



## Conceptualizing of Academic Hardiness During Covid-19 pandemic of an Islamic Senior High School in Malang, East Java

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**Abstract:** This research focuses on the process of establishing the Academic hardiness of the Aisyiyah Boarding School (ABM) high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a form of one's firmness in facing academic challenges during the pandemic, Academic hardiness has an important position to be studied comprehensively and in-depth, especially in terms of students' academic resilience as study subjects. This research is based on Kobasa's Academic Hardiness Theory (AHT) and uses a qualitative approach to obtain descriptive data, observable behavior, and verbal data. Data collection methods used non-participant observation techniques, virtual interviews, and documentation studies. The data collected was then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The conclusion of this research states that the academic hardiness of ABM students is formed through habituation activities in Islamic education. Empirically, the three cognitive evaluation processes (commitment, control, and challenge) are related to students' persistence when dealing with difficult e-learning designs. The implication of the results of the analysis of the process of forming the academic hardiness of students at ABM is the birth of new creations in improving the quality of Islamic education learning through optimizing the cognitive evaluation process of students.

**Keywords:** academic hardiness, academic hardiness theory, COVID 19 pandemic, e-learning, islamic education material.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article intends to analyze the process of forming the Academic hardiness (academic toughness) of students at SMA 'Aisyiyah Boarding School in Malang City during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a personality characteristic in individuals that can be formed and developed, academic hardiness is one of the important factors that must be possessed by students, especially in facing the difficulties of the learning process during a pandemic (Wong et al., 2021). Today, the urgency of developing the academic hardiness dimension has been widely expressed by academics through their research, such as Kuo who stated that academic hardiness can guide students' readiness in controlling, dealing with, and anticipating negative changes that accompany the presence of online learning (Kuo et al., 2021); Houston, who concluded that a hardy personality can change the stress they face into things that trigger their academic achievement; or research that confirms the urgency of developing academic hardiness through the perspective of educational psychology studies and management of educational institutions (Fajriani et al., 2021; Aprodita et al., 2021). Some research indicates that academic hardiness can be developed through cognitive enhancement (Vaziri et al., 2021), as well as training to always think positively (Melhe et al., 2021). On the other hand, academic hardiness has not been able to play an optimal role as a natural instrument that can be used by students-read: students-to face learning challenges in the scope of Islamic boarding schools, as concluded by Karimah's research (Karimah et al., 2021).

Therefore, to fill the gaps in some of these research results, an analysis from another perspective is needed to understand the conceptualization of Academic hardiness as a measure of individual resilience in facing difficulties. Among the perspectives that can be used as a reference by academics to examine this, namely through the design and learning process that students go through as subjects of education. In this context, Arsyad's research reveals that the educational process carried out through training methods can form academic hardiness in students (Arsyad & Sulistiyana, 2021).

There are educational institutions in the city of Malang that form academic hardiness in students through the learning patterns they apply. One of these institutions is SMA 'Aisyiyah Boarding School - hereinafter referred to as ABM - in Malang City, East Java. This school's adaptive response in organizing learning during the pandemic is through online learning designs which are indicated by several types of research as the ideal option for educational models during COVID-19 (Bassey et al., 2007). Research results confirm that online learning designs that optimize the role of information and communication technology as the main media for the learning process in it (Rahiem, 2020), have been able to facilitate the learning process

of students anytime and anywhere without being limited by the space between students and educators (Islahulben & Widayati, 2021). On the other hand, psychologically, online learning also has an impact on changes in the experience and learning behavior of students (Kim, 2020; Prabawangi et al, 2021).

Uniquely, the online learning design is not fully implemented by ABM in the entire learning process given to its students. There is one non-formal Islamic Religious Education material whose implementation is carried out offline (face to face) to develop academic hardiness in the students. This Islamic material which is carried out offline at ABM is the focus of research in this article. Moreover, the intensively carried out Islamic material learning activities are supported by the dormitory education system in the ABM institution. In a partial scope, the researcher indicated that the application of learning carried out through non-formal formats was empirically able to reduce the stress level of students, as revealed in Lobjanidze's research (Lobjanidze et al, 2021). If based on the theoretical level, Kobasa as the originator of the Academic Hardiness theory reveals that the Academic Hardiness character is the seed of the development of a tough personality in the individual (Johnsen et al, 2017). It is this tough personality that is important for students to have, so the implementation of academic hardiness in education is an important concept that is interesting to study in-depth and comprehensively.

