

Mapping Critical Reading Self-Efficacy in Tertiary EFL Learners through Cognitive and Geographical Lenses

Nousin Laila Bristi¹, Lulu AL Marzan^{2*}

¹Department of English, United International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 0000-0001-9526-0531

²Department of English and Modern Languages, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 0000-0001-5364-9223

Keywords:

Academic self-efficacy; critical reading; revised Bloom's taxonomy; rural EFL learners; geographical locations

Abstract

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, critical reading self-efficacy is essential for tertiary EFL learners' academic success. Learners' geographical context, including their residential and institutional locations, is significantly associated with their reading self-efficacy. Grounded in Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the revised Benjamin Bloom taxonomy, this study aims to investigate the relationship between tertiary EFL learners' lower- and higher-order reading self-efficacy and the influence of geographical context on their critical reading self-efficacy. Using a Likert-scale questionnaire, data were collected from 157 undergraduate EFL learners at different urban and rural tertiary institutions in Bangladesh and analyzed employing Pearson's correlation coefficient, MANOVA, and independent sample T-test. The Pearson correlation coefficient analysis revealed a significant association between lower-order and higher-order reading self-efficacy. MANOVA results further showed that learners' geographical context significantly influenced their critical reading self-efficacy, while the independent-samples t-test indicated that rural learners reported lower critical reading self-efficacy than their urban counterparts. The study offers context-specific implications for tertiary EFL teaching instructions and curriculum design. Specifically, it highlights the value of integrating both lower and higher-order reading skills in teaching practices. Additionally, it proposes initiatives to address contextual factors to reduce urban-rural disparities in critical reading self-efficacy of tertiary EFL learners regardless of their residential and institutional locations.

1. Introduction

Critical reading is vital for the academic and career success of 21st-century university students (Van et al., 2022). With the advent of information technology

*Corresponding author's E-mail address: marzan@iubat.edu

Article received: February 26

Revised and accepted: June 26

Published: June 26

and the availability of vast, ever-increasing information, students need to read critically to determine what to accept and what not to. If readers accept all this information without question, they may be misled by false or misleading information (Khalil, 2019). Correspondingly, developing their critical reading skills by ensuring positive self-efficacy is essential. While academic self-efficacy significantly shapes learning behaviors, self-efficacy in critical reading determines how well learners analyze and evaluate information.

Learners' academic self-efficacy, a consideration in educational psychology, has received considerable research attention recently (An *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2021). Learners' autonomous self-evaluation, also known as 'academic self-efficacy,' is defined as learners' judgment of their ability to accomplish academic tasks (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). It serves as their intrinsic motivation for greater academic achievement (Schunk *et al.*, 2013). Understanding academic self-efficacy helps accurately predict actual learning behaviors (Sharma & Nasa, 2014) and identifies the elements that regulate it (Siboro *et al.*, 2022). Social orientations and exposures are prime sources of learners' academic self-efficacies (Bandura, 1997). Thus, the study of self-efficacy can guide the nurturing of the right dispositions and learning behaviors to achieve learning success by addressing the triggering issues.

However, there is a need to conduct further research on Bangladeshi tertiary EFL learners' self-efficacy in critical reading. Though researchers are concerned with developing critical reading self-efficacy (Bozgun & Can, 2023; Kökçü, 2023) and self-efficacy in other EFL fields, contextual differences, particularly, geographical context, involving urban and rural locations, have remained neglected. Additionally, the existing studies (Bozgun & Can, 2023; Karadeniz, 2015; Kökçü, 2023; Saidalvi *et al.*, 2022) on self-efficacy in critical reading lack theoretical foundations. Furthermore, the majority of studies (Küçüköğlu, 2013; Öztürk *et al.*, 2022; Ulu *et al.*, 2017) focused on teachers' critical reading self-efficacy rather than students'.

Specifically, the study aims to explore Bangladeshi tertiary EFL learners' critical reading self-efficacy, based on the revised Bloom's taxonomy, with a focus on their geographical background, to determine the connection between EFL learners' Lower-Order and Higher-Order reading self-efficacy. In addition, the study intends to identify the influences of EFL learners' social status on their critical reading self-efficacy. Finally, the study aims to identify any differences in the critical reading self-efficacy of Bangladeshi urban and rural tertiary EFL learners. Following these considerations, the study tested the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a strong correlation between university EFL learners' Lower-Order reading self-efficacy and Higher-Order reading self-efficacy.

H2: EFL learners' geographical location has a significant influence on their critical reading self-efficacy.

H3: There is a significant difference between urban and rural EFL learners' critical reading self-efficacy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Reading

According to Pirozzi *et al.* (2014), critical reading is a high level of comprehension of the written text. The reader must use interpretive and evaluative skills to differentiate between significant and insignificant information, facts, and opinions, and to identify the author's aims and tone. Additionally, the reader uses inference to go beyond the literal meaning and draw logical conclusions from the text.

