Journal of Authentic Research
https://journal-center.litpam.com/index.php/jar/index

November 2026 Vol. 5, No. 4
e-ISSN: 2828-3724
pp. 7524-7533

The Correlation Between Students' Self-Efficacy and Their English Learning Achievement: A Study of Eighth-Grade Students at SMPN 3 Lingsar

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Received: September 2026; Revised: September 2026; Published: October 2026

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the correlation between students' self-efficacy and their English learning achievement among eighth-grade students at SMPN 3 Lingsar. Although previous studies have examined this relationship, most focused on senior high school or university learners in urban settings and often addressed a single language skill; research on junior high school students in non-urban Indonesian schools remains limited. This study addresses that gap by examining overall English achievement in a non-urban junior high school context. A quantitative correlational design was employed. The sample consisted of 34 eighth-grade students selected through cluster random sampling. Self-efficacy was measured using a six-item questionnaire adapted from the Questionnaire of Self-Efficacy in Learning a Foreign Language (QSLL) developed by Kutuk et al. (2023), and English learning achievement was obtained from first-semester report card scores. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment correlation in SPSS. Most students had a moderate level of self-efficacy and moderate English learning achievement. A moderate, positive, and significant correlation was found between self-efficacy and English achievement ($r = 0.496$, $p = 0.003$), with self-efficacy explaining about 24.6% of the variance. These results suggest that students with higher self-efficacy tend to achieve higher English learning achievement. The study contributes a context-specific perspective from a non-urban junior high school and supports the theoretical view that self-efficacy beliefs are associated with EFL achievement. English teachers are encouraged to build students' self-efficacy through achievable tasks, constructive feedback, and a supportive classroom atmosphere.

Keywords: self-efficacy, English learning achievement, correlation, eighth-grade students.

How to Cite: Haliza, A., Wilian, S., & Junaidi, A. (2026). The Correlation Between Students' Self-Efficacy and Their English Learning Achievement: A Study of Eighth-Grade Students at SMPN 3 Lingsar. *Journal of Authentic Research*, *5*(4), 7524–7533. https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v5i4.7155

https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v5i4.7155

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language starting from junior high school (Suparno et al., 2022). Students are expected to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills within limited instructional time and with minimal real-life exposure to English, so many Indonesian EFL learners find it difficult to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes (Mahmoodi et al., 2014). Students' achievement is influenced by internal factors such as interest, motivation, confidence, and

psychological condition, as well as external factors such as the school environment, teaching methods, and social context (Suparno et al., 2022). In this study, English learning achievement is operationally defined as the level of success or mastery that students demonstrate in learning English as a foreign language, as reflected in their first-semester English report card scores (Mahmoodi et al., 2014).

Among the psychological factors, self-efficacy is considered particularly important because it shapes how students approach their learning tasks. Bandura (1977) introduced self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve a specific goal, and later defined it as beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). In this study, self-efficacy is operationally defined as students' beliefs about their capability to learn and perform English tasks, measured by their scores on the six valid items of the adapted QSLL. Bandura (1997) stresses that self-efficacy is concerned not with the skills one has but with judgments of what one can do with those skills, and that it develops through four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Earlier studies in general academic settings support its importance. Pintrich and De Groot (1990) found that seventh-grade students with high self-efficacy reported using more cognitive and metacognitive strategies and persisted longer at difficult academic tasks, while Zajacova et al. (2005) reported that self-efficacy had a positive effect on academic success among college students.

In English learning, several studies have examined the relationship between self-efficacy and achievement. In Indonesia, Tasha (2023) and Khatimah et al. (2023) reported a positive contribution of self-efficacy to English achievement among senior high school students, while Mulyanto et al. (2022) and Sinaga and Subekti (2025) showed that self-efficacy was relevant to Indonesian learners' speaking and language-skill performance. International evidence points in the same direction. Nguyen et al. (2022), Chen and Sukying (2024), Wu et al. (2022), and Wang et al. (2022) generally concluded that self-efficacy beliefs are positively associated with EFL learners' academic achievement.

Although these studies show the importance of self-efficacy across contexts, three gaps remain. First, most studies involve adult learners or college students, so little is known about junior high school students. Second, research in non-urban schools is still limited, even though cultural background, the learning environment, and teaching quality may affect the relationship between self-efficacy and achievement. Third, studies at the junior high school level usually focus on one language skill, especially speaking, and therefore do not give a complete picture of overall English achievement. In other words, the present study offers a new perspective by examining overall English achievement among junior high school students in a non-urban Indonesian school, a context that has been underrepresented in previous research. In addition, preliminary observations at SMPN 3 Lingsar showed that many eighth-grade students lacked confidence in speaking in public, reading aloud, and expressing ideas in English. If this low confidence is left unaddressed, students may underperform not because they lack cognitive ability but because they doubt their own capability.

