

THE IMPLICATIONS OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS ON THE BALANCE BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND RELIGIOSITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students' subjective experiences in interpreting and managing intimate relationships and their implications for the balance between academic achievement and religiosity. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach involving 22 participants selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings reveal that intimate relationships are ambivalent in nature. On the one hand, they function as sources of emotional support, academic motivation, and spiritual strengthening. On the other hand, they may lead to psychological stress, academic distraction, and moral conflict. The results indicate that the balance between academic achievement and religiosity is not determined by the presence of the relationship itself, but by self-regulation, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness. This study contributes to Islamic educational psychology by positioning intimate relationships as an integrative space connecting emotional, academic, and spiritual dimensions.

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INTRODUCTION

In psychological studies, intimate relationships refer to close interpersonal connections characterized by emotional intimacy, mutual trust, open communication, and psychological support (Tania & Nurudin, 2021). Intimacy is not limited to physical aspects, but includes emotional presence, mutual understanding, and deep personal sharing (Fitriani, 2023). Previous studies categorize intimacy into emotional, intellectual, and physical dimensions, each contributing to the quality of interpersonal relationships.

During early adulthood, individuals actively explore identity, social belonging, and romantic relationships as part of psychosocial development. According to Erik Erikson, intimacy represents a central developmental task in this stage, where individuals seek meaningful connections while maintaining personal identity.

In the context of higher education, intimate relationships among students represent a complex psychosocial phenomenon. These relationships may function as sources of emotional support and motivation, but they may also generate conflict, stress, and role tension between academic responsibilities and personal life. Empirical studies in Indonesia show that intimate relationships may influence students' behavior, including emotional regulation, academic engagement, and decision-making.

At the same time, religiosity plays an important role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors. Previous studies indicate that religiosity positively influences academic motivation, discipline, and learning outcomes (Ariani, 2021; Imron et al., 2023). Religiosity also functions as an internal control mechanism that guides moral decision-making.

However, the interaction between intimate relationships, academic achievement, and religiosity remains underexplored, particularly from a phenomenological perspective. Most previous studies examine these variables separately using quantitative approaches. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' lived experiences in managing intimate relationships and their implications for academic achievement and religiosity within the context of Islamic higher education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study involved 22 participants selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) active students at least in their third semester, (2) having or having had intimate relationships, and (3) willingness to participate in interviews.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews (45–90 minutes), non-participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' subjective experiences and meanings related to their relationships. Data analysis followed IPA procedures, including reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across themes, and cross-case analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation, member checking, audit trail, and researcher reflexivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study shows that intimate relationships are complex psychosocial phenomena with both positive and negative implications. These findings align with the psychosocial development theory proposed by Erik Erikson, which highlights intimacy as a key developmental task in early adulthood. In the academic context, the findings support Self-Determination Theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, particularly the role of relatedness in enhancing intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with the concept of religious coping, which explains how individuals use religious beliefs to manage stress and emotional challenges. Intimate relationships aligned with religious values may strengthen spiritual well-being, while those that conflict with such values may lead to moral tension.

Data analysis is carried out through stages *epoche* (Removing personal bias (Moustakas, 1994), phenomenological reduction (Identifying important elements from various experiences) (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015), imaginative variation (exploring various possible interpretations of meaning) (Mortari et al., 2023), and synthesis of meaning and essence (formulating the meaning and core essence) (Laverty, 2003). Based on the results of data processing on participants, six main themes were obtained which describe the dynamics student experiences in managing personal relationships, academic responsibilities, and religious commitments.

Meaning Intimate relationship as a Learning Space

From the interviews that have been conducted, some participants understand intimate relationship as a form of emotional closeness that involves mutual trust, caring, and moral responsibility. They see intimate relationship not only as a romantic relationship, but it's also a way to learn to understand yourself and others. One participant who shared this view said:

"Relationships are not just about love, but how we learn to understand others, support each other, and grow together."

However, there are also other participants who interpret the relationship intimate relationship as a confusing, exhausting, and even self-defeating emotional experience, as one participant put it:

"I often feel misguided, love that should make me happy instead makes me lose focus."

This finding shows that students' interpretation of intimate relationship are on a broad spectrum, ranging from positive and supportive relationships to relationships full of stress and moral conflict.

