

## **English Self-Efficacy and Gender Differences Among Saudi EFL Learners: A Focused Study on Confidence Across Language Skills**

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English self-efficacy significantly influences learners' success, confidence, and performance in essential language tasks. In Saudi Arabia, where English proficiency is becoming increasingly crucial, numerous EFL learners encounter challenges in developing self-confidence, resulting in discrepancies between their perceived abilities and their actual performance. This study examined Saudi EFL learners' self-efficacy levels across four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—while investigating gender differences in their self-perceptions. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, involving a cross-sectional survey of 477 university students selected through stratified random sampling to ensure broad representation. The participants completed the 'Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy,' which was designed to measure their confidence in performing various language tasks. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were used to identify the critical patterns and gender-based differences. The results revealed moderate overall self-efficacy among learners, with reading identified as the skill with which they demonstrated the highest confidence, while speaking exhibited the lowest confidence levels. Both listening and writing skills showed moderate self-efficacy, indicating potential for targeted improvement. Notably, significant gender differences emerged, with female learners reporting higher self-efficacy in speaking than their male counterparts. These findings emphasize the necessity of targeted pedagogical approaches to enhance verbal communication, particularly for male students, alongside structured support to strengthen listening and writing skills. Integrating authentic language tasks and interactive classroom activities is essential to enhance self-efficacy in all language skills. Future research should investigate self-efficacy across diverse educational settings, and conduct longitudinal studies to monitor its progression.

**Keywords:** EFL pedagogy; English self-efficacy; gender differences in language learning; Saudi EFL learners; speaking self-efficacy.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, learners' beliefs about their capabilities, known as self-efficacy, have emerged as a critical determinant of success (Alkhalifah, 2022; Yasmin & Yasmin, 2023). Defined as the belief in one's capacity to execute tasks and achieve specific goals, self-efficacy profoundly influences learners' motivation and persistence, and their actual performance in language learning (Al-Abyadh & Azeem, 2022). The relationship between self-efficacy and language proficiency was particularly pronounced when examining four fundamental listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For Saudi EFL learners, understanding self-efficacy in these domains is indispensable for shaping effective instructional practices and fostering language mastery (Al-khresheh & Alruwaili, 2024; Almohammadi, 2021).

In Saudi Arabia, English proficiency is fundamental for academic achievement, professional advancement, and global communication. Despite significant investments in English language education, many learners struggle with a persistent gap between their language abilities and perceived competence (Al-Otaibi & Alshaikhai, 2023;



Alharbi, 2021; Nasim & Mujeeba, 2024). This gap, closely tied to self-efficacy, directly affects learners' motivation, engagement, and overall progress in acquiring language skills (Almuhammadi et al., 2020). Learners with lower self-efficacy often find it difficult to navigate challenges in language learning. Simultaneously, those with more vital self-beliefs tend to approach these challenges with greater resilience and persistence.

Although self-efficacy is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing academic performance and motivation, there is limited research focusing on how Saudi EFL learners perceive their abilities in crucial language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Al-Seghayer, 2022; Al-Abyadh & Azeem, 2022; Almuhammadi, 2021). Understanding these perceptions is crucial because these skills are essential for academic and professional success. Bridging this gap requires targeted teaching strategies that enhance learners' competence and confidence, ultimately fostering a more effective and meaningful English-language learning experience.

This study addresses this gap by examining Saudi EFL learners' self-efficacy across the listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills. Through exploring learners' self-assessed confidence in performing a range of language tasks, this study aims to reveal significant patterns that can inform more targeted, skill-specific instructional strategies. Furthermore, this study investigates whether statistically significant differences exist in self-efficacy across these skills, thereby identifying areas where learners perceive themselves as more or less competent.

A good understanding of self-efficacy across these distinct skills is particularly relevant in the Saudi context, where English is increasingly being perceived as a societal and economic advancement mechanism. This study contributes to the growing knowledge of EFL instruction by offering essential perspectives on the psychological aspects that shape language-learning outcomes. In particular, it emphasizes the role of self-efficacy as a critical factor in developing EFL learners who are self-assured, skilled, and effective. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the overall level of English self-efficacy among Saudi EFL learners?
2. What are the levels of self-efficacy in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills among Saudi EFL learners? (Which language skills exhibited the highest self-efficacy?)
3. Are there significant differences in English self-efficacy levels across genders (male versus female) among Saudi EFL learners?

## **Literature review**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Self-efficacy, a core idea in social cognitive theory, is the belief in one's ability to plan and perform actions to achieve specific goals (Cheng, 2020). It is not just about having the necessary skills, but also about feeling confident enough to use them effectively in different situations, which directly impacts how people behave, how much effort they put in, and how they handle challenges (Chen, 2020; Patricio-Gamboa et al., 2021). As a self-regulatory tool, self-efficacy helps individuals set goals, stay motivated, and bounce back from setbacks (Al-Abyadh & Azeem, 2022). However, low self-efficacy can lead to avoiding difficult tasks, feeling anxious, and disengaging altogether, especially in demanding areas such as learning a second language (Livinți et al., 2021). Since confidence can differ based on the task, self-efficacy plays a vital role in language learning, influencing how learners approach essential skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Al-khresheh & Alkursheh, 2024).

According to Goetze and Driver (2022), self-efficacy plays a decisive role in language learning, determining how learners engage with the target language and adopt learning strategies. Language learning differs from other academic disciplines because of its real-time, often unpredictable, nature, particularly in communicative settings. Learners with strong self-efficacy are more likely to participate in classroom activities actively, seek opportunities for authentic language use, and persist through challenges even when initial attempts result in errors or setbacks (Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020). In EFL contexts, where learners often face limited exposure to native speakers and authentic linguistic environments, self-efficacy becomes even more crucial as anxiety and self-doubt can significantly impede progress (Fidan & Tuncel, 2021).

The influence of self-efficacy is not uniform across all the domains. Beatson et al., (2020) posit that learners frequently report varying confidence levels in listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks. Productive skills such as speaking and writing are often perceived as more challenging because of their immediacy and apprehension about committing errors in real-time interactions (Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020). This variability indicates that self-

efficacy is a subtle construct that fluctuates depending on skill and learning contexts. Developing strategies to enhance self-efficacy in each skill is crucial for addressing learners' confidence gaps and promoting balanced language acquisition (Chen, 2020).

