

Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Academic Stress Among Psychology Students Completing Their Final Project

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ABSTRACT

Background: Final-year students are vulnerable to academic stress due to various academic demands, such as completing their final project, undergoing revisions, and coping with the pressure to graduate on time. One psychological factor that is believed to play a role in reducing academic stress is self-efficacy. **Objective:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among final-year students. **Method:** This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. The participants consisted of 149 active students from the 2022 cohort of the Psychology Study Program at State University of Surabaya who were completing their final project and were selected using a saturated sampling technique. Data were collected using adapted versions of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) and the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA). Because the data were not normally distributed, the hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rho correlation analysis with JASP version 0.19.3. **Results:** The findings revealed a significant negative correlation of low-to-moderate magnitude between self-efficacy and academic stress ($\rho = -.353$, $p < .001$). Higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with lower levels of academic stress among students. **Conclusion:** These findings suggest that strengthening self-efficacy may help final-year students manage academic demands more effectively and reduce academic stress during the completion of their final project.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy*, academic stress, final-year students

ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Mahasiswa tingkat akhir rentan mengalami stres akademik karena menghadapi berbagai tuntutan akademik, seperti penyusunan tugas akhir, revisi, serta tekanan untuk menyelesaikan studi tepat waktu. Salah satu faktor psikologis yang diduga berperan dalam mengurangi stres akademik adalah *self-efficacy*. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara *self-efficacy* dan stres akademik pada mahasiswa tingkat akhir. **Metode:** Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional. Partisipan penelitian terdiri dari 149 mahasiswa aktif angkatan 2022 Program Studi Psikologi Universitas Negeri Surabaya yang sedang menyelesaikan tugas akhir dan dipilih menggunakan teknik sampling jenuh. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan adaptasi *General Self Efficacy Scale* (GSES) dan *Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents* (ESSA). Karena data tidak terdistribusi secara normal, hipotesis diuji menggunakan analisis korelasi Spearman's rho dengan JASP versi 0.19.3.

Hasil: Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya korelasi negatif yang signifikan dengan besaran rendah hingga sedang antara efikasi diri dan stres akademik ($\rho = -0,353$, $p < 0,001$). Semakin tinggi *self-efficacy* yang dimiliki mahasiswa, semakin rendah tingkat stres akademik yang dialami. **Kesimpulan:** Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa memperkuat *self-efficacy* dapat membantu mahasiswa tingkat akhir mengelola tuntutan akademik secara lebih efektif dan mengurangi stres akademik selama penyelesaian tugas akhir mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Self-efficacy*, stres akademik, mahasiswa tingkat akhir

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Introduction

From the perspective of health psychology, academic stress is not merely an educational issue but also an important health concern because prolonged exposure to stress may adversely affect both psychological and physical well-being. Health psychology emphasizes the interaction between psychological processes, behavior, and health outcomes, highlighting how individuals perceive and respond to stressors in their environment (Sarafino & Smith, 2018). When academic demands are continuously perceived as exceeding available coping resources, students may experience persistent psychological distress that interferes with emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, health-related behaviors, and overall quality of life. Consequently, academic stress represents an important topic within health psychology, as understanding its underlying mechanisms may contribute to efforts aimed at promoting psychological well-being and preventing stress-related health problems among university students.

Within the health psychology framework, identifying psychological resources that enable individuals to adapt to stressful situations is essential for developing effective preventive and intervention strategies. Rather than focusing solely on the presence of stress, health psychology also emphasizes protective factors that enhance resilience and adaptive coping when individuals encounter challenging situations (Sarafino & Smith, 2018). One of these protective psychological resources is self-efficacy, which influences how individuals appraise stressful situations, regulate their emotions, and maintain confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles. Therefore, examining the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress is important not only for understanding students' academic experiences but also for providing evidence that may support psychological interventions designed to improve students' mental health and well-being throughout the completion of their final project.

Final-year students are a group that is particularly vulnerable to academic stress due to the complex academic demands they face, such as completing a thesis, undergoing revisions, meeting graduation requirements, and preparing to enter the workforce. Academic stress arises when academic demands are perceived as exceeding an individual's available resources or ability to cope with them. This condition may lead to various negative consequences, including anxiety, mental exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, decreased learning motivation, and sleep disturbances (Sarafino & Smith, 2018). During the final project completion stage, academic pressure tends to increase because students are required to conduct research independently while simultaneously meeting various academic targets within a limited period of time.

