

THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF THE MINDFULNESS ATTENTION AWARENESS SCALE (MAAS) ON ACADEMIC STRESS LEVELS AMONG FINAL-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The preparation of a graduation thesis is a crucial phase for senior students so that susceptible to triggering stress. Problems arise when stress pressures are not balanced with adequate self-awareness, potentially hindering the completion process of the final project. The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) serves as a predictor of stress levels among Guidance and Counseling students as they write their theses. Employing a quantitative predictive correlational approach, involved 40 Guidance and Counseling students from the 2021 cohort as the sample. Data were collected online via Google Forms using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI). The collected data were subsequently then processed using simple linear regression analysis. The result of this study indicate that MAAS has a negative influence. And serves as a significant predictor of stress among students writing their thesis ($p=0.037 < 0.05$). And shows that mindfulness levels contribute 11% to the reduction of stress levels. Which confirms that a higher level of MAAS in students lead to lower level of stress experienced during the thesis process

Keywords: Academic Stress; Guidance and Counseling Students; Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS);

1 INTRODUCTION

Senior undergraduates are in a transitional phase toward early adulthood that demands independence and a high level of academic responsibility, particularly in writing their thesis as a graduation requirement (Mananna, 2024:1; Nandasari, 2019:22). However, in reality, this process often becomes a significant psychological burden. Students frequently face various obstacles, including external pressures such as expectations from their academic advisors and parents (Saihu & Abdushomad, 2021:72). These conditions trigger excessive anxiety and worry, leading to academic stress.

The phenomenon of stress among senior students is well-documented in various previous studies, which show that the vast majority of respondents were among the moderate-to-high stress category (Hariaty et al., 2023; Sugito, 2023). Preliminary observations of Guidance and Counseling (BK) students at Pancasakti University in Tegal, Class of 2021, reinforce these findings, as psychological pressure emerges even before the counseling process begins. As prospective counselors, BK students should ideally possess good self-regulation; however, the gap between ideal expectations and on-the-ground realities indicates a risk of a psychological well-being crisis if stress is not managed appropriately (Budisiwi, 2024).

In the psychological literature, stress is defined as a physical and psychological response to threats or difficult situations that require adaptation (Sugito, 2023; WHO, 2023). Specifically among the college student population, Gadzella (1991) divided these dynamics into two main aspects using the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI): academic stressors (such as frustration and conflict) and reactions to stressors (such as physiological and emotional manifestations). Previous research has consistently shown that the majority of senior students experience moderate to high levels of stress (Hariaty et al., 2023; Lestari & Hastuti, 2023), underscoring the need for effective self-regulation mechanisms.

One stress management strategy that has been proven effective in various studies is mindfulness. Brown and Ryan (2003), through the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), emphasize that mindfulness is full awareness of the present moment without judgment. Theoretically, people with a higher level of self-awareness are more able to let go of negative thoughts, so academic pressure is not seen as a debilitating threat. This aligns with Kabat-Zinn's view, which states that mindfulness arises through intentional, non-judgmental attention to the current moment (Kaufmann, 2022). Earlier research has found that mindfulness

can significantly lower stress, anxiety, and depression (Yuliana et al., 2022). However, Much of the earlier research focused on more on the general effectiveness of these interventions.

Although the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions has been extensively studied, few studies have specifically examined the predictive power of mindfulness regarding academic stress. Most previous research has focused on clinical outcomes following treatment, but few have examined how mindfulness spontaneously predicts students' reactions to thesis-related obstacles using a combination of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI). This research attempts to bridge this research gap by analyzing the extent to which MAAS scores can predict stress levels among senior students. Given that students in guidance and counseling programs are expected to demonstrate self-regulation as a model of professionalism for future counselors, this understanding is crucial for enhancing students' mental resilience in completing their final projects and for his empirical contribute to the improvement of guidance and counseling services in higher education institutions.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research uses a quantitative method with a predictor correlation design. This correlational study aims to identify the degree of association among the variables under investigation based on the resulting correlation coefficients (Abdullah et al., 2022). In this research, this design was used to analyze the extent to which mindfulness measured using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) can predict stress levels among senior students who are writing their theses.

