

EWA PIECHURSKA-KUCIEL
Opole University

SELF-EFFICACY IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS: THE LANGUAGE ANXIETY PERSPECTIVE

This paper explores the relationship of self-efficacy to the individual's academic and social abilities in the process of foreign language learning, analyzing the construct of self-efficacy and its domains (academic, self-regulatory and emotional), and providing insight into the issue of language anxiety, which is specific to foreign language acquisition. The empirical part the research on the relationship between self-efficacy domains and language anxiety, meanwhile, ultimately shows that the modern language cannot be viewed or assessed like any other school subject due to its serious impact on the self of the student.

1. Introduction

The influence of cognitive processes on social behaviour has become the subject of social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), which proposes that the individual's beliefs are the foundation for their future success or failure in various aspects of life. The problem of students' variable success while learning a foreign language (FL) can also be explored through the perspective of self-efficacy. This standpoint sheds more light on sources of the student's wellbeing in the foreign language class, making investigation into the relevance of various domains of self-efficacy beliefs decidedly worthwhile.

2. Self-efficacy and the educational context

Social cognitive theory proposes viewing human behaviors as the effect of a complicated system of interrelated elements. Behavioral, personal, and environmental influences concurrently affect one another in a bidirectional manner, determining the individual's actions, and creating the so-called "integrated

causal system” (Bandura 1999: 24) in which sociostructural influences and psychological mechanisms form a mixture of interdependent forces regulating one’s functioning.

However, the individual does not passively respond to these influences. Instead, Bandura sees the human being as a self-system of dispositions, capacities, and cognitive abilities “that provide reference mechanisms and (...) a set of subfunctions for the perception, evaluation, and regulation of behavior” (Bandura 1978: 348). The individual is thus the proactive, self-reflective, self-organizing, and self-regulative agent of psychosocial development.

The central mechanism of the self-system of personal agency is constituted of *self-efficacy beliefs*, defined as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura 1986: 391). Self-efficacy beliefs are not necessarily concerned with skills possessed, but with perceptions of what can be done with those skills. Hence they are seen as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives” (1989: 1175).

The self-system regulates one’s behaviors through the information from four sources: previous (mastery) experiences, watching others, feedback enacted and received externally, as well as somatic and emotional states. *Mastery experiences*, or one’s previous performance, are a primary source of information. Engagement in activities, together with the interpretation of one’s actions, leads to the development of capability beliefs, and high sense of self-efficacy is formed when one’s performance is assessed positively. On the other hand, when the individual perceives the effects of their actions as unsatisfactory, a low sense of self-efficacy results. Individuals also create their self-efficacy beliefs on the basis of *vicarious experiences*, or observing others similar to oneself (observational learning or modeling). In this manner they can increase their knowledge and skills not only through “behavioral mimicry”, but also by way of transmitting rules for their prospective actions (Bandura 1999: 25). *Social persuasions*, verbal or nonverbal information received from others, are another source of self-efficacy beliefs. When positive, they nurture one’s beliefs in their capabilities and increase the chances of success. Negative persuasions, however, lead to a cessation of efforts. Apart from receiving feedback, people also send messages (*invitations*) that affect their own functioning (Usher and Pajares 2006). Boosting and strengthening messages improve well-being, while negative ones may self-handicap, thus reducing the likelihood of future achievement. Information from *somatic and emotional states* is the last source of self-efficacy beliefs. Positive affective modes of being allow one to experience more feelings of competence, while negative emotions lower self-efficacy beliefs because “people read their tension, anxiety, and depression as signs of personal deficiency” (Bandura 2004: 623).

Research has shown that a strong sense of self-efficacy is connected with the ability to accomplish desired aims, inducing persistence in completing a difficult task in spite of obstacles. Consequently, feelings of personal accomplishment

are enhanced, leading to the association of failure with deficient knowledge or inadequate effort (Burney 2008). Furthermore, low self-efficacy entails low personal aspirations, weak commitment to goals, stress and depression vulnerability, together with avoidance of difficult tasks, which are seen as personal threats (Bandura et al. 2003).

Self-efficacy is considered a domain-specific phenomenon (Carroll et al. 2009), meaning that one's competencies may fall within clear-cut spheres. In the field of education, where the process of formal language instruction is one of the regular school subjects, general self-efficacy is represented by *academic self-efficacy*, defined as "as personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated types of educational performances" (Zimmerman 1995: 203). These judgments influence academic achievement directly, with self-efficacy predicting achievement outcomes in diverse academic areas (e.g., Ferla, Valcke and Cai 2009; Klassen and Usher 2010). Such judgments also indirectly mediate the effect of abilities and other self-beliefs on achievement (Robbins et al. 2004), boosting academic goals and prosocial behavior (Pajares 2002). High self-efficacy students are found to persevere longer, pursue deeper meaning in learning tasks, declare lower anxiety levels, and ultimately attain higher achievement at school (Pajares and Schunk 2005).

Within the larger domain of self-efficacy *self-regulated learning efficacy* can be placed. It concerns the individual's self-efficacy to organize settings that contribute to learning, and to design and manage academic activities (Pastorelli et al. 2001). These specific self-efficacy beliefs define how students can become masters of their own learning by being metacognitively, motivationally and behaviorally active in their own learning process (Marchis & Balogh, 2010). As learners use particular processes tailored to their needs, these practices allow them to set personal goals and select strategies for reaching them. This includes controlling one's performance and shaping one's social environment to suit aims, performing efficient management of time, self-evaluation of methods to adapt future behavior, and conscious attribution of causes to consequences (Zimmermann 2002).

