends and family, as stressed individuals may withdraw socially, become irritable or struggle to communicate their feelings (Hamaideh, 2011). This social strain can increase feelings of isolation and anxiety. When stress and pressure continue over a long time, they often create a cycle. Rising expectations, whether from parents, teachers or themselves, can increase anxiety and worsen self-doubt (Lee & Larson, 2000, Misra & Castillo, 2004). This increasing anxiety makes it harder for them to regain focus, motivation, prolonging their distress and harming their overall psychological well-being. (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker , 2020).

2.3 General Coping Theories in Academic Settings

Managing stress in academic settings involves the various ways students respond to and adapt to the demands of their studies. Coping strategies are generally classified into two main types: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Salimzadeh et al., 2021). According to them further, problem-focused coping addresses the underlying causes of stress by activities such as time management and study sessions, whereas emotion-focused coping aims to regulate



emotional responses by seeking social support and maintaining mental and physical health. Furthermore, Annatagia (2023) highlighted the importance of spiritual and religious coping methods, which provide emotional comfort and help strengthen students' resilience. Similarly, Selian et al. (2020) revealed that peer support, family involvement, and participation in group learning not only reduce feelings of isolation but also foster a sense of belonging, thereby enhancing coping effectiveness. According to Zakaria et al. (2022), combining these culturally grounded approaches with practical and emotional coping strategies can improve students' resilience and overall well-being. Consequently, students who successfully implement these coping techniques are more likely to maintain both strong academic performance and overall health. Moreover, support from social networks is also crucial in alleviating emotional stress. Communicating with peers, family members, or counselors offers encouragement and reassurance while habits like getting adequate sleep and regular physical activity play an important part in managing stress levels (Zakaria et al., 2022). These social connections not only provide emotional comfort but also practical advice, which helps students feel less isolated and more capable of coping with academic pressures. Students who combine practical problem-solving with emotional self-regulation often achieve better academic results and experience less burnout (Salimzadeh et al., 2021; Sentürk & Isikan, 2024). Those who adopt a range of coping techniques are generally more resilient when facing academic challenges. These individuals report lower levels of anxiety and maintain motivation, enabling sustained focus and participation in their studies (Salimzadeh, 2021; Sentürk & Isikan, 2024). Coping techniques involve thinking, actions, and emotions, and hence, when students adapt the different ways of coping, they can handle different types of stress better, which will result in academic success and holistic well-being.

To sum, effective coping methods not only help to reduce stress but also allow students to turn difficulties into opportunities for growth and resilience (Salimzadeh et al., 2021; Annatagia, 2023). By combining various practical, emotional, and spiritual strategies, students can improve their academic achievements while preserving their mental health and general well-being (Annatagia, 2023). Therefore, educators and institutions should encourage and facilitate the development of diverse coping skills among students to promote a healthier and more supportive academic environment. Ultimately, fostering these coping mechanisms can contribute to producing well-rounded individuals who are better prepared to face both academic and life challenges.

2.4 Religious Based Coping Mechanism

Religious and spiritual coping strategies have received considerable attention as viable means of alleviating stress. Koenig (2012) emphasized that religion provides followers with a framework to interpret stressful events, offering solace and improved psychological resilience. Islamic spirituality, in particular, is recognized for its holistic approach, integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of coping through faith-based practices (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Despite the growing body of research, most studies have focused on general religious coping without specifically addressing academic-related stress among university students. The present study fills this gap with a mixed-methods approach, illuminating how Islamic coping mechanisms—worship in the heart, verbal worship, and worship by action—are distinctly applied during academic stress episodes and their multifaceted impacts on cognition, emotion, and behavior. Moreover, understanding these coping strategies aligns with theories like the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which posit that coping effectiveness depends on both internal appraisal and external resources. Islamic spirituality thus serves as an internal resource that modulates students' cognitive appraisals of stress and facilitates positive coping behaviors. Koenig (2012) identified 454 studies before 2000 and during 2000 to 2010. Many studies report that religion has helped many individuals to cope with a wide range of illnesses or in a variety of stressful situations. Most studies report that religion is helpful where it has an impact on mental health through many different mechanisms. The studies reported that religion could increase the amount of positive emotions and reduce the possibility that stress will result in emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder, suicide, and substance abuse by providing resources for stress coping.

