

The Effectiveness of Group Counseling Services in Helping Reduce Learning Stress among Madrasah Aliyah Students

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ABSTRACT

Background	This study was motivated by the researcher's observation during a service period at the modern Darunn'aim Islamic boarding school, where many students were experiencing learning-related stress. This stress can be caused by various factors, including both internal and external influences.
Purpose	The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services in helping Madrasah Aliyah students manage learning stress, identify stress factors, and enhance students' motivation and problem-solving skills
Research Methodology	The study employed a qualitative research method. The researcher selected a sample of four students. Data were analyzed through structured observation and interviews. During the interviews, the researcher conducted discussions with three key informants: the Head of Kulliyatul Muallimiyah Al-Islamiyah (KMI), the Guidance and Counseling Teacher, and four student participants. Additional data collection techniques included observation and documentation.
Result	Based on the results, the role of group counseling services in helping students overcome learning stress in Grade V Madrasah Aliyah Darunn'aim can be summarized as follows: 1) The factors causing students' learning stress are highly varied, stemming from both internal and external sources; 2) The role of group counseling services in addressing students' learning stress includes assisting students in taking appropriate steps when facing problems, particularly during stressful learning situations, providing motivation to encourage students to be enthusiastic in learning, strengthening self-confidence, and enabling students to effectively handle challenges they encounter.
Conclusion	Group counseling effectively helps Madrasah Aliyah students manage learning stress by addressing internal and external factors, motivating students, enhancing self-confidence, and supporting problem-solving strategies in academic challenges.
Keywords	Group Counseling, Learning Stress, Madrasah Aliyah



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INTRODUCTION

Learning stress arises when students are confronted with new stimuli and information that can be perceived as stressors. Physiologically, stress triggers various responses, including changes in the expression of stress- and learning-related genes (Black et al., 2021). Stress can be categorized into eustress, or positive stress, which constructively challenges students, and distress, or negative stress, which induces anxiety and frustration (Rudland et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2021). The impact of stress on learning is highly variable. Chronic stress can lead to emotional instability, anxiety, and frustration, thereby impeding the learning process (Córdova et al., 2023). Conversely, controlled eustress can enhance attention, problem-solving abilities, and foster resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Therefore, educators need to identify and maintain an optimal stress zone that positively challenges students without causing fatigue or burnout (Beck et al., 2026).

Moreover, learning stress affects students' physiological and psychological responses, including heart rate variability and cognitive performance, which can be moderated through physical activity (Latino et al., 2025). Psychologically, stress can trigger both positive emotions that support learning and negative emotions that hinder it, making effective emotion regulation and coping strategies essential (Bin Abdulrahman et al., 2025). Adaptive coping strategies, such as planning, task delegation, social support, and recreational or physical activities, have been shown to reduce academic stress and improve learning outcomes (Blindheim et al., 2025). Utilizing creativity as a coping mechanism can also enhance achievement-related emotions and reduce academic stress (Xu & Wang, 2025). Learning environments that support mental resilience, adaptive coping, and emotional regulation improve both student well-being and academic performance (de la Fuente et al., 2016).

Students face various sources of learning stress, particularly academic demands such as high expectations, heavy workloads, exams, and practical assignments, which can lower academic performance and affect physical and psychological health (Tarud et al., 2021). For students who work while studying, conflicting responsibilities add additional stress, including irregular sleep patterns, high blood pressure, digestive issues, and depressive symptoms. Islamic counseling is an effective approach, emphasizing spiritual guidance from the Qur'an and Hadith to help students manage stress through emotional coping strategies without altering the stressors themselves, significantly reducing stress levels (Abdurrahman et al., 2021). Supportive learning environments also play a crucial role by equipping students with adaptive coping strategies, enhancing psychological well-being, and optimizing academic achievement (Bin Abdulrahman et al., 2025).

Various counseling methods have proven effective in addressing learning stress. Behavioral counseling focuses on structured interventions to reduce academic anxiety (Fauzi, 2020), while mindfulness training enhances relaxation, self-awareness, and stress prevention (Dye et al., 2020). Group-based cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) effectively reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety, and maladaptive coping while promoting adaptive coping strategies (Demir & Ercan, 2022). Additionally, life skills training through a cognitive-behavioral approach improves problem-solving, planning, and social support-seeking abilities, which are highly beneficial for students experiencing high stress due to academic demands or personal issues (Mohammadi et al., 2024). The combination of these strategies enables counseling to holistically support students, helping them manage academic pressure while developing emotional well-being.

