

The Influence of Academic Load on Students' Mental Health

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh beban akademik terhadap kesehatan mental mahasiswa. Beban akademik mencakup berbagai aspek seperti jumlah pelajaran, tugas, dan materi yang harus dikuasai dalam waktu yang terbatas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kuantitatif untuk mengumpulkan data yang dapat diukur secara numerik. Sampel dalam penelitian ini adalah 32 mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris semester 6 di Universitas Nias. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar responden sering merasa stres dengan beban akademik yang tinggi, yang berdampak signifikan pada kualitas tidur, kecemasan, kelelahan mental, dan perasaan putus asa. Temuan tersebut menekankan pentingnya pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi beban akademik dan perlunya solusi yang efektif untuk mengelola stres akademik guna meningkatkan kesejahteraan mental mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: *Beban Akademik, Kesehatan Mental, Mahasiswa*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of academic load on students' mental health. Academic load includes various aspects such as the number of lessons, assignments, and materials that must be mastered in a limited time. This study uses a quantitative research approach to collect data that can be measured numerically. The sample in this study were 32 students of 6th semester English Education Study Program at The University of Nias. The results showed that the majority of respondents often felt stressed by the high academic load, which had a significant impact on sleep quality, anxiety, mental fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness. The findings emphasize the importance of a better understanding of the factors that influence academic load and the need for effective solutions to manage academic stress to improve students' mental well-being.

Keywords: *Academic Load, Mental Health, Students*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental aspects of human life. Education not only plays a role in the transfer of knowledge but also in character building and individual skill development. It is a place for each individual to develop their abilities, broaden their horizons, explore their potential, and shape their character as an embodiment to educate the nation's life (Zu'ma, 2023). Education is a systematic process that involves the transfer of knowledge, skills, values, and culture from one generation to the next.

The problems of education today are very complex and diverse, ranging from process issues to implementation and application in everyday life. Among these challenges, academic load is often felt intensely by students. Academic load encompasses the totality of tasks and responsibilities that students must complete to fulfill academic requirements,

including lectures, practicums, independent studies, and other assignments. If not managed properly, this can significantly affect their well-being and academic performance (Smith, 2021). High academic load is associated with increased stress and decreased well-being of students, which can negatively impact their academic performance (Rummell, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial for educators, parents, and policymakers to understand the factors influencing academic load and find effective solutions to address them.

In the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, adolescents face various stressors. Kaur (2014) points out that increased parental expectations in terms of grades and academic achievement sometimes place an additional burden on children, potentially leading to physical or mental illnesses. Mental health is vital in maximizing individual health (Riani et al., 2021). Problems with mental health, such as stress, are frequently experienced by students, with academic stress being particularly common (Kurniasih & Liza, 2018). Many studies have explored the relationship between academic stress, mental health, and other correlates among college students.

The phenomenon or impact of academic load on mental health is complex, triggering various reactions. A heavy workload can lead to academic stress, characterized by increased stress hormones, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and depression. This stress may also drive risky behaviors, such as alcohol or drug abuse. Moreover, a high academic load can result in physical and mental fatigue, reducing academic performance and time for other activities crucial for mental health. Social isolation is another unavoidable impact, as college students often spend more time studying and less time socializing, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Academic burdens can also disrupt eating patterns, leading to eating disorders, whether overeating or under-eating. Prolonged stress and fatigue can trigger risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse, risky sexual behavior, and even violent behavior. In the long run, academic load can trigger psychological disorders, including anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These impacts lead to a decrease in the quality of life, including life satisfaction, quality of interpersonal relationships, and productivity. It is important to remember that each individual responds differently to academic overload, and seeking professional help is highly recommended if mental health symptoms related to academic overload are experienced.

Students today often face high academic loads, including numerous assignments, presentations, practicums, and exams, as well as busy class schedules, which make them feel overwhelmed and exhausted. This is often followed by an increase in mental health problems, such as academic stress, anxiety symptoms, and depression. Previous research has shown that stress due to high academic load can cause mental health problems such as anxiety and depression among college students (Fadilla et al., 2024). High academic stress can trigger sleep disturbances, decreased motivation, and decreased academic performance.

