Enhancing Counseling Practices with Total Quality Management and Photovoice to Mitigate Academic Burnout in Madrasah

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Abstract:

Academic burnout among madrasah students remains insufficiently examined, especially through participatory and culturally responsive approaches. Existing research tends to emphasize quantitative measurement or teacher-centered interventions. This study seeks to address this gap by integrating photovoice within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework and grounding it in the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) to explore and mitigate academic burnout. The research involved collaboration with two Guidance and Counseling teachers and ten students at a Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Pekanbaru. Data were collected through reflective writing, semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation, and participatory observation, and analyzed using thematic coding with methodological triangulation. The findings demonstrate that photovoice effectively exposes latent academic stress, strengthens teachers' reflective practice, and promotes meaningful student engagement in counseling processes. Visual narratives—such as torn notebooks, clocks, and fatigue-related imagery—functioned as symbolic expressions of burnout that facilitated empathetic dialogue and informed more precise intervention strategies. This study contributes a novel model of student-led visual diagnostic practice within Islamic school counseling, aligned with TQM's continuous improvement framework. The findings highlight the value of photovoice as a culturally relevant and sustainable method for strengthening student-centered burnout prevention and improving the overall quality of guidance and counseling services in madrasah settings.

Keywords: *Academic Burnout, Photovoice, Total Quality Management, Student Engagement*

Abstrak:

Kejenuhan akademik (academic burnout) pada siswa madrasah masih belum dikaji secara memadai, terutama melalui pendekatan yang partisipatoris dan responsif terhadap budaya. Penelitian yang ada cenderung menekankan pengukuran kuantitatif atau intervensi yang berpusat pada guru. Studi ini berupaya mengatasi kesenjangan tersebut dengan mengintegrasikan metode *photovoice* dalam kerangka *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) serta mendasarkannya pada prinsip-prinsip *Total Quality*

Management (TQM) untuk mengeksplorasi dan mengatasi kejenuhan akademik. Penelitian dilaksanakan melalui kolaborasi antara dua guru Bimbingan dan Konseling (BK) dan 10 siswa di sebuah Madrasah Tsanawiyah di Pekanbaru. Data dikumpulkan melalui penulisan reflektif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, foto elicitation, dan observasi partisipatif, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan pengodean tematik dengan triangulasi metodologis. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa photovoice efektif dalam mengungkap tekanan akademik laten, memperkuat praktik reflektif guru, dan mendorong keterlibatan bermakna siswa dalam proses konseling. Narasi visual — seperti buku catatan yang robek, gambar jam, dan representasi kelelahan — berfungsi sebagai ekspresi simbolik burnout yang memfasilitasi dialog empatik dan menghasilkan strategi intervensi yang lebih tepat sasaran. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi berupa model baru praktik diagnostik visual yang dipimpin siswa dalam layanan konseling sekolah berbasis Islam, selaras dengan kerangka peningkatan berkelanjutan TQM. Temuan ini menegaskan nilai photovoice sebagai metode yang relevan secara kultural dan berkelanjutan untuk memperkuat pencegahan burnout yang berpusat pada siswa serta meningkatkan kualitas layanan bimbingan dan konseling di lingkungan madrasah.

Kata Kunci: *Burnout Akademik, Photovoice, Total Quality Management, Keterlibatan Siswa*

INTRODUCTION

Academic burnout reflects a decline in students' psychological well-being and emotional resilience within educational environments (Chue et al., 2023; Cengiz et al., 2025). It is typically manifested through emotional exhaustion, a diminished sense of learning purpose, and the perceived inability to cope with academic demands (Jovčić & Simić, 2024; Lebedeva& Pasko2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of academic burnout increased significantly, as evidenced by findings indicating that 73.2% of 1,700 students felt overwhelmed by excessive academic tasks, while 35% reported difficulties in understanding learning materials (Hidayat, 2020). These conditions contributed to decreased motivation and lower levels of learning engagement (Madigan & Curran, 2021).This situation suggests that academic burnout is not merely an individual issue, but rather reflects systemic limitations within educational practices that have yet to adequately accommodate students' emotional and psychosocial needs. Therefore, strengthening counseling services and emotional support systems within a continuous improvement framework as emphasized in Total Quality Management (TQM) principles has become increasingly relevant (Oakland, 2014; Suhendri, 2024).

