

Empowering Readers

The Impact of Self-efficacy on Secondary School Students' Reading Ability

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Abstract

Reading is regarded as the most crucial among the four essential competencies of English. This study set out to explore how self-efficacy influences the reading abilities of secondary school students. To gather meaningful insights, researchers adopted a descriptive survey approach along with a quantitative research design. Data were collected from secondary schools located across four districts in West Bengal. A sample of 501 students was selected using stratified random sampling. To collect data, two standardised tools were employed: (i) Self-efficacy Scale (SES) developed by Singh and Narain (2005), and (ii) Silent Reading Ability Test (SRAT) to assess the students' reading ability. Statistical techniques, such as mean, median, t-test, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, and regression were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that self-efficacy influences the reading ability of students in government-aided secondary schools. The study has implications for teachers and policymakers and recommends targeted intervention strategies to improve self-efficacy and reading proficiency and promote equity and Inclusion among secondary school students.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Reading, Reading Ability, Government-aided school, Secondary school students.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, the concept of self-efficacy was introduced by Albert Bandura, which stems from social cognitive theory. It is a belief of an individual in his own ability to fulfil tasks and achieve the goal.

This belief significantly impacts how individuals think, feel, and behave, influencing their motivation and performance across different areas, including academics. (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1997), those with strong self-efficacy tend to set ambitious goals, remain resilient

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when facing challenges, and bounce back quickly from setbacks, all of which contribute to improved performance. Students with self-efficacy can determine how much effort is required to be put in and how long they can handle a particular task. Students can know their capabilities in facing the obstacles in any challenge, they can measure and judge themselves (Apriliyani *et al.*, 2023). The framework of self-efficacy includes four main elements, as Bandura (1997) stated: mastery experiences achieved after completing a task, vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion, and emotional states. These components highlight that self-efficacy is not fixed; rather, it is a dynamic trait shaped by both internal influences and external circumstances.

The academic achievement and performance are linked by self-efficacy (Salami and Ogundokun, 2009, as cited by Siddiqui, 2015). Studies have shown that higher self-efficacy leads to better academic performance and enhanced retention. The role played by perceived self-efficacy in academic performance has been investigated by many of the researchers at different levels. It is confirmed from the research findings that students' academic performance is influenced by their self-efficacy (Baruah, 2024) and mediates the effect of skills on these attainments (Sharma, 2014). In the realm of education, self-efficacy constitutes a fundamental factor

in influencing students' academic motivation and their subsequent achievements. In the generative system of human competence, efficacy beliefs act as a key factor. Effective functioning requires a combination of both skills and strong self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Research shows that students adopt learning strategies effectively when they have high self-efficacy, remain persistent in their efforts, and perform better academically (Schunk, 1991).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SELF-EFFICACY: NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Nature of Self-efficacy

Bandura (1997) explains that self-efficacy is not purely a cognitive ability and incorporates cognitive judgement about one's capability, affective emotions, such as anxiety, confidence, and behavioural elements like persistence, effort, and choice of academic task. How learners think, feel, and act is affected by self-efficacy in learning situations (Bandura, 1977). Thus, self-efficacy is a construct with multiple dimensions and not a cognitive skill alone.

Acquisition of Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is acquired through developmental experiences and is not inherited or congenital. Students form efficacy beliefs in school circumstantially on the basis of experiences. Peer groups,

the institutional setting, the home environment, and teacher behaviour all have an influence on these experiences. Thus, self-efficacy is an acquired and dynamic belief system which evolves with new experiences based on circumstances (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

According to Bandura (1997), students can acquire self-efficacy independently through circumstantial learning experiences. When a student attempts successful reading, they build mastery-based self-efficacy (Apriliyani and Usuludin, 2023). According to Schunk (1991), vicarious learning is enhanced by observing peers' success. Students, through self-regulation, goal setting, and exposure to a supportive environment, gain confidence (Yang *et al.*, 2018). Provision of varied reading resources and exposure to language outside the classroom in the Indian context influence these experiences (Burgoyne *et al.*, 2013). Students in government-aided schools may experience limited resources, which affects these opportunities and requires additional support.

