Investigation of Self-handicapping Behaviours Among Preservice Teachers of EFL

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İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarında Kendini Sabote Davranışlarının İncelenmesi

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Abstract

While self-handicapping has been extensively studied in the literature, there is limited research in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). This current study addresses this gap by investigating self-handicapping behaviours among EFL preservice teachers at a state university. The research focused on examining the frequency of self-handicapping behaviours among participants and identifying the factors influencing these. This quantitative study utilized a survey design and involved 106 participants who completed the abridged Self-Handicapping Scale. The descriptive statistics of the responses revealed a moderate level of self-handicapping among preservice teachers, with procrastination and insufficient study habits being the most common behaviours. To identify the factors affecting self-handicapping, various inferential analyses were conducted. Independent samples t-tests were employed to assess the impact of gender and grade, neither of which yielded statistically significant differences. However, there was a notable statistical significance in the participants' GPA categorizations, as determined by ANOVA, and their external self-handicapping behaviours. Additionally, Pearson correlation analyses indicated a negative relationship between overall self-handicapping and achievement levels. Furthermore, participants' self-reported achievement levels were found to be significant factors in the manifestation of self-handicapping behaviours. The findings of this study corroborate the results of similar research in the field.

İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarında Kendini Sabote Davranışlarının İncelenmesi

Öz

Kendini sabote, literatürde kapsamlı bir şekilde çalışılmış olsa da yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi alanında sınırlı sayıda araştırma bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bir devlet üniversitesindeki İngilizce öğretmen adayları arasında kendini sabote davranışlarını araştırarak bu boşluğu ele almaktadır. Araştırma, katılımcılar arasında kendini sabote davranışlarının sıklığını incelemeye ve bunları etkileyen faktörleri belirlemeye odaklanmıştır. Bu nicel çalışmada bir anket tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Toplamda 106 katılımcının yer aldığı bu araştırmada Kendini Sabote Ölçeğinin kısaltılmış versiyonu kullanılmıştır. Yanıtların betimsel istatistikleri, öğretmen adayları arasında orta düzeyde kendini sabote olduğunu ortaya koymuş, erteleme ve yetersiz çalışma alışkanlıklarının en yaygın davranışlar olduğunu göstermiştir. Kendini saboteyi etkileyen faktörleri belirlemek için çeşitli çıkarımsal analizler yapılmıştır. Cinsiyet ve sınıfın etkisini değerlendirmek için bağımsız örneklem t-testleri kullanılmış fakat her iki faktör için istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılıklar ortaya çıkmamıştır. Bununla birlikte, katılımcıların ANOVA ile belirlenen not ortalaması kategorileri ile dışsal kendini sabote davranışları arasında kayda değer bir istatistiksel anlamlılık bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, Pearson korelasyon analizleri, genel olarak kendini sabote ile başarı düzeyleri arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. İlaveten, katılımcıların kendi bildirdikleri başarı düzeylerinin, kendini sabote davranışlarının ortaya çıkmasında önemli faktörler olduğu bulunmuştur. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, alandaki benzer araştırmaların sonuçlarını desteklemektedir.

Geniş Özet

Giriş

Bu çalışma, eğitim psikolojisi araştırmalarında önemli bir kavram olan kendini sabote davranışlarını incelemektedir. Kendini sabote, bireylerin başarısızlık korkusuyla kendi gelişimlerini kasıtlı olarak engelledikleri davranışları ifade eder. Bu strateji, bireylerin başarısızlıklarını rasyonelleştirerek algılanan yetkinliklerini korumalarına yardımcı olur. Kendini sabote, bireylerin hem kendilerini hem de başkalarının gözündeki algılarını yönetme çabalarının bir parçasıdır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının kendini sabote davranışlarını ve bu davranışları etkileyen faktörleri araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının kendini sabote davranışları ve bunları etkileyen faktörler araştırılmıştır.

Kendini sabote, bireylerin başarısızlık durumunda dışsal faktörleri suçlayarak kendi yetkinliklerini koruma stratejisidir. Bu davranış, bireylerin olası başarısızlık durumlarında içsel nedenler yerine dışsal nedenlere atıfta bulunmalarını sağlar. Atıf teorisi ise bireylerin olayların nedenlerini nasıl açıkladıklarını ve bu açıklamaların onların duygusal ve motivasyonel durumlarını nasıl etkilediğini inceler. Bu teoriye göre, insanlar başarı ve başarısızlıklarını içsel (yetenek, çaba vb.) veya dışsal (şans, zorluk vb.) nedenlere atfederler. Atıf teorisi ile kendini sabote arasındaki ilişki, bireylerin kendini sabote davranışlarını, başarısızlıklarını dışsal faktörlere bağlayarak (örneğin, yeterince çalışmama veya sağlık sorunları) açıklamalarıyla şekillenir. Böylece, atıf teorisinin öngördüğü şekilde, bireyler başarısızlıklarını dışsal nedenlere atfederek, içsel yeterliliklerini sorgulama ihtiyacından kaçınırlar.

