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Exploring Pre-Service Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Self-Handicapping Behaviors in the Context of University Culture

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Abstract

This study explores pre-service teachers' perceptions of university culture, their beliefs regarding academic self-efficacy, and their engagement in self-handicapping behaviors, as well as the interrelationships among these variables. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 251 pre-service teachers selected through an appropriate sampling method. In addition to descriptive statistical analyses, correlation and regression analyses were conducted. The findings indicate that pre-service teachers predominantly perceive university culture as hierarchical, exhibit high academic self-efficacy beliefs, and demonstrate minimal self-handicapping behaviors. Furthermore, both university culture and academic self-efficacy beliefs were found to be negatively correlated with self-handicapping behaviors. Notably, only the university's innovative team culture significantly predicted pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy and self-handicapping behaviors. Additionally, academic self-efficacy emerged as a significant negative predictor of self-handicapping behaviors.

Keywords: pre-service teacher, university culture, academic self-efficacy, self-handicapping

Introduction

Culture, a concept deeply rooted in anthropology and folklore, possesses a long-standing literary heritage. However, scholarly attention toward its role in organizational settings emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, leading to its systematic study under the term "organizational culture" from the

1970s onward (Hatch, 1993; Hofstede et al., 1990). The interest in organizational culture increased significantly throughout the 1980s as scholars sought to deepen their understanding of organizational dynamics. Landmark works, such as Ouchi's *Theory Z*, Pascale and Athos's *The Art of Japanese Management*, and Deal and Kennedy's studies on corporate culture, brought organizational culture to the forefront of research (Hatch, 1993; Masland, 1985; Pettigrew, 1979). Concurrently, organizational culture was applied to analyze higher education institutions' internal dynamics, offering insights into their operational structures (Dill, 1982; Masland, 1985).

Organizational culture, defined as the shared beliefs, ideologies, and norms that guide individuals' behaviors and provide meaning to their actions, plays a crucial role in the governance and development of academic institutions (Dill, 1982). Research has explored the relationship between different types of organizational culture and institutional effectiveness (Cameron & Freeman, 1991; Smart & John, 1996). Empirical studies indicate that higher education institutions with a strong culture of innovation and collaboration tend to demonstrate high organizational effectiveness. Similar observations have been made for competitive cultures, whereas hierarchical organizational cultures have been linked to lower institutional efficiency (Smart & Hamm, 1993).

Beyond effectiveness, organizational culture influences multiple aspects of academic environments, including work-life quality (An et al., 2011), organizational support mechanisms (Vieira-dos Santos & Gonçalves, 2018), and faculty and student development (Smart & Hamm, 1993). Given that students are among the primary stakeholders in higher education institutions, organizational culture holds particular significance in shaping their experiences and outcomes. Culture, as an embodiment of shared values, norms, and beliefs (Schein, 2010), serves as a critical reference point for both external evaluations and self-assessments. Hatch (1993) has emphasized that cultural dynamics comprise both cognitive and social dimensions, which can directly influence students' self-efficacy beliefs and tendencies toward self-handicapping. Bandura (1993) underscores the role of social influence in shaping self-efficacy beliefs, highlighting that students subjected to frequent comparative evaluations may struggle to mitigate their effects throughout their academic journeys.

Moreover, cultural environments can contribute to psychological pressure, potentially undermining academic growth and leading to diminished self-confidence. As a consequence, individuals may resort to defense mechanisms such as self-handicapping (Jones & Berglas, 1978). While earlier research suggested that students with strong self-handicapping tendencies were more externally oriented (Jones & Berglas, 1978), recent studies challenge this perspective. Twenge (2017) and Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) reveal how the digital era has drastically altered students' cognitive and social orientations. In particular, Valkenburg (2021) identifies an emerging trend of social disengagement and self-construction mediated by digital platforms. These contemporary shifts necessitate a reevaluation of traditional frameworks in university culture, especially concerning self-efficacy and self-handicapping mechanisms. Accordingly, this study integrates recent literature on digital environments' impact on academic behaviors to provide a more comprehensive and updated analysis of pre-service teachers' experiences within university settings.

