



Written Strength: Evaluating Self-Affirmation Notes as an Intervention for Academic Resilience Among Nursing Students

Irish Joy L. Cesar, Dr. Felisse Marianne San Juan

Abstract

Academic resilience is especially relevant in demanding professional programs where students must manage sustained academic workloads, performance expectations, and emerging clinical responsibilities. This study evaluated written self-affirmation notes as a brief behavioral intervention for academic resilience among second-year nursing students. Thirty participants were recruited through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to an experimental condition that completed daily self-affirmation writing or a control condition that completed neutral descriptive writing. Both groups performed the assigned task for approximately 3-5 minutes daily over five days. Academic resilience was measured using the 30-item Academic Resilience Scale at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up. Across the full sample, mean resilience scores increased from pre-test ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.24$) to post-test ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.43$) and remained higher at follow-up ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.42$). The inferential analysis evaluated paired changes across measurement periods after pooling the experimental and control groups. Consequently, the observed improvement cannot be attributed specifically to self-affirmation. The findings nevertheless demonstrate the feasibility of a low-cost written activity and support further investigation of self-affirmation as a potential behavioral strategy for strengthening academic resilience in demanding educational environments. Because the available analysis does not include a condition-by-time test, treatment-specific efficacy is not claimed.

Keywords: *academic resilience; self-affirmation; written intervention; nursing students; behavioral intervention; higher education*

1. Introduction

Academic resilience refers to students' capacity to persist, adapt, and recover when confronted with academic difficulty, stress, failure, or other challenges that threaten continued engagement with learning. This capacity is particularly relevant in professional programs in which students must manage sustained academic requirements alongside performance-based and clinical demands. Nursing education is one such environment. A systematic review of quantitative studies identified academic workload, evaluation, fear of failure, clinical uncertainty, and concerns about making mistakes among the recurrent stressors reported by nursing students (Pulido-Martos et al., 2012). Philippine evidence also indicates that resilience can function as a protective psychological resource among nursing students experiencing stressful conditions (Guillasper et al., 2021).

Resilience in academic settings is not determined solely by the presence or absence of stressors. It also reflects how students interpret and respond to setbacks. Psychological resources such as hope, perceived competence, adaptive reflection, and self-efficacy may support students' capacity to remain engaged when academic demands become difficult. In a longitudinal Philippine study, hope and gratitude predicted later academic self-efficacy, suggesting that positive psychological resources can contribute to students' confidence in managing academic tasks (Datu & Mateo, 2020). Structured resilience interventions have likewise shown that adaptive psychological processes can be strengthened rather than treated solely as fixed personal characteristics (Hechanova et al., 2023).

One intervention with potential relevance to academic resilience is self-affirmation. Self-Affirmation Theory proposes that individuals are motivated to maintain a general sense of self-integrity, particularly when circumstances threaten their perception of themselves as competent, capable, and adaptive (Steele, 1988). Rather than responding defensively to a particular threat, people may reinforce a broader sense of personal adequacy by reflecting on personally important values, qualities, or identities. Later theoretical work describes self-affirmation as a process that can broaden

the individual's perspective on the self and weaken the implications of an immediate threat for personal integrity (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman et al., 2021).

Educational environments provide a relevant context for this mechanism because students repeatedly encounter evaluation, social comparison, uncertainty, and threats to academic identity. Reviews of self-affirmation in education indicate that values-based affirmation activities can improve some educational outcomes, while also emphasizing that effects vary substantially across populations, implementation procedures, and contextual conditions (Easterbrook et al., 2021). A meta-analysis of 144 experimental studies similarly found a small average positive effect of self-affirmation interventions in educational settings and identified important moderators, reinforcing the need to examine how specific forms of affirmation operate in particular student populations (Escobar-Soler et al., 2024).

