

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parental Bereavement and Academic Resilience in Indonesian Adolescents: Emotion Regulation as Mediator and Social Support as Protective Factor

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Abstract. Parental bereavement represents one of the most profound emotional disruptions in adolescence, yet its academic implications remain underexplored, particularly in relation to how emotional regulation interacts with social support to sustain academic performance. This qualitative phenomenological study investigated the adaptive processes of two 18-year-old students in Surabaya who experienced parental loss, aiming to understand how they navigated grief while remaining engaged in learning. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observation, then analyzed using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: academic resilience, emotion regulation, social support, and negative emotional experiences. Findings reveal that despite emotional disruptions and social stigma, both students demonstrated perseverance, reflective help-seeking, and meaning-making abilities, supported by cognitive reappraisal and culturally grounded coping (e.g., sabar, ikhlas, prayer). Emotion regulation served as a mediating mechanism linking bereavement to academic resilience, while peer and family support acted as protective buffers fostering motivation and emotional stability. Practically, this study underscores the need for grief-sensitive pedagogy and teacher training in emotional scaffolding to support bereaved students' adjustment. Theoretically, the study extends Academic Resilience Theory (Cassidy, 2016) by positioning emotion regulation as a mediating mechanism and social support as a key protective factor in the context of parental loss.

Keywords: Parental bereavement, Academic resilience, Emotion regulation, Social support, Adolescents

Abstrak: Kehilangan orang tua merupakan salah satu pengalaman emosional paling mendalam pada masa remaja, namun dampaknya terhadap capaian akademik masih belum banyak diteliti. Penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis ini mengeksplorasi proses adaptasi dua siswa berusia 18 tahun di Surabaya yang mengalami kehilangan orang tua, dengan tujuan memahami bagaimana mereka mengelola duka sembari tetap terlibat dalam proses pembelajaran. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi kelas, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Empat tema utama ditemukan: resiliensi akademik, regulasi emosi, dukungan sosial, dan pengalaman emosional negatif. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa meskipun mengalami gangguan emosi dan stigma sosial, kedua peserta mampu menunjukkan ketekunan, perilaku pencarian bantuan yang reflektif, dan kemampuan memaknai pengalaman, yang didukung oleh reappraisal kognitif dan strategi coping berbasis budaya (misalnya sabar, ikhlas, dan doa). Regulasi emosi berperan sebagai mekanisme mediasi yang menghubungkan pengalaman kehilangan dengan resiliensi akademik, sementara dukungan dari teman sebaya dan keluarga berfungsi sebagai faktor protektif yang memperkuat motivasi dan stabilitas emosional. Secara praktis, temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya penerapan pedagogi sensitif-duka dan pelatihan guru terkait emotional scaffolding dalam mendukung proses adaptasi siswa yang berduka. Penelitian ini memperluas penerapan Academic Resilience Theory (Cassidy, 2016) dengan menempatkan regulasi emosi sebagai mekanisme mediasi dan dukungan sosial sebagai faktor protektif dalam konteks kehilangan orang tua.

Kata kunci: Kehilangan orang tua, Resiliensi akademik, Regulasi emosi, Dukungan sosial, Remaja

INTRODUCTION

Parental bereavement is among the most disruptive life events in adolescence, with effects that extend beyond grief

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into day-to-day learning, attention, and persistence at school. Recent evidence shows that the academic consequences of loss are not uniform; they are shaped by how adolescents regulate difficult emotions and access support from people around them. Yet much of the literature still catalogs outcomes (e.g., sadness, withdrawal, reduced achievement) rather than explaining the mechanisms that connect bereavement to academic functioning. Building on this manuscript's empirical groundwork, the present introduction reframes the problem

as a process linking parental loss → emotion regulation → academic resilience, with social support operating as a key protective context that can accelerate recovery and re-engagement with learning.

Global and regional studies converge on the same pattern: loss destabilizes routines and relationships, often depressing concentration and motivation in school. Work on traumatic loss in school-age children documents classroom disengagement, task avoidance, and distress that “spills over” into academic tasks (Jenkins, Wang, & Turner, 2014). Post-pandemic research similarly depicts compound stressors—parental death, financial strain, shifting caregiving—that heighten grief and complicate academic continuity (Donohue, 2024). Indonesian studies echo these findings, underscoring how parental death or separation can erode well-being and undermine learning persistence (Anwar & Nur, 2023; Suprapmanto, Mukti, & Sujoko, 2023). To move the field forward, the critical question is not whether loss affects school outcomes, but how specific psychological and social processes help adolescents adapt academically after loss.

