

# The effectiveness of counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology to reduce academic stress in students during the covid-19 pandemic

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## Abstract

The study aims to determine whether counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology can reduce student academic stress due to the covid-19 pandemic. This experimental pre-post design study comprises the experimental and control groups. The participants are 23 people selected using the purposive sampling method. The experimental group consisted of 11 people and was given treatment in counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology for 4 weeks in 5 sessions. The academic stress scale was given to both groups as a pre-test before the treatment started in the experimental group. In contrast, the academic stress scale was given as a post-test after the last session. The data analysis's result using the Mann-Whitney U test on the gain score between the experimental and control groups showed a significant difference with  $p(0.022) < 0.05$ . This indicates that counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology effectively reduced students' academic stress levels during the pandemic.

## Keywords

academic stress, Al-fatihah psychology, counseling, intervention, therapy

## Introduction

Universities are requested to adapt to the government policies implemented to minimize the spread of the covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the frequently adopted face-to-face learning procedure was either not held or postponed. According to [Damayanthi \(2020\)](#), this led to adoption of an online learning approach.

Changes in learning methods automatically triggered certain alterations in the students' and lecturers' habits during lectures. Unfortunately, this sudden transformation is more or less perceived as a stressor. The abrupt adoption of online lectures due to the pandemic has caused several students to experience academic stress. [Lubis et al. \(2021\)](#) stated that 66.2% encountered this problem during online learning. Approximately 6.9% of the students experienced extremely high academic stress, which triggered bad behavior and attitudes. According to preliminary studies, academic stress reduces students' self-efficacy and increases the tendency to commit suicide ([Ying et al., 2020](#)). It also causes dependence on smartphones ([Wang et al., 2020](#)) and reduces their achievement motivation ([Indriyani & Handayani, 2018](#)) and academic performance ([Goff, 2011](#)). [Zhang et al. \(2020\)](#) reported that academic stress mediates the effect or symptoms of insomnia on depression or anxiety. [Lubis et al. \(2021\)](#) explained the various symptoms ranging from dizziness, stomach aches, expelled acid, headaches, lack of concentration, and others. Based on the problems caused by academic stress, it is extremely relevant for students to overcome this issue.

[Govaerts & Grégoire \(2004\)](#) stated that academic stress is a condition in which individuals experience pressure due to their perceptions and judgment of college work. However,

the academic stressor is the anxiety that comes from the teaching and learning processes or matters related to academic activities. This includes pressure associated with moving to the next level, study duration, many assignments, test scores, bureaucracy, getting scholarships, decisions to determine majors and careers, exam anxiety, and time management. Stress that lasts for long causes the body to make certain adjustments, thereby subjecting the sufferer to pathological changes. Students tend to view the academic situation as some sort of pressure if it threatens or exceeds the internal or external resources ([Govaerts & Grégoire, 2004](#)).

Efforts to resolve academic stress have been reported in several studies, suggesting that treatment can positively reduce its level in students ([Goff, 2011](#); [Lubis et al., 2021](#); [Zhang et al., 2020](#)). These include how to conduct counseling programs and effective psychotherapy ([Reddy et al., 2018](#); [Ying et al., 2020](#)). One form of counseling usually applied is adopting an Islamic approach such as tadabbur QS. Al-Insyirah ([Ansyah et al., 2019](#)). The importance of implementing this method is based on the fact that it reduces stress levels. This is consistent with the several previous studies ([Ansyah et al., 2019](#); [Prinyapol & Chongruksa, 2013](#); [Webber et al., 2016](#)).

Some counseling approaches and their influences in terms of improving the quality of a person's behavior or attitude have been studied. However, the concepts adopted by several studies in implementing this procedure are based

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on western psychological theory. The counseling application does not apply to the Islamic psychological concept. This is defined as a science that discusses humans, especially their personalities. According to Yudianti (2013), it is the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological approaches used to resolve problems based on the Quran and hadith (Yudianti, 2013). A lack of an Islamic psychological basis tends to result in a less effective counseling application. Wolff et al. (2018) stated that a person's religious beliefs, including Islam for Muslims, are a convincing variable integrated into psychological treatment.

