

Dynamics of Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence, and Behavioral Transformation Among Students: A Case Study at Ponpes Zainul Hafidz, Darul Qur'an Walhadis, and Insan Budi Mulia

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the limited research on the interaction between academic stress, emotional intelligence, and behavioral transformation among students in Indonesia pesantren, despite its significant impact on students' academic performance, mental resilience, and social adaptation. The study aims to explore the forms and sources of academic stress, examine the role of emotional intelligence as a coping mechanism, and analyze how these factors interact to shape adaptive and maladaptive behaviors among santri. The research adopts a qualitative case study design, involving three Islamic boarding schools: Zainul Hafidz, Darul Qur'an Walhadis, and Insan Budi Mulia with a purposive sample of students selected for interviews and observations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and field notes, and analyzed using thematic and comparative analysis techniques. The findings reveal that academic stress primarily arises from memorization demands, cognitive difficulties in understanding classical texts, and social-environmental pressures. Emotional intelligence functions as a critical buffer, enabling students to regulate emotions, manage study schedules, and engage proactively with teachers and peers. Moderating factors, including teacher mentorship, peer support, family expectations, and institutional schedules, significantly influence behavioral outcomes. The study concludes that adaptive behaviors emerge when students possess strong emotional intelligence and receive supportive institutional and social environments, while maladaptive behaviors occur under low emotional regulation or high unmitigated stress. The implications include advancing theoretical understanding of stress-emotion-behavior dynamics in

pesantren and informing practical strategies for educational stakeholders to enhance students' emotional resilience and engagement, with future research suggested in more schools using mixed methods.

Keywords: Academic Stress; Emotional Intelligence; Student Behaviour; *Pesantren* Education; Islamic Boarding Schools

INTRODUCTION

Academic stress has emerged as a critical issue in contemporary education, particularly within boarding school systems such as Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*). Students face multiple stressors, including academic demands, memorization tasks, and strict disciplinary routines. Research shows that emotional intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in academic stress management, as students with higher emotional intelligence tend to have better academic stress management (Iskandar, 2024). Furthermore, academic stress can shift into eustress that motivates students when channeled through discipline and routine religious practices (Khafifah et al., 2023).

In many *pesantren*, a significant proportion of students experience high levels of academic stress, demonstrating the heavy emotional and cognitive burdens posed by *pesantren* academic structures (Renata et al., 2023). However, emotional regulation and religiosity also function as protective factors, improving students' behavioral adaptation (Ikromi, 2025). EI further contributes to learning motivation and disciplined behavior, reinforcing its importance in educational settings (Prayitno & Masluchah, 2024). Yet for new students, academic stress can undermine adjustment processes unless supported by mediating factors such as self-esteem or psychological assistance (Sujadi et al., 2022).

At the national level, mental health concerns among Indonesian students have intensified due to curriculum overload, competition for grades, and highly disciplined school cultures (Putra, 2021). In *pesantren*-based systems, limited emotional intelligence development amidst strenuous academic demands is a frequently noted challenge, making EI reinforcement an essential component of behavioral prevention efforts (Sulaiman, 2020). Broader shifts in adolescent behavior caused by academic pressure, increasing technology use, and evolving social interactions also affect boarding school students, including *santri* (Yuliana, 2022). Academic stress combined with weak emotional skills contributes to

maladaptive behaviors, indicating a need for character education grounded in emotional regulation (Rahmadani, 2023).

On the international scale, a longitudinal European study demonstrated reciprocal effects between academic stress, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and academic motivation, showing that students with higher EI and mindfulness experience lower stress and improved motivation (Zhang et al., 2024). In Iran, an EI-based intervention significantly reduced academic stress and negative stress responses across physical, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Khorasani et al., 2023). Similarly, in Vietnam, EI was found to mediate the relationship between academic stress and students' help-seeking attitudes, indicating that emotionally intelligent students are more open to seeking psychological support (Thao et al., 2024). A Nigerian study further confirmed EI as a significant predictor of academic stress management across cultural settings (Adio & Lasisi, 2023). These international findings highlight the global relevance of emotional intelligence in fostering academic resilience.

In response to these challenges, the researcher argues that academic stress in pesantren must be understood not only as a result of strict academic structures but also as a product of students' emotional readiness and support systems. Studies emphasize that new students often experience heightened pressure due to demanding schedules and rigid rules, which hinder their initial adaptation (Faiqoh et al., 2023). This is intensified when students lack adequate protective factors such as social support, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and religiosity—conditions that can worsen their stress responses (Ikromi, 2025). These findings reinforce the need for early interventions that target emotional preparedness.

At the same time, researchers highlight that pesantren culture itself holds transformative potential. The communal values of togetherness, discipline, and shared responsibility have been shown to strengthen intrapersonal intelligence and contribute to students' behavioral maturity (Arifin, 2022). This suggests that pesantren can function as a developmental environment where emotional intelligence is nurtured through lived experience.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence is widely recognized as a multi-component construct involving self-awareness, self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and empathy—factors that directly influence students' social interactions and everyday behavior (Rahman, 2024). Evidence shows that students with higher emotional intelligence consistently report

lower academic stress, including during home-based learning periods (Daulay & Mirwan, 2021). Expert literature also indicates that EI supports empathy and social responsiveness, qualities essential for maintaining harmony within the communal pesantren setting (Rahman, 2024).

Environmental, social, religious, and regulatory conditions further shape EI development, demonstrating that pesantren contexts—despite their challenges—offer structured opportunities for cultivating emotional skills (Sugiarto et al., 2023). Strengthening EI is therefore not merely beneficial but necessary, as academic stress is closely linked to academic performance and behavioral outcomes (Khafifah et al., 2023). These expert insights affirm the researcher's position that integrating emotional intelligence development into pesantren education can significantly improve students' resilience, adaptation, and academic success.

Previous research further reinforces the complexity of students' psychological dynamics within pesantren environments. Peer social support significantly enhances students' adjustment to boarding school life, while its absence corresponds with increased stress and adaptation barriers (Damayanti et al., 2021). Levels of academic stress in pesantren vary according to academic loads and memorization routines, with many students reporting associated symptoms such as sleep disruption and anxiety (Alwi et al., 2024). Academic self-efficacy and emotional regulation have also been identified as mediators between academic demands and student adjustment Nurhasanah, (2022). Additionally, academic stress among adolescent pesantren students has been associated with family issues, sleep quality, and dietary habits, contributing to reduced concentration and discipline (Rahmah et al., 2023).

Initial observations conducted at Ponpes Zainul Hafidz, Ponpes Darul Qur'an Walhadis, and Ponpes Darul Qur'an Walhadis revealed several notable patterns that reinforce the urgency of this study. First, many students exhibited signs of academic fatigue, such as decreased focus during evening study sessions and inconsistent participation in classroom activities. Some students openly expressed difficulty balancing memorization requirements with formal academic lessons, mirroring prior research findings. Observations also indicated varying levels of emotional regulation: while some students remained calm and cooperative when facing academic pressure, others displayed irritability, withdrawal, or declining motivation. Behavioral changes—such as reduced engagement, lateness, and occasional disregard for communal rules—were more visible among students reporting high academic

workloads. In contrast, students who demonstrated higher empathy, self-regulation, and social support networks appeared more adaptive in managing stress. These preliminary observations signal that the interaction between academic stress, emotional intelligence, and behavioral transformation may differ across individuals and pesantren contexts, justifying further investigation.

Anchored in these issues and grounded in theoretical perspectives such as the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995), Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Self-Adjustment Theory (Schneiders, 1964), and Self-Regulation Theory (Bandura, 1991), this study seeks to analyze the dynamic interplay of academic stress, emotional intelligence, and behavioral transformation among pesantren students. These theories jointly offer a comprehensive lens for examining appraisal processes, coping strategies, behavioral norms, adjustment mechanisms, and self-regulation capacities in the context of pesantren.

Given these complexities, an expanded inquiry is needed to examine how academic stress and emotional intelligence interact within different pesantren contexts. Ponpes Zainul Hafidz, Ponpes Darul Qur'an Walhadis, and Ponpes Darul Qur'an Walhadis provide diverse educational environments in which these psychological mechanisms may operate differently. Through a multi-site case study approach, this research aims to fill existing gaps by exploring how academic stress contributes to behavioral transformation and how emotional intelligence may moderate or mediate such changes.

The Research Questions of this study are: (1) How do students at Ponpes Zainul Hafidz, Ponpes Darul Qur'an Walhadis, and Ponpes Darul Qur'an Walhadis experience academic stress within their respective pesantren environments?; (2) What role does emotional intelligence play in shaping students' responses to academic stress across the three pesantren?; (3) How does academic stress contribute to behavioral transformation among students in each pesantren context?; and (4) How do academic stress and emotional intelligence interact to influence adaptive or maladaptive behavioral outcomes among pesantren students?

