

The Role Of Self-Esteem On Mental Toughness Of College Students

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Abstract

Pursuing higher education is a challenging journey that requires students to be active, independent, and capable of critical and creative thinking. This study aims to examine the influence of self-esteem on students' mental toughness. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 73 university students in Bandung, Indonesia. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression. The results showed that self-esteem has a significant positive relationship with mental toughness ($r = 0.699$, $p < .001$), indicating a strong correlation. Furthermore, self-esteem significantly predicts mental toughness, accounting for 48.9% of the variance ($R^2 = .489$). These findings suggest that higher levels of self-esteem are associated with higher mental toughness. This study highlights the importance of self-esteem as a key psychological factor in enhancing students' resilience in academic contexts.

Keywords: *Self-esteem, Mental toughnes, University students, Higher education, Confidence.*

INTRODUCTION

According to the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 22 of 1961, a university is a scientific institution that has the task of organizing education and teaching at a level above secondary school, and which provides education and teaching based on national culture and scientific methods. Students who pursue education at the university level are referred to as college students, who are usually between the ages of 18 and 25. Unlike education at other levels, the demands on college students are much more complex. Students are required to participate more actively and independently in the learning process and must possess critical and creative thinking skills to complete various academic tasks. As young adults entering adulthood, students face a range of complex challenges. In addition to high academic demands, students must also cope with significant social and emotional pressures. Various stressors such as adapting to a new environment, accumulating task loads, and personal issues often lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems. This aligns with research conducted by Handayani & Nirmalasari (2020), which found that 80.85% of 188 student respondents experienced moderate stress. According to research reported by Prasetio and Triwahyuni (2022), the prevalence of psychological disorders among students is quite high in several regions of Indonesia. For example, at one university in Jakarta, 12.7% of new students experienced psychological disorders; in Banda Aceh, Marthoenis et al. (2018) found that 47.7% of students experienced mild to severe depression and 27.4% experienced anxiety; while at a university in Bandung, Prasetio et al. (2019) reported that 79.5% of students experienced psychological disorders. Furthermore, stress also appears to be common among final-year students. Djoar and Anggarani (2024) found that a significant proportion of final-year students experienced moderate academic stress, with a percentage of 77%, and the most influential factor affecting their academic stress was motivation.

Given the various conditions faced by students, to successfully pursue their education, students require good self-management skills to manage problems so that they do not interfere with the learning process. One such skill is mental toughness. According to Pandiana, Kumar, Kannan, Gurusamy, & Lakshmi (2022), mental toughness is the ability to cope with pressure,

difficulties, and stress by overcoming failure. Mental toughness also reflects a state where individuals persist without giving up, possessing advantages in mental skills. Furthermore, Pandiana et al. (2022) also state that mental toughness has been proven to be associated with various important aspects such as better performance, progress toward achieving goals, stress tolerance, coping strategies, optimism, and self-reflection. Findings from a literature review by Thompson and Devine (2023) indicate a positive relationship between mental toughness and academic achievement in higher education. They also state that individuals with high levels of mental toughness are able to demonstrate better performance after receiving negative feedback compared to individuals with low mental toughness. Enhancing mental toughness in students not only helps them overcome various challenges but also increases life satisfaction and happiness levels, as well as supports their overall mental health (Yasar & Turut, 2020, in Xu, 2022). Similar findings were reported by Akeman et al. (2020, in Liu, 2024), who stated that mental toughness in students was found to mediate the relationship between subjective well-being and mental health.

According to Clough, Earle, & Sewell (2002), mental toughness is a psychological construct that largely determines how individuals can effectively cope with challenges, stressors, and pressures, regardless of the circumstances (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2011). Mental toughness has four components (4C): control, challenge, commitment, and confidence. The first component, challenge, refers to the extent to which individuals view problems as opportunities for self-development rather than threats. This component of mental toughness relates to how individuals respond to challenges. Challenges are any activities (or events) that are considered unusual and require someone to do something outside of their usual routine.

Some individuals may view challenges or periods of major change as exciting and enjoyable, and even welcome them. These individuals are likely to view challenges positively, as an opportunity to discover something new, to prove to themselves or others that they can deal with the unknown, and to take risks that accompany major change. This can be an opportunity for individuals to prove something to themselves. Conversely, other individuals may view change as a threat and view challenges in general as a negative opportunity that will expose their shortcomings. This will trigger feelings of fear and anxiety.