Guidance and Counseling (GC) teachers, who are responsible for ensuring the quality of psychosocial services, continue to face various challenges in delivering interventions effectively. Eneng Siti (2024) reported that 40% of GC teachers experience methodological constraints and time limitations, which hinder early detection and timely intervention for academic burnout. From the perspective of total quality management (TQM), this reflects a weak implementation of continuous improvement principles, limited stakeholder participation, and insufficient responsiveness to students' needs (Quansah & Yamoah, 2024; Suhendri, 2024). Furthermore, counseling approaches that remain

predominantlytop-down tend to restrict students' opportunities to express their emotional conditions (Bovill et al., 2016). Accordingly, there is a critical need to develop collaborative, evidence-based intervention strategies that are oriented toward continuous quality enhancement. One promising approach is the integration of participatory methods such as photovoice within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework (Nguyen, 2024 & Oliffe et al., 2024).

Previous research has introduced a range of interventions to address academic burnout, such as creative arts-based counseling (Supriyanto & Prasetiawan, 2021), self-motivation group counseling (Aulia & Hasibuan, 2025), cognitive behavioral therapy using self-instruction techniques (Rahmania et al., 2025), and individual counseling (Imami et al., 2024). While these approaches offer short-term therapeutic benefits, they largely depend on counselor-directed models that prioritize the application of techniques over active student participation in meaning-making processes. As a result, students are often treated as passive recipients rather than as co-constructors of knowledge about their own experiences, limiting the depth of contextual and emotional insight produced through such interventions. From a Total Quality Management (TQM) perspective, this limited stakeholder involvement indicates weak implementation of continuous improvement and responsiveness to student needs (Edeki & Adaka, 2025). To address this gap, photovoice provides a participatory and reflective method that allows students to visually document and critically reflect on their lived experiences with burnout, thereby enhancing the emotional depth of counseling and supporting ongoing improvement in educational services (Wang & Burris, 1997).

This study addresses gaps in prior research that have overlooked active student participation in expressing burnout-related feelings. Such participation provides a more authentic account of subjective experiences in coping with academic pressures and opens space for identifying emotional needs and developing context-specific coping strategies. Therefore, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How does academic burnout affect the well-being of madrasah students? (2) How can the photovoice method enhance GC teachers' capacity to deliver effective interventions? and (3) How can participatory approaches help reduce academic burnout among madrasah students? The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more empathetic, relevant, and participatory counseling services in madrasahs, consistent with TQM in Education principles.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Design integrated with the photovoice method to address academic burnout among madrasah students. PAR was chosen for its ability to promote social change by actively engaging participants in problem identification, action implementation, outcome reflection, and process evaluation (McTaggart, Nixon, & Kemmis, 2016). In the educational context, PAR positions both teachers and students as collaborative partners in improving service quality. The photovoice method was adopted as a visual-based participatory strategy, allowing students to document

and interpret their experiences of academic burnout through photographs paired with reflective narratives (Wang & Burris, 1997). This method is effective in fostering emotional expression and raising students' critical awareness. Data evaluation used a qualitative triangulation approach, combining interviews, observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), and photographic documentation, and analyzing them thematically (Braun et al., 2022).

