A Systematic Literature Review of EFL Students' Positive Self-Concept in Digital Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This study aims to synthesize the main characteristics of EFL students with a positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. Previous studies have not addressed these characteristics in a focused and systematic way, especially in the context of digital media. Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this study analyzed the selected articles through the PRISMA framework and CIMO logic. The findings revealed four main characteristics of EFL students with a positive self-concept: confidence in their own abilities, high motivation, emotional stability, and use of strategies in learning and reading. These characteristics are considered important to support students' success in comprehending digital texts. Moreover, the presence of a positive self-concept seems to affect not only cognitive but also emotional engagement with reading materials. The study concludes that understanding these key characteristics can help educators design more effective digital reading instruction that can foster students' self-concept, increase motivation, and improve their overall reading comprehension outcomes.

Keywords: characteristics, digital reading comprehension, EFL students, self-concept, systematic literature review

Introduction

Digital texts are becoming more widely used in English language learning. Students have grown up surrounded by technology, which they use not only for academic purposes but also for entertainment and social interaction through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and online games. This familiarity with digital tools has shaped their learning preferences, as many now choose to read and study using computers or mobile devices (Saefatu et al., 2023). As technology and education keep advancing, it becomes essential to incorporate technological tools into the learning process (Silmi, 2023). Computer technology and software development have made it possible to transfer printed texts of textbooks, journals, articles, newspapers, and course notes from an actual paper page to a computer screen (Ristra et al., 2022).

In today's digital learning environment, EFL learners are increasingly expected to engage with digital materials as part of their reading development. The ability to navigate, evaluate, and critically analyze digital texts has become a crucial component of digital reading (Wahyuddin et al., 2024).

This demands not only reading comprehension but also the ability to assess the credibility of sources and adapt to multimodal texts such as videos, hyperlinks, and infographics. Given these demands, it is no surprise that in today's digital learning environment, EFL learners are increasingly expected to engage with digital materials as part of their reading development. This shift enables students to access a wide range of information from a variety of online sources and in a variety of formats. Engaging with digital texts allows EFL learners to develop broader literacy and language skills beyond traditional, isolated learning. Ultimately, the way learners interact with digital content is likely to shape the future of English language learning (Pertiwi & Rodliyah, 2022).

Despite the increasing use of digital materials in language learning, many EFL students still face difficulties when interacting with digital texts. One common difficulty is the ease of distraction when using digital devices. Notifications from social media, messaging apps, or the temptation to browse unrelated websites can disrupt students' focus and reduce their ability to engage deeply with the material. In addition, prolonged screen time can lead to fatigue and decreased concentration, which in turn makes students feel reluctant or unmotivated to read (Ningsih et al., 2023).

Another challenge is the linguistic complexity of the texts. Some students feel that they struggle with advanced vocabulary and unfamiliar expressions, which hinder their comprehension. They often encounter words or passages that are unfamiliar to them and feel discouraged when they cannot grasp the overall meaning (Hartati et al., 2022). These difficulties are often accompanied by cognitive overload - a problem that often arises in digital learning contexts (Todorova, 2024). Learners may experience increased cognitive demands when deciphering new vocabulary, processing complex sentence structures, or integrating unfamiliar linguistic features, all of which can negatively impact their comprehension of the text (Tzafilkou et al., 2021).

Moreover, the multimodal nature of many digital texts, such as hyperlinked text, embedded media, or fragmented layouts, can cause confusion and disinterest, especially for learners who do not have strong digital reading strategies. Beyond these technical and linguistic barriers, psychological factors such as self-concept also play an important role in shaping EFL students' engagement with digital texts. Learners with low academic self-concept may underestimate their ability to comprehend and complete reading tasks, especially when faced with complex or unfamiliar content. This lack of confidence can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as minimal participation in class discussions or unwillingness to attempt reading tasks independently. On the other hand, students with a high self-concept tend to show greater motivation and perseverance. They are often more passionate about understanding the entire text and actively participate in class activities compared to their peers, who have lower self-confidence (Zagoto, 2020).

