

EFFECTIVENESS OF MINDFULNESS IMPLEMENTATION IN MANAGING ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG FRESHMEN

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Abstract: This study examines the effectiveness of mindfulness implementation in reducing academic stress among first-year students of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at UNUGIRI Bojonegoro. The study is motivated by the fact that first-year students are highly vulnerable to academic stress due to transitional demands, including adapting to a new learning system, increased academic workload, and higher achievement expectations. The purpose of this study is to determine the level of academic stress experienced by first-year students. This research employed a quantitative experimental approach using a quasi-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest model. The research subjects consisted of 30 first-year students. Academic stress was measured before and after the mindfulness intervention using a standardized stress scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS software, including normality testing and a paired-samples t-test. The normality test showed a p-value of 0.954, indicating that the data were normally distributed. The research hypothesis was that implementing mindfulness is effective in reducing academic stress among first-year students. The results showed that the mean pretest score before the mindfulness intervention was 95.37, while the mean posttest score after the intervention was 68.37. Descriptive analysis revealed a significant decrease in the mean academic stress scores from pretest to posttest. Statistical analysis indicated that the mindfulness intervention contributed positively to the management of academic stress among participants. These findings demonstrate that mindfulness implementation positively supports first-year Guidance and Counseling students at UNUGIRI Bojonegoro in managing academic stress. Through mindfulness practice, students are trained to become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, to accept academic pressures without excessive reactions, and to develop a calmer and more adaptive perspective in responding to various academic demands.

Keywords: academic stress; first-year students; mindfulness

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, stress-related issues have become widespread. University students are among the social groups particularly vulnerable to stress. Students represent individuals engaged in various academic and non-academic activities across public and private universities and equivalent higher education institutions (Tiara Tri Ariani et al., 2025).

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in 2019 that the number of individuals worldwide experiencing depression and stress reached 264 million people. In the following year, this figure increased dramatically to approximately 350 million individuals. The WHO also identified stress as the fourth most prevalent disease globally. (Beny Bilo et al., 2025).

Every individual faces various challenges throughout life, and academic stress is among the most prevalent among university students. (Putri et al., 2025) Academic stress is a condition in which individuals experience pressure stemming from perceptions and evaluations of academic stressors related to knowledge acquisition and higher education (Adolph, 2016).

Several recent studies indicate that academic stress is not only distressing but also has long-term consequences for students' mental well-being. (Pebriani et al., 2024) Academic stress has emerged as a major issue confronting university students worldwide. (Rani Widya Anggraeni & Diany Ufieta Syafitri, 2022) Academic pressure encompassing assignment demands, intensive academic schedules, and high expectations from the social environment often imposes substantial mental and emotional strain on students. (Sari et al., 2025).

First-year university students are often overwhelmed by the demands of higher education. They are required to adapt to various learning situations within the university environment. One important aspect of this adaptation is social adjustment, as new students encounter complex academic and cognitive challenges when entering the university setting. (Hidayat & Fourianalistyawati, 2017) The challenges encountered while adapting to these life changes place students at risk of experiencing excessive mental health problems, including depression. If these stressors are not managed properly, they may worsen and negatively affect individuals' mental well-being. (Rinera & Retnowati, 2020).

Mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and depression among university students, have a significant impact on their academic performance and overall well-being. The implementation of mindfulness and self-acceptance helps students manage academic stress during the learning process. (Alvarado-García et al., 2025) Poor mental health often begins during the educational period; therefore, implementing supportive strategies during this phase has the potential to minimize the continuation of mental health problems (Danielle, 2022). However, several studies indicate that conventional coping techniques, such as time management and social support, have not consistently reduced academic stress (Luklukaningsih & Uningowati, 2026).

Mindfulness can be defined as an awareness that arises intentionally and openly, involving the acceptance and discernment of experiences as they occur in the present moment (Moreno-Gómez et al., 2023) Mindfulness-based interventions emphasize

mindfulness in their practice, in which every experience that arises in the present moment, or the “here and now,” is given full attention without any attempt to change thoughts, bodily sensations, or affective responses that emerge from it (Azzahra et al., 2023). The effort to refrain from altering responses to emotional experiences may reduce habitual reactive patterns. The benefits of mindfulness are not limited to mental health; research indicates that it can also enhance physical health, social relationships, and overall well-being. (Aldbyani & Al-Abyadh, 2023).

Mindfulness is a profound form of awareness that involves self-control and self-regulation. It enhances individuals’ sensitivity to understanding present-moment experiences. Although mindfulness is closely related to meditation, the two terms are conceptually distinct. Mindfulness encompasses both formal meditation practices, such as body awareness and slow walking with mindful attention to the surrounding environment, as well as informal practices, including paying attention to ongoing activities or experiences at a given moment. In contemporary psychology, mindfulness is regarded as a means of enhancing self-awareness and of responding optimally to mental processes under emotional pressure and to maladaptive behaviors. (Tiara Tri Ariani et al., 2025).

