



The Existential Burden of Quality Assurance: Academic Stress and Resilience Among Lecturers in an Indonesian Islamic University

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ABSTRACT

This is where you explain ‘why’ you undertook this study. If you are presenting new or novel research, explain the problem that you have solved. If you are building upon previous research, briefly explain why you felt it was important to do so. This is your opportunity to let readers know why you chose to study this topic or problem and its relevance. Let them know what your key argument or main finding is. This is ‘how’ you did it. Let readers know exactly what you did to reach your results. For example, did you undertake interviews? Did you experiment in the lab? What tools, methods, protocols, or datasets did you use?. Here, you can explain ‘what’ you found during your study, whether it answers the problem you set out to explore, and whether your hypothesis was confirmed. You need to be very clear and direct and give exact figures rather than generalize. It is important not to exaggerate or create an expectation that your paper will not fulfill. Here, you can explain characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and utility of findings that are the result of how you initially chose to design the study or the method used to establish internal and external validity of the result of unanticipated challenges that emerged during the study. Your research may have multiple limitations, but you need to discuss only those limitations directly related to your research problems. This is your opportunity to provide readers with an analysis of the value of your results. It’s a good idea to ask colleagues whether your analysis is balanced and fair, and again, it is important not to exaggerate. You can also conjecture what future research steps could be.

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1. Introduction

In the last ten years, the systemic needs in higher education have been to enhance the academic qualification of lecturers, as a result of quality policies and global competition ([Hart & Rodgers, 2024](#); [Ul Hassan et al., 2025](#)). In Indonesia, universities are obliged to comply with national and international standards of accreditation, which is the key measure of institutional quality of lecturers at various levels of study ([Komara et al., 2025](#); [Nugraha et al., 2023](#)). In the environment of structural changes that are no longer purely administrative but rather demand serious shifts in professional identity, psychological pressures (anxiety, academic stress, emotional burnout) have arisen in the context of the growing demands of the careers of lecturers ([Kumar et al., 2024](#); [Sun et al., 2024](#)). The decline in the mental health of lecturers and their inability to be scientifically productive can be related to the lack of balance between work demands and psychosocial support according to the job demand control theory and the theory of self-determination ([Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023](#); [Santiago-Torner et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, pressure of academic qualification, not only administrative in nature, has a strong influence on the quality of human resources in higher education, both psychological and institutional.

This research is mainly concerned with pressure that arises due to a need to enhance the academic qualification of lecturers, which is a requirement to guarantee quality and accreditation. The pressures of teaching and research, need to publish and need to compete among lecturers in an attempt to attain academic legitimacy come into play as pressures. A professional obligation to the quality of education and psychological stresses that build up slowly to disturb mental equilibrium poses an existential dilemma. Improving academic qualifications is often a process that is put in the forefront as a meritocratic process as studies by ([Fernández et al., 2023](#); [Henriksson, 2024](#)) elaborate. However, this in reality gives rise to psychological dissonance and alienation at work without institutional support. Such pressure can cause burnout, decrease intrinsic motivation and promote work practices that are more likely to be formalistic and not inner satisfaction. The connection between the effectiveness of higher education, in particular, the continuation of lecturers as agents of intellectual and moral transformation, is a problem that needs to be studied in-depth. Based on this, the study will respond to the question that is behind it: What does the pressure of improving academic qualification entail on the lecturers, and what effects are on their mental health?

Majority of the research that has been carried out thus far has been focused on quantitative variables such as stress levels, job satisfaction or burnout without looking at the reflective and existential elements that are mindful of such phenomena. The gap that is yet to be fully exploited is particularly in regard to the perception and subjective experience of the pressure by lecturers in enhancing the academic qualification and previous research has not addressed the impact of professional pressure on mental health. This gap is attempted to be bridged by a qualitative methodology. It is not only administrative pressure, the consequence of the construction of meaning, formed by the collision of institutional pressures and psychological states, the consideration of the academic pressure as a multifaceted psychosocial experience. This research is enriched by the relationship between academic pressure and the mental health of lecturers, with the help of a phenomenological perspective. To explore lecturers' experiences in dealing with the pressure of increasing academic qualifications in depth, this study uses a

qualitative case study design. This is because of the possibility of describing the complex interplay between institutional policies, psychology processes and social environments.

