



Self-Efficacy Improves English Comprehension Skill in Learning Among College Students: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

English proficiency is a crucial skill linked to individuals' academic performance, employment prospects, and global competitiveness. This study examines the role of self-efficacy in improving English language abilities. Self-efficacy reflects a person's confidence in overcoming learning challenges, which directly influences motivation, persistence, and communication performance. Although English language learning has been widely explored, the specific effects of self-efficacy on speaking and writing skills remain insufficiently understood. Traditional instructional methods focused on memorization and translation often limit students' ability to communicate effectively and lower motivation. Therefore, this study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to analyze existing evidence. Findings show that self-efficacy positively enhances students' English abilities, highlighting the need to strengthen confidence-building strategies to improve communication skills at the university level.

INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency is an important skill that is directly related to a person's income (Bousmah et al., 2021; Jaekel et al., 2023). speaking English is also a major factor in achieving higher education and professional success globally. English plays a crucial role in a variety of educational settings, influencing educational pathways as well as individuals' opportunities for future success and well-being (Jaekel et al., 2023).

Educational success and professional success are mostly the result of the English language ability of non-native speakers. In addition to its role in international education, English also provides advantages in economic, social, and cultural dimensions characteristics that distinguish it from other foreign languages (Keller et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2024). English has become a widely used instructional language (Feng et al., 2023). Students are required to understand English as classroom learning and communication materials are primarily delivered in this language. This demands cognitive and metacognitive skills to navigate dynamic learning through interactions, online exercises, and multimedia resources such as audio, video, and text downloads (Apridayani & Teo, 2021; Zeng et al., 2023).

English proficiency enhances communication by helping individuals understand how people from different backgrounds interact and interpret the world (Olobia, 2024; Sahadevan & Sumangala, 2021). However, effective communication requires specific strategies and techniques (Olobia, 2024). Mastering English does not necessarily mean one has strong communication skills. Therefore, English language teaching should focus not only on language proficiency but also on developing students' ability to communicate effectively at the university level (Huang, 2022; Sun & Wang, 2020).

Despite the extensive research on English language acquisition, gaps remain in understanding how self-efficacy influences language learning, particularly in developing speaking and writing skills. Research shows that the English language learning process in many educational settings often does not provide enough opportunities for students to practice speaking, which is crucial for effective communication (Meng, 2022; Pacheco et al., 2021). In particular, teacher-centered approaches to learning, which emphasize memorization and translation practice, can hinder students' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations and lower their motivation (Lin et al., 2021; Meng, 2022). As a result, students often find it difficult to fully engage with and master the language, which affects their confidence in using English (Alteshehr et al., 2023; Early & Kendrick, 2020).

In spite of the numerous studies that have looked at self-efficacy and how it operates in English language learning, there remains a huge gap in offering a full review that is particular to the impact of self-efficacy on various English language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—of university students. Previous research often focuses on individual skills or specific contexts, and lacks a holistic systematic review that integrates findings across different disciplines and educational settings. This systematic review seeks to complete this gap by meta-synthesizing the results of studies that have already been

published within the range of the years 2020 to 2024 and therefore further in line with how self-efficacy impacts English comprehension skills at the university level. In addition, this study provides new insights by examining mediating factors such as technology use, learning environment, and psychological variables, which have not been collectively analysed in previous reviews.

In this situation, self-efficacy holds significant importance. As per Bandura, 1977) Social Learning Theory, self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in their capacity to tackle challenges, which has a direct impact on their motivation and academic achievement. (Dai et al., 2023; Luu, 2023; Sezgintürk & Sungur, 2020). Self-efficacy boosts students' confidence and encourages them to face challenges with the belief that they can succeed (Xue & Yu, 2023).

Research has indicated that supportive learning settings are able to enhance students' confidence in themselves, and that has an impact on many areas of their academic success, such as communication skills, study skills, and anxiety management skills (Astuti & Kalayo Hasibuan, 2025; Yao-Ping Peng et al., 2023). When students have faith in themselves and their ability to learn, they become more inclined to engage in learning and thus experience better success in learning English and other facets (Dai et al., 2023; Hayat et al., 2020). The present study is an attempt to examine the influence of self-efficacy towards English language abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy drives individuals to overcome future challenges. Without confidence in their abilities, staying motivated to complete tasks becomes difficult (Dai et al., 2023; Sezgintürk & Sungur, 2020). Self-efficacy affects attitudes and acts as a cognitive process that directs motivation. Motivation is a psychological process that directs people to engage in certain activities and influences their behavior (X. Liu et al., 2020; Yao-Ping Peng et al., 2023).

