

**Struggles in managing secular and Islamic studies among senior high school students
at Mindanao State University-Sulu**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between managing secular and Islamic studies and the academic struggles (time management, bodily well-being, and stress overload) among Mindanao State University–Sulu Senior High School Students. The researchers utilized a descriptive research design and gathered data from 110 respondents across the STEM and GAS strands. The findings revealed that most of the respondents balancing secular and Islamic education are female. This study concludes that the impact of dual demands on the academic struggles of students is high, with students experiencing significant physical stress and lack of sleep. However, it was also found that students possess very high levels of spiritual motivation and religious commitment, which serve as their primary coping mechanisms. Therefore, the researchers recommend that school administrators should align academic and religious requirements to prevent workload spikes; teachers should coordinate assignment deadlines across both secular and Arabic departments to reduce student burnout; students should develop advanced time-management skills and maintain their spiritual resilience to balance their dual academic identities; and future researchers may conduct qualitative studies using interviews to

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explore the personal experiences of students and address the gap between their high spiritual motivation and physical struggles.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic and secular education play a crucial role in a student's life, especially for those in a Muslim-majority country or society. The pursuit of both types of studies shape individuals not only intellectually but also spiritually. It strengthens their knowledge, faith, dedication, and commitment. Not just for this world, but also for the hereafter. Moreover, Imran et al. (2024), emphasized that education in Islam is not merely the pursuit of knowledge, but a comprehensive process of nurturing individuals to fulfill their moral and social responsibilities.

However, significant challenges arise from the excessive dual demands placed on students who must manage both Islamic and secular studies. They often struggle to balance faith-based learning, which emphasizes moral and spiritual development, with secular education, which prioritizes critical thinking and academic achievement. This dual expectation can result in heavy workloads, conflicting values, and inner tension as students attempt to reconcile their religious commitments with the demands of modern academic life. This challenge is not confined to one nation but extends across many Muslim societies worldwide. For instance, in Pakistan, Imran et al. (2024), highlighted the ongoing efforts to balance religious and secular knowledge within schools, highlighting the need for a holistic curriculum that nurtures both intellectual and spiritual growth. Beyond religious contexts, studies such as those by (Lin and Chen, 2009), have also pointed out that students globally face increasing academic stress and pressure due to the demands of modern education. Thus, internationally, the pursuit of education in Muslim contexts reveals an ongoing struggle to harmonize secular academic goals with Islamic moral and spiritual development.

Hadji Latif (2014) noted that Muslim students face persistent challenges in balancing secular and Islamic education within a predominantly secular academic system. Although frameworks supporting Islamic education exist, such as regional autonomy and legal recognition, learners continue to struggle with managing academic requirements alongside religious obligations. This difficulty in time allocation is further compounded by cultural and familial expectations that place equal importance on religious proficiency and academic success. Consequently, students often experience time poverty, cognitive strain, and psychological stress as they navigate these competing demands (Orekoya, 2025).

Despite the growing body of literature on the integration of secular and Islamic education, limited research has focused on the unique context of Sulu, particularly within Mindanao State University-Sulu. The experiences of students in the Senior High School Department who must balance both academic and religious expectations remain under explored. In addition, most existing studies use qualitative approaches, leaving a gap for more empirical investigations that can provide measurable insights into how these dual demands affect students' academic performance, time management, and overall well-being. Hence, this study aims to examine the challenges faced by students at Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School Department in managing the dual demands of secular and Islamic education. It seeks to identify the factors contributing to these challenges, the coping mechanisms students use to handle them, and their effects on academic and personal

development. This study is significant as it provides valuable insights into the real-life experiences of students striving to balance faith and academics. The findings may help school administrators and teachers design academic schedules and teaching strategies that accommodate both religious and academic responsibilities. Policymakers may also use the results to create more inclusive educational frameworks that recognize the needs of learners in faith-based settings. Furthermore, this study can serve as a foundation for future research, offering data that can be used to improve student welfare, support mental health initiatives, and strengthen the integration of secular and Islamic education.