The importance of self-concept becomes even clearer when discussing reading comprehension in a digital context. Reading comprehension is a highly complex process that goes far beyond simply recognizing words and understanding their meaning. It requires cognitive engagement, critical thinking, and sustained motivation (Yulianti, 2021; Zagoto, 2020). A positive academic self-concept, which includes aspects such as self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to succeed), self-esteem (personal value as a learner), and self-regulated learning (ability to plan, monitor, and reflect on learning), plays an important role in students' ability to comprehend texts effectively. Students with a high academic self-concept often believe that they are proficient readers, which leads

them to read more often and engage with longer and more challenging texts. These students tend to respond more openly to constructive feedback and use it as an opportunity to grow academically (Tantowie et al., 2022). On the other hand, students with lower reading self-concept may lack confidence and motivation, causing them to avoid reading tasks or not engage in the learning process at all.

Previous research has highlighted that students with low self-concept often face higher levels of anxiety, reduced motivation, and ultimately lower levels of reading comprehension. Research has also shown that students with a positive self-concept tend to be more motivated, self-regulated, and adaptable in various situations, which contributes to better comprehension outcomes (McElvany & Schwabe, 2019; Xie & Huang, 2024). Previous findings have also shown that students with higher self-concept are more likely to perform well in online reading environments. Similarly, high levels of anxiety have been associated with poor digital reading performance, while reading motivation has been shown to significantly impact comprehension in both online and offline settings (Alpian et al., 2023). Previous research also shows that self-efficacy significantly affects reading comprehension outcomes, as students with high self-efficacy are more confident in tackling complex texts and overcoming challenges (Nejati, 2024). Moreover, findings show that students who can plan, monitor, and adjust their learning strategies tend to achieve better comprehension and higher academic success (S. et al., 2023).

However, although previous research has explored individual aspects of self-concept, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-regulated learning, there is still limited research linking all these elements together in the specific context of digital reading among EFL students. This creates a gap in understanding how the characteristics of an overall positive self-concept influence students' success in digital reading. Therefore, this study aims to systematically review existing research on EFL students' positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. The aim is to identify the key characteristics that define high self-concept students to support their reading comprehension in a digital environment. This topic is important because digital reading has become an essential part of modern language learning, and knowing what helps students to succeed can guide better teaching practices and support strategies. Based on this background, the main research question is: What are the main characteristics of EFL students with a positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension?

Method

This study used a systematic literature review design. The systematic literature review aimed to synthesize the findings on characteristics of EFL students with positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. The review processes followed the PRISMA Flow Diagram from identification, screening, and eligibility, and then included (Moher et al., 2010). The PRISMA Flow Diagram was used to ensure transparency and systematic in the process of selecting literature.
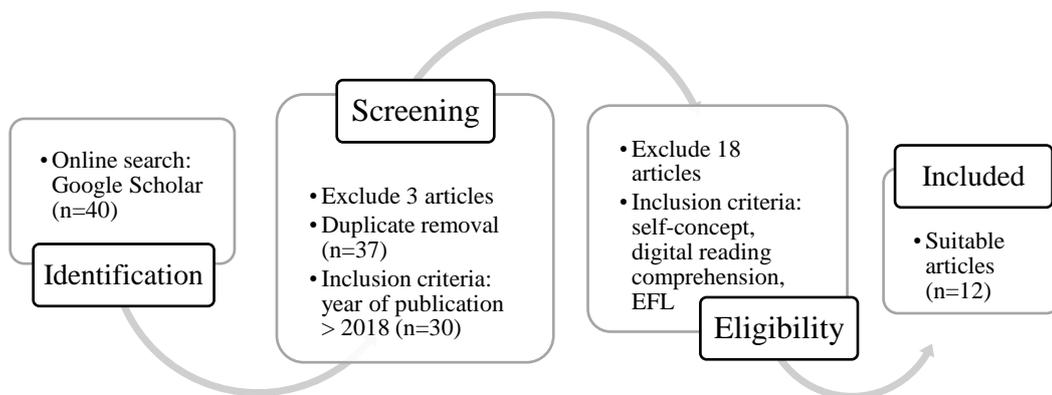
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Chart 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