Written self-affirmation is particularly relevant because it combines affirmation with structured reflection. Writing requires participants to formulate and externalize statements about personally meaningful strengths or values. Randomized research with college freshmen has shown that self-affirmation can support adjustment over time, while other longitudinal work has demonstrated that identity-based affirmation may protect aspects of psychological functioning during educational transitions (Hoffman & Schacter, 2024; Xu et al., 2025). However, the literature does not establish that every brief positive-writing exercise produces the same effect. Intervention content, timing, population, and analytic design remain important considerations.

The present study therefore examined a short handwritten self-affirmation activity among second-year nursing students. Participants completed either daily self-affirmation notes or neutral descriptive notes over five days, and academic resilience was assessed before the writing period, immediately afterward, and at follow-up using the Academic Resilience Scale-30 (ARS-30). The study was intended to test a simple, low-cost behavioral activity within a demanding educational context. Because the inferential analysis pooled participants across experimental conditions, interpretation is limited to observed change over time and does not claim a treatment-specific effect.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to examine academic resilience across a brief structured writing intervention involving self-affirmation and neutral descriptive writing. Specifically, it sought to:

1. determine the level of academic resilience at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up;
2. examine the pattern of change in academic resilience across the three measurement periods;
3. document participation in the assigned writing activities; and
4. evaluate the extent to which the available analysis supports conclusions about written self-affirmation as a behavioral intervention for academic resilience.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Self-Affirmation, Self-Integrity, and Psychological Threat

Self-affirmation is grounded in the proposition that individuals seek to preserve a general sense of self-integrity when confronted with experiences that threaten competence, identity, or personal worth. Steele (1988) proposed that people can respond to threats not only by defending directly against the threatened domain but also by affirming alternative sources of personal adequacy. This mechanism allows the individual to maintain a broader sense of the self as competent and adaptive.

Cohen and Sherman (2014) extended this perspective by explaining that self-affirmation interventions can reduce defensive responses by broadening the individual's view of personal resources. In educational settings, such interventions often ask participants to reflect or write about core personal values. Sherman et al. (2021) similarly describe self-affirmation as a psychologically targeted intervention that may allow existing abilities and adaptive resources to operate more effectively when psychological threat would otherwise inhibit them.

Educational applications have produced meaningful but heterogeneous results. Easterbrook et al. (2021) reviewed self-affirmation theory in educational contexts and emphasized both the potential long-term benefits of values

affirmation and the substantial variability in effectiveness across groups and contexts. This heterogeneity is important for the present study because it argues against assuming that any form of positive writing will necessarily improve resilience. Instead, specific interventions require direct empirical evaluation. Related student research also illustrates that self-relevant psychological processes are selective rather than uniform: among Chinese medical college students, self-identity and self-disclosure were associated with fear of intimacy, while among Philippine psychology students, self-esteem was associated with body image even though general social-media use was not significantly related to either construct (Qi, 2026; Ruela et al., 2026). These adjacent findings do not test self-affirmation, but they reinforce the broader premise that how students organize and evaluate the self can matter for psychological adjustment under salient social or identity-related conditions.

2.2 Academic Resilience and Psychological Resources

Academic resilience concerns adaptive cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to educational adversity. The ARS-30 operationalizes this construct through dimensions involving perseverance, reflecting and adaptive help-seeking, and negative affect and emotional response (Cassidy, 2016). This multidimensional view is useful because resilience is not reduced to academic performance alone; it includes the processes through which students respond to setbacks and threats to continued learning.

Positive psychological resources may contribute to these processes. Datu and Mateo (2020), using a longitudinal sample of Filipino secondary students, found that selected character strengths, particularly hope and gratitude, predicted subsequent academic self-efficacy. Such findings support the broader proposition that beliefs about competence and positive self-regard may influence how students respond to academic demands. They do not establish that self-affirmation causes resilience, but they provide a plausible psychological pathway connecting positive self-related resources with adaptive academic functioning. Related evidence in college and professional populations similarly positions self-regulation and adversity management as adaptive resources: self-control predicted general self-efficacy among Chinese college students, while adversity quotient was strongly associated with resilience among Filipino helping professionals (Rui, 2026; Adame, 2026).