Based on initial observations conducted by the researcher at the Modern Darunnaim Islamic Boarding School, various problems related to learning stress among Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim students were identified. Many students continue to experience learning stress, as evidenced by differences in their problem-solving abilities. Students capable of understanding the steps to take when facing challenges tend to regulate their emotions and maintain focus during learning, whereas students who cannot manage problems often exhibit withdrawn behavior, daydreaming, and lack of concentration. Learning stress is influenced by internal factors, such as negative thinking patterns and inability to control situations, as well as external factors, such as

insufficient family support. Symptoms of learning stress are evident during memorization processes, marked by boredom, decreased concentration, hasty behavior, low persistence, and physical conditions such as fatigue, lethargy, fever, and loss of appetite. However, not all students experience these issues; some feel comfortable and can complete memorization targets more quickly. This situation motivated the researcher to investigate the role of group counseling services in addressing learning stress among Grade V Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the Darunnaim Islamic Boarding School, specifically among Grade XI KMI students at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim, located in Cirende, Kalanganyar, Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The research was scheduled to begin in May 2024. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to provide an in-depth and systematic description of students' learning stress and the role of group counseling services in addressing it. The subjects of this study were Grade XI KMI students selected based on the researcher's initial observations. Subject selection was conducted purposively, choosing respondents deemed capable of providing relevant and in-depth information aligned with the research focus. The total number of research subjects was four students, selected to obtain clear, factual, and continuous data regarding the learning stress experienced by students.

Data were obtained from various primary and secondary sources. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation involved directly monitoring students' activities and behaviors during the learning process to understand the actual conditions in the field. Interviews were conducted face-to-face between the researcher and respondents to explore in-depth information regarding learning stress experiences and the implementation of group counseling services. Documentation was used to complement data through notes, archives, or documents relevant to the study. Data analysis followed the qualitative data analysis process as outlined by Sugiyono, including data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Collected data were systematically organized into specific categories, analyzed, and synthesized to identify patterns and meanings consistent with the research objectives. To ensure data validity, triangulation was employed, including source, technique, and time triangulation. Additionally, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability tests were applied to ensure that the research results achieved a high level of reliability and validity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Learning Stress of Grade XI Students at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim

The study results indicate that students' learning stress at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim varies from mild to moderate. Learning stress arises when students experience pressure from academic or non-academic demands that disrupt their emotional and mental balance. Guidance and counseling teachers reported that students' stress levels can be observed through daily classroom behaviors, such as fatigue, lack of focus, emotional instability, and decreased motivation for learning. While learning stress is not entirely negative, if unmanaged, it can adversely affect the learning process and students' well-being. Therefore, understanding students' stress levels is crucial for the school to provide appropriate interventions, particularly through group counseling services.

Interviews with the four student subjects revealed that two experienced severe stress, while the other two experienced moderate stress. Students with severe stress exhibited withdrawn behavior, limited communication, and social isolation. According to the guidance and counseling teacher, this condition was influenced by the recent loss of a close family member. Severe stress is prolonged and can lead to physical,

psychological, and social changes. In contrast, students with moderate stress showed difficulties in memorization and comprehension, feelings of despair, and low self-confidence. Physical symptoms included stomachaches, muscle tension, restlessness, sleep disturbances, and emotional strain. Moderate stress generally arises from academic pressures, such as understanding lessons, facing exams, and meeting high expectations.

Interviews with the KMI Director, guidance and counseling teachers, and students identified several key factors contributing to learning stress. These include a heavy daily workload and memorization requirements, resulting in physical and mental fatigue. Academic pressure to achieve high grades and meet expectations from parents, teachers, and peers also contributes significantly. Intense learning schedules in school and the boarding environment further increase students' perceived pressure, making it difficult for some to manage time and balance study with rest. These factors are interrelated and collectively contribute to students' learning stress.

