

The Relationship between Irrational Beliefs, Achievement Motivation, and Academic Stress among Students at Teacher Education Institutes (IPG) in Johor

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Abstract

This study focuses on academic stress, achievement motivation, and irrational beliefs among students at Teacher Education Institutes (IPG). The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between irrational beliefs, achievement motivation, and academic stress among students. A correlational research method was used in this study, with random sampling. The sample consisted of 149 second-year students enrolled in the Design and Technology Education, Health and Physical Education, and Guidance and Counselling programs at IPG. Some students at IPG experience academic stress due to workload and exam preparation. The findings of this study indicate a significant positive relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress. However, the results also show no significant relationship between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation. In conclusion, irrational beliefs tend to increase when students experience academic stress. However, students' irrational beliefs are not related to their achievement motivation. The implication of this study suggests the need for interventions that focus on promoting rational thinking strategies to help students manage stress effectively at IPG. At the end of the study, several recommendations are presented regarding irrational beliefs, achievement motivation, and academic stress.

Keywords: Irrational Beliefs, Achievement Motivation, Academic Stress, Students At Teacher Education Institutes (IPG)

Introduction

The concept of irrational beliefs and behaviours has long been discussed in the fields of philosophy and psychology. However, the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) theory, introduced by Albert Ellis in 1955, was one of the first systematic approaches to link irrational beliefs with emotional disturbances and human behaviour. The REBT approach, developed by Ellis, emphasizes changing irrational thought patterns that can influence a person's behaviour and emotions (Ellis & Dryden, 1997).

Through a literature review, this study evaluates and adapts the REBT model for student intervention programs, based on approaches developed in previous research. The REBT theory discusses how irrational beliefs affect individuals' emotions and behaviours, and how they can change their thinking to achieve psychological well-being. Recent studies on REBT show that individuals with irrational beliefs often become trapped in thought patterns that significantly affect their emotions. The ABCDE model in REBT helps individuals identify and change these beliefs to achieve psychological well-being (Ellis & Dryden, 1997). These irrational thoughts can impact their relationships with others and their environment (Dryden & Branch, 2008). Irrational Beliefs (IB) are defined in the literature as beliefs that are not based on logical reasoning about specific situations and are often associated with negative emotions. Individuals who exhibit such behaviours are often influenced by irrational beliefs, which lead to negative emotional and behavioural outcomes without them realizing the actual triggers. Irrational beliefs can influence an individual's thinking and behaviour, increasing the risk of making ineffective decisions or facing difficulties in achieving their goals (Ellis & Dryden, 1997). Rochanah (2022) explains that rational beliefs contribute to increased individual motivation. Faith (2024) found that rational thinking can effectively reduce stress levels among students.

Research on achievement motivation among students at Teacher Education Institutes (IPG) has not yet received serious attention, based on past studies. Preliminary findings indicate that students' achievement motivation is at a low level. This suggests that greater attention needs to be given to this aspect to ensure students reach at least a moderate level of achievement motivation. Similarly, studies focusing on academic stress have also received limited attention. Early findings identified two key sources of academic stress among students: the workload at IPG and examinations. Therefore, a more focused intervention is needed to address this issue.

Based on the literature review, research on irrational thinking among students at teacher education institutes has yet to be conducted. Preliminary findings by the researcher indicate that students exhibit a high level of irrational thinking, suggesting the need for an intervention to address this issue. Based on the study's results, there is potential to develop a more targeted module to address issues related to achievement motivation, academic stress, and irrational thinking among teacher education students. Further research is needed to explore more systematic approaches to enhance their academic well-being.

Literature Review

Mohd. Nasib (2016) stated that understanding the basic concept of stress is important. Three models of stress—stimulus, response, and transactional—explain how stress arises. Stress can be either positive (eustress) or negative (distress), and if not managed, it can harm both physical and mental health. Awareness of stress and its symptoms can help prevent negative consequences. Mubarokah and Sandra (2015) noted that competition among students can lead to academic stress. This competition pushes them to meet academic demands, but if their understanding of these demands is unclear, it can result in academic stress.

