

Exploring the Impact of Academic Resilience on Self-efficacy Among Iranian EFL University Learners

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Abstract

The psychological, social, and academic growth of students is crucial to a society's human capital and future development. Unfortunately, learning and mental health challenges can diminish a learner's productivity and creativity, sometimes leading to dropout and wider societal problems. Iranian students of English face significant stress due to poorly resourced classrooms and limited chances for genuine language practice. Therefore, identifying the factors that affect the academic success and psychological well-being of Iranian EFL students is critically important. Given the profound influence of psychological factors on academic performance, this article examines how academic resilience, which determines a student's capacity to confront challenges, affects the self-efficacy beliefs of Iranian university students learning English as a foreign language. This study is a literature review based on a comprehensive search of databases, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, PubMed, Wiley, and ISC. Using keywords related to self-efficacy, academic resilience, and EFL learners, we identified 90 English and Persian sources published between 1986 and 2024. After reviewing this content, 51 of the most relevant articles were selected for inclusion in this paper.

Keywords: Academic Resilience; English Foreign Language Learners; Psychological Capital; Self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Considering the importance of having a university education in today's society, and the increasing demand from universities to improve students' educational and academic performance. University education researchers

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are more and more seeking to study and investigate factors affecting academic progress and provide effective strategies to meet the academic and psycho-social needs of students, additionally, factors that can help students adapt to and cope with academic challenges and threats, it is one of the topics of interest in this field, therefore, according to the increasing problems and stresses in educational environments in today's era, it is important to prepare students to deal with difficult academic situations.

The growth and excellence of any society are directly related to the quality of its educated and knowledgeable generation. Students, as a young and knowledgeable force of society, play an irreplaceable role in the scientific, cultural, and economic progress of the country; therefore, investing in education and improving students' abilities is considered an investment for the future of the country.

One of the concepts that caused significant changes and the creation of effective research in various behavioral fields related to educational structures is positive psychology. One of its important concepts is psychological capital. Psychological capital refers to a positive state, a realistic and flexible approach to life that includes four components: Hope, optimism, resiliency, and self-efficacy (Mushtaqi & Moaydefar, 2017).

The process of learning a second language is a complex, dynamic, social, and unstable process. Second language refers to learning any language except the mother tongue. Learning English as a second language is different from learning other subjects. According to Hosseini, Rahimi, and Zare (2019), the significant structural differences between English and Persian sentence construction present a major learning obstacle. To comprehend English texts, students must first decode individual word meanings, then determine their syntactic relationships, and finally synthesize an overall understanding. This complex process can hinder acquisition. Furthermore, Iranian students encounter additional linguistic, cultural, and cognitive barriers that may diminish their sense of self-efficacy in learning English.

Research has shown that self-efficacy has a positive effect on language learning motivation and students' academic performance (Saboori Pour et al., 2021) and has an effective role in determining the amount of students' efforts in learning activities (Soleimani & Sayadi, 2022). It is also an effective factor in the direction of the goal of progress (Mushtaqi & Moaydefar, 2017).

Self-efficacy shows a person's general expectations of herself/himself, which makes her/his hope to achieve success and increases her/his self-esteem and will (Yadak, 2017). One of the aspects of self-efficacy is

academic self-efficacy, which refers to students' beliefs about their ability to complete academic assignments (Amiri & Samani, 2021). Academic self-efficacy is people's perception of a certain range of abilities to take necessary actions to achieve valuable goals (Khakpour et al., 2022). The feeling of confidence and belief in one's ability in the field of education promotes the overall motivation to overcome academic challenges and helps them to use all their strength to overcome academic challenges. Based on this, students with high academic self-concept can adapt to the problems in the educational environment and experience more success in completing school assignments (Grundy, 2005).

