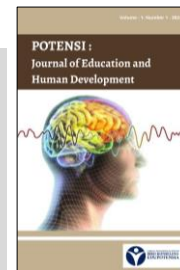


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Mental Toughness in Students: A Descriptive Review

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the level of mental toughness of students at SMA Negeri 7 Tasikmalaya in facing academic failure. The study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive design. The study sample consisted of 213 students selected using a purposive sampling technique. The instrument used was the Adolescence Mental Toughness Scale, which measures three main aspects: persistence and growth orientation, emotional dysregulation, and self-resilience. The results showed that most students were in the medium (46.01%) and low (32.39%) categories of mental toughness, while others were in the high (14.08%) and very low (7.52%) categories. Based on the mental toughness aspects, the lowest scores tended to appear in the emotional dysregulation aspect, while relatively better scores were found in the persistence and growth orientation aspects. These findings indicate that although some students are able to maintain effort in facing academic demands, there are still vulnerabilities in managing emotions and the ability to recover from failure, making student mental toughness an important aspect that requires attention in the educational context.



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Introduction

Academic failure is a common problem experienced by adolescent students and impacts not only their academic achievement but also their psychological well-being and mental well-being (Syah, 2017). The inability to achieve established academic standards can trigger emotional distress, decreased motivation, and the emergence of academic stress and anxiety in students (Santrock, 2018). These conditions are further complicated by the fact that adolescents are in a developmental phase with high demands for social and academic adjustments, as well as high expectations for the future (Januar & Putri, 2007). Persistent academic pressure can potentially increase the risk of burnout and academic failure if not managed appropriately (Rosyid, 2019). Several studies have shown that high levels of academic pressure are associated with increased mental health problems in adolescents, including stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Ramadhani et al., 2021). Burnout in the educational context is characterized by emotional exhaustion, a cynical attitude toward academic tasks, and feelings of incompetence as a student (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This condition negatively impacts students' concentration, motivation to learn, and continued academic achievement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This situation is exacerbated by limited mental health services and persistent social stigma that discourages students from seeking professional help (Eisenberg, 2020).

In the face of academic stress and failure, students need psychological capacities that enable them to persist and adapt positively (Masten, 2014). One important capacity widely studied in educational contexts is mental resilience (Clough et al., 2002). Mental resilience is defined as a psychological quality that helps individuals cope effectively with pressure, challenges, and stress while maintaining focus and motivation (Clough et al., 2002). Students with strong mental resilience tend to be able to manage negative emotions, maintain their commitment to learning, and view difficulties as opportunities for growth (Andreas & Grant,

2020). The mental toughness model developed by Clough et al. emphasizes four main components: control, commitment, challenge, and confidence, which play a role in an individual's response to stress and failure (Clough et al., 2002). These four aspects contribute to shaping how students manage academic stress and maintain consistent academic performance (Gucciardi et al., 2015). Previous research has shown that mental toughness is positively related to achievement motivation, psychological well-being, and adaptive coping skills in students (Nicholls et al., 2008). Furthermore, students with high levels of mental toughness tend to have lower levels of stress and depressive symptoms than students with low levels of mental toughness (Gerber et al., 2013).

Although the role of mental toughness in academic success has been widely discussed, studies specifically describing the profile of students' mental toughness in the context of academic failure are still limited, particularly in Indonesian educational settings (St. Clair-Thompson et al., 2017). Understanding students' mental resilience profiles is crucial as a basis for developing preventive and curative interventions in schools (Syah & Jannah, 2021). A guidance and counseling service-based approach is considered strategic in helping students develop mental resilience and sustainable emotional management skills (Fauzi & Purnama, 2018). Based on this background, this study aims to describe students' mental resilience profiles in the face of academic failure. This study focuses on mental resilience as a key variable in understanding students' abilities to manage stress, maintain motivation, and recover from learning failure experiences (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2011). The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of guidance and counseling services and enrich the study of educational psychology in efforts to improve students' mental well-being and academic success (Prayitno, 2015).

