

أثر الكفاءة الذاتية في مستوى إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الأكراد لغة أجنبية

The Effect of Self-efficacy on English Language Proficiency among Kurdish EFL Learners

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة الذاتية، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية الأكراد، النظرية المعرفية الاجتماعية، مستويات
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تلعب المتغيرات النفسية دورًا حاسمًا في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ويُشار إليها فيما بعد بـ(EFL)، ولا سيما في سياقات التعليم العالي حيث يواجه المتعلمون تحديات لغوية وانفعالية. ومن بين هذه المتغيرات، تم الاعتراف بالكفاءة الذاتية بوصفها عاملاً رئيساً يؤثر في أداء المتعلمين اللغوي. تعتمد هذه الدراسة منهجاً مختلطاً، حيث تبحث في تأثير الكفاءة الذاتية عبر مستويات الكفاءة المختلفة في مدى انخراط طلبة الجامعات الأكراد في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية. تتكوّن عينة الدراسة من 134 طالباً وطالبة في مرحلة البكالوريوس، تتراوح أعمارهم بين 20 و 26 عاماً، من طلبة المرحلتين الثانية والثالثة في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بجامعة دهوك، إقليم كردستان/العراق، كلية التربية الأساسية، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. وقد تم اختيار المشاركين أنفسهم بناءً على إكمالهم اختبار كفاءة معياري، وتم تصنيفهم إلى مستويات مبتدئ ومتوسط ومتقدم لأغراض مناقشات مجموعات التركيز (FGDs)، وذلك لضمان الاتساق بين مصادر البيانات. تشير النتائج إلى أن الكفاءة الذاتية لدى المتعلمين تختلف بصورة منهجية عبر مستويات الكفاءة؛ إذ يُظهر المتعلمون الأكراد في المستوى المتقدم استخداماً قوياً لخبرات الإتقان، وتنظيماً انفعالياً أفضل، ومستوى أعلى من الانخراط، في حين يعتمد المبتدئون بدرجة أكبر على الإقناع الاجتماعي والخبرات البديلة (غير المباشرة). (علاوة على ذلك، يُستخدم التعلّم المدعوم بالتكنولوجيا بوصفه مصدراً متوسط التأثير، ويُوظف أساساً لأغراض التدريب وكأداة موجّهة ذاتياً لدعم المتعلمين، وتعزيز ثقتهم بأنفسهم، وخفض القلق، وزيادة مشاركتهم الفاعلة في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية. وتُظهر النتائج أن المتعلمين الأكثر تقدماً يبرهنون على خبرات إتقان أفضل ومستويات أعلى من الانخراط، بينما يعتمد المتعلمون الأقل تقدماً على الإقناع الاجتماعي والخبرات البديلة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الكفاءة الذاتية لها تأثير ملحوظ في مستوى مشاركة الطلبة وإنجازهم اللغوي في المستويات الأعلى من الكفاءة ضمن مؤسسة تعليم عالٍ متعددة اللغات.

Abstract

Psychological variables play a crucial role in English as a Foreign Language (Henceforth, EFL) learning, particularly in higher-education contexts where learners face linguistic and affective challenges. Among these variables, self-efficacy has been recognized as a key factor influencing learners' language performance. This study uses a mixed-methods approach, investigating the influence of self-efficacy across proficiency levels on English learning engagement among Kurdish university students. The sample of the study consists of 134 male and female undergraduate students aged between 20 and 26 years from the second and third year of Kurdish EFL students from the University of Duhok, Kurdistan/Iraq, college of Basic Education, English Department. The same participants are selected based on their completion of a standardised proficiency test and are categorised into beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels for the focus group discussions (FGDs) to ensure consistency across data sources. The findings suggest that learners' self-efficacy varies systematically across proficiency levels, Kurdish EFL advanced learners shows a strong use of mastery experiences, better emotional regulation and higher engagement, while beginners rely more on social persuasion and vicarious experiences. Furthermore, technology as a moderate source is used primary for practice and self-directed tool to support learners; confidence, reduce anxiety, and enhance active participation in English. The results show that more advanced learners demonstrate better mastery experiences and greater levels of engagement, but less advanced learners depend on social persuasion and vicarious experiences. The findings tend to indicate that self-efficacy has a significant impact on student involvement and language achievement at the higher levels of proficiency in a multilingual institution of higher education.

1. Introduction



Psychological variables play a significant role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) such as the situations where the learning process is characterized with linguistic, instructional and affective difficulties. The studies increasingly emphasised that the EFL learning is not simply a cognitive or a linguistic process but is profoundly affected by the mental processes, emotions, motivation, or attitude of learners (Atmowardoyo & Sakkir, 2021). When EFL learners are in Kurdish universities, they frequently face difficulty, which increases the effects of psychological factors. Many students join the higher education with low self-efficacy beliefs about their English competencies due to previous learning experiences that emphasised the form-based instructions and presented few chances to use language meaningfully. Such circumstances tend to lead to increased anxiety and lack of confidence in using English language successfully, particularly in speaking and academic activities. Self-efficacy is one of psychological variables, which is considered to be a significant predictor of engagement and performance of learners since it represents individuals' belief's ability in performing certain tasks successfully. Dissimilarities in self-efficacy are seen to be connected to proficiency levels; learners with higher education are likely to be processing stronger self-efficacy since they have more successful experiences of mastery and willing to use English more frequently, whereas those with lower proficiency have more self-doubt, anxiety, and avoidance behaviors. Despite its significance, limited studies have been able to investigate the variation in self-efficacy of Kurdish EFL university learners in relationship to varying proficiency levels and how such differences affect language learning experience.

Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine how self-efficacy affects Kurdish EFL university learners across proficiency levels. In particular, the research will seek to target the nature of fluctuation of self-efficacy levels in relation to levels of proficiency and the influence of these levels on engagement and language performance of learners in a multilingual environment in higher education. To this end, the present study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) How does self-efficacy vary among Kurdish EFL university learners at different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, and advanced)? (2) What is the effect of self-efficacy on the classroom performance and engagement of Kurdish EFL university learners at various levels of proficiency? (3) How do Bandura's sources of self-efficacy, mastery experiences, vicarious experience, social persuasion, emotional and physiological states manifest across proficiency levels?



2. Literature Review

2.1 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be studied in the context of the social cognitive theory. Social cognitive learning takes place when a person learns by observing and copying the actions of the others, the imitation process also involves some degree of cognitive development so that the acquired behavior should be in line with the behavior observed (Subbotsky, 2012). On this basis, Albert Bandura (1960) created Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which states that learning occurs in a social context in the form of dynamic and reciprocal interactions of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors (Smith, 2019). SCT is triadic reciprocal deterministic, with (A) individual factors such as self-efficacy beliefs, enjoyment, expectations, and behaviors, (B) environmental factors such as the support of family, peers, and other important figures, and (C) behaviors, including skills or knowledge needed and interaction of behaviors with individual and environmental factors (Pope et al., 2019). The self-efficacy concept is a term that was developed by Bandura (1997) to describe the belief that an individual holds on his or her capability of performing certain tasks or attaining desired outcomes. Self-efficacy in the context of learning a language is the perceived ability of a learner to learn and apply a new language successfully (Yang, 2020). Studies have revealed that self-efficacy is a key player in second language learning as it increases the motivation of learners, lessens anxiety as well as fosters success in EFL classrooms. High self-efficacy learners find it easier to undertake tough tasks, persevere during the process and eventually achieve success in language acquisition (Yang, 2020). On the other hand, learners with low self-efficacy can feel unsure about their proficiency, they can be easily demoralized, and they can evade instances where language is used (Nguyen et al., 2022). Research has also shown that students who have a high level of self-efficacy are more active in language activities, use more successful learning strategies, and are more successful in overcoming problems associated with language (Bai et al., 2022). Self-efficacy is a crucial success factor in Kurdish EFL environments where students tend to struggle with success because of the lack of exposure to English outside of the classroom (Batu, 2024). The high levels of self-efficacy facilitate learners to overcome the anxiety, always be motivated, perceive errors as a learning process and not an indicator of failure and continue to overcome the linguistic difficulties (Graham, 2011; Mills et al., 2007). Batu (2024) also observed that the linguistic gains were significantly improved due to the propensity of the learners in the target language to take risks by employing the target language in the classroom activities and extracurricular language practices, indicating that Kurdish learners could be supported with the significant enhancement of self-efficacy to support



the better language outcome. This can be achieved through setting genuine goals, promoting verbal reinforcement, and creating a friendly classroom atmosphere that would allow students to feel that they can achieve the learning tasks (Teng et al., 2023). Nevertheless, such findings do not rule out the fact that very little research was conducted specifically on Kurdish EFL learners in higher education. Thus, because of the peculiarities of the Kurdish context in the context of linguistics and education, there should be context-specific studies to assess how psychological variables, including self-efficacy, impact the learning environment. In this way, it is significant to focus on self-efficacy to improve the performance of students in EFL environments, according to the reviewed literature.

2.2 Strategies to improve Kurdish student Self-efficacy

Mechanisms to improve self-efficacy in the Kurdish EFL students can be described effectively in the context of Banduras' social cognitive theory. Bandura (1995) held that self-efficacy beliefs are created via the experiences of mastery, vicarious, social persuasion and interpretation of physiological and affective states. These sources form a theoretical background on the classroom practices that seek to enhance confidence and interest of the learners.

It is one of the most powerful strategies as the opportunity to **mastery experiences**, which offers learners to gain success in the language work. The mastery experiences are viewed as the most potent source of self-efficacy as they give tangible demonstrations of the capabilities of the learners (Bandura, 1995; Gale et al., 2021). This process can be facilitated by teachers creating sufficiently difficult but not too difficult tasks that will allow Kurdish EFL learners to achieve success gradually, and thus gain confidence in themselves.

The other instrument that is important in improving self-efficacy is through **social persuasion** in the form of positive feedback and encouragement. Positive feedback that helps to recognize progress of learners and accentuate their positive qualities, thus, enhancing their faith in their capability of successfully completing tasks in language learning (Vattøyet, 2020). Self-efficacy should be further enhanced by encouraging learners to create achievable and real goals, which will make them feel a sense of accomplishment (Gale et al., 2021).

