

Reading Self-Efficacy as a Predictor of Argumentative Text Comprehension among Indonesian Elementary Students

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ABSTRACT

Reading self-efficacy is an important psychological factor in reading; however, its role in comprehending cognitively demanding texts, particularly argumentative texts, remains relatively underexplored among elementary school students. This study examined whether reading self-efficacy predicts argumentative text comprehension among fifth-grade elementary school students. A quantitative predictive correlational design was employed involving 120 fifth-grade students from five elementary schools in Surakarta, Indonesia, selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected using a 25-item reading self-efficacy questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale and a 20-item multiple-choice argumentative text comprehension test. The data were analyzed using simple linear regression after normality and linearity requirements were examined. The results showed that reading self-efficacy positively and significantly predicted argumentative text comprehension ($B = .712$, $SE = .077$, $t = 9.19$, $p < .001$). The regression model explained 41.4% of the variance in argumentative text comprehension ($R^2 = .414$), indicating that higher reading self-efficacy was associated with better comprehension of argumentative texts. These findings highlight the relevance of reading self-efficacy to students' comprehension of cognitively demanding texts and suggest that literacy instruction should consider students' confidence in their reading abilities alongside cognitive reading skills. Further research involving more diverse samples and additional cognitive, linguistic, and motivational predictors is recommended.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading ability is one of the fundamental literacy skills that greatly determines students' academic success. In the context of basic education, reading is not only seen as the ability to recognize letters or words, but also as a complex cognitive process that involves understanding, interpreting, and evaluating the information contained in the text (Kritsotakis & Morfidi, 2024; Marwan et al., 2024; Paige et al., 2024). Through reading activities, students can gain new knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and expand their understanding of various phenomena in the surrounding environment (Fadilla & Pramudiani, 2023; Jannah & Mellliofatria, 2025).

In recent decades, reading literacy has become one of the main indicators of the quality of education in a country. Reading skills are no longer understood simply as the ability to recognize symbols or words, but also as the ability to construct meanings, interpret information, and evaluate ideas contained in texts. More broadly, general literacy, which includes literacy in reading, numeracy, science, and digital, is an essential competency that determines an individual's ability to adapt, actively participate in society, and face the challenges of the 21st century. In a society that is increasingly dominated by information flows, the ability to read deeply is an important foundation for the development of critical thinking skills, problem solving, and rational decision-making.

The importance of reading ability is reflected in various international literacy studies. Various international reports indicate that students' reading literacy remains a challenge in many education systems. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) consistently emphasizes that reading literacy includes the ability to understand, use, evaluate, and reflect on texts to achieve specific goals. Therefore, effective reading skills are not only related to literal comprehension, but also involve analytical and evaluative abilities.

Reading literacy in the study includes not only the ability to understand explicit information in texts, but also the ability to interpret, evaluate, and reflect on information contained in various types of texts (Gildore et al., 2025; Shaona, 2025). This ability is considered important because it enables students to develop knowledge, achieve learning goals, and actively participate in an information-based society (Gomes et al., 2024; Joressa et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Thus, reading skills not only play a role as a basic skill, but also as a foundation for the development of high-level thinking skills in students.

Literacy studies show that most students still have difficulty understanding texts that have complex structures, especially texts that demand information analysis and evaluation skills (Yang et al., 2018). The low level of understanding of complex texts is one of the main problems in learning to read, which has an impact on students' limited ability to process information in depth. This can be seen from various studies that have found that students often experience obstacles in identifying the main ideas, interpreting the meaning of reading, and understanding the information contained in the text in depth (Adam & Suin, 2026; Laia et al., 2024; Shi, 2018). This difficulty shows that students' reading ability is not only influenced by linguistic factors alone, but also influenced by various cognitive and affective factors that play a role in the process of understanding texts.