Wafi (2020) found that in the learning aspect, the highest-rated item was *"I have difficulty understanding what the lecturer is teaching during lessons"*, with a mean score of $M = 4.01$. High academic stress causes students to struggle in understanding lecturers' instruction.

Beech (2020) stated that performing too many tasks within a limited time frame can increase stress. In addition, working in an uncondusive environment and at inappropriate times also contributes to high levels of stress.

Sa'odah (2023) found that academic stress contributes to high levels of anxiety among university students. Mohamad Faizel (2023) discovered that two IPG students experienced high levels of stress. This study emphasizes the importance of specialized programs that focus on stress management skills among pre-service teachers at IPG, with an emphasis on effective coping strategies to manage both academic and professional stress.

Ashira (2017) explained that the wisdom to manage stress effectively can help individuals avoid the negative consequences that may arise in their lives. Facing stress wisely not only reduces the risk of mental health issues but also enhances overall quality of life. In addition, motivation supported by positive emotions and values plays a crucial role in creating a joyful learning environment (Urhahne, 2023). When students experience positive emotions, they are more likely to feel happy and enthusiastic in facing academic challenges. This shows that emotional well-being and effective stress management are key to student success and happiness in life.

Nurain (2022) found that the REBT program had a significant effect in reducing stress among postgraduate students in English education within the intervention group compared to the control group, based on measurements using the PSS-14 (Perceived Stress Scale). Additionally, the positive effects of the program persisted for up to three months after the intervention, as shown in follow-up surveys conducted by the researchers.

Irrational Beliefs

The Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) theory, developed by Albert Ellis in the 1950s, focuses on how rational and irrational thinking influences a person's emotions and behaviour. Irrational thinking can negatively affect emotional well-being, often leading to issues such as anxiety and depression. Ellis introduced the ABC model to explain this process, where A represents the activating event (a negative experience), B represents the belief (often irrational) about the event, and C represents the emotional consequence that follows. According to Ellis, it is not the event itself that causes emotional distress, but the belief about the event. Misinterpretations or irrational views of a situation can lead to emotional consequences, as individuals form emotional responses based on distorted thinking. These irrational beliefs can be challenged and replaced with more rational thoughts through the REBT approach, helping individuals improve their emotional regulation and overall psychological well-being (Dryden, 2022).

Irrational beliefs reflect a mismatch between one's thinking and reality; they are illogical and tend to be extreme (Dryden, 2008). The emotions experienced by individuals are often subjective and influenced by their beliefs and interpretations of a situation, making it difficult to judge them as absolutely right or wrong. However, individuals sometimes realize that the emotions they experience do not align with the actual events they have encountered (Gert, 1988). As a result, individuals who struggle to regulate their emotions often face challenges in managing them, especially when irrational beliefs influence their thoughts and reactions to specific situations. REBT is a method that can help transform irrational thinking and

behaviour into rational ones. Abdul Rashid (2022) stated that Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is a methodology that can change irrational thoughts and behaviours into rational ones.

In negative situations, irrational beliefs can form through two main mechanisms. First, individuals experience specific events that trigger emotional and behavioural disturbances, which then become established as irrational beliefs in their lives. Second, new irrational beliefs may emerge in response to negative events, often influenced by previously formed irrational thinking patterns (DiGiuseppe, 2010). In this context, individuals may create a negative environment based on their experiences, which in turn reinforces those irrational beliefs. The school environment, where individuals spend a significant portion of their time, plays a crucial role in this process. David and DiGiuseppe (2010) argue that an individual's sociocultural environment forms the foundation for irrational beliefs. The human brain does not naturally distinguish between rational and irrational behaviour by nature, and this distinction becomes part of how we perceive our environment. In other words, an individual's understanding is shaped by the information they receive from their surroundings. As a result, past experiences and events related to education have a significant impact on the extent to which irrational behaviour is exhibited by a student (Rona, 2025). Studies have shown that REBT group counseling is effective when used to enhance student motivation.

