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Self-Confidence and Risk-Taking Ability among Students Appearing for Competitive Exams

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Abstract: *Students face pressure during competitive exams. Confidence and risk matter greatly. The aim of the study was to examine their relationship. To assess self-confidence, the Self-Confidence Inventory by Agnihotri (1987) was used. To assess risk-taking ability, the Risk-Taking Questionnaire by Singh and Gupta (2012) was used. Both tools were administered to a sample of 60 students using purposive sampling. The sample was selected from various students in Pune district. The age range was 17 to 22 years. The average age was 19.4 years. A significant positive correlation was found between self-confidence and risk-taking ability ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). Self-confidence significantly predicted risk-taking ability ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). Self-confidence contributed 22% to the variance in risk-taking ability ($R^2 = 0.22$). This shows that improving confidence may help in taking calculated risks. Teachers and mentors should focus on confidence-building during exam preparation.*

Keywords: self-confidence, risk-taking ability, students, competitive exams, correlation

I. INTRODUCTION

Competitive exams are an important step for many students working toward professional goals. Every year, a large number of students prepare for entrance exams in fields like engineering, medicine, law, and government services. These exams are difficult and require long hours of study, practice, and revision. To prepare better, students often join coaching centers and attempt mock tests to improve their performance. But doing well in such exams depends on more than just subject knowledge. Mental and emotional factors also play a strong role in how students perform.

Among the many psychological aspects, two traits often affect how students approach these exams—self-confidence and risk-taking ability. Some students attempt tough or unfamiliar questions without much hesitation. Others avoid them even when they seem to know part of the answer. This behavior makes a difference, especially when exams are time-bound and highly competitive. Students with higher self-confidence are more likely to stay calm and believe in their preparation. They tend to make decisions faster and with more clarity. Students with lower self-confidence may overthink, delay responses, or doubt themselves.

Risk-taking ability refers to how comfortable a person is with making decisions when the outcome is uncertain. In the context of competitive exams, it could mean guessing an answer, selecting a risky option, or trying a new method under pressure. Some students take smart risks and manage their time better. Others avoid taking any risks, which may reduce their final score. These two traits—self-confidence and risk-taking—are not always separate. They often influence each other, especially in high-pressure academic situations.

This study tries to understand the relationship between self-confidence and risk-taking ability in students preparing for competitive exams. It also examines whether one can predict the other. By studying these traits together, we may find useful ways to support students during exam preparation. The findings may help teachers and counsellors guide students more effectively, not just in learning content, but in handling pressure and making confident decisions.

II. CONCEPTS

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence means the belief a person has in their own ability to do things. It does not mean knowing everything, but trusting oneself in different types of situations. As per Agnihotri (1987), "self-confidence is the ability of the

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individual to have faith in himself and to display this faith in any situation." This quality helps students remain calm, take decisions quickly, and accept the outcomes confidently. In exams, confident students approach their tasks with clarity and less confusion or hesitation. It is a key trait that shapes how one sees their strengths and their weaknesses.

Risk-Taking Ability:

Risk-taking involves making choices when the outcome is not fully clear or guaranteed. Singh and Gupta (2012) defined risk-taking as "a behavioral tendency of an individual to take decisions involving potential loss or gain." It does not mean careless action, but comfort with uncertainty when needed in tough situations. In exams, it may involve attempting hard questions or guessing with some logic and strategy. Students who fear risks may skip questions they partly know, which may affect their score. When used well, risk-taking helps in better decision-making, growth in confidence, and better outcomes.

Significance of the Study

Most exam systems mainly focus on academic preparation through classes, books, or test series. But mental preparation is often ignored even though it plays a very important role. This study highlights the importance of understanding this missing part in student performance. Students who lack confidence avoid risk, even when taking it could help their exam score. Some students are overconfident and take unnecessary risks without proper judgment or understanding. Knowing how confidence and risk-taking work together can help students make better choices. Previous studies like Bayat et al. (2019) and Aarthi & Jansirani (2022) show a connection. Their results show self-confidence and risk-taking are related in academic learning situations. Martins et al. (2018) also found that confidence increases the willingness to face uncertainty. Still, not much research has been done in the Indian exam setting where pressure is high. Here, even small choices made during exams can strongly impact students' final performance. This study can help teachers and counsellors guide students on how to handle pressure better. Counsellors may plan activities to grow confidence without encouraging careless risk-taking behavior. Teachers may see hesitation not as weakness but as a lack of belief in self. Students can also become aware of how their mindset affects what they do during exams.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review on Self-Confidence and Risk-Taking Ability

Ismail and Zain (2015) studied academic and entrepreneurial risk-taking in students at the university level. They examined how self-confidence influenced students' choices when facing uncertainty in their academic path. Students with higher confidence were more open to taking academic risks without much hesitation or fear. These risks included joining tough classes or speaking in situations they found challenging. The study found that confidence acted as a protection from the fear of failure. Although the setting was not focused on exams, the academic decisions studied were quite similar. They concluded that confident students are more likely to take smart academic risks.