Second, commitment, which relates to an individual's perseverance, namely the ability of an individual to complete a task, even when faced with many challenges or problems. This component reflects the extent to which a person makes promises—especially concrete and measurable promises—and the extent to which a person is committed to keeping them. Individuals with high commitment will set goals or targets and strive to achieve them. Individuals with low commitment often have difficulty setting goals or targets (goal setting). Third, control, both emotional and in life, which reflects the tendency to feel and act as if one has influence over a situation. Control refers to the extent to which we feel we can control our world or, conversely, believe that the world controls us. Control is a key concept in stress management. Karasek's seminal work shows that it is not merely the amount of work we have to do that matters, but the control we have over that work. High demands with high levels of control tend to result in positive experiences. Conversely, high demands with low control lead to stress and unhappiness. This is clearly an important lesson for educators, both in their teaching practice and in their working lives.

Fourth, confidence, both in terms of ability and interpersonal relationships, reflects high self-belief and a strong belief that one can achieve success without feeling intimidated. There are two distinct components of self-confidence: confidence in one's abilities and confidence in interpersonal relationships. Self-confidence is a person's belief that they are capable of doing something. This belief is very important. However, it must be supported by real ability and quality teaching. A lack of self-confidence can be a major obstacle. It can prevent someone from developing to their full potential. Individuals with high interpersonal self-confidence are able to

build better relationships and feel more comfortable talking to others. Anxiety can hinder creativity and spontaneity, thereby reducing the effectiveness of message delivery. In addition, self-confidence is the core of good networking skills.

Students who have high confidence show high self-confidence in completing various challenging tasks, including mastering lecture material for exams, as well as facing changes in the academic and social environment. Students can also demonstrate composure in accepting that setbacks or failures in their studies are part of everyday life. Thus, when faced with setbacks or failures, they are able to bounce back and continue their efforts with even greater determination. Research by Lochbaum et al. (2022, as cited in Naliza et al., 2024) also shows that athletes with higher levels of self-confidence tend to demonstrate better performance and are more capable of dealing with the demands of competition.

The confidence component is closely related to the concept of self-esteem (Strycharczyk & Cloughs, 2018). The key to self-esteem is pride. This pride is related to oneself and is based on recognition of one's strengths and acceptance of one's weaknesses. Furthermore, according to Strycharczyk & Cloughs (2018), individuals with high scores on the confidence component tend to believe that they are valuable and capable. They are not overly dependent on external validation and generally have a more optimistic outlook on life. Self-esteem is also important for achievement, and individuals who feel confident in interacting with others tend to have a wider social circle and are more active in participating in group or class activities (e.g., Cheng & Furnham, 2002).

This study aims to investigate whether self-esteem plays a role in mental toughness among college students. The findings of this study will contribute to practitioners' understanding of the influence of self-esteem on mental toughness using actual data. Manuscript written with 1 line spacing density.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study in this research is quantitative with a non-experimental approach using a correlational design. A correlational design is a research design in which researchers use correlation statistics to describe and measure the degree of relationship (or association) between two or more variables or sets of scores (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018, in Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The subjects in this study were students in Bandung from both public and private universities. The sampling technique used in this study was convenience, where respondents were selected based on their availability (Creswell, 2023). The target population in this study included students from various study programs across all public and private universities who participated in a webinar on self-esteem and mental toughness, held on Saturday, August 17, 2024, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM WIB. The subjects in this study were 73 people.

The variables in this study were measured using self-esteem and mental toughness questionnaires. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which has been translated into Indonesian by Anggelia, Jacqueline, and Yuspendi (2023). This scale consists of 10 statements with 4 response options: “1 (strongly agree)”, “2 (agree)”, “3 (disagree)”, and “4 (strongly disagree)”. The reliability test results for the SE measurement tool yielded $\alpha = 0.664$, with validity coefficients ranging from 0.375 to 0.631. The mental toughness variable was measured using the Mental Toughness Questionnaire (MTQ18, short version) adapted by Adelina, Priska, and Yulita (2022). This scale consists of 5 response options: “1 (strongly disagree)”, “2 (disagree)”, “3 (neutral)”, “4 (agree)”, and “5 (strongly agree)”. The validity of this measurement tool ranges from 0.347 to 0.735, with a reliability of 0.830.

The data will be processed using regression analysis techniques which aim to measure the value of each variable X which is self-esteem towards mental toughness as variable Y

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Socio-demographic data of respondents

Variable	Respondent (n=73)	
	Mean/ modus	%
Sex	Woman	83,6
Education	S1	79,5
Faculty	Psychology	63,0
University Status	Private University	90,4

Based on Table 1, the majority of participants were female (83.6%). Most participants were undergraduate students (79.5%) and came from the Faculty of Psychology (63.0%). In addition, most participants came from private universities which is 90.4%. Based on data processing using linear regression techniques to measure the effect of self-esteem on mental toughness, the following results were obtained:

Table 2
Linear regression test of the effect of self-esteem on mental toughness

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig	Contribution
0.699	0.489	0.482	8.324	0.000	48.9

Based on the results shown in Table 2, statistical tests indicate that the significance value is 0.000, which is less than the probability limit of 0.05. This indicates that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and mental toughness. The correlation coefficient obtained is 0.699, which falls into the strong category. Additionally, the self-esteem variable contributes 48.9% to mental toughness. In other words, self-esteem significantly predicts 48.9% of students' mental toughness, while the remainder is influenced by other factors.

