
EFFORT MATTERS: EXPLORING INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SELF-EFFICACY IN ENGLISH LEARNING**Marsika Sepyanda^{1*}, Fenni Kurnia Mutiya², Elviza Yeni Putri³, Lucy Oktavani⁴**

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ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping students' motivation and performance, particularly in the context of learning a foreign language such as English. Guided by Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, this study explores Indonesian university students' self-efficacy beliefs in English learning, with a specific focus on the role of effort-related beliefs. This study aims to explore university students' self-efficacy in English learning by analyzing their beliefs and confidence levels toward their language learning abilities. The respondents consisted of 129 students enrolled in a compulsory General English course in Universitas Negeri Padang, selected from a population of 308 students using a simple random sampling technique. A questionnaire comprising 25 items based on a Likert scale was administered to measure students' self-efficacy. The validity and reliability of the instrument were confirmed through Pearson Product-Moment correlation and Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.7926$), indicating strong internal consistency. Data analysis revealed that the average self-efficacy score was 3.29, which falls into the moderate category. The highest-rated statement indicated students' belief that effort leads to improvement, while the lowest-rated item reflected a sense of helplessness regardless of effort. These results suggest that while students believe in their potential to succeed in English learning through hard work, some still struggle with negative self-perceptions. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing students' self-efficacy beliefs to enhance their learning outcomes. Educational interventions that foster self-awareness, goal-setting, and motivational strategies may contribute positively to increasing self-efficacy in language learning. This study contributes to the growth of the literature on EFL self-efficacy in Indonesia. It is suggested that the lecturers to support students' confidence and autonomy in acquiring English as a foreign language.

Keyword: *Self-efficacy, English learning, university students, foreign language, motivation*

INTRODUCTION

In the recent globalized world, English proficiency is considered a crucial skill for academic and professional success, particularly for university students across disciplines. Recognizing this, English has been made a compulsory subject (*mata kuliah wajib*) in many Indonesian universities. The inclusion of English in the general curriculum is aimed at equipping students with sufficient foreign language skills to meet the demands of the modern workforce, where communication in English is often essential (Suryani, 2016). However, while curriculum and instructional input are important, students' achievement in learning English is also influenced by psychological factors, especially self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy refers to one's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks or achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), self-efficacy affects students' motivation, perseverance, and willingness to face challenges. Unfortunately, many students are not fully aware of the role self-efficacy plays a role in shaping their learning behaviour. Without appropriate awareness and self-regulation, students may experience low confidence, anxiety, or negative expectations about their performance, particularly when they think English as a difficult subject. On the other hand, students who believe in their capability to succeed, especially when they associate success with effort, tend to show stronger engagement and improved outcomes (Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Ghonsooly & Elahi Shirvan, 2011).

In the Indonesian university setting, where exposure to English outside the classroom is often limited, students' belief in the power of effort becomes a crucial part of their language learning journey. One of the strongest indicators of self-efficacy is whether students believe that their English skills can improve through hard work and consistent practice. Despite its importance, research that explores which specific aspects of English learning self-efficacy are perceived as strengths or weaknesses by university students is still limited.

This study aimed to investigate university students' level of self-efficacy in learning English and explore to what extent they believe their effort contributes to their success. It also aimed to identify which aspects of self-efficacy are perceived to be the strongest and which are the weakest. By understanding these patterns, lecturers can better support students' psychological readiness in language learning and help them build productive beliefs that lead to real improvement in English proficiency.

METHOD

This research employed a quantitative descriptive approach to explore university students' self-efficacy in learning English. The data were obtained from a total of 129 respondents selected from a population of 308 students enrolled in a General English Course (*Mata Kuliah Umum Bahasa Inggris*) during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. These students came from cohorts ranging from the 2021 to 2024 academic intakes. The General English Course was taught by the researcher herself, which facilitated access to a diverse yet relevant sample of students. However, this dual role of researcher-as-instructor may introduce potential response bias, as students might have responded in ways they believed would be viewed favorably. This limitation is acknowledged and considered in interpreting the results.

Sampling was conducted using a simple random sampling technique. This method was deemed appropriate because the population was considered homogeneous in terms of academic program and course requirements. According to Sugiyono (2015), simple random sampling is effective when the population is relatively uniform, ensuring that each member has an equal chance of selection, thus producing a representative sample. Similarly, Arikunto (2013) emphasizes that a representative sample should reflect key characteristics of the population, enabling generalizable findings.