Irrational thinking arises when individuals believe a distorted perception of a situation as absolute truth, without considering more rational alternatives. In the context of REBT, such irrational beliefs can lead to prolonged emotional and behavioural disturbances (Gert, 1988). As a result, irrational thinking is often difficult to recognize and manage. A study conducted by Ahad (2023), involving 231 students, found that irrational beliefs are present among students. In an experimental study, Omima (2024) explained that REBT had a significant impact in reducing student burnout.

Achievement Motivation

Jessica (2022) explained that human motivation needs, according to McClelland, consist of three components: power, affiliation, and achievement. She also stated that every human behaviour results from their thoughts. Motives involving power, achievement, and affiliation contribute to the desired learning outcomes.

Julius (2023) found that students need support from peers, family, and teachers to succeed in their studies. This indicates that internal motivation alone is not sufficient, as they also require support from their environment. Yanuar (2024), in his study, showed a significant relationship between peer relationships and motivation. Students need to collaborate with their peers in the learning process, as interaction and the sharing of ideas can enhance both their motivation and understanding of concepts.

The level of irrational beliefs can also influence achievement motivation. In a study conducted by Laras (2018), it was found that the REBT approach can enhance learning motivation in efforts to optimize and develop students' potential. Such effects are important for understanding the relationship with achievement motivation, as achievement motivation is a key factor in attaining academic success (Pajares & Urdan, 2002).

Studies have shown that irrational beliefs can influence students' achievement motivation (Ghazali, 2022). Irrational beliefs may disrupt students' motivation to learn and succeed academically. Shazarina (2023) explained that students with irrational beliefs tend to procrastinate on academic tasks, lose interest in learning, or put in less effort overall in their academic performance.

Understanding the psychological dynamics that influence academic stress among teacher trainees is crucial in cultivating resilient, future-ready educators. This study is motivated by the increasing concerns over mental health and academic burnout among students in Malaysian teacher education institutes. By exploring the interplay between irrational beliefs, achievement motivation, and academic stress, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how internal thought patterns impact students' academic well-being. The contribution of this study lies in its potential to inform guidance and counseling practices within teacher education programs, offering evidence-based strategies to enhance emotional regulation and academic resilience. Furthermore, the findings may support policy-makers and educators in designing interventions that promote healthier belief systems and motivation among pre-service teachers (Zhang, 2024)

This research also addresses a critical gap in the Malaysian educational context, where limited empirical studies have examined the intersection of cognitive beliefs and academic stress specifically within IPG environments. By situating the investigation within Johor's teacher education institutes, this study highlights contextual factors—cultural, academic, and psychological—that influence trainee teachers' motivation and mental wellbeing. In doing so, it contributes to the development of localized psychological models that reflect the lived experiences of Malaysian student-teachers, making it especially relevant for guidance and counseling professionals working in this region (Zhang et al., 2024).

Moreover, the study has the potential to inform preventative mental health strategies by pinpointing irrational beliefs that may predispose students to heightened stress. By identifying these cognitive distortions early in the teacher training process, institutions can design tailored interventions that promote achievement motivation while mitigating stress-related consequences. Ultimately, these efforts align with broader national education goals to foster holistic student development, emotional intelligence, and readiness for professional teaching challenges in the 21st century (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Academic Stress

Hans Selye adapted the concept of "stress" from physics—where it refers to the interaction between force and resistance—into the field of medicine to explain how the body responds to physiological and psychological pressure. The stress experienced by students in school or educational environments is referred to as academic stress (Sinaga, 2015).

In addition, irrational beliefs also influence students' academic stress (Ony, 2024). Academic stress refers to the pressure or stress experienced by students in the context of their learning or academic responsibilities. Irrational beliefs can lead to academic stress by causing students to doubt their own abilities and feel less confident in handling academic tasks. According to Nafisah (2024), this can result in a decline in academic performance and a lack of self-

confidence in facing academic challenges. Gokmen (2023) found that academic stress can become a trigger for further stress among students. Students experiencing stress often have disrupted thinking, which in turn affects their emotional well-being.