The participants included GC teachers and students from a Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) in Pekanbaru City. GC teachers with at least 5 years of professional experience were selected to meet the intervention's credibility requirements. They underwent training on photovoice and PAR principles to ensure methodological competence. Student participants were purposively selected based on teacher recommendations and preliminary assessments of learning fatigue or academic pressure (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Ten eighth-grade students were selected based on their emotional readiness to engage in reflective activities without the pressure of final examinations (Prihadi & Setyowati, 2022). All participants provided written informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation in line with ethical standards. The study followed five cyclical stages aligned with the PAR framework and Total Quality Management (TQM) principles: needs assessment, action planning, implementation, reflective dialogue, and quality review (Ochieng, 2025). TQM emphasizes stakeholder involvement and continuous improvement (Helmold, 2023; Alawag et al., 2024)).
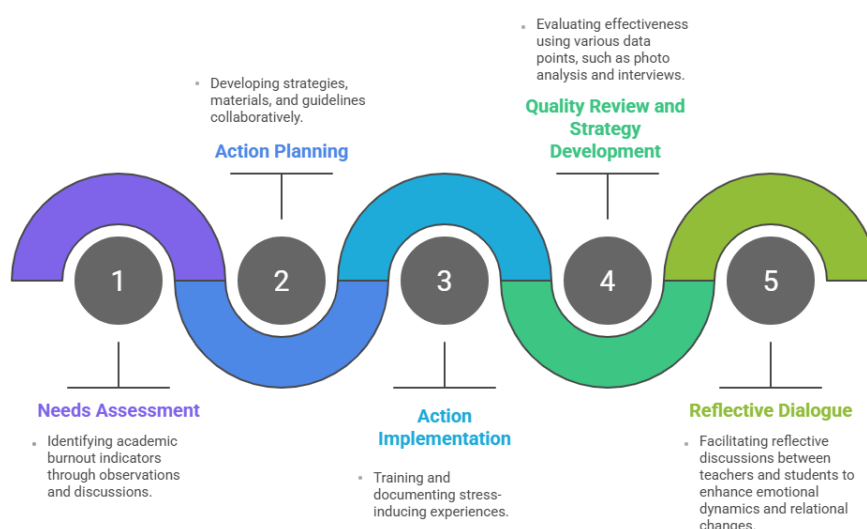

Figure 1. Participatory Action Research (PAR) Procedure

Data for this study were collected using four primary methods to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences with academic burnout and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. First, reflection sheets were used, allowing students to narratively express their academic burdens in line with the reflective orientation of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. Second, semi-structured interviews with both GC teachers and students explored their perceptions, challenges, and perceived changes throughout the program (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Third, photo analysis, a core component of the

photovoice method, involved students creating photographs that depicted their burnout experiences. These photographs were then analyzed collaboratively through focus group discussions (FGDs) to identify root causes and potential solutions derived from visual reflections (Wang & Burris, 1997). Fourth, participant observation was conducted continuously throughout the program to document student engagement, group dynamics, and emerging intervention practices. All data were triangulated to strengthen validity and deepen the understanding of participants' lived experiences (Denzin, 2017).

The data analysis followed an interpretive qualitative approach aligned with PAR principles, emphasizing critical and collaborative reflection. Data from semi-structured interviews, participant observations, photovoice-generated photographs, and reflective dialogues during FGDs were analyzed thematically, as outlined by Braun et al. (2022). First, researchers and participants familiarized themselves with the data through repeated Reading of transcripts, visual examination of photographs, and reflective discussions. Initial codes were then generated inductively to capture recurring meanings related to academic burnout. These codes were organized into potential themes through collaborative reflection, integrating both visual and narrative data. Afterward, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance across data sources. Final themes were clearly defined and named to represent core patterns in students' lived experiences. The findings were reported narratively and visually to support analytical transparency and reflexivity.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source and method triangulation, along with member checking, were utilized to validate interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The analysis was conducted collaboratively, reflecting the core PAR principle of active participant involvement and empowerment in knowledge production (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study, with both GC teachers and student participants being provided with clear, comprehensive information about the study's objectives and procedures before the program commenced. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation (Rana et al., 2023). All data, including interviews, reflections, and photographs, were kept confidential, and student identities were anonymized to protect privacy (Traianou & Hammersley, 2021). The photovoice method was implemented with attention to potential psychological risks, and ethical oversight was maintained through ongoing reflection and dialogue with participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

This section presents the research findings obtained through thematic analysis of interview data, observations, photovoice documentation, and focus group discussions. The study revealed three main themes representing students' and guidance and counseling (BK) teachers' experiences in the context of academic burnout and the photovoice intervention. These themes are: (1) loss of

learning meaning and student disengagement, (2) enhancement of BK teachers' reflective capacity through the photovoice method, and (3) emotional empowerment through active student engagement. The findings for each theme are described below.