Organizational Culture and University Culture

Numerous studies have been conducted to define organizational culture and determine its dimensions. Although providing an exact definition remains challenging, organizational culture is characterized by its holistic nature, historical roots, association with anthropological concepts, social construction, and resistance to change (Hofstede et al., 1990). Organizational culture encompasses shared assumptions about how goals are set within an organization, how tasks are executed, and how objectives are achieved (Schein, 2010). Various approaches have been adopted to conceptualize and categorize organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Hofstede et al., 1990; Schein, 2010). Since Cameron and Quinn's (2011) classification of organizational culture is used as the foundation of this study, explanations are provided accordingly.

Cameron and Quinn (2011) categorized organizational culture into four types: adhocracy, clan, market, and hierarchy. Adhocracy and clan cultures emphasize flexibility and discretion, whereas market and hierarchy cultures prioritize stability and control. Furthermore, organizational cultures can be classified based on their internal and external orientation. Adhocracy, characterized by creativity, and market culture, focused on competition, represent externally oriented and differentiated approaches. In contrast, clan culture, which fosters cooperation, and hierarchy culture, which emphasizes control, reflect an internally focused and integrated perspective.

Although organizational culture can be defined in various ways within higher education, it may be regarded as a set of values and beliefs cultivated in academic environments (Fralinger & Olson, 2007). Different types of organizational culture within higher education institutions influence organizational dynamics in diverse ways. For instance, universities dominated by a cooperative culture exhibit high organizational health, strong personal development among students, and high satisfaction levels among academic staff and administrators. Similarly, institutions where cooperation and innovation cultures coexist show elevated levels of academic development, student satisfaction with education, system openness, and community engagement. In universities characterized by a combination of cooperation, competition, and innovation, resource acquisition capabilities, professional development opportunities, and academic staff quality tend to be high. Moreover, students' career development scores are notably higher in institutions where innovation and competition cultures prevail. Conversely, universities with a dominant hierarchy culture exhibit lower effectiveness scores compared to those with other cultural orientations (Smart & John, 1996).

Self-Efficacy and Academic Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief about performing a particular behavior at a specified level (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy belief is a concept related to the effort for a behavior, perseverance in the face of difficulties, and the degree of optimism or pessimism related to the result (Pajares, 1996). Beliefs about efficacy affect how individuals think, what they feel, what they are motivated by, and how they behave (Bandura, 1993).

The concept of self-efficacy has been examined in different ways in education, such as professional self-efficacy (Runhaar & Sanders, 2016), teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), manager or leader self-efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Liou & Daly, 2018), academic self-efficacy (Chemers et al., 2001). Regardless of how self-efficacy is handled, it can be argued that a high level of self-efficacy has positive reflections on organizations. For example, studies show a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and teacher performance (Bates et al., 2011). The behavior of sharing information with colleagues is widespread in teachers with high professional self-efficacy (Runhaar & Sanders, 2016). According to Liou and Daly (2018), people who make multiple connections with others have more work participation, and ultimately this positively affects the self-efficacy perception. Compared to individuals concerned about their abilities, individuals with firm self-efficacy beliefs have a higher ability to cope with difficulties, and their academic success is high (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

When self-efficacy is considered in the context of achieving academic goals, academic self-efficacy can be mentioned (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). Academic self-efficacy is essential in ensuring learning effectively and improving academic performance (Elias & Loomis, 2002; Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). It can be claimed that healthy peer interactions can reinforce self-efficacy beliefs. Individuals are expected to have higher academic self-efficacy beliefs in educational environments where social comparisons are less common in terms of success (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Self-Handicapping

Self-handicapping can be seen as a defense mechanism to improve the self (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007). Individuals who want to show themselves as talented and intelligent actively try to regulate the conditions that affect their behavior to defend themselves against outside. This deliberate behavior to defend oneself can be accomplished by finding or producing barriers that make a good performance less likely. In this case, failure will be attributed to an external factor rather than the individual's self. Such behaviors that are manifested in a way that harms the individual's performance are called self-handicapping (Jones & Berglas, 1978).