The study is innovative in that it explores the definition of pressure in the context of enhancing academic qualifications to the psychological well-being of lecturers. It sees pressure as a sense-making process as opposed to simply measuring the level of stress. It does this through linking external regulations (including quality policies) and internal regulations. A combination of self-determination theory and role strain theory is employed in the study. This model studies how intrinsic motivation interacts with structural pressures which lecturers have to face. The study is unique in that it focuses on the experiences of lecturers as the central point of view, focusing on how this pressure is subjectively experienced and construed.

The main aim of this research is to understand more about the academic qualification improvement pressures on university lecturers and its effects on mental health. The research, which focuses on the understanding of the requirements of qualification improvement by lecturers in relation to their values, aspirations and life experiences uses an interpretive analysis technique. In this respect, academic pressure is not considered as the outcome of quality policy only, but it is a psychological phenomenon which affects the well-being, motivation and professionalism of lecturers. This study will probably guide the policy of institutions of higher learning towards the creation of more humane policies on lecturer development. This is viewed in a pragmatic way in terms of balancing between academic needs and mental health to put forward a sustainable and respectable academic environment.

The tension between academic achievement demands on the side of the institution and psychological comforts of the individual is the strain to improve academic credentials among lecturers. Self-Determination Theory assumes that in case of a strong external pressure, and the support of autonomy and intrinsic recognition, the motivation will be lower and the individual will be psychologically stressed ([Ye et al., 2025](#); [K. Zhao et al., 2025](#)). In this respect, qualification upgrading as a tool of professional development is a percussion on the mind since it is accomplished as a tool of regulatory coercion as opposed to academic awareness. Role Strain Theory explains that job expectations and the mismatch with actual abilities of lecturers result in role dissonance and emotional exhaustion ([Goga et al., 2023](#); [Zhai et al., 2025](#)). In this research argument therefore the pressure of academic qualification is considered both good and bad in that on the one hand it could be a driving force to the achievement when facilitated by an environment that is favorable yet on the other it could also be the cause of mental disorders when the structural demands are much higher than the psychological ability of a given individual and when it also erodes the importance of professional balance.

The paper establishes its foundation on self-determination theory in explaining the importance of autonomy, efficacy and relatedness in maintaining the motivation of lecturers. On the contrary, Role strain theory is utilized to explain how conflict is developed as a result of a set of different academic demands simultaneously. These two theories need to be integrated in order to have a more detailed and elaborate analysis of the connection between structural pressures and the psychological response of lecturers.

2. Method

The study uses a qualitative design that utilizes an intrinsic case study approach. This design was chosen to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon of academic qualification pressure within the historical and institutional context of Nurul Jadid University, a pesantren-based university. Case study research allows for an in-depth exploration of the relationship between quality assurance policies, institutional frameworks, and the subjective experiences of lecturers within a single bounded system. This methodology is particularly relevant because the phenomenon under investigation is complex, contextual, and inseparable from its social and cultural realities. Previous studies have emphasized that institutional quality transformation in pesantren-based education requires adaptation to modernization while maintaining Islamic educational values ([Hakim et al., 2025](#); [Lathifah et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, qualitative case studies are widely recognized as effective for examining academic pressures and workplace experiences in higher education contexts ([Mai, 2025](#)). Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a holistic understanding of the dynamics of academic pressure and its psychological consequences among lecturers. In addition, this design enables the mapping of relationships between systemic institutional demands and the lived experiences of educational actors within pesantren-based institutions that possess unique cultural and religious values. The study therefore aims not only to identify symptoms of academic pressure but also to uncover the structural relationship between quality assurance policies and mental health conditions among lecturers, thereby contributing to the development of values-based institutional policy recommendations. Concerns regarding burnout, work stress, and psychological well-being among academics have increasingly become central issues in higher education quality management ([Duraku et al., 2024](#); [Lei et al., 2025](#)).

