

The Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Use of Reading Strategies: The Case of Iranian Senior High School Students

Mostafa Zare^{1,*}; Sajad Davoudi Mobarakeh²

¹MA student in TEFL University of Isfahan Isfahan, Iran

²MA student in TEFL University of Isfahan Isfahan, Iran

*Corresponding author.

Email: mostafa.zare314@gmail.com

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Abstract

Reading is an essential skill and probably the most important skill for second language learners to master in academic context (Grabe, 1991). Reading strategies are also inseparable part of all reading activities and tasks. Many different factors may affect one's knowledge of reading. One of such factors is self-efficacy. The present study aims to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and use of reading strategies among Iranian senior high school students. 45 senior high school students in Shoushtar (a city in southwest of Iran) were randomly selected to participate in this study. Instruments used in this study were two questionnaires, one of which measured students reading self-efficacy and the other one measured use of reading strategies. The questionnaires items were on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and use of reading strategies. The result of the study indicated that the participants, on averages felt confident of their capabilities to perform general reading tasks. They also demonstrated an acceptable level of using three different subcategories of reading strategies (metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective strategies). After computations, it was revealed that reading self-efficacy and overall reading strategies use and subcategories of reading strategies were significantly positively correlated.

Key words: Self- efficacy beliefs; Reading strategies; EFL context

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INTRODUCTION

According to Grabe (1991) reading is an essential skill and probably the most important skill for second language learners to master in academic contexts. Reading is an indispensable skill for learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Foreign language reading comprehension is an interactive and complex process influenced by linguistic and cognitive, social and cultural, and affective and motivational factors (Lu, 1989; Xu, 1997, 1998, 1999). To understand the meaning of any piece of written text, a host of processes should take place. As Brown (2001) asserts, "A text does not carry meaning by itself; the reader brings information, knowledge, emotions and experiences to the printed word." In spite of the fact that reading comprehension in Iran EFL context has received a great deal of priority recently (the major focus of all High school English syllabus is reading), the results and performances of learners on reading section both in final exams and Iran university entrance examination (Konkour) is disappointing. Since reading comprehension has been distinctively important, both in first and second/ foreign language learning, the ways to enhance reading comprehension, the most notably, reading strategies are of great interest in the field of reading research.

While the role of intellectual capabilities in learning a second or foreign language is undeniably crucial, the notion that aptitude plays a dominant role seems to be controversial (Rahemi, 2007). As a matter of fact, the literature supports that variation in foreign language learning can be explained by aptitude only to a certain

extent. In Iran EFL context, one of the determining factors affecting the students' foreign language learning is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997, p.391) defines self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute course of action required to attain designated types of performance". Perceived self-efficacy is a crucial component in human functioning because it influences behavior, directly and indirectly, by affecting other vital determinates such as goals and desires, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of obstacles and/or opportunities in the social environment (Bandura, 1995, 1997).

Although so many researchers have been conducted on learning and reading strategies and self-efficacy beliefs. Little of them have explored the relationship between reading self-efficacy and use of reading strategies. In Iran EFL context, specially, the issue has not ever been studied. Novelty and importance of the topic were the main impetus of the researcher to delve into this arena to see if there is any relationship between Iranian senior High school students' reading self-efficacy and their use of reading strategies.

1. Literature Review

Bandura(1996) introduced self-efficacy as one of the components of social cognitive theory. He defines it as "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 392). His focal tenet regarding self-efficacy beliefs in human functioning is that "people's level of motivation, affective states and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true"(ibid). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. As maintained by Bandura (1997) people make causal contribution to their own psychological functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or persuasive than beliefs of personal efficacy (Rahimpur & Nariman-Jahan, 2010). If people do not believe in their own capabilities and power to create and produce the things, situations or behavior they expect, they will make no effort to achieve what they want. On the other hand, people's belief in their competence to produce the results they wish, will make them enthusiastically endeavor to attain their purposes.

1.1 Types & Sources of SE

After self-efficacy came into vogue in language learning researches and studies, numerous classifications about its nature, complying processes, types and sources have been proposed. In one of such classifications, Baron (2004) introduces three types of self-efficacy:

- self regulatory self-efficacy (ability to resist peer pressure, avoid high risk activities)
- social self-efficacy (ability to form and maintain

relationships, be assertive engage in leisure time activities)

- academic self-efficacy (ability to do course work, regulate learning activities, meet expectations).