Besides, while reading critically, one needs to employ comprehension, analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and synthesis to grasp a deeper understanding of the text (Majumdar *et al.*, 2020). It is a top-down reading process in which the reader interprets the text in light of their knowledge of the world and previous experiences. However, the bottom-up reading, the understanding of the words and letters, contributes to the critical reading as the basic understanding of the text is crucial for meaning-making (Niculescu & Dragomir, 2023). Therefore, critical reading is an interactive reading activity that includes HOTS and LOTs, aiming to construct new meanings of the text in relation to readers' prior knowledge.

2.2 Impact of Geographical Locations on Critical Reading Abilities

Learners' geographical location is a prime source of their self-efficacy, which regulates their efforts, strategies, and learning success. Learners living in rural areas and studying in rural tertiary institutions are less intelligent and perform worse academically (Glauber, 2022; Khan & Khan, 2025). Moreover, students residing in rural areas and attending rural tertiary institutions come from less educated, economically less solvent, and low-resourced families, leading to limited exposure to advanced educational materials and opportunities (Cartwright & Allen, 2002; UNESCO, 2020). Conversely, urban-dwelling students who study in urban educational institutions belong to more educated and economically well-off families with greater socio-cultural and technological exposure (OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2020).

Thus, factors such as poverty, the digital divide, teachers' ineptitude, and the overall paucity of development facilities in countries like Bangladesh and Iran (Bhat, 2023; Rajabi, 2009; Ullah *et al.*, 2022) contribute to the urban-rural gaps in critical thinking of tertiary EFL learners. Hence, Cartwright and Allen (2002) claim that rural learners have less exposure to cultural experiences and fewer opportunities to engage in thoughtful discussions with their less educated surroundings. Therefore, students who have poor exposure due to their socioeconomic background during their school years tend to have less knowledge of the world that they need to read critically in their later years of education (Comber & Nixon, 2011). Accordingly, Ma and Li (2024) argue that rural EFL

learners' lack of critical reading skills is a pervasive concern. However, there was no significant difference in the perceived critical thinking skills of Malaysian urban and rural EFL students (Mahmood & Othman, 2020).

2.3 Learner's Geographical Location and Self-efficacy

Learners' geographical location strongly influences their self-competence. Students from rural and associated low socioeconomic backgrounds suffer from lower self-esteem and consider themselves to have lower intelligence than their counterparts from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This adversely affects their academic performance (Wiederkehr *et al.*, 2015). University students who study in rural tertiary institutions and reside in rural areas, thereby having lower socio-economic backgrounds, have lower abilities to adjust to university culture than students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Wiederkehr *et al.*, 2015). For example, students living and studying in rural areas in China and Nigeria have lower self-esteem (Fagbohun *et al.*, 2025; Yu *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, Chinese tertiary students with rural family backgrounds have lower self-efficacy than students with urban family backgrounds (Wang *et al.*, 2026).

2.4 Critical Reading Self-efficacy of Bangladeshi Urban and Rural Tertiary EFL Learners

In Bangladesh, Colleges affiliated with the National University (NU), the only higher education institutions in rural Bangladesh, are far behind in developing learners' critical reading skills (Mamun, 2021; Mridha *et al.*, 2013). Because of the Government's discriminatory policy toward NU and autonomous public universities, NU faces budgetary constraints that undermine the quality of education (Mamun, 2021). Besides, a shortage of qualified teachers, limited sociocultural exposure, limited facilities and connectivity, and low motivation (Mridha *et al.*, 2013) inhibit the effective development of critical reading skills among rural Bangladeshi EFL learners. On the other hand, private universities are among the many tertiary institutional options in Bangladeshi cities.

Improving Bangladeshi tertiary EFL learners' critical reading skills by nurturing their critical reading self-efficacy is pivotal to their academic and career success. According to the National Education Policy 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010), university education in Bangladesh aims to produce independent-thinking, creative citizens and to inspire research. However, given the socio-economic barriers associated with learners' geographical location, there remains a persistent gap in the critical thinking efficiency of Bangladeshi urban and rural learners (Uddin *et al.*, 2023). Since more than 60% of the country's population lives in rural Bangladesh, it will be difficult to sustain economically in global competition without equipping this population with 21st-century employability skills, such as critical reading (Sophia, 2018).

Similarly, private universities fall behind in developing the critical reading skills of their students. Although they emphasize the development of 21st-century skills (Alauddin *et al.*, 2016), the quality of faculty, infrastructure, financial management, research, and technological facilities in many private universities remains below standard (Amin & Sheikh, 2021). This leads to a dearth of critical thinking skills among future job seekers (Hossan, 2022).