Based on these gaps and observations, this study investigated the correlation between students' self-efficacy and their English learning achievement among eighth-

grade students at SMPN 3 Lingsar. The research question was: Is there a correlation between students' self-efficacy and their English learning achievement among the eighth-grade students at SMPN 3 Lingsar? Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H0) stated that there was no significant correlation between the two variables, while the alternative hypothesis (Ha) stated that there was a significant correlation between them. The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical: theoretically, it extends Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory to a junior high school EFL context in a non-urban Indonesian school; practically, it provides information for English teachers and schools in designing instructional support that may strengthen students' confidence and achievement.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with a correlational design. A correlational design was chosen because the study aimed to describe and measure the degree of association between two sets of scores, namely students' self-efficacy (variable X) and their English learning achievement (variable Y), without manipulating either of them (Creswell, 2013; Rulyati & Sujana, 2020). The correlation coefficient indicates both the direction and the strength of the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2013). The study was conducted in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, namely from July to December 2025, at SMPN 3 Lingsar, West Lombok.

The population was all eighth-grade students at SMPN 3 Lingsar in the 2025/2026 academic year, who were distributed in five classes with a total of 142 students. Cluster random sampling was used to select one intact class; a lottery selected class VIII A, consisting of 34 students, as the sample. Eighth-grade students were chosen because they are in a relatively stable phase of learning: they are no longer adapting to a new school as seventh-grade students are, and they are not yet focused on final examinations as ninth-grade students are.

Two kinds of data were collected. Students' self-efficacy was measured with a questionnaire adapted from the Questionnaire of Self-Efficacy in Learning a Foreign Language (QSLL) developed by Kutuk et al. (2023), which is grounded in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory and covers both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). The original scale consists of 11 items on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and reported Cronbach's alpha values of .85 for L2 reception, .84 for L2 production, and .88 for the overall scale (Kutuk et al., 2023). The wording of the items was adapted to suit eighth-grade students. A questionnaire is an appropriate instrument for collecting information about respondents' beliefs (Dörnyei, 2008). English learning achievement was obtained from students' first-semester report card scores for the English subject, which were submitted by the English teacher through a Google Form. These scores represent overall performance in the English subject. The report card score was chosen because it reflects students' cumulative classroom performance across daily, mid-semester, and final-semester assessments and is the official school record available to the researcher. A separate standardized English proficiency test was not used because

of the school's assessment policy and practical constraints; this choice is acknowledged as a limitation because report card scores may have a narrower range than standardized test scores.

Before the main data collection, the adapted questionnaire was approved by the thesis supervisor and tried out on 32 students of class VIII C, who were not part of the sample. Item validity was tested using the corrected item-total Pearson correlation, with an item considered valid when r-count exceeded the r-table value of 0.349 (df = 30, 5% significance level). The try-out showed that six of the 11 items (items 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 11) were valid, with r-count values ranging from .413 to .626, while the five invalid items were excluded. The six valid items comprised two reception items and four production items. The brief contents of the six valid adapted items were as follows: item 2 ("I am confident I can understand English texts given by the teacher"), item 3 ("I am confident I can understand questions asked in English"), item 7 ("I am confident I can express my ideas orally in English"), item 8 ("I am confident I can write English sentences correctly"), item 9 ("I am confident I can answer questions orally in English"), and item 11 ("I am confident I can complete English writing tasks well"). Items 2 and 3 represented receptive skills, while items 7, 8, 9, and 11 represented productive skills. The reliability of the six items was tested with Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.727, above the 0.70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency (Sugiyono, 2017). Therefore, the possible self-efficacy score ranged from 6 to 30.

For data collection, the printed questionnaire was distributed directly to the students in class VIII A during an English lesson, so that students without easy access to the internet or a smartphone could complete it and the researcher could clarify any item that was difficult to understand. The completed forms were collected in the classroom. The report card scores were then collected from the English teacher.

The data were analyzed with SPSS. The analysis began with data editing, coding, and error checking. The scores of each variable were then described using the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum, and were categorized into low, moderate, and high levels based on the mean and standard deviation. The relationship between the two variables was tested using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation, and the coefficient was interpreted using the criteria in Table 1 (Sugiyono, 2017). The null hypothesis was rejected when the significance value (p) was lower than 0.05. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was also calculated to show the proportion of variance in English achievement that was associated with self-efficacy.

