

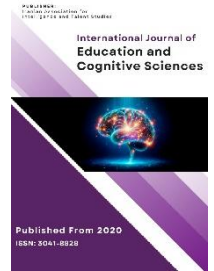


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The Effectiveness of Self-efficacy Training on Self-handicapping and Hope of Probation Students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of self-efficacy training on academic self-handicapping and hope among probation students at Yasouj University.

Methods and Materials: The present study employed a semi-experimental design with a pre-test–post-test control group structure. The statistical population consisted of all probation students at Yasouj University during the second academic semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. Forty probation students were selected using simple random sampling and randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group. Due to attrition, the final analysis was conducted on 36 participants. The experimental group received eight 90-minute sessions of self-efficacy training based on Bandura's theory, while the control group received no intervention. Data were collected using the Self-Handicapping Scale developed by Jones and Rhodewalt and Snyder's Hope Scale. Data analysis was conducted using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in SPSS-24.

Findings: The findings indicated that self-efficacy training had a statistically significant effect on reducing academic self-handicapping among probation students in the experimental group compared to the control group ($F = 21.59, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.54$). In addition, the intervention significantly increased hope among students in the experimental group compared to the control group ($F = 48.12, p < 0.003, \eta^2 = 0.59$). The multivariate analysis also demonstrated significant overall differences between the experimental and control groups across the dependent variables. These findings suggest that self-efficacy training effectively improved adaptive psychological functioning among probation students.

Conclusion: The results of the present study demonstrated that self-efficacy training is an effective psychological and educational intervention for reducing academic self-handicapping and increasing hope among probation students. Strengthening students' efficacy beliefs may help improve academic adjustment, enhance motivation, reduce maladaptive coping strategies, and promote psychological resilience in academically vulnerable students. Therefore, incorporating self-efficacy-based interventions into university counseling and student support programs may contribute to improving students' academic performance and psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: Self-efficacy training, Self-handicapping, Hope, Probation students

1. Introduction

Academic success is widely regarded as one of the primary indicators of effective higher education systems and an essential determinant of individual psychological, occupational, and social development. Universities are expected not only to provide scientific knowledge and professional competencies but also to cultivate psychological resilience, adaptive motivation, and cognitive-emotional capacities that enable students to cope effectively with academic challenges. Nevertheless, academic failure and academic probation continue to represent persistent concerns in higher education institutions worldwide. Academic probation reflects a critical educational condition in which students fail to meet minimum academic standards and consequently experience heightened vulnerability to dropout, emotional distress, low self-esteem, and reduced academic engagement (McPherson et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2022; Sivrikaya, 2019). Research has consistently shown that students on academic probation encounter a wide range of psychological and motivational difficulties, including anxiety, hopelessness, fear of failure, academic disengagement, and maladaptive coping strategies that interfere with learning and achievement (Cassady et al., 2024; Middleton et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2019). These difficulties not only impair academic functioning but also threaten students' long-term educational persistence and psychological wellbeing.

Among the most influential psychological mechanisms associated with academic failure is academic self-handicapping. Self-handicapping refers to a set of cognitive and behavioral strategies through which individuals create or claim obstacles to performance in order to protect self-worth and externalize potential failure (Ferradás et al., 2018; Schwinger et al., 2022). Students who engage in self-handicapping behaviors intentionally reduce effort, procrastinate, avoid preparation, or create excuses prior to evaluation situations so that unsuccessful outcomes can be attributed to external barriers rather than low ability (Barutçu Yıldırım & Demir, 2020; Jia et al., 2020). Although these strategies may temporarily protect self-esteem, they ultimately contribute to academic underachievement, emotional distress, and chronic motivational impairment. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that self-handicapping is associated with perfectionism, fear of failure, low self-confidence, anxiety, maladaptive attributional styles, and poor academic performance (Schwinger et al., 2022). Similarly, research has shown that students with high levels

of self-handicapping demonstrate weaker academic adjustment, lower persistence, and reduced engagement with learning tasks (Akar et al., 2018; Ferradás et al., 2018).

