

Spirituality and Mental Health Among University Students: A Source of Strength Amidst Academic Pressure in the Digital Era

Maria Oktaviani Setia*

Rifaldianus Naban

Fransiskus Sales Lega  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9956-4390>

Saint Paul Catholic University of Indonesia, Ruteng, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The digital era has brought significant transformations to students' academic activities, including increased mental pressure due to academic workloads, unlimited access to information, and intense competition to achieve excellence. These conditions can undermine students' psychological well-being, leading to anxiety, tension, learning difficulties, and fatigue. This study aims to examine the mental health conditions of students facing academic pressure in a highly digital environment, identify various forms and functions of spirituality in academic life, and explain spirituality as a source of strength for maintaining students' mental balance. This research employs a qualitative approach through a literature review, examining scholarly journals, books, and publications related to students' mental health and spirituality. The findings reveal that students experience various forms of academic pressure, such as heavy workloads, digital distractions, and emotional fluctuations during distance (online) as well as hybrid learning modes. However, spirituality plays an essential role in fostering inner peace, a sense of purpose, and self-control, which contribute to students' psychological resilience. Therefore, spirituality is regarded as a source of energy that supports students in managing academic pressure and maintaining mental health effectively in the digital era. In addition, spirituality helps students build more meaningful relationships with themselves, others, and their surroundings. Spiritual understanding encourages students to be more reflective, grateful, and able to find meaning in every learning process they.

Copyright © 2026 Authors

This is an open access article under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.



ARTICLE INFORMATION

Keywords:

Spirituality; Mental Health; Students; Academic Pressure; Digital Era

Article History:

Received: 12 December 2025

Revised: 13 January 2026

Accepted: 9 February 2026

Published: 15 October 2026

How to Cite in APA Style:

Setia, M. O., Naban, R., Lega, F. S. (2026). Spirituality and Mental Health Among University Students: A Source of Strength Amidst Academic Pressure in the Digital Era. *JPAK: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik*, 26(2), 317-323

Introduction

The development of the digital era has significantly influenced human life, including higher education. Technological advancements have facilitated access to information, expanded communication networks, and supported technology-based

*Corresponding author: Maria Oktaviani Setia  ovinsetia026@gmail.com
 <https://doi.org/10.34150/jpak.v26i2>

learning. However, these developments have also created increasingly high academic demands for university students, including online assignments and examinations, intense academic competition, pressure to remain productive, and the need to continually adapt to technological changes. Social media can further intensify these pressures through social comparison, while personal conflicts, parental and societal expectations, and limited financial or educational resources can increase the risk of stress, anxiety, mental exhaustion, and other mental health problems. [Februati et al. \(2024\)](#) explain that excessive use of digital devices can lead to digital fatigue, a condition characterized by mental and physical exhaustion resulting from excessive dependence on electronic media. Such conditions can further intensify the academic pressures experienced by students in the digital era.

Within this context, spirituality constitutes an important source of inner strength for maintaining students' mental health. The term spirituality derives from *spiritus*, meaning breath or the spirit of life, and refers to the inner dimension of human existence associated with the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, moral values, and a relationship with God or a higher power. Spirituality as the core of human existence, encompassing awareness of one's origins, purpose, and destiny. [Zohar & Marshall \(2000\)](#) regard spirituality as the highest form of human intelligence, enabling individuals to think reflectively, meaningfully, and in ways oriented toward goodness. For university students, spirituality can function as an inner source of strength that enables them to respond more positively to academic challenges. Students with higher levels of religiosity tend to be more resilient in facing academic pressure and more capable of managing anxiety ([Osman & Ahmed, 2021](#)). Spirituality may also strengthen emotional resilience, enabling students to perceive academic challenges as part of their personal growth ([Arfianto et al., 2023](#)). Spirituality may be expressed through prayer, self-reflection, meditation, gratitude, and a conscious commitment to living a meaningful life. Therefore, spirituality is not limited to formal religious practices but also functions as a value system that guides how individuals think, feel, and act.