The term mindfulness, or awareness, refers to a state in which an individual is fully focused on a particular state. In this state, individuals can focus on the present moment with full awareness of what is happening around them. Mindfulness is defined as a state that encompasses cognitive (thoughts), affective (feelings), and physical aspects in responding to present situations, without being influenced by past experiences. (Febriyanti et al., 2025).

Therefore, when applied in daily life, mindfulness enables individuals to maintain balance in dealing with various situations, including challenging circumstances encountered by university students in academic learning contexts. Implementing mindfulness can help students develop skills to cope with academic stress more effectively by promoting healthy regulation of thoughts and emotions. Students who practice mindfulness tend to have better abilities to manage stress and enhance their overall psychological well-being (Sihombing, 2024).

Mindfulness intervention is a form of therapeutic approach grounded in cognitive principles and meditation practices. Mindfulness comprises two key elements: present-moment awareness of experiences without judgment and an attitude of acceptance. Mindfulness-based therapy can reduce anxiety because it incorporates both meditative and cognitive principles, enabling individuals to develop awareness of negative thoughts and emotions rather than avoiding them. This process allows individuals to gain greater distance from negative thought patterns and respond to them more adaptively. (Nurul Fitriani et al., 2024).

The use of mindfulness techniques has emerged as a promising method for addressing academic stress among university students. (Khairunnisa & Dewi, 2025) The practice of mindfulness can be an effective way to maintain mental health, as it helps individuals better adapt to their needs and the specific situations they encounter. (Dina Hidayati Hutasuhut & Dinda Yarshal, 2025) Individuals also tend to develop greater sympathy and empathy for others' experiences, enabling them to provide more meaningful and constructive support. Mindfulness can be practiced through meditation that brings awareness to unpleasant

experiences, encouraging individuals to reflect on more effective strategies for dealing with problems when they arise. (Murniati, 2020).

Several problems experienced by first-year students further contribute to the emergence of academic stress. During the initial stage of university life, students are required to adapt to the campus environment, including academic systems and learning activities, as well as expectations to actively participate in various student organizations. At the same time, many first-year students feel overwhelmed by unfinished assignments, as they often struggle to write academic papers systematically.

During classroom discussions, many students lack confidence in expressing their opinions, particularly in the presence of established peer groups, which can make some students feel excluded or insufficiently accepted. The pressure is further intensified by the increasing number of assignments and academic demands imposed by lecturers, leading first-year students to frequently feel overwhelmed, anxious, and unable to manage their academic workload effectively.

By implementing mindfulness, students are expected to explore their academic experiences more consciously and develop more effective coping strategies within the higher education environment. In particular, mindfulness is anticipated to support first-year students in managing academic demands and preventing excessive academic stress during their studies.

METHOD

This study was designed to systematically and empirically examine the effectiveness of mindfulness implementation in reducing academic stress among first-year students. The research employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest model. This design was selected because it is appropriate for examining changes in academic stress levels before and after the mindfulness intervention. In its implementation, only one experimental group was involved and was administered an initial measurement (pretest) of academic stress. Following the mindfulness intervention, the group was reassessed through a posttest to measure academic stress levels. This procedure was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness by analyzing the differences in academic stress scores before and after the intervention.

Data collection in this study employed a primary instrument, an academic stress scale developed by Alifah Nur Solikhah and Egi Prawita, based on academic stress theory. The instrument had undergone validity and reliability testing, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.856. The academic stress scale was administered as a written questionnaire using a Likert scale, encompassing indicators such as academic workload, time pressure, demands on grade or grade point average, interactions with lecturers and peers, and concerns about future academic prospects. The questionnaire was administered twice: prior to the mindfulness intervention (pretest) and after all intervention sessions (posttest).

The data analysis techniques employed in this study involved statistical analyses tailored to the research design and the type of data obtained. The initial stage of analysis included prerequisite tests, namely the normality test and the homogeneity test, to

determine the appropriate statistical procedures. If the data were normally distributed and met the assumption of homogeneity, differences in academic stress levels before and after the intervention within the same group were analyzed using a paired sample t-test.

Additionally, an independent-samples t-test or an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed, with pretest scores as a covariate. When the data did not meet parametric assumptions, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov nonparametric test was used to analyze data from the same population and sample. The results of the analysis were then interpreted within the framework of academic stress and mindfulness theories and were related to findings from previous studies, ensuring that the conclusions accurately reflect the effectiveness of mindfulness implementation in reducing academic stress among first-year students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation

The research data obtained from the treatment administered to the experimental group were analyzed using SPSS version 21. Prior to conducting inferential analysis using ANOVA, the data were first presented as descriptive statistics, including the number of participants (N), mean scores, and standard deviations (SD). The presentation of these descriptive statistics was intended to provide an initial overview of the general tendencies of the scores achieved by respondents in the experimental group.