Many studies have investigated various coping styles that the students may utilise to help them in managing their stress including, better study habits, finding guidance on career choices and cultivating social and familial support. One mechanism by which individuals cope with stress is through religious coping, whereby behavioral or cognitive strategies developed from an individual's religious or spiritual beliefs are used as means to cope with stress (Maynard, Gorusch, & Bjorck, 2001). Zakaria et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative investigation into particular Islamic religious coping behaviors employed by university students to handle academic stress, identifying strategies centered on worship within the heart, verbal expressions of worship, and worship through actions, each of which positively influences distinct domains. Orekoya (2025) discovered that religious activities are a more effective coping mechanism for academic stress among undergraduate students compared to other strategies. A strong negative correlation was reported between religious activities and academic stress, indicating increased religious activity reduces stress. The study recommended fostering spiritual and religious activities on campus to support mental health and academic success. To add, Osman and Mukhtar Ahmed (2021) discussed the role of religious orientation and coping in stress reduction among students. They noted



religion often serves as a defense mechanism to lower academic stress, but effectiveness depends on the religious coping strategy employed—positive strategies aid adjustment while negative ones may worsen outcomes.

2.5 Islamic Coping Strategies as a Response to Stress

Islam is a religion that compliments human aspects of life fully. From the aspect of physical, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, action and others. Islam covers every aspect of human beings and so those aspects of trials and difficulties that are faced by every human being. Allah SWT had stated in The Noble Quran, surah Al-Baqarah verses 155:

"Be sure We will test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives, but give glad tidings to those who are steadfast, who say when afflicted with calamity: To God we belong and to Him is our return. They are those on whom (descend) blessings from God and mercy and they are the ones that receive guidance." (Quran 2:155)

The verses had stated that there are several factors that can lead to stress, which are fear, hunger and grief or loss of beloved people and belongings. These factors are very relatable with students' academic stress as academic stress comes from the worry and fear of failure of an individual towards their study. Furthermore, Islam also provides a variety of methods on what can be done in order to cope with stress. As an example, in the Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah Verse 45:

"And seek help in patience and prayer and truly it is extremely heavy and hard except for those who obey Allah with full submission, fear much from His Punishment, and believe in His Promise and His Warnings" (Quran 2:45).

In this verse, Allah SWT encourages humans to seek help through patience and prayer during hard times. In the context of academic stress, a research by Abdullah, Yusoff, and Abdul Rashid (2019) found that Muslim students often resort to religious coping to maintain psychological well-being during exam periods. Their findings highlighted that students' engagement in Islamic practices not only reduced anxiety but also enhanced motivation and concentration. Similarly, Sulaiman and Suliman (2017) revealed that students utilising Islamic coping strategies demonstrated better stress resilience and academic performance than those who did not engage in spiritual practices. Several studies underscore the importance of Islamic coping mechanisms in managing mental health challenges among Muslim populations. Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2015) categorised religious coping into internal spiritual reflection, verbal worship, and worship through action, all of which foster a sense of meaning, control, and calmness. Internal spiritual reflection involves contemplation and reliance on trust in God's decree (tawakkul), which helps individuals cognitively reframe stressful experiences. Verbal worship, including prayer (salat) and remembrance of God (zikr), induces emotional calmness and comfort. Worship by action comprises practical religious behaviors like attending communal prayers or charity, promoting constructive behavioral responses to stress.

In sum, there are several beneficial attributes of Islamic Coping Strategies that educational institutions could utilise to aid students' academic stress effectively, in which they can integrate spiritual support programming that can be tailored for Muslim students. As a result, these give positive impacts to their overall well being and academic success (Yusoff, 2010). He further suggested that this approach recognizes religiosity not merely as a cultural identity marker but as an active, functional resource for stress management.

2.6 Concepts of Islamic Worship

Every religion has its own unique system of worshipping. Islam prescribes its prayer system without challenging the prayer systems of other religions, in which the verse below suggested that everyone has their own way of worshipping and no one should criticise how others worship. Stated in Al-Quran Al-Baqarah verses 148:

"And for every community is a direction toward which it turns. So race to all that is good. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you forth (for judgement) all together. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent."

Worship in Islam has many aspects, and in the most general meaning, worship includes everything that pleases Allah, whether it is about beliefs or physical actions. It includes what someone thinks, feels, says and does. It also includes everything that Allah requires, external, internal or interactives (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 2024). This means worship is not limited to ritual but also includes beliefs, work, social activities and personal behavior as human beings (Al-Qaradawi, 1999).

