

The Relationship between Self-concept, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem and Reading Comprehension Achievement: Evidence from Iranian EFL learners

By

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Abstract

This study investigated the possible correlation between three Selves (self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem) and reading self-esteem. The participants of the study included 92 EFL learners (68 female, 24 male, $M_{age}=30.06$, age range: 15-53) from Iran Language Institute in Tehran. In this study, the research made use of three questionnaires namely Self-concept Attribute Attitude Scale (SaaS), Self-efficacy Questionnaire, and Self-esteem questionnaire to assess the relationship between different measures of self and reading comprehension score in term of students' score the reading part of the TOEFL test. Spearman correlation was applied to find the strength of the relationship between the study variables. It was found that the relationship between self-concept and reading comprehension scale (Spearman's $\rho=.65$, Sig. $=.01$), and that of self-esteem and reading comprehension score (Spearman's $\rho=.35$, Sig. $=.01$) was significant while the relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension score was not (Spearman's $\rho=.06$, Sig. $=.53$). Overall, this study confirmed that the reading comprehension grades were affected strongly by students' self-concept and self-esteem.

1. Introduction

In line with the growing interest towards teaching and learning English among different nonnative countries of English and also Iran, many researchers attempt to explore some variables which are effective in facilitating this process. Of these affective variables, there are some personal status like self-concept, self-efficacy and self-esteem. In fact, many researchers use these different terms interchangeably (Stern, 1995). Bandura (1993) believed that students, who believe their abilities, act more successfully in their educational performance.

"Self-concept refers to the global understanding a sentient being has of him or herself. It presupposes, but can be distinguished from self-consciousness, which is simply an awareness of one's self" (Sahranavard, et. al., 2012, p. 371). Fleming and Courtney (1984) stated that self-concept is a more general term than self-esteem. "Self-concept can be viewed as having a cognitive/thought orientation that encompasses both descriptive and evaluative beliefs about one's characteristics, whereas self-esteem has a global affective and cognitive orientation that focuses on how an individual feels about him or herself as a person" (Burnett, 1994, p. 165). Self-esteem is defined as the set of attitudes and beliefs that a person bears in relation to the outside world, which includes expectations of success/failure, the effort required for possible success and the reaction to possible failure (Coopersmith, 1967, 1981).

Three types of self-efficacy are introduced by Baron (2004): "self-regulatory self-efficacy (ability to resist peer pressure and avoid high-risk activities), social self-efficacy (ability to form and maintain relationships, be assertive and to engage in leisure time activities), and academic self-efficacy, which is the concern of the present paper (ability to do the course work, regulate learning activities and to meet expectations)" (as cited in Jabbarifar, 2011, p. 119).

Bandura (1986) stated four sources for developing self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, persuasions, and physiological states. He said that the most significant source is "mastery experience" as "the interpreted result of purposive performance" (p.393).

Mastery experiences are related to the students' actual performances that are the most reliable indication of their self-efficacy. The second source of increasing self-efficacy is vicarious experiences that are the acquiring and the use of self-efficacy in comparison to the others' performances in the social context. In this kind of resource, students believe that they are also able to do the tasks that their peers are able to do. The third source for enhancing self-efficacy is persuasion or persuasive information from others like verbal encouragements that improve the learners' motivation in succeeding a task. The last mentioned source in enhancing self-efficacy beliefs is physiological reactions like heart rate, stress, and so on, and as Schunk and Meece (2005) stated, lower emotional states can be an indicator of more self-efficacy.

2. Related Studies

There are a lot of research attempted to investigate the relationship between self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem and English achievement in terms of different skills or sub-skills. Also, as same as the context of this study, many Iranian researchers examined this topic in Iranian context and on Iranian EFL learners' achievements. Some of these studies are mentioned below:

Talebinezhad and Banihashemi (2013) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy of 83 EFL students of an English institute based on Bandure's (1986) contention. At the end of the study, they concluded "there was a significant relationship between EFL learners' EI and their self – efficacy beliefs, and this positive correlation is not affected by gender differences" (p. 1966).