Academic procrastination behaviors are common in students with high self-handicapping behaviors (Akça, 2012; Strunk & Steele, 2011). It is also observed that these students are more inclined to be externally-oriented rather than internally oriented (Akça, 2012; Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014) and their academic achievement is low (Zuckerman et al., 1998). The burnout level is also high in students with high self-handicapping behaviors (Akın, 2012b). It is also observed that self-efficacy and self-regulation are high in students with low self-handicapping behaviors (Strunk & Steele, 2011).

It seems possible to prevent self-handicapping, which is undesirable for organizations (Török et al., 2018). For example, self-handicapping behaviors are less common in organizations where success-oriented but supportive leadership behaviors are displayed, and safe learning environments are created (Author, in press). However, the opposite is true in competitive cultures with high

expectations for academic success and organizations with low self-confidence (Schab, 1991; Özgüngör, 2008; Üzbe & Bacanlı, 2015).

Interconnections

The interplay between organizational culture, academic self-efficacy, and self-handicapping behaviors is a crucial determinant of individuals' academic and professional experiences. Organizational culture, which reflects shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms within an institution (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Hofstede et al., 1990), establishes the structural and psychological environment in which individuals operate. In higher education settings, institutional culture can influence the development of academic self-efficacy the belief in one's ability to succeed in academic tasks (Bandura, 1993) as well as self-handicapping behaviors, which are employed as a defensive mechanism against potential failure (Jones & Berglas, 1978).

Higher education institutions characterized by collaborative and innovation-oriented cultures tend to foster higher academic self-efficacy among students and faculty members. Studies indicate that cooperative and supportive environments enhance self-efficacy by promoting social learning, resource accessibility, and professional development (Smart & John, 1996). Conversely, hierarchical and competitive institutional cultures may inadvertently encourage self-handicapping behaviors, as students and academics feel pressured to meet external expectations, leading to the adoption of defensive strategies such as procrastination and reduced effort (Akça, 2012; Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014).

Academic self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in mitigating self-handicapping behaviors. Individuals with a strong belief in their ability to accomplish academic tasks exhibit greater persistence, effort regulation, and resilience in overcoming challenges (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). In contrast, those with low academic self-efficacy may be more prone to self-handicapping behaviors to protect their self-image in high-stakes academic environments (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007).

Institutional strategies aimed at fostering an adaptive organizational culture, one that balances innovation, collaboration, and support, can minimize self-handicapping behaviors while enhancing academic self-efficacy. Educational settings that emphasize mastery-oriented learning, constructive feedback, and psychologically safe environments promote self-regulation and sustained academic motivation (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Török et al., 2018). Therefore, addressing the underlying organizational dynamics within universities is essential for cultivating academic success and personal development.

Purpose and Sub-Problems of the Research

Higher education constitutes a fundamental pillar in the development of nations, playing a critical role in shaping economic, social, and intellectual progress (Vieira-dos Santos & Gonçalves, 2018). Within this framework, organizational culture serves as a key determinant influencing institutional dynamics and academic advancement (Smart & John, 1996). Given its significant implications for educational institutions, this study holds particular importance. Accordingly, the present research

seeks to examine the relationship among pre-service teachers' perceptions of organizational culture, their academic self-efficacy beliefs, and their self-handicapping behaviors.

For this purpose, the following questions were sought:

1. To what extent are there the perception of organizational culture, academic self-efficacy, and self-handicapping behaviors?
2. What is the relationship among organizational culture, academic self-efficacy, and self-handicapping behaviors?
3. Does organizational culture significantly predict the academic self-efficacy of pre-service teachers?
4. Do organizational culture and academic self-efficacy significantly predict self-handicapping behaviors of pre-service teachers?