We conceptualize academic resilience as the capacity to sustain or regain effective learning in the face of significant stressors, expressed through perseverance, reflective help-seeking, and the regulation of negative affect (Cassidy, 2016). In this study’s context, bereavement is posited to disrupt emotion regulation (e.g., overwhelming sadness, rumination), which in turn undermines everyday “academic buoyancy”—the ability to cope with routine setbacks like poor grades or difficult assignments (Martin & Marsh, 2008). Conversely, when adolescents mobilize adaptive regulation (acceptance, self-soothing, problem focusing) and draw on supportive relationships, they are more likely to re-engage with academic tasks, focus attention, and persist through difficulty (Putri, Darmayanti, & Menanti, 2023; Novianti et al., 2024). Thus, emotion regulation functions as a proximal mechanism translating loss into academic behavior, while social support acts as a contextual buffer that scaffolds regulation and sustains motivation (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015; Mısırlı & Karakuş, 2024).

Positioning this work within the resilience tradition also clarifies novelty. Rather than describing bereavement’s impact in general terms, we specify a mechanism-focused account: parental loss challenges regulatory capacity; regulation then shapes whether students persevere, seek help adaptively, and contain negative affect—the three dimensions of the ARS-30 framework (Cassidy, 2016). In parallel, academic buoyancy literature suggests that daily coping resources (confidence, composure, commitment) are trainable and responsive to context (Martin & Marsh, 2008). By threading these strands together, the present study illuminates how adolescents move from initial emotional disequilibrium to renewed academic engagement, identifying leverage points for school-based support.

Emotion regulation deserves particular emphasis because it links the internal experience of grief to observable learning behavior. Studies in Indonesian school settings show that students who cultivate acceptance, self-talk, and self-compassion cope more effectively with distress, paving the way for sustained effort on tasks (Adriana et al, 2023; Putri et al., 2023). Post-loss pathways mapped during COVID-19 likewise highlight regulation and meaning-making as predictors of adjustment (Novianti et al., 2024; Donohue, 2024). Importantly, regulation here does not imply suppression; rather, it entails recognizing and tolerating difficult emotions while selecting actions (e.g., pausing, seeking clarification, chunking tasks) that keep

learning viable in the moment. These micro-processes are precisely where schools can intervene—through classroom routines that normalize emotions, provide choice, and build metacognitive coping.

Motivation after loss can be elaborated through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which holds that autonomy, competence, and relatedness energize sustained engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In bereavement, each need is at risk: routines restrict autonomy, grief erodes competence beliefs, and relational disruptions threaten relatedness. School ecologies that intentionally restore these needs—offering structured choices (autonomy), scaffolded mastery experiences (competence), and empathic relationships (relatedness)—can re-ignite students’ why for learning. Applying SDT to grief-sensitive schooling, Frei-Landau (2024) shows that teachers who feel resourced to provide autonomy-supportive, emotionally attuned instruction are better positioned to support bereaved students’ mental health and learning. Peer contexts matter as well: the peer buffering effect suggests that affiliative friendships protect against isolation and bolster academic persistence when family systems are strained (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015).

Cultural context shapes these processes profoundly. Indonesia’s collectivist norms emphasize interdependence, mutual aid, and spiritual meaning, all of which can be harnessed to support recovery in school. Family and peer support are consistently associated with stronger academic adjustment and resilience (Aini, 2022; Pratiwi & Kumalasari, 2021; Kaesa, Riskiana, & Adisunarno, 2024). At the same time, prescriptive norms around emotional expression (e.g., the expectation to be *kuat*; boys “should not cry”) can inadvertently encourage suppression, complicating regulation and help-seeking. Values such as *sabar* (patience) and *ikhlas* (acceptance) may facilitate adaptive coping when framed as active acceptance paired with problem solving, rather than passive endurance. School-based spiritual coaching and peer-support initiatives show promise for translating these cultural assets into concrete learning supports (Henriques, Laka, & Hatmoko, 2023), provided they also create space for safe emotional disclosure.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses two interlocking gaps. Theoretically, few qualitative investigations in collectivist settings delineate how emotion regulation mediates the relationship between parental loss and academic resilience, or how social support channels (peers, teachers, family, faith communities) differentially scaffold that regulation. Empirically, the field needs fine-grained accounts of adolescents’ lived experiences that connect the texture of grief to the granularity of classroom coping—how students decide to re-read misunderstood questions, ask for help, or persist after a disappointing mark. By integrating Academic Resilience Theory, SDT-informed motivation, and attachment-sensitive views of support, this study contributes a mechanism-oriented, culturally grounded account of how bereaved Indonesian adolescents “bounce back” in school (Cassidy, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Mısırlı & Karakuş, 2024).

