Journal of Learning and Development Studies
ISSN: 2752-9541
DOI: 10.32996/jlds
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jlds

JLDS
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship Between Academic Self-Efficacy and Perceived Academic Stressors Among Higher Education Students

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| ABSTRACT
This study explores the links between students' perceived stresses (workload, external expectations and anxiety about exams) and their academic confidence (self-efficacy) based on a sample of two hundred forty-four students studying at colleges across the Philippines using a survey format (descriptive/correlational). Results of the survey found that students reported having good levels of self-efficacy (M=4.00) and experienced moderate levels of stress (M=3.57) when rated by stress level. Of the three types of stress, the study found testing caused the most stress (M=3.57); however, when conducting Pearson's r correlation analysis between self-efficacy and testing stress, workload stress and external pressures there were significant positive correlations. The study's findings suggest that having higher self-efficacy provides more confidence in handling workload, but as a result of their higher level of self-efficacy, students with high self-efficacy may experience more stress from academic pressures than do those with lower levels of self-efficacy. Although differences were not found between males and females, both academic year level and department were associated with levels of stress and self-efficacy. Recommendations that came from this study are for departments to create wellness programs based on the needs of their department and to implement universal testing anxiety prevention programs based on evidence from the research to increase the resilience of their students.

KEYWORDS

Academic self-efficacy, academic stress, test anxiety

| ARTICLE INFORMATION
ACCEPTED: 01 February 2026 **PUBLISHED:** February 2026 **DOI:** 10.32996/jlds.2026.6.4.2

Introduction

Like universities worldwide, higher education institutions in the Philippines play an important role in developing intellectual capacity, preparing for future careers, and enhancing one's identity. As students pursue their educational goals, many academic demands are placed on them, creating a high level of psychological stress that negatively impacts their ability to learn and develop into successful individuals (Berdida et al., 2023; Berdida & Grande, 2022). Academic stress, defined simply as the psychological pressure created by academic aspects of student life, is a well-documented, pervasive problem among university students worldwide and across diverse cultural and institutional settings (Ridad et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

Academic stress, when not managed properly, can lead to problems beyond simply not doing well academically. Other consequences can include more severe mental health challenges, decreased quality of life, and, in extreme cases (Ridad et al., 2024; Berdida & Grande, 2022), suicidal thoughts or actions. Furthermore, in the Philippines, stress related to school has been identified as a primary contributor to completed suicides by university students (Ridad et al., 2024). It highlights a need to investigate this phenomenon. Therefore, it is critical to continue exploring the psychological factors underlying how students respond to stressors, particularly in the context of Filipino higher education.

Academic self-efficacy (i.e., the belief students have in their ability to complete their academic tasks successfully) is one construct consistently related to students' ability to navigate academic demands (Berdida et al., 2023; Montero, 2025). Bandura originally

theorized self-efficacy as an individual's belief in his/her ability to perform at pre-established levels and to have control over the situations that influence his/her life. Academic self-efficacy is a specific extension of this construct, focusing on students' beliefs about their ability to succeed academically (Buenconsejo et al., 2024; Calaguas & Consunji, 2022). Academic self-efficacy has been demonstrated to be a strong predictor of many outcomes related to the academic success of students, including academic performance, the degree to which the students are engaged in school, their motivation, and their overall psychological well-being (Buenconsejo et al., 2024; Montero, 2025; Cheng, 2023).

Students who demonstrate high levels of academic self-efficacy are more likely to continue to engage in academic activities when faced with obstacles to their success, utilize effective approaches to learn, and continue to achieve academic success (Montero, 2025; Mamolo & Sugano, 2020). Alternatively, students who exhibit low levels of academic self-efficacy are at greater risk for experiencing anxiety, detachment from academics, and academic failure (Cheng, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, both theoretically and empirically, the psychosocial resource of academic self-efficacy has been established in the current educational psychology literature. Given that academic self-efficacy has been documented as a significant predictor of academic success and a psychological resource that buffers against potential negative psychological outcomes, the examination of this phenomenon remains warranted across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

The relationship between stress and self-efficacy has been a topic of interest among scholars. There is substantial evidence that self-efficacy can buffer the negative effects of stressors on psychological well-being (Berdida et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). See also Berger & Zubrey (2012); Wright et al. (2018). Higher self-efficacy is associated with more positive affect and a lower likelihood of viewing environmental demands as threats or overwhelming (Wang et al., 2023). In higher education, students' psychological functioning has repeatedly been shown to be negatively affected by academic stressors (e.g., heavy workloads, external pressures from family and society, and test anxiety); self-efficacy appears to be an important moderating variable in this relationship (Berdida & Grande, 2022). Also, Wang et al. (2023) found evidence that self-efficacy has a sequential mediating role between academic stressors in university life and anxiety symptoms, providing a clear path to how academic stressors shape psychological distress.