The instrument used for data collection was a self-efficacy questionnaire consisting of 25 items. The items were developed based on key indicators of self-efficacy theory as proposed by Bandura (1997), focusing on components such as task confidence, effort belief, persistence, and emotional control. The questionnaire was newly developed by the researcher through adaptation of Bandura's framework and relevant literature, rather than adopting a single pre-validated instrument. To ensure content validity, the items were reviewed by two experts in educational psychology and English language education. A pilot study involving 20 students was also conducted to check clarity and consistency of the items, and minor modifications were made based on the feedback.

The questionnaire was administered in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and prevent misinterpretation among respondents, especially considering their varied English proficiency levels. While the questionnaire was not formally back-translated, a linguistic validation process was conducted through expert judgment. Two bilingual lecturers reviewed the items to ensure that the Indonesian version retained the intended meaning and theoretical consistency with the original constructs of self-efficacy.

A five-point Likert scale was used to assess students' responses, with values ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The Likert scale is widely accepted in educational research as a means to capture subjective attitudes and beliefs in quantifiable terms (Sugiyono, 2015). This facilitated statistical analysis of trends and variations in students' self-efficacy levels related to English learning.

The data analysis focused on descriptive statistics, including calculation of mean, maximum, and minimum values of students' self-efficacy scores. This analysis aimed to provide insights into which aspects of self-efficacy were perceived as strong and which were identified as weak by the students. However, while this descriptive approach offers a general overview, it is acknowledged that no inferential statistical analysis was conducted. Future research should consider conducting subgroup analyses, such as comparisons across gender or academic year, to enrich the findings and uncover potential patterns among demographic variables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Validity Analysis

Instrument validity is crucial to ensure that each questionnaire item accurately represents the construct being measured, in this case, students' self-efficacy in learning English. The validity test in this research was conducted using the Pearson Product Moment correlation with a significance level of 0.05. The validity of each item was assessed by comparing the correlation coefficient (r) of each item to the critical value of the Pearson correlation table. With 129 respondents, the degrees of freedom were 128, yielding an r -table value of 0.1723.

Table 1: Validity Test Results of Self-Efficacy in English Learning

Validity Test	q1	q2	q3	q4	q5	q6	q7	q8	q9	q10	q11	q12
R values	0.3377	0.2085	0.3179	0.3927	0.4067	0.3421	0.2332	0.2716	0.3673	0.3595	0.3411	0.3658
R table (5% ;128)	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723
Validity Check	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid

Validity Test	q13	q14	q15	q16	q17	q18	q19	q20	q21	q22	q23	q24	q25
R values	0.4166	0.4423	0.4726	0.5114	0.4797	0.5211	0.5258	0.5475	0.4006	0.3651	0.5368	0.4979	0.4743
R table (5% ;128)	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723	0.1723
Validity Check	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid	Valid

Based on the analysis using Microsoft Excel's CORREL function, all items had r -values greater than 0.1723, indicating that each item met the validity criteria and could be retained for further analysis. This finding suggests that the items in the questionnaire accurately

captured the elements of self-efficacy as conceptualized in this study. According to Sugiyono (2015), items with a correlation coefficient higher than the critical r -value are considered valid for inclusion in research instruments.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement instrument over time. To test the internal consistency of the questionnaire, this study used Cronbach's Alpha formula. The formula used is as follows:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum \text{var}(x_i)}{\text{var}(x_{\text{total}})} \right)$$

Where:

α = Cronbach's Alpha

k = Number of items (questions) = 25

The result of reliability test for self-efficacy in English learning is as follows:

$$\alpha = \frac{25}{25-1} \left(1 - \frac{26,0602}{108,9875} \right) = 0,7926$$

The instrument, consisting of 25 items, yielded a reliability coefficient (α) of 0.7926. This value exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating a high level of internal consistency (Arikunto, 2013). As noted by Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha between 0.70 and 0.90 is considered to reflect good reliability in social science research. Thus, it can be concluded that the questionnaire used in this study is both valid and reliable, making it a suitable tool to assess students' self-efficacy in English learning.

Normality Test

Before analyzing the data further, a normality test was conducted to determine whether the data distribution approximated a normal curve. The test was performed using a Quantile-Quantile (QQ) plot generated through the R programming software. The following is the result of the normality test using R software.