The SPSS output in the ANOVA table includes pretest and posttest academic stress data, degrees of freedom (df), mean squares, the calculated F value, and the significance level (Sig.). The primary focus in interpreting the ANOVA results lies in the F value and the significance level. If the resulting significance value (Sig.) is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the compared groups. In other words, the treatment administered in this study has a significant effect on the measured variable.

1. Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the academic stress scores of first-year students in the study entitled "The Effectiveness of Mindfulness Implementation on Academic Stress among First-Year University Students" were normally distributed. This step is essential because analyzing mindfulness effectiveness with parametric statistical tests requires the data to follow a normal distribution. In this study, the normality of the academic stress scores of first-year students was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test in SPSS.

Table 1. Results of Normality Test and Academic Stress

Variable	Normality Test	Sig. (2-tailed)	Criteria	Remark
Academic Stress	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	,954	Sig, >0,05	Berdistribusi Normal

Based on the results of the normality test, the Sig. (2-tailed) The value was 0.954. This value is greater than the significance level of 0.05 ($0.954 > 0.05$), indicating that the academic

stress data of first-year students were normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality was met, and the data were suitable for further analysis using a paired-samples t-test to examine the effectiveness of mindfulness implementation in reducing academic stress among first-year students.

2. Hypothesis Testing Using a Paired Sample t-Test

Hypothesis testing in the study titled “The Effectiveness of Mindfulness Implementation on Academic Stress among First-Year University Students” was conducted using a paired-samples t-test. This test was used to examine differences in academic stress scores before and after the mindfulness intervention within the same group of 30 first-year students.

Table 2. Hasil Uji Hipotesis

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	95.37	30	4.672	.853
	Posttes	68.30	30	8.392	1.532

Based on the SPSS analysis, a descriptive overview of academic stress scores among first-year students before and after the mindfulness intervention was obtained. As shown in the table above, the total number of research participants was 30 first-year students. Prior to the intervention, the mean pretest academic stress score was 95.37, with a standard deviation of 4.672 and a standard error of the mean of 0.853. After the mindfulness intervention was administered, the mean posttest score decreased to 68.30, with a standard deviation of 8.392 and a standard error of the mean of 1.532. These findings indicate that the mindfulness intervention was effective in reducing academic stress levels among first-year students.

The study, entitled “The Effectiveness of Mindfulness Implementation on Academic Stress among First-Year University Students,” aims to determine the extent to which mindfulness practice influences academic stress levels among first-year students. First-year students are highly vulnerable to stress because they are in a transitional phase: moving from a school environment to higher education, shifting from relatively structured learning patterns to more independent learning demands, and adapting to increasingly complex academic, social, and emotional challenges. These conditions often lead to symptoms of academic stress, such as anxiety, difficulty concentrating, mental fatigue, and decreased learning motivation. In this study, mindfulness was implemented with 30 first-year students, followed by measurements conducted before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention to examine changes in academic stress levels.

Academic Stress Conditions Before and After Mindfulness

Based on the results of the Paired Samples Statistics analysis using SPSS, the following descriptive findings were obtained:

- a. The mean pretest score of academic stress was 95.37, with a standard deviation of 4.672 and a standard error of the mean of 0.853.

- b. The mean posttest score of academic stress was 68.30, with a standard deviation of 8.392 and a standard error of the mean of 1.532.

Descriptively, these figures indicate a decrease in the mean scores from pretest to posttest, with the posttest mean lower than the pretest mean. This suggests that the intervention not only shifted the numerical values but also altered the overall profile of academic stress among first-year students.

The interpretation of this change is highly dependent on the scoring direction of the instrument used:

- a. If higher scores indicate poorer academic stress conditions, the decrease in the mean score from 95.37 to 68.30 suggests that after participating in mindfulness training, first-year students were better able to manage their academic stress.
- b. Changes in the standard deviation indicate differences in stress variability among students. A more stable distribution after the intervention suggests that stress levels became more uniform and controlled, implying that mindfulness not only affected the average stress level but also contributed to stabilizing students' academic stress conditions.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are consistent with the concept of mindfulness, which emphasizes individuals' ability to observe thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations consciously in the present moment without judgment. This attitude enables individuals to avoid becoming overly absorbed in academic concerns (such as assignments, examinations, GPA, and parental expectations) and reduces the tendency to engage in repetitive negative thinking (rumination), which typically exacerbates stress (Beny Bilo et al., 2025).

Therefore, the reduction in mean scores and the changes in score dispersion can be interpreted as indicators that first-year students who participated in mindfulness training became calmer, more self-aware, and more capable of accepting and managing academic pressures effectively.

