



The Role of Self-Efficacy in Academic Stress Among Senior Undergraduates in the Faculty of Psychology: The Moderating Effect of Social Support

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of self-efficacy on academic stress among students in the Faculty of Psychology who are writing their theses, while considering the moderating effect of social support. This study involved 145 senior students from the Faculty of Psychology, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Self-Efficacy Scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and the Academic Stress Scale. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results found that social support was significantly moderate this relationship; the presence of social support reinforces the role of self-efficacy in reducing academic stress levels among students in the Faculty of Psychology during the thesis completion process.

INTRODUCTION

Completing a final project or thesis is an essential step that must be taken by anyone pursuing a higher education degree. A thesis is an academic work that requires independent thinking and systematic analytical skills, and its findings must be verifiable (Hadikusuma, 1995). Unfortunately, this process is often accompanied by various obstacles that can trigger psychological pressure, such as difficulty in selecting a topic, limited references, and communication barriers with the thesis advisor (Wulandari, 2012). In psychology, the state of psychological distress experienced by students during the completion of their thesis is known as stress. Stress can be understood as a condition arising from the reciprocal relationship between an individual and their surrounding environment, which the individual perceives as specific demands or as limitations in their ability to cope with situations deemed potentially threatening to their health or likely to cause adverse effects (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As the concept evolved, it was subsequently applied in an educational context, particularly in academic settings, where students face various demands such as research, assignments, exams, and fieldwork. When these academic demands are perceived as exceeding a person's capabilities or available resources, academic stress arises triggering negative physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive reactions as a way to cope with the stress (Gadzella & Masten, 2005).

Unmanaged academic stress can negatively affect one's ability to think, trigger emotional exhaustion, and drastically reduce students' academic performance (Ambarwati et al., 2019; Baste & Gadkari, 2014; Pascoe et al., 2020). To prevent these adverse effects, protective factors are needed, one of which is self-efficacy. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is perception of an individual's ability to create and implement action to achieve a specific outcome (Bandura, 1997). Students with high self-efficacy tend to view the difficulties of writing a thesis as a surmountable challenge rather than a threat, making them more resilient and less prone to excessive academic stress (Handara & Irafahmi, 2022; Utami & Helmi, 2017).

Students in the Faculty of Psychology take many courses that cover mental health, so they are expected to know how to effectively manage the academic stress they experience in order to keep it at a low level. In reality, however, students in the Faculty of Psychology can still experience academic stress even though they study mental health, because a theoretical understanding of mental health does not always guarantee the practical ability to effectively cope with their own academic stress. Based on a study conducted by Sugito (2023) involving 105 Psychology students at the University of Medan Area who were working on their theses, it was found that 7.4% of students experienced high levels of academic stress. A study conducted by Salsabila (2023) on 100 psychology students at USU detailed that "33% of students experienced high levels of academic stress, 47% experienced moderate levels, and 20% experienced low levels of academic stress." This indicates that, on average, students in the Faculty of Psychology experience academic stress while working on their theses."

The researcher conducted a preliminary survey via google forms among 15 students in the Faculty of Psychology to identify the sources of stress

(stressors) they faced while working on their theses. The survey yielded the following results: 15 students (100%) experienced academic stress stemming from frustrations such as difficulty meeting with their thesis advisors due to the advisors' busy schedules; a lack of understanding of the research process and requirements; and a lack of confidence in the thesis's quality due to frequent revisions by the advisor.

Although the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress has been extensively studied, the existence of contradictory findings – in which self-efficacy does not always consistently mitigate stress when academic workload increases rapidly (Kristensen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024) – indicates a gap that needs to be bridged by external factors. Based on the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), social support is hypothesized to act as a key variable that moderates or strengthens the role of self-efficacy in protecting students from the negative effects of academic stress during the thesis writing process. Therefore, this study aims to test the role of self-efficacy in academic stress among students in the Faculty of Psychology who are working on their theses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Gadzella & Masten (2005), academic stress is a condition that arises when academic demands exceed a person's abilities and resilience, thereby triggering physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions as a means of coping with stress. The academic stress experienced by students can have an impact on them because it triggers anxiety, sleep disturbances, interpersonal conflicts, and low self-esteem. Students may experience frustration if academic stress occurs continuously (Barseli et al., 2018)

One factor that can influence academic stress among college students is self-efficacy (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2020). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is a person's belief in their own ability to take action to cope with a situation so as to achieve the desired outcome. Self-efficacy consists of three aspects: the magnitude of the task's difficulty faced by the individual; generality, which relates to the breadth of the individual's skill set; and strength, which refers to the intensity of the individual's belief in their own abilities.

Another factor that contributes to academic stress is social support (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2020). Sarafino and Smith (2011) state that social support is a form of acceptance from a person or group of people toward an individual, which creates a perception within that individual that they are loved, cared for, valued, and helped. Furthermore, according to Sarafino and Smith (2011), forms of social support include emotional support – that is, support provided by demonstrating empathy, concern, and care toward the person. Then, there is instrumental support (Tangible Support), which takes the form of actions or attitudes, as well as material goods or items provided by others. Next is informational support, which involves providing advice and solutions with the aim of helping others resolve their problems. The final form of support is companionship support, where a person is available to spend time with another, fostering a sense of belonging that stems from shared interests or social activities undertaken together.

Social support has an impact on moderating stress. According to Sarafino and Smith (2017), there are two hypotheses regarding the potential role of social support in moderating stress: the direct effect hypothesis and the buffering hypothesis. According to the direct effect hypothesis, social support preserves and enhances people's health and wellbeing both before and during stressful events. According to the buffering hypothesis, those who have a lot of social support will be more composed under pressure and have the ability to change how they react to stressors. People who have a lot of social support have someone who can help them with their issues (Cohen et al, 2000; Sarafino & Smith, 2017; Taylor, 2018).

