

Perspective on College Students' Academic Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Empirical Study in Jakarta Indonesia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between online learning and academic load with academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in students who are studying online in Indonesia. This study uses online learning scales, academic load, and academic stress to measure each variable, using quantitative research methods, and simple random sampling data collection techniques. The number of subjects is 116 first-year second-semester students at seven colleges who are studying online in Indonesia. The results showed that there is a negative relationship between online learning and academic stress, there is a positive relationship between academic load and academic stress, and there is a relationship between online learning and academic load with academic stress in students. The research found online learning is the most dominant variable contributing to the academic stress of students in Indonesia.

Keywords: Online Learning, Academic Workload, Academic Stress.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, China reported the emergence of coronavirus or Covid-19 in Wuhan (BBC News Indonesia, 2020). The World Health Organization later stated that Covid-19 affects animals and humans, in humans, the coronavirus causes respiratory tract infections, flu, MERS– Middle East Respiratory Syndrome–, and SARS –Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome– (WHO Indonesia, 2020). The Covid-19 outbreak then became a pandemic that occurred around the world. Indonesia announced the first official case of Covid-19 on March 2, 2020 (Gitiyarko, 2020). So far, the number of Covid-19 cases in Indonesia continues to increase. Then the government with the Regulation of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia Number 9 imposed Large-Scale Social Restrictions

(PSBB/Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar), which restricted certain activities of residents in an area suspected of being infected with the coronavirus to prevent the possibility of further spreading (Kemenkominfo, 2020). Based on the Letter of the Minister of Education Number 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020, it was stated that starting on March 19, 2020, all teaching and learning activities ranging from elementary education to universities use online methods as an effort to prevent the development and spreading of Covid-19 (Kemendikbud, 2020). Lifestyle changes make individuals feel uncomfortable and depressed (Agustin, 2021). In addition, besides they have to face the Covid-19 pandemic, individuals are also required to adapt to the operating system which is entirely done at/from home.

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The initial interview was conducted on 22 students on October 28, 2020. The goal was to find out the phenomena that occurred concerning online learning, academic load, and academic stress. The results showed that changes in the learning system in high education during the Covid-19 pandemic made it quite difficult for students to adjust. Most students stated that they had difficulty in regulating emotions, sleep disorders, headaches, and dry eyes during online system learning. It was found that the students had physical disturbances. One of the findings of this initial data is in line with a study regarding the impact of stress (physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) on students, as shown in the following figure (Musabiq & Karimah, 2018).

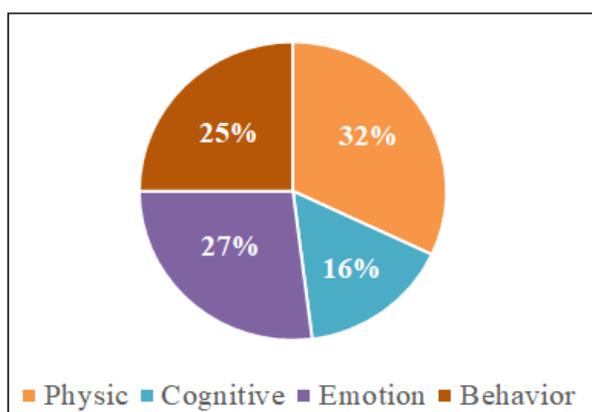


Figure 1: Overview Graph of the Impact of Stress
Source: (Musabiq & Karimah, 2018)

Figure 1 showed that the largest percentage of stress impacts on college students was physical conditions (heart rate was rapid, nausea or wanting to vomit, shaking or tremors, sweating, dry mouth, chest pain, headache, or abdominal pain) by 32%. Then in second place was the emotional impact of 27%, followed by the behavioral impact of 25%, and finally, the cognitive impact was 16%. Based on this, it can be said that students experienced symptoms of stress.

On the other hand, the online learning period used was also one of the triggering factors for psychological changes in students, namely anxiety. The anxiety experienced by the students will affect their learning outcomes because anxiety tends to produce confusion and distortion of perception. These distortions can interfere with learning by decreasing the ability to focus attention and can decrease memory. In addition, distortion can also make students experience academic stress (Kaplan & Sadock, 2015).

