The Relationship between Self-Efficacy in Reading with Language Proficiency and Reading Comprehension among ESL Learner's

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Abstract

This work investigates the relationship between self-efficacy in reading with language proficiency and reading comprehension. The sample utilized is comprised of 64 postgraduate students from two universities, namely Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Malaya. The students are selected from several Master and PhD programs of faculty of Education, Engineering, and Agriculture. The instruments employed to collect the data, was the Scale of Belief Self-Efficacy Comprehension, and reading comprehension test. Quantitative analysis is utilized to analyze the gathered data. The result indicates that, there is a significant correlation between reader self-efficacy and reading comprehension. Moreover, readers' self-efficacy in different levels of foreign language proficiency is different, and readers who possess high level of proficiency, perform reading task better than readers who are considered as high self-officious. In addition, the result demonstrates that, self-efficacy and language proficiency are the key factors in academic achievement. Furthermore, students who are self-efficacious can perform the task better than who are not, and students who possess high level of language proficiency are more successful in the process of reading.

Keywords: self-efficacy, language proficiency, and reading comprehension.

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a process that involves an individual's conscious cognitive efforts. It implies a concern about what is read, what information is already known in line with the reading purpose. It is the cognitive approach that enables the individual to shape and direct the intellectual development. There are also other reading comprehension approaches that have effectively combined functional cognition such as interpreting a text and social interactions.

Grigg and Mann (2008) points to reading as an important study tool, and also sees it as an opportunity to create awareness as well as a useful tool for future employment and for recreational purposes. All this indicates the student's need to master reading ability and acquire reading efficiency because reading is the key to the various components of the school curriculum and also one's chosen vocation. In short, the ability in reading comprehension will empower the student to move ahead and contribute positively to educational success. Hermida's (2009), for example, believes that academic success is largely dependent on an individual's reading skill and goes on to add that with the need to handle lengthy assignments of various difficulty levels, it is crucial for the student to master the reading skill in order to succeed academically. The implication is that lack of reading comprehension skill will lead to an inability to understand information that is read and ultimately result in poor academic performance.

The main purpose of reading is comprehension or understanding and Coiro (2003) defines reading is the process of unearthing and putting together meaning simultaneously as one interacts and is involved with the text. This in turn will trigger a complex correlation of ideas, experience, evaluation and utilization of ideas. For this to take place, it must be assumed that the reader has a basic intellectual ability to understand what is read, implying a psycholinguistic dimension involving an interaction of language, thought and cognition. What is also entailed is complex information processing, comprehension of language, or receptive communication behavior.

All these stimulate intellectual development, thus making reading an important function in our unending search for knowledge and better understanding. To Greene (2001), comprehension is perceived as relative to how a reader is able to identify the intended authorial intent as presented in the written text. As such, therefore, comprehension and intelligence are synonymous and implies an ability to logically analyze conceptual or cognitive relationships. In short, it means that comprehension can be achieved only if one thinks about and understands what is read.

The ultimate result of the inability to acquire the reading comprehension skill is either downright failure or at best, occasional and moderate success. Another consequence would be the learner's limited ability to cope with current high learning standards due to the learner's incapability of benefitting from the study texts. Success in reading tasks is therefore crucial if the learner is to cope with ongoing academic work and the demands faced out of school in the future.

In understanding the reading texts and successfully interpreting the intended meaning, learners are in fact engaged in the process of honing their comprehension skills and enhancing their self-confidence; they are involved in the process of developing their reading comprehension self-efficacy (Demirel, and *Epçaçan,* 2011), which is a concept perceived as a crucial learning process variable as evidenced in many scientific findings.

In contrast to academic self-concept, self-efficacy belief is distinctly related to particular tasks rather than to the global construct (Bandura, 1986; Finney & Schraw, 2003). As such, in predicting their performances, learners are in fact making an assessment of their self-efficacy or passing judgment on their particular capabilities in executing a specific piece of work (Finney & Schraw, 2003). For instance, some learners may consider themselves as generally good students, but at the same time, show a lack of ability in performing specific algebraic equations. This indicates that there are students with high academic self-concepts who continue to have low self-efficacy belief for particular type of tasks.

There are three dimensions in evaluating the concept of self-efficacy: first, the personal self-efficacy of the student in the management of self-learning tasks and the completion of academic endeavors; secondly, the beliefs of teachers in their personal capability to motivate their students in their learning; and thirdly, the collective belief of the school to succeed significantly in its academic processes (Demirel, and *Epçaçan,* 2011). The conclusion therefore from these definitions is that success in education can be expected from people with high self-efficacy belief.