Additionally, EFL courses in Bangladeshi universities are designed to offer linguistic support for English-medium education. Though these courses are implemented with the CLT approach, Tertiary EFL learners' communication needs are inadequately met (Rashid & Rana, 2021). Besides, students' conventional inclination to accept information without question (Laskar, 2021) limits their capacity to build independent perspectives and produce original ideas (The Financial Express, 2023). Hence, developing critical reading self-efficacy among Bangladeshi undergraduates, both in urban and rural tertiary institutions, is crucial to ensure their better future.

2.5 Theoretical Underpinnings

2.5.1 The Theory of Self-efficacy

People's self-efficacy is the belief in their ability to perform an action (Bandura, 1997). The motivational process of the theory holds that people recognize that performing a particular task will yield rewarding results. However, they may stop pursuing the task in the face of challenges. In this connection, the ability to decide is not enough to accomplish the task; they need a persistent self-efficacy belief in the actual performance (Bandura, 1997).

Moreover, based on self-efficacy, people set their goals and ambitions, expected results, dispositions, and understanding of the possible challenges and opportunities within the social context (Bandura, 2006), in other words, achievement strategies. For example, EFL learners with positive self-efficacy use various strategies, such as cognitive, compensatory, memory, social, and particularly metacognitive strategies (Kökçü, 2023). Thus, academic self-efficacy beliefs can accurately predict the learners' actual abilities by determining their strategies.

However, Bandura (1997) indicates that human behavior must be studied in connection with internal personal factors and external social factors which are represented in the *triadic reciprocal causation model*. The *triadic reciprocal causation* model argues that efficacious people can utilize opportunities created by the social system, whereas inefficacious people fail to do so. Vicarious or social experiences lead students to compare their performance with those who serve as models and high achievers in the field, such as teachers, parents, and peers. Therefore, ability modeling based on social examples often depends on the social status of the intra- and intercultural people students interact with (Usher *et al.*,

2018). Accordingly, the triadic causation framework of the self-efficacy theory serves as the basis for H2 (*EFL learners' geographical location has a significant influence on their critical reading self-efficacy.*) and H3 (*There is a significant difference between urban and rural EFL learners' critical reading self-efficacy.*) that focus on the differences in EFL learners' LOT and HOT reading self-efficacies that are shaped by their environmental and educational contexts.

2.5.2 Bloom's Taxonomy of Critical Thinking

The revised Bloom's taxonomy specifies the domain of the learners' self-efficacy in critical reading. The revised Bloom's taxonomy, developed from the original, was created to develop educational goals, teaching-learning materials, and testing materials that will enhance learners' critical thinking (Anderson *et al.*, 2001). The taxonomy contains six levels of thinking, which are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The hierarchical orders of six cognitive levels.

Figure 1 displays the six cognitive levels- remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating in a hierarchical order (Anderson *et al.*, 2001). Remembering, understanding, and applying are LOTs skills where the learners reproduce and recognize information and apply the simple ideas to solve tasks, whereas analyzing, evaluating, and creating are HOTS skills where the learners must employ cognitive skills like differentiating, creating, and judging (Kusuma *et al.*, 2017) to make decisions or construct meaning. However, though the development of thinking occurs hierarchically, LOTs are fundamental to the development of HOTS (Kamarulzaman *et al.*, 2017), as higher-level meaning constructions are based on textual understanding. Therefore, the study's H1 (*There is a strong correlation between university EFL learners' Lower-Order reading self-efficacy and Higher-Order reading self-efficacy.*) is strongly informed by Bloom's taxonomy, reflecting the interdependent relationships between LOT and HOT reading self-efficacies.

Bloom's taxonomy is fundamental to critical reading. There is a heightened concern about including Bloom's taxonomy-based reading activities in EFL textbooks to enhance the learners' critical thinking. Moreover, [Surjosuseno and Watts \(1999\)](#) find close similarities between the original Bloom's taxonomy and critical reading concepts, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Similarities between critical reading and the cognitive levels of Bloom's original taxonomy.

Critical Reading	Bloom's Taxonomy
Assumption	Synthesis
Fact	Knowledge
Conclusion	Analysis
Supporting statement	Analysis
Premise	Analysis
Evidence	Analysis
Relevant and irrelevant	Evaluation
Consistent & inconsistent	Evaluation
Implication	Application
Argument	Evaluation
Point of view/interpretation	Comprehension

[Table 1](#) indicates that critical reading tasks correspond to the cognitive levels of the original Bloom's taxonomy. Therefore, the development of critical reading includes both HOTs and LOTs. These thinking levels, as interlaced processes, allow the readers to make meaning of the given text.

3. Materials and Methods

The study employed a quantitative approach. [Bandura \(2006\)](#) recommends investigating self-efficacy using a self-reporting questionnaire. Moreover, many studies ([Alrahidi & Alshammari, 2025](#); [Aweina, 2024](#)) have explored EFL learners' self-efficacy employing this approach.

