Self-efficacy Theory and its Applications to Education -Reading Self-efficacy as a Model-

نظرية الفاعلية الذاتية وتطبيقاتها في المجال التعليمي -الفاعلية الذاتية القرائية أنموذجا-

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ملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة نظرية الفاعلية الذاتيـــة لألبرت باندورا وتطبيقاتها في المجال التعليمي، آخـــذين الفاعلية الذاتية القرائية كأنموذج. نظرا لكون الفاعليـــة الذاتية أساسا في مختلف المجالات، خاصـــة في مجـــالات التعليم، فقد كانت محور البحوث المتعلقة بالتحصـــيل العلمي للتلاميذ. لقد بيّنت تطبيقات الفاعلية الذاتية في المجال التعليمي الأثر الإيجابي لاعتقادات الفاعلية الذاتية في تحصيل المتعلمين اللغوي، لاسيما أهمية الفاعلية الذاتية القرائية في استخدام استراتيجيات الفهم القرائي الـــذي

يُعدّ مفتاح النجاح العلمي. ومنه، أصبح مـــن الأمـــور الهامة أن يتصدر معلمو اللغة لمساعدة تلاميذهم من أجل تنمية إحساس قوي للفاعلية الذاتية، لاسيما الفاعليـــة الذاتية القرائية، مستخدمين العديد من وسائل التعلـــيم القائمة على أساس المصادر الأربعة للفاعليـــة الذاتيـــة (إنجازات الأداء، وخبرة الآخر، والإقنـــاع اللفظـــي، والإثارة العاطفية) لتحسين مستوى الفهم القرائي لدى تلاميذهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفاعلية الذاتية؛ الفاعليـــة الذاتيـــة القرائية؛ مصادر الفاعلية الذاتية؛ التعليم.

Abstract:

This study seeks to discuss Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory and its applications to education, taking reading self-efficacy as a model. As self-efficacy is the foundation for diverse areas, particularly for academic areas, it has gained more attention in research related to student achievement. Applications of self-efficacy to education have reported the positive influence of self-efficacy beliefs on learners' language learning achievement. Specifically, they have reported the significant importance of reading self-efficacy in the reading comprehension strategy use, which is the key to academic success. Therefore, it is important for language teachers to help their students develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, particularly reading self-efficacy, using several teaching techniques based on the four sources of self-efficacy (performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal) to enhance their students' level of reading comprehension .

Keywords: self-efficacy; reading self-efficacy; self-efficacy sources; education.

Introduction:

Albert Bandura has developed self-efficacy theory in 1977s with the publication of his study *'Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change'*. Since Bandura viewed self-efficacy theory as one aspect of social cognitive theory, which assumes that most human behavior is goal-oriented, he then situated his theory in 1986s within a social cognitive theory with the publication of his study *'Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory'*. Later, Bandura located self-efficacy theory in a theory of personal and collective agency with the publication of his study *'Self-efficacy: The exercise of control'* in 1997s, in which he expanded the definition of self-efficacy construct to include more characteristics.

Bandura defined self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their abilities to perform actions and behaviors, and to exercise control over events that may affect their lives. According to the social cognitive theory, people possess a system of self-beliefs that enables them to exercise control over their thoughts, feelings and actions, and achieving self-efficacy depends upon interactions between the environment, personal factors and behavior. Recent studies have shown that self-efficacy beliefs predict performance in many different areas of human functioning such as academic areas, particularly reading. Therefore, the aim of this study is to have a better understanding of self-efficacy theory and the applications of self-efficacy as a motivational construct in learning, especially in reading.

1. Nature of Self-efficacy.

1.1. Definition of Self-efficacy:

Self-efficacy is "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances"[1] . In other words, self-efficacy is "the beliefs about one's ability to perform a given task or behavior successfully"[2]. Bandura (1986) clarifies that self-efficacy "is concerned not with the skills one has but with judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses"[3]. So, self-efficacy is viewed as a specific type of expectancy concerned with people's beliefs in their abilities to perform actions or behaviors involved to produce an outcome.

According to Zimmerman (1995), self-efficacy has five distinctive features: First, self-efficacy involves judgments of capabilities to perform activities rather than personal qualities. Second, efficacy beliefs are multidimensional rather than a single disposition. Third, self-efficacy measures are context-dependent. Fourth, self-efficacy is based on a mastery criterion of performance rather than normative or other criteria. Finally, self-efficacy is measured before students perform the relevant activities[4]. Self-efficacy beliefs are not static; the beliefs may be

altered as a result of contextual factors. "This antecedent property provides the temporal ordering for evaluating the role of self-efficacy beliefs in causal structures" [5].

