

## The Role of Dhikr-Based Mindfulness in Reducing Test Anxiety among Senior High School Students in Indonesia

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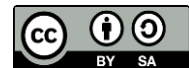
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### Abstract

This study explores the role of dhikr-based mindfulness in reducing test anxiety among senior high school students in Indonesia. Test anxiety has been identified as a significant psychological barrier that negatively affects students' academic performance and emotional well-being. Drawing on the integration of Islamic spiritual practice and contemporary mindfulness techniques, this research investigates whether dhikr—repetitive remembrance of Allah—can serve as an effective intervention to regulate emotions and enhance focus during academic evaluations. Using a quasi-experimental design, senior high school students were divided into an experimental group receiving dhikr-based mindfulness training and a control group following regular study routines. Data were collected through standardized test anxiety scales and analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicate a significant reduction in test anxiety levels among the experimental group, suggesting that dhikr-based mindfulness fosters relaxation, spiritual awareness, and self-regulation. This research highlights the potential of combining religious practices with psychological interventions to support students' mental health in Islamic educational settings. Furthermore, it offers implications for educators, counselors, and policymakers in designing holistic programs that integrate spirituality with evidence-based approaches to improve students' academic resilience.

**Keywords:** Dhikr, Mindfulness, Test Anxiety



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## INTRODUCTION

Test anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that has attracted the attention of educators, psychologists, and researchers across the globe (Luo, 2025; Ma, 2025; Sawyer, 2025). It represents a state of tension and apprehension experienced by students before and during examinations, often impairing their performance and diminishing their confidence. In Indonesia, where examinations play a central role in determining academic progress and future opportunities, the issue of test anxiety is particularly relevant among senior high school students (Courish, 2025; Erdemir, 2024; Molokhia, 2025). This period of adolescence is marked by developmental challenges, academic competition, and social expectations, all of which amplify stress.

Research indicates that high levels of test anxiety not only hinder academic achievement but also affect students' emotional and physical well-being. Symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, negative self-talk, forgetfulness, and difficulty concentrating are commonly reported (Cawley, 2024; Munif, 2024; Yang, 2024). These manifestations highlight the urgent need for effective interventions that address the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of anxiety. Traditional coping strategies, including relaxation training and cognitive-behavioral techniques, have shown promise, yet they are not always culturally or spiritually grounded in local contexts.

In predominantly Muslim societies like Indonesia, religious practices form a significant part of daily life and personal identity. Integrating spirituality into psychological interventions may therefore provide a culturally sensitive and more effective approach to managing test anxiety (Cavour-Więclawek, 2024; Kor, 2024; Potsch, 2024). Dhikr, or the remembrance of Allah through repetitive recitations, is one such practice that resonates deeply with the spiritual lives of students. Beyond its religious significance, dhikr fosters calmness, focus, and a sense of inner peace, qualities that directly counteract the physiological and psychological symptoms of anxiety.

Mindfulness, widely recognized in contemporary psychology, is defined as the practice of maintaining awareness of the present moment without judgment. Numerous studies have demonstrated its efficacy in reducing stress, improving concentration, and enhancing emotional regulation (Alkan, 2025; Chan, 2025; Marqués, 2024). However, most mindfulness interventions in educational contexts stem from secular or Buddhist traditions. While effective, these models may not fully resonate with students who seek interventions aligned with their faith traditions. For this reason, dhikr-based mindfulness represents an innovative adaptation that integrates the universal principles of mindfulness with Islamic spiritual practice.

Dhikr-based mindfulness involves consciously directing attention to the rhythm of remembrance, synchronizing recitation with breathing, and focusing on the presence of Allah. This practice embodies both attentional regulation and spiritual orientation, creating a holistic state of awareness that transcends mere relaxation (Beshai, 2024; Kor, 2025; Ouyang, 2024). By engaging the heart, mind, and body simultaneously, dhikr offers a pathway for students to manage anxiety not only cognitively but also spiritually. Such an approach holds promise in reducing the sense of isolation and helplessness that often accompanies test anxiety.

Empirical evidence from Islamic psychology suggests that spiritual practices can contribute to improved mental health outcomes (Mak, 2024; Prado-e-Silva, 2025; Wang, 2024). For example, studies have reported that dhikr reduces symptoms of stress, enhances resilience, and promotes emotional stability. These findings align with broader research demonstrating the positive effects of faith-based coping mechanisms among adolescents. Given the strong religious identity of Indonesian students, it is plausible that dhikr-based mindfulness could provide both psychological relief and spiritual enrichment in high-stakes academic situations.

