SELF-REWARD BEHAVIOR AS A STRATEGY TO REDUCE ACADEMIC STRESS: EVIDENCE FROM EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress is a pervasive issue among university students, driven by increasing academic demands, high expectations, and insufficient coping mechanisms. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between self-reward behavior and academic stress among sixth-semester students at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta. Employing a quantitative correlational design, the research involved 212 respondents selected through purposive probability sampling. Data were collected via online questionnaires utilizing validated and reliable Likert and Guttman scales. The findings revealed that 80.2% of students reported high self-reward behavior, while 51.4% experienced high academic stress. Statistical analysis using Spearman's rank correlation indicated a significant but weak negative relationship between self-reward and academic stress ($r = -0.207$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that greater self-reward behavior is associated with reduced academic stress. In conclusion, while self-reward alone may not fully alleviate academic stress, it serves as a potential coping strategy that can enhance emotional well-being and support academic adjustment. The study contributes to the literature by highlighting the contextual effectiveness of self-reward in education and recommends further research to examine additional coping strategies and the long-term effects of self-reward interventions in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Coping Strategies, Higher Education, Self-Reward, Student Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

Education is a transformative process involving complex interactions between students, peers, and educators. Particularly for university students, this interaction is vital for both academic achievement and personal development. According to Siregar (cited in Putri, 2019), interactions within the academic environment significantly contribute to shaping students' experiences. However, these interactions often lead to academic stress, negatively impacting students' mental health and academic performance. Academic stress refers to psychological distress resulting from academic demands surpassing students' coping capacities, characterized by anxiety, emotional instability, and cognitive impairment (Gadzella & Masten, 2005; Thawabieh & Naour, 2012). Several factors contribute to academic stress, including heavy workload, time management issues, academic expectations, and achievement motivation (Joshi & Kiran, 2019; Rahmawati et al., 2021). Notably, high levels of academic stress can lead to severe outcomes such as burnout, mental health deterioration, and reduced academic motivation. At Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta, particularly in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), students report increasing academic stress as they progress through semesters. The sixth semester, characterized by heavy workloads involving internships, seminars, and research proposals, presents particularly heightened stress levels (Rantelili et al., 2024). This phenomenon underscores the necessity for effective coping strategies. Self-reward, or the practice of providing rewards or treats to oneself after accomplishing specific goals or tasks, has gained attention as a coping strategy. According to Wahyuningsari et al. (2022), self-reward can enhance motivation and reduce stress by reinforcing positive behaviors and providing emotional relief. Nonetheless, its effectiveness in academic contexts remains underexplored.

The main problem identified in this research is the significant level of academic stress among FKIP students, exacerbated by insufficient coping mechanisms. While self-reward is commonly practiced, its role in managing academic stress remains unclear. Thus, exploring the relationship between self-reward

behavior and academic stress could identify effective coping strategies to mitigate the adverse impacts of stress.

Empirical evidence suggests that self-reward acts as positive reinforcement, motivating individuals to maintain desired behaviors and reduce stress (Kinanti, 2019). Edirisooriya (2014) and Ardiyani (2015) reinforce that regular self-reward increases intrinsic motivation and emotional well-being, ultimately improving academic performance and reducing stress levels. Therefore, fostering self-reward behaviors could enhance students' academic coping strategies.

Research by Wijayanto (2023) found no significant relationship between self-reward and blended learning efficacy, suggesting self-reward might be context-dependent. Conversely, Sagita, Daharnis, and Syahniar (2017) highlight multiple stress-inducing factors among students, emphasizing the importance of effective coping mechanisms, including self-reward. Despite this, research specifically addressing the efficacy of self-reward in reducing academic stress, particularly within the Indonesian university context, remains limited. Furthermore, preliminary observations at Universitas Sanata Dharma indicate that students frequently engage in self-reward, yet its impact on their stress levels and academic outcomes has not been systematically examined. This gap underlines the necessity of this study to clarify the relationship between self-reward behaviors and academic stress management among university students.

This study aims to examine the relationship between self-reward behaviors and academic stress among FKIP students at Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta. Specifically, the objectives include assessing students' self-reward levels, measuring their academic stress, and identifying correlations between these variables. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on self-reward as a coping strategy specifically tailored to academic stress among university students. Prior research predominantly investigated stress management broadly, without explicitly linking it to self-reward behaviors in academic settings. Based on prior literature, it is hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between self-reward behaviors and academic stress, with effective self-reward practices potentially mitigating stress levels. The study scope is restricted to FKIP students of the 2022 cohort at Universitas Sanata Dharma, focusing on sixth-semester students, who experience elevated academic pressures and stress.

METHOD
Research Design
This research adopts a quantitative correlational approach designed to investigate the association between self-reward behavior and academic stress among students. The correlational method was selected to determine the presence and strength of a statistically significant relationship between these two variables without manipulating any conditions.

Research Location and Time
The study was conducted at Universitas Sanata Dharma, specifically across Campus I, Campus III, and Campus V of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), located in Yogyakarta. The data collection process was carried out in February 2025, utilizing an online questionnaire distributed to respondents through Google Forms.

Subjects and Sampling
The target population for this study included all students from the 2022 cohort enrolled at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sanata Dharma, totaling 500 individuals. To achieve representativeness, purposive probability sampling was used, and the sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula where is the sample size, is the total population (500 students), and is the margin of error (set at 5%). Based on this formula, the required minimum sample size was calculated as 221 students.

