

## **ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY: A RELIABLE PREDICTOR OF EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCES**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Academic self-efficacy is receiving increasing recognition as a predictor of educational performances. Academic self-efficacy describes "a person's confidence in their abilities to organize, execute and regulate performance to attain designated types of performances". It functions at a multilevel and multifaceted set of beliefs that influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave during various educational tasks. Self-Efficacy view point can be built up on four bases of knowledge, vicarious experiences, enactive mastery as well as physical and emotional states. Self-efficacy development is closely intertwined with a person's experiences, competencies and developmental tasks in different domains at different stages in life. Self-efficacy beliefs should be relevant for understanding educational outcomes because self-efficacy leads to specific behaviours and motivations that can encourage or discourage effective performance.*

**KEYWORDS-** *Academic Self-Efficacy, Educational Performances*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

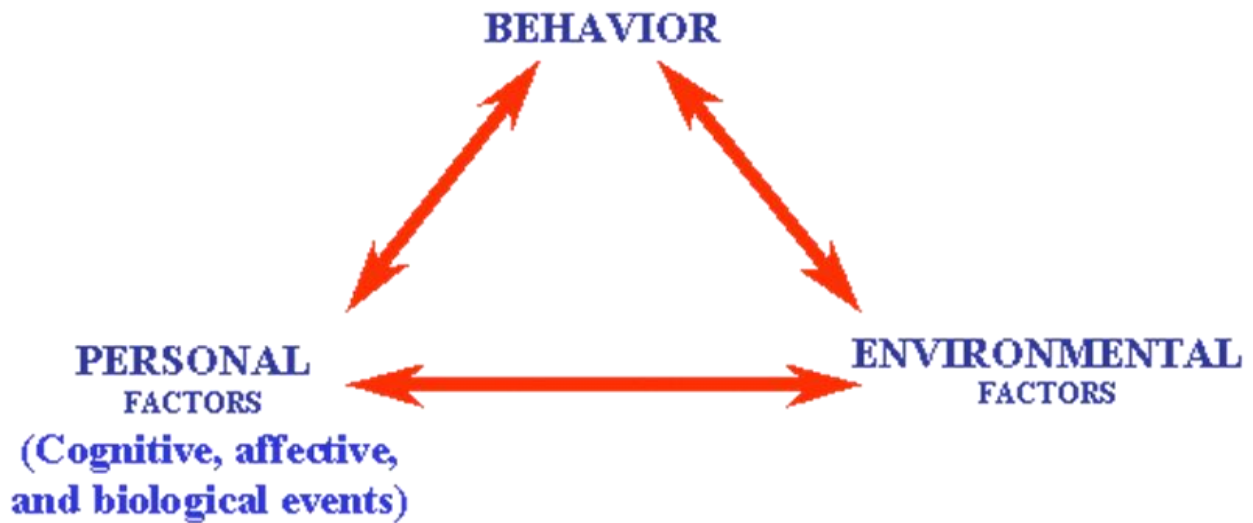
This paper proposes, on the basis of a reflection made in relation to the new educational demands of the current era, a number of strategies with the aim of enhancing the quality of the learning situation and ultimately the level of educational performances of the learners. Researchers in personality and social psychology have long been interested in the role of self related perceptions. Individuals who are otherwise similar feel differently about themselves and choose different courses of action, depending on how they interpret themselves- what attributes they think, they possess, what roles they presume they are expected to play, what they believe they are capable of, how they view they fare in comparison with others and how they judge they are viewed by others without doubt, these are beliefs and perceptions about self that are heavily rooted in one's past achievement and reinforcement theory. It is only reasonable that these self-perceptions have received a great deal of attention in educational research (Byrne, 1984). Children with different self-beliefs demonstrate different levels of cognitive, social and emotional engagement in schools. Because school related experience makes up a major portion of children's lives and shapes the early path to important life outcomes, educational researches try to grasp the meaning of self in student's minds. During the past couple of decades, numerous studies in educational research have resorted to academic self-efficacy to explain the function of self in school contexts. Various definitions are given about academic self-efficacy and its dimensions but all of them included a general academic goal oriented attitude. Before discussing the concept of academic self-efficacy, let us know about self-efficacy.

Confidence is the pivot to success. Whether personally or at professional level, believing in one's own strength and self-confidence matters a lot in achieving the set aims and supports the individual even under any undesirable situations and conditions to accomplish the task. Success requires consistent performance and this heavily depends upon how an individual deals with the situations and changes coming forth in his life. The confidence or believe in self is termed as self-efficacy in behavioural sciences. Self-efficacy means self-confidence, self-reliance and trust on oneself. Self-efficacy does not refer to how much a person likes him or herself or how much he or she likes the task at hand; rather, self-efficacy is concerned with how well a person believes he or she will be able to reach a desired outcome in a designated area (Bandura, 1977).