Jabbarifar (2011), in a review of literature study found the positive importance of self-efficacy on second or foreign language learning in the studies done in 21st century. He, moreover, found the role of teachers as a significant one in detecting learner's beliefs about their abilities and helping them to improve it.

Gahungu (2007) conducted his PhD dissertation on investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and language ability of 37 university students studying French. The data of the participants' self-efficacy were gathered through a questionnaire with 40 questions to measure their level of confidence, and a cloze test to measure their level of proficiency in French, and also some interviews and observation. In the end, he reached the positive effects of self-efficacy on language learning.

Hetthong and Teo (2013) searched the relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance and explored whether students' overall writing self-efficacy predicts their overall writing performance. The participants were 51 third-year students of a Thai university, and a questionnaire and a paragraph writing test were used. The results showed "there is a significant positive relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance both at the section level and the sub-skill level. Furthermore, the overall writing self-efficacy predicts the overall writing performance" (p. 157).

Raofi, Tan and Chan (2012) examined the role of self-efficacy on second or foreign language learning contexts. They reviewed the related empirical literature and at last found "several factors enhance the level of students' self-efficacy, and self-efficacy is a strong predictor of performance in a different language skills and tasks" (p. 60).

Hosseini Fatemi and Vahidnia (2013) examined the relationship between self-efficacy and motivation of 93 Iranian B. A. and M. A. university students. Also, some positive relation between their self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation were found, "Moreover, a motivation, among the subscales of motivation, was found to be negatively related to students' self-efficacy (p. 79).

Ghonsooly and Elahi (2010) studied the effect of self-efficacy of learners in their reading. The participants of this study were 150 sophomore Iranian university students majoring in English literature. The instrument used in the study to meet this goal was an author-designed scale on EFL learners' self-

efficacy in reading comprehension. The results showed "high self-efficacious participants achieved higher scores in reading comprehension course than low self-efficacious participants" (p. 45).

Kalanzadeh, et. al. (2013) examined the impact of Iranian EFL students' self-esteem on their speaking skill. The participants of this study were selected by using a questionnaire in order to diagnose the high and low self-esteem ones. After that, a standard oral proficiency test was used in order to measure five sub-skills related to speaking: vocabulary, structure, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehensibility. After analyzing the data, the results showed a statistically significant correlation between the participants' self-esteem and speaking ability.

Ebrhimzadeh, Khodabandehlou and Jahandar (2013) searched the impact of self-efficacy on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' paragraph writing. This study included both experimental and control group and each of them with 69 participants. The experimental group received treatment for paragraph writing, but the control group experienced it in the traditional way. Finally, the results of the posttest indicated the direct influence of self-efficacy on the participants' paragraph writing.

Rahimi and Abedini (2009) in a study examined the relationship between self-efficacy and listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners based on their listening comprehension test performance. The results showed a statistically significant correlation between high and low self-efficacious students and their rate of listening comprehension. Furthermore, self-efficacy in listening was significantly related to listening proficiency.

3. Method

This study was of correlational design. In this quantitative research design, we have 2 or more variables from the same group of participants. The aim is to determine if there is a relationship between the two variables. A common sense to increase the validity of a correlational study is to have 30 or more participants. In the current study, the research variable involved reading score and the indices of self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Participants and Setting

The participants of the study included 92 EFL learners (68 female, 24 male, $M_{age}=30.06$, age range: 15-53) from Iran Language Institute in Tehran. Convenient sampling in which the researcher uses any subjects that are available to participate in the research study was used to select the participants of the study. Table 1 shows the number of male and female students in this study.