Emotional Ambivalence in Relationships

Participants' emotional experiences revealed ambivalence in intimate relationships. Some participants experienced positive impacts such as increased happiness, a sense of calm, and a heightened enthusiasm for learning due to emotional support from their partners. One participant stated:

"When someone cares, I feel motivated to study. Sometimes just being reminded to eat can make me feel better."

However, on the other hand, some participants experienced negative experiences such as stress, anxiety, and even psychosomatic disorders due to relationship conflict. Participants also reported symptoms of loss of appetite, insomnia, and difficulty concentrating on campus lectures. One participant was even hospitalized due to excessive emotional stress. One participant said:

"It's definitely had an impact, because I've been hospitalized twice because of him. With my first ex, I had acute stomach ulcers, wouldn't eat, cried all the time at work, and had a ruined GPA. He was so sick he was hospitalized. And with my second ex, it's the same, especially since he wouldn't break up with me even though he'd already caught me cheating."

The above findings reinforce the idea that students' emotional balance is not only determined by the presence or absence of a relationship intimate relationship, but rather by the individual's ability to manage ongoing feelings and conflicts in a healthy manner. Healthy relationships tend to improve students' psychological well-being, while toxic relationships have the potential to diminish their emotional state and cognitive function.

Relationships as Motivational and Distractive Factors in Academics

Participants indicated that intimate relationships play a dual role in academic contexts. The majority of participants explained that romantic relationships helped them increase their motivation to study. They felt more enthusiastic and responsible for their future. One male participant said:

"When I remember that my girlfriend is also in college, I feel embarrassed about being lazy. Instead, it motivates me to be diligent."

On the other hand, some participants experienced disruptions to their academic performance due to unstable relationships. They admitted to losing focus and experiencing decreased motivation to study, especially when their relationships were going through arguments or even breakups. One participant said:

"Every time we fight, I can't concentrate on my studies. Everything feels so heavy."

This finding indicates that the intimate relationship as participants explained, intimate relationships can serve a dual function. Intimate relationships can be a motivational factor or even a distraction for academic achievement, depending on the student's emotional stability and self-regulation skills.

Dimensions of Religiosity: Between Strengthening and Moral Conflict

In terms of religiosity, intimate relationships show complex dynamics. Some participants assessed the intimate relationship as a means of reminding each other in worship and increasing their spiritual devotion. One female participant stated:

"We often pray together, recite the Quran together, so we are more diligent in worship"

However, some participants admitted to spiritual guilt because they realized that the intimate relationship what they are doing is not entirely in accordance with the religious norms they believe in. As expressed by one participant:

"I know this relationship isn't completely right, so I often feel far from Allah."

This finding illustrates that the intimate relationship can be a means of spiritual strengthening if it is based on religious values, but it can also give rise to moral conflict when it is not controlled by awareness of faith.

Self-Regulation as a Key Factor for Balance

Participants demonstrated diverse strategies for maintaining balance between personal relationships, study, and spiritual values. The majority of participants emphasized the importance of self-regulation and time management in balancing academics and religiosity. One participant said:

"The key is knowing your priorities. Studying comes first, relationships are a bonus."

Meanwhile, some other participants, especially those who had experienced an unprotected relationship (toxic relationship) argue that they prefer to distance themselves from their partner or end the relationship as a form of coping mechanism as one participant put it:

"I just blocked it so I could relax. So I could focus on studying and worship."

These findings indicate that the balance between academic life and students' religiosity depends on the individual's ability to regulate themselves and maintain psychological boundaries between love, academic responsibility, and religious commitment.

Synthesis of Essential Meaning

Overall, the phenomenon intimate relationship for college students, relationships are an existential experience that combines the need for affection, emotional learning, academic responsibility, and religious awareness. Intimate relationships can be a source of positive energy when grounded in healthy communication, increased emotional support, and strong spiritual values. However, when fraught with emotional dependency and moral violations, these relationships can potentially cause stress, academic disruption, and spiritual dissonance. Students with good self-regulation are able to view relationships as part of the life learning process, rather than as a barrier to achievement. Meanwhile, students with low emotional control are more susceptible to experiencing academic and religious imbalance.

