



The Effectiveness of Dhuha Prayer Practice in Reducing Academic Stress and Enhancing Subjective Well-Being

Zudan Ady Wijaya

Internasional Open University, Gambia

e-mail: zudanady.wijaya@student.iou.edu.gm

Abstract

Final-year university students are particularly susceptible to negative emotions due to the pressure to complete their studies on time. Such academic demands can induce stress, which negatively impacts life satisfaction and overall psychological well-being. Among Muslim students in Indonesia, the Dhuha prayer is a commonly practiced spiritual activity that may serve as a coping strategy. Despite its widespread practice, quantitative research systematically examining the effects of Dhuha prayer on academic stress and subjective well-being remains limited. This study employed a quantitative experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of Dhuha prayer, comparing a treatment group engaging in the practice with a control group. Academic stress, positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction were assessed before and after the intervention using validated instruments. The findings revealed that the Dhuha prayer contributed to a meaningful reduction in academic stress and an improvement in psychological well-being. These results suggest that Dhuha prayer functions as an effective spiritual intervention, promoting emotional stability, enhancing life satisfaction, and supporting the mental health of final-year students.

Keywords: Dhuha Prayer, Academic Stress, Subjective Well-Being, Experimental Design, Final-Year Students.

INTRODUCTION

Final-year students are individuals situated in the closing phase of higher education while simultaneously entering the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, a transitional period from late adolescence to early adulthood. This period generally spans from ages 18 to approximately 40 and is characterized by identity exploration, future planning, and the establishment of educational and career goals (Qolbi et al., 2020). During this phase, students navigate not only rigorous academic demands but also begin to shoulder personal responsibilities regarding their future life trajectories.

These diverse demands render final-year students vulnerable to multidimensional pressures, encompassing academic, financial, social, and physical health issues, as well as expectations concerning the future (Maziyah, 2015). The pressure to graduate on time frequently triggers anxiety and interpersonal conflicts, leading to an increase in negative emotions. Such conditions potentially decrease productivity, trigger mental exhaustion, and

hinder the completion of final projects or undergraduate theses (Andeslan & Uyun, 2023).

The stress experienced by students at this stage typically evolves into academic stress, defined as an individual's perception of pressure within learning situations. In the process of completing a final project, academic stress can be triggered by various factors, such as repetitive revisions, difficulties in comprehending supervisors' instructions, limited mastery of research concepts, challenges in obtaining references, disagreements between supervisors, and research time constraints (Aulia & Panjaitan, 2019). If not managed effectively, academic stress can develop into psychological disorders including depression, loss of motivation, feelings of worthlessness, and the urge to quit, accompanied by physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, changes in eating patterns, headaches, and other health issues (Ambarwati, 2019). Individuals with compromised psychological conditions generally exhibit difficulties in managing negative emotions, including stress, anxiety, and depression (Rahmaputri, 2024).

This phenomenon is closely linked to low subjective well-being, which is an individual's evaluation of their quality of life, encompassing the balance between positive and negative emotions and overall life satisfaction (Diener, 2000). Subjective well-being represents a state of happiness and life satisfaction supported by optimal mental and physical health (Compton & Hoffman, 2018). A decline in subjective well-being results in decreased creativity, persistence, learning effectiveness, and the ability to face academic life challenges. Furthermore, low subjective well-being increases vulnerability to stress.

Empirical findings indicate that a majority of students struggle to maintain their psychological well-being. Reportedly, 86.3% of students experience obstacles in their sense of well-being, while 90% face issues regarding time management, stress control, and academic self-confidence. Additionally, approximately 84% of students do not yet understand strategies to maintain their psychological well-being (Kaligis et al., 2021). Other studies confirm that high academic, financial, and social burdens on final-year students contribute to increased academic stress and decreased life satisfaction (Maziyah, 2015). In the emerging adulthood phase, the pressure to complete studies is proven to correlate with low subjective well-being among students (Qolbi et al., 2020).

Various approaches have been developed to manage academic stress, including psychological, social, and spiritual methods. Within the perspectives of positive psychology and religiosity, spiritual practices are proven to have a relationship with stress reduction and increased life satisfaction. Studies show that worship and prayer correlate negatively with stress levels and positively with life satisfaction as a primary component of subjective well-being (Achour, 2019).

One spiritual practice commonly performed by Muslim students in Indonesia is Duha prayer, a sunnah worship performed in the morning after sunrise until shortly before noon. Duha prayer is viewed as a form of gratitude that provides inner peace, eases the comprehension of knowledge, and enhances psychological tranquility (Sapitri, 2020).

