



Exploring the Interrelationships and Predictive Roles of Social Support and Perceived Stress in Academic Self-Efficacy Among Students in NGO-Operated Schools

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Abstract: Academic self-efficacy plays a critical role in shaping students' motivation, learning strategies, and overall academic achievement. This study examines the interrelationships and predictive roles of social support and perceived stress on academic self-efficacy among 200 students aged 9–15 from NGO-operated schools in rural and urban Alwar, Rajasthan. Drawing on Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress, the research focuses on students in under-resourced educational settings facing significant psychosocial challenges. Using standardized measures—the Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale, Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale, and Perceived Stress Scale for Children—data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. Results indicated that social support positively correlates with and predicts academic self-efficacy, whereas perceived stress shows a significant negative correlation and predictive effect. These findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments and effective stress management to enhance academic confidence among vulnerable students. The study offers valuable implications for educational and mental health interventions in marginalized school contexts.

Keywords: *Academic Self-Efficacy, Social Support, Perceived Stress, NGO-Operated Schools, Children, Regression Analysis*

1. Introduction

Academic success and emotional well-being in students are influenced by several psychological and social factors, notably academic self-efficacy, social support, and perceived stress. Academic self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their ability to perform and succeed in academic tasks (Bandura, 1997). Social support from family, peers, and teachers provides emotional and practical assistance, acting as a protective factor that boosts confidence and helps students cope with challenges (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Conversely, perceived stress reflects how individuals appraise and respond to demands that exceed their coping capacity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Students aged 9 to 15 experience critical developmental changes where academic performance, emotional regulation, and peer relationships are interconnected (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). These factors become especially significant in NGO-operated schools, where students face compounded challenges due to socio-economic hardships such as financial difficulties, limited resources, and lack of access to mental health support (Jeynes, 2007; Patel et al., 2007). Exploring the interactions between academic self-efficacy, social support, and perceived stress can provide important insights to improve both academic outcomes and emotional well-being among these vulnerable student populations.

1.1 Academic Self-Efficacy

Bandura's (1986, 1997) work on self-efficacy has profoundly influenced education, highlighting its role in academic motivation and performance (Graham & Weiner, 1996). Academic self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to successfully complete academic tasks, ranging from general confidence in overall success to specific tasks or subjects (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). These beliefs shape how students approach challenges, motivate themselves, persist through difficulties, and manage stress and anxiety, ultimately affecting their achievement and future academic or career choices.

Students develop academic self-efficacy through four main sources: mastery experiences (successes boost confidence), vicarious experiences (observing others' success or failure), social persuasion (encouragement or criticism), and emotional/physiological states (anxiety lowers,

calmness enhances efficacy) (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). Low academic self-efficacy often increases perceived stress, as students view challenges as threats rather than growth opportunities (Bandura, 1997; Misra & Castillo, 2004). Thus, academic self-efficacy and perceived stress are closely linked in influencing students' academic experiences.

1.2 Perceived Stress

Perceived stress is the subjective feeling of being overwhelmed by situations perceived as exceeding one's coping ability (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Their Transactional Model explains stress through two appraisals: primary (evaluating threat) and secondary (assessing coping resources). Stress is thus an internal experience, especially relevant for children in NGO-operated schools who may face similar or greater stressors but perceive them as more threatening due to fewer resources and lower self-efficacy.

Davis and Soistmann (2022) describe perceived stress in children across emotional, psychological, developmental, and physiological domains, including fatigue, anxiety, concentration difficulties, and emotional withdrawal. The Perceived Stress Scale for Children (PSS-C; White et al., 2014) categorizes stress into academic/performance-related, peer/social, family/home environment, and self-worth/confidence domains. These domains highlight the multifaceted pressures faced by less privileged students, where routine demands can feel overwhelming.

Perceived stress impacts cognitive functions (attention, memory), emotional well-being (anxiety, irritability), and behavior (avoidance, withdrawal) (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Compas et al., 2001; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Social support plays a vital buffering role, mitigating stress effects and promoting resilience, especially in vulnerable populations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Davis & Soistmann, 2022).

