ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' LEARNING DIFFICULTIES FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS, LEARNING STRATEGIES, AND LEARNING MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES AT ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

ANALISIS KESULITAN BELAJAR MAHASISWA DITINJAU DARI FAKTOR PSIKOLOGIS, STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN, DAN MANAJEMEN PEMBELAJARAN DI INSTITUT AGAMA ISLAM PADANG LAWAS

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Abstract

Learning difficulties among higher education students remain a critical issue, particularly in Islamic higher education institutions that integrate academic, moral, and spiritual dimensions. This study aims to analyze students' learning difficulties from three main perspectives: psychological factors, learning strategies, and learning management at the Institute of Islamic Studies (Institut Agama Islam) Padang Lawas. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The participants consisted of undergraduate students and lecturers selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that students' learning difficulties are strongly influenced by psychological factors such as low learning motivation, academic anxiety, limited self-confidence, and weak self-regulated learning skills. In addition, the dominance of conventional teaching strategies and limited student-centered learning practices contribute to low engagement and conceptual understanding. From a learning management perspective, constraints related to instructional planning, classroom organization, and evaluation systems further exacerbate students' learning difficulties. This study highlights the importance of integrating psychologically informed instructional strategies and effective learning management to enhance students' academic performance in Islamic higher education contexts.

Keywords : Learning Difficulties, Psychological Factors, Learning Strategies, Learning Management, Islamic Higher Education.

Abstrak

Kesulitan belajar mahasiswa masih menjadi permasalahan penting dalam pendidikan tinggi, khususnya di perguruan tinggi keagamaan Islam yang memadukan dimensi akademik, moral, dan spiritual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan belajar mahasiswa ditinjau dari faktor psikologis, strategi pembelajaran, dan manajemen pembelajaran di Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas. Penelitian

ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan studi dokumentasi. Informan penelitian terdiri atas mahasiswa dan dosen yang dipilih secara purposive. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan belajar mahasiswa dipengaruhi oleh faktor psikologis seperti rendahnya motivasi belajar, kecemasan akademik, kurangnya kepercayaan diri, serta lemahnya kemampuan regulasi diri. Selain itu, strategi pembelajaran yang masih didominasi metode konvensional dan minimnya penerapan pembelajaran berpusat pada mahasiswa berdampak pada rendahnya keterlibatan dan pemahaman konsep. Dari sisi manajemen pembelajaran, perencanaan pembelajaran, pengelolaan kelas, dan sistem evaluasi yang belum optimal turut memperparah kesulitan belajar mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya penerapan strategi pembelajaran yang memperhatikan aspek psikologis serta manajemen pembelajaran yang efektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran di perguruan tinggi Islam.

Kata Kunci : Kesulitan Belajar, Faktor Psikologis, Strategi Pembelajaran, Manajemen Pembelajaran, Pendidikan Tinggi Islam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulties in higher education have become a global concern, particularly in the context of increasing academic demands and the expectation that universities produce graduates who possess not only strong academic competence but also critical thinking abilities, emotional resilience, and self-regulated learning skills (Wirati et al., 2024). In the era of knowledge-based societies, students are required to actively construct knowledge, manage their learning processes independently, and adapt to complex learning environments (Faridah et al., 2023). However, many students still experience persistent learning difficulties that hinder academic achievement and personal development.

In Islamic higher education institutions, such as Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas, learning challenges tend to be more complex due to the integration of religious values, academic content, and diverse student backgrounds. Students are expected to master disciplinary knowledge while simultaneously internalizing Islamic values and ethical principles. This dual expectation requires not only cognitive readiness but also psychological stability and effective learning support systems. When these conditions are not optimally met, students may encounter various learning difficulties that affect their academic performance.

