

End of College, Start of Stress? Let's Discover the Role of Soft Skills and Self Confidence!

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of soft skills and self-confidence on students' stress levels as they approach graduation. Using a quantitative method, data were collected from 115 university students through a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring soft skills, self-confidence, and stress. The data were processed using SPSS with multiple regression, t-test, and F-test to examine both the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables. The results show that self-confidence has a significant positive effect on students' stress levels, indicating that students with higher self-confidence tend to experience greater psychological pressure due to high expectations and motivation to perform well. In contrast, soft skills do not show a significant effect when tested individually, although both variables together are proven to significantly influence stress levels. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 23.2% of stress variation is explained by soft skills and self-confidence, while the rest is influenced by other factors not examined in this study. These findings suggest that stress among final-year students may be a form of positive stress (eustress) that encourages preparation for future professional challenges. The study implies the importance of not only developing students' competencies but also providing emotional support and stress management strategies.

Keywords:

stress level, soft skills, self confidence, final year students

Introduction

The college period is a crucial phase in students' lives, marked by academic and non-academic experiences that shape their character and competence. The pre graduation stage is particularly challenging, as students face various demands such as completing final projects, comprehensive exams, administrative tasks, and social pressure from family and peers. These factors often trigger stress, which can affect mental health, academic performance, and readiness for employment. Therefore, it is important to identify factors influencing stress levels, particularly soft skills and self-confidence.

Soft skills, including communication, teamwork, time management, critical thinking, and interpersonal abilities, are essential for both academic and professional success. Romanenko (2024) emphasizes that soft skills are as crucial as hard skills for career success. Students with strong soft skills can better manage academic demands, communicate with supervisors, and resolve conflicts. Chen and Lee (2025) found that students with strong problem-solving and social competence experience lower stress. However, in Indonesia, the development of soft skills remains limited because higher education still focuses primarily on hard skills (Krisantia, 2021).

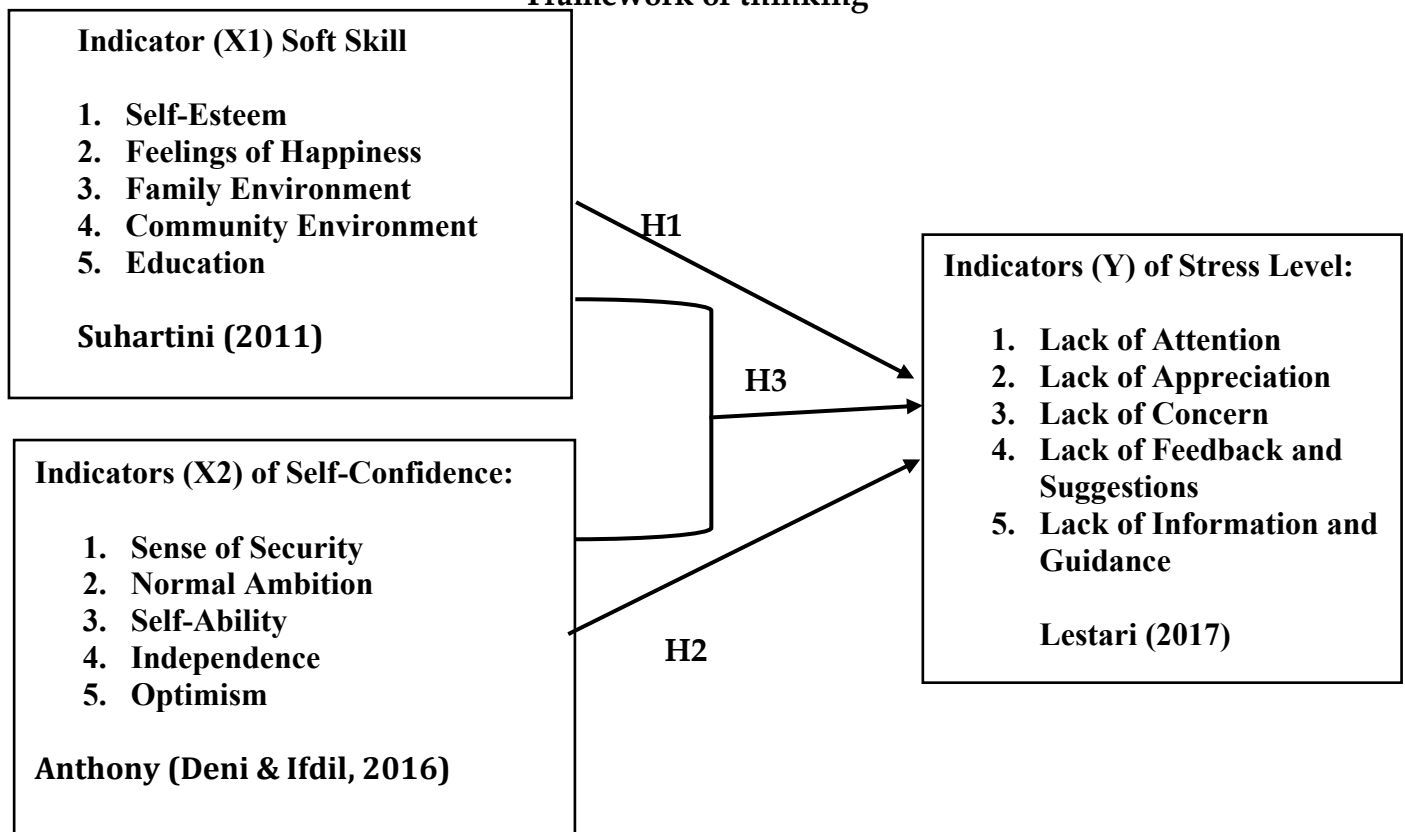
Another significant psychological factor is self confidence the belief in one's ability to handle challenges and achieve goals. Confident students tend to be more optimistic, resilient, and emotionally stable. Galanakis et al. (2016) found a negative correlation between self-confidence and stress levels. Winarsunu et al. (2023) revealed that life-skill training programs can improve self-esteem and reduce anxiety and stress. Moreover, Silitonga (2025) found that soft skills mediate the relationship between self-confidence and psychological well-being.

