ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

KEY WORDS:

DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS BASED ON GENDER, LOCALITY AND MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Academic self-efficacy—students' beliefs in their ability to successfully perform academic tasks—is a central concept in educational psychology (Bandura, 1997). Rooted in social cognitive theory, it shapes how learners think, feel, motivate themselves, and act. Students with high self-efficacy approach challenges as opportunities, persist despite difficulties, and demonstrate greater engagement and achievement, whereas those with low self-efficacy often avoid challenges and experience anxiety (Bandura, 1986). In schooling, academic self-efficacy influences learning behaviors, goal-setting, self-regulated strategies, and performance, often predicting achievement as strongly as prior ability (Pajares, 1996; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). High self-efficacy students set higher goals, use effective strategies, and sustain effort, enhancing success (Zimmerman, 2000). During higher secondary education, self-efficacy gains importance due to increased academic demands, high-stakes exams, and career-related decisions. Students must demonstrate autonomy, advanced cognitive skills, and self-regulation, making variations in self-efficacy potentially impactful on long-term educational and psychosocial outcomes (Schunk & Meece, 2006).

Research shows that academic self-efficacy is influenced by gender, school locality, and medium of instruction. Gender differences arise from socialization, classroom experiences, and cultural expectations (Britner & Pajares, 2006). Rural–urban disparities reflect differences in resources and academic support (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), while language proficiency affects confidence and participation (Cummins, 2000). In the diverse Indian educational context, understanding these influences is crucial. Examining academic self-efficacy among higher secondary students can guide educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers in developing interventions to enhance students' confidence and learning outcomes. This research paper aims to investigate academic self-efficacy among higher secondary students, focusing on differences by gender, school locality and medium of instruction.

Significance Of The Study

Academic self-efficacy plays a vital role in influencing students' learning behaviours, motivation, and academic achievement. Understanding the level and determinants of academic self-efficacy among higher secondary school students is particularly important, as this stage is marked by increased academic demands, crucial career decisions, and preparation for higher education (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Meece, 2006). The findings of the present study can help educators identify students' strengths and areas of low academic confidence, thereby facilitating the development of targeted interventions to enhance self-efficacy and promote effective learning strategies (Pajares, 1996). Furthermore, examining differences in academic self-efficacy based on gender, school locality, and medium of instruction provides insights into the influence of demographic and contextual factors on students' academic beliefs. Such insights are valuable for policymakers and curriculum designers in formulating inclusive and equitable educational practices that support students from diverse backgrounds and foster confidence for academic success (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Cummins, 2000).

Objectives Of The Study

- To find out whether there is a significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on gender.
- To examine whether there is a significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on locality of school.
- To analyze whether there is a significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on medium of instruction.

Hypotheses Of The Study

- There is no significant difference in the academic self-efficacy of higher secondary students based on gender.
- There is no significant difference in the academic self-efficacy of higher secondary students and its dimensions based on locality of school.
- There is no significant difference in the academic self-efficacy of higher secondary students and its dimensions based on medium of instruction.

Methodology

Research Method

The present study adopted the survey method, which is considered appropriate for collecting quantitative data related to students' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes across a large population. The survey method enabled the investigator to obtain systematic information on the academic self-efficacy of higher secondary school students and to examine differences based on selected demographic variables such as gender, locality of school and medium of instruction.

Population And Sample

The population of the study comprised higher secondary school students studying in different schools of Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, Tenkasi and Kanyakumari districts of TamilNadu, India. From this population, a sample of 1044 students were selected for the final investigation using stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of students belonging to different strata.