Berdida et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy, as an internal protective factor, could help mitigate the negative consequences of stress on health among nursing students in the Philippines. Overall, these findings support the importance of self-efficacy in shaping how students perceive and respond to academic stressors.

In the Philippines' post-secondary educational context, studies have investigated both academic stress and self-efficacy among different student groups. However, findings are limited and generally relate to only one type of student. This is particularly true with respect to two studies involving nursing students, who experienced substantial academic stress due to perceived workloads, required courses, and clinical training (Ridad et al., 2024; Berdida & Grande, 2022). Both studies found that academic stress negatively affected the quality of life and resilience of nursing students in the Philippines, while Ridad et al. (2024) noted that academic stress is a leading contributor to distress during clinical practice.

Research conducted among Filipino university students in other disciplines, beyond nursing, suggests that relationships between academic self-efficacy and gratitude, satisfaction with life, and well-being can be observed (Buenconsejo et al., 2024). Furthermore, self-efficacy has been shown to impact motivation and students' study habits, which, in turn, are predictors of academic performance (Montero, 2025). In examining Filipino pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, Muega-Geronimo and Carlos (2023) found that self-efficacy beliefs were predictive of teacher candidates' readiness for licensure examinations; however, they also observed gender differences in the strength of the correlation between self-efficacy and readiness. These findings collectively demonstrate that the construct of academic self-efficacy is a psychologically relevant concept within Philippine education, and that more research is needed to understand how academic stressors may relate to self-efficacy beliefs among students across different post-secondary programs and year levels.

The Philippines' cultural background adds to the difficulties of researching academic self-efficacy and stress. In their study, Ahn et al. (2015) found that self-efficacy information is obtained and interpreted by different cultures. The primary means for Filipino students to develop their academic self-efficacy beliefs is through their peer groups. In contrast, Korean students primarily develop these beliefs through their families. Thus, cultural contexts are significant, and findings from Western or East Asian contexts may not be applied to the Filipino student sample without careful consideration. Dahl et al. (2021) and Klainin-Yobas et al. (2021) further note the significant institutional diversity across the Philippine higher education landscape. In total, there is a diverse set of students in differing departments and disciplines in the Philippine higher education landscape. Each department represents a different set of academic demands and stressor profiles.

Under a legislative and regulatory framework, the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines established extensive academic requirements for each of its disciplines, and the intense competition present in the country's higher education systems (e.g., high stakes examination requirements for admission, comprehensive and rigorous curricula, and societal emphasis on academic accomplishment) have created an environment conducive to the development of academic stress Ridad et al., 2024; Muega-Geronimo & Carlos, 2023. However, little research has examined how different groups of students experience academic self-efficacy in relation to the three components of academic stress (workload, external pressure, and test anxiety) in Philippine higher education institutions.

While numerous studies are available on academic stress and academic self-efficacy in relation to academic performance in the Philippines, there is a significant lack of evidence on how personal efficacy is associated with the multiple dimensions of perceived

stressors in an academic environment among students from various colleges and years in school. Most of the research done has focused primarily on certain populations, such as nursing students, or have examined the relationship between academic performance and self-efficacy, with a few investigating how self-efficacy correlates with other outcomes (online learning or well-being), therefore not examining their relationship with each dimension of academic stress; e.g., external pressure, workload pressure and test anxiety; through the eyes of students from different academic departments.

This disparity is quite evident when viewed through a demographic lens (i.e., sex, department, year level), as these factors likely have a moderating influence on self-efficacy and stress perception levels (Cheng, 2023; Muega-Geronimo & Carlos, 2023). Thus, the current study will help bridge the identified gap by examining the relationship between academic self-efficacy and perceived academic stressors among higher education students in the Philippines. To elaborate, this research will seek to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
   1.1. Sex;
   1.2. Department; and
   1.3. Year Level?
2. What is the level of Personal Efficacy among the respondents?
3. What is the level of academic stress among the respondents in terms of:
   3.1. Workload Stress;
   3.2. External Pressure; and
   3.3. Test Anxiety?
4. Is there a significant difference on the respondents' personal efficacy and their perceived level of academic stress when grouped according to their profile?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' Personal Efficacy and their perceived levels of academic stress?