1.2. Self-efficacy and Related Constructs:

There are some constructs that seem to constitute a conceptual overlap with self-efficacy such as self-esteem, self-concept, and self-confidence.

1.2.1. Self-efficacy and Self-esteem:

Self-efficacy is the perception of one's own ability to reach a particular goal; however, self-esteem is the sense of self-worth. It refers to general feelings of self-value. For Gosselin and Maddux (2003), "Self-efficacy is defined and measured not as a trait but as beliefs about the ability to coordinate skills and abilities to attain desired goals in particular domains and circumstances" [6]. According to Bandura (1997), both constructs refer to entirely different things. "Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capability, whereas self-esteem is concerned with judgments of self-worth. There is no fixed relationship between beliefs about one's capabilities and whether one likes or dislikes oneself" [7].

1.2.2. Self-efficacy and Self-concept:

Unlike self-efficacy beliefs that are 'context-specific' self-appraisals of capacities, self-concept is a 'global description of one's personal essence'. It "is a more general self-descriptive construct that incorporates many forms of self-knowledge and self-evaluative feelings" [8]. Zimmerman (1995) relates self-concept to 'normative assessment of ability' as it involves often establishing external comparisons, stimulated by the desire to outperform others, whereas he associates self-efficacy with 'mastery criteria' as it focuses rather on one's own assets and limitations and evaluating one's own personal competence to succeed in a given domain [9].

1.2.3. Self-efficacy and Self-confidence:

According to Bandura (1986), self-confidence refers to a general sense of confidence, self-efficacy relates to a general sense of confidence in one's abilities to achieve a particular outcome. Confidence is a nonspecific term that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about; perceived self-efficacy on the other hand refers to belief in one's agentive capabilities that one can produce given levels of attainment. Therefore, self-efficacy belief includes both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief. "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" [10].

Researchers have attempted to distinguish the concept of self-efficacy from closely related concepts such as self-esteem, self-concept and self-confidence. In fact, self-efficacy as a construct is distinctive from related motivational constructs because it has distinctive features. It has specific dimensions, and it focuses on performance capabilities. (It is beliefs in one's capacity to handle and succeed in performing tasks- Can I do this task?)

2. Sources of Self-efficacy.

According to Bandura (1977), people's beliefs about their efficacy can be developed by four main sources of influence.

2.1. Performance Accomplishments (Mastery Experiences):

According to Bandura (1977), the most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy toward a particular task is through mastery experiences. "Successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them, particularly if the mishaps occur early in the course of events"[11]. It means that people's achievements raise their level of self-efficacy, or the perception that a performance has been successful enhances self-efficacy beliefs and ensures future success; however, the perception that a performance has been unsuccessful weakens self-efficacy beliefs and leads to the expectation that future performance will also be inefficient[12].

In the educational domain, students with a strong sense of self-efficacy believe may be challenged by an assignment and exert effort to complete it, even if it seems difficult, and tend to attain higher levels of success; The reverse may also be true in that students with low efficacy may try to avoid tasks[13]. Students who judge their own past academic results as being successful often develop a high sense of confidence about their capacities, whereas those who view their past academic results as unsuccessful are likely to experience feelings of doubt and uncertainty about their own effectiveness.

2.2. Vicarious Experience (Social Modeling):

Social modeling originates in observing other similar people performing a behavior successfully. It relates to self-evaluation that individuals derive from observing and comparing themselves with a given 'social model'. "Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they too will improve if they intensify and persist in their efforts. They persuade themselves that if others can do it, they should be able to achieve at least some improvement in performance"[14]. "By the same token, observing others' fail despite high effort lowers observers' judgments of their own efficacy and

undermines their efforts"[15]. So, others' successes and failures can affect one's own efficacy and motivation through perceived similarity[16].

Schunk (2003) states that modeling informs and motivates; models not only provide information by showing a sequence of actions that will cause success if followed correctly, but also increase motivation for the observer to attempt the task. Some students excel with teachers as models; however, other students who are more socially motivated, peer models can provide motivation and help build self-efficacy. Students acquire efficacy information by comparing their performances with those of others[17]. For example, a student who sees a student similar to himself perform well in an exam can be expected to have a high sense of self-efficacy that he also can do well on this specific task.

2.3. Verbal Persuasion (Social Persuasion):

Social persuasion refers to the feedback that individuals receive from others; what others say can influence our beliefs about our abilities, positively or negatively. Bandura (1994) asserts that "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"[18]. In other words, getting verbal encouragements from others helps people overcome self-doubt and instead focus on giving their best effort to the task at hand to achieve a goal, whereas persuading people that they lack capabilities tend to avoid challenging activities that cultivate potentialities and give up quickly in the face of difficulties[19].