This study deepens understanding of academic stress and emotional intelligence in the pesantren context and provides fresh empirical insights through a multi-site qualitative approach. The findings can guide pesantren leaders and educators in developing effective

emotional intelligence and stress-management programs, ultimately supporting students' resilience, character growth, and overall educational development.

METHODS

Research Type

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore students' emotional intelligence and academic stress within the natural learning environment of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Qualitative inquiry is well-suited for examining meanings, lived experiences, and social interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures. As Creswell and Poth (2020) explain, such an approach enables researchers to understand participants' perspectives within their real-world contexts, particularly when investigating complex emotional and behavioral phenomena. This approach was therefore appropriate for generating a rich, contextualized understanding of how stress and emotional intelligence interact in everyday *pesantren* life.

Research Design

A multi-site qualitative case study design was adopted, involving three *pesantren* with distinct organizational models. This design allows for an in-depth examination of a bounded system while enabling the identification of cross-contextual patterns. It is particularly suitable for answering the research questions, which focus on the mediating role of emotional intelligence in academic stress. Case study methodology is widely recognized for producing holistic, detailed descriptions of complex educational environments (Yin, 2020). By incorporating multiple sites rather than relying on a single institutional context, this study offers broader insights and enhances analytical robustness compared to prior studies limited to individual *pesantren* settings.

Population and Sample

This study was conducted from October to November 2025 and involved three madrasahs as research sites, namely Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, and Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School. The research population consisted of students and teachers from these three institutions, representing three models of Islamic boarding schools: traditional, semi-modern, and modern.

The distribution of respondents from each research site were: (1) Zainul Hafidz At-Taufiq Islamic Boarding School (Sepi Hamlet, Buwun Mas Village, Sekotong) comprised 12 respondents; (2) Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School (Telaga Lebur Hamlet, Labuan Tereng Village, Lembar) comprised 12 respondents; and (3) Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School (Pengantap Hamlet, Buwun Mas Village, Sekotong) comprised 11 respondents. Thus, the total sample size in this study was 35 participants.

The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria, particularly those directly involved in academic processes, disciplinary practices, and emotional development within the boarding school environment. This technique was chosen because it emphasizes information-rich cases that can provide in-depth and relevant insights aligned with the study's objectives. Sugiyono (2020) asserts that purposive sampling is appropriate when the aim of the research is deep exploration rather than statistical representation. Likewise, Patton (2020) states that purposive sampling is effective for targeting participants who possess specialized knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews enabled the exploration of emotional intelligence strategies, stress experiences, and adaptation processes, while observations provided direct insight into daily routines, interactions, and behavioral patterns within the pesantren environment. Document analysis—including academic schedules, disciplinary guidelines, and student work—was used to triangulate findings and enhance the depth of interpretation. According to Moleong (2022), using multiple instruments strengthens validity by enabling the researcher to corroborate data from different sources. Given (2020) similarly notes that triangulation increases the credibility and dependability of qualitative findings. The instruments and protocols were adapted from established studies in educational psychology and pesantren-based learning systems.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved systematic phases of familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, and synthesis. An inductive coding strategy was applied to allow themes to emerge organically from participants' narratives without imposing predetermined categories. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2020)

highlight that structured coding, data condensation, and the use of visual displays are essential for ensuring analytical rigor in qualitative research. The approach used in this study aligns with these principles and is suitable for examining emotional, behavioral, and social dimensions. NVivo 12 software supported the organization of codes, identification of thematic patterns, and enhancement of reliability throughout the analytical process.

RESULTS

1. Students' Experiences of Academic Stress in Three Islamic Boarding Schools

a. Forms of Academic Stress

1) Pressure from Assignments and Memorization

Across the three pesantren studied, the most dominant source of pressure stemmed from memorization requirements—whether the memorization of the Qur'an, fiqh texts, or daily evaluation materials. At Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, a fiqh teacher reported that some students began to exhibit signs of emotional strain prior to memorization examinations. He stated:

“Some students begin to show signs of stress as the memorization exam approaches. Some struggle to sleep, and others become quieter than usual. However, some are able to manage their emotions due to guidance from their supervising teachers.” (P03, male, 26, Fiqh Teacher, Zainul Hafidz At-Taufiq Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 26, 2025)

Observation findings corroborated this statement. During memorization sessions, several students were seen repeatedly reciting verses with tense expressions, even letting out deep sighs when mispronouncing a verse. (Observation, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, October 18, 2025)

At Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, memorization pressure was more pronounced due to a strict target system. A tahfiz teacher noted that the institution always sought to balance memorization achievements with the psychological well-being of students:

“We always try to balance memorization targets with students' psychological condition. If someone appears stressed, we give them time to rest and provide emotional support so they don't feel

overwhelmed.” (P12, female, 24, Tahfiz Teacher, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 1, 2025)

Observations revealed that some students bowed their heads for a long time while holding the mushaf after failing to recite their memorization smoothly. (Observation, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, November 3, 2025)

At Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, academic pressure originated not only from memorization but also from organizational activities that coincided with formal learning. The dormitory head explained:

“Students here have diverse personalities. Some become easily panicked when facing intensive lessons, but through consistent dhikr practices and emotional coaching, they learn to control themselves and stay focused.” (P25, male, 35, Dormitory Head, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 20, 2025)

Nighttime observations showed that some students had to study while taking turns attending organizational meetings, resulting in exhausting multitasking. (Observation, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, October 22, 2025)

2) **Difficulty Understanding the Material**

Difficulties in understanding Arabic terminology and fiqh concepts also became a significant source of stress. A mid-level student at Zainul Hafidz explained:

“If the material contains long Arabic terms, I have to repeat it many times to understand it. Sometimes I get overwhelmed because I’m afraid of falling behind.” (P05, male, 17, Mid-level Student, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 19, 2025)

Meanwhile, at Darul Qur’an Walhadis, another student stated that the teacher’s fast pace in explaining new terminology often left her feeling tense:

“I often struggle to follow fast explanations, especially when the Arabic terms are new. It makes me tense and afraid of being asked to repeat the lesson.” (P15, female, 16, Tahfiz Student, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 2, 2025)

3) Pressure from Teachers/Supervisors

At Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, strict disciplinary standards in religious practices enforced by dormitory supervisors contributed to student stress. One student reported:

“Dormitory supervisors often reprimand us if our worship or memorization doesn’t meet the standard. Sometimes I feel afraid of making mistakes, which makes me even more stressed.” (P10, male, 18, Student, Zainul Hafidz At-Taufiq Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 21, 2025)

4) Pressure from Peer Environment

Stress also emerged from competition among students, particularly regarding memorization achievements and academic performance. This was especially prevalent at Darul Qur’an Walhadis and Insan Budi Mulia. A tahfiz student remarked:

“Many of my friends here memorize quickly. If I am even slightly slower, I feel embarrassed and stressed.” (P18, female, 17, Tahfiz Student, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 4, 2025)

At Insan Budi Mulia, perceptions related to students’ organizational involvement also created a unique source of pressure:

“Students who are active in organizations are often seen as more capable. Sometimes it makes me feel left behind and stressed.” (P28, male, 17, Student, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 23, 2025)

