



Academic Self-Concept and Reading Literacy of Grade 8 Learners

Ms. Joseph Claire D Celerinos

Graduate School, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between academic self-concept and reading literacy among grade 8 learners in Cluster 2 secondary schools in the Division of Davao City. A quantitative, descriptive-correlational design was employed to examine the two dimensions of academic self-concept: academic confidence and academic effort, and their connection to five domains of reading literacy: literal, inferential, critical, creative, and applied comprehension. Findings revealed that learners generally exhibited moderate to high levels of academic self-concept. Students expressed confidence in collaborative settings and in the belief that effort leads to academic success, yet demonstrated lower confidence in competitive and leadership-related academic tasks. Their academic effort was found to be highly extensive, particularly in striving to pass subjects and attentively participating in class activities. In reading literacy, learners showed strong competence in literal and inferential comprehension but faced challenges in applied, critical, and creative domains. These results suggest the need for instructional strategies that strengthen higher-order thinking and real-world application of reading skills. The study established a strong, positive relationship between academic self-concept and reading literacy. Both academic confidence and academic effort significantly influenced learners' reading performance, indicating that motivational beliefs are closely tied to literacy development.

Introduction

Reading literacy is a foundational skill that plays a vital role in learners' academic development and lifelong learning. However, many Grade 8 learners in Philippine public secondary schools demonstrate varying levels of reading comprehension and confidence. While some actively engage with texts and exhibit strong understanding, others appear disengaged or struggle with basic comprehension. This discrepancy in performance prompted the present study, which investigates how students' perceptions of their academic abilities, referred to as *academic self-concept*, relate to their reading literacy.

Academic self-concept, defined as a learner's self-perception of their competence and effort in academic tasks, has been widely acknowledged in international research as a key predictor of academic motivation and performance. Marsh and Martin (2020) emphasized that a strong academic self-concept contributes to improved motivation and academic achievement, especially in language-related areas. Studies by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) in the United States and Arens et al. (2021) in Australia further confirm that students who view themselves as capable learners tend to perform better in reading tasks.

Globally, countries such as Finland and Indonesia have produced similar findings. Lerkkanen et al. (2019) found that fostering a positive academic self-concept early on supports long-term reading success. In Indonesia, Wiriawan (2023) and Kusumawardana & Akhriyah (2022) observed that students with a higher academic self-concept utilize more effective reading strategies, enhancing comprehension and vocabulary



acquisition. These international studies underscore the universal relevance of academic self-concept in developing literacy skills.

In the Philippine context, significant challenges in reading literacy persist despite efforts to improve reading programs. The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), released in 2019, reported that the Philippines ranked lowest in reading literacy among 79 participating countries. Regional studies, such as those by Pocaan et al. (2022), De Guzman et al. (2023), and Cabural & Infantado (2023), highlight that poor reading performance is often associated with students' low academic confidence and limited instructional support.

Specifically, in Cluster 3 of the Davao City Division, initial teacher observations indicate that many Grade 8 learners struggle with reading comprehension and demonstrate low confidence in their academic abilities. Even when materials are available, students often hesitate to participate in discussions or express understanding. Although reading programs are being implemented, there is a lack of concrete data examining the relationship between academic self-concept and reading literacy in this local setting.

This study aims to address that gap by exploring the connection between academic self-concept and reading literacy among Grade 8 learners. Unlike previous studies that have examined these variables independently, this research seeks to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the two within the specific context of Philippine public schools. By understanding this relationship, educators and curriculum developers can design interventions that are not only cognitively effective but also support learners' affective and motivational needs.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of academic self-concept of Grade 8 learners in terms of:
 - 1.1. Academic confidence; and
 - 1.2. Academic effort?
2. What is the extent of reading literacy of Grade 8 learners in terms of:
 - 2.1. Literal understanding;
 - 2.2. Inferential approach;
 - 2.3. Critical assessment;
 - 2.4. Creative interpretation; and
 - 2.5. Applied knowledge?
3. Is there a significant relationship between academic self-concept and reading literacy of Grade 8 learners?
4. What variables of academic self-concept significantly influence the reading literacy of Grade 8 learners?