Table 1: Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	The Cumulative Percent
F	68	73.9	73.9	73.9
Valid M	24	26.1	26.1	100.0
Total	92	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows the total mean score of the participants in reading comprehension test and also students' mean age.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Score	92	20.00	75.00	53.3333	14.78788
Age	92	15.00	53.00	30.0652	7.73575
Valid N (listwise)	92				

Instruments

Three questionnaires and one reading test were used to collect the research data. The questionnaires of the study are as following:

Self-concept Attribute Attitude Scale (SaaS)

This scale developed by Campbell (1991) is a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire which was validated by factor analyzing the data from 1300 high achieving high school students'. The final three factors were math self-concept, science self-concept, and general self-concept. In the current study, the researcher made use of general and science self-concept which include 6 and 14 items respectively. In this study, the reliability of the SaaS was computed as .75 and .71 for general self-concept and science self-concept respectively

Self-efficacy Questionnaire

In order to measure the participants' self-efficacy in reading comprehension Ghonsooly and Elahi (2010) self-efficacy questionnaire was used. This questionnaire is based on three related questionnaires, namely

1. The Persian Adaptation of General Self-efficacy Scale developed by Nezami, Schwarzer, and Jerusalem (1996);
 2. Morgan-Links student Efficacy Scale (MLSES) constructed by Jinks and Morgan (1999).
 3. Beliefs about Language Learning (BALL) designed by Horwitz (1988)
- The Cronbach Alpha for this questionnaire was reported to be .78

Self-esteem Questionnaire

This questionnaire consisted of 20 items which constructed to measure students' self-efficacy. This questionnaire was developed by Marsh (2007) to measure self-esteem. The reliability index of this questionnaire was .70.

TOEFL Test (Reading section)

Some passages from the reading section of TOEFL test which contain reading passages and questions about the passages was used to assess students' score in reading comprehension. Five reading passages of general topics, including the characteristics of bacteria, Peal Buck (an American writer) bibliography, the evolutionary cycle of stars, the rise of Urban Middle Class, and early attempts at colonizing North America was selected from (Pyle, 2001) (see appendix A). The test was piloted among 20 students' and some problematic items were deleted from the main test. Finally, 20 reading question remained to measure students' reading comprehension performance.

Data Analysis

Data, which were collected by the questionnaires and the test, were analyzed by using SPSS 21 version for windows. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to answer the research question concerning the relationship between Self-concept, Self-esteem, Self-efficacy and reading comprehension achievement. Spearman correlation was applied to find the strength of the relationship between the study variables. The Spearman's rank-order correlation is the nonparametric version of the person product-moment correlation. This correlation statistics is used in order to evaluate the relationship between two variables of different scale (e.g. ordinal and interval).

4. Results and Discussion

First Research Question

Is there a relationship between students' Self-concept and reading comprehension score?

Table 3 shows the participants' responses to the FLRAS questionnaire.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics (Self-concept)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Concept	92	2.60	3.80	3.2944	.24790
Valid N (listwise)	92				

As the table shows the total mean of the responses was ($M=3.29$, $SD=.24$). This is considered as a neutral response based on the Likert scale ($2.8 < \text{mean} < 3.4$)

Table 4: Correlations (Self-concept and reading score)

		Self-concept	ReadingScore
Se	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.65**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	92	92
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.65**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	92	92

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

The Spearman's rho correlation between the students' total mean Self-concept score and that of reading comprehension was .65 (Sig. = .01). This suggested that there is a slight correlation between the two variables.

Second Research Question

Is there a relationship between students' self-esteem and reading comprehension score?

Table 5 shows the participants' responses to the Self-esteem questionnaire.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics Students' Self-esteem

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Selfesteem	92	2.90	4.00	3.2922	.21328
Valid N (listwise)	92				

As the table shows the total mean of the responses to the self-esteem questionnaire was ($M=3.29$, $SD=.21$). This is considered as the neutral response based on the Likert scale ($2.8 < \text{mean} < 3.4$).

Table 6. Correlation

		Selfesteem	ReadingScore
Self-esteem	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.159
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.130
	N	92	92
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.45	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.130	.
	N	92	92

The Spearman's rho correlation between the students' total mean Self-esteem score and that of reading comprehension was .45 (Sig. = .01). This suggested that there is a significant correlation between the two variables.