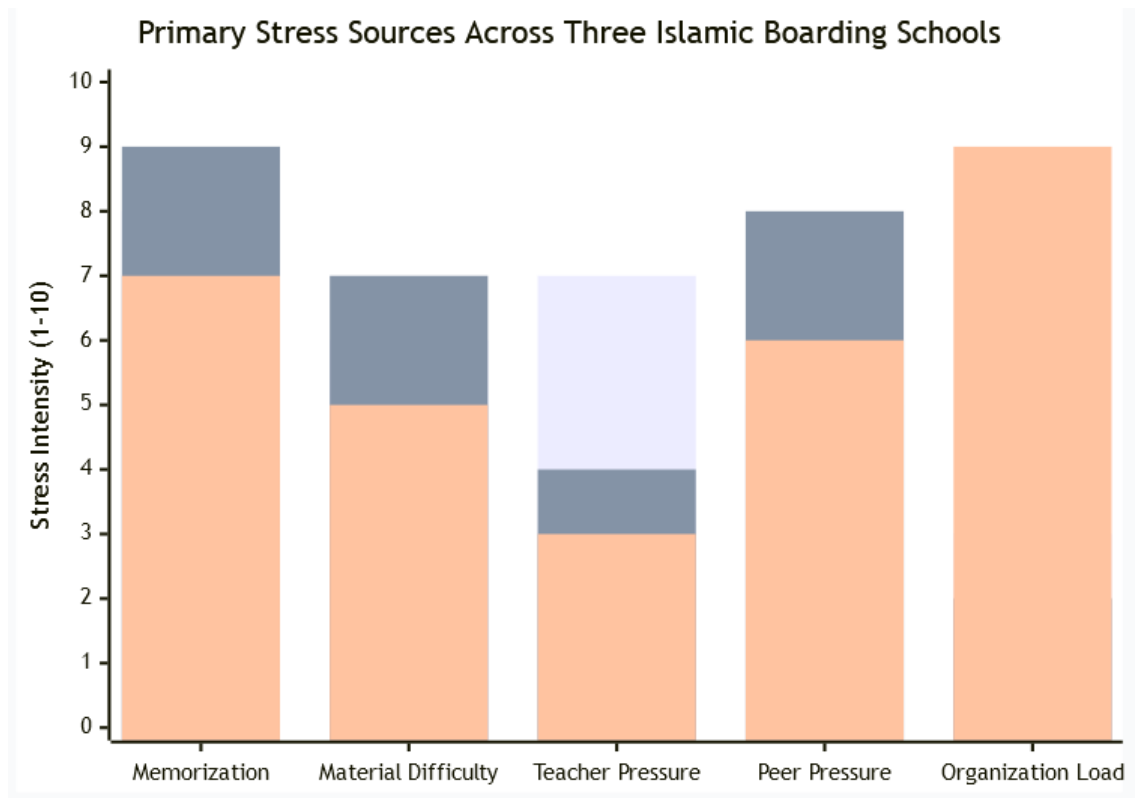


Figure 1: Primary Stress Sources Across the Three Boarding Schools

This bar chart visually compares the intensity of five key stress sources across the three boarding schools. It clearly shows that Darul Qur'an experiences the highest memorization stress (9/10), Zainul Hafidz has significant teacher pressure (7/10), while Insan Budi uniquely suffers from organization load (9/10). The color-coded bars allow for instant comparison and pattern recognition.

b. Differences in Stress Levels Among the Pesantren

1) Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School

Stress levels were primarily influenced by the intensity of fiqh activities and strict worship standards. Although this created pressure, the intensive coaching system helped many students develop discipline and adapt more quickly.

2) Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School

Stress was dominated by memorization targets and daily recitation schedules. The pressure was consistent due to the continuous rhythm of the memorization process with minimal breaks.

3) Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School

Stress levels were shaped by the combination of memorization demands, formal lessons, and organizational responsibilities. Students active in organizations experienced higher mental pressure because they had to divide their time and energy across multiple commitments simultaneously.

Table 1: School-Level Stress Profile

Stress Factor	Zainul Hafidz	Darul Qur'an	Insan Budi	Key Quote
Memorization Pressure	High (Exams)	Very High (Daily targets)	Moderate	"Some struggle to sleep before exams"
Material Difficulty	Medium	High	Medium	"Long Arabic terms overwhelm me"
Teacher Pressure	High (Strict standards)	Medium	Low	"Afraid of making mistakes"
Peer Competition	Medium	High	Medium	"Embarrassed if slower"
Organization Load	Low	Low	Very High	

Table 1 shows stress profiles of students at three pesantren. Darul Qur'an students face very high memorization and peer competition stress, Zainul Hafidz students experience high teacher pressure and exam stress, and Insan Budi students have very high organizational load but moderate memorization stress. Material difficulty is high at Darul Qur'an and medium elsewhere. Key quotes highlight anxiety, fear of mistakes, and social pressure.

c. Students' Initial Emotional Responses to Stress

The study found similar patterns of emotional responses across the three pesantren. Observations indicated:

- 1) Anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and fatigue, especially before memorization examinations. (Observation, October 10–20, 2025)
- 2) Tension in interpersonal interactions, such as irritability or withdrawal when students felt unprepared for memorization evaluations.
- 3) Declining motivation to study, as expressed by several students:

"When there are too many assignments, sometimes I lose the motivation to study." (P06, male, 17, Student, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 19, 2025)

“When memorization piles up, I become reluctant to open the textbook. I feel exhausted even before starting.” (P15, female, 16, Tahfiz Student, Darul Qur’an Walbadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 2, 2025)

“When organizational activities are intense, I often lose the mood to study.” (P25, male, 35, Dormitory Head, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 20, 2025)

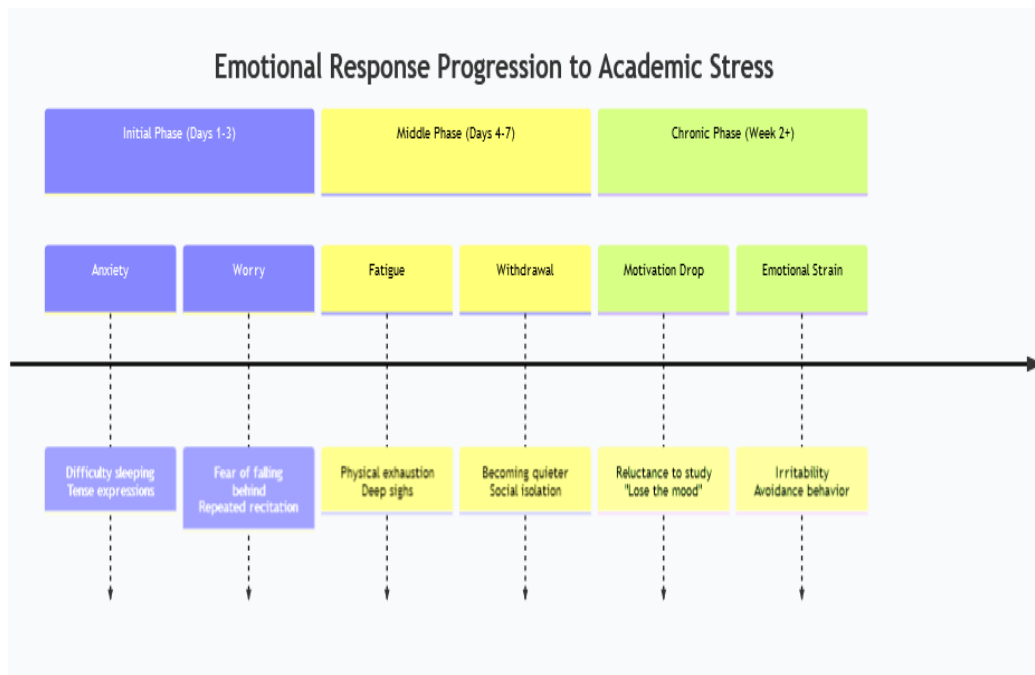


Figure 2: Emotional Response Progression to Academic Stress

This timeline of figure 2 illustrates how stress responses evolve over time, showing a progression from initial anxiety to chronic emotional strain. It demonstrates that stress isn't static but follows a predictable developmental pattern across all three institutions.

2. The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Students' Responses to Academic Stress

The findings of this study demonstrate that emotional intelligence plays a central role in shaping how students respond to academic pressures, particularly within the pesantren context, which is characterized by intensive memorization routines, classical text study, and religious activities. Abilities such as emotional management, self-awareness, emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills determine whether students respond adaptively to stress or instead experience excessive emotional strain.

a. Ability to Manage Emotions

The ability to manage emotions emerged as one of the most prominent aspects among students who successfully coped with academic pressures constructively. Senior students generally displayed more emotional maturity than middle or junior students. They remained calmer during memorization assessments, were less prone to panic when interacting with teachers, and were better able to maintain emotional stability when facing academic uncertainty.

A dormitory supervisor at Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School described this ability as a result of prolonged experience with memorization examinations:

“Senior students are usually more mature. They know how to calm themselves before memorization assessments. The juniors still tend to be anxious and hurried.”
(P07, male, 30, Dormitory Supervisor, Zainul Hafidz At-Taufiq Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 27, 2025)

Observations supported this finding: senior students were seen repeating their memorization with a steady rhythm and calm expression, whereas junior students appeared more tense, frequently pausing to take deep breaths or restarting from the beginning. (Observation, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, October 26, 2025)

At Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, a tahfiz teacher emphasized that emotional management is influenced not only by age but also by the frequency with which students encounter pressure:

“The more often they face difficult situations, the more trained they become in managing their emotions. Some students who used to cry easily are now much calmer.” (P13, female, 28, Tahfiz Teacher, Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 5, 2025)

b. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness enables students to recognize when they are experiencing excessive pressure and to understand their own limits. Students with high self-awareness tended to seek help proactively, either from teachers or peers.

At Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, a student explained that he could identify early signs of stress when his concentration began to decline:

“When I start having difficulty concentrating, that means I need to ask for guidance from the teacher or take a short break so the stress doesn’t get worse.” (P29, male, 17, Student, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 24, 2025)

A similar pattern was observed at Darul Qur’an Walhadis, where some students returned to the fiqh teacher after class to request additional explanation as a form of acknowledging their comprehension limits. (Observation, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, November 6, 2025)

This self-awareness helped students prevent the accumulation of stress and encouraged them to take preventive measures.

c. Emotional Regulation

Students’ emotional regulation was strongly influenced by routine religious practices such as dhikr, *muroja’ah*, and voluntary prayers, all of which form an integral part of pesantren life. These practices serve as internal mechanisms for calming oneself when facing pressure from memorization or classical text lessons.

At Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, the dormitory head stated:

“We usually encourage students to increase their dhikr or perform voluntary prayers when they appear tense. This method is quite effective in helping them relax.” (P25, male, 35, Dormitory Head, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 20, 2025)

Beyond spiritual practices, personal approaches from teachers were also crucial. At Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, the tahfiz teacher regularly engaged in personal conversations with students who appeared overwhelmed:

“I often speak with students privately. We help them release their tension so their memorization is not disrupted.” (P14, female, 32, Tahfiz Teacher, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 5, 2025)

Observation during group dhikr sessions at Zainul Hafidz showed that these activities successfully reduced emotional tension; students who had previously appeared restless looked more relaxed afterward. (Observation, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, October 28, 2025)

d. Motivation and Mental Resilience

Motivation—whether academic, spiritual, or linked to long-term goals—was found to greatly influence students’ mental resilience. Students with a clear vision of their future were better able to withstand academic pressure.

At Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, a tahfiz student described religious motivation as her primary source of strength:

“When I remember my goal to become a hafizah, the stress slowly fades. I become more enthusiastic even when I feel tired.” (P17, female, 16, Tahfiz Student, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 4, 2025)

At Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, a fiqh teacher emphasized the importance of sincere intention:

“Students who have strong and sincere intentions are usually more resilient. They don’t easily give up even when the workload is heavy.” (P04, male, 40, Fiqh Teacher, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 26, 2025)

Observations at Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School showed that highly motivated students repeated their memorization more consistently and remained focused despite a demanding schedule. (Observation, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, October 23, 2025)

e. Empathy and Social Skills

Empathy and social skills played an important role in enabling students to adopt collective strategies for coping with academic pressure. Study groups and open communication helped students feel emotionally supported.

A mid-level student at Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School stated:

“When studying together, the atmosphere feels lighter. We can help each other when someone doesn’t understand, so no one feels alone.” (P06, male, 17, Student, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 19, 2025)

At Insan Budi Mulia, an open communication culture allowed students to express academic pressures more freely:

“We try to create an open environment so students don’t bottle up their stress. Usually after sharing their feelings, they look more relaxed.” (P31, female, 29, Student Organization Advisor, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 24, 2025)

Observation during group discussions showed that students who initially appeared withdrawn became more active, indicating the strong effect of social support in reducing emotional burden. (Observation, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, November 5, 2025)

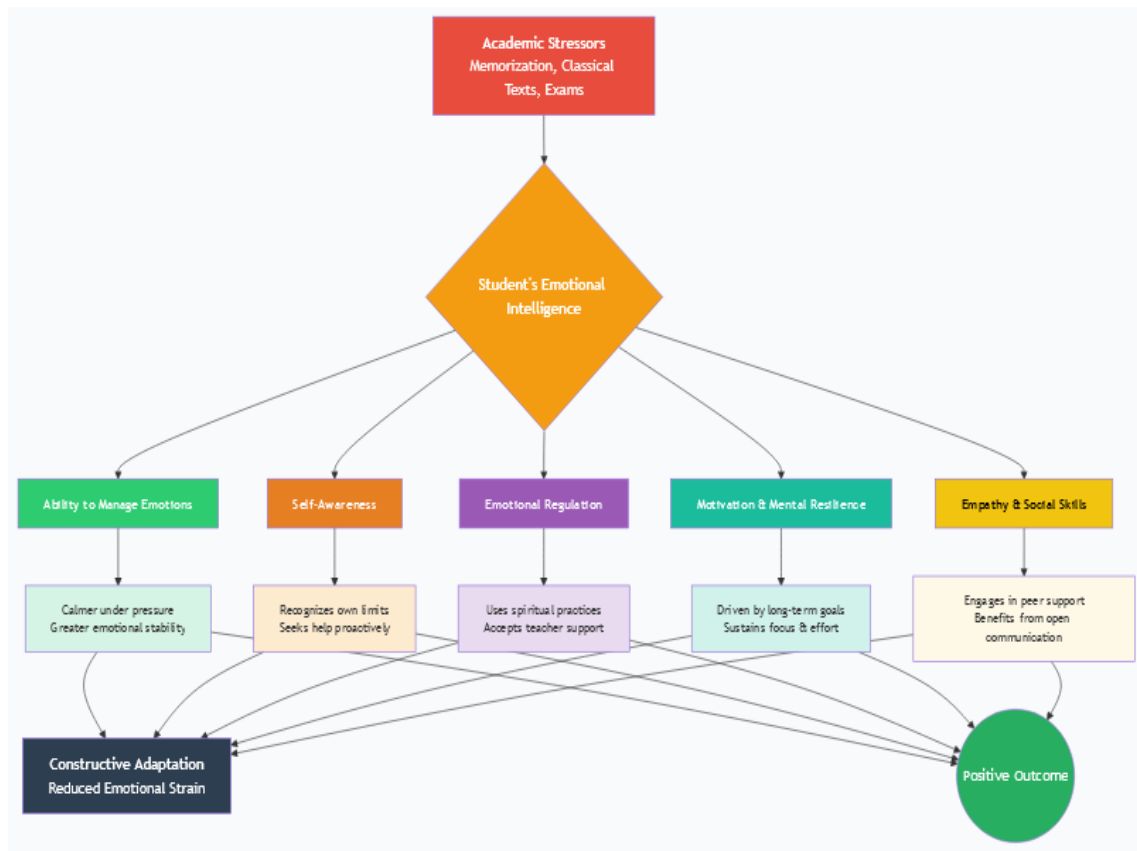


Figure 3: The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Students’ Responses to Academic Stress

Figure 3 illustrates the pivotal role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in shaping students' responses to academic stress. The data reveal that EI functions as the central mechanism determining whether students become overwhelmed or can manage stress effectively. Its five components operate as an interconnected system: for instance, Self-Awareness triggers Emotional Regulation, while Empathy enhances Social Skills, collectively reducing the overall emotional burden. The findings also emphasize the pesantren context, where emotional regulation is closely linked to spiritual practices such as dhikr and prayer, and motivation is often driven by religious goals, like becoming a hafiz or hafizah. Moreover, the data indicate that these abilities develop over time, with senior students exhibiting more mature emotional management skills due to repeated exposure to academic pressure.

3. The Impact of Academic Stress on Students' Behavioral Transformation

The findings of this study indicate that the academic stress experienced by students in the three Islamic boarding schools results in two primary forms of behavioral transformation: adaptive behaviors and maladaptive behaviors. Adaptive behaviors emerge when students are able to manage pressure effectively, allowing stress to become a motivator for improving learning quality, worship practices, and personal responsibility. Conversely, maladaptive behaviors arise when students are unable to control their academic burden, leading to mental fatigue, decreased motivation, and minor violations. Both types of behaviors were observed among students across different levels (junior, intermediate, and senior), with variations influenced by the culture and mentoring system in each boarding school.

a. Adaptive Behaviors

1) Increased discipline in worship

Across the three boarding schools, some students responded to academic pressure by strengthening their religious discipline. Practices such as performing additional sunnah prayers, engaging in extra dhikr, and conducting night-time *muroja'ah* were performed to attain inner peace and maintain memorization focus. A student at Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School shared:

"When I start feeling pressured, I usually increase my night prayers so my heart feels calmer and my memorization becomes stronger." (P15, female, 16, Student, Darul Qur'an Walhadis, personal communication, November 3, 2025)

Observations at Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School confirm this phenomenon, where senior students regularly conduct *muroja'ah* after the dawn prayer, which appears to help maintain their mood and concentration throughout the day. (Observation, Zainul Hafidz, October 27, 2025)

2) Consistent study and review routines

Another form of adaptation is the establishment of more consistent study routines. Final-year students at Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School were more structured in managing their time between academics, organizational responsibilities, and dormitory activities. One student explained:

"If I don't manage my time, I'll get even more stressed. That's why I created a personal schedule so my memorization and lessons don't pile up." (P26, male, 18, Senior Student, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 8, 2025)

3) Increased responsibility for memorization

The daily recitation requirements at Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School encouraged intermediate students to improve their learning strategies. Many students began using personal notes to support their *muroja'ah*.

"At first, I often forgot things, but as the target increased, I made special notes so my memorization wouldn't get messy." (P14, male, 17, Final-Year Student, Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 2, 2025)

4) Greater initiative in seeking teacher guidance

Students also showed a growing tendency to seek help from teachers. At Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, a fiqh teacher noted that previously quiet students began actively asking questions.