Believing in one's abilities involves thinking about outcomes, reactions to goals, and self-assessment, all of which help improve performance (Xu et al., 2022; Yao-Ping Peng et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). The capacity to accomplish a task, along with the conviction of attaining the intended outcome, clearly indicates a sense of practical self-confidence (Fu et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021; C.-J. Wang, 2023). Understanding how students self-efficacy their abilities and how this relates to aspects such as self-directed learning strategies is crucial, as these findings show. This knowledge helps teachers better understand their students and adapt teaching methods more effectively (Gan et al., 2023).

Unidirectional relationship pattern between writing skills, self-discipline, and self-efficacy can be explained because writing is a thinking process. Grammar usage, composition, and mechanics skills are the basis for assessing one's confidence in completing writing tasks successfully. Professional writers typically show higher motivation, invest greater effort, and experience less anxiety (Sun & Wang, 2020).

English Comprehension Ability

One of the expressions of language proficiency is writing. When studying various languages, especially English, writing skills as a form of language proficiency become a difficulty for students. Writing is frequently regarded as the most challenging aspect of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) when compared to other language skills (Sun & Wang, 2020). This is because writing requires a shift from reading, making it a task that demands more cognitive effort and can be exhausting. Several factors such as environmental atmosphere, motivation, recall ability, and mental processes are involved in the writing activity, which is complex and has many dimensions (Pham & Nguyen, 2023; Shofiah et al., 2023). According to Keller et al. (2020), students' proficiency level in English as an extraneous language is determined by diverse variables, such as language background and gender.

Gender

Switzerland's national assessment of educational standards for foreign languages reveals that women perform significantly better than men in writing English texts. Studies in Germany show a similar gender gap in developing English language competencies. Female students have much higher overall English proficiency (Muna et al., 2021; Sahadevan & Sumangala, 2021).

Language Background

Language background and language proficiency are the key factors in determining a student's ability to learn English. The number of students with backgrounds involving movement between European countries has been increasing. The study found that students who grew up bilingual showed a much higher level of proficiency in English. The study also mentioned that bilingual users have an advantage in learning additional languages (Mengist et al., 2020; Rui & Liu, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to locate, assess, and combine important results concerning the impact of self-efficacy on English reading skills in students. The SLR approach was chosen to provide relevant evidence based on the eligibility criteria that have been established with a thorough and comprehensive review of the existing literature on this topic (Mengist et al., 2020).

Database Search

Literature searches are conducted via WOS (Web of Science) and Scopus using the following search parameters:

Table 1. Literature Search in Database

No	Search Parameters	Restriction
1	Information storage system	WOS, Scopus
2	Explore through	Article title, abstract, keyword
3	Archive inquiry	Self-Efficacy, English Comprehension, English Learning, College Student
4	Access protocol	Open access, gold, hybrid gold
5	Year	2020-2024
6	Subject area	Language and linguistic
7	File category	Article
8	Publishing phase	Final
9	Resources name	Language and linguistic journal
10	Sponsorship providers	All (not specified)
11	Association and partnership	All (not specified)
12	Keyword	All (not specified)
13	Countries	All (not specified)
14	Date access	May 28, 2025
15	Languages	English
16	Data origin	Journal

Inclusion and Exclusion Standard

- The research sample consists of students.
- The factors examined in the study were self-efficacy, understanding of English, and learning of the English language.

Selection Process for Studies

The process of selecting studies follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to guarantee clarity and repeatability in research. The process of selection occurs in four primary phases:

- **Identification**
Articles are collected from the WOS and Scopus databases using predefined search parameters. Duplicate articles are removed before further filtering.
- **Feasibility**
Articles in full-text form were checked for compatibility with the research variables (self-efficacy, English comprehension, English language learning) and the population being studied (students).
- **Included in the Analysis**
Those articles that satisfy all the criteria are part of the data analysis and synthesis process. The number of articles identified, screened out, excluded, and included in the final study will be demonstrated using the PRISMA flowchart. The process of article selection is illustrated in the following given image.

