

## The relationship between Iranian male and female high school EFL learners' self-efficacy domain

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### Abstract

The study explored the domains of self-efficacy among senior high school learners of English as a foreign language, with particular attention to gender-based variations. It was motivated by the increasing diversity of learner abilities in language classrooms and the limited empirical understanding of how gender influences different dimensions of self-efficacy in this context. A total of 100 learners, comprising equal numbers of males and females, participated in the study. The Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Adolescents was employed to assess academic, social, and emotional domains of self-efficacy. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to determine associations between gender and self-efficacy domains. Findings revealed a meaningful relationship between gender and learners' perceived capabilities across self-efficacy dimensions. Female learners tended to report higher academic self-efficacy, while male learners demonstrated stronger emotional and social self-efficacy. The study underscores the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive strategies into language teaching practices to enhance learners' confidence and performance across domains of self-efficacy.

**Keywords:** Emotional self-efficacy; English learners; gender differences; academic self-efficacy; social self-efficacy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, education retrospectively and prospectively has been viewed as a key to one's success in life, implying that one who gets an education succeeds in life, and vice versa is also true. Due to the unstoppable march of time towards the interactive role of the development of language teaching and learning in the modern world, individual differences are one of the most vital issues to be concerned about holistically (Huang & Liu, 2024). In the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, understanding the numerous factors that affect learners' academic success becomes vital for educational settings, teachers, and educators. In fact, the more domination and acquaintance a teacher has over his/her students in a broad perspective, the easier it gets to find the most appropriate teaching procedure that suits them individually.

This is an international imperative in which every student deserves equal opportunities in the academic setting (Amini et al., 2025). Otherwise, a student who felt left behind in an educational competition would refuse to elaborate on their whole resources and passion due to the lack of reaching their goals respectively (Uzunboyly & Özmen, 2021; Strogilos et al., 2017). Academic excellence is one of the criteria that can demonstrate student performance in educational settings (Uzunboyly & Altay, 2021). However, one of the problems argued in the process of language learning is that there are still many school students who have difficulty not only in evaluating their learning process activities but also a lack of awareness in their way of thinking related to their capability to succeed in their learning procedure. This belief is called self-efficacy (Mesir, 2006).

In the modern world, Policymakers are forced by the law to ensure all students meet the standard frameworks of the state, district, or school, notwithstanding the evidence that students possess differing abilities, attitudes, and tendencies (Birnie, 2015). In their paradigm, individual differences and differentiated instruction are sometimes sacrificed for the sake of government. While students are aware of their potential self-efficacy, they will be more motivated, and they will find a way through the complex conditions of daily life (Kharb et al., 2013).

In the last decade, there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in investigating learners' personality traits and self-efficacy. It is an undeniable fact that having domination over someone's personality and self-efficacy, as the two main components of one's identity, can accelerate the process of education. Having domination over students' self-efficacy and personality type gives influence on learning. Students with high self-efficacy and high mastery of their personality will give great effort when facing difficulties; they say, "I can do this." They will have a strong belief in their abilities, thus increasing their motivation and enthusiasm in the learning process. In contrast, students who have low self-efficacy with a low understanding due to their specific personality traits may doubt their ability; they think, "It seems hard and difficult." Due to these facts, self-efficacy and personality type awareness can affect motivation and choice of activities (Diseth, 2011).

### 1.1. Literature review

An extensive body of evidence suggests that inspecting the hidden layers of the students' characteristics framework plays a significant role in the process of foreign language teaching and learning. Nowadays, Classrooms are more diverse than ever before, the knowledge of teachers has evolved prominently, and choosing a special curriculum and teaching method over an educational program would not ideally satisfy every student (Aftab, 2015; Birnie, 2015; Marghitan et al., 2016). According to Aftab (2015), as a result of the rising dominance of heterogeneous classrooms, it is crucial to consider equity of opportunities regularly for males and females worldwide.