Krueger and Dickson (1994) studied how self-efficacy and confidence shaped students' thoughts about risky situations. Their study found that confident students viewed risky challenges as easier to manage and overcome. This mindset helped them take part in difficult tasks instead of avoiding them. The findings showed that belief in ability can affect one's risk-related behavior clearly. While the research was not done in an academic setting, its use applies to exams. The work helped build a strong base for later studies about confidence and exam pressure. It explained how confidence shapes choices in pressure-based decision-making.

Fatima and Pradhan (2025) focused their study on students preparing for government entrance exams across various Indian cities. They observed that confident students kept trying even after failing the exams multiple times. These students were more likely to take risks and try new preparation techniques under pressure. In exams, they attempted uncertain questions and managed their time with strategy. The study found that confidence helped both emotionally and behaviorally in hard exam settings. The researchers advised training programs to include confidence-building along with academic support. They concluded that confidence improves decision-making during high-stakes competitive exams.

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Moradi et al. (2014) explored the link between self-confidence and risk behavior in students studying medicine under pressure. The results showed a clear positive connection between confidence and their academic risk-taking choices. Confident students often attempted difficult questions and used creative thinking during stressful exams. The study also noticed that male students showed slightly more risk-taking behavior than females. Even though only medical students were studied, the findings apply to similar student groups. Their results proved the value of self-confidence when handling academic risks in pressure-based settings.

Martins et al. (2018) researched how self-confidence shapes students' behavior in uncertain academic environments at university level. Their study showed that confident students often chose harder tasks and challenging academic situations. They took part in leadership roles, answered difficult questions, and joined selective academic programs. The authors found that confidence helps reduce hesitation and builds mental strength in students. Though the work was not directly on competitive exams, it matched many similar behaviors. They concluded that a strong belief in oneself supports better choices under stress or uncertainty.

Aarthi and Jansirani (2022) studied how self-confidence connects to academic risk-taking in postgraduate students facing academic pressure. Their results showed that confident students were more likely to attempt tough or unclear questions. These students also tried new methods and adjusted well when tasks changed suddenly. The researchers found that both traits—confidence and risk-taking—worked together to improve academic decisions. Even though competitive exams were not studied, the academic stress was equally high. The authors believed building confidence helps students take balanced and useful academic risks.

Bayat et al. (2019) designed a training program to increase self-confidence and risk-taking in university students. After taking part in the program, students scored higher in both traits on assessment tests. They were more willing to try new academic tasks and solve problems they once avoided. The study showed that building confidence had a real effect on risk-taking ability. While this research was not done on competitive exam students, it used similar timed task settings. The authors concluded that both traits can improve through guided practice and structured support.

Review on Self-Confidence and Its Influence on Risk-Taking Ability

Ismail and Zain (2015) explored how academic and entrepreneurial risk-taking was impacted by self-confidence in university students. It was found in their research that calculated risks were more often taken by confident students. Included were difficult projects and class participation when uncertainty or challenge was being experienced by them. It was concluded by the authors that fear of failure was reduced by self-confidence in risky moments. Students were encouraged by it to take chances that involved challenge or possible uncertainty. It was suggested by the findings that confident students made decisions more effectively under pressure or unfamiliar conditions.

Krueger and Dickson (1994) explored how risk-taking behavior was related to self-efficacy as psychologically perceived by individuals. It was found that those with higher self-belief perceived risky conditions more as challenges than threats. Greater academic and behavioral risks were taken when uncertainty was being interpreted with a positive mindset. It was explained in the study that uncertainty was reframed more positively by confident individuals. Action was more likely to be taken rather than avoided when confidence was influencing the thought process. The belief was supported that improving self-confidence may impact the handling of academic risks by students.

Martins et al. (2018) investigated how academic risk-taking readiness was shaped by self-confidence among university students in uncertain tasks. It was shown that students with more confidence were more engaged with unfamiliar learning conditions in academics. Risky or unfamiliar tasks were faced by them more actively and positively when confidence was high. It was pointed out by the authors that belief systems internally acted as a major motivator. In high-stakes academic scenarios, this internal confidence helped guide the students' decision-making process. It was confirmed that confidence acted as a strong influence behind student behavior under academic uncertainty.

Bayat et al. (2019) designed a training program where self-confidence was improved and academic risk-taking was later examined. It was found after intervention that both self-confidence and risk behavior had shown a clear increase. It was concluded that growth in confidence helped students become more ready for uncertain academic challenges. Risk-taking was increased when unfamiliar tasks were approached without fear following improvement in confidence. It was

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emphasized by the results that students were helped by self-confidence to engage with challenging academic tasks. It was reinforced that confidence underlies risk behavior in many academic decisions and exam conditions.