The academic environment itself may intensify self-handicapping tendencies. Competitive classroom climates, evaluative pressures, uncertainty regarding performance outcomes, and fear of social judgment can increase students' motivation to protect self-worth through defensive strategies (Cassady et al., 2024; Coudeville et al., 2020). In recent years, educational disruptions related to technological transitions and online learning environments have further amplified these psychological pressures. Wong and Yuen reported that online learning stress significantly contributed to maladaptive academic coping among college students, while academic hope and self-efficacy acted as protective factors against psychological exhaustion (Wong & Yuen, 2023). Likewise, Jia and colleagues demonstrated that academic anxiety significantly predicts self-handicapping behaviors among medical students, especially under stressful conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Jia et al., 2020). These findings suggest that academic self-handicapping is not merely an isolated behavioral tendency but rather a multidimensional psychological response to perceived academic threat and uncertainty.

Another major psychological variable closely linked to academic adjustment and student resilience is hope. Within positive psychology, hope is conceptualized as a dynamic cognitive-motivational system involving goal-directed determination and the perceived ability to generate pathways toward desired outcomes (Krafft et al., 2018). According to hope theory, hopeful individuals possess both agency thinking, which reflects motivational energy toward goals, and pathway thinking, which involves the ability to identify effective routes for goal attainment (Kashiwabara et al., 2022). Hope has emerged as a critical predictor of academic achievement, persistence, psychological wellbeing, and adaptive coping among students. Research indicates that students with high levels of hope are more likely to maintain academic engagement, persist during challenges, and demonstrate greater resilience under stressful educational conditions (Okur et al., 2023; Penzar et al., 2021).

Hope also functions as an important buffer against psychological distress and academic burnout. Positive educational environments that foster encouragement, relational support, and academic adaptability contribute significantly to students' hopeful thinking and wellbeing (Middleton et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020). Okur and colleagues demonstrated that academic encouragement

positively predicts academic wellbeing through the mediating roles of grit and hope (Okur et al., 2023). Similarly, Kashiwabara et al. found that adolescents with greater hope for the future achieved higher academic performance and stronger psychological adjustment (Kashiwabara et al., 2022). Research conducted during periods of crisis has further emphasized the protective role of hope in maintaining academic functioning under stressful circumstances (Wong & Yuen, 2023; Yaqoobi & Khalilpour, 2022). Consequently, hope is increasingly recognized as a foundational psychological resource that promotes academic persistence, emotional stability, and educational success.

Despite the positive role of hope, probation students frequently exhibit diminished hopeful thinking due to repeated academic failure, low perceived competence, and fear of future inadequacy. Persistent experiences of failure can weaken students' agency beliefs and reduce their confidence in identifying effective pathways toward success (Chang et al., 2025). Students experiencing academic burnout often develop feelings of helplessness, reduced motivation, and hopelessness regarding educational goals. Chang et al. demonstrated that perfectionism, procrastination, fear of failure, and self-handicapping collectively contribute to academic burnout and depression among university students (Chang et al., 2025). These findings indicate that psychological vulnerabilities associated with probation status extend beyond academic difficulties and encompass broader emotional and motivational dysfunctions.

One psychological construct that may effectively address both self-handicapping and hopelessness is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs regarding their capability to organize and execute actions necessary to achieve specific goals and desired outcomes. Rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy influences cognition, emotional regulation, motivation, persistence, and behavioral performance across multiple domains. Students with strong self-efficacy beliefs approach challenging tasks with greater confidence, perseverance, and adaptive coping, whereas students with low self-efficacy are more vulnerable to avoidance, anxiety, helplessness, and self-defeating behaviors (Haerazi & Irawan, 2020; Penzar et al., 2021). Academic self-efficacy has consistently been associated with academic achievement, resilience, engagement, and psychological wellbeing among university students (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Xiong et al., 2020).