Worship may be classified into three types: in the heart (tawakkul), verbal (zikr, Quran recitation) and action (sunnah prayers). Worship in the heart refers to the inner feelings and intentions that show our loyalty to Allah, even when other people cannot see them. This includes trusting Allah after doing our best (tawakkul), being sincere (ikhlas), being patient (sabr), being thankful (shukr), fearing to displease Allah (khauf) and hoping for Allah mercy's (raja') (Al-Ghazali, 1997).



These feelings help build a close relationship with Allah and guide us in our daily life. Tawakkul can help us to stay calm and always positive during hard times. As stated in Al-Quran Surah At-Talaq Verse 3:

“And whoever puts their trust in Allah, He will suffice them. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Verily, Allah has set a decree for everything.”

Worship in verbal refers to acts of devotion that are expressed through speech, recitation or praise. This includes reciting the Quran, making zikr remembering Allah through phrases such as Subhanallah, Alhamdulillah and Allahu Akbar and praying in du’a. These speeches of worship are not only a way to express love, gratitude and submission to Allah but also serve to strengthen faith and bring peace to the heart. Through verbal worship, a believer used to glorify the Creator and spread good words. Allah stated in the Quran in Surah Ar-Ra’d Verse 28:

“To those believers and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah. Indeed, it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.”

Worship in action refers to acts of devotion expressed through physical deeds rather than words. In Islam it refers to five pillars of Islam which are reciting Shahadah, performing the prayer, fasting during Ramadhan, giving zakat and performing hajj. It also includes helping those in need, engaging in acts of kindness for the sake of Allah. These action expressions of worship show obedience, humility and commitment and Muslims do it as everyday activities to get a chance of gaining Allah’s pleasure. By worshipping through action, Muslims turn their faith into visible deeds, proving true devotion not only through heart or tongue but also in the way the person behaves. As stated in Quran surah Al-Baqarah Verse 195:

“And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw yourself into destruction. And do good, indeed Allah loves the doers of good.”

In summary, when students experience academic stress, Islamic worship practices can aid them to cope with these stressors effectively. These practices cultivate positive inner attitudes such as trust in Allah and patience, which help students maintain calm and hope during challenges. Through verbal worship such as prayer and remembering Allah, the students find their peace of mind. Additionally, engaging in worship through actions, such as disciplined prayers and acts of kindness, encourages resilience and constructive behavior. Together, these spiritual coping strategies strengthen the students’ overall wellbeing and ability to handle academic pressures.

3. Conceptual Framework

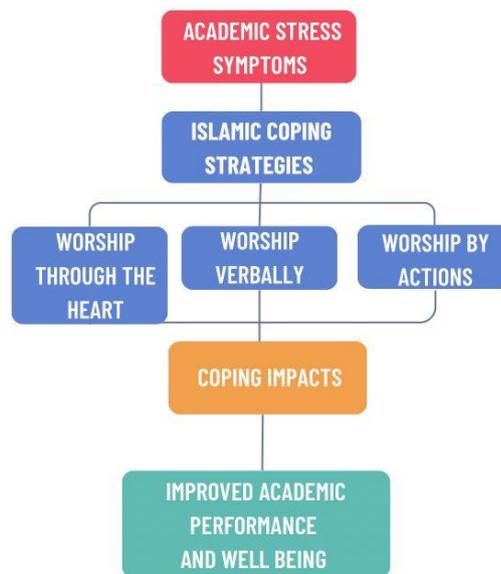


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This framework demonstrates that awareness of stressors, combined with the active use of Islamic coping behaviors in dealing with academic stress, where the respondents would opt for either they would worship through the heart (patience and *tawakkul*: trust and reliance on Allah), worship verbally (zikr, doa recitation and Quran recitation) and worship by actions (sunnah praying). These are believed to equip the students to effectively manage their academic stress. These



coping methods could enhance many aspects that could benefit the students' academic success and overall wellness. Educational institutions can draw on these insights to develop targeted programs that integrate both academic and spiritual support for students.

4. Research Questions

The research questions formulated are as follow:

- A. What are the common symptoms of academic stress experienced by Muslim undergraduate students during examination periods?
- B. What Islamic coping mechanisms (by heart, verbal and actions) do Muslim undergraduate students employ to manage academic stress?
- C. What are the impacts of Islamic coping strategies on the students' ability to deal with academic stress?