One of the factors affecting self-efficacy is resilience. Resilience is a normal construct and studied by positive psychology (May Jones, 2019). Academic resilience is defined as the comprehensive ability to respond constructively to the main obstacles that students face in different ways of reasoning and attitudes in facing academic problems and other life situations. Instead of focusing on challenges, they investigate and analyze the problem creatively. Also, they look at dangerous situations as an opportunity and take advantage of them. By relying on skills such as problem solving, resilient people can maintain their adaptability and mental health in difficult situations and when experiencing adverse emotions (Tamnai Far & Arbabi Ghahroodi, 2022).

Considering that, students are an important and vulnerable segment of the society, who are supposed to be responsible for providing and improving the health of the society in the future, therefore, their mental health is very important along with their academic progress, on the other hand, considering that research shows that psychological factors such as resilience and academic self-efficacy affect academic performance (Khakpour et al., 2022). And also, because in the research, the role of academic resilience on the academic self-efficacy of Iranian English language students has received less attention. The current research is designed to investigate the relationship between academic resilience and academic self-efficacy among EFL Iranian university students.

1.1. Concepts

1.1.1. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, a core concept of Bandura's social cognitive theory, refers to individuals' beliefs about their abilities to perform tasks, control situations, and achieve outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Mahna & Samani, 2017). It involves mobilizing cognitive, motivational, and volitional resources to adapt to challenges and persist in the face of difficulties (Takaki et al., 2003; Bandura et al., 2001). According to multiple studies,

individuals with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident and persistent when facing difficulties, leading to better performance. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid challenges, feel inadequate, and achieve less (Agha Youssefi et al., 2013; Tors & Selberg, 2001; Tahmasian, 2012; Amini & Samani, 2021).

Self-efficacy is multidimensional, encompassing academic, social, and emotional domains (Bandura et al., 2001). In academic contexts, it specifically refers to students' beliefs in their ability to complete learning tasks and achieve educational goals (Zimmerman, 2000; Pajares, 1996; Zajacova et al., 2005; Amini & Samani, 2021; Moll et al., 2016; Soleimani & Sayadi, 2022). Research confirms that academic self-efficacy strongly predicts effort, persistence, and academic outcomes, more so than general self-efficacy (Lindley & Bergen, 2002; Bong, 2001; Malten, Brown, & Lent, 1991). It enhances motivation, resilience, and effective use of knowledge, thus contributing to academic success and well-being (Bandura, 1995, 1997; Mushtakhi & Moidfar, 2016; Khakpour et al., 2022).

Students with high academic self-efficacy demonstrate persistence, enthusiasm, and effective coping strategies when facing academic challenges (Bandura, 1989; Stubbs & Maynard, 2017; Tamannai Far & Arabi Qahroodi, 2022). They approach difficulties as opportunities, organize their abilities efficiently, and achieve higher performance, while those with low self-efficacy often focus on weaknesses and experience anxiety or burnout (Baltes, Hoffman-Kipp, & Lynn, 2010; Soleimani & Sayyadi, 2022). Academic self-efficacy increases resilience and motivates learners to overcome obstacles, shaping cognition, attitudes, and behaviors toward success (Basharpour & Aini, 2022; Pour Taleb & Badr, 2022; Abdolrezapour et al., 2023; Rezaei & Najarpour, 2023; Galla et al., 2014).

1.1.2. Resilience

Resilience, a construct of positive psychology, is the ability to maintain mental health despite acute or chronic stressors and to return to balance after difficulties (Kalisch, Müller, & Tüscher, 2015; Basharpour & Aini, 2022). It involves active adaptation rather than passivity, enabling individuals to transform challenges into opportunities for growth (Sadooghi, 2018; Khakpour, Lotfnejad Afshar, & Dookanai Fard, 2022), and is characterized by healthy responses and recovery from stress (Pourtalab & Badri Gorgari, 2022).

In education, academic resilience refers to students' ability to manage academic pressures, persist, and succeed despite challenges (Basharpour

& Aini, 2023; Rudd et al., 2021; Pourtalab & Badri Gorgari, 2023). Closely linked to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), it enhances flexibility, motivation, and persistence (Kilmister, 2015). Approaches to studying it include psychological (individual traits), environmental (institutional and social factors), and social-interactive (peer and university relations) (Gashmardi & Boghiri, 2023). Ultimately, academic resilience fosters self-belief, confidence, and commitment, reducing fear of failure and improving performance (Sadooghi, 2018).