Method

This study examined the relationship among pre-service teachers' perceptions of university culture, academic self-efficacy beliefs, and self-handicapping behaviors. In this study, designed in the relational survey model, university culture and academic self-efficacy were examined as the predictive variables. In addition, self-handicapping behaviors were examined as predicted variables.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of the second-, third- or fourth-grade pre-service teachers studying at a state university in Ankara, Turkey, in the 2019–2020 academic year. An appropriate sampling method was used in the research. The sample of the study consisted of 251 students who answered the online questionnaire. It was found that all questionnaires were filled with care, no questions were left blank, and all questionnaire answers were evaluated. Of the students participating in the study, 78.5% (n = 197) were female and 21.5% (n = 54) were male. The majority of the sample was in the 19–22 age range (M = 21.20). Information about the sample is given in Table 1.

Table 1.
Information about Participants

Variables		**n**	**%**
Gender	Girl	197	78.5
	Boy	54	21.5
Age	19	44	17.5
	20	80	31.9
	21	66	26.3
	22	35	13.9
	23	7	1.8
	24	4	1.6

	25	4	1.6
	26 and above	11	4.4
Grade	2. Grade	138	55.0
	3. Grade	76	30.3
	4. Grade	37	14.7

Instruments

In the study, the Organizational Culture Assessment Scale, developed by Cameron and Quinn (2011) and adapted for higher education institutions by Köse (2017), was used to examine university culture. Other scales used in the study were the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale adapted to Turkish by Yılmaz et al. (2007) and the Self-Handicapping Scale adapted into Turkish by Akın (2012a). Data collection tools were created electronically.

Organizational Culture Assessment Scale: On this scale, whose original structure has four factors, a three-factor structure, including innovative team culture, competitive culture, and hierarchical culture, has emerged in the context of Turkish higher education culture. This scale, consisting of 24 items, was prepared as a 7-point Likert type between "I do not agree at all" and "I completely agree." There are no items on the scale that need reverse coding. There are ten items in the "innovative team culture" dimension (sample item: My university is dynamic and entrepreneurial; people are assertive and willing to take risks). There are eight items in the "competitive culture" dimension (sample item: My university is result-oriented; people are competitive and success-oriented).

Moreover, there are six items in the "hierarchical culture" dimension (sample item: My university is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures usually determine what people do). The reliability coefficients for the dimensions of the scale were found between 0.80–0.93. In this research, the three-factor structure in this adapted scale explained 60.06% of the total variance. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients for each dimension of the scale were 0.935 for innovative team culture, 0.846 for competitive culture, and 0.819 for hierarchical culture.

Academic Self-Efficacy Scale: Jerusalem and Schwarzer developed this scale in 1981, and Yılmaz et al. (2007) adapted it into Turkish. This one-dimensional scale consisting of seven items has a four-point Likert structure (never, sometimes, often, always; sample item: I consistently achieve high success in exams when I prepare enough). The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient calculated in the adaptation study was 0.79, and the total variance explained by the scale items in one dimension was 45%. In this research, the factor structure of this scale explained 51.87% of the total variance. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient calculated in this study was 0.835.

Self-Handicapping Scale: This scale was developed by Jones and Rhodewalt in 1982 and adapted into Turkish by Akın (2012a). The scale consists of 25 items and one dimension in a 6-point Likert (sample item: I will postpone my works until the last moment). Items 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20, 22, and 23 in this scale were reverse coded. In the adaptation study, the scale items explained 32% of the

total variance. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient calculated in this study was 0.761, which is suitable for the internal consistency coefficient (Taber, 2018).

Data Analysis

In the study, correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among variables. In addition, simple regression analysis and multiple regression analysis were carried out. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which variables explain each other. For basic assumptions to be ensured, multicollinearity and outliers (R-value of 0.9 and more) were examined. It was found that the data showed a normal distribution (Cohen et al., 2018). Since the continuous variable data are in the range of ± 1 in terms of skewness and kurtosis, it is accepted that the data show normal distribution. VIF (between 1.120 and 2.452 values) and tolerance values (between 0.408 and 0.893 values) were seen in acceptable ranges in the multicollinearity review. According to Field (2005), the maximum VIF value must be less than 10, and the tolerance value must be greater than 0.20 to perform multiple regression analysis. The interval width in the scales was calculated using the formula Range / Number of Groups to Be Made (Tekin, 1996). The interval width for the Organizational Culture Assessment Scale was (7–1) / 7 = 0.857, for the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale was (4–1) / 4 = 0.75, and for the Self-Handicapping Scale was (6–1) / 6 = 0.833. For example, for the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale, scores in the range of 1.00–1.74 mean "never" level; scores in the range of 1.75–2.49 mean "sometimes" level, scores in the range of 2.50–3.24 mean "often" level, and scores in the range of 3.25–4.00 mean "always."