Moreover, learners' prior experiences and ability to manage academic tasks significantly influence their self-efficacy beliefs. Beatson et al., (2020) stress that positive prior learning experiences foster stronger self-efficacy, contributing to improved academic performance. Al-Abyadh and Azeem (2022) highlight that effective academic self-management practices, such as time management and self-discipline, are critical in bolstering self-efficacy, leading to enhanced achievement. Howell and Hickman (2022) argued that integrating self-efficacy-building practices into instructional design can assist learners in navigating the uncertainties of language learning, particularly in technology-mediated environments.

Finally, as noted by Fidan and Tuncel (2021), self-efficacy in language learning is closely associated with learners' motivation to engage in challenging tasks and persist through difficulties. The ability to believe in one's capacity to succeed directly influences how learners approach increasingly complex language requirements, from basic comprehension to advanced production skills. This belief is central to improving learners' performance, as evidenced by Ortlieb and Schatz's (2020) study, which accentuates the importance of connecting self-efficacy theory to practical classroom interventions, particularly reading and speaking tasks.

### *Self-Efficacy in EFL Contexts*

Self-efficacy is vital in EFL learning, primarily because of learners' unique challenges in non-native contexts. Unlike in immersive environments, EFL learners often encounter linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural barriers, along with limited opportunities for authentic language use, which can undermine their confidence and engagement with the target language (Cabillon, 2023; Fan & Cui, 2024; Li & Wang, 2024). In these settings, self-efficacy is more than just a predictor of academic success; it shapes how learners approach language tasks, handle challenges, and respond to feedback (Wang & Sun, 2020; Zahra & Rosheen, 2022). Confidence levels can vary across the four listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, influenced by factors such as past experiences, learning environment, and task difficulty (Milliner & Dimoski, 2024; Yang et al., 2024). Studies have shown that EFL learners often have lower self-efficacy than those in immersive settings due to reduced exposure to authentic interactions (Goetze & Driver, 2022). This makes self-efficacy critical in determining whether learners actively participate in class, seek opportunities to practice beyond formal instruction, and persist despite challenges (Yang et al., 2024). To succeed in these contexts, maintaining strong self-efficacy is essential for learners to confidently engage in language learning and to overcome its inherent complexities (Li & Wang, 2024).

Several studies have consistently indicated that self-efficacy is intricately linked to learners' language proficiency, which influences their academic performance and affective experiences in language learning. For example, Wang and Sun's (2020) meta-analysis found that self-efficacy positively correlates with language proficiency, albeit with varying effect sizes depending on cultural context. Similarly, Goetze and Driver (2022) identified a moderate positive correlation between self-efficacy and second language achievement, further underscoring the importance of self-belief in successful language learning. Learners with greater confidence in their language abilities are more inclined to take risks in communicative tasks, experiment with language production, and engage in spontaneous conversations (Chen, 2020). By contrast, those with lower self-efficacy are more likely to experience heightened anxiety, which can manifest as avoidance of speaking opportunities, reluctance to participate in discussions, and overall disengagement from the learning process (Mulyanto et al., 2022). This dynamic highlights EFL teachers' need to cultivate an instructional environment promoting self-efficacy and linguistic competence (Fan & Cui, 2024).

The complexity of self-efficacy in EFL settings is compounded by its skill-specific nature. While learners may exhibit high levels of self-efficacy in receptive skills, such as reading or listening, they often report significantly lower self-efficacy in productive skills, such as speaking and writing (Yang et al., 2024). Montañó-González and Cancino (2020) identified a strong positive correlation between language learning strategies and self-efficacy, particularly in productive skills, where learners who employed effective strategies demonstrated higher self-efficacy. However, the discrepancy between high self-efficacy in reading and listening, and low self-efficacy in speaking remains pronounced. Speaking is frequently regarded as the most anxiety-inducing skill because of its real-time, interactive nature and apprehension about committing errors in the presence of peers

(Mulyanto et al., 2022). Although less immediate, writing can also elicit low self-efficacy because of the challenges of producing coherent, grammatically accurate text in a foreign language. These findings suggest that self-efficacy is not a uniform construct but varies considerably across different linguistic competencies, necessitating targeted interventions to address specific areas of weakness (Sari & Han, 2024).

The nature of self-efficacy constantly evolves in response to learners' experiences and feedback. Positive experiences, such as completing a task or receiving constructive feedback, can enhance self-efficacy, increasing motivation and effort for future challenges (Lu et al., 2022). Conversely, repeated failures or negative feedback can weaken learners' beliefs about their abilities, creating a cycle of disengagement and low achievement (Chen, 2020). This highlights the importance of formative assessment and teacher support in EFL classrooms, where learners often have limited exposure to the target language outside formal instruction. Teachers play a critical role in fostering self-efficacy by creating a supportive environment for language practice, providing timely feedback, and designing appropriately challenging tasks that learners can achieve (Graham, 2022). Additionally, incorporating authentic materials, such as real-world texts and conversations, offers meaningful exposure to the language, reinforcing learners' confidence in their ability to understand and effectively use English (Kim et al., 2024).

To summarize, self-efficacy in EFL settings is a complex construct that affects students' language performance and emotional reactions to the learning process. It is essential to comprehend how self-efficacy interacts with various language skills, particularly noting the varying confidence levels across listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities to create effective teaching strategies (Chen, 2020). EFL teachers can significantly improve students' capacity to attain language proficiency by targeting their specific self-efficacy requirements and cultivating a classroom atmosphere that promotes linguistic and psychological development (Yang et al., 2024).

### ***Gender and Self-Efficacy in Language Learning***

Research on gender differences in self-efficacy among EFL learners elucidates the relationship between sociocultural factors, learning environments, and instructional approaches to language learning (Kutuk et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Yu & Deng, 2022). A recurrent theme in the literature is that female learners exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy, particularly in language tasks that require active participation and engagement. Namaziandost and Çakmak (2020) observed that female students demonstrated more significant gains in self-efficacy, especially in productive skills such as speaking, within the flipped classroom model. This aligns with the findings of Kutuk et al., (2021), who posited that gender stereotypes influence language-learning outcomes with self-efficacy as a mediating factor. Their study revealed that female students, when empowered through enhanced self-efficacy, exhibited superior performance in language tasks, suggesting that addressing gender stereotypes and fostering self-confidence can significantly enhance their language proficiency.

Liu et al., (2022) further examined the influence of the educational context on gender differences in self-efficacy, determining that female learners in mono-gender educational settings generally reported higher self-efficacy. These results suggest that gender differences in self-efficacy may be amplified in environments that promote female learners' confidence, underscoring the significance of culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches to language learning.