Further research is needed to explore the complexity and variety of issues in education, including challenges such as high academic loads that can potentially affect students' mental well-being. Although education plays a crucial role in character building and individual development, negative impacts such as academic stress and mental health disorders need to be better understood to be managed effectively, aiming for holistic educational goals. Hence, the researcher is interested in conducting further research on the influence of academic load on student mental health.

METHODS

This type of research is quantitative research approach. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to collect data that can be measured numerically or statistically. By using quantitative research, researchers can directly measure the variables to be studied, such as the level of mental health, and the frequency of social interaction. The data collection method in quantitative research that is often used is a questionnaire (Jailani,

2023). Surveys allow researchers to collect data directly from respondents through structured questionnaires.

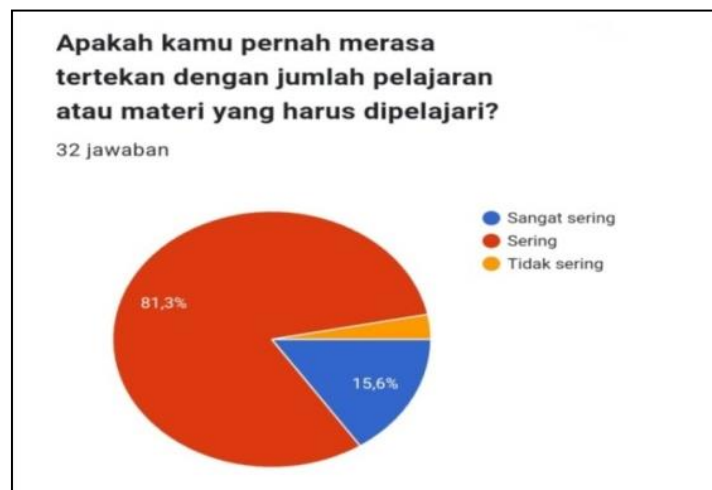
In this study, researchers tried to take samples using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a sample selection method where the researcher deliberately chooses participants who are in accordance with the research objectives or certain characteristics that are relevant to the topic under study. Stein et al. (2017) explain that purposive sampling is used to obtain in-depth and meaningful information about research subjects, by selecting participants who have certain experiences, knowledge, or characteristics relevant to the research question. The sample taken was 6th semester English education study program students, as many as 32 students from a total population of 80 students.

In this study, researchers used a questionnaire to collect data. According to Zimmerman and Zumbo (2017), a questionnaire is one type of research instrument used to collect data from respondents in a study. The questionnaire contains mental health variables with indicators of academic load, social interaction and the use of technology that can interfere with mental health.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

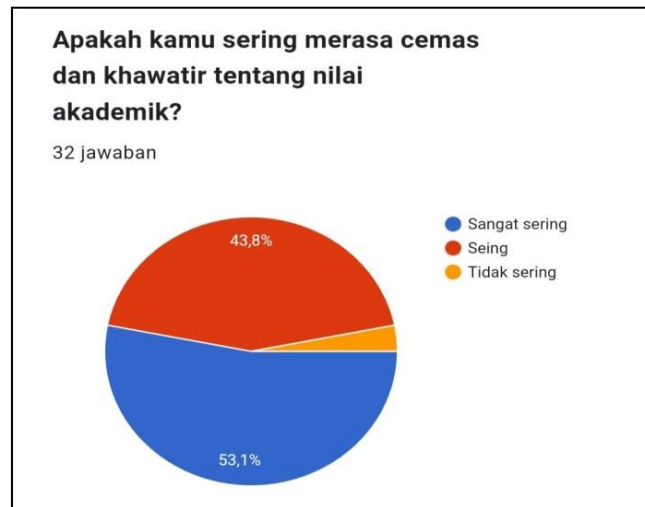
The results of this survey provide data on how academic load can impact mental health. From the 32 participants' responses to the questionnaire, the following results were obtained.



Picture 1. Do you ever feel pressured by the amount of lessons or material you have to learn?