In another classification, Bandura (1994) argues four sources of efficacy on which efficacy beliefs are based:

- mastery experience: it is the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy. The essential premise in mastery experience is that successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy and failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established. If people experience only easy successes they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort.

- vicarious experience: it is the second way of creating and strengthening self-beliefs of efficacy. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required to succeed. It is in fact "if he can do it, so I can" method of developing self-beliefs.

- social persuasion: people who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given activities are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise. To the extent that persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy lead people to try hard enough to succeed, they promote development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy.

- physiological states: people rely partly on their emotional states in judging their capabilities. They interpret stress reactions and tension as signs of vulnerability to poor performance.

1.2 Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Albert Bandura's (1986&1997) theory of self-efficacy has important implications with regard to motivation. To support Bandura, Schunk (2003) believes that perceived self-efficacy or students' personal beliefs about their capabilities to learn or perform behaviors at designated levels, plays an important role in their motivation and learning. Zimmerman (1997) adds that students' perceived self-efficacy influenced their skills acquisition both directly and indirectly by highlighting their persistence. Motivation is directly related to self-efficacy in that if someone perceives him/herself as able to handle a situation (high self-efficacy), s/he will be more motivated to work hard at successfully perform in that situation. Pajares (1997) noted that self-efficacy could influence choices made, efforts expended and perseverance executed when confronted with obstacles, stress and anxiety. Specifically, students who had high self-efficacy beliefs were persistent when faced with challenges and were more successful in academic achievement (Schunk, 1990; Wang Pape, 2007). Furthermore, Multon, Brown and

Lent's (1991) meta-analysis of researcher studies showed a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievements.

Reading self-efficacy was defined in this study as learners' perception of their reading abilities to perform various reading tasks, such as grasping the main idea, guessing the meaning of an unknown word, and inferring the authors' attitudes toward their own written text. A great deal of L1 reading studies has demonstrated significant positive correlation of reading efficacy with reading achievements (Barkley, 2006; Shell, Murphy & Bruming, 1989; Song & Sang, 2000). As was previously mentioned, little research has explored the reading self-efficacy in ESL or EFL context.

Rahimpur and Nariman-Jahan (2010) investigated the impact of self-efficacy and proficiency on Iranian EFL learners' written task performance regarding concept load, fluency, complexity and accuracy. The participants in this study were both low proficiency and high proficiency EFL learners. Each participant was requested to do three tasks, a narrative task, a personal task and decision-making task and fill out the self-efficacy questionnaire. After participants' performances analysis, the researchers found out that there was a significant relationship between self-efficacy and narrative and personal tasks in terms of concept load but not in terms of fluency, complexity and accuracy in high proficiency participants. Furthermore, no relationship was seen between self-efficacy and decision-making tasks in terms of concept load, fluency, complexity and accuracy in both low and high proficiency participants.

In another study, Rahemi (2007) explored the humanities students' English self-efficacy beliefs and examined the contributions they make to their EFL achievements. Participants of the study were both students and teachers. The research triangulated her data through both qualitative (teacher interviews, classroom observations and students diaries) and quantitative (implementation of a structured questionnaire and a measure of EFL achievement) methods. The results revealed that the students majoring in humanities had a very weak English self-efficacy and held certain negative beliefs about their academic ability as foreign language learners.

Among the researchers studying self-efficacy in Iranian students, Eslami and Fatahi (2008) examined the efficacy beliefs of nonnative English speaking (NNES) Iranian EFL teachers. EFL teachers' perceptions of their teaching efficacy in terms of personal capabilities to teach, EFL and their perceived English language proficiency level were investigated. A modified version of the teachers' sense of efficacy scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was used to measure self-efficacy for management, engagement and instructional strategies. The results of the study revealed that the more efficacious the teachers felt, the more inclined they were to use communicative-based

strategies.

1.3 Learning and Reading Strategies

Learning strategies are divided into three main categories: metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). While learners use cognitive strategies to achieve a particular goal, say, understanding a text, metacognitive strategies are used to ensure that the reader has successfully done the activity after it is completed (Living Stone, 1997). Socioaffective strategies, on the other hand, deal with learners' interactions with others (Brown, 2000).