Yöntem

Araştırma, nicel bir yaklaşımla, anket araştırma deseni kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın katılımcıları, 2022-2023 akademik yılının güz döneminde bir Türk devlet üniversitesinin İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümünde öğrenim gören öğretmen adaylarından oluşmaktadır. Rasgele örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen 50 erkek ve 56 kadın öğretmen adayı ($N = 106$), 19 ile 24 yaşları arasında olup, yaş ortalaması 21'dir. Katılımcılar, ikinci ($n = 67$) ve dördüncü ($n = 39$) sınıf öğrencileridir. Katılımcıların not ortalamaları 1.00 ile 4.00 arasında değişmektedir. Katılımcılar, kendi atfettikleri başarı seviyelerini de paylaşmıştır.

Veri toplama sürecinde Kendini Sabote Ölçeği kullanılmıştır ve süreç, çeşitli aşamalardan oluşmuştur. İlk olarak, araştırmanın uygulanabilmesi için eğitim fakültesi araştırma kurulundan izin alınmıştır. Daha sonra, İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümündeki öğretim elemanları bilgilendirilmiş ve sınıflarda anket uygulanması için izin istenmiştir. Gönüllü katılımcılara anket formları ve onam formları dağıtılmıştır. Ayrıca, belirli bir sayıya ulaşmak için çevrimiçi anket formu da kullanılmıştır.

Araştırma sorularını yanıtlamak için hem betimleyici hem de çıkarımsal istatistiksel analizler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Verilerin normal dağılım gösterip göstermediği kontrol edildikten sonra bağımsız örneklemler t-testi ve varyans analizi yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın değişkenleri arasındaki korelasyonu belirlemek için korelasyon analizi yapılmıştır.

Sonuçlar

İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının kendini sabote davranışları orta düzeyde bulunmuştur. En çok rapor edilen kendini sabote davranışları arasında erteleme, yeterince çalışmama ve performans öncesi stres yaşama yer almaktadır. En az rapor edilen kendini sabote davranışları ise kapasitesini tam olarak kullanmama ve erteleme davranışlarıdır.

Kendini sabote davranışlarını etkileyen faktörler incelendiğinde, cinsiyet, sınıf düzeyi, not ortalaması ve katılımcıların kendi bildirimlerine göre başarı seviyeleri arasında anlamlı farklılıklar bulunmuştur. Cinsiyet farklılıklarına bakıldığında, erkek ve kadın katılımcılar arasında kendini sabote davranışları açısından istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır. Sınıf düzeyine göre ise, dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin kendini sabote davranışları, ikinci sınıf öğrencilerine göre daha düşük seviyededir. Not ortalaması ve kendi bildirimlerine göre başarı seviyeleri de kendini sabote davranışlarını etkilemektedir. Düşük not ortalamasına sahip öğrenciler ve kendilerini düşük başarı seviyesinde değerlendiren öğrenciler, daha yüksek düzeyde kendini sabote davranışları sergilemektedir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının kendini sabote davranışlarını ve bu davranışları etkileyen faktörleri ortaya koyarak literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, öğretmen adaylarının kendini sabote davranışlarını azaltmaya yönelik müdahalelerin geliştirilmesine ışık tutabilir. Bu doğrultuda, öğretmen eğitim programlarında, öğrencilerin kendini sabote davranışlarını tanıma ve yönetme becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik eğitimler verilmesi önerilmektedir. Ayrıca, öğrencilerin öz-yeterlik inançlarını artırmaya yönelik stratejilerin uygulanması da kendini sabote davranışlarını azaltmada etkili olabilir. Bu çalışma, eğitim psikolojisi alanında kendini sabote davranışlarını inceleyen önceki araştırmalarla uyumlu sonuçlar sunmaktadır. Ancak, daha geniş katılımcı grupları ve farklı eğitim seviyelerinde yapılacak gelecekteki araştırmalar, kendini sabote davranışlarının daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkı sağlayabilir. Bu bağlamda, öğretmen adaylarının eğitim süreçlerinde kendini sabote davranışlarını en aza indirmek için etkili stratejiler geliştirilmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Introduction

