

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN SELF-RELATED PERSONALITY TRAITS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of Iranian EFL learners' proficiency level on their self-related personality traits (self-esteem and self-efficacy). To this end, 141 English major students, male and female, studying at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU) and Kar Non-profit University in Qazvin, Iran were asked to respond to the Rosenberg Self-esteem Test, the General Self-efficacy Scale, the Academic Self-efficacy Scale, and the Self-efficacy for Self-regulated learning Scale. Also, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) was administered to determine their language proficiency level. Kruskal-Wallis procedure was used to analyze the data. Based on the findings, no significant difference was found in the participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy across proficiency levels. The results of this study may have theoretical and pedagogical implications for teachers, learners and syllabus designers.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, Language Proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the enthusiasm to speak a Foreign Language, especially English, is not the result of entertainment only; in most cases, because of business and many other vital issues in their lives, people feel the need to learn it. Because of this, scholars of the field have tried to create conditions to make the learning process easier and more effective for learners. The result of this endeavor has been the identification of many factors playing a considerable role in teaching and learning a language. Personality traits are considered as one of the most important factors. From among them, some are related to one's 'self', which can be called self-related personality traits. Self-esteem, self-compassion, self-efficacy, self-evaluation and self-regulation are some examples for this type of traits.

A huge amount of research has been done to investigate the relationship between these factors and the learners' academic achievement. To give an example, Bandura's studies are among the most helpful works in the field of efficacy. In his study in 1977, he emphasized the importance of efficacy in learning and held that efficacy "not only has directive influence on choice of activities and settings by learners, but through expectations of eventual

success, it can affect coping efforts once they are initiated" (p. 194). Self-esteem is the other factor which is investigated in the present study. Self-esteem is a matter of self-perception; therefore, a high perception of oneself leads one to believe in oneself as a worthy person who is capable of learning in general and language learning in particular (James, 2002; Liu, 2009). There is little doubt that these factors can influence learners' achievement and success. The question is whether students' achievement and proficiency may mutually influence their personality traits. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate this reciprocal relationship; it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any significant differences in EFL learners' self-esteem across proficiency levels?
2. Are there any significant differences in EFL learners' general self-efficacy across proficiency levels?
3. Are there any significant differences in EFL learners' academic self-efficacy across proficiency levels?
4. Are there any significant differences in EFL learners' self-efficacy for self-regulated learning across proficiency levels?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of the personality variables whose existence is useful not only for people but also for societies. Coopersmith (1967), Wells and Marwell (1976), Skager and Kerst (1989) and many others have carried out studies and come to this conclusion (Rubio, 2007). They believe that most social crimes have roots in the lack of self-esteem. James (2002) likens a society with high self-esteem people to a man with a healthy and strong body. He refers to the policy of California State which aimed at raising the self-esteem of the whole population in order to decrease the crime rate.

A large body of research has been carried out within the field of Educational Psychology, particularly about language learning. James (1890), White (1959), Coopersmith (1959) and Rosenberg (1965) have been mentioned by Rubio (2007) as some examples. James (2002) investigated the role of learners' self-esteem in language learning and found that although low self-esteem is a barrier to learning for many adults, "Once they overcome this barrier, participation in learning can lead to an increase in self-esteem" (p. 4). This implies that it is a two-way road, i.e., high self-esteem leads to more learning, which consequently leads to higher self-esteem. In fact, she could answer the classic "chicken-or-egg" question (mentioned in Brown, 2007); does high self-esteem cause language success, or vice versa?

Actually, self is a broad term which appears in a diverse range of contexts and is open to a variety of definitions. Baumiester (1999) asserts that the concept of 'self' used by a writer does not necessarily mean the same when it is used by another writer. There have been many different terms related to 'self'. Self-concept and self-esteem are two of them which, in Baumiester's opinion, are two distinct terms that can be distinguished from each other. He believes that self-concept is the broader concept that includes self-esteem as just a part of its evaluative dimension while others (Rubio, 2007; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982; Zare & Riasati, 2012) use them interchangeably. In the present study the authors adopt the latter position and use them interchangeably.