Based on the diagram shown, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents feel often pressured by the amount of lessons or material that must be learned. Of the 32 answers collected, 81.3% of respondents admitted that they often feel pressured. In contrast, 15.6% of respondents reported that they felt the pressure very often. Only a small proportion, namely 3.1% of respondents, stated that they did not often feel pressured. This data shows that a high learning load is a significant source of pressure for most respondents.

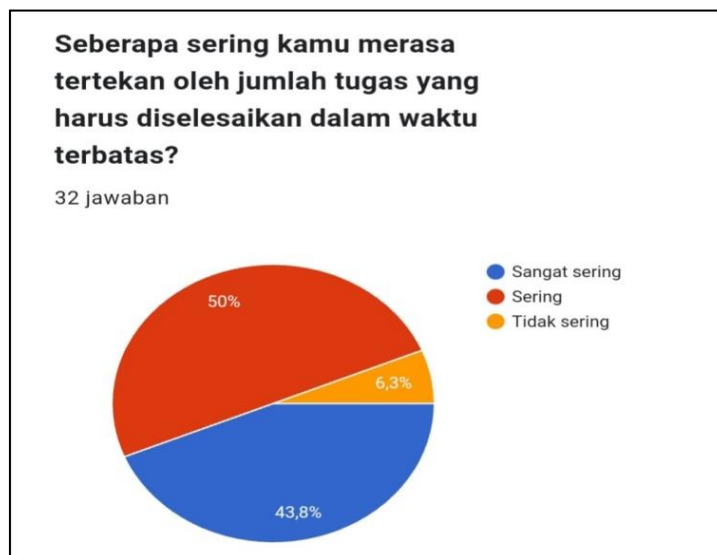
Very often	: 5 students
Often	: 26 students
Not often	: 1 students



Picture 2. Do you often feel anxious and worried about your academic grades?

Based on the diagram shown, the majority of respondents often feel anxious and worried about their academic grades. Out of the 32 responses collected, 53.1% of respondents reported that they very often feel anxious and worried about their academic grades. In addition, 43.8% of respondents claimed to feel this way frequently. Only 3.1% of respondents stated that they did not often feel anxious or worried about their academic grades. This data shows that anxiety related to academic performance is a common problem experienced by most respondents.

Very often : 17 students
Often : 14 students
Not often : 1 students

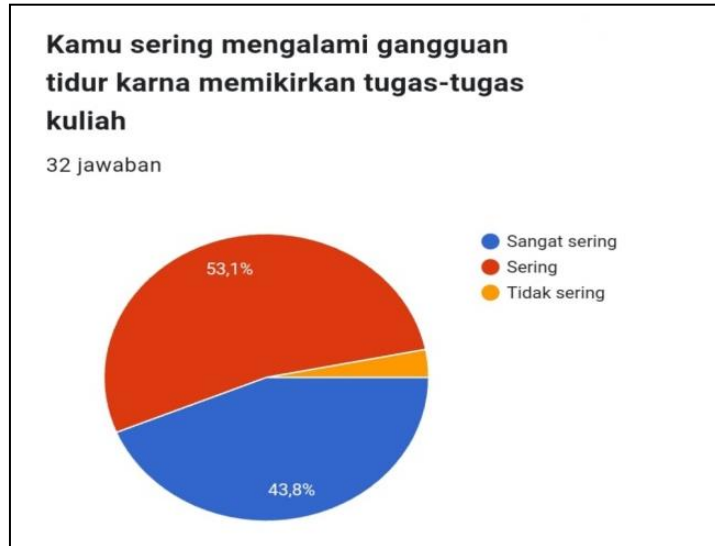


Picture 3. How often do you feel pressured by the number of tasks you have to complete in a limited amount of time?

Based on the diagram shown, most respondents feel pressured by the number of tasks to be completed within a limited time. Of the 32 responses collected, 50% of respondents claimed to feel pressured often, while 43.8% of respondents reported that they experience this pressure very often. Only 6.3% of respondents stated that they did not often

feel pressured. This data shows that pressure due to the large number of tasks and limited time to complete them is a common problem faced by respondents.

Very often : 14 students
Often : 16 students
Not often : 2 students



Picture 4. Do you often experience sleep disturbances because of thinking about college assignments?