Loss of Learning Meaning and Student Disengagement

The thematic analysis of interviews and reflective discussions indicates that academic burnout substantially eroded students' sense of learning meaning and engagement in the madrasah context. Learning was no longer perceived as a purposeful process but rather as a routine obligation disconnected from personal goals, leading to psychological disengagement. Several students described attending school merely to comply with external demands; one participant noted that they studied "just out of obligation" without understanding the purpose of schooling (P2), while another explained that, although physically present in class, their attention was mentally absent (P6). This loss of meaning was accompanied by persistent fatigue, boredom, and emotional emptiness, further diminishing motivation to participate in classroom activities. One student characterized the learning experience as monotonous and lacking excitement (P3), whereas another expressed emotional disengagement, stating that listening to teachers felt "empty" despite outward attentiveness (P7). Collectively, these narratives illustrate how academic burnout manifests not only as exhaustion but also as a more profound disengagement from the educational process, where students remain present in form yet detached in purpose and meaning.
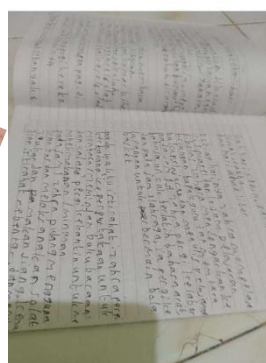
When asked to document their experiences through the photovoice method, many students chose to photograph objects symbolically representing their disconnection from the learning process. These included torn notebook pages, wall clocks, lesson notes, and faces expressing exhaustion. Such visual symbols reinforced their verbal narratives, indicating that learning activities no longer held personal or emotional meaning for them.
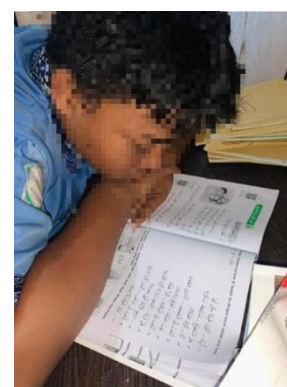

"Torn Pages"   "The Wall Clock"   "Lesson Notebook" "Exhausted Expression"

Joint visual discussions with GC teachers further revealed that most students felt the madrasah's learning process failed to address their emotional needs and was more task-oriented than focused on personal development. This

was confirmed by GC Teacher Participant 1 (GBK1): "They seem to have lost their spirit—present in class, but not fully engaged."

Direct observation during the process also showed that several students appeared passive in group discussions, lacked initiative, and rarely responded when invited to dialogue. This pattern reflected clear signs of disengagement and emotional and cognitive detachment from the learning environment, characteristic of academic burnout that undermines student engagement and intrinsic motivation.

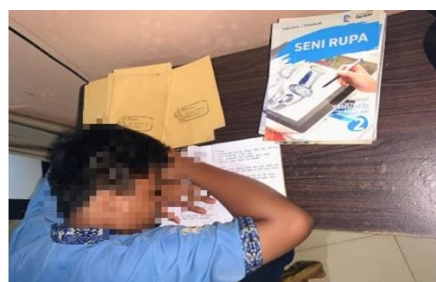**Enhancing GC teachers' reflective capacity through the photovoice method**

