

Determinant Factors of Academic Stress: A Study of First-Year University Students in Indonesia

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Abstract

Academic stress can reduce academic performance in first-year university students. Based on theoretical studies and previous research, three factors are predicted to influence academic stress: academic self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and happiness. This study analyzes the correlation of academic self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and happiness with first-year university students' academic stress. This research uses a quantitative approach with correlational methods and path analysis. The participants in this research were 720 first-year university students in Indonesia. The research instruments used were the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale, Happiness Scale, and Academic Stress Scale. Research data was collected online and then analyzed using the partial-least squares-structural equation model (PLS-SEM) technique. The results of this study show that life satisfaction and happiness are negatively and significantly correlated with first-year university students' academic stress. Furthermore, this research shows that happiness is the most determinant factor for academic stress, so it acts as a mediator in the correlation of academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction with first-year university students' academic stress. These three factors must be considered to reduce first-year university students' academic stress.

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1. Introduction

In Indonesia, university is the level of formal education after high school. The academic system in university is different from the academic system at previous levels of education. These differences exist in the curriculum, academic administration, and learning patterns (Balzer, 2020; Hadiyanto et al., 2021). The university academic system is designed so students can think creatively, think innovatively, and have skills appropriate to current developments (Damanik, 2020; Handayani et al., 2021; Pabbajah et al., 2020). Apart from that, in the current era of digital technology, the academic system of universities in Indonesia has adapted to developments in digital technology (Akbari & Pratomo, 2022; Awaludin et al., 2022; Widjaja, 2023). Almost all university learning activities use digital platforms (Sayaf et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2022). Therefore, first-year university students need to adapt to the current academic system of the university.

The ability of first-year university students to adapt to the university academic system is a factor that determines student success in learning (Neviyarni et al., 2018). Therefore, first-year university students must adapt well to the university academic system (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Hamza et al., 2021; van Rooij et al., 2018). The inability of first-year university students to adapt to the university academic system can cause academic stress (Putra & Ahmad, 2020).

Academic stress is a person's physical and psychological condition with negative symptoms caused by academic stressors (Barker et al., 2018; Mishra, 2018). Academic stressors come from study pressure, task load, worries about grades, hope for yourself, hopeless (Ardi, 2021; Ardi et al., 2022). First-year university students who have a low ability to control academic stressors can

experience psychological conditions that are not conducive, so they are prone to experiencing academic stress (Putra & Ahmad, 2020).

Throughout 2022-2023, we surveyed the academic stress conditions of 500 first-year university students in Indonesia. The survey results showed that 196 people (39.20%) experienced high-category stress, 230 people (46.00%) experienced medium-category stress, and 74 people (14.80%) experienced low-category stress. However, not all stress levels can cause academic problems in first-year university students (Willroth et al., 2020). Low-category academic stress can be useful for increasing students' readiness to meet academic demands (Händel et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2020). Academic stress that causes academic problems in first-year university students is moderate to high category academic stress. Medium to high academic stress experienced by first-year university students can result in low academic performance, low learning outcomes, physical health problems, anxiety disorders, low subjective well-being, and behavioral disorders (Ang & Huan, 2006; Sun et al., 2011).

Academic stress in first-year university students can be influenced by happiness, academic self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Freire et al., 2020; Karaman et al., 2019; Moksness et al., 2019). Among these three factors, happiness is predicted as a determinant factor of academic stress (Capone et al., 2020; Caso et al., 2020). In addition, happiness is also predicted to mediate the effect of academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction on academic stress (Tan et al., 2019). This is because happiness is also positively correlated with these two factors. Happiness is a condition of a person with positive and grateful feelings as a result of an affective evaluation of his life (Barraza Macías, 2020; Muyan-Yılık & Bakalim, 2022; Portocarrero et al., 2020; Quidbach et al., 2019). Happiness can influence academic stress because positive feelings can reduce negative physical and psychological reactions caused by academic stressors. First-year university students with high levels of happiness tend to avoid academic stress. This is also proven by Vintilă (2021) research, which found that happiness significantly affects academic stress.