The term self-efficacy was coined around 40 years ago by Albert Bandura (1977a). Since then, research in this area has been growing steadily and focuses mainly on the concept of self-efficacy which is considered as “one of the most theoretically, heuristically and practically useful concepts formulated in modern psychology” (Betz et al., 1996, p. 47). Self-efficacy is not the same as ability or motivation, but they are strongly related (Kozlowski & Salas, 2010). Indeed, self-efficacy is the personal determination of one's own ability to deal with a certain task. Bandura (1994) noted that how people's behavior could often be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their own capabilities than by what they were really capable of accomplishing. In his conceptualization, self-efficacy is a mechanism to explain and predict one's thought, emotion and action and to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals. It is less concerned with what skills and abilities individuals possess. It considers more important what individuals believe they can do with whatever skills and abilities they may possess. Bandura suggested that self-efficacy made a difference in how people feel, think and act (Bandura, 1995). In all, self-efficacy serves a self regulatory function by providing individuals with the capability to influence their own cognitive processes and actions and thus alter their environments (Bandura, 2001).

Bandura (1995) also stressed further that self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Self-efficacy beliefs provide the foundation for human motivation, well-being and personal accomplishment. This is because unless people believe that their actions can produce the outcomes they deserve, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. many empirical evidences support Bandura's contention that self-efficacy beliefs touch virtually, every aspect of people's lives- whether they think productively, self-debilitating, pessimistically or optimistically, how well they motivate themselves, their vulnerability to stress and depression and the life choices they make.

Bandura's theory identifies four core features of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2004). Social cognitive theory is rooted in a view that individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development and can make things happen by their actions. In the social cognitive view people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other. (Figure 1) The nature of persons is defined within this perspective in terms of a number of basic capabilities (Bandura, 1986, p.18).



**Figure 1-Model of the relations between the three classes of determinants in Bandura's (1986) conception of triadic reciprocity in Social Cognitive Theory.**

Individuals typically select tasks and activities in which they feel competent and avoid those in which they do not. Students who are confident in their capability to organize, execute, and regulate their problem-solving or task performance at a designated level of competence are demonstrating high self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is generally regarded as a multidimensional construct differentiated across multiple domains of functioning. The construct of self-efficacy helps explain the finding that the behavior of individuals is not always accurately predicted from their capability to accomplish a specific task. How a person believes they will perform is often more important. One construct gaining increased credence as a determinant of student's goal orientation is academic self-efficacy (Skaalvik, 1997). It refers to student's judgments of how well he or she can do class-related works (Bandura, 1986). During the past two decades, self-efficacy has emerged as a highly effective predictor of students' motivation and learning. As a performance-based measure of perceived capability, self-efficacy differs conceptually and psychometrically from related motivational constructs, such as outcome expectations, self-concept, or locus of control. Self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be sensitive to subtle changes in students' performance context, to interact with self-regulated learning processes, and to mediate students' academic achievement. *"Academic self-efficacy refers to a person's conviction that they can successfully achieve a designated level in a specific academic subject area"*.

### **ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY**

In Education, self-efficacy is a key contributing factor to learners' success, because self-efficacy influences the choices learners make and the courses of action they pursue (Pajares, 2002). Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief (conviction) that they can successfully achieve a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Elias & Loomis, 2002; Linenbrink & Pintrich, 2002a; Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Academic self-efficacy is grounded in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). According to self-efficacy theory, self-efficacy is an “individual’s confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 110). Self-efficacy theory suggests that academic self-efficacy may vary in strength as a function of task difficulty—some individuals may believe they are most efficacious on difficult tasks, while others only on easier tasks. Furthermore, self-efficacy is believed to be situational in nature rather than being viewed as a stable trait (Linenbrink & Pintrich, 2002a). Students make reliable differentiations between their self-efficacy judgments across different academic domains which, collectively, form a loose hierarchical multidimensional structure. Self-efficacy is different from self-esteem or self-concept as it is a task-specific evaluation whereas self-esteem and self-concept reflect more general affective evaluations of self (Linenbrink & Pintrich, 2002a).

Two general categories of academic expectancy beliefs have been postulated. Academic outcome expectations are a student’s beliefs that specific behaviors will lead to certain outcomes (e.g., “If I do homework my grades will improve”). Academic efficacy expectations are a student’s beliefs in their ability to perform the necessary behaviors to produce a certain outcome (e.g., “I have enough motivation to study hard for this test”). Understanding the difference between these two forms of expectancy beliefs is important as “individuals can believe that a certain behavior will produce a certain outcome (outcome expectation), but may not believe they can perform that behavior (efficacy expectation)” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 111).