Preliminary research indicates that the practice of Duha prayer serves as a religious coping mechanism that assists in emotion regulation and the management of academic anxiety. Performing Duha prayer with solemnity (*khusyuk*) is reported to reduce fear, restlessness, and anxiety while increasing enthusiasm in facing academic demands (Khaira, 2022). Furthermore, this practice contributes to stress reduction and the enhancement of individual psychological peace and happiness (Fikri, 2024). Nevertheless, quantitative research systematically examining the relationship between Duha prayer, academic stress, and subjective well-being among final-year students remains relatively limited, thus presenting an opportunity for further investigation.

Initial observations through interviews with students currently writing their theses revealed anxiety resulting from repetitive revisions, uncertainty in the research process, and concerns regarding post-graduation career prospects. Pressures from family expectations and future uncertainty further reinforce feelings of distress, indicating low psychological well-being. These preliminary findings emphasize the urgency of research concerning stress management strategies relevant to the religious context of students. Based on the aforementioned context, this study is essential to examine the effectiveness of Duha prayer in reducing academic stress and increasing subjective well-being among final-year students. The results are expected to provide a scholarly contribution while offering an applicable Islamic therapeutic approach to enhancing students' psychological well-being amidst increasingly complex academic pressures.

Academic stress is a psychological phenomenon widely experienced by students, particularly final-year students facing the pressure of completing final projects, time constraints, and increasingly complex academic and social demands. This condition affects not only cognitive and emotional functions but also impacts psychological welfare and results in an overall decline in subjective well-being. Final-year students are in the emerging adulthood phase, a transition to maturity characterized by identity exploration, career planning, and increased personal responsibility (Qolbi et al., 2020). At this stage, students are required to complete their studies independently while facing various academic and life pressures, including financial issues, social relations, health, and future uncertainty (Maziyah, 2015; Beiter et al., 2015).

The process of thesis writing often encounters both academic and non-academic obstacles, such as difficulties in determining research topics, limited references, supervision hurdles, ineffective time management, and family pressure or social expectations (Roellyana & Listiyandini, 2016; Maesyaroh, 2021). Such situations increase vulnerability to anxiety, mental exhaustion, academic procrastination, and decreased productivity (Andeslan & Uyun, 2023). If stress is not managed adaptively, individuals may experience impaired concentration, decreased problem-solving abilities, depression, and maladaptive behaviors detrimental to both physical and mental health (Goff, 2011 in Ambarwati, 2019). Therefore, academic resilience and time management skills are vital factors in the successful completion of studies and the maintenance of students' psychological well-being (Fitriana, 2023; Aprilagera & Paryontri, 2023).

Conceptually, academic stress is understood as a psychological response resulting from an imbalance between academic demands and an individual's ability to cope with them (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015; Safitri & Dewi, 2020; Qonita et al., 2021). Stress is an adaptive response to life pressures (WHO, 2023); however, it can evolve into psychological distress when academic demands exceed an individual's coping capacity (Erindana, 2021; Jeyasingh, 2022; Ibda et al., 2023). The dimensions of academic stress include academic stressors and individual responses to those pressures, whether emotional, cognitive, or behavioral (Gadzella & Masten, 2005). Performance pressure, perception of workload, academic self-perception, and time constraints are the primary components of academic stress in students (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Additionally, internal factors such as self-efficacy, personality, motivation, and sleep quality, as well as external factors like social support, the learning environment, and time management, influence academic stress levels (Hall & Mansfield, 1971; Yusuf & Yusuf, 2020; Fardani et al., 2021; Arwina et al., 2021).

The impact of academic stress is closely related to subjective well-being (SWB), an individual's comprehensive evaluation of their life quality, which includes the cognitive aspect of life satisfaction and the affective aspect of the balance between positive and negative emotions (Diener, 1984; 2009). From a positive psychology perspective, SWB is determined not only by life satisfaction levels but also by the dominance of positive affect over negative affect in daily experiences (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Individuals with high SWB tend to be happier, more optimistic, and more resilient to pressure, whereas low SWB is associated with increased stress and vulnerability to mental disorders (Compton, 2005; Das et al., 2020; Martín-María et al., 2023). Various studies indicate that subjective well-being is influenced by multidimensional factors, including social support (Gulacti, 2010; Siedlecki & Salthouse, 2013; Brajsa-zganec, 2017), gratitude (Datu, 2013; Kong et al., 2014; Jackowska et al., 2015), forgiveness (Allemand et al., 2012; Roxas et al., 2019), personality (Jovanovic, 2010; Stead & Bibby, 2017), self-esteem (Kong et al., 2012; Li et al., 2015), and

spirituality (Khalek, 2010; Liu, 2014; Joshanloo & Daemi, 2014). These factors demonstrate that subjective well-being is influenced not only by internal conditions but also by social interactions and spiritual values.