Finally, the practical stakes are clear. If emotion regulation is the engine and social support the fuel of post-loss academic resilience, then grief-sensitive pedagogy should aim to (a) normalize emotion talk and teach concrete regulatory strategies; (b) structure autonomy-supportive classrooms that rebuild competence; and (c) cultivate peer and adult relationships that provide empathic, non-stigmatizing support. These moves align with inclusive education goals and can be implemented through advisory programs, teacher professional learning, and school–family

partnerships that honor local cultural resources. Consistent with this framing, the study explicitly aims to explore how emotion regulation and social support foster academic resilience among bereaved students, tracing the processes by which adolescents move from acute grief to renewed academic engagement within Indonesian school contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to deeply explore the lived experiences of adolescents who faced parental bereavement and navigated academic challenges in its aftermath. A phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the subjective emotional, cognitive, and social processes underlying grief and academic resilience, aligned with the study's goal to illuminate meaning-making and adaptation mechanisms rather than generalize outcomes. Two 18-year-old female students from a Madrasah Aliyah in Surabaya participated in this study. Both had experienced parental loss—one due to death and one due to divorce followed by remarriage—and were selected using purposive sampling based on their willingness to share their grief experiences and their observable challenges in school functioning. A small sample is appropriate in phenomenological inquiry, as the primary objective is depth and richness of insight rather than statistical representation.

This study took place in Surabaya, Indonesia, a setting embedded in collectivist cultural norms emphasizing family ties, communal support, and religious meaning—factors that shape grieving, emotional regulation, and academic engagement. Recognizing this cultural context enriched interpretation of how participants balanced cultural expectations (e.g., appearing strong, avoiding emotional disclosure) with personal coping needs.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from May to July 2025 through two primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observation. Each participant completed two interview sessions, each lasting approximately 60–90 minutes, allowing time for rapport building, sensitive emotional exploration, and follow-up clarification. The interview guide included prompts on emotional reactions to loss, coping strategies, academic challenges, social support experiences, and meaning-making processes. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and conducted in a private room on school premises to ensure comfort and confidentiality.

Classroom observations (2–3 sessions per participant) supported understanding of behavioral manifestations of resilience and emotional coping in real-time learning contexts. Observation focused on student engagement, help-seeking behaviors, task persistence, emotional responses to academic tasks, and interactions with peers and teachers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, operationalized through open, axial, and selective coding to ensure structured interpretation. First, interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion (familiarization). During open coding, meaningful units relating to emotions, academic strategies, and support experiences were identified. These codes were then grouped into conceptual

clusters during axial coding, highlighting relationships between parental loss, emotion regulation, and academic behaviors. Finally, selective coding refined core themes aligned with Academic Resilience Theory dimensions and emergent emotional adjustment themes. NVivo-assisted manual coding ensured transparency and traceability of the analytic process.

To strengthen analytic rigor, Cassidy's (2016) Academic Resilience Theory served not only as a conceptual lens but also as a coding scaffold, especially in organizing themes around perseverance, adaptive help-seeking, and emotional response. Integrating this theoretical model minimized bias and grounded interpretations in established psychological constructs.

Trustworthiness Strategies

Multiple strategies ensured research trustworthiness. Member checking was conducted after preliminary theme development, allowing participants to verify that interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. Peer debriefing with a qualitative research colleague enhanced reflexivity and reduced interpretive bias. Method triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data with observational notes, strengthening validity through convergence of evidence. An audit trail was maintained documenting analytic decisions, coding steps, and memos.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the school's ethics and student support committee. Informed consent was secured from participants and their legal guardians, given their minor status at the time bereavement began, and assent was re-confirmed at age 18. Pseudonyms were assigned (e.g., "Nuris," "Cahaya") and identifying information was omitted to protect confidentiality. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Because bereavement is a sensitive topic, a psychological referral protocol was in place, and participants were offered access to the school counselor if emotional distress arose during or after interviews.

RESULTS OF STUDY

The first participant, Nuris (pseudonym), is 18 years old and a student at Madrasah Aliyah in Surabaya. Born in Surabaya and raised in France, she struggled to communicate in Bahasa Indonesia, which caused tension with her mother. After her father died in 2022, her emotional relationship with her mother became even more tenuous, leaving her feeling isolated and shut down. Despite this, Nuris had a talent for drawing, which she used to express her feelings. After experiencing difficulties, Nuris took the initiative to consult a counselling teacher to discuss her social and academic problems.