Another type of self-efficacy is *self-efficacy to meet others' expectations*. More precisely, this refers to the belief in one's ability to accomplish what their parents, teachers, and peers expect of them, and to act accordingly to what one expects of him or herself, as well (Pastorelli et al. 2001). The active involvement of others in one's school obligations, naturally, conveys a message to learners concerning their beliefs about their own ability to succeed (Weiser and Riggio 2010).

Perceived social efficacy, another domain of self-efficacy, refers to the perception of one's capability to form and manage social relationships, and deal with interpersonal conflicts (Bandura 1997). It also relates to beliefs about using one's abilities for the purpose of managing satisfactory relationships. The individual's belief that they can make friends, form reliable peer relationships, receive encouraging peer feedback, be socially acceptable, and act in a prosocial

manner at school are good indicators of such efficacy, conducive to academic success (Patrick, Hicks and Ryan 1997). This type of self-efficacy also covers other social domains, such as *self-efficacy for leisure and extracurricular activities*, which relates to the individual's beliefs that he or she can carry out recreational and student group activities (Pastorelli et al. 2001). These activities include organized leisure-time pursuits, such as sports or any optional pastimes, or prearranged courses offered outside the school regime. *Self-assertive efficacy*, meanwhile, covers one's perceived capability to voice opinions, stand up to abuse, and refuse irrational requests (Bandura et al. 2001). In general, this type of self-efficacy denotes one's opinion about resisting peer pressure to engage in high-risk behaviors involving alcohol, drugs, and other transgressive acts (Pastorelli et al. 2001).

Lastly, the domain of *self-regulatory efficacy* monitors and takes charge of one's own cognitive outcomes (West and Hastings 2011) by designating self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and regularly adapted to achieve personal goals (Zimmerman 1989). Self-regulatory (self-management) efficacy therefore "refers to the ability to regulate cognition, motivation, affect, and behavior" (Klassen 2010: 19), a cyclical process, constantly monitored, that triggers changes in an individual's strategies, cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. According to the three-phase self-regulation model proposed by Zimmerman (1998), at the forethought phase, preceding actual performance, processes that set the stage for action are prepared. Subsequently, the performance control phase encompasses processes occurring during actual performance, which require attention and action. Finally in the self-reflection phase, taking place after performance, individuals evaluate their efforts.

Each of these domains significantly contributes to the individual's learning process. First of all, academic self-efficacy predicts achievement outcomes in diverse academic areas (e.g., Klassen and Usher 2010), and is a powerful and reliable predictor of grade point average (GPA) and expectations of academic success (Weiser and Riggio 2010) that mediates the influence of other variables such as gender or ethnicity (Pajares 2002). Moreover, perceived social efficacy indirectly affects learning outcomes by influencing problem-solving and learned resourcefulness skills (a facet of behavioral and cognitive skills that enables the controlling of internal responses) (Bilgin 2011). In this way academic achievement is affected through prosocialness induced by social efficacy. Self-regulatory efficacy, on the other hand, contributes to academic achievement directly, because perseverance in self-controlling efforts leads to success in resisting social pressures and temptations to behave in ways that undermine academic achievement (Carroll et al. 2009).

Research on the role of self-efficacy in the foreign language learning process is still scarce. Nevertheless, it to a large extent confirms findings from other academic areas. Self-efficacy has been shown to be a strong predictor of performance in English as a foreign language (EFL) (Anyadubalu 2010; Tilfarlioğlu and Cinkara 2009). It also plays a significant role in the development

of FL skills, such as writing (Erkan and Saban 2011), reading (Ghonsooly and Elahy 2010), or listening (Rahimi and Abedini 2009). Ultimately, then, while global self-efficacy beliefs about future FL success are positively correlated with self-assessment scores (Coronado-Aliegro 2008), there are also studies that do not corroborate the relationship between language anxiety and self-efficacy (e.g. Çubukçu 2008).

3. Foreign language learning and language anxiety

It follows that one of the subjects that still demands more attention from the point of view of self-efficacy research is the process of foreign language learning. Though it ostensibly can be treated like any other school subject because it requires a regular study of the content matter (e.g. vocabulary or grammar) though a routine approach on the part of the student, learning a new language also demands the development of skills and abilities such as the use of language skills required to perform in the new language (speaking, listening, writing, and reading). Understandably, performance strain represents a threat to the student in that they may expose weaknesses in public. Furthermore, what makes language learning an exceptional, and at the same time threatening experience is the acquisition of the foreign language culture, which may “unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them” (Kramsch 1993: 1). Cultural differences have been found to constitute a serious obstacle language learners have to overcome, leading to profound difficulties in the foreign language learning process. They are also accompanied by the development of the social aspects of language learning motivation and other influential variables, for example the relation between attitudes toward the second language speaking group and the classroom, language aptitude, self-determination, personality, and anxiety, to mention the basic ones (MacIntyre, Clément and Noels 2007). This risky interplay of powerful linguistic and nonlinguistic outcomes influences may result in an internal clash of different opinions and ideas, destabilizing the learner’s worldview and beliefs in his or her abilities, as well as threatening his or her ego, which has already been developed in reference to the mother tongue. For this reason foreign language learning can be described as “fundamentally different (...) compared to learning another skill or gaining other knowledge, namely, that language and self are so closely bound, if not identical, that an attack on one is an attack on the other” (Cohen and North 1989: 65). Thus it should not be conceived of as just the acquiring a neutral medium of communication, but rather as a constant organization and reorganization of one’s sense of self through identity construction (Jang 2006).