The measurement of subjective well-being generally employs multidimensional approaches, such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) for the cognitive aspect (Diener et al., 1985) and the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) for the affective aspect (Watson et al., 1988). Meanwhile, academic stress can be measured using the Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS) developed by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015), which possesses good construct validity and adequate reliability in measuring students' perceptions of academic pressure. In a religious context, spiritual practice becomes an effective coping strategy for facing academic stress. One practice widely utilized by Muslim students is Duha prayer, a sunnah worship performed in the morning believed to offer spiritual and psychological benefits (Oktaviani & Husin, 2022). From an Islamic psychology perspective, Duha prayer functions as religious coping, utilizing religious practices to manage stress, enhance inner peace, and strengthen individual emotion regulation (Purnomosidi, 2022). This spiritual activity encompasses not only a dimension of worship but also the potential to enhance psychological well-being through the integration of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects within the individual.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design to empirically examine the effectiveness of Duha prayer in reducing academic stress and enhancing subjective well-being among final-year students. The methodological framework operates as a systematic blueprint to test the causal relationship between a religious intervention (independent variable) and psychological outcomes (dependent variables) through objective measurement (Creswell, 2014). Philosophically, the research is rooted in the positivist paradigm, viewing psychological phenomena as objective realities measurable through standardized instruments (Sugiyono, 2022). However, it acknowledges post-positivist nuances by recognizing that spiritual experiences carry subjective meanings that intersect with modern psychological constructs, such as academic stress (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015) and subjective well-being (Diener, 1984).

The research strategy utilizes a pre-test and post-test control group design. The experimental group consists of final-year students who perform Duha prayer according to a specific intervention protocol, while the control group receives no specific treatment. This comparative design allows for the identification of significant psychological shifts specifically attributable to the intervention. Data collection involves the Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PASS) to quantify academic stress (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015), alongside the Satisfaction with Life

Scale (SWLS) and the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) to evaluate subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Watson et al., 1988). Statistical rigor is maintained through paired-sample t-tests for intra-group changes and independent-sample t-tests for inter-group comparisons.

The Duha prayer intervention is implemented as a 14-day brief psychological intervention. This duration aligns with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) principles, which suggest that cognitive and emotional response patterns begin to stabilize within two to four weeks of consistent practice (Beck, 2011). Furthermore, habit formation theories indicate that daily repetition initiates automatic behavioral patterns within the first few weeks (Lally et al., 2010). Evidence from mindfulness research also supports a 10-14 day window as sufficient to significantly improve emotion regulation and reduce stress (Zeidan et al., 2010). From a self-regulation perspective, repeated practice strengthens emotional control (Baumeister et al., 2007), and neuroplastic changes related to stress management can emerge within two weeks of intensive mental training (Tang et al., 2015; Schumer et al., 2018).

The research variables are categorized into independent, dependent, and mediating components. The independent variable is Duha prayer, operationalized as the disciplined performance of worship according to the research schedule. The dependent variables include academic stress—defined as the perception of academic pressure exceeding coping capacity (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015)—and subjective well-being, which encompasses life satisfaction and affective balance (Diener, 1984). Additionally, academic stress is analyzed as a mediating variable that explains the mechanism through which Duha prayer enhances subjective well-being, following the mediation framework established by Baron and Kenny (1986).

The study is conducted at the student dormitory of the Madani Islamic Teacher Training College (STITMA) Yogyakarta. Participants include final-year students aged 20-30 who are currently drafting their undergraduate theses, experiencing academic anxiety, and who previously performed Duha prayer infrequently. Instrumentation includes observation sheets for prayer consistency, the PASS for academic stress, and the SWLS and PANAS for subjective well-being. The PASS is utilized for its high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values consistently exceeding 0.80 (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015; Aihie & Ohanaka, 2019). Construct validity is further supported by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), yielding an RMSEA of 0.030, which indicates a superior model fit (Kartika, 2023). Data are gathered using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," to systematically capture attitudes and psychological experiences (Siregar, 2017). Score categorization follows a theoretical norm approach using the interval method described by Azwar (2012). This ensures that the interpretation of academic stress and subjective

