Dynamics of Self-Regulation: A Study of College Students Who Occupy Dual Roles as Couples and Young Academics

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Abstract: Self-regulation is an individual's ability to plan, control, and reflect on thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to achieve desired goals. College students who marry while still studying face unique challenges in the form of dual roles: student and spouse. This situation demands strong self-regulation skills to maintain balance between the two. This study aims to explore the dynamics of self-regulation in married seventh-semester college students. This study used a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to explore the participants' subjective experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observation of two married seventh-semester female college students. Analysis was conducted thematically, emphasizing the interpretation of the meaning of the participants' experiences. The results showed that both participants were able to apply self-regulation through time management aligned with their daily schedules, active communication with their partners, and setting academic and family priorities. Motivation to study was driven by personal responsibility, promises to family, and emotional support from their partners. Despite facing the pressures of dual roles, both participants demonstrated different adaptation strategies, both structured and flexible, to maintain academic and family balance. This study confirms that self-regulation, social support, and personal discipline are important factors for the academic success of married college students. Keywords: self-regulation, married students, dual roles.

1 INTRODUCTION

During the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, university students face increasingly complex academic demands (Perdana & Wijaya, 2021). This stage is also characterized by the search for personal identity alongside the strengthening of independence in learning and decision-making (Panadero, 2017). Students are required to develop time management skills, emotional regulation, and learning strategies in order to complete their studies successfully (Zimmerman, 2002). However, this transition is often accompanied by psychological pressures that affect academic performance (Clark, 2014). The situation becomes even more complex when students must take on additional roles such as marriage (Justin et al., 2024).

A qualitative study in Pakistan found that married students experienced significant challenges in time management, mainly due to urgent domestic responsibilities that caused frequent delays in study

schedules (Batool, 2023). Research also shows that married students are vulnerable to role conflict, stress, and delays in completing their studies (Justin et al., 2024). Moreover, limited social and economic support exacerbates the difficulties of married students in pursuing higher education (Clark, 2014). Empirical data in Indonesia indicate that student marriage rates remain relatively high, which negatively impacts academic achievement (Dommaraju & Tan, 2024). Another study comparing students based on marital status found that married students reported greater role conflict and time-related psychological stress, which in turn affected their academic performance (Iqbal et al., 2024).

Theoretically, self-regulation and self-regulated learning (SRL) provide an important framework to understand students' learning strategies (Panadero, 2017). Zimmerman (2000) explained that self-regulation consists of three interrelated phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection, each of which is closely tied to academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2002). The SRL model can help explain how married students balance academic demands with household responsibilities (Zimmerman, 2002). Recent meta-analyses have concluded that SRL interventions are consistently associated with improved academic performance in blended and online learning contexts (Xu et al., 2023). A study in Indonesia on self-regulated learning ability found that many students had not yet mastered the planning attribute of SRL, indicating that the forethought phase often becomes a weakness (Nusantara et al., 2025).

Most previous studies have focused on students who work while studying or on self-regulation in academic contexts alone (Clark, 2014). Furthermore, a study on marital readiness among university students found that although students possess emotional knowledge and family preparation, there is still a lack of in-depth research on how they practically regulate adaptive behavior and self-regulation strategies when dealing with academic and household demands (Nur et al., 2021). In fact, the experience of married students is different due to greater emotional commitment and household responsibilities (Justin et al., 2024). This research gap opens opportunities to explore more deeply how married students regulate themselves in the face of dual roles (Panadero, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to understand the dynamics of self-regulation among students who carry dual roles as spouses and young academics (Zimmerman, 2002).

2 METHOD

This qualitative research was conducted using a phenomenological approach, namely a study that seeks to understand the shared meaning of the lived experiences of several individuals toward a phenomenon, with the aim of uncovering the universal essence of those experiences (Creswell, 2021). Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews and direct observation. Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique in qualitative research where the researcher deliberately selects individuals or research sites because they are considered capable of providing rich information related to the research problem and the central phenomenon under investigation (Sugiyono, 2020).

Table 1.1 Participant Data

Name	Age	Marriage Duration
ABP	23 years old	1 year
ETM	21 years old	1 year

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore participants' experiences. The entire interview process was recorded with the participants' consent, and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Subsequently, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and identified key points to be developed into main themes. These themes were then analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized into conclusions. In the analysis process, the researcher carried out procedures such as identifying major themes, coding, forming categories, and examining connections or patterns emerging from the data (Rifa'i, 2023).

3 RESULT

The interview results revealed four main themes in both participants that illustrate the experience of self-regulation among students who simultaneously play the roles of spouses and young academics.