Both variables are interrelated in influencing student stress. Soft skills serve as practical coping tools, while self-confidence provides the psychological foundation to apply them effectively. According to Lazarus and Folkman's appraisal stress theory, stress occurs when environmental demands exceed personal resources soft skills and self-confidence act as internal resources that help students cope.

WHO (2022) reported that 37–53% of students worldwide, including in Indonesia, experience moderate to high stress levels due to academic and social pressure. Thus, studying the influence of soft skills and self confidence on student stress is both theoretically and practically relevant. Practically, this study's findings can help universities design programs that enhance students' soft skills and confidence through training, mentoring, and counseling to prepare them for graduation and maintain psychological well-being.

Theoretical Framework

Framework of thinking



Soft skills and self confidence are two crucial factors that influence students' stress levels as they approach graduation. According to Suhartini (2011), soft skills encompass various aspects such as self-esteem, positive emotions, family environment, social environment, and education. Mastery of soft skills enables individuals to better adapt to social and academic demands, communicate effectively, and build harmonious relationships with others. However, during the period leading up to graduation, students with strong soft skills may actually experience increased stress due to their heightened self-awareness of greater academic and professional responsibilities. With strong interpersonal abilities, they often become more sensitive to both self-expectations and external expectations, which can create psychological pressure. Therefore, this study assumes that the higher the mastery of soft skills, the higher the level of stress experienced by students, although this stress can be positive (eustress) and serve as motivation for better achievement.

In addition, self confidence also plays a significant role in shaping how individuals respond to pressure. Anthony (as cited in Deni & Ifdil, 2016) explains that self-confidence consists of a sense of security, normal ambition, self competence, independence, and optimism. Students with a high level of self-confidence possess a strong awareness of their abilities and responsibilities. In the context of preparing for graduation, this may lead to positive stress because confident individuals tend to set high goals and expectations for their academic results and future careers. They are driven to maintain their achievements and are reluctant to fail in meeting those expectations. Thus, the higher a student's self-confidence, the greater the likelihood of experiencing psychological pressure due to internal motivation to achieve success.

According to Lestari (2017), student stress levels can be observed through several indicators such as lack of attention, appreciation, concern, feedback, and guidance. In an academic context, stress arises when students feel burdened by final project demands, anxiety about the future, and the perception of insufficient emotional support. However, stress is not always detrimental; in certain amounts, it can serve as a driving force that encourages students to work harder and stay focused on their goals. Therefore, it is important to understand that the relationship between soft skills, self-confidence, and stress is not always suppressive but can be mutually reinforcing in shaping students' readiness to transition into the professional world.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the study formulates three main hypotheses. First, mastery of soft skills has a positive effect on students' stress levels before graduation (H1). Second, self-confidence has a positive effect on students' stress levels before graduation (H2). Third, mastery of soft skills and self-confidence simultaneously have a positive effect on students' stress levels before graduation (H3).

