

Academic Self-Efficacy and Social Support as Predictors of Academic Resilience among First-Year University Students

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Abstract

Academic resilience has emerged as a critical academic condition influencing students' ability to adapt and persist during the transition to higher education. This study examined the relationships among academic self-efficacy, social support, and academic resilience among first-year university students. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected from 250 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATHFIT 1) at a public higher education institution in the Philippines. Standardized instruments were used to measure academic resilience, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple linear regression analyses were employed. Results indicated that students demonstrated moderate levels of academic resilience, academic self-efficacy, and social support. Academic self-efficacy showed a moderate and statistically significant relationship with academic resilience, while social support exhibited a low to moderate but significant association. Regression analysis revealed that academic self-efficacy and social support jointly explained a meaningful proportion of variance in academic resilience, with academic self-efficacy emerging as the stronger predictor. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening both students' internal academic beliefs and their social support systems, particularly during the first year of university. Implications for student support programs and resilience-oriented educational practices are discussed.

Keywords: academic resilience; academic self-efficacy; first-year university students; higher education; PATHFIT; social support

1. Introduction

Academic resilience is increasingly conceptualized as a complex and context-sensitive academic capacity that reflects students' ability to remain academically engaged under sustained academic pressure and vulnerability. From a definitional standpoint, Ye et al. (2021) describe academic resilience as a dynamic construct operationalized through students' capacity to demonstrate academic competence despite significant risk, underscoring its variability across educational systems and measurement frameworks. Extending this conceptualization, Shen et al. (2024) frame academic resilience in higher education as an academic disposition anchored in self-efficacy, self-regulation, and recovery, highlighting how its absence becomes particularly visible in academically intensive professional programs where strain is structurally embedded. From a broader institutional lens, Ross (2023) positions academic resilience as a critical concern for universities navigating prolonged uncertainty, intensified performance demands, and evolving learning environments, suggesting that resilience increasingly functions as a marker of students' academic sustainability. Taken together, these perspectives position academic resilience not as a peripheral student attribute but as a central academic condition, the erosion of which signals a growing vulnerability within contemporary higher education.

Across international higher education contexts, academic resilience is increasingly portrayed as an uneven and contested academic condition rather than a stable student capacity. In Malaysia, Singh (2021) characterizes academic resilience among international university students as a fragile and situational academic resource, one that becomes visibly strained as students negotiate unfamiliar pedagogical expectations and academic cultures in non-Western institutions. From the Middle Eastern context, Gal and Mor (2025) describe academic resilience in Israeli international programs as an academically demanding condition that must be continually negotiated alongside language proficiency and disciplinary expectations, suggesting that resilience remains vulnerable within globally oriented academic environments. Within the United Kingdom, Mawdsley and Willis (2023) present academic resilience among pharmacy students as a diminishing academic condition, particularly within rigid and performance-driven curricula that appear to erode students' sense of academic agency over time.

At a broader cross-national level, Elnaem et al. (2024) report marked disparities in academic resilience among pharmacy students across twelve countries, underscoring the absence of a consistent resilience profile within global higher education. Collectively, these international accounts frame academic resilience as a precarious and unevenly sustained academic condition, reflecting persistent structural and disciplinary pressures embedded within contemporary university systems.

Within Philippine higher education, academic resilience is increasingly surfaced not as a uniformly distributed student strength, but as an uneven academic condition that appears to fluctuate across contexts and learner groups. In an early higher-education baseline, Lanuza et al. (2020) reported "likely" resilience among first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education students, yet the same dataset reflected meaningful variation across specializations—suggesting that resilience profiles among beginning college learners may be more fragile and program-contingent than institutions typically assume. More recently, Lobo (2024) documented that academic resilience levels in a Philippine higher education institution differed by sex and were positively aligned with students' study engagement and perceived instructor emotional support, positioning resilience as closely interwoven with the lived texture of classroom experience rather than as a purely internal student trait. In a parallel niche, Jaspe et al. (2024) observed a mid-range academic resilience mean among Filipino university student-athletes, subtly reinforcing the notion that resilience—while present—may sit at a merely adequate level even among students accustomed to perseverance demands. Against this backdrop, Panganiban et al. (2025) explicitly noted the scarcity of focused resilience research for Physical Education Teacher Education students, implying that parts of Philippine higher education still operate with limited empirical clarity about how academic resilience is patterned, experienced, and sustained within discipline-specific training environments.

