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A profile of academic stress in the full-day school system: a case study of junior high school students

Hasnaini Hasnaini*) , Abdul Saman, Aswal Aswal, Maslina Maslina
Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the nature of academic stress among students in a full-day school system. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design focused on a middle school student selected through purposive sampling based on indications of academic stress, such as difficulty concentrating, fatigue, and decreased motivation to learn. Data collection was conducted through observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, while data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results indicate that academic stress is characterized by physical and mental fatigue, anxiety, decreased motivation to learn, and maladaptive behaviors during learning. The findings suggest that a packed academic schedule, high academic demands, and limited rest time are associated with the emergence of academic stress in students. This study underscores the importance of self-management-based guidance and counseling support to help students adapt more effectively.

Corresponding Author:

Hasnaini Hasnaini,
Universitas Negeri Makassar
Email: hasnaininen@gmail.com

Introduction

Stress is a symptom of events or occurrences, whether in the form of environmental demands or internal (physiological/psychological) demands, that tax, burden, or exceed an individual's adaptive capacity. Academic stress is also a response that arises due to the excessive number of demands and tasks that students must complete (Ascila et al.,(2024) . The learning stress experienced by students at the junior high school level, particularly within the context of the *full-day school* system, is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon. This educational system is fundamentally designed with a noble purpose: to improve educational quality through extended learning hours and the addition of various supportive activities to foster academic development and character building among students (Pascoe et al., 2020) . However, in its implementation, the application of this system often gives rise to significant psychological challenges. Several studies, such as those conducted by Mardisentosa et al.(2020) , have indicated the presence of psychological stress arising from the intensity and duration of extended learning activities.

The results of the study by Soeli et al.(2021) indicate that students enrolled in the *full-day school* system often exhibit symptoms of academic stress, such as fatigue and excessive anxiety. If these symptoms are not properly addressed, the consequences can negatively impact students' motivation to learn, their ability to concentrate, and their overall academic achievement. This stress not only affects cognitive function but also emotional and social aspects, ultimately creating a suboptimal learning environment for the development of students' potential.

If stress persists without adequate intervention, it can disrupt students' mental health and limit their future personal development. Although the full-day school system is designed to improve educational quality through extended learning hours and additional self-development activities, its implementation often creates significant psychological pressure (Marcus et al., 2020) . A packed schedule, a pile of assignments, and a lack of rest time lead to mental and emotional exhaustion in students, which risks lowering their motivation to learn and disrupting their social interactions. According to Sonya(2020) , failure to manage stress can hinder the learning process, reduce psychological well-being, and have negative impacts on personal development. Therefore, a deep understanding of the system's effects is necessary to formulate effective intervention strategies for maintaining students' psychological balance in an intensive learning environment. The situation is increasingly concerning because the full-day school system, which is actually intended to improve the quality of education, can instead increase psychological pressure on students. As a result, students may experience mental fatigue, decreased motivation, and even disruptions in their daily social relationships. If not properly addressed, this prolonged stress has the potential to hinder the learning process and disrupt students' overall psychological well-being.

This situation requires serious attention from schools and all education stakeholders to design and implement comprehensive strategic measures to manage and reduce students' academic stress levels. This is crucial because effective learning is not determined solely by academic achievement but also by students' healthy and stable psychological well-being, which supports optimal cognitive, emotional, and social development. These efforts can be realized through various approaches, such as adjusting academic workload, managing a more balanced learning schedule, and providing adequate rest time to prevent students from experiencing excessive physical and mental fatigue. Research indicates that a high academic workload without sufficient recovery time can increase the risk of academic stress and reduce the quality of student learning (Liu et al., 2025) .

Interventions focused on developing students' self-management skills also play a very significant role in reducing academic stress. Self-management techniques, for example, have been proven effective in helping students manage their time, control their emotions, and develop a mindset that is more adaptable to academic pressure, thereby enabling students to respond to academic demands more constructively (Zimmerman 2020). Thus, addressing academic stress should not only focus on improving the learning system externally but also be directed toward strengthening students' internal capacities. This integrative approach is believed to create a balance between academic demands and students' psychological well-being, enabling the education system to function effectively, sustainably, and support students' holistic development (Kapadia, 2024) .

Research findings Jumini et al.,(2025) indicate that the majority of students enrolled in the *full-day school* system experience moderate stress levels. Nearly one-third of the sample exhibited stress levels in this category. Additionally, the primary stress-related issue reported by students is difficulty relaxing due to the volume of assignments assigned by teachers, with nearly half of the students reporting that this occurs very frequently. The most prevalent stress level among students falls into the moderate category, involving 22 students (27.8%). Furthermore, the statement most frequently selected by students was "I find it difficult to relax due to the piling assignments given by teachers," with the response "very often" chosen by 37 students (46.8%)

Based on various opinions and findings from previous research, it can be concluded that the full-day school system aims to improve educational quality through extended learning hours and the strengthening of students' character; however, the high intensity of learning, the density of academic activities, and the limited rest time also have the potential to cause academic stress. This condition can affect students' concentration, learning motivation, emotional control, and overall psychological well-being. Academic pressure that persists continuously without adequate coping skills can also lead to physical and mental exhaustion and reduce the quality of students' social interactions within the school environment. Therefore, a more balanced approach to learning management, adequate psychological support, and the strengthening of students' self-management skills are necessary so that they can effectively adapt to academic pressure within an intensive learning environment.

