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The Relationship between Overthinking and Academic Anxiety among Ninth-Grade Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 4 Kota Jambi

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Abstract

Overthinking and academic anxiety are relevant psychological concerns during adolescence, yet their relationship among *madrasah tsanawiyah* students remains insufficiently examined. This study investigated the relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety among ninth-grade students at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi. A quantitative correlational design involved 122 students selected from a population of 175 through proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire (PTQ) and an academic anxiety scale and analyzed using Pearson's product–moment correlation. The results indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between overthinking and academic anxiety ($r = .467$, $p < .001$), corresponding to 21.8% shared variance. Students reporting higher levels of overthinking also tended to report greater academic anxiety. These findings provide contextual evidence of the association between repetitive negative thinking and academic anxiety within *madrasah tsanawiyah* education, highlighting the relevance of students' cognitive patterns to their academic emotional experiences. The study suggests that school counselors should consider repetitive and unproductive thinking patterns when designing services to help students manage academic concerns more adaptively. Future research should include more diverse student populations and examine additional psychological and contextual factors associated with academic anxiety.

Keywords: Overthinking; Academic Anxiety; Repetitive Negative Thinking; *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Students; School Counseling

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent mental health has become an increasingly important concern in education because psychological difficulties during this developmental period can affect well-being, social functioning, and engagement with learning. The World Health Organization (2025) estimates that approximately one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 years experiences a mental health condition, with anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders among the leading causes of illness and disability in this age group. Anxiety disorders are estimated to affect 4.1% of adolescents aged 10–14 years and 5.3% of those aged 15–19 years, indicating that vulnerability may become particularly salient as adolescents encounter increasingly complex developmental and educational demands. Similar concerns are evident in Indonesia. The 2023 Indonesian Health Survey reported that depressive symptoms affected approximately 2% of individuals aged 15–24 years, a prevalence higher than the national estimate of 1.4% (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). These conditions position schools not only as places of academic development but also as important settings for recognizing and responding to students' psychological needs.

Academic demands constitute one context in which adolescent anxiety can become particularly visible. Academic anxiety refers to worry, fear, tension, and other psychological responses that arise when students perceive academic situations as threatening or difficult to manage (Khitami et al., 2026). Its manifestations may involve cognitive preoccupation, difficulty concentrating, physiological discomfort, and maladaptive behavioral responses when students encounter examinations, assignments, performance expectations, or concerns about academic outcomes. Evidence from secondary-school settings indicates that academic anxiety is not limited to a small group of students and may vary according to individual and educational characteristics (Hasan, 2022). Indonesian studies have likewise documented anxiety associated with academic pressure among secondary-school students (Laely et al., 2022; Tondani et al., 2024). Kristiyanti & Ardhanaputra (2025) further emphasize that persistent academic pressure may be accompanied by fear, helplessness, and a reduced sense of control, making academic anxiety relevant to both students' educational experiences and psychological well-being.

Academic anxiety, however, cannot be understood solely through academic achievement or the objective amount of schoolwork students face. Tondani et al. (2024), for example, found that students could experience moderate academic anxiety without a

significant association with academic achievement, suggesting that anxiety is shaped by a more complex combination of psychological and contextual processes. Research conducted in Madrasah Tsanawiyah settings also shows that students may experience fear of examinations, reduced confidence, and difficulty concentrating, while guidance and counseling services can provide emotional support and coping assistance (Putra & Perianto, 2025). Such evidence shifts attention toward the ways students cognitively process academic demands. One psychological process that warrants closer examination is the tendency to repeatedly analyze problems, anticipate undesirable outcomes, and remain mentally occupied with concerns that are difficult to resolve a pattern commonly described in everyday language as *overthinking*.

Psychological literature provides a more precise framework for understanding overthinking through the concept of *repetitive negative thinking* (RNT). RNT refers to persistent, repetitive, and difficult-to-disengage negative thought processes that cut across specific emotional disorders. The Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire developed by (Ehring et al., 2011) conceptualizes this process independently of the specific content of thoughts, allowing persistent negative thinking to be examined as a transdiagnostic cognitive process. Worry and rumination represent closely related forms of repetitive thinking, although worry tends to be oriented toward anticipated threats whereas rumination more often involves repeated attention to negative experiences, feelings, or their implications. Contemporary evidence continues to position these processes as relevant to anxiety and depression in young people (Bell et al., 2023; Egan et al., 2025). From this perspective, overthinking is not simply extensive reflection; it becomes psychologically relevant when repetitive thought is difficult to control, emotionally negative, and unproductive.

