

Coping with Thesis Writing: An Analysis of Stress Management Techniques in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress among students at Satya Wacana Christian University. In an academic environment where students face immense pressure, particularly during the thesis-writing phase, understanding how coping strategies impact stress levels is crucial. The study involves 145 students, predominantly female, from different faculties, who were surveyed using the Academic Stress Scale and Problem-Focused Coping Scale. The research adopts a quantitative approach with a correlational design to analyze the relationship between coping mechanisms and stress levels. Key findings indicate a diverse range of coping capabilities among students, with a majority scoring medium on the Problem-Focused Coping scale. However, a significant minority demonstrates high coping abilities, suggesting variable stress management skills as per Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model. Alarming, 63% of the participants scored high in the Academic Stress category, underlining the prevalent stress challenges faced by students. Statistical analysis reveals a non-normal distribution of both coping and stress levels, hinting at unique stressors in the university environment. A significant negative correlation between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress, as shown by Spearman's rho results, supports the hypothesis that effective coping strategies can alleviate stress. The study contributes to the existing literature on stress management in academic settings by highlighting the protective role of Problem-Focused Coping against Academic Stress. It underscores the importance of developing robust coping strategies to aid students in managing academic pressures, particularly during critical phases like thesis writing. The findings also suggest the potential for interventions to enhance Problem-Focused Coping strategies, thereby supporting student well-being and academic success.

Keywords: Academic Stress; Problem-Focused Coping; Thesis Writing; Student Well-Being; Stress Management Strategies



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INTRODUCTION

University students are entrusted with significant responsibilities concerning their academic assignments and tasks, with a clear expectation to complete them within the stipulated deadlines. This pursuit of timely task completion extends to the overarching goal of concluding their academic studies on schedule. In the culminating phase of their coursework, students are obliged to undertake a final year project or thesis, which is a mandatory graduation requirement for the conferral of their bachelor's degrees. The thesis is an individual endeavor, where students select distinct phenomena to study, employing diverse research methodologies. The majority of students perceive the thesis as a daunting task, further compounded by the mandate to publish their work in scholarly journals. This requirement often exacerbates the stress associated with thesis composition (Putri & Arif, 2019). Academic stress related to coursework and thesis obligations, defined in the study by Munir et al. (2015) as a state of anxiety, worry, pressure, and tension

stemming from difficulties in managing deadlines and exams (Azizah & Satwika, 2021), can lead to detrimental effects such as sleep disturbances, eating disorders, and potentially hazardous substance abuse (Yusuf, 2020).

The phenomenon of academic stress is not confined to a single institution; it is a widespread issue affecting students at various stages of their educational journey, impacting their personality, emotional well-being, and physical health (García-Ros, Pérez-González, & Tomás, 2018). A study by Putri and Arif (2019) on Stikes Ngudi Waluyo Ungaran students revealed that 41.7% experienced moderate stress levels, exhibiting symptoms such as irritability, difficulty relaxing, and restlessness. Similar findings were echoed by Sipayung (2016), indicating a high prevalence of stress among thesis-writing students. In the context of Satya Wacana Christian University, academic stress is a palpable concern during the thesis-writing process, as evidenced by interviews conducted by the author in March 2023 with students who reported stress-related symptoms such as sleep disruption and concentration difficulties, along with physical ailments like headaches and gastric issues.

These students outlined various challenges encountered in thesis composition, ranging from topic selection, scheduling meetings with advisors, sourcing relevant literature, to motivational lapses and procrastination, further complicated by fears of negative feedback from supervisors. These difficulties are not only logistical but also psychological, as the fear of criticism can significantly hinder a student's ability to progress effectively through the different stages of thesis development. This creates an environment where students might feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the project and their perceived lack of preparedness. This aligns with findings from Imandiri, Widyastuti, and Jonosewojo (2017), which highlighted obstacles such as finding themes, appropriate measurement tools, suitable samples, and the iterative nature of revisions and supervisory meetings. Their research suggests that these challenges are pervasive and can significantly impact the student's ability to produce a high-quality thesis within the expected time frame.

Stress among thesis-writing students is influenced by both internal factors—gender, socioeconomic status, personality traits, coping strategies, ethnicity, and intelligence—and external factors, such as task demands and social environment (Gunawati & Listiara, 2006). The stress can lead to perceptions of academic frustration, conflict, pressure, and anxiety (Yikealo, Yemane, & Karvinen, 2018). Coping strategies, as described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), play a crucial role in managing stress, with problem-focused coping being one effective approach, which involves direct actions towards solving the stress-inducing issue. Research by Dela (2019) and Iqramah, Nurhasanah, and Nurbaity (2018) has shown that students often adopt problem-focused coping strategies, with varying degrees of engagement.