In this context, academic hardiness in strong students will position them as individuals who can neutralize stress related to the learning process they are undergoing, as well as turn these negative stressor conditions into positive challenges (Dewi et al, 2021). This tough personality will in reality be able to face the challenges of learning in the current COVID-19 pandemic, including Islamic Religious Education learning as one of the compulsory subjects in school (Yumnah, 2021; Zafi et al, 2021). Therefore, the behavior that arises from the academic hardiness of students needs to be developed simultaneously so that the learning challenges in the online learning implementation process can be faced optimally (Simamora, 2020).

Therefore, this research aims to examine the process of forming Academic hardiness through Islamic material organized by SMA 'Aisyiyah Boarding School Malang. Based on the Academic Hardiness Theory (AHT) proposed by Kobasa, this research aims to conduct a critical analysis of the process of forming the Academic hardiness of students at the school. Through this study, the conceptualization of Academic hardiness in the process of implementing learning during the COVID-19 pandemic found the culmination of its ideals so that it can be developed by educational institutions in improving the quality of academic toughness in students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **METHODS**

Based on this description, this research focuses on the process of forming students' academic hardiness through the provision of Islamic Religious Education material at ABM. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this school did not change the overall online learning pattern. There are religious activities outside of learning hours that are intensely carried out in school dormitories to foster the character of Academic hardiness in their students. Therefore, this research has an orientation to understand the argumentative framework for implementing Islamic Religious Education learning activities in the form of Islamic material at ABM Malang City and examines the concept of forming students' academic hardiness through these activities.

Considering the construction of the focus of the problem, the qualitative approach is appropriate as the foundation of this research to be able to more critically understand the reality of the implementation of Islamic material in ABM, as well as to analyze the concept of forming students' academic hardiness through these activities. The process of understanding the reality of the implementation of Islamic material referred to in this context is understanding the argumentative construction of the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning activities in the form of presenting Islamic material to students at ABM. The theoretical basis of the analysis is based on the Academic Hardiness Theory, which was coined by Suzanne C. Kobasa in 1979 which states that Academic Hardiness is a personality pattern related to individual performance in dealing with academic stress in front of him through cognitive responses, behavior, and certain affective aspects (Mund, 2016). Moreover, the academic toughness of ABM students is unquestionable so that they can bring the school to its position as the school with the best quality index in Malang City (Anis, 2019). Based on this construction, this article seeks to comprehensively examine the argumentative framework for the concept of the formation of academic hardiness through the activities of Islamic material in ABM.

Data collection that will be carried out in the field, researchers will make observations beforehand to determine the implementation of Islamic religious education learning activities in the form of Islamic material at ABM Malang City and examine the concept of the formation of Academic hardiness so that it is easier for researchers to make observations that are the goal of the researcher. Before the research took place, the researcher conducted interviews with related parties in ABM to know the concept of forming Academic hardiness. After that, the researcher will analyze the data obtained and determine the targets/targets to be researched. During the research, the researcher will find it easier to collect data and make observations with

predetermined targets.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Academic Hardiness in Education

The online learning phenomenon that is widely applied by schools today has had an impact on shifting the learning paradigm from teacher-centric to learner-centric (Suti'ah & Mardiana, 2021). In this context, the change in the learning paradigm is seen by education experts as a complementary factor in realizing the expected educational goals (Murty & Rao, 2019). This shift certainly requires the psychological readiness of students to be able to go beyond the learning process with various academic challenges in it. One of the internal strengths that can be used by students in facing these challenges lies in academic hardiness as a personal character who dares to face various academic challenges that are in front of him (Kamtsios & Karagiannopoulou, 2013). Moreover, in the context of education in today's 5.0 era, students need to have a strong character as a form of adaptive response to the massive changes in the learning system that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic as it is today.