3.1 Participants

157 undergraduate EFL learners, comprising 82 participants from three rural tertiary colleges affiliated with NU and 75 participants from three private universities situated in Dhaka, were selected using purposive sampling ([Campbell, 2020](#)). Among them, 94 were male, and 63 were female. While 82 belonged to rural higher educational institutions, 75 were from urban ones. To ensure a clear distinction between the two groups, participants were selected based on where they had completed their earlier education. Those in the rural group had completed their primary, secondary, and higher secondary education in

rural areas, while those in the urban group had completed these stages of education in urban areas.

3.2 Instruments

Self-efficacy evaluation is related to specific tasks (Bandura, 2000). Hence, a 29-item questionnaire was developed using the action verb lists from Anderson *et al.* (2001) to specify the types of tasks on which learners' self-efficacies were measured. The questionnaire variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree-5, Agree-4, No comment-3, Disagree-2, Strongly Disagree-1).

To ensure clarity of expression, the questionnaire was verified by one English professional and one non-English professional. Secondly, the Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire items is 0.876. Construct-specific reliability scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha scores for LOT and HOT reading self-efficacy

Variable Name	Reliability Scores
LOT reading self-efficacy	.790
HOT reading self-efficacy	.785

Table 2 indicates that the reliability score for LOT reading self-efficacy is .790, while that for HOT reading self-efficacy is .785. The acceptable range of Cronbach's Alpha is .60-.80+ (Taber, 2017). Therefore, the questionnaire is both valid and reliable.

Moreover, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) indicates that the extracted factors account for 51.46% of the variance across all items in the questionnaire. This establishes the questionnaire's construct validity. The EFA was conducted using PCA with varimax rotation.

Additionally, Bandura (2006) proposes that, to ensure the content validity of the perceived self-efficacy questionnaire, the researchers should use the word 'can' instead of 'will' because 'can' denotes ability, whereas 'will' denotes willingness. As a result, the questionnaire items are self-evaluative, consistent with previously validated self-efficacy questionnaires (Kutuk *et al.*, 2023). Accordingly, the self-evaluative questionnaire is an acceptable form of investigation.

3.3 Data Collection

Questionnaire data from urban learners were collected manually and via Google Forms. In contrast, the survey data from the rural areas were collected with the help of a research assistant, an EFL teacher at a rural college.

3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze data for H1, a Pearson's correlation coefficient test was run. For H2, MANOVA was used because it allows the analysis of multiple correlated dependent variables, thereby enhancing statistical power and reducing the risk of Type I error (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; Pallant, 2020). An Independent Samples T-test was used to analyze data for H3, which tests the difference in means between two independent groups (Pallant, 2020).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of LOT and HOT Reading Self-Efficacy

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for LOT and HOT reading self-efficacy, including mean, standard deviation, and range.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of LOT and HOT reading self-efficacy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LOT	157	2.00	4.73	3.6628	.50531
HOT	157	2.05	4.68	3.4238	.57666

The findings in Table 3 show that the mean score for LOT was $M = 3.6628$ ($SD = .50531$), while the mean score for HOT was $M = 3.4238$ ($SD = .57666$), based on a sample size of $N = 157$.

4.2. H1: Correlation between LOT and HOT-based Reading Self-efficacy

To determine the correlation between LOT- and HOT-based reading self-efficacy (H1), a Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed. The summary of the findings is presented below.

Table 4: The correlation between Lower-Order and Higher-Order reading self-efficacy

		LOT	HOT
LOT	Pearson Correlation	1	.730**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	157	157
HOT	Pearson Correlation	.730**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	157	157

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 4 indicate a strong positive correlation, $r = .730$, $p < .001$, between LOT and HOT reading self-efficacy, suggesting that higher LOT reading self-efficacy is correlated with higher HOT reading self-efficacy. The findings suggest that learners who demonstrate greater confidence in lower-order reading skills also tend to report higher confidence in higher-order reading skills.

4.3 H2: Influence of Geographical Location on Critical Reading Self-efficacy

The impact of EFL learners' geographical location on their critical reading self-efficacy (H2) was examined using a MANOVA. The summary of the univariate findings is given in Table 5.

Table 5: The impact of geographical location on self-efficacy for lower-order and higher-order reading

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Lower-order reading self-efficacy	9.830	.002	.060
	Higher-order reading self-efficacy	23.812	.000	.133
Intercept	Lower-order reading self-efficacy	8672.840	.000	.982
	Higher-order reading self-efficacy	6296.611	.000	.976
Geographical location	Lower-order reading self-efficacy	9.830	.002	.060
	Higher-order reading self-efficacy	23.812	.000	.133
	Higher-order reading self-efficacy			

Table 5 indicates that geographical location significantly affected LOT reading self-efficacy ($F = 9.830$, $p = .002$), with a small effect size (partial eta squared = .060). Similarly, EFL learners' geographical location, in terms of their stay in rural and urban areas, has a statistically significant impact ($F = 23.812$, $p < .001$) on their HOT reading self-efficacy, with a moderate effect size (partial eta squared = .133). In short, EFL learners' geographical location significantly influences their lower-order and higher-order reading self-efficacy, with a stronger effect observed for HOT reading self-efficacy.