Furthermore, studies by Saputri and Wulanyani (2019) and Azahra (2017) have demonstrated a significant negative correlation between problem-focused coping and stress levels during thesis composition, suggesting that effective coping strategies can alleviate academic stress. This implies that when students engage in problem-focused coping, they actively seek solutions to

their stressors, such as better time management or seeking support, which can lead to a decrease in their overall stress levels. These findings emphasize the importance of equipping students with the skills to employ problem-focused coping strategies, as they can be critical in managing the challenges associated with academic pursuits, particularly in the demanding process of thesis writing. Given the vulnerability of students to academic stress, particularly in the context of mandatory thesis publication, and the potential for this stress to disrupt daily life, this research will examine the relationship between problem-focused coping and academic stress.

METHOD

This research employs a quantitative approach using a correlational design to explore the relationship between problem-focused coping and academic stress among Satya Wacana Christian University students who are in the process of completing their final projects or theses. This methodology allows for the measurement of the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables, providing a statistical basis for understanding how problem-focused coping strategies might influence levels of academic stress.

Participants

The participants of this study are 145 students from Satya Wacana Christian University, selected through purposive sampling techniques. The participants are characterized as active students from the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts who are currently working on their final projects or theses. This sample size is considered sufficient to provide a representation of the student population while ensuring the manageability and feasibility of the study.

Instruments

Data collection for this research is conducted using a Likert scale model for the questionnaires. The Academic Stress Scale, adapted from the work of Alimah and Khoirunnisa (2017), and the Problem-Focused Coping Scale, adapted from the research by El Roy and Soetjningsih (2022), have been modified to fit the context of the current study. The reliability of these scales has been established with Cronbach's Alpha calculations, yielding a coefficient of 0.827 for the Academic Stress Scale, which includes 28 items, and a coefficient of 0.943 for the Problem-Focused Coping Scale, which consists of 12 items. The high alpha values suggest that the instruments are reliable measures of the respective constructs.

Data Analysis

The study will employ descriptive analysis to categorize the levels of problem-focused coping and academic stress as measured by the scales. Hypothesis testing will be conducted using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to determine the strength and nature of the association between the variables. Prior to this, tests for normality and linearity will be conducted to ensure the appropriateness of the correlational analysis. This statistical approach is chosen because it does

not assume normality of the data distribution and is suitable for ordinal data, which is typical of Likert scale responses. The outcome of the analysis will provide insights into the prevalence of academic stress and the utilization of problem-focused coping strategies among the students. The results will also inform whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the students' stress levels and their coping strategies, which could have implications for academic support services.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The investigation into the relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress among students at Satya Wacana Christian University is a valuable addition to the body of research on stress management strategies in academic settings. The sample of 145 students, with a higher proportion of female participants (64.8%) compared to male participants (35.2%), is reflective of global higher education trends which often show a higher enrollment rate for females (UNESCO, 2019). The cohort distribution, with a majority from the year 2019 (74.48%), may indicate a particular stress pattern or coping behavior unique to that year's academic or social environment, which could be an interesting avenue for further research. The varied timeframe for completing final assignments shows a clear trend towards longer completion times, which might be indicative of either a more rigorous academic program or potential challenges in the students' Problem-Focused Coping strategies.

The Problem-Focused Coping scale scores ranging from 42 to 85 highlight the diverse coping capabilities among students. With 68% of participants scoring in the medium range, it suggests a general adequacy in coping strategies employed by the students. However, the presence of a significant minority (21%) with high coping scores points towards a subset of students who are particularly adept at managing stress. This aligns with the Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping, which posits that individuals vary in their assessment of stressors and their response to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The Academic Stress categorization reflects the prevalence of high stress among the students, with 63% scoring in the high-stress category. This is an alarming statistic that raises concerns about the well-being of students and the potential impact on their academic performance and mental health. High levels of stress in students have been linked to decreased academic performance and increased vulnerability to mental health issues (Stallman, 2010).