Academic success is a complex notion in educational psychology research, influenced by various psychological factors such as motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety, stress, and attribution. Among these factors, self-handicapping emerges as a critical component. Self-handicapping refers to behaviors demonstrated by individuals who intentionally hinder their own development, potentially weakening their academic achievement due to the fear of failing to accomplish assigned tasks (Jones & Berglas, 1978). Alternatively, self-handicapping can be defined as a cognitive strategy used by individuals to avoid exerting effort in order to protect their self-esteem from anticipated failure, effectively making it a form of impression management (Kolditz & Arkin, 1982). It is important to note that self-handicapping is not a new concept; its roots can be traced back to Heider's (1958) attribution theory, which seeks to explain causal linkages. Furthermore, self-handicapping is closely related to another psychological construct: self-efficacy beliefs, a well-studied topic in educational research. Numerous studies, including those with diverse participant populations, have explored these areas (Büyükgöze & Gün, 2016; Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997; Kaya et al., 2017; Rhode & Kristian, 1995). Building on this research trajectory, the current study aims to contribute to the existing body of literature by investigating the self-handicapping behaviors of preservice EFL teachers in Turkey, a population that has been under-researched in this context. The study developed two main research questions to achieve this purpose.

RQ1. What are the reported self-handicapping behaviours of the preservice EFL teachers?

RQ2. What factors influence the self-handicapping behaviours of preservice EFL teachers?

    RQ2.1. Is there a statistically significant difference in self-handicapping behaviours between genders?

    RQ2.2. Is there a statistically significant difference in self-handicapping behaviours based on the year of study?

    RQ2.3. Do GPAs significantly impact self-handicapping behaviours?

    RQ2.4. Do self-claimed achievement levels significantly impact self-handicapping behaviours?

    RQ2.5. Is there a statistically significant correlation between self-handicapping behaviours and demographic features?

Self-Handicapping

Self-handicapping is a well-established concept with diverse interpretations by various scholars in the field. Originally introduced by Jones and Berglas (1978), self-handicapping can be defined as a set of strategies individuals employ to rationalize their failures while preserving their perceived competence. It serves as a defensive mechanism to distance oneself from failure but can also hinder one's ability to perform well in a given task (Hirt et al., 1991; Rhodewalt, 1990). This definition aligns with Carver and Scheier's (1981) perspective, where self-handicapping involves intentionally creating or manipulating situations that make success difficult, providing a convenient justification for subsequent failures.

In essence, self-handicapping is a bidirectional psychological construct. It can serve as a strategy to externalize the causes of failures while internalizing successes, fostering self-enhancement and safeguarding self-esteem (Sedikides & Strube, 1995). It also serves as a means to manage self-presentation in the eyes of others, positioning self-handicapping as a defensive strategy (Rhodewalt & Vohs, 2005). While initial research on self-handicapping primarily took place in controlled environments such as laboratories (Rhodewalt, 1990), its relevance has extended into the academic realm since the early 2000s, as noted by Midgley and Urdan (2001), which is pertinent to the focus of the current study.

In situations where there is a perceived risk of failure during a performance evaluation that assesses an individual's capabilities, self-handicappers attempt to save face by rationalizing the obstacles they face, whether these obstacles are real or self-imposed (Rhodewalt, 2008). Therefore, self-handicapping serves as an attributional mechanism used to protect one's self-esteem (Rhodewalt & Fairfield, 1991). For instance, a self-handicapper could be a student who, after failing an exam due to procrastination and inadequate studying, hides behind statements like, "I could have earned an A, but I only studied the day before the test." Another form of self-handicapping may involve not getting enough sleep or being hungover on the night before the exam. Similarly, a student might make excuses like, "It's math, so I'm bound to fail because it's a difficult subject." Self-handicapping, therefore, arises from negative actions or a lack of initiative, as seen in the first two examples, and the provision of excuses, as in the last one (Urdan & Midgley, 2001). These constitute the main types of self-handicapping, which are respectively behavioral and self-reported self-handicapping.

Behavioral self-handicapping and self-reported self-handicapping refer to the two main ways in which people engage in self-handicapping behavior, as exemplified above. This distinction was initially put forth by Leary and Shepperd (1986), who argued that using a single term to refer to self-handicapping behaviors would obscure their distinguishing features. These two types of self-handicapping differ not only in their consequences but also in their

origins. Behavioral self-handicapping involves actual actions taken to create obstacles, allowing the self-handicapper to rationalize failures (Berglas & Jones, 1978). It is typically the costlier type of self-handicapping, as it frequently involves performance-impairing behaviors such as drug use, insufficient sleep, procrastination, skipping classes, or engaging in risky or self-destructive behavior (Hirt et al., 1991). Self-reported self-handicapping, on the other hand, concerns a person's intentions or views toward their own self-handicapping behaviors, such as experiencing high anxiety or tension or verbally expressing an intention to engage in self-handicapping behaviors (Leary & Shepperd, 1986). This distinction is crucial in the study of self-handicapping because it enables researchers to clarify the causes, effects, and costs of these two different types of self-handicapping behaviors, facilitating better understanding and communication about the concept. This distinction is important for both information dissemination and future research.