Research has increasingly highlighted the inverse relationship between self-efficacy and self-handicapping. Students with low self-efficacy are more likely to doubt their abilities and employ defensive strategies such as procrastination, excuse-making, and effort withdrawal to protect self-worth (Akar et al., 2018; Barutçu Yıldırım & Demir, 2020). Conversely, stronger self-efficacy beliefs promote persistence, adaptive learning strategies, and constructive responses to academic stress. Török et al. demonstrated that promoting a growth mindset significantly reduced behavioral self-handicapping among students, especially those characterized by fixed mindset orientations (Török et al., 2022). Similarly, Schwinger et al. identified low self-efficacy as one of the strongest antecedents of academic self-handicapping in their meta-analysis (Schwinger et al., 2022). These findings suggest that strengthening self-efficacy beliefs may reduce students' reliance on maladaptive self-protective strategies.

Self-efficacy also appears to play a central role in the development and maintenance of hope. Students who perceive themselves as capable of overcoming obstacles are more likely to sustain motivational energy toward goals and generate effective strategies for success (Penzar et al., 2021). Wong and Yuen found that academic self-efficacy significantly enhanced students' academic hope during stressful online learning conditions (Wong & Yuen, 2023). Similarly, positive mood induction and supportive educational experiences have been shown to strengthen hope through increases in self-beliefs and motivational confidence (Dong et al., 2022; Yaqoobi & Khalilpour, 2022). Self-efficacy therefore appears to function as a foundational cognitive mechanism that supports hopeful thinking, resilience, and adaptive educational functioning.

In addition, contemporary research within positive psychology emphasizes the importance of interventions aimed at strengthening adaptive psychological capacities rather than solely reducing pathology. Positive education approaches seek to enhance wellbeing, resilience, motivation, and psychological strengths alongside academic learning. Hope, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and academic buoyancy are increasingly recognized as central protective factors in educational contexts (Dong et al., 2022; Middleton et al., 2023). Chen and Cheng demonstrated that emotional intelligence positively predicts creative self-efficacy among gifted students, highlighting the importance of psychological strengths in educational achievement (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Likewise, Jin and Ye reported that self-efficacy contributes significantly to students'

psychological wellbeing and educational adjustment (Jin & Ye, 2022). These findings reinforce the importance of interventions targeting self-efficacy enhancement among vulnerable student populations.

Probation students represent a particularly important population for such interventions because they often experience cumulative psychological risk factors, including low self-confidence, academic anxiety, uncertainty regarding future success, and social-emotional distress (Cassady et al., 2024; McPherson et al., 2021). Students from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds may experience even greater vulnerability due to social, economic, and cultural stressors (Ramsay & Baker, 2019). Without effective psychological intervention, these students may continue cycles of academic failure, disengagement, and withdrawal from higher education. Therefore, identifying evidence-based psychological interventions capable of improving adaptive beliefs and reducing maladaptive coping strategies remains an important priority within educational psychology.

Although previous studies have independently examined self-handicapping, hope, academic motivation, self-efficacy, and academic wellbeing, limited research has specifically investigated the simultaneous impact of self-efficacy training on both self-handicapping and hope among probation students. Existing evidence suggests that interventions focused on behavioral activation, academic encouragement, positive mood induction, and motivational enhancement can reduce maladaptive behaviors and improve psychological functioning (Chaabi Iman et al., 2025; Okur et al., 2023; Yaqoobi & Khalilpour, 2022). However, there remains a need for experimental studies examining structured self-efficacy training programs among academically vulnerable university students. Furthermore, most prior studies have focused on general student populations rather than probation students who may face more severe motivational and emotional challenges.

Given the critical role of self-efficacy in academic adaptation, the destructive consequences of self-handicapping, and the protective function of hope in educational persistence, investigating interventions that simultaneously target these variables appears highly necessary. Moreover, the increasing prevalence of academic burnout, dropout intention, and psychological distress among university students further underscores the importance of developing effective educational and psychological support programs (Chang et al., 2025; Losova, 2025; Peng et al., 2022). Therefore, the present

study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of self-efficacy training on self-handicapping and hope among probation students.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a semi-experimental field design with a pre-test-post-test control group structure. The statistical population consisted of all probation students at Yasouj University during the second academic semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. From this population, 40 probation students were selected using simple random sampling based on the official list. Subsequently, they were randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group ($n = 20$) and a control group ($n = 20$). Two participants in the experimental group were excluded from the study due to absenteeism. Additionally, two participants from the control group were randomly removed.