Method

Participants

This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to objectively describe the mental resilience profile of students facing academic failure (Creswell, 2014). The study population was all 426 students at Tasikmalaya State Senior High School 7, deemed relevant for examining mental resilience in high school adolescents (Syah & Jannah, 2021). The study sample size was 213 students using purposive sampling, selecting subjects based on their suitability to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). The study focused on a single class due to time constraints, data collection effectiveness, and the uniformity of student characteristics (Creswell, 2014). This single class selection was deemed adequate to provide a representative picture of students' mental resilience profile in the face of stress and academic failure (St. Clair-Thompson et al., 2017). Focusing on a relatively homogeneous group also supported the accuracy of mapping students' psychological states (Gucciardi et al., 2015). The research instrument used a mental toughness scale based on the 4C model, which includes control, commitment, challenge, and confidence, to measure students' ability to manage emotions, maintain commitment, and respond positively to academic challenges (Clough et al., 2002). Data analysis was conducted descriptively to obtain a picture of the students' overall level of mental toughness and each of its dimensions (Sugiyono, 2019). The research results are expected to form the basis for developing guidance and counseling services to support students' mental health and academic readiness (Fauzi & Purnama, 2018).

Measure

This study used a standardized instrument designed to objectively and systematically assess students' mental toughness (Creswell, 2014). The instrument used was the Adolescence Mental Toughness Scale (AMTS), developed by Auria (2024) based on Clough's (2002) theory of mental toughness. The AMTS scale was specifically designed to measure the level of mental toughness in adolescents aged 12–18 years in academic and psychological contexts (Auria, 2024). The AMTS scale consists of 24 items covering three main aspects: Perseverance and Growth Orientation, Emotional Dysregulation, and Personal Resilience (Auria, 2024). These three aspects represent students' ability to sustain learning efforts, manage negative emotions, and recover from academic stress and failure (Clough et al., 2002). Each item was answered using a five-point Likert scale: Very Appropriate (5), Appropriate (4), Neutral (3), Not Appropriate (2), and Very Not Appropriate (1) (Azwar, 2018). The total score obtained reflects the students' level of mental toughness and is then categorized into high, medium, and low to facilitate interpretation of the research results (Sugiyono, 2019). The use of the AMTS is considered appropriate because the indicators measured align with the research objective, namely to obtain a profile of students' mental toughness in dealing with academic stress and failure (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2011).

Procedure

Data collection in this study was conducted to systematically obtain a picture of students' mental toughness levels through direct measurements in the school environment (Creswell, 2014). The study subjects were students of SMA Negeri 7 Tasikmalaya, who had been selected as a sample based on predetermined research criteria (Etikan et al., 2016). Before completing the instrument, students provided informed consent

explaining the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, benefits of the study, and guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity of respondents' data (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Student participation in this study was voluntary, and students had the right to discontinue participation at any time without academic consequences (Cohen et al., 2018). The instrument used for data collection was the Adolescence Mental Toughness Scale (AMTS), which was distributed to students directly in class (Auria, 2024). The questionnaire was completed in a single session under researcher supervision to ensure students understood each statement and minimize errors (Azwar, 2018).

During the data collection process, researchers monitored the completeness and consistency of student responses to maintain the quality of the data obtained (Sugiyono, 2019). The collected data then underwent a data checking and cleaning phase before conducting descriptive statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). This procedure was designed to ensure that the resulting data were valid and accurately represented the students' mental toughness profiles (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2011).