Academic self-efficacy is also predicted to influence first-year university students' academic stress (Kristensen et al., 2023; Trigueros et al., 2020; Wong & Yuen, 2023). Academic self-efficacy is a person's belief in his ability to meet academic demands. Three indicators characterize students with high academic self-efficacy. First, students believe in their ability to learn even at a high difficulty level (Putra & Ahmad, 2020). Second, students strongly believe in their learning ability (Perera & Priyanath, 2022). Third, students believe in their ability to learn even in difficult situations (Erlina et al., 2019). Low academic self-efficacy will make first-year university students avoid assignments, put less effort into completing things, and give up easily. This condition will increase negative physical and psychological reactions to sources of stress (Warsito, 2012; You, 2018). This is proven by research by Arslan (2017), which found that someone with low academic self-efficacy is vulnerable to experiencing academic stress. Subsequent research was conducted by Freire et al. (2020), who found that academic self-efficacy is an important variable influencing first-year university students' academic stress.

Life satisfaction can also influence academic stress (Bohman et al., 2023; Ho et al., 2022). Life satisfaction is a cognitive component of subjective well-being, which refers to a person's level of satisfaction with his life (Jebb et al., 2020; Sewaybricker & Massola, 2022). There are four indicators of someone with a high level of life satisfaction: being satisfied with life's achievements, satisfied with current life, not regretting anything that has happened, and optimistic about the future (Margolis et al., 2019). Low levels of life satisfaction make someone judge their life as unworthy, making them vulnerable to stress. First-year university students who are dissatisfied with their lives also have the potential to experience academic stress. This is proven by Karaman et al. (2019) research regarding predictors of student academic stress. The results of this study indicate that life satisfaction is a variable that significantly affects academic stress in university students.

Based on theoretical studies and previous research results, seven research hypotheses (H) can be developed, namely:

H1: Academic self-efficacy has a positive and significant correlation with the happiness of first-year university students

H2: Life satisfaction has a positive and significant correlation with the happiness of first-year university students

H3: Happiness has a negative and significant correlation with first-year university students' academic stress

H4: Academic self-efficacy is negatively and significantly correlated with first-year university students' academic stress

H5: Life satisfaction is negatively and significantly correlated with first-year university students' academic stress

H6: Academic self-efficacy has a negative and significant correlation with the academic stress of first-year university students, with happiness acting as a mediator

H7: Life satisfaction has a negative and significant correlation with the academic stress of first-year university students, with happiness acting as a mediator

This article explains the correlation of academic self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and happiness with first-year university students' academic stress. In addition, this article aims to explain happiness as a mediator in the correlation of academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction with academic stress in first-year university students. The novelty of this study is to separate life satisfaction and happiness as two components that build subjective well-being. We also want to identify the correlation between life satisfaction and happiness of first-year university students. Apart from that, happiness as a mediator also adds novelty value to this research. Recent research by Denovan and Macaskill (2017) describes the relationship between subjective well-being and student stress in the United Kingdom. However, our research will study the correlation of academic self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and happiness with the academic stress of first-year university students in Indonesia. Furthermore, this research was urgent to find the determinants of first-year university students' academic stress. The results of this study will also be used to develop counseling and psychotherapy approaches for reducing academic stress for first-year university students.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This research uses a quantitative approach with correlational methods and path analysis. The correlational method analyzes the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2014; Seeram, 2019). Next, path analysis is used to analyze direct effects, indirect effects, and the total effect of independent variables on the dependent variable (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). The dependent variable in this research is academic stress, while the independent variables are academic self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and happiness. Besides that, happiness is predicted as a mediator variable in the correlation of academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction with academic stress.

2.2. Research Participant

The participants in this study were first-year university students in Indonesia. 720 Indonesian first-year university students participated as respondents in this research. The demographics of the research participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Research Participants

	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	304	42.22
Female	416	57.78
<i>Type of University</i>		

	Frequency	Percentage
State-owned University	422	58.61
Private University	298	41.39
The average length of study per day		
< 3 hours	54	7.5
3-5 hours	79	10.97
5-7 hours	396	55.00
> 8 hours	191	26.53
Source of income		
From Parents	562	78.05
Own Revenues	37	5.14
Scholarship	103	14.31
Other	18	2.5
Cost of Living per Month (IDR)		
< 1,000,000	19	2.64
1,000,000 – 2,000,000	376	52.23
2,000,000 – 3,000,000	302	41.94
> 3,000,000	23	3.19

2.3. Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study were the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, the Life Satisfaction Scale, the Happiness Scale, and the Academic Stress Scale. The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale is used to measure the academic self-efficacy level of first-year students. The Life Satisfaction Scale measures the life satisfaction level of first-year university students. The Happiness Scale measures the happiness level of first-year university students. The Academic Stress Scale measures the academic stress level of first-year university students. Making research instruments begins with exploring the literature related to research variables. Next, we discuss the concept of each research variable. Each research variable is translated into several indicators. These variable indicators are used as the basis for making research instrument items. In general, the research instruments can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Outline of Research Instruments