According to Schunk (1991), following are some pedagogical interventions to strengthen students' self-efficacy:

Mastery-based Instruction

Among the foremost sources of efficacy beliefs, according to Bandura (1997), is graded reading tasks, beginning with simpler texts to ensure success incrementally. In this

way, students' reading self-efficacy increases through consistent mastery (Zhang, 2013).

Modelling and Peer Learning

The teacher demonstrates reading strategies and peer modelling to help students in reading. High and low efficacy students can be paired for collaborative reading. For Adolescents who rely on peer comparison, vicarious experiences are effective for them (Yang *et al.*, 2018), such as verbal persuasion and feedback.

Positive reinforcement encourages perseverance and boosts self-esteem (Schunk, 1991). Reading comprehension results are improved by teachers who provide constructive criticism, steer clear of unfavourable comparisons, and conduct non-threatening evaluation, encouraging feedback, avoidance of negative comparisons and non-threatening evaluation (Begum and Hamzah, 2018).

Managing Emotional States

Students' self-efficacy is directly strengthened when reading anxiety is reduced and a safe environment is established (Bandura, 1997). By lowering students' fear of failing, a supportive classroom enhances reading performance (Anggriawan *et al.*, 2023).

Indian—Contextual and Cultural Tools

Using reading materials that are familiar and culturally relevant improves comprehension and

confidence (Burgoyne *et al.*, 2013). DIKSHA resources, NCERT and WBBSE texts, and bilingual scaffolds align with the socio-linguistic needs of Indian students.

Reading

Language learning and language acquisition depend on the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Among the four, reading is considered indispensable in education. Reading skills are essential for both academic success and broader communication competence. Two groups under which the theories of reading are divided. One group considers reading as a process, while the other group considers reading as an ability comprised of components.

● **Reading as an ability**

The true essence of reading is to extract the inferred message from the text. Hoover and Tunmer (1993) stated the following components of reading. (i) word recognition (ii) language (iii) background knowledge (iv) comprehension

● **Word recognition and Phonological awareness**

In reading acquisition, phonological awareness is essential and delivers better learning outcome conversely lack of knowledge can inhibit reading proficiency. According to Siregar *et al.* (2023), those who possess strong phonological awareness perform better in reading than those who lack such awareness. Goswami(2010)

provides empirical data on how phonological awareness develops in relation to literacy. It discusses the causal connection between phonological awareness and literacy development.

● **Language**

Syntax, like phonemic awareness, plays a vital role. In a language, syntax is a set of rules which governs the structure of the sentence. It is the meaningful arrangement of words and phrases that facilitates comprehension and meaning construction (Cao,2023). According to Chretien (2003), knowledge of syntax helps the readers construct meaning by breaking down texts into parts and integrating their own knowledge. Syntax provide structural foundation necessary for effective reading comprehension.

● **Background knowledge**

Students acquire knowledge formally inside and informally outside the classroom through life experiences, which is known as background knowledge. Second language learners lack knowledge and have limited vocabulary in English needs specific intervention to build knowledge and skills (Burgoyne *et al.*, 2013).

● **Comprehension**

Reading comprehension, according to Lockhart (n.d.), is the ability to read text, process it, and make inferences and is a multifaceted process that involves both

componential knowledge and skills. Reading comprehension can be defined as “a holistic procedure of constructing interpretation from a written passage by the interaction of the information the reader gathers from the comprehension passage, the reader’s interpretation of the language that the writer used in constructing the text, and the situation in which the text is read” (Lenz, 2005 cited by E *et al.*, 2019). Readers acquire information and experience while reading comprehension, and become aware of the world around lead to academic success (Anggriawan *et al.*, 2023).

According to Gough and Tunmer (1986) the simple view of reading suggests that language comprehension and reading skills are the two broad components of reading comprehension (Oakhill *et al.*, 2019). According to Arcos (2018), comprehension is a dynamic and active process that requires readers to engage with the text by linking it to their prior knowledge, which significantly influences their understanding of the material. Failure to do so may hinder their comprehension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Specifically, self-efficacy serves a pivotal role in reading proficiency by preparing students’ attitudes towards reading, their readiness to engage with difficult texts, and their overall reading comprehension abilities (Zhang, 2013). Begum and Hamzah (2018) investigated the relationship

between Self-Efficacy and teaching reading comprehension skills among secondary school teachers at Telangana State in India. It was found to be statistically significant. Conversely, weak significant relationship was found in the earlier study of (Yuliani, 2016)

Similarly, in task engagement, where learners manage and understand the given reading task, self-efficacy plays an important role. It accentuates students’ reading performance and accomplishment. (Apriliyani *et al.*, 2023). Firm belief in one’s abilities equips students with the confidence needed to accomplish a difficult task with ease (Lestari *et al.*, 2020).