Nurul Jadid University was selected as the research site because it represents a pesantren-based university currently undergoing an institutional acceleration process toward becoming a competitive and high-quality higher education institution. The university symbolizes the transformation of private Islamic higher education institutions in responding to national quality assurance standards and accreditation demands. Previous research has shown that pesantren-based educational institutions in Indonesia are increasingly integrating modernization and quality assurance systems to remain adaptive within the national education framework while preserving Islamic boarding school values ([Lathifah et al., 2025](#); [Thoyib, 2022](#)). This institutional transformation also places significant pressure on lecturers to continuously improve academic qualifications, research productivity, and professional performance in alignment with accreditation standards and institutional expectations ([Le et al., 2025](#)).

The study collected data through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation enabled the researchers to directly examine the working dynamics of lecturers and institutional leaders in carrying out administrative and academic responsibilities under the pressure of quality assurance policies. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore more comprehensively the perceptions, challenges, and experiences of lecturers, leaders, and unit heads regarding the implementation of lecturer qualification requirements and institutional quality demands. Meanwhile, documentation techniques were used to collect secondary data from institutional policies, strategic plans, accreditation documents, and quality improvement programs related to lecturer development. The use of multiple data collection techniques

was intended to strengthen the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings. Previous studies have highlighted that triangulation through interviews, observations, and institutional documents is essential in understanding the impact of quality assurance systems on academic staff well-being and institutional culture ([Tran et al., 2024](#)). Thus, this combination of methods is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of quality assurance policies and their implications for lecturers' mental health and professional experiences within pesantren-based higher education institutions.

The following are some of the informants involved in this research:

Table 1. Informants

Number	Informants	Gender	Background Education	Number of Informants
1	Rectorate Leadership Elements	Male	S2	1
2	Faculty Leadership Elements	Male	S2, S3	3
3	Leadership Elements of Institutions and Units	Male	S2, S3	3
4	Lecturers	Male & Female	S2, S3	7

Observed, in-depth interviews, and documented data were examined qualitatively with the use of a thematic approach. The steps of data reduction, data presentation and conclusion, which were proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, were applied to analyze it ([Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024](#)). Data reduction process entailed selection of significant data on the pressure to the academic qualification of lecturers, mental health of leaders and strategic plans of institution. The data thus categorized were then expressed in matrix and graphs to demonstrate the relationship between quality policies, managerial dynamics and psychosocial responses of the different university leaders. The techniques to enhance the data validity included the triangulation of the sources, i.e. the results of interviews, official documents, and observation results were compared. The validity was also achieved by members checking key informants in the sense that the researcher could know what the participants were experiencing and consequently make relevant interpretations that were similar to those of the participants. This way, the study was at a position to further build on the relationship between systemic pressure in order to improve the qualifications of lecturers and the implications of this on the mental health particularly within the context of Islamic boarding school-based institutions.

3. Finding and Discussion

Finding

Pressure as an existential burden

The findings of the research indicate that the pressure to improve the academic qualifications of lecturers is interpreted as existential pressure which has a direct impact on the identity and the existence of lecturers in the academic world. Lecturers who do not fit the standards of established qualifications have a threat to their academic identity and therefore view the need to continue with their study and publication as necessary to continue their career. This is also enhanced by the fear of losing social status and academic honor in case institutional targets are not achieved. Besides, qualifications are

not merely considered to be an administrative formalism but as the valid self-existence with which they are identified within the university. Recent studies explain that changes in higher education systems and increasing performance demands significantly influence the formation of academic identity and professional legitimacy among lecturers ([Marques et al., 2024](#); [Mula et al., 2021](#)). The stress is also internalized as a moral strain which renders lecturers trying to prove their academic status irrespective of the results of the change in their mental health and mental state. This phenomenon is closely related to the “publish or perish” culture that often creates emotional tension and professional insecurity among academics ([Aprile et al., 2020](#); [Madikizela-Madiya, 2022](#)).

In line with the results generated through the interviews conducted on various lecturers, the following are some of the informant’s statements about the issue of pressure of existential burden.