Adolescence provides an important developmental context for examining this cognitive tendency. Research has demonstrated that repetitive negative thinking is associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents, supporting its relevance as a transdiagnostic vulnerability process (McEvoy et al., 2019). Tichenor et al. (2023) similarly found that more frequent repetitive negative thinking among children and adolescents was associated with greater anxiety characteristics, while longitudinal evidence indicates that RNT can operate within pathways linking psychological or behavioral difficulties with subsequent symptoms of generalized anxiety, social anxiety, and depression (Richardson et al., 2025). A meta-analysis of psychological interventions among young people also found consistent relationships between changes in RNT and emotional outcomes, particularly when

interventions explicitly targeted repetitive thinking processes (Bell et al., 2023). These findings suggest that how adolescents repeatedly process threatening or uncertain experiences may be as important as the experiences themselves in understanding anxiety.

Educational experiences provide numerous situations in which repetitive negative thinking may become activated. Students may repeatedly anticipate poor examination results, revisit mistakes, question their ability to complete assignments, or imagine unfavorable consequences of academic failure. Indonesian evidence indicates that overthinking occurs across different stages of education. Ivanka & Saragi (2023) found overthinking among both beginning and final-year university students, with differences emerging according to students' academic stage. Muslimah & Sahrani (2025) subsequently reported a significant relationship between overthinking and social anxiety among university students experiencing impostor syndrome. Although these studies were conducted primarily with university populations and examined outcomes other than academic anxiety, they illustrate a consistent pattern in which persistent negative thinking coexists with heightened anxious responses. The pattern provides a reasonable conceptual basis for examining whether a similar relationship is present earlier in the educational trajectory, particularly among adolescents confronting school-specific academic demands.

The Indonesian school context further underscores the relevance of this question. Guidance and counseling services are expected to support students not only after psychological difficulties become severe but also by identifying cognitive and emotional patterns associated with academic adjustment. Putra & Perianto (2025) showed that guidance and counseling teachers in a Madrasah Tsanawiyah setting supported students experiencing academic anxiety through emotional assistance, identification of anxiety sources, and coping strategies. The preliminary observations and interviews conducted for the present study at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi similarly indicated that ninth-grade students frequently expressed excessive concerns regarding grades, examinations, school assignments, and the choice of subsequent schools. These concerns are particularly relevant for students approaching the transition from junior secondary education, when immediate academic responsibilities coexist with decisions about further education. Repeatedly processing such uncertainties may intensify the psychological meaning students attach to ordinary academic demands.

Existing evidence nevertheless leaves an important empirical gap. Research on RNT has established meaningful associations with anxiety and depression among adolescents (Bell

et al., 2023; McEvoy et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2025; Tichenor et al., 2023). while Indonesian studies have separately documented overthinking among university students Ivanka & Saragi (2023), its relationship with social anxiety Muslimah & Sahrani (2025), and academic anxiety among secondary-school or Madrasah Tsanawiyah students (Kristiyanti & Ardhanaputra, 2025; Putra & Perianto, 2025; Tondani et al., 2024). Much of this evidence, however, either examines broader forms of anxiety, focuses on university populations, or treats academic anxiety without directly examining overthinking as its psychological correlate. Evidence specifically addressing the relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety among Madrasah Tsanawiyah students remains limited. Examining this relationship is important because findings derived from university populations or from generalized and social anxiety cannot automatically be assumed to represent the experiences of younger students facing school-based academic demands.

The present study addresses this gap by examining overthinking and academic anxiety specifically among ninth-grade students at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi. Its contribution lies in bringing the transdiagnostic perspective of repetitive negative thinking into the context of academic anxiety among Madrasah Tsanawiyah students, while retaining attention to the educational circumstances in which these psychological experiences occur. Evidence concerning this relationship may extend current understanding of adolescent academic anxiety and provide an empirical basis for guidance and counseling services to identify students whose repetitive patterns of thinking accompany heightened anxiety toward academic demands. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the relationship between overthinking and the level of academic anxiety among ninth-grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 4 Kota Jambi.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety among ninth-grade students. A correlational design was appropriate because the study focused on identifying the direction and strength of the relationship between two naturally occurring variables without manipulating either variable (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) 4 Kota Jambi during the first semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. The population comprised 175 ninth-grade students from six classes. A sample of 122 students was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin

of error and selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. The sample was proportionally distributed across the six classes, consisting of 20 students from Class IX A, 20 from IX B, 20 from IX C, 22 from IX D, 20 from IX E, and 20 from IX F. This procedure was used to maintain proportional representation of students from each class in the study sample.