Instrument	Variable	Factor/Indicator	Number of items	Reference
Academic Self-Efficacy Scale	Academic Self-Efficacy	Students believe in their ability to learn even at a high difficulty level Students strongly believe in their learning ability Students believe in their ability to learn even in difficult situations	34	Erlina et al., 2019; Perera & Priyanath, 2022
Happiness Scale	Happiness	Positive feelings Gratitude	12	Diener et al., 2009; Portocarrero et al., 2020
Life Satisfaction Scale	Life Satisfaction	Satisfied with life achievements Satisfied with current living conditions Do not regret something that has happened Optimistic about the future	11	Margolis et al., 2019
Academic Stress Scale	Academic Stress	Study Pressure Task Load Worries about value Hope for yourself Hopeless	21	Ardi, 2021; Ardi et al., 2022

The Academic Self-Efficacy, Life Satisfaction, and Happiness Scale use four alternative answers. The answer "Strongly Agree" is given a score of 4, the answer "Agree" is given a score of 3, the answer "Disagree" is given a score of 2, and the answer "Strongly Disagree" is given a score of 1. Furthermore,

the Academic Stress Scale also uses four alternative answers. The answer "Always" is given a score of 4, the answer "Often" is given a score of 3, the answer "Rarely" is given a score of 2, and the answer "Never" is given a score of 1. Then, the validity and reliability of the research instruments were tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The standard value used to test the validity is the average value of the loading factor. An instrument can be considered valid if it has an Average Loading Factor Value above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021). Then, to determine the instrument's reliability, we used the standard Cronbach's Alpha Value (CAV). Reliable instruments have CAVs of more than 0.6 (Hair et al., 2021). The results of testing the validity and reliability of the instrument can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Test Results of Research Instruments

Instrument	Average Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha Value (CAV)
Academic Self-Efficacy Scale	.893	.897
Life Satisfaction Scale	.850	.895
Happiness Scale	.871	.731
Academic Stress Scale	.891	.936

Based on the CFA calculation results, all the Average Loading Factor Values for the research instruments were above 0.7, meaning that all research instruments were valid in measuring the variables to be studied. Furthermore, based on the calculations, all instruments had CAVs above 0.6, meaning all research instruments were reliable in measuring research variables.

2.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data was collected through an online survey of first-year university students in Indonesia. Research data were analyzed using the partial least squares-structural equation model (PLS-SEM). This research has two stages: outer model evaluation and inner evaluation. Then, each variable was coded in the data analysis: Academic Self-Efficacy = ASE, Life Satisfaction = LS, Happiness = Hp, and Academic Stress = AS.

3. Results

3.1. Outer Model

Outer model evaluation aims to analyze the validity and reliability of the model (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The validity test evaluated the research variables' convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021). Furthermore, the reliability test was carried out by calculating CAV and the composite reliability value of each research variable (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). The results of the evaluation of the outer research model can be seen in Table 3.

