The Relationship between Self-efficacy and Academic Stress among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among students of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya from the 2021 and 2022 cohorts. The research employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design involving 72 students. The research instruments consisted of a self-efficacy scale and an academic stress scale. At the same time, data analysis was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test with the aid of SPSS version 26. The results revealed a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress, with a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.582 and a significance value (p) of 0.00 (<0.05). This indicates that the higher the students' self-efficacy, the lower their level of academic stress. Conversely, students with lower self-efficacy tend to experience higher academic stress. This study concludes that self-efficacy is important in reducing academic stress among students. The implications of thesefindings highlight the crucial role of academic advisors and educational counselors in designing guidance programs and psychological interventions to enhance students' self-efficacy as a preventive measure against academic stress.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara efikasi diri dengan stres akademik pada mahasiswa Program Studi Bimbingan dan Konseling Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya angkatan 2021 dan 2022. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional, melibatkan 72 mahasiswa sebagai sampel. Instrumen yang digunakan berupa skala efikasi diri dan skala stres akademik, sedangkan analisis data dilakukan menggunakan uji korelasi Pearson Product Moment dengan bantuan perangkat lunak SPSS versi 26. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara efikasi diri dan stres akademik, dengan koefisien korelasi (r) sebesar -0,582 dan nilai signifikansi (p) sebesar 0,00 (<0,05). Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa semakin tinggi efikasi diri mahasiswa, maka semakin rendah tingkat stres akademik yang dialami. Sebaliknya, mahasiswa dengan efikasi diri rendah cenderung mengalami stres akademik yang lebih tinggi. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penguatan efikasi diri merupakan strategi yang potensial dalam mengurangi stres akademik pada mahasiswa. Kontribusi penelitian ini memberikan landasan empiris bagi praktisi pendidikan dan konselor untuk merancang program bimbingan yang berfokus pada peningkatan keyakinan diri mahasiswa dalam menghadapi tantangan akademik.

1. INTRODUCTION

College students are individuals undergoing the learning process in higher education, whether in public or private universities (Hofer et al., 2021). During their studies, students face various academic and non-academic demands. Academic demands include understanding complex course material, completing assignments and exams, and working on a final project or thesis. On the other hand, non-academic demands involve participation in organi-

zational activities, personal development, and other extracurricular engagements. Students are expected to think critically, act maturely and independently, take responsibility, and demonstrate academic achievement and readiness for the workforce (Herber et al., 2020). These high demands often create pressure that can lead to stress among students.

Etymologically, the word "stress" originates from the Greek word *merimnao*, which combines *meriza* (to divide or split) and *nous* (mind). Based on this meaning, stress can be interpreted as a condition that involves both beneficial and harmful aspects (Epel et al., 2018). A person experiencing stress may struggle to achieve peace of mind as their thoughts become clouded, and it becomes difficult to distinguish between positive and negative thinking (Henriksen et al., 2020). Destructive thoughts may be perceived as threats from otherwise harmless situations or as influences that disrupt one's life. As a result, mental instability arises, which contributes to the onset of stress.

Stress is the body's response to various demands or stressors and reflects the body's reaction to applied pressure. In the context of individuals, stress occurs as a response to situations or events perceived as threatening or overwhelming to one's ability to manage them (Yusof et al., 2025). It emerges from a mismatch between one's expectations and the biological, psychological, or social conditions experienced. Stress is a natural part of life for every individual and is often defined in psychology as mental pressure and tension (Agustine et al., 2024). It frequently results from an imbalance between the demands encountered in academic life and an individual's ability to cope with them (Azzahra, 2020).

Academic stress refers to a negative emotional and physical response to various pressures in the educational setting. Students experiencing academic stress often show symptoms such as anxiety, tension, pressure, and a lack of motivation in their academic activities. This type of stress may occur when academic demands exceed an individual's capacity to handle them (Azzahra, 2020). Academic stress reflects students' subjective perception of the imbalance between external demands and internal resources. Internal factors, such as mindset, personality, and self-belief, and external factors, such as task pressure, parental expectations, and social environment, are key contributors to academic stress (Barseli & Ifdil, 2017).