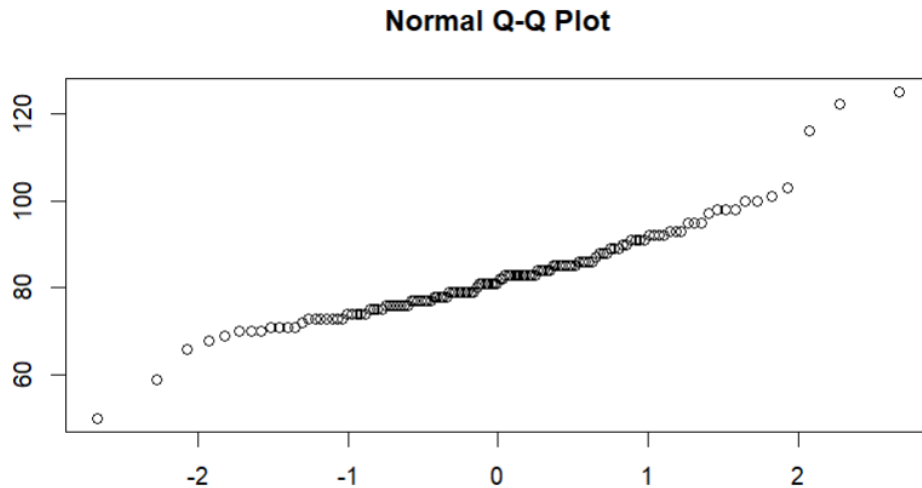


Figure 1: Q-Q Plot Data

As shown in Figure 1, the points on the QQ plot form a line that closely follows the diagonal, indicating that the data were normally distributed. According to Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012), when the data points lie close to the line in a QQ plot, it is generally assumed that the data follow a normal distribution. This justifies the use of parametric statistical techniques for further analysis.

Normality testing of the data was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, as presented in the output generated by the R software below

Asymptotic one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

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data: x
D = 0.11052, p-value = 0.08353
alternative hypothesis: two-sided
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Figure 2: Kolmogorov Smirnov Test

Based on the output above, the p-value was 0.0833, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the data are normally distributed.

Questionnaire Results Analysis

From a total of 129 respondents, the questionnaire revealed a mean score of 3.2905, indicating a moderate level of self-efficacy in English learning. The highest score recorded was 4.2791, suggesting that some students demonstrated strong confidence in their English abilities. In contrast, the lowest score was 2.2093, reflecting the presence of students with

relatively low self-belief. These results show a varied distribution of self-efficacy among the participants, with most responses falling within the moderate to high range.

The highest average score was recorded for the statement *"Saya dapat meningkatkan kemampuan Bahasa Inggris saya jika berusaha keras"*, reflecting a strong belief in the effect of personal effort on language learning. On the other hand, the lowest score was for *"Saya percaya bahwa saya akan selalu lemah dalam Bahasa Inggris, apa pun usaha saya"*, indicating that few respondents held a fatalistic view about their language learning ability.

Moreover, the use of the Indonesian language in the questionnaire was intentional to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings among the students in interpreting each item. Since not all respondents have the same level of English proficiency, using their native language helped improve the accuracy of responses and reduced the risk of misinterpretation that could affect the validity of the data collected. The average scores calculated from the 25 statements included in the questionnaire are presented as follow.

Table 2: Scoring Items

Statement	Average Score
q21	2.209302
q22	2.426357
q17	2.488372
q16	2.612403
q18	2.651163
q1	3.767442
q4	3.782946
q11	3.821705
q5	4.124031
q3	4.27907

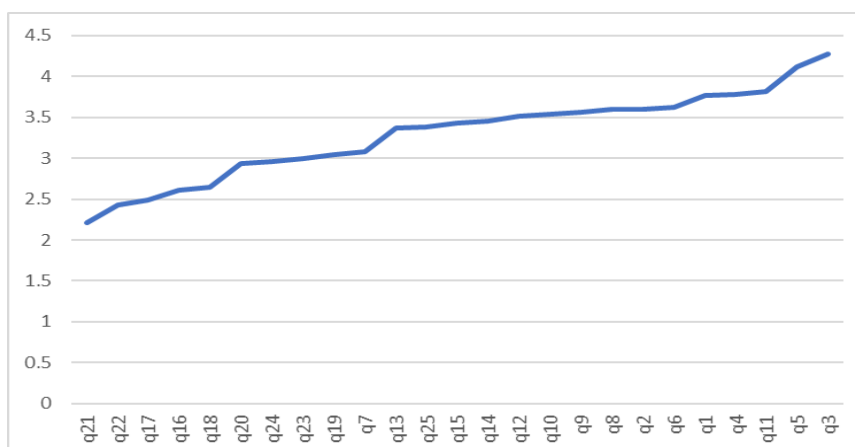


Figure 3: Scoring Items

From Figure 3, the five statements with the lowest average scores are as follows:

- a. q21: I believe that I will always be weak in English, no matter how much effort I make.
- b. q22: I avoid practicing English outside the classroom.
- c. q17: I often give up when facing difficulties in learning English.
- d. q16: I feel incapable of completing English assignments on my own.
- e. q18: I feel that English is too difficult to master.

