

STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND SCHOOL SUPPORT

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Abstract : Student learning experiences and psychological well-being are important issues in education, particularly amidst increasing academic demands that impact students' mental health. However, qualitative studies linking learning experiences, academic stress, and social support are still limited. This study aims to explore students' learning experiences and their relationship to psychological well-being. The study used a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with three purposively selected students. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and validated through triangulation and member checking. The results indicate that interactive learning increases student motivation and engagement; that academic stress elicits diverse psychological responses depending on coping strategies; and that social support from teachers and peers strengthens students' emotional stability and self-confidence. This study provides a more integrated qualitative empirical understanding of the relationship among these three factors. It serves as a basis for developing interactive learning strategies, managing academic stress, and strengthening social support to improve students' psychological well-being.

Keywords : Students' Learning Experiences; Psychological Well Being; Academic Pressure.

Abstrak : Pengalaman belajar siswa dan kesejahteraan psikologis menjadi isu penting dalam pendidikan, terutama di tengah meningkatnya tuntutan akademik yang berdampak pada kesehatan mental siswa. Namun, kajian kualitatif yang menghubungkan pengalaman belajar, tekanan akademik, dan dukungan sosial masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengalaman belajar siswa serta keterkaitannya dengan kesejahteraan psikologis. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap tiga siswa yang dipilih secara purposive. Data dianalisis dengan analisis tematik, serta diuji melalui triangulasi dan member checking. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran interaktif meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa, tekanan akademik menimbulkan respons psikologis yang beragam tergantung strategi coping, dan dukungan sosial dari guru serta teman sebaya memperkuat stabilitas emosional dan kepercayaan diri siswa. Kontribusi penelitian ini adalah memberikan pemahaman empiris kualitatif yang lebih terintegrasi mengenai hubungan ketiga faktor tersebut, serta menjadi dasar pengembangan strategi pembelajaran interaktif, pengelolaan beban akademik, dan penguatan dukungan sosial untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis siswa.

Kata Kunci : Pengalaman Belajar Siswa; Kesejahteraan Psikologis; Tekanan Akademik.

INTRODUCTION

The learning process in madrasas does not only focus on academic achievement but also involves students' learning experiences during educational activities (Murni & Saputra, 2023). Learning experiences include interactions between students and teachers, instructional methods, classroom environments, and academic demands, all of which shape how students engage in the learning process (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013). These elements are interconnected and may be interpreted differently by each student depending on their perceptions, emotional conditions, and adaptive abilities (Lu et al., 2022). As a result, learning can be perceived either as a meaningful and motivating experience or as a source of pressure and stress. Positive interactions and supportive environments tend to enhance motivation and engagement (Dalimunthe et al., 2024), whereas less varied instruction and excessive academic demands may reduce interest and increase emotional strain (He et al., 2024).

In practice, students experience diverse learning conditions that influence their psychological well-being. Some students are able to adapt and show high enthusiasm, while others encounter difficulties related to academic workload, teaching methods, and social interactions. These variations indicate that learning experiences are closely linked to students' psychological well-being, as they shape emotional responses, motivation, and overall functioning in the school context (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2025; Shao et al., 2024).

Previous studies have explored psychological well-being from different perspectives. Chaudhry et al. (2024) highlight the role of social and institutional support in influencing students' psychological well-being, with academic engagement acting as a mediator. However, this study mainly focuses on positive support factors without considering negative learning experiences that may also affect students' psychological conditions. Meanwhile, Suherlin et al. (2024) found that students' psychological well-being is generally at a moderate level and varies by gender, yet their study remains descriptive and does not examine the underlying factors that explain such variation.

These limitations indicate a research gap. Existing studies tend to examine psychological well-being partially, either by focusing on support systems or by providing descriptive findings, without integrating students' learning experiences—including both positive and negative dimensions into a comprehensive analytical framework. Furthermore, limited research adopts a qualitative approach to capture students' subjective experiences and interpretations within real classroom settings. Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in its integrative and exploratory approach, which combines multiple dimensions of learning experiences classroom interaction, academic pressure, and social relationships—with psychological well-being in a single analytical framework. In addition, this study employs a qualitative approach to provide in-depth insights into students lived experiences,

which are often overlooked in previous research. Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' learning experiences and their relationship with psychological well-being, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing students' psychological conditions in the learning process and to contribute to the development of more effective educational practices and counseling services.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore students' psychological well-being and their learning experiences in depth (Sugiyono, 2021). A case study approach was considered appropriate because this research focuses on an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon within a bounded system, namely students' lived experiences in a particular school context. This study adopts an instrumental case study, where the selected case is used to provide a broader understanding of the relationship between learning experiences and psychological well-being.

