Living in the Shadow of First-Born Achiever Sibling: Second-Born's Perceived Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Ever feel overshadowed by your sibling? A groundbreaking study explores the hidden world of second-born teens and their journey of self-discovery. Researchers examined 100 high school students, revealing that these teens are not just surviving in the shadows; they are thriving with impressive self-efficacy scores. This challenges traditional views on birth order and sparks a new understanding of sibling dynamics. The findings show significant variations in self-efficacy based on age and academic year, reflecting the complex psychological landscape of second-borns. These students excel at navigating family expectations while fostering a growth mindset. It's not about competing with siblings; it's about becoming your best self. Embrace your unique potential—your story is waiting to be written beyond the constraints of birth order.

Keywords: Second-Born children. family dynamics, self-efficacy, first-born, achiever, experiences

1.0 Introduction

Growing up in the shadow of a high-achieving older sibling can significantly shape family dynamics and individual self-perceptions. This study explores the impact of having a successful firstborn on the self-efficacy and confidence of second-born siblings. Research indicates that first-borns often receive more attention, leading to feelings of entitlement, while second-borns may feel overlooked, diminishing their self-efficacy (Greenwood, 2019; Gupta et al., 2019). This competitive atmosphere can foster feelings of inadequacy as younger siblings strive to establish their identities.

Psychologists suggest that birth order influences personality traits and self-perception (Voo, 2023), with first-born achievements setting benchmarks for second-borns. Studies show that constant comparisons can lead to behavioral issues and low self-worth among second-borns (Qian et al., 2020). Conversely, positive parent-child interactions are crucial for fostering self-esteem (Fuentes, 2019). Recent findings indicate that older siblings shape younger siblings' views of their abilities, with later-born children often scoring lower in academic diligence (Stewart, 2019).

While some research has explored differential parental treatment among siblings, inconsistencies remain regarding favoritism's impact on self-efficacy (Jensen et al., 2019). This study aims to assess the perceived self-efficacy levels of second-born siblings

with high-achieving older siblings and to explore intervention programs that support those struggling with low self-efficacy. Conducted during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year at Iligan City National High School, this research seeks to illuminate the complex dynamics of sibling relationships and contribute valuable insights into enhancing the well-being of second-born children.

2.0 Theoretical and Empirical Background

This study is grounded in three foundational theories that shed a light to the complex dynamics of second-born children's self-efficacy in relation to high-achieving older siblings. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1986), as part of his broader social cognitive theory, establishes that behavioral outcomes are primarily determined by individuals' perceived self-efficacy and outcome expectations, with recent studies by Schunk et al. (2021) demonstrating how self-efficacy functions as a crucial internal motivational force shaped by both personal and environmental factors. This understanding is complemented by Adler's Birth Order Theory (1927), which posits that birth order significantly influences personality development, particularly noting how second-born children may develop distinct competitive tendencies or seek alternative paths for distinction, as evidenced in Sulloway & Zweigenhaft's (2020) research on second-borns' psychological adaptation mechanisms. Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) further enriches this theoretical foundation by explaining how individuals naturally evaluate their abilities and opinions through comparisons with others, providing insight into how second-born children might assess their capabilities in relation to high-achieving older siblings.

Together, these theories create a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between birth order, social comparison, and self-efficacy development in second-born children, particularly when they grow up alongside high-achieving older siblings.

3.0 Research Objectives

This study dealt with the level of perceived self-efficacy among second-born students with first-born achiever siblings at Iligan National High School during the academic year 2024-2025. The participants of this study were second-born students who had first-born achiever siblings from various strands of the senior high school department.

Specifically, this paper examined the following:

- 1. The demographic profile of respondents, specifically focusing on their age, sex, and year level;
- 2. The level of perceived self-efficacy among second-born respondents;
- 3. The significant difference in the respondents' levels of perceived self-efficacy when analyzed according to their demographic profiles; and
- 4. The lived experiences of second-born individuals who have high-achieving first-born siblings.

