

Challenges and Rationality in Choosing the Islamic Education Major in Islamic-Based Higher Education

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Abstract:

This study explores the reasons behind selecting the Islamic religious education major at an Islamic-based higher education institution and the challenges faced when individual interests and chosen majors are not aligned with their chosen majors. The primary data collection method is a qualitative questionnaire. It also aims to find ways to overcome the challenges students face and help them achieve a more meaningful education and a more satisfying career in the future. The research reveals that not all students choose their majors based on their interests. Several challenges arise when individuals encounter a gap between their interests and the reality of the academic environment. This research identifies potential solutions to bridge this gap.

Keywords: interest, major decision-making, talent

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi alasan pemilihan jurusan pendidikan agama Islam di perguruan tinggi berbasis Islam dan tantangan yang dihadapi ketika minat individu dan jurusan yang dipilih tidak selaras dengan jurusan yang dipilihnya. Metode pengumpulan data primer adalah kuesioner kualitatif. Hal ini bertujuan untuk menemukan cara mengatasi tantangan yang dihadapi siswa dan membantu mereka mencapai pendidikan yang lebih bermakna dan karir yang lebih memuaskan di masa depan. Penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa tidak semua siswa memilih jurusan berdasarkan minatnya. Beberapa tantangan muncul ketika individu menghadapi kesenjangan antara kepentingannya dengan realitas lingkungan akademik. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi solusi potensial untuk menjembatani kesenjangan ini.

Kata Kunci: bakat, minat, pengambilan keputusan jurusan.

Introduction

College students pick majors like science, religion, or education. Some might still need to finish, and the choice of major can play a role. Privilege can shape educational options, with affluent backgrounds favouring risk-taking.¹ Choosing a major carries long-term implications in a student's life. The desired major will form the foundation for their career development in the future.² This decision is not only about understanding theory but also about practical preparation for entering the workforce. Students will receive specialised training relevant to their major, enabling them to be ready to compete in an increasingly competitive job market. Therefore, students need to choose a major that aligns with their interests and talents and has the potential to lead them toward success in their future careers. The desired major can also impact the well-being and academic success of students.³ A strong interest in a particular major will drive high motivation in learning. Students tend to be more enthusiastic in the learning process and more prepared to face challenges that arise. Conversely, if students choose a major that aligns differently with their interests, they may experience satisfaction, fatigue, and a lack of motivation to pursue their higher education. Therefore, choosing a major significantly impacts students' college learning experience and personal development.

Unfortunately, the essence of one's intellectual and skill potential is not easily realised. Recognising one's potential intelligence requires a process that begins with everyday activities linked to academics from elementary to high school.⁴ Once individuals recognise their intellectual

¹Randolph R Nerona, "Parenting, Major Choice Motivation, and Academic Major Satisfaction among Filipino College Students: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective," *Journal of Career Assessment* 29, no. 2 (2021): 205–20; Judith M. Delaney and Paul J. Devereux, "Choosing Differently? College Application Behavior and the Persistence of Educational Advantage," *Economics of Education Review* 77, no. April (2020): 101998, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2020.101998>.

²Ashley Cureton and Erick Aguinaldo, "After High School, What's Next? Exploring Refugee Youths' Perceptions and Preparations Around College Choice and Transition," *Journal of Career Assessment*, 2023, 10690727231185176.

³Alanna Gillis and Renee Ryberg, "Is Choosing a Major Choosing a Career or Interesting Courses? An Investigation into College Students' Orientations for College Majors and Their Stability," *Journal of Postsecondary Student Success* 1, no. 2 (2021): 46–71; Nerona, "Parenting, Major Choice Motivation, and Academic Major Satisfaction among Filipino College Students: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective."

⁴Eka Bella Veronica Wahyudhani, Nadhirotul Laily, and Prianggi Amelasasih, "The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Self-Adjustment In Students," in *Journal Universitas*

and skill potential, they will proceed to the gateway of higher education to further their knowledge related to that potential and talent.⁵

Thus, the output of higher education serves as a platform for deepening intellectual potential and producing professional workers with a high level of human resources.⁶ As the final stage in the world of education, the selection of a major at the college level becomes a crucial decision. Before entering the college level, prospective students should choose a major that aligns with their interests, talents, and intellectual potential. This ensures that students do not feel burdened during their college education.