Moreover, **vicarious experiences** also help in building self-efficacy as the learners view the successful use of the target language by their peers or teachers. This type of social modeling enables Kurdish EFL students to acquire the ability to learn through the example of peers or instructors of proper language use and enhances their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Cooperation, competition reduction, and encouragement and motivation of students through peer learning activities and collaborative



classroom practices help students observe other competent language models, including guest speakers (Derivry & Potolia, 2023).

Last but not least, the **physiological and emotional states** of the learners should also be considered because anxiety, stress, and emotional discomfort can impair self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). By establishing a favorable and conducive classroom environment, it is possible to minimize language-related fear and make learners see errors as an inherent component of the learning process and, in the end, improve engagement and learning.

In this context, various expressions of the self-efficacy including coping, recovery, and controlling self-efficacy would be of great importance to EFL learning since they capture the beliefs of the learners in their potential to cope with challenges, deal with setbacks, and control learning behaviors (Bandura, 1995). Improving these areas of self-efficacy is particularly relevant in Kurdish EFL contexts, where the exposure to English and the presence of more affective barriers are likely in most cases. To illustrate, the lack of the chance to use English can become the restraint to the confidence of learners and their anxiety increase especially when it comes to speaking activities. Fear of adverse appraisal is also high in the context of collectivist classroom culture and when coupled with teacher-centered instruction it may reduce a learner to active involvement in the communicative activities, thus limiting the growth of self-efficacy.

Similar multi-linguals in contextual studies

The use of English as the focal point of education in Kurdistan has also taken the characteristics of the importance of English globally in the fields of academics, professions, and technology. As such, in numerous universities, English medium of instruction has been introduced into different fields of study and the need to have English proficiency in the workforce is becoming more and more evident (Ali & Mohammadzadeh, 2022). In the multilingual EFL settings, self-efficacy of learners is generally considered to be one of the primary psychological variables that determine language engagement, persistence, and performance. The Kurdish higher education scenario has shown that the perceptions held by students regarding their proficiency in the English language are greatly shaped by the previous educational experiences in grammar-based learning and few chances of communicative use (Ahmed, 2021; Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2023). The lack of outside classroom exposure to English, which increases anxiety and hesitation, supports the beliefs of low self-efficacy in the area of communicative competence. Consequently, most Kurdish EFL learners start university with limited domain-specific lexicogrammatical experience, limited confidence in speaking and listening skills, and social language anxiety when facing curricula where building vocabulary through consistent lexicon and effective meaning delivery is a



constant requirement (Ahmed, 2021; Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2022). The same trends are observed in other Expanding Circle settings: Iran, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf, where learners tend to gain low confidence despite their years of studying English in a formal setting (Khajavy et al., 2016). These researches show that emotional conditions have a very powerful influence on self-efficacy, teacher feedback is one of the most frequent forms of **social persuasion** in influencing self-efficacy and technology-based strategies are gaining more and more influence.

Although communicative and task-based approaches have been shown to enhance self-efficacy by providing supportive environments and opportunities for successful language use, low self-efficacy persists in Kurdish and similar multilingual settings. Research in Kurdish contexts remains limited, with existing findings consistently pointing to low confidence, fear of speaking, and strong dependence on teacher approval (Ahmed, 2016). Notably, there is a dearth of empirical research systematically examining the ontogeny of self-efficacy among Kurdish EFL learners across proficiency levels in relation to Bandura's four sources, highlighting the need for focused investigation into the psychological processes underlying self-efficacy among Kurdish university learners.

2.1 Previous Studies

This section reviews three different empirical studies conducted in the same field with different researchers and different background in a chronological order.

Abdulrahman and Mahmood (2023) published a paper under the title "The Effect of Implementing Selected Strategies on Promoting Kurdish University EFL Students' Self-Efficacy" which identified two primary concerns: the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the construct of self-efficacy and the socio-cognitive influence of motivation on student performance and the other issue resided in the socio-cognitive influence of motivation over students. Their work aimed at finding out whether Kurdish university students' self-efficacy has positive or negative influence, and the correlation of self-efficacy and motivation. Their work hypothesised that students naturally had s positive motivation themselves and from their teachers. Two procedures were carried out for the purpose of answering their hypothesis and collecting data. One was theoretical and one was practical. For the theoretical part, the procedure consisted of definitions, terminology, and elements of self-efficacy which presented a theoretical element. On the other hand, the practical section consisted of a questionnaire for measuring students' level of self-efficacy. Their sample consisted of 100 Kurdish University students from three different universities including (Koya, Charmo, & Garmian) and the sample was



chosen randomly. The result of their data showed that students have a positive self-efficacy level towards learning. The results also indicated a correlation between their self-efficacy and motivation.

Additionally, a study by Ariyanti (2025) under the title “Writing Self-Efficacy in English Language Learning: A Study of University Students’ Academic Achievement and Motivational Factors” examined the relationship between academic performance and self-efficacy in regards to EFL university students who are enrolled in English writing classes. Their work made also use of a mixed-method approach and had a sample of 150 university students among three universities in Indonesia. The study used a Simi-structured interview alongside a questionnaire of English Writing Self-Efficacy (QEWS) to evaluate the students’ beliefs and identity. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between academic performance and self-efficacy.