well-being levels remains objective and standardized. Through this robust methodological architecture, the study aims to produce compelling empirical evidence for the efficacy of Duha prayer as a psycho-religious intervention in fostering student mental health amidst complex academic pressures.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Academic Stress Dynamics in Final-Year StudentsThe initial phase of this study involved 90 seventh-semester students at the Madani Islamic Teacher Training College (STITMA) Yogyakarta, predominantly aged 21 and enrolled in the Islamic Religious Education Program. Descriptive analysis revealed that academic stress levels were primarily distributed in the moderate category (54.4%), followed by low (43.3%), and high (2.3%). These findings underscore the psychological vulnerability of students entering the "emerging adulthood" phase, where identity exploration intersects with high-stakes academic accountability (Qolbi et al., 2020). The moderate-to-high stress levels identified resonate with the observations of Maziyah (2015), who highlighted that final-year students face multidimensional pressures, including workload perceptions, performance anxiety, and career uncertainty.

Prior to intervention, qualitative insights indicated that the primary stressors were perceived workload and time constraints. The looming requirement of a final thesis often triggers fears of academic failure, which is compounded by the existential pressure of future career prospects. As noted by Andeslan and Uyun (2023), if left unmanaged, these stressors foster mental fatigue and academic procrastination. The high concentration of moderate stress in this cohort confirms that the final academic year is a critical period for psychological intervention.

The Efficacy of Duha Prayer in Reducing Academic StressThe core finding of this research is the significant reduction in academic stress within the treatment group following a 14-day Duha prayer intervention. While the control group remained relatively stable in the moderate stress category, the treatment group showed a distinct decline in stress scores, notably eliminating the "high stress" category altogether. Statistical verification through the Paired Samples T-Test confirmed a significant mean decrease of 8.160 points ($p = 0.000$) in the treatment group. In contrast, the control group's minor fluctuation (1.120 points, $p = 0.020$) suggests that natural environmental changes are insufficient to produce the profound psychological shifts observed through spiritual intervention. The impact of Duha prayer is further validated by the effect size analysis. The treatment group yielded an f effect size of 0.903, which is classified as a "very large effect" in social science research (Cohen, 1988). This massive effect size signifies that the intervention was not merely statistically significant but practically transformative. From a physiological perspective, this reduction in stress likely stems from the activation of the

parasympathetic nervous system during worship, which lowers cortisol levels and promotes physical relaxation (Ernst, 2009). Spiritually, the act of Duha prayer—performed during the transition from morning to noon—serves as a "cognitive break," allowing students to re-center their focus and surrender their anxieties to a higher power, thereby enhancing their coping capacity (Sapitri, 2020).

Enhancing Subjective Well-Being: Affective Balance and Life Satisfaction Subjective well-being (SWB) was analyzed through two distinct yet interrelated components: affective balance and life satisfaction. Affective balance represents the equilibrium between positive and negative emotions. The control group showed no significant change ($p = 0.090$) with a small-to-moderate effect size ($r = 0.34$). Conversely, the treatment group exhibited a significant shift ($p = 0.010$) with a moderate effect size ($r = 0.50$). This indicates that consistent Duha prayer effectively bolsters positive affect (such as gratitude and serenity) while diminishing negative affect (such as anxiety and restlessness). [Image showing the components of Subjective Well-being: Life Satisfaction and Affective Balance] The second component, life satisfaction, reflects a cognitive evaluation of one's life quality. The results for this dimension were even more striking. The treatment group's life satisfaction scores increased by 4.52 points ($p = 0.001$) with a moderate-to-large effect size ($r = 0.59$). Most notably, the comparison between the control and treatment groups at day 14 yielded an r effect size of 0.91, indicating a "very large" disparity. Without spiritual intervention, student life satisfaction remained stagnant ($r = 0.20$).

This enhancement of SWB aligns with the positive psychology framework established by Diener (1984, 2009), who argues that high well-being is a product of both cognitive satisfaction and emotional stability. Within a religious context, Duha prayer functions as a form of "religious coping" (Purnomosidi, 2022). By engaging in morning worship, students cultivate a sense of gratitude that broadens their cognitive perspective, making them more resilient to the setbacks of thesis writing. As suggested by Compton and Hoffman (2018), high SWB is a predictor of creativity and persistence—two traits essential for the successful completion of an undergraduate degree. **Statistical Assumption Testing and Robustness** The validity of the findings is supported by rigorous assumption testing. Normality tests for affective balance and life satisfaction predominantly met the criteria ($p > 0.05$), allowing for parametric analysis. Although some academic stress data did not follow a normal distribution ($p < 0.05$), the robust nature of the t-test and the use of effect size calculations ensured that the findings remained reliable. Homogeneity tests (Levene's Test) for affective balance ($p = 0.913$) and life satisfaction ($p = 0.930$) further confirmed that the variances across groups were equal, justifying the use of comparative statistical methods. **The Multidimensional Mechanism of Spiritual**