5. Significance of Study

This research is significant as it addresses a critical gap in understanding how Muslim university students specifically utilize Islamic spiritual coping mechanisms to manage academic stress, particularly during challenging examination periods. Academic stress is a pervasive issue adversely affecting students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being globally. While psychological and behavioral coping strategies have been studied extensively, the unique role of Islamic spirituality, encompassing many vital dimensions grounded in faith and religious practices, still remains under-explored. Islamic coping strategies such as reliance on Allah (tawakkul), patience (sabr), gratitude (shukr), verbal worship (prayer, zikr), and physical worship practices offer culturally and spiritually relevant resources that potentially enhance Muslims' resilience, reduce anxiety, and promote positive mental health outcomes. By thoroughly examining these Islamic coping mechanisms, this research seeks to generate meaningful insights that can enhance culturally sensitive student support services. The findings aim to develop more effective, faith-based stress management programmes tailored to students' differing needs. Notably, this approach aspires to strengthen students' academic resilience and overall well-being by integrating their cultural and spiritual values into academic stress coping strategies.

6. Research Methodology

This current research for studying how Muslim university students use Islamic coping strategies to manage academic stress is a mixed-method approach, utilising an adapted survey and through in-depth interviews combined with thematic analysis. These methods allow for a rich exploration of students' lived experiences, providing detailed insights into their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral coping mechanisms rooted in Islamic spirituality. The survey consists of four sections, where the first section asks about demographics, and the second section identifies their frequency of academic stress occurrences and the types of stressors. The third section examines the coping strategies employed, specifically worship through the heart, verbal expressions, and physical actions. The final section explores the impacts of these strategies on the students' different dimensions. The online surveys were distributed using a convenience random sampling method to 60 respondents; however, with only 53 completed surveys were returned. These respondents were undergraduate students from various faculties, ranging from Part 1 to Part 5 of different diploma programmes. The survey data were analysed using SPSS Version 26 and presented through tables and pie charts, showing the number of respondents and percentages. The survey questions were adapted from Mohd Zaliridzal et al. (2021) and included sections on demographics (such as programmes enrollment, academic level, and gender), the frequency of academic stress experienced, common symptoms related to stress, and the students' preferred Islamic coping strategies.

In addition, semi-structured surveys were also conducted to obtain in-depth insights into Research Question 3 (the specific examples of Islamic Coping Strategies) and Research Question 4 (Impacts of the strategies to the students). The selected participants were fifteen students of different gender, various faculties and diploma levels (Part 1 to Part 5 students). By conducting semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of Muslim undergraduate students, the study can capture personal narratives about the specific religious practices they employ in dealing with academic stress, such as internal spiritual reflection, verbal worship like prayer and zikr, and physical acts of worship, as well as the impacts on the overall well beings. In the context of this study, using purposive sampling to conduct semi-structured interviews with Muslim undergraduate students means that the participants were intentionally selected in terms of those who practice specific religious coping mechanisms for academic stress. This approach allows the study to capture rich, personal narratives on how these particular religious practices are employed in managing stress, focusing on the participants who can best answer the research question. The data from the interview were then analysed by using thematic analysis: Section 4 (Impacts of Islamic Coping Strategies). This analysis enables the identification of key themes that reveal how these coping strategies could influence the students' different dimensions, and the interview findings could be categorised into mental processes, emotional regulation, and behaviors in response to academic challenges. This qualitative approach is well-suited to uncover the nuanced ways in which Islamic principles contribute to students'



resilience and well-being, ultimately informing culturally and spiritually relevant stress management programs in higher education settings.

7. Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the online survey (including demographics such as programmes, academic level, gender, and frequency of stress) addressing Research Question 1 and 2, as well as the insights gathered from semi-structured interviews with participants, pertaining to Research Question 2 and 3.

Table 1: Respondents’ Programmes and Parts

No.	PROGRAMME	PART	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
1	AC110	4	4
2	IC120	2	15
3	AS120	1	7
4	AS116	2	1
5	CDCS110	3	1
6	AM110	7	6
7	HM111	2	3
8	CEEC110	2	2
9	AS117	5	14

The 53 respondents were from nine different faculties, ranging from Part 1 to Part 5 diploma students. The faculties were Civil Engineering, Applied Sciences, Hotel Management, Halal Management, Computer Science and Mathematics, Accountancy and Public Administration. The respondents' demographics represent a diverse range of diploma programmes, encompassing students from both Social Sciences and Science and Technology fields.