Attribution Theory
The psychological theory of attribution explains how individuals determine the reasons behind their own actions and events. First introduced by Heider (1958) and subsequently refined by Weiner (1972) and Kelley (1973), attribution theory suggests that individuals often attribute the causes of events to either internal or external factors. Internal factors encompass personal traits or competencies, while external factors pertain to circumstantial aspects. This theory encompasses several essential features. The concept of attribution of causality explains how individuals elucidate the causes behind events and behavior (Heider, 1958). The theory also differentiates between dispositional (internal) attribution and situational (external) attribution. Dispositional attributions relate to internal causes and are typically made when the attributed event is positive. In contrast, situational attributions are linked to external and unstable causes and are made when a negative event is encountered (Jones & Davis, 1965). Furthermore, the theory incorporates the notion of self-serving bias, wherein individuals tend to attribute their successes to themselves and their failures to external factors (Pal, 2007). Context plays a crucial role in attribution, as the same behavior may be attributed to varying reasons based on contextual elements, aligning with the covariation model for attribution (Kelley, 1967). Finally, motivation and self-esteem are identified as influential factors in the theory, as people's attributions can influence their motivation and self-esteem (Weiner, 1972).

External and internal attributions are integral components of the theory and are closely related to self-handicapping. External attribution involves individuals explaining causal relationships by interpreting incidents as outcomes of environmental factors unrelated to themselves (Kelley, 1973). Often, individuals attribute unfavorable events to external factors, a practice that helps them distance themselves from failure or challenging situations. Conversely, internal attribution is the opposite, where causal relationships are ascribed to individual and internal characteristics (Myers, 2010). In summary, within the context of this study, attribution theory is highly relevant to self-handicapping and lies at the core of the concept. Self-handicapping often involves internalizing success and externalizing failure, a phenomenon frequently observed in self-handicapping (Berglas & Jones, 1978). In alignment with the premises of attribution theory, individuals engaging in self-handicapping behaviors do so to preserve their self-esteem. Consequently, self-handicapping behaviors are actions taken by individuals to position themselves for potential failure, providing them with a justification for their eventual shortcomings.

Method
Following a quantitative approach, the current study utilizes a survey research design. In a survey research design, quantitative data is collected through the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of the population. Key features of survey research design include collecting quantitative data from many participants in a brief time, using standardized and objective questions that are the same for all participants, and gathering self-reported participant data. Various statistical techniques are then applied to this data to reach conclusions (Creswell, 2009).

Research and publication ethics were complied with. Ethical approval was received for this research from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University School of Graduate Studies Ethics Committee (Date: 05.10.2023, Issue: 12/21).

Setting and Participants
The current study took place in the department of English Language Teaching at a Turkish state university during the fall term of the 2022-2023 academic year. The study's population consisted of Turkish EFL preservice teachers. Through random sampling, 50 male and 56 female preservice teachers were selected ($N = 106$), with ages ranging from 19 to 24, averaging 21 years old. The participants were in the second ($n = 67$) and fourth ($n = 39$) grades. Among them, 2 participants had GPAs between 1.00 and 1.99, 18 had GPAs between 2.00 and 2.49, 32 had GPAs between 2.50 and 2.99, 46 had GPAs between 3.00 and 3.49, and 10 had GPAs between 3.50 and 4.00. Regarding self-reported achievement beliefs, 33 participants identified as distinct underachievers, 63 as normal achievers, and 10 as distinct

overachievers. Tables 1 and 2 provide descriptive statistics for participant demographics by their grouped GPAs and self-claimed achievement levels for easier understanding.

Table 1. Frequency Summary of Participant Information by Grouped GPA.

Grade	Gender	Grouped GPA				
		1.00-1.99	2-2.49	2.5-2.99	3-3.49	3.5-4.00
2nd	Male	2	14	11	9	2
	Female	0	4	12	14	1
4th	Male	0	0	7	7	0
	Female	0	0	2	16	7

Table 2. Frequency Summary of Participant Information by Self-Claimed Achievement Levels.