Mental health refers to a state of psychological well-being in which individuals are able to recognize their abilities, cope with the pressures of daily life, study and work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Consistent with the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health involves the capacity to realize one's potential, manage life's stresses, function productively, and contribute to social life. Among university students, academic demands such as assignments, examinations, achievement expectations, and social pressures may develop into academic stress, mental exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and even depression when they are not properly managed. Mental health, therefore, constitutes an essential foundation for academic achievement, motivation, adaptability, and healthy social relationships.

Spirituality is closely related to mental health because it can function as an effective coping mechanism in dealing with stress and life pressures. [Koenig \(2018\)](#) emphasizes that spiritual practices such as prayer, self-reflection, and the search for meaning can foster inner peace and emotional strength. This relationship was also highlighted in the 2023 CPMH seminar at the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada, which identified spirituality as a protective factor against mental health problems. According to Bagus Riyono, strong

spirituality can serve as an inner fortress that protects individuals from mental health difficulties (Erna, 2023). Spiritual values such as acceptance, patience, gratitude, and hope may therefore provide students with inner strength to confront academic pressures amid the demands of digitalization.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that spirituality and religiosity contribute to resilience and help individuals cope with negative emotions and life pressures, Wahyuni & Bariyyah (2019) did not specifically examine the role of spirituality in students' mental health when facing academic pressure in the digital era. This indicates a research gap concerning the relationship between spirituality, mental health, and academic pressure within the specific context of university students living amid rapid digital transformation. The novelty of this study lies in integrating spirituality as an inner source of strength and a coping mechanism for understanding students' mental health in responding to academic pressures intensified by digitalization. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the relationship between spirituality and students' mental health, describe students' mental health conditions in facing academic pressure in the digital era, and analyze the extent to which spirituality functions as an inner source of strength and a coping mechanism. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the study of spirituality and mental health and to provide a foundation for educational institutions in developing spiritual formation programs that support students' mental well-being and resilience in facing academic pressures.

Method

Data collection in this study employed a literature review method by examining various relevant sources, including scientific journals, reference books, scholarly articles, and credible, official websites related to spirituality, academic stress, and the mental health of university students in the digital era. According to Zed (2008), a literature review is a research method that involves collecting, reading, recording, and processing relevant bibliographic sources to obtain the data required for a study.

The data collection process began with a systematic search for relevant written sources, followed by a selection process based on their relevance, quality, and publication date. The collected data were analyzed by examining their content and meaning and then classified into specific themes to facilitate the process. This technique was employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation without conducting direct observations or interviews. The data analysis process concluded with the formulation of conclusions and verification of the findings derived from the literature. Subsequently, the researchers conducted a discussion to further interpret and contextualize the findings.

Results

Mental Health Conditions among University Students amid Academic Pressure in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that many university students experience symptoms of psychological stress while engaging in online academic learning. Such stress

manifests as anxiety, emotional exhaustion (burnout), difficulty concentrating, and a decline in motivation to learn. The primary contributing factors include heavy academic workloads, the pressure to respond promptly through online platforms, and limited social interaction, which can lead emotional loneliness.

A study conducted by [Maulidia et al. \(2024\)](#) involving 165 nursing students found that nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) experienced anxiety at a very severe level, while 29.1% experienced moderate level of depression and 28.5% experienced moderate level of stress. Furthermore, the Psychological Distress theory proposed by [Curelaru & Curelaru \(2024\)](#) explains that psychological distress in the context of online learning consists of two interrelated sub-constructs: affective distress, encompassing anxiety and stress, and online academic difficulties, including declining academic performance, exhaustion, and lack of motivation. Their study of 398 Romanian university students confirmed that these two dimensions are integrated into a higher-order factor representing students' mental health difficulties during online learning.

Under such circumstances, students' mental health becomes particularly vulnerable. Changes in learning methods that require students to swiftly adapt rapidly to technology may increase their cognitive and emotional burden. Students are expected to remain constantly responsive to rapidly changing information, attend online meetings, complete assignments on time, and maintain their academic performance. Without adequate stress-management skills and support, these demands may contribute to anxiety and a depressive symptoms ranging from mild to severe.