Research Methods

This chapter explains the research process used to examine the relationship between academic self-efficacy and perceived academic stressors. The framework, participants, and analysis tools used in this research are described, along with their use to verify the validity and reliability of the findings.

This research design is a quantitative study that employs a descriptive, correlational approach. It is descriptive because it presents the students' demographic profile and their respective levels of self-efficacy and stress. It is correlational in that it seeks to describe the direction and strength of the relationship between these two primary variables without altering either variable. This design allows the researcher to statistically determine the relationship between a student's belief in their ability to do academically (self-efficacy) and their perception of various pressures (stress).

The study took place at Northeastern College in the various academic departments. This site was chosen because it is home to a diverse student population seeking to succeed academically and who have experienced first-hand the demands of the academic environment, as outlined in the research questions. The academic environment in which the study took place is an authentic setting for analyzing workload stress, external pressures, and test anxiety.

To ensure a representative cross-section of the student body, the researcher used stratified random sampling to create strata based on Department and Year Level, allowing students from different disciplines and year levels to be represented. Individual respondents were selected from within these strata. By using this method, bias is minimized, and the demographic profile is accurately represented in the final dataset.

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections. The first section consists of demographic information. The second section was an adapted version of Bedewy and Gabriel's (2015) validated scale (Perception of Academic Stress Scale), which was used to assess a respondent's level of personal efficacy. The third section consisted of a Likert-scale designed to measure respondents' perceived academic stressors specifically related to Workload Stress, External Pressure, and Test Anxiety. Pilot testing of the instruments took place prior to full deployment to ensure reliability and internal consistency.

Statistical tools were used to analyze the data from this study using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean, to summarize the demographic profile of study participants in terms of their personal efficacy and the academic stressors they face. In addition, the final research question about the relationship between variables was tested using Pearson's r correlation coefficient to determine whether a significant relationship exists between personal efficacy levels and academic stressors; thus, testing the hypothesis at a set alpha level.

The study followed strict ethical standards outlined for conducting research. All students participating in this study provided informed consent. Each participant was notified of the purpose of the survey, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that their privacy and confidentiality would be maintained through anonymity; thus, there would be no connection between any individual participant's responses and the researcher. The researcher agrees to adhere to the principle of non-maleficence (i.e.,

not causing harm), so that participants are not placed under any additional stress or in danger during the survey's administration. After the completion of the study, the researcher will securely store all participant data and destroy it in compliance with standard regulations for the storage and destruction of personal data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Frequencies of SEX

SEX	Counts	% of Total
FEMALE	111	45.5%
MALE	133	54.5%

Frequencies of DEPARMENT

DEPARMENT	Counts	% of Total
CIT	20	8.2%
COC	41	16.8%
COED	55	22.5%
COHM	128	52.5%

Frequencies of Year Level

Year Level	Counts	% of Total
FIRST YEAR	95	38.9%
FOURTH YEAR	52	21.3%
SECOND YEAR	52	21.3%
THIRD YEAR	45	18.4%

The demographic composition of the study sample provides a foundational context for interpreting the findings on academic self-efficacy and perceived academic stressors among higher education students at Northeastern College. The sample of 244 respondents shows a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 54.5% (n = 133) male respondents and 45.5% (n = 111) female respondents. This near-equal distribution is methodologically advantageous, as it allows for meaningful gender-based comparisons without the confounding effects of severe sampling imbalance. The College of Hospitality Management (COHM) contributed the largest proportion of participants (52.5%), followed by COED (22.5%), COC (16.8%), and CIT (8.2%), reflecting the institutional enrollment distribution across departments. The year-level distribution, with first-year students constituting the largest group (38.9%), followed by second-year (21.3%), fourth-year (21.3%), and third-year (18.4%) students, ensures representation across all stages of the undergraduate academic journey. This multi-departmental and multi-year-level composition is particularly significant because, as Tindle et al. Tindle et al. (2022) noted in their scoping review, psychosocial factors affecting academic performance—including self-efficacy and stress—are shaped by the broader learning environment and institutional context in which students are embedded. Furthermore, the diversity of academic disciplines represented in the sample is consistent with the recognition that different academic environments impose distinct demands on students, which may differentially influence their self-efficacy beliefs and stress perceptions (Cheng, 2023), Cao et al. (2024). The representativeness of the sample across departments and year levels thus strengthens the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of college students at Northeastern College and, potentially, to comparable higher education institutions in the Philippine context.