Table 2. Pressure as an existential burden

Indicator	Informant's Statement	Informants
Feelings of academic identity being threatened	<i>“The threat to identity depends on the lecturer, as the university has facilitated and provided support; however, many have not yet taken advantage of the training”</i>	PA
Qualification requirements as a condition for career continuity	<i>“Qualifications are not entirely mandatory, but each institution must have policies in place to improve quality”</i>	AM
Fear of losing social recognition	<i>“Seeing colleagues get doctorates motivates me to continue learning and developing with full support from the university”</i>	NH
The meaning of qualification as legitimacy of existence	<i>“The title is now not just an administrative one, but a kind of legal proof that we deserve to be called academics”</i>	AZ
Internalization of demands as a moral burden	<i>“I try hard to meet these demands, even though I often feel mentally burdened. However, if I do not, it feels like I am failing my responsibilities”</i>	BF

As the result of the interview showed, the stress of academic qualification of Nurul Jadid University can be characterized by a dynamic of various psychological pressures and positive motives towards development. According to the judgement of the informant, PA, the threat to academic identity is in fact more the result of the non-participation of individuals in the training and development programmed by the university, than the policies of the institution. In the meantime, informant AM does not see academic qualifications as a formal requirement, but as one of the attempts to enhance the quality of the institution. Such findings are in line with studies emphasizing that institutional quality policies can simultaneously function as pressure and motivation for professional growth among academics ([Giladi et al., 2022](#); [Sarpong, 2023](#)). An informative view was also formed based on informant NH who got inspired by the image of colleagues who had already received a doctorate, reflecting a growth mindset in overcoming the social pressures of academia. In addition, informant AZ indicated that academic degrees are administrative decorations, as well as legitimizing the existence and demonstration of professionalism of an academic. Contemporary studies have similarly argued that academic qualifications increasingly represent symbolic capital and markers

of institutional legitimacy in modern universities ([Taylorson et al., 2025](#); [W. Xu & Poole, 2023](#)).

But informant BF acknowledged that such requests may be an emotionally painful moralist compulsion. Conversely, they make them very responsible and committed towards the profession. Emotional tension caused by academic expectations has been widely associated with psychological vulnerability, burnout, and emotional exhaustion among lecturers ([Halat et al., 2023](#)). Nevertheless, other scholars also explain that pressure may strengthen resilience and reinforce professional identity when institutions provide adequate emotional and structural support systems ([Yang et al., 2021](#)). On the whole, the pressures of academic qualifications at Nurul Jadid University not only lead to anxiety and psychological strain but also become a catalyst for some lecturers to continually develop their competencies, based on how they perceive these pressures and whether they have the support of the institution.



Figure 1. Pressure as an existential burden

Figure 1 shows that academic qualification pressure on lecturers has five top-level indicators which are interrelated and form a cyclic process. Beginning with the sense of threatened academic identity where lecturers see themselves to have fallen short of the prescribed level of qualification this pressure is then carried over to the pressure of qualifications as a condition of career continuity which are then represented in the institutional policy of ensuring the quality of the profession. In addition, there is anxiety of social status loss since the lecturers feel the need to maintain their status in their colleagues. Qualification is also construed in this sense as a legitimacy of being which authenticates credibility and professionalism of an academic. However, this pressure does not only exist at the structural level but is internalized as a moral imperative, a psychological compulsion of lecturers to continue with it so that they can deliver to the demands of the institution or the academic community. Comprehensively, this figure demonstrates that the phenomenon of academic qualifying pressure is rather complicated, involving psychological, social, and moral components, as it presents the ways lecturers can harmonize the needs of the professional and personal sphere.