Unlike self-efficacy, learning strategies, generally, and reading strategies, particularly, have been the focus of a wealth of studies. Reading strategies were defined as "deliberate, conscious procedures used by readers to enhance text comprehension" (Sheory & Mokhtari, 2001, p.433). The purpose of reading strategies are to have general knowledge, to get a specific detail, to find the main idea or theme, to learn, to remember, to delight, to summarize and to do research (Hyland, 1990). Regarding the importance of reading strategies, Pressly and Afflerbach (1995) identified several key strategies that were evident in the verbal protocols they reviewed including: (a) overview before reading; (b) look for important information and pay greater attention to it; (c) relate important points to one another; (d) activate and use prior knowledge; (e) change strategies when understanding is not good; and (f) monitor understanding and take action to correct inaccuracies in comprehension. Concentrating on differences concerning the way and number of reading strategies, Richards (2002) argues that the use of well-chosen strategies distinguishes experts from novices in many learning areas. Pressly (2000) and Wade (1990) also believe that good readers apply a variety of appropriate strategies to the text they are reading. Implying the crucial importance of reading strategies, some studies support the effectiveness of reading strategies instruction (Carrel, 1998; Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Kern, 1989; Meng, 2004) whereas others indicate futility of reading strategies instruction (Barnett, 1988; White, 2006). With regard to the paradoxical findings of these studies, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading strategies and consequently find an answer to the question "should reading strategies instruction be incorporated in English teaching and learning curriculum or not?"

2. Research Questions and Hypothesis

The questions to be answered in this study are as follows:

1. What is the current level of Iranian senior High school students' reading self-efficacy beliefs and their use of reading strategies?
2. Is there a significant relationship between Iranian senior high school students' reading self-efficacy beliefs

and their use of reading strategies?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

45 students of grade three from Ferdousi High school in Shoushtar (a city in southwest of Iran) participated in this study. Random sampling was used as Ferdousi High school was selected by chance among other Shoushtar High schools. The students' age ranged from 17 to 19, with a mean of 18.1. They were all from Shoushtar city and had studied English for at least 6 years at school. Some of them had extra English classes in private institutes out of school. All the participants were roughly were in lower-intermediate level of proficiency

3.2 Instruments & Procedure

Two questionnaires have been used in this study as instruments. Reading self-efficacy questionnaire and use of reading strategies questionnaire, both of which are explained in detail below.

3.3 Reading Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

Reading self-efficacy questionnaire was intended to solicit information regarding participants' beliefs in their own reading capabilities. The questionnaire was partly adapted from Wang (2007). There were, initially 32 items in Wang's questionnaire, 8 of which directly measured self-efficacy in reading. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), test-retest reliability and concurrent validity in Wang's (2007) study were, respectively, 0.96, 0.82 and 0.55. In addition to 5 out of 8 items (directly measuring self-efficacy adapted from Wang), 9 more items were adapted from Li & Wang (2010) who studied reading self-efficacy and use of reading strategies in China. Participants were asked completed the questionnaire items on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (I can't do it at all) to 7 (I can do it well). (See appendix 1)

The questionnaire was written and administrated in Persian to assure the students' understanding of the content. The questionnaire was reviewed by three teachers who had more than twenty years of experience in teaching English in Iranian High school and private institutes and two professors teaching English at university level. The teachers and professors' valuable comments on the questionnaire were implemented in editing and arranging items. The questionnaire was piloted with a class of 20 students who were similar to those of the study. After piloting 4 problematic items which were found to be unrelated to Iran EFL High school context were eliminated. Thus we finally came up with 10 items.

Scoring procedure employed was to add the number of choices selected by participants for each item as a participant's total score. For example if student A, selected choice 6 "I can do it" for item 1, his score for this item was 6 and if selected "I cannot do it" his score was

2. Therefore the maximum and minimum score possible would be 70 and 10 respectively.

3.4 Use of Reading Strategies Questionnaires

According to O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) language learning strategies, other researchers' classification of reading strategies and globally accepted taxonomy, reading strategies are classified under three headings: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies. The use of reading strategies questionnaire was adopted from Li & Wang (2010) study which contained 48 items. After piloting the questionnaire with the same 20 students with whom self-efficacy questionnaire was piloted, the researcher selected 20 items which were optimally feasible in Iranian High school EFL reading context. The final 20 items were asserted by three experienced teachers and two professors. The questionnaire was written and administrated in Persian to avoid misunderstanding. Participants were required to complete the questionnaire items on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (this statement is never or almost never true of me) to 5 (this statement is always or almost always true of me). Oxford's (1990) criterion about strategy frequency was also adopted to report the frequency of the use of reading strategies. The scoring procedure was the same as executed in self-efficacy questionnaire, i.e. if a student selected scale 4 (this statement is usually true of me), his score for that item would be 4. Therefore, each student's score would be between 20, minimally, and 100, maximally.