Researches conducted by Linenbrink and Pintrich (2003) have shown that academic self-efficacy is significantly associated with students' learning, cognitive engagement, analytical thinking, academic commitment, strategy use, persistence, susceptibility to negative emotions and achievement. In the academic context, children's beliefs in their personal efficacy to control their own educational processes and outcomes and to become proficient in challenging subject matter, likely has a great impact on their scholastic impetus, interest and educational performance. Students who are confident in their capability to organize, execute, and regulate their problem-solving or task performance at a designated level of competence are demonstrating high self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is generally regarded as a multidimensional construct differentiated across multiple domains of functioning.

Academic self-efficacy refers to individuals convictions that they can successfully perform given academic tasks at designated levels. A similar definition also expressed by Midgley et al. (2000) as "academic self-efficacy refers to students' perceptions of their competence to do their classwork". Students make reliable differentiations between their self-efficacy judgments across different academic domains which, collectively, form a loose hierarchical multidimensional structure.

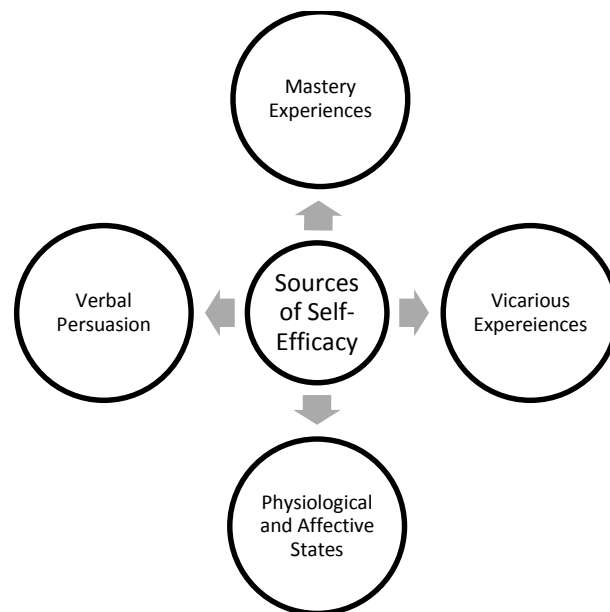
Self-efficacy beliefs should be relevant for understanding academic outcomes because self-efficacy leads to specific behaviors and motivations that can encourage or discourage effective performance. As outlined by Bandura (1993), students with high academic self-efficacy

- view problems as challenges to be mastered instead of threats and set goals to meet the challenges;
- are committed to the academic goals they set;

- have a task-diagnostic orientation, which provides useful feedback to improve performance, rather than a self-diagnostic orientation, which reinforces the student's low expectation about what he or she can accomplish;
- view failures as a result of insufficient effort or knowledge, not as a deficiency of aptitude; and
- increase their efforts in cases of failure to achieve the goals they have set. This highlights the reciprocal or cyclical relationships among the environment, self, and behaviors posited by Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. Environmental interventions may improve self-efficacy, which can lead the student to select more challenging tasks, which in turn creates more opportunity for useful feedback and can lead to increased self-efficacy and better outcomes.

### Sources of Self-Efficacy

In Education, self-efficacy is a key contributing factor to learners' success, because self-efficacy "influences the choices learners make and the courses of action they pursue" (Pajares, 2002, p.116). Generally, self-efficacy is influenced by four main sources: enactive mastery experience—that is, hands-on experience; vicarious experiences—that is, other people's experience; verbal persuasion—that is, appraisal or feedback from others; and physiological and affective states—that is, stress, emotion, mood, pain, and fatigue (Hodges, 2008). Mastery experiences are considered to be the most significant source of efficacy (Bandura, 1977a). Once self-efficacy is established, it can be applied to similar learning situations. The closer these situations are to those in which self-efficacy has been improved, the stronger the effect (Bandura & Adams, 1977). These sources are selected, interpreted and integrated into a total estimate of self-efficacy that in turn influences subsequent, cognitive, motivational, emotional and selective processes.



**Fig. 1 Sources of Self-Efficacy**

### **Effects of Academic Self-Efficacy on Educational Performances**

In line with the theory, academic self- efficacy beliefs affect students educational performance due to the effects they produce through four psychological processes (Bandura, 1993) namely, the *cognitive, motivational, and affective* and *selection* processes:

**At the cognitive level:** the nature of beliefs students hold about their abilities in relation to a given task influences the way they perceive their prospective future academic results. Students who believe in their abilities visualize successful positive outcomes while those who do not trust their capacities are likely to suffer from what Bandura (1997 b) names cognitive negativity (A state where they become somewhat obsessed by their shortcomings and too skeptic about their capacity to succeed in the face of challenging learning situations)

**At the motivational level:** a high sense of self –efficacy increases students readiness to invest efforts in their learning, serves them well to persist when facing difficulties and helps them to recover more quickly after a negative attainment. Conversely, a perceived sense of inefficacy diminishes students interest in their learning, lessens from their capacity to resist when facing impediments and undermines their commitment to achieving their goals.

