

Understanding the Role of Self-Efficacy in Mediating the Relationship Between Peer Support and School Engagement

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The sentence “Self-efficacy...has gained substantial empirical attention” would benefit from clearer distinction between general self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy. Given that the SEQ-C is used, which includes academic, emotional, and social domains, the authors should specify which facet is most theoretically relevant to school engagement.

While the authors mention the use of SEM, they should clarify whether item parcels or latent constructs were used in the model. If latent constructs were applied, detail how measurement error was handled.

The authors state, “Model fit was evaluated using standard indices...” The SRMR is mentioned in the narrative but not reported in Table 3. For transparency, please include SRMR in the fit indices table.

The sentence, “Students reported relatively high levels...” would benefit from interpretive benchmarks (e.g., average scores from similar populations) to contextualize whether these scores are unusually high or normative.

While Mahalanobis distances were assessed, the authors should specify the actual chi-square cutoff used (e.g., for $p < .001$ with $df = 3$, the cutoff is approximately 16.27) to help readers judge robustness.

The sentence, “These results indicate significant associations...” should include a comment on the relative strength of correlations (e.g., $r = .62$ is large, $r = .47$ is moderate) to guide interpretation.

The sentence, "...more likely to develop higher self-efficacy..." should be qualified with "as suggested by the mediation analysis," to avoid implying causality in a cross-sectional study.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The authors state, "The lack of comprehensive structural modeling...limits our understanding..." It would strengthen the rationale if the authors referenced specific gaps in prior SEM-based studies or meta-analyses to show where their model offers added value.

The sentence "...the present study aims to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy..." would be more compelling if it included a specific hypothesis, such as "We hypothesized that self-efficacy would partially mediate the relationship between peer support and school engagement."

The statement, "Participants were selected through stratified random sampling..." lacks detail on the strata used (e.g., by school region, grade level, or demographic characteristics). Clarify the stratification procedure to support claims of representativeness.

The labeling of effects (e.g., B vs. Beta) should be clarified. For example, "B" represents unstandardized regression coefficients, while "Beta" is the standardized effect size. This distinction is not clearly explained.

The SEM figure is referenced but not described. The authors should provide a caption or figure note clarifying whether it presents standardized path coefficients and whether all paths shown were statistically significant.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.