Table 2. Personal Efficacy

	Mean	SD
1. Am confident that I will be a successful student	4.25	0.894
2. Am confident that I will be a successful in my future career	4.20	0.914
3. I can make academic decisions easily	3.53	0.798
Overall Mean	4.00	0.731

According to several studies, college students who have developed a positive self-image and a strong commitment to academic performance are healthier and perform better than those who do not. (E.g., Muchtar et al. (2023), Richardson et al. (2012)) At Northeastern College, the incredibly high levels of confidence reported for both future success in academics (Mean = 4.25) and in their ability to succeed later in life (Mean = 4.20) show the students have a high degree of optimism about their future academic outcomes and exhibit high levels of belief in themselves and their abilities to be successful—characteristics which Bandura's theory of social cognition describes as being important to developing confidence and self-efficacy (Darmayanti et al. (2021); Potoy et al. (2023)).

Richardson et al. (2012) previously conducted the first meta-analysis of the association between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement in colleges and universities, finding that academic self-efficacy was one of the strongest non-intellective correlates of undergraduate students' grade point average, with 242 studies reporting a medium-to-large effect size for that relationship. Muchtar et al. (2023) also demonstrated that higher academic self-efficacy is positively associated with both mental health and academic progress among students enrolled in postsecondary education, and that these two variables have a strength of association parameter of .520 for mental health outcome measures, thereby directly affirming the psychological relevance of the construct. Additionally, participants' mean score for ability to easily make academic decisions (M = 3.53) was still greater than halfway between not being able to make academic decisions easily; however, given the relative determination of higher education decisions in the Philippines where students must navigate academic requirements; while also having to balance those requirements and gainful employment goals or aspirations, they exhibit increased difficulty in making those decisions (Muñoz et al., 2023; Potoy et al., 2023).

The overall high efficacy profile of the participants indicates they likely have a strong psychological base for complex learning approaches and for successfully achieving academic goals, similar to the observation of Darmayanti, Xie, and Tan (2021) that higher levels of academic self-efficacy result in student motivation to use self-regulated learning techniques and lower levels of anxiety/stress associated with school. This psychological base is particularly significant given the academic-related stressors identified in the following studies, as high levels of self-efficacy may serve as a protective factor against the adverse effects of academic obligations (Chongjin & Keyserlingk, 2021).

Table 3. Workload Stress

	Mean	SD
4. The time allocated to classes and academic work is enough	3.53	0.858
5. I have enough time to relax after work	3.16	0.980
10. The size of the curriculum (workload) is excessive	3.41	0.814
11. I believe that the amount of work assignment is too much	3.37	0.844
12. Am unable to catch up if getting behind the work	3.19	0.865
Overall Mean	3.37	0.542

The survey data on workload and stress from the current study's participants provide a clearer picture of the extent of academic pressure at Northeastern than previously reported. While the average response to whether the student felt they had adequate time to do their work was 3.53 (indicating they fell between "strongly disagree" and "neutral"), other average scores were much higher: 3.41 for the number of courses and 3.31 for the number of assignments. This combination demonstrates how subjective feelings of having 'time enough' to complete one's schoolwork can coexist with a generally perceived academic overload. While students manage their workloads appropriately, it is possible that high academic demands result in emotional responses (such as

anxiety and frustration) documented by Cao et al. (2024). In addition, two of the most troubling items were the mean scores of 3.16 for whether students feel they have adequate time to relax and 3.19 for whether students can recover from falling behind on their coursework. These low values suggest that students may be reaching their limits for coping with academic demands. García-Ros et al. (2022) reported similar findings in their study of the role of self-regulated learning strategies (such as time management and self-efficacy) as mediators of the relationship between academic demands and stress outcomes. They found that when strategies are used to their limits, academic stress and procrastination generally increase.

The study's findings—showing a pattern among students—are strikingly similar to that of Keyserlingk et al. (2021), who found a significant positive association between limited time available to complete coursework and an increase in perceived stress. In addition, self-efficacy in self-regulation provides a protective factor to the exacerbation of perceived stress. Lastly, our identification of high volumes of due academic assignments as the most significant burden or levels of workload were consistent with vast amounts of literature that suggest curriculum and assignments are among the most frequently cited academic-related stressors experienced by students in college or other forms of higher education Tindle et al., 2022, García-Ros et al., 2022. Taken together, these findings suggest that at this time, students at Northeastern College are managing their workloads. However, if their cumulative academic expectations remain unaddressed, the cumulative burden may lead to the gradual depletion of academic resilience and social efficacy among students.