The highly threatening context of foreign language acquisition produces *language anxiety*, a variable that is inherent, and usually defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom

language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986: 128). This definition stresses the importance of the formal language learning context for producing self-centered thoughts, feelings of inadequacy, and fear of failure.

The basic foundations of language anxiety are rooted in the psychological characteristics of the FL learner, underpinning the theoretical model of language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. There are also other causes of language anxiety that stem from the specificity of the language-learning situation. Nevertheless, language anxiety evidently shares some features of communication apprehension, such as fear of making mistakes, intense feelings of self-consciousness, and a desire to be perfect when speaking. Likewise, personal convictions about not being understood or not being able to understand evoke strong feelings of communication avoidance (Horwitz et al. 1986). Both communication apprehension, a native language phenomenon, and language anxiety indicate the pressure to perform, yet language anxiety also reveals the requirement to learn and use the language that has yet not been mastered (Foss and Reitzel 1988). The major role of test anxiety in generating elevated levels of language anxiety is attributed to learners’ inappropriate perception of FL production. Instead of viewing it as “an opportunity for communication” (Horwitz et al. 1986: 128), they handicap themselves by avoiding it for fear of losing face in front of their teacher and peers. Kitano proposes that students who fear negative evaluation tend to suffer from elevated levels of language anxiety, especially in respect to their self-perception of speaking abilities (2001). Students’ concern with FL competence, especially performance, induces avoidance of the possibility of negative evaluations, leading to minimal interactions or passivity, and withdrawal.

Following Spielberger (1972), who speculated that anxiety effects are the function of the ability level, the model of language anxiety development poses that as proficiency and experience in the FL increase, anxiety starts declining “in a consistent manner” (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b: 111). It follows that the learner’s growing proficiency is connected with more successful language use (Mihaljevic Djigunović 2004) and declining language anxiety levels over the length of secondary grammar school education (Piechurska-Kuciel 2008).

The negative effects of language anxiety are found to be numerous in relation to various aspects of student functioning, such as learning and performance (see Horwitz 2010 for a review of research). Personal effects consist in self-deprecating and worrisome thoughts, or overwhelming fear (Horwitz and Young 1991; Piechurska-Kuciel 2008). The social effects of language anxiety reside in the learner’s unwillingness to communicate in the foreign language classroom and in the natural setting (MacIntyre and Charos 1995; MacIntyre 2007). The academic consequences define the detrimental influence of the variable on foreign language learning and performance (e.g. Hewitt and Stephenson 2011), proving it to be a significant predictor of failure in language class (Woodrow 2006). The research also focuses on a negative correlation between language anxiety

and course grades, as well as proficiency tests and communicative competence (Wilson 2006; Cheng 2005). The performance problems of an FL student can also be explained by the cognitive effects of language anxiety influencing language processing at the stage of input, processing and output (Piechurska-Kuciel 2008), because language anxiety interferes with cognitive processes.

Altogether, an anxious FL learner is excessively concerned with the impression they make with in communication efforts (Gregersen and Horwitz 2002) because the language-learning situation is perceived as dangerous. The mismatch between the learner's mature and advanced thoughts, and immature and poor language produces self-consciousness and anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986), while inability to make a good social impression becomes a serious source of stress and tension. It is important to note here that the association of language anxiety with personal deficiency leads to the conclusion that the phenomena of language anxiety and self-efficacy share the same characteristic feature, namely negative self-perception. An anxious FL learner and an ineffective student are convinced of their inability to successfully manage cognitive, somatic, affective and behavioral processes. In consequence, they are incapable of persisting in the face of the danger created by the FL learning situation or any challenge perceived as a personal threat. This fact begets failure, which naturally further enhances deficiency.

Another aspect that identifies the commonality in the two phenomena is the affective background of language anxiety and self-efficacy, one of whose sources is information drawn from somatic and affective states. Negative emotional responses generated by these conditions, such as worry, tension, or shame, are accompanied by cognitive generalizations, such as feelings of inferiority or degradation. As powerful causes of personal deficiency, the constructs of language anxiety and low self-efficacy can be regarded as threatening for the general wellbeing of the student. Empirical research on self-efficacy in foreign language learning has been carried out worldwide; yet, there is virtually no research on this issue in Poland. Apart from that, little is known about its relationship to language anxiety. These facts undoubtedly speak to the need to implement an empirical study firmly grounded in psychological, linguistic, and sociological domains within the Polish cultural context.

For the purpose of this paper it is hypothesized that self-efficacy in the academic domain (academic, self-regulated and social) is related to language anxiety because foreign language learning is one of the school subjects. Nevertheless, this relationship is expected to be weak, due to the uniqueness of the FL learning experience. Therefore in spite of the fact that language learning requires similar study habits as other school subjects, its demands are at the same time inextricably intertwined with the presence of language anxiety. For this reason general efficacy beliefs functioning within the academic area may not play a clear explanatory role in the foreign language process. It may be speculated that other self-efficacy beliefs connected with language learning, and not attributable to studying other school subjects may come into play.