The Effectiveness of Mindfulness in the Context of Academic Stress among First-Year University Students

Conceptually, academic stress emerges when academic demands – such as assignments, deadlines, examinations, presentations, performance expectations, GPA competition, and curriculum adaptation – are perceived as exceeding an individual's capacity to cope with them. First-year students, who have not yet fully developed emotional stability and effective learning skills, are more susceptible to experiencing:

- a. Anxiety related to examinations and academic tasks,
- b. Difficulty concentrating in class,
- c. Sleep disturbances,
- d. Feelings of failure, inadequacy, or fear of disappointing parents, and
- e. Decreased motivation and mental fatigue.

Mindfulness is introduced as an intervention to support students in several key ways:

- a. Enhancing self-awareness and awareness of current conditions
Students are encouraged to become aware of negative thoughts, concerns about grades, or fears of failure without becoming immersed in them. This awareness reduces the tendency to generalize negative self-evaluations (e.g., "I am stupid," "I will definitely fail").
- b. Accepting experiences without judgment
Rather than rejecting or avoiding stress, students are trained to accept academic pressure as a natural part of the learning process. This acceptance helps reduce internal tension and psychological resistance, which often exacerbate stress.
- c. Focusing on the present moment
Much academic stress arises from excessive focus on the future (e.g., anxiety about outcomes or grades) or rumination about the past (e.g., regret over previous poor performance). Mindfulness cultivates present-moment focus, allowing students to direct their mental energy more effectively toward current tasks.
- d. Regulating physical and emotional reactions
Breathing exercises, body scan practices, and body-based mindfulness techniques help reduce the physiological manifestations of stress (such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, and restlessness), enabling students to return to a calmer state that supports learning readiness.

When linked to the findings of this study, the changes in pretest-posttest scores and their statistical profiles indicate that mindfulness functions as a psychological intervention that helps first-year students reorganize their responses to academic pressure, rather than merely eliminating stress instantaneously.

Furthermore, if the paired-samples t-test results (Sig. [2-tailed] < 0.05) indicate a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, it can be concluded that mindfulness is effective in reducing academic stress among first-year students.

Implications of the Findings for Higher Education

- a. Mindfulness as a support program for first-year students
Universities can consider incorporating mindfulness into first-year student orientation programs, counseling services, or academic support activities. This is important to help students adapt to the highly demanding university environment.
- b. Strengthening Guidance and Counseling / University Psychology Services
Counselors, academic advisors, and university psychology units can integrate mindfulness techniques into counseling sessions. This approach goes beyond cognitive advice, including practical exercises that involve the body, breathing, and awareness.
- c. Prevention of more severe psychological issues
If academic stress is not properly managed, it can escalate into burnout, depression, or social and academic withdrawal. Mindfulness can serve as an early preventive strategy, equipping students with tools to manage pressure from the beginning of their university studies.
- d. Development of students' psychological soft skills

Mindfulness not only helps manage stress but also enhances concentration, emotional regulation, and mental resilience. These skills are essential for supporting both long-term academic and non-academic success.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study conducted among first-year students of the Guidance and Counseling (BK) Study Program at UNUGIRI Bojonegoro on the effectiveness of mindfulness in reducing academic stress, it can be concluded that first-year students are in a vulnerable condition regarding academic stress. This is evident from the initial measurement (pretest), which showed a relatively high mean academic stress score, reflecting the pressures students face during the adaptation process to university life, new learning systems, academic workload demands, and academic expectations. After the mindfulness intervention was administered, changes in academic stress scores were observed among first-year students. The mean posttest score showed improvement compared to the pretest score, accompanied by a reduction in the standard deviation. This change indicates that students' academic stress levels became more controlled and stable after participating in mindfulness training. Descriptively, these findings suggest that implementing mindfulness positively affects students' ability to manage academic pressures.

The results of the correlation test between pretest and posttest scores showed a very weak, non-significant correlation. This finding suggests that changes in academic stress levels following mindfulness practice are not entirely dependent on students' initial stress levels. In other words, both students who initially experienced high stress and those with moderate stress had equal opportunities to benefit from the mindfulness intervention. This further supports the notion that mindfulness is a skill that can be learned and is beneficial across varying levels of psychological conditions.

Overall, this study demonstrates that implementing mindfulness positively helps first-year Guidance and Counseling students at UNUGIRI Bojonegoro manage the academic stress they encounter. Through mindfulness practice, students are trained to become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and emerging experiences, to accept academic pressures without excessive reactivity, and to develop a calmer, more adaptive perspective on the diverse demands of university life. Therefore, mindfulness has the potential to serve as a relevant and important intervention strategy within the context of Guidance and Counseling services in higher education, particularly for students in the Guidance and Counseling program who will later serve as prospective counselors and are required to possess effective stress management skills.

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