"Recently, students have been coming more often to ask about material they don't understand. It's a good sign that they are becoming more responsible." (P03, male, 26, Fiqh Teacher, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 26, 2025)

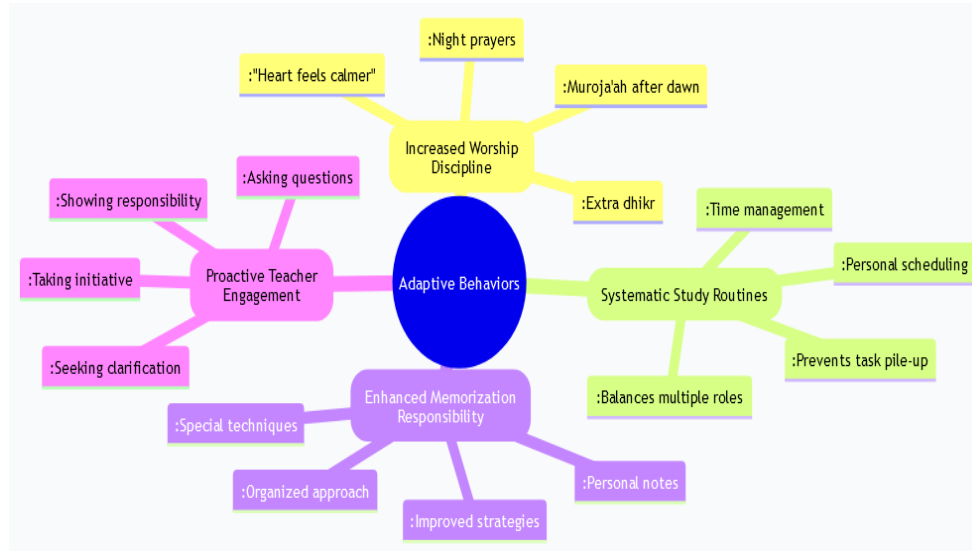


Figure 4: Framework Maps Four Primary Adaptive Behaviors Students

The visual framework maps four primary adaptive behaviors students develop in response to academic stress: spiritual discipline (night prayers, dhikr), systematic study routines (personal scheduling), enhanced memorization strategies (personal notes), and proactive teacher engagement. These responses form a positive cycle where stress triggers emotional awareness, leading to adaptive choices that result in inner peace, better time control, improved retention, and clarity. The mind map shows these behaviors as interconnected strategies, while the cycle diagram illustrates their self-reinforcing nature—successful adaptation reduces stress, which in turn enhances academic performance. The accompanying timeline reveals this is a developmental process, evolving from initial awareness to habitual mastery over several weeks. Different boarding schools show strengths in different adaptive areas, but all pathways demonstrate students' capacity to transform pressure into productive growth.

b. Maladaptive Behaviors

1) Withdrawal from social groups

In some cases, academic stress led students to withdraw from their social environment. This behavior was found at both Darul Qur'an Walhadis and Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School.

“When I have many assignments, I sometimes just stay in my room. I don’t join group study because my head feels full.” (P19, female, 16, Dormitory Student, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 5, 2025)

Observations at Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School documented students sitting alone and avoiding interaction when their memorization workload increased. (Observation, Insan Budi Mulia, November 8, 2025)

2) Decreased motivation to study

Junior students were particularly prone to losing study motivation when experiencing prolonged stress.

“When I’m physically and mentally tired, I don’t feel like opening the kitab. I just want to sleep.” (P07, female, 15, Junior Student, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 28, 2025)

3) Increased irritability or sensitivity

Inability to manage stress also manifested as irritability. An akhlak teacher at Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School explained:

“Before exams, some students become easily offended. If a friend says something slightly wrong, they get angry right away.” (P13, male, 32, Akhlak Teacher, Darul Qur’an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 2, 2025)

4) Minor rule violations

Severe stress sometimes led students to commit minor violations, such as skipping recitation sessions or arriving late to class.

“Some students, when extremely stressed, prefer not to attend recitation sessions. We call them in and give guidance so it doesn’t escalate.” (P23, male, 25, Aqidah-Akhlak Teacher, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 7, 2025)

Further observations noted two students at Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School sitting outside during scheduled recitation time, indicating emotional exhaustion. (Observation, November 4, 2025)

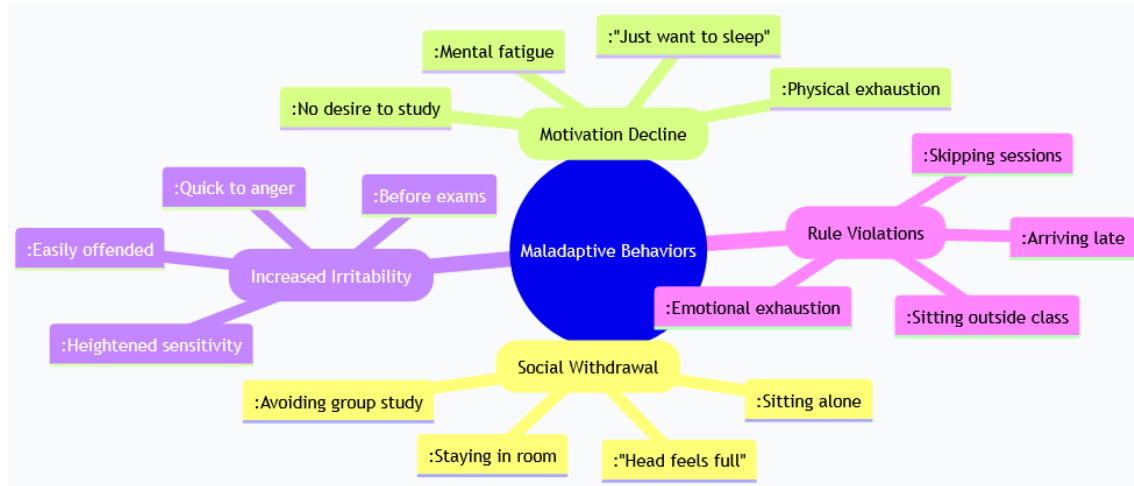


Figure 5: four key maladaptive behaviors Behaviors Students

The figure 5 illustrates four key maladaptive behaviors that emerge when students fail to cope with academic stress: social withdrawal (isolating in rooms, avoiding group study), motivation decline (loss of study drive, fatigue), increased irritability (easily offended, quick to anger), and minor rule violations (skipping sessions, arriving late). These behaviors form a negative cycle where each response exacerbates stress, leading to further deterioration. The mind map shows their interconnected nature, while the cycle diagram reveals their self-reinforcing pattern—stress triggers coping failure, which leads to maladaptive behaviors that then increase stress levels further. The progression timeline demonstrates how these responses escalate from initial emotional overwhelm to observable behavioral issues requiring intervention. Different schools show distinct patterns, with social withdrawal prominent in Darul Qur'an and Insan Budi, while motivation decline affects Zainul Hafidz's junior students most severely.

c. Variations in Impact Across the Three Boarding Schools

1)Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School

In this boarding school, adaptive behaviors were more dominant. A strong culture of discipline and intensive mentoring allowed students to be redirected more effectively when experiencing stress.

“Students here are used to being guided. If someone is stressed, we handle it quickly so they can refocus.”
 (P10, male, 18, Dormitory Mentor, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 30, 2025)

2) Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School

The high memorization demands produced split responses: some students became highly disciplined, while others grew increasingly overwhelmed and withdrawn.

“Some become more diligent, but others get more tense and often isolate themselves.” (P12, female, 24, Tabfiz Teacher, Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 1, 2025)

3) Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School

Students active in organizational roles appeared most vulnerable to mental fatigue. They had to balance academic work, organizational duties, and boarding school activities.

“Students who are active in organizations sometimes get overwhelmed. They return from activities and still have to study. That's when stress often appears.” (P28, male, 17, Student Leader, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 9, 2025)

Observations revealed that some student leaders were found sleeping in class or arriving late to evening study sessions. (Observation, November 10, 2025)

Table 2: Comparative Analysis Variations in Impact Across the Three Boarding Schools

Aspect	Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School	Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School	Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School
Dominant Pattern	Adaptive	Mixed	Maladaptive-prone
Key Strength	Mentoring System	Memorization Rigor	Organizational Skills
Main Challenge	Maintaining Consistency	Emotional Polarization	Role Overload
Student Quote	"We handle stress quickly"	"Some diligent, some isolate"	"Return and still have to study"
Observational Evidence	Effective redirection	Split behavioral responses	Sleeping in class

Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of student responses across three boarding schools. Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School shows an adaptive pattern, supported by a strong mentoring system, helping students handle stress quickly. Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School exhibits a mixed pattern, with rigorous memorization as a strength but emotional polarization among students. Insan Budi Islamic Boarding School tends toward a maladaptive pattern, with strong organizational skills but role overload, often leading to stress-related behaviors such as sleeping in class.