Several preliminary studies reported that the effectiveness of adopting an Islamic approach had been proven to reduce psychological problems or increase one's potential. This includes reducing academic stress levels with *tadabbur* or understanding the meaning of the QS. Al-Insyirah (Ansyah et al., 2019; Zahra & Saidiyah, 2013), reading the Quran (Nugraheni et al., 2018; Nugroho & Kusrohmaniah, 2019), and praying at midnight (Azam & Abidin, 2014). Moreover, the use of dhikr aids to reduce anxiety (Maimunah & Retnowati, 2011), thereby boosting meaningful life (Kurniawan & Widiana, 2013), as well as psychological (Wulandari & Nashori, 2014) and subjective well-being (Wahyunita et al., 2014). It simply implies that the use of an Islamic approach is an effective procedure for reducing psychological problems.

The adoption of Islamic concepts, such as Al-Quran media, as some sort of treatment to reduce academic stress has been reported in several studies. Nugraheni et al. (2018) proved the effectiveness of reading the Al-Quran to reduce academic stress in students writing their thesis. Furthermore, Nugroho & Kusrohmaniah (2019) reported that listening to murottal Al-Quran also aids in curbing this issue in Muslim students residing in Yogyakarta. Understanding the meaning of QS. Al-Insyirah tends to have a positive impact in terms of reducing academic stress (Ansyah et al., 2019; Zahra & Saidiyah, 2013). Silvitasari & Hermawati (2018) discovered that reading several Al-Quran surahs, such as Al-Fatihah, An-Nas, Al-Ikhlâs, and Al-Insyirah, can help resolve this issue.

One of the recently presented Islamic Psychological approaches is Al-Fatihah Psychology (Ansyah & Hadi, 2017). This science studies human psychology as a system used to achieve true happiness based on surah Al-Fatihah (Ansyah & Hadi, 2017). Additionally, Ansyah & Hadi (2017) stated that this concept could be used as a basis for describing, maintaining, or improving mental disorders and can be developed into a counseling method. Ansyah & Hadi (2017) proposed Al-Fatihah psychological concept, based on the research carried out by Hamka. (2015), which explains its various features. One of the Al-Fatihah special attributes is that it is being the first surah revealed by Allah, completely unified in seven verses. This depicts some wisdom inseparable from the first to the last verses. Based on this opinion, Ansyah and Hadi concluded that surah Al-Fatihah contains strong concepts and theories about human psychology. This can cause people to enjoy their lives, as mentioned in the seventh verse, which denotes "the Path of those You have blessed."

In relation to the study of surah Al-Fatihah, it was concluded that human psychology forms a type of system starting from the input, process, output, and impact, which operate as a cycle (Ansyah & Hadi, 2017). It consists of

five components that are related to one another. First is belief, a cognitive component possessed by an individual. It shows that one has to believe in the three attributes of Allah, namely Loving and Merciful, Lord of the World, and Ruler of Judgment Day. The stronger the belief, the more the roots support the tree trunks to soar higher into the sky. Therefore, the first component is categorized in the input system, and its basis is centered on QS. Al-Fatihah (1 to 4). The second and third components are Worship and Prayer, respectively, and these are translated as behavior and communication. People need to behave and communicate in a certain manner daily. This makes humans capable of embracing dynamics that allow them to achieve their desires. These two components are based on Al-Fatihah verse five and are categorized in the processing system. It tends to deliver how input and output can be achieved. Fourth, Hope or motivation emphasizes the importance of one's ability to trigger certain expectations related to an individual's behavior and communication. This led to the emergence of the fifth component, namely positive emotions. These are three types, namely happiness, patience, and passion. On the other hand, negative emotions are sadness, anger, and laziness. These need to be resolved by someone in order to be subjected to positive emotions, which is referred to as Al-Fatihah psychology.

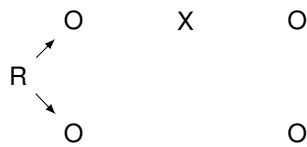
According to Al-Fatihah psychology, people with the five components comprising of beliefs, behavior, communication, expectations, and emotions are mentally healthy and capable of enjoying life. The predominance of happy feelings notices them, and they are always joyful. Meanwhile, those who enjoy life do not get angry easily and are extremely patient in going through difficulties, finding and carrying out these solutions when faced with challenges. They are also optimistic and have a solid life principle concerning their happiness and spread. These individuals are also classified as those who possess an extreme passion developed from bitter life experiences and are presumed to be wise (Ansyah & Hadi, 2017).