Consequently, the main hypothesis proposed in this paper is: *Students with high language anxiety levels experience low self-efficacy levels in comparison to their high self-efficacy peers*. It is expected that students with high-efficacy beliefs are able to manage the foreign learning process well due to their confidence regarding FL achievement, commitment to achieve chosen goals, hard work, and resilience to stress. For these reasons they can efficiently control their negative emotions, like language anxiety, which enables FL success (high final course grades and self-assessment of the four FL skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading). On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy beliefs are unable to manage language acquisition effectively. Also, their learning goals may be inadequate or imposed on them, and they may be doubtful about their own language abilities. Moreover, such students may fall victim to pressures of the language learning process, experiencing higher levels of stress and language anxiety.

4. Method

Below there is a description of, and justification for the chosen methodology and research methods used in the study carried out for the purpose of this paper.

4.1. Participants

The participants of the study (N=621) were first grade students from 23 randomly selected classes of the six secondary grammar schools in Opole, southwestern Poland (396 girls and 225 boys), whose mean age was 16.50 (range: 14.5–18). The cohort comprised students from different residential locations, mostly urban (286 of them from the city of Opole, 122 from neighboring towns), and 213 from rural areas. The participants' level of English was varied, depending on the class they attended, and ranged from upper elementary to intermediate, with three to six hours a week of formal language instruction. The students also differed in the length of their English language experience, with the vast majority of the participants (91%) having been learning it for five to 15 years (the average length was almost nine years). Aside from that, the students studied French or German as the other compulsory foreign language (two hours a week).

On the basis of the participants' language anxiety levels, the sample was divided into quartiles: the lower one, called LLA (≤ 66 points), comprised 170 students with low levels of language anxiety (88 girls and 82 boys), and the upper, HLA, (≥ 100 pts) consisted of 156 students with high language anxiety scores (117 girls and 39 boys).

4.2. Instruments

The basic instrument adopted for the purpose of the research was a questionnaire. It first focused on demographic variables, such as age, gender (1 – *male*, 2 – *female*), and place of residence (1 – *village: up to 2,500 inhabitants*, 2 – *town: from 2,500 to 50,000 inhabitants*, 3 – *city: over 50,000 inhabitants*).

The next part of the questionnaire included the *Perceived Academic Efficacy* scale (Pastorelli et al. 2001), composed of 19 items devoted to different academic areas. Seven items explored beliefs in one's capability to master various areas of coursework, ten items investigated perceived efficacy for controlling one's motivation and learning activities, and two items focused on efficacy beliefs regarding parental and teacher expectations. Sample items on the scale were: "How well can you organize your school work?" or "How well can you concentrate on school subjects?" The participants indicated their answers in a 5-point response format ranging from 1 (perceived incapability) to 5 (complete self-assurance in one's capability). The minimum number of points on the scale was 19, while the maximum was 95. The scale's reliability in the study was measured in terms of Cronbach's alpha, ranging the level of .78.

Perceived Social Efficacy (Pastorelli et al. 2001) comprised 13 items referring to different social domains: three items estimated efficacy for leisure and extracurricular group activities, five items measured the individual's beliefs about the development and sustaining of social relationships, and the management of interpersonal conflicts, and five items assessed self-assertive efficacy. Sample items included in the scale were: "How well can you stop yourself from skipping school when you feel bored or upset?" and "How well can you live up to what your peers expect of you?" (the min. number of points: 13, the max: 65). The answer format was used similarly as in the previous scale. Its reliability was .76.

Self-Regulatory Efficacy (Pastorelli et al. 2001) consisted of 5 items measuring one's capability to resist peer pressure to engage in high-risk activities that can get one into trouble, with sample items, like: "How well can you deal with situations where others are annoying you or hurting your feelings?" and "How can you work in a group?" (min. 5, max. 25 points, previous answer format, reliability: .78).

The next part of the questionnaire was the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (Horwitz et al. 1986). Its purpose was to assess the degree to which students feel anxious during language classes. Sample items on the scale were as follows: *I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class* or *I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am*. All positive items were key-reversed so that a high score on the scale represented a high anxiety level. The minimum number of points that could be obtained on the scale was 33, while the maximum was 165. The scale's reliability was assessed in terms of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient $\alpha = .94$.

Self-perceived levels of FL skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) was another instrument used in the study as an aggregated value of separate

assessments of the FL skills, measured with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*). The minimum number of points on the scale was 4, the maximum: 24. The scale's reliability was Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$.

Finally, *final grades* were computed as the aggregated value of the student's grade from the previous year and the prospective semester and school year grades. They were assessed by means of the Likert scale ranging from 1 – *unsatisfactory* to 6 – *excellent*. The scales reliability was $\alpha = .87$.

4.3. Procedure

The data collection procedure took place over the months of March and April 2010. In each class, the students were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The time designed for the activity was 15 to 45 minutes. The participants were asked to give sincere answers without taking excessive time to think. Each part of the questionnaire was preceded by a short statement introducing a new set of items in an unobtrusive manner.

The data were computed by means of the statistical program STATISTICA, with the main operations being descriptive statistics (means and *SD*), correlations, and a student's *t*-test for independent samples, estimating differences between the groups with a low (LLA) and high language anxiety levels (HLA) (between-group comparisons).