4. The Interaction of Academic Stress and Emotional Intelligence in Shaping Adaptive or Maladaptive Behaviors

a. Interaction Model

The findings indicate that the interaction between academic stress and students' emotional intelligence forms a consistent pattern across the three boarding schools. Students experiencing high levels of stress but possessing strong emotional intelligence tend to exhibit **adaptive behaviors**. They are able to interpret pressure as a motivator for greater focus and organization. One student explained:

"When the ustaz assigns many tasks or the memorization piles up, I usually take a deep breath first, organize my schedule, and then work through it slowly. If I panic, it just becomes more chaotic." (P14, male, 16, Senior Student, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 9, 2025)

Observations support this, showing that students with good self-regulation skills appear calmer during recitation sessions and maintain a steady learning rhythm (Observation, November 9, 2025).

Conversely, students experiencing high stress but low emotional intelligence display maladaptive behaviors. They are more likely to withdraw, postpone memorization, and avoid interaction with teachers. One student stated:

"When there's a lot of memorization, I just feel like staying in my room. I'm afraid of being scolded by the ustaz if I make mistakes." (P31, male, 15, Junior Student, Darul Qur'an Walhadi Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 12, 2025)

Field observations showed a similar situation, where some students chose to sit alone in dormitory corners, avoid study groups, and appear anxious before recitation schedules (Observation, November 12, 2025).

Students experiencing moderate stress but with high social support displayed relatively stable and productive behaviors. They leveraged peer interactions as a source of emotional support. One student explained:

“When I feel overwhelmed by memorization, I usually study with friends. It feels lighter that way.”
(P28, male, 17, Student Leader, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 9, 2025)

Observations revealed that students active in organizations were more skilled in communication and problem-solving, though they appeared fatigued when their schedules were dense (Observation, November 11, 2025).

b. Moderating Factors

Several moderating factors were found to influence the relationship between academic stress and emotional intelligence. Support from teachers or mentors serves as a significant protective factor that enhances adaptive responses to academic pressure. A student stated:

“When I feel down, I usually consult the ustaz. He provides guidance so I don’t panic.” (P07, male, 16, Intermediate Student, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 8, 2025)

Observations indicated that such personal interactions create a safe emotional climate, enabling students to express difficulties more openly (Observation, November 8, 2025).

The boarding school lifestyle also strongly affects students’ emotional resilience. In schools with tight schedules, the risk of mental fatigue is higher, particularly for students involved in multiple activities. One student leader shared:

“Sometimes the schedule is too packed. After night study, I continue with organizational activities. Sometimes it feels like there’s no time to rest.” (P28, male, 17, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 9, 2025)

Observations confirmed signs of fatigue, such as students appearing lethargic during morning activities after attending organizational meetings the previous night (Observation, November 10, 2025).

Peer groups also play a crucial role. Supportive peer environments help students alleviate stress through collaborative learning or mutual assistance in completing tasks. For instance, one student stated:

“When there are problems with memorization, we usually discuss them together. So, we don’t get too stressed.” (P12, male, 15, Intermediate Student, Darul Qur’an Walbadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 11, 2025)

Observations indicated that these informal study groups effectively maintained student engagement in academic activities (Observation, November 12, 2025).

Family influence also affects students’ emotional state, especially regarding high expectations for memorization. One student said:

“When my parents call and tell me I need to memorize a certain number of juz quickly, I feel even more pressured.” (P05, male, 14, New Student, Darul Qur’an Walbadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 7, 2025)

Observations revealed that students experiencing high family pressure appeared more anxious and often repeated memorization independently before scheduled recitations (Observation, November 9, 2025).

c. Patterns Observed in Each Boarding School

The interaction between academic stress and emotional intelligence varies according to the characteristics of each boarding school.

At Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, emotional mentoring is strong due to intensive supervision and close relationships between senior and junior students. One senior student stated:

“When the juniors are stressed, we help them manage their targets.” (P18, male, 17, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 10, 2025)

Observations confirmed supportive interactions, with senior students actively guiding juniors in responding to academic pressure (Observation, November 10, 2025).

At Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, memorization stress is the dominant trigger of behavioral changes. Students tend to express fear of failing their recitations. One student said:

"If I haven't recited yet, I feel really scared. That's why sometimes I don't want to meet the ustaz." (P31, male, 15, Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 12, 2025)

Observations showed that many students appeared tense while waiting for their turn, walking back and forth while repeating memorization (Observation, November 12, 2025).

At Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, students' emotional intelligence is closely linked to organizational activities. Active students demonstrate better social skills but are prone to fatigue. One student explained:

"Being active in the organization helps me gain confidence, but it's tiring when tasks pile up." (P28, male, 17, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School personal communication, November 9, 2025)

Observations showed that these students could resolve group conflicts effectively but sometimes lost focus on academic activities when organizational schedules became dense (Observation, November 11, 2025).

Overall, the study confirms that emotional intelligence acts as a critical buffer in coping with academic stress. Students who can recognize and manage their emotions are more likely to develop adaptive behaviors, such as discipline, perseverance, and high academic engagement. This is reinforced by a student's statement:

"If we know how to calm ourselves, memorization becomes smoother." (P14, male, 16, Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 9, 2025)

Boarding schools with strong emotional mentoring systems were found to be more effective in reducing maladaptive behaviors. Observations conducted from November 11–13, 2025, indicated that guidance from teachers, healthy peer group dynamics, and structured

daily routines strengthened students' mental resilience and stabilized behavioral patterns (Observations, November 11–13, 2025).

Thus, the interaction between academic stress and emotional intelligence not only influences immediate responses but also shapes long-term behavioral patterns in students within the boarding school environment.



Figure 6: The Path Analysis of Academic Stress and Emotional Intelligence Interaction in Shaping Adaptive or Maladaptive Behaviors

The figure 6 of path analysis demonstrates a clear mediation model where academic stress does not directly determine student behavior, but rather flows through emotional intelligence as a critical filter. Four key moderating factors—teacher support, peer groups, family expectations, and school schedules—either strengthen or weaken this emotional intelligence capacity. Students with well-developed EI interpret academic pressure as a constructive challenge, leading to adaptive behaviors like better organization and disciplined study. Conversely, students with underdeveloped EI perceive the same pressure as a threat, triggering maladaptive responses such as withdrawal and avoidance. This model varies significantly across boarding schools, with Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School showing strong EI development through mentoring, Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School experiencing more threat responses due to high memorization pressure, and Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School displaying mixed outcomes where organizational activities build social EI but create schedule exhaustion. Ultimately, the analysis reveals that behavioral transformation is not about stress elimination, but about building the emotional and environmental resources that enable positive stress interpretation.

5.Synthesis of Research Findings

The synthesis of the research findings indicates that the dynamics of academic stress, emotional intelligence, and behavioral transformation among students in the three boarding schools are closely interrelated phenomena.

First, the study confirms that academic stress is a real and nearly universal experience among students, although the sources and intensity of stress vary across institutions. At Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, students predominantly face pressure from fiqh assignments and the discipline of worship; at Darul Qur'an Walhadis Islamic Boarding School, stress is mainly driven by rigorous memorization targets and recitation deadlines; while students at Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School experience combined pressure from formal academic tasks and organizational activities. One student emphasized:

“Stress is inevitable, especially when memorization and assignments come simultaneously.” (P25, male, 35, Dormitory Head, Insan Budi Mulia Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 20, 2025)

Observations corroborate this, showing signs of nervousness, decreased concentration, and physical fatigue among several students before memorization sessions (Observation, November 11, 2025).

Second, the study found that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in stabilizing students' responses to academic pressure. Students who can recognize, understand, and manage their emotions tend to remain calmer, more organized, and are more likely to adopt constructive coping strategies. A teacher noted:

"Students who can manage their emotions usually recover more quickly when under pressure." (P03, male, 26, Fiqh Teacher, Zainul Hafidz At-Taufiq Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, October 26, 2025)

Observational data also indicate that students with higher emotional intelligence appear more stable and rarely exhibit impulsive behaviors when facing heavy workloads (Observation, November 9, 2025).

Third, behavioral transformation—both adaptive and maladaptive—is strongly influenced by the interaction between stress levels and emotional regulation abilities. Students experiencing high stress but possessing strong emotional regulation exhibit positive behaviors, such as increased discipline in worship, improved time management, and proactive engagement with teachers for guidance. Conversely, students with poor emotional regulation tend to show decreased motivation, social withdrawal, or minor infractions, such as skipping recitation sessions. This is reinforced by a student's statement:

"If I can't manage my emotions, my memorization becomes chaotic, and I end up reluctant to leave my room." (P31, male, 15, Junior Student, Darul Qur'an Walbadis Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, November 12, 2025)

Fourth, the study provides insight that the combination of academic stress and emotional intelligence determines the quality of students' adaptive behaviors. Boarding schools with robust emotional mentoring systems, such as Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, are more effective in minimizing maladaptive behaviors. Conversely, institutions with extremely high memorization pressure without adequate emotional support are more likely to foster excessive anxiety, withdrawal, or interpersonal tension among students. Cross-

institutional observations from November 11–13, 2025, demonstrate that a supportive learning environment, peer group assistance, and close guidance from ustaz contribute to stabilizing students’ psychological well-being, even when facing similar academic pressures (Observations, November 11–13, 2025).