2. Method

This study employed a review design using a library research method. Sources were collected from reliable databases like Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, PubMed, Wiley, and ISC. The main keywords were “academic resilience”, “EFL learners”, “psychological capital”, and “self-efficacy”.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Studies published between 1986 to 2024 in English or Persian.
2. Peer-reviewed articles, books, or dissertations directly related to the relationship between self-efficacy and academic resilience.
3. Studies focusing on EFL/ESL learners or the broader student population in academic contexts.
4. Research with empirical data, clear theoretical frameworks, or systematic review methodology.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Articles not peer-reviewed (e.g., blogs, conference abstracts without full texts).
2. Studies outside the field of education or psychology (e.g., purely medical or unrelated clinical research).
3. Duplicate publications of the same study.
4. Papers with insufficient methodological rigor or lacking relevance to academic resilience/self-efficacy.

Based on these criteria, 51 out of the original 90 sources were selected for their relevance and reliability in addressing the study's purpose. These studies provided the conceptual and empirical basis for writing this article.

3. Results

The review of the selected studies showed consistent evidence that self-efficacy and resilience are strongly interconnected. Most studies confirmed that self-efficacy positively predicts resilience, enhancing persistence, motivation, and coping strategies in academic contexts (Bandura, 1986; Keye & Pidgeon, 2013; Cassidy, 2015; Victor-Igboidion,

Onyishi, & Ngwok, 2018). Similarly, resilience was found to strengthen students' self-efficacy by promoting adaptability, self-esteem, and positive coping mechanisms (Pourtalab & Badri Gorgari, 2022; Khakpour et al., 2022). Thus, both constructs support each other and contribute to academic success.

Similarities among the studies:

1. Most studies emphasized the reciprocal relationship between academic self-efficacy and resilience.
2. Many studies highlighted their role in increasing academic motivation, persistence, and academic performance (Lent et al., 2001; Bong, 2001; Tamannai Far & Arabi Qahroodi, 2022).
3. A common finding was that students with higher levels of either construct demonstrate greater adaptability to stress and stronger commitment to educational goals (Rahmawati & Wirza, 2022; Yada et al., 2021).

Differences among the studies:

1. Some studies focused on self-efficacy as the predictor of resilience (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2008; Keye & Pidgeon, 2013), while others highlighted resilience as the predictor of self-efficacy (Abdolrezapour et al., 2023; Rezaei & Najarpour, 2023).
2. Research varied in contexts: some examined general university students (Martin, 2002; Guest et al., 2015), while others focused on EFL learners or students in specific educational environments (Rahmawati & Wirza, 2022; Eskandari et al., 2019).
3. Methodological differences existed: while some studies were quantitative surveys using standardized scales (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005), others employed structural models or longitudinal designs to explore causal directions (Galla et al., 2014; Khakpour et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings indicate that although there is consensus on the importance of self-efficacy and resilience in academic success, studies differ in their perspectives on causality, population focus, and methodological approach. These differences highlight the need for further empirical studies, particularly in the context of Iranian EFL learners.

4. Discussion

The findings of this review indicate that academic resilience and self-efficacy have a reciprocal relationship: each construct reinforces the other, and together they significantly affect students' academic performance. This is consistent with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986, 1997), which emphasizes that individuals' beliefs about their abilities shape their

motivation, persistence, and achievement. Learners with high self-efficacy show greater resilience in the face of stress, while resilient learners, by maintaining adaptability and optimism, further strengthen their efficacy beliefs. From the perspective of positive psychology (Luthans et al., 2007), both self-efficacy and resilience are core components of psychological capital, enabling students to cope with challenges and remain engaged in academic tasks.