**At the affective level :** a strong perceived sense of competence is likely to reduce the amount of stress students might experience in the course of their learning whereas a low self-estimation of capacity might result in high levels of anxiety and agitation that often lead to irrational thinking that ultimately impair their cognitive and intellectual effectiveness.

**At the selection level:** the conceptions that students develop about their academic abilities are likely to influence the type of decisions they take, the environment they opt for and the kind of choices they select. It is often the case that students often engage in activities in which they feel efficacious while they avoid those in which they feel less competent.

### **Teachers' Role in Developing Academic Self-Efficacy**

The teachers play crucial role in instilling positive self –perceptions of efficacy in their students through training them to make use of a variety of learning strategies such as Goal – setting, strategy training, modeling and feedback (Schunk, 1995)

- **Goal setting:** Teachers should make their students aware about the goals that need to be attained in their courses and provide them with feedback on goal progress. It might be motivating also for students to set their proximal goals, to enhance their commitment and help them avoid putting things off.

- **Strategy training:** Teachers should develop instructional programs that train students on the use of certain strategies to improve their performance. This might be achieved through using strategy verbalization or think aloud procedures (Schunk, 1995). This might keep students alert to the basic elements of the task, activate their encoding and retention abilities , help them to be more systematic in their work and more in control of their learning .

- **Modeling:** Teachers are likely to provide remedy to the learning and motivational deficiencies that their students might have by modeling cognitive strategies and self-regulatory techniques (Zimmerman, 2000). Providing students with a model that uses a given cognitive strategy for

solving an exercise, for instance, is likely to have a positive effect on students motivation and learning.

**D • Feedback:** Regular and immediate feedback be given to the students by teachers as it provides them an opportunity to assess their progress in learning. As a result, it will enhance ultimately their academic achievement.

### **Dimensions that influence performance**

A person's attributions about his performance are related to his motivation to achieve. There are three attributional dimensions that influences a person's success or failure in learning i.e. locus of control (internal vs. external causes), stability (long term vs. short term effects) and controllability (controllable vs. uncontrollable).

- **Locus of Control:** refers to beliefs about whether a given outcome was caused by the individual or by some external factor outside of his control. for example, some students attribute their failure on exams to luck. Other students believe that factors such as effort or their level of knowledge of a particular area are responsible for their grades. Thus, students in the latter group will try harder if they are dissatisfied with their performance.
- **Stability:** refer to a cause being attributed to either unstable or stable factors that lead to positive or negative results. For example, a student may attribute poor performance to an illness that came on suddenly before an exam. On the other hand, another student might attribute poor performance to factors that the student perceives as beyond his or her control. Some will say that the task is just too difficult which can lead to a decrease in the student's efforts to improve his or her performance on that task.
- **Controllability:** refers to whether or not a person feels that he has control over a given outcome. For example, a student who attributes failure to uncontrollable factors may decide that the teacher creates biased and confusing exam questions that are designed to promote student failure; thus expanding a great deal of effort would be a waste of time. On the other hand, a student who attributes success to controllable factors might decide that his or her performance was due to methods of studying and would be more likely to feel motivated to change something about the way that he or she studies in order to attain a more acceptable outcome.

### **CONCLUSION**

Self-efficacy has been applied to the area of school achievement and has become a clear variable in educational psychology (Schwarzer, 1997). All children have a natural need to think highly of themselves. In order for this need to be satisfied, children must believe that they are capable of doing well and succeeding in a multitude of ways. In the classroom, children discover and develop much of their sense of who they fail is extremely important to their self-esteem. A child's thoughts about what lies behind these successes or failures helps to form his/her beliefs about himself/herself and his/her expectations for the future (Apter,1997). Odaci (2011) expressed that "students belief in their academic self-efficacy and their ability to begin and continue their studies is also highly important" (p. 110). This fact is very important for education and training process for prospective teachers. Because, it is expected that students with high level academic self-efficacy are more self-confident and have more positive attitudes towards future profession. Furthermore, the studies reviewed also indicated that it can be improved, making this a worthy area of further research and investment. Self-efficacy is developed through feedback and continues

to add unique variance in explaining differences in outcomes. Bong (1998) and Pajares and Miller (1995) demonstrated academic self-efficacy can be good predictor of more general or aggregated academic achievement. But, in general, the best predictor of specific academic performances will be self-efficacy beliefs about those specific academic problems (Pajares, 1996).

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