Table 2: Gender Profiles

GENDER	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Female	31
Male	22
TOTAL:	53

In terms of gender, the female respondents were slightly more than the male respondents with the difference of 9 respondents, making a total of 53 respondents. The difference in number between female and male respondents indicates a modest majority of female participants.

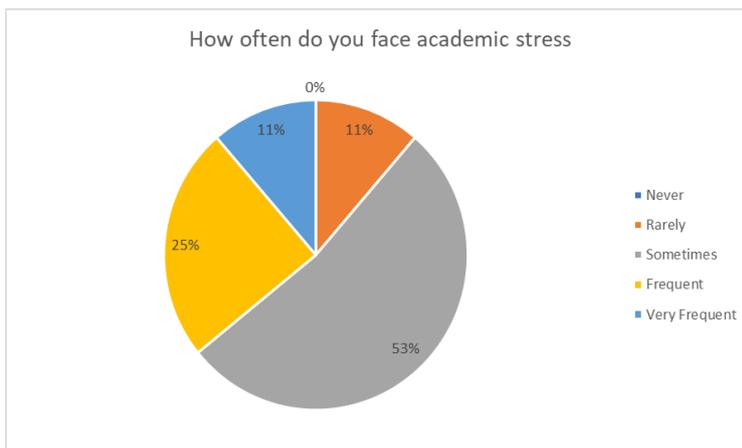


Figure 1: Frequency of Academic Stress

Looking at Figure 1, when the students were asked about their frequency of academic stress, more than half (53%) admitted to facing such stress ‘sometimes’, while 25% opted for ‘frequent’ and 11% chose ‘very frequent’. Thus, it can be concluded that most of the respondents had experienced academic stress at some time of their academic years. These findings are supported by other research as well. David (as cited in Kumar & Bhukar, 2013) emphasized that university life is considerably more stressful than other stages of life. Furthermore, multiple studies have documented that a substantial proportion of university students experience stress levels ranging from moderate to severe (Asif, Mudassar, Shahzad, Raouf, & Pervaiz, 2020; Yikealo, Tareke, & Karvinen, 2018; Y, P., Fauzan, & B., 2018; Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018).

Table 3: Symptoms of Academic Stress

Academic Stress Symptoms	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequent	Very Frequent
Cannot sleep	19%	26%	25%	21%	9%
Nervousness	5%	16%	30%	40%	9%
No appetite	19%	42%	24%	15%	0%
Moody	13%	15%	38%	23%	11%
Angry with others	21%	23%	36%	13%	7%
Disorganised work	8%	26%	36%	19%	11%
Not communicating with others	17%	40%	26%	13%	4%

The table above shows the different stressors that the students were facing in relation to academics, and the findings indicate that many of them chose ‘very frequent’ for symptoms such as being moody and disorganised work with 11%. As for the ‘frequent’ option, 23% chose moodiness, 21% had sleeping problems and 40% were experiencing nervousness. The symptoms can be categorised into physical (cannot sleep and no appetite), emotional (nervousness, moody and anger) and actions (disorganised work and not communicating). Consequently, these findings align with other research indicating that academic stress adversely affects individuals by contributing to anxiety, depression, reduced academic performance, and diminished social functioning (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). Misra and Mckean (2000) also revealed that academic stress can make concentrating difficult, reduce motivation, and lead to poor academic performance.

Table 4: Islamic Coping Strategies in Handling Academic Stress

Islamic Coping Strategies	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequent	Very Frequent
Worship in heart (tawakkul)	2%	4%	6%	41%	47%
Worship verbally	2%	6%	9%	45%	38%
Worship in action	4%	9%	21%	34%	32%

Table 4 above deals with the final survey item which asks the respondents on the strategies to handle their academic stress, and the strategies are related to Islamic Coping Strategies (worship in heart, verbally and in action). Generally, for the options of ‘very frequent’ and ‘frequent’, 88% preferred to worship in heart when they are stressed, showing high degree of tawakkul (to place trust or reliance on Allah), while 83% were shown for worship in verbal and 66% of the



respondents chose worship in action. To note, the following section provides a detailed description or examples of the strategies identified from the semi-structured interview data.

