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The Role of Reading Self-Efficacy in Enhancing High School Students' Comprehension of Argumentative Texts

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ABSTRACT

Reading self-efficacy is believed to influence students' engagement and success in comprehending complex texts, particularly argumentative texts that demand higher-order thinking. However, its specific contribution remains underexplored in the Indonesian EFL context. This study employed a correlational design to examine the contribution of reading self-efficacy to the comprehension of argumentative texts among senior high school students. Data were collected from 125 twelfth-grade students across four public schools in Padang City using a reading comprehension test and a self-efficacy questionnaire. To enrich the quantitative findings, brief follow-up interviews were conducted with selected participants. Statistical analysis using simple linear regression revealed that reading self-efficacy significantly contributed 9.83% to students' reading comprehension scores, indicating a modest but meaningful relationship ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative data supported this finding, showing that students' perceptions of personal progress, emotional responses, peer comparison, and strategy use shaped their self-efficacy. Students with high self-efficacy reported greater persistence and more effective reading strategies, while those with lower self-efficacy expressed anxiety and limited engagement with text content. The findings suggest that while reading self-efficacy does not fully predict comprehension outcomes, it plays a crucial motivational role, particularly when students face cognitively demanding texts. The results underscore the importance of fostering self-belief alongside strategy instruction in reading classrooms. Given the limited geographic scope, future research should include broader populations and additional variables to enhance generalizability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in language learning and plays a crucial role in academic success, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It enhances vocabulary, grammar awareness, and overall language proficiency (Raunaq, Mustofa, & Habibah, 2021), while also fostering intellectual growth and critical thinking, enabling students to become informed and active citizens (Clark

& Rumbold, 2006). Recognizing its importance, the Indonesian government, through Permendikbud No. 37 of 2018, mandates the teaching of reading skills in senior high schools as part of the English curriculum. Reading involves multiple sub-skills, including decoding, fluency, and comprehension, with comprehension being key to constructing meaning from texts (Stoller, Grabe, & Wolf, 2018).

Among the various text types, argumentative texts present unique challenges due to their persuasive nature and complex structure (Larson, Britt, & Kurby, 2009). These texts require students to analyze viewpoints, evaluate arguments, and form their own opinions, enhancing their critical thinking skills (Diakidoy, Ioannou, & Christodoulou, 2017). The implementation of the "Merdeka Curriculum" has placed greater emphasis on argumentative texts, particularly for Grade XII students, aligning with broader educational goals of preparing them for higher education and professional life (Sinaga, Kadaryanto, & Aulia, 2023). However, many students face difficulties in comprehending these texts due to linguistic challenges, insufficient critical thinking skills, and ineffective instructional methods (Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011). Addressing these issues is essential to improving students' reading comprehension and equipping them with skills necessary for academic and real-world decision-making.

Reading comprehension difficulties in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts can be attributed to external, teacher-related, and student-related factors (Ganie, Deliana, & Rangkuti, 2019). External factors include environmental conditions such as noise, poor lighting, and uncomfortable study spaces, which can hinder students' ability to concentrate. Teacher-related issues often stem from ineffective teaching strategies and the use of irrelevant materials that fail to engage students effectively. Meanwhile, student-related factors, such as limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, are significant barriers to reading comprehension (Guna, 2023; Nurmalasari & Haryudin, 2021).. Argumentative texts, in particular, present additional challenges as they require analytical skills, yet many teachers still rely on passive reading approaches that do not encourage deeper engagement (Wulandari et al., 2023). This lack of interactive strategies affects students' reading self-efficacy, leading to decreased motivation and confidence in tackling complex texts.

Research on the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension has shown mixed results. Several studies indicate that students with higher self-efficacy tend to exhibit better comprehension skills (Walidaini, 2020; Fitri, Sofyan, & Jayanti, 2019), and self-efficacy has been linked to overall academic success (Schöber et al., 2018). However, Apriliyani & Usuludin (2023) found only a weak correlation between self-efficacy and comprehension in Indonesian high school students, suggesting that other factors, such as educational context and task complexity, may influence this relationship. Peura et al. (2019) further argued that while self-efficacy is linked to reading fluency, its impact on comprehension depends on how it is measured. These findings highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of self-efficacy's role in reading comprehension, particularly in argumentative texts, and suggest that additional cognitive and instructional factors should be explored.