The assumed positive relationship in this study is based on the understanding that students with higher mastery of soft skills and self confidence tend to have greater awareness of their responsibilities, expectations, and life goals. This condition may trigger positive stress that is constructive and motivates them to continue growing both academically and personally.

Method

This study employs a quantitative research method aimed at analyzing the influence of soft skills and self confidence on students' stress levels as they approach graduation. The population in this study consists of university students, with a sample of 115 respondents obtained through the distribution of a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument.

The questionnaire was designed using a Likert scale to measure students' levels of soft skills, self-confidence, and stress. The collected data were then processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The statistical analyses applied include the regression test, t-test, and F-test to determine both the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables (soft skills and self-confidence) on the dependent variable (students' stress levels). In addition, the researcher calculated the coefficient of determination (R^2) to identify how much the independent variables contribute to explaining the variation in students' stress levels.

The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows for an objective, measurable, and systematic analysis of the relationships among variables and produces findings that can be explained based on data directly obtained from respondents.

Results

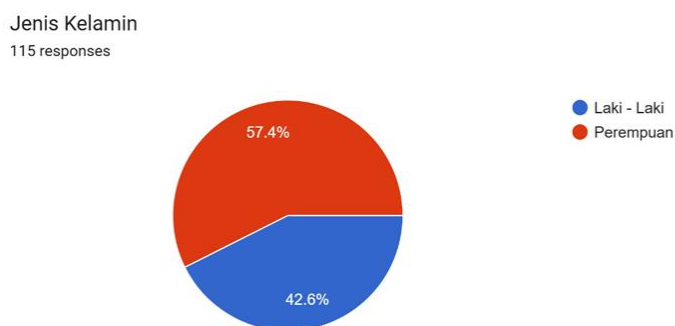


Figure 1. Respondent Gender

From the image above, it can be seen that the number of female respondents is higher than male respondents. Female respondents make up 57.4%, while male respondents account for 42.6% of the total 115 respondents. This indicates that female participation in this survey is higher than that of males.

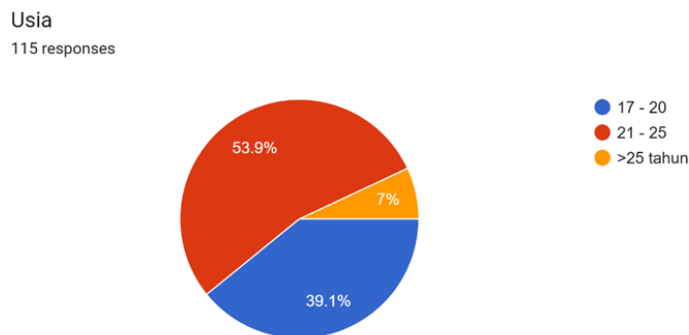


Figure 2. Respondent age

From the image above, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are aged 21–25 years, accounting for 53.9%. Meanwhile, respondents aged 17–20 years make up 39.1%, and 7% are over 25 years old. This indicates that most respondents belong to the younger age group, particularly those in the college age range.

Table 1. Simple Regression

X1 Against Y

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	18.529	4.526		4.094	<,001					
	Soft Skill	.515	.109	.405	4.708	<,001	.405	.405	.405	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Stress Level

Based on the table above, the Soft Skill variable has a positive and significant effect on Stress Level, with a coefficient value of 0.515 and a significance level of < 0.001 . This means that each increase in Soft Skill is followed by an increase in Stress Level by 0.515 units. The t-value of $4.708 > t\text{-table}$ indicates a significant effect, and the VIF value of 1.000 shows that there is no multicollinearity problem.

Table 2. Simple Regression

X2 Against Y

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	15.637	4.208		3.716	<.001					
	Self Confidence	.586	.102	.477	5.763	<.001	.477	.477	.477	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Stress Level

Based on the table above, the Self Confidence variable has a positive and significant effect on Stress Level, with a coefficient value of 0.586 and a significance level of < 0.001 . This means that each increase in Self Confidence is followed by an increase in Stress Level by 0.586 units. The t-value of $5.763 > t\text{-table}$ indicates a significant effect, and the VIF value of 1.000 shows that there is no multicollinearity problem.

Table 3. Multiple Regression

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	14.176	4.573		3.100	.002					
	Soft Skill	.132	.161	.104	.822	.413	.405	.077	.068	.428	2.336
	Self Confidence	.489	.156	.398	3.144	.002	.477	.285	.260	.428	2.336

a. Dependent Variable: Stress Level

Based on the multiple regression table above, it can be seen that the Self-Confidence variable has a significant effect on Stress Level, with a significance value of $0.002 < 0.05$ and a Beta value of 0.398, indicating a positive relationship. This means that higher self-confidence tends to be associated with higher stress levels. Meanwhile, the Soft Skill variable does not have a significant effect on stress level, as its significance value is $0.413 > 0.05$.