1.2 Social Support

Social support is a crucial protective factor in child and adolescent development, especially for students facing environmental and emotional challenges. It involves feeling loved, valued, and connected to a caring network that provides assistance and comfort (Cobb, 1976; Sarason et al., 1987; Wills, 1991). This support helps children cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors (APA, n.d.) and can come from various interpersonal relationships.

According to the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS; Malecki & Demaray, 2002), key sources include:

- Parental Support: Emotional warmth and involvement boost security and confidence, even when material resources are scarce (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Parental support strongly relates to academic adjustment and self-concept.
- Peer Support: Friendships foster belonging, emotional regulation, and academic participation, reducing isolation and improving social-emotional functioning (Malecki & Demaray, 2002).
- Teacher Support: Teachers provide guidance and reassurance, enhancing motivation and adaptive outcomes (Reddy et al., 2003).
- School-Wide Support: The broader school environment influences stress regulation and academic behavior (Malecki & Demaray, 2002).

In NGO-operated schools, reliable social support directly strengthens academic self-efficacy, encouraging students to view challenges as manageable and promoting persistence and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Malecki & Demaray, 2006; Wentzel, 1998).

In India, many students attend NGO-operated or under-resourced schools where poverty, limited infrastructure, and social exclusion affect both education quality and emotional well-being (Chitnis, 1981; Davie, 1973). As mental health and resilience gain attention as vital for academic success (WHO, 2008), it is crucial to study how perceived stress and social support impact academic self-efficacy in these settings. This research aligns with national priorities on inclusive education and holistic well-being (National Education Policy, 2020), aiming to inform supportive interventions for disadvantaged students.

2. Review of Literature

Recent empirical studies have underscored the role of academic self-efficacy, social support, and stress in shaping students' academic outcomes, particularly within resource-limited contexts. Chen et al. (2025) demonstrated that social support enhances academic self-efficacy both directly and indirectly by fostering emotional security, with family cultural capital serving as a significant moderator of these effects. Similarly, Kumar and Kumari (2025), employing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, reported that robust social support and heightened self-efficacy positively predict academic motivation, whereas perceived stress and financial constraints exert adverse effects, especially among Adivasi youth in India.

Rosyid and Laili (2024) revealed a significant inverse relationship between social support and academic stress among vocational high school students in Indonesia, emphasizing the

protective function of emotionally supportive environments. Complementing these findings, Muhtar and Wijaya (2024) identified academic self-efficacy, social support, and academic procrastination as significant predictors of academic stress in university students during remote learning, illustrating the complex interplay between psychological and contextual factors.

Further, Adhikari et al. (2024) documented the persistence of stress among Indian paramedical students despite high levels of academic motivation, thereby underscoring the multifaceted pressures confronting students. Ullah et al. (2023) corroborated the stress-buffering role of social support, mediated through emotional intelligence, particularly in emotionally demanding academic environments.

Additional studies by Haddad et al. (2023) and Singh and Sharma (2023) further affirm the influence of academic self-efficacy and emotional adjustment on academic stress and achievement. Saeed et al. (2023) emphasized the mediating role of academic self-esteem in the relationship between social support and academic performance, particularly among students with special needs. Vasquez et al. (2022) validated the combined predictive value of social support and academic self-efficacy for effective coping strategies among university students in Peru, thereby offering cross-cultural evidence.

Within the Indian educational landscape, Gajula et al. (2021) and Dogra (2020) highlighted the prevalence of academic stress among adolescents, predominantly attributed to academic workload and economic pressures. Beri and Pathak (2020) found that high-achieving secondary school students exhibited elevated levels of academic self-efficacy, while Nirwal (2019) underscored the critical role of non-governmental organizations in enhancing educational access and retention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

To examine the interrelationships and predictive roles of social support and perceived stress in academic self-efficacy among students in NGO-operated schools.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between perceived academic self-efficacy and perceived stress among students in NGO-operated schools.
2. To assess the relationship between perceived academic self-efficacy and social support in

the same population.

