Stress Management Skills and University Students’ Academic Behaviour: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT
There are various potential stressors that students face on a daily basis. These include the challenge of properly adjusting to the campus life, which is quite different from their home environments. Lifestyle change is quite challenging. The more life changes an individual experiences, the more the stress the individual faces and the more likely it is that illness and disease will result. This study explored the stress management skills and academic behaviour of undergraduate students. Data was collected based on the observation and interviews. The respondents were selected from the University of Daar El-Salam Gontor Ponorogo Indonesia. Data was analysed based on the transcriptions. By using qualitative method, the data analysis revealed that stress management skills and academic behaviour has positive mainstream. It was recommended that stress management skills training should be given prominence in universities’ guidance programmes, while concerned authorities should endeavour to provide facilities that may help to reduce academic stress.

Keywords: Stress Management, Academic Behavior, Student Perceptions, Case Study

INTRODUCTION
Life in the boarding school (called by pondok or pesantren) provides many challenges for students who are studying there. Various conditions have been set by the school for 24 hours should proceed as daily demand. If something goes wrong there will be consequences received by the particular student. Therefore, many students are not able to continue their study in the school due to the desire for greater freedom and get away from stress. That is one of reason that research on stress management among students who attend in the boarding school is very interesting to explore because it has a unique character and provide a view that is different than other public schools.

When researching the life of pondok, the students generally experience a variety of conditions that force them to follow all the roles, both in the formal and informal learning activities. Although it is part of a boarding school education curriculum, but there are still many students or parents who are unable to follow those kinds of roles. That's the prominent consequences that must be lived in the pondok. Actually, the entire goals of these activities are to provide optimum conditioning of children in all domains such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. In general, modern pondok in Indonesia and Malaysia are using integration curriculum between religious teachings and modern scientific. In further developments, many of graduates of pondok are able to compete in the modern world without leaving the religious values on the dimension of faith, belief and morality.

Modern pondok of Gontor Indonesia, particularly ISID (Institut Study Islam Darussalam), is one of the oldest boarding schools that integrate religious curriculum and modern curriculum in Indonesia. At school, students are taught five principles of life that is simplicity, sincerity, brotherhood, freedom of thought and independence of living. Furthermore, the students were taught cognitive with comprehensive scientific, life skills and the principle of sincerity and independence of living and taught undergo all processes in the school environment. Many students from outside the country came to study there like Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei, Australia, and the Middle East, as it has a unique scientific characteristics and superior compared with the other pondok.

However, many students who are not able to live in a very complex school and closed system. There are various potential stressors that students face on a daily basis. These include the challenge of properly adjusting to the campus life, which is quite different from their home environments. Lifestyle
change is quite challenging. The more life changes an individual experiences, the more the stress the individual faces and the more likely it is that illness and disease will result (Greenberg, 1999). The enormity of academic work, the rush for space in lecture rooms, the harsh economic conditions, which makes procurement of basic needs almost impossible and the need to achieve academic excellence against all odds are some of the major potential stressors to students. Others are the incessant power outage, which makes relaxation almost impossible after a highly stressful day. The challenges of developing necessary competence, managing emotions, time management, managing relationships, reacting to a noisy environment and coping with a highly tensed social situation on campuses are also stress inducing.

In term of stress, there are various definitions. For instance, Blonna (2005) defined stress as a holistic transaction between the individual and a stressor that results in the body’s mobilization of a stress response. Stress is also defined as a combination of a stressor and stress reactivity. A stressor reactivity is the tough processes, which interprets the stressor as a cause of stress (Greenberg, 1999). A stressor has only the potential of eliciting a stress reaction. Stress is also found to upset people self-esteem, attitude, interest and general intellectual ability (Fortner, 2002). Stress is a common problem to male and female students in schools and the way it is managed may reflect in their academic performance (Salami, 2001). A stressful person is prone to several health problems and psychological disorders. Stress has been cited as a cause of major illnesses, such as migraine, ulcer, backache and rheumatoid arthritis (Payne and Hahn, 2002).