Statement of the problem

The main purpose of the was to determine the motivational factors that lead students to pursue both types of studies despite the challenges they might face, and the coping mechanism they use to overcome these challenges. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors motivate students to pursue both secular education and Islamic studies simultaneously?
2. What challenges do they encounter in balancing Islamic studies and academic coursework?
3. What coping mechanism do they adopt to manage these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework that guided the conduct of the study, detailing the research design, site, sampling technique, respondents, instrument, validation procedures, ethical protocols, data collection process, and statistical techniques employed to address the study's research questions.

The study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive research design. As cited by Calonia et al. (2023), Cresswell (2014) described this approach as one that focuses on gathering data through surveys and employs statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis to examine a phenomenon. The descriptive design was deemed appropriate for this study as it aimed to identify and describe the motivational factors, challenges, and coping strategies encountered by the respondents.

The study was conducted at Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School, located at Capitol Site, Patikul, Sulu, Philippines. This site was selected because it serves a diverse student population actively engaged in both secular and Islamic studies, making it an ideal setting for investigating dual education experiences. In selecting the respondents, the researchers employed purposive sampling, a technique used because participation was limited to individuals who met specific criteria related to the study. Accordingly, the respondents were those who were qualified and possessed sufficient knowledge and experience to provide accurate and relevant information about the topic.

The respondents consisted of 110 Senior High School students enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 at Mindanao State University-Sulu, drawn from two academic tracks: the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) strand and the General Academic Strand (GAS). Of the total 110 respondents, 81 were female and 29 were male. Among the STEM strand, Grade 11 sections contributed the following: STEM 1-11 had 3 females and 2 males for a total of 5; STEM 2-11 had 12 females and 0 males for a total of 12; and STEM 3-11 had 8 females and 1 male for a total of 9. Among the STEM Grade 12 sections, STEM 1-12 had 2

females and 0 males for a total of 2; STEM 2-12 had 12 females and 3 males for a total of 15; and STEM 3-12 had 13 females and 4 males for a total of 17. Among the GAS strand, Grade 11 sections were distributed as follows: GAS 1-11 had 6 females and 2 males for a total of 8; GAS 2-11 had 4 females and 2 males for a total of 6; GAS 3-11 had 3 females and 0 males for a total of 3; and GAS 4-11 had 7 females and 8 males for a total of 15. Among the GAS Grade 12 sections, GAS 1-12 had 4 females and 3 males for a total of 7; GAS 2-12 had 5 females and 1 male for a total of 6; and GAS 3-12 had 2 females and 3 males for a total of 5. All participants were actively engaged in both secular and Islamic studies to ensure that they could provide meaningful insights and experiences related to managing a dual education system.

The primary data gathering instrument was a structured survey questionnaire composed of three parts addressing motivational factors, challenges encountered, and coping strategies. The items were adapted from previous studies and modified to align with the specific objectives of the research. Respondents indicated their level of agreement using a Likert scale format. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the instrument, the questionnaire underwent expert validation and pilot testing. It was evaluated by subject matter experts to assess its clarity, relevance, and appropriateness in relation to the study's objectives. Following validation, a pilot test was conducted among selected respondents to determine the reliability and consistency of the questionnaire. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, the result of which indicated an acceptable level of reliability.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was secured by requesting formal permission from the Senior High School Director and the advisers of the chosen respondents. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of their involvement. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the study by coding all responses and reporting data exclusively in aggregate form. Upon receiving approval, the researchers personally administered the survey questionnaires to the selected respondents within their classrooms to encourage participation and to address any questions that arose during completion. Respondents were allotted sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. Afterward, the accomplished questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness, and securely stored before being encoded and organized for analysis.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation. The mean was used to determine which motivational factors, challenges, and coping mechanisms were most prevalent among the respondents, thereby providing an understanding of what most students commonly experience or prefer. The standard deviation complemented this by measuring the consistency of responses; a small standard deviation indicated that respondents provided similar answers, while a larger standard deviation reflected greater variability in the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the data gathered from the respondents and provides an integrative discussion of the findings in relation to the objectives of the study. The study involved students who are simultaneously pursuing secular and Islamic education, commonly referred to as dual education. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire administered to the participants, and the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, to determine the level of agreement and consistency of the respondents' perceptions across the key variables of the study, namely motivational factors, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms employed.

