

The Relationship between Coping Mechanisms and Self-Efficacy in Learning Social Studies among Grade 3 Learners

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300243>

Received: 15 March 2026; Accepted: 20 March 2026; Published: 02 April 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between coping mechanisms and self-efficacy in learning Social Studies among 372 Grade 3 learners in San Fernando District II, Division of Bukidnon, during the School Year 2025–2026. A descriptive–correlational research design was employed to determine learners’ coping mechanisms across five dimensions: advanced learning and motivation, self-direction and focus, enthusiasm and positive outlook, pursuing the course and rigorous study, and teacher aid and assistance, as well as their level of self-efficacy. Data were collected using validated survey instruments and analyzed using means, standard deviations, and Pearson product–moment correlations.

Findings revealed that learners demonstrated a generally high level of coping mechanisms, with most dimensions rated highly, except for advanced learning and motivation, which were rated moderately. Learners also exhibited a high level of self-efficacy in learning Social Studies. However, correlation analysis indicated no statistically significant relationship between overall coping mechanisms and self-efficacy. Among the dimensions, only advanced learning and motivation showed a weak but significant negative relationship with self-efficacy.

The findings suggest that coping mechanisms are not strongly associated with learners’ academic confidence and may function more as responses to perceived learning challenges rather than as direct contributors to self-efficacy. This result highlights the importance of considering other influencing factors, such as instructional practices, classroom environment, and socio-emotional support, in understanding learners’ confidence in Social Studies.

The study underscores the need for instructional approaches that provide meaningful learning experiences, reinforce mastery, and support learners’ emotional and motivational development, thereby strengthening self-efficacy.

Keywords: coping mechanisms, self-efficacy, Social Studies learning, Grade 3 learners, descriptive–correlational research.

INTRODUCTION

Lack of confidence in reading abstract and complex concepts is one of the biggest problems of developing self-efficacy in elementary learners in Social Studies. Social Studies usually encompasses history, geography, government, and culture, and may seem too broad or distant for young students to relate to in their present lives. Oktarianto et al. (2024) describe lessons that are not aligned with real-life examples as a situation in which students perceive the subject in question as challenging, resulting in low motivation and a lack of self-confidence in their ability to succeed. A lack of classroom engagement and the use of traditional, lecture-style teaching may also limit learners' chances of experiencing success, which is crucial for developing self-efficacy.

Rostami et al. (2022) also highlight that inconsistent feedback and motivation do not contribute to learners' self-confidence. Most students tend to rely too much on teacher approval or grades rather than developing their own sense of competence. Failing to see mistakes as learning opportunities may lead students to be afraid of failure

and reluctant to engage in class-related practices. Moreover, learning styles, home support, and access to learning materials may influence the learner's perceptions of his or her capabilities. Most elementary students still cannot be convinced that they can excel in Social Studies without a supportive learning environment that recognizes their efforts, curiosity, and progress (Alabi, 2024).

According to the recent statistics provided by the Department of Education (DepEd, 2025), the proportion of Grade 3 students in the country who know and can employ the content of the subject matter in Social Studies is 62 percent, which is a vast difference in the level of knowledge and skills in the specified area. It is also observed that the majority of classroom activities are heavily lecture-based, leaving little room for active engagement or collaborative learning. Also, parent surveys show that over 50% of learners receive little support at home in Social Studies, which influences academic performance and self-efficacy. These difficulties will lay the groundwork for carrying out this research. The development of self-efficacy is a vital aspect for young learners because their confidence in their abilities is directly proportional to their motivation, interest, and academic achievement.

Coping mechanisms are crucial for helping learners manage the challenges they face in the study of Social Studies. The topic often involves analyzing complex concepts, memorizing facts, and relating historical or social concepts to contemporary processes, which can overwhelm young learners. By applying healthy coping skills, such as advanced studying, questioning, and collaborating with peers, students can alleviate anxiety and enhance their understanding. Such mechanisms enable learners to control their emotions, stay motivated, and remain engaged despite what seems like a challenging lesson. It has been found that resilience and persistence are encouraged by effective coping behaviors, which are fundamental to mastering Social Studies and acquiring the skill of critical thinking (Adu et al., 2024).