Previous studies have consistently emphasized that psychological factors play a significant role in students' academic success. Motivation, academic anxiety, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation are widely recognized as key determinants of learning outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002). Students with low learning motivation often demonstrate minimal engagement in academic tasks, limited persistence in overcoming learning challenges, and a tendency to avoid complex assignments. Similarly, high levels of academic anxiety can disrupt concentration, impair working memory, and reduce students' ability to process information effectively, ultimately leading to learning difficulties and suboptimal achievement.

Beyond psychological factors, instructional strategies adopted by lecturers also significantly influence students' learning experiences. Research in higher education pedagogy indicates that teacher-centered approaches—particularly those dominated by one-way lecturing—often limit students' opportunities for active engagement, critical inquiry, and

meaningful interaction with learning materials (Prince, 2004; Biggs & Tang, 2011). While lecturing remains a common instructional practice, excessive reliance on this method may reduce students' motivation and hinder deep understanding. In contrast, student-centered learning strategies such as collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and reflective activities have been shown to enhance engagement, promote higher-order thinking skills, and reduce learning difficulties by actively involving students in the learning process.

Furthermore, learning management plays a crucial role in shaping the overall learning environment. Learning management encompasses instructional planning, classroom organization, implementation of teaching strategies, and evaluation of learning outcomes. Effective learning management ensures coherence between learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment systems, thereby providing clear expectations and structured learning experiences for students (Fink, 2013). Conversely, inadequate learning management—such as unclear lesson planning, inconsistent assessment criteria, and limited feedback—can create confusion, reduce students' learning motivation, and exacerbate existing psychological challenges.

Despite the growing body of international research on learning difficulties in higher education, studies focusing specifically on Islamic higher education institutions, particularly in regional contexts such as Padang Lawas, remain limited. Most existing studies tend to examine psychological factors, instructional strategies, or learning management in isolation, rather than exploring their interrelated influence on students' learning difficulties. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of students' learning difficulties from psychological, instructional, and managerial perspectives at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas. By integrating these perspectives, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of learning challenges in Islamic higher education and to offer practical implications for improving instructional practices and learning management systems.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine students' learning difficulties from psychological factors, learning strategies, and learning management perspectives (Nugraha, 2025). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges within authentic learning contexts, particularly in Islamic higher education institutions. The research was conducted at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas, which was selected due to its role in integrating academic instruction with religious and moral education, thereby presenting a unique learning environment with distinct academic and psychological demands.

The participants in this study consisted of undergraduate students and lecturers who were actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed relevant experience and knowledge related to the research focus. Students were drawn from various study programs and academic levels

to capture diverse learning experiences, while lecturers were selected based on their teaching experience and involvement in instructional planning and assessment activities.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to examine instructional practices, student engagement, and classroom interactions. Semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers were used to explore psychological factors influencing learning, perceptions of instructional strategies, and experiences related to learning management. In addition, document analysis of syllabi, lesson plans, and assessment guidelines was carried out to gain insight into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning.

Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data from different sources were coded and categorized into key themes related to psychological factors, learning strategies, and learning management. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation across methods and sources was applied, and member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Psychological Factors Contributing to Learning Difficulties

The findings indicate that psychological factors constitute a dominant source of students' learning difficulties at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas. Many students reported low intrinsic motivation, particularly in courses perceived as abstract, theoretical, or cognitively demanding. This lack of motivation was often associated with minimal engagement in learning activities, limited persistence when facing academic challenges, and a tendency to rely on surface learning strategies such as memorization rather than deep conceptual understanding. International research has consistently shown that intrinsic motivation plays a critical role in sustaining students' engagement and academic success, especially in higher education contexts that require independent learning and intellectual autonomy (Pintrich, 2004; Schunk, 2012).

Academic anxiety, particularly related to examinations, presentations, and classroom participation, also emerged as a significant psychological barrier. Many students expressed fear of making mistakes, concern about negative evaluation from lecturers or peers, and pressure to achieve satisfactory academic results. Such anxiety was found to interfere with students' concentration and information processing, thereby limiting their ability to perform optimally during learning and assessment activities. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the negative impact of academic anxiety on cognitive processing, working memory, and academic performance (Pekrun et al., 2002; Putwain & Symes, 2011). In Islamic higher education contexts, this anxiety may be further intensified by the expectation to demonstrate not only academic competence but also moral and religious understanding.