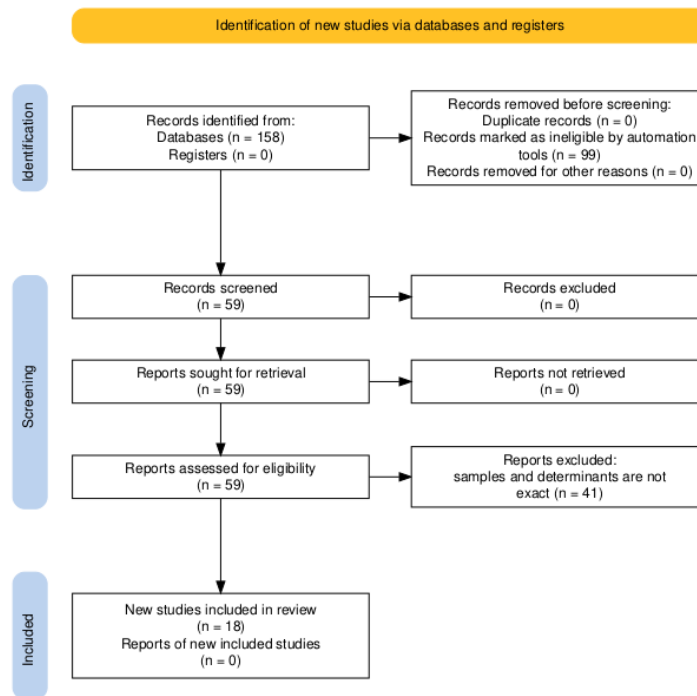


Figure 1. PRISMA Literature Search Research

Data Extraction Process

The selected articles will be collected for relevant data through a standard data extraction form. The form will document the following: (1) the name of the author and the year published, (2) academic major, (3) determinant, and (4) outcome.)

RESEARCH RESULT

Summary of studies and findings regarding the impact of self-efficacy on students' English comprehension

Table 2. Data Extraction Results of the study

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
1	(Feng et al., 2023)	960 undergraduate and postgraduate China students	Liberal arts and science	Questionnaire on student's engagement in learning English; Index of teacher support; Self-efficacy in the use of technology	Students' belief in their ability to use ICT positively affects their online English learning, and the support they perceive from teachers also influences their engagement in the learning process.

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
2	(Zeng et al., 2023)	45 adult ethnic minority students from a university in Sichuan Province, China	Not specified	Instrument for the quality of the learning surroundings; Scale of intrinsic interest in scientific knowledge (PSL); Index of effective learning approaches;	Self-efficacy has a significant influence on the motivation of Chinese students learning English L3.
3	(Lu et al., 2022)	538 Northern China students	non-English major	Self-assessed English Language Competence Scale; Self-efficacy scale; Learner level perception of feedback; SRL scale	Self-efficacy was identified as the most significant predictor of self-assessed English proficiency and standardised English test scores, both of which serve as indicators of English language achievement.
4	(Xu et al., 2022)	1130 undergraduate China students	non-English major	Emotional Fatigue; English Language Learning Stress; Fatigue; Mindfulness; Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy in learning English acts as a mediator in the positive relationship between stress and burnout in learning English for both men and women.

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
5	(M. Liu, 2023)	1,698 China students	medicine, architecture, business management, psychology, and civil engineering	Background information questionnaire; English Learning Belief Inventory; and Self-Efficacy Belief Questionnaire	Students' beliefs about learning English are significantly related to their confidence in self-efficacy. Participants with different levels of English proficiency showed significant differences in confidence about language learning and self-efficacy.
6	(Mendoza-Torres et al., 2023)	453 Peru students	Natural sciences, Engineering, industry, exact sciences, computing, construction, Social sciences, art, commerce, law, Education, Health sciences, Agriculture, humanities, and veterinary science	English Self-Efficacy Scale (ESS-P)	It has a positive correlation with academic self-efficacy and a negative correlation with test anxiety. That is, as English proficiency rises, academic self-confidence will rise, while test anxiety will fall.
7	(Apridayani & Teo, 2021)	215 first-year Thai University Students	Non-English major students	Self-regulated learning, strategies, English self-efficacy and	Students who possess greater English skills usually have higher confidence in

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
				English proficiency	their English abilities than those with lower skills.
8	(Pham & Nguyen, 2023)	128 university students in northern Vietnam	Non-English majors	Efficacy; Google tools; online learning	Students generally regard the Google tools implemented as an effective resource for supporting online English learning
9	(Lu et al., 2022)	538 university student in Northern China	Not specified	Self-regulated learning; self-efficacy; English proficiency	Self-efficacy has been recognized as the key factor influencing self-rated English skills and standardized English examination results, both of which serve as measures of English success.
10	(Yao-Ping Peng et al., 2023)	1432 students from 10 different Universities	User M-Learning	M-Learning; efikasi diri; Smart-PLS 4.0	Perceived convenience positively affects the perceived ease of use of a system, its usefulness, and attitudes towards its use. A significant and good relationship