3. To explore the relationship between perceived stress and social support.
4. To investigate whether perceived stress and social support jointly predict perceived academic self-efficacy.

3.3 Research Hypotheses

H1. There will be a significant correlation between perceived academic self-efficacy and perceived stress.

H2. There will be a significant relationship between perceived academic self-efficacy and social support.

H3. There will be a significant correlation between perceived stress and social support.

H4: Perceived stress and social support will significantly predict perceived academic self-efficacy among students.

3.4 Variables

1. Independent Variable - Social support, as measured by the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS).
2. Independent Variable - Perceived stress, as measured by the Perceived Stress Scale for Children (PSS-C).
3. Dependent Variable - Academic self-efficacy, as measured by the Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES).

3.5 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to explore the interrelationships among perceived academic self-efficacy, social support, and perceived stress in students enrolled in NGO-operated schools. In addition to conducting correlational analysis, regression analysis was used to investigate the predictive role of social support and perceived stress on academic self-efficacy.

3.6 Sample

The study sample comprised 200 students (114 girls, 86 boys) aged between 9 and 15 years ($M = 12.05$, $SD = 2.18$), all enrolled in NGO-operated schools in Alwar district, Rajasthan. Participants were distributed across Standards 5 to 10, with the following representation: 5th ($n = 31$), 6th ($n = 32$), 7th ($n = 38$), 8th ($n = 31$), 9th ($n = 35$), and 10th ($n = 33$).

A purposive and convenience sampling strategy was employed to select students from two

NGO-run schools, one located in an urban area and the other in a rural setting, ensuring a mix of geographic and socio-educational contexts.

3.7 Inclusion Criteria

Participants must have been enrolled in the respective NGO-operated schools for a minimum of one year.

children experience stress, with responses ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (A lot). Higher scores reflect greater levels of perceived stress. The PSS-C was validated in a pilot study with 153 children and has shown good discriminative validity in differentiating clinical and non-clinical populations (White, 2014).

3.8 Procedure

Data was collected through an in-person, offline administration at each of the two school locations. Ethical clearance was obtained from the respective NGO authorities, and informed consent was acquired from the head of each institution, given the participation of minors. Prior to data collection, students were informed of the study's voluntary nature, ensuring that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were also assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Each participant completed the questionnaire individually in a quiet classroom under the supervision of the researcher. The administration of the questionnaires took approximately 10–15 minutes per student. To ensure clarity, participants were provided with assistance if they encountered difficulties in understanding any items.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were rigorously followed, particularly due to the involvement of minors. Informed consent was obtained from the NGO heads and assent was acquired from the students. Data was stored securely and used solely for research purposes. The study adhered to ethical guidelines set by both the NGO administration.

3.10 Statistical Analysis

The data were analysed using Jamovi version 2.6.26, an open-source statistical software. The analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) was used to summarize participant responses and understand the distribution of key variables.
- Given the non-normality of the data, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was utilized

to investigate the strength and direction of associations among perceived academic self-efficacy, social support, and perceived stress.

- Multiple linear regression was used for assessing the extent to which perceived stress and social support independently and jointly predicted academic self-efficacy.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics were calculated separately for male and female students to examine perceived academic self-efficacy, perceived stress, and social support. On average, male students reported slightly higher academic self-efficacy ($M = 95.2$, $SD = 17.9$) compared to female students ($M = 93.8$, $SD = 18.7$). In contrast, perceived stress was slightly higher among female students ($M = 36.0$, $SD = 5.8$) than male students ($M = 35.4$, $SD = 6.1$). Similarly, male students reported marginally higher social support ($M = 179.2$, $SD = 34.1$) than their female counterparts ($M = 175.1$, $SD = 32.6$). The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated significant deviations from normality for all variables ($p < .001$). A detailed summary of these descriptive statistics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy, Perceived Stress, and Social Support ($N = 200$)*

Variable	M (Male)	SD (Male)	M (Female)	SD (Female)	W	p-value
Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy	95.2	17.9	93.8	18.7	0.697	< .001
Perceived Stress	35.4	6.1	36.0	5.8	0.845	< .001
Social Support	179.2	34.1	175.1	32.6	0.831	< .001

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; W = Shapiro–Wilk Test Statistic. $N = 200$.