The research was conducted at MAN Tenggarong Kutai Kartanegara, which was purposively selected as the research site due to its relevance in representing diverse student learning experiences, variations in academic demands, and observable differences in students' psychological conditions during the learning process. This context provides a suitable setting to explore the complex interactions among academic, social, and emotional factors in shaping students' well-being.

The participants consisted of three students selected through purposive sampling, based on specific criteria: 1) actively participating in classroom learning, 2) having varied academic experiences (e.g., high, moderate, and low engagement), and 3) being willing to share their experiences openly. The small number of participants is consistent with qualitative case study principles, which emphasize depth of data rather than quantity, allowing for a detailed and nuanced exploration of individual experiences.

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, supported by limited observations and documentation to strengthen data triangulation. The interview guidelines consisted of open-ended questions focusing on classroom learning experiences, interactions with teachers and peers, academic pressures, emotional responses, and perceived psychological well-being. Each participant was interviewed individually in a comfortable and private setting to encourage openness. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Observations were conducted to capture classroom dynamics and student engagement, while documentation (e.g., school activities or learning records) was used to support contextual understanding.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving several stages: familiarization with the data through repeated reading, initial coding to identify meaningful units, categorization of codes into broader patterns, and the development of key themes representing participants' experiences. The themes were then interpreted in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several validation strategies were applied, including triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documentation), member checking to confirm the accuracy of participants' responses, and peer debriefing to minimize researcher bias and enhance the consistency of interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

a) Students' Learning Experiences in the Classroom

The findings from the interviews indicate that teaching strategies and classroom interaction strongly influence students' classroom learning experiences. All three participants stated that the way teachers deliver material plays a central role in shaping their interest and motivation to learn. One participant stated that interactive learning methods make lessons easier to understand and more enjoyable. As she explained, *"I feel more enthusiastic when the teacher explains while discussing with us, not only lecturing all the time."* This shows that active learning environments contribute positively to students' engagement. On the other hand, students also reported that monotonous teaching methods reduce their concentration and learning motivation. One participant described his experience by saying that *"Sometimes I lose focus when the teacher only explains without involving students. It makes the class feel boring."*

This response indicates that a lack of variation in teaching approaches may lead to disengagement and passive learning behavior. Despite this, students still attempt to stay attentive, although their emotional involvement in learning decreases when classroom activities are less interactive. Another important aspect identified is the role of classroom atmosphere in shaping students' comfort during learning. A supportive and open classroom environment encourages students to ask questions and participate actively. One participant shared that *"I am not afraid to ask questions when the teacher is friendly and patient in explaining."* This suggests that teacher-student relationships significantly affect students' willingness to engage in learning activities. Positive interactions create a sense of safety that supports better learning experiences.

To provide a clearer overview of the interview results, the following table summarizes the key themes related to students' learning experiences:

Table 1: Summary of Students' Learning Experiences

Theme	Description	Student Response Example
Interactive teaching methods	Increase engagement and motivation	<i>"I feel more enthusiastic when the teacher explains while discussing with us."</i>
Monotonous teaching style	Reduces focus and interest	<i>"It makes the class feel boring."</i>
Classroom atmosphere	Affects comfort and participation	<i>"I am not afraid to ask questions when the teacher is friendly."</i>

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that teaching methods and classroom atmosphere strongly influence students' learning experiences. Interactive teaching approaches, particularly those involving discussion and active participation, tend to enhance students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. In contrast, monotonous teaching styles reduce students' focus and interest, leading to a less effective learning experience. In addition, the classroom atmosphere plays a crucial role in shaping students' participation. A supportive and friendly environment encourages students to express their ideas and ask questions without fear, thereby fostering active learning. These findings suggest that both instructional strategies and socio-emotional classroom conditions are key factors in creating meaningful learning experiences for students.

b) Academic Pressure and Emotional Responses

The interview results show that all participants experienced academic pressure in their school lives, particularly regarding assignments, examinations, and deadlines. Students reported that the accumulation of tasks across subjects often creates a sense of burden and emotional strain. One participant stated, *"When many assignments come at the same time, I feel stressed and sometimes overwhelmed because I do not know which one to finish first."* This indicates that workload management poses a significant challenge for students and directly affects their emotional state during learning.