The turmoil of challenges that accompany the educational design during the pandemic requires each learner to have the resilience to manage the stressors that accompany the learning process. This is where the role of academic hardiness gives influence in the form of confidence in a person so that he can anticipate and control external changes that exist, and are converted into essential values for the development of a better personality (Funk & Houston, 1987). When examined from a theoretical perspective, the researchers found similarities with Kobasa's theory which emphasized Academic hardiness as a tough character possessed by a person who is facing academic challenges in front of him. That is, the tough behavior characteristics shown by students in their academic dimensions are a reflection of the individual's ability to deal with anxiety and academic stress that accompanies the learning process (Kobasa, 1982). The epistemological stance that was born through this theory is an important construct for the development of the tough character of students as subjects of education, as was done by ABM for their students.

Through this description, it is clear that the aspect of academic toughness is an urgent character that students need to have to be able to overcome the challenges of the learning process. Academic hardiness in students will lead to the formation of tough behavior in facing academic challenges, having a commitment to play an active role in learning activities, and making maximum use of abilities to achieve academic achievement.

### Habituation Activities through Islamic Religious Education Materials at ABM

The ABM educational institution is an institution that organizes the educational process in two designs, namely the design of formal education through school learning in the morning, while the design of non-formal education is carried out through a learning process in dormitories outside school hours. Such a design was implemented by ABM to build a balance of students' abilities in terms of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor with an emphasis on the capability of good Islamic religious understanding in these students, as stated by one of the ABM students.

"We carry out activities in the dormitory from before dawn until the evening after the evening prayer. The pattern of learning that we follow at school is the same as in other schools. The only difference is that after school activities are dominated by religious activities, starting from qiyamullail, habituation to Muslim women's clothing, to being accustomed to maintaining etiquette towards friends and Ustadzah".

Thus, it can be said that the main focus of efforts to increase the capabilities of students is carried out by ABM by maximizing the design of the formal school curriculum with the design of non-formal education in dormitories through a pattern of habituation and the provision of Islamic material intensively and thoroughly to students. Through the observations of researchers, the Islamic material given to ABM students can be classified into two aspects, namely Islamic material in the field of Islamic jurisprudence and morals. These two main areas are continuously provided by dormitory educators in the form of habituation activities. The author describes the distinction between the two fields through the following table.

**Table 1.** Patterns of Habituation of Islamic Materials at ABM

| Aspect          | Islamic Materials                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fiqh of Worship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prayers in congregation</li> <li>- Qiyamullail</li> <li>- Fasting sunnah</li> <li>- Muroja'ah al-Qur'an</li> </ul> |

|        |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Morals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Muslim dress</li><li>- Maintain etiquette</li><li>- Dhikr all the time</li><li>- Maintain personal and environmental hygiene</li></ul> |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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The application of habituation patterns in dormitories that ABM does to students is a series of activities that are carried out routinely in a cycle of their daily activities. That is, the daily routines that are lived by these students ultimately lead to the internalization of tough characters in each student. The researcher affirms the conclusion based on at least two arguments. First, a series of learning activities (formal and non-formal) organized by ABM is a form of activity that requires an adaptive-academic response from the students themselves. It is not impossible if in the learning process there are obstacles, challenges, and clashes of demands that students must find solutions for. In this context, opportunities for stressors -read: causes of academic stress- for students are much easier to find. Therefore, academic toughness in the cognitive domain (understanding, analyzing) which is framed in the character of not giving up easily, not giving up easily, and making maximum efforts to solve learning problems is a logical implication that every student in ABM must-have. This is in line with Kobasa's thesis which states that academic hardiness is formed through a synergistic combination of cognitive orientation and academic motivation within the individual (Kobasa, 1982). Second, the socio-spiritual implications born of habituation routines in the dormitory scope act as a stimulus that demands a positive response from the students to be able to achieve their educational goals and academic achievements at the level of formal education at school. With the constant, continuous, and continuous stimulus provided, a hardy personal character (a tough individual) is formed who is ready to face the various challenges that lie ahead. If viewed from the epistemological framework, it can be said that the habituation activity through Islamic material at ABM is a process of forming academic hardiness which is strung together through the continuity of the daily routines of the students themselves. As Kobasa emphasized in his theory, academic hardiness is related to a person's persistence when facing difficult learning conditions, and is supported by the motivation that gives understanding to aspects of increasing academic achievement.