Grade	Gender	Self-Claimed Achievement Levels		
		Distinct Underachiever	Normal Achiever	Distinct Overachiever
2nd	Male	9	26	1
	Female	5	23	3
4th	Male	3	7	4
	Female	16	7	2

Instrument

Developed by Jones and Rhodewalt (1982), the Self-Handicapping Scale (SHS) was used in the study to measure self-handicapping behaviors on a 6-point Likert-type scale. The original instrument consists of 25 items, assessing various self-handicapping behaviors such as obstacle creation, rationalization, and procrastination. Items numbered 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20, 22, and 23 are reverse scored. The validity and reliability of the SHS have been well-documented in the literature. The SHS has good construct and criterion validity, as it is significantly related to other measures of self-handicapping, such as the Self-Handicapping Inventory (Jones & Berglas, 1978) and the revised version of the SHS by Rhodewalt and Fairfield (1991). The original scale has shown good reliability, with high internal consistency (α = .79) and stability (test-retest reliability of α = .74) (Rhodewalt, 1990).

A more recent validation study by Clarke and MacCann (2016) suggests using an abridged version of the SHS, which consists of 13 items under two dimensions: internal self-handicapping and external self-handicapping. Clarke and MacCann's structuring of the SHS demonstrates improved reliability and validity, with higher factor loadings on the scale's items and a large sample size (N = 482). The internal self-handicapping dimension has a reliability score of α = .77, and the external self-handicapping dimension has a reliability score of α = .73. Accordingly, the abridged version presented by Clarke and MacCann was used in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection procedure in this study consisted of several stages. Firstly, since the study's participant population was preservice EFL teachers studying at a state university in Turkey, permission for the study's implementation needed to be obtained from the faculty of education's research board. Necessary documents were gathered and submitted to the faculty of education for approval. Secondly, the teacher educators of the department of English language teaching were informed of the study and kindly asked to allocate time in their classes to conduct the survey with the preservice teachers. After receiving permissions, the researcher attended the classes with the instructors and explained the aim, significance, and procedures of the research. Volunteering students were then provided with handouts of the questionnaire along with consent forms. Additionally, an online version of the questionnaire was provided to reach a sufficient number of participants.

The handling and analysis of the quantitative data were done using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. To answer the research questions, both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed. Prior to inferential analysis, normality distributions were checked by considering the skewness and kurtosis values of the quantitative data to ensure the assumption of normally distributed data was met. Independent samples t-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVA) were then computed to compare means of the gathered data in terms of self-handicapping behaviors and affecting factors. Following that, correlational analyses were conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the study's variables.

Results

Conducting each inferential statistical analysis requires several statistical assumptions to be met. Firstly, the assumption of an adequate participant group size with random sampling was met with 60 participants. Secondly, the data needed to show univariate normal distribution, which it did, in accordance with the ±1 interval of skewness and kurtosis values as proposed by Hair et al. (2013) as an indication of normality. Lastly, equality and homogeneity of variances were assumed for each statistical analysis. With these assumptions met, the statistical analyses were conducted, and their results are presented by research question in the following sections. These results are discussed in relation to relevant literature to determine whether the findings corroborate or contrast with those of similar studies in the field.

RQ1. Reported Self-Handicapping Behaviours

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics of the preservice EFL teachers' self-handicapping behaviors are presented in Table 3. The total mean score for the entire sample group is 2.60, corresponding to 'disagree a little' on the SHS. This indicates that the participants have shown moderate, if not low, levels of self-handicapping behaviors overall, with internal self-handicapping levels ($M = 2.69$) and external self-handicapping levels ($M = 2.49$) being similar. The most reported self-handicapping behaviors include items E5, I3, and E4, indicating that the preservice EFL teachers in this study frequently procrastinate, lack adequate studying, and feel distressed before performing. Conversely, the least reported self-handicapping behaviors are items E1, I5, and E2, again implying a lack of fully utilizing one's capacity and a tendency to procrastinate.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Handicapping Behaviours (N = 106)

Subscales and Items	*M*	*SD*
Internal Self-Handicapping	2.69	0.92
I3. I tend to get very anxious before an exam or "performance."	2.98	1.75
I4. I suppose I feel "under the weather" more often than most people.	2.94	1.53
I1. Sometimes I get so depressed that even easy tasks become difficult.	2.94	1.79
I7. I am easily distracted by noises or my own creative thoughts when I try to read.	2.82	1.81
I2. I would do much better if I did not let my emotions get in the way.	2.64	1.67
I8. I sometimes enjoy being mildly ill for a day or two because it takes off the pressure.	2.63	1.71
I6. I try not to get too intensely involved in competitive activities, so it won't hurt too much if I lose or do poorly.	2.38	1.63
I5. I often think I have more than my share of bad luck is sports, card games, and other measures of talent.	2.20	1.59
External Self-Handicapping	2.49	0.79
E5. I would do a lot better if I tried harder.	3.35	1.57
E4. I tend to put things off until the last moment.	2.94	1.73
E3. I tend to overprepare when I have an exam or any kind of "performance."*	2.47	1.53
E2. Before I sign up for a course or engage in any important activity, I make sure I have the proper preparation or background.*	2.24	1.61
E1. I always try to do my best, no matter what.*	1.46	1.34
Total	2.60	0.63

* Items are reverse scored.