These definitions show that what is considered a stressor for one person may not be a stressor for another. Thus, a stressor is any physical, psychological, or environmental events or condition that initiates the stress response (Fortner, 2002). The effects of stress can be positive or negative. Positively used, stress can be a motivator for an improved quality of life. Stress can be negative, when it becomes destructive as a result of how an individual negatively perceived it and reacted to it. Stress, especially one that is noise induced can lead to increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, increased fatigue, depressed mood and decreased mental and physical performance (Blonna, 2005).

Academic behaviour is something of great importance to parents, teachers and students themselves. Even the larger society is aware of the long term effects of positive or negative academic behaviour since graduates from educational institutions are expected to shape the destiny of the society (Salami, 2001). Academic behaviour points to individuals disposition to academic activities including lecture attendance, participation in tutorials, submission of assignments, use of library, study habits, note-taking and preparation for examinations (Akinade, 2001). Effective learning and sound academic behaviour are said to constitute an integral part of the goal of schooling (Hassan, 2006). Unfortunately, academic behaviour of undergraduates is becoming worrisome and this has remained a matter of grave concern to many educationists (Aremu, 2001).

Some researchers have reported a strong relationship between level of stress and academic interest (Fortner, 2002), between stress level and mental performance (Blonna, 2005) and between stress level and academic behaviour (Fortner, 2002). Therefore, this study investigates the stress management skills and its influence to student’s academic behaviour.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Since researchers have reported strong relationship between stress and academic behaviour (Blonna, 2005; Fortner, 2002), could there be any influence of students ability to manage stress and their academic behaviour? Caused crowds and tight schedules of ISID Gontor, the researchers were interested to explore the extent of resilience of the students to live on campus and how they manage all the trouble and expense in academic situations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were tested in the study:

RQ1: What are the stressor factors faced by university student in ISID Gontor Ponorogo Indonesia?
RQ2: How does university student manage his stress in the school?
RQ3: What can be strengthen to manage the stress in ISID Gontor Ponorogo Indonesia?
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is meant to provide empirical evidences, which will serve as useful guides to school counsellors, educational psychologists, teachers, school administrators, parents and policy makers who may be working to improve student’s academic behaviour. The findings of the study apart from adding to available literature on the subject matter have the potential to generate more research interests that could enhance an understanding of the problem of stress management and academic behaviour, particularly in the boarding school situations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs the qualitative research design to explore the phenomenon of stress management skills and academic behaviour.

Respondent
A student selected constituted as the respondent. The respondent is male, in the last level of study in ISID Gontor. He has been in ISID Gontor since 4 years and he will finish his study next year.

Data Collection
The general approach to this study is to develop greater understanding about stress management and academic behaviour through face to face or in-depth interviews where the interviewer remains in control throughout the whole process. Semi-structured interview allows the researchers freedom in the sequencing of questions, and allows flexibility in the amount of time and attention to be given to different situation compared to structured interviews.

Interview Questions Guide
The objective of this interview guide is to provide topics and to allow the researchers to ask, explore, and probe questions freely to elucidate and illuminate the issue of stress management and academic behaviour. These topics were selected in advance based on The Stress Management Scale (SMS) and the Academic Behaviour Scale was trial tested to establish their validity and reliability.

RESULTS

The results of data analysis are presented based on research questions as following:

RQ₁: What are the stressor factors faced by university student in ISID Gontor Ponorogo Indonesia?

Internal Pressure
There are some stressors that cause students stress at pondok Gontor which is from internal pondok such as the relationship between with seniors and teachers, heavy timetable, language pressure, less of sincerity, personal needs, and adjusting with environment. For example, he said that he had made a mistake by using local language in school (beside English and Arabic), so he proposed to the discipline court. He must to memorize Qur’anic verses and some new vocabularies, and to find other student who using local language. This even made he stress.