Educational systems are one of the most strategic sites that can apply the whole concept of social cognitive theory because teachers are regularly exposed to students, as well as have the authority to influence student behavior by providing different experiences through the classroom. Vice versa is also true; that is, successes and failures (Subban & Round, 2015). In the present generation, everyone is always running after something to achieve academic achievement and forgets to see their thoughts,

emotions, and behaviors on the path to reach success. The underlying cause originates internally rather than externally, necessitating introspective evaluation to determine the factors influencing specific behavioral patterns. An individual might have more positive cognition that allows them to look at their situation more positively. The concept of self-efficacy has a prominent influence on these attitudes.

At the beginning of the 1900s, Binet opened a new window through the angle of differentiated learning by presenting the first intelligence test, which paid attention to individual differences (Binet and Simon, 1916). Moreover, the term *participatory learning* also emerged in the early 1900s, which holds that educators should design an authentic instruction format, directly paired to their background lives and routines simultaneously. During the 1970s, the concept of individualized learning was coined as a revolutionary approach to emphasize the uniqueness of individuals' identity (Sreenidhi and Helena, 2017).

Bandura (1994), by means of employing social cognitive theory, claimed that everybody is a representative sample of their environment; therefore, people's decisions form their interests, competencies, and careers in the path of life. Bandura (1994), a professional expert in the domain of self-efficacy, announced that students reach a specific level of self-efficacy through ideal performances related to their responsible acceptance (Alqurashi, 2016; Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2016).

Bandura (1994) defined "self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2). According to Fallan and Opstad (2016), a learner's average self-efficacy can be determined by the level of his/her effort, teachers' feedback, the difficulty of the subject, and the socio-cultural environment. Additionally, in a school context, teachers can boost self-efficacy by preparing a non-threatening atmosphere, giving supportive messages, and reducing negative emotions and information directly (Doménech-Betoret et al., 2017).

Self-efficacy has an important influence on human achievement in a wide variety of educational settings. According to Albert Bandura's (1994) social cognitive theory, the ultimate result of human behavior is dominantly derived from the function of intrinsic processes throughout colorful experiences, as well as acquiring stable beliefs in life. He believes people with a high level of self-efficacy believe they can do even challenging tasks. More simply, self-efficacy is what an individual believes he or she can accomplish using his or her skills under certain circumstances. The basic principle behind self-efficacy theory is that individuals are more likely to engage in activities for which they have high self-efficacy and less likely to engage in those they do not.

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy beliefs are relatively personal attitudes; they can vary from one person to another on several dimensions. In other words, Self-efficacy is an absolute trait that can be accumulated and thus developed. So, it is not something that people are born with. Even with differences in environments and culture, every individual is capable of exercising and strengthening self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Schunk and DiBenedetto (2016) recorded that the concept of self-efficacy can be applied in the education sector. He notes that self-efficacy beliefs affect academic performance by influencing several behavioral and psychological processes. Paying attention to differentiation, students are willing to participate in classrooms in which they feel courageous without ambiguous, unfamiliar tasks during the course timetables.

## 1.2. Purpose of study

The study aimed to explore the domains of self-efficacy among senior high school learners of English as a foreign language, with particular attention to gender-based variations. Based on the objective of the study, the following research question was formulated.

RQ1- Is there any significant relationship between Iranian senior high school EFL learners' gender and any of their self-reported levels of self-efficacy domains?

## 2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

The participants of the study, the instruments, and the data collection procedures are discussed below.

### 2.1. Participants

Based on random sampling, 100 students in intact English classes (50 males and 50 females) with an age range from 14 to 18 were selected from the secondary senior high schools. They were studying in Khesht and Kamarej, Fars province. The students were all first speakers of Persian and were all studying English as a foreign language.

### 2.2. Data collection instruments

To fulfill the objectives of the present study, the Self-Efficacy Survey for Children/ Adolescents (SEQ-C), developed by Muris (2001), was selected as an instrument to gather data for the study. The researcher administered the Persian version of the questionnaire. The SEQ-C Survey includes the following domains: Academic Self-Efficacy, Social Self-Efficacy, and Emotional Self-Efficacy (Muris, 2001). The Persian version of the questionnaire is a 23-item survey, which is scored on a five-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very well) with eight items for each category. Muris (2002) report this scale to be a valid and reliable one with the internal consistency of 0.80; alpha levels indicate reliability estimates for each subscale: academic (8 items,  $\alpha = .87$ ), social (8 items,  $\alpha = .78$ ), emotional (7 items,  $\alpha = .80$ ). The alpha reliability estimates for this instrument in the current study for general self-efficacy is .89 and for each subscale as follows: academic (8 items,  $\alpha = .81$ ), social (8 items,  $\alpha = .87$ ) and emotional (7 items,  $\alpha = .88$ ).