Academic stress is part of a student's life that can influence how they respond to academic demands. It arises from what are known as academic stressors, or an individual's perception of being unable to meet academic requirements, which leads to feelings of frustration, conflict, and internal pressure. Reactions to stress may be observed through physiological, emotional, and behavioral changes. In addition to academic factors, stress may be caused by non-academic demands related to students' roles. For instance, students living away from home may face financial challenges, interpersonal and intrapersonal issues, unpreparedness for university life, and a lack of balance between academic responsibilities and personal life (Gadzella & Masten, 2005).

Academic stress increases when expectations for academic performance rise, whether from parents, instructors, or peers (Almroth et al., 2019(. It can be understood as emotional tension caused by academic pressure and the threat it poses to one's self-esteem or well-being. When individuals perceive that the burden exceeds their capacity, they may experience physical, psychological, and behavioral reactions that impact psychological adjustment and academic performance (Zhang et al., 2016). If academic stress is not managed properly, it can disrupt emotional and psychosocial health.

Academic stress becomes even more challenging when individuals cannot regulate their emotions. Emotionally sensitive students often struggle to cope with academic demands, especially under pressure. This can result in anxiety and negative thinking, such as feeling incapable of handling their academic workload (Sari & Rahayu, 2022).

Previous studies have shown that academic stress is one of the main barriers to students' academic achievement. A survey by the American College Health Association (ACHA) reported that 32 percent of 97,357 students across various countries identified academic stress as the primary obstacle to academic success. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also reported that more than 350 million people worldwide experience stress, making it a major global mental health issue (Gustama, 2024). However, not everyone experiences the effects of stress in the same way. One factor that contributes to this variation is the level of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in overcoming challenges and completing specific tasks (Bandura, 1997). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to manage pressure effectively, set clear goals, and demonstrate greater resilience when facing difficulties. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy are more likely to give up easily and perceive themselves as incapable of handling difficult situations. In an academic context, self-efficacy influences how students approach coursework, assess their capabilities, and choose learning strategies. Strong self-efficacy

has been shown to reduce stress levels, enhance academic performance, and support students' mental health (Cahyani & Mastuti, 2022).

Self-efficacy is a concept in behavioral psychology that describes a person's belief in their abilities. It does not reflect how much individuals like themselves or the tasks they face but rather their confidence in achieving success in specific areas. Because it is subjective, even individuals with objectively high achievements may still feel inadequate.

Fundamentally, self-efficacy results from a cognitive process involving judgments, beliefs, or expectations about how much a person believes they can perform tasks or actions required to achieve goals. It is not directly related to a person's skills but to their confidence in using those skills to reach a desired outcome. This concept emphasizes the individual's belief in managing uncertain, unpredictable, and high-pressure situations. Although self-efficacy plays a significant role in shaping behavior, it is not the only factor determining how people act.

Self-efficacy influences how individuals feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. It reflects a person's belief in their ability to succeed in specific domains. It is not merely about being satisfied with oneself or the tasks at hand but more about the belief in one's capability to achieve success. Due to its subjective nature, even someone with high objective achievements may feel less capable (Siregar & Putri, 2019).

Students with high levels of self-efficacy tend to consider their assignments carefully and manage their time and effort efficiently, focusing only on tasks they believe they can complete. They are unlikely to force themselves to take on tasks beyond their perceived abilities. Various factors, including the task's difficulty, belief in personal competence, and self-confidence in different areas of life, influence a person's level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key factor in self-regulation and in shaping individual behavior change.

Although many studies have explored the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress, most have taken a general approach and have not specifically examined students in the Guidance and Counseling program, particularly at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya. Students in this program face dual expectations as learners and future counselors who must demonstrate emotional stability and strong self-management skills. This is where the research gap lies, which this study seeks to address.