2. Theoretical Perspective

Social cognitive theory is very much central to the construct of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997). From the theoretical, heuristic and practical points of view, Self-efficacy theory is a significant and useful concept in modern psychology, based on the notion of the self-efficacy expectations proposed by Bandura's (1977). The term self-efficacy expectations related to our belief about ability to deliver the successful performance of behaviors we are entrusted with and these expectations have an effect on how we perform our behavioral choices and perseverance. Bandura (1977) recommends that among the multiplicity of a counselor's roles, a major role is to help his client to increase his self-efficacy expectations in targeting behavior domains, employing interventions based on accomplishment, empathy, psychological awareness, motivation and encouragement.

Bandura (1997: 24) contends that self-efficacy affect how people think of themselves: their level of motivation, their affective state and actions determined by what they think they are capable of rather than the reality of what they actually are. Behavioral outcomes therefore are more truly predicted by what people belief they can achieve and self-efficacy expectations therefore determine what people do with the knowledge and skills they possess.

It is this construct of self-efficacy expectations that explain why different people with similar levels of knowledge and skill often exhibit significantly different behaviors. It is also the reason why some people's behaviors do not reflect their actual capabilities. For the same reason, there are many who are talented and yet succumb to bouts of self-doubt regarding their capabilities while some others confidently take on difficult tasks even though their knowledge and skills are only of a modest level.

In the case of students, those who exude confidence in their academic capabilities have positive expectations and believe they will score high marks in their examinations and also expect to gain personally and professionally from the quality of their work. On the other hand, the reverse is true of those who are lacking in confidence regarding their academic capabilities and believe they will not score well in an examination even before the event or succeed in a course they are about to sign up for even before they enroll.

The researchers in this study have considered this particular context in their endeavor to determine the impact of students' academic self-efficacy on their performance in reading comprehension. Since beliefs determine people's set goals, which in turn affect their reading performance. Schunk (2000) is of the opinion that there is a relationship between higher self-efficiency and interest and the utilization of strategic cognition (e.g. elaboration, and paraphrasing) and the will to develop one's skill proficiency.

In academic writing, Niemivirta and Tapola (2007), and Vatham and Locke (1991), state that self-efficacy affects both the level and type of goals people aim for. Thus, as Schunk (1991) indicates, the self-efficacy of students are derived from their belief to execute all of the academic tasks at specific levels. According to Bandura, perceived academic self-efficacy refers to the personal assessment of one's capability in the organization and execution of a course of action to achieve specified types of academic performance. It is Bandura's (1993) assertion that students' belief in their capability to manage their personal learning tasks and succeed in their academic endeavors predicts their goals, motivation level and academic achievements.

In agreement with the view expressed above, Barkley (2006) undertook an investigation to determine if relationships existed between Grade Six to Grade Eight learners and if indeed participants self-efficacy belief could predict reading comprehension performance as assessed in a comprehension sub-test score of a standardized test. The sample comprised 400 Grade Six to Eight students from middle school. Indications from the results were that between students efficacy and comprehension abilities positive correlation exists between students' self-efficacy and comprehension performance when the Grades Six to Eight students were combined.

Barkley finding is in line with Bandura's suggestions in which one of the powerful factor that predicts an individual performance is efficacy belief.

Bandura (1997) also sees increased self-efficacy as a factor that increases motivation, improves the sustainable level of motivation and behavior that is achievement oriented, and greater persistence when facing challenges as well as a greater ability at problem solving. Bandura (1997) also believes that perceived self-efficacy can better predict intellectual achievement than skill alone. This is a possible reason why Bandura (1997) insists that more efficacious students tend to opt for more difficult tasks, make greater efforts and are more persistent when they encounter problems. It can therefore be concluded that high efficacy is crucial in assisting students to participate in and stick with challenging tasks including reading for comprehension. For example, while many studies have shown that acquiring cognitive skills affects efficacy beliefs, Bandura's (1997) argument is that the cognitive skills alone are not the only reflection of efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, the author refers to research showing that children with similar level cognitive skills exhibit varying levels of intellectual achievement based on how strong or weak their perceived self-efficacy is. In the same way Schunk (2000) maintains that those with high level of self efficacy beliefs regarding their capability to succeed in accomplishing their assigned tasks will perform well as a rule. On the other hand, those with lower efficacy beliefs for specified tasks will more likely do nothing or just abandon their tasks the moment they encounter any difficulties. From this we can therefore conclude that those with higher sense of efficacy will make greater efforts, be more persistent and more resilient. However, Choi (2005) in his study arrived at a contrary conclusion, which was that general self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy played no significant part in the prediction of students' academic grades.