Initially, the researchers obtained approval from the university's education department to conduct the study with probation students. Subsequently, the list of probation students was obtained from the vice-presidency of education. To achieve the research objectives, 40 probation students from Yasouj University were selected using random sampling and randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group ($n = 20$) and a control group ($n = 20$). Prior to the commencement of the training sessions, a pre-test was administered to both groups using the designated measurement tools. Following the pre-test, the intervention based on self-efficacy training was implemented. After the completion of the training sessions, a post-test was conducted for both groups.

The experimental group received the self-efficacy training intervention over eight 90-minute sessions, whereas the control group received no training. The inclusion criteria for the study were being enrolled in the second academic semester of 2023–2024 and having academic probation for two or more semesters. The exclusion criteria were absent from more than two sessions, the presence of acute physical illnesses, and major psychiatric disorders diagnosed by a specialist. Two participants in the experimental group were excluded from the study due to absence, exceeding two sessions. Two participants from the control group were randomly removed, and the analysis was performed on the remaining 36 participants.

2.2. Measures

Self-Handicapping Scale: This scale was developed by Jones and Rhodewalt (1982) and originally consists of 25 items, which was reduced to 23 items in the study by Heydari et al. (2010). This scale measures individuals' tendency toward self-handicapping using a Likert-type response format ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (scores 0 to 5). The Self-Handicapping Scale was translated into Persian and its psychometric properties were examined by Heydari et al. (2010). Based on the factor analysis conducted by Heydari et al. (2010), the 23 items of the scale loaded onto three factors: Negative Mood (items 4, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 19, 20, and 23), Effort (items 3, 5, 6, 10, 17, 21, and 22), and Excuse-Making (items 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 16, and 18). The combination of the Negative Mood factor and the reverse-scored Effort factor indicates Behavioral Self-Handicapping, while the combination of the Negative Mood and Excuse-Making factors indicates Claimed Self-Handicapping. Correlations of the Self-Handicapping Scale with related constructs, such as excuse-making and low effort, in a sample of 245 individuals ranged from 0.27 to 0.60, and its internal consistency ranged from 0.38 to 0.70. The reliability of the scale, assessed using the test-retest method in the study by Heydari et al. (2010), was reported as 0.86. Using the internal consistency method (Cronbach's alpha), reliability coefficients ranged from 0.60 for the excuse-making subscale to 0.73 for the negative mood subscale, and from 0.67 for effort to 0.76 for the total self-handicapping score (Heydari et al., 2010). In the study by Delavar (2022), this questionnaire was re-normed, and the reliability of the excuse-making, negative mood, effort, and total score components was reported as 0.87, 0.88, 0.92, and 0.91, respectively, using Cronbach's alpha. In the study by Chaabi Iman et al. (2025), the reliability of the present questionnaire was found to be 0.69 using Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, in the present study, the reliability of the excuse-making, negative mood, effort, and total score components was calculated as 0.88, 0.86, 0.90, and 0.89, respectively, using Cronbach's alpha.

Hope Scale: The Hope Scale, developed by Snyder et al. (1991), is a 12-item instrument utilizing an 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (score 1) to "strongly agree" (score 8). This scale consists of two main subscales: "Agency Thinking," which includes four items (items 2, 9, 10, and 12), and "Pathways," which includes four items (items 1, 4, 7, and 8). The remaining four items (items 3, 5, 6, and 11) are considered filler items to enhance test