Overall, this synthesis emphasizes that **academic stress does not inherently lead to negative outcomes**, provided that students’ emotional intelligence is nurtured and supported through the boarding school’s mentoring system. The interaction between stress and emotional intelligence is pivotal in fostering **adaptive behaviors aligned with the educational objectives of boarding schools**, including mental resilience, independence, and discipline in both worship and academic activities.

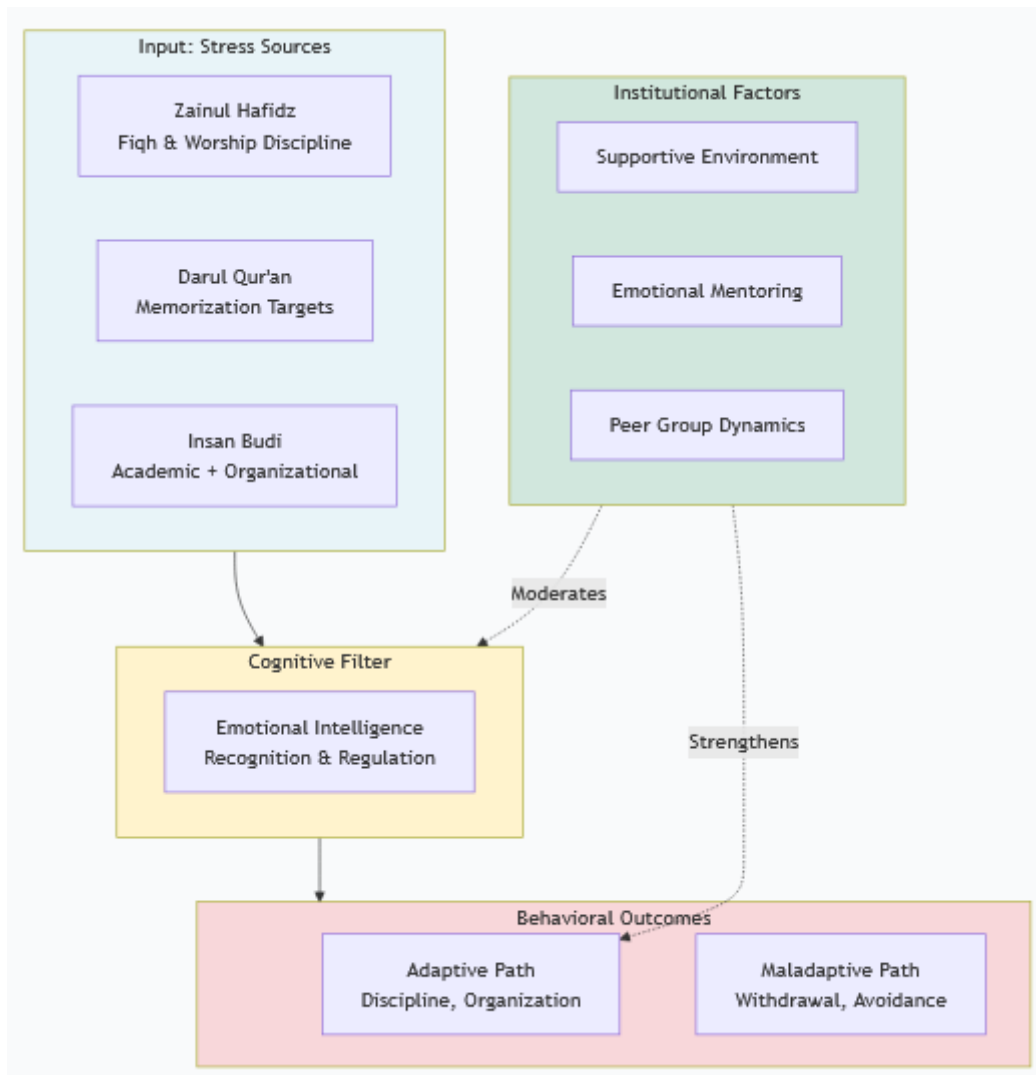


Figure 7: The Integrated Framework Diagram of Research's Core Dynamic

The figure 7 of The Integrated Framework Diagram visually summarizes the research's core dynamic: academic stress from three distinct sources (Fiqh discipline in Zainul Hafidz Islamic Boarding School, memorization targets in Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School, and combined academic-organizational pressure in Insan Budi Islamic Boarding School) flows through a student's Emotional Intelligence, which acts as the central cognitive and emotional filter. This EI capacity is either strengthened or weakened by key institutional factors like mentoring systems and peer support. The filtered outcome then bifurcates into two behavioral pathways—adaptive (disciplined, organized) or maladaptive (withdrawn, avoidant)—demonstrating that stress itself is neutral; its constructive or destructive impact is determined by the quality of emotional intelligence, which is heavily influenced by the school's support environment.

DISCUSSION

1. Results Analysis

a. Forms and Sources of Academic Stress Among Santri

The findings of this study indicate that academic stress in the three pesantren primarily stems from memorization demands, cognitive difficulties in understanding classical Islamic texts, as well as social and environmental pressures. Memorization requirements—particularly of the Qur'an and fiqh texts—consistently emerged as the most dominant stressor. This aligns with recent findings stating that “in many pesantren, the proportion of students experiencing high levels of academic stress is quite significant, reflecting a substantial emotional and cognitive burden resulting from the academic structure of Islamic boarding schools” (Renata et al., 2023).

Several behaviors exhibited by the santri, such as repeating memorization with tense expressions, withdrawing socially, and showing physical fatigue, reflect early manifestations of performance-based stress. Variations in stress intensity across the three pesantren are influenced by their respective academic demands. Islamic Boarding School of Darul Qur'an Walhadis displayed more persistent stress due to its strict memorization targets; Islamic Boarding School of Insan Budi Mulia showed layered stress resulting from the combination of academic and organizational responsibilities; whereas Islamic Boarding School of Zainul Hafidz fostered pressure through fiqh routines and high disciplinary standards. These findings affirm that the sources of stress are multifaceted—driven both by tasks and

contextual factors—reflecting a pesantren pedagogical ecosystem that integrates academic, spiritual, and social dimensions.

b. Emotional Intelligence as a Coping Resource

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a substantial role in shaping how santri interpret, manage, and respond to academic stress. The five major elements of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, emotional regulation, self-control, motivation, empathy, and social skills—were prominently observed in the students' behaviors.

Santri with good emotional regulation tended to organize their memorization schedules systematically, respond calmly to evaluations, and take breaks to regain emotional stability. This is consistent with findings that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to possess better academic stress management skills (Iskandar, 2024). Religious practices such as dhikr, voluntary prayers, and tilawah also reinforced emotional regulation as an integral aspect of pesantren's religious culture.

Intrinsic motivation, such as the desire to become a hafiz or to deepen religious knowledge, strengthened the santri's mental resilience. Emotional support and empathy among peers functioned as an informal protective system that effectively reduced emotional burdens. Thus, emotional intelligence serves as a buffer against academic pressure, enabling santri to convert stress into adaptive energy.

c. Behavioral Transformation: Adaptive and Maladaptive Responses

Academic stress generated two primary patterns of behavioral responses: adaptive and maladaptive. Adaptive responses were evident in increased discipline in worship, consistent review of learning materials, proactive efforts to seek guidance from teachers, and improved time management. These responses indicate that stress may act as a catalyst for academic and spiritual growth when emotional intelligence functions optimally.

Conversely, maladaptive behaviors emerged when emotional capacity was overwhelmed by academic pressure. Such behaviors included social withdrawal, irritability, loss of concentration, and minor violations of dormitory rules. A relevant statement emphasizes that “academic stress combined with poor emotional skills contributes to maladaptive behaviors” (Rahmadani, 2023).

Each pesantren exhibited different patterns: Pondok Pesantren Zainul Hafidz showed a higher prevalence of adaptive responses due to strict supervision; Pondok Pesantren Darul

Qur'an Walhadis displayed mixed patterns depending on individual coping capacities; while Pondok Pesantren Insan Budi Mulia showed higher fatigue levels among students actively involved in organizational duties. These findings reinforce that behavioral transformation is shaped not only by stress intensity but also by institutional support.

d. Interaction Between Academic Stress and Emotional Intelligence

The dynamic interaction between stress and emotional intelligence explains the variations in santri's ability to cope with pressure. Santri with high emotional intelligence tend to view stress as a manageable challenge rather than a threat. They often demonstrated behaviors such as breathing regulation, seeking clarification from teachers, asking questions confidently, and organizing structured study patterns.