However, not all studies have reported significant gender-based differences. Hoesny et al., (2023), for instance, found no substantial gender differences in self-efficacy within an English for specific purposes context, indicating that the influence of gender on self-efficacy may vary depending on the specific learning environment or the nature of the language task. Similarly, Yuehua and Qiumei (2023) observed minimal gender differences in overall self-efficacy among translation students. However, female learners outperformed males in self-regulated learning, suggesting that gender differences may manifest in specific skill areas rather than across the board.

A wide-ranging perspective on gender differences in self-efficacy was provided by Kheder and Rouabhia (2023), who reviewed multiple studies and concluded that while some research identifies gender-related differences in self-efficacy, other studies show no significant impact. This inconsistency highlights the variability in how gender influences language learning, depending on context and specific learning tasks. This variability was corroborated by Liu et al., (2022), who found that female students typically exhibited higher self-efficacy in language learning. In contrast, male learners demonstrated greater confidence in STEM-related subjects such as mathematics and science. Generally, research suggests that gender differences in language learning self-efficacy are context-dependent (Kheder & Rouabhia, 2023). Female learners frequently display higher self-efficacy in

communicative and language-based tasks, particularly in environments that foster confidence. However, these differences may be less pronounced in more structured or specialized language learning settings such as English for specific purposes (Hoesny et al., 2023).

### ***Self-Efficacy in Saudi EFL Learners***

The eminence of English in Saudi Arabia has grown substantially in recent years, reflecting its significance in academic achievement, professional advancement, and international engagement (Alkhalifah, 2022; Al-Seghayer, 2022; Massri, 2022). English has become an integral component of the Saudi education system, introduced at earlier stages of schooling and prioritized at the tertiary level, particularly in disciplines such as science, technology, and business (Almohammadi, 2021; Zhang, 2022). Despite this institutional emphasis, numerous Saudi EFL learners have encountered persistent challenges in terms of their proficiency in crucial language skills. These challenges are attributed to external factors, such as limited exposure to authentic English use beyond the classroom, and internal factors, including motivation and self-confidence (Al-Otaibi & Alshaikhai, 2023; Mohammed, 2021). Self-efficacy, defined as learners' belief in their capability to succeed in specific tasks, has emerged as a crucial variable for understanding the barriers to English language acquisition within this context. This influences how Saudi learners engage with the language and the extent to which they persist in developing proficiency (Alharbi, 2021; Altumigah & Alkhaleefah, 2022).

Although still developing, research on self-efficacy in the Saudi EFL setting provides critical insights into learners' self-perceptions of different language skills. For instance, Almohammadi (2021) found that self-efficacy beliefs among Saudi EFL learners in their preparatory years are significantly shaped by their perceptions of English attainment, the expectations of others, and the level of academic and emotional support they receive. Similarly, Altumigah and Alkhaleefah (2022) highlighted the positive correlation between reading self-efficacy and metacognitive reading strategies. Their findings suggested that learners with higher self-efficacy in reading are more inclined to adopt effective strategies, ultimately enhancing their performance. This aligns with Alharbi's (2021) research, which underscores the role of self-efficacy as a primary factor in reading comprehension, influenced by teacher support and competitive learning environments.

Existing studies indicate that Saudi EFL learners generally exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy in receptive skills, such as reading and listening, where tasks are more structured and less reliant on immediate spontaneous language use. In contrast, productive skills such as speaking and writing pose greater challenges. Mohammed (2021) highlights that many learners report lower levels of confidence and increased anxiety when required to engage in real-time communicative tasks. This tendency is consistent with global EFL trends, where learners often find the unpredictability of spoken language more challenging than the controlled nature of reading and listening tasks. Alharbi (2021) further reinforces this observation, suggesting that external factors such as teacher support significantly bolster self-efficacy in receptive skills, but may not translate as effectively to productive ones.

The learning environment and instructional practices in Saudi Arabia play crucial roles in shaping self-efficacy. Massri (2022) highlights that traditional teacher-centred classrooms, emphasizing rote memorization over communicative competence, reduce self-efficacy, particularly in speaking and writing. The lack of engagement in communicative tasks and limited opportunities for constructive feedback often reinforce a cycle of low self-efficacy. Learners' perceptions of their abilities impede their attempts at or persistence in challenging tasks, ultimately hindering their overall language development. In this context, Al-Otaibi and Alshaikhai (2023) discussed how cultural attitudes towards EFL can further diminish learners' motivation, which is often perceived as less essential in daily life, contributing to lower self-efficacy.

Limited exposure to English outside of the classroom exacerbates these issues. Saudi learners often lack authentic language practice opportunities, which can intensify anxiety in spontaneous communicative situations, mainly speaking and listening, where tasks demand immediate response. Zhang (2022) points out that integrating educational technology into language learning can help bridge this gap by promoting online interaction and self-assessment, fostering a more growth-oriented mindset that improves learners' self-efficacy.

Educational practices in Saudi Arabia also contribute to self-efficacy. Reliance on teacher-centred approaches, which prioritize linguistic accuracy over fluency and communication, can impede the development of self-efficacy. Al-Seghayer (2022) highlights that many Saudi EFL teachers exhibit low self-efficacy in technology-

assisted language learning, primarily due to limited training in integrating digital tools into their pedagogical practices. This technological gap affects teachers' confidence and limits their engagement with English outside of traditional classroom methods. Almuhammadi et al., (2020) stressed the importance of professional development for teachers, noting that mentoring and training programs significantly enhance self-efficacy among Saudi EFL teachers, leading to more effective teaching and improved student outcomes.

Furthermore, the high-stakes nature of assessments in Saudi education, where errors are penalized, fosters a performance-driven environment that discourages risk-taking, an essential element in language learning. This environment perpetuates a low self-efficacy cycle, in which learners' apprehension about making errors leads to disengagement from language tasks, particularly those involving communicative proficiency. Zhang (2022) accentuates the role of educational technology in disrupting this cycle, demonstrating that technology-enhanced learning can enhance self-efficacy by encouraging learners to take risks, interact online, and develop a growth mindset through self-assessment tools.

