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The Effect Of *Self-Efficacy* On Students' Critical Thinking Skills Through Social Studies Learning At Smpn 17 Lebong

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the level of self-efficacy and critical thinking skills of ninth grade students, and to see the effect of self-efficacy on critical thinking skills through social studies learning at SMPN 17 Lebong. The study used a quantitative approach with a causal associative design. The population in this study was 89 and the research sample was 40 ninth grade students selected through a total sampling technique. Data were collected through a four-point Likert Scale-based questionnaire instrument and analyzed using simple linear regression analysis, t-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2) with IBM SPSS 2026. The results showed that self-efficacy was in the Very High category (46.40) and critical thinking skills were also in the Very High category (46.73). The results of the hypothesis test proved that self-efficacy had a positive and significant effect on critical thinking skills (sig. 0.012 <0.05; Y = 56.493 + 0.211X) with a contribution of 33.9% (Adjusted R^2 = 0.339). The remaining 66.1% is influenced by other factors outside this study.

Keywords: Self-Efficacy, Critical Thinking Skills, Social Studies Learning

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first-century education demands a young generation that excels not only academically but also possesses critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative skills. International organizations stress the importance of developing *Higher Order Thinking Skills* (HOTS) so that students can adapt to increasingly rapid social and technological change (Carney, 2022; Canton, 2021). In the Indonesian context, the Merdeka Curriculum, which is oriented toward *student-centered* learning, is designed to develop critical, creative, and independent students in line with the Pancasila Student Profile (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024).

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Self-efficacy is one of the key psychological variables influencing learning success. The concept developed by Bandura in social cognitive theory refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to organize and execute actions to achieve specific goals (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Students with high self-efficacy have been shown to be more persistent, active, and able to develop effective learning strategies. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy tend to be passive and give up easily in the learning process (Pattiasina & Mardikawati, 2023). Critical thinking skills, which encompass analyzing information, evaluating arguments, drawing logical conclusions, and solving problems independently, are an essential competency in Social Studies (IPS) learning (Maesaroh & Hari, 2025). A number of studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between self-efficacy and critical thinking skills (Setiyawan & Alfatih, 2024; Angela, Handican, & Casanova, 2025; Juliani, Hanifah, & Haji, 2024). Nevertheless, contextual empirical studies at the junior high school level remain limited, particularly in the Bengkulu region.

Observations at SMPN 17 Lebong (a state junior high school) indicate that some students remain passive in learning, are reluctant to express their opinions, and are not yet able to connect the material to real social phenomena. This condition calls for an empirical study to measure the effect of self-efficacy on the critical thinking skills of ninth-grade students through Social Studies learning at the school. Critical Thinking Skills. Critical thinking is defined as a cognitive process involving the systematic analysis of information, evidence-based evaluation of arguments, the drawing of logical conclusions, and independent problem solving (Hidayati, Fadly, & Ekapti, 2021). These skills enable individuals to distinguish fact from opinion, evaluate the veracity of information, provide logical reasons, draw appropriate conclusions, and engage in self-reflection (Fridayani, Riastuti, & Jehamu, 2022). Tumanggor (2021) asserts that critical thinking is the most important skill for facing the challenges of 21st-century learning. The Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Critical Thinking. Students with high self-efficacy tend to be less easily swayed by misinformation, more willing to question assumptions, and more skilled at constructing logical arguments (Angela, Handican, & Casanova, 2025). The mechanism can be explained through the perspective of Schunk & DiBenedetto (2020): strong self-belief reduces cognitive load when processing complex information, so that reasoning capacity can be devoted fully to in-depth analysis and evaluation. Setiyawan & Alfatih (2024) and Pattiasina & Mardikawati (2023) confirm a positive correlation between self-efficacy and critical thinking skills as well as critical literacy, particularly in the digital era.

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RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with a causal associative design, namely to test the cause-and-effect relationship between self-efficacy (X) as the independent variable and critical thinking skills (Y) as the dependent variable (Sugiyono, 2022). The study was conducted at SMPN 17 Lebong, Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province, from February 10 to March 10, 2026. The study population comprised all ninth-grade students of SMPN 17 Lebong, consisting of two classes (IX A and IX B) with a total of 40 students. Because the population was fewer than 100, a total sampling technique was used so that all students became research samples (Arikunto, 2021).