In addition, coping mechanisms help learners develop a positive attitude towards academic challenges. Students can gain control over their learning by formulating strategies to manage stress, such as time management, scheduling an appointment with a teacher, or reflecting on themselves. This is beneficial not only to performance but also to self-efficacy and interest in Social Studies. The research has established that students who engage in positive coping skills exhibit better problem-solving abilities and greater academic satisfaction than students who adopt avoidance or passive responses (Yaghoubi et al., 2025). Coupled with encouraging coping skills in the classroom, Social Studies teaches learners not only to succeed academically but also to develop life skills they will apply throughout their lives.

While previous studies have established that coping mechanisms and self-efficacy are important factors in academic success, recent research (2022–2025) suggests that their relationship is more complex and context-dependent. For instance, Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2020) emphasize that intrinsic motivation and perceived competence are key determinants of self-efficacy, while coping strategies may only indirectly support these processes. Similarly, recent studies (Basileo et al., 2024; Maqsood et al., 2024) indicate that coping behaviors contribute to emotional regulation and persistence but do not always translate into increased academic confidence unless accompanied by successful learning experiences.

Moreover, emerging literature highlights the role of instructional practices, socio-emotional support, and classroom climate in shaping learners' self-efficacy (Adeoye et al., 2024; Abrouq, 2024). These findings suggest that coping mechanisms alone may not fully account for variations in learners' confidence, particularly among younger learners who are still developing metacognitive and emotion regulation skills.

Despite these developments, research on elementary learners in rural Philippine contexts remains limited. Existing studies often examine older learners or fail to consider how coping strategies function alongside classroom and socio-emotional factors. This study addresses this gap by examining coping mechanisms and self-efficacy among Grade 3 learners in San Fernando District II, Bukidnon. It provides localized evidence of how these variables are associated in early-stage learning environments.

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) of Lazarus and Folkman and Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2000) of Zimmerman, which, in combination, describe the relationship between coping processes and learners' self-efficacy in studying Social Studies. The initial theory is Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which

holds that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and interaction with others. Albert Bandura stressed that personal factors, behavior, and the environment interact to shape human behavior. The second theory is the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), proposed by Lazarus and Folkman, which explains the process of stress in the individual and their coping style, depending on how they appraise a stressor. Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman have proposed that coping is a dynamic concept that involves evaluating whether a given situation is a challenge or a threat, and how to handle it.

The independent variable of this research, as shown in Figure 1, is the coping mechanism, which, as described by Almoslamani (2022), encompasses how learners manage academic challenges and improve their learning performance. This variable is quantified across five dimensions: advanced learning and motivation, self-direction and focus, enthusiasm and positive outlook, pursuit of the course and rigorous study, and teacher aid and assistance. These dimensions explain how learners pre-plan, remain focused, maintain a positive attitude, study, and seek help from their teachers to overcome learning challenges. The dependent variable is the learners' self-efficacy, which, in turn, is conceptualized by Lopez-Garrido (2025) as the belief that learners can understand the lessons, complete tasks, and perform successfully in the Social studies learning process.

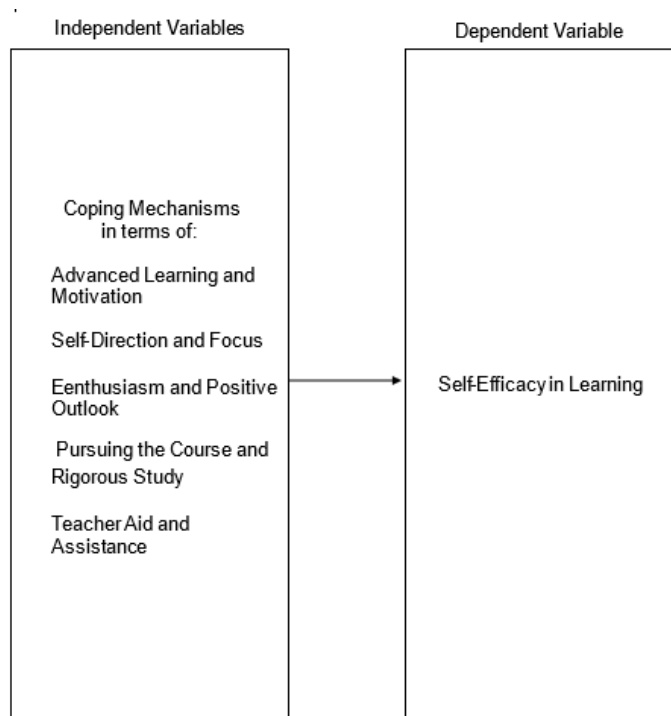


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram showing the Relationship of the Independent and Dependent Variables of the Study