### 2.3. Data analysis technique

In order to remove any language problems, the researcher provided the Persian version of the English items in selected questionnaires. In the first step, the researcher evaluated the reliability of the questionnaires through a pilot study. To this end, the researcher administered the questionnaires to twenty students who were identical to the target respondents of the study. Afterward, Cronbach's alpha analysis was run to estimate the internal consistency of the questionnaires. To obtain more reliable answers from the participants, they were asked to complete the questionnaires in one session. In addition, the researcher was present during classes during data collection and explained the purpose of the study to the participants. The participants were also informed about the questionnaires and how to respond to them. Statistical data analyses were performed using SPSS Statistics (version 27). Descriptive statistics and the Chi-Square test were used to see if there is a relationship between Iranian male and female senior high school EFL learners and self-efficacy domains, and to evaluate the strength of the relationship. Phi/Cramer's V statistic test was also used.

## 3. RESULTS

In order to identify gender-based differences between Iranian senior high school EFL learners' self-efficacy, descriptive statistics of the scores were run on the collected data. The 23-item survey was scored on a five-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely well) with eight items for each self-efficacy type for a maximum score of 40 in each domain and a minimum score of eight in each domain (Muris, 2002). The score an individual receives can range from 23 (the lowest) to 115 (the highest), representing varying levels of self-efficacy.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Self-Efficacy Scores*

	Gender	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Academic	Males	50	28.98	17	37
	Females	50	33.08	21	40
	Total	100	31.03	17	40
Social	Males	50	27.12	14	36
	Females	50	29.72	21	37
	Total	100	28.4	14	37
Emotional	Males	50	23.96	15	35
	Females	50	21.38	10	33
	Total	100	22.67	10	35

As shown in Table 1, there was a significant difference between male and female participants in terms of self-efficacy domains; females exhibited higher mean scores in social self-efficacy ( $M=29.72$ ) compared to males (27.12), and females had a prominent mean score in academic self-efficacy ( $M=33.08$ ). Additionally, emotional self-efficacy was recorded higher mean score among males ( $M=23.96$ ) compared to the female participants ( $M=21.38$ ).

In the next step, the sample characteristics frequencies, which consisted of an equal number of males ( $n = 50$ ) and females ( $n = 50$ ), should be observed. It would therefore pave the way for an examination of any potential gender-based differences in the frequency of their self-efficacy domain.

**Table 2**

*Gender and self-efficacy domains cross-tabulation of frequencies*

		Self-efficacy			Total
		Social	Educational	Emotional	
Gender	Count	17	28	5	50
	% within Gender	34.0%	56.0%	10.0%	100.0%
	<u>Male</u>				
	% within Self-efficacy	58.6%	42.4%	100.0%	50.0%
	% of Total	17.0%	28.0%	5.0%	50.0%
	Count	12	38	0	50
	% within Gender	24.0%	76.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	<u>Female</u>				
	% within Self-efficacy	41.4%	57.6%	0.0%	50.0%
	% of Total	12.0%	38.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Total	Count	29	66	5	100
	% within Gender	29.0%	66.0%	5.0%	100.0%
	% within Self-efficacy	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	29.0%	66.0%	5.0%	100.0%

The data analysis reveals notable disparities in the distribution of self-efficacy type profiles between male and female participants. Specifically, a higher proportion of males (34%) exhibited strong social self-efficacy compared to females (24%). Conversely, females demonstrated a greater prevalence of high academic self-efficacy at 76%, which was 20 percentage points higher than the rate observed in the male subsample (56%). Additionally, the data indicate that emotional self-efficacy was more common among male participants, with 10% reporting high levels, while no females in the sample fell into this category. These divergent patterns across the various self-efficacy domains suggest that gender may play a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their capabilities in particular areas of functioning.