The second participant, Cahaya (pseudonym), is also 18 years old and a student at Madrasah Aliyah in Surabaya. Cahaya lives with her mother after her parents separated when she was a toddler. She felt confused and awkward when her mother remarried without a sufficient introduction to the new father. This change left Cahaya feeling deprived of quality time with her mother and isolated. After struggling to concentrate on her studies, Cahaya sought support from friends and took the initiative to undergo counselling with a counsellor, who helped her accept the changes in her family and refocus on her studies.

Table 1. Themes and Coding

Major Theme	Category	Coding
Academic Resilience	Perseverance	• Failure is normal • Continuing to strive despite unsatisfactory results • Maintaining learning enthusiasm despite failure • Accepting failure as part of the process • Learning independently and trying repeatedly despite difficulties
	Strategies for Overcoming Learning Difficulties	• Rereading questions even when not understanding • Seeking alternative ways to solve problems • Using other resources like YouTube or friends to understand the material • Trying to complete assignments despite confusion
	Motivation and Academic Goals	• Not stopping at the point of failure • Striving to improve despite shortcomings • Focusing on long-term goals rather than temporary results • Keep moving forward despite challenges
Emotion Regulation	Self-Control and Emotions	• Managing emotions by talking to oneself ("It's okay, you can do this") • Calming oneself before reacting • Crying to release pent-up emotions after holding feelings back • Accepting and understanding negative emotions without letting them interfere
	Emotional Healing Process	• Crying to release pent-up emotions • Coping with feelings of longing for deceased parents • Facing sadness and processing it through expression • Taking time for oneself after expressing emotions
Social Support and Interpersonal Relationships	Seeking Social Support	• Talking to close friends to share feelings • Seeking support from peers to deal with issues • Relying on friends for academic support • Turning to friends for understanding and emotional validation
	Building Interpersonal Relationships	• Emotional support from close friends in overcoming difficulties • Friends as a source of academic motivation • Sharing feelings and receiving understanding from friends • Feeling accepted and understood by close peers
Negative Influence and Emotional Response	Negative Feelings and Confusion	• Feeling confused when facing difficult exam questions • Feeling pressured when facing tasks that cannot be completed • Lack of understanding of the learning material • Frustration due to unsatisfactory results despite effort
	Loneliness and Social Isolation	• Feeling isolated despite being around many people • Feeling emotionally misunderstood • Feeling lonely despite being in a busy social environment • Difficulty connecting with peers
	Reaction to Social Stigma	• Receiving the "orphan" label that affects self-esteem • Facing judgmental comments about family status • Feeling unvalued or different due to a family situation • Discomfort with the social stigma attached to their identity

Theme 1. Academic Resilience

Academic resilience refers to a student's ability to recover from adversity and remain positively adapted in the academic environment (Elya & Widyatno, 2022). Based on interviews conducted with learners, academic resilience is described as a psychological phenomenon that encompasses perseverance, strategies for overcoming learning difficulties, and academic motivation and goals. Each of these subcategories reflected learners' responses to the academic and emotional challenges they faced, especially after the loss of a parent, which worsened their learning dynamics.

Perseverance

Perseverance is at the core of academic resilience. Participants demonstrated that, despite facing failure or unsatisfactory results, they persevered and did not give up. In the interview, the participant stated:

"still struggling but yes, even though I have studied but in the end my results are still not satisfactory... yes I have taught you" (Interview 23 May 2025).
"failing is normal for me... failing often is okay" (Interview 23 May 2025).

These statements reflect the mentality of a learner who can see failure as part of the inevitable process in academic

achievement. They not only accept failure but also make it a stepping stone to try harder. Perseverance helps students to stay focused on their goals despite emotional distractions or pressure from the environment (Elya & Widyatno, 2022). Perseverance is not just about trying despite failure, but also about accepting the failure and continuing the struggle, even if the results are not as expected. It aligns with the concept of academic resilience, which refers to the ability to face, overcome, and adapt to academic challenges (Harahap et al., 2020). This perseverance is fuelled by the understanding that quitting is stagnation. It is reflected in the phrase:

"if I don't learn or stop at that point, I will definitely not walk again... it will not develop" (Interview 23 May 2025).

This quote highlights the participants' heightened awareness of the negative consequences of stagnation in their education. Emotional support from family is crucial in building this resilience, as students who feel supported tend to have higher perseverance in learning (Aini, 2022). Their perseverance focuses not only on repetitive actions in learning but also on deep reflection on the importance of the process itself.