To examine the hypothesized relationships between perceived academic self-efficacy, perceived stress, and social support, Spearman's rank-order correlations were computed. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients among the variables. In line with Hypothesis 1, perceived academic self-efficacy was negatively associated with perceived stress, $r_s(198) = -.148$, $p < .05$, indicating that higher levels of stress were related to lower academic self-efficacy. Supporting Hypothesis 2, perceived academic self-efficacy showed a positive correlation with social support, $r_s(198) = .165$, $p < .05$, suggesting that greater social support was associated with higher self-efficacy. However, no significant relationship was observed between perceived stress and social

support, $r_s(198) = .105, p > .05$.

Table 2. *Spearman Correlation Coefficients Among Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy, Perceived Stress, and Social Support (N = 200)*

Variable	Perceived Stress	Social Support	Academic Self-Efficacy
Perceived Stress	—	.105	-.148*
Social Support	.105	—	0.165*
Academic Self-Efficacy	-.148*	0.165*	—

Note. * $p < .05$

To test the hypothesis that perceived stress and social support significantly predict perceived academic self-efficacy, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 197) = 40.90, p < .001$, with an R of .541 and an R^2 of .293, indicating that approximately 29.3% of the variance in perceived academic self-efficacy could be explained by the two predictors.

Table 3 presents the unstandardized regression coefficients for each predictor. Perceived stress was found to be a significant negative predictor of academic self-efficacy, $B = -0.784, SE = 0.184, t = -4.27, p < .001$. Likewise, social support also significantly and negatively predicted academic self-efficacy, $B = -0.261, SE = 0.033, t = -7.94, p < .001$. These results support the stated hypothesis.

Table 3. *Multiple Linear Regression Results Predicting Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy (N = 200)*

Model Summary	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df ₁	df ₂	p
	.541	.293	.286	40.90	2	197	< .001

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	168.523	8.796	19.16	< .001
Perceived Stress	-0.784	0.184	-4.27	< .001
Social Support	-0.261	0.033	-7.94	< .001

Note. R = multiple correlation; R^2 = coefficient of determination; F = F-test value; df_1, df_2 = degrees of freedom for the F-test; p = probability value; B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; t = t-test value.