Even though the recognised importance of self-efficacy in educational settings, few studies have been conducted on the present problem. There is a notable gap in empirical research specifically examining its impact on reading abilities among secondary school students in the context of India, particularly in the framework of educational entities within the region of West Bengal. The researcher aims to fill this gap by exploring A. Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory component, self-efficacy on reading in academic settings. These findings explain that students’ confidence in their ability to read impacts various academic outcomes in school.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The outcomes of this study are anticipated to offer meaningful

interpretations into how self-efficacy relates to reading ability. These findings can help to shape effective strategies aimed at improving academic performance in general and reading capabilities in specific among secondary school students. This research underscores the necessity for educators to implement strategies that cultivate self-efficacy, thereby enhancing students' reading abilities and promoting equitable academic outcomes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present problem was stated as "Empowering Readers: The Impact of Self-efficacy on Reading Ability of Secondary School Students.

Operational Definition

- **Self-efficacy** is having confidence in one's ability to achieve a goal. Here, it means self-confidence, efficacy expectation, positive attitude, and outcome expectation.
- **Reading ability** here refers to the performance in the silent reading ability test (SRAT), consisting of subtests of the reading comprehension skills stated by Yang-Heim, G.Y. (2023). These skills are retrieving directly stated information, interpreting explicit information, interpreting by making inferences and reflecting on text.
- **Secondary school students** here refer to the students studying Grade 9 in government-aided schools.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To study the influence of self-efficacy on secondary school students reading ability.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H⁰: There is no significant impact of self-efficacy on secondary school students' reading ability.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Data was collected from secondary school students in four districts of West Bengal, focusing solely on government-aided institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The design of the study was a descriptive survey method, employing quantitative techniques to analyse the data collected from the participants.

Population

The population consisted of secondary school students enrolled in government-aided institutions across four districts in West Bengal.

Sample

Government-aided secondary school students ($N=501$) were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring representation across different demographics and academic performance levels.

Research Tools

The tools used for data collection

- Self-efficacy Scale (SES) developed by Singh and Narain (2005).

- Silent Reading Ability test (SRAT) developed by the researcher and the supervisor

DATA COLLECTION

The self-efficacy is a Likert-type scale having five response options such as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. For the evaluation of silent reading, a reading comprehension test (SRAT) was developed for ninth graders. The test consisted of multiple-choice question was to measure the reading comprehension skills stated by Yang-Heim, G.Y. (2023). These skills are retrieving directly stated information, interpreting explicit information, interpreting by making inferences and reflecting on text. In order to evaluate their reading comprehension abilities, a passage was chosen from the English textbook endorsed by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, which had been thoroughly reviewed in the classroom. An unfamiliar passage was extracted from the esteemed literary work *wise and otherwise*, authored by Sudha Murty. To assess the oral reading proficiency, the methodology proposed by Yang-Heim, G. Y. (2023, ch-4.2.1.2) was implemented. Thus, reading ability comprises of silent reading ability test and oral reading (fluency). The methodology emphasises the importance of evaluating both silent and oral reading fluency, which are critical components in assessing the overall reading ability in students.

Result

The analysis will involve statistical techniques to evaluate the data collected, focusing on the impact on the reading ability of the participants. The investigator employed Excel and SPSS version 22 for the purpose of conducting data analysis.

Score Transformation

The scales of measurement used are self-efficacy and reading ability. They are likely to have different units, and as we know, the scales of measurement must be comparable. The scores on these scales make different sets of distributions. Thus, these distributions are converted into a common distribution in order to make a common or comparable scale for making relative comparisons. The raw scores were converted into some common or standard scores. In this process, firstly, the raw scores are converted into z-scores by using the formula, but these standard scores have certain limitations. To overcome such limitations, T-scores are used by using the formula (Mangal, 2017).