Academic stress is the mental and emotional stress or tension, that occurs due to the demands of campus life (Simbolon, 2015). During the Covid-19 pandemic, students are required to be able to adjust themselves to the online learning system. Lack of prepared facilities and infrastructure in universities, as

well as not widely available internet access in Indonesia become obstacles to online learning activities (Briliannur, Ameli, Hasanah, Rahman, & Putra, 2020).

Researchers found that self-esteem with a campus life that has implemented online learning provides a burden for students, in addition to the absence of physical classrooms and direct social interaction, which can make students lose the purpose of learning. In addition, online learning requires students to be more in control of the assignments and classes taken, consequently, if students have many classes, they will have difficulty in monitoring. The consequence of the new classes taken by students is that it will be an academic load, and the amount of academic load can cause students to experience academic stress when taking online lectures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Academic Stress

Changes in life force the individual to adjust, if the individual is not able to adapt then the person will experience stress. Lazarus and Folkman (Erteka, 2018) explain that stress is an internal condition that can be caused by physical demands from oneself or the environment and social conditions that are felt to be dangerous and uncontrollable or exceed the individual's ability to cope. Stress occurs when individuals perceive that their abilities cannot meet the demands of the environment so pressure arises within them. According to Lazarus and Folkman (Erteka, 2018), stress is a person's reaction both physically and emotionally (mentally/psychically) when there is a change in the environment that requires a person to adjust. Stress is a natural and important part of life, but if it is severe and persists for a long time, it can be detrimental to health.

The source of stress can come from anything, and in students, one of them comes from the academic field (Calaguas, 2011). Academic stress in students is a source of stress that occurs in settings of learning (Azhar, 2015). In addition, academic stress is stress arising from academic demands that exceed the limits of the adaptability of the individual who experiences it, in other words, academic stress is caused by the inability of students to adapt to the many academic demands, which can trigger discomfort and trigger psychological, physical, and behavioral changes (Wilks, 2008). In line with the above that academic stress is stress related to aspects of learning, especially the learning experience with online learning, students will feel a new way of learning and not so familiar with these ways, so it can make students frustrated or upset when facing obstacles in learning (Aryani, 2016).

Several possible factors cause stress in students who study online, namely academic demands that are considered too heavy, poor exam results, piled-up tasks/assignments, and a social environment. This is supported by several other opinions, such as academic

stress is a condition of students who cannot face academic demands and perceive existing academic demands as a disturbance (Rahmawati, 2016). This is in line with Desmita's opinion that academic stress is emotional tension that arises from life events at school and feelings of threat to students' safety or self-esteem, resulting in physical, psychological, and behavioral reactions that have an impact on psychological adjustment and academic achievement (Desmita, 2009). Some aspects of stress, in general, can be recognized, namely: physiological, cognition, emotions, and behavior.

Physiological aspects are physiological reactions in individuals when facing stress. These physiological reactions can be in the form of a faster heartbeat, trembling arms, and legs, stuttering when talking, starting to appear diseases due to weakening immunity, the presence of indigestion, and decreased individual energy for activity. Physically stress conditions can appear with facial features/face reddened, the pale, feeling weak, feeling unwell, heart palpitations, dizziness, stiff body, and cold sweat.

In the cognitive aspect, stress can interfere with an individual's ability to regulate and direct his or her behavior. This student stress condition is caused by difficulty focusing attention in the learning process, and having a negative thought about themselves and the surrounding environment. The disorder can be seen in individuals who have difficulty maintaining attention, acting impulsively, easily forgetting, misinterpreting the questions on the exam, and having difficulty making decisions.

While on the emotional aspect, an individual's emotional response when stressed can be in the form of feelings of fear and anxiety, negative feelings, and low self-confidence. The other things are anxiety, fear, irritability, deep sadness, depression, feeling hesitant, feeling embarrassed, and believing in low abilities or potential so that they feel unable to meet academic demands.

The last aspect is the aspect of social behavior, which relates to other individuals (Sarafino & Smith, 2011). Individuals who experience stress will usually withdraw from the social environment, show a less friendly or hostile attitude, and be less sensitive to the needs of others (Robotham, 2008)

2.2. Online Learning

Online learning is often termed as learning in a network, which is interpreted as learning activities carried out by using an internet connection. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced the government to take this policy, starting from basic (elementary) education to the higher (tertiary) institution. By learning online, students are expected to get the same knowledge as face-to-face learning (offline/off-network) but with a more relaxed

atmosphere because teaching and learning activities are carried out not limited to classrooms.