Overall, the findings of the research indicate that the stress of improving academic qualifications has extensive implications on professional identity, psychological well-being, and social mechanisms of lecturers in the university context. It was also revealed through interviews that most lecturers do not merely perceive qualification requirements as an administrative requirement, but as a signal of legitimacy and as a sort of moral obligation to the academic community. Although it might seem that his/her academic

identity is threatened when the lecturers believe that they are not able to live to the expectations of the institution, not all informants are negative to this as it can be seen as a challenge towards further development. This phenomenon puts into light the variations in internalization of structural and social pressures brought about by policies of improving the quality of institutions. An institutional support system such as training, funding to continuing studies and academic counseling is a highly critical component towards counteracting the adverse psychological effects of such demands. Recent literature highlights that universities need to balance performance expectations with mental health support and empathetic institutional policies to maintain academic well-being ([Halat et al., 2023](#); [Ryan et al., 2021](#)). Academic credentials are no longer taken as merely a form of administrative requirement but an avenue of self-actualization and professional dignity building. Consequently, academic qualification pressure can be a cause of continual anxiety where it is not adequately supported by the organization but can be an excellent driver to professionalism in lecturers where it is undertaken with an orientation of participatory, empathetic and psychologically well-being.

Ongoing academic anxiety

The research results indicate that lecturers are persistently under academic pressure as a result of the pressure to advance in terms of qualification. Over-obsessiveness in regard to academic goals is a major trend and any setback in publication or subsequent research is viewed as a serious personal failure ([Halat et al., 2023](#)). This impacts sleep problems and lack of concentration in performing day-to-day activities. Anxiety is also created in the academic social space, as lecturers are anxious that they have to interact with the people they perceive to be more successful ([Salazar et al., 2022](#)). In addition, they remain uncertain about their further professions, which is why it leads to new anxiety and constant anxiety ([Lee et al., 2021](#)).

He disclosed in an interview with a lecturer at Nurul Jadid University that he was required to remain prolific in writing and furthering his studies but sometimes time and mental conditions do not favor him, he said. The increasing academic stress that is continually imposed on them can be very difficult to emotionally cope with. Another lecturer told me that whenever a fellow lecturer is able to publish or even to attain a doctorate, I am left behind and this causes anxiety and a sense of failure. However, when one of the leaders of the institution was asked about the same, he said that I am personally not concerned about the pressure in fact I find the pressure to be a good motivator, but I also know there are lecturers who experience the pressure. Based on the results of the interviews, it is a complex fact that the academic pressure, which lecturers in Nurul Jadid University experience, goes with both the negative side of the problem of anxiety and mental exhaustion on the one hand and the positive side of the stimulus to develop on the other hand ([Zhou & Wang, 2025](#)). According to one university leader, the university has been offering study, teaching and research mentoring programs to alleviate the anxiety of lecturers but their attendance in these programs is yet to be enhanced.

This shows a positive attitude on the side of the university leaders who consider this pressure as a positive motivating factor to encourage lecturers to keep on developing their skills. The university is trying to address the adverse effects of this pressure by institutional initiatives, such as mentoring advanced studies, better teaching pedagogy, and enhancement of research, which show their desire to reduce the pernicious effects of this pressure. Although the issue of lecturers' participation in such programs is yet to

be optimal, the mentoring policy shows that the institution is aware of the need to balance the need to attain academic performance and the psychological well-being of the lecturers. Accordingly, academic stress in Nurul Jadid University is not viewed as an individual issue only but as an institutional issue which must be addressed through a systematic redress by a sustained mentoring and empowerment policy ([Ohadomere & Ogamba, 2020](#)).

This paper has revealed that institutional support is an important intervention that can be used to mitigate the adverse effects of academic stress. The University of Nurul Jadid has also developed a work-study balance program and an academic mentoring policy allowing lecturers to enjoy a more lenient time and work schedule. The other observation of the study is the shift in attitude towards the significance of educational qualifications as the administrative need to self-actualization and professional legitimacy. The levels of anxiety and productivity are lower in lecturers who have a perception of qualifications as a self-development process. Leader and colleague social support has also been proven to be a protective factor as it avoids developing chronic stress and work burnouts ([Cao et al., 2025](#)).

Overall, this paper demonstrates that academic stress is dual in its nature as it is simultaneously an anxiety factor and a factor that enhances oneself. The strategies that aid in creating a conducive working environment in the university are essential in minimizing the negative psychological impacts besides making sure that the academic potential of the lecturers is maximized. This implies that the implementation of mentoring policies, training programmed as well as performance-based reward system should be evaluated periodically to ascertain the wellbeing of lecturer's sustainability.