In the educational domain, teachers can be the principal aid in helping their students be convinced they can accomplish certain tasks, and they also can arrange for successful circumstances to occur and prevent placing students in situations where they will most likely fail. "Students often receive information from parents, teachers, coaches, and peers that they are capable of performing a task 'You can do this'. Positive persuasive information raises efficacy, although this increase will be temporary if students subsequently perform poorly"[20]. Negative persuasion, on the other hand, may tend to lower self-beliefs.

2.4. Emotional Arousal (Emotional States):

Responses and emotional reactions to situations such as anxiety, stress and fear also play an important role in self-efficacy. The effect on self-efficacy lies more in how an individual perceives these reactions versus the physical reactions themselves. "Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by

aversive arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated"[21]. "Positive mood enhances perceived self-efficacy; despondent mood diminishes it"[22]. Therefore, trying to reduce individual's negative emotional states can be used to strengthen self-efficacy beliefs.

Self-efficacy beliefs are developed from four sources. First, successes build a strong belief in one's personal efficacy and failures undermine it. Second, if others can do it, so I also can as a method of developing self-efficacy beliefs. Third, persuasive encouragements in perceived self-efficacy lead people to work hard to succeed. Fourth, people depend partly on their emotional states in judging their capabilities.

3. Measurement of Self-efficacy.

As self-efficacy beliefs are task specific and can vary from domain to domain, Bandura (2006) states that "there is no all-purpose measure of perceived self-efficacy. The 'one measure fits all' approach usually has limited explanatory and predictive value because most of the items in an all-purpose test may have little or no relevance to the domain of functioning"[23]. Items on self-efficacy measures should be phrased in terms of what people believe they 'can do'; the focus should be on capabilities, instead of feelings of self-esteem or self-concept. Bandura (2006) stresses that the study of efficacy should take into consideration three main dimensions: magnitude, generality and strength.

3.1. Magnitude:

Magnitude deals with the belief about performance in increasingly difficult aspects of the task. "When tasks are ordered in level of difficulty, the efficacy expectations of different individuals may be limited to the simpler tasks, extend to moderately difficult ones, or include even the most taxing performances"[24]. For example, reading self-efficacy magnitude measures the difficulty level (e.g. easy, moderate, and hard) an individual feels is required to read and comprehend a certain text. How difficult is this passage?

3.2. Generality:

Generality refers to whether the task is associated with a general or specific sense of efficacy; it includes the range of activities included in the perception. When tasks are similar in nature, situation and capability, they become more generalizable to individuals. "Generality can vary across types of activities, the modalities in which capabilities are expressed (e.g., behavioral, cognitive, affective), situational variations, and the types of individuals toward whom the behavior is directed"[25].

3.3. Strength:

Strength means how weak or strong a person's efficacy is. "Weak expectations are easily extinguishable by disconfirming experiences, whereas individuals who possess strong expectations of mastery will persevere in their coping efforts despite disconfirming experiences"[26]. Bandura (2006) designed a scale where the subjects are presented with items describing some task demands, and are asked to rate the strength of their beliefs in their ability to perform those activities such as reading comprehension capability.

Bandura's scale is based on a 100-point scale that ranges in 10-unit intervals. The lowest number is 0 (cannot do at all), there are intermediate degrees of efficacy, such as 50 (moderately can do), and finally there is complete or absolute assurance, represented on the scale by 100 (highly certain can do).

4. Self-efficacy and Education.

4.1. Ways of Self-efficacy Influences:

Recent research has shown that efficacy beliefs predict performance in many different areas of human functioning. "Researchers have investigated the influence of efficacy beliefs on behavior in diverse areas, such as the workplace, politics, mental health, and athletics"[27]. Self-efficacy theory states that "efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences"[28]. According to the social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is one of the most important variable, which influences academic performance and achievement.

When facing difficulties, "People with weak self-efficacy beliefs easily develop doubts about their ability to accomplish the task at hand, whereas those with strong efficacy beliefs continue their efforts to master a task when difficulties arise"[29]. So, learners only continue the task that they think are able to do well and keep away from that they believe they do not have the ability to do it effectively. According to Bandura (1997), "Efficacy beliefs are concerned not only with the exercise of control over action but also with the self-regulation of thought processes, motivation, and affective and physiological states"[30]. Generally, self-efficacy beliefs influence many things such as:

1-Choices: "Self-efficacy is more powerful determiner of the choices that individuals make"[31]. Most people take part in tasks in which they feel competent and avoid those in which they do

not. "By the choices they make, people cultivate different competencies, interests and social networks that determine life courses"[32].