4.0 Methodology

The researchers utilized a sequential explanatory research design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative methods. They first collected quantitative data to outline respondents' profiles and their perceived self-efficacy levels, followed by qualitative data to examine the experiences of second-born individuals with high-achieving older siblings.

To gain insights, three open-ended questions were crafted to assess how these experiences affect self-efficacy. The study focused on senior high school students from Iligan City National High School, targeting 100 respondents in Grades 11 and 12, selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: they had to be second-born with a high-achieving first-born sibling, enrolled at ICNHS, and willing to participate. Each respondent completed an integrated questionnaire that included the Self-Efficacy Scale adapted from Schwarzer and Jerusalem's General Self-Efficacy Scale (1995). In the qualitative phase, the five highest and lowest scorers from the quantitative phase answered the open-ended questions.

The researchers described respondents' profiles using frequency and percentage, assessed average self-efficacy scores with mean and standard deviation, and analyzed differences in scores using a t-test for independent samples and ANOVA for demographic comparisons.

5.0 Results and Discussion

The results and findings of this study are presented chronologically based on the objectives as presented herein.

Table 1 *Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile* (n=100)

Profile	8	Frequency	Percent
Age	15 Years old	24	24.0
	16 Years old	39	39.0
	17 Years old	28	28.0
	18 Years old	8	8.0
	19 Years old	1	1.0
Sex	Male	41	41.0
	Female	59	59.0
Year Level	Grade 11	70	70.0
	Grade 12	30	30.0

Table 1 presents the respondents' profile, highlighting age as a key demographic influencing the perceived self-efficacy of second-born children. Most respondents were 16 years old (39%), followed by 17 (28%) and 15 (24%). As second-borns navigate adolescence, their self-efficacy evolves due to increased responsibilities and

comparisons with high-achieving siblings. Younger adolescents may struggle with self-perception, while older ones often develop a stronger identity. Educational interventions should address these age-specific challenges to foster supportive environments that enhance mastery experiences. Research by Usher and Pajares (2008) shows that self-efficacy beliefs change with new experiences, while Zysberg and Schwabsky (2021) found that positive classroom settings boost self-efficacy in older students.

Sex also plays a significant role in the perceived self-efficacy of second-born children, with a slight majority of female respondents (59%) compared to males (41%). This suggests that female second-borns may face different familial expectations impacting their self-efficacy. Gender norms influence how boys and girls view their capabilities, with girls often facing higher academic expectations. Interventions aimed at improving self-efficacy among second-borns should be gender-sensitive. Zysberg and Schwabsky (2021) found that female students reported higher academic self-efficacy than males, influenced by societal expectations and parental support. Alshahrani et al. (2023) noted that gender differences affect perceptions of employability skills and self-efficacy.

Year level also affects the perceived self-efficacy of second-born children in educational settings. Data indicated that 70% of respondents were in Grade 11, while 30% were in Grade 12. Most respondents faced foundational academic challenges impacting their confidence. Grade 11 students may experience heightened competition as they form their academic identities, while Grade 12 students might feel pressure to perform well for future opportunities. Educators should provide targeted support systems for second-born students at different year levels to enhance self-efficacy. Wu (2024) emphasized that year level correlates with academic self-efficacy, with higher levels typically showing greater confidence due to accumulated experiences. Usher et al. (2019) noted that positive learning conditions contribute to higher self-efficacy as students progress through grades.

Table 2 *Level of Respondents' Self-Efficacy*

Indicators		SD	Qualitative Description
1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	2.93	.95	Moderately True
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.	2.65	.89	Moderately True
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.	2.83	.86	Moderately True
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.	2.61	.86	Moderately True
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.	2.73	.83	Moderately True
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.	3.03	.90	Moderately True
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.	2.79	.98	Moderately True
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.	2.81	.96	Moderately True
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.	2.85	.95	Moderately True
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.	2.78	.94	Moderately True

Table 1.1 presents the respondents' levels of self-efficacy, with indicator 4 showing the lowest mean of 2.61 and indicator 6 the highest mean of 3.03 (SD = .90; Moderately True).