Findings from Persian literature align with and extend this evidence. According to Parikari and Parikari (2024), academic resilience significantly promotes foreign language learning by mitigating anxiety, enhancing adaptability, and motivating learners to reframe obstacles as opportunities. Complementing this, their subsequent review (2025) established that resilience bolsters academic self-efficacy by cultivating self-esteem, fostering positive outlooks, and improving emotional control, thereby enabling students to preserve motivation during stressful periods. Evidence from studies published in the *Journal of Language, Culture, and Translation (LCT)* further supports these findings. For example, Nikbin (2022) demonstrated that Iranian EFL learners' academic self-concept has a significant influence on their syntactic complexity in speaking, highlighting the close connection between self-concept, self-efficacy, and performance. Similarly, Nazari (2023) found that applying cooperative learning methods such as the STAD model enhanced learners' autonomy and attitudes, which aligns with the idea that supportive environments strengthen resilience and self-efficacy. In the context of digital learning, Bagheri Masoudzade and Fatehi Rad (2022) indicated that virtual teaching plays a significant role in constructing EFL learners' identities, as students developed a strong sense of language learning identity through online platforms. Their study also indicated that relational and collective identity aspects were less dominant, and no gender differences emerged, suggesting that digital contexts—like traditional classrooms—can boost learners' confidence, adaptability, and resilience.

Furthermore, Karimloo (2022) examined the relationship between suggestion speech acts, language proficiency, gender, and verbal intelligence among Iranian EFL learners, revealing the impact of individual differences on linguistic and academic outcomes. This supports our finding that resilience and self-efficacy interact dynamically with both personal and contextual factors. Similarly, Shobeiry et al. (in press) explored language learning strategies and beliefs among Afghan EFL learners, reporting a strong preference for writing and reading strategies and a common belief in the difficulty of learning English. Their study showed that these beliefs were moderately correlated with strategy use,

emphasizing the role of self-regulation and persistence in overcoming barriers. Such results reinforce the current study's claim that strengthening resilience and self-efficacy enables learners to challenge limiting beliefs and adopt more effective strategies for academic achievement. The outcomes of this review are also echoed in research on grammar learning strategies in Iranian contexts.

Zeinali et al. (in press) developed a questionnaire to identify the most and least frequently used grammar strategies among Iranian learners. Their findings revealed that communicative strategies were most widely adopted, while memory strategies were least used. These results underscore the importance of interactive, purposeful, and metacognitive approaches in fostering learner autonomy and adaptability. Importantly, they also suggest that strategy use is closely linked to psychological resources: effective grammar strategies not only improve linguistic competence but also strengthen self-efficacy and resilience in facing academic challenges.

Taken together, the integration of international and local evidence suggests that the relationship between academic resilience and self-efficacy is bidirectional and dynamic. While international literature highlights their universal role in enhancing educational outcomes (Cassidy, 2015; Tamannai Far & Arabi Qahroodi, 2022), findings from Iranian and regional contexts (Negarin, 2022; Nadari, 2023; Taghizadeh Rad, 2022; Bagheri Masoudzade & Fatehi Rad, 2022) demonstrate that cultural, contextual, and strategic variables also shape how these constructs function in practice. This combined perspective provides a stronger theoretical and empirical foundation, indicating that both resilience and self-efficacy are essential psychological resources for EFL learners, particularly in Iran and neighboring contexts, where students face linguistic, cultural, and motivational barriers.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of academic resilience and self-efficacy in Iranian EFL learners. The review demonstrated that these constructs not only predict academic performance but also interact dynamically, reinforcing one another within the frameworks of social cognitive theory and positive psychology. This two-way interaction creates a protective system that enables students to cope with the linguistic, cultural, and psychological challenges of learning English in Iran.

For practical implications, universities and educators should design interventions to simultaneously strengthen students' resilience and self-

efficacy through counseling, skill-building workshops, and learner-centered teaching approaches. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to examine the causal mechanisms of this relationship and investigate the role of mediating factors such as social support, motivation, and coping strategies.

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