In spite of the large number of studies conducted on self-esteem, there has been no unanimously agreed-upon definition for it (Liu, 2009). Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) gave an initial definition quoted by Sanchez and Roda (2003, p. 97) as "the perception that each one has about himself, formed from experiences and relationship with environment, where significant people play an important role". As another definition, Murk (1999) holds that "Self-esteem is the lived status of one's competence in dealing with the challenges of living in a worthy way over time" (cited by James, 2002, p. 8). Following James (1890), White (1959); Coopersmith (1959); Rosenberg (1965), and Rubio (2007) developed a framework for self-esteem and enumerated competence and worthiness, cognition and affect, stability and openness as its main components.

In his study, Brown (2007) describes three general levels of self-esteem: "Firstly, general or global self-esteem is a stable quality within an individual and is an evaluation that one makes of one's worth. Secondly, situational or specific self-esteem is one's assessment of one's ability in a certain situation, such as work or education. Finally, task self-esteem refers to specific activities in particular situations" (Zare & Riasati, 2012; p. 220). In the relevant literature, alternative terms have also been used by other researchers to refer to self-esteem and its components. For example, some researchers have used 'trait', 'academic', situational, and specific self-esteem (Alexander, 2001; Ferla, Valcke & Cai, 2009; Liu, 2009). In the case of language learning, second or foreign language learning can be an instance for specific self-esteem, and self-evaluation of one's skills (listening, speaking, etc) may be an instance of task self-esteem.

2.2 Self-esteem and Language Learning

A number of studies have been conducted regarding the role of self-esteem in language learning and its relationship with other. In their research, Roebbers and Schneider (1999) concentrated on acculturation and studied self-esteem and anxiety of immigrant children in a German context. 364 elementary students took part in the study in which they were divided into four groups: two immigrant and two nonimmigrant groups. The aim of the study was to compare the students' global versus mathematic and

German language self-esteem as well as their general and test anxiety. The findings showed that students' global self-esteem and general anxiety were not affected by migration, while migration influenced students' German self-esteem as well as their test anxiety.

Using shyness as an example, Asendorpf, Banse, and Mücke (2002) tried to show that "(a) it is possible to reliably assess individual differences in the implicit self-concept of personality (b) they are partly independent from traditional explicit self-ratings and (c) increase significantly the prediction of spontaneous behavior in a realistic social situation" (p. 380). For this purpose, they asked 139 participants to complete an Implicit Association Test (IAT) and explicit self-ratings of shyness. Results indicated a moderate correlation between IAT and explicit self-ratings and supported IAT's prediction of spontaneous (not controlled) shy behavior and the prediction of controlled (not spontaneous) shy behavior by explicit self-ratings.

Additionally, Hayati and Ostadian (2008) explored the relationship between self-esteem and EFL learners' listening comprehension. They selected 60 Iranian students based on their proficiency test scores. They used an audio test of TOEFL to assess their listening comprehension and Coopersmith's (1967) questionnaire for their self-esteem assessment. The results highlighted a positive and significant correlation between the two variables.

Similarly, Liu (2009) investigated the changes in EFL learners' domain-specific self-concept over time. 126 freshmen were divided into three different levels of proficiency. Liu hypothesized the presence of difference in academic self-concept of students across proficiency levels as well as changeability of self-concept during the specified time. Based on the results obtained from the academic self-concept scale, he discovered that both his hypotheses were supported; he concluded that learners' ability level was an effective factor on their academic self-concept, and that this personality related variable could change over time. Interestingly, lower level students showed more improvement in their academic self-concept than their higher level counterparts.

In another study conducted by Zare and Riasati (2012), the relationship between language learning anxiety, self-

esteem, and academic level of EFL students was investigated. Using cluster sampling, 108 University students were chosen and given questionnaires of anxiety and self-esteem to fill in. The results suggested a negative correlation between students' language learning anxiety and self-esteem as well as their language learning anxiety and academic level, whereas learners' self-esteem and academic level were found to be positively correlated.

Moreover, Ferla, et al. (2009) reconsidered the structural relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic self-concept. They investigated the psychological construct of academic self-efficacy and academic self-esteem and the nature of their relationship. They used data obtained from the 2003 PISA-survey (Programme for International Student Assessment), which had assessed 8796 students' mathematical literacy. Findings indicated that both self-constructs differed from each other conceptually, and that students' academic self-efficacy was strongly affected by their academic self-concept. Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of self-efficacy in education. The following section discusses this role in further detail.