Thus, the balance between academic achievement and religiosity is not determined by the existence of intimate relationship itself, but rather is determined by the emotional maturity, spiritual awareness, and reflective ability of students in interpreting these relational experiences.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that intimate relationships are complex psychosocial phenomena that play a dual role in the lives of college students. Relationships not only serve as a source of emotional support but can also become a source of psychological distress depending on their quality. This finding is consistent with the psychosocial development theory proposed by Erik Erikson, which emphasizes intimacy as a central developmental task in early adulthood. In this phase, individuals seek meaningful connections while simultaneously maintaining their personal identity.

However, this study extends Erikson's perspective by demonstrating that intimate relationships are not limited to emotional development, but also function as integrative spaces that connect emotional, academic, and spiritual dimensions. Thus, relationships should not be viewed as isolated aspects, but as part of the holistic life experience of college students. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach in understanding student relationships within educational psychology.

In the academic context, the findings of this study support Self-Determination Theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, particularly the importance of relatedness as a basic psychological need that enhances intrinsic motivation. Supportive relationships can foster responsibility, persistence, and academic engagement.

However, unlike previous studies that predominantly emphasize the positive role of relationships, this study reveals that intimate relationships can also function as a source of distraction. Relationship conflicts were found to negatively affect students' concentration, motivation, and academic performance. This suggests that the impact of relationships is not inherently positive or negative, but depends on relational dynamics and individual regulation. Therefore, intimate relationships can simultaneously act as both facilitating and inhibiting factors in academic achievement.

In the emotional dimension, the findings reveal ambivalence in students' experiences. Relationships can provide comfort, emotional security, and psychological support, yet they can also trigger stress, anxiety, and emotional instability. This is in line with previous research indicating that relationship conflict is associated with psychological distress. However, this study emphasizes that such impacts are not universal, as emotional experiences are strongly influenced by relationship quality and individuals' emotional regulation capacity. This indicates that relational experiences are dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by both internal and external factors.

In terms of religiosity, this study demonstrates a dynamic interplay between spiritual strengthening and moral conflict. This finding aligns with the concept of religious coping proposed by Kenneth Pargament, which distinguishes between positive and negative coping strategies. Relationships that are aligned with religious values can enhance spiritual awareness, increase engagement in worship, and strengthen moral commitment. Conversely, relationships that contradict religious norms may lead to feelings of guilt, inner conflict, and decreased spiritual well-being.

Importantly, this study highlights that the impact of intimate relationships on religiosity is not deterministic, but depends on individuals' interpretation and spiritual awareness. Thus, religiosity within relationships is subjective, negotiated, and contextually constructed.

Furthermore, this study confirms that self-regulation is a key factor in maintaining balance in students' lives. This finding is consistent with the concept of self-regulated learning, which emphasizes individuals' ability to control thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in achieving goals. However, this study expands the concept beyond academic settings by demonstrating that self-regulation also plays a crucial role in managing interpersonal relationships and spiritual commitments. Students with strong self-regulation tend to maintain stability across emotional, academic, and religious domains, whereas those with lower self-

regulation are more vulnerable to imbalance. Therefore, self-regulation emerges as a central mechanism in navigating the complexities of student life.

Overall, this study makes a significant theoretical contribution by demonstrating that intimate relationships cannot be understood as a single variable with a linear impact. Instead, they function as integrative and dynamic spaces that bring together emotional, academic, and spiritual dimensions into a unified experience. These findings enrich the field of educational psychology by offering a more holistic perspective on student development.

In addition, this study provides practical implications for higher education institutions. Universities should not only focus on academic development, but also promote relationship literacy, emotional regulation skills, and spiritual awareness among students. Such efforts are essential in supporting students to achieve a balanced and healthy life. Therefore, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to understanding the complexity of student development in contemporary educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that students' experiences in establishing intimate relationship is a complex psychosocial phenomenon that influences the dynamics of academic and religious life. Intimate relationships do not function as a single determinant, but rather have an impact based on how students interpret them in their daily lives. Relationships fostered with healthy communication, clear emotional boundaries, and an awareness of religious values can be a source of emotional support, increased learning motivation, and spiritual empowerment. Conversely, relationships filled with conflict, emotional dependence, or inconsistencies with moral norms have the potential to cause stress, decreased academic focus, and religious dissonance. Therefore, the balance between academic and religious life is determined more by students' self-regulation skills, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness in managing and interpreting these relationships. This study confirms that students' academic and religious balance is the result of an integrated process of relational experiences mediated by self-regulation and spiritual awareness.

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