This study aims to determine whether there is a relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among students in the Guidance and Counseling program at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya. It seeks to measure the extent to which self-efficacy influences academic stress and provides theoretical contributions to educational psychology literature and practical contributions for educational institutions in designing interventions to reduce student academic stress.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational design. This design was chosen to analyze the relationship between two main variables: self-efficacy and academic stress. The quantitative approach allows the researcher to process data objectively and systematically using numerical values throughout all stages of the study, from data collection and analysis to the interpretation of results. Through this correlational design, the study aims to determine the extent of the relationship between students' levels of self-efficacy and the academic stress they experience, as well as to test the hypotheses that have been previously formulated.

2.2 Research Subjects

The subjects of this study consist of 72 active students from the Guidance and Counseling Program at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, specifically from the 2021 and 2022 cohorts. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling, considering that students from these cohorts have had sufficient academic experience to meaningfully reflect their self-efficacy and academic stress levels.

2.3 Data Collection

The instruments used in this study include two scales: the Academic Stress Scale and the Self-Efficacy Scale. The Academic Stress Scale was developed based on the theory of Sun and Dunne, which includes five aspects of academic stress. The Self-Efficacy Scale was developed based on Bandura's theory and includes three key aspects of self-efficacy. Both scales were developed through validity and reliability testing to ensure accurate and dependable measurement. Data were collected using online questionnaires distributed through Google Forms.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique with the help of SPSS version 26.00 for Windows. This technique was applied to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress. The analysis results are expected to provide a clear understanding of the connection between these two variables and support decision-making in developing guidance and counseling services in higher education settings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis, it was found that each variable included data from 72 respondents. Self-efficacy had a minimum score of 17, a maximum score of 62, a mean score of 45.93, and a standard deviation of 7.14. Academic Stress had a minimum score of 20, a maximum score of 68, a mean score of 51.04, and a standard deviation of 9.25.

Table 1. Descriptive Data of the Self-Efficacy Variable

No.	Category Score	Frequency	Percentage
1.	High 43 to 58	54	75 %
2.	Medium 28 to 43	17	23,6 %
3.	Low 13 to 28	1	1,38 %

Tabel 1, Data Deskripsi Variabel Stres Akademik

No.	Category Score	Frequency	Percentage
1.	High 43 s/d 58	45	62,5 %
2.	Medium 28 s/d 43	25	34,7 %
3.	Low 13 s/d 28	2	2,77 %

The Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis was used to determine whether there is a relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among students. The results showed a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.582 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.050$). This indicates a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and academic stress. In other words, the higher a student's self-efficacy, the lower the level of academic stress they experience. Conversely, students with lower self-efficacy tend to experience higher levels of academic stress.

3.2. Discussion

These findings indicate that students with higher self-efficacy tend to experience lower levels of academic stress. The significant negative correlation suggests that confidence in managing academic tasks and challenges is important in reducing stress levels. While most respondents (75%) were in the high self-efficacy category, a substantial proportion (62.5%) also reported high academic stress. This suggests that other factors also influence academic stress.

Strong negative emotional reactions and physical complaints often accompany low perceived self-efficacy. In contrast, stronger cognitive interpretations of difficult situations associated with high self-efficacy can protect individuals from psychological and physical harm. Self-efficacy often determines whether a person will take a particular action (Mudhar et al., 2023). When individuals believe in their ability to carry out certain actions, they are less likely to hesitate or feel overwhelmed. This highlights the importance of strengthening self-efficacy as part of counseling services or academic support programs.

This study supports Bandura's theory that self-efficacy influences how individuals handle pressure, including academic stress. The results show a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among students. These findings reinforce Bandura's (1995) assertion that self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to organize and execute the actions needed to manage demanding situations. In academic life, self-efficacy functions as a valuable psychological resource that helps students view academic challenges not as threats but as opportunities for growth. According to Bandura, beliefs about self-efficacy serve a dual function—as a buffer against stress and a potential vulnerability factor. Students with high self-efficacy are generally more confident in completing academic tasks, managing their time, and coping with academic pressure. They tend to view stress as a

manageable challenge and believe that success results from personal effort. This leads to the perception of "eustress," or positive stress, which motivates individuals to take proactive action.