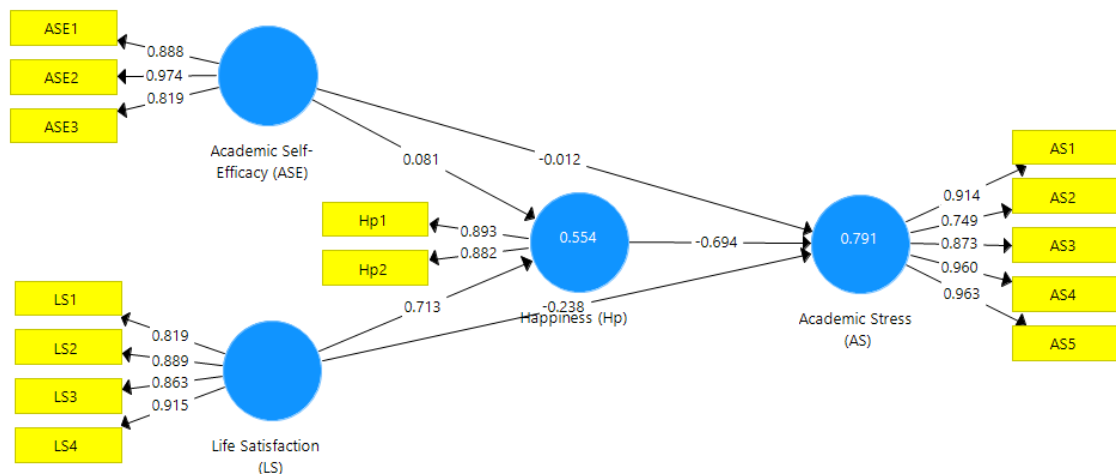


Figure 1. Outer Evaluation of the Research Model

3.1.1. Convergent Validity

The convergent validity test evaluates the relationship between variable indicators and their constructs. An indicator can be valid in measuring its construct if it has a loading factor value above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021). The results of the convergent validity test can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variable	Indicator/Factor	Loading Factor	AVE	Information
Academic Self-Efficacy	ASE1	.888	.802	Valid
	ASE3	.974		Valid
Happiness	ASE3	.819	.760	Valid
	Hp1	.893		Valid
	Hp2	.882		Valid
Life Satisfaction	LS1	.819	.788	Valid
	LS2	.889		Valid
	LS3	.863		Valid
	LS4	.915		Valid
Academic Stress	AS1	.914	.802	Valid
	AS2	.749		Valid
	AS3	.873		Valid
	AS4	.960		Valid
	AS5	.963		Valid

Based on Table 4, it can be seen that all variable indicators have loading factor values above 0.7. This means that each indicator can be valid in measuring its construct so that it can be continued for hypothesis testing.

3.1.2. Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity test aims to evaluate the differentiability of the concepts of each variable. The criteria used to test discriminant validity are the Fornell-Lacker criteria. A variable can have good discriminant validity if it has a Fornell-Lacker value that is greater and different from the Fornell-Lacker value of other variables (Afthanorhan et al., 2021). The results of the discriminant validity test can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Fornell-Lacker Criteria)

	ASE	LS	Hp	AS
Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE)	.896			
Life Satisfaction (LS)	.329	.872		
Happiness (Hp)	.316	.740	.888	
Academic Stress (AS)	-.310	-.756	-.874	.896

Based on the discriminant validity test with the Fornell-Lacker criteria, it can be seen that each variable has sufficient differentiation so that it can be continued for hypothesis testing.

3.1.3. Reliability

The research variable reliability test aims to evaluate the reliability of each variable. A variable can be considered reliable if it has a CAV and a composite reliability value above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021). The results of the research variable reliability test can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Research Variable Reliability Test Results

	Cronbach's Alpha Value (CAV)	rho_A	Composite Reliability
Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE)	.897	1.409	.924
Life Satisfaction (LS)	.895	.904	.927
Happiness (Hp)	.731	.732	.881
Academic Stress (AS)	.936	.943	.953

Based on the research variable reliability test results, all variables have adequate reliability values to continue hypothesis testing.

3.2. Inner Model

Evaluation of the inner model aims to evaluate causality between variables. The inner model is evaluated by calculating the r-square value of the research model. Furthermore, testing the research hypothesis with bootstrapping (Hair et al., 2021).

3.2.1. R-Square

The R-squared value is used to evaluate the simultaneous effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2021). The R-square value of the model can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. R-Square Value

	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Academic Stress (AS)	.791	.790
Happiness (Hp)	.554	.552

Based on Table 7, it can be seen that the R-square value of happiness is 0.554. That is, 55.4% of happiness can be explained by academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction. Furthermore, the R-square value of academic stress is 0.791, meaning that 79.1% of academic stress can be explained by academic self-efficacy, life satisfaction, and happiness.

3.2.2. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was carried out using the bootstrapping method with the help of SmartPLS 4.0 software. The rule of thumb to support a research hypothesis is if the coefficient or direction of the variable relationship aligns with the hypothesis. Furthermore, the hypothesis can be accepted if the t-statistic value is more than 1.96 and the probability value is less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2021). Based on the results of hypothesis testing, one hypothesis is not accepted. The hypothesis that is not accepted is the fourth hypothesis (H4). The results of hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping method can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Research Hypothesis Test Results

Direct Effect	Original Sample	Sample Average	STDEV	T Statistic	P Values	Hyphotesis Result
Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE) -> Happiness (Hp)	.081	.083	.016	4.961	.000	Hyphotesis 1 Accepted
Life Satisfaction (LS) -> Happiness (Hp)	.713	.713	.022	31.714	.000	Hyphotesis 2 Accepted
Happiness (Hp) -> Academic Stress (AS)	-.694	-.695	.039	17.862	.000	Hyphotesis 3 Accepted
Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE) -> Academic Stress (AS)	-.012	-.013	.016	.786	.432	Hyphotesis 4 Rejected
Life Satisfaction (LS) -> Academic Stress (AS)	-.238	-.237	.036	6.613	.000	Hyphotesis 5 Accepted
Indirect Effect						
Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE) -> Academic Stress (AS)	-.056	-.057	.011	5.155	.000	Hyphotesis 6 Accepted
Life Satisfaction (LS) -> Academic Stress (AS)	-.495	-.496	.038	12.978	.000	Hyphotesis 7 Accepted