RQ2. Factors Affecting Self-Handicapping Behaviours

In addressing the second research question, the researchers sought to determine the significant impact, if any, of the demographical factors on the self-handicapping behaviors of the participants. These factors included gender, year of study, GPA, and self-claimed achievement levels. Related findings are provided in the following subheadings.

RQ2.1. Gender Differences

To determine if there were statistically significant differences in self-handicapping behaviors based on gender, independent samples t-tests were conducted for both the overall mean score and the subscale scores. No statistically significant difference was found between male ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.69$) and female ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.58$) preservice EFL teachers, $t(104) = -0.20$, $p > .05$ in the overall mean score. Similarly, there was also no significant difference observed in the scale's dimensions since neither for the internal self-handicapping subscale, male ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.92$) and female participants ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.91$) differed significantly [$t(104) = -1.30$, $p > .05$] nor did these genders (male $M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.84$; female $M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.75$) differ in the external self-handicapping [$t(104) = 1.17$, $p > .05$]. Therefore, gender did not have an impact on the reported self-handicapping behaviors of the participating preservice teachers.

RQ2.2. Study Year Differences

Since the participants were from the second and fourth years of study, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if the grade level significantly influenced their overall self-handicapping behaviors. No statistically significant difference was found between the second-year (M = 2.63, SD = 0.63) and fourth-year (M = 2.52, SD = 0.65) participants, $t(104)$ = 0.84, p > .05. Additionally, to identify whether internal and external self-handicapping differed significantly across the grades, two more independent samples t-tests were computed. As seen in Table 4, these tests did not result in any significant differences either.

Table 4. Independent Samples t-test Results of Self-Handicapping by Grade

Subscales	Second Year		Fourth Year				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Internal self-handicapping	2.69	0.84	2.70	1.06	-0.03	104	.98
External self-handicapping	2.57	0.82	2.35	0.74	1.38	104	.17

RQ2.3. GPA Differences

The participants' individual GPAs originally ranged from 1.00 to 3.77, with an average GPA of 2.90. However, conducting an inferential analysis on 106 different GPA variables was impractical, so they were grouped into five GPA categories as mentioned in the method section: 1.00-1.99, 2.00-2.49, 2.50-2.99, 3.00-3.49, and 3.50-4.00. To determine whether these grouped GPAs had a statistically significant impact on the participants' overall self-handicapping behaviors, an ANOVA was computed. No statistically significant difference was observed between groups [$F(4, 101)$ = 2.29, p > .05]. However, ANOVA tests for the dimensions of the SHS showed a statistically significant difference for external self-handicapping [$F(4, 101)$ = 3.99, p = .005]. LSD was then conducted as the post-hoc test since other post-hoc tests did not indicate where the statistical significance was observed. The results of the post-hoc test, as seen in Table 6, showed a statistically significant difference in five directions when the descriptives in Table 5 are considered, indicating that GPAs had a significant impact on self-handicapping behaviors.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the GPA Groups for ANOVA

GPA Groups	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
(A) 1.00-1.99 GPA	2	3.30	0.14	3.20	3.40
(B) 2.00-2.49 GPA	16	2.85	0.82	1.40	4.40
(C) 2.50-2.99 GPA	32	2.71	0.65	1.40	3.80
(D) 3.00-3.49 GPA	46	2.28	0.83	0.40	3.80
(E) 3.50-4.00 GPA	10	2.04	0.59	1.00	3.00
Total	106	2.49	0.79	0.40	4.40

Table 6. ANOVA Results of the GPA Groups

	SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	Direction of differences
Between Groups	14.34	4	2.26	3.99	A>E, *p* = .03
Within Groups	25.94	101	0.57		B>D, *p* = .01
Total	40.28	105			B>E, *p* = .01
					C>D, *p* = .01
					C>E, *p* = .02