Results

Table 1. Demographic Description of Mental Toughness of Students at Tasikmalaya State Senior High School 7

	Characteristics	Frequency	Presentase
Gender	Man	113	30.46%
	Female	258	69.54%
	15 years	6	1.62
	16 years	183	49.33
	17 years	182	49.06%
Extracurricular Activities	YES	237	63.88%
	NO	134	36.12%
Have you achieved any achievements in the last 12 months?	YES	115	31.00%
	NO	239	64.42%
Types of Achievements Achieved	Academik	80	21.56%
	Non-Academic	152	40.97%
	school	159	42.86%
Achievement Level	City/Regency	44	11.86%
	Provinsi	4	1.08%
	Nasional	3	0.81%
	Internasional	4	1.08%
Family Status	Intact	311	83.83%

	Divorce	60	16.17 %
	No school	0	0
	SD	93	25.07 %
	SMP	84	22.64 %
Parents' Highest Education	SMA/SMK	153	41.24 %
	Diploma	6	1.62 %
	S1	28	7.55 %
	S2 and above	7	1.89%
	Doesn't work	18	4.85%
Father's occupation	Laborers/Early Workers	251	67.65%
	Farmers/Fishermen	3	0.81%
	Self-employed	78	21.0 %
	PNS/TNI/POLRI	16	4.31%
	Professionals (Doctors, Teachers, Lecturers, etc.)	0	0
	Doesn't work	240	64.69
Mother's Job	Laborers/Early Workers	88	23.72%
	Farmers/Fishermen	2	0.54%
	Self-employed	26	7.01%
	PNS/TNI/POLRI	4	1.08%

I feel that I get support from my parents in my daily activities.	Professionals (Doctors, Teachers, Lecturers, etc.)	0	0
	Strongly disagree	6	1.62%
	Don't agree	10	2.70%
	Netral	121	32.61%
	agree	135	36.39%
	Strongly agree	99	26.68%

Regarding the demographic description of mental toughness of students of SMAN 7 Tasikmalaya, it is known that the number of respondents in this study was 371 students. In terms of gender, there were 113 students (30.46%) male and 268 students (69.54%) female. Meanwhile, in terms of age, the majority of students were 16 years old, as many as 183 students (49.33%), followed by 17 years old as many as 182 students (49.06%), and 15 years old as many as 6 students (1.62%). Judging from participation in extracurricular activities, as many as 237 students (63.88%) participated in activities, while 134 students (36.12%) did not participate. As for students who had achieved achievements in the last 12 months, there were 115 students (31.00%), while those who had never achieved achievements were 239 students (64.42%). Based on the type of achievement, 80 students (21.56%) achieved academic achievements, and 152 students (40.97%) achieved non-academic achievements. Based on achievement level, 159 students (42.86%) achieved academic achievements at the school level, 44 students (11.86%) at the city/district level, 4 students (1.08%) at the provincial level, 3 students (0.81%) at the national level, and 4 students (1.08%) at the international level.

Regarding parental occupation, the majority of students' fathers worked as laborers or manual laborers, totaling 251 (67.65%). Others were self-employed (78); unemployed (18); and employed as civil servants, members of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), or the Indonesian National Police (POLRI) (16). Only a small number worked as farmers or fishermen (3) (0.81%), and none worked as professionals. Meanwhile, the majority of mothers' occupations were unemployed housewives, amounting to 240 people (64.69%). The rest worked as laborers or manual laborers (88 people (23.72%), self-employed (26 people (7.01%), farmers or fishermen (2 people (0.54%), and civil servants, military personnel, or police officers (4 people (1.08%). None worked as professionals. Finally, students' perceptions of parental support in daily activities showed that most students felt quite good support. A total of 135 students (36.39%) agreed and 99 students (26.68%) strongly agreed that they received parental support. The remaining 121 students (32.61%) chose neutral, while those who felt they did not receive support consisted of 10 students (2.70%) who disagreed and 6 students (1.62%) who strongly disagreed.