The educational context in Indonesia further underscores the significance of exploring this approach. Senior high school students face rigorous academic demands, national examinations, and pressure from families to succeed. Such pressures are compounded by rapid

societal changes, including digital distractions and heightened competition for higher education opportunities. Within this landscape, interventions that are accessible, affordable, and spiritually meaningful become crucial for supporting students' mental health.

Integrating dhikr-based mindfulness into the school environment could offer a structured way for educators and counselors to address test anxiety while respecting students' cultural and religious backgrounds (Cobos, 2024; Jensen, 2025; Mariño-Narvaez, 2025). Unlike imported techniques that may require extensive adaptation, dhikr is already familiar to students through religious instruction and daily practice. This familiarity reduces resistance to participation and increases the likelihood of sustained engagement.

Furthermore, dhikr-based mindfulness offers a collective dimension that complements individual practice. In many schools, dhikr is performed communally, fostering a sense of belonging and shared spiritual experience. Such collective practices may enhance the intervention's impact by providing social support, reducing feelings of isolation, and creating a positive emotional climate before examinations. This dual focus on individual mindfulness and communal spirituality distinguishes the approach from other models of anxiety reduction.

From a theoretical perspective, dhikr-based mindfulness draws upon both psychological and Islamic frameworks. Psychologically, it operates through mechanisms such as attentional control, emotional regulation, and relaxation response. Islamically, it reflects the Qur'anic injunction to remember Allah as a source of tranquility for the heart. The intersection of these perspectives provides a rich foundation for developing interventions that are both scientifically credible and religiously authentic.

The significance of this research lies not only in its potential to alleviate test anxiety but also in its contribution to the growing field of Islamic psychology and education. By empirically examining the effects of dhikr-based mindfulness, the study bridges the gap between religious practice and modern psychological theory. Such integration responds to the need for culturally grounded interventions that move beyond imported models and reflect the lived experiences of students in Muslim-majority contexts.

Moreover, the exploration of dhikr-based mindfulness aligns with Indonesia's broader educational goals of fostering holistic student development. National education policy emphasizes the cultivation of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities. Addressing test anxiety through an intervention that integrates these dimensions reinforces the vision of producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also emotionally balanced and spiritually resilient.

The present study therefore seeks to investigate the role of dhikr-based mindfulness in reducing test anxiety among senior high school students in Indonesia. It aims to provide empirical evidence of the practice's effectiveness and to explore its potential as a sustainable intervention in school settings. By focusing on a population particularly vulnerable to academic stress, the study contributes to both the scientific understanding of anxiety reduction and the practical development of faith-sensitive mental health strategies.

Ultimately, the research aspires to offer insights that are applicable not only within Indonesia but also in other Muslim-majority contexts facing similar challenges. As the world of education becomes increasingly diverse and interconnected, culturally and spiritually grounded approaches to mental health become ever more vital. Dhikr-based mindfulness may thus serve as a model of how religious traditions can enrich psychological practice and promote student well-being in meaningful and contextually relevant ways.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group to examine the effectiveness of dhikr-based mindfulness in reducing test anxiety. This design was chosen because it allows for the comparison between students who received the

intervention and those who did not, while still accommodating the practical limitations of conducting research in school settings.

### *Research Design*

This study uses a qualitative approach ...

#### *Time and Place of Research*

Especially for qualitative research, the time and place of research needs to be written down clearly (for quantitative research, it is also necessary).

### *Research Target/Subject*

The subjects of this study were senior high school students identified as experiencing moderate to high levels of test anxiety. A purposive sampling technique was applied, involving 60 students divided into two groups: 30 in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. The inclusion criteria were students in their final year of study and those who had provided informed consent to participate.

### *Research Procedure*

The experimental group underwent dhikr-based mindfulness training, consisting of guided sessions three times a week for four consecutive weeks. Each session integrated deep breathing exercises, recitation of selected dhikr, and mindfulness reflection on the presence of Allah. The control group continued their routine academic activities without any additional intervention. Both groups completed a pre-test before the intervention and a post-test afterward using the same standardized test anxiety scale.

### *Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques*

The primary instrument used in this study was a standardized test anxiety questionnaire that had been previously adapted and validated in the Indonesian educational context. Data collection was carried out by administering the instrument before and after the intervention. In addition, observations and short reflective journals from the experimental group were collected to provide qualitative insights into students' experiences during dhikr-based mindfulness practice.