accuracy and are excluded from the final score calculation. Consequently, the total score range of the scale varies between 8 and 64. Snyder et al. (2003) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.85 for the scale using the test-retest method over a three-week interval, with reliability coefficients for the Agency and Pathways subscales reported as 0.81 and 0.74, respectively. Additionally, the internal consistency of the scale, based on Cronbach's alpha, was reported to range between 0.74 and 0.84, with a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.80. Regarding the localization and psychometric evaluation of this questionnaire in Iran, Kermani et al. (2011) confirmed its validity and reliability through factor analysis. Their findings indicated that the factors of this scale explained approximately 62% of the variance in hope. Cronbach's alpha and test-retest reliability in the study by Kermani et al. were reported as 0.86 and 0.81, respectively. Regarding concurrent validity, the correlation between hope scores and the Beck Depression Inventory was reported as -0.40. Furthermore, the correlations of hope with the Perceived Social Support and Meaning in Life scales were 0.40 and 0.57, respectively, which support the convergent and divergent validity of the Hope Scale. Moreover, Yaqoobi and Khalilpour (2022) also reported a reliability of 0.86 for this questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha. In the present study, the reliability of the scale was found to be 0.74 using Cronbach's alpha.

2.3. Intervention

The self-efficacy training intervention implemented in the present study was designed based on Bandura's social cognitive theory and was conducted across eight 90-minute group sessions for probation students. The intervention began with the administration of the pre-test, introduction of participants, clarification of group goals and procedures, and enhancement of participants' motivation for regular attendance. Subsequent sessions focused on familiarizing students with the concept of self-efficacy, characteristics of individuals with high self-efficacy, dimensions and types of efficacy beliefs, and the developmental mechanisms underlying efficacy formation. Participants were trained to recognize their personal strengths, competencies, and successful experiences in order to strengthen positive self-perceptions. The program also emphasized the concept of hope, the importance of future-oriented thinking, and practical methods for increasing hopeful cognition and motivation. In addition, students were introduced to successful role models to facilitate observational learning

and strengthen efficacy beliefs. Several sessions specifically targeted academic self-handicapping by increasing students' awareness of maladaptive coping patterns, excuse-making behaviors, and ineffective attributional styles, while simultaneously teaching adaptive coping strategies for managing academic challenges. Cognitive and behavioral techniques such as self-relaxation, guided mental imagery, positive visualization, problem-solving training, identification and modification of negative automatic thoughts, and enhancement of self-esteem were incorporated throughout the intervention. The final session focused on reinforcing positive self-talk, replacing dysfunctional cognitions with adaptive beliefs based on self-efficacy

principles, reviewing learned skills, and administering the post-test assessment.

2.4. Data Analysis

For data analysis, potential effects of hope or academic self-handicapping on the study outcomes were statistically controlled by entering the pre-test scores of these variables as covariates in the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) using SPSS software (Version 24).

3. Findings and Results

Descriptive statistics for the research variables, including means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Handicapping and Hope Scores for the Experimental and Control Groups

Variables	Statistical Indices	Experimental Group		Control Group	
		Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Academic Self-Handicapping	Mean	63.15	54.50	63.30	63.10
	SD	11.17	11.70	11.84	9.97
Hope	Mean	44.95	51.58	44.55	44.35
	SD	7.45	7.34	6.15	6.09

As shown in Table 1, the means (and standard deviations) for the pre-test and post-test scores of academic self-handicapping in the experimental group were 63.15 (SD = 11.17) and 54.05 (SD = 11.70), respectively. In the control group, these values were 63.30 (SD = 11.84) and 63.10 (SD = 9.97), respectively. Furthermore, the means (and standard deviations) for the pre-test and post-test scores of hope in the experimental group were 44.95 (SD = 7.45) and 51.85 (SD = 7.34), respectively, while in the control group, they were 44.55 (SD = 6.15) and 44.35 (SD = 6.09), respectively. According to Table 2, the mean score of academic self-handicapping in the post-test of the experimental group was lower than its pre-test score compared to the control group. Conversely, the mean score of hope in the post-test of the

experimental group was higher than its pre-test score compared to the control group.

To examine the differences between groups regarding academic self-handicapping and hope, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed. Initially, the assumptions of this statistical test were checked. The results of Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variances indicated that for the academic self-handicapping score, , and for hope, . These results indicate that there is no significant difference in the variances of the two groups, and the assumption of homogeneity of variance is met for these variables. Additionally, the results concerning the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes for the research variables are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of the Homogeneity of Regression Slopes Assumption for the Research Variables

Variable	F (Pretest)	Sig. (p)
Academic Self-Handicapping	1.35	0.173
Hope	0.536	0.258

The results regarding the homogeneity of regression slopes for the research variables, presented in Table 2, indicate that the F-value for the equality of regression slopes

for the variables of academic self-handicapping and hope is not significant. In other words, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has been met.