There are several meanings of online learning. For example, Bilfaqih stated that it is a class implementation program in a network that can reach a broad and massive target group (Bilfaqih & Qomarudin, 2015). Another statement is that online learning is simply one of the online learning methods carried out through the internet network (Mustofa, Chodzirin, & Sayekti, 2019). Others suggest that online learning is a method of delivering lecture materials online, which is a few face-to-face processes (Poon, 2013). Another expert, namely Rosenberg explained that e-learning leads to the utilization of internet technology as a solution to improve knowledge and skills in a person (Alimuddin, 2015). While Thorne stated that online learning is a teaching that utilizes multimedia technology, virtual classes, video-streaming, voice messages, animated online texts, CD-ROMs, e-mail, telephone conferences, to online video-streaming (Kuntarto & Asyhar, 2017). Another expert added about the achievement of learning goals, stating that the achievement of learning goals on the online learning system using the e-learning website must accommodate students' needs and preferences (Williams, Bland, & Christie, 2008). Graham mentioned that e-learning websites can encourage students to learn interactively and collaboratively (Graham, 2006).

Based on the explanation above, online learning can be interpreted as a result of learning that is delivered electronically using computers and computer-based media, and learning materials are usually accessed through an internet network that has been previously prepared by the teacher. So online learning is a process of change in the human personality and these changes are shown in the form of increasing the quality and quantity of behavior such as increasing skills, knowledge, attitudes, habits, understanding, skills, thinking power, and other abilities. Online learning is said to have good quality if it meets the following aspects: relevance of learning, the attractiveness of online learning, effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of learning.

The relevant aspect of learning is the suitability of learning activities (materials and assignments) with the course syllabus. Aspects of the attractiveness of online learning, in terms of the appearance of e-learning, media or platforms that are in accordance with the form of the classroom to support and how far students are interested in participating in learning activities. The effectiveness aspect is the achievement of learning objectives by students during online learning through understanding the material. The efficiency aspect is the duration of teaching activities and sufficient time for students to understand the material and do the tasks/assignments given by the lecturer. Finally, the aspect of learning productivity is

the opportunity that students have to be actively involved in learning situations (Toatubu, Rijal, & Muhammad, 2018).

2.3. Academic Load

Academic load is a task related to work that must be completed by individuals in higher education in the form of tasks given by lecturers to students to be done within a certain time limit. Academic load is the number of courses and semester credit units offered by universities to their students. In line with this statement, Huntington & Gill stated that the academic load is a semester credit unit taken by students (Huntington & Gill, 2020). Meanwhile, based on the Regulation of the Minister of Research Technology and Higher Education (Permenristekdikti/Peraturan Menteri Riset Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi) No. 44 of 2015 Article 17, a one-semester credit unit has a different size of time, according to the academic activities carried out (Bakrie, 2016). Based on this definition, the academic load can be said to be a student learning activities consisting of various classes taken along with learning activities that will be carried out such as quizzes, assignments, or presentations of learning outcomes and these activities have a duration of time that has been determined by ministry regulations. In this regard, both students and academic advisors often assume that a lighter academic load in the lecture period will result in greater student success (Szafran, 2002).

In the context of the occurrence of stress, several factors influence the stress experienced by students. One of those is related to excessive task loads or fewer task loads (Cooper, Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Michael, 2001). Students experience stress because of the many tasks assigned to them by demanding their completion simultaneously, thus the factors that will be carried out in this study are those related to the task load received by students. Then is whether the task load is perceived as positive or negative for him/her, depending on his/her attitude in dealing with the task load as the student's response. Therefore, in this study, the academic load is considered to be equivalent to the workload. As stated by Suryani & Wulandari (Suryani & Wulandari, 2009), the workload is the period for individuals to carry out work activities according to their abilities and work capacity without showing signs of fatigue. Thus, related to this research, the academic task load is the task demands given to students that must be completed within a certain period at a university. To measure the academic task load, the

workload aspect of Gawron (2008) will be used, namely:

- a. The time load is known from how often or rarely individuals have free time, experience interruptions, or do other activities when doing tasks.
- b. The mental effort load is known from how much the individual is aware of his/her mental effort or can concentrate automatically when working on completing coursework, paying attention to directions, as well as the individual's ability to find resources and make decisions to complete assignments.
- c. The psychological pressure load is known from how easily the individual copes with confusion, risks faced, frustration, or anxiety experienced.