In accordance with this explanation, the title of the present research is based on two reasons. First, academic stress and its diverse negative impacts are relevant problems that must be resolved during the ongoing pandemic. Second, counseling perceived as a treatment to reduce academic stress rarely uses an approach based on the Islamic Psychological concept. Therefore, it is possible to reduce its effectiveness, especially for Muslims. Counseling based on Al-Fatihah Psychology is expected to prove its effectiveness in reducing academic stress. The purpose is to develop oneself, provide support, psychotherapy, and guidance, as well as solve clients' problems by helping them understand this concept. Emotions such as being happy, patient, and full of enthusiasm for self-development, tend to emerge. This study aimed to measure the counseling effectiveness based on Al-Fatihah psychology in terms of reducing academic stress in students during the covid-19 pandemic.

## Method

### Research Design

A classical design involving a random assignment, control, and experimental groups, alongside pre and post-tests, was adopted (Neuman, 2014). The classic experimental design image is shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1.** Classical Experimental Design

The dependent and independent variables are academic stress and counseling with Al-Fatihah Psychology, respectively. The present research was carried out at the Muhammadiyah University of Sidoarjo, and the participants determined based on the criteria that students tend to experience moderate or high levels of academic stress.

### Research subject

The research subjects were 23 Muslim undergraduates at the Muhammadiyah University of Sidoarjo who were selected using purposive sampling and were willing to participate in this study. They were further divided into two, namely the experimental and control groups. The research subjects are males and females, with 11 and 12 in the experimental and control groups, respectively. These participants are between the age of 19 to 22 years and usually experience moderate to high levels of academic stress.

### Research Instrument

The Stress Scale of Academics (SSA) is used to measure the student's academic stress, adapted from the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) (Sun et al., 2011). SSA consists of five indicators workload, study pressure, anxious about grades, hopelessness, and self-expectations. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) result realized using 251 samples shows that the SSA has a fit model with RMSEA showing a score less than 0.08, approximately 0.061, with a total of 15 items. This scoring scale involves using a Likert-type scale with four answer choices, from one depicting strongly disagree to four for strongly agree. The higher the score, the greater the level of academic stress.

### Experimental procedure

The stages of the research process were carried out based on the Al-Fatihah psychological concept. The first stage was the counseling module preparation in accordance with this approach. Second, the research participants selection was divided into two, namely the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was counseled based on Al-Fatihah psychology, while the control was deprived of such benefit. The criteria for selecting the participants were based on their status as active students experiencing moderate levels of academic stress. This initial screening was also used as pre-test data. Third, the experimental group was counseled based on Al-Fatihah psychology in two to four meetings. Fourth, all participants were asked to fill out the academic stress scale after the last meeting. Fifth, the data were analyzed using the statistical formula *Mann Whitney U test*, a non-parametric evaluation used to differentiate the median of the two groups.

### Stages of counseling based on the psychology of Al-Fatihah

The five counseling stages based on Al-Fatihah Psychology are shown in Figure 2. These five stages of counseling are given between 2-4 depending on the client's condition.

**Session 1** Ask and listen to the client's understanding of al-Fatihah, explain Al-Fatihah Psychology, listen to the client's understanding of academic stress, ask what the client wants so that they are encouraged to attend the counseling session.

**Session 2** Asking and listening to what the client believes about Allah SWT, the client evaluates current negative beliefs about God and how they affect them, conveying the 3 main characteristics of Allah in Surah Al-Fatihah, namely Allah's love, Allah as the Lord of the universe, and Allah as the ruler of the day of judgment, the client meditates on these attributes of God to find the good in everything the client has because everything comes from God.

**Session 3** Ask and listen to the good things that have been done by clients, the client evaluates the negative actions that have been carried out and what the impact is, the counselor reminded again about the importance of prioritizing belief in God before acting and basing actions only on God who has 3 characteristics as in session 2, the counselor asks and listens to what good things the client wants to do next and to whom the good things will be given.