Results

First, the study aimed to determine the level of pre-service teachers' perceptions of university culture, academic self-efficacy beliefs, and self-handicapping. Then, it aimed to determine the relationships among these variables. Finally, it aimed to determine the extent to which university culture and academic self-efficacy explain pre-service teachers' self-handicapping behaviors. Table 2 shows the relationship among pre-service teachers' perceptions of university culture, academic self-efficacy beliefs, and self-handicapping behaviors, and the average and standard deviation values.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Values of the Research Variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Innovative Team Culture	4.022	1.357	-	0.679**	0.598**	0.317**	-0.270**
2. Competitive Culture	4.420	1.353		-	0.696**	0.203**	-0.160*
3. Hierarchical Culture	4.759	1.166			-	0.237**	-0.187*
4. Academic Self-Efficacy	2.947	0.612				-	-0.416**
5. Self-Handicapping	3.336	0.588					-

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

According to the findings, pre-service teachers' perceptions of university culture were moderate in the innovative team culture dimension (M = 4.022), close to a high level in the competitive culture dimension (M = 4.420), and a high level in the hierarchical culture dimension (M = 4.759). On the other hand, academic self-efficacy perceptions of the sample were at a high level ("often" level; M = 2.947), and self-handicapping behaviors were low but close to a moderate level (M = 3.336).

The results showed that innovative team culture was positively and moderately related to academic self-efficacy (r = 0.322; p <0.01) and negatively and moderately associated with self-handicapping (r = -0.294; p <0.01). Besides, competitive culture was positively and lowly associated with academic self-efficacy (r = 0.240; p <0.01), and negatively associated with self-handicapping (r = -0.188; p <0.01). The hierarchical culture was positive and almost moderately related to academic self-efficacy (r = 0.279; p <0.01) and negatively and moderately associated with self-handicapping (r = -0.288; p <0.01). All these findings are statistically meaningful.

Findings regarding the extent to which pre-service teachers' perceptions of university culture predict their academic self-efficacy and self-handicapping behaviors are given in Table 3.

Table 3.
Simple and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

	Predicted variables					
	[a]Academic self-efficacy			Self-handicapping[b]		
Predictive Variables	*β*	t	*p*	*β*	t	*p*
Constant		14.253	0.000		24.229	0.000
1. Innovative Team Culture	.307	3.636	.000	-0.281	-3.279	0.001
2. Competitive Culture	-.082	-.877	.381	0.085	0.890	0.374
3. Hierarchical Culture	.111	1.284	.200	-0.078	-0.893	0.373
[a]R = 0.327; R^2 = 0.107; F = 9.842. *p* = 0.000						
[b]R = 0.278; R^2 = 0.077; F = 6.873. *p* = 0.000						
				Self-handicapping[c]		
				β	t	*p*
Constant					27.112	.000
Academic self-efficacy				-.416	-7.224	.000
[c]R = 0.416; R^2 = 0.173; F = 52.189, *p* = 0.000						

According to the findings in Table 3, only the innovative team culture among the culture types significantly explained academic self-efficacy (β = 0.307, p <0.05) and self-handicapping behaviors (β = -0.281, p <0.05) of the pre-service teachers. These findings show that innovative team culture is a negative predictor of pre-service teachers' self-handicapping behavior and positive predictors of academic self-efficacy. In other words, the fact that pre-service teachers see

their universities in an innovative team culture increases their academic self-efficacy and decreases their self-handicapping behavior. However, the competitive and hierarchical culture in a university does not significantly predict pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy and self-handicapping behaviors.

Finally, the academic self-efficacy of the pre-service teachers (β = -0.416, p <0.05) negatively and significantly predicted their self-handicapping behaviors. These findings show that pre-service teachers with high academic self-efficacy exhibit less self-handicapping behaviors.