Intervention evidence also suggests that resilience-related processes can be supported through structured activities. Hechanova et al. (2023) evaluated synchronous and asynchronous resilience interventions among Filipino college students and found differences in outcomes such as depression and nonreactivity across intervention conditions. Their findings illustrate that brief psychological interventions can be feasible in tertiary education, while also showing that outcomes depend on the specific design and mode of implementation. Student-focused research also identifies emotional control and responsibility as salient personal-social competencies and links professional value orientations with learning motivation, reinforcing the broader relevance of regulatory and value-based resources to sustained engagement (Balut et al., 2026; Yan, 2026).

2.3 Written and Values-Based Affirmation Interventions

Self-affirmation interventions in education are commonly implemented through writing. The process typically asks participants to reflect on important values or valued aspects of the self, thereby creating distance between an immediate threat and the person's broader sense of identity (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman et al., 2021). The written format is attractive for educational settings because it can be brief, inexpensive, and implemented without specialized equipment.

The accumulated experimental literature indicates that such interventions can produce beneficial outcomes, although effect sizes are generally modest and context-dependent. Escobar-Soler et al. (2024) synthesized 144 experimental studies and reported a small average positive effect of self-affirmation interventions in educational settings, with effects moderated by variables such as identity threat, participant age, and intervention procedure. This evidence supports continued experimentation but also cautions against broad claims of universal effectiveness.

More recent randomized evidence has examined affirmation during educational transitions. Xu et al. (2025) randomly assigned more than one thousand Chinese college freshmen to self-affirmation or control conditions and reported longer-term benefits for school adjustment and selected mental-health-related outcomes. Hoffman and Schacter (2024), in a five-wave study of students entering high school, found that an identity-based self-affirmation intervention attenuated declines in self-esteem. Although these studies differ from the present sticky-note intervention, they reinforce

the importance of testing affirmation as a structured behavioral activity rather than treating it as generic positive self-talk. Methodologically, a Philippine pilot of digital sleep-diary self-monitoring used a controlled pretest-posttest design and found a larger numerical improvement in the intervention group without a statistically significant group-by-time effect, illustrating why brief behavioral activities require direct condition comparisons before treatment claims are made (San Juan et al., 2026). Other educational studies show a similar need to separate contextual usefulness from verified outcome change: a quasi-experiment found faster task completion under an organized-desk condition, whereas respondents in an AI-education survey rated engagement and feedback benefits more positively than direct academic-performance gains (Manio et al., 2026; Rao et al., 2025).

2.4 Academic Resilience in Nursing Education

Nursing students face a combination of academic and clinical demands that make resilience a particularly relevant outcome. Pulido-Martos et al. (2012) identified academic evaluation, workload, fear of failure, clinical uncertainty, concern about mistakes, and interpersonal demands among recurring sources of stress in nursing education. These stressors make nursing students a defensible population for examining low-cost behavioral strategies intended to support adaptive academic functioning.

Philippine research further supports the relevance of resilience in this population. Guillasper et al. (2021) found that resilience played a protective role in the relationship between the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and quality of life among nursing students. Although that study was cross-sectional and did not evaluate self-affirmation, it demonstrates that resilience is meaningfully associated with student functioning in a Philippine nursing context. A broader Philippine review of health professions education likewise identifies psychosocial pressure, burnout, generational demands, and clinical-training constraints as interacting challenges rather than isolated student problems (Bermido et al., 2025). At the wider university level, mental-health risk factors among CALABARZON students were found to span individual, interpersonal, and systemic domains, while introverted Gen Z students in another Philippine study described passive social-media use as an emotional-regulation strategy during stressful situations, further illustrating the multiple contexts through which students manage strain (Malabanan, 2026; Dancel et al., 2026).