Tool Used For Data Collection

To measure academic self-efficacy, the investigator used an Academic Self-Efficacy Scale developed and standardized by the investigator and the research supervisor. The scale was designed to assess students' beliefs regarding their ability to successfully perform academic tasks and cope with academic challenges. The tool was validated through a pilot study. The reliability of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale was established using the test–retest method. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.81, indicating a high degree of consistency and stability of the scale. The validity of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale was established through multiple approaches. Face validity was ensured by consulting experts in education and psychology, who examined the items for relevance, clarity, and adequacy in measuring academic self-efficacy. Concurrent validity of the scale was established by correlating the scores of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale with the Morgan–Jinks Student Efficacy Scale

(MJSES), a well-established standardized tool. The correlation coefficient obtained was 0.84, indicating a high degree of validity.

RESULTS

Demographic Variable	N	Mean	SD	t value	p value	Remarks at 5% Level
Male	421	154.23	4.440	6.558	0.004	S
Female	623	156.39	4.662			
Rural	509	154.37	4.164	7.339	0.005	S
Urban	535	156.76	4.889			
Tamil	444	153.80	4.195	6.398	0.006	S
English	600	155.92	4.448			

Interpretation

The analysis reveals a statistically significant difference in the academic self-efficacy of higher secondary school students based on gender. The results indicate that female students possess higher academic self-efficacy than male students. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on gender is rejected at the 5% level.

With respect to locality of school, the findings show a significant difference in academic self-efficacy between rural and urban students. Urban students demonstrate higher levels of academic self-efficacy compared to their rural counterparts. Therefore, the null hypothesis related to locality of school is rejected at the 5% level.

Similarly, the analysis indicates a significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on medium of instruction. Students studying through the English medium exhibit higher academic self-efficacy than those studying through the Tamil medium. Thus, the null hypothesis pertaining to medium of instruction is rejected at the 5% level.

Overall, the results suggest that demographic variables such as gender, locality of school, and medium of instruction play a significant role in influencing the academic self-efficacy of higher secondary school students.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on gender, with female students demonstrating higher levels than male students. This finding suggests that female students may exhibit stronger academic confidence, persistence, and self-regulated learning behaviours, which are critical for academic success. Similar gender-related patterns in academic self-efficacy have been reported in earlier research, indicating that motivational and behavioural factors play an important role in shaping students' self-beliefs (Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000).

With respect to locality of school, urban students were found to have higher academic self-efficacy than rural students. This difference may be attributed to greater access to educational resources, supportive learning environments, and exposure to diverse academic experiences in urban settings. The influence of contextual and environmental factors on students' academic self-efficacy has also been emphasized in previous studies (Gafoor & Ashraf, 2012).

Regarding medium of instruction, English-medium students demonstrated higher overall academic self-efficacy, which may be linked to greater exposure to academic resources and opportunities for classroom interaction. However, Tamil-medium students showed stronger learning engagement, reflecting sustained motivation and perseverance. This suggests that while instructional language may influence access to resources and confidence, culturally supportive learning environments can foster deep engagement and commitment to learning (Cummins, 2000; Gafoor & Ashraf, 2012).

Educational Implications Of The Study

- Since female students demonstrated higher academic self-efficacy, instructional strategies should be designed to strengthen academic confidence and self-regulation among male students.
- The lower academic self-efficacy observed among rural students indicates the need for enhanced academic support, learning resources, and mentoring programmes in rural schools.
- As English-medium students exhibited higher academic self-efficacy, Tamil-medium classrooms should be supported with enriched academic resources and interactive teaching practices to improve students' confidence in handling academic tasks.
- The strong learning engagement shown by Tamil-medium students should be effectively utilized through culturally responsive and supportive teaching practices to further enhance their academic self-efficacy.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that academic self-efficacy among higher secondary school students is significantly influenced by gender, locality of school, and medium of instruction. Female students, urban students, and English-medium students exhibited higher levels of academic self-efficacy, while Tamil-medium students demonstrated strong learning engagement. These findings highlight the role of demographic and contextual factors in shaping students' academic beliefs and emphasize the need for targeted educational interventions to promote equitable development of academic self-efficacy among all groups of students. By addressing identified disparities, schools can foster positive academic self-beliefs that support effective learning and improved academic outcomes.

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