5. Results

In the first step means, *SD* and correlations for all the variables were calculated – found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and correlations for the study variables (N=621)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Academic self-efficacy	65.59	10.69	--	--	--	--	--
2. Social efficacy	50.49	7.04	.52***	--	--	--	--
3. Self-regulated efficacy	19.67	3.50	.32***	.42***	--	--	--
4. Language anxiety	83.96	23.88	-.04	-.07	-.17***	--	--
5. FL skills	15.75	3.51	.16***	.06	.11**	-.60***	--
6. Grades	12.21	2.33	.26***	.11**	-.03	-.42**	.53***

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The results showed that all self-efficacy scales were strongly correlated with one another, though language anxiety was negatively correlated only with self-regulated efficacy. Its strong negative correlations, meanwhile, can be found in the case of FL skills and grades.

Finally, the student's t-test was carried out in order to detect differences between means in the students with high and low language anxiety levels. It was found that the greatest differences were spotted in the relationship between FL skills, and then grades: $t(1,324)=15.66^{***}$ and $t(1,324)=9.71^{***}$, respectively. As far as self-efficacy domains are concerned, significant differences were found in social and self-regulated efficacy: $t(1,324)=6.42^{***}$ and $t(1,324)=3.92^{***}$. No significant difference was detected in reference to academic self-efficacy with $t(1,324)=.55$, $p=.58$. A summary of the results is below in Table 2.

Table 2: Between-group comparisons in students with low (N=170) and high language anxiety levels (N=156)

Variable	LLA		HLA		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Academic self-efficacy	65.71	9.82	65.03	12.37	.55	.58
Social efficacy	33.78	7.64	28.58	6.93	6.42***	.00
Self-regulated efficacy	20.65	3.17	19.10	3.96	3.92***	.00
FL skills	18.23	2.83	13.04	3.16	15.66***	.00
Grades	13.25	1.96	10.91	2.38	9.71***	.00

*** $p<.001$

6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to corroborate the hypothesis: *Students with high language anxiety levels experience low self-efficacy levels in comparison to their high self-efficacy peers*. However, ultimately the results are inconsistent concerning the relationship between language anxiety and self-efficacy domains.

The self-efficacy domain that seems to be most strongly related to language anxiety is social efficacy, which is connected with the belief that individuals are able to establish and maintain social relationships in different contexts, the academic being one of them. Students with high social efficacy are able to translate their goals into actions, which means that their good convictions about successful management of bonds with others support them in the academic context. This ability is certainly of high importance, because healthy relationships have a significant impact on one's well-being. Taking into consideration the language learning situation, high social self-efficacy facilitating relationships with peers

and teachers leads to stress-relieving behaviors, which certainly aids acquisition of the foreign language.

Moreover, students with high and low language anxiety levels significantly differ in their self-assertive efficacy, as well as self-efficacy for leisure and extracurricular activities. It may be understood that the student's positive beliefs about effective management of activities performed in their free time (e.g. organized leisure-time pursuits, sports or any optional pastimes or prearranged courses offered outside the school regime) allow them to deal more successfully with negative emotions. A high level of self-efficacy concerning leisure and extracurricular activities may prompt the learner to voluntarily participate in extracurricular language courses, or to devote their free time to language study (e.g. listening to songs or watching films in the original, English version).

Similarly, self-assertive efficacy may play a role in explaining language anxiety functioning, as self-assertion may allow a FL student to oppose peer pressure when language study is at stake. Conversely, a low level of self-assertive efficacy may be connected with harmful behaviors that result from negative peer pressure the student is unable to resist. Then, instead of fostering positive emotions in reference to the language learning process, the student may develop negative feelings, due to insufficient language practice.

Additionally, it must be emphasized that language learning is a social process, requiring interacting with others. To paraphrase van Lier (1998), the student's relationships with others are the basis of their language awareness, which, in turn, gives way to L2 learning opportunities because the human being is a social animal. The language learning process requiring learner socialization and participation, gives priority to the social skills of interaction and communication with others. For this reason, the significant interplay of social self-efficacy and language anxiety is a likely consequence of the social background of the two constructs. The specificity of the language learning situation requires apt social skills, whose clever use can be obstructed by negative emotions. Students with low language anxiety levels are able to attain social goals and are usually unobstructed in their language acquisition process. On the other hand, students with high language anxiety levels have problems demonstrating successful behaviors in interpersonal situations created in the classroom.

At this point it is vital to relate the above findings to the specificity of the foreign language learning process, as due to its dissimilarity from other school subjects, it cannot be treated as an ordinary course whose completion is required for graduation. Obviously, like in the case of other subjects, students have to master the coursework; however, the social aspects of the language learning process may have a significant impact on the strong relationship between language anxiety and social efficacy. In the foreign language classroom it is of paramount importance to use language actively in a realistic manner, which involves a certain degree of unpredictability. In this way learners not only share or report the knowledge acquired in the field (as in the case of any other subjects

when predictable outcomes are expected), but – above all – they face the danger of managing unclear communication, both from the point of view of speaker and listener. Moreover, learners are encouraged to personalize their language use through expressing their sincere, strong feelings in a means of communication that is new to them. This entails treading on unknown ground, accompanied by other, more or less able peers. The contrived communication, far removed from natural, social behavior, brings about an array of negative emotions, such as anxiety, leading to doubts about their social acceptance in the peer group induced by self-doubts and low self-expectations of adequate performance. Therefore the strong interdependence of language anxiety and social efficacy are undoubtedly a sign of the uniqueness of the language learning process.