3. FRAMEWORK OF THINKING

Under normal conditions (without an outbreak that limits human activity), learning can be done in the classroom, but during the Covid-19 pandemic, learning in this way was stopped and replaced with online learning methods. Online learning is an open and distributed learning system using pedagogical tools/devices, which are made possible through the internet and network-based technologies to facilitate the formation of learning processes and knowledge through meaningful action and interaction. Learning with an online system can be successful if it is supported by the facilities and infrastructure owned by teachers and students (Dabbagh & Ritland, 2005). This is in accordance with what Briliannur *et al.*, explained that facilities and infrastructure are the main support for the success of online learning (Briliannur, Ameli, Hasanah, Rahman, & Putra, 2020). Even though the teaching staff has exerted their full potential, technical barriers such as slow internet connections can hinder students' understanding. Barriers felt by students can trigger stress, such as the opinion of Harahap *et al.*, who state that there is a relationship between online learning and academic stress in students (Harahap, Harahap, & Harahap, 2020). Finally, with the explanation stated above, it can be concluded that online learning and the load of academic tasks that students must complete within a certain time during the Covid-19 pandemic are important factors that make students experience academic stress. For more details, it is stated in a framework of thinking so that it is easy to understand the relationship between variables in the study.

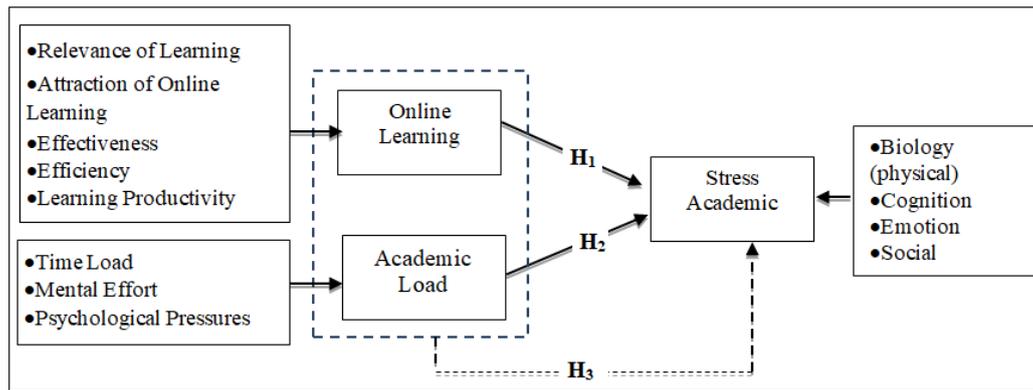


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework Model

In addition to barriers related to online learning, the number of courses studied by students can also be a driving force and a cause of academic stress. This is in line with the results of Livana *et al.*, research (Livana, Mubin, & Yazid, 2020) which stated that the majority of stressors for Indonesian students during the Covid-19 pandemic were learning assignments/tasks. Stress levels related to daily life stressors such as academic load, materials to be studied, lack of free time, and competitive academic pressures in the everyday environment are also causes of stress. Referring to the framework of thinking, the hypothesis can be put forward as a provisional assumption, namely:

H₁: There is a relationship between online learning and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia.

H₂: There is a relationship between academic load and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia.

H₃: There is a relationship between online learning and academic load on academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

This study is quantitative descriptive, that is, the research aims to describe and explain the characteristics of a situation at a certain time. This quantitative descriptive study aims to explain the academic stress experienced by students when studying online and a load of academic assignments/tasks given by lecturers that must be completed simultaneously during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collection uses

a questionnaire with simple random sampling based on the characteristics of the participants, namely college students in the second semester of the first year of college during the Covid-19 pandemic. The sample size obtained was 116 second-semester students in the 2020/2021 academic year at seven universities that were conducting online learning during the covid-19 pandemic. The study method used is an investigative type with a descriptive survey method and an explanatory survey method that is correlational (r) and causal (R²).