Furthermore, a study by Zahawi and Hasan (2025) entitled “The Effect of Implementing Selected Strategies on Promoting Kurdish University EFL Students’ Self-Efficacy” investigated some targeted pedagogical strategies effects on how to enhance the academic self-efficacy of Kurdish EFL learners. To measure this construct, a scale was adopted by the work of Morgan-jinks scale to assess the perceived confidence of learners in their academic potential. At the department of English at the University of Salahaddin, during the academic year of (2023-2024) 62 freshmen year students were taught a course that consisted of three strategies (Brainstorming, cooperative work, and debating). The scale that was use was given twice, once before the intervention and once after that. At the end of the course, 10 students were randomly chosen to get more in depth qualitative data. The data were then collected and analyzed thematically through SPSS. The findings of their study revealed a significant relationship between the integration of these strategies which boosted positively the self-efficacy of 1st year university students.

Across these studies, a consistent positive relationship between self-efficacy and language learning outcomes is evidence. Ariyanti (2025) found that writing self-efficacy significantly is correlated with academic performance, although cultural factors and limited feedback moderate its development. Similarly, Abdulrahman and Mahmood (2023) reported that Kurdish university EFL students demonstrate positive self-efficacy, which was strongly associated with intrinsic motivation to learn English. Zahawi and Hasan (2025) also established that focused pedagogical strategies, such as cooperative learning, brainstorming, and debating, with support of peer interaction have a strong effect on the enhancement of self-efficacy in learners. All these results highlight the significance of the personal, social and instructional factors in enhancing self-efficacy in various EFL settings. Nevertheless, despite the increasing accumulation of evidence,



very little of this research has been done to explore how self-efficacy operates at various levels of proficiency in Kurdish EFL university environment, and this justifies the focus of the current research to examine how self-efficacy affects the performance of learners at different levels in the language.

3. Methodology

In this study, a mixed-methods design will be employed, utilising two data collection instruments: focus group discussions (FGDs) and proficiency tests. The sample consists of 134 male and female undergraduate students aged between 20 and 26 years, enrolled in the second and third year (Levels 2 and 3) of the undergraduate programme at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, Department of English.

The self-efficacy component of data collection was conducted through focus groups discussions. The FGDs were conducted in groups of five to seven students, which were aimed at investigating learners' perceptions of self-efficacy and its influence on their language development during second language learning. The discussions were recorded using an AI-powered transcription tool, which automatically generated transcripts, and the transcripts were manually reviewed to ensure accuracy and correct transcription. Verbal consent of the students was taken before data collection and they were requested to declare their voluntary participation in the study and no personal information or identification details would be revealed. The respondents were also informed about their right to drop out of the study without any negative consequences, thus the research was conducted with the consideration of confidentiality and anonymity. To enhance validity and reliability of the research instruments, the FGD questions were consulted and endorsed by a panel of experts to ensure the relevance, clarity, and correspondence to the study objectives. The proficiency test used in this study was the standardized **Oxford Placement Test**, which is a widely used and globally recognized instrument with well-established reliability and validity and reported by its creators (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

Thematic Analysis of the qualitative data provided by the FGDs was performed (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which entails an inductive coding procedure that aims at determining recurrent patterns, with particular emphasis on self-efficacy as a psychological construct. The analysis identified patterns in learners' perceptions, attitudes, and confidence towards their capabilities of performing the tasks related to language. The proficiency tests offered quantitative information on the performance of the learners in the English language across various levels of proficiency. The data were analysed with the use of R, where correlation and regression analysis were performed on the results to examine the relationship

between self-efficacy and language performance. This enabled the exploration of how self-efficacy is associated with language performance across various proficiency levels.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

Before conducting the statistical analysis using the R environment to employ the correlation and regression model, qualitative focus group data were transformed into quantitative data by coding the "Self-Efficacy Type" into a numerical index based on the four Pandora's boxes (mastery, social persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological states), plus the emerging factor of "technology." Below, the findings of the analysis are presented.

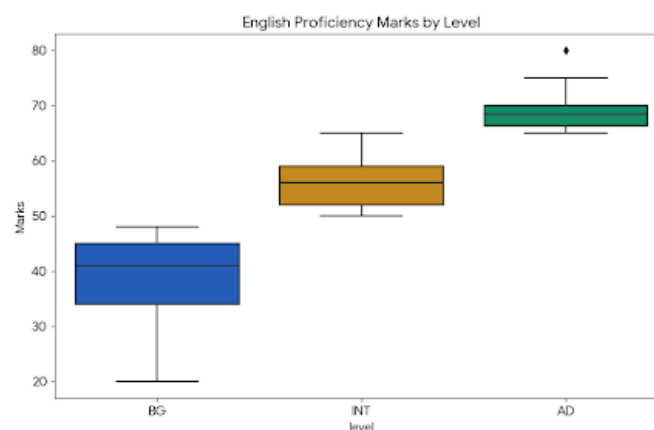
4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics and the Proficiency Test

Prior to conducting the regression analysis, the distribution of proficiency test scores were examined across the three defined sub-groups. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the students based on their performance in the proficiency test, which shows that there was a clear progression in performance.