Compulsory Motivation for Standards

Study findings indicate that lecturers feel a compulsion to standards in seeking upgrades in academic qualification. The latter is seen in the exemplary submission to regulatory demands where further research and publication are seen as administrative demands. The second trend is an emergence of external forces that overwhelm individual will, killing internal drive to develop his or her capacity ([Daumiller et al., 2021](#)). In addition, rigid institutional standards result in some psychological pressure where the lecturers are focused on attaining formal credit points, instead of the quality of their scientific work. This has culminated into the fact that academic activities are geared towards fulfilling technical needs and not knowledge building ([Trueblood et al., 2025](#)). This situation affects the depletion of the intrinsic job satisfaction, whereby the lecturers perform their profession under stress, which indirectly affects their pride and happiness in their academic professions ([Akosile & Ekemen, 2022](#)).

The results that were obtained after the interview that were presented in Table 3 indicate that the pressure of academic qualification in Nurul Jadid University is not regarded as a negative aspect but is seen as a positive stimulus to improve the professionalism of lecturers. Some of the informants emphasized that they did not merely go along with it due to coercion, but they are aware of the importance of accreditation, and that they have a moral obligation of driving the institution ahead. In practice the forces of change such as accreditation needs and government policies are driving forces which are encouraging lecturers to continue self-developing ([Jeyaraj, 2021](#)). Though a few lecturers were able to admit the pressures, including time pressures, administrative requirements, these pressures also encourage adaptive habits and a better work ethic. At least not all lecturers interpreted institutional standards as repressibility,

but they saw it as professional tasks which are to be fulfilled with a sense of responsibility and sincerity. Consequently, the dynamics of the interviews present a pressure-motivation balance whereby lecturers can use the external pressures as a growth, academic quality improvement and reputation building opportunities in a sustainable manner to the institute.

Table 3. Compulsory Motivation for Standards

Indicator	Informant's Statement	Informants
Compliance due to regulatory demands	“The university doesn't pressure doctoral lecturers, but for the sake of accreditation, we are encouraged to improve quality and continue our studies”	SR
External drive, not personal intention	“My motivation for writing articles is primarily driven by accreditation requirements, rather than a personal desire for research”	KL
Feeling pressured by institutional standards	“Institutional standards are not pressure, but rather an obligation to be carried out sincerely in accordance with government regulations”	NF
Formality-oriented academic performance	“The publications I created were often made to chase credit points, not always in line with my research interests, but over time, this compulsion became normal”	BE
Loss of intrinsic job satisfaction	“Having to juggle time between teaching and continuing my studies due to pressing obligations can be quite a headache”	JN

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Gradually this compulsion gradually became an adaptive behavior by lecturers. Numerous people started to discover a new work rhythm and establish academic discipline in procedures, which were originally of administrative character. This is evidenced by the increasing number of articles being published in reputable journals by different lecturers as a means of adapting to the professional requirements. Although this process was initially motivated by regulatory pressure, it has paved way to institutions to switch their external motivation into intrinsic motivation through research mentoring programs, scientific writing training and quality-based awards.

Moreover, institutional encouragement is also important in turning pressure into academic producing value. The universities also offer financial support to lecturers who publish their articles in internationally recognized journals such as Scopus as an

appreciation of their efforts to enhance the quality of academics. Not only does this policy remove the burden of finances, but it also fosters a healthy spirit of competition among the lecturers, hence making them desire to work on. Such an incentive mechanism is a motivational stimulus over the long term that will shift the emphasis of lecturers on meeting the requirements of the administration to producing good scientific outcomes ([P. Xu, 2021](#)). With this moral and economic support, universities gradually form a positive academic environment, where the improvement of qualifications is not seen as a pressure but as an opportunity to make a more general contribution to scientific development.