Table 3

Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA)

Test Statistic	Value	F Ratio	Hypothesis Degrees of Freedom	Error Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level (p)	Effect Size	Observed Power
Pillai's Trace	0.36	5	4	35	< 0.003	0.76	98
Wilks' Lambda	0.63	5	4	35	< 0.003	0.76	98
Hotelling's Trace	0.57	5	4	35	< 0.003	0.76	98
Largest Root (Roy's)	0.57	5	4	35	< 0.003	0.76	98

As shown in Table 3, the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) statistical tests for the experimental and control groups are significant. These findings indicate that the experimental and control groups differ in at least one of the dependent variables. Therefore,

to investigate and identify this difference, a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted following the MANCOVA, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results of ANCOVA within MANCOVA on the Posttest Means of Academic Self-Handicapping and Hope among Probation Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom for F	Mean Square	F	Significance Level	Effect Size	Observed Power
Academic Self-Handicapping	Pretest	3.36	1	3.36	35	< 0.321	0.003	0.015
	Group	131.96	1	131.96	21.59	< 0.001	0.54	98
	Error	146.54	33	4.44				
Hope	Pretest	70.45	1	70.45	2.10	< 0.85	0.006	0.023
	Group	1048.52	1	1048.52	48.12	< 0.003	0.59	1
	Error	806.16	33	24.34				

As shown in Table 4, there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups of probation students in terms of academic self-handicapping ($F = 21.95, p < 0.001$). In other words, group self-efficacy, considering the mean of academic self-handicapping in the experimental group of probation students compared to the control group, led to a reduction in academic self-handicapping among the experimental group. Furthermore, the results in Table 5 indicate a significant difference between the experimental and control groups of probation students in terms of hope ($F = 48.12, p < 0.001$). In other words, group self-efficacy, considering the mean of hope in the experimental group of probation students compared to the control group, led to an increase in hope among the experimental group.

self-efficacy training significantly reduced academic self-handicapping and significantly increased hope among students in the experimental group compared to the control group. These results indicate that strengthening students' beliefs regarding their own competence and capability can play a substantial role in improving psychological adjustment and reducing maladaptive academic coping strategies among academically vulnerable students. Considering the fact that probation students are frequently exposed to repeated experiences of failure, low self-confidence, fear of evaluation, and academic anxiety, the effectiveness of self-efficacy training observed in the present study highlights the central role of cognitive-motivational processes in academic adaptation and psychological resilience.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of self-efficacy training on self-handicapping and hope among probation students. The findings demonstrated that

One of the major findings of the present study was the reduction of academic self-handicapping following self-efficacy training. This finding is consistent with previous empirical and theoretical research indicating that students with stronger efficacy beliefs are less likely to engage in

defensive or self-defeating academic behaviors (Akar et al., 2018; Schwinger et al., 2022). Self-handicapping is fundamentally rooted in fear of failure and concerns regarding self-worth preservation. Students who doubt their capabilities often attempt to protect themselves psychologically by creating excuses, procrastinating, reducing effort, or avoiding full engagement in academic tasks. Such strategies temporarily shield individuals from attributing failure to low ability; however, they eventually contribute to poorer academic performance and greater emotional distress (Barutçu Yıldırım & Demir, 2020; Ferradás et al., 2018). The present findings suggest that self-efficacy training may weaken the motivational need for such defensive strategies by increasing students' confidence in their ability to cope successfully with academic demands.