Based on the results of the data analysis, it is known that self-esteem has a significant influence on mental toughness. This means that the higher the level of self-esteem, the higher the mental toughness of students. This is consistent with the findings in the study conducted by Chung et al. (2020) and Caton (2021), which showed a positive relationship between self-esteem, religiosity, social support, and resilience (in Sulistiawati, Razak & Alwi, 2024). Aryanto & Larasati (2020) also stated that self-esteem has a strong influence on mental toughness. Self-esteem is one of the important dimensions of mental toughness. By having self-confidence, an athlete will be able to coordinate other attributes of mental toughness; even when facing obstacles, the athlete will still be able to cope well (Zeiger & Zeiger, 2018 in Aryanto & Larasati, 2020). Mental toughness enables individuals to adapt to difficult conditions, allowing them to bounce back and overcome the challenges they face.

Furthermore, this study also found that self-esteem contributes 48.9% to mental toughness, meaning that self-esteem has a significant influence on an individual's mental toughness. Theoretically, self-esteem is related to mental toughness through the component of confidence (Strycharczyk & Cloughs, 2018). The confidence construct in mental toughness measures the extent to which an individual has the self-confidence to complete tasks that may be

considered too difficult by others with similar or even higher abilities but lower self-confidence (Strycharczyk & Cloughs, 2018). Individuals with low self-esteem often feel ashamed and lack self-respect. In addition, individuals with low self-esteem believe that they lack skills and have little to contribute to the world. These beliefs ultimately lead them to resist efforts to improve their self-esteem, such as ignoring positive feedback they receive or avoiding situations where they could learn new skills, on the grounds that they are incapable. Furthermore, they also tend to set low goals, which ultimately reinforces their feelings of inadequacy. In general, self-esteem appears to be an important component in how an individual approaches the world. Essentially, self-esteem enables individuals to face the reality that life will end by acknowledging the importance of themselves and their contributions to the world.

Self-esteem can affect a person's mental toughness by playing an important role in influencing how individuals face challenges, commit to goals, and manage control in their lives. Individuals with low self-esteem tend to avoid challenges that could threaten their self-confidence. They feel less competitive and less confident in their ability to face challenges, so they prefer to avoid them rather than try to overcome them. As a result, they feel powerless to control the situation and are more vulnerable to feelings of helplessness. Low self-esteem also has a direct impact on their commitment to goals. Individuals with low self-esteem often feel inadequate to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. They feel that their efforts will not succeed and tend to procrastinate. They find it difficult to commit to the process necessary to achieve those goals. The inability to remain committed ultimately traps them in a cycle of procrastination and prolonged delay. In addition, individuals with low self-esteem feel a loss of control over their lives. They feel that circumstances beyond their control affect the results they achieve. When someone feels powerless, they may have difficulty managing their emotions and responding to situations constructively. This feeling of powerlessness makes them feel more stressed and anxious when facing challenges or changes, which in turn further exacerbates their situation.

Overall, low self-esteem hinders the development of mental toughness because individuals who feel inadequate or incapable tend to avoid challenges, have difficulty committing to goals, and feel they have no control over their lives. When these three components—challenge, commitment, and control—are affected, individuals are more likely to give up and feel depressed, making it difficult for them to stay focused, manage stress, and persevere in the face of adversity. Without a positive increase in self-esteem, these individuals will continue to struggle to develop the mental toughness they need to succeed and thrive.

Nevertheless, an individual's mental toughness is the result of a long process that is a synergy of various factors (Declan, 2008 in Adelina, Priska, & Yulita, 2023). Therefore, there are many factors to consider when explaining the dynamics of mental toughness within an individual. Further research is needed to identify the specific factors that contribute to an individual's mental toughness

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the data analysis, self-esteem has a significant positive effect on mental toughness ($p < .001$), with a strong correlation ($r = 0.699$). Self-esteem contributes 48.9% to the variance in mental toughness. This indicates that higher levels of self-esteem are associated with higher levels of mental toughness among students. Therefore, efforts to enhance students' mental toughness can be facilitated by improving their self-esteem.

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