The research population consisted of all 2021 graduating students in the Guidance and Counseling program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University Pancasakti Tegal, totaling 42 students. Given the relatively small population size, The sampling method used was saturation sampling, in which the complete population was included in the study sample (Abdullah et al., 2022). However, of the total questionnaires distributed, 40 respondents provided valid data and participated fully, while the other 2 did not respond. Therefore, data analysis was conducted on the 40 participants who met these criteria.

The research instruments used in this study employed two types of measurement: the SLSI and the MAAS scales. The Student-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) is an instrument for measuring stress levels. The Student-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) was development by Gadzella (1991). According to Gadzella & Masten (2005:3–5), the Student-Life Stress Inventory consists of 51 items across 9 categories: 5 stressors and 4 reactions. The SLSI instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Quite Often; 5 = Always), where a higher score indicates a more severe level of stress.

The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) is an instrument developed by Brown and Ryan (2003) (as cited in Ferdian & Helmi, 2023); this unidimensional scale consists of 15 items designed to measure awareness and attention to present-moment experiences. The MAAS instrument uses a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Almost Always; 2 = Very Often; 3 = Somewhat Often; 4 = Somewhat Rarely; 5 = Very Rarely; 6 = Almost Never). A high total score reflects a higher level of mindfulness.

Data analysis in this study utilized several involed descriptive statistics alongside classical assumption tests such as the normality test, linearity test, and homoscedasticity test. Hypothesis testing was then conducted using simple linear regression and t-tests. The analysis was performed using SPSS for Windows Version 31.0.2.0 (126).

3 RESULTS

Prior to the study, validity and reliability tests were conducted on the research instrument. These pilot tests were conducted on 15 respondents outside the research sample who met similar criteria. Although ideally the sample size for validity testing should be ≥ 30 respondents, this sample size is still acceptable. This is in line with (Amalia, 2022), who states that the determination of sample size for validity and reliability testing can be adjusted according to the characteristics of the population. Thus, for a study with $N = 15$, the calculated r value will be compared to the table r value at a 5% significance level, which is 0.514. The results of the validity test for the SLSI instrument showed that 34 items were valid and 17 items were deemed invalid. Meanwhile, for the MAAS instrument, 14 items were valid and 1 item was deemed invalid. This decision is based on the criteria for interpreting validity test results, which compare the calculated r value to the table r value at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). An item is deemed valid if the calculated r value is greater than the table r value or if the p -value is less than α (0.05). Regarding the invalid item, the researcher excluded it, considering that the remaining items still adequately represent the indicators of the variables under study. Furthermore, the reliability tests for the MAAS and SLSI instruments indicated that both are

reliable, with the SLSI instrument yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.959 and the MAAS instrument yielding 0.910, both meeting the criterion of a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.70.

The study was conducted online via Google Forms with 42 participants. However, only 40 participants provided complete responses, while the remaining 2 did not respond; therefore, the analysis was based on 40 respondents, comprising 13 men and 27 women. Furthermore, this study had two phases: current students and graduates within a timeframe of 1–6 months.

Descriptive statistical tests were conducted to examine the general characteristics of the data, such as the mean, maximum (max), minimum (min), and standard deviation of each variable, namely MAAS (X) and SLSI (Y). The descriptive statistical tests were performed using SPSS, with the following results:

Table 1. Descriptive statistica

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MAAS	40	25.00	83.00	50.8000	13.81786
SLSI	40	50.00	136.00	94.9750	18.45367
Valid N	40				

Next, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of the data and determine whether the research data followed a normal distribution. This test was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk analysis. This decision was made to accommodate the relatively small sample size. This aligns with the view expressed by Hidayat (2023), who states that if the sample size is less than 100, the Shapiro-Wilk test should be used. Based on the Shapiro-Wilk test conducted using SPSS, a significance value of 0.239 was obtained, and the data were deemed normally distributed because the significance value (sig.) was greater than the alpha level (0.05). This indicates that the data distribution is symmetric and aligns with the characteristics of a normal distribution curve—not skewed. For the linearity test, the researcher used the “Test for Linearity” procedure in SPSS. The results of this linearity test showed a significance value (Sig.) of 0.085 for “Deviation from Linearity” and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.014 for “Linearity.” These results indicate that the linearity test in this study was deemed linear because the Sig. value for “Deviation from Linearity” was greater than 0.05; therefore, the relationship between variables X and Y is linear. Next, the homoscedasticity test was conducted using the Glejser test. The results of the homoscedasticity test using the Glejser test are as follows:

Table 1. Glejser test

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	Constant	2.254	6.932		0.325
	MAAS	0.208	0.132	0.248	1.580

a. Dependent Variable: ABS_RES

Based on the results of the analysis, the significance value (Sig.) was found to be 0.122. The decision criterion for this test is that if Sig. > 0.05, then the variance of the residuals is considered homogeneous. Therefore, it can be concluded that the homoscedasticity test indicates the variance of the residuals is homogeneous—or that the homoscedasticity test is passed—since the significance value (Sig.) of 0.122 is greater than 0.05.

Next, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the percentage of influence between variables, based on the significance value (Sig.), as well as testing using the regression equation. Based on

the linear regression analysis using SPSS, a coefficient of determination (R-squared) of 0.110 was obtained, indicating that the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable is 11%.

The decision criterion for a simple linear regression test based on the significance value (Sig.) is that if Sig. < 0.05, then variable X has a significant effect on variable Y, and vice versa. Thus, in Table 4, the Sig. value is 0.037, which is less than 0.05; therefore, it can be concluded that variable X has an effect on variable Y.

Next, the simple linear regression analysis based on the regression equation, as shown in Table 4, uses the following formula:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta X$$

$$Y = 117.462 + (-0.443)X$$

As can be seen from the equation above, it can be concluded that the constant term is 117.462, meaning that if there is no change in the independent variable ($X = 0$), the value of the dependent variable (Y) is 117.462. Furthermore, the regression coefficient for variable X (MAAS) is -0.443, which is negative. This means that for every one-unit increase in the X variable, the Y variable is predicted to decrease by 0.443 units.

Next, the hypothesis test was conducted using the t-test and based on the significance level. The results of the t-test are shown in Table 4. The t-value obtained is -2.166. Therefore, the decision will be based on a negative value. Here's how to calculate the t-table value first. $df = N - k = 40 - 2 = 38$. If $\alpha = 0.05 / 2 = 0.025$. Referring to the t-distribution table, the critical t-value is 2.024. Since the calculated t-value is $-2.166 < -2.024$, we reject H_0 and accept H_1 —meaning that variable X has an effect on variable Y.

Furthermore, based on the significance value, the result is 0.037, which means the Sig. value is less than 0.05. This implies that H_0 is rejected, H_1 is accepted, and there is an effect. Thus, it can be concluded that this study reveals a significant negative relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) score and stress levels. Specifically, the higher the MAAS score, the lower the level of stress experienced. Conversely, the lower the MAAS score, the higher the level of stress experienced.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted with 40 respondents. The respondents were Guidance and Counseling students who were in the process of writing their theses or had experience writing them. Although the study initially used a saturation sampling technique with 42 respondents, in practice, 40 respondents provided complete responses. The respondents in this study had diverse academic statuses, including those who were still struggling to complete Chapters 1 through 5 and those who graduated on time.

Based on the results of the study, the findings indicate that the MAAS score has a significant negative effect on stress levels. This means that the higher a student's level of mindfulness while writing their thesis, the lower their stress levels will be. Conversely, a low level of mindfulness while writing a thesis will increase the stress experienced. Thus, it can be concluded that the MAAS score can predict the stress experienced by students. Students with sufficient mindfulness do not get caught up in repetitive thoughts about failure, allowing them to focus more on solutions rather than anxiety.

The results of the analysis show that the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is 11%. Although mindfulness's contribution as a predictor of stress stands at 11%, the resulting negative effect remains a crucial finding in the psychological dynamics of college students. The researchers argue that this effect is closely related to an individual's ability to manage attention. Students with high MAAS scores tend to be able to deal with thesis-related "stressors"—such as repeated revisions and pressure from their advisors—in a more objective manner. Consequently, they are able to accept every obstacle without placing excessive negative judgment on themselves. This capacity for present-moment awareness prevents students from becoming trapped in anxiety about the future, such as the fear of failing or concerns about facing their thesis defense.