Despite increasing scholarly interest in self-efficacy among Saudi EFL learners, significant lacunae persist in the extant literature. A substantial portion of the existing research focuses on issues such as learner anxiety or general motivation without adequately addressing the task-specific nature of self-efficacy across various language skills. Alkhalifah (2022) posits that more comprehensive studies are required to explore Saudi learners' challenges in developing self-confidence, particularly in productive skills such as speaking and writing. Furthermore, the impact of instructional practices on self-efficacy across diverse language domains, especially in teacher-centred environments, necessitates further investigation.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a focused analysis of the self-efficacy of Saudi EFL learners across four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Through the identification of patterns of self-efficacy in each skill area and examination of the factors influencing these patterns, this research offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers. Understanding these dynamics will facilitate the development of targeted interventions to enhance learners' self-efficacy and ultimately contribute to improved language proficiency and more effective educational outcomes.

## Method

### *Research Design*

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate Saudi EFL learners' self-efficacy across the four primary language skills. A cross-sectional survey was conducted to collect data simultaneously, facilitating precise measurement and analysis of participants' self-reported self-efficacy. This design was particularly appropriate for examining patterns and variations in self-efficacy across different language skills, without experimental manipulation. The quantitative approach facilitated the statistical analysis of the data, ensuring that the findings were reliable and generalizable. It provides valuable insights into enhancing pedagogical practices in language education (Fischer et al., 2023).

### *Participants*

The study sample comprised 477 participants selected through stratified random sampling to ensure a well-adjusted representation of critical subgroups. The participants were male and female Saudi EFL learners from diverse university majors, reflecting the heterogeneity of the target population. While the specific majors of the participants were not collected, this was because the primary focus of the study was on language learning factors rather than disciplinary backgrounds. Future research should consider including this information to provide further context. All participants were recruited from a single higher education institution in Saudi Arabia and enrolled in programs where English was a core subject and a mandatory requirement for university graduation. This indicates that the students were enrolled in programs in which Arabic was the primary medium of instruction, but English courses were compulsory as part of their academic curriculum. Arabic was identified as the native language for all participants. Table 1 presents a detailed breakdown of the participants by gender and age. Female learners constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 68.8% of the participants, whereas male learners represented 31.2%. The higher percentage of female participants aligns with the broader national trend in Saudi Arabia, where women increasingly outnumber men in tertiary education. This shift is driven by enhanced educational opportunities for women and progressive policies that promote gender equity in higher education. Societal changes have also played a pivotal role in expanding women's access to university programs, contributing to their higher representation. Furthermore, female students often have a higher representation in university programs, which may

explain the gender disparity in the sample. Regarding age distribution, 97.1% of the participants were under 20 years of age, and 2.9% were over 20. This age distribution aligns with the typical demographics of undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia, as most learners enter university immediately after completing their secondary education.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Characteristics.*

Variables	Sub-variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	149	31.2%
	Female	328	68.8%
Age	Less than 20	463	97.1%
	More than 20	14	2.9%
<b>Total</b>		477	100%

### ***Instruments***

The ‘Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy,’ developed by Wang et al., (2013), was utilized to assess the self-efficacy levels of participants across the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The questionnaire comprised 32 items, each requiring students to evaluate their perceived ability to accomplish specific tasks in English. Participants were instructed to rate their perceived competence on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from very low to very high.

The questionnaire was structured according to four distinct factors.

- Listening Efficacy (Items 1, 3, 9, 10, 15, 22, 24, and 27)
- Speaking Efficacy (Items 4, 6, 8, 17, 19, 20, 23, and 30)
- Reading Efficacy (Items 2, 12, 16, 21, 25, 26, 29, and 32)
- Writing Efficacy (Items 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 18, 28, and 31)

A pilot study involving 36 participants was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of this questionnaire. The instrument demonstrated strong psychometric properties with an overall internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of 0.89, reflecting a high level of reliability. Although the sample size was limited, it was sufficient for a preliminary reliability assessment in the exploratory phase, as supported by the guidelines for pilot studies (Hertzog, 2008; Kang, 2021). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the four subscales were as follows: Listening Efficacy (0.85), Speaking Efficacy (0.87), Reading Efficacy (0.88), and Writing Efficacy (0.86), indicating consistent reliability across all areas (, 2024).

Content validity was assessed by two experts specializing in applied linguistics. While only two experts were involved, their high level of specialization ensured a focused and precise evaluation. Their evaluation ensured that the questionnaire items accurately represented the targeted constructs and adhered to established best practices in language testing. The experts had no further involvement in the study, beyond their role in reviewing the instrument. On the basis of their feedback, minor revisions were made to enhance the clarity and alignment of the items, ensuring the questionnaire’s suitability for measuring English self-efficacy across the four language skills.

### ***Data Collection***

Data collection for this study was conducted during the first academic term of the 2024-2025 academic year. The primary instrument used was an online questionnaire disseminated through a web-based platform. The participants were recruited from a single Saudi university following the acquisition of ethical approval. Utilizing an online format facilitated broad participation, while ensuring both convenience and participant anonymity. The questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms managed by faculty members, enabling the efficient and timely collection of responses. All participants were thoroughly informed of the study objectives and were assured of the confidentiality of their data. Informed consent was obtained electronically before participation. Participation was voluntary and no payments or incentives were provided to the respondents. The participants were informed of the study objectives and were assured of data confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained electronically, as detailed in Section 3.5.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data obtained from the English self-efficacy questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methodologies.



1. **Descriptive Statistics** Descriptive statistics were employed to provide a comprehensive overview of the participants' self-efficacy levels across the four key language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Measures, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and median, were calculated for each skill, offering insights into central tendencies and variability within the dataset. Furthermore, self-efficacy levels were categorized into four groups based on the calculated mean scores to facilitate interpretation: low (mean < 2.30), moderate (mean  $\geq$  2.30 and < 3.30), high (mean  $\geq$  3.30 and < 4.30), and very high (mean  $\geq$  4.30). This approach provided a systematic framework for analyzing participants' confidence in their English language proficiency.
2. **Item-level Analysis:** A thorough item-level analysis examined the specific self-efficacy items within each language skill category. This approach provided a detailed understanding of learners' self-perceived competence in distinct tasks related to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Through an analysis of individual items, the study elucidated the specific strengths and weaknesses of participants' self-efficacy across various language tasks.
3. **Inferential Statistics:** Independent sample t-tests were performed to investigate potential gender differences in self-efficacy across the four language skills. These tests compared the mean self-efficacy scores of male and female participants for each skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and overall English self-efficacy. Statistical significance was determined using a threshold of 0.05, enabling the study to identify whether the observed differences in self-efficacy levels between genders were statistically significant. Although multiple t-tests were conducted, the Bonferroni correction was not applied. This approach was chosen to retain statistical power because the analysis was exploratory. Using a correction may increase the risk of missing meaningful patterns. Future research could apply such adjustments to reduce the potential for Type I errors.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study adhered to stringent ethical protocols to safeguard the rights and well-being of all participants. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee to ensure that the study complied with the requisite guidelines for conducting studies involving human subjects. The purpose and objectives of the study were explicitly delineated at the start of the questionnaire, providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of the research and its aims. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained after the completion of the survey. Participants were assured of the complete protection of their anonymity and confidentiality, with all data exclusively utilized for academic research and publication purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the participants retained the right to withdraw without penalties. Through adherence to these ethical principles, the study ensured a respectful and transparent approach to data collection.