Table 6: Summary of Islamic Coping Strategies with Examples

Examples of Islamic Coping Behaviour Strategies: Most Frequently Mentioned	
Worship in heart	Tawakkul (Trust in Allah), Accepting the reality or whatever outcomes, Maintaining patience at all times, Remembering Allah and Having sincere intention
Worship verbally	Zikr, Quran Recitations and Verbal Prayers (dua)
Worship in action	Heartfelt Sunnah Prayer like ‘Tahajjud’, Prayer of needs: ‘solat hajat’, Ablution (wudu) and Fasting

Table 6 provides an overview of the activities reported by 15 respondents during academic stress. When they were asked to give examples on how they deal with academic stress, the findings reveal that the students cope with academic stress through multidimensional Islamic worship practices that can be categorised into three main themes, encompassing the heart, verbal expressions, and physical actions. The findings relate to the study by Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2015) who categorised religious coping into internal spiritual reflection, verbal worship, and worship through action, all of which foster a sense of meaning, control, and calmness. Internally, the respondents rely on tawakkul (trust in Allah), acceptance, patience, sincere intentions and constant remembrance of Allah to sustain emotional balance. Verbally, they would engage in zikr, Quran recitation, and personal supplications (dua) to calm the mind and seek spiritual support. In terms of actions, the students claimed that they would perform heartfelt Sunnah prayers like Tahajjud and Solat Hajat, practice ritual purification (wudu), and observe fasting, which collectively foster psychological renewal and spiritual resilience. Several students responded that the Tahajjud prayer, a voluntary night prayer performed in the last third of the night, has been found to offer significant benefits in managing academic stress and promoting mental and emotional well-being. Together, these integrated coping strategies highlight the essential role of faith in managing academic stress through cognitive, emotional, verbal, and physical dimensions of worship. The next section reveals the respondents’ responses on the impacts of Islamic Coping Behaviours and their responses were categorised into three themes: cognitive, emotions and actions.

Table 7: The Impacts of Islamic Coping Behaviours (Semi-structured Interview)

RESPONDENT	COGNITIVE (MENTALLY)	FEELINGS (EMOTIONALLY)	ACTIONS (BEHAVIOURALLY)
R1	Practising tawakkul teaches me to let go of things beyond my control, which helps reduce stress and brings emotional relief.	Performing prayer and zikr helps to calm the mind and reduce anxiety, allowing me to focus and feel at peace. Reciting the Al-Quran gives me emotional comfort and strengthens my faith especially during difficult times.	Performing Tahajjud, <i>Hajat</i> prayer, zikr and reciting Al-Quran, calm me down
R2	InshaAllah,our sustenance will be increased	Our day will feel much calmer	Performing the Sunnah Qabliyah prayer before Subuh and reciting at least one page of the Quran after the Subuh prayer gives me a sense of purpose.
R3	Helps Muslims to deal with stress by relying on faith, patience, prayer and trust in Allah. It also strengthens social support through shared faith	It brings emotional strength, reduces anxiety.. provides inner peace through spiritual connection	Praying make me calmer and refresh my heart