Data were collected using Likert-type scales measuring overthinking and academic anxiety. Overthinking was assessed using the *Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire* (PTQ) developed by Ehring et al. (2011), which conceptualizes repetitive negative thinking independently of disorder-specific thought content. The initial PTQ consisted of 15 items representing three dimensions: *core characteristics of repetitive negative thinking*, *unproductiveness of repetitive negative thinking*, and *mental capacity captured by repetitive negative thinking*. Academic anxiety was measured using a 24-item scale adapted from Kholilullah based on Ottens' conceptualization of academic anxiety, encompassing four dimensions: *anxiety-engendering mental activity*, *misdirected attention*, *physiological distress*, and *inappropriate behavior*. Jurnal Hubungan Overthinking de… Prior to the main data collection, the instruments were pilot-tested with 38 respondents. Item validity testing resulted in the retention of 12 of the 15 overthinking items and 22 of the 24 academic anxiety items. Reliability analysis of the retained items yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .811 for the overthinking scale and .902 for the academic anxiety scale, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including minimum and maximum scores, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to describe the distributions of the two variables. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and linearity assumptions were examined. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction indicated no statistically significant departure from normality for either overthinking ($p = .098$) or academic anxiety ($p = .061$). The linearity test showed a significant linear component ($F = 31.214$, $p < .001$) and a nonsignificant deviation from linearity ($F = .688$, $p = .857$), supporting the use of linear correlation analysis. Pearson's product–moment correlation was subsequently used to examine the direction and strength of the relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety, with the significance level set at .05.

RESULTS

The results are presented in three sections: descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and hypothesis testing. Data from 122 ninth-grade students at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi were included in the analysis. Descriptive statistics were first examined to provide an overview of the distribution of overthinking and academic anxiety scores, followed by normality and linearity tests as prerequisites for Pearson's product–moment correlation.

1. Descriptive Statistics of Overthinking and Academic Anxiety

Descriptive analysis showed that the overthinking scores ranged from 15 to 45, with a mean of 30.68 (*SD* = 6.784). Academic anxiety scores ranged from 28 to 82, with a mean of 58.48 (*SD* = 12.019). The descriptive statistics for both variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Overthinking and Academic Anxiety

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Overthinking	122	15	45	30.68	6.784
Academic anxiety	122	28	82	58.48	12.019

As shown in Table 1, academic anxiety scores exhibited a wider observed range and greater variability than overthinking scores. These descriptive results provide an overview of the scores obtained by the participants before the relationship between the two variables was examined.

2. Assumption Testing

Normality was examined using the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction. The results showed a test statistic of .074 for overthinking with $p = .098$ and .079 for academic anxiety with $p = .061$. Since both significance values exceeded .05, neither variable showed a statistically significant departure from normality. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Normality Test

Variable	N	Kolmogorov–Smirnov Statistic	p	Result
Overthinking	122	.074	.098	Normal
Academic anxiety	122	.079	.061	Normal

Linearity testing was subsequently conducted to determine whether the relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety could be adequately represented by a linear pattern. As reported in Table 3, the linear component was statistically significant ($F = 31.214$, $p < .001$), whereas the deviation from linearity was not statistically significant ($F = .688$, $p =$

.857). The nonsignificant deviation from linearity indicated that the relationship between the two variables did not significantly depart from a linear pattern.

Table 3. Results of the Linearity Test

Component	F	p	Result
Linearity	31.214	< .001	Significant
Deviation from linearity	.688	.857	Not significant

Taken together, the normality and linearity results supported the use of Pearson's product–moment correlation to examine the relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety.

3. Relationship between Overthinking and Academic Anxiety

Pearson's product–moment correlation was used to test the research hypothesis. As presented in Table 4, the analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between overthinking and academic anxiety, $r = .467$, $p < .001$, with 122 students included in the analysis.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation between Overthinking and Academic Anxiety

Variables	N	Pearson's r	p	Direction
Overthinking – Academic anxiety	122	.467	< .001	Positive

Table 4 shows that the correlation coefficient was positive, indicating that higher overthinking scores tended to be associated with higher academic anxiety scores. The magnitude of the coefficient ($r = .467$) indicated a moderate relationship between the two variables. Since the significance value was below .05, the null hypothesis was rejected, supporting the research hypothesis that overthinking was positively and significantly associated with academic anxiety among ninth-grade students at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi.

The squared correlation coefficient was $r^2 = .218$, indicating that overthinking and academic anxiety shared approximately 21.8% of their variance in the study sample. This value represents shared variance between the two variables rather than a causal effect, given the correlational design of the study. Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence of a significant positive relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety among the participating students.