Despite experiencing pressure, students expressed different emotional responses depending on how they perceive and manage the demands. Some students reported feelings of stress, anxiety, and fatigue, especially during exam periods. One participant explained that *"Before exams, I usually feel anxious because I am afraid, I cannot*

get good grades even though I have studied.” However, not all emotional responses were negative, as some students viewed academic pressure as a motivation to study harder and improve their performance. This variation suggests that students interpret academic demands differently, which affects their psychological responses.

In dealing with academic pressure, students apply various coping strategies to maintain emotional stability. Several participants mentioned time management, taking short breaks, and discussing difficulties with friends as ways to reduce stress. One student said that *“I usually take a short break or talk to my friends when I feel stressed so I can calm down again.”* These coping mechanisms help students regulate their emotions and prevent academic pressure from negatively affecting their well-being.

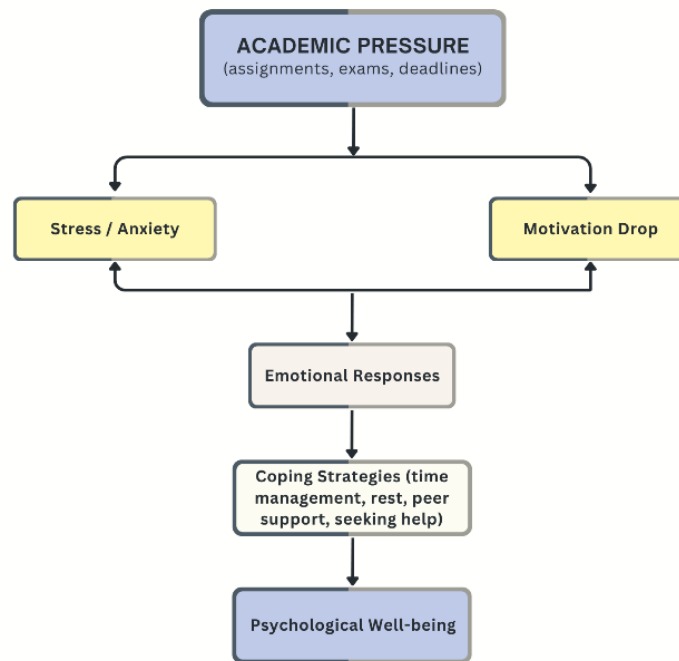


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Academic Pressure and Emotional Responses

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual relationship between academic pressure and students’ emotional responses, along with its implications for psychological well-being. Academic pressure, arising from assignments, examinations, and deadlines, triggers various emotional responses among students, primarily stress, anxiety, and decreased motivation. These responses indicate that academic demands not only affect students cognitively but also influence their emotional conditions during the learning process.

The model further shows that students do not respond to academic pressure uniformly. Instead, they employ different coping strategies, such as time

management, taking breaks, seeking peer support, and asking for help. These coping mechanisms play a crucial role in mediating the impact of academic pressure by helping students regulate their emotions and maintain balance.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of these coping strategies determines students' psychological well-being. Adaptive coping can reduce negative emotional responses and support emotional stability, while ineffective coping may exacerbate stress and negatively affect well-being. Therefore, this model emphasizes that psychological well-being is not solely influenced by academic pressure itself, but also by students' ability to manage and respond to it effectively.

c) Social Relationships and Support Systems

The findings indicate that social relationships and support systems play a significant role in shaping students' psychological well-being in the school environment. All participants emphasized that interactions with teachers and peers influence their comfort, motivation, and emotional stability during learning. Positive relationships create a sense of belonging, while negative interactions may lead to discomfort and reduced engagement in academic activities.