R4	Help build both mental and emotional strength. They might not remove life's problems but provide ways to deal with them patiently and wisely.	It makes us feel more relaxed and strengthens trust in our hard work	Performing sunnah 'solat' helps me perform better academically
R5	Helps me to deal with stress through faith and trust in Allah	Honestly, it makes me feel mentally calmer and makes it easier to face life as a student who is often known for being stressed	Praying improves my discipline. I become more organized, patient, and respectful towards others. I also avoid negative behaviours like lashing out or isolating myself.
R6	It makes me feel at ease every time I do that	When I recite the Quran, I feel so calm	Performing prayer and Quran recitation helps create tranquility in our hearts whenever we do it.
R7	I gain more peace by having tawakkul.	Zikr calms me down and soothe my anxiousness	Brings myself closer to Allah SWT by praying especially in the middle of the night for sunnah prayers.
R8	Believing that Allah is always with us and near is enough to comfort my heart	Reading the Quran also comforts me in the sweetest way possible, reducing the butterflies in my stomach	For me, what really keeps me sane and going is when I do my prayer and dua.
R9	Patience helps me to believe that the hardships and problems I am currently going through will be easier and the future will be bright for sure.	When I make lots of zikr and istighfar, everything seems to go smoothly with Allah's will.	Even the things I forget, Allah inspires me with the answers during exams. So, pray more, especially tahajjud.
R10	Even if I cannot remember or revise everything that I learn, Allah guides me to focus on topics included in examination	I feel at ease and learn to do my best without too much pressure. I also recite the Quran frequently, never compromise the time I spend with Allah, pray, read mathurat, and practise Qailullah every day	When it gets hard, I stop to take wudhu or do zikr.
R11	Makes us be more grateful and present in life	Zikr and Quran ease the mind and heart	Calming my anger by praying tahajjud has made me more focused and organized
R12	Tawakkul helps reduce overthinking by reminding us that Allah is in control	Emotionally, prayer and zikr bring peace and comfort, especially during stressful times	Praying tahajjud promotes patience, discipline, and better decision-making
R13	Practices like tawakkul help me stay calm and think more clearly during difficult times	Emotionally, prayer and zikr bring peace to my heart and reduce anxiety or sadness	Praying guides me to act more patiently and make decisions based on faith
R14	Believing in Allah helps me to trust Allah's plan, reduce anxiety and respond with patience	Zikr brings emotional peace	When I pray, 5 times a day and sunnah prayers, it will promote behavioral discipline



R15	Mentally, being patience and to trust Allah reduce overthinking and provide clarity	Emotionally, zikr brings comfort, hope, and a sense of inner peace	Praying encourages me to be more patient, forgiving, and mindful in my actions
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The interview findings in Table 6 and Table 7 are interconnected. Table 6 identifies the types of activities the respondents engage in when facing academic stress, specifically involving worship in the heart, verbal worship, and worship through actions. Table 7, meanwhile, describes the impacts the respondents experience after practicing these coping strategies. When the respondents were asked to describe in detail about the impacts of using these strategies, their responses were categorised into three main themes: cognitive (mental), emotional (feelings), and behavioral (actions). The interview findings reveal that cognitively, many students rely heavily on the concept of tawakkul, or trust in Allah’s plan, which helps them to mentally accept that certain outcomes are beyond their control. This trust mitigates overthinking and excessive worry about academic results, fostering mental clarity and focus. Emotionally, these Islamic coping behaviors bring about profound calmness and inner peace. Many respondents expressed how verbal worship through zikr, Quran recitation, and heartfelt supplications (dua) provide emotional relief, spiritual comfort, and reassurance. Additionally, the relaxation gained from these practices supports emotional stability during stressful academic periods, helping students manage frustration and anger more effectively. Behaviorally, students translate their beliefs and emotions into consistent, positive actions that help them cope with academic stress. Many reported to regularly perform Sunnah prayers such as Tahajjud and *Solat Hajat*, engaging in ritual purification through wudu, and sometimes observing fasting, all of which reinforce discipline, perseverance, and a stronger spiritual connection. These behaviors contribute to improved focus, organisation, and academic performance by promoting patience and mindful decision-making.

Overall, this integrated coping framework illustrates how Islamic beliefs and practices empower the students cognitively by providing acceptance and mental clarity, emotionally by fostering peace and resilience, and behaviorally by encouraging disciplined and spiritually grounded actions to navigate academic stress effectively.

8. Discussions

The present study provides valuable insights into how students experience academic stress and employ Islamic coping behaviors to manage these challenges. The stressors reported that physical symptoms, emotional distress, and behavioral disruptions could manifest academic pressure. Notably, moodiness and disorganisation emerged as prominent indicators of stress, with substantial portions of the students frequently experiencing nervousness and sleep difficulties. These findings align with previous studies which have shown about the strong emotional and mental stress students feel because of academic demands. In addressing these stressors, the majority of respondents opted for faith-based coping strategies, particularly worship practices such as worship in the heart, verbal worship, and worship in action. The high prevalence of approaches involving internal spiritual reflection (88% indicating frequent use) and verbal expressions of faith (83%) underscores the significance of Islamic spirituality in students’ stress management repertoire. Although the findings were slightly less common, active worship like ritual prayers and fasting (66%) is still important. This shows that the students are fully engaged in thinking, feeling, and acting in their Islamic faith. The qualitative interview data enrich this understanding by illustrating the multidimensional nature of Islamic coping behaviors. Internally, students leaned heavily on tawakkul, trust in Allah’s plan which functioned as a key mental mechanism enabling acceptance of uncontrollable outcomes. This trust appears to reduce overthinking and excessive worry, facilitating mental clarity and focus which are vital for academic performance. Emotionally, verbal worship like zikr, Quran recitation, and sincere prayers (dua) gave the students significant relief. These practices could create feelings of calmness, spiritual comfort, and help control their emotions, reducing anxiety, frustration, and restlessness. This revelation matches with how prayer and meditation are known to help manage emotions and lower stress.