4. Discussion

The academic stress experienced by first-year university students is influenced by three variables: happiness, academic self-efficacy, and life satisfaction. Among these three variables, happiness is predicted to mediate the relationship between academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction with first-year university students' academic stress. There are seven hypotheses proposed in this research. The first hypothesis (H1) is accepted, meaning that academic self-efficacy is negatively and significantly correlated with the happiness of first-year university students. First-year university students adapting to the university academic system must believe in their abilities. First-year university students confident in their abilities tend to be more enthusiastic and have good learning performance (Kahu et al., 2022). This can directly increase student happiness in studying at university. This means that the higher the level of academic self-efficacy, the higher the happiness of first-year university students. These findings support the research of Mahmoodi et al. (2019), who also found academic self-efficacy as a variable determining students' happiness.

The second hypothesis (H2) of this research was also accepted, meaning that the higher the level of life satisfaction, the higher the level of happiness in first-year university students. Life satisfaction is a component of subjective well-being that can describe a person's level of satisfaction with their life (Ahmed et al., 2021; Espejo et al., 2022). First-year university students with high levels of life satisfaction tend also to have high levels of happiness. This is in accordance with research by Braun et al. (2020), who found that life satisfaction influences a person's level of happiness.

The third hypothesis (H3) in this study is accepted, meaning that happiness has a negative and significant correlation with the academic stress of first-year university students. Happiness is characterized by positive feelings and gratitude (Diener et al., 2009; Portocarrero et al., 2020; Putra & Hariko, 2023). People with positive and grateful feelings for their lives tend to avoid psychological disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Debt et al., 2020). These findings show that the higher the level of happiness, the lower the stress level in first-year university students. These findings show that happiness is the most determining factor in first-year university students' academic stress. This is because the t-statistic value obtained from the correlation between happiness and academic stress is 17.862. This finding supports the research of Lew et al. (2019), who found that happiness is the variable that most determines academic stress in students.

The results of this study indicate that the fourth hypothesis (H4) is rejected. That is, academic self-efficacy does not directly correlate significantly with the academic stress of first-year university students. Academic self-efficacy is a person's belief in his ability to do academic tasks. The level of academic self-efficacy is not significantly correlated with academic stress. Even though first-year university students have high academic self-efficacy, they still have the potential to experience academic stress. This finding rejects the research results of Putra & Ahmad (2020), which found that academic self-efficacy has a significant relationship with first-year university students' academic stress.

This research's fifth hypothesis (H5) is also accepted, meaning that life satisfaction is negatively and significantly correlated with first-year university students' academic stress. First-year university students who are satisfied with their lives tend to think positively and have high learning motivation (Diener & Chan, 2011; Moksnes et al., 2016). This can directly reduce academic stress levels. However, if students are dissatisfied with their lives, they tend not to be enthusiastic about studying and give up more quickly if they face difficult conditions in learning. This is what will cause academic stress in first-year university students. These findings support the research of Rogowska et al. (2020), who found that life satisfaction is one of the determinants of academic stress in students.

The findings of this research also accept the sixth and seventh hypotheses (H6 & H7). This means that happiness is a mediator in the correlation of academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction with academic stress. Directly, academic self-efficacy does not have a significant correlation with academic stress. However, this correlation can be significant if it is mediated by happiness. This means that high academic self-efficacy cannot directly reduce academic stress in first-year university students, but high academic self-efficacy will make first-year university students happy so they can avoid academic stress. In addition, the findings of this study indicate that life satisfaction can directly

and indirectly influence first-year university students' academic stress. High life satisfaction can reduce first-year university students' academic stress and vice versa.

Academic stress can reduce the academic performance of first-year university students. First-year university students who experience academic stress must be assisted through counseling services. Counselors at university can help first-year university students who experience academic stress with the right approaches and techniques so that the academic stress experienced by first-year university students can be overcome.

5. Conclusion

Academic stress can interfere with first-year university students in learning. Based on the results of this study, there are two determinant factors of academic stress: life satisfaction and happiness. In addition, this research shows that happiness acts as a mediator in the correlation of academic self-efficacy and life satisfaction with first-year university students' academic stress. First-year university students who experience academic stress must be assisted through counseling services. The results of this research can be a reference for counselors in higher education to help first-year university students reduce their academic stress levels.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to this paper. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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