This study aimed to determine the relationship between coping mechanisms and self-efficacy in learning Social Studies among Grade 3 learners in San Fernando District II, Division of Bukidnon, School Year 2025-2026.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of coping mechanisms learners exhibit in learning Social Studies when measured across the following dimensions: advanced learning and motivation, self-direction and focus, enthusiasm and positive outlook, pursuing the course and rigorous study, and teacher aid and assistance?
2. What is the level of learners' self-efficacy in learning?
3. Is there a significant relationship between learners' coping mechanisms and self-efficacy in learning?

Hypothesis of the Study

The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between learners' coping mechanisms and self-efficacy in learning.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationship between learners' coping mechanisms and their self-efficacy in learning Social Studies. A descriptive–correlational design is a quantitative approach used to determine relationships between variables without manipulating them in a natural setting (Clarete et al., 2023). In this study, the design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to examine the association between coping strategies and learners' self-efficacy in Social Studies. Data were collected using survey questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient. The design provided insights into the existing relationships between the variables and helped determine whether coping mechanisms influence learners' confidence in learning Social Studies.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the San Fernando II District, Division of Bukidnon, Philippines. The district includes several public elementary schools serving learners from rural and mountainous communities. The municipality of San Fernando is located approximately 48 kilometers from Valencia City and consists of 24 barangays. The area is characterized by mountainous terrain and river valleys formed by the Tigwa and Salug rivers.

The selected schools represent diverse learning environments within the district, making them well-suited to examine the relationship between learners' coping mechanisms and self-efficacy in Social Studies.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were Grade 3 learners enrolled in public elementary schools in San Fernando II District, Division of Bukidnon. A total of 372 Grade 3 learners participated in the study. Grade 3 learners were selected because they are at a developmental stage where they begin to develop coping strategies and confidence in academic learning, which may influence their self-efficacy in Social Studies.

Sampling Procedure

The study utilized simple random sampling, a probability sampling technique in which every Grade 3 learner had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent. The list of all Grade 3 learners in the participating schools served as the sampling frame.

Random selection was conducted using a lottery method or random number generator to ensure fairness and minimize selection bias. This sampling method allowed the sample to represent the characteristics of the entire population, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Research Instrument

Two survey questionnaires were used in this study.

The first instrument measured coping mechanisms and was adapted from Aguilod et al. (2023), covering five dimensions: advanced learning and motivation, self-direction and focus, enthusiasm and positive outlook, pursuing the course and rigorous study, and teacher aid and assistance. The second instrument measured learners' self-efficacy in learning Social Studies, adapted from Kang et al. (2019).

To ensure content validity, the instruments were reviewed by three experts in Social Studies education and educational psychology to assess the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items for Grade 3 learners. Revisions were made to simplify language and ensure age-appropriate wording.

To assess construct validity, a pilot test was conducted with 30 learners, and item analysis was performed to ensure that the items consistently reflected the intended constructs.

The instruments were deemed suitable for young learners because they used simple language, short statements, and context-based items aligned with learners’ experiences. Reliability testing using Cronbach’s alpha yielded acceptable coefficients ($\alpha \geq 0.80$), indicating good internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Bukidnon and the school heads of the participating schools. After obtaining the necessary permissions, informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of the Grade 3 learners.

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents through their respective teachers. The researcher personally collected the completed questionnaires to ensure accuracy and completeness. After retrieval, the responses were coded, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis.

All data were treated with strict confidentiality, and the results were reported in aggregated form without identifying individual respondents.

Scoring Procedure

Responses were interpreted using a five-point Likert scale.