**Session 4** Ask and listen to what good things the client often says and to whom he says it, clients evaluate bad or negative words that are often conveyed and their impact on themselves, the counselor reminded again of the importance of prioritizing belief in God before communicating and laying the groundwork for communication only on God who has 3 characteristics as in session 2, the counselor asks and listens to what good things the client wants to say next and to whom the good things will be said.

**Session 5** Asking and listening to the client's wishes that make him happy, make him not angry or impatient, and make him excited to be better, evaluate the feelings the client has when those desires or expectations are fulfilled, remind client of session 1

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Mann-Whitney U test because the variance did not show homogeneity. The normality test results for both groups were detected to be normal with  $p > 0.05$ , while the Equality of Variances showed that the acquired data did not meet this assumption because  $p < 0.05$ . A non-parametric statistic was performed using the Mann-Whitney U test to evaluate the post and pre-tests scores. Additionally, the data analysis procedure was performed with the JASP 16.00 windows program.

### Result

After filtering the data obtained from 24 subjects, one was detected as an out layer and was not included in the analysis. Therefore, 23 subjects consisting of 11 experimental and 12 control groups were utilized. The analysis procedure was carried out using the JASP 16.00 windows program



**Figure 2.** Counseling Stages based on Al-Fatihah Psychology.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis

	N	Mean	SD	SE
Pre Control	12	41.17	6.32	1.83
Pest Control	12	40.92	3.63	1.05
Pre Experiment	11	39.82	4.54	1.37
Post Experiment	11	33.27	6.7	2.02

Descriptive data on academic stress in the control and experimental groups during the pre and post-tests.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Data based on The Gain Score

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE
Gain Score	1	11	-6.55	6.62	2
	2	12	-0.25	3.93	1.14

**Table 3.** Results of Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test Analysis

Measure 1	Measure 2	W	p
Pre Control	Pest Control	36	0.86
Pre Experiment	Post Experiment	43	0.02

Note: Wilcoxon signed-rank test

### The results of the different test analysis

The descriptive analysis result of the gain score shows that the experimental group (1) consists of 11 subjects with a mean of -6.545. Meanwhile, the control group (2), which consisted of 12 subjects, had a higher average of -0.250. The difference test result was obtained by using the Mann-Whitney U test. It was discovered that the gain score of the experimental and control groups showed a significant difference with  $p$  (0.022) < 0.05. This depicts that the hypothesis that counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology reduces anxiety was accepted. The experimental group has a lower average (-6.545) compared to the control (-0.250).

More details regarding the decline before and after the administration of Al-Fatihah Psychological treatment in both the experimental and control groups are shown in the *paired sample t-test* and the *Wilcoxon signed-rank test*.

The descriptive analysis result showed that the average pre-test in the experimental group was 39.818. Unfortunately, the average post-test was reduced by 33.273 due to the subject's anxiety level. In the control group, the average pre-test was 41.167, while the post also showed a slight decrease, namely 40.917. Statistical evidence of the experimental and control groups, before and after the treatment realized using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test analysis, is shown in table 3.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test analysis showed that there was no difference between the pre and post-test results in the control group ( $p$  (0.858) > 0.05). Meanwhile, in the experimental group, the pre and post-tests showed a significant difference due to the  $p$ -value (0.018) < 0.005. This shows that counseling based on Al-Fatihah Psychology can reduce

the subject's academic stress. The average pre and post-test results obtained from the two groups, shows that the decline in the experimental group is steeper when compared to the control, which is more sloppy.

## Discussion

Based on these results, it is evident that counseling based on Al-Fatihah Psychology reduces the subject's academic stress. Therefore, this research proves that its application aids in reducing students' academic stress. The results reinforce the study by (Putri & Nashori, 2018) that applying Al-Fatihah as a form of therapy can help reduce psychological problems. This also includes listening to the Murottal Al-Quran to reduce the patient's anxiety before surgery (Faridah, 2015). Counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology is extremely effective because the subject listens or reads Surah Al-Fatihah and learns to understand its contents. They are usually made to understand themselves based on psychological concepts. Due to this self-understanding, the subjects are able to control and regulate themselves. It is presumed that this has certain implications regarding reducing academic stress (Markus & Nurius, 1984).