Based on interviews conducted at a junior high school, it was found that one student experienced significantly more severe academic stress compared to other students. This condition was manifested through restless behavior, frequently leaving and re-entering the classroom without a clear reason, difficulty concentrating, decreased motivation to learn, and the emergence of prolonged boredom and fatigue. Additionally, the pressure resulting from long study hours and a packed schedule also affects students' physical and psychological well-being, thereby impacting their ability to manage emotions and engage in the learning process optimally. Overall, these symptoms indicate that the academic stress experienced by students has had a significant impact on their psychological well-being and academic performance.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the phenomenon of academic stress within a real-world context. This approach was chosen because it allows for a more comprehensive exploration of students' subjective experiences, enabling the researcher to understand the meanings students ascribe to the stress they experience. According to Fiantika et al.(2020) , a case study is a form of research conducted based on events that have already occurred. This study aims to examine the relationship and interconnection between one variable and another. Creswell (1998) defines a case study as research conducted by exploring a specific phenomenon (case) within a specific timeframe and set of activities, such as a program, event, process, institution, or social group (Assyakurrohim et al. 2022).

The research was conducted at a junior high school with the primary subject being an eighth-grade female student identified as experiencing academic stress. Subject selection was conducted using a purposive approach, based on specific criteria such as symptoms of difficulty concentrating, fatigue, decreased motivation to learn, and behaviors indicating psychological pressure during the learning process. In addition to the primary subject, this study also involved supporting informants consisting of a Guidance and Counseling teacher, a homeroom teacher, and peers. The involvement of these informants aimed to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the student's condition from various perspectives.

Data collection techniques included participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation was used to directly observe student behavior in learning situations; interviews were used to explore students' experiences and perceptions; and documentation served as supporting data to reinforce the research findings. The data obtained were then analyzed inductively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. During the analysis process, the researcher sought to identify patterns emerging from the data and link them to relevant theoretical concepts. To ensure data validity, source and method triangulation techniques were employed, thereby ensuring the research results possess a credible and accountable level of reliability.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of observations conducted on August 20, 2025, at a junior high school, it was found that a female student with the initials AL in eighth grade exhibited more pronounced symptoms of academic stress compared to other students. During the learning process, AL appeared restless, frequently entered and exited the classroom without a clear reason, had difficulty concentrating, easily felt tired, and showed a decline in learning motivation. Additionally, the subject also appeared to experience prolonged boredom and difficulty maintaining focus while participating in extended learning sessions. These conditions indicate the presence of psychological pressure affecting the student's learning activities at school.

The research findings were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews with the subject, and supporting interviews with the relevant teacher as a form of data source triangulation to enhance the credibility of the research findings. This study employs a single-case exploratory design; therefore, it is not intended to produce broad generalizations regarding the relationship between the full-day school system and academic stress, but rather to understand students' subjective experiences within the context of extended learning sessions. This exploratory case study approach is supported by Yin's ((2018)) perspective, which states that the single-case study method is highly effective for understanding deep, contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, despite its limitations regarding statistical generalization. Internal validity in tracking these psychological dynamics is also consistent with the recommendations by Creswell and Creswell (2018) regarding the importance of multi-source triangulation to minimize researcher subjectivity bias. Therefore, the results of this study should be understood as a contextual description of the dynamics of learning stress experienced by the research subjects.

Based on the interview results, AL revealed that the packed academic schedule and the heavy workload caused him to feel both physically and mentally exhausted. With classes lasting until the afternoon, students have limited time for rest and recovery, which affects their ability to maintain concentration during lessons. This phenomenon of reduced recovery time aligns with findings from Ong and Johnson's(2023) , which explains that the absence of adequate psychological recovery breaks following intensive cognitive activities triggers a drastic decline in brain executive function. Additionally, the subject also reported difficulty balancing time between studying, resting, and other personal activities. These conditions lead to feelings of burnout, emotional stress, and a decline in motivation to learn. This is supported by a study by Sonnentag et al. (2022), which confirms that the inability to achieve psychological detachment (disengaging from school-related matters) while at home is positively correlated with the accumulation of emotional exhaustion in adolescents.

However, this study does not directly conclude that the full-day school system is the sole factor causing academic stress in students. The symptoms experienced by AL may also be influenced by other factors, such as individual psychological conditions, coping abilities regarding academic pressure, family environment, social relationships with peers, or classroom learning factors that were not fully addressed in this study. Therefore, this study views academic stress as a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by the interaction between the demands of the learning environment and an individual's adaptive capacity. This multifactorial perspective is supported by research from Bhui et al.(2023) Evans et al., which found that academic stress is an accumulative product of an individual's genetic vulnerability, emotional regulation, and simultaneous environmental stressors.