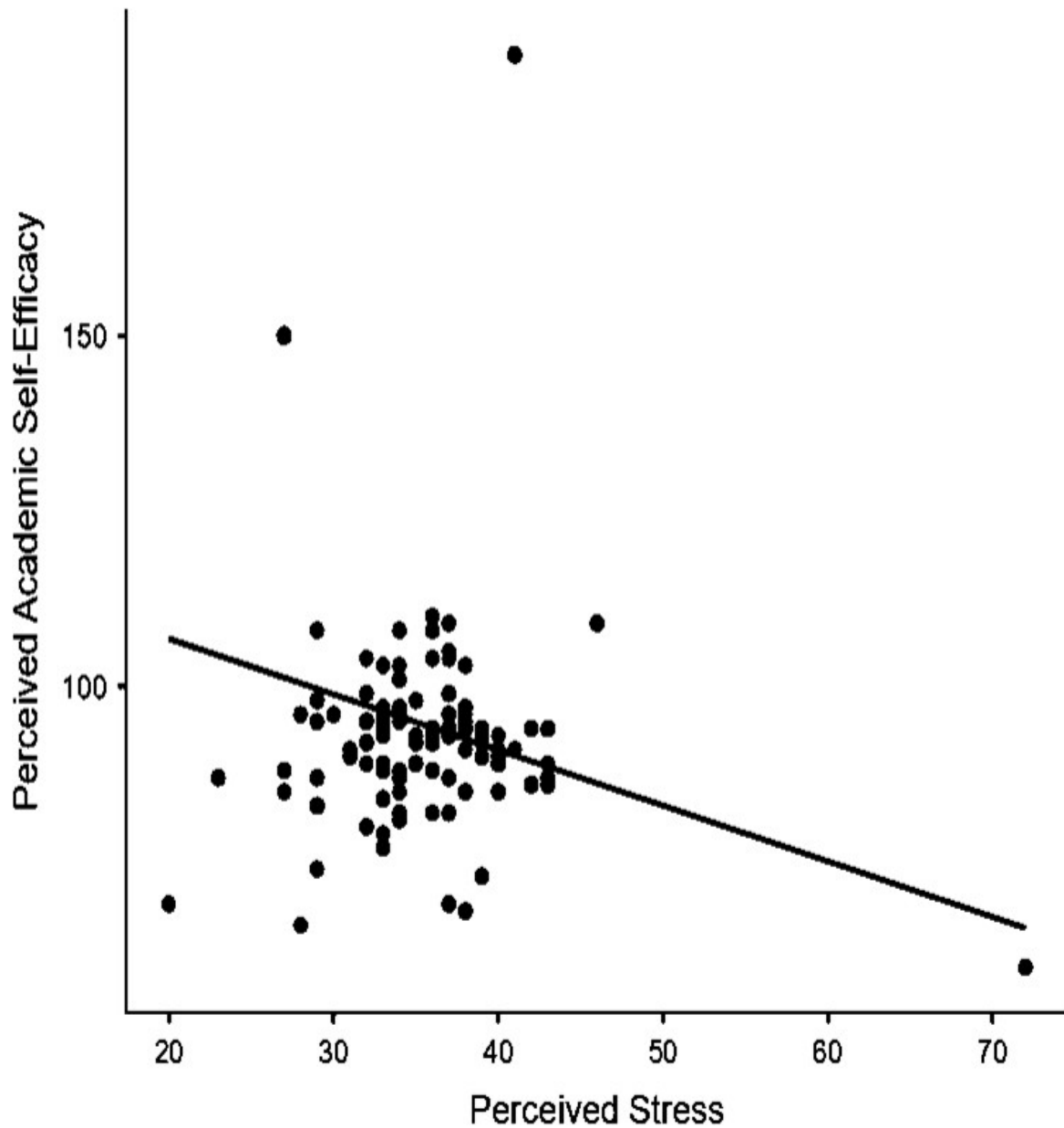


Figure 1. Scatterplot showing the relationship between perceived stress and perceived academic self-efficacy among students ($N = 200$)

Figure 1 displays the scatterplot of perceived stress and perceived academic self-efficacy. A negative linear relationship is observed, indicating that as perceived stress increases, students' academic self-efficacy tends to decrease. This visual pattern supports the regression results, where perceived stress significantly and negatively predicted academic self-efficacy ($B = -0.784$, $p < .001$).