Teachers' support emerged as an important factor in students' experiences. Participants described that teachers who are approachable, patient, and willing to provide guidance help them feel more confident in learning. One student stated, "*I feel more comfortable when the teacher explains again if I do not understand, so I am not afraid to ask questions.*" This response highlights that supportive teacher behavior encourages active participation and reduces anxiety in the classroom. Conversely, limited interaction or less responsive teachers may make students hesitant to engage.

Peer relationships were also identified as a crucial source of emotional and academic support. Students reported that friends help them cope with academic difficulties and emotional stress. One participant explained that "*When I have difficulties with assignments, I usually discuss them with my friends, and it makes me feel less stressed.*" In addition, friendships contribute to a more enjoyable school experience, as students feel supported both academically and socially. However, one participant noted that misunderstandings or a lack of closeness with peers can create feelings of isolation, as evidenced by the statement, "*Sometimes I feel uncomfortable if I cannot connect well with my classmates.*" To summarize these findings, the following table presents the key aspects of social relationships and their impact on students:

Table 2: Social Relationships and Their Impact on Students' Well-being

Aspect	Description	Student Response Example	Impact
Teacher Support	Guidance, patience, and approachability	<i>"I am not afraid to ask questions."</i>	Increases confidence and participation
Peer Support	Help with assignments and emotional sharing	<i>"I discuss with my friends when I have difficulties."</i>	Reduces stress and builds motivation
Negative Interactions	Lack of connection or poor communication	<i>"I feel uncomfortable if I cannot connect well."</i>	Decreases comfort and engagement

Table 2 highlights the significant role of social relationships in shaping students' psychological well-being. The findings indicate that supportive interactions with teachers and peers contribute positively to students' emotional and academic experiences. Teacher support, characterized by guidance, patience, and approachability, fosters a sense of safety that encourages students to ask questions and actively participate in classroom activities. This, in turn, enhances students' confidence and engagement in the learning process.

Similarly, peer support plays an important role in reducing academic stress and strengthening motivation. Through collaboration and emotional sharing, students can cope more effectively with learning challenges. Discussing difficulties with peers not only facilitates problem-solving but also provides emotional reassurance, which is essential for maintaining psychological balance.

In contrast, negative interactions, such as poor communication or a lack of social connection, have adverse effects on students' well-being. These conditions may lead to discomfort, reduced participation, and a sense of isolation. Overall, the findings suggest that social relationships function as a critical support system that can enhance or hinder students' psychological well-being, depending on the quality of interactions.

d) Psychological Well-Being of Students

The findings reveal that a combination of academic experiences, emotional responses, and social relationships within the school environment shapes students' psychological well-being. Overall, participants described their well-being as fluctuating depending on daily school conditions, such as workload, classroom atmosphere, and the level of support they receive. One student explained that *"Sometimes I feel happy and motivated at school, but at other times I feel tired and*

stressed when the tasks are too many." This statement indicates that psychological well-being is dynamic and influenced by situational factors in school life.

Students also reported that their psychological well-being is closely related to their ability to manage stress and maintain emotional balance. Participants who used coping strategies such as time management, rest, and social support tended to feel more in control of their emotions. One participant stated, *"If I can manage my time well, I feel calmer and more confident in doing school tasks."* This shows that self-regulation plays an important role in maintaining positive psychological conditions despite academic demands.

In addition, feelings of satisfaction, confidence, and comfort in school emerged as key indicators of psychological well-being. Students who felt supported by teachers and peers reported higher levels of motivation and emotional stability. One student shared that *"I feel comfortable at school when my teachers and friends support me, it makes me enjoy learning more."* However, when support is lacking or academic pressure increases, students tend to experience stress, fatigue, and decreased enthusiasm for learning. To present a clearer overview of the findings, the following figure illustrates the components influencing students' psychological well-being:

The main components influencing students' psychological well-being, highlighting the interaction between academic experience, emotional regulation, and social support. The figure demonstrates that psychological well-being is not shaped by a single factor, but rather by the dynamic interplay of these three interconnected dimensions. Academic experience forms the foundational aspect, as students' engagement with learning activities, teaching methods, and classroom environments directly affects their motivation and satisfaction. Positive academic experiences contribute to a sense of achievement and fulfillment, while negative experiences may lead to disengagement and emotional strain.