2.3 Self-efficacy

Like many other psychological concepts, self-efficacy has been introduced to educational contexts in the last few decades. A review of the related literature shows that it was Bandura (1977) who introduced this term and proposed a definition for it as personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce attainment. He believes that not all people act perfectly in all the domains of their lives. For example, an architect may be very efficacious in his/her job, but not in parenting. Bandura asserts that the choices people make, the attempt to do something and the amount of their perseverance are strongly influenced by the self-efficacy beliefs (Hongying, 2009; Pajares & Miller, 1994; Zimmerman, 2000).

In his extensive studies, Bandura (1977, 1997) found four sources of self-efficacy beliefs in people and described them as follows:

a) Enactive or mastery experience is the first and the most influential source which relates to success and failure

people encounter when doing an activity, i.e., success in a task raises one's efficacy while failure has a converse effect.

b) Vicarious experience has to do with observing others' performance and comparing it with one's own performance in the same situation. In this mode of efficacy induction, people select a model, observe his/her outcome and compare it with themselves.

c) Verbal (Social) persuasion deals with verbal encouragement and appraisal people receive from their significant others. This source is believed to have a more limited impact on peoples' self-efficacy, because it depends upon the creditability of the persuader. Finally,

d) Physiological and emotional states have to do with physical and affective conditions of people.

For example, having good feelings enhances peoples' self-efficacy, whereas negative feelings leave the opposite effect on it (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2010; Bandura, 1977, 1982; Zimmerman, 2000). These studies highlight the importance and magnitude of this psychological trait, and confirm that being more self-efficacious has become a key goal in daily life, specifically in language learning. Hidi, Berndorff and Ainley (2002) describe self-efficacious individuals as those who: "are more willing to participate in tasks, work harder, persist longer and have less adverse reactions when they encounter difficulties than do those individuals who doubt their capabilities" (p. 432).

General, academic and self-regulatory efficacies constitute three different types of self-efficacy. According to Luszczynska, Scholz, and Schwarzer (2005), general self-efficacy is a broad and stable concept which deals with more generalized domains of functioning and seems to be a universal construct related to other psychological constructs. Despite Bandura's devoted attention to academic sense of self-efficacy, some researchers have focused on its general sense (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001; Yildirim, & Ilhan, 2010). Academic self-efficacy, on the other hand, is a task-specific concept which measures individuals' perception of different subject matters and their academic achievement as well. In Schunk's (1991) words, academic self-efficacy refers to peoples' attitudes towards their successful performance of an academic activity at a designated level. Comparing academic self-concept

and academic self-efficacy, Ferla, et al., (2009) argue that self-efficacy scholars focus more attention on the cognitive nature of self-efficacy beliefs, while some self-concept scholars argue that an affective/motivational dimension together with a self-evaluative/cognitive dimension forms students' academic self-concept.

Zimmerman (1989) describes self-regulated learners as those who have meta-cognitively and motivationally active participation in their learning process and instead of relying on teachers, lead themselves into acquiring knowledge. He asserts that to be quietly counted as a self-regulated learner, "students' learning must involve the use of specified strategies to achieve academic goals on the basis of self-efficacy perceptions" (p. 329). In this definition, he stresses the importance of three elements: "students' self-regulated learning strategies, self-efficacy perceptions of performance skill, and commitment to academic goals" (p. 329). Several researchers have conducted studies to verify these statements (Bandura, 1986; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). They have found a direct relationship between self-regulated learning and self-efficacy. This means that more self-efficacious learners are good at self-regulated learning and vice versa. In this regard, Bandura (1982) states that "self-regulatory capabilities require tools of personal agency and the self-assurance to use them effectively" (p. 129). He argues that in affecting one's own behavior, self-regulatory efficacy gets an inevitable role, and that mastery of difficult situations enhances self-regulatory efficacy.

2.4 Self-efficacy and Language Learning

Several studies have investigated the relationship between various aspects of self-efficacy and different aspects of learning including language learning. In one such study, Shell, Murphy and Bruning (1989) explored the relationship between self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs with reading and writing achievement. 153 undergraduate students volunteered for the study. Efficacy for reading and writing tasks and outcome expectancies were assessed. Instruments required to do so were developed by researchers based on the methods Bandura (1982, 1986) had outlined. Reading and writing achievements were assessed through the Degrees of Reading Power test and a

holistically scored writing sample, respectively. To analyze data, multiple regression analysis was used. Findings indicated that "self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs jointly account for significant variance in reading achievement with self-efficacy being the stronger predictor and that self-efficacy, but not outcome expectancy, accounts for significant variance in writing achievement" (p. 91).