Indicator 4, "I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events," had a mean of 2.61 (SD = .86; Moderately True), suggesting that while second-born siblings generally maintain high self-efficacy, they feel less confident in managing unexpected situations compared to areas requiring personal effort. Research by Krejčová et al. (2019) indicates that second-borns often gauge their academic self-efficacy through sibling comparisons, which may lower their confidence in unpredictable scenarios. Zysberg and Schwabsky (2021) also found that older siblings serve as benchmarks for younger ones, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to boost second-borns' adaptability and confidence in handling challenges.

Indicator 6, "I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort," had the highest mean of 3.03 (SD = .90; Moderately True), indicating that second-born children are more confident in task-oriented problem-solving than in adaptability. This aligns with Alshahrani et al. (2023), who noted that students' perceptions of their problem-solving abilities are closely linked to their academic self-efficacy. Wu (2024)

further emphasized that students who believe in their problem-solving capacity tend to perform better academically, reinforcing the importance of fostering a strong work ethic to enhance self-efficacy among second-born children.

Table 3Significant Differences in Perception of the Respondents on Their Resource-Based Practices When Grouped According to Profile

	Profile	Resource-Based	Practices	Test Statistic-value	p-value
		Mean	QI		
Age	15 Years old	2.95	Н	3.170	.040
	16 Years old	2.90	Н		
	17 Years old	2.68	Н		
	18 Years old	2.40	L		
Sex	Male	2.78	Н	365	.716
	Female	2.82	Н		
Year	Grade 11	2.91	Н	3.210	.002
Level	Grade 12	2.55	Н		

Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 shows significant differences in perceived self-efficacy levels based on age (p = .040) and academic year level (p = .002), but no significant differences were found between male and female participants (p = .716). The data indicates that age and academic progression significantly influence self-efficacy, with younger students generally reporting higher perceived self-efficacy. The lack of gender differences suggests that the effects of birth order on self-efficacy transcend gender. These findings align with Barclays (2022) research on academic self-perception patterns among siblings and Dugas (2021) on the positive impact of sibling relationships in achievement contexts

1. How confident do you feel in managing challenging situations and emotions effectively, especially when faced with difficulties or setbacks, considering your firstborn achiever sibling's presence and achievements?

Table 4.1 *Codes and Theme for Question 1 in Qualitative Phase*

Codes and Theme for Question I in Qualitative Ph	Axial Code	Overall Theme
1. "Well, in my case, I don't really mind the achievements of my older sister but instead, I used those as a motivation to strive harder in life. When faced with difficulties or setbacks, I tend to focus on myself only. I take several considerations but focusing on my own self is my top priority." 2. "I feel somewhat confident in managing challenging situations and emotions, even when things get tough or I face setbacks. Having an older sibling who is a high achiever sometimes adds pressure, but I try to remind myself that everyone has their own path. I focus on what I can do, setting my own goals and learning from mistakes. It helps me to stay calm and take things one step at a time, even if I don't know everything yet. My sibling's success inspires me, but I work hard to measure my progress by my own standards, not just comparing with others." 3. " I am confident in my ability to tackle any challenging situations and emotions effectively. I have developed problem-solving skills that allow me to remain focused, even in the face of adversity. While my sibling's achievements may inspire me, it reminds me that we have different paths to take in life and I'm thankful for it since we are given a choice to do anything that will improve ourselves positively." 4. "I am aware of myself that I am really prone to emotional or mental breakdown, however, I can manage myself to overcome such difficulties or setbacks. On that matter, I usually focus on what should I do and not to compare myself to anyone's achievements." 5. "I'm not actually confident. Growing up, my mother set a very high standard for my older sister. She excels in both academics and her career. Unintentionally, she's created incredibly high expectations for all of us. Our neighbors, family, and even relatives have high hopes that I'll follow in her footsteps. If I were to ever fall off the honor list, the comparisons would start immediately. My sister has set the bar so high, and I don't know how to reach it."	1. Self-Motivation and Individuality 2. Comparisons and Pressure 3. Emotional Resilience and External Influence 4. Struggles with Self-Esteem and Societal Expectations	Navigating Confidence Amid High-Achiever Sibling Expectations

Thematic analysis reveals how participants navigate challenges and emotions, especially in relation to high-achieving older siblings. Key themes include self-motivation and individuality, comparisons and pressure, emotional resilience and external influences, and struggles with self-esteem and societal expectations.