- Beginner (BG): Mean score ≈ 39.2
- Intermediate (INT): Mean score ≈ 56.0
- Advanced (AD): Mean score ≈ 68.9

The data confirm a clear variability in performance, providing a solid basis for investigating the correlation between self-efficacy and these scores.

Figure 1: English proficiency marks by level



To ensure that these three levels were truly distinct from one another, and not simply a random overlap, a statistical test known as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. The results confirmed a statistically significant difference in proficiency scores among the three sub-groups ($F(2, 131) = 258.05, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the effect size was very strong ($\eta^2 = 0.80$). In other words, this means that approximately



Statistical term	Explanation
F (2, 131)	This is a very high F-value. This means that the "gap" between the sub-groups (beginner, intermediate, advanced) is much larger than the variance within the groups themselves.
$p < 0.001$	This means there is a 0.1% (or less) probability that these differences occurred by chance. Statistically, this is "significant".
$\eta^2 = 0.80$	This is the "effect size." In the social sciences, anything above 0.14 is considered a "large" effect. The score of 0.80 is enormous, meaning that the proficiency test was very successful in classifying students into the appropriate levels.

80% of the difference in scores is directly related to the student's proficiency level. This mathematically validates our classifications and provides a solid foundation for investigating how confidence changes within each level. Table 1 shows the meanings of the statistical terms used above:

Table 1: Explanation of statistical terms

4.1.2 Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether the range of self-efficacy sources relied upon by the student was related to their proficiency level.

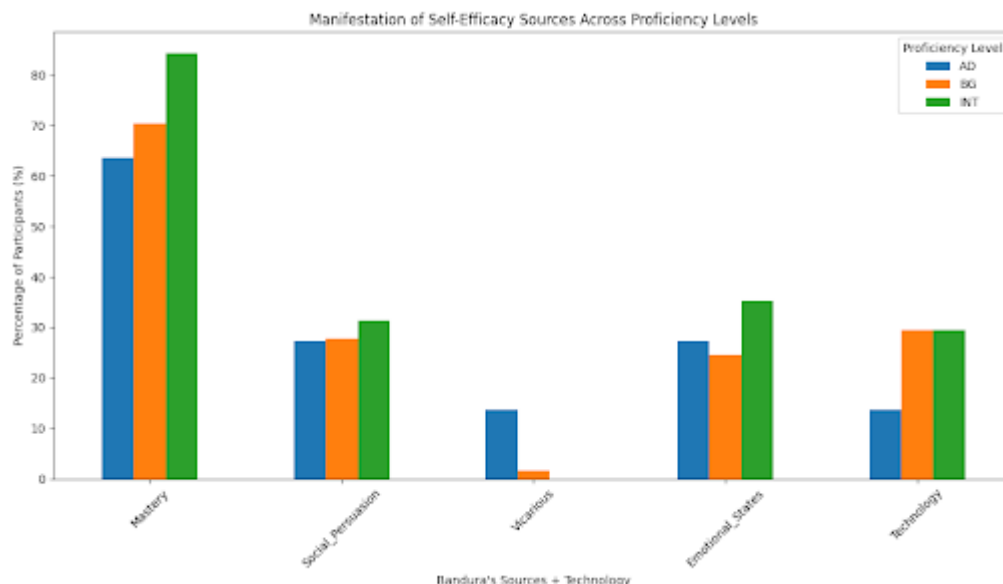
- Overall Correlation: $r = 0.093$ ($p = 0.284$)
- By Sub-group: Interestingly, the relationship was more pronounced in the advanced group ($r = 0.36$) compared to the beginner ($r = 0.18$) and intermediate ($r = 0.001$) groups.

This suggests that advanced learners' beliefs about themselves more closely align with their actual language performance, while beginners may have fluctuating, yet unstable, confidence in their proficiency level.

4.1.3 The Impact of Confidence Sources on Proficiency Level

A regression model was conducted to determine the "value" of each confidence source. The results showed a clear positive trend: for every additional confidence source a student could draw upon (such as past success plus a helpful application), their test score increased by approximately 1.5 points. While this trend is not a "statistical guarantee" for all students, it does suggest that building a broad "toolbox" of confidence-boosting strategies—rather than relying on just one—is a path to higher achievement. Figure 2 shows the self-efficacy sources across proficiency levels.

Figure 2: Manifestation of Self-Efficacy Sources across Proficiency Levels



4.1.4 How Confidence Manifests: Mastery, Technology, and Emotions

The factors that make the Kurdish learners feel competent were also investigated. Confidence “recipes” varied considerably depending on the student’s level. “Mastery” (the most important factor) was the primary motivator for everyone. 84% of intermediate-level students and 70% of beginner-level students indicated that successfully completing a task boosted their confidence. In this context, “doing” is the strongest form of “believing.”