Academic stress is one of the most common issues found in higher education settings. Numerous studies have shown that students frequently experience psychological pressure due to high academic demands, academic competition, and responsibilities related to completing coursework. According to Gadzella (1994), academic stress is an individual's response to various stressors that emerge within the academic environment and may affect physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning. High levels of academic stress among students have the potential to hinder the learning process, reduce academic performance, and negatively affect psychological well-being.

The experience of academic stress among final-year students differs from that of students in earlier semesters. Final-year students face the demands of completing a thesis, which requires critical thinking skills, effective time management, and psychological resilience in dealing with various challenges throughout the research process. Difficulties in determining a research topic, limited references, supervisory processes that do not always proceed as expected, and pressure to graduate promptly often become significant sources of stress (Djoar & Anggarani, 2024). Previous studies have shown that final-year students frequently experience moderate to high levels of academic stress during the completion of their final projects. These findings suggest that the final project completion process is a phase that has the potential to generate considerable psychological pressure.

Educational psychology literature explains that academic stress is influenced by various internal and external factors (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Sarafino & Smith, 2018). Internal factors include coping ability, optimism, time management, hardiness, and self-efficacy. External factors include social support, academic workload, the learning environment, and demands from the surrounding environment. Among these factors, self-efficacy has become one of the most widely studied psychological constructs because it is related to individuals' beliefs in their ability to face challenges and accomplish assigned tasks.

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific outcomes. This concept emphasizes that behavior is influenced not only by one's actual abilities but also by beliefs regarding those abilities. Individuals with

high levels of self-efficacy tend to set more challenging goals, demonstrate greater persistence, and remain resilient when facing obstacles. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to doubt their abilities, avoid tasks perceived as difficult, and become more vulnerable to psychological distress when encountering failure.

In the academic context, self-efficacy plays an important role in determining how students perceive and respond to academic demands. Students with high self-efficacy tend to view academic tasks as challenges that can be overcome through effort and appropriate strategies. Previous studies have shown that students with stronger self-efficacy are more persistent in facing academic difficulties and demonstrate better adjustment to academic demands (Mahmoud et al., 2020; Wardani et al., 2025). Such beliefs encourage students to persist when facing difficulties during the completion of their final project. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy are more likely to perceive academic demands as threats that are difficult to control, making them more susceptible to anxiety, self-doubt, and higher levels of academic stress. This explanation is consistent with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which states that beliefs about personal capabilities influence how individuals think, feel, motivate themselves, and behave when confronting various life situations.

The relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress has been widely examined in previous research. Empirical findings consistently indicate that students with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to experience lower levels of academic stress, as they are more confident in their ability to manage academic demands and challenges (Mulyadi et al., 2016; Siregar & Putri, 2020). Similar evidence from more recent studies also shows that academic self-efficacy plays a significant role in influencing students' stress levels, where increased self-efficacy is associated with reduced academic stress and better psychological adjustment in academic settings (Liu et al., 2024; Maulana & Paryontri, 2024). Collectively, these findings suggest that self-efficacy serves as an important protective factor that helps students cope more effectively with academic pressure.

Although previous studies have consistently reported a relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress, several limitations remain. Most studies have focused on university students in general or have been conducted within specific academic disciplines, making it difficult to understand whether similar patterns apply to final-year students. In addition, the academic challenges faced by final-year students differ from those experienced by students in earlier stages of study, as they are required to complete independent research, meet graduation requirements, and prepare for career transitions simultaneously. These unique circumstances may influence both self-efficacy and academic stress in ways that have not been fully explored. Therefore, further investigation is needed to better understand the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among final-year students. These unique circumstances highlight the importance of focusing research on final-year students in order to gain a more specific understanding of the factors associated with academic stress during this stage (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Based on empirical evidence, theoretical foundations, and findings from previous studies, this research was conducted to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among final-year students. This study is expected to contribute to the development of educational psychology literature, particularly regarding psychological factors associated with academic stress. The findings are also expected to serve as a basis for developing intervention programs and support services aimed at helping final-year students manage academic pressure more effectively.

