

## The Relationship between Iranian EFL Upper Intermediate Learners' Self-Efficacy and their Reading Comprehension Performance

Katayoon Salehi <sup>1</sup>, Hamid Reza Khalaji <sup>2\*</sup>

---

1. M.A Student, English Teaching Department, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran

2. PhD, English Teaching Department, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran

\* Corresponding Author: hrkhala20@gmail.com

---

### **Abstract**

The present article was an attempt to investigate whether there was any significant relationship between reading self-efficacy beliefs and reading comprehension in Iranian EFL upper-intermediate learners. To achieve this goal, Longman reading comprehension tests, and Wang Reading Self-efficacy Questionnaire were administered to forty eight EFL upper-intermediate learners. In addition, an interview session was conducted. The results showed that there was a significant strong positive correlation between reading self-efficacy beliefs and reading comprehension. Thus, the learners' level in reading self-efficacy matched more with the item '*I can do it*'. Also, the results of the interview supported the research findings.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, self-efficacy questionnaire, reading comprehension ability, learner's belief

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Self-efficacy is a motivational construct that promotes students learning. Teaching students to be self-regulated readers, which can also enhance their self-efficacy, includes teaching such students to improve self-control and to have an awareness of the reading process (Chularut & DeBacker, 2004). Bandura and Locke (2003) reported that the relationship between self-efficacy and outcome expectancy may have relevance for reading instruction, because result from his study revealed that students are motivated to choose and practice behaviors that they are confident they can successfully perform and that they feel, are related to obtaining desired outcomes. Other researchers such as Barkley (2006), Bouffard Bouchard & Larivee, S. (1991), Chermers, Hu, & Garcia (2001), Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) also found a positive relationship between beliefs of reading comprehension self-efficacy and academic performance.

Self-efficacy related to literacy shows what a person believes about their capabilities to understand a text, their choices in strategy use, their interest and stance toward the text, and the purpose for their reading (Freedman, 2006). It is defined as the belief that one can be successful at reading. When individuals believe they are successful at an activity they are more likely to engage in it (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). As Freedman (2006) asserted, “*readers’ beliefs about themselves as readers often influence their literacy development*”.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Freedman (2006) suggests that according to Bandura’s four elements, students need the practice, the teacher modeling, teacher encouragement, and an affective state that will allow for their literacy self-efficacy to develop. Along with such development, “their cognitive abilities will be also increased” (Freedman, 2006, p. 32). Teachers may, therefore, encourage students to become strategic readers by modeling the use of various strategies, using a variety of texts, and gradually releasing responsibility for employing the strategies to the students, as they become more capable readers. This cycle of modeling and scaffolding will encourage students to engage in increasingly more difficult reading tasks with more effort and perseverance. Success in these tasks provides the experiential-based evidence students need to build higher levels of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy developing is formed in the early childhood as children deal with a wide variety of experiences, tasks, and situations. However, the growth of self-efficacy does not end during youth, but continues to evolve throughout life as people acquire new skills, experiences, and understanding. Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs are influenced in four ways, ranked in order of most to least influential on behavior which are: (a) Mastery Experiences: “The most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences,” Bandura explained. Performing a task successfully strengthens our sense of self-efficacy. However, failing to adequately deal with a task or challenge can undermine and weaken self-efficacy, (b) Social Modeling: Witnessing other people successfully completing a task is another important source of self-efficacy. According to Bandura, “Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers’ beliefs that they too possess the capabilities master comparable activities to succeed”, (c) Social Persuasion: Bandura also asserted that people could be persuaded to believe that they have the skills and capabilities to succeed. Consider a time when someone said something

positive and encouraging that helped you achieve a goal. Getting verbal encouragement from others helps people overcome self-doubt and instead focus on giving their best effort to the task at hand, and (d) Psychological Responses: Our own responses and emotional reactions to situations also play an important role in self-efficacy. Moods, emotional states, physical reactions, and stress levels can all impact how a person feels about their personal abilities in a particular situation. A person who becomes extremely nervous before speaking in public may develop a weak sense of self-efficacy in these situations.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Statement of the Problem

Recently, there have been many attempts and studies for improving the situation of learning/teaching English in Iran. But "despite the growing interest in learning English as a foreign language in Iran, students seem rarely proficient enough to read and comprehend English language texts" (Jalilifar, 2010, p. 98). Most learners want to get the meaning of a text within printed words, and they are relying on dictionaries. Despite all the efforts, their reading comprehension remains poor and they lose their interest in reading English texts and this could lead to their failure in academic English courses.

According to Bandura (1997, p. 390) "Many students have difficulty in school not because they are incapable of performing successfully, but because they are incapable of believing that they can perform successfully, that they have learned to see themselves as incapable of handling academic skills".

There have been so many researches in the related fields lately. Researches involved qualitative, quantitative or a mix of both. Shang (2010) also discusses about self-efficacy on reading comprehension. Nikoopour (2011) studied teachers' self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. Khajavi and Ketabi (2012) investigated self-efficacy and reading with the use of concept mapping. Ahmadian and Hosseini (2012) also presented how learners' self-efficacy beliefs affected on their writings.