One type of text that requires high-level thinking skills is argumentative texts. Argumentative texts are texts that aim to convince readers through the presentation of opinions accompanied by logical reasons and evidence (Rahmi, 2025; Wulandari & Adri, 2025). In argumentative texts, readers are not only required to understand the content of the text literally, but must also be able to identify claims, analyze the relationship between reason and evidence, and evaluate the strength of the arguments presented by the author (Yunus & Hartati, 2022). Therefore, understanding argumentative texts requires more complex reading skills compared to other types of texts.

In the context of basic education, the development of reading skills has a very important role because at this stage, students begin to develop the ability to understand different types of texts that have different communication structures and objectives. One type of text that has an important role in the development of critical thinking skills is argumentative texts. Argumentative texts are texts that aim to convince readers through the presentation of opinions accompanied by logical reasons and evidence.

Understanding argumentative texts requires more complex reading skills compared to other types of texts. The reader needs to be able to identify the main claims made by the author, understand the reasons used to support the claims, and evaluate the strength of the arguments presented. This process involves high-level thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information. In practice, students often have difficulty distinguishing between facts and opinions, relating reasons to relevant evidence, as well as drawing logical conclusions from the argumentative texts they read.

However, various studies show that elementary school students often have difficulties when faced with texts that have an argumentative structure. These difficulties are not only related to limited linguistic ability, but also related to psychological factors that affect students' involvement in the reading process. One of the psychological factors that has an important role in reading learning is reading self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy acts as an internal driver that determines how students start reading activities, how much effort is given, and how far they survive when facing difficulties in understanding the text.

Self-efficacy according to Bandura in Saad et al. (2024) refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to carry out certain actions necessary to achieve a goal. In the context of reading learning, the concept of self-efficacy is known as reading self-efficacy. Reading self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to understand the text read and complete various reading tasks given (Sholihah & Juniardi, 2025; Yulian et al., 2023). According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy influences learning behavior through three main mechanisms, namely choice of activities, effort level, and persistence. In the context of reading, students with high self-efficacy tend to choose to engage in challenging reading tasks, use more effective strategies, and demonstrate better resilience in understanding complex texts. Students who have a high level of reading self-efficacy tend to show stronger motivation in reading, use more effective reading strategies, and have higher perseverance when dealing with difficult texts (Cho et al., 2021).

Various studies show that reading self-efficacy has a significant relationship with students' reading ability. Witri (2022) found that students who have a high level of self-efficacy tend to have better reading comprehension skills compared to students who have a low level of self-efficacy. This shows that confidence in one's abilities can affect the level of success of students in understanding the texts they read.

Other research has also shown that reading self-efficacy plays a role in increasing student involvement in reading activities. Students who have high self-efficacy tend to be more active in using reading strategies such as making predictions, identifying key ideas, and connecting new information with pre-existing knowledge (Peura et al., 2019). Thus, reading self-efficacy can be an important factor that affects the quality of students' reading comprehension.

However, the results of studies on the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading ability do not always show consistent results. Several studies have found that the influence of reading self-efficacy on reading ability is not always significant if it is not supported by other factors such as reading strategies, learning motivation, and students' vocabulary skills (Fitri et al., 2019). These findings suggest that the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading ability still needs more in-depth study.

In addition, most previous studies have examined the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading ability in general without paying attention to the characteristics of the type of text read by students. In fact, each type of text has different cognitive demands. Argumentative texts, for example, demand more complex information analysis and evaluation skills compared to narrative or descriptive texts.

Research on reading self-efficacy in elementary school students is also still more focused on the aspect of reading motivation in general. Meanwhile, studies that specifically examine the role of reading self-efficacy in understanding argumentative texts are still relatively limited, especially in the context of basic education in Indonesia. In fact, the ability to understand argumentative texts has an important role in supporting the development of students' critical thinking skills.