To emphasize the importance of self-efficacy in education performance, Solheim (2011) by employing various format of the items investigated the power of the self-efficacy in reading and value of the task value on outcomes of the comprehension process. The hypothesis is that students possessing low self-efficacy have a problem coping with the more difficult reading tasks especially in test situations. This study involved a sample of Fifth Graders who were studied to determine if understanding self-efficacy in the process of reading and value of the reading task could predict scores of comprehension in various items using both fiction and non-fiction texts. It was found that with control for variance related to word reading ability, listening and understanding and non-verbal ability through hierarchical analysis of multiple regression, self-efficacy in reading was confirmed to strongly predict participants scores in comprehension.

In the case of students who showed low level of self-efficacy, it was found that self-efficacy in reading positively predict of only comprehension scores through multiple choice items, not constructed-response comprehensions scores. In the case of high self-efficacy students, on the other hand, reading self-efficacy failed to address any addition in differences in both item formats.

Yoğurtçu (2012) investigated the effect of understanding self-efficacy in the process of reading comprehension among 556 students in University Preparation Classes. The research was the work of Demirel and *Epçaçan (*2011) who also developed the scale of belief self-efficacy reading comprehension. The findings indicate that the readiness of a student's self-efficacy is a crucial factor that influences his academic success. Students' self-efficacy is reflected in the successful study of foreign language. Participants who have successful achievement, particularly in the second or foreign language learning, exhibit a heightened comprehension performance. Meanwhile, the theoretical explanations in this study were investigated by Bandura in 1986 and 1995.

From the scientific finding in literature on reading comprehension, those with self-efficacy develop various reading strategies to enhance their cognitive interactions, experiences and interactive capacities to achieve comprehension. Yoğurtçu (2012) stated that students could progress their reading skills from low level to the upper level. This achievement is a crucial actor in educational setting to improve the readiness level positively, particularly if there are plans to teach foreign languages that help students to improve their comprehension. It means that the self-taught the student will be able to develop his reading comprehension through self-regulation. Also, the self-confidence of the student will be enhanced which would improve his reading comprehension.

Chen, et al. (2001) conducted a meta-analytical study to determine if self-efficacy affects the relationship of cognitive ability-performance and conscientiousness-performance, and whether complexity of the task moderates the degree to which self-efficacy affects these relationships. The findings showed that cognitive ability and conscientiousness had a positive relationship with self-efficacy, but that the level of these relationships changed with the complexity of the task. It was also shown that self-efficacy affected the relationship of cognitive ability and conscientiousness in the performance of simple tasks, but not complex ones. This assumes that efficacy beliefs are mediated cognitive ability is acquired on simple task alone in relation to these findings.

Artino and Stephens' (2006) in another study endeavored to find out if the self-efficacy of students was linked in any way to their admitted on line courses in use of two learning strategies of cognitive and metacognitive. The sample comprised 32 graduate and 64 undergraduate students. They selected from public university in Northeastern United States. The results indicated that self-efficacy had a positive relationship with students' critical thinking and self-regulation. This is an assumption that students who believed in their capability to learn would more likely strategize cognitively and metacognitively. This indicates that having a high feeling of

efficacy would contribute to greater attempt, having ability of determination to do something, and become successful after a difficult situation as posited by Bandura (2001).

Wolters and Rosenthal (2000) conducted an investigation of the relationship between a set of pre and post decisional beliefs. The former included task values of students, self-efficacy and learning and performance goal options, and the latter included implementation strategies used by students in regulating their endeavors for academic tasks. A group of Grade Eight comprised of 114 students who required to answer a survey of self-report. The purpose of the survey was to measure self-equating, controlling environment, enhancement of interest, master, and performance self-talk. Findings showed that self-efficacy has no significant relationship with any of the five regulatory strategies. This finding contradicts that of Bandura's (1997) that viewed self-efficacy as a superior predictor of intellectual performance than skill alone.

Although strong relationship between self-efficacy and second language achievement was reported by the previous studies, the influence of this factor with respect to language proficiency, particularly among Iranian EFL learners is not cited. Therefore, there is a need to establish empirical study to find out the impact of self-efficacy skills on reading comprehension performance among students with respect to their language proficiency.

3. Research Questions
1) What is the relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy in reading and comprehension performance?
2) Do reader with the high self-efficacy belief accomplish reading better or high proficient readers?
3) Do EFL self-efficacy are different among proficiency levels?