Most of the studies are on self-efficacy and its crucial role performed on children or researchers studied on other skills except reading. Some researchers focused on reading strategies or argued about teachers' self-efficacy. Of course, there have been various studies about learners' self-efficacy on reading comprehension recently, but it seems necessary to

study in this field again in order to explore the result and outcome of the study and remove shortage of previous ones.

It is essential especially in Iran that learners do not have much interaction with second or foreign language outside the classes, and they have problems while reading. The reason for including self-efficacy as a variable in this research is that self-efficacy beliefs seem to be closely related to achievement of students (Pajares & Valiante, 2002; Chapman & Tunmer, 2003). Schunk (2000) believed Learners' self-efficacies keep their motivation and promotes learning. Receiving efficient feedback has essential role in better reading comprehension. These motivated the researchers to set out the present study in order to investigate the perspectives about learners' ability on reading comprehension in the process of English language learning. Based on the problem which was stated, the following question was formulated and pursued to answer.

1. Is there any significant relationship between learners' self-efficacy and their reading comprehension?

#### *B. Instruments*

Two questionnaires were used in this study as instruments: reading self-efficacy questionnaire and reading comprehension questionnaire. Learners' English reading proficiency was assessed through the TOEFL reading passages. Since the study did not have any treatment, *ex quo facto* was used, so the study did not have any training instrument and both of instruments belonged to measurement instruments which are explained in details below.

#### *C. Measuring Instruments*

The reading self-efficacy was intended to solicit information regarding participants' beliefs in their own reading capabilities. It was used from the English Self-efficacy Questionnaire designed by Wang (2007) who is a professor of educational research university of North Carolina in the USA. In Wang's (2007) study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) reported .96, test-retest reliability was observed .82, the concurrent validity was .55, and the predictive validity was .41. The reading self-efficacy questionnaire used in this study included 14 items and participants provided confidence judgments to complete English

(language related tasks described in each of the 14 items on a 7 point Likert-type scale from 1 (“I can’t do it at all”), 2 (I cannot do it), 3 (Maybe I can do it), 4 (Maybe I can do it), 5 (I basically can do it), 6 (I can do it), and 7 (“I can do it well”). The scale was found to have high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha=.88).

It is necessary to mention that the instrument totally was given by an expert who is a Chinese educational psychologist and have conducted the relevant research in many countries. There are some researches in which this instrument was used. For instance, Yushengli and Wang from Binhou university in their research (An empirical study of reading self-efficacy and the use of strategies in the Chinese EFL context) or Itui Fang Shag, from Shou university in Taiwan that worked on the relationship among reading comprehension, self-efficacy, and reading strategies.

Infirmity with this fact that the dependent variable of the present study is the reading comprehension of upper intermediate level students, the second instrument is for assessing the learners reading comprehension, so a section of reading comprehension from TOEFL was selected. The test included five sections each of which had a separate subject and questions followed by some multiple choice questions. The first text was about Carbon tetrachloride and had 9 items, the second was about an American artist with 10 multiple questions, the third was about the location of stars with 11 items, the fourth was about Courts with 10 items and fifth section was about literature with 10 items.

In order to arrange the passages from easy to difficult, the researchers calculated the text difficulty. The questionnaire included 50 items, and learners had 55 minutes to answer the questions. Time is definitely a factor in reading comprehension section. Many students, who took the TOEFL test before, noted that they were unable to finish all the questions. Therefore, they needed to make the most efficient use of their time by highest score in reading strategies to get the highest score in a limited amount of time.

#### D. The Procedures

The following procedures were proceeded to carry out the study: At the beginning of the study, learners of upper intermediate level were selected randomly. Each class consisted of 12 students. The researchers typed questionnaires themselves to add to the face validity of the items. It is worthy to mention that in order to encourage the participants to answer more

carefully; they were told that their scores in the entire administered test would be considered as a part of their final examination score.

Firstly, questionnaire was distributed among the students and the researchers gave explanations to the learners to make it clear for them how to fill out the questionnaires and it was told them that they should ask for any clarification they needed, of course the researchers expected that they didn't have any specific problem with the content of the items and the researchers translated some difficult words in to Persian to make clear all the items for her participants before the administration. The students had 15 minutes time to fill out the first questionnaire concerned to self-efficacy. The participants were asked to circle one number that best represented the degree to which the corresponding statement applied to.

Secondly, when the learners filled it out, they returned it to the researchers immediately. So, she distributed the second one and allocated one minute for each question, so participants had almost 25 minutes for answering the second questionnaire. The researchers were present in all classes to control all the elements affecting the result of the study such as classes 'light, sounds, weather, etc.

Thirdly, after the collection of the data, the researchers made an arrangement to have an interview with some of learners who were volunteers.