RQ2.4. Self-claimed Achievement Differences

As the last factor affecting the participants' self-handicapping behaviors, the study sought to determine whether self-claimed achievement levels had a statistically significant impact. To this end, an ANOVA was computed. The results indicated a significant difference between self-claimed achievement levels and the participants' overall self-handicapping behaviors [$F(2, 103)$ = 1.29, p = .04] as well as their internal self-handicapping behaviors [$F(2, 103)$ = 4.16, p = .02]. On the other hand, the ANOVA computed for the subscale of external self-handicapping [$F(2, 103)$ = 0.22, p > .05] did not result in a statistically significant difference. Table 7 exhibits the descriptive statistics for the ANOVAs run for overall and internal self-handicapping behaviors, and Table 8 shows the statistically significant differences according to LSD post-hoc tests. The direction of differences in Table 8 indicates that only the claimed normal achievers and claimed distinct underachievers differed in a statistically significant manner in their internal and overall self-handicapping behaviors.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Self-Claimed Achievement Levels

Handicapping Type	Self-Claimed Achievement	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Internal	(X) Distinct Underachiever	33	2.39	0.91	0.63	3.88
	(Y) Normal Achiever	63	2.90	0.84	0.75	4.25
	(Z) Distinct Overachiever	10	2.39	1.15	0.88	4.63
	Total	106	2.69	0.92	0.63	4.63
Overall	(X) Distinct Underachiever	33	2.41	0.66	1.31	3.38
	(Y) Normal Achiever	63	2.72	0.53	1.08	3.73
	(Z) Distinct Overachiever	10	2.37	0.97	0.64	3.71
	Total	106	2.59	0.63	0.64	3.73

Table 8. ANOVA Results of the Self-Claimed Achievement Levels

Handicapping Type		*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	Direction of differences
Internal	Between Groups	6.63	2	3.31	4.16	Y>X, *p* = .01
	Within Groups	82.16	103	0.80		
	Total	88.79	105			
Overall	Between Groups	2.58	2	1.29	3.34	Y>X, *p* = .02
	Within Groups	39.69	103	0.39		
	Total	42.26	105			

RQ2.5. Correlational Analyses

At the end of the data analysis, to address the last sub-question of the second research question, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between all the potentially affecting factors and the total mean score of the participants' overall self-handicapping scores. The analysis aimed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the self-handicapping scores ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.63$) and other variables. According to Table 9, only the grouped GPAs showed a statistically significant negative correlation with a medium effect size, $r(104) = -.24$, $p = .01$, $R^2 = .06$, explaining 6% of the variance.

Table 9. Variables' Correlations with the Self-Handicapping Behaviours (N = 106)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*r*
Gender	0.53	0.50	.02
Grouped GPA	2.43	0.93	-.24*
Self-claimed Achievement Level	1.78	0.60	.09
Year of Study	0.37	0.49	-.08

*p = .01

Discussion

Although lacking in numbers in the field of teaching EFL, the body of research on self-handicapping in the general literature is vast due to the complex nature of the phenomenon, which can be influenced by many factors that may vary across study samples and contexts. This study was conducted in Turkey with a group of preservice EFL teachers studying at a state university. Findings revealed that the participants exhibited low to moderate levels of self-handicapping behaviors, corroborating the findings of similar studies (Akça, 2012; Anlı, 2011; Büyükgöze & Gün, 2016; Gündoğdu, 2013; Mamaril et al., 2013; Tanrıöğren & Sertel, 2019). The most frequently reported self-handicapping behaviors included procrastination and not studying enough, which are significantly correlated according to some research in the field of educational psychology (Akpur, 2020; Ferrari et al., 2005; Steel, 2007), impacting academic performance as well. Thus, the overall finding suggests a plausible level of self-handicapping behaviors with anticipated degrees of procrastination and lack of studying.

Regarding gender differences, the study found no significant difference between male and female participants in terms of self-handicapping behaviors, nor a correlation between the variables. Although the mean score of the female participants was higher than that of the male participants, the difference was not statistically significant. This contrasts with some prevalent research studies (McCrea et al., 2008; Kimble et al., 1998; Rhodewalt & Davison, 1986) and some studies conducted in Turkey (Anlı, 2011; Yavuzer, 2015). These studies demonstrate that gender has a statistically significant influence on self-handicapping behaviors, with female participants exhibiting these behaviors more frequently than males. Relevant research suggested that males typically engage in self-handicapping behavior while performing tasks, whereas females often do so in social contexts (Dietrich, 1995). However, other studies corroborate the findings of this study, revealing no statistically significant gender difference in self-handicapping behaviors (Ferrari & Tice, 2000; Leondari & Gonida, 2007; Yusuf & Adıgün, 2010).