As for “Technology”, beginners (29.5%) and intermediate (29.4%) rely on technology significantly more than advanced students (13.6%). For those still at the beginning of their journey, tools like YouTube and translation apps serve as a vital bridge, allowing them to feel competent even when the language seems challenging.

As far as “Emotional Regulation” is concerned, intermediate students reported the highest use of self-talk and anxiety management (35%). This suggests that the intermediate stage of learning is the most emotionally taxing, requiring students to effectively manage their stress to maintain their self-confidence.

In conclusion, the data show that self-efficacy is not a one-size-fits-all approach. In the context of Kurdish higher education, advanced students have learned to align their beliefs with their skills, while beginners still use technology as a temporary tool to boost their self-confidence.

For teachers, these results suggest a step-by-step approach: beginners should be provided with digital tools to enhance their sense of security, intermediate students supported with strategies to reduce stress and anxiety, and advanced students provided with high-level challenges to solidify their mastery.



4.2 Discussions

This study investigates the impact of self-efficacy among Kurdish EFL university learners across various proficiency levels. The findings reveal a dynamic relationship between proficiency levels and the development of sources of self-efficacy. While the quantitative analysis revealed a general positive correlation—showing that a broader range of self-efficacy sources is largely associated with enhanced proficiency—the qualitative data provides a deeper understanding of how learners actively construct and support their beliefs regarding language learning and emotional challenges. This discussion interprets these findings through Bandura's (1997) theory and in relation to the broader context of Kurdish EFL learning and similar settings.

4.2.1 Self-efficacy across Proficiency levels

In response to the first research question, the findings reveal clear differences across proficiency in relation to self-efficacy.

At the advanced level, Kurdish learners are most frequently and strongly connected to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy at this level is consistently high and closely linked to actual performance outcomes. Their confidence is grounded in repeated success, self-assessment, and practice as important strategies that allow them to view error as a part of learning rather than an obstacle or fear.

At the intermediate level, self-efficacy is more transitional and less stable. Learners' confidence emerges from a combination of strategies, including language improvement, receiving support, and managing anxiety.

At the beginner levels, the results indicate that learners' confidence appears more fragile, often shaped by anxiety and low communicative experience and skills. Their confidences highly depend on context and often controlled by fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation. As a result, self-efficacy at this level is changeable and weakly aligned with real language performance.

In conclusion, self-efficacy develops progressively across proficiency levels among Kurdish EFL learners. Their confidence transfers from unstable, externally influenced beliefs at the beginner level toward a more internalized, performance-based confidence at the advanced level.

4.2.2 Influence of self-efficacy on Classroom Engagement and Language Performance

Addressing the second research question, the statistical analysis suggests that self-efficacy positively influences learners' engagement as their proficiency is increased. The results show that learners strengthen their confidence and performance by using different strategies, as the effect of each strategy combines to support language development.



The findings shows that Kurdish EFL advanced learners' beliefs about themselves more closely align with their real-life performance. The results indicate that to maintain fluency and foster engagement, learners use practical strategies such as actively seeking challenges or paraphrasing, as one participant explained *"I'll try to use alternatives... easy words or something to describe them"* (P14, AD). Preparation and practice are also central, as another advanced participant noted, *"Well, just to study the material that I'm going to present the day before presenting... I feel more confident, like I'm creating something unique and presenting... practicing"* (P7, AD). The results suggest that learners clearly connect their confidence with active communication, which is a key feature for learners to move beyond basic communication toward more expressive and persuasive engagement (Graham, 2022).

Kurdish EFL intermediate learners' engagement is described in terms of managing participation and social interaction. Their self-efficacy helps them speak despite their anxiety or fear through using different strategies such as self-talk, deep breathing, and support from friends to create a safe learning environment; as cited by a participant, *"The first... person you should talk to is yourself"* (P56, INT), or by creating a safe environment through talking to themselves or a supportive friend, as noted, *"When I am with my friends, as cited, 'When I am with my friends... I really speak very well'"* (P46, INT)

On the other hand, beginner learners show unstable and generally low level of confidence in their classroom engagement and performances. The findings indicates that Kurdish

EFL learners at the beginner level demonstrate the lowest degree of engagement due to high level of stress and anxiety. *"I use AI... to correct my mistakes... Making me more comfortable"* (P98, BG), as well as encouragement from friends and family: *"My friends support me and every time... tell me, 'Don't worry about the mistakes and grammar rules and word order. Just speak'"* (P93, BG). The results suggest that beginner learners are at an early stage of confident development and depend primary on peers, teachers, or technological tools to support their confidence, rather than relying on themselves. They often focus on completing tasks rather than communicating due to low confidence that limits classroom engagement.

Overall, the results suggest that self-efficacy plays a developmental and changeable role in shaping classroom engagement among Kurdish EFL learners across proficiency levels. Anxiety strongly affects learners' engagement at the beginner level, as their confidence is weak and unstable. Consequently, the level of their participation and engagement in classrooms is more passive. At the middle level, the learner is more active; however, his/her participation is related to how he/she manages his/her



anxiety and is able to prepare despite the fear. Nevertheless, high-level learners relate their high levels of self-belief to active communication.