A short written intervention is therefore practically attractive because it can be integrated into ordinary academic routines with minimal logistical demand. Nevertheless, feasibility is not equivalent to effectiveness. In an experimental design, the critical evidence is whether participants assigned to the intervention improve more than those assigned to an appropriate control condition. This distinction is central to interpreting the present study.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature establishes a coherent theoretical basis for examining written self-affirmation in relation to academic resilience. Self-affirmation theory explains how reflecting on valued aspects of the self may reduce the psychological consequences of threat (Steele, 1988; Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Educational research shows that values-based affirmation can produce modest benefits under some conditions, but also that effects are heterogeneous and sensitive to context and implementation (Easterbrook et al., 2021; Escobar-Soler et al., 2024). Academic resilience, meanwhile, captures adaptive responses to educational adversity and can be measured through cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes rather than performance alone (Cassidy, 2016). Adjacent evidence further indicates that adaptive functioning in students is shaped by regulatory, identity, motivational, environmental, and systemic conditions, supporting a multidimensional rather than single-mechanism interpretation of resilience.

The specific gap addressed by the study concerns a brief, repeated, handwritten self-affirmation exercise among nursing students. Existing research provides stronger evidence for structured values-affirmation paradigms and broader resilience interventions than for simple daily sticky-note affirmations in this population. The study therefore contributes a feasible behavioral protocol and repeated resilience measurements. Its contribution, however, depends on distinguishing changes shared by both study conditions from changes specifically attributable to self-affirmation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a randomized controlled pilot design with repeated measurement. Written self-affirmation served as the intervention condition, while neutral descriptive writing served as the control condition. Academic resilience was assessed at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up.

The intervention was conceptually grounded in Self-Affirmation Theory, which proposes that affirming valued aspects of the self may buffer the psychological consequences of threat (Steele, 1988). The design therefore sought to test whether a brief written affirmation activity could be associated with changes in resilience within an academically demanding student population.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of 30 second-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing students. Participants were approximately 19 to 25 years old and were predominantly female (83.3%). Second-year students were selected because they had already encountered sustained academic demands and initial clinical exposure while remaining accessible during the intervention period.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to participate. After recruitment, they were randomly assigned to the experimental group (n = 15) or control group (n = 15). Thus, the study used nonprobability recruitment followed by random assignment to condition. This distinction is important: the participants were not randomly sampled from the wider nursing-student population.

3.3 Instrument

Academic resilience was measured using the Academic Resilience Scale-30 (ARS-30) developed by Cassidy (2016). The ARS-30 is a 30-item multidimensional measure designed to assess adaptive responses to academic adversity. It comprises three dimensions: perseverance; reflecting and adaptive help-seeking; and negative affect and emotional response. Cassidy (2016) reported good internal reliability and construct validity for the instrument in an undergraduate sample.

Items were answered using a five-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items requiring reverse scoring were treated according to the instrument's scoring procedure. The questionnaire was administered electronically through Google Forms at each measurement period. A sample-specific reliability coefficient was not available for the 30-participant dataset and is therefore not reported.

3.4 Intervention and Data-Gathering Procedure

Before participation, students received information about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent. All participants first completed the ARS-30 pre-test.

Participants in the experimental condition were instructed to write one or more positive self-affirmation statements on sticky notes for approximately 3-5 minutes per day over five days. Examples included statements emphasizing capability, strengths, goals, motivation, personal growth, or emotional well-being. Participants in the control condition wrote neutral, factual, and descriptive statements about daily events or surroundings under comparable time and task conditions. Both groups used a checklist to document completion of the assigned activity.

After the five-day writing period, participants completed the ARS-30 post-test. The scale was administered again at follow-up. The archived study documentation did not preserve a single consistent follow-up interval. The follow-up assessment is therefore reported as a later measurement point without assigning a specific duration.

A total of 331 sticky notes were collected: 151 from the self-affirmation condition and 180 from the neutral-writing condition. These counts document participation in the assigned writing tasks but do not constitute outcome measures of academic resilience.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in Jamovi using descriptive statistics and paired-samples comparisons. Means and standard deviations were reported for pre-test, post-test, and follow-up scores. Normality of the difference scores was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Paired-samples t-tests and Bayesian paired-samples t-tests were used for the pre-test to post-test and post-test to follow-up comparisons.