DISCUSSION

The present study found a significant positive relationship between overthinking and academic anxiety among ninth-grade students at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi ($r = .467$, $p < .001$).

The moderate magnitude of the correlation indicates that students who reported stronger tendencies toward overthinking also tended to report higher levels of academic anxiety. This finding supports the proposed hypothesis and suggests that repetitive patterns of thought are meaningfully associated with how students experience academic demands. The shared variance of 21.8% further indicates that the two constructs overlap to a meaningful extent, although a substantial proportion of variation in academic anxiety remains associated with factors beyond the bivariate relationship examined in this study. Given the correlational design, this finding should be understood as evidence of an association rather than evidence that overthinking causes academic anxiety.

The relationship identified in this study can be understood through the conceptualization of overthinking as *repetitive negative thinking* (RNT). Ehring et al. (2011) describe RNT as repetitive, difficult-to-disengage, and largely unproductive negative thinking that can occur across different forms of psychological distress. When this pattern develops around academic experiences, students may repeatedly anticipate undesirable outcomes, revisit perceived mistakes, question their ability to meet academic expectations, or remain mentally occupied with possibilities that have not yet occurred. Such thinking may make academic concerns more persistent because the individual repeatedly returns attention to the perceived threat without necessarily reaching a workable solution. For ninth-grade students, concerns about examinations, grades, school assignments, and transition to further education can therefore extend beyond the immediate academic situation and continue as recurring cognitive concerns.

The present findings are consistent with broader evidence positioning RNT as a transdiagnostic process associated with anxiety during adolescence. McEvoy et al. (2019), in a study involving 840 adolescents, found that RNT was associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression regardless of age and gender. Their findings support the view that persistent negative thinking is not restricted to a single diagnostic category but represents a cognitive process relevant to different forms of emotional distress. Research by Tichenor et al. (2023) also demonstrated an association between more frequent RNT and greater self-reported anxiety characteristics among older school-age children and adolescents. Although the populations and specific forms of anxiety examined in these studies differ from the academic anxiety investigated here, their results converge with the present finding that adolescents who become more persistently engaged with negative thoughts tend to experience greater anxiety.

Longitudinal evidence further strengthens the relevance of repetitive thinking during adolescence. Richardson et al. (2025) examined RNT within a five-year longitudinal framework and identified it as an important cognitive process in pathways involving generalized anxiety, social anxiety, depression, and other psychological symptoms during adolescence. Bell et al. (2023), through a meta-analysis of psychological interventions for youth depression and anxiety, likewise demonstrated the clinical relevance of RNT and showed that interventions targeting repetitive negative thinking can produce changes in this cognitive process alongside emotional outcomes. Taken together, these findings provide a broader psychological context for the present results: repetitive negative thought is not merely an occasional response to stressful circumstances but can become an important cognitive feature accompanying emotional difficulties in young people.

The findings also extend Indonesian research on overthinking in educational populations. Ivanka & Saragi (2023) documented overthinking among both beginning and final-year university students using measures that included the PTQ, demonstrating that repetitive thinking occurs across different stages of academic life. Muslimah & Sahrani (2025) subsequently reported that higher overthinking was associated with higher social anxiety among university students experiencing impostor syndrome. Their study involved 385 university students and found a positive relationship between the two constructs. The present study shows a comparable directional pattern but in a substantially different educational context. Rather than university students and social anxiety, the current participants were ninth-grade Madrasah Tsanawiyah students and the outcome examined was anxiety specifically related to academic experiences. This distinction is important because the psychological demands encountered by early adolescents at school cannot simply be equated with those experienced by university students.

The educational context of ninth-grade students may help explain why this relationship deserves particular attention. Students at this stage encounter routine academic demands while simultaneously approaching a transition to the next level of education. Preliminary information obtained at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi indicated that students' concerns frequently centered on grades, examinations, assignments, and the choice of subsequent schools. These concerns are understandable within the students' developmental and educational circumstances. The difficulty may emerge when ordinary concerns become repetitive, difficult to disengage from, and increasingly focused on unfavorable possibilities. Rather than facilitating problem solving, persistent mental rehearsal may keep academic

threats cognitively active and make it more difficult for students to redirect their attention toward the task at hand. This interpretation is consistent with the dimensions measured by the PTQ, particularly the repetitive nature, perceived unproductiveness, and mental capacity captured by negative thinking.