4. ANALYTIC PROCEDURES

The two questionnaires were administrated to 45 grade three High school students. The questionnaires' scores were submitted to SPSS 16 for analysis. First, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the students' responses to reading self-efficacy and use of reading strategies questionnaires. Then Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to see whether there is any relation between reading self-efficacy and use of reading strategies.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 The Current Level of Reading Self-Efficacy

As the results in Table 1 indicate, the participants, on average, felt confident of their capabilities to perform English reading tasks which were measured in reading self-efficacy questionnaire. The average score of participants in reading self-efficacy questionnaire was 47 which shows an acceptable level of self-efficacy among students. As noted earlier, the highest possible score on self efficacy questionnaire was 70 and if we round up the average score (47) we will achieve scale 5 which stands for "I basically can do it" in the questionnaire. Therefore,

students' beliefs in their abilities to do reading tasks were in an appropriate level.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Reading Self-Efficacy and Reading Strategy Use (n.45)

	SE	Overall strategy use	Metacognitive strategy use	Cognitive strategy use	Socioaffective strategy use
Mean	47	56	59	57	55
SD	2.48	3.73	1.12	3.35	2.25

The results of self-efficacy questionnaire reject previous studies findings. While Rahemi in her research concludes that Iranian senior High school students majoring in Humanities, in specific, lack an appropriate level of self-efficacy to cope with their daily task and exercises in Iran EFL context, the current research illustrates that Iranian senior High school students believe in their own abilities to successfully conduct their learning activities in the classroom.

5.2 The Current Level of Use of Reading Strategies

Concerning Oxford's (1990) criterion of frequency, table 1 indicates that participants' overall strategy use (mean=56) and three subcategories of metacognitive (mean=59), cognitive (mean=57) and socioaffective (mean=55) strategies were at a medium level. As the numbers clearly show, metacognitive strategies are the most frequently used strategies employed by participants followed by cognitive strategies. Socioaffective strategies are the least frequently used strategies. This is the truth that denotes the emergent need to abandon the traditional ideas which did not take into account affective considerations of learners and to construct a new framework within which affective side of learning and teaching receive its convenient position. The results of reading strategies in the present research support findings in the literature (Li & Wang, 2010; Shang, 2010), suggesting that metacognitive strategies are most frequently used category, through which students try to check and evaluate their comprehension of the reading passages.

5.3 The Relationship Between Reading Self-Efficacy and the Use of Reading Strategies

To study the relationship between reading self-efficacy and use of reading strategies, Pearson correlation coefficient was run. After computations, it was revealed that reading self-efficacy was significantly positively correlated with overall reading strategy use ($r=0.46$, $p<.01$) and subcategories of reading strategies; metacognitive strategy use ($r=0.42$, $p<.01$), cognitive strategy use ($r=0.44$, $p<.01$) and socioaffective strategy use ($r=.35$, $p<.01$). The results of correlation strongly show that reading self-efficacy directly affects the students' performance on the use of reading strategies. In other words, the more confident and competent students feel about overcoming reading tasks, the more they employ reading strategies.

As was discussed before in the literature review, teachers must not only pay attention to self-efficacy as an important potential part of each students' personality that should be activated in the course of language learning, but also concern self-efficacy as a motivational parameter in language learning process. The students who have a higher degree of self-efficacy tend to utilize a comprehensive repertoire of strategies to achieve their goal, work in groups, employ numerous methods of getting the meaning and exhibit a great deal of perseverance.