## **Results**

This section presents the results of both descriptive and inferential analyses, focusing on English self-efficacy across the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To interpret the data, the mean scores were categorized into four levels: low (mean < 2.30), moderate (mean  $\geq$  2.30 and < 3.30), high (mean  $\geq$  3.30 and < 4.30), and very high (mean  $\geq$  4.30). This revised categorization ensures a consistent and precise evaluation of participants' perceived confidence in their English language proficiency and provides a systematic framework for interpreting the results.

### ***Descriptive Statistics of English Self-Efficacy***

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for English self-efficacy across the four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results indicated that participants demonstrated varying levels of perceived competence in their abilities across these skills.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics of English Self-Efficacy Levels.*

English self-efficacy	Mean	Std	Min	Max	Level
Listening Efficacy	2.45	0.58	1	5	Moderate
Speaking Efficacy	2.20	1.29	1	5	Low

Reading Efficacy	3.94	0.93	1	5	High
Writing Efficacy	2.60	0.15	1	5	Moderate
Overall	2.80	0.85	1	5	Moderate

The table shows that listening efficacy demonstrated a mean score of 2.45 (SD = 0.58), which falls within the moderate range, indicating that learners exhibit reasonable confidence in their listening abilities. However, there remains the potential for enhancement. Speaking efficacy recorded the lowest mean score at 2.20 (SD = 1.29), placing it in the low category, suggesting that participants experienced diminished confidence in their speaking abilities, thus highlighting the need for targeted instructional interventions. Reading efficacy exhibited the highest mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.93), classified as high, indicating that learners had substantial confidence in their reading skills. Writing efficacy yielded a mean score of 2.60 (SD = 0.15), which was also categorized as moderate, reflecting an average level of confidence in writing. Overall, the mean score for English self-efficacy across all skills was 2.80 (SD = 0.85), which was moderate. This suggests that while learners generally demonstrate confidence in their language abilities, certain areas such as speaking may require more focused support to enhance their self-efficacy.

Table 3 summarizes the participants' self-efficacy in various listening tasks. The overall mean score for listening efficacy was 2.45 (SD = 0.65), which was classified as low. This indicates that learners generally demonstrate lower confidence in their listening abilities.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics of English Listening Efficacy.*

Listening Efficacy items	Mean	Std	Min	Max	Level
1 Can you understand stories told in English?	2.78	0.48	2	5	Moderate
3 Can you understand American English TV programs?	2.52	0.54	2	5	Moderate
9 Can you understand radio programs in English-speaking countries?	2.52	0.53	2	5	Moderate
10 Can you understand English TV programs?	2.52	0.54	2	5	Moderate
15 If your teacher gives you an audio-recorded English dialogue about school life, can you understand it?	2.46	0.55	1	3	Moderate
22 Can you understand English movies without Arabic subtitles?	2.27	0.86	1	5	Low
24 Can you understand English songs?	2.27	0.87	1	5	Low
27 Can you understand telephone numbers spoken in English?	2.26	0.86	1	5	Low
<b>Total</b>	2.45	0.65	1.5	4.75	Moderate

At the item level, participants reported moderate self-efficacy in comprehending narratives presented in English (M = 2.78, SD = 0.48) and understanding American English television programs (M = 2.52, SD = 0.54). Similarly, their capacity to comprehend radio programs in English-speaking countries and English television programs was also assessed as moderate, with a mean score of 2.52 for both tasks. However, more specific and challenging tasks such as understanding English-language films without subtitles (M = 2.27, SD = 0.86), English songs (M = 2.27, SD = 0.87), and telephone numbers articulated in English (M = 2.26, SD = 0.86) received lower self-efficacy ratings, indicating a diminished sense of confidence in these areas. Overall, participants demonstrated moderate self-efficacy in broader listening tasks, but their confidence decreased significantly when confronted with more complex listening activities. This suggests that, while learners perceive themselves as reasonably capable in general listening scenarios, they experience more difficulty and reduced confidence when engaging in more advanced or context-specific listening tasks.

Table 4 analyzes the participants' self-efficacy across various speaking tasks. With an overall mean score of 2.20 (SD = 1.39), which is classified as low, the findings indicate that learners generally lack confidence in speaking English fluently and effectively.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics of English Speaking Efficacy.*

Speaking Efficacy items	Mean	Std	Min	Max	Level
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4	Can you introduce your university in English?	2.14	1.44	1	5	Low
6	Can you tell the directions to your classroom from your home/dormitory in English?	2.19	1.38	1	5	Low
8	Can you tell a story in English?	2.05	1.35	1	5	Low
17	Can you ask questions to your teachers in English?	2.22	1.41	1	5	Low
19	Can you introduce your English teacher in English?	2.12	1.39	1	5	Low
20	Can you discuss in English with your classmates some topics assuming all of you are interested?	2.03	1.41	1	5	Low
23	Can you answer your teachers' questions in English?	2.36	1.33	1	5	Moderate
30	Can you introduce yourself in English?	2.45	1.38	1	5	Moderate
<b>Total</b>		2.20	1.39	1	5	Low

The participants primarily reported low self-efficacy in their speaking abilities, as reflected in their overall mean score of 2.20 (SD = 1.39). Tasks such as introducing one's university (M = 2.14, SD = 1.44) and giving directions from home to the classroom (M = 2.19, SD = 1.38) demonstrated a lack of confidence even for relatively straightforward tasks. Similarly, posing questions to instructors (M = 2.22, SD = 1.41) and responding to their inquiries (M = 2.36, SD = 1.33) were rated low, highlighting the challenges in classroom interactions. However, some tasks showed slightly higher confidence levels, with answering teachers' questions (M = 2.36, SD = 1.33) and introducing oneself to English (M = 2.45, SD = 1.38) categorized as moderate. More complex tasks, such as narrating a story in English (M = 2.05, SD = 1.35), engaging in discussions with classmates (M = 2.03, SD = 1.41), and introducing an English instructor (M = 2.12, SD = 1.39) received the lowest ratings, reflecting significant challenges. These results suggest that speaking remains a key area in which learners lack confidence and would benefit from targeted practice and instructional support.