Based on the research results shown in the diagram above, it can be seen that the majority of respondents often experience sleep disturbances due to thinking about college assignments. Of the 32 answers collected, 53.1% of respondents admitted that they often experienced sleep disturbances due to the burden of college assignments. Meanwhile, 43.8% of other respondents stated that they very often experienced sleep disturbances for the same reason. Only a small proportion, 3.1%, stated that they did not often experience sleep disturbances due to coursework. This data shows that high academic load has a significant impact on students' sleep quality, with almost all respondents experiencing frequent sleep disturbances.

Very often : 14 students
Often : 17 students
Not often : 1 students



Picture 5. Do you often feel mentally tired due to the academic load?

Based on the research results shown in the diagram above, it can be seen that the majority of respondents often feel mentally tired due to academic load. Of the 32 responses collected, 50% of respondents claimed to feel mentally tired very often. Meanwhile, 46.9% of other respondents stated that they often felt tired. Only a small proportion, 3.1%, stated that they did not often feel tired due to the academic load. This data shows that high academic load has a significant impact on students' mental health, with almost all respondents experiencing high levels of mental fatigue.

Very often : 16 students
 Often : 15 students
 Not often : 1 students



Picture 6. Do you often feel hopeless and give up with the current academic load?

Based on the diagram shown, the research results regarding the frequency of feeling hopeless and wanting to give up with the current academic load show that out of 32 respondents, there are 50% who often feel hopeless with their academic load. A total of 34.4% of respondents claimed to feel hopeless very often, while 15.6% of respondents stated that they did not often experience these feelings. This data shows that the majority of the respondents, 84.4%, often or very often feel discouraged by the academic load, indicating significant academic stress among the respondents.

Very often : 11 students
 Often : 16 students
 Not often : 5 students

Table 1. The Students Disiplinary Attitudes Statements

NO	The Statement	Answers from students			
		Very often	Often	Not often	Total
1	Do you ever feel pressured by the amount of lessons or material you have to learn?	5	26	1	32
2	Do you often feel anxious and worried about your academic grades?	17	14	1	32

3	How often do you feel pressured by the number of tasks you have to complete in a limited amount of time?	14	16	2	32
4	You often experience sleep disturbances because of thinking about college assignments.	14	17	1	32
5	You often feel mentally tired due to the academic load.	16	15	1	32
6	You often feel hopeless and give up with the current academic load.	11	16	5	32
Total		77	104	11	192
Mean		12,83	17,33	1,83	-
Median		14	16	1	-
Sample Variance		18,97	19,07	2,57	-
Sample Standard Deviation		4,36	4,37	1,60	-

Table 1 shows the number of student answers to the 6 statements submitted by the researcher in the questionnaire. Most students chose to answer often, followed by the answers very often and not often with the least answer. Based on the data in Table 1, the majority of students often feel pressured by the amount of lessons or material they have to learn. A total of 26 students chose the answer 'often', and 5 students chose the answer 'very often', while only 1 student answered 'not often'. Furthermore, 17 students often feel very anxious and worried about their academic grades, and 14 students often feel anxious, while only 1 student rarely feels anxious.

The third statement, 14 students often feel very stressed by the amount of tasks that must be completed in a limited time, with 16 students often feeling stressed, and 2 students answering 'not often'. Then, sleep disturbances due to thinking about college assignments are often experienced by 14 students with a very frequent frequency and 17 students with a frequent frequency, while only 1 student rarely experiences sleep disturbances. Therefore, mental fatigue due to academic load is often experienced by 16 students with a very frequent frequency and 15 students with a frequent frequency, and only 1 student rarely experiences it. Finally, feelings of hopelessness and wanting to give up with the current academic load were very often felt by 11 students and often felt by 16 students, while 5 students rarely felt it.

The mean of students' responses for the 'very often' category was 12,83, with a median of 14 and a sample variance of 18,97, as well as a sample standard deviation of 4,36. For the 'often' category, the mean was 17,33, median 16, sample variance 19,07, and sample standard deviation 4,37. Meanwhile, for the category 'not often,' the mean was 1,83, median 1, sample variance 2,57, and sample standard deviation 1,60. This analysis shows that academic pressure and task load greatly affect students' mental health. Most students often feel anxious, depressed and tired as a result of their academic load. These results underscore the need for more attention from educators and policy makers to find effective solutions for managing students' academic load to improve their well-being.