Table 1. Interpretation of the correlation coefficient (Sugiyono, 2017)

Coefficient (r)	Interpretation
0.800–1.000	Very high
0.600–0.799	High
0.400–0.599	Moderate
0.200–0.399	Low
0.000–0.199	Very low

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Self-Efficacy Level

Students' self-efficacy scores were calculated from the six valid items, so the possible range was 6 to 30. The mean score was 17.03 (SD = 3.86), with a lowest score of 8 and a highest score of 25. Based on the mean and standard deviation, students were categorized into three levels, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Categorization of students' self-efficacy level

Category	Score range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	< 13.17	4	11.8%
Moderate	13.17–20.89	22	64.7%
High	≥ 20.89	8	23.5%
Total		**34**	**100%**

Table 2 shows that most students (64.7%) had a moderate level of self-efficacy, while 23.5% were in the high category and 11.8% in the low category. The mean of 17.03 is also slightly below the midpoint of the 6–30 scale (18), which indicates that students' confidence in their English ability was neither weak nor strongly established. This result is consistent with the preliminary observation that many students showed limited confidence in speaking, reading aloud, and expressing ideas in English. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy develops gradually through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Eighth-grade students are still building their English learning experience, so a moderate level is a reasonable outcome at this stage of language development rather than a sign of a serious psychological problem. The relatively small high group (23.5%) suggests that only some students have accumulated enough successful experiences to hold strong beliefs about their English ability.

Students' English Learning Achievement

English learning achievement was measured with the first-semester report card scores. The mean score was 78.35 (SD = 1.70), with scores ranging from 76 to 85. The scores were categorized using the same procedure, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Categorization of students' English learning achievement

Category	Score range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	< 76.65	1	2.9%
Moderate	76.65–80.06	32	94.1%
High	≥ 80.06	1	2.9%
Total		**34**	**100%**

Table 3 shows that almost all students (94.1%) were in the moderate category, with one student in the low category and one in the high category. In other words, the report card scores were highly homogeneous. This similarity can be explained by several interrelated factors. First, it may reflect a shared instructional environment. All students in class VIII A were taught by the same teacher, followed the same curriculum, and were assessed with the same daily, mid-semester, and final-semester instruments, so similar outcomes are to be expected when teaching methods, pace, and assessment procedures are standardized for the whole class.

Second, the narrow range may result from the nature of report card grading. A report card score is an accumulation of knowledge scores from daily assessments, mid-semester assessments, and final semester assessments (Gunawan & Triantoro, 2017; Putri et al., 2024). Combining several components into one composite score tends to reduce extreme values, because a low score on one component can be balanced by a higher score on another, and the final scores cluster around the middle. Moreover, teachers in Indonesian junior high schools commonly refer to a minimum mastery criterion (Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal, KKM), and students who score below it are usually given remedial assessments until they reach the passing score. This practice may create a floor effect that compresses the lower end of the distribution. As a result, report card scores may not fully show the real variation in students' English ability, compared with a single standardized achievement test administered under the same conditions.

Third, the restricted range has an important methodological implication. In correlational research, a restricted range in either variable can reduce the size of the Pearson coefficient, because the coefficient is sensitive to the amount of variance in each variable (Creswell, 2013). Since the variation in achievement scores in this study was narrow, the true relationship between self-efficacy and English achievement may be underestimated rather than overestimated by the observed coefficient, so the correlation reported below is best treated as a conservative estimate. A stronger relationship might emerge if achievement were measured with an instrument that yields a wider range of scores, such as a standardized English proficiency test administered separately from classroom assessment. The homogeneity of the scores therefore appears to reflect the characteristics of the report card assessment system more than a real lack of variation in students' English ability.

The Correlation between Self-Efficacy and English Learning Achievement

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation test was run with SPSS, and the result is presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Results of the Pearson correlation test

Variables	N	r	p (Sig.)	r^2
Self-efficacy × English achievement	34	0.496	0.003	0.246

The correlation coefficient was r = 0.496 with a significance value of 0.003 ($p < 0.05$), so the correlation was statistically significant. The null hypothesis (H0) was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted. Based on the criteria in Table 1, a coefficient of 0.496 falls in the moderate category, which indicates a moderate, positive, and significant correlation between students' self-efficacy and their English learning achievement. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.246$) shows that self-efficacy accounted for approximately 24.6% of the variance in English achievement, while the remaining 75.4% was associated with other factors that were not examined, such as motivation, learning strategies, teaching methods, and the classroom environment.

To illustrate the relationship beyond the coefficient, the mean English achievement score was calculated for each self-efficacy category (Table 5). The mean rose from 77.50 in the low group to 78.05 in the moderate group and 79.63 in the high group. This upward pattern is consistent with the positive coefficient and suggests that students with stronger self-efficacy beliefs tended to perform better in English,

rather than the correlation being driven by a few extreme scores alone. The low group contained only four students, however, so the group means should be read as descriptive illustrations only.