With respect to differences in the year of study, which is related to participant age, no statistical significance in self-handicapping behaviors was found. This corroborates the findings of some studies (Glazier et al., 2019; Özlü & Topkaya, 2020) and contrasts with others (Lammers et al., 2001; Şahin & Çoban, 2020). However, the lack of a significant age gap between participants may have limited the ability to reveal if age or grade had any significant impact on self-handicapping behaviors, as the study only included preservice teachers in the second and fourth years. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to broader contexts.

The study revealed that GPA, an indicator of achievement, had a statistically significant impact on self-handicapping behaviors, aligning with findings on self-claimed achievement levels. Higher-achieving students engaged in self-handicapping behaviors less frequently than those with lower achievement levels. Numerous studies in the field corroborate these results (Midgley et al., 1996; Şahin & Çoban, 2020; Urdan, 2004). An extensive meta-analysis by Schwinger et al. (2014), which reviewed 36 studies on the relationship between achievement and self-handicapping behaviors, found a statistically significant negative mean correlation with a small effect size, $r = -.23$, $p < .001$. Therefore, most research suggests that higher achievement levels are associated with less frequent engagement in self-handicapping behaviors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study aimed to investigate the self-handicapping behaviors of preservice EFL teachers in Turkey. The main objectives were to determine the level of self-handicapping behaviors and to explain them in relation to variables such as gender, grade, and achievement levels. The findings indicated moderate levels of self-handicapping behavior among the participants, with no significant differences based on gender or grade. However, self-handicapping behaviors were influenced by the participants' GPAs and self-claimed achievement levels. Individuals with higher academic success and self-efficacy beliefs engaged in self-handicapping behaviors less frequently than those with lower levels. The moderate levels of self-handicapping observed among preservice EFL teachers suggest that while these behaviors are present, they are not excessively pervasive. This indicates a need for targeted interventions to address and reduce self-handicapping behaviors before they escalate and negatively impact academic performance and teaching competencies. The lack of significant differences based on gender or grade suggests that interventions should be universally applied, rather than tailored to specific demographic groups in contexts similar to that of the present study.

From an educational stakeholder perspective, minimizing self-handicapping behaviors in preservice teachers is crucial for raising successful educators. In achieving this, increasing awareness about self-handicapping behaviors among preservice teachers and educators is essential. Workshops and seminars can be organized to educate students about the negative impacts of self-handicapping and to provide strategies to overcome these behaviors. Cognitive-behavioral techniques can be employed to help students recognize and change self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. Additionally, creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment can help reduce the fear of failure, which often leads to self-handicapping. Educators should emphasize the importance of effort and improvement over perfection and provide constructive feedback that focuses on students' strengths and areas for growth. Mentorship programs can prove beneficial, where experienced teachers guide preservice teachers and help them develop effective coping strategies for academic challenges.

Implementing stress management and time management workshops can also be effective in reducing self-handicapping behaviors. Teaching preservice teachers how to manage their time efficiently, set realistic goals, and cope with stress can help them avoid procrastination and other self-handicapping behaviors. Encouraging a growth mindset, where students believe in their ability to develop skills and improve over time, can further reduce the tendency to self-handicap. Furthermore, incorporating reflective practices in teacher education programs can help preservice teachers become more self-aware and recognize their self-handicapping behaviors. Reflection journals, peer discussions, and self-assessment activities can encourage preservice teachers to reflect on their learning experiences, identify self-handicapping behaviors, and develop strategies to overcome them.

The study contributes to the body of literature on self-handicapping, particularly in the context of EFL teaching, where similar studies are lacking. The findings highlight the importance of academic success and self-efficacy beliefs among preservice teachers, as their success levels may be linked to their teaching competencies and are negatively correlated with self-handicapping behaviors. These insights can inform teacher education programs, suggesting that fostering self-efficacy and academic success in preservice teachers can help reduce self-handicapping behaviors. Therefore, the aforementioned strategies and recommendations for managing self-handicapping behaviors in preservice teacher training are critical. By implementing these practices, teacher education programs can enhance the overall effectiveness and confidence of future educators, ultimately leading to improved teaching outcomes and reduced self-handicapping behaviors in the classroom.

For future research, two main recommendations are proposed. First, designing mixed-method research with triangulation of data sources is suggested, as the current study's survey design may not fully explain self-handicapping behaviors. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can provide deeper insights into the underlying reasons for self-handicapping and how it manifests in different contexts. Second, conducting longitudinal studies with larger groups of preservice teachers in each year of study could help determine if self-handicapping behaviors change over time. Longitudinal research can track the development of self-handicapping behaviors and their impact on academic performance and teaching competencies throughout the teacher education program.

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All authors contributed equally to the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest
The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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