Table 5 presents an analysis of participants' self-efficacy in reading tasks. The overall mean score was 3.94 (SD = 1.04), which was categorized as high. This finding indicates that the learners collectively exhibited substantial confidence in their English reading proficiency across diverse tasks.

**Table 5**  
*Descriptive Statistics of English Reading Efficacy.*

Reading Efficacy items		Mean	Std	Min	Max	Level
2	Can you finish your homework of English reading independently?	4.08	1.02	1	5	Very High
12	When you read English articles, can you guess the meaning of unknown words?	3.97	1.02	1	5	High
16	Can you understand the English news on the Internet?	3.92	1.05	1	5	High
21	Can you read English short novels?	3.96	1.02	1	5	High
25	Can you read English newspapers?	3.89	1.06	1	5	High
26	Can you find the meaning of new words by using English-English dictionaries?	3.91	1.05	1	5	High
29	Can you understand English articles about German culture?	3.93	1.02	1	5	High
32	Can you understand new reading materials (e.g., news from the Time magazine) selected by your	3.88	1.04	1	5	High
<b>Total</b>		3.94	1.04	1	5	High

The highest-rated item was the ability to independently complete English reading assignments, with a mean score of 4.08 (SD = 1.02), which was categorized as very high. This finding suggests that participants perceived themselves as proficient in managing academic reading tasks. Similarly, high levels of self-efficacy were reported for inferring the meaning of unknown words in English articles (M = 3.97, SD = 1.02) and for comprehending short English novels (M = 3.96, SD = 1.02), reflecting learners' overall perceived competence in these areas. Other tasks, such as comprehending English news on the Internet (M = 3.92, SD = 1.05) and utilizing English-English dictionaries to interpret unfamiliar words (M = 3.91, SD = 1.05), were also rated highly, reinforcing participants' confidence in their reading skills. More specialized tasks, including the comprehension of

English articles about German culture ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and reading materials such as Time magazine ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), also fell within the high range. Overall, the participants exhibited consistently high self-efficacy across a range of reading tasks, indicating that reading is an area in which they perceive themselves as remarkably self-assured in their English language skills.

Table 6 outlines the participants' self-efficacy in the various writing tasks. The overall mean score of 2.60 ( $SD = 0.15$ ) was in the moderate range. This indicates that learners generally feel somewhat confident in their English writing skills, but there is room for improvement.

**Table 6***Descriptive Statistics of English Writing Efficacy.*

Writing Efficacy items	Mean	Std	Min	Max	Level
5 If you have access to internet, can you release news on the Internet (e.g., facebook, twitter, blogs)?	2.49	0.81	1	5	Moderate
7 Can you write English compositions assigned by your teachers?	2.46	0.77	1	5	Moderate
11 Can you leave a message to your classmates in English?	2.8	0.74	1	5	Moderate
13 Can you make new sentences with the words just learned?	2.57	0.8	1	5	Moderate
14 Can you send emails in English?	2.74	0.76	1	5	Moderate
18 Can you make sentences with English idiomatic phrases?	2.74	0.75	1	5	Moderate
28 Can you write diaries in English?	2.58	0.82	1	5	Moderate
31 Can you write an article in about two pages about your English teacher in English?	2.4	0.80	1	5	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	2.60	0.15	1	5	Moderate

When examining specific tasks, the participants consistently reported moderate levels of confidence. For instance, their ability to disseminate news on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs had a mean score of 2.49 ( $SD = 0.81$ ), and composing English assignments given by instructors scored similarly at 2.46 ( $SD = 0.77$ ). Communicating messages to classmates in English was rated slightly higher, with a mean of 2.80 ( $SD = 0.74$ ), indicating that learners experience relatively greater comfort with informal everyday writing. Participants also demonstrated moderate confidence in constructing new sentences using recently acquired vocabulary ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) and composing emails in English ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ). However, more complex tasks, such as writing an article about their English instructor ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ), received slightly lower scores, although they still fell within a moderate range. These findings suggest that learners perceive themselves as adequately capable of engaging in various writing tasks ranging from casual communication to more structured assignments. Nevertheless, additional support may enhance confidence levels, particularly in more complex writing activities.

### *Gender Differences in English Self-Efficacy*

Table 7 delineates the gender-based disparities in self-efficacy across the four fundamental English language competencies of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The findings elucidated substantial distinctions between male and female participants, with statistically significant differences manifesting in specific domains.

**Table 7***Gender Differences in English Self-Efficacy Across Language Skills.*

English self-efficacy	Gender	Mean	SD	DF	T	Sig
<b>Listening Efficacy</b>	Male	2.41	0.56	477	-0.95	0.342
	Female	2.46	0.59			
<b>Speaking Efficacy</b>	Male	1.76	0.95	477	-5.08	< 0.001*
	Female	2.39	1.37			
<b>Reading Efficacy</b>	Male	3.8	0.93	477	-1.94	0.054
	Female	3.98	0.94			
<b>Writing Efficacy</b>	Male	2.67	0.70	477	1.57	0.116
	Female	2.57	0.63			
<b>Overall</b>	Male	2.66	0.45	477	-4.06	< 0.001*

Female	2.85	0.50
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*\*is significant at the 0.05 level*

Table 7 presents the t-test results for gender differences in English self-efficacy across the four language skills and the overall scores. The analysis highlights the following significant and non-significant findings:

- **Speaking Efficacy:** A statistically significant difference was observed, with females reporting a mean score of 2.39 (SD = 1.37) compared to 1.76 (SD = 0.95) for males ( $t = -5.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result indicates higher self-efficacy in speaking among females.
- **Overall English Self-Efficacy:** Females demonstrated a significantly higher overall mean score of 2.85 (SD = 0.50) compared to 2.66 (SD = 0.45) for males ( $t = -4.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- **Non-Significant Results:** For listening, reading, and writing efficacy, no statistically significant differences were found between males and females. For example, in listening efficacy, males reported a mean score of 2.41 (SD = 0.56), while females scored 2.46 (SD = 0.59), with a t-test result of  $t = -0.95$ ,  $p = 0.342$ . Similarly, no significant differences were observed between reading ( $p = 0.054$ ) and writing ( $p = 0.116$ ).