4.4 H3: Differences in Critical Reading Self-efficacy between Urban and Rural EFL Learners

An Independent Samples T-test was conducted to examine differences in critical reading self-efficacy between urban and rural EFL learners (H3). The summary of the Independent T-test findings is presented below.

Table 6: Differences between rural and urban EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs in critical reading

Variables	Levene's T Test (Sig.)	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	Cohen's d
Lower-order Reading Self-efficacy	0.002	3.095	136.225	0.002	0.24627	0.08894 to 0.40359	---
Higher-order Reading Self-efficacy	0.002	4.815	134.946	0.000	0.41995	0.24744 to 0.59245	0.780

Table 6 demonstrates significant differences between urban and rural EFL learners' lower-order and higher-order reading self-efficacy with Levene's Test indicating unequal variances across groups for both variables ($p = .002$). The subsequent t-test confirmed the significance of the difference. Urban students showed greater self-efficacy for both LOT reading ($t = 3.095$, $p = .002$; mean difference = .24627) and HOT reading ($t = 4.815$, $p < .001$; mean difference = .41995). The size of the difference in HOT reading self-efficacy, as measured by Cohen's d , was large (0.780). Therefore, urban EFL learners have greater confidence in their critical reading abilities than their rural counterparts.

5. Discussion

The analysis shows that EFL learners' lower-order reading self-efficacy strongly correlates with their higher-order reading self-efficacy. Previous discussions on the issue indicate that lower-order thinking abilities are foundational to the development of higher-order thinking (Marzano, 2012). According to Willingham (2007), if a student lacks mastery over lower-order thinking skills, he/she cannot adequately perform higher-order thinking activities. This finding aligns with previous conclusions (Rahim *et al.*, 2023). This implies that EFL learners' persistent weakness in higher-order reading skills and self-efficacy stems from inadequate mastery of lower-order reading tasks and insufficient the development of self-efficacy.

The study also found that EFL learners' geographical location, in terms of their area, significantly impacts both lower-order and higher-order reading self-efficacy. Additionally, the study found that urban EFL learners are more self-confident in their critical reading abilities than rural EFL learners. In this regard, Aiken and Barbarin (2008) contend that learners' disadvantaged family

backgrounds, such as low income and limited exposure to a rich literary environment, limits their ability to develop vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. In the Bangladeshi context, villagers have lower incomes and fewer opportunities than urban residents ([Staff Correspondence, 2023](#)). Further, there exists a growing educational gap between Bangladeshi urban and rural tertiary education seekers. The number of higher education recipients from rural areas is much lower than that of urban ones ([Tareque & Ahmed, 2024](#)). They further argue that without addressing this disparity, it is impossible to achieve sustainable national development. However, this finding contradicts those of [Mahmood and Othman \(2020\)](#), who found no significant differences between urban and rural EFL learners in Malaysian schools. This may be due to higher living standards across all locations, as Malaysia is an upper-income developing country ([Export Finance Australia, 2024](#)), whereas Bangladesh is a lower-middle-income country ([The European Institute for Asian Studies, 2023](#)), which affects the overall quality of life and education in rural areas.

Therefore, the study's findings extend [Bandura's \(1997, 2006\)](#) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy and Bloom's taxonomy ([Anderson et al., 2001](#)) by indicating that the development of critical reading self-efficacy is constructed simultaneously by cognitive and social factors, including living zones. The significant influence of learners' geographical location on LOT and HOT reading self-efficacy corroborates that personal beliefs evolve through the interplay among personal and environmental factors. In addition, the strong correlation between lower-order and higher-order reading self-efficacy substantiates the interlocked system of Bloom's taxonomy.

Considering the urban-rural gaps in EFL learners' critical self-efficacy, the findings may have implications for the educational stakeholders. In particular, efforts to improve learning environments and allocate sufficient learning and teaching resources can help enhance learners' critical reading self-efficacy, particularly in under-resourced settings. Additionally, tertiary EFL teachers can benefit from designing activities that incorporate both LOT and HOT reading skills. In particular, rural tertiary EFL teachers can reflect on instructional strategies that motivate learners to engage in critical reading tasks and thus nurture their self-confidence in critical reading. Curriculum designers can develop materials to support balanced development of LOT and HOT reading performances.

In essence, the study's findings bear significance for both theory and practice in EFL education. The findings indicate that fostering critical reading self-efficacy involves addressing contextual realities, going beyond classroom dynamics, and ensuring fair access to resources and supportive learning conditions. These findings further highlight the development of tertiary EFL learners' critical-reading self-efficacy as a context-bound learning outcome. Therefore, building critical reading is not only a cognitive goal but also a social commitment.