2-Effort: Self-efficacy is also a powerful determiner of how much effort people will expend on an activity. When faced with diffuclties and failures, "People who have a strong belief in their capabilities exert greater effort when they fail to master the challenge"[33].

3-Perseverance: How long people will persist when dealing with difficulties. "Perseverance usually produces desired results, and this success then strengthens the individual's self-efficacy beliefs"[34]. Bandura (1994) states that "strong perseverance contributes to *performance accomplishments*"[35].

4-Resilience: How resilient people will prove in the face of difficult situations.

5-Stress and Anxiety: People's beliefs in their abilities influence how much stress and anxiety they experience when they engage in difficult task.

The way students think, feel and behave in academic situations is influenced by beliefs in their own abilities. However, there is a major difference in the way individuals think, feel and act depends on whether they have low or high level of self-efficacy. Individuals suspicious of their own abilities tend to avoid challenges and difficult tasks[36]. It means that while students who doubt their abilities avoid engaging in difficult tasks, those with a high level of self-efficacy cope with challenging situations in a more mature way. For Schunk (2003), students' self-efficacy sustains their motivation and promotes learning. During periods of self-reflection, students evaluate their progress by comparing their performances to their goals. Self-evaluation of progress enhances efficacy and maintains motivation. Students may decide to continue pursuing their goals, modify them, or set new ones[37].

Self-efficacy beliefs influence learning, especially language learning. Within the language learning context, self-efficacy refers to a learner's cognitive process in judging his/her language abilities and organizing them in order to perform specific language tasks. Compared with students who doubt their learning capabilities, those with high self-efficacy for acquiring a skill or performing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at higher levels[38]. Zimmerman (1995) states that language learners' perceived self-efficacy influences their skills acquisition directly and indirectly by reinforcing their persistence; therefore, motivation is directly related to self-efficacy in that if someone

perceives him/herself as able to handle a situation s/he will be more motivated to work hard successfully perform in that situation[39].

4. 2. Reading Self-efficacy:

4.2.1. Definition of Reading Self-efficacy:

Reading self-efficacy is a subset of general learning self-efficacy. It is defined as learners' perception of their reading abilities to perform various reading tasks, such as understanding the main idea, guessing the meaning of an unknown word, and inferring the authors' attitudes toward their own written text as well as the use of reading comprehension strategies[40].

4.2.2. Applications of Reading Self-efficacy:

As EFL students face difficulties in reading comprehension, and seem not proficient enough to use reading comprehension strategies, researchers point out the influence of many factors, including internal factors and the learning context and its variables. Among these influential variables is self-efficacy belief, which is viewed as a vital factor in helping students to select challenging tasks, increase effort, and persist when encountering difficulties, especially in language domains such as reading for understanding. As Bandura' studies came with the results showing the positive impact of self-efficacy in language domains, particularly in reading comprehension strategy use, researchers followed different methodologies to confirm Bandura's findings and therefore to improve learners' reading comprehension.

Researchers such as Shang (2010), Li and Wang (2010), Zare and Mobarakeh (2011), and Kargar and Zamanian (2014) carried out studies to investigate the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategy use. They used different means to gather data such as questionnaires, surveys and interviews as well as experiments since experimental evidence better aids in clarifying effects. In some studies such as in Magogwe's and Oliver's (2007), Shang's (2010), and Naseri's and Zaferanieh's (2012) studies, other independent variables were included such as gender, reading proficiency, or reading comprehension as another source of evidence on the important role played by self-efficacy in reading achievement.

Li's and Wang's study[41] focused on investigating the reading strategy use in relation to self-efficacy. The findings reveal that reading self-efficacy is positively related to the reading strategy use. Accordingly, students with high self-efficacy use more reading strategies compared to those with low self-efficacy. Another study[42] conducted by Zare and Mobarakeh who classified the reading strategies into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive and socioaffective

strategies. The results show that the overall reading strategies in general and in each category positively correlate with reading self-efficacy. They conclude that students who believe that they can successfully use reading tasks would apply more reading strategies to accomplish the task than those who do not believe.

Shang's study[43] examined the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading strategies, and added reading comprehension as another variable. After a semester of reading strategy instruction in the form of a reading course for fifty-three Taiwanese freshmen majoring in English. The results indicated that there is a significant correlation between all categories of reading strategy with self-efficacy, and a positive correlation between self-efficacy and reading achievement. The results also indicated that the improving reading self-efficacy through instruction is very important in helping students to use reading strategies more frequently, which makes them more confident about reading English texts.