On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy often perceive academic tasks as overwhelming burdens. They are more prone to anxiety and feelings of inadequacy and are more likely to give up when faced with difficulties. Previous studies (Brown & Siegel, 1988; Schwarzer, 1986; Wine, 1982; Jerusalem, 1990) have shown that individuals with low self-efficacy often experience intense negative emotional reactions, have low expectations of success, and interpret academic stress as threatening their self-esteem. Over time, this may increase the risk of psychosomatic complaints and mental exhaustion.

From a developmental standpoint, early adulthood marks a critical period where individuals exhibit more mature decision-making skills and greater independence. During this phase, young adults typically take on increased responsibilities related to their academic, social, and personal lives. This growth in autonomy encourages them to develop stronger self-regulation and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for managing the complexities they face. As a result, individuals in early adulthood often show heightened confidence in their ability to navigate challenges, reflecting their evolving cognitive and emotional maturity.

Additionally, this age range is closely linked to increased self-efficacy, as individuals become more familiar with their strengths and limitations through accumulated life experiences. The repeated exposure to diverse situations allows them to build resilience and adaptability, reinforcing their belief in their capacity to succeed despite obstacles. This enhanced self-efficacy supports better stress management and promotes proactive behaviors in pursuing academic and personal goals. Understanding the developmental context of early adulthood helps educators and counselors tailor interventions that leverage these natural growth processes to further empower students in managing academic stress and achieving overall well-being.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a deeper understanding of self-efficacy's important role in helping students cope with academic stress. Students with high self-efficacy tend to have greater confidence in completing coursework, managing their time, and effectively handling academic pressure. The findings are also expected to offer valuable insights for school counselors, lecturers, and higher education institutions to recognize the importance of strengthening self-efficacy to support students' academic well-being.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among students. In other words, the higher a student's self-efficacy, the lower the level of academic stress they experience, and vice versa. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework previously discussed, especially Bandura's theory, which emphasizes the crucial role of self-efficacy in helping individuals cope with pressure and challenges. It reinforces the understanding that confidence in one's abilities is a key factor in managing stress arising from academic demands. Moreover, this result reinforces the broader understanding that self-efficacy is not just about skill or knowledge but about the belief in one's capacity to apply those skills effectively under pressure. Confidence in one's abilities empowers students to adopt constructive coping strategies, stay motivated, and maintain focus during difficult academic periods. Consequently, fostering self-efficacy should be a key objective for educators and counselors aiming to support students' mental health and academic success, as it protects against the detrimental effects of academic stress.

Although most students demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy, academic stress continues to be a significant challenge, especially during the middle to later semesters when academic demands intensify. This indicates that while self-efficacy plays an important role in managing stress, it is insufficient to alleviate the pressures students face throughout their academic journey fully. As a result, there is a clear need for supplementary support systems, such as targeted stress management training and ongoing programs designed to strengthen self-efficacy further. These interventions can equip students with practical tools and strategies to better cope with the complex and evolving demands of their coursework, deadlines, and examinations. By addressing both the psychological and practical aspects of academic stress, such programs can enhance students' resilience, promote healthier coping mechanisms, and ultimately lead to improved well-being and academic success. Implementing these supports within educational institutions can help create a more balanced and supportive environment that fosters sustained motivation and reduces the negative impact of academic stress.

This research makes an important contribution to understanding self-efficacy as a protective factor against academic stress in higher education settings. Future studies could expand on this by including mediating or moderating variables such as social support, coping strategies, or emotional regulation to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of academic stress. Additionally, broadening the sample to include students from various study programs or universities would yield more comprehensive results and strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have contributed equally and substantially to this work. Their contributions include the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, as well as the drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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