Intervention The success of this intervention can be attributed to the integration of physiological, psychological, and spiritual mechanisms. Physiologically, the repetitive movements and regulated breathing in prayer act similarly to mindfulness or progressive muscle relaxation, which are proven to reduce autonomic hyperarousal (Zeidan et al., 2010). Psychologically, the prayer provides a structured routine that aids in self-regulation and time management (Baumeister et al., 2007).

However, the spiritual dimension is the primary catalyst. In the perspective of Islamic Psychology, Duha prayer is more than a ritual; it is a mechanism for dhikr (remembrance) that provides "inner tranquility" (Ancok & Suroso, 2011). As stated in classical prophetic medicine, such practices maintain the "homeostasis of the soul" (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2003). The 14-day duration was sufficient to initiate habit formation, as supported by Lally et al. (2010), suggesting that even brief spiritual interventions can yield significant mental health benefits if performed consistently. Limitations and Future Research Directions Despite the compelling results, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the scope was restricted to a single institution (STITMA Yogyakarta) with 90 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to more secular or diverse academic environments. Second, the reliance on self-reporting instruments (PASS, SWLS, PANAS) introduces the risk of subjective bias or social desirability bias. Third, the short 14-day duration, while theoretically grounded in brief intervention models (Schumer et al., 2018), cannot account for the long-term sustainability of the observed mental health gains. Future studies should consider a multi-center approach with a larger and more heterogeneous sample size to enhance external validity. Additionally, a longitudinal design spanning a full semester would provide insights into the lasting effects of Duha prayer. Integrating qualitative methods—such as phenomenological interviews—would further enrich the findings by exploring the "lived experience" and specific spiritual realizations students encounter during the intervention. Conclusion and Practical Recommendations This study provides robust empirical evidence that the consistent practice of Duha prayer significantly reduces academic stress ($r = 0.903$) and improves subjective well-being, particularly life satisfaction ($r = 0.91$).

The intervention successfully mitigated the negative psychological impact of final-year academic demands, offering a culturally relevant and accessible tool for student mental health. Higher education institutions, especially those with an Islamic affiliation, should consider integrating spiritual "well-being breaks" or promoting sunnah prayers as a formal part of their student support services. By fostering a "biopsychosocial-spiritual" approach (Engel, 1977; Hawari, 2016), universities can equip students not only with academic knowledge but also

with the spiritual resilience required to navigate the complexities of emerging adulthood and the modern workforce.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the consistent practice of Duha prayer serves as a transformative psycho-religious intervention for final-year students navigating the multifaceted pressures of higher education. The findings confirm that this spiritual engagement effectively mitigates the psychological burdens associated with the "emerging adulthood" phase and thesis-related anxieties. Beyond mere stress reduction, the intervention successfully fosters subjective well-being by optimizing emotional stability and significantly enhancing life satisfaction. These results suggest that a disciplined period of spiritual practice is sufficient to initiate habit formation and produce meaningful shifts in both emotional regulation and cognitive appraisal.

Theoretically, this research reinforces the Biopsychosocial-Spiritual model by demonstrating that religious coping mechanisms provide a unique "spiritual buffer" that conventional secular interventions may lack. It bridges the gap between ancient prophetic wisdom and modern positive psychology, proving that Sunnah-based rituals offer a viable framework for fostering psychological resilience. Practically, higher education institutions, particularly those within Islamic contexts, are encouraged to integrate such spiritual modalities into their student counseling services. Promoting "well-being breaks" centered on voluntary worship can serve as an accessible, cost-effective, and culturally resonant strategy to improve student mental health and academic persistence. Despite the compelling results, the scope of this study is limited by its specific institutional setting and the relatively short duration of the intervention. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and randomized controlled trials across diverse multi-center populations to evaluate the long-term sustainability of these mental health gains. Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach is recommended to explore the subjective "inner peace" and cognitive transformations experienced by students, providing a more granular understanding of the spiritual-psychological nexus. Ultimately, this study positions Duha prayer not merely as a ritual, but as a potent cognitive and emotional anchor for navigating the complex challenges of higher education and early adulthood.

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