The research question answered relates to how can counseling based on Al-Fatihah Psychology help the subject. First, it aids the subject in remembering and believing in Allah SWT properly, and this serves as an input dimension from one's psychological system. This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen that beliefs can influence a person's behavior (Ramdhani, 2016). It also teaches the subject to appropriately believe in Allah according to Al-Fatihah verses one to four. This belief is based on the three inseparable characteristics of Allah (Ansyah & Hadi, 2017). The first is Allah, the Most Gracious and Merciful as Allah SWT says, "My mercy encompasses all things." (QS Al-A'raf [7]: 156). Because of His love, Allah has given humans nothing but the best.

The second characteristic is the rabbul 'Alamin attribute that Allah is the Lord of the universe and all things in the heavens, the earth, and between. As stated in the Holy book, "Allah is the One to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, Who has never had any offspring, nor does He have a partner in governing the kingdom. Allah has created everything and has ordained it precisely." (QS Al-Furqon [25]: 2). Because of Allah's power, not a single leaf falls without His permission (QS Al-An'am [6]: 59). Therefore, whatever happens, of course, needs to be associated with the first attributes of Allah.

The third characteristic of Allah is the attribute of who controls Judgment Day. "Luqman added: "O, my dear son! even if a deed were the weight of a mustard seed—be it (hidden) in a rock or the heavens or the earth—Allah will bring it forth. Surely Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware." (QS.

Luqman [31]: 16). Because of His loving nature, all good deeds will be rewarded manifold while evil ones will be persecuted. However, this simply implies that nothing is in vain. The subjects need to understand these three attributes to change their orientation and beliefs. Based on the TPB theory Ramdhani (2016), it gives rise to an attitude, subjective norms, and new behavioral controls that are more effective in developing more positive intentions. Therefore, it tends to lead to more productive and happier behavior as well as help relieve academic stress.

Second is how counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology helps reduce academic stress in the subjects. This is realized by aiding them to embrace appropriate behavior and communication as a form of worship to Allah SWT. The Theory of Planned Behavior Ramdhani (2016) states that an individual's belief affects their intentions, which tend to determine their behaviors directly. Therefore, positive behavior is determined by a person's belief in Allah's love and power and its impact on humans. For example, students tend to study more diligently as a form of gratitude because Allah has been affectionate enough to pay tuition through their parents or other people. Besides from behavior, the belief in Allah's attributes also determines the kind of communication an individual intends to convey. This usually reflects affection, humility, and progressiveness. At these stages of counseling, the subject is motivated to reflect on Allah's attributes as a follow-up to decide which activities are considered different and better than before. Moreover, they are also encouraged to exhibit any behavior deemed fit. The effectiveness of counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology in terms of reducing student academic stress supports the fact that it can be used to increase psychological potential, such as self-esteem (Kaharja & Latifah, 2016), mindfulness (Kadafi et al., 2021) as well as reduce anxiety (Kadafi et al., 2021).

During the covid-19 pandemic, several humanitarian sectors, including the educational field, felt the negative impacts, especially the students. The presence of Al-Fatihah psychology-based counseling was used to resolve the issue of academic stress experienced. Irrespective of the pandemic being bound to end later, the divine concepts based on Al-Fatihah remain relevant in terms of solving psychological problems.

The limitation of this research is that the experiment was carried out on a small group of students. Therefore, to get a stronger evidence-based picture regarding the impact of Al-Fatihah psychology counseling on academic stress, there is a need to implement it in a larger group. Nevertheless, the results are sufficient to consider the dissemination of this concept as a new field in the development of Islamic psychology.

## Conclusion

Based on these results, it was concluded that counseling based on Al-Fatihah psychology was used to reduce student academic stress during the covid-19 pandemic. This means there were slight changes after this concept was applied. Therefore, it serves as a basis for reducing academic stress during the pandemic.

## Recommendation

The systematic use of an Islamic approach, especially Al-Fatihah Psychology, must be adopted by counselors on campus to solve student academic stress. Furthermore, this counseling approach needs to be intensively studied in relation to its effectiveness in resolving the investigated issue, even when the pandemic is over.

## Declarations

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### Author contributions

The first author compiled the writings, designed and conducted treatment, assembled measuring instruments, collected data, and research results. The second author submitted writing, measuring instruments, and collected research data. Meanwhile, the third author conducted data analysis and constructed research results.

### Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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