Academic self-efficacy has been consistently positioned in the literature as a salient explanatory factor in the development of academic resilience among university students. In Iran, Abdolrezaipoor and Ghanbari (2023) demonstrate that students' beliefs in their academic capabilities significantly predict their capacity to withstand academic challenges, positioning self-efficacy as a foundational psychological mechanism underlying resilient academic functioning. Similarly, drawing on data from China, Mao et al. (2022) establish that academic self-efficacy exerts a significant mediating influence between academic stressors and adaptive academic outcomes, reinforcing its role as a conduit through which resilience is strengthened in demanding learning environments. From an East Asian context, Yao et al. (2023) further show that higher levels of academic self-efficacy contribute to sustained academic resilience by supporting students' ability to maintain goal-directed engagement and psychological balance under academic pressure. Within professional education, Chen et al. (2024), working with nursing students, provide evidence that self-efficacy significantly influences students' resilience levels, underscoring its relevance in academically intensive programs characterized by

persistent performance demands. Collectively, these findings substantiate academic self-efficacy as a critical determinant of academic resilience, offering empirical justification for its inclusion as a key independent variable in models seeking to explain students' capacity to endure and recover from academic adversity.

Academic resilience has been shown to be substantially shaped by contextual and relational forces embedded within students' academic environments. In Indonesia, Madjid et al. (2021) establish that social support derived from family, peers, and educational institutions directly enhances academic resilience by reducing maladaptive academic behaviors, underscoring the role of culturally grounded support systems in sustaining academic persistence. From China, Cao et al. (2024) demonstrate that perceived social support significantly strengthens academic resilience through the promotion of mature coping styles, positioning relational resources as active mechanisms that reinforce students' capacity to withstand academic strain. Within the Spanish higher education context, Ríos-Risquez et al. (2018) show that supportive academic environments significantly contribute to higher resilience among nursing students, particularly by alleviating emotional exhaustion and psychological vulnerability. In the United Kingdom, Mawdsley and Willis (2023) further reveal that learning environments perceived as controlling or adversarial directly undermine academic resilience, highlighting how institutional climate can either sustain or erode students' ability to persist academically. Taken together, these findings affirm that academic resilience is not merely an individual attribute but a contextually produced outcome, shaped decisively by social support structures and the quality of the learning environment. Despite the expanding body of literature framing academic resilience as a central yet fragile academic condition, several critical gaps remain evident. Existing studies have largely examined academic resilience either as a broadly conceptual construct or through isolated international, national, psychological, or contextual lenses, resulting in a fragmented understanding of how resilience is simultaneously shaped by individual and environmental forces. While international and Philippine-based research consistently point to variability and unevenness in academic resilience across programs, disciplines, and learner groups, there remains limited empirical work that systematically integrates personal psychological resources and contextual supports within a single explanatory framework. In particular, the concurrent roles of academic self-efficacy and social support in shaping academic resilience have seldom been examined together, especially within discipline-specific higher education contexts in the Philippines. Moreover, much of the local literature remains descriptive in nature, offering limited insight into how these variables interact to explain resilience as an academic condition rather than a static trait. Addressing these gaps, the present study seeks to examine how academic self-efficacy and social support relate to academic resilience among university students, thereby providing a more integrated and contextually grounded understanding of academic resilience within Philippine higher education.

This study is significant in advancing a more integrated understanding of academic resilience by examining the combined roles of academic self-efficacy and social support within Philippine higher education. By addressing gaps in local and international literature, the study contributes context-specific evidence on how individual psychological resources and relational learning environments intersect in shaping students' capacity to sustain academic functioning under pressure. The findings are expected to inform educators, academic leaders, and institutional policymakers in designing targeted support strategies that strengthen both students' internal capabilities and the social conditions of learning. Moreover, the study seeks to generate empirical insights that can guide the development of evidence-based academic support programs aimed at fostering resilient, sustainable, and inclusive higher education environments. Guided by these aims, the study is directed by the following research questions: (1) What is the level of academic resilience among university students? (2) How is academic self-efficacy related to academic resilience? (3) How is social support related to academic resilience? (4) To what extent do academic self-efficacy and social support jointly explain variations in academic resilience among university students?

2. Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationships among academic self-efficacy, social support, and academic resilience among university students. Quantitative correlational designs are appropriate when the primary objective is to determine the strength and direction of relationships among variables as they naturally occur, without manipulating conditions or introducing interventions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). Such designs are widely used in physical education and higher education research to examine psychological and contextual factors influencing students' academic functioning within authentic learning environments.

The correlational approach allows for the simultaneous examination of individual-level psychological resources and contextual support factors as explanatory variables of academic resilience. This design is consistent with recommendations for educational research that seeks to model complex academic phenomena shaped by multiple interacting influences rather than isolated causal effects (Shadish et al., 2002; Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, the selected design aligns with the study's aim to generate empirically grounded insights into academic resilience as a condition shaped by both internal beliefs and social learning environments within higher education contexts.

Respondents and Sampling

The respondents consisted of 250 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATHFIT 1) at Western Mindanao State University (WMSU), Zamboanga City, Philippines, during the academic term in which the study was conducted. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling from the official list of students enrolled in PATHFIT 1 to ensure proportional representation across academic groupings. Stratified random sampling is recommended when a population is heterogeneous and representation across subgroups is necessary to improve sample precision and reduce sampling bias (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This sampling approach was deemed appropriate given the diversity of academic programs represented in PATHFIT 1 and the study's aim to capture variations in early university experiences within a common instructional context. Eligibility criteria included (a) enrollment as a first-year undergraduate student, (b) official registration in PATHFIT 1 during the data collection period, and (c) willingness to participate voluntarily in the study. Students who were not officially enrolled in PATHFIT 1 or had incomplete enrollment status at the time of data collection were excluded to ensure sample consistency and data integrity, consistent with best practices in educational research sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Research Instrument

Validated and widely used instruments were employed in this study to ensure methodological rigor and alignment with international research standards.

Academic resilience was measured using the Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30), which assesses students' capacity to persist, adapt, and recover when confronted with academic challenges. The ARS-30 has been widely applied in higher education research and demonstrates established construct validity for assessing resilience-related academic behaviors among university students.

Academic self-efficacy was assessed using the College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES), which measures students' confidence in performing common academic tasks such as studying, completing coursework, and managing academic responsibilities. The CASES has been extensively utilized in higher education research and has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties across diverse student populations.

Social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which evaluates perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. The MSPSS is a well-established instrument in educational and psychological research and is appropriate for examining relational resources that influence students' academic experiences.

All instruments employed a Likert-type response format. Prior to full-scale data collection, a pilot test was conducted to assess clarity and contextual suitability for the local student population. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with the results reported in the Results section.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics aligned with the study's research questions. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed to describe respondents' profiles and to determine the level of academic resilience, academic self-efficacy, and social support.

To address the relationships between variables, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the strength and direction of the associations between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience, and between social support and academic resilience.

To determine the extent to which academic self-efficacy and social support jointly explain variations in academic resilience, multiple linear regression analysis was performed, with academic resilience as the dependent variable. Model fit indices and standardized regression coefficients were used to interpret explanatory power and predictor contributions.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics review committee, and permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned academic offices. All respondents were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential benefits, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by assigning numerical codes to participants and by securely storing all data in password-protected files accessible only to the researchers. As the study involved survey-based data collection within an academic setting, respondents were not exposed to any physical or psychological risk beyond those ordinarily encountered in higher education research.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for academic resilience, academic self-efficacy, and social support among first-year university students enrolled in PATHFIT 1. Overall, respondents demonstrated moderate levels across the three constructs, suggesting that while students possess adaptive capacities and support resources, these are not uniformly strong during the early stage of university transition.

Table 1. Level of Academic Resilience, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Social Support

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Academic Resilience	3.41	0.52	Moderate
Academic Self-Efficacy	3.58	0.55	Moderate
Social Support	3.62	.60	Moderate

Table 2 presents the results of the Pearson Product–Moment Correlation analysis examining the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience among first-year university students. The analysis indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables, suggesting that variations in students' confidence in managing academic tasks are accompanied by corresponding differences in their capacity to cope with academic challenges.

Table 2. Relationship Between Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Resilience

Paired Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Academic Self-Efficacy × Academic Resilience	0.42	< .001	Moderate, Significant

Table 3 shows the results of the correlation analysis between perceived social support and academic resilience. The findings reveal a statistically significant relationship, indicating that differences in students' perceived levels of support from their social environment are associated with variations in their academic resilience levels.