Strategies for Overcoming Learning Difficulties

Strategies to overcome learning difficulties also determine academic achievement. From the interviews, although participants often felt confused or did not understand the subject matter, they persevered. Instead, they sought solutions to overcome their incomprehension. Students demonstrated high perseverance in facing academic challenges, such as difficulties in understanding newly learned Arabic materials and memorization tasks. Despite attending extracurricular robotics competitions, they remain calm, positive, and seek help through other sources, such as YouTube, and do not hesitate to ask questions. Failure is viewed as an integral part of the learning process, and individuals can motivate themselves to persevere despite obstacles. One statement that illustrates this is:

"I read the question again even though I don't understand it... it's still okay than zero not answered at all" (Interview 23 May 2025).

This statement illustrates how participants actively tried to complete the task despite being confused. They chose to put in more effort than to leave the problem unanswered. In learning, this is a form of self-directed learning, where individuals take full responsibility for their learning process, despite facing obstacles. "Students have ways of facing and overcoming their academic challenges through asking close friends, classmates, and even taking private Arabic courses. It shows a form of reflecting and adaptive help-seeking (seeking adaptive help in facing and overcoming academic challenges). This process involves reflecting on learning outcomes and adjusting strategies as necessary, allowing individuals to improve their learning process based on their experience (Sumner, 2018). In addition, participants also demonstrated independence in their learning endeavours, as seen from the statement:

"I like my own self-improvement, Mum" (Interview 23 May 2025).

The ability to self-improve and take concrete steps to understand the material indicates a strong reflective process within the participants. They do not wait for help

from others; instead, they seek ways to develop independently.

Motivation and Academic Goals

Motivational dynamics in the learning process are also fundamental in creating sustained perseverance. Participants demonstrated that, despite facing various obstacles, they had clear and strong academic goals. One phrase that reflects their motivation is:

"I'm walking even though I'm lacking there are still minuses... but it means that I'm still persevering... Alhamdulillah, I won second place in the end" (Interview 23 May 2025).

Participants recognised that although they still had shortcomings or challenges, they felt they had to keep fighting to achieve their goals. It indicates that their motivation is not dependent on achieving immediate results, but instead on the process and gradual progress that can be achieved through consistent effort. There is an understanding that failure is not the end of the world. Students' ability to cope with academic failure is an important indicator of their independence and responsibility in learning (Saraswati et al., 2018). It is reflected in their views on failure:

"failure for me is normal... failing often is okay" (Interview 23 May 2025).

This statement suggests that failure is an integral part of their journey to success. There is no sense of despair, but rather a focus on continuing to strive to achieve their goals. Failure is considered a natural process that does not stop their motivation to keep fighting. By engaging in the process of reflection and problem solving, students can refocus their energy on learning goals, even if the expected results are not achieved at the first opportunity (Saputra, 2021). The researcher reflected that the findings of this first theme suggest that academic resilience is not just the ability to persevere in the face of academic challenges, but also includes an active, reflective attitude and deep self-awareness. Perseverance in learning is not just a matter of repeatedly trying, but also involves adaptive strategies that facilitate problem-solving and intrinsic motivation, which keeps them going despite failure.

Theme 2. Emotion Regulation

Emotions are an integral part of the human experience, and for adolescents facing significant challenges, such as the loss of a parent, the ability to regulate and healthily respond to emotions becomes a crucial factor in developing their resilience. Based on the results of the interviews, it was found that the aspects of emotion regulation were described in two subcategories, namely self-control and emotions, and emotional healing processes. Both were able to describe how participants learnt to manage their feelings in an academic and emotional context after experiencing loss.

Self-Control and Emotion

Some participants demonstrated a high awareness of their emotions and how they endeavoured to control them. One quote that reflects self-control is:

"For me, originally, I mean I was a very sensitive child. Then, how come I can't stand it, I cry. So like, sometimes there is like, okay, it's okay, it's okay, don't worry, don't worry, like that. What, it's like a bad position, then like, no, it's alright, you can do this."

And then, but at the end it was like I cried"(Interview 12 July 2025).

This statement illustrates the inner struggle faced by participants when feelings of sadness arise. They tried to calm themselves down by talking to themselves, but still recognised that pent-up emotions eventually needed to be expressed through crying. These negative emotions, if left unmanaged, can negatively impact students' academic performance and overall well-being (Adriana et al., 2023). There is evidence to suggest that students who develop self-compassion practices are better able to cope with resilience after experiencing a significant loss (Fachrial & Herdiningtyas, 2023). This shows that emotional control does not necessarily mean holding back feelings, but rather recognising and accepting the emotions that arise, and giving space to feel them without being bothered by them. Self-compassion enables students to cope with negative emotions and manage stress more effectively. In some situations, participants demonstrated strategies to control their emotional reactions to intense feelings. They tried to remain calm despite being in situations that triggered anxiety or frustration, as expressed by one participant:

"Like what, for example, when he was training, he was all confused and then like I'm a child who is a bit clueless and then like yes, there was a sprain and this and that. I was like saying, okay gapapa I can fix it, why can I? But lately I can't seem to get emotional, and then I cry"(Interview 12 July 2025).