Although they found that reading achievement positively influences self-efficacy, and vice versa, there is still limited knowledge about how self-efficacy interact and contribute to comprehension, particularly in reading argumentative texts. Furthermore, a significant portion of the current literature on reading comprehension and critical thinking has been explored across various educational and cultural contexts, such as in Finland (Peura et al., 2019), Iran (Yousefi & Mohammadi, 2016), Germany (Schöber et al., 2018), and Abu Dhabi (Yang et al., 2018). These studies provide valuable insights, but they may not fully capture the dynamics of reading comprehension in Indonesian senior high schools, particularly in a specific region like Padang City. The cultural, linguistic, and educational differences between these contexts suggest that the findings from other countries may not be entirely applicable to Indonesian students, especially when dealing with argumentative texts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the contribution of reading self-efficacy to high school students' comprehension of argumentative texts. The main research question guiding this study is: "To what extent does reading self-efficacy contribute to the reading comprehension of argumentative texts among senior high school students in Padang City?"

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to examine the contribution of reading self-efficacy to high school students' comprehension of argumentative texts. Although this research mainly used a quantitative approach, a small qualitative part was included to provide clearer interpretation of the results. Short follow-up discussions with selected students were conducted to help explain how their perceptions related to their questionnaire answers. This step followed Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) idea that qualitative insights can support and enrich quantitative findings, as this approach was considered suitable for capturing students' real experiences behind the statistical data.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of twelfth-grade students from four public senior high schools in Padang City, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. This level was chosen because argumentative texts are one of the main focuses in the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages students to think critically and express opinions.

The sample was selected using a cluster random sampling technique. One class from each school was randomly chosen, and all students in the selected classes were included as participants, resulting in a total of 125 students. This method was considered suitable because it was not practical to randomly select individual students from several schools, and selecting by class allowed fair representation of different learning environments.

To strengthen the quantitative results, four students were later invited for short follow-up discussions. They were selected to represent a variety of responses found in the questionnaire, so their perspectives could help explain how students' experiences and attitudes connected with the overall findings.

2.3 Instrument

This study used three instruments: a reading comprehension test, a reading self-efficacy questionnaire, and a short interview guide for follow-up discussions. All instruments were carefully developed and validated to ensure accuracy and consistency.

2.3.1 Reading Comprehension Test

The reading comprehension test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items on argumentative texts, constructed based on Barrett's Taxonomy (Reeves, 2012). The initial 35 items were reviewed by experts in English education and a high school English teacher to confirm content and construct validity. After revisions, the test was piloted with a group of students outside the main sample. The validity test using SPSS 27 identified five invalid items, which were removed. The remaining 30 valid items produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.93, indicating very high reliability.

2.3.2 Reading Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

The reading self-efficacy questionnaire, adapted from Kassem (2013), consisted of 30 statements using a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree), with reverse scoring for negative items. The questionnaire measured four aspects of reading self-efficacy: progress, psychological states, observational comparison, and strategic awareness. The instrument underwent expert review and a pilot test with students outside the main sample. After item validation through SPSS 27, six items were dropped, and the remaining items achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.95, categorized as very high reliable.

2.3.3 Interview Guide for Follow-Up Discussions

The interview guide was developed from the four aspects of reading self-efficacy to ensure alignment with the questionnaire. Each aspect was represented by one or two open-ended questions, such as how students perceive their reading progress, how confident or anxious they feel, and what strategies they use when facing difficult texts. The interviews were conducted informally to allow students to share their experiences freely.

Before data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the participating schools and explained the purpose of the study to the students. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept anonymous and confidential to maintain ethical standards throughout the research.

2.4 Data Collection

The data were collected after obtaining permission from the headmasters of the participating schools. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and ensured that student participation was voluntary. The process began with a paper-based reading comprehension test on argumentative texts consisting of 30 multiple-choice questions, completed in about 60 minutes. Afterward, students filled out a reading self-efficacy questionnaire, which took approximately 30 minutes. Clear instructions were given, and students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. To complement the quantitative data, the researcher also conducted brief follow-up interviews with several students to confirm and clarify responses given in the questionnaire. All data collection activities were conducted respectfully under school permission and with students' consent.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data from the reading comprehension test and the reading self-efficacy questionnaire were processed using Minitab version 19. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' scores, followed by inferential analyses including normality and linearity tests to meet regression assumptions. A simple linear regression analysis was then performed to examine the contribution of reading self-efficacy to students' comprehension of argumentative texts. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to indicate the strength of the relationship between variables. In addition, qualitative data from short follow-up interviews were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and reflections among participants. These qualitative insights helped explain and strengthen the interpretation of the statistical findings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to describe and find out the contribution of the independent variables and dependent variable of this research, these findings presented a description of the data which consists of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity.