The findings demonstrate that the photovoice method significantly enhanced the reflective capacity of guidance and counseling (GC) teachers in delivering counseling services by enabling a deeper understanding of students' academic pressures and emotional conditions. Through collective reflection on student-produced photographs, teachers became more aware of the symbolic meanings embedded in students' everyday behaviors and experiences. For instance, a GC teacher interpreted a picture depicting a student placing his feet on a desk as an expression of motivational decline and emotional withdrawal, prompting the realization that students' pressures stem not only from academic demands but also from environmental and internal factors previously overlooked (GBK1). Similarly, another teacher reflected that engaging with images of students sleeping in class encouraged a shift from providing generic advice toward adopting a more empathetic, listening-oriented counseling approach (GBK2). This reflective process also led teachers to critically reassess their own counseling practices, with one teacher acknowledging a tendency to dominate conversations and subsequently learning to provide greater space for students' voices (GBK1). Moreover, symbolic images—such as a photograph of a broken plate representing irreversibility and helplessness—evoked emotional responses that deepened teachers' understanding of students' vulnerability and complexity, reinforcing the need for more sensitive and student-centered counseling strategies (GBK2). Collectively, these reflections indicate that photovoice functioned not merely as a data-collection tool but also as a transformative reflective medium that reshaped teachers' perspectives and counseling practices.
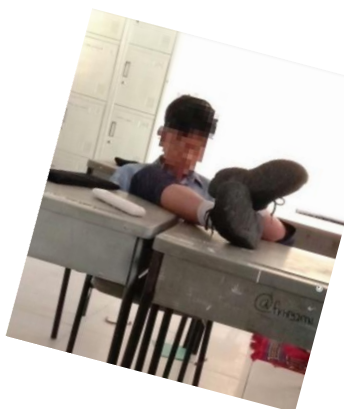
"Shattered Spirit".   "Silent Protest"   "Exhausting Classroom"

The teachers also noted that the visual results from photovoice served as concrete, valuable material for reflection in the counseling process, particularly in designing approaches more relevant to students' lived experiences. These photographs enabled deeper discussions about students' emotional states and academic pressures, helping educators better understand their needs and tailor interventions accordingly. This visual data proved essential in fostering a more empathetic and personalized approach to addressing academic burnout.

Emotional Empowerment through Active Student Engagement

The findings indicate that the participatory photovoice approach facilitated active student engagement and emotional empowerment within the counseling process by providing a safe space for self-expression that was largely absent in conventional guidance services. Through photographing their learning experiences and discussing them in FGDs, students were able to articulate emotions that had previously remained unspoken. Several students reported that reflecting on shared images fostered a sense of emotional relief and collective understanding, as they realized that academic stress was a shared experience rather than an individual burden (P7). Visual storytelling also enabled students to externalize their struggles symbolically; for example, one participant described a photograph of a broken plate as representing an inability to cope with academic demands, noting that narrating its meaning reduced emotional pressure and renewed motivation (P3). Others emphasized that photographs made it easier to communicate stress compared to verbal expression alone, particularly for students who typically remained silent during counseling sessions (P6).

This increased emotional openness was accompanied by observable changes in students' attitudes and participation, as reported by GC teachers. Students became more willing to express feelings, identify sources of stress, and actively contribute ideas for coping strategies (GBK1; GBK2). The visual data further revealed recurring themes of fatigue, loneliness, and academic pressure, which consistently emerged across students' photographs and discussions. These images functioned as a communicative bridge between students and teachers, fostering emotional engagement, mutual understanding, and collaborative reflection. Collectively, these findings suggest that photovoice not only enhances student participation but also empowers students emotionally by transforming counseling interactions into a more dialogical and supportive process.

Discussion

This study identified three interrelated findings that illuminate students' and guidance and counseling (GC) teachers' experiences with academic burnout and the photovoice intervention in the madrasah context. First, students demonstrated a diminished sense of learning purpose accompanied by low academic engagement, a pattern consistent with recent international studies linking burnout to motivational disengagement and meaning loss in learning (Madigan & Curran, 2021; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2020). Second, the integration of photovoice enhanced GC teachers' reflective capacity by enabling more contextually and empathetically responsive responses to students' emotional and academic needs, aligning with research that emphasizes reflective

practice as a core component of effective school counseling and teacher professionalism. Third, the participatory nature of photovoice facilitated emotional empowerment among students by creating an inclusive and dialogical space for self-expression, supporting findings from recent studies that highlight student voice and participatory visual methods as effective strategies for promoting psychological well-being and engagement in educational settings (Cook-Sather, 2020; Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2021).