There are three variables in this study, namely academic stress, online learning, and academic load. In this study, academic stress was measured using a scale based on stress aspects of Sarafino and Smith (2011) which consisted of aspects of biology, cognition, emotion, and social behavior. The online learning variable was measured using the online learning aspect of Toatubu, et al (2018) which consisted of aspects of learning relevance, the attractiveness of online learning, effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of learning. Academic load is measured using aspects of a workload consisting of time load, mental effort load, and psychological stress load (Gawron, 2008). To determine the accuracy of the concepts developed in this study, validity tests were conducted on each indicator that became a measuring instrument. Followed by a reliability test to determine the consistency of measurement on the three variables. The validity and reliability test using the SPSS program 22.0 version for Windows can be seen in the table below.

Table 1: Research Instrument Trial Results

Variable	Total Items	Valid Items	Drop Items	RIT Value	Information
Academic Stress	40	32	8	0.304 – 0.877	0.916 – very reliable
Academic Load	40	31	9	0.303 – 0.722	0.918 – very reliable
Learn Online	32	27	5	0.304 – 0.732	0.876 – reliable

Source: SPSS output 22.0

Referring to the table above, it can be seen that the total items for the academic stress variable are 40, with 32 valid items, 8 dropping items with rit values

0.304 – 0.877, and very reliable (0.916). The total academic load variable item is 40, with the number of valid items 31, items dropping 9, the rit value 0.303 –

0.722, and very reliable (0.918). Finally, the total online learning variable items are 32, valid items are 27, dropped items are 5, rit values are 0.304 – 0.732, and reliable (0.876). Thus the data meets the requirements to be continued at the analysis stage.

4.1. Data Description

The description of the data presented aims to provide an overview of the distribution of data that has been collected through questionnaires. This data is the result of categorization and normality test results to know whether the data is normally distributed or not. The following table is a test of normality and categorization.

Table 2: Normality and Categorization

Variable	Probability (p)	Distribution data	Mean Theoretical (x)	Mean Findings	Categorization
Academic Stress	(p= 0.007; p< 0.05)	not normal	96	103.43	high
Academic Load	(p= 0.028; p< 0.05)	not normal	96	88.82	low
Learn Online	(p= 0.200; p> 0.05)	usual	81	75.40	medium

Source: SPSS Output 22.0

In this study, the normality test data processing refers to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with a significance level of 0.05. The results of the normality test on the academic stress variable showed that the data were not normally distributed, and the results of the categorization of academic stress had high criteria ($92.86 \leq x \leq 99.14$). Furthermore, the normality test was conducted on online learning variables which showed that the data were not normally distributed, and the results of online learning categorization had low criteria ($92.67 \leq x \leq 99.33$). Finally, the results of the normality test on the academic load variable showed that the data is normally distributed. The results of the categorization of academic load have moderate criteria ($63 \leq x \leq 99$).

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

To test the first and second hypotheses, the bivariate correlation technique was used, and to test the third hypothesis, the multivariate correlation technique was used. The results of the bivariate correlation analysis of online learning variables with academic stress variables produced correlation coefficients of (r)= -0.477 and (p)= .000 < (p)= 0.05, which proved that there was a negative relationship. Based on these results, the hypothesis that there is a relationship between online learning and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia can be accepted and proven.

The results of the bivariate correlation analysis on the academic load variable with the academic stress variable obtained a correlation coefficient of (r)= 0.188 and (p)= .043 < (p)= 0.05, which proves that there is a positive relationship. Based on these results, the hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between academic workload and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia is accepted and proven.

Furthermore, the results of multivariate correlation analysis, online learning, and academic load with academic stress obtained R scores of 0.502 and

(p)= .000 < (p)= 0.050, which proves that there is a fairly strong and significant relationship between the three variables. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between online learning and academic load and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia can be accepted and proven.

4.3. RESEARCH RESULTS DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, there is a negative relationship between online learning and academic stress, where online learning aspects include relevance, the attractiveness of online learning, effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity contained in learning carried out using electronic devices connected to the internet network. This negative relationship indicates that the better the quality of online learning felt by students, the lower the level of academic stress felt. In other words, studying online during the Covid-19 pandemic can cause ups and downs in stress levels in students in Indonesia. To reduce student academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic with a distance learning system, a good online learning system is needed and encourages students to be actively involved in it. Briliannur *et al.*, (2020) stated that an online learning system supported by good facilities and infrastructure can provide a conducive learning situation. These facilities and infrastructure are not only provided by universities, but also students can easily access or use online learning support facilities, in this case, gadgets and internet connections that are quite good.