3.1 Normality test of reading self-efficacy toward reading comprehension of argumentative text

The normality test for both variables—reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension of argumentative texts—was carried out using the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The results showed that the data were normally distributed, with significance values of 0.150 for both variables, exceeding the threshold of 0.05. These findings indicate that the data met the assumption of normality.

Table 1. Normality of Residual

Variable	Sig. Value (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)
Reading Self-efficacy	0.150
Reading comprehension of argumentative texts	0.150

Source: Minitab version 19

Based on Table 1 above, the p-value is 0.150, which is greater than 0.05, meaning that the residuals were distributed normally and suitable for further regression analysis.

3.2 Linearity Test of Students' Reading Self-efficacy

Before conducting the regression analysis, it was essential to ensure that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables followed a linear pattern. The linearity test was used to examine whether the assumption of linearity was met, which was crucial for the validity of the regression model. The following were the analysis results and their interpretations.

Table 2. Linearity of reading self-efficacy

Source	DF	Adj SS	Adj MS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	1	735.5	735.52	13.41	0.000
Reading Self-efficacy (X1)	1	735.5	735.52	13.41	0.000
Error	123	6746.8	54.85		
Lack-of-Fit	29	1078.4	37.19	0.62	0.930
Pure Error	94	5668.4	60.30		
Total	124	7482.3			

Source: Minitab version 19

Based on Table 2 above, the lack-of-fit p-value = 0.930, which is greater than 0.05. This means that there is no strong evidence that the linear regression model does not fit. In other words, the linear model is good enough to explain the relationship between reading self-efficacy(X1) and reading comprehension of argumentative text (Y).

3.3 Hypothesis Test Results of reading self-efficacy toward reading comprehension of argumentative text

The researcher used single regression analysis in order to find out the contribution of reading self-efficacy to students' reading comprehension of argumentative text. The result can be seen as follow:

Reading Comprehension (Y) = 62,77 + 0,2871 Reading Self-efficacy (X1)

Based on result above, the regression equation shows that reading self-efficacy contributes positively to reading comprehension of argumentative text, where every one unit increase in reading self-efficacy would increase reading comprehension of argumentative text by 0.2871, with an intercept value of 62,77 which shows the prediction of reading comprehension of argumentative text when reading self-efficacy is zero, so it can be concluded that the higher one's reading self-efficacy, the better one's reading comprehension of argumentative text.

To further analyze the contribution of reading self-efficacy (X1) to reading comprehension of argumentative text (Y), a regression coefficient analysis was conducted. This analysis aims to determine the significance and strength of the relationship between these two variables. The results of this analysis, including the T-Value and P-Value, provide statistical evidence regarding the impact of reading self-efficacy on reading comprehension of argumentative text. The detailed findings are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 3. Regression Coefficient between Reading self-efficacy toward reading comprehension of argumentative text

Term	Coef SE	Coef	T-Value	P-Value	VIF
Constant	62.77	5.79	10.85	0.000	
Reading Self-efficacy (X1)	0.2871	0.0784	3.66	0.000	1.00

Source: Minitab version 19

Based on Table 4 above, the result of the partial P-value of reading self-efficacy to students' reading comprehension of argumentative text was 0.001. The first hypothesis is stated below:

Ha : There is a significant contribution of reading self-efficacy to students' reading comprehension of argumentative text at senior high school.

Ho : There is no significant contribution of reading self-efficacy to students' reading comprehension of argumentative text at senior high school.

The interpretation of this hypothesis was analyzed if P-Value > 0.05, Ho was accepted. If P-value < 0.05, Ha was accepted. Based on the result, 0.000 < 0.05, so it can be concluded that Ha is accepted. This interpretation aligns with Creswell (2012), where a p-value lower than the predefined alpha level indicates that the null hypothesis should be rejected in favor of the alternative. In this case, the low p-value provides strong evidence against Ho, thus supporting the hypothesis that reading self-efficacy significantly influences reading comprehension outcomes. So, if the reading self-efficacy decreased, the reading comprehension of argumentative text also decreased.

3.4 The contribution of students' reading self-efficacy toward their reading comprehension of argumentative text

R square used to find out how much the contribution of reading self-efficacy to reading comprehension of argumentative text.

