

Workshop on Improving Self-Resilience through Self-Existential Discovery (Tadabbur Alam) for Researchers and Academics in A Higher Education Institution of Brunei

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ABSTRACT

This community service program aims to strengthen the mental resilience and emotional well-being of researchers and academics at a higher education institution in Brunei Darussalam through a Self-Resilience Enhancement workshop based on self-existential discovery techniques using a self-existential discovery (tadabbur alam). The Community Service Team from State University of Surabaya (UNESA) organized the program in response to the high levels of stress, burnout, and workload pressure experienced by the academic community. The tadabbur alam was chosen because it can combine self-introspection, strengthening self-identity, and spiritual connection through direct observation of natural phenomena. The program resulted in an increase of self-awareness, clarity of thought, gratitude, and inner peace, and gained adaptive strategies to deal with life's stressors of participants. Participants also understood resilience not only as the ability to bounce back from setbacks, but also as an internal strength derived from self-understanding and a spiritual connection with God. This activity is an example of cross-country collaboration between UNESA and a higher education institution in Brunei Darussalam through Guidance and Counseling Study Program and Counselling and Diverse Learning Needs Unit that is relevant to be developed in a program to improve academic mental health based on Islamic values and local culture.

Keywords: self-resilience; self-existential discovery; tadabbur alam

ABSTRAK

Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat ketahanan mental dan kesejahteraan emosional para peneliti serta akademisi di sebuah perguruan tinggi di Brunei Darussalam melalui kegiatan lokakarya Self-Resilience Enhancement yang berbasis pada teknik penemuan eksistensi diri (self-existential discovery) dengan metode tadabbur alam. Tim Pengabdian Masyarakat dari Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) menyelenggarakan program ini sebagai respons terhadap tingginya tingkat stres, kelelahan (burnout), dan tekanan beban kerja yang dialami oleh komunitas akademik. Metode tadabbur alam dipilih karena mampu mengintegrasikan introspeksi diri, penguatan identitas diri, dan hubungan spiritual melalui pengamatan langsung terhadap fenomena alam. Program ini menghasilkan peningkatan kesadaran diri, kejernihan berpikir, rasa syukur, dan ketenangan batin, serta membantu peserta memperoleh strategi adaptif dalam menghadapi tekanan hidup. Para peserta juga memahami bahwa

ketahanan diri tidak hanya dimaknai sebagai kemampuan untuk bangkit kembali dari kegagalan, tetapi juga sebagai kekuatan internal yang bersumber dari pemahaman diri dan hubungan spiritual dengan Tuhan. Kegiatan ini menjadi contoh kolaborasi lintas negara antara UNESA dan perguruan tinggi di Brunei Darussalam melalui Program Studi Bimbingan dan Konseling serta Unit Counselling and Diverse Learning Needs, yang relevan untuk dikembangkan dalam program peningkatan kesehatan mental akademik berbasis nilai-nilai Islam dan budaya lokal.

Kata Kunci: ketahanan diri; penemuan eksistensi diri; tadabbur alam

INTRODUCTION

In essence, humans are social beings who desperately need the help of others to survive. This need is not only about social relationships, but also related to emotional support when facing various problems in life, including in the academic context. Researchers and academics, as part of the scientific community, often face very high work pressure, such as the demand to publish research results, provide good teaching, and carry out community service activities. If not managed properly, this continuous work pressure can cause prolonged stress and emotional exhaustion (burnout). One important thing to consider in the workplace is workload and burnout. Workload can be a major obstacle for individuals in achieving and maintaining good motivation and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, burnout is a condition of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that arises from prolonged pressure or stress, especially when someone is involved in situations that are emotionally draining (Parashakti & Ekhsan, 2022). If burnout is not addressed in the long term, it can lead to decreased productivity, deteriorating mental health, and a loss of meaning in one's profession.

Recent research shows that researchers and academics who face high work pressure are more prone to mental health problems such as anxiety, ongoing stress, and mild depression. The causes of stress itself can be attributed to internal and external factors (Rahmah & Wardiani, 2021). Internal factors are those that originate from within oneself, such as fear of the future and a lack of individual commitment. Meanwhile, external factors are factors that come from outside the individual, such as inadequate facilities, financial problems, and excessive workloads (Ratnaningtyas & Fitriani, 2019). Extremely high levels of stress that last for a long time without any way to overcome them can cause various diseases, such as digestive disorders, heart attacks, high blood pressure, asthma, skin problems, and insomnia or sleep disorders (Saswati & Maulani, 2020). Too many thoughts and feelings of stress can cause the brain to work too hard and continuously. When a person feels stressed, the body produces more adrenaline. Adrenaline is a chemical produced by the brain to increase alertness, making it difficult for a person to sleep and causing insomnia (Tyas & Zulfikar, 2021).