To address these questions, the following null hypotheses of the study were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between the academic self-concept and reading literacy of Grade 8 learners.

Ho2: No domains of academic self-concept significantly influence the reading literacy of Grade 8 learners.

This study contributes to the broader field of psychology of learning and language education by clarifying how learners' self-perceptions influence their reading performance. The findings aim to help learners become more aware of how academic confidence and effort impact their reading literacy. Teachers may also gain insight into designing instructional strategies that boost self-confidence and encourage effort. For DepEd and curriculum planners, the study offers a framework for creating programs that integrate



affective and cognitive development. Lastly, this research may serve as a foundation for future academic inquiries, encouraging further exploration into self-concept and literacy across different contexts.

Methodology

This study made use of a quantitative non-experimental design utilizing the descriptive-correlational method. Descriptive correlational studies describe the variables and the relationships that occur naturally between and among them. The study variables are classified as independent (predictor) and dependent (outcome). Further, descriptive research attempts to describe, explain, and interpret conditions. This method is used to gather relatively limited data from a relatively large number of cases involving the variables. The purpose of this method is to gather information about prevailing conditions and characteristics of the variable under study (Ary, 2019).

It is for this purpose that the chosen research method was employed, as it aligned with the primary objective of the study, that is, to examine and determine the significance of the relationship between two key variables: academic self-efficacy and reading literacy. The focus of this investigation centered specifically on Grade 8 learners within Cluster 2 of the Division of Davao City, Region XI. By exploring how students' beliefs in their academic capabilities relate to their performance in various domains of reading literacy, the study aimed to generate insights that may inform instructional practices and support interventions designed to enhance both self-efficacy and reading literacy among junior high school learners.

Research Design and Respondents

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive-correlational design to determine the relationship between academic self-efficacy and reading literacy among Grade 8 learners. The study was conducted in Cluster 2 secondary schools within the Division of Davao City during the school year 2022–2023.

A total of 101 Grade 8 students participated in the study. These respondents were selected from five secondary schools within the cluster. To ensure representativeness and reduce sampling bias, simple random sampling was employed through the fishbowl technique. This method involved placing the names of all eligible Grade 8 learners from each school in a container and drawing them randomly without replacement until the target number per school was reached. This approach ensured that each student had an equal chance of being selected, thus preserving the objectivity and generalizability of the findings.

Research Instruments

Due to the absence of standardized tools measuring the specific variables of this study, a researcher-made instrument was developed, drawing upon extensive review of relevant literature, previous studies, and theoretical frameworks.

The instrument comprised two parts. Part 1 measured the independent variable, academic self-efficacy, which included two key indicators: *academic confidence* and *academic effort*. Each indicator consisted of five (5) items, translated into Filipino to facilitate respondents' comprehension, while part 2 assessed the dependent variable, reading literacy, which was measured through five (5) indicators: *literal understanding*, *inferential approach*, *critical assessment*, *creative interpretation*, and *applied knowledge*. Each indicator also included five (5) items. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate all items, with the following interpretations:

Academic Self-Efficacy Scale

Range of Means Scale Descriptive Equivalent Interpretation			
4.21 – 5.00	5	Very Highly Extensive	The trait is always manifested and observed.
3.41 – 4.20	4	Highly Extensive	The trait is often manifested and observed.
2.60 – 3.40	3	Moderately Extensive	The trait is sometimes manifested and observed.
1.80 – 2.59	2	Less Extensive	The trait is rarely manifested and observed.
1.00 – 1.79	1	Not Extensive	The trait is almost never manifested and observed.