### **Conceptualization of Academic Hardiness at ABM: Aspects of Challenge, Control, and Commitment**

Explicitly, Kobasa's theory positions the urgency of academic hardiness in its role to generate student interest in achieving life success in the future. The principles contained in the Kobasa Academic hardiness are narrowed down to three main aspects, namely challenge, control, and commitment (Britt et al, 2001). These three things also become reference points for the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning through Islamic material received by students at ABM.

First, namely the challenge. In a hardy person, the challenge is understood as a form of change to a condition that has previously been stable and is normal, so hardy people consider it something that must be anticipated so that they can continue to grow into good people. In reality, this understanding can be achieved by students at ABM as long as they follow the education pattern in the dormitory through religious activities and acceptance of Islamic Religious Education Islamic material. The challenges that accompany the learning process of the students do not stop at online learning designs that are applied within the scope of formal learning in schools, but also include the challenges of non-formal learning framed in Islamic Religious Education material. The author points out that the challenges in these two activities indirectly shape the character of the students' academic hardiness, as revealed by one of the Islamic Religious Education teachers at ABM.

"The pattern of education applied by our school is a combination of the design of the formal school curriculum and the design of learning in the dormitory. We apply these two patterns integrally to form quality students' personalities. The indicators we use to measure this quality, one of which is the attitude of not giving up and the willingness to solve academic problems faced by our students".

The concept of establishing Academic hardiness applied by the ABM educational institution is carried out through two educational patterns that complement each other. In particular, the design of education in dormitories that focuses on providing Islamic material to students is one of the gaps in shaping the character of students' academic toughness.

Second, namely commitment (commitment). In simple terms, the terminology relates to a person's tendency to actively involve themselves in whatever situation they face. In this context, the commitment of students at ABM is clearly described through their willingness to carry out their daily routines in the dormitory, as well as following Islamic material delivered through a habituation pattern organized by ABM. Commitments that are carried out continuously downstream can form academic hardiness in students, as the results of research by Tan, Booth, or Zwagery (Tan, 2021; Booth, 2021; Zwagery & Liza, 2021).

Third, namely control (control). This dimension is related to a person's ability to feel and act to make the right decisions when there are obstacles in front of him. Students at ABM are accustomed to following Islamic material provided in non-formal education formats in dormitories. Making the right decisions for all the challenges faced by students becomes a place for seeding the formation of strong characters in each individual. So, they can feel the challenge as well as decide on the appropriate action response to solve the challenge.

Thus, it can be said that the formation of academic hardiness characters in ABM students is intertwined through three cognitive evaluation processes (commitment, control, and challenge) in the habituation pattern that accompanies the education process at ABM. The interrelation between the three elements is a driving force for each student's performance at ABM, especially in the formation of characters who can face stressor conditions with optimal toughness.

## CONCLUSION

The study in this article presents an empirical study of the process of forming academic hardiness in students at SMA 'Aisyiyah Boarding School (ABM) during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a form of resilience in facing various learning challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, Academic hardiness is one of the main priorities emphasized by ABM. Therefore, the analysis of the formation of tough characters in students becomes an urgent domain to be studied comprehensively and in-depth. The results of this research study on the process of forming students' academic hardiness, concluded that there are three cognitive evaluation processes (commitment, control, and challenge) that are empirically related to the persistence of ABM students when dealing with difficult learning designs. The three evaluation processes identified by researchers can shape the character of academic hardiness in students through habituation patterns and the provision of Islamic material in two aspects, namely Islamic material in the field of Islamic jurisprudence and morals. These two main areas are continuously provided by ABM in the form of habituation activities for students so that they can form good academic hardiness in students.

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