Table 1. Number of Research Samples

Class	Number of Students
IX A	20
IX B	20
Total	40

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale (SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1). The self-efficacy instrument consisted of 12 statement items referring to Bandura's three dimensions, while the critical thinking instrument consisted of 12 items covering the indicators of identifying facts, evaluating arguments, drawing conclusions, solving problems, and self-reflection. All instruments underwent validity and reliability testing before use. Data analysis comprised: (1) descriptive statistics; (2) the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test; (3) the linearity test; (4) simple linear regression analysis (Y = a + bX); (5) the partial test (t-test); and (6) the coefficient of determination test (R^2). All data processing used IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Description of the Self-Efficacy and Critical Thinking Skills Variables

Based on descriptive statistical analysis, students' self-efficacy obtained a mean score of 46.40 (within a range of 39–48), while critical thinking skills obtained a mean of 46.73 (the same range). Both variables were in the Very High category. The low standard deviations (1.081 and 0.905) indicate a homogeneous data distribution. A summary of the descriptive statistics is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

Statistic	Self-Efficacy (X)	Critical Thinking (Y)
N	40	40
Minimum	44.00	45.00
Maximum	48.00	48.00
Mean	46.40	46.73
Std. Deviation	1.081	0.905
Category	Very High	Very High

Source: SPSS Data Processing, 2026

2. Classical Assumption Tests

The normality test using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200 > 0.05, so the residual data are normally distributed. The linearity test yielded a Sig. *Deviation from Linearity* value of 0.398 > 0.05, which indicates a linear relationship between variables X and Y. Both assumptions were met, so the regression analysis could proceed. The test results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the Normality and Linearity Tests

Test	Test Statistic	Sig.	Conclusion
Normality (K-S)	0.103	0.200	Normal
Linearity (Dev. from Linearity)	1.014	0.398	Linear

Source: SPSS Data Processing, 2026

3. Simple Linear Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The results of the simple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 4. The resulting regression equation is Y = 56.493 + 0.211X. The constant value of 56.493 means that when self-efficacy is zero, the critical thinking skills score is 56.493. The regression coefficient of 0.211 (positive) indicates that each one-unit increase in self-efficacy is followed by a 0.211-unit increase in critical thinking skills.

Table 4. Results of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis and t-Test

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.

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(Constant)	56.493	6.102	-	9.258	0.000
Self-Efficacy (X)	0.211	0.131	0.251	1.601	0.012

Source: SPSS Data Processing, 2026

The t-test results show a significance value of 0.012 < 0.05, so H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted. This means that self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on students' critical thinking skills. The coefficient of determination (Adjusted R^2 = 0.339) shows that self-efficacy contributes 33.9% of the variance in critical thinking skills, while the remaining 66.1% is influenced by other factors. A summary of the coefficient of determination is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of the Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Test

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
0.251	0.363	0.339	0.888

Source: SPSS Data Processing, 2026

4. Discussion

These findings confirm the hypothesis that self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on critical thinking skills in Social Studies learning. Theoretically, students with high self-efficacy experience reduced cognitive load when processing complex information, so that their reasoning capacity can be focused fully on in-depth analysis and evaluation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Strong self-belief also encourages students to be more willing to question assumptions and construct logical arguments (Angela, Handican, & Casanova, 2025).

The high self-efficacy score (46.40) is consistent with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages students' independence and self-confidence (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Meanwhile, the high critical thinking score (46.73) indicates that the students of SMPN 17 Lebong have reached the cognitive stage of independently analyzing and evaluating social phenomena. These findings are consistent with the studies by Setiyawan & Alfatih (2024) and Juliani, Hanifah, & Haji (2024), which demonstrated a significant effect of self-efficacy on critical thinking skills.

Nevertheless, the *Adjusted* R^2 value of 33.9% indicates that self-efficacy functions as psychological capital (mental readiness), not the sole determinant of critical thinking skills. External factors such as the quality of the learning model, teachers' pedagogical competence,

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and a conducive learning ecosystem contribute significantly to the 66.1% of variance not explained by this model (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). These findings underscore the need for synergy between strengthening students' self-efficacy and optimizing the quality of the learning environment to maximize critical thinking skills.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research results, three main conclusions can be drawn. First, the self-efficacy of ninth-grade students at SMPN 17 Lebong in Social Studies learning is in the Very High category (46.40), reflecting students' strong belief in facing and completing academic tasks. Second, students' critical thinking skills are also in the Very High category (46.73), showing good skills in analyzing information, evaluating arguments, and solving social problems reflectively. Third, self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on critical thinking skills (sig. 0.012 < 0.05; Y = 56.493 + 0.211X), with a contribution of 33.9%.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are put forward. Social Studies teachers are advised to consistently apply student-centered learning models such as *Problem-Based Learning* and *Project-Based Learning* to maintain and increase students' self-efficacy, along with providing constructive feedback. Schools need to create a conducive learning environment that supports students' mental and cognitive development, considering that 66.1% of the variance in critical thinking is still influenced by external factors. Future researchers are advised to explore additional variables such as specific learning models, metacognitive awareness, learning styles, or teachers' pedagogical competence in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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