Table 4. External Pressure

	Mean	SD
6. My teachers are critical of my academic performance	3.37	0.858
9. Teachers have unrealistic expectations of me	3.06	0.882
13. The unrealistic expectations of my parents stresses me out	3.24	1.205
14. competition with my peers for grades is quite intense	3.13	1.046
Overall Mean	3.20	0.718

The mean level of external pressures reported by students (Mean = 3.20, SD = 0.718) illustrates that social-academic environmental factors are important in determining how students at Northeastern College experience stress. The fact that students indicate that teachers' negative attitudes toward academic achievement (Mean = 3.37) and parents' unrealistic expectations (Mean = 3.24) were among the highest sources of external pressure to succeed further illustrates how Filipino college students face both social and cultural expectations from their schools and families. This is further supported by Chee et al.'s (2019) study of Native American undergraduate students, which found that overall external social pressures and cultural expectations were strong predictors of academic stress and explained 23.7% of the variance in stress outcomes. The relatively large standard deviation (SD = 1.205) of stress resulting from parental expectations as compared to that resulting from teacher pressures indicates that there is considerable variability in the way that students experience familial pressures, which suggests that the impact of parental expectations on students is a highly individualized experience and that there is significant variability in how this operates for the entire student population. Differences in family backgrounds, cultural norms, and the extent to which individual students have internalized their parents' expectations as performance standards may contribute to this variability.

Students face numerous external pressures that create an environment of multiple stressors, including peer competition for grades (normalized mean [M] = 3.13) and teachers' unrealistic expectations (normalized mean [M] = 3.06). Chung and Chong (2025) conducted research indicating that academic stress was negatively correlated with academic self-efficacy ($r = -0.36$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that prolonged exposure to the external pressures identified in the current study negatively affected academic self-efficacy beliefs. Muñoz et al. (2023) reported that stress and anxiety resulting from academic pressure negatively affected students' beliefs about their ability to perform academic work, further supporting the notion that external pressures are not only situational stressors but also have the potential to change self-efficacy beliefs over time. The combined effect of external pressures on students' learning strategies and social efficacy is a serious concern for institutional stakeholders at Northeastern College, especially in light of research supporting a negative relationship between external stressors and academic self-efficacy (Zhang et al. (2024), Chee et al., 2019).

Table 5. Test Anxiety

	Mean	SD
7. I fear failing courses this year	4.02	1.215
8. I think that my worry about examinations is weakness of character	3.65	0.984
15. The examination questions are usually difficult	3.41	0.900
16. Examination time is short to complete the answers	3.24	0.944
17. Examination times are very stressful to me out	3.35	0.963
18. Even if I pass my exams, am worried about getting a job	3.73	1.066
Overall Mean	3.57	0.717

Many respondents (M=3.57 SD=0.717) reported moderate-to-severe levels of test anxiety, which were perhaps the most important finding of the study, as you will see in the literature on test anxiety, test anxiety is a powerful disruptor of both academic performance and psychological well-being (García-Ros et al., 2022; Kadosh et al., 2023). Respondent's primary source of test anxiety is the fear of failing courses this year (M=4.02), suggesting that academic assessments in higher education in the Philippines have significant consequences for students' future academic and career paths. Cheng (2023) observed that students attach great importance to their academic achievements, leading to higher pre-test state anxiety and greater post-examination stress. Additionally, the respondent's future employment concerns after taking a test (M=3.73) demonstrate that the test anxiety experienced during the testing period has long-lasting impacts on concerns that stretch beyond testing for academic performance to a general concern about their careers, professional success, and future career opportunities as identified by Verdi et al. (2016) where students with academic self-efficacy tend to experience high levels of psychological functioning and positive future outcomes.