Table 2. Mental Toughness Overview Statistics

N	371
Mean	80.97
Median	82
Modus	83
Variance	106.66
Standar Deviation	10.33
Max Score	110
Min Score	41

Tabel 3. Overview of Student Resilience Categorized

Range	Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Average
$X < 56$	24- 55	14	3.77 %	74%
$56 \leq X \leq 88$	56- 88	284	76.55 %	
$88 > X$	89- 120	73	19.68 %	
Total		371	100%	

Based on the research results, eleventh-grade students at SMAN 7 Tasikmalaya demonstrated varying levels of mental resilience. Fourteen students (3.77%) were in the low category, indicating their mental resilience was still weak. In this group, several dimensions of mental resilience were not yet met, such as low growth-oriented persistence, lack of resilience, and the inability to manage or control emotional dysregulation. Then, there were 284 students (76.55%) who were in the medium category. Students in this category were generally quite capable of self-control, including aspects of growth-oriented persistence, resilience, and managing emotional dysregulation, although not yet fully optimal. Meanwhile, 73 students (19.68%) were in the high category, indicating that their mental resilience dimensions were well met. Students in this category were able to demonstrate consistent growth-oriented persistence, have a good level of resilience, and can manage emotional dysregulation effectively.

Tabel 4. Overview of Mental Toughness Dimension Achievement Scores of Grade Students of SMAN 7 Tasikmalaya

Dimensions	M	SD	Range	Categori	Frekuensi	(%)	Average
Perseverance and Growth Orientation	33	7	11- 26	Low	16	4.31 %	81%
			27- 42	Currently	104	28.03%	
			43- 55	Tall	251	67.65%	
Resilience	9	2	3-6	Low	7	1.89 %	70 %
			7-12	Currently	310	83.56%	
			13-15	Tall	54	14.56%	
Emotional Dysregulation	30	7	10-23	Low	91	24.53 %	64 %
			24-37	Currently	275	74.12 %	
			38-50	Tall	5	1.35 %	

Based on the table above shows a picture of the achievement of the mental toughness dimension of grade XI students at SMAN 7 Tasikmalaya, which includes three main dimensions, namely Perseverance and Growth Orientation, Resilience, and Emotional Dysregulation. In the Perseverance and Growth Orientation dimension, the majority of students are in the high category with a frequency of 251 students (67.65%), while 104 students (28.03%) are in the medium category, and only 16 students (4.31%) are in the low category, with an average value of 81%. This shows that students have relatively good perseverance and growth orientation. In the Resilience dimension, most students are also in the high category, namely 54 students (14.56%), followed by the medium category of 310 students (83.55%), and only 7 students (1.89%) in the low category, resulting in an average of 70% which shows a fairly good level of resilience but lower than the first dimension. Meanwhile, in the Emotional Dysregulation dimension, the majority of students were in the moderate category, namely 275 students (74.12%), followed by the low category with 91 students (24.53%), and only 5 students (1.35%) were in the high category, with an average of 64%. This finding indicates that although students have good mental toughness in the aspects of perseverance and resilience, the ability to manage or regulate emotions still tends to be at a moderate level and requires more attention.

Tabel 5. Mental Toughness Dimension Overview Statistics

Scale	Mean	Median	Modus	Standard Deviation	Score Max	Scor Min	Average
Perseverance and Growth Orientation	43.92	45	46	6.94	55	19	0,80%
Resilience	10.61	11.00	9.00	1.81	15.00	5.00	0,70%
Emotional Dysregulation	26.44	27.00	24.00	4.62	5.00	1.00	5,29%

Based on the analysis results table on the perseverance and growth orientation aspects, the overall average score is 0.80%. In more detail, the average value (M) obtained is 43.92 with a standard deviation (SD) of 6.94. In addition, the median is 45, the mode is 46, and the maximum and minimum scores are each at 19. In the

resilience dimension, the overall average score is 0.70%. In general, the analysis results show an average value (M) of 10.61 with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.81. The median is 11.00, the mode is 9.00, the maximum score is 15.00, and the minimum score is 5.00. Furthermore, in the emotional dysregulation dimension, the overall average score is 5.29%. The analysis shows an average value (M) of 26.44 with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.62. The median is rated 27.00, the mode 24.00, the maximum score 5.00, and the minimum score 1.00.