Table 4. R Square Value of reading self-efficacy

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
7.40621	9.83%	9.10%	7.33%

Source: Minitab version 19

The model summary shows that reading self-efficacy explain only 9.83% of the differences in students' reading comprehension scores. This indicates a weak impact, suggesting that other factors play a much larger role in influencing comprehension. The adjusted R^2 (9.10%) is slightly lower, meaning the model is not overfitting but still has limited explanatory power. The predicted R^2 (7.33%) shows how well the model would perform on new data, indicating low predictive accuracy. In short, the significant contribution of reading self-efficacy toward reading comprehension is reflected in the R-squared (R^2) value of 9.83%.

To strengthen the interpretation of the quantitative findings, short follow-up interviews were conducted with several senior high school students. The interview guide was based on the four aspects of reading self-efficacy—progress, psychological states, observational comparison, and strategic awareness—to align with the questionnaire.

Regarding progress, students were generally aware of their improvement in understanding argumentative texts, though some expressed uncertainty. One student said:

"Hmm… I think I'm a little better at reading these kinds of texts than before, but sometimes I still don't get everything the first time. I notice I can catch the main idea faster now, I guess." Another shared, *"Well… I feel like I've improved a bit. I can follow some arguments more easily, though tricky topics still make me pause a lot. It feels nice when I finally understand it."* These reflections suggest that perceiving personal progress enhances confidence and motivates students to keep reading, even when facing challenging arguments.

In terms of psychological states, students often reported feeling a mix of nervousness and slight confidence. One student explained, *"Honestly, I get kind of nervous with controversial topics. I have to read some parts again… but I try to calm myself and focus on understanding the argument."* Another said, *"Sometimes I feel unsure if I really got it, especially with complicated arguments. But I try to keep going, even if it's a bit stressful."* This indicates that emotional states influence reading comprehension, with nervousness potentially slowing understanding, but managing these feelings helps maintain focus.

For observational comparison, students described evaluating their own reading by noticing how peers approached the texts. One mentioned, *"I see my friends finish reading and understand faster… at first I feel a bit behind, but then I try to pay more attention and follow their way."* Another student said, *"When I watch classmates summarize arguments quickly, I get nervous, yeah… but then I try to read carefully and take notes too."* These comments show that observing others can motivate students and encourage the adoption of effective strategies.

Finally, strategic awareness revealed students' conscious, though sometimes hesitant, use of reading strategies. One student admitted, *"Uh… I usually try to find the main argument first, then read the details. I sometimes underline important parts, though I'm not sure if I'm doing it right."* Another added, *"If a paragraph confuses me, I reread it or try to guess from the words around it… I feel unsure sometimes, but it helps me understand the argument better."* These insights suggest that strategy use, even when students feel unsure, supports comprehension of complex argumentative texts.

Overall, the interviews indicated that students' perception of progress, psychological states, observational comparison, and strategic awareness all contribute to reading self-efficacy. Even when students feel hesitant or nervous, acknowledging improvement, observing peers, and applying strategies helps them better understand argumentative texts.

Discussion

The quantitative findings show that students' reading self-efficacy contributes 9.83% to their comprehension of argumentative texts. Although this contribution is modest, it demonstrates that students' confidence plays a meaningful role in their engagement with reading tasks. Students who believe they can understand a text tend to read with more effort and persistence, while those with lower self-efficacy often give up when facing challenging passages.

The current result aligns with previous studies in both local and international contexts that found a positive correlation between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension (Apriliyani & Usuludin, 2023; Fitri, Sofyan, & Jayanti, 2019; Walidaini, 2020; Peura et al., 2019). These studies revealed that when students perceive themselves as capable readers, they are more motivated to comprehend texts deeply. However, the effect size found in this study was smaller than that reported by Schöber et al. (2018), who found stronger reciprocal effects between self-efficacy and reading achievement in Western contexts. This difference might stem from learning environments; Indonesian classrooms often remain teacher-centered, leaving limited room for student autonomy and confidence-building (Guna, 2023; Nurmalasari & Haryudin, 2021).

The interviews provide a clearer picture of how students perceive and experience self-efficacy in reading argumentative texts. Across the four aspects—progress, psychological states, observational comparison, and strategic awareness—students revealed mixed confidence and hesitancy.

Regarding progress, most students believed they had improved over time but still doubted their ability to fully grasp argumentative content. One student said, *"Hmm… I think I'm a little better at reading these kinds of texts than before, but sometimes I still don't get everything the first time. I notice I can catch the main idea faster now, I guess."* This uncertainty suggests that their self-efficacy is situational, depending on the topic and text difficulty. Similar findings were reported by Guna (2023), who noted that unfamiliar vocabulary and text length often reduce Indonesian students' reading confidence.