In addition, limited self-regulated learning skills significantly contributed to students' learning difficulties. Many students reported challenges in setting clear academic goals, managing study time effectively, monitoring their learning progress, and maintaining learning discipline outside the classroom. As a result, students often experienced difficulties in completing assignments on time and preparing adequately for examinations. Research on self-regulated learning emphasizes that students who lack these skills tend to struggle with academic demands and are more vulnerable to learning difficulties (Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). The findings of this study suggest that insufficient self-regulation, combined with low motivation and high anxiety, creates a psychological condition that hinders students' ability to manage learning tasks independently.

Overall, these results highlight that psychological factors—particularly intrinsic motivation, academic anxiety, and self-regulated learning—play a central role in shaping students' learning difficulties. Without adequate psychological support and instructional strategies that foster motivation, confidence, and self-regulation, students are likely to continue experiencing persistent learning challenges. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating psychological considerations into instructional design and learning management practices in Islamic higher education institutions.

b. Learning Strategies and Instructional Practices

The findings reveal that learning strategies and instructional practices significantly influence students' learning experiences and contribute to learning difficulties at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas. Classroom instruction was predominantly characterized by teacher-centered approaches, with lecturing serving as the primary instructional method. While lecturing remains an efficient means of delivering course content, its excessive use limited opportunities for active student participation, critical inquiry, and meaningful interaction with learning materials. Many students reported that they became passive recipients of information, which reduced their engagement and hindered their ability to construct knowledge independently. Similar findings have been reported in international studies, which suggest that teacher-centered instruction often encourages surface learning and limits the development of higher-order thinking skills (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004).

The lack of variation in instructional strategies further contributed to students' difficulties in understanding complex and abstract concepts. Students indicated that learning activities rarely involved collaborative discussions, problem-solving tasks, or contextual examples that could help bridge theory and practice. As a result, learning tended to focus on memorization for examinations rather than on deep conceptual understanding. Research in higher education pedagogy emphasizes that student-centered learning strategies—such as collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based instruction—are more effective in promoting active engagement, conceptual understanding, and long-term knowledge retention (Prince, 2004; Freeman et al., 2014).

Moreover, limited opportunities for reflective learning and formative assessment were identified as additional instructional challenges. Students rarely received opportunities to

reflect on their learning processes or to receive constructive feedback during the learning process. Without regular feedback and reflection, students found it difficult to identify their learning strengths and weaknesses, which further constrained their academic development. International research highlights that formative feedback and reflective learning play a critical role in supporting students' learning and improving academic outcomes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

In the context of Islamic higher education, the findings also suggest that instructional practices have not fully integrated pedagogical approaches that connect academic content with Islamic values and students' lived experiences. When learning materials are presented in a purely theoretical manner without contextual or value-based integration, students may find the learning process less meaningful and motivating. Previous studies indicate that contextualized and value-oriented instructional approaches can enhance students' engagement and deepen understanding, particularly in religious and moral education settings (Biggs, 1999; Kuh, 2008).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that instructional strategies dominated by conventional, teacher-centered practices contribute to students' learning difficulties by limiting engagement, interaction, and reflective learning. The results underscore the need for a pedagogical shift toward student-centered, interactive, and reflective instructional practices that support active learning, critical thinking, and meaningful knowledge construction in Islamic higher education institutions.

c. Learning Management Issues

The findings indicate that learning management issues play a substantial role in contributing to students' learning difficulties at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas. Learning management in this context encompasses instructional planning, classroom organization, implementation of learning activities, and evaluation of learning outcomes. The results reveal that these components were not always implemented in a coherent and systematic manner, which affected the overall quality of the learning process. In several cases, learning objectives and expected learning outcomes were not clearly communicated to students at the beginning of the course, leading to confusion and uncertainty regarding academic expectations. Previous studies emphasize that clarity of learning objectives is essential for guiding students' learning behavior and enhancing academic achievement (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Fink, 2013).