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
					was found between perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards usage, and intention to use. Furthermore, curiosity and self-efficacy both positively influenced the intention to use.
11	(Xu et al., 2022)	1130 Chinese Undergraduate Students	Not specified	Mediating; moderating; self-efficacy; English Learning Burnout	Self-efficacy in learning English mediates the positive relationship between stress from learning English and burnout from learning English, for both men and women.
12	(Mendoza-Torres et al., 2023)	453 students from various major in Peruvian university	Not specified	Self-efficacy; interest; belief; English; ESS-P	ESS-P is a valid and consistent instrument that measures three aspects of English self-efficacy – reading, writing, and speaking – to measure Peruvian university

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
					students' English language ability.
13	(Y. Wang et al., 2023)	406 students of Chinese universities	Not specified	Self-efficacy; mediates; students' attitude; internet; English learning	The perceptions of students towards internet usage have a positive and significant impact on English language learning. Self-efficacy for language learning can be developed by offering chances to learn internet skills.
14	(Rui & Liu, 2023)	220 online English learners in Chinese University	Not specified	Online learning; teacher support; self-efficacy; self-regulation	The study's results indicated that the support perceived by online English learners from their teachers had a positive impact on their self-efficacy and self-regulation.
15	(Zeng et al., 2023)	45 minority students in Chinese University	Not specified	Learning style; environment; belief in own capabilities; and motivation	Learning environment and learning strategies have a direct influence on Chinese L3

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
					English learners' motivation of participation in self-directed learning (PSL), and an indirect influence on this motivation via the mediation of self-efficacy.
16	(Lian et al., 2021)	529 Chinese university students	Not specified	Authentic language learning (AULL), independent learning (SDL), collaborative learning (CL), and English language proficiency (ESE).	Structural equation modeling (SEM) confirmed the interlinked relationships between students' ESE, AULL, CL, and SDL. Furthermore, the mediating roles of SDL and CL have important implications for the meaningful online learning experience of language learners.
17	(Hayat et al., 2020)	279 students at Shiraz University	Medical Sciences	Academic emotional intelligence (AEQ); metacognitive learning strategies; and academic self-efficacy.	Students' self-efficacy affects their metacognitive learning strategies and learning-related emotions,

No	Author	Sample	Academic major	Determinant	Outcome
					which in turn affects their academic performance.
18	(Sun & Wang, 2020))	319 sophomoreCollege Chinese students	Non-English Major	Self-Efficacy; Self-Regulated; English	Believing in themselves and being in control of their own actions are essential to students' writing. This study provides useful information to classroom teachers regarding how to incorporate instruction in the English as a foreign language classroom for enhancing student writing achievement.

DISCUSSION

Academic Major

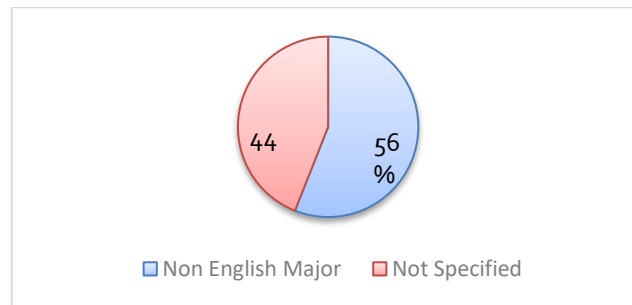


Figure 2. Academic Major

As indicated in Figure 2, the focal point of the research studies under consideration in this analytical overview is the impact of self-efficacy on the English language proficiency of non-English program students. Previous studies overlooked samples from English major students.

Factors Affecting English Language Proficiency

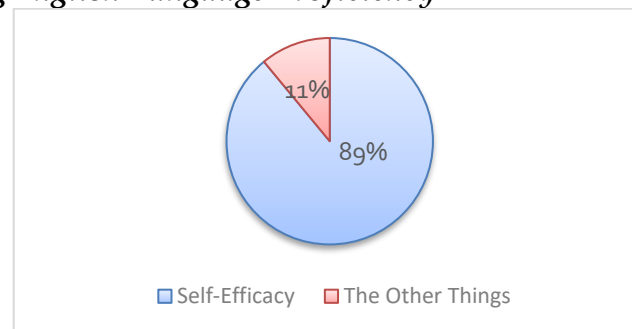


Figure 3. Factors Affecting English Language Proficiency

Figure 3 shows that almost all the articles reviewed in the systematic review stated that self-efficacy affected students' ability to learn English by 89%.

