

The Role of Self-Efficacy in Emotional Regulation and Psychological Adaptation of New Students in the Transition to College

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Abstract. The transition to college is a critical period that requires new students to be able to adjust emotionally and psychologically to the new academic environment. This study aims to examine the role of self-efficacy on the ability to regulate emotions and psychological adaptation of new students in facing initial challenges in college. Self-efficacy, as an individual's belief in his or her ability to manage academic and social demands, plays an important role in developing adaptive emotional regulation strategies and also increasing the capacity for mental adaptation. A systematic review of a number of literature shows that students with high levels of self-efficacy tend to have better emotional control, are able to deal with stress more positively, and also show more stable psychological resilience during the transition period. These findings reinforce that strengthening self-efficacy is a strategic approach in psychological interventions and orientation programs in higher education to support the mental well-being of new students. This study also recommends the development of strength-based guidance and counseling services to facilitate the formation of self-efficacy from the beginning of the study period.

Key words: self-efficacy, emotion regulation, psychological adaptation, freshmen, transition to college.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from high school to college is a crucial stage for many new students. During this phase, they face a variety of new academic, social, and emotional challenges that can cause significant stress and impact their mental health and ability to adapt to a new environment (Mughtar et al., 2022). Therefore, internal aspects such as self-efficacy are crucial because they influence one's ability to overcome academic challenges and the stress associated with this transition.

Self-efficacy, according to Bandura's social-cognitive theory, is defined as the belief in one's ability to achieve success in specific tasks or challenges. Recent research shows that academic self-efficacy plays a crucial role in students' mental health and educational progress.

In the post-pandemic era, the concept of self-efficacy has proven to be a significant protective factor for dealing with stress, especially among students transitioning to online or hybrid learning systems. Furthermore, self-efficacy also serves as a buffer against stress and supports the adjustment process to a new campus environment.

Meanwhile, emotion regulation, namely how individuals regulate and express emotions according to the needs of the situation, is also crucial for maintaining the mental balance of freshmen. Longitudinal research shows changes in students' emotion regulation strategies during the first two years of college, including an increase in the use of maladaptive strategies such as suppressing emotions or escaping through substance use, and a decrease in adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal.

Freshmen's psychological adjustment can be assessed by their ability to adapt academically, socially, and emotionally to college. A study in Brazil showed that self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of academic adaptation, explaining approximately 45% of the variation in adaptation, significantly more than other variables such as stress or social skills. Research in Indonesia also showed that academic self-efficacy predicts first-year students' adaptation by up to 32.29%, with school well-being as a contributing factor.

Thus, the relationship between self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and psychological adjustment in

freshmen is crucial for further research, particularly in the context of the transition to college. Understanding the interaction of these three elements can provide a strong foundation for developing counseling and orientation-based intervention programs for freshmen to prepare them emotionally and psychologically.

METHODS

a. Data Search Strategy

The data search was conducted systematically using a literature review method based on PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Data sources were journal articles published in the last five years (2020–2025) relevant to the topics of self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and psychological adaptation in new college students. The databases used included: Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and Sinta (Science and Technology Index). Search keywords were adjusted using Boolean operators, such as: "self-efficacy" OR "self-efficacy" AND "emotion regulation" OR "emotion regulation" AND "psychological adaptation" OR "psychological adaptation" AND "college transition" OR "transition to college" AND "first-year students" OR "freshmen".

b. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Published between 2020–2025.
- Use a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research design.
- Focus on a population of new students or individuals undergoing transition to higher education.
- Discuss the variables of self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and/or psychological adaptation directly or in correlational relationships.
- Available in full-text format and freely accessible (open access).