This aligns with the vision and mission of Nurul Jadid University that is dedicated to being a superior and civilized university in the innovative development of the Tridharma basing on the Trilogy and Pancakesadaran Santri Pesantren Nurul Jadid to develop the Indonesian and global society in 2027. The efforts of providing publication incentives and financial support to the lecturers who have managed to get their publications on internationally recognized journals are a practical manifestation of the implementation of the Tridharma of Higher Education that is both innovative and of high quality. This policy demonstrates the intention of the university to unite science, technology and morality of the students into one civilized academic value. Furthermore, the step assists the university objective of coming up with higher scientific work, competitive internationally and advantageous to society. In this way, such a shift in forced motivation to honest academic commitment does not only enhance the ability of the individual lecturers, but also hastens the achievement of better, responsible and civilized governance of higher education.

Institutional Emotional Exhaustion

The results that were obtained after the interview that were presented in Table 3 indicate that the pressure of academic qualification in Nurul Jadid University is not regarded as a negative aspect but is seen as a positive stimulus to improve the professionalism of lecturers. Some of the informants emphasized that they did not merely go along with it due to coercion, but they are aware of the importance of accreditation, and that they have a moral obligation of driving the institution ahead. In practice the forces of change such as accreditation needs and government policies are driving forces which are encouraging lecturers to continue self-developing ([Rahardja et al., 2020](#)). Though a few lecturers were able to admit the pressures, including time pressures, administrative requirements, these pressures also encourage adaptive habits and a better work ethic. At least not all lecturers interpreted institutional standards as repressibility, but they saw it as professional tasks which are to be fulfilled with a sense of responsibility and sincerity. Consequently, the dynamics of the interviews present a pressure-motivation balance whereby lecturers can use the external pressures as a growth, academic quality improvement and reputation building opportunities in a sustainable manner to the institute ([Scott et al., 2023](#)).

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programs, scientific writing training and quality-based awards. Research motivation supported by institutional recognition and professional development can gradually strengthen lecturers' commitment toward sustainable academic productivity ([Lu, 2021](#)).

Moreover, institutional encouragement is also important in turning pressure into academic producing value. The universities also offer financial support to lecturers who publish their articles in internationally recognized journals such as Scopus as an appreciation of their efforts to enhance the quality of academics. Not only does this policy remove the burden of finances, but it also fosters a healthy spirit of competition among the lecturers, hence making them desire to work on. Such an incentive mechanism is a motivational stimulus over the long term that will shift the emphasis of lecturers on meeting the requirements of the administration to producing good scientific outcomes. Studies also confirm that the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contributes significantly to improving academic performance and productivity among higher education staff ([Matei et al., 2025](#)). With this moral and economic support, universities gradually form a positive academic environment, where the improvement of qualifications is not seen as a pressure but as an opportunity to make a more general contribution to scientific development.

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Discussion

The main findings of the study are that the pressure to increase the level of academic qualification of lecturers has turned into an existential burden not only administrative, but also to their professional identity and meaning. Lecturers always think that their existence and publications are the only means to evaluate their contribution in the science and not their actual contribution. This is in line with the Existential Stress theory that says when people experience a sense of loss of meaning in their role a severe psychological stress ensues ([Lopez-Tiu, 2025](#); [Ravn, 2024](#)). Higher education, in particular, comes with a lot of stress to achieve elevated academic status and a sense of alienation and lack of autonomy in the realization of the tridharma (the three pillars of the teaching profession) ([Lailia & Mascarinas, 2023](#); [Purwanti, 2024](#)). As a result, it negatively affects the quality of interaction of lecturers with the vision of the institution, as they apply more psychological power to meet the administrative requirements rather than achieve important scientific interests ([Samuel, 2024](#); [Si, 2024](#)).

This paper has shown that the academic community is always anxious due to the cyclic nature of the institutional quality evaluation and accreditation. This anxiety does not merely represent a transient reaction to work stress, but is a persistent mental model influencing academic work. According to the Conservation of Resources theory, stress comes about when the emotional and cognitive resources of a person are inadequate to respond to the demands encountered ([Chen et al., 2024](#); [Demerouti & Bakker, 2023](#)). The lecturers are usually in the resource-depleting state, when time, energy, and attention are spent on the achievement of the publication goals, accreditation, and performance reports ([Chen et al., 2024](#); [Demerouti & Bakker, 2023](#)). As a result, there is reduced time to think and be innovative academically. In order to contain this anxiety, more adaptive institutional policies are required, which would entail an achievement-based quality approach and a psychosocial support that would moderate the cognitive and emotional aspects of lecturers ([Nannings et al., 2025](#); [Rivera-Santana, 2024](#)).