This phenomenon is not only occurring in large institutions, but is also being felt by academics in Southeast Asia, including at a university in Brunei Darussalam. This condition is getting worse because institutional expectations continue to increase, but are not accompanied by an adequate support system. Therefore, it is important for people in the academic

environment to have the ability to bounce back or be resilient, so that they can adapt to these pressures in a positive way. Resilience is one of the important factors that help people cope with work pressure. Individuals can overcome academic pressure by building resilience, so that they remain strong when facing difficult situations (Septiana, 2021). In work activities, people with high resilience perform better than those with low resilience. This is due to their tendency to blame themselves and their higher levels of anxiety and depression (Gatt et al., 2020). It can be concluded that by increasing resilience, individuals can better develop life skills such as communication skills, making realistic life plans, and taking the right steps in facing difficult situations.

Resilience has three main sources, namely *I am*, *I can*, and *I have* (Alvina & Dewi, 2016). The *I am* source includes attitudes, self-confidence, and emotions that originate from within oneself, such as optimism, self-esteem, and empathy. The *I can* source focuses on interpersonal skills and problem-solving abilities that individuals utilize to face various challenges. Meanwhile, the *I have* source includes external support obtained by individuals, such as from family, friends, or community, which plays an important role in strengthening resilience. Of these three sources, The *I am* has a very close relationship with the self-existential discovery approach, because this approach focuses on self-exploration and recognition of personal values that encourage individuals to find strength within themselves.

The self-existential discovery approach is a way of thinking that involves self-reflection, focusing on finding meaning in life, personal values, and goals that a person wants to achieve. The goal is to increase mental resilience, deepen self-understanding, and strengthen the spirit in facing various challenges in life. This approach is in line with Viktor Frankl's logotherapy theory, which emphasizes the importance of finding meaning in order to face various challenges in life. In the academic realm, this approach provides researchers and academics with the opportunity to reflect on their intentions, reidentify their inner motivations, and improve the connection between their work and personal lives.

The workshop on improving Self-Resilience through Self-Existential Discovery is designed as a learning medium that combines theory with reflective practice using a *tadabbur alam* approach. It aims to help researchers and academics understand their internal state, create better adjustment strategies, and rediscover the meaning that motivates them in their professional and personal roles. Nature contemplation is the activity of observing, studying the properties of, and understanding the signs conveyed by nature. Understanding the signs in nature aims to find solutions to the problems faced by humans. Nature contemplation activities do not only focus on physical aspects (Hambali, 2017).

Through this training session, participants are encouraged to realize the importance of recognizing emotions, honing their stress management skills, and reflecting on the perspectives and values that have been the basis for their academic work. This approach is expected to build resilience that is not only responsive to stress, but also proactive in creating a more balanced and meaningful life. Thus, this workshop not only serves as a place for recovery, but also as a means to refresh the spirit of researchers and academics so that

they can continue to contribute to the field of science with a better quality of life.

ACTIVITY STAGES AND METHODS

The implementation of this Community Service (PkM) activity was carried out through several systematic stages, namely the preparation stage, the implementation stage, and the evaluation and reporting stage. The approach used was psychoeducational with a phenomenological basis, aiming to understand the reflective experiences of participants in internalizing resilience values through Self-Existential Discovery with a *tadabbur alam* approach. The phenomenological approach is considered appropriate because it seeks to explore the meaning of an individual's life experiences in depth (Creswell, 2018). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research allows researchers to understand human consciousness of experiences that are lived directly.

During the preparation stage, the PkM team first collaboratively drafted a proposal for the activity, involving all team members. This process was carried out to agree on the objectives, methods, and desired outcomes of the community service activity. Once the proposal was complete, the team conducted initial coordination to ensure the division of tasks, setting of activity schedules, and implementation mechanisms. Next, training materials are prepared, including the development of pre-test and post-test questionnaires, self-resilience enhancement modules, practical guidelines and simulations for Self-Existential Discovery, and program effectiveness evaluation instruments. Coordination is also carried out with partners, namely the counselling and diverse learning needs unit of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, to agree on the technical and administrative aspects of the activity's implementation. All stages of preparation are carried out with consideration for the principle of collaboration between the implementation team and partners, so that the activity runs effectively and in accordance with the context of the participants' needs.