4.2.3 The Manifestation of Bandura sources of self-efficacy Cross Proficiency Levels.

The third research question examined how the four sources of self-efficacy, as proposed by Bandura (1997) were expressed across different proficiency levels.

Mastery Experiences

Across all proficiency levels, mastery experiences are the most commonly utilized source of self-efficacy among Kurdish EFL learners.

The findings suggest that Kurdish intermediate learners are more reliant on mastery experience, and their sense of competence is based on context, which is easily exposed by anxiety during performance. They rely on completing a task successfully to help them feel more confident and less anxious, said one student, "When I finish the task by myself, I feel I can do more next time" (G3P6, INT). This result strongly supports Bandura's (1997) claim that direct success experiences are the most powerful drivers of self-efficacy

For advanced learners, mastery changes from quantity to quality and strategic reinforcement, emphasising on the development of meaning and effective communication rather than accuracy. As one participant explained, "*When I talk to someone, I don't think about any of the structures. I might think about, for example, what forms to use, like past and present for sure. It's already settled in my mind. But when I talk to someone, I'll be thinking about conveying the message, what I want to say to them. The strategies that I used to speak... I usually talk to myself a lot... I used to act in the language, then I talked to people*" (P3, AD).

Kurdish advanced learners also demonstrate that self-efficacy becomes increasingly integrated into their self-concept, which develops gradually through repeated practice, presentations, and reflection on mistakes as opportunities to enhance confidence and learning, as highlighted by one participant "*I think, generally, if you want to make yourself confident and speak clearly, you have to build yourself. Skills make you confident... Because if you speak every day, if you have a conversation with others every day... you can speak in every situation. I speak. I don't care if I make mistakes. If I do, it is okay for me, because if I make mistakes, I know my ability and I will do more and also work best on myself because of the mistakes I've done before*" (P18, AD).

Emotional states

The emotional conditions appear to play an essential role in the case of beginner and intermediate Kurdish EFL students, who are often characterized by anxiety, uncertainty, and fear of being judged in speaking



English. Conversely, advanced learners display emotional stability, indicating that self-efficacy becomes a more controlled and independent strategy as proficiency increases.

Beginner learners refer to their emotional conditions as shyness, fear of being judged, nervousness and they tend to resort to avoidance behaviours like eye contact and tension when making a presentation. Students experience anxiety and limited coping strategies, often resulting in avoidance behaviours such as avoiding eye contact, as one participant noted, “You don’t look the eyes for student. Just look at the door or walls more. More window. Then you are confident. If I look my friends- Friend. He is laughing. I am also laughing” (P77, BG). Learners’ confidence is also linked to emotional comfort through self-talk, as one participant noted, “I need just practice, with myself.” This indicates that emotional regulation at this level serves mainly to reduce anxiety and allow limited participation rather than active engagement.

The emotional condition seems to be a major challenge for intermediate learners. The results suggest that while anxiety and nervousness remain present, learners use active, manageable, and strategic modifications, including self-talk, mirror practice “mostly talking to myself, in front of mirror or something like that” (P27, INT), deep breathing and risk-taking “If you didn’t take risks with your language, you will never learn. And for example, go and present, so you... after presenting, you will feel better.... practicing with yourself” (P36, INT).

Advanced learners, on the other hand, show emotional stability and regulation, suggesting that as proficiency increases, self-efficacy gradually becomes a controlled independent strategy. Emotional and psychological states usually help them manage their participation.

Technology as an Emerging Source of Self-Efficacy

In the context of Kurdish learners, this study identifies technology as a significant additional emerging source of self-efficacy that crucially moderates confidence across proficiency levels. Technology is regarded as a reliable source of self-efficacy, particularly for beginner and intermediate EFL Kurdish learners.

Learners show that using AI tools for feedback and error correction helps in improving their language skills, “AI method. ... the use technology to improve yourself, uh, ChatGPT, Gemini, I use that” (P28, INT). They also rely on podcast or online courses for practice “I practice my English every day, uh, one hour to two hours, and I have an online course.” (P58, INT), and movies or media for exposure “Like practice outside the classroom. Not with the group. Speak with my sister. Watching cartoons. Movies. Yeah, movies. Series. Movies are my favorite. Technology ... like social media” (P65, INT).



Advanced learners, in contrast, use technology less frequently, primarily to support independent learning and language development rather than to enhance confidence. It is employed to reinforce mastery experience and improve performance, as one participant explained, “You can talk with the AI. For example, I’ll say “Hey, ChatGPT, I’m gonna talk about my day, and then correct me if I have a mistake.” And then he would say, “Oh, in this case or in this moment, yeah, you did a mistake” (P21, AD). This aligns with Jonson’s (2021) observation revealing that the use of technology and quality of instruction resources, has a noticeable impact on students’ motivation and engagement in classrooms, which are closely related to confidence and self-concept. Therefore, technology is viewed as a transitional tool that helps higher-level learners develop and refine their language abilities while assisting lower-level learners in overcoming obstacles.