Discussion

This study aims to examine the effect of academic load on students' mental health. Academic load includes various aspects, such as the number of lessons, assignments, and materials that must be mastered in a limited time. Along with the increasing complexity and demands in higher education, students often feel significant pressure that can affect their mental well-being (Robotham, 2008:718; Misra and Castillo 2004:143). This study focuses on 6th semester English Education study program students at Nias University. Using a

quantitative approach through surveys and regression analysis, this study sought to gain a comprehensive picture of how academic load affects students' mental health.

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the extent to which academic load affects students' mental health. More specifically, this study sought to identify the specific elements of academic load that have the most impact on mental health. With a deeper understanding of these factors, it is hoped that effective interventions can be found to reduce the negative impact of academic load on students' psychological well-being. In addition, this study aims to provide recommendations to educators, parents, and policy makers on ways that can be implemented to support students' mental health.

The results showed that most respondents often felt pressured by the amount of subject matter they had to learn. Of the 32 survey participants, 81.3% reported feeling stressed often, while 15.6% felt stressed very often. Only 3.1% reported rarely feeling stressed. Anxiety and worry about academic grades was also a significant issue, with 53.1% of respondents feeling anxious frequently and 43.8% feeling anxious very frequently. Pressure related to the number of assignments to be completed in a limited amount of time was also felt by the majority of respondents, with 50% often feeling stressed and 43.8% very often feeling stressed. Sleep disturbance due to thinking about coursework was experienced by 53.1% of respondents who experienced sleep disturbance frequently and 43.8% who experienced it very frequently. Finally, mental fatigue due to academic load was felt by 50% of respondents who often felt tired and 46.9% who very often felt tired. Then, the mean of students' responses for the 'very often' category was 12,83, with a median of 14 and a sample variance of 18,97, as well as a sample standard deviation of 4,36. For the 'often' category, the mean was 17,33, median 16, sample variance 19,07, and sample standard deviation 4,37. Meanwhile, for the category 'not often,' the mean was 1,83, median 1, sample variance 2,57, and sample standard deviation 1,60. This data shows that high academic load significantly affects students' mental health, with the majority of respondents experiencing severe stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and mental fatigue.

The implications of these findings are significant for education. High academic load can negatively impact students' mental health, which in turn can affect their academic performance. Students who experience stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and mental fatigue may experience decreased motivation and difficulty in achieving optimal academic outcomes. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to consider the academic load placed on students and find ways to reduce the pressure they experience. Educators and policy makers need to develop strategies to support students' mental health, such as providing adequate counseling services, raising awareness about the importance of balance between academics and personal life, and reducing the number of tasks that must be completed in a short period of time.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the limited sample size and focus on one study program at one university mean that the results of this study may not be generalizable to a wider population of students. Future research needs to involve a larger and more diverse sample from various study programs and universities to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Secondly, data collection methods through surveys may have limitations in terms of the depth of information that can be obtained. Future research could use qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, to gain deeper insights into students' experiences. Recommendations for future research include expanding the sample size, using more diverse research methods, and exploring other factors that may affect college students' mental health. In addition, it is important to develop effective interventions to reduce academic load and improve students' psychological well-being, such as stress management programs, time management skills training, and social support. With a better understanding of the influence of academic load on mental health, it is hoped that educational institutions can take proactive steps to create a more supportive and healthy learning environment for students.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that high academic load has a significant impact on college students' mental health. The majority of respondents often felt pressured by the number of lessons and assignments to be completed in a limited amount of time, resulting in sleep disturbances, anxiety, and mental fatigue. In addition, many students felt hopeless and wanted to give up because of the academic load they faced. These findings suggest that academic overload affects not only academic performance but also students' overall mental well-being. It is important for educators, parents and policy makers to understand the negative impact of high academic load and find effective solutions to reduce academic stress. Interventions such as better time management, providing mental support, and increasing intrinsic motivation can help students better manage academic load. Thus, efforts to improve students' mental well-being can contribute to the achievement of more holistic and balanced educational goals.

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