The implementation stage took the form of a psychoeducational workshop, consisting of a series of conceptual and practical activities. The activity began with a pre-test to measure the initial resilience of the participants. The results of this initial measurement were used as a reference in assessing changes after the program was completed. After the assessment stage, participants received the main material on Self-Existential Discovery, which was delivered by the speaker and expert of *tadabbur alam*, Dr. Devi Ratnasari, M.Pd. The material was presented through lectures, demonstrations, interactive discussions, and practical simulations of self-reflection based on *tadabbur alam* (contemplation of nature). Participants were actively involved in exploring their existential experiences through observing natural phenomena and the symbolic meanings contained within them. According to Hambali (2017), *tadabbur alam* is a contemplative process that invites individuals to observe God's creation to find spiritual meaning and life values that can strengthen self-awareness.

The workshop was held on July 22, 2025, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. BNT and was placed at a higher institution of Brunei Darussalam, with the theme "Improving Self-Resilience Through Self-Existential Discovery

(Tadabbur Alam)”. The material covered included: (1) the importance of resilience, (2) the concept of self-resilience from an Islamic perspective, (3) the urgency of self-discovery, (4) tadabbur alam as a path to existential contemplation, (5) the stages of tadabbur alam in building resilience, (6) the results of research in 2025 related to the relationship between resilience and tadabbur alam, and (7) the benefits of tadabbur alam in improving individuals' coping skills and psychological resilience. At the end of the session, participants filled out a post-test questionnaire to measure changes in their understanding and level of self-resilience. The pre-test and post-test data were the main materials used in the evaluative analysis of the program's effectiveness.

The evaluation stage was conducted through analysis of pre-test and post-test results to determine the extent to which the training influenced participants' resilience. In addition, the team also collected direct feedback through brief interviews and participant reflection sheets regarding the benefits, suitability, and personal experiences during the activities. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach to identify themes of change and reflective meanings experienced by participants (Moustakas, 1994). The evaluation focused not only on increasing knowledge, but also on strengthening participants' existential and spiritual awareness in facing life's challenges. All activity evaluation results were summarized in the final PkM report, which was collaboratively compiled by all team members. This report serves as documentation of the activity implementation as well as a basis for recommendations for the implementation of nature-based resilience strengthening programs in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Analysis of Participants' Needs and Initial Conditions

Before implementing the International Community Service (PkM) program at a university in Brunei, the PkM team first conducted an initial assessment to understand the participants' needs. This activity was part of a training program entitled Improving Self-resilience Through Self-existential Discovery (Tadabbur Alam). The training team, consisting of five lecturers and three students, assessed the needs and problems faced by researchers and academics at the university. The assessment was conducted through a series of preliminary tests, interviews, and reflective questionnaires distributed prior to the training. The assessment results revealed that most participants experienced difficulties in dealing with emotional and psychological challenges during their intensive lectures, and that a spiritual and introspective approach was needed to strengthen their mental resilience. Based on these findings, the training material was designed to be thematically and contextually relevant, using a self-existential discovery approach through meditation in nature (tadabbur alam).



Figure 1. Material Presentation Session

This workshop was organized as a collaboration between the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Surabaya State University (UNESA) and a university in Brunei. The workshop was presented by Dr. Dewi Ratnasari, M.Pd. on July 22, 2025, and was attended by 44 researchers and academics with characteristics as educators and academics who institutionally have a role in the development of guidance and counseling science, education, as well as psychological and Islamic studies. These characteristics enabled the participants to have sufficient prior knowledge to engage in in-depth scientific discussions on strengthening resilience based on psychological and spiritual approaches.

B. Main Theme and Conceptual Basis of Activities

The main topic raised in this community service activity was strengthening self-resilience through self-existential discovery techniques with a *tadabbur alam* approach. Self-resilience is a person's ability to adapt, persevere, and rise from difficult conditions, which plays an important role in protecting them from the negative impacts that may arise from various problems (Wulandari & Mawardah, 2023). From an Islamic perspective, resilience is not only seen from mental and emotional strength, but also from spiritual awareness and the ability to recognize one's essence (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) as part of servitude to God (Fazrian, 2024). Low resilience can result in various negative effects, such as pessimism, loss of humor, weak problem-solving skills, and difficulty adapting to change (Oktafryadi *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, it is important to develop an integrated and contextual approach in building psychological resilience, especially for academics who are prone to work pressure, overthinking, and burnout (Pratiwi *et al.*, 2025).

Based on an initial assessment of workshop participants, it was found that most participants tended to internalize stress, exhibited symptoms of social isolation, and lacked adaptive self-recovery strategies. Through the self-existential discovery technique designed in seven stages of *tadabbur alam*, starting from *ma'rifat al-nafs*, *takhalli*, *tahalli*, *tajalli*, *mujahadah*, seeking *ibrah*, to *tafakur* (Ratnasari *et al.*, 2023). This training is expected to facilitate participants in identifying life values, strengthening spiritual connections, and developing a more resilient perspective towards life's challenges. This activity not only introduces a new approach to strengthening mental health

based on Islamic values, but also provides a meaningful contemplative experience for participants through reflection on God's creation in the universe.