The limitations of previous research show that there are research gaps that need to be studied further. Until now, there have been few studies that have specifically examined the role of reading self-efficacy as a predictor of argumentative reading comprehension ability in elementary school students. In fact, understanding the psychological factors that affect students' reading ability is very important to develop a more effective literacy learning strategy.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the role of reading self-efficacy as a predictor of argumentative reading comprehension ability in elementary school students. This research is expected to contribute to the development of reading literacy studies, especially in understanding the role of psychological factors in the reading comprehension process. In addition, the results of this research are also expected to be the basis for the development of more effective reading learning strategies in improving the literacy skills of elementary school students.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a predictive correlational design to examine the role of reading self-efficacy in predicting argumentative text comprehension among fifth-grade elementary school students. Reading self-efficacy was treated as the predictor variable, while argumentative text comprehension was treated as the outcome variable. This design was selected because the study aimed to examine the predictive relationship between the two variables without manipulating the conditions experienced by the participants.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population consisted of fifth-grade elementary school students from five schools in Surakarta, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. A total of 120 fifth-grade students participated in the study. The participants were selected using a cluster random sampling technique.

The use of cluster random sampling was intended to facilitate participant selection across the participating schools while capturing variation within the educational context represented by the sample. Because the participants were drawn from five schools within a single geographical area, the findings of this study should be interpreted within the context and characteristics of the sampled population.

2.3 Research Instruments

Data were collected using two instruments: a reading self-efficacy questionnaire and an argumentative text comprehension test.

2.3.1 Reading Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

Reading self-efficacy was measured using a 25-item questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was used to assess students' beliefs in their ability to perform reading-related tasks. Higher questionnaire scores represented higher levels of reading self-efficacy.

Before data collection, the questionnaire underwent an expert validation process to evaluate the appropriateness of the items in relation to the construct being measured. The validation was conducted by two experts in language education and reading literacy. The expert validation focused on the relevance and correspondence of the questionnaire items to the intended indicators of reading self-efficacy.

2.3.2 Argumentative Text Comprehension Test

Argumentative text comprehension was measured using a 20-item multiple-choice test. The test assessed students' ability to identify main ideas, understand arguments, identify supporting evidence, and draw conclusions from argumentative texts. Higher test scores indicated better argumentative text comprehension.

Before being administered to the participants, the test underwent expert validation by two experts in language education and reading literacy. The validation process was conducted to ensure that the test items corresponded to the intended indicators of argumentative text comprehension.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted using the reading self-efficacy questionnaire and the argumentative text comprehension test. The data collection process consisted of two stages. In the first stage, students completed the reading self-efficacy questionnaire to obtain information about their beliefs in their reading abilities. In the second stage, students completed the argumentative text comprehension test to measure their ability to comprehend argumentative texts.

The scores obtained from the questionnaire and comprehension test were subsequently compiled and prepared for statistical analysis. The reading self-efficacy questionnaire scores were used as the predictor variable, whereas the argumentative text comprehension test scores were used as the outcome variable.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the characteristics of the research variables, while inferential analysis was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between reading self-efficacy and argumentative text comprehension.

Before conducting simple linear regression analysis, normality and linearity tests were performed as preliminary statistical procedures. The normality test was conducted to examine the distribution of the data, while the linearity test was used to determine whether the relationship between reading self-efficacy and argumentative text comprehension could be appropriately represented by a linear model.

After the preliminary requirements were met, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether reading self-efficacy significantly predicted students' argumentative text comprehension. Statistical significance was determined at an alpha level of .05. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to determine the proportion of variance in argumentative text comprehension explained by reading self-efficacy.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the participating schools and classroom teachers. Student participation was voluntary, and the identities of the participants were kept confidential. All data collected during the study were used solely for research purposes.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The analysis was conducted to examine whether reading self-efficacy significantly predicted argumentative text comprehension among fifth-grade elementary school students. Before conducting the simple linear regression analysis, normality and linearity tests were performed. The results of the assumption tests and regression analysis are presented below.

3.1.1 Normality Test

A normality test was conducted before the regression analysis. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Normality Test

Variable	Statistic	<i>p</i>	Interpretation
Reading self-efficacy	.071	.200	Normally distributed
Argumentative text comprehension	.065	.200	Normally distributed

As shown in Table 1, the significance values for reading self-efficacy and argumentative text comprehension were both .200, exceeding the significance level of .05. Based on the normality test reported in this study, the data met the normality criterion used for the subsequent analysis.