Overall, these studies show that irrational beliefs have a significant impact on students' achievement motivation and academic stress. Therefore, it is important to recognize the potential effects of these irrational beliefs and take steps to address them so that students can more effectively reach their academic potential.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a quantitative research approach. It was carried out to examine the relationships between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation, irrational beliefs and academic stress, and the relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation. Data were collected using instruments measuring academic stress, achievement motivation, and students' beliefs. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents consisting of students from the Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia (IPGM).

Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of second-year students at a teacher education institute in Johor. A correlational method was used in this study. It aimed to measure the relationships between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation, irrational beliefs and academic stress, and academic stress and achievement motivation. The study population was based on the enrollment of students in the Bachelor of Teaching Programme (PISMP) at the Institute of Teacher Education in Johor (N = 854). The sample was selected randomly and involved students from three different programs. Although there was diversity in academic backgrounds, analysis was conducted to ensure that the effects of the intervention could be comprehensively measured across student groups. A total of 149 second-year students currently studying at the teacher education institute in Johor Bahru were selected as the study sample. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation to examine the relationships between irrational beliefs and academic stress, as well as between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation.

Research Instruments

The researcher used the Irrational Belief System Instrument by Iman (2017), known as the Student Belief Questionnaire, for data collection. However, the instrument was modified to suit the context of students in higher education institutions. The Student Belief Inventory (SBI) consists of 66 items using a five-point Likert scale, where students respond to questions categorized under the Likert Scale Statements of Student Beliefs. In terms of reliability, the questionnaire instrument indicates the extent to which the scores for each item are consistent or stable when tested multiple times. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this questionnaire was 0.84, based on a pilot test involving twenty IPG students.

The academic stress questionnaire developed by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) was used to measure academic stress responses among university students. Based on evidence and a review of the literature, 18 items were constructed to assess perceptions of academic stress and its sources. The instrument demonstrated an internal consistency reliability of 0.70 (Cronbach's alpha). Factor analysis revealed that four identified factors had significant

correlations and supported the content validity of the instrument used. These findings are consistent with the underlying theory of the study, indicating that the factors have a strong foundation in explaining the concept being examined.

The McClelland Motives Instrument was used to measure students' level of achievement motivation. This instrument contains three subscales: (1) Affiliation, (2) Power, and (3) Achievement. The Achievement Motivation Scale (1985) was used to determine their achievement motivation. The Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.89. This instrument consists of 30 items.

There are several instruments for measuring irrational beliefs used in both local and international studies. In the context of higher education institutions in Malaysia, the researcher selected the Irrational Belief System Instrument developed by Iman (2015), known as the Staff Belief Questionnaire, and adapted it for students at teacher education institutes (IPG). Before being used, the instrument underwent a validation process through expert review in the field of Guidance and Counseling. In addition, content validity testing was conducted to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the items used to measure the studied concept. The reliability of the instrument was also assessed using tests such as Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency. There are four main indicators: (1) Extreme Demands, (2) Awfulness, (3) Low Frustration Tolerance, and (4) Global Evaluation. This instrument uses a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of the instrument, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.84 (Iman, 2015).

This study used two main instruments to measure academic stress and achievement motivation. The academic stress questionnaire developed by Bedewy (2015) consists of 18 items that assess perceptions of academic stress and its sources, with an internal reliability of 0.7 (Cronbach's alpha). Factor analysis identified four correlated factors that reflect academic expectation stress, perceptions of workload and examinations, academic self-perception, and time constraints (Arif, 2019).

In addition, this study also used the achievement motivation questionnaire developed by McClelland (1985), which measures three primary needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. This instrument consists of 30 items with an internal reliability of 0.8 (Cronbach's alpha), and factor analysis confirmed three correlated factors that support the motivation theory (McClelland, 1985).