The other critical finding augers the growth of compulsion-for-standards drive whereby the academic motivation of lecturers is not as inherent as control. The Self-Determination Theory assumes that the compulsively driven individuals will do their best to satisfy the external needs without satisfying themselves in their job ([Goldfarb et al., 2023](#); [Lindgren & Melander, 2024](#)). Here, numerous lecturers would write articles or keep on studying not because it is scientifically driven but because it is a requirement to meet the accreditation or even promotions. Nevertheless, this process also suggests that there is a possibility of making a shift to a more integrated motivation, where compulsion is turned into a productive habit ([Su et al., 2024](#)). One of the major methods of transforming the pressure into adaptive motivation is institutional support, including the incentive to publish and fund the studies ([Adinew, 2024](#); [M. Zhao, 2024](#)). The quality assurance policies can be employed as a career development tool rather than a formal assessment tool by universities by assuming the right attitude.

In addition, this research indicates that there is institutional emotional exhaustion. In this state the lecturers lose empathy, social interaction and professional motivation due to accretion of constant pressures. This is in line with Maslach and Leiter Burnout theory, which suggests that emotional burnout, depersonalization, and the lack of personal accomplishment are responses to a work environment that is high demanding yet lacks appropriate recovery ([Dobešová Cakirpaloglu et al., 2024](#)). In this regard, universities ought to reshape the speed of academic action to a more human and sustainable one. The common burnout can be prevented through preventive intervention programs, such as psychological mentoring programs, non-formal recognition that is valued, and educational leave policies ([Dolev & Levi, 2025](#)).

Overall, the results of this study prove that the implication of the pressure to increase the academic qualification of lecturers has two-sided effects; on the one hand it facilitates the enhancement of the quality of the institution and on the other hand it also has a psychological threat that can undermine the sustainability of academic performance. Institutions of higher learning now need to strike a balance between the quality assurance requirement and emotional sustainability. An emotional well-being management strategy will result in not only an academically skilled but also psychologically robust lecturer ([Brandao De Souza & Jacomuzzi, 2025](#); [Ghafar, 2024](#)). Therefore, productivity and a guarantee of quality mental health balance will guarantee competitiveness of universities, and save the humanitarian values, bread and butter of a civilised higher education.

4. Conclusion

The results of this paper demonstrate that pressure to improve the academic qualification of lecturers is a complicated process that goes beyond the administration policies of the past to encompass psychological, ethical and professional considerations. The predicament facing lecturers is that they want to be more competent and the emotional needs of the requirements that they face as their professions become more complex. Other lecturers are scared, psychologically stressed, and their intrinsic satisfaction is denied. However, other people are motivated with this pressure as an incentive to grow and mature in their academic identity. These results indicate that pressure is a term that is defined by people in relation to their interpretation and reaction to institutional pressures. Some of the lessons that I have acquired due to this research include the need to juggle between the need to meet the requirements of academic qualification, and the continuing psychosocial and institutional support. The pressure can be transformed into positive energy, which is part of the professional development of lecturers, by help, such as mentoring to continue the research, to further develop the quality of research, and to enhance mental health.

The study is a good scientific contribution in the sense that the authors of this study have been able to combine Self-Determination and Role Strain theories in the context of phenomenology in order to have an insight on the relationship between structural stress and intrinsic motivation by lecturers. This will revive the sense on the connection between quality policies and academic mental well-being especially in the Indonesian higher education. This study however has its shortcomings of being carried out in a single institution and with few informants and therefore cannot reflect the general situation of higher education in Indonesia. Moreover, some of the variables were age, gender, and academic field which had not been properly researched. As such, additional studies, using a mixed-methodology and a wider scope, are necessary to derive an overall picture of the meaning of academic stress and the adaptive strategies of lecturers to balance professional and mental health.

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