Reading Literacy Scale

Mean Range	Score Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
90 – 100	Very Highly Extensive	Learners demonstrate a very high level of reading mastery.
85 – 89	Highly Extensive	Learners demonstrate a high level of reading mastery.
80 – 84	Moderately Extensive	Learners demonstrate an adequate level of mastery.
75 – 79	Less Extensive	Learners show a low level of reading mastery.
Below 75	Not Extensive	Learners display very low reading literacy skills.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

To ensure the validity of the instrument, content validation was carried out. Three expert validators in the field of education reviewed the tool based on the following criteria: (1) clarity and direction of items (vocabulary, structure, conceptual level); (2) presentation and organization; (3) suitability and appropriateness to research objectives; (4) adequacy of items per category (5) attainment of purpose; (6) objectivity; and (7) appropriateness of the rating scale.

Each validator was provided with the literature foundation of the instrument, a copy of the instrument, and an evaluation form based on the graduate school standard. Based on their feedback, appropriate revisions were made, and the instrument received an average rating of "very satisfactory." To test reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested with 30 Grade 8 students from a school outside the target population. Using Cronbach's Alpha, Instrument A (Academic Self-Efficacy) yielded a coefficient of 0.990, and Instrument B (Reading Literacy) yielded 0.963, both indicating excellent internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Dean of the Graduate School, who endorsed the researcher's request to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao City. Following approval, the researcher coordinated directly with the PSDS and school principals to schedule data collection in a manner that would not disrupt classes or school activities. The researcher personally administered and retrieved the instruments. Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout, including: (1) Adherence to Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) Distribution and explanation of informed consent and assent forms to ensure participants' understanding and voluntary participation; (3) Assurance of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity in handling the data.

(4) After the instruments were retrieved, the responses were tallied, encoded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, the following statistical tools were employed:

- **Mean** – Used to determine the overall extent of academic self-efficacy and reading literacy. It provides the arithmetic average of the responses for each indicator and variable.
- **Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r)** – Utilized to determine the **strength and direction of the relationship** between academic self-efficacy and reading literacy. Pearson's r is particularly suited for examining linear correlations between two continuous variables.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis** – Applied to assess the **predictive influence** of academic self-efficacy indicators (academic confidence and effort) on reading literacy. This method provided a more detailed understanding of the individual contribution of each indicator while controlling for the effects of others.

These statistical tools were selected for their appropriateness in addressing the research questions and in providing evidence-based conclusions about the correlation and predictive relationships between the study variables.

Results and Discussion

Extent of Academic Self-Concept of Grade 8 Learners

Tables 1 and 2 present the extent to which Grade 8 learners from Cluster 2 secondary schools in the Division of Davao City manifest academic self-concept, specifically in terms of academic confidence and academic effort.

Academic Confidence

Table 1 shows the respondents' level of academic confidence, measured through five items. The overall mean score of 3.22 (SD = 0.59) indicates a moderately extensive level of academic confidence.

Table 1. Extent of Academic Self-Concept of Grade 8 Learners in Terms of Academic Confidence

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Description
1	I can follow the lectures easily.	3.77	0.55	Highly Extensive
2	I am able to help my classmates in our school work.	3.94	0.70	Highly Extensive
3	If I work hard, I can get better grades.	3.92	0.71	Highly Extensive
4	I am able to do better than my friends in most activities.	2.21	0.57	Less Extensive
5	I can lead groups effectively.	2.23	0.41	Less Extensive
Overall		3.22	0.59	Moderately Extensive

The highest mean was recorded for “I am able to help my classmates in our school work” ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.70$), followed closely by “If I work hard, I can get better grades” ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.71$), both rated highly extensive. This suggests that the learners show confidence in collaboration and in the belief that effort leads to academic success. These findings are consistent with Kelly and Johnston (2021) and Usher

and Pajares (2021), who highlighted the positive influence of collaboration and effort on academic confidence.