4. Methodology
4.1 Research design
Since the independent variables are not under the control of the researcher, Ex-post Facto design which is organized empirical inquiry is adopted in this study. A total of 64 EFL graduate students in several Master and PhD programs at UM and UPM Universities, from faculty of Education, Engineering, and Agriculture participated in this study. Based on their language proficiency score in TOEFL, we classified the participants into three levels of proficiency, namely, high, mid, and low.

4.2 Instruments
4.2.1 Questionnaire of Reading Comprehension Self- Efficacy Perceptions
In order to measure self-efficacy of the participants, the Scale of Belief Self-Efficacy Comprehension developed by Demirel and *Epçaçan (2011) is employed. The scale* is comprised of twenty seven items identifying participants' self-efficacy belief in English. Participants are questioned regarding their perception of efficacy in reading comprehension such as, self regulation and self-esteem in the process of reading comprehension, visual and written meaning, and other factors that are related to their understanding abilities. The answer of the questions is ranged between one to five.

4.2.2 Reading comprehension Tests
Two reading comprehension passages adopted from Carrel (1991) are used to measure participants' reading comprehension abilities. The texts are in almost equal length, related to the general topic of 'language' and selected from the authentic text in publications. The range of vocabulary in both texts varied between three hundred fifteen to three hundred forty four. Each text designs to seek information regarding deep level understanding of passage upon the careful reading through ten multiple-choice comprehension questions.

4.3 Survey validity and reliability
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was utilized to identify the questionnaire's responses reliability. In the social sciences, it is used to calculate the research internal consistency and the Likert scale's internal consistency. Opinions and attitudes of the respondents to the 27-question Likert scale were found to be 0.866. Generally, coefficients ranging from 0.80 to 1.00 are viewed as highly reliable. A coefficient within this range is indication of the high reliability of the survey and the existence of internal consistency. Besides Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test of reliability, the correlation coefficients were also calculated. It has been recommended that in order to increase the internal consistency, items with low correlation should be excluded through the analysis. Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was less than 0.866, meaning that the reliability of the questionnaire remained unchanged despite the removal of some questions.

4.4 Results
In order to answer the first research question which was to identify whether there is a relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their reading comprehension achievement, Pearson product moment is conducted and the result illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The relationship between learners' self-efficacy in reading and reading comprehension

		Self-efficacy	Reading comprehension
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.624
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.004
	N	64	64
Reading comprehension	Pearson Correlation	.624	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.004	
	N	64	64

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the analysis in Table 1, the correlation coefficient between the two variables is .624 and is significant at $p < 0.01$, which indicates that there is a strong relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension as emphasized by researchers (Bassi et al., 2007 and Bandura, 1997).

The second research question seeks information on whether readers with high self-efficacy belief perform better in reading or high proficient reader. Using T-test mean groups scores of both was compared (Table 2 and 3).

Table 2. Comparing mean score of high self-efficacious and high proficient in reading comprehension

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score	high self-officious	23	9.00	4.045	.843
	high proficient	15	14.33	3.222	.832

Table 3. Determining the significance of the mean score difference of high self-efficacious and high proficient in reading comprehension

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
Score Equal variances assumed	.554	.462	-4.289	36	.000	-5.333	1.243	-7.855	-2.812
Equal variances not assumed			-4.502	34.427	.000	-5.333	1.185	-7.740	-2.927

In order to identify the statistically significant difference in the mean for high self-officious and high proficient groups, an Independent Samples T-Test is employed. The group statistics shows that, the mean score for high proficient readers is higher than the high self-officious readers in reading comprehension. The result of the tested significance shows that, the test is -4.502. This test result shows a negative value which denotes that, the mean for high self-officious readers is smaller than the high proficient. The p value for the statistic is 0.000. The mean difference between the two groups is -5.333. This result indicates that, not only is there a significant difference in the mean score for high self-officious and high proficient readers, but also it confirms the strong effect of language proficiency in reading comprehension. Therefore, language proficiency can be a vital tool in academic achievement.

The third research question seeks information that whether EFL self-efficacy is different among proficiency levels, initially, descriptive statistic is applied to determine the mean scores of three proficiency level readers (Table 4). Afterwards, one-way ANOVA is employed to find out whether the mean difference between three groups is significant (Table 5). Finally, a Scheffe post-hoc test is performed to identify the differentiating groups.