The Forms and Role of Spirituality in Students' Academic Life

The findings of this study indicate that spirituality serves as a strong foundation for students in coping with various forms of academic pressure, particularly in the contemporary digital era. The principal elements of spirituality include personal faith and a relationship with God or transcendent values, which provide a sense of security and hope; as well as moral principles and an understanding of the meaning of life, which assist students in making academic and social decisions. Within the educational context, spirituality functions as an emotional-regulation mechanism that enables students to manage anxiety, attain inner calm, and maintain their motivation to learn.

Research conducted by [Putra et al. \(2026\)](#) among Chemistry students at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) revealed that 83.8% of students perceived academic pressure as very high, primarily due to heavy academic workloads and intensive laboratory schedules (81.1%). Nevertheless, the study also demonstrated that regular obligatory religious practices, such as "Salat" (prayer), remained consistently practiced by 70.3% of respondents as a result of the internalization of spiritual values. Moreover, 94.6% of the students acknowledged that religious worship provided a sense of calm and helped stabilize their mental condition, thereby preventing academic stress. Theoretically, this phenomenon can be understood through the concept of spiritual coping within the perspective of Islamic psychology. [Nurfadilah et al. \(2025\)](#) explain that spiritual coping encompasses strategies for strengthening faith and religious practice, interpreting

life pressures within the framework of religious teachings, and obtaining social support from Islamic communities.

Students who integrate spiritual values into their learning process tend to develop a more positive perspective toward academic challenges because they perceive learning as part of their broader journey of life rather than merely as a means of achieving high grades. In addition, spirituality enhances students' capacity to establish positive and empathetic social relationships within the university environment. This is reflected in students' tendency to support one another, avoid unhealthy competition, and become more open in sharing their feelings and experiences.

Spirituality as a Source of Strength for Maintaining Mental Balance in the Digital Era

The analysis indicates that spirituality plays a significant role as an inner source of strength and a coping mechanism to maintain students' mental health and psychological balance. Spirituality helps students accept circumstances beyond their control, cultivate gratitude, and develop an optimistic attitude when confronted with academic pressure. It contributes to psychological resilience through several mechanisms. First, spirituality enhances self-awareness, enabling students to recognize and understand their emotional conditions before stress develops into more serious mental health problems. It also facilitates meaning-making by providing students with a sense of purpose and direction in life, thereby reducing the likelihood of despair when facing academic challenges in the digital era.

A literature review conducted by [Arrayan et al. \(2026\)](#) revealed that spiritual coping strategies, including prayer, *salat*, and self-reflection, make a significant contribution to managing student stress, strengthening psychological resilience, and the transforming defense mechanisms from dysfunctional to more adaptive forms. Similarly, [Suryanto \(2024\)](#) confirmed that spiritual practices, particularly regular religious worship, help students regulate their emotions and activate autonomic responses associated with reduced levels of stress.

Second, spirituality strengthens hope and self-efficacy by fostering the belief that challenges can be overcome and may contribute to personal growth. Third, it promotes inner peace through regular spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, and reflection on the meaning of life. In this way, spirituality is not merely an element of students' personal identity but also functions as a psychological support system that helps maintain mental health and psychological stability amid a rapidly changing, highly competitive, and high-pressure digital environment.

[Kass \(2017\)](#) further explains that environmental support from spiritual role models, such as religious leaders, lecturers, and faith-based communities, can encourage the development of healthy qualities, including spirituality, mindfulness, forgiveness, and hope. These qualities, in turn, are associated with increased confidence among students in their ability to navigate university life and academic demands, commonly referred to as college self-efficacy.

Conclusion

Spirituality has proven to play a central role in sustaining students' mental health amid the demands of technology-based learning, which are often associated with worry, mental fatigue, and learning burnout. The findings indicate that students' mental condition can be classified as vulnerable, owing to heavy workloads, the rapid flow of information, and a lack of social interaction. Within this context, spirituality plays a significant role, as it draws on divine values, a sense of life purpose, religious connection, and self-reflection—elements that help students respond to academic demands in a healthier way. These spiritual values also have a tangible impact, strengthening mental resilience, regulating emotions, cultivating gratitude, and safeguarding inner peace.