Conversely, the items “I am able to do better than my friends in most activities” and “I can lead groups effectively” scored the lowest, both rated as less extensive. This reflects a hesitation in leadership and peer comparison, consistent with Dela Cruz and Santos (2023), who reported that Filipino students often show lower confidence in competitive and leadership contexts due to limited reinforcement in these areas.

These results confirm the assertion of Marsh and Craven (2020) that academic self-concept is shaped by peer relationships, classroom dynamics, and prior academic experiences. It is evident that learners are more confident in cooperative and effort-based tasks than in individual leadership roles.

Academic Effort

Table 2 presents learners’ responses related to academic effort. The overall mean of 3.46 (SD = 0.73) suggests a highly extensive manifestation of academic effort.

Table 2. Extent of Academic Self-Concept of Grade 8 Learners in Terms of Academic Effort

No.	Items	Mean	SD	Description
1	I often do my coursework without thinking.	3.55	0.59	Highly Extensive
2	I pay attention to the teachers during class.	3.91	0.55	Highly Extensive
3	I study hard for my tests.	3.54	0.97	Highly Extensive
4	I am usually interested in my coursework.	2.23	0.71	Less Extensive
5	I do my best to pass all the courses this grading period.	4.06	0.82	Highly Extensive
Overall		3.46	0.73	Highly Extensive

The item “I do my best to pass all the courses this grading period” had the highest mean ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.82$), indicating strong commitment to academic success. This aligns with Santos and Velasco (2023), who noted that learners with strong academic effort show greater motivation and self-regulation.

Meanwhile, the item “I am usually interested in my coursework” received the lowest rating ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.71$), reflecting less extensive interest in academic tasks. This gap between effort and interest is consistent with findings by Garcia and Reyes (2020) and Müller and Seidel (2023), who highlighted that learners may exert effort due to external pressure, despite low intrinsic motivation.

Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of fostering not just academic diligence but also interest and intrinsic motivation, which are key to sustaining meaningful learning (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Extent of Reading Literacy of Grade 8 Learners

Table 3 summarizes the reading literacy performance of Grade 8 learners across five domains. The overall mean score was 82.84 (SD = 16.83), categorized as moderately extensive.

Table 3. Reading Literacy of Grade 8 Learners

No.	Domain	Mean	SD	Description
1	Literal Understanding	86.26	13.05	Highly Extensive
2	Inferential Approach	85.02	12.38	Highly Extensive

No.	Domain	Mean	SD	Description
3	Critical Assessment	83.17	18.63	Moderately Extensive
4	Creative Interpretation	80.53	20.15	Moderately Extensive
5	Applied Knowledge	79.21	19.92	Less Extensive
Overall		82.84	16.83	Moderately Extensive

The learners performed best in literal comprehension ($M = 86.26$), indicating a strong ability to identify explicitly stated information. This supports Cain and Oakhill's (2020) view that literal comprehension is the foundation of reading literacy. However, lower performance in applied comprehension ($M = 79.21$) suggests difficulty in transferring reading skills to practical, real-world situations. Galang and Dacillo (2023) similarly found that Filipino students often struggle to apply classroom reading skills in everyday tasks.

Performance in inferential and critical comprehension was moderately strong, but variability suggests inconsistent instruction in higher-order reading skills (Magliano et al., 2022; Gatcho & Bautista, 2019). Learners also showed challenges in creative interpretation, which may stem from limited opportunities for open-ended, imaginative reading tasks (Alghonaim, 2020).

These findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive reading program that targets both foundational and higher-order comprehension, especially in applied and creative domains (Afflerbach et al., 2018).

Relationship Between Academic Self-Concept and Reading Literacy

Table 4 presents the relationship between academic self-concept and reading literacy. The computed Pearson $r = 0.96$, with a p -value = 0.01, indicates a very high positive and statistically significant correlation.