A. Coping Mechanisms

Scale	Range	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Description
5	4.20–5.00	Always	Very High
4	3.40–4.19	Often	High
3	2.60–3.39	Sometimes	Moderate
2	1.80–2.59	Rarely	Low
1	1.00–1.79	Never	Very Low

B. Learners’ Self-Efficacy

Scale	Range	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Description
5	4.20–5.00	Always	Very High
4	3.40–4.19	Often	High
3	2.60–3.39	Sometimes	Moderate
2	1.80–2.59	Rarely	Low
1	1.00–1.79	Never	Very Low

Statistical Treatment of Data

The following statistical tools were used to analyze the data:

The mean and standard deviation were used to assess the level of learners’ coping mechanisms in learning Social Studies.

Mean and standard deviation were also used to determine the level of learners’ self-efficacy in Social Studies.

The Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient (Pearson *r*) was used to assess the relationship between coping mechanisms and learners’ self-efficacy in learning Social Studies.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent and the school administrators before conducting the research.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of the learners. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by coding the responses rather than using respondents’ names. The collected data were used solely for research purposes and were stored securely. All procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical research practices to protect the rights and welfare of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from Grade 3 learners in San Fernando District II, Division of Bukidnon. The results are organized according to the study's research problems. Statistical tools such as the mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient were used to assess the levels of coping mechanisms and learners’ self-efficacy, and to examine the relationship between the two variables.

Level of Coping Mechanisms of Learners in Learning Social Studies

Table 1. Overall Level of Coping Mechanisms of Learners in Learning Social Studies

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Advanced Learning and Motivation	3.39	0.474	Moderate
Self-Direction and Focus	3.44	0.487	High
Enthusiasm and Positive Outlook	3.44	0.502	High
Pursuing the Course and Rigorous Study	3.42	0.468	High
Teacher Aid and Assistance	3.44	0.459	High
Overall Mean	3.43	0.478	High

Table 1 shows the overall level of coping mechanisms exhibited by learners in learning Social Studies. The results indicate an overall mean of 3.43 (SD = 0.478), interpreted as High, which means that learners often demonstrate coping strategies when managing academic tasks and challenges in Social Studies. Among the dimensions, self-direction and focus, enthusiasm and positive outlook, and teacher aid and assistance obtained the highest mean scores (3.44). In contrast, advanced learning and motivation had the lowest mean (3.39), which is interpreted as moderate.

These findings indicate that learners generally display positive coping behaviors such as persistence, maintaining focus on tasks, sustaining optimism during learning activities, and seeking guidance from teachers when they

encounter difficulties. Such coping strategies enable learners to manage academic pressures and remain engaged in their Social Studies lessons. However, the moderate level of advanced learning and motivation suggests that learners may not consistently prepare for lessons independently or engage in proactive learning behaviors such as studying ahead of time.

The results highlight the importance of strengthening learners' coping mechanisms to support effective learning. Teachers may enhance these strategies by encouraging goal setting, providing structured learning guidance, and fostering classroom environments that support persistence and resilience. Learning activities that promote reflection, independent practice, and collaborative engagement may also help learners strengthen their coping strategies when dealing with challenging academic tasks.

These findings support Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2000), which emphasizes that learners who demonstrate self-regulation behaviors such as persistence, attention, and effort are better able to manage academic challenges and improve learning outcomes. Likewise, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explains that coping strategies help individuals evaluate challenges and develop responses to manage stressful situations. In academic contexts, learners who apply strategies such as persistence, optimism, and help-seeking are better able to handle academic demands. Furthermore, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) explains that behavior, personal beliefs, and environmental factors interact to shape learning outcomes. Teacher support and classroom interactions, therefore, play an important role in strengthening learners' coping behaviors. These findings are also consistent with the studies of Datu and Mateo (2020) and Macalisang and Bonghawan (2024), which reported that perseverance, positive learning attitudes, and teacher guidance contribute to learners' academic engagement and coping behaviors.

Level of Learners' Self-Efficacy in Learning Social Studies

Table 2. Overall Level of Learners' Self-Efficacy in Learning Social Studies

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Self-Efficacy in Learning Social Studies	3.94	0.229	High

Table 2 presents the overall level of learners' self-efficacy in learning Social Studies. The results show a mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.229), which is interpreted as High, indicating that learners generally have strong confidence in their ability to understand lessons, complete academic tasks, and apply strategies when learning Social Studies. The findings suggest that learners believe they are capable of completing learning tasks and overcoming difficulties encountered during classroom activities. High self-efficacy indicates that learners are confident in their ability to participate actively in discussions, accomplish assignments, and apply knowledge in learning situations. The relatively low standard deviation also indicates consistency among learners' responses, suggesting that most respondents share similar levels of confidence in their learning abilities.