External Pressure
From external Pondok there are some pressure which lead student to stress such as family factors that could not bear to the pressure in the pondok, miscommunication with figures of pondok, and works pressure. He ever had to pick up guests coming from abroad at middle night, take them to the hotel of pondok and entertain them, but he still has to learn to prepare for the assignment in the morning session.
RQ2: How does university student manage his stress in the school?

Positive Response and Pleasure
Students in ISID Gontor received various pressures with full sincerity and steadfastness because those are the principle in their lives at Pondok. So despite the pressures, they generally accept it as an obligation and pride. This condition of pondok had become one of the important keys in managing students stress, because the intention gives powerful confidence and pleasure in handle the tasks.

Religious Advices
Another factor that reduces the level of stress is religious advices from teachers and figures of pondok pertaining the importance of sincerity and independence in life. The teachers said that the burden in Gontor is a real training session for students for preparation of real life in the community. With these religious advices, the students feel more passion to manage their stress in the pondok. Furthermore, the teachers and figures of pondok also give good examples for the students to manage all the pressures in the pondok.

Similarity
The other feeling of students that can manage their stress on the school environment is similarity feeling and togetherness. He said that all students have same feeling and conditions in front of teachers and figures of pondok. There is no different between sons of minister or figures of government and sons of common people, because the one of principle of pondok is simplicity and sincerity. This condition also created strong brotherhood feeling among students. In such an environment, the students do not feel too heavy of stress because they are familiar with the pressure and stressor from pondok.

RQ3: What can be strengthen to manage the stress in ISID Gontor Ponorogo Indonesia?

Field Trip
He suggested some of things that can be done to manage the stress among students such as field trip or picnic. The purpose of this field trip is to refresh the mind and eliminate a pressure on work load. With a picnic, the mind can relax for a while and can give some motivation to students.

Trainings
In addition, it needs to be done by teachers and figures of pondok was trainings to students particularly in the areas of skills appropriate to their requirement of work. Because with the training, it will increase the ability of students and will provide a high spirit in performing duties. Training needs to be done such as communication skills, IT skills, managerial skills, leadership skills, and entrepreneur skills.

DISCUSSION
The findings of this study are quite informative and plausible. The finding has explore the student skills to manage stress in the school environment and his academic behaviour further revealed the prevalence of stressors in educational institutions (Aremu, 2001). Undergraduates face several challenges that are quite stressful in Indonesian colleges, particularly in pondok. These include incessant disruption of internal stressor such as academic work, formal and in-formal activities, social relationship between senior and junior, students and teachers. Also external stressor due to fear of families feeling and relations hip between figures of pondok and work load pressure.

It is also interesting that stress management skills and academic behaviour are related with the milieu of school that give some feeling of togetherness and brotherhood. This means the stressor can be managed with positive response and pleasure in mind of students themselves. Also it can managed with understanding of religious teaching, particularly Islamic concepts. The findings suggest that trainings and field trip can reduce the stress on undergraduate students.

These results buttress the opinion that students are prone to stress in schools and its management is necessary to ensure progressive academic behaviour (Salami, 2001). The extent to
which undergraduates are able to manage these challenges may determine their academic growth. This lends credence to Blonna (2005) who reported a strong relationship between stress level and mental performance. The results also corroborate Fortner (2002) who found a strong relationship between stress and academic performance. This suggests that the way of individual manages stress has a bearing on his or her academic behaviour.

The findings from this study again bring into fore, the need to provide adequate guidance and counselling services to students in order to assist them manage stress effectively. The findings also imply that stress management skills should form part of the training, which counsellors should give to students whose academic behaviours fall short of the expected standards.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that stress management skills could positively influence academic behaviour. Hence, it is quite imperative for students to learn stress management skills so as to be able to cope with the highly stressful academic environment in ISID Gontor Indonesia. It is also recommended that genuine effort should be made by concerned authorities to provide adequate facilities such as lecture rooms, field trip, trainings, and secured social environment so that stress can be reduced to the barest minimum. It is hoped that a careful consideration and implementation of the recommendations will be of immense benefit to the education system.

REFERENCES