Table 1.2 Findings Table

Aspect	Subject 1	Subject 2
Management Strategy	Structured time management for studying	Flexible learning according to priorities
Academic Motivation	Motivated by moral commitment	Motivated by personal goals
Social Support	Receives social support	Supported by spouse and family
Adaptive Behavior	Manages stress through prayer and simple entertainment	Maintains consistency with a tidy learning environment

Time Management Strategy

Time management strategy emerged as one of the key aspects of self-regulation among married students. Subject 1 demonstrated a more structured pattern of managing time. She divided her time clearly between academics and household responsibilities, for instance, working on her thesis when her husband was at work and stopping academic activities once he returned. "When my husband is at work, I prioritize working on my proposal defense. When he comes home, I focus on household matters." (Subject 1)

In addition, she organized a daily routine that included household chores in the morning, thesis supervision in the afternoon, and classes in the

evening. "Usually in the morning I do chores like cleaning and cooking… Then in the afternoon I prepare to go to campus for thesis supervision… and in the evening I attend lectures." (Subject 1)

For Subject 1, time management also involved communication with her spouse to resolve conflicts between academic, household, and personal needs. "Usually I communicate with my husband, especially about those needs… the most important thing is to have conversations together." (Subject 1)

Meanwhile, Subject 2 demonstrated a more flexible pattern. She prioritized urgent tasks, adjusted her study activities based on mood, and still allocated special time for her husband. "For example, if it's close to the proposal defense I have to work on that first… If I really feel like working, then I do it. The important thing is that there's some progress, even if just a little." (Subject 2)

She also emphasized that mornings to afternoons were used for thesis writing, while evenings were entirely dedicated to her husband. "Morning is for working on thesis tasks… in the evening it's time for my husband, so once he comes home I don't touch any tasks at all." (Subject 2)

This difference shows that Subject 1 was more disciplined with a clear division of time, while Subject 2 was more adaptive to circumstances, prioritizing balance between academic work and marriage.

Academic Motivation

Motivation served as the main driving force in completing studies amidst the demands of dual roles.

Subject 1 possessed strong motivation derived from a moral promise to her late grandmother, so completing her studies was regarded as a form of respect and responsibility. "It is my responsibility to finish… to fulfill my promise to her, who raised me since childhood." (Subject 1)

This motivation was reinforced by spiritual belief that every task can be accomplished when one has a clear goal. "God willing, it will be completed, because every task can be finished if we truly have one clear goal." (Subject 1)

Subject 1 also stated that spousal support was a reinforcement, especially when facing stress. "Even though I sometimes… have many problems and little time, thankfully he patiently accompanies me and my moods." (Subject 1)

In contrast, Subject 2 emphasized intrinsic motivation in the form of a personal desire to complete her studies and even aspired to continue to higher education. "My goal in finishing this study is my personal wish to study in education. After completing my bachelor's, I really want to continue further." (Subject 2)

Subject 2 also expressed strong confidence in her ability to finish her thesis, driven by determination to be free from academic burdens. "How confident am I? I am very confident because I really want to finish my studies so that I won't have any obligations left." (Subject 2)

Thus, it can be concluded that Subject 1's motivation was strongly influenced by moral commitment and spousal emotional support, while

Subject 2 placed greater emphasis on personal academic goals and strong self-confidence.

Social Support

Social support from spouses, family, and friends played a significant role in maintaining both participants' learning spirit. Subject 1 acknowledged that her friends and family always encouraged her not to give up, especially when she felt tired. "My friends… always cheer each other on, supporting one another… they keep encouraging me whenever I feel tired or stressed." (Subject 1)

Furthermore, her spouse played a major role in calming her when she felt panic or anxiety. "My partner usually calms me down when I panic… he always reassures me to stay calm when I am anxious." (Subject 1)

Subject 2 experienced similar support. She emphasized that her parents and friends encouraged her to complete her thesis quickly. "Support definitely comes from my parents and friends, who always motivate me to finish my thesis faster." (Subject 2)

In addition, her spouse was actively involved in providing emotional support and sharing household responsibilities, thereby lightening her academic burden. "My husband usually helps by giving emotional support… and if there are household chores, we do them together." (Subject 2)

From both subjects, it is clear that spousal support served as a key factor in maintaining psychological resilience among married students, alongside family and peer support.

Adaptive Behavior

Adaptive behavior was reflected in study habits, environmental management, and stress-coping strategies. Subject 1 organized a flexible study schedule with her husband's assistance in household tasks. "Of course, I have a schedule… my husband helps with household chores because he is very helpful." (Subject 1)

She created a conducive learning environment by listening to music or preparing snacks to accompany her study sessions. "I usually study while listening to calm songs or in a peaceful environment, with some snacks. That way, I enjoy studying more." (Subject 1)

When facing stress, Subject 1 chose to pray, recite sholawat, or seek her husband's attention to calm herself. "The best things we can do are pray, recite sholawat, or eat our favorite food… to feel calmer and more relaxed." (Subject 1)

Meanwhile, Subject 2 developed adaptive behaviors through daily learning consistency, even if only small progress was made each day. "Consistency means I keep studying when my husband isn't around… every day I must get something done, and it has to be finished that day." (Subject 2)

She also maintained a tidy room as a strategy to create a comfortable learning environment. "For me, I need a comfortable place… my bedroom must be tidy so that I can study comfortably." (Subject 2)

To cope with stress, Subject 2 preferred going for walks or eating out with her spouse. "Maybe by

going for a walk with my partner, or eating out together." (Subject 2)

This comparison shows that Subject 1 emphasized spiritual support and spousal assistance, while Subject 2 relied on daily learning consistency and simple strategies to create comfort.