Self-efficacy of Secondary School Students

Table 1 shows that the mean score of self-efficacy of the government school ($N=501$) is 49.188, and the SD is 10.157. The minimum T-score started from 23.09 and reached 75.01 (maximum). The median of the distribution is 49.0478. Skewness is 0.045, which is close to 0, and

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Self-efficacy of Secondary School Students

Scale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Self-efficacy (T-Score)	501	49.188	10.157	0.453	-0.045	0.109	-0.391	0.218
Level of Self-efficacy (T-Score)								
	Low (≤ 40.00)		Medium (40.01–60.00)		High (60.01+)		Total	
Count	98		331		72		501	
%	19.6%		66.1%		14.4%		100.0%	

the distribution can be called nearly symmetric. The kurtosis value is 0.391, which depicts that the distribution is approximately normal (mesokurtic).

The classification of students' self-efficacy levels was done based on T-scores by using the mean $\pm$ 1 standard deviation (SD) method. This approach categorised the whole group of individuals into three categories, namely low, medium, and high. The low self-efficacy group has T-scores ≤ 40.00 , the medium has T-scores between 40.01 and 60.00, and the high has T-scores ≥ 60.01 . Further, it is observed that the percentage of low self-efficacious students is 19.6 per cent, medium efficacious students is 66.1 per cent, and high efficacious students is 14.4 per cent.

The analysis indicates that a significant portion of students exhibit medium self-efficacy levels, which may influence their reading performance and overall academic outcomes.

Reading Ability of Secondary School Students

Table 2 shows that the mean score of reading ability of the secondary school students (N=501) is 48.0585, and the SD is 7.67204. The minimum T-score started from 28.22 and reached 68.88 (maximum). Skewness is 0.197 which is slightly left-skewed: which is close to 0, and the distribution can be called nearly symmetric. The kurtosis value is 0.516; a negative kurtosis indicates a platykurtic distribution, which depicts that the distribution is approximately normal.

The classification of students' reading ability levels was done based on T-scores by using the mean $\pm$ 1 standard deviation (SD) method. This approach categorised the whole group of individuals into three categories, namely low, medium, and high. The low Reading Ability group has T-scores ≤ 41.87 , medium has T-scores between 41.88 and 58.13, and high has T-scores ≥ 58.14 .

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Reading Ability of Secondary School Students

Scale	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Reading Ability (T-Score)	501	48.0585	7.67204	0.34276	-0.197	0.109	-0.516	0.218

	Level of Reading Ability (T-Score)			Total
	Low (<=41.87)	Medium (41.88-58.13)	High (58.14+)	
Count	111	345	45	501
%	22.2%	68.9%	9.0%	100.0%

In secondary school students, the percentage of students with low reading ability is 22.2 per cent, students with medium reading ability are 68.9 per cent, and students with high reading ability is 9.0 per cent.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

Objective

To study the impact of self-efficacy on secondary school students reading ability.

H₀: There is no significant impact of self-efficacy on secondary school students reading ability.

Interpretation

In the Regression Summary Model, in Table 3, R square is found to be 0.015, which shows that the model self-efficacy explains only 1.5 per cent of the variance of reading ability. For the test of statistical significance of the result, the linear regression ANOVA summary is

Table 3
Regression Model Summary of the Score of Reading Ability of Secondary School Students

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.123 ^b	0.015	0.013	7.62093	0.162
^a Predictors: (Constant), Self-efficacy (T-Score)					
^b Dependent Variable: Reading Ability (T-Score)					

Table 4
Linear Regression ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	448.838	1	448.838	7.728	0.006c
	Residual	28981.231	499	58.079		
	Total	29430.069	500			
^a Dependent Variable: Reading Ability (T-Score)						
^b Predictors: (Constant), Self-Efficacy (T-Score)						

Table 5
Regression Coefficient

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	43.470	1.685		25.796	0.000
	Self-efficacy (T-Score)	0.093	0.034	0.123	2.780	0.006
Dependent Variable: Reading Ability (T-Score)						

shown in Table 4. The analysis of the result of linear regression for the prediction of reading ability from the scores of self-efficacy is found to be significant, $F(1, 499) = 7.728$, $p < 0.05$. The contribution of self-efficacy is presented in Table 5, and this model can be used for the prediction of Reading Ability.