## Discussion

### What is the overall level of English self-efficacy among Saudi EFL learners?

The overall level of English self-efficacy among Saudi EFL learners was moderate. This finding suggests that, while learners demonstrate a reasonable degree of confidence in managing various language tasks, there remains substantial room for improvement, particularly in tasks requiring advanced proficiency or spontaneous language use. Although the study's descriptive nature does not establish causality, the observed moderate self-efficacy levels can be considered in light of the contextual factors related to English instruction in Saudi Arabia. The structured, teacher-centred nature of classroom practices, which prioritize formal instruction and controlled exercises, may contribute to learners' confidence in predictable, familiar tasks while limiting their ability to engage with more dynamic or less rehearsed language activities. Saudi EFL learners are primarily exposed to formal classroom-based learning, which tends to foster confidence in controlled and predictable tasks. However, this environment provides limited opportunities for authentic language use, such as spontaneous speaking and writing, which likely accounts for the moderate self-efficacy observed among learners. This interpretation aligns with previous research by Al-Seghayer (2022) and Massri (2022), who pointed out that the emphasis on rote learning and grammatical accuracy in Saudi EFL classrooms often results in a focus on familiarity and correctness, rather than fluency and adaptability. While these contextual factors provide a plausible explanation for the findings, further research is required to confirm the relationship between instructional practices and self-efficacy outcomes.

Moreover, the lack of opportunities for exposure to English outside formal academic settings may be associated with the challenges in developing higher levels of self-efficacy. Goetze and Driver (2022) noted that EFL learners in contexts such as Saudi Arabia often face reduced opportunities for authentic language interaction, which can impede the development of robust self-efficacy. This is corroborated by Al-Otaibi and Alshaikhai (2023), who revealed the critical role of authentic language practice in building learner confidence, particularly in environments where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited. The emphasis on linguistic accuracy over fluency, a characteristic of many Saudi EFL programs, might influence moderate self-efficacy levels, as suggested by previous studies. According to Beatson et al., (2020), this focus can constrain learners' ability to engage confidently in more interactive and communicative tasks because the emphasis on error avoidance overshadows the development of practical expressions. This pattern aligns with previous research, which suggests that structured academic tasks often foster higher confidence, whereas tasks requiring real-time language production or less-structured communication present additional challenges.

The findings of this study align with those of previous research on self-efficacy in EFL contexts. Both Cheng (2020) and Goetze and Driver (2022) accentuate the significant impact of the learning environment on shaping self-efficacy beliefs. In environments such as Saudi Arabia, where instruction is predominantly classroom-based, and opportunities for real-world language practice are limited, learners are more likely to develop moderate levels of self-efficacy, as evidenced in this study. Furthermore, Alharbi (2021) and Altumigah and Alkhaleefah (2022) affirm the task-specific nature of self-efficacy. Saudi EFL learners tend to exhibit higher confidence in routine, predictable tasks, but their self-efficacy decreases when confronted with spontaneous or interactive

language use. The moderate self-efficacy levels observed in this study align with prior research suggesting that learners in structured environments often exhibit higher confidence in routine tasks, but face challenges with less predictable or interactive language use.

### **What are the levels of self-efficacy in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills among Saudi EFL learners? (Which language skills exhibited the highest self-efficacy?)**

The study revealed varying levels of self-efficacy across the four critical language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, learners demonstrated the highest self-efficacy in reading, indicating a strong confidence in comprehending written texts. Conversely, speaking emerged as a skill with the lowest self-efficacy, highlighting learners' challenges in verbal communication. Listening and writing fell between moderate levels of self-efficacy. A high level of self-efficacy in reading could be associated with the structured nature of academic reading tasks, as suggested by previous studies. Reading tasks allow learners to process information at their own pace, enhancing their confidence. This aligns with the findings of Beatson et al., (2020) and Alharbi (2021), who found that learners often exhibit greater confidence in receptive skills, such as reading and listening, as these tasks offer opportunities for reflection and revision. The predictability and structured nature of reading tasks also contribute to higher self-efficacy, as learners can apply familiar strategies to decode and comprehend text more effectively.

By contrast, low self-efficacy in speaking reflects the inherent challenges of real-time language production. Mulyanto et al. (2022) noted that speaking is frequently the most anxiety-inducing skill for EFL learners due to the apprehension of making errors and the unpredictability of conversations. In Saudi EFL classrooms, where emphasis tends to be on rote learning and grammatical accuracy rather than communicative fluency (Massri, 2022), learners may lack the practical experience necessary to develop confidence in spontaneous speaking. Al-Otaibi and Alshai Khai (2023) revealed limited opportunities for authentic conversational practice, further impeding learners' ability to build fluency and confidence in verbal interactions.

The moderate self-efficacy levels in listening and writing align with the findings of previous studies, which identify varying levels of confidence across these skills in structured learning environments. Listening, although also a receptive skill, necessitates processing spoken language in real-time, which can present challenges without the ability to pause or revisit information, as one can in reading. This may explain why learners exhibit slightly lower listening confidence than reading. Similarly, writing involves the production of accurate and coherent text, which can elicit anxiety due to concerns regarding grammar and organization. Alharbi (2021) posited that writing, while less immediate than speaking, still demands significant cognitive effort, which may reduce learners' confidence.

These findings are consistent with existing research on self-efficacy in language learning. Cheng (2020) and Goetze and Driver (2022) reported that learners tend to exhibit higher self-efficacy in receptive skills such as reading and listening compared to productive skills such as speaking and writing. The results of this study also support those of Mulyanto et al. (2022), who identified speaking as the most anxiety-inducing skill, leading to lower self-efficacy among learners. Likewise, Fidan and Tuncel (2021) noted that learners in EFL contexts often experience difficulties with productive skills because of limited opportunities for authentic practice, which contributes to lower self-efficacy in speaking and writing.

### **Are there significant differences in English self-efficacy levels across genders (male versus female) among Saudi EFL learners?**

The study revealed substantial gender disparities in overall English self-efficacy among Saudi EFL learners, with female participants demonstrating significantly higher levels of self-efficacy than their male counterparts, mainly speaking. Nevertheless, no statistically significant gender differences were observed in listening, reading, or writing self-efficacy.