C. Discussion Dynamics and Participants' Spiritual Experiences



Figure 2. Discussion Session

Figure 2 shows documentation of the discussion activities in a workshop that was held at a university in Brunei. The participants appeared enthusiastic following the presentation delivered by the main speaker, Dr. Devi Ratnasari, M.Pd. Based on the evaluation through reflection sheets, the majority of participants stated that the material presented deeply touched their spiritual and emotional aspects and provided a new, in-depth approach to understanding resilience through *tadabbur alam*. Most participants stated that contemplating nature can help build inner resilience by increasing spiritual awareness, gratitude, and belief in divine plans. Many of them felt that the presence of nature provided calmness, clarity of thought, and served as a reminder of God's power and love in every phase of life. Important values such as patience, acceptance, and sincerity were also considered to emerge through contemplation of natural phenomena, thereby strengthening the will to fight when facing life's trials.

Contemplating nature - or *tadabbur alam* - is considered not only as an activity of deep reflection, but also as a bridge that connects the dimensions of self, universe, and God in finding new meaning and hope in life. In addition, participants' reflections on the meaning of psychological resilience after participating in the activity show that most of them understand this concept as the ability to bounce back from adversity, manage emotions in a healthy way, and continue to grow in the face of life's pressures.

Psychological resilience is also defined as inner strength that arises from self-understanding, spiritual connection, and the ability to face challenges flexibly and meaningfully. In line with the participants' reflections, research by Muna *et al.* (2024) shows that interaction with nature can provide mental calm and help relieve emotional stress naturally. In addition, exposure to natural surroundings has also been shown to promote mental resilience,

as individuals can learn to recover, cultivate inner peace, and rebuild their emotional balance.

This is in line with Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory by Kaplan & Kaplan in Kotera *et al.* (2022), which states that being in nature can help restore concentration naturally without requiring much effort. In fact, according to research by Richardson *et al.* in Kotera *et al.* (2022), stimulation from nature, such as forests, can reduce anxiety, calm the mind, and activate the nervous system, helping the body to relax and become emotionally healthier.

D. Impact and implications of activities

This workshop not only presents theories about resilience from an Islamic perspective, but also equips participants with contemplative practices and expressive activities that stimulate deep self-reflection. Partners from the university demonstrated their active commitment by providing space, facilities, and logistical support during the event. The implementation of this Community Service Program (PkM) shows that the self-existential discovery approach through *tadabbur alam* activities can increase self-awareness, spiritual connection, and mental resilience of participants in facing the pressures of daily life.



Figure 3. Group Photo After the Implementation of PkM

This activity not only helped participants develop personally, but also opened up space for cross-country collaboration in introducing value- and culture-based counseling approaches.

E. Evaluation and Limitations of Activities

The implementation of workshop activities in the Community Service Program (PkM) showed that it was carried out in line with the objectives that had been set. The evaluation results indicate that the material presented was relevant to the participants' needs and facilitated active academic discussion on resilience and the integration of psychological approaches and spiritual values in the context of guidance and counseling. The level of participant

engagement during the activity reflected a sufficient initial understanding and interest in the topics discussed, thereby strengthening participants' conceptual insights and reflections.

On the other hand, this activity still has several limitations that need to be considered. The implementation of the program was limited to workshops and scientific discussions, so it did not include the direct application of reflective practices, such as nature contemplation activities in the field. The next limitation was related to the lack of quantitative evaluation instruments that would enable the objective measurement of changes in participants' resilience or spiritual awareness. In addition, the relatively short duration of the activity also limits the depth of the material and follow-up on the participants' reflection process.

CONCLUSION

International Community Service (PkM) to increase self-resilience through self-existential discovery techniques with a *tadabbur alam* approach has had a positive impact on researchers and academics from various education institutions of Brunei Darussalam. Participants showed increased self-resilience, clarity of thought, gratitude, and inner peace, as well as gaining adaptive strategies for dealing with academic and daily life pressures. This activity also reinforced the understanding that resilience is not only the ability to bounce back from adversity, but also an internal strength that comes from self-understanding and a spiritual connection with God. For sustainability, similar programs need to be designed in a more structured manner and implemented periodically, so that this reflective-spiritual approach can have a broader impact on the academic community while also serving as a model for the development of value-based and culturally adaptive mental health programs in various universities.

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