Motivational factors of students in pursuing dual education

The analysis of motivational factors revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions contribute meaningfully to students' pursuit of dual education, with intrinsic motivational factors yielding a mean score of 4.32 and a standard deviation of 0.536, which falls under the "very high" descriptive category. Extrinsic motivational factors, by comparison, registered a mean score of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.532, interpreted as "high." Although the difference between the two means is marginal, it nonetheless indicates that students are driven slightly more by internal motivations, such as personal interest, enjoyment, and a sense of satisfaction derived from the learning process itself, than by externally oriented factors such as rewards, recognition, or social expectations. The comparable standard deviation values across both domains further suggest that the respondents' answers were fairly homogeneous within each category, reflecting a general consistency in how students perceive and experience motivation in the context of balancing two educational systems.

These findings are theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory, as articulated by Ryan and Deci (2000), who categorized motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic types and argued that intrinsic motivation, being rooted in personal interest and internal satisfaction, tends to produce stronger and more sustained engagement over time. The present results align with this theoretical perspective, in that although both motivational types are operative among the respondents, the slightly elevated mean for intrinsic motivation suggests that students' enduring commitment to dual education is more deeply anchored in internal drive than in external incentives. Importantly, the near equivalence of the two mean values underscores that neither form of motivation operates in isolation; rather, both function in tandem to support the students' continued engagement with the demands of pursuing simultaneous secular and religious academic tracks.

Challenges faced by the students in balancing dual education

Turning to the second research objective, the study identified two domains of challenges encountered by students engaged in dual education: academic and personal challenges, and family and environmental challenges. Academic and personal challenges obtained a mean score of 3.22 with a standard deviation of 0.745, while family and environmental challenges recorded a mean of 2.90 with a standard deviation of 0.882. Both mean scores fall within the "moderate" descriptive range, suggesting that students do not experience these difficulties at an extreme or consistently overwhelming level, but neither are these challenges entirely absent from their daily realities.

Despite both domains sharing the same descriptive classification, the higher mean of the academic and personal challenges domain indicates that students encounter difficulties related to academic workload, mental stress, physical fatigue, and meeting deadlines more frequently than they do challenges rooted in family circumstances or environmental conditions. The slightly lower mean for family and environmental challenges, coupled with a somewhat higher standard deviation of 0.882, reflects greater individual variability in this domain, which is logically attributable to the differing family backgrounds, financial situations, and living environments of the respondents. Students from more economically constrained or less academically supportive home environments may experience this category of challenge more acutely than their peers, contributing to the broader spread of responses observed in this domain.

These findings are consistent with the conclusions drawn by Jorge et al. (2025), who established that academic stressors such as performance pressures and excessive workload are not uniformly experienced by students but instead fluctuate in intensity depending on factors such as year level, subject difficulty, and the individual student's coping capacity at a given point in time. The moderate and variable responses observed in the present study corroborate this characterization, indicating that the impact of academic and personal challenges on students pursuing dual education is real but contextually contingent rather than uniformly severe.

Coping mechanisms employed by the students

The final variable examined in this study pertained to the coping mechanisms that students employ in managing the pressures associated with dual education. Results indicated that internal coping mechanisms yielded a mean score of 3.86 with a standard deviation of 0.469, while external coping mechanisms produced a mean of 3.66 with a standard deviation of 0.604. Both scores fall within the "high" descriptive category, confirming that the respondents actively and regularly engage in both forms of coping to manage academic stress.

Internal coping strategies encompassed behaviors and dispositions such as maintaining a positive outlook, exercising emotional self-regulation during stressful periods, proactively organizing one's responsibilities, and sustaining optimistic thinking when confronted with academic difficulties. External coping mechanisms, on the other hand, included seeking guidance from teachers, family members, or peers, engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, structuring study schedules, incorporating rest intervals, and participating in leisure activities to mitigate psychological and physical fatigue. The slightly higher mean score for internal coping mechanisms suggests a modest but consistent tendency among the respondents to rely more heavily on their own psychological resources and internal motivation than on external support systems, even as both categories remain meaningfully present in their coping repertoire.