The idea that test-worry is an indication of one's character (M = 3.65) reflects the possibility of students suffering from a kind of 'metacognitive doubt'—feeling anxious about being anxious—which can place an additional burden on the student by increasing the amount of stress placed upon him/her in a test-taking situation. García-Ros et al. (2022) report that test anxiety had a significant negative relationship to students' academic achievement and overall well-being but was positively associated with students' academic stress. In contrast, Kadosh et al. (2023) demonstrated that targeted interventions can reduce test anxiety and increase self-efficacy in academic settings; thus, these constructs are dynamically related. Additionally, as would be expected, test anxiety is increased due to additional stressors, including perceived difficulty of questions and time restrictions. This results in an overall test anxiety profile that is multidimensional and negatively affects academic achievement and social self-efficacy. Finally, Arthur et al. (2025) report that severe test anxiety was significantly correlated with academic achievement ($p = 0.020$) while high self-efficacy protects against the negative effects of test anxiety; that is, self-efficacious students were three times as likely to achieve a high degree of academic performance as compared to those who are not self-efficacious—emphasizing the importance of self-efficacy in providing a buffer against the performance-reducing effect of test anxiety.

Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test (Sex)

		Statistic	df	p
Personal Efficacy	Student's t	0.314	242	0.754
Workload Stress	Student's t	1.141	242	0.255
External Pressure	Student's t	-0.320	242	0.749
Test Anxiety	Student's t	-1.819	242	0.070

Note. H_a $\mu_{FEMALE} \neq \mu_{MALE}$

The results of the independent-samples Craig's t-test, which concluded that no statistically significant gender differences exist in personal efficacy ($p = 0.754$), workload stress ($p = 0.255$), external pressures ($p = 0.749$), and test anxiety ($p = 0.070$), represent an important theoretical and practical finding. The lack of gender-based differences found in these constructs implies that the academic stress experience at Northeastern College is fundamentally a shared experience, which cuts across gender differences,

and that male and female students have similar levels of self-efficacy, workload stress, external pressure and test-related anxiety; this finding contrasts with Muega-Geronimo and Carlos, who found that female pre-service teachers had higher levels of self-efficacy than males in the Philippines (Muega-Geronimo & Carlos, 2023) and with Arthur et al., who found that pre-service female teachers with mental health problems were significantly less likely to achieve high levels of academic performance than their male counterparts (Arthur et al., 2025). The differences in these findings compared to those from this study may reflect that Northeastern College has specific institutional and disciplinary influences that create a more equitable environment for academic stress and efficacy, relative to what has been observed in other institutions.

In agreement with the findings of Hossain et al. (2022), gender-based differences were also observed among university students in financial stress, providing evidence that gender effects of stress due to academic pressures may be domain-specific rather than universally applicable. Additionally, the near-significant p-value reported for test anxiety ($p = 0.070$) suggests a potential trend towards gender differentiation in test-related anxiety that may reach traditional significance with a larger sample size. Notably, Morton's study (2014) indicated that optimism, depression, and anxiety were each statistically related to students' self-reported levels of stress; while self-efficacy was positively correlated with students' adaptation to college (suggesting that psychological mechanisms affecting stress and self-efficacy may function similarly for both genders). Overall, these results indicate that sex has a minimal impact on students' self-perception of their academic abilities or experience of academic stress at Northeastern College. This has significant implications for designing institutional interventions related to stress management and self-efficacy enhancement, suggesting that gender-specific programme designs would be inappropriate for this institution.

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA (Department)

	F	df1	df2	p
Personal Efficacy	2.87	3	66.4	0.043
Workload Stress	22.14	3	63.1	<.001
External Pressure	55.26	3	66.2	<.001
Test Anxiety	9.24	3	64.8	<.001

The statistically significant differences between personal self-efficacy and all three dimensions of academic stress (actual and perceived external pressure, and actual and perceived workload stress) across the various departments at Northeastern College that were established through one-way ANOVA demonstrate how the academic discipline and the department's environment are two powerful determinants of a student's psychological experience in higher education. Given the extremely high F-statistics for actual and perceived external pressure ($F = 55.26$) and actual and perceived workload stress ($F = 22.14$), the level of variation experienced from each of these stressors between academic programs at Northeastern College is not only statistically significant, but it also is based on substantial differences, thereby supporting the conclusion that students that are enrolled in different academic programs at Northeastern College are experiencing qualitatively different levels of academic stress. These findings are consistent with the results of Tindle et al.'s (2022) review of the effects of psychosocial factors on students' academic performance, as well as with Cheng's (2023) observations regarding the influence of both educational environment and cultural factors on the relationship between academic self-efficacy and success.