Measurement Scales
The study utilized two measurement instruments with distinct scales. The self-reward variable was measured using a Likert scale comprising 46 statements, while the academic stress variable was measured with a Guttman scale comprising 29 statements. Responses on the Likert scale ranged from strongly disagree (4), disagree (3), agree (2), to strongly agree (1). The self-reward scale was structured around four

dimensions: recognition of achievement (items 1–15), self-appreciation (items 1–16), function of self-reward (items 1–10), and frequency of implementation (items 1–5). The academic stress scale encompassed five dimensions: pressure from study (items 1–12), workload (items 13–16), worry about grades (items 17–22), self-expectation (items 23–26), and despondency (items 27–29).

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Validity was evaluated using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation method at a significance level of 0.05. All items demonstrated correlation coefficients greater than the critical value (r-table = 0.135, N = 212), confirming their validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with acceptable reliability defined as an alpha greater than 0.70. The self-reward scale achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.889, indicating strong internal consistency, while the academic stress scale had an even higher reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.961, reflecting excellent internal consistency (see Table 3.2).

Table 1. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Standard Reliability	Interpretation
Self Reward	0.889	0.70	Reliable
Academic Stress Level	0.961	0.70	Highly Reliable

Item discrimination analyses identified specific items suitable for final data analysis. For the self-reward scale, items 8, 17, and 24 were excluded, resulting in the retention of items 1-7, 9-16, 18-23, and 25-46. For the academic stress scale, item 17 was discarded, leaving items 1-16 and 18-29 for further analysis (see Table 3.3).

Table 2. Item Discrimination Results

Variable	Items Retained	Items Excluded
Self Reward	1-7, 9-16, 18-23, 25-46	8, 17, 24
Academic Stress Level	1-16, 18-29	17

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Sample Characteristics

The respondents were students from various study programs within FKIP batch 2022 at Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta. Distribution by study program is summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 3. Distribution by Study Program

Study Program	Frequency	Percentage
Guidance and Counseling	26	12.3%
Primary School Teacher Education	21	9.9%
English Education	10	4.7%
Economic Education (Accounting Specialization)	37	17.5%
History Education	4	1.9%
Physics Education	11	5.2%
Biology Education	23	10.8%
Indonesian Language and Literature Education	28	13.2%
Mathematics Education	6	2.8%
Chemistry Education	16	7.5%
Economic Education (Economics Specialization)	10	4.7%
Catholic Religious Education	20	9.4%
Total	**212**	**100%**

From the table, the largest group of respondents came from Economic Education (Accounting Specialization) (17.5%), followed by Indonesian Language and Literature Education (13.2%) and Guidance and Counseling (12.3%). The smallest groups were History Education (1.9%) and Mathematics Education (2.8%). Based on Azwar's (2021) categorization method, the self-reward variable scores ranged from 43 to 172, resulting in the following categorization:

Descriptive Analysis

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Self Reward

Self Reward Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	4	1.9%
Medium	38	17.9%
High	170	80.2%
Total	**212**	**100%**

Most respondents exhibited a high level of self-reward (80.2%), indicating a widespread use of self-reward strategies among students.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Academic Stress

Academic Stress Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	64	30.2%
Medium	39	18.4%
High	109	51.4%
Total	**212**	**100%**

Over half of the students (51.4%) experienced high academic stress.

Hypothesis Testing

Spearman's Rank Correlation was utilized to examine the relationship between self-reward and academic stress:

Table 6. Spearman's Rank Correlation Results

Correlation	Self Reward	Academic Stress
Self Reward	1.000	-0.207
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
Academic Stress	-0.207	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.

The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of -0.207 ($p = 0.002$), signifying a weak but statistically significant negative correlation between self-reward and academic stress.

Self-Reward

The findings indicate a high prevalence of self-reward practices among students, which aligns with existing research suggesting that self-reward positively impacts emotional well-being and motivation (Kinanti, 2019; Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). However, the high self-reward frequency may also suggest potential issues related to excessive reward-seeking behaviors, highlighting the need for balanced practices.

Academic Stress

The dominance of high academic stress aligns with previous studies identifying multiple stressors among students, including workload, parental expectations, and extracurricular commitments (Joshi &

Kiran, 2019; Sagita, Daharnis, & Syahniar, 2017). This high stress level underscores the urgency for effective coping mechanisms within academic institutions.

Relationship Between Self Reward and Academic Stress

The negative correlation, though weak, implies that higher self-reward behaviors slightly mitigate academic stress, supporting the coping strategy role of self-reward (Edirisooriya, 2014; Ardiyani, 2015). This finding contrasts with Wijayanto's (2023) results on blended learning, indicating the context-dependent nature of self-reward's effectiveness. The complexity of self-reward as a coping mechanism necessitates further exploration, considering factors like reward magnitude and frequency to understand its efficacy fully. This study's contribution lies in identifying self-reward as a potential stress-management tool, guiding future research toward deeper exploration into how self-reward might be optimized within educational settings to improve student mental health and academic outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-reward behavior and academic stress among students of the 2022 cohort at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta. The core findings revealed that the majority of students exhibited high levels of self-reward (80.2%) as well as high academic stress (51.4%), with a statistically significant but weak negative correlation between self-reward and academic stress ($r = -0.207$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that increased self-reward behaviors are associated with lower academic stress levels. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge regarding stress management strategies in higher education, highlighting self-reward as a potential coping mechanism to improve emotional well-being and academic performance among university students, and laying the groundwork for future psychological interventions in academic settings.

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