The decision to choose a major is a strategic and critical step in the development of a student's future. It is common for some students to make the wrong choice, leading to a burdensome and uncomfortable academic experience during their college years.⁷

A student's decision to choose a major can also be influenced by parental opinions, peer pressure, or following in the footsteps of admired figures. If one decides solely based on these factors without assessing their potential and abilities, they might choose a primary contrary to their interests and talents. This can lead to future issues, such as reluctance to attend classes and academic procrastination, which can result in a decline in academic performance and the quality of graduates due to the consequences of choosing the wrong major.⁸

Every university undoubtedly has favoured majors that attract a significant number of applicants, and the same goes for the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) major, which consistently draws a substantial number of prospective students in Islamic university settings. This is evident in the fact

Muhammadiyah Gresik Engineering, Social Science, and Health International Conference (UMGESHC), vol. 2, 2023, 33–41.

⁵Ribangun Bambang Jakaria and Boy Isma Putra, *Buku Ajar Mata Kuliah Psikologi Industri*, ed. Wiwik Sumarni, *Pedoman Good Corporate Governance Perusahaan Konsultan Aktuaria Indonesia 2011*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Jawa Timur: UMSIDA Press, 2020).

⁶Linda Mey Lestari and Hadi Muridan, "Pemilihan Jurusan Kuliah Berdasarkan Bakat, Minat Dan Kepribadian," *Jurnal Cermin: Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling Dan Psikologi Pendidikan* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–12, <https://ejournal.unugba.ac.id/index.php/crm/article/view/364>.

⁷Annisa Ulfa, Doni Winarso MKom, and Edo Arribe MMSi, "SISTEM REKOMENDASI JURUSAN KULIAH BAGI CALON MAHASISWA BARU MENGGUNAKAN ALGORITMA C4.5 (Studi Kasus: Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau)," *Fasilkom* 10, no. 1 (2020): 61–65.

⁸Adhi Nurhartanto and Tyas Desita Wengrum, "Edukasi Pemilihan Jurusan Kuliah Melalui Metode Pemetaan Bakat," *ANDASIH Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 2, no. 1 (2021): 33–39.

that each year, the number of applicants for the PAI major is relatively higher compared to other majors. Prospective students applying for the PAI major come from diverse educational backgrounds, not limited to those with a prior focus on religious studies, such as Islamic boarding schools and madrasahs. Students with technical and vocational backgrounds also choose the PAI major as their preference.⁹

Choosing a primary concerning students' future is crucial in determining whether the chosen major will lead them to prosperity based on the alignment between their interests, talents, and abilities. This decision can either enable students to excel in their studies or lead to difficulties in their academic journey as they strive to remain competent in their chosen field. Sometimes, students may even contemplate giving up and discontinuing their education simply because the chosen major does not align with their skill competencies.

Previous research also identified many reasons a student influences significant decision-making.¹⁰ This research hopes to minimise student regret after choosing a major and become a consideration for universities in providing direction to prospective new students. Previous research also revealed that reflections from similar studies could be used as material for consideration by academic advisors at the tertiary level to make better decisions.¹¹

Research Method

This qualitative research uses a grounded theory approach that seeks to understand the phenomenon of students' decision-making in choosing a major in Islamic Religious Education by utilising various dimensions to

⁹Norma Fitria, Ulfah Ulfah, and Opan Arifudin, "Analisis Faktor-Faktor Terhadap Pengambilan Keputusan Calon Mahasiswa Untuk Memilih Jurusan Pendidikan Agama Islam," *Jurnal Al-Amar: Ekonomi Syariah, Perbankan Syariah, Agama Islam, Manajemen Dan Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2020): 120–27.

¹⁰Richard W Patterson, Nolan G Pope, and Aaron Feudo, "Timing Matters," *Journal of Human Resources* 58, no. 4 (July 2023): 1347 LP – 1384, <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.59.2.0820-11127R1>; Kathleen M. Galotti, "Making a 'Major' Real-Life Decision: College Students Choosing an Academic Major," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 91, no. 2 (1999): 379–87, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.91.2.379>.