This quote illustrates an attempt to remain calm and continue with the task despite feeling confused or frustrated. Although participants tried to maintain control, they recognised that sometimes the emotions were too strong to contain and ended up expressing them through crying. It illustrates that self-control does not mean completely suppressing emotions, but rather recognising one's limits and making space for emotional expression when needed. Research indicates that children who are allowed to express their feelings healthily tend to cope better with the grieving process (Donohue, 2024).

The Emotional Healing Process

The emotional healing process is closely related to an individual's ability to cope with and accept negative feelings after experiencing an emotionally shocking event, such as the loss of a parent. Participants indicated that although they endeavoured to control their emotions, they also allowed space for emotional healing. One quote that reflects the emotional healing process is:

"Yes, like I said before, everything has... Okay, you know enough. So it's like having a friend to talk to. So I chat to him every day, I tell him what I did today." (Interview 12 July 2025).

This statement indicates that the emotional healing process is inextricably linked to seeking social support. Participants believed that sharing their feelings with close friends created a safe space, enabling them to process their emotions effectively. The support of friends who are ready to listen and provide empathic responses plays a role in helping them feel understood, thus facilitating the emotional healing process. This finding is in line with Novianti et al. (2024), who suggest that adolescents should seek alternative sources of support to help them cope with feelings of loss. It contributes to building stronger mental resilience, which supports their ability to achieve long-term academic performance (Putri et al., 2023). The healing

process was also seen in participants' self-realisation that, in facing difficult times, what is needed is not a concrete solution, but the presence of someone who can listen with empathy. It can be seen from the following expression

"all I need is someone to understand"(Interview 12 July 2025).

This statement emphasises that the process of emotional healing is related to awareness of emotional needs. When participants felt understood by others, they felt better and could manage feelings of grief or loss more constructively. Healthy emotional processing often relies on empathetic social support, rather than just individual effort.

Theme 3. Social Support and Interpersonal Relationships

Social support and interpersonal relationships were notable findings in helping students overcome the emotional and academic challenges they face. Two subcategories illustrate the importance of social support and the quality of interpersonal relationships, namely seeking social support and building interpersonal relationships.

Seeking Social Support

Many participants mentioned the importance of having close people they could trust. In dealing with learning difficulties and feelings of loss, participants sought emotional and practical support from friends or family. It is reflected in some of the quotes:

"Then he also responded well, then I was like ... Hmm...so I thought maybe all this time what I need is just someone to understand okay"(Interview 12 July 2025).

This statement indicates that empathic communication with a trusted friend provided participants with a space to share their feelings openly, thereby helping them feel understood. Positive social relationships with peers can provide essential emotional and physical support for grieving students (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015). Seeking social support is not just about finding solutions or advice, but also about finding a safe space for self-expression that is free from judgment, thereby accelerating the emotional healing process. Participants also actively sought sources of support from peers whom they considered could help in understanding the subject matter or in providing emotional support, as seen in the expression:

"If for example they are studying. I want to learn too" (Interview 23 May 2025).

The above quote suggests that social support from peers is not limited to emotional support, but also encompasses academic assistance that encourages persistence and motivation in the face of difficult situations.

Building Interpersonal Relationships

The study found that students who have strong relationships with friends and significant others tend to be better able to manage their academic and emotional challenges. For example, participants felt considered and understood by their closest friends, who provided consistent support. One quote that emphasises the importance of supportive relationships is:

"Firstly, yourself of course. Okay. Secondly, the same as N. But myself too, I still know what is wrong, what is right"(Interview 12 July 2025).

This statement indicates that, apart from themselves, participants believed that close friends played a significant role in providing moral support that helped them maintain emotional and academic stability. These friends are not only a place to tell stories, but also a reflective mirror that helps participants to get to know and understand themselves better. Positive interactions with peers can help reduce loneliness and give children a sense of belonging (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2016). Participants also indicated that relationships with friends who value empathy and understanding can create a supportive environment in dealing with feelings of loneliness or loss.