Material and Method

Participants

The participants in this study were final-year students of the Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology, State University of Surabaya, who were in the process of completing their final project. A saturated sampling technique was employed, whereby all members of the population who met the research criteria were included as participants. The study involved 149 students, consisting of 30 males (20.1%) and 119 females (79.9%). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 23 years. Most participants were 22 years old (45.6%), followed by 21-year-olds (37.6%), 23-year-olds (13.4%), and 20-year-olds (3.4%).

Procedure

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among final-year students. After the instruments met the validity and reliability requirements, the questionnaire was distributed online to eligible participants through Google Forms. Data collection was conducted during the research period after participants provided informed consent. After the instruments were deemed suitable for use, data were collected from active students of the 2022 cohort in the Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology, State University of Surabaya, who were completing their final project. The collected data were subsequently screened for response completeness before being subjected to further analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected using an online survey questionnaire. Self-efficacy was measured using an adapted version of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). Based on corrected item-total correlation analysis, nine items met the validity criterion of $r > .30$ and were retained for further analysis., 9 items met the validity criteria, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .797. Academic stress was measured using an adapted version of the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) developed by Sun et al. (2011). Following the validity assessment, 13 items were retained, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .874. Both instruments employed a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instruments were linguistically adapted and modified to suit the context of final-year university students while preserving the original construct dimensions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using JASP software version 0.19.3. Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe participant characteristics and the distribution of the research data. The Shapiro–Wilk test was performed to assess data normality and determine the appropriate statistical technique. The results of the normality test indicated that the data were not normally distributed ($p < .05$); therefore, the research hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rho correlation to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress. The significance level adopted in this study was .05.

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, and data confidentiality. All information provided by the participants was used solely for research purposes and was treated confidentially.

Result

A total of 149 final-year students from the Psychology Study Program at University X participated in this study. Participant characteristics based on gender, age, and type of final project are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	20.1%
	Female	119	79.9%
Age	20	5	3.4%
	21	56	37.6%
	22	68	45.6%
	23	20	13.4%
Final Project Type	Undergraduate Thesis	92	61.7%
	Artikel	57	38.3%
Total		149	100%

As shown in Table 1, most participants were female (79.9%), while male participants accounted for 20.1% of the sample. The majority of respondents were 22 years old (45.6%), followed by 21 years old (37.6%). Regarding the type of final project, most students were completing a thesis (*skripsi*) (61.7%), whereas 38.3% were working on a journal article as their final project requirement.

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Self-efficacy	149	13	36	29.51	4.896
Academic Stress	149	15	60	37.13	13.10

The mean score of self-efficacy was 29.51 (SD = 4.896), indicating that participants generally reported relatively favorable beliefs in their ability to manage academic demands. Meanwhile, the mean score of academic stress was 37.13 (SD = 13.10), suggesting that participants experienced varying levels of academic stress during the completion of their final project.

The distribution of participants across self-efficacy and academic stress categories is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Category Distribution of Self-Efficacy and Academic Stress

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Self-efficacy	Low	12	8%
	Moderate	127	85%
	High	10	7%
Academic Stress	Low	39	26%
	Moderate	77	52%
	High	33	22%
Total		149	100%

The categorization results revealed that most participants were classified in the moderate self-efficacy category (85.0%). Only a small proportion of students were categorized as having low (8.0%) or high (7.0%) levels of self-efficacy.

Regarding academic stress, the majority of participants were categorized as experiencing moderate levels of stress (52.0%). Furthermore, 26.0% of students reported low levels of academic stress, whereas 22.0% experienced high levels of stress.

Before testing the hypothesis, a normality test was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk procedure. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Result

Variable	p-value	Interpretation
Self-efficacy	<.001	Not normally distributed
Academic Stress	<.001	Not normally distributed

The results showed that both self-efficacy and academic stress were not normally distributed ($p < .001$). Therefore, a non-parametric statistical approach was considered more appropriate for subsequent analyses. Based on these findings, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was used to test the research hypothesis.

The relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress was examined using Spearman's rho correlation analysis. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Spearman's Rho Correlation Analysis

Variables	ρ	p
Self-efficacy – Academic Stress	-.353	<.001

Spearman's rho correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress ($\rho = -.353$, $p < .001$). The negative coefficient indicates that students with higher levels of self-efficacy tended to report lower levels of academic stress. Conversely, students with lower self-efficacy were more likely to experience higher levels of academic stress. Therefore, the findings support the proposed research hypothesis.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that self-efficacy is negatively associated with academic stress among final-year students. The findings indicate that students who possess greater confidence in their abilities tend to experience lower levels of academic stress than those with lower self-efficacy. Therefore, self-efficacy can be considered an important psychological factor that helps students cope more effectively with academic

demands during the completion of their final project. Although the relationship was statistically significant, the relatively low correlation coefficient suggests that self-efficacy represents only one of several factors associated with academic stress.

These findings are consistent with Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities influence how they think, feel, motivate themselves, and behave when facing various situations. In academic settings, students with high self-efficacy tend to perceive academic tasks as manageable challenges that can be overcome through effort and appropriate strategies. In contrast, students with low self-efficacy are more likely to perceive academic demands as overwhelming, making them more vulnerable to psychological distress.

The findings of this study are also consistent with previous research indicating that self-efficacy is associated with lower levels of academic stress among university students. Honicke and Broadbent (2016) reported that students with stronger self-efficacy demonstrate better academic adjustment and coping abilities when facing academic demands. Likewise, Mulyadi et al. (2016) found that academic self-efficacy contributes to students' ability to manage academic pressure effectively. More recently, Liu et al. (2024) also showed that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with lower perceived stress among university students. Taken together, these findings reinforce the role of self-efficacy as an important psychological resource for managing academic stress in higher education.

Most participants were classified in the moderate category for both self-efficacy and academic stress. This finding suggests that final-year students generally possess sufficient confidence in their abilities to cope with academic demands while continuing to experience considerable pressure during the completion of their final project. Demands related to thesis writing, revision processes, graduation requirements, and preparation for entering the workforce may continue to generate academic stress despite students having relatively adequate levels of self-efficacy.

The relatively low strength of the relationship found in this study indicates that academic stress is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various psychological and environmental factors beyond self-efficacy. Factors such as social support, coping strategies, optimism, hardiness, time management, academic workload, and the learning environment may also contribute to students' academic stress levels. This finding suggests that interventions aimed at reducing academic stress should not focus solely on strengthening self-efficacy but should also consider these complementary factors.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports educational psychology literature identifying self-efficacy as an important psychological factor associated with students' ability to cope with academic demands. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of developing self-efficacy through academic mentoring programs, study-skills training, and counseling services to strengthen students' confidence in completing academic tasks and managing academic challenges more effectively.

This study has several limitations. The participants were drawn from only one study program and one university; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized broadly to all final-year students. In addition, the correlational design does not allow causal conclusions to be drawn regarding the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress. Future studies are encouraged to involve more diverse participant groups and to examine additional variables associated with academic stress in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among final-year students. The findings indicate that self-efficacy is negatively associated with academic stress, suggesting that students with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to cope with academic demands adaptively and experience lower levels of academic stress. These findings reinforce the role of self-efficacy as a psychological factor associated with students' ability to face various challenges during the completion of their final project.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study may serve as a basis for developing academic support programs and counseling services aimed at enhancing students' self-efficacy. Within the field of educational psychology, these findings contribute to the understanding of psychological factors associated with academic stress among final-year students. Future research is encouraged to involve more diverse participants and to consider additional factors that may be related to academic stress in order to provide a

more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, efforts to strengthen self-efficacy may help final-year students manage academic demands more effectively and reduce the likelihood of experiencing excessive academic stress.

Author contribution statement

Meuthia Hanifatus Sa'idah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft preparation, and Writing – review & editing. Specifically developed the research design, conducted instrument adaptation and pilot testing, collected and managed the research data, performed statistical analyses using JASP, interpreted the findings, and prepared the initial manuscript. Also contributed to revising and finalizing the manuscript throughout the publication process.

Damajanti Kusuma Dewi: Supervision, Methodology validation, Data validation, Writing – review & editing. Specifically provided academic supervision throughout the study, reviewed and validated the research methodology and data analysis procedures, critically evaluated the interpretation of findings, and contributed to manuscript review and refinement to ensure scientific quality and academic rigor. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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