Exclusion Criteria:

- Published before 2020.
- Not relevant to one of the research variables (self-efficacy, emotion regulation, psychological adaptation).
- Only in the form of an abstract, proceedings, or research report without complete data.
- Research conducted on a non-student population or not in the transition period of higher education.
- Paid-for articles or not fully accessible.

c. Data Analysis Method

The data analysis process was conducted using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The stages include:

- Initial Selection: Screening titles and abstracts to ensure the topic aligns with the research objectives.
- Full Reading: Articles that pass the initial stage are read in their entirety to evaluate relevance, methodological quality, and completeness of data.
- Data Extraction: Important information such as author(s), year, research objectives, methods, population, and main results are recorded on an extraction sheet.
- Synthesis of Findings: Data are analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns, trends, and research gaps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Research Result

Based on a literature search process through three major databases (Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and DOAJ) with the keywords "self-efficacy," "emotional regulation," "psychological adaptation," "freshman," and "transition to higher education," a total of 87 relevant

articles published in the 2020–2025 period were obtained. After going through a screening stage based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 15 articles were obtained that met the requirements for further analysis.

The analysis showed that 12 of the 15 articles (80%) found a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and new students' emotional regulation skills. Furthermore, 10 of the 15 articles (67%) reported that self-efficacy significantly contributes to psychological adaptation in the transition to college, either directly or mediated by emotion regulation.

Key findings:

1. New students with high self-efficacy are better able to manage negative emotions such as academic anxiety, feelings of inferiority, and social pressure.
2. Emotion regulation is an important mediator of the influence of self-efficacy on psychological adaptation.
3. Good psychological adaptation is reflected in the ability to build social relationships, manage time, and adapt to academic demands.

b. Discussion

Research shows that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in supporting new students in managing their emotions and psychologically adapting to college. High self-efficacy gives individuals confidence that they can overcome academic and social challenges in a new environment (Bandura, 1997, cited in Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020). For new students, this confidence serves as a protective factor that can reduce stress during the transition (Putra and Sari, 2021).

Previous research has shown that self-efficacy positively influences emotion regulation, with students with high self-efficacy tending to choose adaptive strategies such as reappraisal over maladaptive strategies such as suppression (Gross, 2015; Saputra et al., 2022). Effective emotion regulation allows students to overcome anxiety, increase their attention to learning, and reduce emotional exhaustion (Khoirunnisa and Prasetyo, 2023).

Furthermore, new students' psychological adjustment is significantly influenced by their level of self-efficacy. Students with high self-efficacy typically adapt more quickly to the college environment because they are able to set clear goals, manage their time well, and actively seek social support (Yuliani and Handayani, 2021). These findings align with meta-analyses showing that self-efficacy has a significant positive relationship with adjustment experienced by both international and domestic students (Liu et al., 2022).

The transition to college often causes psychological stress due to changes in the learning environment, social roles, and academic expectations (Arjanggi and Kusumaningsih, 2020). Without the ability to regulate emotions and adapt effectively, students are vulnerable to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, or decreased academic performance (Hidayati et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening self-confidence is an important strategic step, such as through orientation programs, stress management skills training, and peer mentoring (Wijaya and Rahayu, 2022).

Overall, the results of this study confirm that self-efficacy serves as a crucial bridge between emotional regulation and psychological adjustment in new students. In other words, increasing self-efficacy will produce dual benefits, namely in the ability to control emotions and readiness to face the demands of the campus world (Sari and Widodo, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The results of this systematic review indicate that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in helping new students navigate the academic and social challenges of the transition to college. Students with high levels of self-efficacy tend to have better emotional regulation skills, enabling them to manage stress, control negative emotional reactions, and maintain motivation to learn. Furthermore, self-efficacy also supports psychological adaptation, including adjustment to a new environment, positive social interactions, and the ability to cope with academic pressure.

These findings confirm that self-efficacy is not only a cognitive factor but also a psychological resource that can strengthen new students' emotional regulation skills and mental resilience. Therefore, orientation programs and guidance services in higher education need to integrate strategies to enhance self-efficacy through coping skills training, experiential learning, and positive feedback.

Overall, this research confirms that self-efficacy plays a strategic role in facilitating the successful adaptation of new students, which ultimately impacts their academic achievement and psychological well-being.

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