As indicated in Table 5, it is observed that according to the statistics provided, there is no problem of collinearity as the

tolerance and VIF were found to range much above 0.01 and much below 10, respectively. Table 5 identified self-efficacy as the dependent variable (reading ability). As the column of unstandardised coefficients is measured with T scores only, Table 5 indicates the independent variable self-efficacy ($B = 0.093$, $t = 2.780$, $p < 0.05$) was found to have made a positively significant impact on the dependent variable reading ability.

Regression Equation

As for linear regression, the coefficients in Table 5 provide the essential values for the prediction equation.

$$y = a + bx$$

$$y = 43.470 + 0.093 * \text{Self-efficacy (T-Score)}.$$

where y = Reading Ability (dependent variable)

a = constant, 43.470

b = the slope for (regression coefficient)

x = Self-efficacy

Hence, the regression equation is as follows

Unstandardised Regression Equation

$$\text{Reading Ability (y)} = 43.470 + 0.093 * \text{Self-Efficacy (T-Score)}.$$

Standardised Regression Equation

$$\text{Reading Ability (y)} = 43.470 + 0.123 * \text{Self-Efficacy (T-Score)}.$$

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of the results of descriptive analysis, the students who got a high level of self-efficacy were 72 (14.4%), a medium level of self-efficacy 331(66.1%) and a low level of self-efficacy 98(19.6%). It showed that a significant portion of secondary school students have a medium level.

Descriptive analysis delineates that 45 (9.0%) students got high level reading ability, medium level of reading ability 345 (68.9%) and low level of reading ability shown by 111 (22.2%).

Impact of Self-efficacy on Reading Ability

Results of inferential statistics suggest that even a modest increase in self-efficacy can enhance the reading ability of secondary school students. The regression analysis, $F(1, 499) = 7.728$, $p < 0.05$, indicates that self-efficacy has a statistically significant effect on reading ability, suggesting that interventions may improve students' performance in reading. Results show a significant positive relationship; high self-efficacy can lead to better reading in secondary school students. Self-efficacy influenced reading ability among students, as evidenced by previous studies (Habibian and Roslan, 2014; Boakye, 2015; Begum and Hamzah, 2018). When students possess high Self-Efficacy, then score in reading are also high implies self-efficacy and reading scores are directly related. If self-efficacy is increased, then scores in reading comprehension are also high. In determining the students' success in reading comprehension, not exclusively self-efficacy but also the educational environment and teaching methodologies employed. For instance, teachers who provide constructive feedback and create a supportive atmosphere can significantly boost students' confidence and overall performance (Anggriawan *et al.*, 2023).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, findings emphasise the self-efficacy role in shaping reading ability, suggesting that helping students having belief in their ability can lead to stronger academic

performance and better educational outcomes. Integrating technology-enhanced interventions can empower learners to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. To support all learners and ensure equitable access to literacy, it is essential to develop educational strategies that are inclusive and targeted. By combining strategies to strengthen self-efficacy with targeted allocation of resources, educators can create a more inclusive educational system that empowers every student to succeed in their literacy journey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Diverse learning materials:** Teachers should allow the learners to read diverse reading materials.
- **Tailored approaches for differential need:** Reading comprehension skills development, teachers play a pivotal role by assisting in developing confidence and aims successful reading outcomes by selecting appropriate strategies, reading material and providing enough time to read (Setiorini *et al.*, 2022)
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Teachers who had higher self-efficacy were more likely to have a positive classroom environment, support students' ideas, encouraging them to develop a positive mindset towards their reading capabilities (Schunk, 1991, cited by Maheshwari, 2022).
- **Use of Educational Technology:** Use of digital platforms, e-books, online quizzes, and gamified applications, which provide immediate feedback along with interactive learning experiences, can offer learners skill development at different levels (Smith, *et al.*, 2021). By integrating self-efficacy theory with educational technology, teachers can design differentiated instruction for learners of varying levels that fosters confidence, motivation, and measurable improvements in reading ability.
- **Professional Development:** There is a need to focus on professional development programmes of educators, which equip their skill acquisition as well as train them to foster learners' self-efficacy and motivate them to apply new strategies in the classroom.
- **Future Research:** Future research can be conducted on factors which may affect students' self-efficacy and reading ability in other disciplines.

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