

Empowering Schools  
in Self-Regulation of  
Media and Information  
Literacy processes

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# **Education Brief**





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## What drives Children's Beliefs in Their Reading Skills? The Role of Self-Efficacy

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### What drives children's beliefs in their reading skills? The role of self-efficacy

**Self-efficacy is a motivational construct that drives children's beliefs about their learning skills including the ability to read. The higher self-efficacy the more children believe in their reading skills.**

### Why should we pay attention to self-efficacy in primary school children?

**Self-efficacy** refers to one's beliefs in their ability to complete a task. It relates to beliefs in one's capacity rather than to one's existing skills to complete that task (Bandura, 1977). Although children need both beliefs and skills, to successfully complete their learning tasks, self-efficacy early affects their efforts and determination in the course of task completion. Self-efficacy is very much linked to children's expectancy for their academic achievement. For example when children believe in their abilities to achieve academically this impacts their actions to achieve their academic goals (i.e. extra reading they do, persevere in problem solving tasks etc). Conversely, when children have doubts about their ability to achieve academically they make less efforts towards their learning goals and are anxious about their performance. Children's self-efficacy is influenced by four main sources: 1) their own learning experience 2) observation of someone else's performance, 3) teachers and parent's feedback on their performances, and 4) their own emotional state. Thus, schools should continuously pay attention to these sources that drive children's level of self-efficacy.

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## Does self-efficacy matter in children's reading skills?

**Reading** is an effortful task for many children, especially for younger children who haven't yet become independent readers. Since self-efficacy drives children's efforts in the task, then self-efficacy must be an important element in children's reading activity. This is especially true for the children in the first phases of reading acquisition or when they face reading difficulties. In addition, self-efficacy represents a protective factor also at a later stage of reading development by allowing children to read more and thus practise their reading skills (Schiefele et al., 2001). This is important for educators as it is well established that reading quantity determines children's reading quality (*Matthew Effect*, Stanovich, 1986).

**Digital reading skill** is also influenced by children's level of self-efficacy. In fact digital reading has transformed the ways in which children read and perhaps also the way children feel about their reading abilities. Studies have shown that digital text is an appealing medium for reading for children (e.g. Thorner and Williams, 2012) mainly due to its user-friendliness and many features it offers (Ozturk & Ohi, 2018). Some studies also report that young children prefer digital text over print text (Ciampa, 2016) perhaps on the assumption that this way of reading is easier compared to print reading. The expectations of effortless could make children approach digital reading with high self-efficacy. Conversely, the scientific literature suggests that digital reading may be more effortful than print reading (Delgado & Salmeron, 2021) and that children's high self-efficacy can be

in fact driven by their entertainment experiences in digital texts rather than their performance in reading tasks. Although studies on primary graders are still scarce (Ruffini et al., 2023), it is plausible that children's perception of their high self-efficacy in digital reading could eventually lead to a gap between expectation and required effort, thus contributing to decrease in children's motivation and self-efficacy. To avoid these situations educators should instruct children to use digital tools in an effective and contextualised manner, preparing them to the appropriate behaviours and cognitive efforts.

## Is self-efficacy related to children's motivation to read?

Motivation to read is a critical aspect of reading and academic achievement. Children who are motivated to read spend more time reading which contributes to their growing capabilities as readers. Educators often find that some children are unmotivated to read, not because they lack capacity but because they believe that they are not good readers. This is mainly due to their low self-efficacy which hinders their reading efforts resulting in demotivation. Those who are intrinsically motivated have an internal desire to read, and those extrinsically motivated seek reward for their reading (Schiefele *et al.*, 2012). Children will most likely lack both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation if they believe that they are not sufficiently capable of reading. Therefore educators must be continuously mindful of not only helping children learn how to read but also encourage children to want to read.

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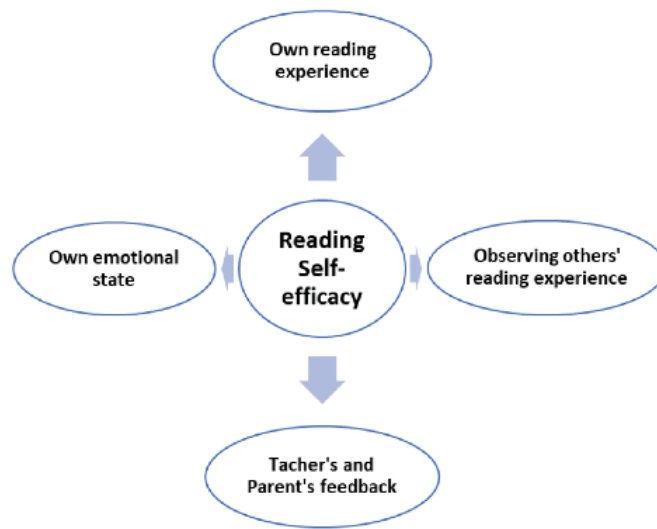


Figure 1. Four main sources influencing children's self-efficacy in reading skills, based on Bandura's model of self-efficacy (1997).

### Practical tips

- Self-efficacy is crucial to children's academic achievement, including digital and print reading. To understand what influences children's self-efficacy, educators should explore the four main self-efficacy sources (i.e. own experience, vicarious experience, feedback and an emotional/motivational state).

- To motivate more children to read books, understanding their level of self-efficacy is a good start.

- Educators should instruct children to use digital tools in an effective and contextualised manner, preparing them to the appropriate behaviours and cognitive efforts.

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