3.1.2 Linearity Test

A linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between reading self-efficacy and argumentative text comprehension could be appropriately represented by a linear model. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Linearity Test

Relationship	Linearity, p	Deviation from Linearity, p	Interpretation
Reading self-efficacy → Argumentative text comprehension	< .001	.428	Linear

As presented in Table 2, the linearity component was statistically significant ($p < .001$), while the deviation from linearity was not statistically significant ($p = .428$). These results indicate that the relationship between reading self-efficacy and argumentative text comprehension met the linearity criterion. Therefore, simple linear regression analysis was subsequently conducted.

3.1.3 Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether reading self-efficacy significantly predicted students' argumentative text comprehension. The regression coefficients are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Constant	21.348	4.217	5.06	< .001
Reading self-efficacy	.712	.077	9.19	< .001

As shown in Table 3, reading self-efficacy was a positive and statistically significant predictor of argumentative text comprehension ($B = .712$, $SE = .077$, $t = 9.19$, $p < .001$). The positive regression coefficient indicates that higher reading self-efficacy scores were associated with higher argumentative text comprehension scores.

The model summary is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Model Summary of the Simple Linear Regression

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error of the Estimate
.643	.414	.408	7.81

As shown in Table 4, the regression model yielded an R value of .643 and an R^2 value of .414. Thus, reading self-efficacy accounted for 41.4% of the variance in argumentative text comprehension among the students included in this study. The remaining 58.6% of the variance was not explained by the predictor included in the present model. Overall, the results indicate that reading self-efficacy was positively and significantly associated with argumentative text comprehension and served as a significant predictor within the regression model.

3.2 Discussion

The main finding of this study indicates that reading self-efficacy positively and significantly predicted argumentative text comprehension among fifth-grade elementary school students. The regression model explained 41.4% of the variance in argumentative text comprehension, suggesting that students' beliefs in their reading capabilities are meaningfully associated with their ability to comprehend argumentative texts. This finding is particularly relevant because argumentative texts require readers not only to understand explicit information but also to identify claims, relate reasons to supporting evidence, and evaluate the arguments presented in the text (Yunus & Hartati, 2022). Thus,

the present findings suggest that reading self-efficacy is relevant not only to general reading performance but also to comprehension tasks that involve relatively complex cognitive demands.

The positive relationship between reading self-efficacy and argumentative text comprehension can be understood through the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their capability to perform the actions required to achieve particular goals (Saad et al., 2024). In reading contexts, self-efficacy reflects students' beliefs that they are capable of understanding texts and successfully completing reading tasks (Sholihah & Juniardi, 2025; Yulian et al., 2023). From this theoretical perspective, students who have stronger beliefs in their reading capabilities may be more willing to engage with challenging reading tasks and persist when encountering comprehension difficulties. Previous research has similarly indicated that students with higher self-efficacy tend to demonstrate stronger motivation and persistence when dealing with learning challenges (Ratuela et al., 2022). These characteristics may be particularly relevant when students read argumentative texts because comprehending such texts requires sustained attention to claims, reasons, evidence, and relationships among ideas.

The findings are consistent with previous studies reporting positive relationships between reading self-efficacy and reading-related outcomes. Peura et al. (2019), for example, demonstrated the relevance of reading self-efficacy to reading development among primary school children and emphasized the importance of considering the specificity of self-efficacy beliefs. Similarly, Witri (2022) reported an association between self-efficacy and reading comprehension, while Shaona (2025) identified self-efficacy as an important factor related to students' reading achievement. More recent research has also demonstrated that self-efficacy is associated with students' engagement in reading activities (Li et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies support the present finding that students' beliefs about their reading capabilities are meaningfully related to reading performance. The present study extends this line of research by focusing specifically on argumentative text comprehension among elementary school students rather than treating reading comprehension solely as a general construct.