Data Analysis

In the context of this research, Pearson correlation analysis was used to measure the relationship between irrational behaviour and achievement motivation, as well as between irrational behaviour and academic stress. In this analysis, the significance level was set at .05

Research Findings*Identifying the Relationship between Irrational Beliefs and Achievement Motivation*

Table 1

Relationship between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation.

Variables	Pearson Correlation(n = 149)	Sig (2-Tailed)
Irrational Belief * Motivation	-.140	.089

Table 1 above shows the relationship between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation. Correlation analysis indicates that the relationship between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation is not significant ($r = -.140$, $p = .089$, $p > .05$).

Identifying the Relationship between Irrational Beliefs and Academic Stress

Table 2

Relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress

Variables	Pearson Correlation (n = 149)	Sig (2-Tailed)
Irrational Belief * Academic Stress	.325**	.000

The table above shows the relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress. The findings indicate a significant relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between irrational beliefs and academic stress ($r = .325$, $p < .001$). Although significant, the correlation level is low. This means that the higher the irrational beliefs, the higher the academic stress.

Identifying the relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation

Table 3

The relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation

Variables	Pearson Correlation (n = 149)	Sig (2-Tailed)
STRESS * motivation	-.273**	.001

The table below shows the relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation. The findings indicate a significant relationship between academic stress and motivation, $r = -0.273$, $p = .001$ ($p < .05$). The strength of the relationship is low. Since the correlation is negative or inverse, this means that the higher the academic stress, the lower the motivation.

Discussion

The discussion is based on the findings for three variables: the relationship between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation, the relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress, and the relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation among IPG students.

The Relationship between Irrational Beliefs and Achievement Motivation

The study found no significant relationship between irrational beliefs and achievement motivation. This indicates that irrational beliefs do not influence students' level of achievement motivation. This contrasts with the study conducted by Onyewuotu (2024), which found that irrational beliefs do affect motivation. Motivation can be enhanced when students think rationally. However, the educational setting may have influenced these findings, as Onyewuotu conducted the study at a federal college, whereas this study was conducted among students at the Institute of Teacher Education (IPG).

The Relationship between Irrational Beliefs and Academic Stress

The results of the study show that there is a significant relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Murat (2024), which also found a significant relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress. It was found that students experience academic stress particularly in relation to the fear of failure in examinations.

The Relationship between Academic Stress and Achievement Motivation

The results of the study show that there is a significant relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation. The lower the level of academic stress, the higher the level of achievement motivation. This is consistent with the study conducted by Merina (2022), which found a significant relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size used may not fully represent the broader population, thus limiting the generalizability of the results to specific contexts. Second, the correlational approach employed only indicates relationships between variables without establishing causal links. Additionally, time constraints in conducting the study may have affected the observation of long-term intervention effects. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger samples and adopt a longitudinal approach to better understand changes over a longer period.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, there is a significant but weak positive relationship between participants' irrational beliefs and their achievement motivation. The results indicate that there is no significant relationship between irrational beliefs and motivation. Students are still able to maintain consistency in their studies despite having a low level of rational thinking. However, an appropriate intervention should be provided to students to help them achieve a normal level of rationality in line with a balanced level of self-motivation.

In terms of academic stress, the results show that there is a significant relationship between irrational beliefs and academic stress. The higher the students' irrational beliefs, the higher their level of stress. Therefore, appropriate interventions need to be developed to help students overcome irrational beliefs, which in turn can have a positive impact on maintaining a normal level of stress.

The findings also show that there is a significant relationship between academic stress and achievement motivation. A low level of motivation affects the level of stress, making it higher. Likewise, a high level of stress contributes to a lower level of motivation. An appropriate intervention should be developed to balance students' motivation and academic stress, which in turn can contribute to the desired academic achievement.

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