These findings align with the theoretical assumptions of Bandura's social cognitive framework, which proposes that individuals with high self-efficacy interpret difficult situations as manageable challenges rather than threatening experiences. When students perceive themselves as capable of handling academic responsibilities, they are more likely to invest effort, persist during setbacks, and utilize adaptive coping strategies instead of resorting to self-protective avoidance behaviors. In contrast, low self-efficacy increases vulnerability to anxiety, helplessness, and behavioral withdrawal, thereby facilitating self-handicapping tendencies (Cassady et al., 2024; Haerazi & Irawan, 2020). The reduction in self-handicapping observed in this study therefore appears to reflect a cognitive restructuring process through which students gradually replaced negative beliefs about incompetence with more adaptive perceptions of personal capability.

The present findings are also consistent with the work of Török and colleagues, who demonstrated that interventions promoting adaptive mindsets significantly reduce behavioral self-handicapping among students (Török et al., 2022). Similarly, Coudeville et al. emphasized that motivational climates fostering competence and self-determination reduce students' tendency to engage in claimed self-handicapping strategies (Coudeville et al., 2020). Probation students often experience chronic academic pressure and repeated exposure to evaluative situations, which intensify fear of failure and increase the likelihood of self-protective behaviors. Through self-efficacy training, participants in the present study may have learned to reinterpret academic challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats to self-worth, thereby reducing the psychological necessity of self-handicapping.

Another important explanation for the effectiveness of self-efficacy training in reducing self-handicapping relates to emotional regulation and anxiety reduction. Previous studies have shown that academic anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty strongly contribute to maladaptive academic coping patterns (Cassady et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2020). Students with low efficacy beliefs frequently anticipate negative outcomes and experience heightened emotional distress during performance situations. Such emotional discomfort often motivates avoidance-oriented strategies designed to reduce immediate psychological pressure. Self-efficacy training may reduce these maladaptive responses by increasing perceived control and enhancing students' confidence in managing academic stressors. As students begin to believe in their competence, academic tasks become less threatening, which decreases the need to protect self-esteem through excuse-making or reduced effort.

The findings of the present study also demonstrated that self-efficacy training significantly increased hope among probation students. This result is consistent with previous research emphasizing the strong association between self-efficacy beliefs and hopeful thinking (Penzar et al., 2021; Wong & Yuen, 2023). According to hope theory, hopeful individuals possess both motivational energy toward goals and the cognitive ability to generate pathways for achieving desired outcomes. Students with strong efficacy beliefs are more likely to perceive themselves as capable of overcoming barriers and progressing toward academic goals. Consequently, enhancing self-efficacy may strengthen both components of hope by increasing students' confidence in their ability to initiate and sustain goal-directed behavior.

The increase in hope observed in this study can also be interpreted within the broader framework of positive psychology. Positive psychology emphasizes the cultivation of strengths, resilience, and adaptive psychological capacities rather than focusing exclusively on pathology and dysfunction. Hope is considered one of the most important protective psychological resources because it supports persistence, emotional wellbeing, and adaptive functioning during stressful circumstances (Krafft et al., 2018; Okur et al., 2023). Probation students often experience repeated academic disappointments that weaken future-oriented motivation and generate feelings of helplessness. Self-efficacy training appears to counteract these negative experiences by strengthening beliefs regarding personal competence and control, thereby promoting more optimistic expectations about future success.

The present findings correspond closely with the study conducted by Wong and Yuen, who reported that academic self-efficacy significantly predicted academic hope and adaptive coping during stressful online learning conditions (Wong & Yuen, 2023). Likewise, Kashiwabara et al. found that hope for the future was strongly associated with academic achievement and psychological adjustment among adolescents (Kashiwabara et al., 2022). The current results suggest that self-efficacy training may operate as a psychological resource that enables students to maintain motivation and future-oriented thinking despite previous academic failure. When students begin to believe in their capacity to succeed, they become more capable of envisioning achievable academic goals and identifying effective strategies for attaining them.

Another possible explanation for the increase in hope relates to the role of self-efficacy in enhancing persistence and resilience. Students with high self-efficacy typically demonstrate greater perseverance during difficult tasks and are more likely to continue striving despite setbacks (Knowles et al., 2020; Xiong et al., 2020). Such persistence contributes to successful experiences that reinforce optimistic expectations regarding future outcomes. In the present study, the self-efficacy training sessions emphasized positive self-talk, cognitive restructuring, identification of personal strengths, and adaptive coping strategies. These interventions may have facilitated a gradual shift from helplessness and pessimism toward confidence and future-oriented motivation. Similar findings have been reported in studies examining the effects of positive mood induction and academic encouragement on students' hope and wellbeing (Okur et al., 2023; Yaqoobi & Khalilpour, 2022).