Emotional regulation acts as an internal mechanism that enables students to manage their feelings in response to academic challenges. Through strategies such as mindfulness, self-control, and adaptive coping, students are able to maintain emotional balance and resilience. This component plays a mediating role in determining how academic pressures are interpreted and managed. Social support, derived from teachers, peers, and the broader school environment, serves as an external resource that strengthens students' ability to academic and emotional demands. Supportive relationships foster a sense of belonging, increase confidence,

and reduce stress, whereas limited support may hinder students' psychological adjustment.

2. Discussion

Learning experiences in the classroom are among the central elements in shaping students' academic and psychological development. The way learning is delivered, the quality of interaction, and the overall classroom atmosphere contribute significantly to how students perceive and engage in the learning process (Wang et al., 2022). A supportive and interactive environment can foster curiosity, participation, and emotional comfort, while a less engaging classroom may lead to disengagement and reduced motivation (Kelkar, 2025). These conditions highlight that learning is not merely about content delivery, but also about how students experience and interpret the process itself in meaningful ways.

The findings of this study indicate that teaching strategies and classroom interaction strongly influence students' learning experiences. Students reported higher engagement when teachers used interactive methods such as discussions, group work, and question-and-answer sessions. This finding is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and experience rather than passively receiving information (Halid, 2024). When students are actively involved in learning, they tend to show higher motivation and better emotional engagement (Shen et al., 2024). In contrast, monotonous lecture-based teaching reduces participation. It leads to boredom (Al-Amri, 2025), suggesting that limited student involvement in the learning process may hinder both cognitive and emotional development in the classroom.

These findings also suggest that the quality of learning experiences is closely tied to how students internalize and respond to instructional practices. Active participation allows students to develop a sense of ownership over their learning, which can strengthen their confidence and willingness to engage in more complex academic tasks (Uzorka et al., 2024). In such conditions, students are not only recipients of knowledge but also contributors in the learning process, which supports deeper understanding and sustained interest in lessons (Ghaleb, 2024). At the same time, limited variation in teaching approaches may gradually influence students' attitudes toward learning. When classroom activities lack stimulation, students may become less responsive and show reduced initiative in participating, even if they initially can engage. This condition suggests that learning experiences are cumulative, and that repeated exposure to less

engaging instruction can shape students' long-term perceptions of learning as less meaningful.

Classroom interaction is a fundamental element in shaping how students experience the learning process daily. The quality of communication between teachers and students influences not only how information is delivered, but also how students perceive their role within the classroom (Tang, 2025). When interaction is balanced and inclusive, students are more likely to feel acknowledged and involved in the learning process, which supports both their academic engagement and emotional comfort (Fidosieva, 2026). In addition, teacher-student interaction is an important factor in shaping students' classroom experiences. Students feel more comfortable and confident when teachers create an open, supportive learning environment that allows them to ask questions and express their opinions (Khodadad, 2023). Such conditions not only improve understanding of the material but also contribute to students' sense of belonging in the classroom (Penuel et al., 2024). Conversely, when interaction is limited or when the learning process is too teacher-centered, students tend to become passive and less motivated to participate, which may reduce their overall learning experience (Tang, 2023).

Academic pressure is widely recognized as a central aspect of students' school experiences, reflecting the demands placed on them through assignments, examinations, and deadlines (Chong, 2026). These academic demands are part of the structured learning process and are intended to support students' cognitive development and achievement. However, the way students experience and respond to these demands can differ significantly depending on their personal perceptions, emotional readiness, and available support systems within the school environment (Madsgaard et al., 2022). Students reported varied emotional responses, including stress, anxiety, fatigue, and motivation. These differences show that academic demands are experienced in multiple ways depending on how students interpret and respond to them in their daily school life (Silseth & Erstad, 2022). Some students view academic tasks as a normal part of learning that can be managed gradually. In contrast, others feel overwhelmed when multiple responsibilities come at the same time, especially when deadlines are close and workload increases (Sun & Kim, 2023).