Table 4. Significant Relationship Between Academic Self-Concept and Reading Literacy

Variables	r-value	Degree of Correlation	p-value	Decision on Ho
Academic Self-Concept and Reading Literacy	0.96	Very High	0.01	Rejected

This means that as academic self-concept increases, reading literacy tends to improve. The result aligns with the findings of Afflerbach et al. (2018) and Cain & Oakhill (2020), who assert that motivation and self-perception significantly influence reading outcomes. Learners who believe in their abilities are more likely to approach reading tasks enthusiastically and resilient.

In the Philippine context, Gatcho and Bautista (2019) and Galang and Dacillo (2023) confirmed that learners with strong academic self-beliefs perform better across reading domains, particularly in comprehension and application. Thus, strengthening self-concept is essential in improving reading literacy outcomes.

Academic Self-Concept Variables That Influence Reading Literacy

Table 5 shows the influence of academic confidence and academic effort on reading literacy using multiple regression analysis. Both indicators showed significant contributions.

Table 5. Variables of Academic Self-concept that Significantly Influence the Reading Literacy of Grade 8 Learners

Indicators	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i> -ratio	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<i>Constant</i>	β_0	3.37	0.44	21.00	0.01
Academic Confidence	β_1	0.56	0.94	29.09	0.02
Academic Effort	β_2	0.58	0.47	6.20	0.01

Both academic confidence ($p = 0.02$) and academic effort ($p = 0.01$) significantly influenced reading literacy. This reinforces the view of Afflerbach et al. (2018) that reading success stems not only from cognitive strategies but also from non-cognitive factors like belief systems and motivation.

Cain and Oakhill (2020) emphasized that academic belief enhances comprehension, while Lee and Yoon (2021) linked academic self-concept to improved creativity and critical engagement. These findings affirm that learners' self-concept serves as both a driver and product of academic success.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that academic self-concept, particularly academic confidence and academic effort, has a significant and positive relationship with the reading literacy of Grade 8 learners. Students who believe in their academic abilities and who exert consistent effort tend to perform better in reading tasks across various domains. While learners displayed moderately extensive academic confidence and highly extensive academic effort, their confidence was stronger in collaborative and goal-driven tasks but weaker in leadership and competitive situations.

In terms of reading literacy, learners showed strengths in literal and inferential comprehension but faced challenges in applied and creative tasks, highlighting the need for more contextualized and higher-order literacy instruction. The statistical analysis confirmed a very high positive correlation between academic self-concept and reading literacy, leading to the rejection of the null hypotheses. These findings align with the Self-Concept Model (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), emphasizing that self-beliefs are central to motivation, effort, and academic success.

Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations are advanced for the key stakeholders in the education sector. For the learners, it is important to cultivate a stronger academic self-concept by developing purposeful study habits, setting realistic goals, and maintaining a positive learning attitude. Learners are also encouraged to actively participate in reading activities, seek support from teachers and peers, and relate academic experiences to real-life contexts to further strengthen both their confidence and reading comprehension.

For the teachers, it is recommended to foster inclusive and motivating classroom environments that build learners' belief in their abilities. This may be achieved by integrating goal-oriented reading tasks, contextualized group activities, and varied assessment tools that address the diverse needs and strengths of learners.



For school administrators and DepEd officials, it is essential to design and implement programs that support both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. These include reading intervention initiatives, literacy enhancement programs, and the provision of adequate resources to sustain learner engagement. Moreover, professional development programs for teachers should be prioritized to ensure that instructional practices remain aligned with the needs of diverse learners, particularly in promoting academic effort and reading proficiency.

Lastly, for future researchers, it is recommended to extend investigations into different contexts and populations to validate and broaden the understanding of the relationship between academic self-concept and reading literacy. Exploring additional variables such as socio-cultural influences, instructional strategies, and family involvement would provide a more comprehensive perspective. In addition, employing longitudinal or qualitative research designs may yield deeper insights into the development of learners' self-beliefs and their long-term impact on academic performance.

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