Focusing on gender, Magogwe's and Oliver's study[44] indicated that the relationship between reading self-efficacy beliefs and reading strategy use is higher, but is not affected by gender eventhough learners differ from each other with respect to their reading comprehension ability, reading self-efficacy beliefs and the use of reading comprehension strategies. While Kargar's and Zamanian's study[45] asserts the same results, Wang's study[46] asserts significant differences in favour of Taiwanese females in English self-efficacy and English reading strategy use; however, students' gender has no significant relationship with their English reading proficiency.

Naseri's and Zaferanieh's study[47] investigated the relationship between reading self-efficacy beliefs, reading strategy use and reading comprehension level of Iranian EFL learners. The findings reveal that there is a significant strong positive correlation between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension, and between reading self-efficacy and reading strategy use. Similarly, Tobing's study[48] shows that the use of reading strategies has a small significant effect on reading comprehension; however, the use of reading strategies is a non-significant variable to predict reading comprehension when used as one of multiple independent variables with self-efficacy. As an independent variable, the use of reading strategies has produced inconsistent results in its correlation to reading ability.

The findings of those studies came with results showing positive correlation between reading self-efficacy and reading strategy use. This is in line with Bandura's suggestion that one of the powerful factors that increases effort and predicts an individual performance is self-efficacy belief. It means that the findings of those studies support the hypothesis that students who are

more efficacious about their ability to read comprehend significantly better, and use more reading strategies than those lower in reading self-efficacy. Results of both types of research (experimental and non-experimental) reveal to what extent self-efficacy belief is very important in reading.

4.2.3. Developing Learners' Reading Self-efficacy:

According to Bandura (1993), a major goal of formal education should be to equip students with the intellectual tools, self-beliefs, and self-regulatory capabilities to educate themselves throughout their lifetime. These personal resources enable individuals to gain new knowledge and to cultivate skills either for their own sake or to better their lives[49]. Self-efficacy is 'a malleable construct', which can be enhanced through instruction. Antoniou and Souvignier (2007) state that "similarly important for increased reading comprehension is enhancement of self-efficacy by prompting motivational aspects of self-regulation (goal setting, attributions of success and failure, self-monitoring and judgements, etc.)"[50].

Teachers play a crucial role in instilling positive self-perceptions of efficacy in their students through training them to make use of a variety of reading strategies. "A stronger sense of academic self-efficacy is associated with a greater likelihood of seeking help from teachers"[51]. As students are acquiring a foreign language, it is necessary to provide them with additional support to gain self-efficacy belief in their ability to be a good reader with strong comprehension skills. Therefore, teachers should encourage their students to become strategic readers by modeling the use of various reading strategies, and gradually giving them the responsibility for employing reading strategies to become proficient readers.

Chen and Graves (1998) state that reading self-efficacy can be supported by explicit instruction in previewing materials prior to reading. These reading materials should be appropriate for the level of students, giving them tasks which will result in success by starting with easier tasks then gradually building up to more challenging ones, modeling expected behaviors, setting attainable goals and assisting students in meeting those goals, and finally, having students participate in paired and repeated readings. For Chen and Graves (1998), these simple steps can provide the necessary scaffolding to help ESL/EFL students engage better with texts and improve comprehension[52]. Teachers can use these suggested ideas to build students' self- efficacy in reading, but they can also contribute with their personal ideas and insights based on their experiences and the local context.

Conclusion:

This study discussed self-efficacy theory and its applications to education, especially reading self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a motivational construct and among influential factors for language learning, particularly reading. As believing in one's own ability to tackle reading tasks successfully can make language learning more productive, teachers should help their students develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, particularly reading self-efficacy. They can use several teaching techniques based on the four sources of self-efficacy to enhance the level of their students' reading self-efficacy.

Teachers should start with easier reading tasks to perform in order to build successful experiences since repeated experiences of success make learners' self-efficacy higher than repeated experiences of failure. They should provide their students with positive encouragement and detailed feedback since teachers' encouragement is an important factor to enhance students' self-efficacy. Moreover, teachers should provide them with opportunities to observe their classmates doing reading tasks successfully; these opportunities help them to foster positive beliefs about themselves.

This can be achieved through designing different reading activities and assignments, which are suitable to each level, purposeful, varied and challenging. As developing students' reading self-efficacy is important, being aware of the origins of the notion of self-efficacy and its relationship with reading strategy use, which is the key to academic success, is very important for both teachers and students. Teachers are the best determinants for fostering their students' self-efficacy beliefs, leading to great academic achievements and success.

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