Similarly, Pajares and Miller (1994) conducted a study to investigate the role of self-efficacy and self-concept beliefs in mathematical problem solving. Math self-efficacy, math self-concept, math anxiety, perceived usefulness of mathematics, gender, and prior experience with mathematics were the variables studied in relation to self-efficacy. 350 voluntaries participated in the study. Researchers employed related instruments to assess the variables. Path analysis techniques were used to analyze the obtained data. Findings showed a stronger predictive role for math self-efficacy in problem solving than other variables. "Self-efficacy also mediated the effect of gender and prior experience on self-concept, perceived usefulness, and problem solving. Gender and prior experience influenced self-concept, perceived usefulness, and problem solving largely through the mediational role of self-efficacy" (p. 193). Gender was also reported to directly influence only self-efficacy.

Education is not the only area influenced by self-efficacy research; medicine has taken advantage of it as well. Medical experts believe that "exaggerated blood pressure responses to stress are implicated in the development of cardiovascular disease" (Hilmert, Christenfeld & Kulik, 2002, p. 122). Experts have attempted to discover the effective factors related to these responses. Accordingly, Hilmert, et al., examined the effects of audience and self-efficacy on cardiovascular reactivity during public speaking. They used 64 female University students who were all normotensive and an apparatus called Ohmeda Finapres 2300 Blood Pressure Monitor for their examination. The participants who were classified as low or high efficacious for public speaking had to present a 5-minute speech to an audience who were half skilful and half novice public speakers. Results indicated that cardiovascular reactivity

was greater for low self-efficacy speakers as well as those who presented their speech before an expert audience. Moreover, the effects of self-efficacy were amplified before a skilful audience.

According to Çubukçu (2008), little research has been done regarding language learning anxiety. Therefore, he conducted a study to explore the relationship between the anxiety level of EFL learners and their self-efficacy levels. The Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale and The Self Efficacy Scale were used to this end. Results indicated no significant correlation between the two variables and no remarkable role for gender in terms of participants' anxiety and self-efficacy levels.

In another study conducted by Zarei and Taheri (2013), the role of multiple intelligences was investigated as predictors of self-efficacy. They aimed to find out which type of multiple intelligences is a better predictor of general, academic and self-regulatory self-efficacy. For this purpose, they chose 148 homogenized students and used the Michigan test (MTELP), MI questionnaire, General self-efficacy scale, Academic self-efficacy and Self-efficacy for self regulated learning scale as their instruments; they also used multiple regression to analyze data. Findings showed that musical, and linguistic intelligences predicted general self-efficacy, spatial/visual intelligence predicted self-regulatory efficacy, but none of the intelligence types predicted academic self efficacy.

Additionally, Wang and Pape (2004) conducted four case studies aiming at exploring the relationship between the participants' self-efficacy beliefs, use of SRL strategies, and success in ESL learning. Four 5th grade students and one of their parents participated in the study. Instruments for collecting data consisted of Interviews, The ESL Self-efficacy Questionnaire and The ESL SRL Strategy Questionnaire. They found a positive relationship between those two variables and learners' language proficiency.

As the above literature review suggests, various aspects of self-related personal traits have been investigated. However, there seems to be a paucity of research as to whether such traits are influenced by learners' language proficiency level. This study is an attempt to fill part of the existing gap in this area.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study were 141 English Teaching and Translation students at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU) and Kar non-profit University in Qazvin, Iran. They were both females (60.3%) and males (39.7), and their age ranged from 19 to 29. Data was collected in the spring semester of 2013-2014 academic year.

3.2 Instruments

The instruments utilized in this study included the following:

3.2.1 Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP)

To determine the participants' level of proficiency, MTELP was used. It contains 100 questions in three sections: grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. Grammar and vocabulary parts of the test contain 40 items, and the reading part consists of 4 short passages each followed by 5 items. MTELP is a multiple choice test which should be responded to in 60 minutes.

3.2.2 The Rosenberg Self-esteem Test

The participants' self-esteem was measured with 'The Rosenberg self-esteem Test' which was developed by Rosenberg (1965). A total number of 10 statements regarding the participants' self-esteem are coded on a Likert scale with four choices; half of the items are scored from (0) strongly agree to (3) strongly disagree and the other half are scored from (0) strongly disagree to (3) strongly agree.