The inferential analysis pooled all 30 participants rather than estimating changes separately by experimental condition. Consequently, it evaluates change across time in the combined sample but does not provide the group-by-time comparison required to isolate the treatment-specific effect of self-affirmation. The reported p values of .013 for $t(29) = -2.35$ and .042 for $t(29) = -1.79$ correspond mathematically to one-tailed directional tests. For transparency, the approximate two-tailed equivalents are .026 and .084, respectively.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and commenced after informed consent. Participants were informed of the study procedures, expected duration, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality provisions, and their right to withdraw without academic penalty. The activity was treated as minimal risk, and participants could discontinue participation if the reflective writing produced discomfort.

Names were optional in the data-collection form, and results were reported in aggregate form. Electronic information was stored for research purposes and was accessible only to the researcher. Data handling followed the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). The project was conducted under an approved course research protocol with informed-consent documentation. No separate institutional ethics committee protocol number was recorded in the study materials; the approval pathway is therefore described as course-based rather than as institutional ethics-board approval.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Academic Resilience Across Measurement Periods

Academic resilience was measured at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics. Mean resilience increased from 2.29 at pre-test to 2.51 at post-test and remained higher at follow-up ($M = 2.55$). The largest descriptive change occurred between pre-test and post-test, while the post-test to follow-up difference was small.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Academic Resilience Across Measurement Periods

Measurement Period	N	Mean	SD
Pre-test	30	2.29	0.24
Post-test	30	2.51	0.43
Follow-up	30	2.55	0.42

Note. N = 30 at each measurement period.

4.2 Paired Changes Across Time

The Shapiro-Wilk test for the pre-test to post-test difference scores was $W = .925$, $p = .036$, indicating a departure from normality. The paired comparison nevertheless produced $t(29) = -2.35$, $p = .013$ (one-tailed), with a mean difference of -0.2177 ($SE = 0.0926$). The corresponding Bayes factor was $BF_{10} = 4.02$.

For the post-test to follow-up comparison, the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated a stronger departure from normality, $W = .467$, $p < .001$. The paired comparison yielded $t(29) = -1.79$, $p = .042$ (one-tailed), with a mean difference of -0.0444 ($SE = 0.0248$). The corresponding Bayes factor was $BF_{10} = 1.52$. Given the small magnitude of the mean difference and the substantially non-normal difference scores, the follow-up pattern is more appropriately described as maintenance of the higher post-test level than as strong evidence of continued improvement.

Table 2. Paired Comparisons of Academic Resilience Scores

Comparison	Mean diff.	SE	t	df	p*	BF10
Pre-test - Post-test	-0.2177	0.0926	-2.35	29	.013	4.02
Post-test - Follow-up	-0.0444	0.0248	-1.79	29	.042	1.52

Note. *p values are one-tailed, consistent with the directional alternatives represented by the reported Jamovi output. Approximate two-tailed equivalents are .026 for pre-test-post-test and .084 for post-test-follow-up. The inferential analysis pools both experimental conditions.

4.3 Participation in the Writing Activities

The study collected 331 sticky notes during the writing period. Of these, 151 notes (45.6%) were produced by the self-affirmation group and 180 notes (54.4%) by the neutral descriptive-writing group. The counts show that both conditions engaged with the assigned activities and support the practical feasibility of implementing short handwritten tasks. The number of notes should not be interpreted as an indicator of resilience or treatment strength because participants were not required to produce a fixed number of notes.

4.4 Discussion

The descriptive findings show that academic resilience scores increased during the study period and remained above baseline at follow-up. This pattern is compatible with the broader literature indicating that adaptive psychological resources can be strengthened through structured educational interventions (Hechanova et al., 2023) and with evidence that self-affirmation may improve selected educational and psychological outcomes under some conditions (Easterbrook et al., 2021; Escobar-Soler et al., 2024). It is also theoretically consistent with the proposition that affirmation can broaden the individual's sense of personal adequacy in the face of threat (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Steele, 1988).