Theoretically, the results of this study support the view (Brown & Ryan, 2003) that mindfulness is an effective form of self-regulation for coping with mental stress. Furthermore, a study (Wahyudi et al., 2020:2) states that mindfulness is a psychological process that can change the way individuals consciously respond to unavoidable realities. This aligns with the benefits of mindfulness as described in the book **Introduction to Mindfulness**; mindfulness practices generally make a significant contribution to enhancing an individual's effectiveness in responding to various difficult or complex situations. In addition to fostering inner peace, this intervention also helps optimize focus and concentration while reducing the negative effects caused by mental and emotional stress (Maulinda & Rahayu, 2022:105). In the context of the 2021

Guidance and Counseling students, mindfulness serves as an “internal shield” that helps them regulate negative emotions. Furthermore, mindfulness also helps increase full awareness—meaning that students are aware of the reality they are facing without judging themselves—and enables them to shift their perspective, thereby reducing negative impacts and fostering inner calm when facing stress. The awareness of being fully present in the moment helps students manage negative emotions and academic stress in a more adaptive way, whether they are currently enrolled or have already graduated.

Based on the results of this research and analysis, it can be better understood that the stress levels experienced by students fall into the moderate-to-high category. This phenomenon indicates that the process of preparing a final thesis is not merely a routine academic burden but has reached a crisis stage for the majority of students. As defined by Budisiwi (2024:76–77), a crisis is an uncomfortable condition faced by an individual that arises suddenly because the person is unable to resolve existing problems. In this context, the demands of the thesis at Pancasakti University in Tegal become an event that threatens students’ psychological well-being when they feel unable to cope with their problems. This is where the crucial role of mindfulness is found. The research analysis shows that students with low levels of mindfulness tend to become trapped in these crisis characteristics, feeling insecure about their future and powerless in the face of revisions. However, students with high levels of mindfulness are able to break this cycle of crisis. By being fully present in the moment, students no longer view their thesis as a threat to their well-being, but rather as a challenge that can be managed step by step.

This can be seen in students who have graduated on time, which suggests that they were able to navigate and cope well with periods of crisis or stress during the thesis writing process. In contrast, students who have not yet graduated are not necessarily unable to cope with periods of stress or crisis during the thesis writing process; rather, the ways in which they cope with the various factors contributing to stress during this time vary, as do their levels of mindfulness.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research indicating that mindfulness interventions can significantly stabilize the psychological well-being of students working on their final projects. As explained in Ilmayasari’s (2022) study, the research identified a negative correlation between MAAS scores and academic stress among students writing their theses. Thus, this study demonstrates that increasing MAAS levels can help students reduce stress while completing their final projects (Mananna, 2024:34). In line with this, a study by Yuliana et al. (2022:1) concluded that MAAS scores can be utilized to minimize stress levels among graduating students. This was further reinforced by Mananna (2024:29–30), whose research results showed a significant negative correlation between MAAS scores and academic stress.

This indicates that an increase in MAAS levels contributes significantly to a reduction in academic stress levels among students. It also shows that internal factors—namely, how students perceive and are aware of their thoughts—play an important role in determining stress levels, in addition to the academic workload itself. Although this study did not aim to reduce or lower the stress levels experienced by students while writing their theses, it did aim to demonstrate that MAAS measurements can be used as a predictor of stress. The findings show a negative correlation between MAAS measurements and stress levels, which implies that MAAS measurements can serve as a predictor of stress levels. Thus, the finding that mindfulness is a significant predictor of stress demonstrates that an individual’s ability to remain mindful and accept situations without judgment is key to preventing academic crises from escalating into permanent mental breakdowns. As future counselors, this understanding is crucial for Guidance and Counseling students so that they not only graduate academically but also develop the resilience to face future crises.

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This study concludes that the results of the data analysis indicate a significant negative relationship between mindfulness and stress levels ($t = -2.166$, $p\text{-value} = 0.037$), with a contribution of 11%. These findings demonstrate that mindfulness, as measured by the MAAS, serves as an important predictor of academic stress; the higher a student’s level of mindfulness, the lower the stress levels experienced during the thesis writing process. Conversely, lower MAAS scores are associated with increased stress levels during the thesis writing process.

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