The data indicate that personal efficacy differs across departments. However, the effect size of the variance in personal efficacy among departments ($p = .043$) was smaller than that for students' perceived stress ($p = .001$). Thus, these data support the notion that the culture of each department, the pedagogical methods used in that department, and the demands of the curriculum interact in different ways to shape a student's self-belief in his or her ability to succeed academically. For instance, students who experience low levels of self-efficacy regarding their academics experience higher levels of stress related to their academics, and their performance expectations mediate this relationship; however, the manner in which this relationship develops may be different across the departments based on the demands of the curricula and the culture of evaluation present within the discipline (Zhang et al., 2024). Similarly, Cao et al. (2024) reported that students' academic self-efficacy is much more effective at predicting academic success than students' perceived stress, by demonstrating the need to understand the connection between self-efficacy and stress, in order to understand better how students see and react to the environmental demands that affect their academic success. Thus, to conclude, this research confirms that a student's department is more than just an administrative category; it is a psychologically salient variable that significantly impacts all aspects of a student's academic self-efficacy and experiences of academic-related stress. Therefore, the results of this study suggest important implications for designing department-specific academic support and stress management programs at Northeastern College.

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA (Year Level)

	F	df1	df2	p
Personal Efficacy	2.80	3	116	0.043
Workload Stress	6.42	3	120	<.001
External Pressure	2.99	3	119	0.034
Test Anxiety	1.28	3	114	0.286

Results from the One-Way ANOVA ($F(3,116) = 2.80$, $p < .043$)) show significant differences between year levels of personal efficacy, workload stress, and external pressure. Test anxiety was not significantly different ($F(3,114) = 1.28$, $p = .286$). This information will help in understanding the development of stress (academic) and self-efficacy over the course of a student's degree. The variance in workload stress was the most pronounced between year groups. Students are subjected to increasingly rigors academic demands as they progress through their respective degree programs, causing multiple challenges to students at different year levels. This is consistent with Richardson et al. (2012), who state that self-efficacy will stabilize as a function of university experience and will develop greater predictive validity once student skill and performance are established. In turn, the relationship between self-efficacy and stress may subsequently change as a student acquires more academic experience. Morton et al. (2014) indicate that the transition from secondary to tertiary education is a period of heightened stress for students. That self-efficacy and optimism are protective factors during this time. In light of these studies, the present research's findings indicate that the year of study significantly moderates personal efficacy and workload stress.

Significant differences in external pressures based on year level ($p=.034$) suggests that socio-academic pressures from authority and peer groups change and/or become more or less intense based on student's year level in school, possibly reflecting changes in the interactions and relationships with faculty, shifts in peer/peer dynamics, and nearness to high-stakes outcomes e.g. graduation/employment. Conversely, the non-significant difference between year levels in test anxiety ($p=.286$) is a strong indicator that the psychological component of test-related anxiety most likely is an ongoing or stable aspect of an undergrad's experience and does not change significantly based on their year in school. Similarly, García-Ros et al. (2022) found consistent test anxiety relationships with different levels of academic pressure and wellness across all educational levels suggesting that test anxiety is probably a stable psychological trait characteristic rather than an external determinant to a specific situation. This finding has significant implications for practice, as test anxiety interventions at Northeastern College should be designed as universal, targeting all year levels, rather than being focused on specific year levels.

Table 9. Correlation Matrix

		Personal Efficacy	Workload Stress	External Pressure	Test Anxiety
Personal Efficacy	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
Workload Stress	Pearson's r	0.506***	—		
	df	242	—		
	p-value	<.001	—		
External Pressure	Pearson's r	0.159*	0.459***	—	
	df	242	242	—	
	p-value	0.013	<.001	—	
Test Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.260***	0.444***	0.574***	—

Table 9. Correlation Matrix

	Personal Efficacy	Workload Stress	External Pressure	Test Anxiety
df	242	242	242	—
p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The positive associations discovered through correlation analyses between personal efficacy and all three phases of academic stress (i.e., workload stress, r = 0.506, p of .001; test anxiety, r = 0.260, p of .001; external pressure, r = 0.159, p of .013) present the most theoretically interesting aspect of the study, challenging the traditional belief that higher levels of self-efficacy protect against or diminish levels of academic stress. The medium level of positive correlation between personal efficacy and workload stress is particularly surprising, suggesting that higher levels of self-efficacy indicate students' better recognition of, rather than insulation from, the academic demands made of them. The unexpected nature of this correlation may be explained by Zhang et al.'s (2024) argument that academic self-efficacy does not protect students from stress; rather, it shapes how students evaluate their experiences and respond to academic demands. The possibility exists that higher levels of self-efficacy support students in developing a higher standard for academic performance, thereby increasing their perception of the amount of work they need to complete. Similarly, Cao et al. (2024) concluded that the relationship between academic stress and academic self-efficacy is complex: high levels of academic stress can engender negative feelings about academics, which may, in turn, affect how students view themselves in relation to academic success.