First, in the identification process, researchers conducted a systematic search of the database, such as *Google Scholar,* through the *Publish or Perish* application. The researcher used a strategy by combining the keywords "self-concept" AND "reading" OR "reading comprehension" AND "EFL" OR "EFL students" OR "L2" AND "digital" OR "digital media" in the process of searching for data. In this process, the researcher also utilized the CIMO Logic Framework, which included the components of context, intervention, mechanisms, and outcome (Denyer et al., 2008) to record important information in the articles.

Second, the screening process was carried out to remove duplicate articles, but it did not meet the year of publication criteria. The criteria for the range of publication years that researchers set from 2019 to 2025. This criterion was set with the expectation that the research results could be relevant at least until the present. For this reason, articles with publication years below the last 6 years were removed.

Third, the eligibility process was conducted to exclude articles that were not relevant to the inclusion criteria. The researcher determined several criteria, such as those relevant to self-concept, digital reading comprehension, and English Foreign Learners. This process was conducted to ensure that the articles that were included were relevant to the research topic. Therefore, the results can be properly defined, and the research objectives can be achieved. Finally, the included process contains the set of data used for further systematic review. It contains articles that are relevant to the research topic and qualified through the exclusion process. The data are then analyzed to synthesize the research results.

Inductive content analysis is used to analyze the data. There are three main phases of inductive content analysis. First, the preparation phase is to decide units to analyze. Researchers in this study use sentences in results or findings and the discussion of each article as units to be analyzed. Second, the organization phase includes open coding, grouping data, categorizing, and abstraction. The third phase is the reporting phase (Elo & Kyngas, 2007).
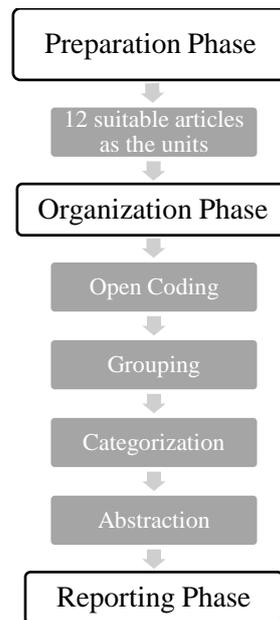
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Preparation Phase    │
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Chart 2. Process of Data Analysis

In the preparation phase, the researchers selected 12 suitable articles, and sentences were taken from the results or findings and discussion sections of each article as the units of analysis were carefully examined. Then, in the organization phase, the researchers conducted open coding by labeling relevant segments with meaningful codes. For instance, a sentence "Students with high self-efficacy tend to be avid readers who are motivated to accomplish any reading challenge." Was coded as "high self-efficacy." These codes were then compiled in a coding sheet and grouped based on similarity concepts.

After grouping, the researchers continued to categorize by interpreting each group of codes to identify patterns that appeared and core themes. The process continued with abstraction, where the categories were refined and synthesized into a final list of key characteristics of EFL students with a positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. Finally, in the reporting phase, the final findings were systematically described and supported with data from the twelve selected articles.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study revealed four key characteristics of EFL students with positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. The characteristics of EFL students with positive self-concept in reading comprehension include confidence in their own abilities, high motivation, emotional stability, and the use of learning and reading strategies. These characteristics were identified through an inductive content analysis of twelve selected articles.