Self-Motivation and Individuality

Many participants highlighted self-motivation as crucial for managing challenges. Respondent 33 viewed their sibling's achievements as inspiration, stating, "I used those as motivation to strive harder." Respondent 77 emphasized personal growth, noting, "We have different paths to take in life." This reflects a strong sense of individuality that fosters resilience. Research by Decker and Durik (2022) supports this, showing that second-born children who reframe sibling achievements positively tend to be more motivated.

Comparisons and Pressure

A common theme is the burden of comparisons. Respondent 16 expressed how high expectations from family and community lead to feelings of inadequacy: "I forget how to begin tasks." Respondent 67 echoed this frustration, stating, "It's easy to spiral into negative thoughts." Whiteman et al. (2020) argue that such pressures can harm the well-being of second-born children.

Emotional Resilience and External Influences

Resilience is often bolstered by external support. Respondent 30 credited their confidence to parental guidance: "My papa and mama teach me how to be strong." However, societal pressures can undermine this resilience. Respondent 46 shared feelings of weakness when compared to their sister, illustrating how external influences can erode self-confidence. Research by Brinberg et al. (2019) indicates that parental favoritism can create stress for second-born siblings.

Struggles with Self-Esteem and Societal Expectations

Participants also discussed self-esteem issues linked to societal narratives. Respondent 9 described the impact of being labeled negatively by family: "I'm often called 'stupid.'" Such derogatory remarks led to low self-esteem and reluctance to participate in school activities. Respondent 23 noted community pressures that exacerbate feelings of inadequacy.

Individuals navigate these experiences through various strategies, with some finding inspiration in sibling success while others struggle with comparison and societal expectations. The importance of supportive environments is evident, as they significantly influence emotional resilience and self-perception. By mitigating the harmful effects of comparisons, supportive environments can help individuals build self-esteem and view challenges as opportunities for development.

Research supports these findings, highlighting the role of sibling dynamics, parental influence, and societal expectations in shaping self-esteem. Liem et al. (2021) note that high-achieving siblings can inspire or pressure individuals, while Amparo et al. (2020) found that supportive parenting reduces the negative impacts of sibling

comparisons. Salmela-Aro et al. (2022) stress cultivating personal achievement goals to build resilience in high-expectation environments.

2. To what extent do you believe in your ability to take proactive steps and persistently work towards achieving your goals, even when obstacles arise, given your firstborn achiever sibling's influence on your self-efficacy?

Table 4.2 *Codes and Theme for Question 2 in Qualitative Phase*

Soues and Theme for Question 2 in Qualitative Praise				
Common Responses	Axial Code	Overall Theme		
1. "I believe and I am confident that I have the intellect and skills to achieve my goals in life. It really depends on your mindset and perspectives on how you view life as a whole." 2. "I believe in my ability to take proactive steps and keep working toward my goals, even when challenges come up. Having a first born sibling who is really good at things and that can make me doubt myself, but it also helps me to do my best. I know that reaching goals takes effort and persistence, so I try to focus on what I can control and take small steps forward. Even when things get hard, I remind myself that success doesn't happen very fast and that my journey is unique. I'm learning to trust in my own strengths and keep moving forward, no matter the challenges." 3. "I may not know what the future holds but I somewhat have a clear goal in my mind on what steps to take in the different areas of my life. Just like the phrase in cebuano "bahalag hinay-hinay basta kanunay" is a motto I firmly believe in. Despite having difficulties and challenges, so long as I have my family and friends that support me entirely is clearly enough for me." 4. "I have always bear this in mind that "if they can, I will too", that phrase really pursue me to strive persistently. Life doesn't end where I feel weak and hopeless. For me, as long as I live there will always a way." 5. "As a second born child I believe that I will achieve all my dreams in life since my parents raised me as a strong person that can face all the obstacles and challenges in life. I'm trying my best because my older brother didn't finish college and we also don't have our father."	1. Self-Motivation and Intrinsic 2. Resilience Amidst Comparisons 3. External Support and 4. Self-Doubt and the Impact of Comparisons	Proactive Goal Pursuit and the Influence of High-Achieving Siblings on Self-efficacy		

Thematic analysis reveals varying beliefs among participants regarding their ability to proactively pursue goals despite challenges. Key themes include self-motivation and intrinsic belief, resilience amid comparisons, external support, and self-doubt influenced by comparisons.