Aarthi and Jansirani (2022) assessed how self-confidence was related to academic risk-taking among postgraduate students under academic pressure. It was found that high levels of confidence were associated with more willingness to take academic risks. Tasks such as debates, difficult questions, and complex subjects were more often attempted by confident students. It was suggested by the authors that self-confidence provided the strength to face unpredictable outcomes calmly. Support was provided by their research for confidence as a builder of risk-taking in students. It was shown that academic decision-making became more balanced when confidence was being supported.

Moradi et al. (2014) examined how medical students under pressure showed different risk-taking depending on self-confidence levels. Strong self-belief was associated with more clinical decision-making in uncertain or high-risk situations by students. Questions with partial certainty were attempted when confidence allowed better judgment to guide academic choices. It was emphasized that self-confidence helped manage exam stress while supporting smarter academic decisions. The findings were relevant to high-stakes or competitive environments requiring quick and accurate responses from students. The authors advised academic programs to include support that would strengthen student confidence under pressure.

Fatima and Pradhan (2025) studied government exam aspirants in India and examined their readiness to take strategic academic risks. It was observed that those with greater confidence adopted aggressive time strategies and solved unfamiliar exam questions. Exam pressure was interpreted more as challenge and not threat by those confident in their preparation. Unique learning methods and exam choices were applied when confidence was acting as a guiding trait. It was concluded that risk-taking was highly supported by the trait of academic self-confidence. A strong influence of belief in ability was shown on performance in competitive testing conditions.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

To study the relationship between self-confidence and risk-taking ability among students appearing for competitive exams.

Objectives

- To assess the correlation between self-confidence and risk-taking ability among students appearing for competitive exams.
- To study the whether self-confidence can predict risk-taking behavior among students appearing for competitive exams.

Hypothesis

- There is a significant positive correlation between self-confidence and risk-taking ability among students appearing for competitive exams.
- Self-confidence significantly predicts risk-taking ability among students appearing for competitive exams.

Variables

Independent Variable: Self-confidence

Dependent Variable: Risk-taking ability

Operational Definitions

Self-Confidence

Total raw score on all factor of self-confidence and it is measure by Self-Confidence Inventory of Agnihotri (1987).

Risk-Taking Ability

Total raw score on all factor of Risk-Taking Ability and it is measure by Risk-Taking Questionnaire of Singh and Gupta (2012).

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Sample Selection

A total sample of 60 students was selected from various colleges in Pune district by using purposive sampling technique. The age range of the participants was 17 to 22 years, and the average age was 19.4 years. They were administered the questionnaires and were asked to fill them carefully with honest responses.

Measurement Tools

Self-Confidence Inventory

Self-Confidence Inventory developed by Agnihotri (1987). It involves 56 items with five alternatives, namely: Always, Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, and Never. The score range of this test is 56 to 280. The reliability of the test is 0.88, and the validity is 0.82. A high score indicates a higher level of self-confidence.

Risk-Taking Ability

Risk-Taking Questionnaire developed by Singh and Gupta (2012). It involves 30 items with four alternatives, namely: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The score range of this test is 30 to 120. The reliability of the test is 0.85, and the validity is 0.79. A high score indicates a greater risk-taking ability.

V. RESULTS

Correlation between self-confidence and risk-taking ability

Table 1: Correlation between Self-Confidence and Risk-Taking Ability

Variables	N	r-value	Significance Level (p)
Self-Confidence & Risk-Taking	60	0.46	0.001

The above table shows that the correlation between self-confidence and risk-taking ability. The correlation value ($r=0.46$, $p < 0.01$) shows that this correlation is statistically significant. It indicates that as self-confidence increases, risk-taking ability also tends to increase. The first hypothesis stating that "There is a significant positive correlation between self-confidence and risk-taking ability among students appearing for competitive exams" is accepted.

Self-confidence on Risk-Taking ability

Table 2: Regression Analysis Showing Prediction of Risk-Taking by Self-Confidence

Model	β	t-value	Significance (p)	R^2
Self-Confidence → Risk-Taking	0.47	5.12	0.001	0.22

The above table shows that the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.47$) is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), indicating that self-confidence is a significant predictor of risk-taking ability. The R^2 value (0.22) shows that self-confidence explains 22% of the variance in risk-taking behavior. It indicates that students with higher self-confidence are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour. The second hypothesis stating that "Self-confidence significantly predicts risk-taking ability among students appearing for competitive exams" is accepted.

Limitations

- The sample was restricted to urban coaching centers, possibly excluding rural or non-institutional learners.
- Cross-sectional design; does not account for changes in confidence or risk over time.
- Reliance on self-report measures may involve some bias.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Explore longitudinal changes in self-confidence and risk behavior across exam cycles.
- Investigate how gender or academic stream influences this dynamic.
- Examine role of parental or institutional pressure as mediating variables.

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