The relatively narrow standard deviations across both domains, particularly the 0.469 recorded for internal coping, indicate a notable degree of uniformity in the students' responses, suggesting that the coping behaviors captured in the instrument are widely and similarly practiced among the respondents rather than being isolated to particular subgroups. This finding is further reinforced by Zakaria et al. (2021), whose study demonstrated that students engaged in religiously oriented academic settings frequently draw upon internal spiritual practices, including strengthened faith, prayer, and trust in a higher power, as primary mechanisms for managing academic stress, and that these internal strategies are associated with improved emotional stability and enhanced capacity to navigate academic demands. The correspondence between the present findings and those of Zakaria et al. (2021) affirms the salience of internal coping as a culturally and spiritually embedded strategy among students in dual educational contexts, while also confirming that external coping resources serve as a complementary and valuable dimension of students' overall stress management repertoire.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a synthesis of the study's principal findings, integrating the results drawn from the investigation of motivational factors, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms among students who simultaneously pursue secular and Islamic education. The discussion that follows consolidates these dimensions into a coherent interpretive narrative,

from which the study's recommendations naturally emerge, collectively affirming the broader significance of understanding dual educational engagement among this student population.

The findings of the study reveal that the motivational landscape of students engaged in dual education is shaped by a balanced yet internally oriented dynamic. Intrinsic motivational factors were found to be slightly higher than extrinsic ones, indicating that students are primarily driven by personal goals, an internal desire for knowledge, and a deep commitment to their academic pursuits across both educational tracks. While external influences, including recognition, rewards, and encouragement from others, also contribute meaningfully to student motivation, the marginal difference between intrinsic and extrinsic factors underscores that motivation among this population arises from a combination of both internal and external sources, with the former being slightly more dominant. This pattern suggests that students' engagement in dual education is not merely a response to outside pressures or incentives but is substantially grounded in self-determined aspirations and a genuine valuation of integrated learning.

With respect to the challenges students encounter, the study identified two principal categories: personal and academic challenges, and financial and environmental challenges. Personal and academic challenges were found to be slightly higher, reflecting the frequency with which students experience difficulties related to academic workload, time management, and the competing responsibilities inherent in managing two educational systems concurrently. Financial and environmental challenges, while marginally lower, remain a relevant and consequential dimension of students' experiences, with the narrow gap between both categories indicating that students must navigate a complex set of overlapping pressures. The modest difference between these challenge types affirms that both personal and academic concerns, as well as family and environmental circumstances, collectively shape the dual education experience and should not be treated as mutually exclusive domains.

The coping mechanisms employed by students in response to these challenges were similarly organized into internal and external strategies. Internal coping mechanisms were found to be slightly higher, suggesting a stronger reliance on personal resilience, self-discipline, and individual stress management practices. External coping strategies, such as seeking support from family members, peers, or teachers, were also utilized, though to a slightly lesser degree. As with the patterns observed across motivation and challenges, the minimal gap between internal and external coping approaches reflects a fundamentally balanced orientation, wherein students draw on both personal and relational resources to manage the demands of dual education. This equilibrium indicates an adaptive capacity among students that merits recognition and institutional support.

Taken together, these findings point to a student population that is primarily guided by strong internal motivation, faces moderate but multidimensional challenges, and employs an integrated set of coping strategies to sustain their dual academic commitments. The consistently small differences in dominance observed across all three dimensions underscore that no single factor operates in isolation; rather, motivation, challenges, and coping mechanisms interact meaningfully and contribute collectively to students' overall academic experiences and outcomes. In view of these findings, it is recommended that school administrators and faculty members consider the development of inclusive policies and coordinated scheduling frameworks that equitably address the demands of both secular and Islamic studies, thereby reducing the risk of student burnout and emotional exhaustion. Students, in turn, may benefit from cultivating effective time management practices alongside spiritual coping strategies, including prayer and dhikr, which can support both organizational functioning and personal well-being. Future researchers are encouraged to examine the causal relationships between

integrated educational frameworks and long-term student mental health, with the aim of generating evidence-based interventions tailored to the unique needs of students in dual education contexts.

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