The higher self-efficacy observed among female learners in speaking aligns with the findings from prior research, which indicates that female learners may experience greater confidence in productive language tasks in supportive educational environments. This aligns with the findings of Namaziandost and Çakmak (2020), who noted that female learners exhibit more significant improvements in self-efficacy, particularly in productive language tasks such as speaking. This phenomenon may be attributed to the more supportive classroom

environments that female learners often experience, and their heightened motivation to succeed in language learning. As claimed by Kutuk et al. (2021), self-efficacy plays a mediating role between gender stereotypes and language attainment, frequently benefiting female learners who may feel encouraged to engage actively in language use. As noted by Liu et al. (2022), sociocultural and educational contexts that prioritize language learning may play a role in fostering higher self-efficacy among female learners in mono-gender settings, which could provide a context for the observed differences in this study. This could explain the greater confidence exhibited by female learners in Saudi EFL settings, particularly in tasks that require active participation, such as speaking.

The absence of significant gender differences in listening, reading, and writing self-efficacy is corroborated by Hoesny et al., (2023), who observed no notable gender disparities in overall self-efficacy despite a strong correlation between self-efficacy and speaking proficiency. Correspondingly, Yuehua and Qiumei (2023) reported minimal gender differences in self-efficacy among translation major undergraduates, except for self-regulated learning, in which females exhibited higher self-efficacy. Furthermore, the lack of gender differences in receptive and structured tasks, such as reading and listening, may align with the findings of Kheder and Rouabhia (2023), who noted that while gender differences may exist in motivation and self-efficacy, structured tasks tend to demonstrate fewer variations between genders due to the uniform instructional approaches in language learning environments.

These findings are consistent with broader research, such as Namaziandost and Çakmak (2020) and Liu et al. (2022), who observed that female learners frequently reported higher levels of self-efficacy, particularly in language tasks requiring active engagement. The absence of significant gender differences in listening, reading, and writing aligns with the findings of Yuehua and Qiumei (2023) and Hoesny et al., (2023), who observed minimal gender disparity.

### **Pedagoical Implications**

The findings of this study elucidate how teachers can more effectively support Saudi EFL learners in developing self-efficacy across the four primary language skills. Learners demonstrated the highest confidence in reading, indicating greater comfort when engaging in a written text. To reinforce this strength, teachers should continue to provide structured reading exercises while progressively introducing more complex texts to assist students in maintaining and enhancing their reading proficiency.

On the other hand, speaking emerged as a skill in which learners exhibited the least confidence, highlighting the necessity of specific strategies to enhance their self-assurance in verbal communication. Teachers can foster more interactive and communicative classroom environments by incorporating activities such as role-play, group discussions, and debates. These low-stakes, real-time speaking opportunities enable students to practice without apprehension of errors, gradually facilitating the development of confidence in their speaking abilities.

There remains potential for improvement in listening and writing, where learners demonstrate moderate self-efficacy. The utilization of multimedia resources such as podcasts, videos, and authentic conversations can help expose students to natural language use, enhancing their ability to comprehend spoken English in diverse contexts. Writing proficiency can be enhanced through a process-oriented approach encompassing drafting, receiving feedback, and implementing revisions, which not only improves writing skills but also bolsters students' confidence as they observe tangible improvements in their work.

This study also revealed gender disparities, with female learners reporting higher self-efficacy, particularly in speaking. This finding suggests that teachers should be cognizant of the different needs of male and female students, offering targeted support to assist all learners, regardless of gender, in building confidence in areas where they feel less secure. Teachers can nurture self-efficacy more effectively by cultivating a learning environment that addresses students' diverse needs.

Finally, integrating authentic language tasks into the classroom enhanced overall self-efficacy. Activities such as collaborative projects, virtual exchanges with native speakers, or community-based language use allow students to apply their skills in authentic situations. These experiences bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, enhancing students' confidence and rendering language learning more engaging and relevant to their daily lives.

### **Limitations and recommendations for further research**

While this study provides valuable insights into gender differences in self-efficacy among Saudi EFL learners, several limitations warrant consideration. Although widely utilized in self-efficacy research, relying on self-reported data may not fully capture the discrepancy between learners' perceived and actual abilities. Learners may overestimate or underestimate their self-efficacy, potentially skewing their results. To address this limitation, future research should integrate objective performance-based assessments with self-reported data to accurately reflect learners' confidence and language proficiency. Furthermore, the study's focus on formal academic settings limits our understanding of how self-efficacy manifests in informal, real-world contexts. Learners may experience different confidence levels when using English outside a structured classroom environment, particularly in spontaneous or unplanned interactions. Exploring self-efficacy in everyday social and professional scenarios offers a more comprehensive perspective on learners' true language capabilities. Moreover, the study's focus on the Saudi educational context with its unique cultural and gender dynamics may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Future research could expand this scope by examining gender-based differences across cultural and educational environments. This would help determine whether the patterns observed in Saudi EFL learners are consistent or vary based on the context. Expanding this investigation to include diverse cultural backgrounds and non-academic settings will enhance our understanding of the complexities of self-efficacy in language learning.

### **Conclusion**

This study has provided significant insights into Saudi EFL learners' self-efficacy levels across four core language skills. The findings indicate that learners generally display moderate self-efficacy, with reading identified as the area in which learners demonstrate the highest confidence. In contrast, speaking was identified as the skill with the lowest self-efficacy, suggesting a need for targeted interventions to enhance students' confidence in verbal communication. Moderate levels of self-efficacy in listening and writing further underscore the importance of adopting tailored pedagogical strategies to improve learner performance.

A salient aspect of the findings was the notable gender difference in self-efficacy. Female learners consistently reported higher self-efficacy, particularly in speaking, while male learners demonstrated lower confidence in productive tasks, such as speaking and writing. These results emphasize the need to nurture a learning environment that is inclusive and supportive for all students, ensuring that both male and female learners are provided with tools and encouragement to succeed, especially in areas with low confidence.

The pedagogical implications of this study highlight the importance of implementing communicative and interactive teaching methods. Teachers can create engaging learning experiences that promote stronger self-efficacy in all language skills by incorporating authentic language tasks and encouraging active participation. Activities that simulate real-world language use, such as discussions, role-play, and collaborative projects, can assist learners in developing greater confidence in their abilities.

Future research should build on these findings by examining self-efficacy in diverse educational contexts and among various learner populations. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in tracking changes in learners' confidence over time, offering profound insights into the relationship between self-efficacy and language learning success. This will further inform the development of teaching strategies that effectively support and enhance learner self-efficacy in EFL contexts.

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