The next phase to address the second research question is to identify if there is a statistically significant relationship between the gender and self-efficacy domains of participants. To do so, the Pearson chi-square test was performed.

**Table 3**  
*Chi-square test results for gender and self-efficacy domains*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.377 <sup>a</sup>	2	.025
Likelihood Ratio	9.319	2	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	.000	1	1.000
N of Valid Cases	100		

The Pearson chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between gender and self-efficacy types,  $\chi^2(2) = 7.377$ ,  $p = 0.025$ . This indicates that the observed differences in self-efficacy type frequencies between males and females are unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. In other words, an individual's gender is associated with his/her propensity for certain self-efficacy characteristics.

The final phase is to determine the strength of the relationship between gender and self-efficacy domains to see how strong or weak the relationship is. This section thus utilizes the Phi/Cramer's V statistic test to shed light on the aforementioned strength of the relationship.

**Table 4**  
*Symmetric measures of gender and self-efficacy domains*

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.272	.025
	Cramer's V	.272	.025
N of Valid Cases		100	

The value of 0.272 suggests a moderate relationship between gender and self-efficacy types. These findings suggest that gender plays a role in the expression of self-efficacy traits. The data highlight distinct patterns in how self-efficacy characteristics are distributed between males and females within this sample.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The current study aimed at investigating whether there was any statistically significant gender-based differences in Iranian senior high school EFL learners' self-efficacy. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant moderate-to-strong relationship between male and female participants in terms of their self-efficacy domains in specific areas. The findings indicated a notable difference in self-efficacy domains between male and female participants. Females were more prevalent in academic self-efficacy. Conversely, males exhibited greater emotional and social self-efficacy than their female counterparts.

Previous research results on gender and academic self-efficacy revealed mixed findings, which are thus inconclusive. While some analyses reported findings in favor of girls (Britner and Pajares, 2001), some showed no differences (Pajares, 1996). On this account, the outcomes of this study provide further support and theoretical bases that female students in the Iranian setting demonstrate higher academic self-efficacy. The findings of the present study are also consistent with previous studies suggesting that females tend to exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy in this domain (Pajares and Valiante, 1999).

Females exhibited lower levels of social self-efficacy compared to males. It may result from the fact that all the teachers in Iran's Ministry of Education compulsorily take in-service courses related to classroom management; therefore, teachers inadvertently provide a homogeneous atmosphere of learning, and students experience the same procedure of instruction without the notion of gender differences. In such an atmosphere, male students, in particular, cannot freely present their own feelings socially.



This finding on social self-efficacy was unexpected, as previous literature has suggested that females tend to demonstrate higher emotional self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2011; Bandura, 1994). The higher emotional self-efficacy in males could potentially be attributed to cultural factors such as traditional masculine norms that encourage emotional self-control and self-reliance (Ptacek et al., 1992). This finding may have to do with the fact that girls more frequently rely on ineffective emotion-focused coping strategies (Ptacek et al., 1992).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study revealed a significant moderate-to-strong relationship between gender and self-reported levels of self-efficacy across different domains among Iranian senior high school EFL learners. Male students demonstrated higher levels of social and emotional self-efficacy, indicating greater confidence in interpersonal and affective situations, while female students showed stronger academic self-efficacy, reflecting their persistence and confidence in learning tasks. These findings point to distinct gender-based patterns in how learners perceive and regulate their abilities in language learning contexts. Understanding these differences is essential for educators, as they can use this knowledge to design gender-responsive teaching strategies that recognize diverse motivational and emotional needs. EFL teachers, students, and parents can apply these insights to classroom practices and curriculum planning, helping students develop a deeper awareness of their learning identities and self-efficacy strengths.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that education stakeholders adopt alternative learning pathways and assessment methods that promote learner autonomy and satisfaction. Differentiated instruction, collaborative projects, and reflective learning activities can create more inclusive environments where both male and female learners can strengthen underdeveloped areas of self-efficacy. For these recommendations to have lasting impact, a broader shift in educational philosophy is needed—one that values emotional and ethical dimensions of learning alongside academic achievement. Such an approach would not only foster balanced learner development but also contribute to more equitable and holistic language education practices.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Approval:** The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

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