The variation can be explained through the lens of the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which suggests that stress is not caused solely by external demands but by individuals' cognitive appraisal of those

demands and their coping resources (Knapp & Sweeny, 2022). From this perspective, academic pressure is understood as a process that involves continuous interaction between environmental demands and students' internal evaluation (Córdova et al., 2023). Students do not respond to academic tasks in a uniform way, as their interpretation of situations plays a decisive role in determining whether those demands are perceived as manageable or threatening. Within this appraisal process, students first evaluate the significance of academic demands in relation to their personal capabilities and available resources. When tasks are seen as within their ability to handle, students are more likely to respond with a sense of control and constructive effort, which may manifest as motivation and persistence in completing schoolwork (Xu, 2024). The positive appraisal allows academic challenges to be integrated into learning goals rather than being perceived as burdensome obligations, thereby influencing how students engage with their studies on both cognitive and emotional levels.

Coping strategies are generally understood as the cognitive and behavioral efforts that individuals use to manage internal and external demands that are perceived as stressful (Bondarchuk et al., 2024). In the context of students' academic life, coping plays an important role in helping them deal with pressures arising from assignments, examinations, and other school-related responsibilities (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2023). These strategies function as mechanisms that allow individuals to regulate emotional responses, maintain focus, and adapt to challenging situations in their learning environment. Coping strategies such as time management, rest, and peer support reflect adaptive coping processes that help students regulate emotional tension and maintain psychological balance (Qi et al., 2025). Students who are able to organize their study time effectively tend to feel more in control of their academic responsibilities, which reduces feelings of pressure (Galindo-Domínguez & Bezanilla, 2021). In addition, seeking support from friends provides emotional relief and helps students feel less isolated when facing difficulties (Al-Oraibi et al., 2022).

Social relationships within the school environment also play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences. Support from teachers and peers contributes significantly to emotional comfort, motivation, and confidence in learning (Wu & Dong, 2024). This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which highlights that individual development is influenced by multiple environmental systems, including microsystems such as family, peers, and school (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). In this study, the school environment functions as an immediate context where students interact daily, and these interactions directly shape how they perceive and respond to academic demands and

emotional challenges. Supportive teacher-student relationships, such as providing guidance, encouragement, and openness in communication, help students feel valued and understood, which in turn increases their willingness to participate actively in learning activities (Romanovska & Novak, 2024). Similarly, positive peer interactions foster a sense of belonging and emotional security, enabling students to share academic difficulties and reduce stress. These supportive elements serve as protective factors, strengthening students' resilience in navigating academic pressures and enhancing their overall learning experience. Conversely, weak or negative social interactions, such as a lack of communication, limited teacher attention, or peer exclusion, may reduce students' sense of belonging and increase emotional distress. When students feel socially disconnected, they tend to become less engaged in classroom activities and more vulnerable to stress and anxiety.

Psychological well-being in this study is reflected in students' emotional stability, sense of comfort, and ability to manage academic demands. These findings are consistent with Ryff's (1989) concept of psychological well-being, which emphasizes dimensions such as self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others (Dierendonck & Lam, 2023). Students who reported supportive learning environments and effective coping strategies showed higher levels of emotional balance and satisfaction in school life (Nwoko et al., 2023). Meanwhile, those experiencing high academic pressure without adequate support tended to show lower psychological comfort and increased stress. This indicates that psychological well-being is a dynamic condition shaped by the interaction between individual coping abilities and environmental support systems.

CONCLUSION

The research results indicate that a combination of classroom learning experiences, academic pressure, and social relationships within the school environment influences students' psychological well-being. Interactive and engaging teaching methods positively contribute to students' motivation and emotional comfort, whereas monotonous learning approaches tend to reduce engagement. All students experience academic pressure, but its impact varies depending on how students perceive and manage it through coping strategies such as time management and seeking support. Social relationships with teachers and peers also play a crucial role in shaping students' emotional well-being, where supportive interactions enhance confidence, reduce stress, and improve learning experiences. Overall, psychological well-being is a dynamic condition shaped by both academic and social factors

in students' daily school lives.

Further studies may also consider involving different educational levels or comparing several schools to gain broader insights. In addition, future research is recommended to integrate quantitative methods to measure psychological well-being more objectively alongside qualitative exploration. Exploring additional variables, such as family support, digital learning environments, and mental health interventions in schools, may also provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing students' psychological well-being.

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