Table 4. t-Test

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.176	4.573		3.100	.002
	Soft Skill	.132	.161	.104	.822	.413
	Self Confidence	.489	.156	.398	3.144	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Stress Level

Based on the t-test results in the table above, it can be seen that the Soft Skill variable has a significance value of $0.413 > 0.05$, indicating that this variable does not have a significant effect on stress level. Meanwhile, the Self Confidence variable has a significance value of $0.002 < 0.05$, meaning that it has a significant effect on stress level. Thus, only Self Confidence is proven to have a significant influence on Stress Level, while Soft Skill shows no significant effect.

Table 5. F Test

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1407.883	2	703.941	16.894	.000 ^b
	Residual	4666.778	112	41.668		
	Total	6074.661	114			

a. Dependent Variable: Stress Level

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self Confidence, Soft Skill

Based on the F-test results in the table above, the significance value is $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that the regression model used is simultaneously significant. In other words, the variables Self Confidence and Soft Skill together have a significant effect on Stress Level. This shows that both independent variables collectively can explain the variations in the respondents' stress levels.

Table 6. Test Of the Coefficient Of Determination

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.481 ^a	.232	.218	6.455	1.633

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Confidence, Soft Skill

b. Dependent Variable: Stress Level

Based on the results of the coefficient of determination (R^2) test in the table above, the R Square value is 0.232, which means that 23.2% of the variation in Stress Level can be explained by the variables Self Confidence and Soft Skill. Meanwhile, the remaining 76.8% is influenced by other factors not included in this research model. The R value of 0.481 indicates a fairly strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables, while the Durbin-Watson value of 1.633 indicates that there is no autocorrelation problem in the regression model.

Discussion

The results of this study show that self-confidence has a significant positive effect on students' stress levels, while soft skills do not have a significant effect when tested individually. This means that students with higher self-confidence tend to experience higher levels of stress as they approach graduation. This finding is in line with the idea that confident individuals often set high personal standards and feel responsible

for achieving their goals, which can lead to increased psychological pressure (Anthony in Deni & Ifdil, 2016). In other words, their stress does not necessarily come from fear or anxiety, but from strong internal motivation to succeed.

On the other hand, soft skills were found to have no significant effect on stress levels when tested separately. This result suggests that good communication, adaptability, or social interaction ability alone may not directly trigger stress. However, based on the F-test results, soft skills still contribute when combined with self-confidence, meaning that the combination of both variables can collectively influence stress levels. This supports previous assumptions that stress is multidimensional and influenced by more than one factor.

The findings of this study support the theoretical view of Lestari (2017), which states that students may experience stress due to academic expectations and the feeling of being unprepared for future responsibilities. In this context, stress can be seen as positive stress (eustress), because it may function as motivation for students to keep improving their performance and prepare themselves for entering the professional world.

From a practical perspective, this study implies that universities should not only develop students' technical and soft skills, but also help them manage self-expectations and emotional pressure, especially during the final year. Guidance programs or stress management workshops could be useful in helping students maintain balance between confidence and emotional stability.

However, this study has limitations, particularly because it only explains 23.2% of the variation in stress levels, meaning that other factors such as family pressure, financial issues, academic workload, or future uncertainty were not included in this research model. Future research is suggested to include more psychological or external variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that self-confidence has a positive and significant effect on students' stress levels as they approach graduation. This means that the higher a student's level of self-confidence, the greater the likelihood of experiencing psychological pressure. This occurs because confident individuals tend to set high standards and expectations for themselves and feel responsible for achieving success.

Meanwhile, soft skills do not show a significant partial influence on stress levels. This indicates that the ability to communicate, adapt, or interact socially does not directly trigger stress on its own. However, the simultaneous test shows that soft skills still contribute when combined with self-confidence, confirming that student stress is multidimensional and influenced by multiple interacting factors.

Overall, this study suggests that stress experienced before graduation is not always negative. In many cases, it can manifest as eustress, or positive stress, which motivates students to stay focused, work harder, and prepare themselves for entering the professional world. Therefore, universities should not only focus on developing students' technical and soft skill competencies but also provide support to help them manage self-expectations and emotional pressure through counseling services or structured stress management programs.

This study has limitations, as it only explains 23.2% of the variation in stress levels. Other factors such as family pressure, financial conditions, academic workload, and uncertainty about the future were not included in this research model. Future studies are recommended to incorporate additional psychological and external variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

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