¹¹Amy Milsom and Julie Coughlin, "Satisfaction With College Major: A Grounded Theory Study," *NACADA Journal* 35, no. 2 (2015): 5–14, <https://doi.org/10.12930/nacada-14-026>.

maximise a comprehensive understanding of analytical logic.¹² Data collection was carried out through a survey approach, where questionnaires in the form of Google Forms were distributed to a group of students currently enrolled in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) major. Although this research was qualitative, 64 students were randomly selected to guarantee a better probability of being selected. Then, to ensure the validity of the data, researchers interviewed 22 students directly. Participants were asked to carefully read and comprehend the questions in the questionnaire before providing their responses.¹³

The acquired data is then analysed using the thematic analysis method to support the research objectives, extracting more detailed insights from the gathered data and identifying relationships among phenomena. The researcher provides a detailed explanation of the extent and how the observed phenomenon occurs.¹⁴

Result and Discussion

¹²Wayne A Babchuk and Eileen Boswell, "Grounded Theory," in *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Robert J Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye B T - International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition) Ercikan (Oxford: Elsevier, 2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11013-9>; Elizabeth G Creamer, "Mixed Methods and Grounded Theory," in *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Robert J Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye B T - International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition) Ercikan (Oxford: Elsevier, 2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11055-3>.

¹³Whitney N McCoy, Jessica T DeCuir-Gunby, and Andrea J B T - Reference Module in Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Psychology Macias, "Qualitative and Mixed Methods," in *Reference Module in Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Psychology* (Elsevier, 2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-96023-6.00017-8>; John H Hitchcock and Allison Crean Davis, "Mixed Methods in Survey Research," in *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Robert J Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye B T - International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition) Ercikan (Oxford: Elsevier, 2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11067-X>.

¹⁴Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Evaluation," in *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Robert J Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye B T - International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition) Ercikan (Oxford: Elsevier, 2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11017-6>; Svend Brinkmann, "Qualitative Interviews," in *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Robert J Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye B T - International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition) Ercikan (Oxford: Elsevier, 2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11022-X>.

After conducting a thorough qualitative research study on the factors influencing students when choosing a major, data was collected using a grounded theory approach. This involved distributing questionnaires and conducting direct interviews with research respondents. The results of the research stages revealed several considerations that students consider before choosing a major, including the suitability of their interests, parental support, and the risks involved. These findings are consistent with previous research, which indicates that parents influence 40.6% of decision-making, while other factors influence the remaining 50.4%.¹⁵

An individual typically goes through several considerations as choices, including gathering information, predicting the likelihood of success or failure in completing their education without pressure, understanding the risks or benefits of the chosen major, and aligning it with future career prospects before deciding on a particular major.¹⁶

The following data indicates the alignment of students' interests and talents with their decision to choose the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) major.

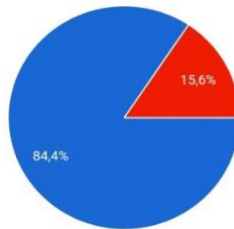


Figure 1 Alignment of Interests, Talents, and Majors

The data shows that 84.4% of students perceive that their interests and talents align with their chosen Islamic Religious Education (PAI) central. This finding significantly impacts their academic performance because when students select a major that aligns with their interests and talents, they tend to feel comfortable and enthusiastic about attending classes. This alignment affects their academic achievements and creates a conducive environment

¹⁵ Dahani and Sri Muliati Abdullah, "Pengambilan Keputusan Jurusan Ditinjau Dari Dukungan Sosial Orangtua Pada Mahasiswa," *Seminar Nasional Hasil Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Pada Masyarakat*, no. 2008 (2020): 386–91, <https://seminaslppm.ump.ac.id/index.php/seminaslppm/article/view/178>.

¹⁶ Istiqomah Istiqomah, Lilik Sri Hariani, and Affan Afian, "Pengaruh Konformitas Teman Sebaya, Motivasi Dan Minat Karir Terhadap Pemilihan Program Studi Akuntansi Di Perguruan Tinggi," *Jurnal Riset Pendidikan Ekonomi* 3, no. 2 (2018): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.21067/jrpe.v3i2.3801>.

for deep and high-quality learning in the context of the PAI major they are pursuing, contributing to the effective development of their skills and knowledge.¹⁷

Students who choose their major based on personal interests and desires tend to have a more relaxed college experience, can optimise their academic achievements, and have the potential to develop their skills in the chosen major. Although there are students with educational backgrounds that may not be directly related to religion, such as from vocational programs or public schools, their decision to choose the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) major based on personal interests makes them feel comfortable during their studies and willing to adapt to the subject matter explicitly taught in the context of the PAI major. This indicates that intrinsic motivation and personal interests play a crucial role in student's academic experience in the PAI major.