#### IV. RESULTS

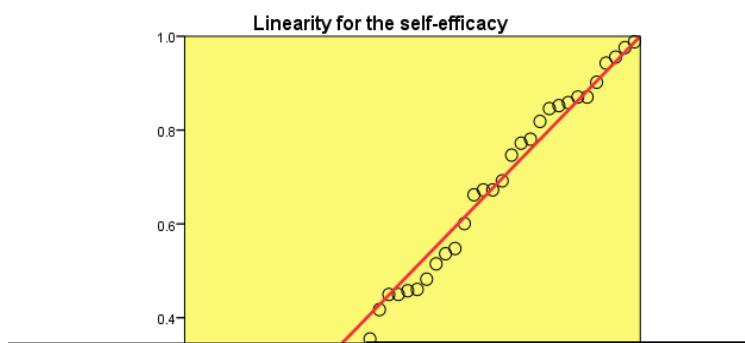
In the following part, the results of the study have been summarized and tabulated in the table and graph.

**Table 1: Correlation Statistics**

<b>Correlations</b>		Reading Proficiency Scores	Reading Self-efficacy Questionnaire
<b>Reading Proficiency Scores</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.452**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	48	48
<b>Reading Self-efficacy Questionnaire</b>	Pearson Correlation	.452**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	48	48

To answer the research question, data were analyzed applying Pearson Product-Moment correlation to determine the relationship between students' reading self-efficacy and their reading proficiency. The data showed no violation of normality, linearity or homoscedasticity, which are the three basic assumptions of Pearson Product-Moment correlation. Therefore, all the assumptions for this inferential statistics were met. There was a moderate, positive correlation between students' reading self-efficacy and their reading proficiency, which was statistically significant ( $r = .452$ ,  $n = 48$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Values of correlation between 0.4 and 0.69 could be considered as moderate relationship between the two variables of study.

As it is shown in the following figure, there is a linear relation between learners' self-efficacy and reading comprehension. It should be made clear that the higher learners' self-efficacy, the higher their reading comprehension level.



**Figure 1: The Relationship between Learners' Self-efficacy and Reading Comprehension**

Consequently, the hypothesis was rejected and it is concluded that statistically significant relationship exists between learners' efficacy and their reading comprehension.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmadian, M., & Hosseini, S. (2012). A study of the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' Multiple Intelligences and their performance on writing. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(1),111-126.
- Baker, L., & Wigfield, A. (1999). Dimensions of children's motivation for reading and their relations to reading activity and reading achievement. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34, 452-477.
- Bandura A (1977). *Social learning theory*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura A (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barkley, J.M. (2006). Reading education: Is self-efficacy important? *Reading Improvement*, 43, 4, 194 – 210.
- Bouffard-Bouchard, T., Parent, S., & Larivee, S. (1991). Influence of self-efficacy on selfregulation and performance among junior and senior high-school age students. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 14, 153–164.
- Brown, H. Douglas (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Pearson ESL Press.
- Chemers, M. M., Hu, L.-T., and Garcia, B. F. (2001). Academic self-efficacy and first-year college student performance and adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 93(1): 55–64.
- Chularut, P. and DeBacker, T. (2004). "The influence of concept mapping on achievement, self regulation, and self-efficacy in students of English as a second language", in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 29: 248-263.
- Freedman, L. (2006). *Actions that create, actions that destroy: Practices and processes for building secondary students' reading proficiency* Symposium presentation at National Reading, Los Angeles, CA.
- Jalilifar, A. (2010). "The effect of cooperative learning techniques on college students' reading comprehension", in *System*, 38: 96-108.
- Khajavi, Y., & Ketabi, S. (2012). Influencing EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension and Self-efficacy Beliefs: The Effect of Concept Mapping Strategy. *PortaLinguarum*, 17, 9-27.
- Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P. (2003). The role of self-efficacy beliefs in student engagement and learning in the classroom. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 19, 119-137. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10573560390143076>.
- Nikoopour, J., Farsani, M, A., Tajbakhsh, M., & Sadat Kiyae, S H. (2012) .The relationship between trait emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3 (6),1165-1174.

- Pajares, F., & Valiante, G. (2002). Students' self-efficacy in their self-regulated learning strategies:A developmental perspective. *Psychologia: An International Journal of Psychology in the Orient*, 45, 211-221.
- Pajares, F. (2006). Self-efficacy during childhood and adolescence: Implications for teachers and partners. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Self-efficacious beliefs of adolescents* (p.339-67). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Schunk, D. H. (2000). Learning theories an educational perspective, (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Schunk, D. H., & Meece, J. L. (2006). Self-efficacy in adolescence. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Adolescence and Education* (Vol. 5, pp. 71-96).
- Shang, H.F. (2010). Reading Strategy Use, Self-Efficacy and EFL Reading Comprehension. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly* June 2010 ,12(2).
- Tunmer, W. E., & Chapman, J. W. (2003). The reading Recovery approach to preventive early intervention: As good as it gets? *Reading Psychology*, 24,337-360.
- Wang, C. (2007). Chinese Secondary School Self-Regulated Learners of English. Paper presented at TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) 2007 Convention,Seattle, WA.