Discussion and Suggestions

This study sought to address three fundamental research questions. First, it aimed to determine how pre-service teachers perceive their university's organizational culture, their levels of academic self-efficacy, and the extent to which they engage in self-handicapping behaviors. Second, it examined the relationships among these three variables. Finally, it investigated whether university culture serves as a significant predictor of pre-service teachers' academic self-efficacy beliefs and self-handicapping behaviors.

The findings indicate that pre-service teachers predominantly perceived their university's organizational culture as hierarchical. Additionally, competitive culture was reported at a high level, while innovative team culture was perceived at a moderate level. Studies conducted by Vieira-dos Santos and Gonçalves (2018) on organizational culture in Portuguese higher education institutions similarly revealed an emphasis on rules reflective of hierarchical culture. The researchers attributed this pattern to the historical traditions of higher education institutions, suggesting that Turkish universities may share a similarly traditional structure. Giritli et al. (2013) also found a strong presence of hierarchical culture, albeit in a different research context, reinforcing the idea that the centralized nature of public institutions in Turkey influences these results.

Moreover, the competitive culture in Turkish universities appears to be shaped by the structure of the higher education entrance system and the emphasis on result-oriented evaluations (Yıldırım, 2006). Cross-national comparisons further demonstrate that organizational culture varies across educational systems (Al Issa, 2019; Fralinger & Olson, 2007). For instance, a study conducted among administrators of public universities in Malaysia revealed that the clan (cooperation) culture was dominant, followed by hierarchical culture, a finding attributed to Malaysia's collectivistic societal orientation (Al Issa, 2019). Similarly, research from the United States—recognized for its individualistic cultural tendencies—found that cooperation culture was perceived as the most prominent (Fralinger & Olson, 2007). Given that Turkey shares cultural similarities with other Far Eastern societies, including Malaysia, it can be argued that its organizational culture aligns more closely with collectivist traditions (Hofstede, 2001).

A particularly striking result of this study is the low-level perception of innovative team culture, which signifies cooperation. One possible explanation for this outcome is the differing

perspectives between administrators or academic staff and pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers, who primarily engage with coursework, assignments, and examinations while preparing for future employment, are more likely to perceive hierarchical and competitive cultural elements more prominently. Since these expectations are shaped by centralized institutional structures beyond their control, hierarchy and competition become defining aspects of their experience.
Another plausible interpretation of this trend relates to Hofstede et al.'s (1990) concept of uncertainty avoidance. Cultures with a high tendency to avoid uncertainty are less likely to foster perceptions of innovative team culture, as innovation often entails unpredictability and risk. Given the increasing importance of higher education reforms in equipping students with the necessary skills for an evolving global society (Vieira-dos Santos & Gonçalves, 2018), the limited emphasis on innovation within university culture warrants further investigation.

Additionally, findings by Frisby et al. (2017) demonstrate a significant difference in adaptation levels between Turkish and American students, favoring the latter. This discrepancy is attributed to Hofstede's (2001) classification of cultural dimensions, particularly power distance. Turkey's high power distance may hinder adaptability, making it challenging for students to engage with dynamic and participatory learning environments.

Furthermore, the strong perception of hierarchical culture among pre-service teachers in Turkey should be carefully examined, particularly by academic leaders, policymakers, and institutional decision-makers. Previous research has consistently shown that hierarchical organizational cultures are associated with lower effectiveness in key areas, including organizational health, professional development, student academic achievement, career development, and fundraising capabilities (Smart & John, 1996). Given these implications, addressing hierarchical structures in higher education institutions is crucial for fostering more adaptive and student-centered learning environments.

Pre-Service Teachers' Academic Self-Efficacy and Self-Handicapping Behaviors

The study revealed that pre-service teachers exhibited high perceptions of academic self-efficacy while demonstrating self-handicapping behaviors at a low but nearly moderate level. This finding on academic self-efficacy aligns with previous research conducted among higher education students in Turkey (Yilmaz et al., 2007). The high level of academic self-efficacy and the relatively low incidence of self-handicapping among participants are favorable outcomes for academic life, as increased academic self-efficacy is associated with enhanced academic performance and intellectual growth (Elias & Loomis, 2002; Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Lane & Lane, 2001; Lane et al., 2004; Zuckerman et al., 1998). However, it is essential to recognize that self-efficacy alone does not guarantee academic success, as additional factors contribute to achievement (Bandura, 1977).