A previous study conducted by Kappner et al. (2022) on the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between academic stress and depression—which examined 224 medical students in North Rhine-Westphalia—found that individuals with higher social support exhibited a lower impact of academic stress on depression compared to those with low social support.

H1: Social support acts as a moderator variable that strengthens the role of self-efficacy in academic stress among students in the Faculty of Psychology who are working on their theses. The greater the social support, the stronger the role of self-efficacy in academic stress.

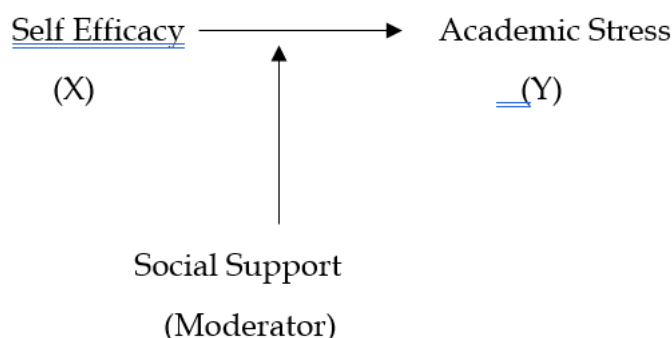


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method. Sampling was conducted using convenience sampling. The study population consisted of psychology students currently working on their theses. The sample comprised 145 psychology students at “X” University who were working on their theses during the 2025–2026 academic year. The study was conducted from October through November 2025. A Likert scale was used in an online questionnaire to gather data. The Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by the researcher based on the aspects of self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997), which include level, strength, and generality, with a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.976. The Social Support variable was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) instrument developed by Zimet et al. (1988) and adapted into Indonesian by Sulistiani et al. (2022), with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.85. Academic stress was measured using a theory-based instrument by Gadzella

(1991), which assesses stressors and stress reactions, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.992. The construct validity of all scales was confirmed (outer loadings > 0.7) through convergent and discriminant validity tests. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

R-Square

Table 1. R-Square Analysis Results

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Stress Akademik	.392	.379

The R-squared (R^2) value for the academic stress variable was .392, and the adjusted R-squared was .379. This indicates that the variables of self-efficacy, social support, and their interaction account for 39.2% of the variance in academic stress. The remaining 60.8% is explained by other variables outside the research model. This value falls into the moderate category, indicating that the model has reasonably good explanatory power.

Effect Size (f^2)

Table 2. F-Square Analysis Results

	F-square
Dukungan Sosial x Efikasi Diri -> Stress Akademik	0.080

The F-square test results show an f^2 value of .08 for the moderating variable, which falls into the "small effect" category. This indicates that social support acts as a moderator, but its contribution is relatively small in practical terms in strengthening the role of self-efficacy in academic stress.

Q Square

Table 3. Q-Square Analysis Results

	Q ² predict	RMSE	MAE
Stress Akademik	0.342	0.818	0.615

The Q² predict value for the academic stress variable is 0.342 (>0). This value indicates that the model has good predictive power in explaining the endogenous variable. Thus, the structural model developed has adequate predictive relevance.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamplings to obtain estimates of the standard error, t-statistics, and p-values. The test was conducted using a two-tailed test; thus, a relationship was considered significant if the t-statistic was ≥ 1.96 at a 5% significance level or the p-value was $\leq .05$ (Hair et al., 2022).

Tabel 4. Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statis tics	P valu es
Social Support x Self-Efficacy-> Stress Akademik	-.189	-.192	.063	3.026	.002

The interaction between social support and self-efficacy had a coefficient of $-.189$, a t-statistic of 3.026 , and a p-value of $.002$. These results indicate that social support significantly moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress. The negative coefficient indicates that social support amplifies the negative effect of self-efficacy on academic stress; thus, it can be concluded that social support moderates the role of self-efficacy in academic stress among Psychology students who are currently working on their theses.

Based on the results of the statistical tests, it was found that the regression coefficient for the interaction between self-efficacy and social support had a p-value of $.002$ (< 0.05). This indicates that the interaction between self-efficacy and social support has a significant effect on academic stress. Thus, it can be concluded that social support acts as a moderator in the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress.

This finding is consistent with the stress-buffering model proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), which states that the negative effects of stress on an individual's psychological well-being are mitigated by social support. Social support provides emotional validation, assistance, and relevant information, so that individuals do not feel they are facing demands alone. Research conducted by Wilks and Spivey (2010) found that social support significantly reduced students' levels of academic stress, particularly when students were facing the pressure of final assignments. Furthermore, Friedlander et al. (2007) demonstrated that students who received adequate social support exhibited better academic adjustment and lower levels of psychological distress.

The significance of the interaction between self-efficacy and social support in this study indicates that the effect of self-efficacy on academic stress becomes stronger when students receive adequate social support. Students with high self-efficacy and high social support tend to have more adaptive coping mechanisms, are better able to manage academic pressure, and are more resilient in facing obstacles during the thesis writing process.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SEM-PLS analysis's findings allow for the conclusion that social support significantly moderates and reinforces the role of self-efficacy on academic stress. A high level of self-confidence, when accompanied by adequate social support from family, friends, and the surrounding environment, is an effective combination for reducing the academic stress experienced by students while working on their theses.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations; therefore, future research on this topic may consider other variables that contribute to academic stress, such as procrastination, achievement motivation, and high academic standards (Olejnik and Holschuh, 2007). In addition, researchers may use a mixed-methods research approach to explore the phenomenon of academic stress in greater depth and also use other types of sampling, such as stratified random sampling or probability sampling.

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