These findings align with Lazarus and Folkman's theory, which explains that stress arises when an individual perceives environmental demands as exceeding their ability to adapt. In the context of this study, persistent academic pressure appears to affect the subjects' ability to manage emotions and maintain learning motivation. This condition is evident in the emergence of maladaptive behaviors during learning, such as a tendency to leave and re-enter the classroom, loss of focus, and a reluctance to participate in lessons. This theoretical correlation is reinforced by Røsand and Klomstén's (2024) , which states that the failure of cognitive appraisal regarding constant school workload triggers avoidant behavior as a defensive mechanism in adolescents.

The results of this study are also consistent with several previous studies addressing academic stress within long-duration learning systems. The study by(2021) indicates that students in full-day school systems tend to experience fatigue, anxiety, and reduced learning motivation due to the high intensity of academic activities. The study by Marcus et al.(2020) also explains that high-intensity learning systems can increase the risk of mental and emotional exhaustion if students do not have adequate recovery time. These findings are relevant to AL's condition, which showed a decline in focus and the emergence of emotional stress during full-day learning.

The study by Ningsih and Ardian(2025) explains that a full-day school system can lead to psychological stress if the management of students' study time and their psychosocial needs are not optimally addressed. Additionally, the study by Fatchurahman(2021) states that the transition from a regular school system to a full-day school system reduces students' leisure time at home, thereby increasing the risk of psychological fatigue. This assumption aligns with cross-cultural studies demonstrating that restrictions on leisure time due to long school hours in Southeast Asia are directly correlated with somatic anxiety among students. The study by Abidah et al.(2025) also explains that academic stress is influenced by various learning demands, such as the volume of assignments, pressure to achieve high grades, prolonged study duration, and anxiety regarding academic evaluations.

Furthermore, the study by Pascoe et al.(2020) indicates that academic stress not only affects students' cognitive abilities but also impacts their emotional and social well-being. This is evident in study participants who became more sensitive, prone to anxiety, and tended to withdraw from social environments while under academic pressure. The impact of this social withdrawal is validated by a study by Museus and Huber) (2023) , which confirms that unmanaged academic distress impairs adolescents' autonomic emotional regulation, leading to self-imposed social isolation. Research by Jumini and Asnaniar(2025) also found that the majority of students in the full-day school system experience moderate stress levels, with the primary complaint being difficulty relaxing due to the heavy academic workload.

In addition to the duration of study, the quality of instructional management and psychological support from the school environment also play a crucial role in influencing students' well-being. The study by Liu et al.(2025) demonstrates that high academic workload without psychological recovery support can increase the risk of academic stress and reduce the quality of student learning. Limited psychological support and a school environment that overly emphasizes academic performance demands can accelerate the onset of emotional stress in students. These conditions make students more vulnerable to anxiety, mental fatigue, and difficulties in managing the constant pressure of studying. Therefore, self-management skills are essential to help students develop more adaptive coping strategies, such as emotional regulation, study time management, and problem-solving skills in dealing with academic pressure.

In addition to strengthening self-management skills, psychological interventions based on an expressive approach can also serve as an alternative in helping students reduce emotional stress caused by heavy academic workload. The expressive approach provides a safe space for students to express feelings, anxieties, and learning experiences that are difficult to articulate verbally. Through activities such as writing, drawing, or other forms of creative expression, students can channel their emotions in a healthier way, thereby helping to improve mental resilience, self-efficacy, and the ability to adapt to academic pressure.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that students' experiences of academic stress are associated with the high intensity of academic activities within the full-day school system, although other factors outside the school context may also influence students' psychological well-being. Since this study employed a single-case study

design with a limited number of participants, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to all students in the full-day school system. Nevertheless, this study can serve as an initial insight into the dynamics of students' academic stress in extended learning settings and provide a foundation for future research with a comparative design, a larger sample size, and the use of more standardized psychological instruments to gain a more comprehensive understanding of academic stress among adolescents.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the academic stress experienced by the student identified as AL is related to the high intensity of academic activities within the full-day school system, such as prolonged learning hours, heavy workloads, and limited time for psychological recovery. These conditions affect the student's ability to manage emotions, maintain concentration, and adapt to the continuous demands of the learning process. However, this study does not conclude that the full-day school system is the sole cause of academic stress, as other factors such as individual psychological conditions, coping abilities, family environment, and social relationships can also influence students' stress experiences.

This study employs an exploratory single-case study approach to gain a deeper understanding of students' subjective experiences; consequently, the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Nevertheless, the study suggests that academic pressure in extended learning periods can affect students' engagement in learning and psychological well-being if not balanced by psychological support, a proportionate management of study schedules, and the strengthening of self-management skills. Therefore, further research with a broader sample and more standardized psychological instruments is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of academic stress in adolescents.

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