The nursing-student context adds practical relevance. Nursing education exposes students to recurrent academic and clinical stressors (Pulido-Martos et al., 2012), and resilience has been associated with better functioning among Philippine nursing students facing stressful conditions (Guillasper et al., 2021). A brief handwritten intervention is therefore attractive because it can be delivered with minimal cost and logistical burden.

However, the design-level treatment inference remains limited. The design included a self-affirmation group and a neutral-writing control group, but the inferential analysis combined both conditions. A pooled pre-test to post-test improvement cannot determine whether self-affirmation caused the change because both groups participated in a structured writing activity and repeated testing. The observed improvement could reflect a treatment effect, a general

effect of writing or study participation, repeated measurement, temporal variation, or another factor shared by both conditions.

The assumption results also require caution. Normality was rejected for both difference-score comparisons, and the violation was pronounced for post-test to follow-up scores. The reported p values align with one-tailed directional tests; under a conventional two-tailed interpretation, the pre-test to post-test comparison remains statistically significant at approximately $p = .026$, whereas the post-test to follow-up comparison is approximately $p = .084$. These issues do not erase the descriptive improvement, but they limit the strength of inferential claims that can be made from the available output.

Accordingly, the present evidence supports feasibility and an overall pattern of higher resilience scores after the writing period, but it does not establish a specific causal effect of written self-affirmation. Because no condition-by-time estimate is available, the manuscript treats self-affirmation as a promising intervention candidate rather than an established treatment effect.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

5.1 Conclusions

The study examined academic resilience among nursing students participating in a brief structured writing experiment. Across the combined sample, mean academic resilience increased from pre-test to post-test and remained higher at follow-up. The writing protocol was feasible, required minimal resources, and generated documented participation in both experimental conditions.

The available analysis, however, does not establish that written self-affirmation specifically produced the observed improvement. Because the inferential comparisons pooled the experimental and control groups, they demonstrate change over time in the combined sample rather than a treatment-specific effect. The study should therefore be interpreted as preliminary evidence supporting the feasibility of the intervention and the presence of overall resilience change during the study period, not as definitive proof that self-affirmation caused the change.

This distinction is important for both scientific accuracy and practical application. Self-affirmation remains theoretically plausible and supported by a broader experimental literature, but a causal conclusion cannot be drawn from the pooled analysis.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Future analysis of the original participant-level dataset should directly evaluate experimental condition across time. A mixed repeated-measures model or another appropriate group-by-time analysis would provide the necessary test of whether the self-affirmation group changed differently from the neutral-writing group.
2. Report the directional one-tailed test setting explicitly and include two-tailed and/or nonparametric robustness checks in future analyses, particularly because the reported difference scores departed from normality.
3. Future replications should pre-specify and report the follow-up interval clearly. Longer and consistently documented follow-up periods would strengthen conclusions about maintenance of any intervention effect.
4. Replicate the study with a larger sample and across additional year levels or academic programs to improve precision and external validity.
5. Consider additional outcomes such as academic stress, self-efficacy, persistence, academic performance, or well-being to determine whether any intervention effect extends beyond self-reported resilience.
6. Use brief affirmation activities in institutional settings only as pilot or evaluated support strategies until stronger condition-specific evidence is available from the present dataset or subsequent replications.

5.3 Implications of the Study

Behaviorally, the study contributes a simple and replicable protocol for examining how repeated self-directed writing may relate to academic resilience. Theoretically, it places the intervention within Self-Affirmation Theory and the broader literature on psychological resources under academic threat. Educationally, the protocol demonstrates that a brief writing task can be implemented among nursing students without specialized technology or substantial institutional resources.

Methodologically, the study illustrates a central requirement of intervention research: experimental conclusions must follow the experimental comparison. When an intervention and a control condition are both present, overall change across time is insufficient to establish treatment effectiveness. The most important next step is therefore not additional narrative interpretation but a direct analysis of whether the two groups followed different resilience trajectories.

Practically, written self-affirmation remains a promising low-cost strategy worthy of further evaluation. Its value for academic-support programs should be based on verified condition-specific effects rather than on feasibility or pooled improvement alone.

6. References

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