As stated at the outset of the study, critical reading self-efficacy is not just a cognitive skill but an indicator of educational equity and social empowerment. By establishing that critical reading self-efficacy emerges from both cognitive efforts and social opportunities associated with residential and institutional locations, the study reinforces the inseparable connections between language education and broader influential contexts. Moreover, the findings defy the view that critical reading self-efficacy can be promoted in isolation from learners' locational backgrounds, underscoring the significance of a language pedagogy that integrates intellectual development with the social conditions that sustain it.

Despite its contribution, the study has some limitations. The limited sample may not fully capture the diversity of the target population. In addition, the quantitative design lacks the deeper exploration of learners' personal and social experiences and classroom dynamics. Hence, further research should be conducted using mixed methods and a larger sample.

6. Conclusion

The study addressed a critical gap in understanding how EFL learners' cognitive and social factors shape their self-efficacy in critical reading. The study intended to identify the connection between LOT and HOT reading self-efficacy, the influence of geographical location, and the differences in critical reading self-efficacy between urban and rural EFL learners. The hypotheses were supported by the findings, which showed that LOT reading self-efficacy is crucial for HOT reading self-efficacy and that learners' living and institutional locations influence both LOT and HOT reading self-efficacies. Particularly, it confirmed that Bangladeshi rural EFL learners, due to their poorer social orientation and subsequent challenges, have lower critical reading self-efficacy.

The results, consistent with Bandura (1997, 2006) and Bloom's (Anderson *et al.*, 2001) frameworks, corroborate the idea that critical reading self-efficacy develops through the mutual contributions of learners' cognitive abilities and social contexts. The study calls for establishing educational equity through consciously designed materials and socially aware instructional practices that engage tertiary EFL learners in critical reading practices. It also advocates initiatives to reduce the urban-rural gaps in critical reading self-efficacy. Though limited by its sample and research approach, the study lays the foundation for future cross-context and mixed-methods research on how social factors sustain confidence in critical reading. Overall, equipping tertiary EFL learners with critical reading self-efficacy is both a pedagogical goal and a social responsibility.

References

- Alauddin, M., Kabir, M. K., Sharif, M. Y. (2016). Prospects and challenges of higher education in the 21st century: Bangladesh perspective. *Feni University Journal*, 1(1), 90-110
- Alrashidi, O., & Alshammari, S. H. (2025). The effects of self-efficacy, teacher support, and positive academic emotions on student engagement in online courses among EFL university students. *Education and Information Technologies*, 30(6), 8139-8157. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-13139-3>
- Amin, M. R. & Sheikh, M.R.I. (2021). A comparative study of the quality of higher education provision in public and private universities in Bangladesh. *Global Journal of Educational Studies*, 7(1), 1 -18. Doi:10.5296/gjes.v7i1.18725
- An, Z., Wang, C., Li, S., Gan, Z., & Li, H. (2021). Technology-assisted self-regulated English language learning: Associations with English language self-efficacy, English enjoyment, and learning outcomes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 558466. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.558466
- Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P. W., Cruikshank, K. A., Mayer, R. E., Pintrich, P. R., Rath, J., & Wittrock, M. C. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. Longman.
- Aweina, S. (2024). *Comparing the academic self-efficacy of English language learners taking College Prep ESL, English Composition I, or English Composition II Courses at a US Community College: A quantitative causal-comparative study* (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/5752/>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Bandura, A. (2000). Self-efficacy: The foundation of agency. In *Control of human behavior, mental processes, and consciousness* (pp. 16-30). Psychology Press.
- Bandura, A. (2006). Guide for constructing self-efficacy scales. *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents* (pp. 307-337).
- Bhat, M. S. (2023). Rural education enhancement strategies: Bridging the urban-rural education gap. *International Review of Practical Innovation, Technology and Green Energy (IRPITAGE)*, 3(3), 73-79.
- Bozgun, K., & Can, F. (2023). The associations between metacognitive reading strategies and critical reading self-efficacy: Mediation of reading motivation. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences*, 5(1), 51-65. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonses.383>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Waters, D. & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652-661. Doi: 10.1177/1744987120927206