There is a direct relationship between emotional competence and adaptation, as Ikromi, (2025) notes: "emotional regulation and religiosity function as protective factors that enhance students' behavioral adaptation." Conversely, santri with low emotional intelligence displayed behaviors such as avoiding memorization submissions, fear of teacher correction, or emotional isolation.

Peer support also emerged as an important moderator. Study groups and positive peer relationships helped reduce feelings of isolation, thereby minimizing the destructive impact of stress. These findings are consistent with social-emotional learning theory, which emphasizes the interaction between internal emotional capacity and external relational support.

e. Moderating Factors Influencing Coping and Behavioral Outcomes

The analysis identified several moderating factors that influence the relationship between academic stress, emotional intelligence, and behavioral responses among santri. First, teacher and mentor support played a foundational role. Personalized approaches, flexible memorization targets, and emotional reinforcement functioned as institutional buffers against rising stress levels.

Second, spiritual practices served as a major psychological foundation. Dhikr, night prayers, and collective tilawah fostered emotional calmness, mental clarity, and self-control. Third, peer dynamics were a key factor. This is reinforced by the statement that "peer social support significantly improves students' adaptation to dormitory life, whereas its absence is associated with increased stress and adaptation barriers" (Damayanti et al., 2021).

Fourth, institutional structure and activity load contributed to stress dynamics. Dense schedules, strict memorization demands, or intensive organizational activities heightened the need for stronger emotional intelligence and support systems to prevent burnout.

2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study show that academic stress among santri in pesantren settings primarily originates from memorization burdens, difficulties in understanding classical Islamic texts, disciplinary pressures, and social dynamics. These findings are consistent with earlier studies reporting that the academic demands of pesantren—particularly the memorization of the Qur'an and classical texts—serve as major triggers of cognitive and emotional stress (Renata et al., 2023; *Abwi et al.*, 2024). Symptoms commonly exhibited by santri, such as fatigue, anxiety, and social withdrawal, align with previous reports indicating that academic stress correlates with reduced sleep quality, diminished learning focus, and challenges in personal adjustment (*Rahmah et al.*, 2023).

This study also reinforces the findings of Ikromi, (2025) and Prayitno & Masluchah, (2024), which emphasize the mediating role of emotional intelligence in enhancing santri adaptation. In this research, santri with higher emotional intelligence were better able to organize memorization schedules, regulate emotions, and manage disciplinary pressures, supporting the argument that emotional intelligence strengthens intrinsic motivation and disciplined behavior.

In the international context, the findings align with studies such as Zhang et al., (2024), which highlight the reciprocal relationship between emotional intelligence, academic stress, and motivation. Adaptive behaviors demonstrated by santri—such as self-regulation, empathy, and seeking social support—also correspond to findings from Thao et al., (2024) in Vietnam, which show that emotional intelligence promotes proactive behaviors, including help-seeking. Moreover, the presence of negative emotions and maladaptive behaviors among santri with low emotional intelligence is consistent with psychological intervention studies in Iran, demonstrating that strengthening emotional intelligence can reduce emotional, physical, and behavioral stress responses (Khorasani et al., 2023).

On the other hand, this study identifies elements that differ from previous research. The primary distinction lies in the strong cultural context of pesantren—emphasizing communal values, collective discipline, close teacher–student relationships, and routine spiritual practices—which significantly contributes to the development of everyday

emotional intelligence. This supports the argument that pesantren constitute environments that are not only demanding but also possess transformative pedagogical potential (Arifin, 2022; Rahman, 2024). The unique blend of academic stress and spiritual cultivation represents a distinctive finding rarely discussed in international studies.

Thus, this study expands the existing literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how academic stress and emotional intelligence interact within Indonesia's highly structured pesantren context.

3. Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study contribute important theoretical insights to the development of research on academic stress and emotional intelligence in boarding-based educational settings. First, the study reinforces the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) through evidence that the stress experienced by santri arises not only from academic pressure but also from an interaction of memorization demands, cognitive appraisal, and individual emotional-management abilities throughout their learning activities in the pesantren.

Second, this study also strengthens Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995). The santri's behavioral patterns—such as emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—demonstrate that emotional intelligence is a key determinant of adaptive responses when facing intense academic pressure.

Third, the relevance of the findings to Self-Regulation Theory (Bandura, 1991) is evident in the persistence of santri in maintaining memorization discipline and managing time, shaped through habituation and spiritual practices. Fourth, the variation in adaptive capacities among santri also confirms the principles of Self-Adjustment Theory (Schneiders, 1964), which posits that adjustment processes are heavily influenced by internal psychological conditions and environmental support.

Overall, this study expands these theoretical frameworks by showing that a structured religious environment can strengthen emotional intelligence, creating a more complex interplay between stress, emotion, and behavioral change among santri.

From a practical standpoint, the findings carry strategic implications for the management of learning systems in pesantren. Strengthening emotional intelligence should be designed as a dedicated program through training in emotional regulation, empathetic

communication, and Islamic-value-based stress management to enhance santri's emotional resilience. Pesantren also need to develop preventive interventions for new students who are more vulnerable to stress, such as orientation programs emphasizing emotional readiness, understanding academic demands, and spiritual coping strategies.

Teachers' roles as emotional mentors must be optimized through basic counseling training so that their guidance addresses not only academic matters but also psychological needs. Peer support can be reinforced through study groups, peer mentoring, or halaqah to reduce emotional isolation. At the policy level, adjustments to schedules and academic loads are essential to maintain balance between memorization, formal learning, and rest time. Meanwhile, spiritual practices such as dhikr, tilawah, and voluntary prayers have proven effective as psychological coping strategies and can be incorporated more structurally into student development systems.

4. Limitations of the Study

Despite offering an in-depth portrayal of the dynamics of academic stress and emotional intelligence among santri, this study has several limitations. The relatively small sample size—limited to only three pesantren—restricts the generalizability of the findings to all pesantren in Indonesia. Additionally, the qualitative methods used, namely interviews and observations, open the possibility of subjective bias from both researchers and respondents, particularly in relation to emotional expression.

This study also did not use standardized quantitative instruments such as EQ-i to measure emotional intelligence or academic stress scales; therefore, the results cannot be statistically validated. External variables such as family factors, health conditions, and non-academic issues were not explored in depth, even though these factors may influence stress and behavior among santri. Cultural differences between pesantren—related to leadership styles, local traditions, and organizational structures—also represent contextual variations that may affect the findings.

Nevertheless, these limitations open opportunities for future research. Subsequent studies may employ mixed-method designs to combine the depth of qualitative data with the statistical validity of quantitative approaches. The number of pesantren involved can be expanded, and emotional-intelligence-based interventions can be tested to evaluate their empirical effectiveness. Such future research would yield a more comprehensive

understanding of how academic stress, emotional intelligence, and santri behavior interact within the broader ecosystem of pesantren education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the dynamics of academic stress, emotional intelligence, and behavioral transformation among students at Ponpes Zainul Hafidz, Darul Qur'an Walhadis, and Insan Budi Mulia. The findings demonstrate that academic stress is a pervasive experience for santri, stemming primarily from memorization demands, cognitive challenges in understanding classical Islamic texts, and social-environmental pressures unique to each pesantren. Emotional intelligence emerged as a critical coping resource, enabling students to interpret stress as a constructive challenge rather than a threat. Students with high emotional intelligence exhibited adaptive behaviors, including disciplined study habits, proactive engagement with teachers, and effective self-regulation, while those with lower emotional intelligence were prone to maladaptive responses, such as withdrawal, avoidance, and fatigue. Moderating factors—such as teacher mentorship, peer support, family expectations, organizational involvement, and structured schedules—significantly influenced the interaction between stress and emotional intelligence, shaping both short-term behavioral responses and longer-term adaptive capacities. The study further highlights that the unique cultural and pedagogical context of pesantren—emphasizing spiritual practices, communal discipline, and close teacher–student relationships—strengthens emotional intelligence and fosters resilience among students.

Despite offering rich qualitative insights, this study has limitations. The sample was limited to three pesantren, which restricts the generalizability of the findings across Indonesia. Additionally, the absence of standardized quantitative instruments for measuring emotional intelligence and academic stress limits the statistical validation of the observed patterns. External variables such as health, non-academic responsibilities, and broader familial or community influences were not deeply explored, leaving potential gaps in understanding the full complexity of stress and behavior interactions.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample to include more pesantren, employ mixed-method approaches combining qualitative and quantitative data, and incorporate standardized measures of emotional intelligence and academic stress. Investigating the effectiveness of targeted emotional-intelligence interventions, as well as the

role of spiritual and organizational activities in mitigating stress, would provide valuable empirical evidence to enhance student well-being and adaptive capacities within pesantren educational contexts.

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