"I hope from more mature people to still understand their children, like being invited to confide in them, not instead of comparing them to their previous life," she said. instead of comparing it to their previous lives, yes, all of them are like us, I know even though like for example my mother from the past did not have a father figure, there was no attention even though her mother was there but her attention was still lacking but like what yes, originally invited to communicate, it can be just like don't be too what do you think about yourself first, so listen first. So listen first, don't just jump in like saying yes you are like this, like this, like this, like the intention is just communication, not to compare each other, not to look for problems, looking for who is wrong, you should know better like ngerim first, calm down first" (Interview 12 July 2025).

This quote reflects the importance of the quality of empathic interpersonal relationships. Participants hoped that people around them, including friends and adults, could provide space for open communication and listening without judgment. Findings from Mısırlı and Karakuş (2024) suggest that bereaved children often have difficulty conveying their feelings, and supportive and understanding communication from adults can provide the encouragement they need to start talking about the loss. In this third theme, researchers noted that social support and good interpersonal relationships not only provide practical help but also serve as an emotional pillar, helping students manage their feelings, especially in difficult situations. The importance of creating a supportive social environment that provides a space for students to feel understood and accepted extends beyond practical help with learning to the creation of a safe emotional space where students can express their feelings without fear of judgment (Frei-Landau, 2024).

Theme 4. Negative Experiences and Emotional Responses

In this last theme, researchers found three subcategories to describe how students respond and manage their negative feelings, namely negative feelings and confusion, loneliness and social isolation, and reactions to social stigma. All three represent the psychological impact on students' learning and emotional health.

Negative Feelings and Confusion

Negative feelings such as confusion, frustration, and worry arise in students facing academic challenges, especially when they also have to manage feelings of grief due to the loss of a parent. These feelings manifest as confusion due to the academic difficulties they face, which are exacerbated by the emotional problems they experience. One quote that illustrates this confusion is:

"Confused. Confused and I don't know what to do but I just try but even if it's a dead end...let's just say that if the question depends on something like MTK and I don't know the formula, I don't know what to do" (Interview 23 May 2025).

This statement shows that the participant felt overwhelmed by not understanding the lesson. This confusion was also exacerbated by the loss of parents, resulting in a sense of helplessness in completing academic tasks. Students admitted to feeling like giving up on learning because they felt lonely at home and missed their father, who had died. Students who experience bereavement often struggle to adapt emotionally and psychologically, which can hinder their participation in class and task completion (Jenkins et al., 2014). Nonetheless, they managed to overcome these negative feelings by motivating themselves, so that feelings of grief did not hinder their learning process and their ability to face academic challenges. In class activities, they demonstrated initiative in attempting to solve problems, even when they were unsure of the correct formula or concept. This situation demonstrates mental resilience in the face of incomprehension, although the feeling of confusion is often unavoidable. Participants also realised that sometimes they could not maximise their learning process, as reflected in the following expression:

"Yes, I have-I myself sometimes don't study enough" (Interview 23 May 2025).

Loneliness and Social Isolation

Participants described feeling isolated and struggling to connect with others, especially in their social environment. One statement describing loneliness was:

"Yes, I have. Feeling alone. Like it's impossible not to have. Okay. Everyone has experienced this." (Interview 12 July 2025).

Although many people experience this feeling of loneliness, participants felt it as something very personal and painful. They felt isolated in their social groups, despite being amongst their friends. This feeling of isolation was even more pronounced when they saw their friends having closer relationships with each other, as seen in the statement:

"until it's okay how come he's random, sometimes the feeling suddenly arises when for example there are times when I feel like I can't connect with people so I don't have the mood to talk to them and then they also don't invite me to talk so from there I feel lonely so I usually get supervised anyway" (Interview 12 July 2025).

This finding suggests that participants struggled to form deep interpersonal relationships with their friends. They felt alienated even within the same social group. It can harm their emotional health, as the feelings of loneliness they experience can hinder their ability to function effectively in their academic and social lives. When peers are supportive of one another, they can provide encouragement, engage in social activities, or be good listeners. It is imperative in reducing the sense of isolation often experienced by bereaved individuals (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015).

Another finding is that changes in family structure during grief cause children to develop a sense of isolation. Students had difficulty concentrating and felt like giving up on learning after their mother remarried. Despite the difficulties in understanding the material and doing assignments, they did not let the feelings of sadness linger.

Students self-reflect on and accept changes in family conditions, and establish themselves to adjust to the new father and their new role as a conjugal child, which helps them overcome negative feelings and refocus on their studies. Acceptance of a new partner can help improve family dynamics and make children feel more emotionally stable (H. Ganong et al., 2021).