Social Persuasion

Social persuasion plays a secondary yet supportive role and is most influential among beginners and intermediate learners. The findings suggest that verbal encouragement and reassurance from peers, teachers, and family creates a safe environment. This is especially true for teachers, as one participant explicitly associates confidence with their teacher’s support “I am confident when I speak with my teacher. She is active, and she is friendly” (P31, INT). Family praise and peer support positively contribute to a safe emotional environment, reducing stress and enhancing learners’ confidence, as one participant noted: “I speak with my mom when I feel shy. My mom give me advice and say to me, “Why you feel shy? It’s not a problem to make a mistakes” (P130, BG).

The findings suggest that learners’ confidence mainly comes from internal validation, but the absence of encouragement can be harmful, as cited by a participant, “For example, sometimes the teacher said, Your English-your presentations was perfect. So that motivated me and that makes me to be better at my confidence. if a teacher says something negative in front of the whole class, It’s going to be a bit of like, uh, it’s going to be a less a bit of my confidence.” (P5, AD).

Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences, although being less frequent overall, were meaningful among advanced learners, as they were more capable of learning from observing native speakers or competence peers to gain confidence, and using these observations to enhance their learning performance and confidence, as cited by a participant “I have like three, four native speakers, friends, so whenever I talk to them- Speaking with them... I feel confident, even I know that my English is not that good, but I feel free to talk, so and they teach me always” (P12, AD).



Beginner learners also engage in vicarious learning, primarily through observation, such as watching presenters or media, but in a less interactive way, like watching presenters or movies, as noted, “I try to practice it daily and sometimes watch other people presenting a topic” (P129, BG).

To sum up, the level of proficiency of Kurdish EFL learners affects the mechanics of self-efficacy; more fluent the language of the learners, the less the learners have to depend on the support of others including peers or teachers and the more relying on self-confidence. The higher the language abilities of the students, the more independent they are in participating in the classes, and their self-efficacy contributes to their better performance.

4.3 Pedagogical and Educational Implications

Pedagogically, this highlights the importance of considering proficiency differences, particularly at lower levels, where fostering self-beliefs can promote long-term engagement and learning. The paper concludes that to create an environment in which students feel secure enough to interact and engage in the classroom with some degree of confidence, teachers and educators should consider tactics that would serve the psychological needs of the learners, in particular, in terms of enhancing self-efficacy.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the development of self-efficacy among the Kurdish EFL university students of various levels of proficiency. The results can be concluded with the following **key findings**:

1. Variations at Different Levels of Proficiency.

- a) Advanced learners demonstrate high self-efficacy, strong classroom engagement, and greater tolerance of errors as part of the learning process.
- b) The intermediate learners demonstrate moderate confidence yet they still have anxiety that needs to be actively controlled.
- c) Beginner learners have a high level of anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation as a result of poor language proficiency.

2. Developmental Nature of Self-Efficacy.

- a) Self-efficacy is developed at different levels of proficiency.
- b) Students progressively leave the dependence on external assistance to the internal regulation and autonomy to strategic learning.
- c) The efficacy beliefs are theoretical, cumulative and context-specific as per the theoretical framework of Albert Bandura.

3. Sources of Self-Efficacy Identified.



- a) Mastery Experiences (Most Influential Source)
- b) Obvious at all levels of competence.
- c) Beginners: correlated with successful completion of tasks.
- d) Intermediate learners: associated with the strengthening of emerging skills.
- e) Advanced learners: strategic, challenging, and self-directed mastery experiences.

4. Emotional Regulation

- a) Beginners are likely to cope with anxiety by avoiding it.
- b) Self-talk and relaxation are some of the strategies used by intermediate learners.
- c) Advanced learners demonstrate greater emotional stability and self-control.

5. Social Persuasion and External Support.

- a) Teacher and peer support are more effective in lower levels of proficiency.
- b) Reliance on extrinsic motivation reduces with competency among learners.

6. Vicarious Experiences.

- a) Observation of peers and native speakers is also a relatively important contribution to the development of confidence at the lower levels.

7. Technology as Situational Aid.

- a) Very common with beginner and intermediate learners as a way to lessen anxiety and offset linguistic shortcomings.
- b) Used more selectively by advanced learners to get specific skills developed.
- c) Provide secure practising environment, instant responses, exposure to real input, and chances of self-directed learning.

Overall, the findings are consistent with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy manifestation. The four sources of self-efficacy including mastery experience, emotional states, social persuasion and vicarious experience are observed in Kurdish EFL university learners' beliefs about their English learning. However, self-efficacy accordance among Kurdish EFL university learners varies across proficiency levels, which aligns with Bandura's own claim that efficacy belief are developmental, cumulative progressive and context-dependent, rather than being static. It reveals that fostering English language acquisition in Kurdish university students, requires considering both their language skills and their psychological state of confidence. By understanding the way confidence at each proficiency



level develops, teachers can effectively support students in reaching their potential.

6. Recommendation for Further Studies

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of how the psychological factor of self-efficacy influence the learning of Kurdish EFL university students to see learners' environment and experience in the adaptation of SLA learning process. Future research should focus on longitudinal, contextually relevant empirical studies in K-12 educational settings, rather than restricting investigations to university students. In this manner, the educators and the policymakers will create evidence-based pedagogical models in all levels and grades in all educational institutions and not just at the university.

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