The finding can also be considered in relation to the strategic demands involved in successful reading comprehension. Effective comprehension requires students to actively process information rather than merely recognize words or retrieve explicit information. Peura et al. (2019) showed that reading self-efficacy is relevant to reading development, while Yulian et al. (2023) highlighted the relationship among self-efficacy, attitudes, and self-regulated learning in reading. In argumentative reading, such active engagement may be particularly important because students need to distinguish central claims from supporting information and construct relationships among ideas. Nevertheless, the present study did not directly measure students' reading strategies, persistence, or engagement. Therefore, these mechanisms should be regarded as theoretically plausible explanations supported by previous literature rather than as direct empirical findings of the present study.

Although the findings are consistent with much of the previous literature, the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension should not be interpreted as independent of other factors. Fitri et al. (2019) indicated that the relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension needs to be considered alongside other factors involved in reading performance. Reading comprehension itself is a complex process involving linguistic and cognitive abilities (Kritsotakis & Morfidi, 2024), while critical thinking also contributes to deeper reading comprehension (Paige et al., 2024). Consequently, the 41.4% variance explained by reading self-efficacy in the present model does not imply that self-efficacy alone determines students' argumentative text comprehension. Rather, the unexplained variance indicates that additional linguistic, cognitive, motivational, and contextual variables may contribute to students' performance.

The contribution of this study lies particularly in its text-specific and educational context. Previous research on reading self-efficacy has frequently examined general reading comprehension, reading achievement, or reading engagement (Peura et al., 2019; Witri, 2022; Shaona, 2025; Li et al., 2025). In contrast, the present study focuses on argumentative text comprehension among elementary school students in Indonesia. This distinction is important because different text types impose different comprehension demands. Argumentative texts require readers to recognize positions, understand

relationships between claims and evidence, and evaluate the logical organization of information (Yunus & Hartati, 2022). By demonstrating a significant predictive relationship in this context, the findings provide empirical support for considering reading self-efficacy when examining students' comprehension of cognitively demanding texts at the elementary school level.

From an educational perspective, the findings suggest that literacy instruction may benefit from considering students' beliefs about their reading capabilities alongside the development of cognitive reading skills. Social Cognitive Theory proposes that self-efficacy can develop through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states (Wahyuni & Fitriani, 2022). In classroom practice, teachers may therefore provide appropriately challenging reading tasks, gradual scaffolding, constructive feedback, and opportunities for students to experience successful comprehension of increasingly complex texts. Such practices are theoretically relevant to strengthening students' confidence when approaching challenging reading activities. However, because this study employed a predictive correlational design rather than an experimental design, the findings do not establish that increasing reading self-efficacy will directly cause improvements in argumentative text comprehension. Intervention studies are needed to test this possibility.

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of considering psychological factors in understanding elementary students' reading comprehension while also recognizing that reading performance is multidimensional. Reading self-efficacy emerged as a significant predictor of argumentative text comprehension, but it represents only one component of the broader set of factors associated with successful reading. Future research could therefore examine reading self-efficacy together with vocabulary knowledge, metacognitive reading strategies, reading interest, prior knowledge, and other relevant variables to develop a more comprehensive model of argumentative text comprehension. Such research could clarify both the direct and indirect pathways through which cognitive and motivational factors contribute to students' ability to understand complex texts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that reading self-efficacy significantly and positively predicted argumentative text comprehension among fifth-grade elementary school students, with the regression model explaining 41.4% of the variance in students' argumentative text comprehension ($R^2 = .414$). This finding indicates that students' beliefs in their reading capabilities are an important psychological factor associated with their ability to comprehend argumentative texts. However, the study was limited to 120 fifth-grade students from five elementary schools in one geographical area and examined reading self-efficacy as a single predictor, which limits the generalizability and explanatory scope of the findings. Future research should therefore involve larger and more diverse samples and incorporate additional predictors, such as vocabulary knowledge, metacognitive reading strategies, reading interest, and prior knowledge, to provide a more comprehensive explanation of argumentative text comprehension. Longitudinal, experimental, or mixed-methods studies are also recommended to further examine how reading self-efficacy relates to the development of argumentative text comprehension across different educational contexts.

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