The study also found that there is a positive relationship between academic load and academic stress, where aspects of academic load are manifested in the form of time load, mental effort, and psychological distress. A positive relationship indicates that the higher the academic load, the higher the academic stress experienced by students, and vice versa. Academic load is a task load based on the intensity and volume of learning activities, materials to be studied, lack of free

time, and competitive academic pressure to be completed within a certain time. The academic load can cause academic stress when students delay and ignore the lecture materials that must be studied and the assignments/tasks given so that it takes a fairly heavy mental effort to complete. To reduce academic stress, students must complete assignments/tasks on time. If there is a delay, a growing pile of work will cause psychological distress such as frustration and anxiety. Therefore, lecturers should provide flexible time for students within one semester to complete reports and lectures. Thus student academic stress can be reduced, psychological stress such as frustration and anxiety can be avoided.

Furthermore, it was found that online learning and academic load contributed by 25.2% to academic stress, which means that 74.8% was determined by other factors outside this study. These other factors are for example the condition of the online study room, the surrounding environment, self-adjustment, stress coping mechanisms, self-regulation, peer support, and optimism. Further analysis showed that online learning was the variable that contributed the most to the academic stress of college students in Indonesia, which was 22.7%. This means that online learning is the dominant factor that drives academic stress in college students in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. Actually, academic stress is a fairly common thing experienced by students (Govaerts & Gregoire, 2004), but the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic makes students feel more burdened and disturbed by their academic load. Academic stress can be the increasing number of materials that must be studied, the number of assignments/tasks, and the pressure to maintain academic achievements.

Academic stress of college students in the Covid-19 pandemic condition can be seen as distress and eustress. Distress during the Covid-19 pandemic for college students is a negative response to online learning and academic load. The impact of distress can cause a pessimistic feeling that is unable to cope effectively, easily tired and lethargic, emotional and more sensitive, and decreased interest in learning can even become frustrated which causes failure in learning activities. On the contrary, eustress in the Covid-19 pandemic condition in students is a positive response to online learning and academic load. The impact of eustress on college students can cause optimistic feelings, namely a condition that can generate learning motivation, provide inspiration, behave positively, and optimize all physical and psychological functions. This kind of academic stress condition during the Covid-19 pandemic is classified as stress, because it causes the same physical and psychological reactions, with an increase in hormones from the adrenal glands and emotional turmoil. It can be said that eustress comes from a situation that can be controlled (Rosenthal, 2001). To maintain eustress requires students' mental

resilience in dealing with various situations and pressures, besides that it also requires the ability to view online learning positively and the academic load is a challenge to increase creativity and innovation in learning. In line with that, it is necessary to understand the changing situation in the learning system due to the Covid-19 pandemic which requires from offline learning to online learning, students and lecturers must be able to adapt to changing learning conditions. Besides that, there must be university support that provides the necessary technological equipment and an adequate internet network for online learning, so that the transfer of knowledge can run as it should.

5. CONCLUSION

There is a negative relationship between online learning and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in college students in Indonesia. Where aspects of online learning include relevance, the attractiveness of online learning, effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity contained in learning that contributes to academic stress. The negative relationship indicates that online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to the up and down of stress levels for students in Indonesia. The more students feel that the quality of online learning is good, the lower the level of academic stress experienced and felt by students.

There is a positive relationship between academic load and academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in students in Indonesia. Where aspects of academic load are manifested in the form of time load, mental effort, and psychological pressure that contribute to academic stress, but this occurs only if students delay and ignore the presentation of lecture materials and tasks/assignments.

There is a relationship between online learning and academic load with academic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic in university students in Indonesia with a contribution of 25.2%. This means that online learning and academic loads can cause academic stress in students during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. While 74.8% was determined by other factors outside of this study, such as the condition of the online study room, the environment around self-adjustment, stress coping mechanisms, self-regulation, peer support, optimism, and so on. In addition, this study did not distinguish the stress experienced by male and female students.

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