Meanwhile, the five statements with the highest average scores are as follows:

- a. q1: I am confident that I can understand the English material presented in class.
- b. q4: I am capable of achieving good results in the English course.
- c. q11: I am confident that I can obtain good scores in English exams.
- d. q5: I feel motivated to learn English even though it is difficult.
- e. q3: I can improve my English skills if I put in hard work.

Based on the questionnaire results, the following table presents the respondents' scores categorized by gender:

Table 3: Scoring Items based on Gender

Gender	Average Score	Number of Respondents
Male	3.27	43
Female	3.30	86

As shown in Table 3, the number of male respondents is smaller compared to the number of female respondents. This difference in sample size may contribute to the slightly lower average score among male students. Additionally, this finding suggests that female students tend to report slightly higher self-efficacy in learning English compared to their male counterparts. However, the gap between the two groups is relatively small, indicating generally comparable perceptions of self-efficacy across genders. Further analysis could be conducted to explore whether specific aspects of self-efficacy differ more significantly between male and female students.

To interpret these results, the self-efficacy score scale was categorized into five levels:

Table 4: Self-Efficacy Score Scale

Interpretation	Score Interval
Very Low	1.00 – 1.79
Low	1.80 – 2.59

Moderate	2.60 – 3.39
High	3.40 – 4.19
Very High	4.20 – 5.00

With a mean score of 3.2905, students' self-efficacy in English learning falls within the moderate category. This suggests that, while students believe in their ability to succeed in English to some extent, there remains room for growth in terms of confidence and persistence in the face of difficulty. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy significantly influences how individuals approach challenges and persevere toward goals. A moderate level of self-efficacy implies that students have a basic belief in their abilities, but this belief may fluctuate depending on external pressures or task difficulty.

Recent studies in EFL contexts also highlight similar patterns. For instance, Rahmawati and Mulyono (2022) found that Indonesian university students often exhibit moderate self-efficacy due to limited language exposure and a lack of authentic communication opportunities. Furthermore, Sari and Marzulina (2023) emphasize that students with moderate self-efficacy may require more targeted support to maintain motivation and develop a growth mindset. This is especially crucial in EFL environments where learners frequently face anxiety or low self-confidence, which can hinder consistent engagement (Usman & Kurniawati, 2021). Therefore, while a moderate score is a positive indicator of foundational belief, it also signals the need for pedagogical interventions that reinforce students' confidence, particularly through effort-based feedback, collaborative activities, and incremental skill-building strategies.

The results of this study align with previous research indicating that students' beliefs about their language capabilities significantly affect their engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes (Pajares, 2002; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006). These findings underscore the importance of creating English language learning environments that foster and reinforce students' positive self-beliefs, for instance through feedback, achievable challenges, and peer support.

Discussion

Self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in English language learning, as it influences how students approach challenges, persist through difficulties, and believe in their ability to succeed. Learners with high self-efficacy are typically more motivated, engaged, and resilient when facing complex language tasks. In this study, university students' self-efficacy in

learning English was examined through both their overall scores and specific belief patterns, with the findings interpreted in light of established theory and recent empirical research.

First, the study revealed that students' overall level of self-efficacy in English learning fell into the moderate category, with a mean score of 3.29 on a five-point scale. This suggests that while students generally believe in their ability to learn English, their confidence may not be strong or stable in more demanding situations. Bandura (1997) noted that individuals with moderate self-efficacy may exert effort but could falter when facing failure or setbacks. This aligns with findings from Wang et al. (2013), as well as more recent studies such as Rahmawati and Mulyono (2022), who observed that many EFL students in Indonesia experience fluctuating confidence levels due to limited exposure to authentic English use, test-oriented instruction, and anxiety. Moreover, cultural factors such as exam-driven learning environments and the collectivist emphasis on group performance over individual risk-taking may discourage students from taking initiative or persisting through difficulty (Tran, 2021; Wijaya, 2020).