Additionally, based on the gathered data, approximately 15.6% of students choose the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) central even though their alignment with interests and talents needs to be fully met. Several prospective students pursue the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) central under pressure or parental expectations. In contrast, some others decide to switch to the PAI major after failing to gain admission to their initially desired major, making PAI an alternative option. These findings reflect the plurality of motivations underlying the selection of the PAI major and thus illustrate the complexity of the decision-making process in higher education. The factors influencing these decisions are highly diverse, including family considerations, academic achievements, and future career prospects.¹⁸ In this context, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of these decisions can provide a crucial foundation for higher education institutions and career advisors to offer more effective and targeted advice to prospective students.

¹⁷Allan Wigfield, "The Role of Children's Achievement Values in the Self-Regulation of Their Learning Outcomes," in *Self-Regulation of Learning and Performance* (Routledge, 2023), 101–24; Abdallah Namoun and Abdullah Alshanqiti, "Predicting Student Performance Using Data Mining and Learning Analytics Techniques: A Systematic Literature Review," *Applied Sciences* 11, no. 1 (2020): 237.

¹⁸Xin Li, *College Major Choices in China* (University of California, Los Angeles, 2022); Lina Aldén and Emma Neuman, "Culture and the Gender Gap in Choice of Major: An Analysis Using Sibling Comparisons," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 201 (2022): 346–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2022.07.026>; Nerona, "Parenting, Major Choice Motivation, and Academic Major Satisfaction among Filipino College Students: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective."

This issue hurts students' academic achievements, with learning outcomes failing to reach their full potential. The lack of alignment between the chosen major and the individual's interests and skills results in discomfort, a lack of motivation to attend classes, and difficulties completing academic tasks. In some cases, students facing such challenges tend to shift their focus to participating in organisational or extracurricular activities, neglecting their studies. This indicates that choosing a major that is not well-matched with one's interests and skills can disrupt the overall academic experience for students.¹⁹

Some students shift their focus by prioritising participation in organisational activities to gain additional insights and experiences that may only be partially attainable through the regular curriculum.²⁰ The discomfort or dissatisfaction often influences these decisions during the academic process. By redirecting their focus to extracurricular activities, students hope to broaden their horizons, sharpen practical skills, and build social networks that may not be attainable within the classroom environment. These decisions reflect the complex dynamics in the higher education experience, where students actively respond to the challenges and opportunities they encounter throughout their academic journey.

As a result, some students became unwilling to complete academic assignments, had to retake courses because their academic performance did not meet the expected standards, and even experienced delays in completing their degree programs. This indicates that discomfort during their studies could negatively impact students' academic achievements and educational progress.²¹

It is essential to acknowledge that factors contributing to discomfort in the academic context, such as curriculum mismatch or low self-confidence, can become significant barriers in students' educational journeys. Therefore,

¹⁹Michael L. Shaffer, "Impacting Student Motivation: Reasons for Not Eliminating Extracurricular Activities," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 90, no. 7 (2019): 8–14; Abdul Sami and Asmara Irfan, "Academic Achievement of College Students Based on Co-Curricular Activities," *Journal of Management Info* 7, no. 1 (2020): 16–23.

²⁰Shaffer, "Impacting Student Motivation: Reasons for Not Eliminating Extracurricular Activities"; Sami and Irfan, "Academic Achievement of College Students Based on Co-Curricular Activities."

²¹Jose Gustems-Carnicer, Caterina Calderón, and Diego Calderón-Garrido, "Stress, Coping Strategies and Academic Achievement in Teacher Education Students," *European Journal of Teacher Education* 42, no. 3 (2019): 375–90; K Renninger and Suzanne E Hidi, "Interest Development and Learning," 2019.

more severe and structured efforts from academic institutions are required to identify and address these sources of discomfort.

Through a deeper understanding of students' challenges and issues, educational institutions can design more effective solutions, such as curriculum enhancements, broader academic support, and psychological counselling. As a result, students can achieve higher levels of academic performance and complete their degree programs according to the established schedules.

Furthermore, these steps will help create a more inclusive and supportive academic environment where students feel more motivated, comfortable, and better equipped to overcome challenges that may arise during their educational journey. The mismatch between a student's interests and talents directly impacts several vital aspects, such as self-confidence, motivation, and academic stress.