Psychological, physiological, and academic factors significantly influence stress levels. Psychological factors, such as self-esteem and anxiety, correlate negatively with academic performance, indicating that psychological stress can reduce learning outcomes (de Filippis & Foysal, 2024). Personality traits, including extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, hope, agreeableness, and resilience, also affect various stress types, including interpersonal, academic, and motivation-related stress (Vijayabanu et al., 2018). Physiological factors, such as poor sleep quality and health issues, exacerbate stress, while social issues like bullying contribute to psychological pressure (Lian et al., 2025; Zamani et al., 2019). Academic factors, including workload and pressure to maintain performance, are primary stressors, particularly during the transition to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Marsella & Citrayasa, 2022; Jeitziner et al., 2022; Dharaneedharan et al., 2025; Nahdliyah et al., 2025).

Personal problems are also critical contributors to learning stress, including family issues, friendships, health, or the loss of a loved one. Emotional disturbances from these problems often hinder concentration, memorization, lesson comprehension, and exam performance. Communication and support are therefore essential in helping students manage stress. Schools emphasize that students should feel encouraged to talk to teachers or counselors and seek support from family and peers to avoid internalizing psychological burdens.

Interviews with students AM and SZ revealed that learning stress occurs when they cannot understand teacher explanations or face exams. Stress responses included stomachaches, palpitations, nervousness, and anxiety during public speaking. These findings indicate that learning stress affects not only academic performance but also physical and emotional well-being. Social and environmental factors also play a significant role. Limited interaction with peers and teachers can increase stress, while social support from parents and instructors mitigates it (Wijaya et al., 2022). Financial stress and unsupportive learning environments further reduce mental well-being and academic performance (Pallavi et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic added pressures through online learning challenges, system failures, and social isolation, affecting students' mental health (Shreeharsha et al., 2025). Coping strategies, such as physical activity and mental health interventions through counseling services, effectively reduce stress and improve academic achievement (Ochoa-Andrade & Saldarriaga-Mera, 2024; Singh et al., 2023).

During interviews, all four students initially appeared nervous when answering questions but later shared their experiences of learning stress. Students reported difficulties concentrating during memorization, understanding lessons, and solving exam questions. Some frequently changed answers hesitantly, while one answered based on personal understanding. Several students disclosed problems to the guidance and counseling teacher, receiving positive responses in the form of motivation and guidance for self-regulation. One student, however, rarely communicated with the counselor, instead turning to religious practices as a coping mechanism.

The KMI Director explained that the school implements various strategies to help students manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to prevent learning stress. These strategies include swimming programs and motivational seminars. Swimming, as a Sunnah exercise, provides physical health benefits and mental relaxation, effectively reducing tension and fatigue from intensive learning. Motivational seminars aim to foster intrinsic motivation so that students remain enthusiastic about learning without external pressure. Such interventions help students manage academic pressure, set clear learning goals, and build confidence in facing challenges.

The study highlights that understanding students' learning stress is crucial for schools, teachers, and students themselves. Awareness of stress levels enables teachers to adopt appropriate instructional and counseling approaches. The KMI Director emphasized that students' mental and emotional well-being is as important as academic achievement. Students also recognized that unmanaged stress can hinder learning and personal development. Therefore, schools must actively identify, monitor, and respond to students' stress levels. Group counseling services provide an effective solution to help students manage stress, enhance motivation, and create a supportive, safe, and conducive learning environment that optimally fosters student potential.

Implementation of Group Counseling Services for Grade XI Students at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim

Group counseling services at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim for Grade XI students play a crucial role in helping students manage learning stress. Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers stated that through group counseling, students can share their burdens, receive emotional support, and develop strategies for addressing academic challenges. In practice, BK teachers act as motivators, directors, initiators, facilitators, mediators, and evaluators. Interview results indicate that after participating in group counseling, students feel relieved, calmer, and mentally refreshed. Group counseling also enhances students' self-confidence, fosters independence, and strengthens mental resilience in facing academic pressures.

Interviews with BK teachers, the director, and students concluded that group counseling effectively reduces students' learning stress at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim. Students reported feeling more supported, learning to manage stress, gaining self-awareness, and regaining motivation for learning. Group counseling represents a valuable investment in helping students reach their full potential and maintain better mental and emotional health.