Students put their beliefs into action through clear practices such as praying Sunnah prayers like Tahajjud and Solat Hajat, performing ritual cleansing (wudu), and sometimes fasting. These activities strengthened their spiritual discipline and persistence. Besides being acts of worship, these practices have helped students develop better self-control, organization, and focus in their studies. By involving both the mind and body, these actions support ways of coping that balance mental and physical responses to stress. It is important to note that these findings show an Islamic coping framework where trusting highly in Allah (tawakkul), calming the emotions through spoken worship, and acting through prayers and fasting help students handle academic stress more effectively. This complete approach shows that religious coping supports the overall well-being of an individual: mental, emotional, and physical strength. It is also important to note the significant role of Sunnah prayers, especially Tahajjud. Known for its deep spirituality and reflection, Tahajjud gives students a quiet time for focused worship, which boosts their emotional and mental resilience. This suggests that certain types of voluntary (sunnah) worship can be especially helpful for managing stress and should be studied more for



supporting Muslim students. The study's findings also have important practical implications. Educational institutions with Muslim student bodies should consider integrating awareness of faith-based coping strategies into support services, recognizing the vital role that spirituality plays in students' mental health and academic success. Encouraging spiritually congruent approaches may enhance the effectiveness of counseling and stress reduction programs. In short, this study shows that Islamic coping behaviors are the important and helpful ways to handle academic stress. By encouraging acceptance in the mind, calm feelings, and disciplined actions based on Islamic faith, these practices give students a complete and meaningful way to build strength and resilience. Future research might expand on these findings by quantitatively assessing the relative efficacy of each dimension and exploring how institutional environments can better support faith-informed coping among students.

9. Conclusion

This study highlights the important role of Islamic coping behaviors in helping students handle academic stress by using a combined approach involving their thoughts, feelings, and actions in worship. Mentally, trusting in Allah's plan (tawakkul) helps students accept what they cannot change, bringing clarity and reducing anxiety. Emotionally, practices like zikr, Quran recitation, and personal prayers (dua) provide comfort and inner peace, supporting emotional regulation during stressful times. Behaviorally, students who engage in physical worship such as voluntary Sunnah prayers like Tahajjud and Solat Hajat, ritual cleansing (wudu), and fasting, could build discipline, resilience, and offer practical ways to cope with academic stress. This holistic approach enables students to manage academic challenges more effectively. These combined coping strategies show a complete Islamic strategy that helps support mental health and keeps students motivated in their studies. The important role of Tahajjud prayer shows how voluntary, thoughtful worship can help build strong mental and emotional strength. Overall, this study offers valuable insights of how spirituality and religious practices connect to form effective ways for Muslim students to handle academic stress, highlighting the value of religion in their everyday lives. In light of these findings, several practical recommendations are proposed to better support Muslim students in educational settings. First, universities should integrate faith-based approaches within their counseling and students' support services. Recognising Islamic coping behaviors as effective strategies allows mental health professionals to incorporate these tools in culturally appropriate supports.

Second, academic institutions are encouraged to promote awareness and accessibility of voluntary worship practices by providing dedicated quiet spaces like prayer corners or rooms, and accommodating flexible schedules, thereby supporting students' spiritual needs alongside their academic responsibilities. To add, education programmes and workshops on Islamic stress management techniques, covering practices such as tawakkul, zikr, dua, wudu, and fasting and these should be developed to empower students to adopt these strategies consciously and effectively during times of academic pressure. In addition, it is important to help students find a balance between putting their trust in their faith and actively putting effort into their studies. This balance prevents procrastination and helps them fully benefit from their spiritual beliefs. Subsequent investigations should aim to quantitatively assess the differential impact of various Islamic coping dimensions and to consider how these practices might be systematically embedded within institutional frameworks for student well-being. Moreover, future research may undertake comparative analyses to examine potential differences in coping strategies across gender, academic programmes, and age cohorts.

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