Reactions to Social Stigma

Students who have lost a parent have to deal with social stigma related to their status as "orphans" or due to differences in their family structure. One participant described how they felt the impact of this stigma, especially when their peers started judging them or making derogatory comments. One quote that shows the reaction to stigma is:

"I hope from more mature people to still understand their children, like being invited to confide in them, not instead of comparing them to their previous life," she said. I know even though like for example my mother from the past did not have a father figure, there was no attention even though her mother was there but the attention was still lacking but like what yes, the original communication can be done but like don't be too what, think of yourself first, listen first, don't just go straight through like saying yes you are like this, like this, like this, like the intention is just communication, not to compare each other, not to look for problems, like who is wrong" (Interview 12 July 2025).

Participants were bothered by judgmental comments about their family status. This social stigma created a sense of injustice and inability to be accepted, resulting in feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem. They wished that adults, or even their friends, could be more empathetic and listen without comparing their own experiences to those of others. This finding reinforces that social stigma can exacerbate existing negative feelings and hinder the process of emotional healing (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2016), as well as their academic resilience. Positive, non-judgmental social support is needed to help these adolescents cope with these feelings. The primary concern with the findings of this fourth theme is that an inclusive and empathetic social environment is not only important, but a necessity. Positive learning environments and psychological support can help students not only to cope with loss but also to achieve better academic success (Pratiwi & Kumalasari, 2021; Kaesa et al., 2024). The role of the social environment is crucial in helping students adapt and recover after facing profound loss.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights how adolescents who experience parental bereavement can demonstrate meaningful academic resilience when supported by effective emotion regulation strategies and strong social support systems. While grief initially disrupted focus, motivation, and emotional stability, participants gradually regained their academic engagement by employing adaptive coping strategies such as self-reflection, emotional expression, and active help-seeking. These findings reveal a dynamic adjustment process rather than a linear recovery trajectory, illustrating that resilience is not the absence of distress but the capacity to function and grow despite emotional pain.

Importantly, this study contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing that emotion regulation serves as a mediating mechanism in the pathway from parental loss to academic resilience, while social support functions as a critical protective factor that accelerates emotional adjustment. This mechanism-oriented perspective enriches Academic Resilience Theory by situating bereavement within developmental and socio-contextual processes unique to Indonesian adolescents.

From a practical standpoint, the results underscore the need for grief-sensitive pedagogy. Schools must create emotionally attuned learning environments where teachers are trained to recognize grief responses, offer safe spaces for emotional disclosure, and provide academic scaffolding without stigma. Teachers can serve as grief mentors by modeling empathy, validating students' emotions, and guiding gradual reintegration into academic demands. Peer-support structures, faith-based counseling, and school counseling services grounded in social-emotional learning and emotional intelligence frameworks can further enhance students' adaptive capacity. Strengthening collaboration between schools and families is essential to ensure consistent emotional support across environments and to promote culturally aligned values such as *sabar*, *ikhlas*, and mutual care in constructive, non-suppressive ways.

Despite offering rich insights, this study has limitations. The sample size—two female students from a single Islamic senior high school in Surabaya—limits generalizability. Gender dynamics, socio-economic background, type of parental loss (death vs. divorce), and school settings (public, private, *pesantren*) may shape bereavement experiences differently. The study also relied primarily on interviews and observations within a limited time frame, without longitudinal follow-up to capture long-term resilience trajectories.

Future research should expand participant characteristics and employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to validate and extend the mediation model proposed here: emotion regulation → academic resilience → academic engagement, moderated by social support. Quantitative approaches could test causal pathways and explore variations by gender, school type, socio-religious context, and cultural expectations surrounding emotional expression. Qualitative inquiries might also examine spiritual coping, the role of teachers in grief support, and culturally informed emotional socialization practices in Indonesian families. Together, these lines of inquiry can strengthen contextually grounded models of resilience and inform scalable school-based interventions.

Overall, this study reinforces that bereaved students are not defined by vulnerability alone; with compassionate support, culturally meaningful coping strategies, and emotionally responsive learning environments, they can not only persist but also experience constructive growth. Building grief-sensitive schools is not simply a psychological necessity but a moral and educational imperative to ensure that every student—regardless of life circumstances—can thrive academically and emotionally.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The present study adhered to established ethical guidelines for qualitative research. Prior to the data collection process, verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants. As the research did not involve

vulnerable groups or clinical interventions, formal ethical clearance was deemed unnecessary according to institutional policy.

Consent for publication

All participants granted verbal consent for the inclusion of their anonymized statements and narratives in this publication.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets produced and examined in this study are not publicly accessible due to confidentiality agreements with participants. Nevertheless, the data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon a reasonable request.

Conflicts of interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have influenced the outcomes of this study.

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