Second, one of the most encouraging findings was that the highest-scoring item was “I can improve my English ability if I try hard enough.” This response reflects a strong effort belief, signaling that students see improvement as a product of personal effort. This aligns with Bandura's (2006) notion of personal agency, and with Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory, where learners believe that abilities are malleable rather than fixed. Such beliefs are foundational to self-regulated learning (SRL), as students who see effort as productive are more likely to set goals, monitor progress, and sustain motivation (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). In recent Indonesian EFL studies, such as by Sari and Subekti (2020), effort belief was found to significantly predict students' persistence in writing tasks. Similarly, Li and Liu (2021) reported that EFL learners with higher self-regulation skills tend to display stronger academic resilience and better outcomes in vocabulary retention and writing tasks.

However, the presence of low-scoring items—notably “I believe I will always be poor in English no matter what I do”—reveals that some students hold persistent negative or fixed beliefs about their English ability. While only a subset of students agreed with this item, its existence warrants concern. Negative self-beliefs may stem from prior learning experiences marked by repeated failure, lack of encouragement, or punitive feedback systems that emphasize performance over progress (Pajares, 2003; Mahmud & Nur, 2021). Such beliefs can fuel language anxiety, reduce risk-taking, and diminish learner autonomy (Horwitz, 2016). Recent findings by Syafryadin and Fitrawati (2022) show that Indonesian students

often feel discouraged due to fear of making mistakes in front of peers or being evaluated harshly by instructors, leading to self-defeating attitudes.

To move beyond the descriptive level, we must ask: Why do some students develop strong self-efficacy while others internalize limiting beliefs? Factors may include prior success/failure, the type of teacher feedback received, peer influence, and institutional emphasis on grades over learning. In many Indonesian classrooms, a strong focus on exam preparation limits students' opportunity to explore language use meaningfully, affecting their confidence in real-life communication (Yanti & Nugroho, 2021). Moreover, students who have not been trained in metacognitive strategies or autonomous learning may rely heavily on external validation, making them vulnerable when faced with independent learning challenges (Afidah & Yuliana, 2023).

The recognition of effort as a path to improvement is a powerful strength, but it must be supported by instructional practices that nurture learner autonomy, strategic learning, and positive emotional experiences in the classroom. English lecturers can play a key role by providing process-oriented feedback, modeling strategic behavior, and offering frequent low-stakes opportunities for students to succeed. Furthermore, incorporating reflective tasks, peer support, and self-assessment activities can help students build both confidence and ownership of their learning (Putri et al., 2023; Pratiwi & Fauzan, 2021).

Lastly, pedagogical implications must be considered. Teachers should avoid over-relying on summative tests and instead emphasize continuous formative feedback. Promoting safe classroom environments, collaborative activities, and the normalization of mistakes as part of learning can gradually shift students away from fear-based mindsets toward more empowered, self-regulated learners. Integrating self-efficacy-enhancing strategies into language instruction, such as goal-setting workshops, modeling successful strategies, and explicitly teaching SRL techniques, can foster long-term learner development (Widodo, 2021; Ningsih & Subekti, 2022).

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on self-efficacy in EFL contexts by providing insight into the beliefs of Indonesian university students enrolled in a General English course. The findings underscore both promising trends—such as students' strong belief in the power of effort—and areas that require attention, particularly the presence of fixed or negative beliefs among some learners. These insights have important implications for classroom practice, suggesting the need for pedagogical strategies that not only build language skills but also actively promote self-efficacy, learner autonomy, and

emotional resilience. Future research could explore longitudinal interventions aimed at enhancing self-efficacy and examine how demographic or contextual factors further shape students' beliefs over time. By fostering environments that encourage growth, reflection, and persistence, English lecturers can play a pivotal role in helping students transform their mindset and achieve greater success in language learning.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, this study revealed that university students generally possess a moderate level of self-efficacy in learning English. While they show strong belief in the role of effort and persistence, indicating potential for growth, some still hold negative or fixed beliefs about their English abilities. This highlights the need for supportive learning environments that foster positive mindsets and learner autonomy. Enhancing students' self-efficacy is essential to improving motivation, engagement, and overall achievement in English learning. To respond to these findings, lecturers and curriculum designers are encouraged to apply practical strategies such as mastery-based feedback, goal-setting activities, and reflective learning journals to build students' confidence and metacognitive skills. Classrooms should be structured to reduce fear of failure, promote collaboration, and normalize mistakes as part of the learning process. While this study used self-reported data and a cross-sectional design, future research could explore self-efficacy development through longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights and support more targeted interventions.

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