There is a positive correlation between test anxiety and personal efficacy, as documented by Cheng (2023), which is attributed to self-efficacy beliefs affecting how students value achieving high academic performance. Specifically, when a student places a high value on achieving an academically high performance (the importance they place on achieving highly academically), they also experience a higher level of anxiety before they take a test. Conversely, Chong et al. (2025) found a negative correlation between stress and self-efficacy (r = -.36, p < 0.01), contradicting the current study's results. However, one possible explanation for this contradiction could be due to the current study measuring three specific stressors (test anxiety, workload, and external pressures) of the overall construct of academic-related stress which Chong, et al. used to describe their findings; therefore, perhaps the findings presented by Chong and colleagues may reflect cultural or institutional variations between the populations sampled.

The relationship between personal efficacy and external pressure (r = 0.159) holds up in contrast to two other significant correlations; therefore, as another piece of evidence supporting the theory that highly efficacious students might be sensitive to external evaluative expectations by authority figures and/or peers, because of their high level of investment in success within academia, making them highly attuned to performance cues occurring outside of their academic environment. Keyserlingk et al. (2021) demonstrated that the relationship between academic self-efficacy and self-regulation to an increased level study-related stress during acute periods of high academic demand supporting the idea that self-efficacy and stress may be differentially moderated based on if self-efficacy is assessed within the context of self-regulation and/or the context of the specific type or instance of stress. These studies suggest that personal efficacy at Northeastern College does not serve merely as a buffer against potential stressors but rather an amplifying factor on level of awareness of his/her academic performance and sensitivity to performance-related cues occurring within an academic environment, affecting the design and/or implementation of self-efficacy building programs within Northeastern College.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Northeastern College students demonstrate strong personal efficacy, reflected in positive expectations about their academic performance and confidence in future success; however, they report using these beliefs primarily to amplify academic performance rather than as a traditional buffer against stress. The existence of a positive correlation between academic efficacy and two of the three dimensions? Whether it is through increased academic burden (workload) or increased anxiety associated with tests) suggests that students with high academic efficacy may set higher standards for their own performance, which, in turn, results in greater sensitivity to the demands of their studies and external expectations.

It appears that while these students demonstrate a solid psychological foundation to achieve mastery of skills, their capacity to recover is currently being pushed to its limits, suggesting that while both academic efficacy and feelings of academic overload exist at the same time, they are both experienced without resolution by students who are experiencing academic overload. Based on the findings of this study, the author concludes that there are no gender-based differences in academic stress or efficacy, but that there are significant differences in the academic cultural environment across departments and year levels.

The environment for students in each discipline creates a different kind of qualitative stress, largely due to differences in external demands and workload. External demands fluctuate as students' progress through to degree completion. Yet, test anxiety continues to exist as a pervasive and stable source of stress across all year levels. The author notes that systemic issues related to

failure and high stakes of assessment are cultural norms within the institution, and that these issues do not resolution as students gain academic experience.

Northeastern College should adopt a department-specific academic wellness framework rather than a generic, one-size-fits-all approach. Given the significant external influence of teachers' negative perspectives on student success, the College should offer faculty development workshops to foster supportive pedagogical communication and establish realistic expectations for students. Academic departments that sustain the highest levels of stress should examine their curricula to ensure that the total number of assignments does not exceed the capacity of students to recover. Recommendations may include creating "wellness break" periods or implementing non-assessment weeks, which will provide students opportunities to catch up on their academic activities and maintain their academic resilience.

Because anxiety about taking tests is stable across all grade levels, the Guidance and Counseling office needs to create and offer Universal Interventions for Test Anxiety. These programs should teach students more than basic study skills—they should also incorporate metacognitive coaching to help students work through (1) anxiety about the anxiety of taking tests and (2) the idea that being worried about taking a test indicates an inability/weakness of character.

Because students with high self-efficacy are generally more responsive to external pressure, Northeastern College should conduct Parent-Student Orientation Seminars to help align familial educational expectations with the realities of higher education today. This would help alleviate the dual pressures of the institution and parent(s), thereby allowing students' inherent high self-efficacy to be applied to deep learning rather than merely managing external expectations of performance.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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