Table 1
Final Characteristics of EFL Students with Positive Self-Concept in Digital Reading Comprehension

No.	Final Characteristics	Sources
1.	Confidence in own abilities	(Alpian et al., 2023; Anggia & Habók, 2025; Drepper, 2024; Nejati, 2024; Nejati & Ilchi, 2023; Resila & Kuswandono, 2024; Tarigan et al., 2022; Zuhri et al., 2021)
2.	High motivation	(Alpian et al., 2023; Anggia & Habók, 2025; McElvany & Schwabe, 2019; Nejati, 2024; Tarigan et al., 2022)
3.	Emotional stable	(Alpian et al., 2023; Xie & Huang, 2024)
4.	The use of strategy in learning and reading	(Nadirah et al., 2020; Nejati, 2024; Nejati & Ilchi, 2023; Saqr, 2021)

The first characteristic of EFL students with positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension is confidence in their own abilities. Students with positive self-concept consistently believed that they were competent in understanding texts. This strong sense of self-efficacy enabled students to face reading tasks with assurance, and to perceive even difficult text as manageable challenges rather than as threats. Students' belief in their ability to comprehend contributed to better digital reading comprehension performance and a greater willingness to persist in the face of difficulty. It can be interpreted that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping students' reading behavior, particularly in promoting students' confidence in their own ability.

The next characteristic of EFL students with positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension is a high level of motivation. In this case, students are driven to read and excited to achieve comprehension goals. Students' motivation comes from within them, which is often associated with a positive self-concept. Students who are motivated are more persistent, more engaged, and more enthusiastic in performing reading tasks, even when the text being read is complex. So that motivation in this context is a characteristic that defines EFL students with a positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension, as well as contributing to the development of a strong self-concept.

Emotional stability also characterized students with positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. Students with emotional stability demonstrate the ability to accept themselves and others, and they are emotionally mature in responding to feedback or reading challenges. This stability was reflected in their sense of equality with peers, their comfort in receiving praise, and their understanding of emotional experiences, which helped them manage anxiety during reading. From that, emotional stability supports students' concentration when engaging with a digital reading context.

Finally, the findings also highlighted the use of strategy in learning and reading. EFL students with a positive self-concept tended to make use of self-regulated learning strategies. Students were

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able to plan, monitor, and adjust their reading processes effectively, and many showed a preference for independent learning. These strategic behaviors were often enhanced by their familiarity with digital tools, allowing them to engage more deeply with texts in both online and offline environments. This use of strategy improved their digital reading comprehension.

Previous studies have found that students with low self-concept often experience higher levels of anxiety, lower motivation, and weaker reading comprehension (McElvany & Schwabe, 2019; Xie & Huang, 2024). In contrast, students with a positive self-concept tend to be more motivated, more self-regulated, and better at adapting to learning situations, which leads to improved reading outcomes (Alpian et al., 2023). In digital reading environments, self-concept has been linked to better performance, while high anxiety can negatively impact comprehension. Motivation also plays an important role in both online and offline reading tasks (Nejati, 2024). Additionally, students who plan, monitor, and adjust their reading strategies often show higher comprehension results (S. et al., 2023).

However, most previous research only focuses on one or two aspects of self-concept, such as self-efficacy or learning strategies, without examining them together. There is still limited research that connects these elements as part of a complete self-concept in digital reading among EFL students. To fill this gap, this study conducts a systematic literature review to identify the key characteristics of EFL students with a positive self-concept in digital reading comprehension. The findings aim to help educators understand what supports student success in digital reading and provide guidance for future teaching practices.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has synthesized the main characteristics of EFL students with a positive self-concept in the context of digital reading comprehension. Despite the growing importance of digital reading in language learning, previous research has not specifically or systematically explored how the characteristics of high self-concept students influence students' success in digital reading comprehension. Applying the PRISMA framework and CIMO logic, this review identified four key characteristics consistently associated with a positive self-concept: confidence in their own abilities, high motivation, emotional stability, and use of strategies in learning and reading. These characteristics were found to significantly support students' ability to comprehend digital texts effectively. Moreover, the findings suggest that a positive self-concept not only enhances cognitive engagement but also fosters emotional readiness and resilience in the face of reading challenges. Thus, understanding these characteristics can guide educators and curriculum designers in developing digital reading programs that promote self-concept, motivate students, and ultimately improve reading comprehension outcomes among EFL students.

Acknowledgements

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