Table 3. Student Engagement Dimensions of the Respondents

Paired Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Social Support × Academic Resilience	0.36	< .001	Low to moderate, Significant

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the joint contribution of academic self-efficacy and social support to academic resilience. The regression model was statistically significant, indicating that the two predictor variables collectively explain a meaningful proportion of variance in academic resilience among first-year university students. Both academic self-efficacy and social support emerged as significant predictors, although their relative contributions differed in magnitude.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Resilience

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Academic Self-Efficacy	0.34	6.02	< .001	Significant
Social Support	0.21	3.78	< .001	Significant

4. Discussion

Level of Academic Resilience, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Social Support

The present findings indicate that first-year university students demonstrated moderate levels of academic resilience, academic self-efficacy, and social support, suggesting that adaptive capacities are present but not yet fully consolidated during early university transition. This pattern is consistent with evidence showing that resilience helps students manage academic and career concerns during periods of uncertainty, while remaining sensitive to contextual pressures and adjustment demands (Lytle & Shin, 2022). Similarly, research in higher

education indicates that students with moderate resilience levels are less likely to disengage academically, though resilience at this stage remains uneven and context-dependent (López-Aguilar et al., 2023).

Relationship Between Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Resilience

The study revealed a moderate and statistically significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience, indicating that students who report stronger confidence in managing academic tasks tend to cope more effectively with academic challenges. This finding aligns with research demonstrating that instructional approaches that enhance academic self-efficacy also strengthen resilience by improving students' perceived competence and adaptive capacity (Wu et al., 2024). Evidence further suggests that self-efficacy supports motivation and persistence in demanding learning environments, reinforcing its role as a central psychological mechanism underlying academic resilience (Abdolrezaipoor & Ghanbari, 2023).

Relationship Between Social Support and Academic Resilience

Results showed a low to moderate but significant relationship between perceived social support and academic resilience, suggesting that social support contributes to students' academic coping while exerting a more limited influence than individual psychological resources. Prior research indicates that support from family, peers, and educational institutions can reduce academic stress and strengthen resilience, particularly during periods of academic transition (Madjid et al., 2021). More recent evidence further suggests that social support enhances resilience by promoting adaptive coping and psychological well-being, although its effects may vary depending on students' access to and utilization of available support systems (Naz et al., 2024).

Joint Contribution of Academic Self-Efficacy and Social Support to Academic Resilience

The regression analysis demonstrated that academic self-efficacy and social support jointly explained a modest but meaningful proportion of variance in academic resilience, with academic self-efficacy emerging as the stronger predictor. This finding is consistent with integrative models showing that social support often enhances resilience indirectly by strengthening self-efficacy and other internal coping resources (Lei et al., 2022). At the same time, evidence suggests that academic resilience is shaped by a broader set of cognitive, dispositional, and contextual factors beyond self-efficacy and support alone, underscoring its complexity as an academic condition (Wang et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that first-year university students enrolled in PATHFIT 1 demonstrate moderate levels of academic resilience, academic self-efficacy, and social support, reflecting an ongoing process of academic adjustment during the transition to higher education. The results suggest that students possess emerging adaptive capacities, though these remain uneven and vulnerable to both personal and contextual challenges.

Academic self-efficacy was found to be significantly associated with academic resilience, highlighting the importance of students' confidence in managing academic tasks as a key psychological resource. Social support also showed a significant relationship with academic resilience, reinforcing its role as a contextual factor that complements individual coping capacities. Together, academic self-efficacy and social support

explained a meaningful portion of variance in academic resilience, although a substantial proportion remained unexplained.

Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of supporting both students' internal beliefs and their social learning environments, particularly during the first year of university. Programs embedded in general education courses such as PATHFIT may serve as strategic platforms for fostering holistic student development, contributing to more resilient, adaptive, and academically sustainable student populations.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study should be interpreted within certain contextual boundaries. Data were obtained through self-report instruments, which capture participants' perceptions and experiences and may be influenced by individual response tendencies. The cross-sectional correlational design provides a snapshot of relationships among academic self-efficacy, social support, and academic resilience at a specific point in time and does not aim to establish causal relationships. In addition, the study was conducted among first-year students enrolled in PATHFIT 1 at a single public higher education institution, which frames the applicability of the results within similar educational contexts. Other academic and contextual factors not included in the present analysis may also contribute to academic resilience. Within these parameters, the study offers meaningful insights that can inform subsequent research using broader samples and longitudinal approaches.

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