The statistical findings of non-normal distribution for both Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress suggest that these variables deviate from what would be expected in a typical student population. This could be due to external factors unique to the university environment or the specific demographic of the participants. The linear relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress, as evidenced by the ANOVA results, reinforces the theory that effective coping strategies can mitigate the impact of stressors on students. Spearman's rho correlation results indicate a significant negative relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress, confirming hypotheses from previous studies by Saputri and Wulanyani

(2019), and Basith et al. (2021). These findings underscore the protective role of Problem-Focused Coping against Academic Stress, suggesting that interventions aimed at enhancing these coping skills may be beneficial for students.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Demographic Data	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	51	35.2%
Female	94	64.8%
Total	145	100%
Cohort		
2018	33	22.76%
2019	108	74.48%
2020	4	2.76%
Total	145	100%
Time Taken to Complete Final Assignment		
1 Semester	8	5.52%
2 Semesters	23	15.86%
>2 Semesters	114	78.62%
Total	145	100%
Faculty		
Faculty of Theology	4	2.76%
Faculty of Languages and Arts	6	4.14%
Faculty of Psychology	83	57.24%
Faculty of Economics and Business	8	5.52%
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences	9	6.21%
Faculty of Law	6	4.14%
Faculty of Education and Teacher Training	5	3.45%
Faculty of Electronic Engineering and Computer	2	1.38%
Faculty of Information Technology	10	6.90%
Faculty of Social Sciences and Communication	12	8.28%
Total	145	100%

Table 2. Problem-Focused Coping Categorization

Interval	Category	N	Percentage (%)
$72 \leq x < 85$	High	30	21%
$57 \leq x < 71$	Medium	99	68%
$42 \leq x < 56$	Low	16	11%
Total		145	100%

Table 3. Academic Stress Categorization

Interval	Category	N	Percentage (%)
$66 \leq x < 86$	High	91	63%
$44 \leq x < 65$	Medium	37	25%
$22 \leq x < 43$	Low	17	12%
Total		145	100%

Table 4. Normality Test Results

	KS-Z	Sig.	Description
Problem-Focused Coping	0.109	0.000	Not Normal
Academic Stress	0.186	0.000	Not Normal

Table 5. Linearity Test Results

	F	Sig.	Description
Linearity	85.892	0.000	Linear

Table 6. Hypothesis Test Results

Variables	rx _y	Sig.	Description
Problem-focused coping - Academic stress	-0.469	0.000	$p < 0.05 \rightarrow$ Significant

The discussion of the results situates this study within the broader context of existing literature. For instance, the findings are in line with Raharjo and Prahara, who also identified a negative correlation between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress. This body of research collectively advocates for the importance of developing robust Problem-Focused Coping strategies to alleviate Academic Stress among university students. The average score for Problem-Focused Coping being 64.81 suggests that while the students are somewhat effective at managing stress, there is room for improvement. The high average score of 64.94 for Academic Stress implies that despite some level of coping skills, students are still experiencing considerable stress, which could be impacting their overall well-being and academic output. This is consistent with findings from Chen and Lin (2009) that stress can arise from various academic-related interactions and concerns. The analysis provided by the research, indicating that Problem-Focused Coping accounts for 21.99% of the variance in Academic Stress, offers a significant insight into the extent of the impact that coping strategies can have on stress levels. However, it also leaves a large percentage of the variance unexplained, which suggests that there are other significant factors at play. These could include personal characteristics, environmental factors, and the nature of the academic stressors themselves, as suggested by research into academic stress (Misra & McKean, 2000).

The limitations noted in the study, such as the small participant pool and the use of online data collection methods, do present challenges to the generalizability of the findings. However, they also reflect the growing trend in research to utilize digital platforms for data collection, which

has been expedited by the global shift towards online interaction due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Browning et al., 2021). The study provides valuable insights into the coping mechanisms employed by students at Satya Wacana Christian University and the prevalence of Academic Stress within this population. It contributes to the growing evidence of the importance of Problem-Focused Coping in mitigating Academic Stress and highlights the need for further research to explore additional factors influencing stress and coping in academic settings. The findings also point to the potential benefits of interventions aimed at enhancing Problem-Focused Coping strategies to support student well-being and academic success.

CONCLUSION

The study on the relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress at Satya Wacana Christian University offers significant insights into stress management in academia. With a sample of 145 students, predominantly female, it reflects global trends in higher education and suggests a potential unique stress pattern for the 2019 cohort. The findings reveal diverse coping capabilities among students, with a majority in the medium range but a significant minority exhibiting high coping skills. This aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model, emphasizing individual variability in stress perception and response. The high prevalence of academic stress (63% in the high-stress category) is concerning, indicating potential impacts on student well-being and performance. The study shows a non-normal distribution in both coping and stress levels, suggesting unique university or demographic factors. A significant negative correlation between coping and stress, supported by Spearman's rho, echoes previous research, highlighting the protective role of Problem-Focused Coping. While the average scores suggest some effectiveness in stress management, there's room for improvement. The study, while limited by its small sample size and online data collection method, underscores the importance of enhancing coping strategies to support student well-being and academic success, suggesting further research in this area.

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