Table 4. Comparing mean score of readers in different proficiency levels in reading comprehension

Score

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
High	13	120.77	7.026	1.949	116.52	125.01	108	129
Mid	19	101.05	17.896	4.106	92.43	109.68	59	128
Low	31	73.52	20.570	3.694	65.97	81.06	34	119
Total	63	91.57	26.011	3.277	85.02	98.12	34	129

Table 5. One-way ANOVA for reader in different proficiency level in reading comprehension

Score

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	22896.432	2	11448.216	36.055	.000
Within Groups	19050.997	60	317.517		
Total	41947.429	62			

Table 6: The Scheffe Post-Hoc test for high, mid, and low proficiency levels
Score Scheffe
Multiple comparisons

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High	Mid	19.717*	6.414	.012	3.62	35.82
	Low	47.253*	5.888	.000	32.47	62.03
Mid	High	-19.717*	6.414	.012	-35.82	-3.62
	Low	27.537*	5.192	.000	14.50	40.57
Low	High	-47.253*	5.888	.000	-62.03	-32.47

 The result of comparing mean score of readers in different proficiency levels in reading comprehension (Table 4) shows that, three EFL proficiency level group students have different mean score. High proficient group have an average of 120.77 (*SD*=7.026), which is the highest means score among the groups. The low proficiency group, have an average of 73.52 (*SD*=20.570), which is the lowest mean scores among the groups. Mid proficiency level group have an average of 101.05 (*SD*=17.896), with their mean scores in between the mean scores of the high and low proficient groups.

In order to prove that the difference of mean scores between the levels of proficiency is statistically significance, one-way analysis of variances (ANOVAs) is utilized (Table 5). The result indicates that the difference between the mean scores of the three groups is varied (sig. = .000 < .05).

A Scheffe post-hoc test with multiple comparisons of learner's proficiency levels is performed to identify the differentiating groups (Table 6). The mean differences can be observed from the Table 6 in which there is a significance difference between high and mid proficiency levels (19.717, sig. = .012), high and low (-47.253, sig. = .000), and mid and low (27.537, sig. =.000).

Therefore, we can postulate that self-efficacy is different among proficiency levels and readers with high language proficiency level have high self-efficacy. Moreover, readers with high proficiency level do not only feel more efficacious than learners who have low proficiency level, but also their motivation leads them to accomplish a task successfully.

4.5 Discussion

One of the major conclusions of this study is that students' self-efficacy plays an important role in their

academic performance. EFL self-efficacy and foreign reading comprehension are closely related and several researchers have pointed to its significant influence on the success of EFL students. Bandura (1984), for example, mentions the potential of self-efficacy to assist or hinder the learner's progress in the learning process. Zimmerman et al. (1992) also mentioned that "perceived efficacy to achieve motivates academic attainment both directly and indirectly by influencing personal goal setting," while. Chen (2007) discovered that the self-efficacy of EFL learners and their progress in listening are closely related. Chen's (2007) findings are in agreement with those of this study in showing that the self-efficacy of EFL learners plays a significant role in helping them to excel listening and reading comprehension. Although there is consensus among researchers that self-efficacy regulates the thoughts, feelings and responses of individuals and therefore contributes to achieve positive outcomes (Bandura), this study only indicates how students' self-efficacy is positively and significantly correlated to their reading comprehension performance. It should be noted that this contradicts earlier findings of Wolters and Rosenthal (2000), who reported that there is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and reading achievement. Similarly, Choi (2005) findings indicated no significant correlation between either general self-efficacy or academic self-efficacy and the terms grades of students.

Another finding of this study is that readers' self-efficacy differs in different proficiency levels. As such the higher the students' perception of their skills in language proficiency, the more successful they felt themselves to be. Also, how well students performed in their reading comprehension was significantly influenced by their proficiency level. Consequently, when the performance of high cognitive ability was compared to that of high proficient groups, it was the latter group that excelled in FL reading comprehension. This goes to show that although possessing the vocabulary and understanding structure are important, learners must also understand the contextual function of language as it plays a very significant role in academic performance. It is therefore proposed that teachers consider these variances because they can influence the eventual achievement of their students. To succeed in teaching EFL it is therefore important to pay attention to all aspects of the pedagogical process from learner self-efficacy, to language skills and components, each of which must be considered separately and at its respective level of language proficiency.

In conclusion, it can be seen that self-efficacy and language proficiency can reliably predict the academic achievements of students, assisting them to perform their tasks successful in the classroom and in the process enhance their self confidence, independence and self-esteem. Proficiency in language, however, leads the learners to a better understanding of the text and enables them to more appropriately construct meaning of the text.

As for the findings of this study, it is the researchers' belief that self-efficacy and language proficiency of the students need to be further developed. To achieve this, teachers of English language should enhance their personal knowledge of the English language and subsequently transfer such knowledge and skills to their charges in order to motivate them towards enhancing their performance capacity. It is also necessary to conduct further studies and father more data to identify the reasons why in the case of comprehension, the highly proficient students perform better than those who are highly self-officious.

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