Another self-efficacy domain significantly related to language anxiety is self-regulated efficacy. It can be inferred that self-regulation, as the ability to control one's own emotions, desires and behaviors, is important for controlling negative feelings connected with the language acquisition process – as also confirmed by a strong negative correlation between these variables. Language anxiety, produced uniquely in this context, triggers states of self-deprecation that are impossible to control. At the forethought stage, before actual performance in L2, it is likely that anxious students are already worried about future outcomes and loss of face, and are unable to prepare well. Performance, then, is hampered due to their low self-perceived levels of FL skills or their inability to control negative emotions, evoked by performance demands. It is no wonder, therefore, that afterwards their performance will be poorly self-evaluated at the self-reflection phase, leading to withdrawal or augmentation of self-doubts. Moreover, aside from self-regulated efficacy, it can be presumed that self-efficacy for leisure and extracurricular activities has important ties with language anxiety. One's beliefs that they can carry out recreational and student group activities is connected with voluntary participation in extracurricular activities that may serve the purpose of developing stronger bonds with peers or acquiring the foreign language alongside regular instruction. Consequently, this form of self-regulation may be considered crucial to lowering language anxiety levels. Likewise, another form of self-regulation, self-assertive efficacy, is also connected with language anxiety. Anxious students, it is inferred, are unable to resist peer pressure for high-risk behaviors, which may distract them from studying. Even more so, they may be unable to identify their negative affective states connected with the language learning process, which may further increase their inability to manage negative affective states.

The lack of a relationship between academic self-efficacy and language anxiety seems a surprising outcome of the study. The perceived academic self-efficacy scale measures different domains of academic activities, modern languages being one of them, as well as self-regulated learning efficacy and efficacy to meet others' expectations. One should then expect that a relationship between these variables should be found. However, this speculation has been disproved. Such a result can be attributed to specific demands of the language

learning process. Language anxiety produced in this unique context cannot be related to academic self-efficacy at all. As far as efficacy for controlling one's motivation and learning activities is concerned, it seems that in spite of the fact that a student obtains a high GPA, he or she may still be unable to manage the emotional impact of the language learning process. Even though the learner may generally be able to self-regulate, the unique pressures encountered in the language learning situation, as revealed by high language anxiety levels, may be beyond their capacities. Also, efficacy related to meeting others' expectations seems to be inefficiently controlled by high anxiety students. It may be hypothesized that expectations of significant others (more able peers, parents or teachers) may appear irrelevant in the situation of threat imposed on the student, and as such cannot be controlled.

The uniqueness of the foreign language learning experience is further acknowledged by another variable – self-assessment of FL skills. These subjective interpretations of one's skill levels are drawn on the basis of past linguistic experiences. Obviously, greater self-assessment ability to perform a task in L2 leads to the further development of a feeling of mastery of the language, which in turn decreases language anxiety levels. Furthermore, it can be assumed that somatic and emotional states experienced while learning and performing in the foreign language may be considered a powerful indicator of one's abilities. As such, language anxiety has a tendency to influence self-perceived competence in such a way that anxious students evaluate their skills at a lower level in comparison to their less anxious peers, who in turn are likely to overestimate them. As such, self-assessment of skills acquired in the foreign language process, shaped by language anxiety, also stresses the differentness of the language acquisition experience.

Final grades are another variable confirming the specificity of the language learning situation against the background of schoolwork. On the basis of this cumulative assessment of previous performance students can become aware of how their foreign language abilities are valued in relation to the norms of acceptability or other students' skills, as revealed by final grades. Hence, language anxiety is bound to be strongly connected with final grades, because whenever students are under stress or anxiety, their language performance is poor. As soon as these negative experiences mount, they lead to the formation of language anxiety or a negative attitude to language learning. Such a disposition can only induce the further development of negative states, culminating in low grades. On the other hand, high grades are connected with positive affective states encountered in the FL classroom, i.e. low language anxiety levels. From the point of view of the magnitude of the relationship between language anxiety and the two measures of student FL achievement (self-perceived levels of FL skills and final grades), it can be deduced that language anxiety, as a subjective measure, is more strongly related to self-perceived FL skills than final grades, as they, too, constitute another subjective measure.

7. Implications and recommendations

It is undeniable that within the academic domain students with high self-efficacy beliefs are more confident about what they can achieve, and set themselves goals they strive to attain. Apart from that, they work harder for their success and are flexible, associating failure with inadequate effort or poor knowledge and skills, which they are convinced they can acquire. For this reason the development of positive self-efficacy beliefs is indispensable to language teachers, alongside with lowering students' language anxiety.

The basic goal of the foreign language teacher may be to focus directly on the main sources of students' self-efficacy in the FL learning process. In order to boost it, past experiences should be positive, which can be obtained by a pace of FL instruction accommodating needs and abilities of the students, and positive feedback. Alongside interpreting the results of their actions, the vicarious experience of observing successful classmates may foster ability beliefs. Also, positive social persuasion by parents, teachers, and peers, may boost self-efficacy, especially when students are yet unable to make accurate self-appraisals. Furthermore, they should also learn to assess their performance while under different physiological states, whose interpretation has the function of personal efficacy. This is why lowering language anxiety may play a key role in boosting students' self-efficacy.

Accordingly, students should be taught to recognize basic symptoms of anxiety at various stages of the lesson in order to be able to interpret them correctly. For this reason they can be encouraged to keep diaries to record everything new they learned during a lesson, and, most importantly, be instructed to self-assess their language progress and to focus on their emotional responses to them. The diaries will aid them in identifying negative emotions openly, which will help them manage them more confidently.