Self-Confidence

The discomfort and the lack of self-confidence experienced by some students in the decision-making process regarding their choice of central in college can be a significant factor influencing their academic experience. This often emerges due to the mismatch between the chosen major and the individual's interests and competencies.

Student self-efficacy, which reflects their belief in their ability to complete academic tasks, is a central aspect of their self-confidence. This self-confidence is often influenced by how much students feel they possess relevant and adequate skills in the field of study they are pursuing. Students who feel less competent in their chosen major tend to have lower self-efficacy, which can then disrupt their academic achievements.²²

Student self-efficacy, which reflects an individual's belief in their ability to complete academic tasks, is a central factor in determining their self-confidence level in higher education. This self-confidence is often influenced by the extent to which students feel they possess relevant and adequate skills in their field of study. There is a strong connection between the level of self-efficacy and academic success.

Students who feel less competent in their chosen major tend to have lower self-efficacy—the inability to identify as individuals capable of

²²Dale H Schunk and Maria K DiBenedetto, "Self-Efficacy and Human Motivation," in *Advances in Motivation Science*, vol. 8 (Elsevier, 2021), 153–79; Heather Farmer, Hanzhang Xu, and Matthew E Dupre, "Self-Efficacy," in *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging* (Springer, 2022), 4410–13.

handling academic tasks can hinder their academic achievements. Conversely, students who believe in their abilities have better academic performance.²³

Factors such as the curriculum, academic support, and recognition from professors and fellow students can influence students' self-efficacy. Therefore, understanding and enhancing students' self-efficacy in the context of higher education is an essential aspect in helping them achieve better academic performance and overcome potential obstacles in their educational journey.

Prior research has confirmed the relationship between students' self-confidence levels and ability to complete academic tasks. These findings underscore the importance of a deeper understanding of the role of self-confidence in higher education and indicate that higher levels of self-confidence tend to positively impact student's academic performance. In this context, educational institutions must pay attention to developing students' self-confidence as an integral part of their learning experience and provide appropriate support to enhance their self-efficacy in facing academic tasks.²⁴

Motivation

Motivation in an academic context can be seen as a source of energy that provides enthusiasm and drive for students as they navigate their educational journey. It is a fleeting positive feeling and a sustained driving force in pursuing their academic goals.

Prior research has revealed that motivation in the context of higher education has a significant impact on student's behaviour and academic achievements. Students with high motivation levels tend to be more enthusiastic and committed to achieving the best outcomes in their studies. They are determined to complete their education with satisfactory, or even outstanding, achievements. This motivation enables them to overcome challenges and obstacles during their educational journey.²⁵

²³Julia Roick and Tobias Ringeisen, "Self-Efficacy, Test Anxiety, and Academic Success: A Longitudinal Validation," *International Journal of Educational Research* 83 (2017): 84-93; John M Majer, "Self-Efficacy and Academic Success among Ethnically Diverse First-Generation Community College Students.," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 2, no. 4 (2009): 243.

²⁴Urip Tisngati and Nely Indra Meifiani, "Pengaruh Kepercayaan Diri Dan Pola Asuh Orang Tua Terhadap Prestasi Belajar," *Jurnal Derivat* 1, no. 2 (2014): 8-18.

²⁵Muhammad Ansor, "Analisis Pengaruh Manajemen Waktu Dan Motivasi Kuliah Terhadap Keberhasilan Akademik Mahasiswa Yang Berkerja," *Paper Knowledge . Toward a Media History of Documents* 7, no. 2 (2014): 107-15.

Students with intrinsic motivation for learning tend to feel joy and enthusiasm during every step of their academic journey. They are driven to prioritise their education and consistently work hard to complete their studies on time. This motivation also propels them to continually self-improve, seek additional learning opportunities, and become more self-reliant in managing their education.