Self-Motivation and Intrinsic Belief

Many participants exhibited strong self-efficacy, viewing challenges as growth opportunities. Respondent 33 noted, "It really depends on your mindset," while Respondent 49 shared their mantra: "If they can, I will too." This intrinsic belief fosters resilience, with Respondent 30 attributing their confidence to a supportive upbringing.

Resilience Amidst Comparisons

Some participants found ways to forge their own paths despite high-achieving siblings. Respondent 81 focused on personal strengths, stating, "I'm learning to trust in my own strengths." Respondent 77 embraced steady progress with the motto, "It's okay to be slow, as long as you're consistent." Respondent 16 emphasized their determination to try new things despite potential failure.

External Support and Influence

Support from family and friends was crucial for many respondents. Respondent 77 credited their confidence to loved ones, saying, "As long as I have my family and friends supporting me, that's enough." Respondent 23 echoed this sentiment, recognizing the positive influence of their social circle.

Self-Doubt and the Impact of Comparisons

Despite positive influences, some participants struggled with self-doubt, particularly when comparing themselves to siblings. Respondent 67 expressed feeling overshadowed: "I'm stuck in their shadow." Respondent 9 voiced deeper insecurities about their abilities, while Respondent 46 described the challenges of favoritism in their household.

The responses illustrate the complex relationship between intrinsic belief, external support, and sibling comparisons on self-efficacy. While some participants demonstrate strong confidence and persistence, others battle self-doubt due to familial comparisons. These findings underscore the importance of supportive environments that encourage individuality and mitigate the negative effects of comparisons. Research supports these conclusions, showing that sibling dynamics significantly impact self-efficacy (Poon & Cohen, 2020) and that parental and peer support enhances adolescents' belief in their abilities (Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, fostering a growth mindset is essential for navigating challenges (Duckworth et al., 2022). Creating nurturing environments can help individuals build confidence and pursue their unique paths despite obstacles.

3. How assured are you in your capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills, overcome self-doubt, and approach tasks with a mindset geared towards success and personal growth, considering your firstborn achiever sibling's academic and professional accomplishments?

Table 4.3Codes and Theme for Question 3 in Qualitative Phase

Common Responses	Axial Code	Overall Theme
1. "I am very much assured that I can achieve greater outcomes in life. Truly, self-doubt and other setbacks can be encountered during the process of achieving something. However, with the right mindset, perseverance and enough knowledge and skills, we can individually attain success and personal growth. We may consider the professional accomplishments and personal achievements of our older siblings but we should not let those get into us. We should not let those things discourage us but instead, take it as a motivation and a factor that drives us to success. Personally, I believe in the saying "You do you and I do I". Focus on your own self." 2. "I feel good about my ability to learn new things. I can also beat self-doubt and try tasks with a happy, growing mindset. Sometimes, my older sibling's school and work success makes me feel unsure, but it shows me what I can do too. I know that learning new skills takes time and hard work, so I try to be patient. When I feel unsure, I tell myself that everyone learns in their own way and my progress is important. Thinking about my own journey helps me face problems with courage and a wish to keep improving." 3. "I'm partially confident that I can learn any skill that will contribute to my personal growth and I don't really compare myself with my brother's achievements since I fully support him on what he does." 4. "Knowing and believing myself deeply will help me to overcome self-doubt, and I believe myself, I know that I still have the capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills. Hence, Whatever the outcome of what I am doing and becoming won't affect anyone and anything. I grew where I am being planted and bloom like them also." 5. "As someone who always tries, I believe I can truly acquire knowledge. It may not be through excelling, but at least I'm trying, right? Even if I'm just mediocre, I can still gain knowledge. I'm not excellent, but I'm not dumb either, so I'll keep fighting, even if I'm under a lot of pressure"	1. Self-Motivation and Growth Mindset 2. The Influence of Familial Expectations 3. The Impact of Self-Doubt and Societal Perception	Self-Assurance in Acquiring Knowledge and Overcoming Self-Doubt Amidst Familial Achievement Comparisons