Aside from that, the teacher may also allow students to exercise control of their own learning. Learners may be advised to choose tasks or strategies to apply while working on an activity. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to set goals for themselves, immediate and distant. Of course they should be instructed on how these goals may be achieved, what strategies to use, and in what groupings.

When discussing ways of improving students' self-efficacy, the role of language anxiety stands paramount. Providing a stress-free environment that allows for the development of the student's self-efficacy is a significant source of positive emotions that leads to the lowering of language anxiety levels. This can be accomplished by applying co-operative learning, which creates opportunities for creating mutual understanding and acceptance, and can enable them to feel less stressed in the presence of their peers, and count on their help. Anxious students can also be advised to organize a study plan for the calendar year, in order to arrange more effective study time.

It should also be noted that, above all, a warm and friendly teacher, genuinely interested in students' problems, is perhaps the key to obtaining positive learning

effects. Also, an interesting way of helping students learn is applying a teaching approach that aids remembering and concentration, even among those with learning disabilities, such as multisensory language instruction.

This study, however, has some limitations that need to be addressed. Although the results undoubtedly prove the uniqueness of the foreign language learning process, the role of self-efficacy has not been sufficiently addressed. In spite of the fact that no relationship was detected between language anxiety levels and academic self-efficacy, this fact does discredit the importance of self-efficacy in language acquisition. The study results rather prompt an approach to investigating self-efficacy in the FL classroom by means of tools more sensitive to the specificity of the language study process. It is therefore necessary to design an instrument to measure FL learning self-efficacy within the academic domain, which would render it possible to investigate more intricate relationships between self-efficacy and various aspects of learning foreign languages, such as other affective consequences (language awareness and identity formation or self-perception, to mention a few). In this way it would also be possible to address the similarities and differences among different areas of coursework. It would also be desirable to opt for more objective and controlled data measuring actual performance in the foreign language. They can be operationalized as a number of points gained in an oral exam, which is a form of external measurement, supplementing measures of self-perception. Their inclusion could shed more light on the social implications of the relationship under scrutiny. Last but not least, the direct sources of self-efficacy should be inspected with greater caution, by including specific measurements of mastery and vicarious experiences, social persuasions, invitations, as well as other somatic and emotional states, aside from language anxiety, specifically tailored for the language learning situation. Through such methods a greater insight into the role of self-efficacy in the language learning process could be secured.

References

- Anyadubalu, C.C. 2010. Self-efficacy, anxiety, and performance in the English language among middle-school students in English Language Program in Satri Si Suriyothai School, Bangkok. *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences* 5: 193-198.
- Bandura, A. 1978. The self-system in reciprocal determinism. *American Psychologist* 33: 344-358.
- Bandura, A. 1986. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. 1989. Perceived self-efficacy in the exercise of personal agency. *The Psychologist: Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* 2: 411-424.
- Bandura, A. 1995. Exercise of Personal and Collective Efficacy in Changing Societies. In A. Bandura (ed.), *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*, 1-45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bandura, A. 1997. *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: Freeman.
- Bandura, A. 1999. Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 2: 21-41.
- Bandura, A. 2004. Swimming against the mainstream: The early years from chilly tributary to transformative mainstream. *Behaviour, Research, and Therapy* 42: 613- 630.
- Bandura, A., C. Barbaranelli, G.V. Caprara and C. Pastorelli 2001. Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development* 72: 187-206.
- Bandura, A., G. V. Caprara, C. Barbaranelli, M. Gerbino and C. Pastorelli 2003. Role of affective self-regulatory efficacy in diverse spheres of psychosocial functioning. *Child Development* 74: 769-782.
- Bilgin, M. 2011. Relations among proposed predictors and outcomes of social self-efficacy in Turkish late adolescents. *Cukurova University Faculty of Education Journal* 40: 1-18.
- Burney, V.H. 2008. Applications of social cognitive theory to gifted education. *Roeper Review* 30: 130-139.
- Carroll, A., S. Houghton, R. Wood, K. Unsworth, J. Hattie, L. Gordon and J. Bower 2009. Self-efficacy and academic achievement in Australian high school students: The mediating effects of academic aspirations and delinquency. *Journal of Adolescence* 32: 797-817.
- Chen, C. 2008. The relationship between foreign language anxiety and English achievement of Taiwan's junior high school students in school level 7 and 8. MA thesis, Tunghai University, Taiwan.
- Cohen, Y. and M. North 1989. Fear, dependence and loss of self-esteem: Affective barriers in second language learning among adults. *RELC Journal* 20: 61-77.
- Coronado-Aliegro, J. 2008. The relationship between self-efficacy and self-assessment in foreign language education: A pilot study. *Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics* 2: 1-4.
- Çubukçu, F. 2008. A study on the correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language learning anxiety. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education* 4: 148-158.
- Erkan, D.Y., and A.I. Saban 2011. Writing performance relative to writing apprehension, self-efficacy in writing, and attitudes towards writing: A correlational study in Turkish tertiary-level EFL. *Asian EFL Journal* 13: 164-192.
- Ferla, J., M. Valcke and Y. Cai 2009. Academic self-efficacy and academic self-concept: Reconsidering structural relationships. *Learning and Individual Differences* 19: 499-505.
- Foss, K.A., and A.C. Reitzel 1988. A relational model for managing second language anxiety. *TESOL Quarterly* 22: 437-454.
- Ghonsooly, B., and M. Elahy 2010. Learners' self-efficacy in reading and its relation to foreign language reading anxiety and reading achievement. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning* 53: 45-67.
- Gregersen, T., and E.K. Horwitz 2002. Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *Modern Language Journal* 86: 562-570.
- Hewitt, E., and J. Stephenson 2011. Foreign language anxiety and oral exam performance: A replication of Phillips's *MLJ* study. *The Modern Language Journal* 95: 1-20.
- Horwitz, E.K. 2010. Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching* 43: 154-167.
- Horwitz, E.K., M.B. Horwitz and A.J. Cope 1986. Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal* 70: 125-32.