Measures of Academic Success

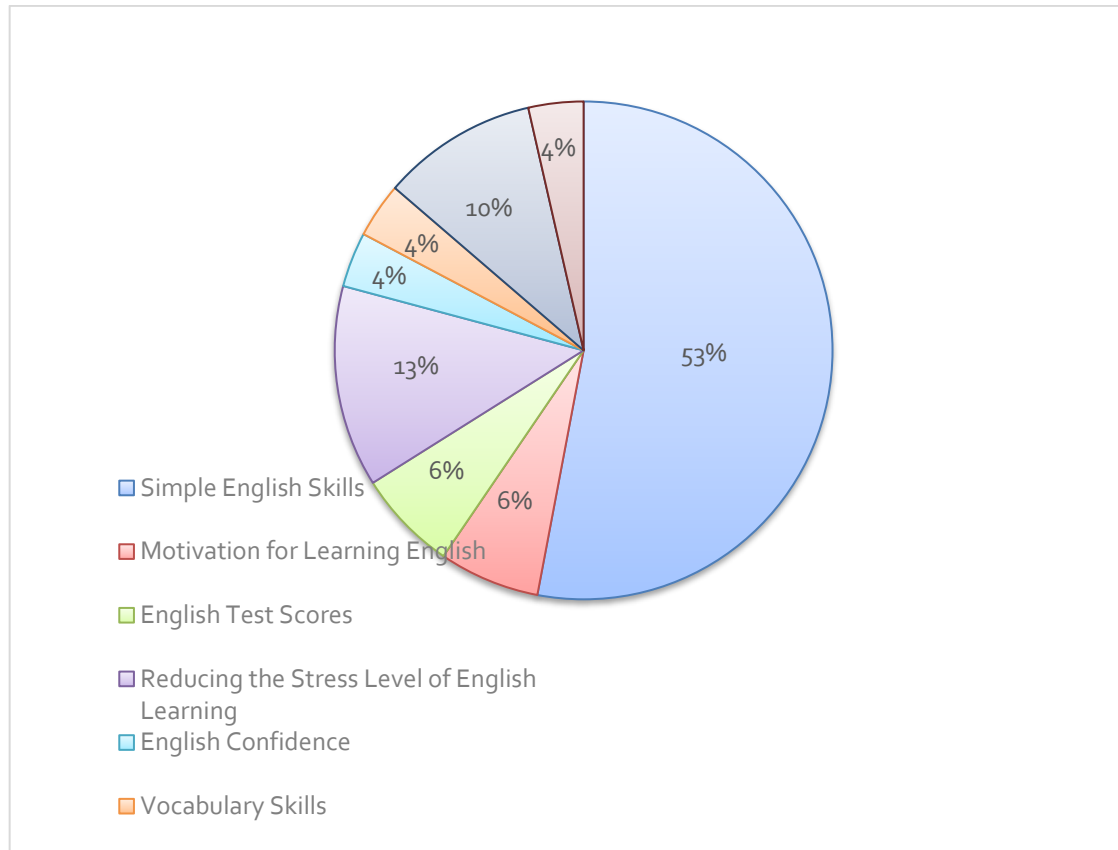


Figure 4. English Comprehension Skills

Figure 4 shows that psychological factors such as motivation and self-confidence play an important role in improving English comprehension skills. In addition, effective learning strategies, including stress reduction and online learning methods, can contribute to students' academic success in mastering the English language.

Analysis methods and Potential predictors of Self-Efficacy success

This systematic review screened 18 articles that investigated the correlation between self-efficacy and English language proficiency. As seen from Figure 2, nearly all the reviewed articles (n=16) stated that students' belief in their abilities would enhance their overall English language proficiency.

Self-Efficacy and Language Skills

Findings of 18 studies indicate that self-efficacy has a direct impact on improving four essential English skills:

- **Listening:** students with high self-efficacy report greater confidence in comprehending conversation and oral content in English.
- **Speaking:** high confidence increases students' fluency and courage in using English in everyday interactions.
- **Reading:** self-efficacy helps students to understand and analyze English texts better.
- **Writing:** Students who have a strong belief in themselves are more courageous to express their ideas in writing and produce better work.