In this context, the role of educational institutions in fostering and enhancing student motivation becomes highly crucial. The facilities and support provided by educational institutions can assist students in maintaining and optimising their motivation levels. Furthermore, developing an academic community that supports and motivates one another can also contribute to increased motivation and better academic achievements.²⁶

Hence, motivation is not merely a subjective aspect of the higher education experience but a critical element influencing students' behaviour, achievements, and success. Awareness of the significance of motivation in higher education can assist both students and educational institutions create a supportive and motivating environment, which, in turn, can lead to higher academic achievements.²⁷

This motivation can influence one's mindset and catalyse academic enthusiasm. Learning motivation enhances the quality of learning outcomes and fosters students' hopes and desires to achieve their desired success.²⁸ In higher education, a deeper understanding of the role of motivation allows educational institutions to design supportive strategies to enhance student motivation. This support may include developing personal growth programs, academic mentoring, and forming motivating and supportive communities. Awareness of the importance of motivation can help create an

²⁶Mayuri Borah, "Motivation in Learning," *Journal of Critical Reviews* 8, no. 2 (2021): 550–52; Valarmathie Gopalan et al., "A Review of the Motivation Theories in Learning," in *Aip Conference Proceedings*, vol. 1891 (AIP Publishing, 2017).

²⁷Nasim Saeid and Tahere Eslaminejad, "Relationship between Student's Self-Directed-Learning Readiness and Academic Self-Efficacy and Achievement Motivation in Students," *International Education Studies* 10, no. 1 (2017): 225–32; Adnan Tasgin and Göksel Coskun, "The Relationship between Academic Motivations and University Students' Attitudes towards Learning," *International Journal of Instruction* 11, no. 4 (2018): 935–50.

²⁸Rochmat Budi Santosa, "Motivasi Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris: Studi Kasus Pada Mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IAIN Surakarta," *Jurnal Ilmiah Didaktika* 18, no. 1 (2018): 87, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jid.v18i1.3089>.

educational environment that fosters students' academic and personal growth.

Academic Stress

Academic stress in students can manifest as a lack of concentration during lectures, frequent restlessness, quick boredom, rapid irritability, and so on. Academic stress is a condition in which there needs to be a match between students' demands and available resources. Academic stress can occur during their studies because students need more interest in their major, causing the assignments given during the educational process perceived as burdensome.²⁹

Academic stress at the college level typically arises from the educational process itself. It includes complex course assignments, the difficulty of the course material, the pressure of facing exams, a low GPA, the workload exceeding one's capabilities, and increasing competition in academia. Academic stress is a common occurrence but should be addressed promptly because if left unattended in the long term, it can have negative mental and physical impacts on students.³⁰

The following research results indicate that 69.8% of PAI students at IAIN Kerinci feel free of the burden of completing their college assignments. Some consider the PAI major a platform to acquire more knowledge in areas they previously had limited understanding.

The findings of this research depict an exciting context in which most students in the Islamic Education program feel comfortable and not burdened by their academic assignments. This reflects the positive encouragement received from the curriculum and their learning experiences in the PAI major. Students who choose this major appear to have a strong intrinsic motivation to deepen their understanding of religion and spirituality.

Conclusion

Choosing a major that aligns with one's interests and abilities positively impacts student learning outcomes. The study results indicate that

²⁹Nia Agustiningsih, "Gambaran Stress Akademik Dan Strategi Koping Pada Mahasiswa Keperawatan," *Jurnal Ners Dan Kebidanan (Journal of Ners and Midwifery)* 6, no. 2 (2019): 241–50, <https://doi.org/10.26699/jnk.v6i2.art.p241-250>.

³⁰Mufadhal Barseli, Ifdil Ifdil, and Nikmarijal Nikmarijal, "Konsep Stres Akademik Siswa," *Jurnal Konseling Dan Pendidikan* 5, no. 3 (2017): 143–48, <https://doi.org/10.29210/119800>.

some students in the Islamic Education major choose their field without considering their interests, leading to difficulties completing assignments and a loss of motivation. Therefore, it is essential for prospective students and higher education institutions to seriously consider factors such as students' self-confidence, inspiration, and academic stress to create a successful educational experience. In higher education, these findings can provide valuable insights into the importance of offering academic programs that align with students' interests and motivations. Encouraging students to pursue fields they love and creating an environment where they feel comfortable completing their academic tasks can enhance overall satisfaction and student achievement. This also underscores the value of religious education in offering a spiritual and ethical foundation for students in higher education, helping them better cope with academic burdens and challenges.

Naturally, this research may need limitations, such as a restricted number of participants and research sites. Additionally, ambiguity in word meanings may have also arisen. Given these factors, the researcher encourages future investigators to utilise this study as a reference point and refine any shortcomings through mixed methods and grounded theory research. Expanding the sample size during the quantitative research stage may also contribute to this process.

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