These results emphasize the importance of nurturing learners' confidence in their academic abilities. Learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate persistence, motivation, and active engagement in their studies. Teachers can further strengthen self-efficacy by providing constructive feedback, encouraging participation, and designing learning experiences that allow learners to experience success and mastery of academic tasks.

The findings strongly support Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which explains that self-efficacy influences learners' motivation, persistence, and academic performance. According to Bandura, learners who believe in their ability to succeed are more likely to exert effort and persist when facing challenges. The findings also align with Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2000), which highlights the role of self-efficacy in regulating learning behaviors and improving academic outcomes. Similarly, studies by Freire et al. (2020) and Basileo et al. (2024) reported that learners with strong self-efficacy demonstrate higher motivation, better learning strategies, and improved academic performance.

Relationship Between Coping Mechanisms and Self-Efficacy in Learning Social Studies

Table 3. Test of Significant Relationship Between Coping Mechanisms and Self-Efficacy

Variable	r	p-value	Interpretation
Advanced Learning and Motivation	-0.123	0.018	Significant
Self-Direction and Focus	0.000	0.999	Not Significant
Enthusiasm and Positive Outlook	-0.039	0.454	Not Significant
Pursuing the Course and Rigorous Study	0.064	0.215	Not Significant
Teacher Aid and Assistance	-0.047	0.371	Not Significant
Overall Relationship	-0.063	0.228	Not Significant

Table 3 presents the correlation analysis between learners’ coping mechanisms and their self-efficacy in learning Social Studies. The results show that the overall relationship between coping mechanisms and self-efficacy is not statistically significant ($r = -0.063$, $p = 0.228$). The results revealed that the overall relationship between coping mechanisms and self-efficacy was not statistically significant ($r = -0.063$, $p = 0.228$), indicating a negligible and negative association. This suggests that, when considered collectively, coping mechanisms are not strongly related to learners’ confidence in learning Social Studies.

Interestingly, the dimension of advanced learning and motivation showed a weak but significant negative relationship ($r = -0.123$, $p = 0.018$). This finding may be explained by learners engaging more frequently in advanced study behaviors in response to perceived difficulty or low confidence. In this case, increased effort may reflect compensatory behavior rather than confidence, indicating that learners who feel less may attempt to study more intensively.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns with Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that self-efficacy is primarily shaped by mastery experiences rather than effort alone. Learners may employ coping strategies; however, if these strategies do not lead to successful outcomes, their self-efficacy may not improve. Similarly, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping suggests that coping responses help manage challenges but do not automatically enhance confidence unless they result in positive experiences.

The findings also suggest that other variables, such as instructional quality, classroom environment, peer interaction, and socio-emotional support, may play a more significant role in shaping self-efficacy. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive model that considers both cognitive and environmental factors in explaining learners’ academic confidence.

The absence of a significant overall relationship suggests that future studies should incorporate additional variables such as instructional practices, socio-emotional factors, peer support, and classroom climate. These variables may interact with coping mechanisms to influence learners’ self-efficacy more comprehensively. Including these factors in future models may provide a clearer explanation of the determinants of academic confidence among young learners.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions presented, the following conclusions are drawn:

The findings indicate that Grade 3 learners demonstrate generally high levels of coping mechanisms and self-efficacy in learning Social Studies. However, when considered collectively, coping mechanisms are not significantly associated with learners’ self-efficacy.

The weak and negative relationship observed in the advanced learning and motivation dimension suggests that increased effort may not always reflect higher confidence but may instead indicate learners' attempts to cope with perceived academic difficulty. This highlights the complexity of the relationship between coping and self-efficacy.

Overall, the study suggests that learners' self-efficacy is influenced by factors beyond coping strategies, including mastery experiences, instructional practices, and socio-emotional support. These findings emphasize the need for a more comprehensive approach to supporting learners' confidence in Social Studies.

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