- Cartwright, F., & Allen, M. K. (2002). *Understanding the Rural-Urban Reading Gap*. Human Resources Development Canada.
- Comber, B., & Nixon, H. (2011). Critical reading comprehension in an era of accountability. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 38, 167-179.
- The Financial Express. (2023, June 23). Industry's contribution to GDP up, employment down. *The Financial Express*. Retrieved from <https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/first-page/industrys-contribution-to-gdp-up-employment-down-1687458468>
- The European Institute for Asian Studies. (2023, July 3). *Towards the middle income status in Bangladesh*. EIAS. Retrieved from <https://eias.org/policy-briefs/towards-the-middle-income-status-in-bangladesh/>
- Export Finance Australia. (2024, January). *Malaysia*. Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://www.exportfinance.gov.au/resources/country-profiles/malaysia/>
- Fagbohun, A. O., Orimadegun, A., & Akinyinka, O. O. (2025). A comparative study of self-esteem in secondary school adolescents in urban and rural settings of Oyo State, Nigeria. *Rural and Remote Health*, 25(3), 1-9. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.22605/rrh9143>
- Glauber, R. (2022). Rural depopulation and the rural-urban gap in cognitive functioning among older adults. *The Journal of Rural Health*, 38(4), 696-704. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12650>
- Hossan, M. M. (2022). Sustainable employability skills among Bangladeshi university graduates: employers' perspective. *Daffodil International University Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*, 15(2), 1-18. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.36481/diujbe.v015i2.mrtgqz80>
- Kamarulzaman, M. S., Sailin, S. N., Mahmor, N. A., & Shaari, A. J. (2017). Correlation between Lots and Hots scores among UUM. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 5(3), 71-76.
- Karadeniz, A. (2015). An examination of critical reading self-efficacy perceptions among the students of the faculty of education over different variables. *Anthropologist*, 22(2), 167-175. Doi: 10.31901/24566802.2015/22.02.03
- Khalil, A. M. A. (2019). An investigation of critical reading skills on tertiary level students. *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches*, 6(9), 70-82.
- Khan, A., & Khan, S. (2025). Educational Disparities in Rural vs. Urban Settings: A sociological analysis. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*, 3(1), 275-283.
- Kökçü, Y. (2023). Critical reading self-efficacy and metacognitive reading strategies: A relational study. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 19(1), 47–61. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.29329/ijpe.2023.517.4>
- Küçüköğlu, H. (2013). The interface between EFL teachers' self-efficacy concerning critical reading comprehension and some select variables.

- Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1646-1650. Doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.235
- Kusuma, M. D., Rosidin, U., Abdurrahman, A., & Suyatna, A. (2017). The development of Higher Order Thinking Skill (HOTs) instrument assessment in Physics Study. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSRJME)*, 7(1), 26–32. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-0701052632>
- Kutuk, G., Putwain, D. W., Kaye, L. K., & Garrett, B. (2023). The development and preliminary validation of a new measure of self-efficacy: Questionnaire of self-efficacy in learning a foreign language. *ITL-International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 174(2), 230-262. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/itl.21031.kut>
- Laskar, M. A. I. (2021, June 21). Questioning and critical thinking: Do teachers and students entertain them in Bangladesh? *The Business Standard*. Retrieved from <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/questioning-and-critical-thinking-do-teachers-and-students-entertain-them-bangladesh-263959>.
- Ma, S., & Li, B. (2024, September). Classroom for critical thinking development. In *Proceedings of the 2024 3rd International Conference on Science Education and Art Appreciation (SEAA 2024)*, 866 (pp. 233-242). Springer Nature. Doi: https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-291-0_30
- Mahmood, M. S., & Othman, M. K. (2020). Learning style practices and critical thinking of students in Malaysia. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(8), 3570-3578. Doi: 10.13189/ujer.2020.080833
- Majumdar, R., Bakilapadavu, G., Majumder, R., Chen, A. M. R., Flanagan, B., & Ogata, H. (2020, November). Learning analytics of critical reading activity: Reading Hayavadana during lockdown. In *28th International Conference on Computers in Education Conference Proceedings 1*, 127-136. Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education (APSCE).
- Mamun, S. A. K. (2021). Is quality education possible in the affiliated college system? *The Daily Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/quality-education-possible-the-affiliated-college-system-2902866>.
- Marzano, R. J. (2012). The new art and science of teaching. *Marzano Research Laboratory*.
- Ministry of Education. (2010). *National Education Policy 2010*.
- Mridha, M., Nihlen, G., Erlandsson, B., Khan, A., Islam, M., Sultana, N., Reza, S., & Srinivas, M. (2013). E-Learning for empowering the rural people in Bangladesh opportunities and challenges. *Second International Conference on E-Learning and E-Technologies in Education (ICEEE)*. IEEE, 323-328.
- Niculescu, B. O., & Dragomir, I. A. (2023). Critical reading-a fundamental skill for building 21 century literacy. In *International Conference on Knowledge-Based Organization*, 29(2), 215-220. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2023-0060>

- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 results (Volume II): Where all students can succeed*. OECD Publishing. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>
- Öztürk, K., Denkeci-Akkaş, D., & Tikiz-Ertürk, G. (2022). Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their critical reading self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility. *The Reading Matrix*, 22(2), 121-137.
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS*. Routledge.
- Pirozzi, R., Dziewisz, J., & Starks-Martin, G. (2014). *Critical reading, critical thinking: Focusing on contemporary issues*. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Rajabi, P. (2009). Cultural orientation and reading comprehension models: The case of Iranian rural and urban students. *Novitas-ROYAL*, 3(1), 75-82.
- Rashid, A., & Rana, M. M. (2021). The efficacy of syllabi of general English courses at undergraduate level in Bangladesh: An evaluation. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 12(6), 979-989. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1206.14>
- Saidalvi, A., Noorezam, M., Fakhrudin, W. F. W. W., & Aziz, A. A. A. (2022). Self-perceptions and actual performance of critical reading skills among Malaysian engineering students. *Res Militaris*, 12(2), 542–552. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i8/14314>
- Schunk, D. H., & Pajares, F. (2002). The development of academic self-efficacy. In *Development of achievement motivation* (pp. 15-31). Academic Press.
- Schunk D. H., Meece J. L., Pintrich P. R. (2013) *Motivation in Education: Theory, research and applications* (3rd ed.). Prentice-Hall.
- Sharma, Prof. H.L. & Nasa, G. (2014). Academic self-efficacy: A reliable predictor of educational performances. *British Journal of Education*, 2(3), 57-64.
- Siboro, E. S., Agung, A. S. S. N., & Quinones, C. A. (2022). Exploring the level of students' self-efficacy in speaking class. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 25(2), 651-659.
- Sohel, Md. A. H., & Mojumder, M. J. H. (2021). Absenteeism in the colleges under the National University of Bangladesh: Causes, effects and gender relations. *The Journal of Rural Development*, 44(2), 1–44.
- Sophia, M. N. (2017). Critical reading skills for the 21st century: The role of universities. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 22(12), 53-59. Doi: 10.9790/0837-2212055359
- Staff Correspondence. (2023, August 23). 24.5pc people leaving villages for towns due to lack of livelihood: study. *The Prothom Alo*. Retrieved from <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ergvhq6ncn>.
- Surjosuseno, T. T., & Watts, V. (1999). Using Bloom's taxonomy to teach critical reading in English as a Foreign Language classes. *Queensland Journal of Educational Research*, 15(2), 227-244.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2019). *Using multivariate statistics* (7th ed.). Pearson.

- Taber, K. S. (2018). The use of Cronbach's Alpha when developing and reporting research instruments in science education. *Research in Science Education*, 48(6), 1273–1296. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-016-9602-2>
- Tareque, M., & Ahmed, T. T. (2024, April 3). Growing rural-urban education divide is hurting Bangladesh's future. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/growing-rural-urban-education-divide-hurting-bangladeshs-future-3580771>.
- Uddin, M. R., Shimizu, K., Sharmin, H., & Widiyatmoko, A. (2023, June). Comparing critical thinking skills between rural and urban students in secondary level education of Bangladesh: A focus on environmental education. In *the 8th International Conference on Mathematics, Science, and Education 2021*, 2614(1), 020035. AIP Publishing LLC. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0127674>
- Ullah, M. M., Uddin, M. E., Karmakar, K., Alam, M. S., & Islam, T. (2022). Exploring EFL teachers' facilitating critical thinking skills in teaching writing to low-proficient undergraduate students in Bangladesh: A mixed method approach. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 11(4), 222-234. Doi: 10.55493/5019.v11i4.4690
- Ulu, H., Avsar-Tuncay, A., & Bas, Ö. (2017). The relationship between multimodal literacy of pre-service teachers and their perception of self-efficacy in critical reading. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5(12), 85-91. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v5i12.2806>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-education-monitoring-gem-report-2020>
- Usher, E. L., Weidner, B. L., Liem, G. A. D., & McInerney, D. M. (2018). Sociocultural influences on self-efficacy development. *Big Theories Revisited*, 2, 141-164.
- Van, L. H., Li, C. S., & Wan, R. (2022). Critical reading in higher education: A systematic review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 44, 101028. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101028>
- Wang, L., Pang, L., Yang, S., & Shui, H. (2026). Urban–rural background disparities and their impact on college students' academic outcomes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 17, 1724706. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1724706>
- Wang, Y., Shen, B., & Yu, X. (2021). A latent profile analysis of EFL learners' self-efficacy: Associations with academic emotions and language proficiency. *System*, 103, 102633. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102633>
- Wiederkehr, V., Darnon, C., Chazal, S., Guimond, S., & Martinot, D. (2015). From social class to self-efficacy: Internalization of low social status pupils' school performance. *Social Psychology of Education*, 18, 769-784.

- Willingham, D. T. (2007). Critical thinking: Why is it so hard to teach?.*American Federation of Teachers, Summer 2007*, 8-19.
- World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. World Bank. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>
- Yu, W., Qian, Y., Abbey, C., Wang, H., Rozelle, S., Stoffel, L. A., & Dai, C. (2022). The role of self-esteem in the academic performance of rural students in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(20), 13317. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192013317>