For psychological states, many students expressed anxiety when reading long or abstract arguments. One participant admitted, *"Honestly, I get kind of nervous with controversial topics. I have to read some parts again… but I try to calm myself and focus on understanding the argument."* This emotional

tension can distract focus and lower comprehension. Ganie, Deliana, and Rangkuti (2019) also found that Indonesian high school students often feel anxious when reading English texts due to limited vocabulary and fear of making mistakes. Such anxiety may prevent students from engaging critically with arguments (Christodoulou & Diakidoy, 2020).

In terms of observational comparison, students often evaluated their reading ability based on how quickly or accurately their peers read. As one said, *"I see my friends finish reading and understand faster… at first I feel a bit behind, but then I try to pay more attention and follow their way."* This peer comparison can motivate or discourage learners, depending on their self-perception. As Bandura (1997) noted, social persuasion and vicarious experiences shape self-efficacy judgments. In highly collective classroom settings, such as Indonesian schools, students' confidence often depends on how they perceive others' success.

Finally, strategic awareness appeared to be the most visible expression of self-efficacy. Confident students described rereading, identifying main arguments, or underlining key sentences. One student said, *"Uh… I usually try to find the main argument first, then read the details. I sometimes underline important parts, though I'm not sure if I'm doing it right*." These behaviors reflect active strategy use, which Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) identify as both a cause and a consequence of high self-efficacy. Conversely, students with lower self-beliefs reported giving up easily or guessing answers without reviewing the text—behaviors that limit comprehension growth.

When linked to argumentative reading specifically, this study supports previous claims that comprehension of argumentative texts demands higher cognitive and evaluative engagement (Diakidoy, Ioannou, & Christodoulou, 2017; Newell et al., 2011). Understanding arguments requires readers not only to decode meaning but also to identify claims, evidence, and reasoning (Christodoulou & Diakidoy, 2020). Therefore, students' self-efficacy directly affects how deeply they process such texts—those with stronger confidence are more likely to analyze arguments critically, while those with low confidence tend to read only for surface meaning.

Contextually, these findings also reflect broader educational characteristics in Indonesia. Traditional exam-oriented classrooms often emphasize correctness over understanding, fostering fear of mistakes (Ganie et al., 2019; Saraswati, Dambayana, & Pratiwi, 2021). As revealed in the interviews, many students read mainly to "get the right answer," not to evaluate ideas. Such practices may suppress curiosity and critical engagement, leading to limited comprehension of argumentative structures. In contrast, Guthrie and Klauda (2014) showed that classrooms encouraging autonomy, discussion, and authentic reading tasks promote both reading motivation and comprehension.

For the pedagogical implications, the results suggest that teachers need to develop instructional approaches that enhance both students' self-efficacy and strategic reading competence. Reading activities should allow gradual success experiences—starting from shorter, simpler argumentative texts to more complex ones—to build confidence progressively. Collaborative reading tasks, such as peer discussion or debate, can also strengthen students' sense of competence and social support (Kassem, 2013). Teachers are encouraged to provide feedback that recognizes students' progress and effort, not just correctness, to reduce reading anxiety and promote self-belief (Wulandari et al., 2023).

At the same time, reading instruction should explicitly model how to approach argumentative texts, including identifying claims, evaluating evidence, and questioning reasoning. As Diakidoy et al. (2017) emphasize, argument comprehension requires guided practice in reasoning and critical evaluation. Integrating these elements into reading instruction can make students more confident and strategic readers..

4. CONCLUSION

The study found that reading self-efficacy contributes a modest yet meaningful 9.83% to students' comprehension of argumentative texts, with higher self-efficacy associated with greater persistence, strategic reading, and confidence, whereas lower self-efficacy correlates with anxiety and superficial

understanding; this supports Bandura's (1997) view that self-efficacy shapes motivation, effort, and resilience in challenging cognitive tasks. The findings imply that pedagogical practices should foster supportive environments through scaffolded reading activities, constructive feedback, and collaborative strategies that build students' confidence and analytical engagement with texts. However, the study's sample was limited to 125 students from four schools in Padang City, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Therefore, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate additional factors such as reading motivation and critical thinking, and apply longitudinal or intervention-based approaches to provide deeper insights into the development and impact of reading self-efficacy over time.

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