- Horwitz, E.K., and D.J. Young 1991. Afterword. In E.K. Horwitz and D.J. Young (eds.), *Language Anxiety: From Theory and Research to Classroom Implications*, 177-178. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Jang, Y. 2006. Adult language learners' self-concepts in second language academic contexts. *The Journal of Linguistic Science* 37: 139-160.
- Kitano, K. 2001. Anxiety in the college Japanese language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal* 85: 549-566.
- Klassen, R.M. 2010. Confidence to manage learning: The self-efficacy for self-regulated learning of early adolescents with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly* 33: 19-30.
- Klassen, R.M., and E.L. Usher 2010. Self-efficacy in educational settings: Recent research and emerging directions. In T.C. Urdan and S.A. Karabenick (eds.), *Advances in Motivation and Achievement. The Decade Ahead: Theoretical Perspectives on Motivation and Achievement*, 1-33. Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Kramsch, C. 1993. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacIntyre, P.D. 2007. Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process. *The Modern Language Journal* 91: 564-576.
- MacIntyre, P.D., and C. Charos 1995. How does anxiety affect second language learning? A reply to Sparks and Ganschow. *The Modern Language Journal* 79: 1-32.
- MacIntyre, P.D., and R.C. Gardner 1991. Methods and results in the study of anxiety in language learning: A review of the literature. *Language Learning* 41: 85-117.
- MacIntyre, P.D., R. Clément and K.A. Noels 2007. Affective variables, attitude and personality in context. In D. Ayoun (ed.), *Handbook of French Applied Linguistics*, 70-298. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Marchis, I. and T. Balogh 2010. Secondary school pupils' self-regulated learning skills. *Acta Didactica Napocensia* 3: 47-52.
- Mihaljević Djigunović, J. 2004. Language anxiety – An important concern in language learning. In N. Murray and T. Thornz (eds.), *Multicultural Perspectives on English Language and Culture*, 42-51. Tallin, London: Tallin Pedagogical University, University of London.
- Pajares, F. 2002. Gender and perceived self-efficacy. *Theory into Practice* 41: 116-125.
- Pajares, F., and D.H. Schunk 2005. Self-efficacy and self-concept beliefs: Jointly contributing to the quality of human life. In H. Marsh, R. Craven and D. McInerney (eds.), *International advances in self research*, 95-121. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Pastorelli, C., G.V. Caprara, C. Barbaranelli, J. Rola, S. Rozsa and A. Bandura 2001. The structure of children's perceived self-efficacy: A cross-national study. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* 17: 87-97.
- Patrick, H., L. Hicks and A.M. Ryan 1997. Relations of perceived social efficacy and social goal pursuit to self-efficacy for academic work. *Journal of Early Adolescence* 17: 109-128.
- Piechurska-Kuciel, E. 2008. *Language Anxiety in Polish Secondary Grammar School Students*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego.
- Rahimi, A., and A. Abedini 2009. The interface between EFL learners' self-efficacy concerning listening comprehension and listening proficiency. *Novitas-ROYAL* 3: 14-28.
- Robbins, S.B., K. Lauver, H. Le, D. Davis and R. Langley 2004. Do psychosocial and study skill factors predict college outcomes? A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 130: 261-288.

- Spielberger, C.D. 1972. *Anxiety: Current Trends in Theory and Research*. New York: Academic Press.
- Tilfarlioğlu, F.T., and E. Cinkara 2009. Self-efficacy in EFL: Differences among proficiency groups and relationship with success. *Novitas-ROYAL* 3: 129-142.
- Tsiplakides, I., and A. Keramida 2009. Helping students overcome foreign language Speaking anxiety in the English classroom: Theoretical issues and practical recommendations. *International Education Studies* 2: 39-44.
- Usher, E.L., and F. Pajares 2006. Inviting confidence in school: invitations as a critical source of the academic self-efficacy beliefs of entering middle school students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 31: 125-141.
- van Lier, L. 1998. The relationship between consciousness, interaction and language learning. *Language Awareness* 7: 128-145.
- Weiser, D.A., and H.R. Riggio 2010. Family background and academic achievement: Does self-efficacy mediate outcomes? *Social Psychology of Education* 13: 367-383.
- West, R.L., and E.C. Hastings 2011. Self-regulation and recall: Growth curve modeling of intervention outcomes for older adults. *Psychology and Aging* 26: 803-812.
- Woodrow, L. 2006. Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *Regional Language Centre (RELC) Journal* 37: 308-328.
- Zimmerman, B.J. 1995. Self-efficacy and educational development. In A. Bandura (ed.), *Self-efficacy in Changing Societies*, 202-231. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zimmerman, B.J. 1998. Developing self-fulfilling cycles of academic regulation: An analysis of exemplary instructional models. In D.H. Schunk and B.J. Zimmerman (eds.), *Self-regulated Learning: From Teaching to Self-reflective Practice*, 1-19. New York: Guilford Press.
- Zimmermann, B.J. 2002. Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice* 41: 64-70.