It is therefore concluded that self-efficacy directly affects 4 fundamental skills of English namely speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Students with high self-efficacy are more confident in comprehending spoken dialogue and audio content, more fluent in communication, and more competent in analyzing and articulating ideas in writing. These findings are consistent with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which predicts that individuals with high self-confidence are likely to approach challenges in a positive manner and exert more effort to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1977; Muna et al., 2021).

Self-Efficacy and English Academic Achievement

Some studies included in this review demonstrated that self-efficacy was associated with English achievement. Students with high levels of self-efficacy are most likely to succeed on tests, participate more in classroom discussions, and exhibit greater levels of competence in mastering learning. This is in concurrence with the result of a study that covered 64 articles published since the year 2000 that had a high level of correlation between student learning and self-efficacy outcomes that can readily be observed (Bartimote-Aufflick et al., 2016).

Self-Efficacy in the Context of English Language Learning

Self-efficacy directly influences language ability and assists in establishing an even more supportive learning environment. Students with greater self-efficacy are more capable of coping with English learning anxiety and stress. They are also more inclined to employ more efficient learning strategies, which include the utilization of technology in learning. This is the reason that it is crucial for instructors to establish a learning environment conducive to higher levels of self-confidence to enhance learning. These findings are supported by research (Masrun & Rusdinal, 2022), which says that self-efficacy has a direct influence on learning outcomes and also affects indirectly through the learning environment. The findings of the research also bring out technology as a major instrument for enhancing the confidence of learners in online education, particularly through M-Learning and other technology devices like Google. Learners who are at ease with the use of technology to acquire English are more likely to have a positive idea of its simplicity and are more inclined towards enhancing their language. As found (Rahman et al., 2023), in his research which states that technology can increase self-efficacy in online learning.

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator in the Learning Process

Self-efficacy acts as a mediator between learning English-related stress and levels of academic fatigue, on one hand, and the acquisition of students' writing skills, on the other hand. Self-efficacy plays a central role in making connections between real language learning, autonomous learning, and cooperative learning, hence the essence of self-efficacy in achieving English language learning success. These results are in line with the study of Shofiah et al. (2023), which further asserts that self-efficacy mediates between academic achievement and academic motivation.

Implications and Significance of the Findings

The findings consistently show that self-efficacy is a very important determinant in improving all four English language skills. This is in line with Bandura (1977) social cognitive theory, which states that belief in one's own ability will foster motivation and perseverance. The mediating role of technology

adoption and learning environment suggests that modern pedagogical approaches that integrate digital tools can significantly improve self-efficacy, which corroborates Rahman et al. (2023) study. However, some studies showed variability in outcomes depending on contextual factors such as academic major and gender, indicating the need for more nuanced research. The identified gaps regarding the underrepresentation of English majors highlight opportunities for future empirical research to diversify the sample and explore the dynamics of the discipline.

Research on 18 journals tested that self-efficacy plays the central role in English language learning success, both directly and as a mediator for stress, self-confidence, and motivation to learn. Perceiving to possess language ability enables one to study more actively, use English in real-life situations, and attain a superior level of proficiency. This is in line with research Ndruru et al. (2025) states that there is an increase in learning in students who have received self-efficacy training. Therefore, educational strategies that support increased self-efficacy, such as positive feedback and an achievable challenge-based learning approach, are highly recommended to improve student learning outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Self-efficacy plays an important role in the process of acquiring English language ability. Individuals' belief that they can comprehend, speak, read, and write English influences their academic success and everyday language use. High self-efficacy makes students feel more self-assured when studying a foreign language, more engaged in communication, and more competent in using English skills in other contexts. Individuals who are high in self-efficacy are more likely to achieve greater academic success, react more to classroom discussion, and have fewer occurrences of stress and anxiety when learning a second language. In addition, self-efficacy also acts as a mediator in the relationship between learning strategies, motivation, and academic fatigue levels. In the context of modern learning, the use of technologies such as mobile learning and digital tools has been shown to increase students' self-efficacy, which ultimately contributes to the improvement of their English language proficiency. These findings confirm that educational strategies that target self-efficacy improvement, such as providing positive feedback, achievable challenges, and an experiential learning approach, are critical in helping students achieve optimal levels of English language proficiency. Although gender factors were not found to be a major determinant in English learning outcomes, the study shows that self-efficacy remains a key factor that can help students from diverse backgrounds overcome academic challenges. Thus, educators and educational institutions must create instruction plans that do not only emphasize cognitive skills but also self-efficacy development. This is crucial in creating a learning environment that maximally promotes English acquisition.

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