4 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that married students are able to exercise self-regulation through four main aspects: time management strategies, academic motivation, social support, and adaptive behavior. These findings are consistent with Zimmerman's (2000) concept of self-regulation, which emphasizes the integration of metacognition, motivation, and behavior in supporting learning success.

Students in this study employed different time management strategies. Subject 1 tended to be structured, with a clear division of time between study and household responsibilities, whereas Subject 2 was more flexible, adjusting schedules according to urgency and emotional conditions. This aligns with Pintrich's (2004) view that self-regulation involves the ability to set goals, manage time, and adjust strategies according to circumstances. Subject 1's strategy demonstrated stronger self-monitoring, as she set explicit boundaries for when to study and when to manage household duties. Meanwhile, Subject 2's strategy demonstrated adaptive self-regulation, where the student was able to adjust to circumstances without losing sight of academic goals.

The findings also reveal variations in sources of motivation. Subject 1 was driven by moral factors (a promise to her grandmother) and religious values, whereas Subject 2 was motivated by intrinsic factors such as personal aspirations to graduate and pursue further education. This is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which states that one's belief in their own ability can enhance motivation when facing challenges. Subject 2 demonstrated high self-efficacy through her determination to complete her thesis in order to be free from academic burdens. Meanwhile, Subject 1's motivation more closely reflects the concept of introjected regulation in motivational theory, namely a drive arising from moral obligations or promises to be fulfilled. Thus, married students' academic motivation is not solely driven by personal achievement, but also by moral, spiritual, and social responsibilities.

Both subjects highlighted the importance of social support, particularly from spouses, family, and peers. Spouses served as the primary source of emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and encouragement. According to Zimmerman (2000), self-regulation is not only influenced by internal factors but also by external environments that provide support. A patient and participative spouse strengthens students' self-regulation, as it helps reduce stress, enhance self-confidence, and maintain focus on academic goals. These findings also align with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which posits that human behavior is shaped by reciprocal interactions between individuals, behaviors, and the environment. In this context, spouses, family, and peers act as environmental factors that facilitate the success of self-regulation among married students.

The adaptive behaviors of the two subjects were reflected in study habits, the creation of conducive learning environments, and coping mechanisms for stress. Subject 1 relied more on spiritually based strategies (prayers, recitations) and spousal support, while Subject 2 focused more on daily consistency in studying, maintaining a tidy study environment, and engaging in recreational activities with her spouse. These behaviors are consistent with Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulation cycle, which involves three phases: forethought (planning), performance (execution and monitoring), and self-reflection (evaluation). Both Subject 1 and Subject 2 experienced this cycle, albeit in different ways. Subject 1 emphasized creating a comfortable study atmosphere and emotional support, while Subject 2 emphasized consistent small efforts undertaken daily. Furthermore, the coping strategies employed by both subjects demonstrate self-regulated coping, namely the ability to choose stress management methods that do not hinder academic goals.

Overall, the findings of this study show that married students are still able to maintain self-regulation by integrating strategies for time management, motivation, social support, and adaptive behavior. The differences in strategies between subjects illustrate that self-regulation is dynamic and contextual, adapting to the demands of both household and academic life. These findings reinforce the self-regulation theories proposed by Zimmerman and Pintrich, while also emphasizing the importance of socio-ecological factors as explained in Bandura's social cognitive theory. In other words, the success of married students in completing their studies depends not only on individual abilities but also on the support of spouses, families, and social environments.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that married students are able to exercise self-regulation through four main aspects, namely time management strategies, academic motivation, social support, and adaptive behavior. In terms of time management, there were differences between the subject who adopted a structured pattern with a clear schedule and the subject who was more flexible, adjusting to conditions and priorities. The academic motivation of both subjects was influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The first subject was driven by moral commitments and religious values reinforced by spousal support, while the second subject emphasized personal academic goals and aspirations to continue further studies. Social support, particularly from spouses, family, and peers, was proven to play a crucial role in maintaining learning enthusiasm and resilience in the face of academic pressures. Regarding adaptive behavior, the first subject emphasized creating a conducive learning environment, spousal support, and spiritually based coping, whereas the second subject emphasized daily learning consistency, a tidy study environment, and simple recreational activities with the spouse. Overall, this study shows that the self-regulation of married students is not solely determined by individual abilities but is also influenced by the support of spouses, families, and the social environment. In this context, self-regulation is

dynamic and contextual, adapting to both academic demands and household roles.

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