3.2.3 The General Self-efficacy Scale

The participants' general self-efficacy was measured with 'The General Self-efficacy Scale' developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1981). The questionnaire contains 12 statements scored on a Likert type scale with five choices from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

3.2.4 The Academic Self-efficacy Scale

The participants' academic self-efficacy was measured using 'The Academic Self-efficacy Scale' developed by Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) and Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001). The 8 statements in the

questionnaire are scored on a Likert type scale with five choices ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

3.2.5 The Self-efficacy for Self-regulated Learning Scale

The participants' self-efficacy for self regulated learning was measured with 'The Self-efficacy for Self-regulated Learning Scale' developed by Bandura. The questionnaire includes 11 statements which are scored on a Likert type scale with five choices from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

It needs to be noted that all the above-mentioned questionnaires have already been used extensively both in the Iranian context and elsewhere, and different reliability indices have been reported. Still, to ensure the reliability of the instruments in the context of this study, Chronbach's alpha was checked for each questionnaire and the index of reliability for 'The Rosenberg self-esteem Test', 'The General Self-efficacy Scale', 'The Academic Self-efficacy Scale', and 'The Self-efficacy for Self-regulated Learning Scale' turned out to be .74, .86, .81, and .83, respectively.

3.3 Procedure

Initially, all the 141 participants were given the proficiency test. Based on the results, they were divided into high, mid and low proficiency levels. Each group contained one third of the total number of the participants. Having been divided into the three proficiency groups, all the participants were asked to fill out the required questionnaires. After summarizing and processing the questionnaires, they were submitted to statistical analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Kruskal-Wallis procedure was used to analyze the obtained data. There was one Kruskal-Wallis procedure for each research question. The reason for the choice of Kruskal-Wallis was that data came through questionnaires, and due to the relatively small number of the participants, the normal distribution and the interval nature of data could not be guaranteed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Investigation of the First Research Question

The first research question attempted to see whether there is any significant difference in the self-esteem of learners at

different proficiency levels. To this end the Kruskal Wallis procedure was run. The results of the descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

As Table 1 shows, there are differences among the mean ranks of the high (73.69), the medium (70.76), and the low (68.55) groups. To check whether these differences are statistically significant, the Kruskal Wallis was run. The results, summarized in Table 2, show no significant differences among the self-esteem of the participants of three groups ($\chi^2 = .376, p > .05$).

4.2 Investigation of the Second Research Question

The second research question sought to investigate the effect of proficiency level on the participants' general self-efficacy. To this end, another Kruskal Wallis was used. Descriptive statistics are summarized in the Tables 3 and 4:

Although Table 3 shows different mean ranks for three proficiency groups, Table 4 indicates no statistically significant differences among the groups' general self-efficacy ($\chi^2 = 1.169, p > .05$).

	Proficiency	N	Mean Rank
Self-esteem	High	47	73.69
	Mid	47	70.76
	Low	47	68.55
	Total	141	

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Kruskal Wallis on Self-esteem

Self-esteem		
Chi-Square		.376
df		2
Asymp. Sig.		.829

Table 2. Results of Kruskal Wallis on Self-esteem

	Proficiency	N	Mean Rank
General Self-efficacy	High	47	76.03
	Mid	47	69.79
	Low	47	67.55
	Total	141	

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Kruskal Wallis on General Self-efficacy

General Self-esteem		
Chi-Square		1.169
df		2
Asymp. Sig.		.557

Table 4. Results of Kruskal Wallis on General Self-efficacy

4.3 Investigation of the Third Research Question

The aim of the third research question was to investigate whether there is any significant difference in academic self-efficacy of learners at different proficiency levels. To answer this question, the Kruskal Wallis procedure was used; the results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

As it can be seen in Table 5, the high group has the highest mean rank, followed by the medium and the low groups, respectively. Based on Table 6 ($\chi^2 = 2.871, p > .05$), it can be concluded that there are no significant differences among the mean ranks of the groups.

4.4 Investigation of the Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question sought to investigate whether there is any significant difference in self-efficacy for self-regulated learning of learners at different proficiency levels. To do so, a Kruskal Wallis procedure was used. Table 7 shows the summary of the descriptive statistics.