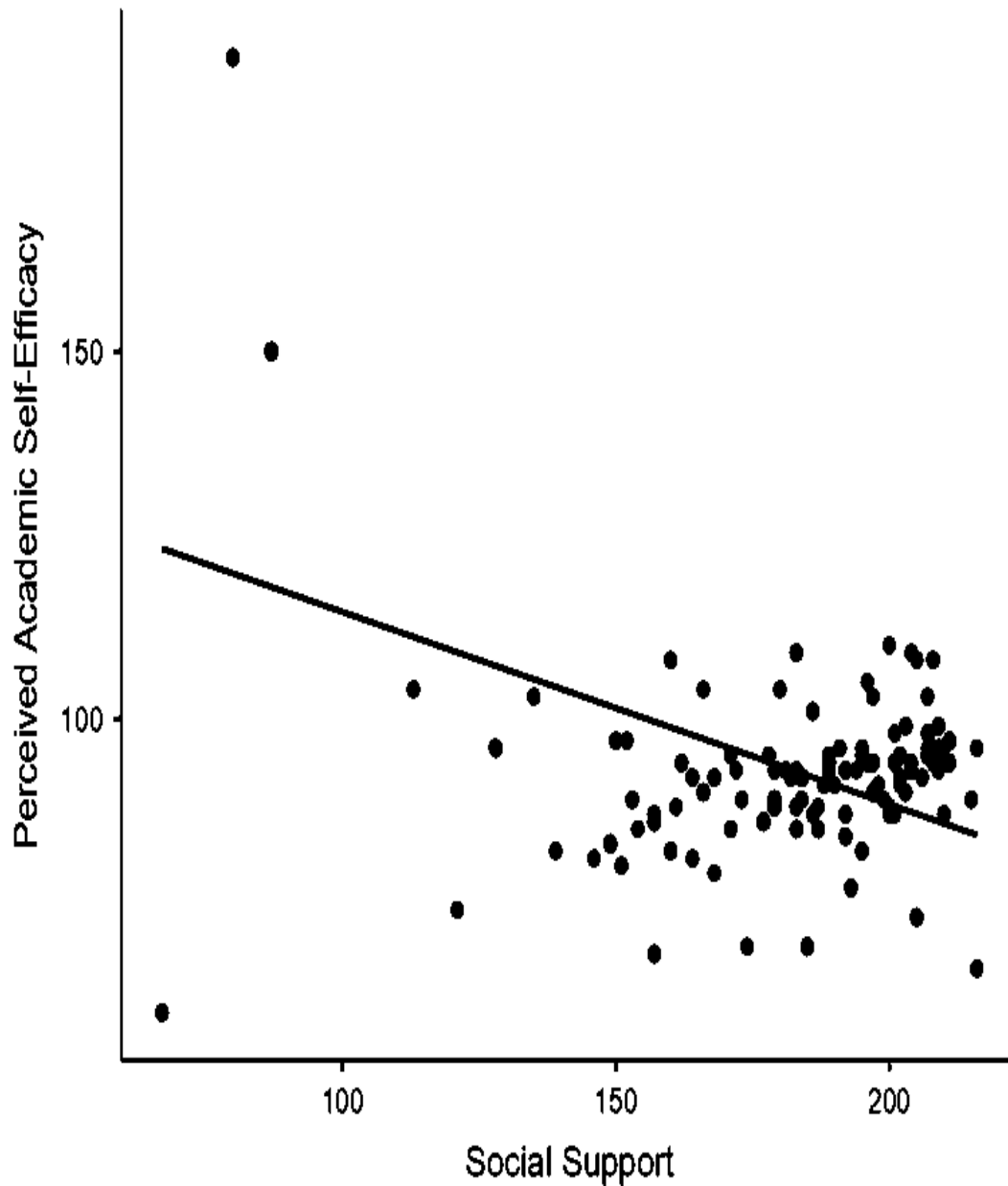


Figure 2. Scatterplot illustrating the relationship between social support and perceived academic self- efficacy among students ($N = 200$).

Figure 2 presents the scatterplot of social support and perceived academic self-efficacy. Similarly, the plot shows a weak to moderate negative linear relationship, suggesting that higher levels of social support are unexpectedly associated with lower academic self-efficacy. Although counterintuitive, this finding is consistent with the regression analysis ($B = -0.261, p < .001$), and may reflect specific contextual or institutional factors.

5. Discussion

Mohanty and Misra (2000) stress the importance of prioritizing the psychological study of social disadvantage in India, where poverty affects not just economic status but also cognitive, emotional, and academic development. This study investigated how perceived stress and social support influence academic self-efficacy among students in NGO-operated schools—a population often under chronic socioeconomic strain.

The first hypothesis, which predicted a negative relationship between perceived stress and academic self-efficacy, was supported ($\rho = -.148, p < .05$). Consistent with Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory and studies by Zajacova et al. (2005) and Saadat et al. (2015), students under greater stress exhibited reduced academic confidence. Stress disrupts emotional regulation, impairs motivation, and leads to avoidance—factors detrimental to self-efficacy.