A possible explanation for the strong self-efficacy beliefs observed among pre-service teachers is their prior academic success. Research indicates that past achievements significantly influence self-efficacy perceptions (Elias & MacDonald, 2007). Given that these individuals successfully

navigated a selective admission process to enter the teaching profession, forming a relatively homogeneous group based on academic performance, self-handicapping behaviors are less likely to manifest among them. Another possible explanation lies in their learning environment. Schunk and Pajares (2002) assert that an individual's surroundings play a crucial role in shaping self-efficacy beliefs. A positive organizational culture that fosters curiosity, specialization, and professional engagement can reinforce academic self-efficacy. Moreover, a learning environment that promotes academic development without undermining self-esteem may help reduce self-handicapping behaviors (Üzbe & Bacanli, 2015).

Relationships Among Organizational Culture, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Self-Handicapping Behaviors

The study further examined the relationships among pre-service teachers' perceptions of organizational culture, academic self-efficacy beliefs, and self-handicapping behaviors. The findings indicated that all three cultural types—innovative team culture, competition culture, and hierarchical culture—were positively associated with academic self-efficacy and negatively linked to self-handicapping behaviors. This pattern suggests that cultural components fostering self-efficacy tend to inhibit self-handicapping behaviors. Previous studies support this claim (Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014; Strunk & Steele, 2011; Özgürgör, 2008).

Multiple regression analyses revealed that innovative team culture was the only cultural dimension that significantly predicted both academic self-efficacy and self-handicapping behaviors. This suggests that a strong innovative team culture enhances students' self-efficacy while simultaneously reducing self-handicapping tendencies. Research has demonstrated that universities with innovation-driven cultures foster academic growth and productivity (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004; Shen & Tian, 2012). Within the scope of this study, an innovative university culture may have facilitated student career progression and intellectual development, particularly through successful engagement with external environments and the resolution of adaptation challenges (Smart & Hamm, 1993).

Surprisingly, contrary to expectations, competition culture did not significantly increase self-handicapping behaviors. Given previous studies suggesting a strong link between competitive environments and self-handicapping (Schab, 1991; Üzbe & Bacanli, 2015), it was anticipated that competition would exert greater pressure on students, leading to higher self-handicapping tendencies. However, the findings did not confirm this hypothesis.

Academic Self-Efficacy as a Negative Predictor of Self-Handicapping

A key finding of the study was that academic self-efficacy negatively predicted self-handicapping behaviors. As pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs strengthened, their tendency to engage in self-handicapping decreased. This result is consistent with previous literature, which has established a positive association between low self-efficacy and self-handicapping behaviors

(Smith, Sinclair & Chapman, 2002). Moreover, students with high self-efficacy perceptions tend to experience lower levels of performance-related anxiety (Bandura, 1993).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite its contributions to the field, this study has certain limitations. The timing of the research, which coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, restricted access to pre-service teachers and resulted in a limited sample size. Future studies employing random sampling methods and larger participant pools may enhance the reliability and generalizability of findings by reducing error rates and increasing confidence intervals.

Another significant limitation concerns the self-report methodology used to assess self-efficacy and self-handicapping behaviors. Since the study relied on a single assessment method (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002), incorporating multiple approaches—such as observational methods or mixed-method designs—would yield more robust conclusions. Additionally, given that organizational culture is a complex and evolving phenomenon, measuring it solely through participants' immediate perceptions presents challenges (An et al., 2011). Although some scholars argue that organizational culture can be measured (Hofstede et al., 1990), further research employing alternative tools and methodologies will likely strengthen the literature on this subject. Addressing these aspects through future investigations may provide deeper insights into the interplay between organizational culture, academic self-efficacy, and self-handicapping behaviors.

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