Based on the Table 7 the high and the low group participants have the highest and the lowest means

	Proficiency	N	Mean Rank
Academic self-efficacy	High	47	79.03
	Mid	47	68.52
	Low	47	65.45
	Total	141	

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Kruskal Wallis on Academic Self-efficacy

Academic Self-efficacy		
Chi-Square		2.871
df		2
Asymp. Sig.		.238

Table 6. Results of Kruskalwallis on Academic Self-efficacy

	Proficiency	N	Mean Rank
Self-efficacy for self-regulated learning	High	47	75.79
	Mid	47	70.48
	Low	47	66.73
	Total	141	

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Kruskal Wallis on Self-efficacy for Self-regulated Learning

Self-efficacy for self-regulated learning		
Chi-Square		1.169
df		2
Asymp. Sig.		.557

Table 8. Results of Kruskal Wallis on Self-efficacy for Self-regulated Learning

respectively. To see whether or not the differences among the groups are statistically significant, a Kruskal Wallis procedure was run. The obtained results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8 shows no significant differences among the three groups ($\chi^2 = 1.169$, $p > .05$). This means that the participants' proficiency level does not affect their self-efficacy for self-regulated learning.

5. Discussion

The present study attempted to investigate the effects of proficiency level on EFL learners' self-related personality traits. Some of the findings of the present study are in line with those of other related studies, while others contradict those of the previous studies. Regarding self-esteem, the results did not show any significant differences among students at different proficiency levels. This finding is in contrast with that of Zare and Riasati (2012), who found a negative correlation between language learning anxiety and self-esteem among learners, and also a negative correlation between language learning anxiety and academic level. However, a positive correlation was seen between the learners' self-esteem and their academic level. Moreover, although the present study did not focus on any skill, its findings differ from those of Hayati and Ostadian (2008), because they claim that there is a positive relationship between students' self-esteem and their English language listening comprehension. At the same time, although types of self-esteem were not considered in the present study, its findings contradict some previous studies (Liu, 2009; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). The present study is in contrast with Liu (2009), who claims that students at lower proficiency levels have significantly lower perceived academic self-esteem than their average and above-average counterparts. The results of the present study are also different from those of Shavelson and Bolus (1982), who found a higher correlation between academic self-esteem and achievement than general self-esteem and achievement, a claim that the present study failed to support, since it did not find any significant differences in the self-esteem of students who had different proficiency levels.

Another finding of this study was that EFL learners' proficiency level had no effect on their self-efficacy. This finding is different from that of several studies which were

reviewed in the present study (Wang & Pape, 2004; Pajares & Miller, 1994; Multon et al., 1991; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). All these studies found self-efficacy as an effective factor in learners' performance and achievement and reported that high self-efficacy learners experienced more success in learning language. This means that the more efficacious students are more proficient in language learning, a claim which is not supported by the findings of the present study. In addition, although this study did not focus on any skill, it seems to contradict the finding of Shell, et al. (1989), who found self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs jointly as significant variables in reading achievement and self-efficacy.

A number of factors might have contributed to the results obtained in this study. One of the reasons may be social and cultural differences in the educational setting. In Iran, the educational system seems to be more teacher-centered, and students may not play a significant role in the classroom. It lowers their self-esteem and, consequently, negatively influences their attitude toward foreign language learning.

The learners' social class differences may also be another possible factor influencing the findings. Often, those learners who grow up in low and even middle classes do not enjoy such self-esteem and self-efficacy levels as the learners who belong to the high social strata. Therefore, when they all gather in a classroom, the high class students would perform better as they profit enormously from the high level of self-esteem and self-efficacy which their family, and more generally, the society has given them.

The age and the number of participants could be addressed as other possible reasons for such discrepancies. Another possible reason for the discrepancies between the findings of the present study and those of the above-mentioned studies could be partially related to gender differences. In this study, gender differences were not taken into account, while Pajares and Miller (1994) accentuated the role of gender in their findings.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to answer the question of whether there are significant differences in self-esteem and

different types of self-efficacy of Iranian EFL learners with different proficiency levels. Based on the findings of the present study, students' proficiency had no significant effect on these self-related personalities of the participants. Both students and instructors should notice the ineffective role of proficiency in fostering these two variables. In other words, if language teachers want their students be more efficacious and have more self-esteem, they cannot achieve this goal by focusing on improving the students' proficiency. Therefore, they should find and follow techniques and strategies which aim at those variables directly, and cannot rely on proficiency improvement techniques.

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