Recommendations

In response to these challenges, students' spiritual development should be strengthened through practices aligned with their personal beliefs, such as prayer, meditation, introspection, or journaling about life's meaning as strategies for managing academic stress. Educational institutions should provide psychological support programs and activities that foster spiritual character, enabling students to build more stable mental resilience. A more humane approach to digital learning design is also recommended, taking into account students' workload, rest patterns, and emotional well-being. Furthermore, future research could be conducted with a broader scope or through quantitative methods to enrich understanding of how spirituality influences mental health across different educational and cultural contexts.

References

- Arfianto, M. A., Haqqiyah, S. N., Widowati, S., & Ibad, M. R. (2023). Korelasi kesejahteraan spiritual dan tingkat stres pada mahasiswa: Studi korelasional. *Jurnal Praktik Keperawatan Indonesia*, 7(1), 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.18196/ijnp.v7i1.17914>
- Arrayan, B. H., Safitri, Z. A., Fajriah, E. I., Fadhilah, N. M., & Ramadhan, Y. L. (2026). Peran praktik ibadah sebagai mekanisme coping spiritual dalam menjaga kesehatan mental mahasiswa: Studi literatur. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Akademik*, 3(3), 1545–1562. <https://doi.org/10.61722/jmia.v3i3.10891>
- Curelaru, M., & Curelaru, V. (2024). Psychological distress and online academic difficulties: Development and validation of scale to measure students' mental health problems in online learning. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15010026>
- Erna. (2023). Webinar CPMH Fakultas Psikologi UGM bahas keterkaitan spiritualitas dan kesehatan mental. *Fakultas Psikologi Universitas Gadjah Mada*. <https://share.google/aBc3AvWzS9iwSuene>
- Februati, B. M. N., et al. (2024). Analisis pengaruh beban tugas akademik dan digital fatigue terhadap prestasi akademik siswa. *Edu Cendikia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*, 4(3), 1846–1852. <https://doi.org/10.47709/educendikia.v4i03.5632>
- Kass, J. D. (2017). *A person-centered approach to psychospiritual maturation: Mentoring psychological resilience and inclusive community in higher education*. Springer International Publishing.
- Koenig, H. G. (2018). *Religion and mental health: Research and clinical applications*. London, England: Academic Press.

- Maulidia, I. R., Mita, & Adiningsih, B. S. U. (2024). Gambaran depresi, cemas, dan stres selama perkuliahan daring pada mahasiswa keperawatan. *Tanjungpura Journal of Nursing Practice and Education*, 6(2), 14-21. <https://doi.org/10.26418/tjnpe.v6i2.65121>
- Nurfadilah, U., Rahmat, M., & Surahman, C. (2025). Upaya koping spiritual untuk mengatasi stres pribadi dan akademik di komunitas LDM Universitas Islam Negeri Bandung. *Tesis magister*. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia.
- Osman, A., & Ahmed, I. O. M. (2021). Religious orientation, academic stress and religious coping among first year undergraduate students. *IIUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 9(2), 123–140. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijes.v9i2.244>
- Putra, M. D. P., Ubaidillah, M. N. A., Nurizki, T., & Romli, U. (2026). Dinamika spiritualitas mahasiswa: Analisis konsistensi ibadah mahasiswa Kimia UPI di tengah tekanan akademik. *Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling Islam*, 10(1), 160–170. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jbk.v10i1.15617>
- Suryanto, Y. I. (2024). Pengaruh ibadah Taize terhadap resiliensi stres, tingkat stres, dan tingkat spiritualitas dewasa muda: Kajian terhadap fungsi sistem saraf otonom, kardiovaskular, dan endokrin, serta perubahan gelombang otak. *Doctoral dissertation*. Universitas Gadjah Mada
- Wahyuni, E. N., & Bariyyah, K. (2019). Apakah spiritualitas berkontribusi terhadap kesehatan mental mahasiswa? *Jurnal EDUCATIO: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia*, 5(1), 46–53. <https://doi.org/10.29210/120192334>
- Zed, M. (2008). *Metode penelitian kepustakaan*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (2007). *SQ: Kecerdasan spiritual*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Mizan Pustaka.