While participants have had a medium level of overall strategy use, Iranian student's report card in reading achievement is far from expectation. Mc Namara (2009) argues that reading problems stem from several sources. He believes that the students may lack the reading strategies necessary to overcome challenges in reading materials. All those who have experienced Iran EFL context will presumably assert that reading strategies instruction is a neglected point in English teaching and learning. Findings of the present study and similar researches exploring the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and use of reading strategies among Iranian senior High school student lead us to the conclusion that it seems quite beneficial to allocate special sections of reading classes to explicitly teaching reading strategies to improve our students' beliefs about their capabilities and consequently enhancing their conscious, purposeful and permanent use of reading strategies

CONCLUSION

Participants' beliefs about their abilities to perform reading tasks in the questionnaire was roughly near choice 5 "I basically can do it" which represents adequate level of self-efficacy. This is in line with participants' answers in the use of reading strategies questionnaire. They demonstrated that metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective strategies were, respectively, used more to handle reading tasks and exercises. The reason of trivial use of socioaffective strategies lies in the traditional view of language teaching and learning in Iran which has always taken these factors for granted. Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was seen between reading self-efficacy and use of reading strategies. This is the point that implies the double concern on the part of teachers for learners' beliefs about their abilities before and during

doing a task not only as an inseparable part of each learner's character but also as a motivational parameter. It is through this viewpoint that we will have interested and strategic learners.

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Appendix A

Reading Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Notes: please read the following questions carefully and make an accurate evaluation of your reading abilities no matter whether you are doing it or not. These questions are designed to measure your judgment of your capabilities, so there is no right or wrong answers. Please do not write your name, but you should answer all of the questions and write down your student number.

Please use the following scales to answer these questions accordingly. Please choose the number accurately representing your capabilities.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
	I cannot do it at all.	I cannot do it.	Maybe I cannot do it.	Maybe I can do it.	I basically can do it.	I can do it.	I can do it well.					
1	Can you finish your homework of English reading all by yourself?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	Can you read and understand the English information on the Internet?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	Can you read and understand English newspapers?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	Can you read and understand new lessons in your comprehensive English course book?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	Can you read and understand English advertisements of commodities?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	Can you read and understand English poems?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	Can you read and understand a letter from an American pen pal introducing his or her college life?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	Can you read and understand English short novels?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	Can you read and understand an English tourist brochure introducing western countries?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	Can you read and understand English popular science books?					1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix B

The Use of Reading Strategies Questionnaire

Please choose one number below to represent your actual learning conditions most.

	1	2	3	4	5				
	This statement is never or almost never true of me	This statement is usually not true of me	This statement is sometimes true of me	This statement is usually true of me	This statement is always or almost always true of me				
1	Reclassifying and reordering information of texts while reading.				1	2	3	4	5
2	Relaxing yourself when you become anxious and nervous in reading.				1	2	3	4	5
3	Skimming the whole passage quickly and then reading selectively according to your reading purposes.				1	2	3	4	5
4	Browsing titles, sub-titles, illustrations and diagrams to predict the main idea before reading.				1	2	3	4	5
5	Making detailed plans for reading to improve your reading abilities.				1	2	3	4	5
6	Using what you have read in English daily conversation.				1	2	3	4	5
7	Reading selectively, choosing to read what you think is necessary, and skipping unnecessary parts.				1	2	3	4	5
8	Using background information and common sense to predict the main idea of passages.				1	2	3	4	5
9	Checking continuously whether your comprehension is right and correcting in time.				1	2	3	4	5
10	Evaluating what you have gained from reading and finding out your shortcomings and thinking about countermeasures.				1	2	3	4	5
11	Noticing the topic sentence, the first sentence of each paragraph, the first and last paragraphs, and connectives.				1	2	3	4	5
12	Adopting different methods to handle unknown words according to different reading purposes.				1	2	3	4	5
13	Making predictions about the passages continuously and adjusting them as reading goes on.				1	2	3	4	5
14	Encouraging yourself to continue reading when you get tired in reading.				1	2	3	4	5
15	Translating English sentences into Persian to help comprehend passages.				1	2	3	4	5
16	Relating new information to the background knowledge in your mind.				1	2	3	4	5
17	Using word formation (prefix, suffix) and semantic knowledge (synonym, antonym) to guess unknown words.				1	2	3	4	5
18	Using dictionaries, encyclopedias, and grammar books to help comprehend passages.				1	2	3	4	5
19	Using diagrams or outlines to summarize the topic, structure and the content of passages after reading.				1	2	3	4	5
20	Using underlines and signs to highlight some key information while reading.				1	2	3	4	5