Third Research Question

Is there a relationship between students' self-efficacy and reading comprehension score?

Table 7 shows the participants' responses to the Self-efficacy questionnaire.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for the self-efficacy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-efficacy total	92	2.73	3.73	3.2810	.20
Valid N (listwise)	92				

As the table shows the total mean of the responses to the self-esteem questionnaire was (M=3.73, SD=.20). This is considered as a neutral response based on the Likert scale (2.8<mean<3.4).

Table 8. Correlations

		Self-efficacy	ReadingScore
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.065
	Self-efficacy total		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.537
	N	92	92
	Correlation Coefficient	.065	1.000
	ReadingScore		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.537	.
	N	92	92

The Spearman's rho correlation between the students' total mean Self-concept score and that of reading comprehension was .065 (Sig. = .01). This suggested that there is not a significant correlation between the two variables.

5. Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the possible relationship between three indices of self (self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem) students' score in reading comprehension test. The results for the relationship between self-concept and reading comprehension scale (Spearman's rho=.65, Sig. =.01), and that of self-esteem and reading comprehension score (Spearman's rho=.35, Sig. =.01) was significant while the relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension score was not (Spearman's rho=.06, Sig. =.53)

The results of this study showed that the reading comprehension grades were affected strongly by students' self-concept and self-esteem. The results are in line with some of the research in the related literature. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) in research on the role of self-efficacy construct in Math and English achievements exposed the participants to the self-report measures of self-perceptions of ability and expectancy. Therefore, based on these issues "the notion of self-efficacy, its' origins and effects, as well as strategies for developing high and positive self- beliefs should be given due attention in any educational programs, including foreign language learning" (Jabbarifar, 2011, 122). The results of this study are also confirmed the results of the study conducted by Hetthong and Teo (2013) who found a positive and direct relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance. Koosha, Ketabi, and Kassaian (2011) using a speaking scale to measure students' speaking abilities concluded that there is "a significant relationship between self-esteem and speaking skill with fluency exerting the most influence" (p. 1328). Therefore, based on the findings of the current study and also conducted research, it

can be concluded self-efficacy is a key construct in the different skills of English achievement (i.e. reading, writing, and speaking).

As Bandura (1986) mentioned, self-efficacy affects behavior in some ways as: it influences the behaviors that a person choose to do, i. e. if he/she is confident in doing something, so prefers to it and vice versa. In other words, "our assessment of our own capabilities is primarily responsible for the outcomes we expect and for the knowledge and skills we seek and acquire. Hence, self-efficacy is more powerful determiner of the choices that individuals make" (Bandura, 1986, .394). Furthermore, students' self-beliefs determine the amount of students' effort for an activity and how long they will persevere on it. In fact, high self-efficacy acts as a motivator in encouraging students to dare in doing an activity. The last case is about taking responsibility of the tasks done by the students and to assume them as the producers. In this regard, Bandura (1986) argues "Self-confidence breeds success which in turn breeds more challenging performance; self-doubt breeds hesitancy, defeat, and failure to try. In other words, our perceptions of efficacy help determine how we think, feel, and behave" (p. 396).

6. Conclusion

This study is addressed here the limitations of the past conducted studies as the implicit recommendation for future research. These limitations might influence the results directly or indirectly. For example, in Khan mohammad and Eilaghi's (2013) study, the limited number of the participants, and any differentiation in their age, education, and their knowledge of self-efficacy. The other limitation of this study was that students' level of education was not taken into account. The other limitation can be the fact that most the respondents to the self-efficacy questionnaire are tended to show themselves socially a desirable one by showing a good picture of themselves by their responses, so the validity of their responses is always questionable (Hancock & Flowers, 2001; Rosenfeld, Booth-Kewley, Edwards & Thomas, 1996). Further research can take this limitation into account in order to have a comprehensive role of different measures of self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem on learners' improvement.

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