The moderate correlation observed in this study also warrants careful interpretation. Overthinking and academic anxiety were significantly related, but they were not interchangeable constructs. The shared variance of 21.8% indicates that academic anxiety cannot be adequately understood through overthinking alone. Students' anxiety may also be related to academic self-efficacy, family expectations, examination pressure, peer relationships, learning difficulties, coping resources, school climate, or other personal and contextual conditions that were not measured in the present study. The finding therefore supports a multidimensional understanding of academic anxiety. Overthinking appears to represent one relevant cognitive correlate within a broader network of factors rather than a single explanation for students' academic anxiety.

The findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study extends the literature on RNT by demonstrating that the relationship between repetitive negative thinking and anxiety is also evident when anxiety is situated specifically within the academic experiences of Madrasah Tsanawiyah students. Previous research has established RNT as relevant to anxiety and depression among adolescents McEvoy et al. (2019), anxiety characteristics among young people Tichenor et al. (2023), and several emotional outcomes across adolescence (Richardson et al., 2025). The present findings add an educationally specific perspective by showing that this cognitive pattern is also associated with academic anxiety in a school-based Islamic educational context. This contribution is particularly relevant because much of the Indonesian literature identified in this area has focused on university populations or forms of anxiety other than academic anxiety.

Practically, the results suggest that guidance and counseling services should pay attention not only to visible manifestations of anxiety but also to the patterns of thought accompanying students' academic concerns. Students who repeatedly anticipate failure, revisit academic mistakes, or remain preoccupied with uncertain outcomes may benefit from support that helps them distinguish productive reflection from repetitive and unproductive thinking. School counselors can incorporate the identification of repetitive thinking patterns into needs assessments and provide individual or group guidance focused on recognizing

thought patterns, directing attention toward manageable problems, developing adaptive coping strategies, and strengthening problem-solving skills. Such services should not treat every instance of worry as pathological. Concern about examinations, grades, or future schooling can be a normal response to meaningful academic demands; intervention becomes particularly relevant when repetitive thinking begins to interfere with concentration, emotional regulation, or students' ability to respond constructively to those demands.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the correlational and cross-sectional design does not permit conclusions regarding the direction of causality between overthinking and academic anxiety. It remains possible that repetitive negative thinking contributes to heightened academic anxiety, that anxious students become more likely to engage in overthinking, or that both are shaped by other psychological and contextual factors. Second, the study was conducted with 122 ninth-grade students from a single Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Kota Jambi, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to students from different educational levels, school systems, or geographical settings. Third, both variables were assessed using self-report scales, making the data dependent on students' perceptions and response patterns. Finally, variables that may be relevant to academic anxiety, such as academic self-efficacy, parental expectations, coping strategies, school climate, and perceived academic pressure, were not included in the analysis.

Future research could address these limitations by involving students from multiple schools and regions, employing longitudinal designs to clarify temporal relationships, and integrating additional psychological and educational variables into multivariate models. Qualitative inquiry may also provide a richer account of what students repeatedly think about when they describe themselves as overthinking and how those thoughts are experienced in specific academic situations. Intervention-based research could subsequently examine whether helping students manage repetitive negative thinking is accompanied by meaningful changes in academic anxiety. Such work would deepen understanding of the cognitive and contextual processes surrounding academic anxiety while providing a stronger empirical basis for responsive guidance and counseling services in secondary education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, this study concludes that overthinking is positively and significantly associated with academic anxiety among ninth-grade students

at MTsN 4 Kota Jambi. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .467$, $p < .001$) indicates a moderate relationship, suggesting that students with higher levels of overthinking tend to report higher levels of academic anxiety. The two variables shared approximately 21.8% of their variance, indicating a meaningful association while also showing that academic anxiety cannot be understood through overthinking alone. These findings extend the understanding of repetitive negative thinking in an educational context by demonstrating its relationship with academic anxiety among Madrasah Tsanawiyah students, a population that has received relatively limited attention in previous research.

The findings also highlight the relevance of students' thought patterns for guidance and counseling services in schools. School counselors may consider repetitive and unproductive thinking when identifying students' needs and designing support related to examinations, academic performance, assignments, and transitions to further education. Counseling services may incorporate strategies that help students recognize repetitive negative thoughts, redirect attention toward manageable concerns, strengthen problem-solving skills, and develop more adaptive ways of responding to academic pressure. Since this study was limited to a cross-sectional correlational design, self-report measures, and students from one Madrasah Tsanawiyah, future research should involve more diverse school populations, employ longitudinal or intervention-based designs, and examine additional factors such as academic self-efficacy, coping strategies, parental expectations, and perceived academic pressure. Such research may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cognitive and contextual factors are associated with academic anxiety during adolescence.

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