Table 5. Mean English achievement score by self-efficacy category

Self-efficacy category	Mean score	SD	N
Low	77.50	1.73	4
Moderate	78.05	1.05	22
High	79.63	2.56	8

The finding is in line with several previous studies. Tasha (2023) found a moderate, positive correlation (r = 0.422) among tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Pekanbaru, which is comparable in strength to the present result, and Nguyen et al. (2022) also found a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and English achievement among Vietnamese university students. These similarities suggest that the positive role of self-efficacy tends to hold across educational levels and contexts, including junior high school students in a non-urban setting such as SMPN 3 Lingsar. The result also echoes Pintrich and De Groot (1990) and Zajacova et al. (2005), who found that self-efficacy was related to greater persistence, strategy use, and academic success.

On the other hand, the coefficient in this study was lower than the large correlation (r = 0.58) reported by Chen and Sukying (2024) for Chinese high school students, and the self-efficacy contribution (24.6%) was much lower than the 67.20% reported by Khatimah et al. (2023). Several factors may explain this difference. First, eighth-grade junior high school students are at an earlier stage of cognitive and psychological development than senior high school students, so their self-efficacy beliefs may be less firmly established and less strongly tied to their performance. Second, the narrow range of achievement scores (76–85) may have limited the strength of the observed correlation. Third, differences in educational context, such as school location, instructional quality, and exposure to English outside the classroom, may also affect the strength of the relationship. Khatimah et al. (2023) also analyzed self-efficacy together with motivation in a multiple regression, so their figure is not directly comparable with a bivariate correlation. In addition, studies such as Mulyanto et al. (2022) and Sinaga and Subekti (2025) indicate that self-efficacy may operate differently across language skills, which helps explain why a measure of overall English achievement may produce a more moderate coefficient than skill-specific measures. Despite these differences in magnitude, the direction of the findings is consistent: self-efficacy is positively associated with English learning achievement. This supports Bandura's (1997) theory that beliefs in one's own capabilities influence the effort, persistence, and strategies that learners apply to academic tasks, which in turn affect their performance (Wang et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022).

Interpretation, Implications, and Limitations

The result should be interpreted with caution. A moderate correlation does not mean that self-efficacy causes higher English achievement, nor that raising students' confidence alone will automatically raise their grades. The relationship may also run in the opposite direction: students who performed well in the past may have developed higher self-efficacy through repeated success, in line with Bandura's (1997) concept of mastery experience as the most influential source of self-efficacy. Because

this study used a correlational design with data collected at one point in time, the direction of influence cannot be determined, and the relationship is best understood as a reciprocal association. The fact that self-efficacy accounted for about a quarter of the variance also shows that it is not a dominant predictor at this educational level, and that motivation, learning strategies, and classroom instruction play a substantial role as well.

Theoretically, the study adds empirical support for Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory in the context of junior high school EFL learners in a non-urban Indonesian school, a context that has received little attention. Practically, English teachers at SMPN 3 Lingsar and similar schools may benefit from strategies that build self-efficacy, such as giving manageable and achievable tasks that create mastery experiences, offering constructive verbal encouragement, and creating a classroom atmosphere in which students feel safe to practice English without fear of making mistakes. Several limitations should be noted. The sample was limited to 34 students of one class, which restricts generalization; achievement was measured only through report card scores with a narrow range; self-efficacy was self-reported and may be affected by social desirability or limited self-awareness among young adolescents; and the cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions.

CONCLUSION

In answer to the research question, this study concludes that there is a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between students' self-efficacy and their English learning achievement among eighth-grade students at SMPN 3 Lingsar. Most students had a moderate level of self-efficacy, and their English learning achievement was relatively homogeneous and mostly moderate. The finding means that students who reported stronger beliefs in their English learning capability tended to obtain higher English report card scores, although the relationship was not strong enough to imply causation and self-efficacy explained only about one quarter of the variance in achievement. Taken together, the results suggest that self-efficacy is a meaningful but not exclusive factor in English learning achievement; it should be understood alongside motivation, learning strategies, teaching quality, and classroom environment. Because the design was correlational and the achievement scores had a narrow range, the finding describes an association rather than a cause-and-effect relationship and is likely to be a conservative estimate of the true relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study with a larger sample across several classes or schools, to include other variables such as motivation, learning strategies, or the classroom environment, and to use achievement measures with a wider score range, such as standardized English proficiency tests. Longitudinal or experimental designs would also help to examine the direction of the relationship between self-efficacy and English learning achievement.

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