Another significant issue identified in this study relates to the organization and consistency of learning implementation. Students reported variations in teaching approaches and assessment practices across courses, which made it difficult for them to adapt their learning strategies effectively. Inconsistent classroom management and limited coordination between instructional activities and assessment tasks contributed to students' feelings of academic pressure and uncertainty. International research suggests that inconsistent learning management can increase students' cognitive load and negatively affect motivation and engagement (Sweller, 2011; Hattie, 2009).

Evaluation and feedback practices also emerged as critical challenges in learning management. The findings indicate that assessment was often perceived as summative rather

than formative, with limited opportunities for ongoing feedback during the learning process. Many students reported that feedback on assignments and examinations was insufficient or delayed, making it difficult for them to identify mistakes and improve their performance. Research in higher education consistently highlights feedback as a powerful factor influencing learning outcomes, particularly when feedback is timely, specific, and constructive (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Furthermore, the lack of systematic monitoring and support for students' learning progress was found to exacerbate existing psychological difficulties, such as academic anxiety and low motivation. Without clear guidance, structured learning schedules, and consistent evaluation mechanisms, students struggled to regulate their learning independently. Studies on self-regulated learning emphasize that effective learning management systems can provide external scaffolding that supports students in developing independent learning skills (Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that weaknesses in learning management—particularly in instructional planning, consistency of implementation, and feedback mechanisms—significantly contribute to students' learning difficulties. These results underscore the importance of strengthening learning management practices through clear instructional planning, coherent implementation, and formative evaluation systems. Improved learning management has the potential to reduce psychological barriers, enhance the effectiveness of instructional strategies, and support students' academic success in Islamic higher education institutions.

d. Integrated Discussion

The findings indicate that learning management issues play a substantial role in contributing to students' learning difficulties at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas. Learning management in this context encompasses instructional planning, classroom organization, implementation of learning activities, and evaluation of learning outcomes. The results reveal that these components were not always implemented in a coherent and systematic manner, which affected the overall quality of the learning process. In several cases, learning objectives and expected learning outcomes were not clearly communicated to students at the beginning of the course, leading to confusion and uncertainty regarding academic expectations. Previous studies emphasize that clarity of learning objectives is essential for guiding students' learning behavior and enhancing academic achievement (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Fink, 2013).

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4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' learning difficulties at Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas are the result of an interconnected interaction among psychological factors, learning strategies, and learning management practices. Psychological factors—particularly low intrinsic motivation, academic anxiety, limited self-confidence, and weak self-regulated learning skills—emerge as dominant contributors to students' learning challenges. These psychological conditions hinder students' engagement, concentration, and ability to manage academic tasks independently, thereby negatively affecting their learning outcomes.

In addition, instructional practices that are predominantly teacher-centered and rely heavily on lecturing limit students' opportunities for active participation, critical thinking, and meaningful knowledge construction. The lack of student-centered learning strategies, collaborative activities, and reflective practices further intensifies learning difficulties, especially when students are required to understand complex and abstract concepts. These instructional limitations are compounded by learning management issues, including unclear instructional planning, inconsistent implementation, limited formative assessment, and

insufficient feedback, which collectively increase academic anxiety and reduce learning motivation.

The findings highlight the importance of adopting a holistic and integrated approach to addressing learning difficulties in Islamic higher education institutions. Efforts to improve learning quality should not focus solely on content delivery but must also consider students' psychological readiness, the application of student-centered instructional strategies, and the strengthening of effective learning management systems. By integrating psychologically informed pedagogy, active learning strategies, and coherent learning management practices, institutions such as Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas can create supportive learning environments that enhance academic achievement, foster self-regulated learning, and support students' personal and moral development in line with the goals of Islamic higher education.

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