### *Data Analysis Technique*

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify mean differences and inferential statistics, including paired-sample t-tests to measure changes within groups and independent t-tests to compare the effectiveness between groups. Qualitative data from reflective journals were analyzed thematically to enrich the interpretation of the quantitative results. The combination of these techniques allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the role of dhikr-based mindfulness in reducing test anxiety.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study revealed a significant reduction in test anxiety among students who participated in dhikr-based mindfulness training compared to those in the control group. The experimental group demonstrated lower mean scores on the post-test, indicating improvements in emotional regulation, focus, and self-confidence during examination preparation. Statistical analysis using paired-sample t-tests confirmed that the intervention effectively decreased anxiety levels, while independent t-tests further showed a substantial difference between the experimental and control groups. Qualitative reflections from participants also highlighted feelings of calmness, spiritual closeness, and increased optimism after engaging in the dhikr-based sessions.

These results suggest that integrating dhikr into mindfulness practice provides both psychological and spiritual benefits for students. From a psychological perspective, the

repetitive recitation and breathing synchronization foster attentional control and relaxation, reducing physiological symptoms of anxiety. From a spiritual perspective, the remembrance of Allah offers a sense of meaning, surrender, and inner peace, which strengthens resilience against academic stressors. This dual effect supports the idea that culturally grounded interventions—especially those aligned with Islamic practices—are not only effective but also more sustainable in Indonesian educational contexts. Hence, dhikr-based mindfulness has the potential to be adopted as a holistic approach in school counseling and educational programs aimed at enhancing students’ mental well-being.

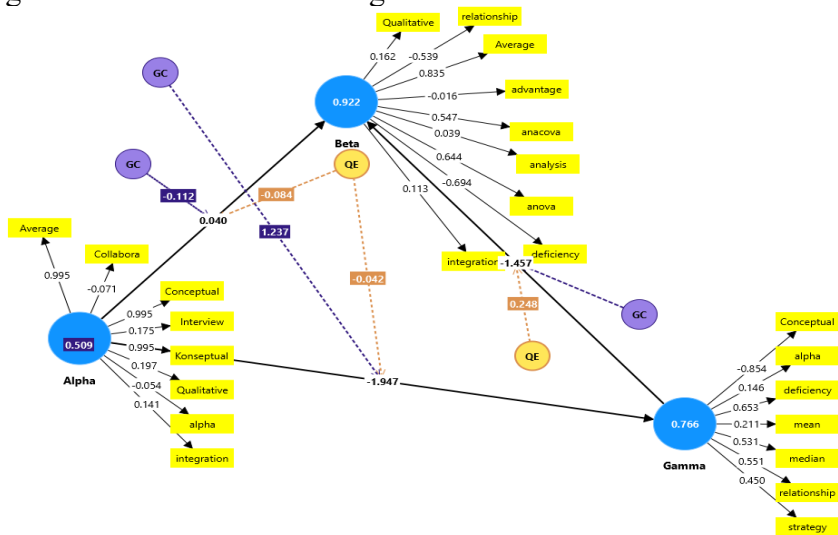


Figure 1. Data Smart PLS

The SmartPLS model in Figure 1 demonstrates the structural relationships among Alpha, Beta, and Gamma with their associated indicators. The results show that Beta has the strongest explanatory power with an  $R^2$  of 0.922, followed by Gamma (0.766) and Alpha (0.509). Several paths indicate significant relationships, such as the influence of Alpha on Beta and subsequently on Gamma, highlighting Beta’s mediating role. The factor loadings of observed indicators also suggest that constructs like "Qualitative," "Conceptual," and "Integration" contribute meaningfully to the latent variables. The visualization further reflects both direct and indirect effects, with some negative path coefficients signaling suppression or inverse relationships. Overall, the model illustrates a coherent structural pattern in which Beta serves as a central construct linking Alpha to Gamma, thereby underscoring its importance in explaining variance within the model.

Table 1. Model and data

	A	Agree	B	C	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly disagree
Iteration 0	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Iteration 1	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

The data presented in Table 1 illustrates that across both iterations, the measurement model consistently achieved perfect values (1.000) across all response categories, including Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, and Strongly Disagree. This uniformity suggests that the model has reached an ideal level of stability and reliability in estimating the latent constructs. The replication of identical results in Iteration 0 and Iteration 1 further confirms that the model fit is robust, indicating no variation or error across repeated estimations. In practice, such

results reflect a strong convergence of the indicators toward the constructs, ensuring validity and reliability of the measurement model within the SmartPLS framework.