The findings may also be interpreted through the lens of academic adaptability and psychological wellbeing. Research has demonstrated that students who possess adaptive psychological resources such as self-efficacy and hope are less vulnerable to academic burnout, disengagement, and dropout intention (Peng et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2019). Probation students frequently experience feelings of failure, academic exhaustion, and diminished motivation, which negatively affect educational persistence. By strengthening efficacy beliefs and hopeful thinking, self-efficacy training may improve students' psychological resilience and increase their capacity to manage academic challenges constructively. This interpretation is supported by studies indicating that self-efficacy contributes significantly to wellbeing, creativity, and academic adjustment (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Jin & Ye, 2022).

The present findings additionally support the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of psychological interventions within higher education settings. Universities increasingly recognize that academic achievement cannot be fully understood solely in terms of cognitive ability or intellectual aptitude. Psychological variables such as self-efficacy, hope, motivation, emotional regulation, and coping strategies play critical roles in determining educational outcomes (Middleton et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, interventions targeting these psychological dimensions may serve as effective tools for supporting academically vulnerable students. The present study contributes to this literature by demonstrating that structured self-efficacy training can simultaneously reduce maladaptive coping behaviors and strengthen positive motivational resources among probation students.

Furthermore, the present findings align with contemporary educational approaches emphasizing supportive and growth-oriented learning environments. Research suggests that students are more likely to thrive academically when educational contexts foster encouragement, psychological safety, and opportunities for mastery experiences (Dong et al., 2022; Middleton et al., 2023). Self-efficacy training may therefore function not only as an individual intervention but also as part of a broader educational strategy designed to enhance resilience, persistence, and adaptive functioning within university populations. Given the increasing prevalence of academic stress, burnout, and psychological distress among students, such interventions appear particularly important in modern higher education systems.

One limitation of the present study was the relatively small sample size, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations. Additionally, the participants were selected exclusively from probation students at a single university, which may limit the applicability of the results to students from other academic, cultural, or institutional contexts. Another limitation was the reliance on self-report questionnaires for data collection. Although standardized instruments were utilized, self-report measures may be influenced by response biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-perception. Furthermore, the absence of a follow-up stage prevented examination of the long-term stability of the intervention effects. It is therefore unclear whether the observed reductions in self-handicapping and increases in hope would persist over extended periods following completion of the training program.

Future research should investigate the long-term effectiveness of self-efficacy training through longitudinal and follow-up designs. Researchers may also compare the effectiveness of self-efficacy interventions with other psychological approaches such as mindfulness-based interventions, cognitive-behavioral training, resilience enhancement programs, or positive psychology interventions. Expanding the research to include students from different universities, academic disciplines, and educational levels would improve external validity and strengthen understanding of contextual influences. Future studies could additionally examine mediating and moderating variables such as academic anxiety, perfectionism, emotional intelligence, academic motivation, and social support in order to clarify the psychological mechanisms underlying changes in self-handicapping and hope. Employing qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups may also provide deeper insight into students' subjective experiences of self-efficacy training.

From a practical perspective, the findings of the present study suggest that universities should pay greater attention to psychological support services for probation students. Structured self-efficacy training programs may be integrated into counseling centers, academic advising systems, and student support initiatives in order to strengthen adaptive coping skills and reduce maladaptive academic behaviors. Educational workshops focusing on cognitive restructuring, goal setting, positive self-talk, stress management, and resilience training may help students develop stronger beliefs in their own capabilities. Faculty members and academic advisors should also create supportive learning environments that encourage persistence, constructive feedback, and growth-oriented attitudes toward failure. Establishing comprehensive psychological intervention programs within universities may contribute substantially to reducing academic probation, improving student wellbeing, and promoting long-term academic success.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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