Group counseling in schools is an effective approach that utilizes various therapeutic factors and techniques to support students' social, emotional, and academic development. Therapeutic factors such as universality, imparting information, catharsis, and modeling behaviors play a significant role in promoting positive outcomes by helping students recognize shared experiences and adopt adaptive behaviors (Ho, 2023). Techniques including values clarification, sociodrama, and role-playing foster respect, empathy, and social interaction, with values clarification particularly effective in enhancing students' empathy and respect for others (Nuraeni et al., 2026; Subandi et al., 2020). Moreover, group counseling must be developmentally tailored to meet the unique needs of students at different educational levels, from elementary through high school, to optimize engagement and therapeutic benefits (Edwards & Steen, 2022).

Group counseling at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim is conducted systematically, both in classrooms and dormitories. Sessions are held in an open forum format, allowing students to express feelings, problems, and experiences. The objectives of group counseling are to help students become more independent, resilient, and capable of resolving issues individually or collaboratively. The implementation follows five stages: formation, transition, activity, summarization, and termination. Each stage plays a crucial role in developing a healthy and productive group dynamic. During the activity stage, students actively share opinions and discuss personal and academic problems, demonstrating that the program aligns with the principles and objectives of group guidance and counseling.

The study indicates that the school plays a vital role in supporting and monitoring the implementation of group counseling. The KMI Director emphasized that supervision occurs through both direct and indirect observation. Direct observation involves attending group counseling sessions to assess interactions, the role of BK teachers, and the overall group environment. Indirect observation occurs from outside the room or through other assigned teachers. The school's role extends beyond supervision to creating an environment that ensures effective counseling, maximizing benefits for students in addressing both academic and personal challenges.

Cultural competence and strategic resource allocation are essential for successful group counseling implementation. Culturally responsive and anti-racist counseling fosters resilience and equity, particularly for minoritized and marginalized students (Muratori et al., 2025). Adequate resource allocation ensures that group counseling interventions achieve intended outcomes within school systems (Hebaish et al., 2025). Beyond psychosocial support, group counseling can facilitate career development by integrating cultural contexts and structured guidance for students' future planning (Falco & Shaheed, 2021; Roziqi, 2025). School counselors can also leverage large-group consultation to disseminate expertise to faculty and staff, indirectly enhancing students' academic, career, and social-emotional outcomes (Saunders & Merlin-Knoblich, 2021).

Interviews with Grade XI students revealed highly positive responses to group counseling services. Students expressed enthusiasm for participation, noting that they could speak openly without fear or pressure. Through group counseling, students felt heard, understood, and supported by peers and BK teachers. Participation in group counseling yielded positive effects, including increased self-confidence, enhanced motivation for learning, and reduced emotional burden. Some students expressed a desire for continuous implementation of group counseling sessions. These findings indicate that group counseling not only assists students in resolving problems but also provides meaningful social and emotional learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of group counseling services at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim aims to help students develop social skills, increase confidence in expressing opinions, and equip them with strategies to address various personal and academic challenges. Group counseling provides a safe environment where students can share experiences, express feelings, and receive emotional support from peers and guidance and counseling teachers. The learning stress levels of Grade XI students at Madrasah Aliyah Darunnaim vary. Differences in stress levels are influenced by factors such as the loss of loved ones, difficulties in understanding learning materials, lack of concentration during lessons, and a tendency to daydream. These conditions can trigger learning stress, affecting students' emotional balance, motivation, and self-confidence.

The role of group counseling services has been shown to be highly effective in helping students manage learning stress. Students reported that group counseling and related school activities significantly assist in stress management, calming the mind, and enhancing motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Based on these findings, it is recommended that students actively participate in and take full advantage of the group counseling services provided by guidance and counseling teachers. The Islamic Education Guidance and Counseling Study Program is encouraged to conduct more in-depth research on individual counseling, particularly in enhancing students' self-confidence. Guidance and counseling teachers are also advised to implement appropriate counseling strategies, exercise wisdom, and strengthen their rapport with students.

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learning stress and the effectiveness of group counseling in fostering emotional resilience, self-confidence, and motivation. The findings highlight the significant role of structured counseling interventions in improving students' academic performance and well-being. We hope this study contributes to the development of more effective counseling programs and encourages educators to prioritize students' mental and emotional health.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

- Author 1 : Conceptualizing the study, designing the research framework, and conducting data collection through observations and interviews
- Author 2 : Data analysis, interpretation, and synthesizing the findings. Both authors collaborated on drafting the manuscript, reviewing relevant literature, and ensuring the study's methodological rigor.

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