Discussions

Research results show that students' mental resilience levels vary across categories, with the majority of students falling in the moderate category, while others fall in the low and high categories (Sugiyono, 2019). This variation indicates that students' ability to cope with academic stress and failure is uneven, and some students still exhibit psychological vulnerability (Syah & Jannah, 2021). This condition confirms that mental resilience is a dynamic psychological capacity influenced by both individual factors and the educational environment (Clough et al., 2002). Students with moderate mental resilience tend to still be able to carry out academic activities, but are vulnerable to decreased motivation and emotional stability when faced with repeated failures (Andreas & Grant, 2020). This suggests that academic failure can be a latent psychological burden that is not always immediately apparent in learning performance (Santrock, 2018). Without adequate mental resilience, academic stress has the potential to hinder students' learning processes and ongoing psychological well-being (Rosyid, 2019).

Analysis of the mental toughness dimension shows that emotional control and self-resilience are relatively vulnerable areas for students (Auria, 2024). Poor emotional regulation skills indicate that academic pressure is often responded to with anxiety, frustration, and feelings of helplessness (Ramadhani et al., 2021). This condition aligns with the view that the inability to manage negative emotions can amplify the impact of academic failure and increase the risk of prolonged stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Regarding persistence and growth orientation, some students still view failure as a threat to self-esteem, rather than as part of the learning process (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This pattern reflects a tendency toward a fixed mindset, where students give up more easily and avoid academic challenges (Dweck, 2016). Conversely, students with high mental toughness are better able to interpret failure as a learning opportunity and remain committed to their academic goals (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2011).

Interestingly, although some students exhibit low levels of mental resilience, they are still able to maintain formal academic roles, such as class attendance and completing assignments (Rahimsyah et al., 2021). This phenomenon suggests the possibility of a coping mechanism called over-functioning, where students appear to be functioning externally but harbor significant internal emotional burdens (Boss, 2016). This condition carries the risk of long-term psychological exhaustion if not balanced with adequate psychosocial support (Masten, 2014). The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of mental resilience as a protective factor in educational contexts (St. Clair-Thompson et al., 2017). Students' mental resilience profiles can form the basis for developing preventive guidance and counseling services and strengthening students' psychological capacities (Fauzi & Purnama, 2018). Strengthening mental resilience, particularly in the areas of emotional regulation and self-resilience, is expected to help students face academic failure without losing motivation and direction in their studies (Gucciardi et al., 2015).

Overall, the results of this study underscore that mental resilience plays a central role in determining students' ability to persist, recover, and thrive amidst academic demands (Clough et al., 2002). Although some students appear capable of maintaining academic functioning, hidden psychological vulnerabilities still require serious attention from the school environment (Syah & Jannah, 2021). Therefore, developing an educational environment that is supportive and responsive to students' mental health is a crucial step in supporting academic success and long-term psychological well-being (Prayitno, 2015).

Conclusions

This study provides an overview of students' mental resilience in the face of academic stress and failure. Mental resilience, understood as the psychological capacity to manage emotions, maintain commitment, and rebound from adversity, determines how students respond adaptively to academic challenges. The results indicate that although most students have low to moderate levels of mental resilience, there are clear indications of psychological vulnerability, such as difficulty regulating emotions, decreased motivation, and a tendency to interpret failure as a threat to the self. These findings emphasize the importance of paying attention to students' mental resilience, because even though externally academic functioning and school roles appear relatively stable, internal psychological burdens can function as covert coping mechanisms that have the potential to disrupt long-term mental well-being. Variations in coping abilities and psychological adjustment among students indicate that mental resilience has not developed evenly, necessitating psychosocial strengthening efforts focused on emotional management, resilience, and adaptive interpretation of academic failure.

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