Emerging from a thematic analysis of interviews, observations, visual data, and group discussions, these findings suggest that photovoice serves not only as a medium for emotional disclosure but also as a mechanism for continuous improvement in counseling services. In this regard, the results resonate with contemporary interpretations of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education, which emphasize stakeholder participation, reflective feedback, and service responsiveness as key indicators of quality enhancement (Oakland & Tanner, 2022; Suhendri, 2024). Collectively, this study reinforces the relevance of participatory approaches in strengthening psychological well-being and improving the quality of educational interactions in madrasahs.

These findings align with previous research showing that academic burnout is associated with reduced intrinsic motivation and student engagement in learning. As also highlighted by Madigan & Curran (2021), burnout among adolescents is characterized by emotional exhaustion and a sense of alienation from school—patterns echoed in students' narratives in this study. Furthermore, the results confirm the effectiveness of the photovoice approach in educational contexts, as Wang and Burris (1997) demonstrated that photovoice enables participants to reveal hidden emotional experiences through visual media. A study by Sprague et al. (2021) likewise affirmed that photovoice effectively promotes participation and critical awareness in educational communities. However, this study further contributes by showing that integrating photovoice into school counseling services also enhances teachers' reflection, as part of the continuous improvement principle in TQM (Oakland, 2014).

The findings indicate that students' emotional needs remain marginal within the prevailing madrasah education system, where teaching and counseling practices continue to emphasize normative academic compliance over holistic human development. The manifestation of academic burnout alongside low learning engagement can be understood, from a theoretical perspective, as a consequence of misalignment between institutional expectations and students' emotional capacities, a condition frequently associated with emotionally unsupportive learning environments (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2020; Madigan & Curran, 2021). The use of photovoice revealed latent emotional tensions that are often obscured by students' outward adherence to school norms, suggesting that conventional counseling approaches may inadequately capture the depth and complexity of students' lived experiences.

This finding underscores the need for a paradigm shift toward a participatory Total Quality Management (TQM) framework, in which students are positioned not merely as service recipients but as active stakeholders whose perspectives inform continuous improvement processes (Oakland & Tanner,

2022). From this standpoint, photovoice serves as both a diagnostic and developmental tool, enabling dialogic interaction, reflective feedback, and emotionally responsive interventions. Theoretically and practically, these results imply that integrating participatory and emotionally grounded approaches into educational services is essential for fostering sustainable student well-being and improving the overall quality of educational interactions in madrasahs (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2016).

The main implication of these findings is the need to strengthen both GC teachers' professional capacity and the madrasah education system in designing counseling and learning services that are more adaptive to students' emotional needs. The use of photovoice demonstrates that participatory and reflective approaches can effectively bridge communication gaps between students and teachers, foster greater empathy among counselors, and cultivate a more inclusive and responsive school culture. From a quality-improvement perspective, these results emphasize the importance of grounding educational services in continuous reflection and in direct student feedback. Accordingly, madrasahs are encouraged to integrate participatory practices into counseling and instructional processes as part of a comprehensive strategy to enhance educational quality. Placing students' emotional and psychosocial well-being at the center of educational practice is essential for sustaining meaningful engagement and supporting long-term academic development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that academic burnout among madrasah students is closely linked to learning environments that fail to attend to students' emotional and psychosocial dimensions adequately. The findings demonstrate that burnout is not solely the result of excessive academic demands but also emerges from limited opportunities for self-expression, weak supportive relationships, and counseling practices that are insufficiently responsive to students' lived experiences. In such contexts, an overemphasis on academic achievement risks deepening students' disengagement and diminishing the meaning of learning.

The study further confirms that photovoice is a practical, participatory, and reflective approach for addressing these challenges. By enabling students to symbolically and narratively express their emotional experiences, photovoice fosters a sense of ownership, emotional empowerment, and active engagement in the counseling process. At the institutional level, the findings indicate that strengthening GC teachers' reflective capacity and systematically integrating participatory approaches into counseling services are essential steps toward more responsive educational practices. Accordingly, madrasahs are encouraged to cultivate inclusive school cultures that value student voice and embed continuous quality improvement into counseling and learning systems. Such efforts are critical for creating emotionally supportive learning environments that are resilient to academic burnout and conducive to sustainable student well-being.

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