The second hypothesis—expecting a positive relationship between social support and self-efficacy—was also validated ($\rho = .165, p < .05$). Support from family, peers, and teachers has been shown to enhance students' academic beliefs and coping (Malecki & Demaray, 2006; Rueger et al., 2010). Social support provides emotional affirmation and motivational cues, reinforcing Bandura's (1997) view that encouragement boosts self-efficacy.

Contrary to expectations, the third hypothesis—predicting an inverse relationship between stress and social support—was not supported ($\rho = .105, p > .05$). This diverges from Cohen and Wills' (1985) buffering hypothesis and may reflect the limited or ineffective nature of support in low-resource school settings. Support may not adequately counteract structural stressors such as poverty, academic disadvantage, or unstable caregiving (Nambissan, 2012). Moreover, the *quality* and *fit* of support matter more than its mere presence (Thoits, 2011). When support is sporadic, formal, or emotionally mismatched, its stress-reducing effects may diminish.

The final hypothesis—testing the combined predictive role of stress and support on academic self-efficacy—was supported, with the model accounting for 29.3% of the variance. As expected, stress negatively predicted self-efficacy. However, social support, while positively correlated with self-efficacy in bivariate analysis, became a *negative* predictor in the regression model. This suppression effect may signal a deeper issue: in some cases, perceived support may feel intrusive, controlling, or conditional—especially when it's reactive rather than proactive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, support that emphasizes remediation over empowerment can reinforce feelings of inadequacy (Jain & Ghosh, 2020), while overprotective interactions may

erode autonomy and competence (Skinner et al., 2008).

These findings emphasize that both stress and support are not merely external conditions but are subjectively interpreted experiences. While stress consistently weakens academic confidence, support can either bolster or undermine it depending on how it's delivered. In marginalized settings, building self-efficacy requires more than help—it demands intentional, strengths-based engagement that fosters trust, autonomy, and belief in one's abilities (Wentzel, 1998; Thoits, 2011).

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study highlights the nuanced interplay between academic self-efficacy, perceived stress, and social support in under-resourced settings. The findings support Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, showing how stress undermines self-efficacy. However, the surprising negative link between social support and self-efficacy suggests that poorly matched or controlling support may harm rather than help (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Jain & Ghosh, 2020). The lack of correlation between stress and support also challenges the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), emphasizing that support must be timely, relevant, and autonomy-enhancing to be effective (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Practically, student-centered interventions like CBT, mindfulness training, peer mentoring, and autonomy-supportive communication can strengthen confidence and coping, especially when tailored to the cultural and developmental context of NGO-run schools.

5.2 Limitations

While offering key insights, this study has limitations. Its cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation, and the sample from two NGO-run schools in Alwar limits generalizability. Reliance on self-reports may have introduced bias, especially given the young age group. Moreover, important contextual factors like classroom climate, parental involvement, and teacher support were not considered, which could have influenced the findings.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

To build on the findings of this study, future research could adopt longitudinal designs to better capture the directionality and development of self-efficacy and stress over time. Expanding the sample to include diverse socio-cultural and institutional contexts would improve the representativeness of results. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative insights, could offer a deeper understanding of students' experiences and contextual influences. Future studies might also explore intervention models aimed at enhancing academic self-efficacy and resilience,

while including additional variables such as emotional regulation, motivation, and school engagement to provide a more comprehensive picture.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the interrelationships between perceived stress, social support, and academic self-efficacy among students in NGO-operated schools. Results revealed that while higher stress correlated with lower self-efficacy, social support—though typically beneficial—showed a complex, negative predictive role when analyzed alongside stress. The absence of a significant link between stress and support further underscores the importance of support quality and contextual relevance. These findings suggest that in under-resourced settings, simply providing support is not enough—what matters is delivering timely, autonomy-supportive interventions that align with students' needs and actively foster resilience and academic confidence.

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