Participants identified several themes related to self-assurance in learning new skills, overcoming self-doubt, and personal growth, influenced by familial achievement comparisons. Key themes include self-motivation and growth mindset, familial expectations, and the impact of self-doubt and societal perceptions.

Self-Motivation and Growth Mindset

Many respondents expressed confidence in acquiring new knowledge through personal growth and a positive mindset. For instance, Respondent 33 emphasized perseverance, stating, "We should take our siblings' accomplishments as motivation." Similarly, Respondent 81 highlighted the importance of patience in facing challenges. Respondent 30 reinforced this by expressing trust in their abilities to overcome self-doubt. These narratives reflect a proactive approach to self-improvement despite external pressures.

The Influence of Familial Expectations

Several participants noted the pressure from high-achieving siblings that affected their self-confidence. Respondent 67 shared feelings of inadequacy due to comparisons, while Respondent 23 acknowledged the pressure but recognized it as not the sole reason for their struggles. Conversely, Respondent 77 expressed support for their sibling's success without feeling diminished by it. This illustrates the complex relationship between familial expectations and self-perception.

The Impact of Self-Doubt and Societal Perceptions

Participants also discussed how societal views and family dynamics contribute to self-doubt. Respondent 46 described feeling neglected and low in self-esteem due to comparisons, while Respondent 67 struggled to maintain a success-oriented mindset amid feelings of inadequacy. In contrast, Respondent 9 expressed a desire to prove their worth despite societal judgments, stating, "I want to impress myself." This highlights the tension between external pressures and internal resolve.

Overall, while some individuals exhibit resilience through a growth mindset, others grapple with feelings of inadequacy from constant comparisons. The study emphasizes the need for supportive environments that recognize individual strengths and validate efforts, fostering robust self-confidence. These findings align with research indicating that familial expectations significantly influence self-esteem and motivation (Li & Li, 2021; Nurture et al., 2022). Moreover, parental support plays a crucial role in shaping confidence (Santrock, 2023), as seen in Respondent 46's experience with a lack of encouragement.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The experiences of second-born siblings often reflect resilience, self-discovery, and personal growth as they navigate societal expectations, comparisons, and self-doubt. This study examines how these individuals develop strategies to transform obstacles into opportunities, utilizing Self-Efficacy Theory, Birth Order Theory, and Social Comparison Theory. While they may initially struggle with feelings of inadequacy due to perceived differences in parental attention, second-borns ultimately

embrace a growth mindset that enhances their self-efficacy. By recognizing their unique worth, they learn to define their identities independently of their older siblings' achievements. This psychological transformation allows self-doubt to be replaced by confidence in their capabilities. Therefore, effective support programs must consider family dynamics beyond birth order, acknowledging the complex interplay of these theories in shaping the self-efficacy of second-born children.

With the bounds of the research locale, target respondents and the overall methodology employed in this study, the researcher recommends the following for the improvement of the current programs concerning these special cohorts and to ensure greater validity and significance of this study's future replications.

To better support second-born students, school administrators should prioritize enrichment and peer support programs tailored to their needs. Teachers should receive professional development on birth order effects, and policies should celebrate all students' accomplishments to foster inclusivity. Guidance personnel should monitor self-efficacy levels during key transitions to identify those needing extra support. Teachers are encouraged to avoid sibling comparisons and use diverse teaching strategies. Parents should recognize each child's unique strengths and maintain open communication. Future research should explore family dynamics and sibling age gaps to enhance understanding of factors influencing self-efficacy among second-born children.

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