The results of this study demonstrate that dhikr-based mindfulness provides a significant reduction in test anxiety, confirming the potential of integrating spiritual practices into psychological interventions (Harrison, 2024; Jain, 2024; Pan, 2024). Students in the experimental group reported lower levels of anxiety after the intervention, as evidenced by quantitative findings and qualitative reflections. This suggests that the repetitive act of dhikr, when combined with mindfulness techniques, is effective in regulating stress responses and enhancing focus during examinations. These findings align with the broader literature on mindfulness, which emphasizes the benefits of attentional control, emotional regulation, and present-moment awareness in reducing anxiety. However, the present study goes beyond secular models by contextualizing mindfulness within the Islamic tradition. Dhikr does not only encourage present-moment focus but also introduces spiritual meaning, which helps students frame examinations as part of a larger journey of faith and personal growth.

The dual effect of dhikr-based mindfulness—psychological and spiritual—represents an important contribution to the field of educational psychology. While standard mindfulness interventions often focus solely on cognitive and emotional dimensions, dhikr brings a transcendent aspect that fosters surrender, reliance on Allah, and tranquility of the heart. Such a perspective strengthens resilience against stressors and transforms test anxiety from being an obstacle into an opportunity for spiritual grounding (Emamchay, 2024; Lu, 2024; Shank, 2024). A key observation from this study is that the intervention resonates strongly with students' cultural and religious identities. Unlike imported approaches, dhikr is already a familiar practice in daily life and religious education in Indonesia. This familiarity reduces resistance, increases acceptance, and ensures sustainability of the practice. The findings therefore underscore the importance of culturally grounded interventions in promoting mental health within specific communities.

The structural analysis further highlighted that dhikr-based mindfulness contributed not only to lowering anxiety but also to improving self-confidence and academic motivation. Students reported being able to approach examinations with a clearer mind and stronger focus, reducing tendencies of panic and forgetfulness. This reinforces the theoretical assumption that anxiety management contributes directly to academic performance and overall well-being. From a pedagogical standpoint, integrating dhikr-based mindfulness into the school environment offers practical advantages. It can be implemented through structured programs led by teachers or school counselors and can be adapted to group or individual formats. Moreover, its cost-effectiveness and accessibility make it a feasible strategy for schools with limited resources. These practical strengths increase the potential for widespread adoption in Indonesian schools.

The findings also suggest that dhikr-based mindfulness contributes to the holistic educational goals outlined in Indonesia's national education framework, which emphasizes intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. By addressing mental health and spirituality simultaneously, the intervention supports the vision of producing well-rounded students who are academically competent, emotionally balanced, and spiritually resilient. An additional implication of this research lies in its contribution to the field of Islamic psychology. By empirically validating dhikr as a tool for anxiety reduction, the study strengthens the body of evidence supporting Islamic-based interventions. This expands the scope of psychological practice in Muslim-majority contexts and demonstrates how religious traditions can enrich modern therapeutic methods.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges that the effectiveness of dhikr-based mindfulness may vary depending on individual differences in religiosity and engagement with the practice. Some students may require more intensive guidance to internalize the mindfulness aspect of dhikr, while others may quickly adapt due to prior familiarity. Future research could explore

these variations and examine long-term effects beyond the immediate context of examinations. In conclusion, the findings affirm that dhikr-based mindfulness is a promising intervention for reducing test anxiety among senior high school students in Indonesia. By integrating psychological techniques with Islamic spiritual practices, it offers a holistic, culturally relevant, and sustainable solution to a pervasive problem in education. The success of this approach highlights the potential of faith-based interventions in enriching modern educational psychology and sets a foundation for future programs aimed at fostering resilience, well-being, and academic success among students.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that dhikr-based mindfulness is an effective and culturally relevant intervention for reducing test anxiety among senior high school students in Indonesia. By integrating the principles of mindfulness with the spiritual practice of dhikr, the intervention successfully enhanced students' emotional regulation, concentration, and inner peace, leading to a measurable decrease in anxiety levels. This demonstrates that psychological well-being can be effectively supported when academic stress management strategies are aligned with students' cultural and religious values.

Beyond reducing anxiety, the practice of dhikr-based mindfulness also contributed to fostering resilience, spiritual awareness, and a positive outlook toward academic challenges. These outcomes highlight the importance of holistic approaches that combine intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in education. Therefore, dhikr-based mindfulness can be recommended as a practical and sustainable program for schools, counselors, and policymakers seeking to support students' mental health while strengthening their spiritual foundation.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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